**Propitiation – The Wall Between God and Man – BD02-2**

**Mental Attitude Sins**

It would be very difficult this morning for most of us to bring an overt, open, evident sin into this group. Yet it is very easy, without any difficulty at all, to bring in mental attitude sins, sins of the mind within this service. So as we come to the word of God, it is very important that we search not only those outward things that are evident to us, but those inward things of the heart and of the mind which are the worst kind of sins. For you may sit here this morning this morning with mental attitude sins which will completely neutralize any value and any affect that may accrue to you from the word of God. Unless you are able to take into the word of God into your spiritual life, into your human spirit, you cannot walk before God in an acceptable way.

**Progressive Sanctification**

There is such a thing as “progressive sanctification” which means that increasingly as you move on with the Lord, your situation becomes such that you are able to cope and deal with sin more effectively all the time. You walk with God more acceptably all the time, never to a point of full perfection, but constantly as the word of God is taken in, and the spirit of God is free to work in your life because your sin is confessed. You are able to walk progressively and increasingly in a way that is acceptable to the heavenly Father. So we are going to ask all of us to bow our heads and close our eyes in a moment of personal silent prayer, that confession of sin may be made if it needs to be and that we yield to God the Holy Spirit to be our teacher in these moments.

**Confession**

“Our Heavenly Father, we do ask thee to instruct us. To give us wisdom and judgment concerning Thy word, and we pray that Thou would help us to walk before Thee, day by day in an acceptable way, both outwardly and within our minds. So we pray this morning that all sin may be fully confessed. That Thou would burden our heart, and bring conviction of anything that ought to be said to Thee in order that the spirit of God may instruct us in this very valuable time that we shall spend together in Thy living word for we ask in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

**The Great Wall of Separation Between God and Man**

We come now to number four in the series of considering the basic doctrine of the great wall of separation between God and man. Here in this diagram, we have illustrated the problem. Here is a wall, God is on one side and we are on the other side. This wall consists of certain specific blocks which separate us from God. Of course they are all interrelated, and we are simply looking at them as individual blocks in order to understand what a varied and deep and extensive act God performed in grace on our behalf.

The first problem was that we were in the slavery of sin. We were in the slave market chained to sin and we had no assets whereby we could buy our way out of that condition, so God did it for us by redeeming us. The answer to our sin slavery was redemption. Then we had a penalty that was demanded of us- spiritual death because of our sin. All of our sin that was against us demanded that penalty. So God handled that by the doctrine of expiation where He blotted out all our sins and Himself, paid the penalty and removed that block for us. Then we had the problem that when we are born physically, we are born with an old sin nature inherited from our parents, through our father. The result is that physical birth brings us immediate spiritual death. We are separated from God because we are spiritually dead, and a dead person can’t do anything so we are in an extremely helpless position. God removed this problem by the act of “regeneration” which means to “be born again, to give a new birth.”

**The Character of God**

Now we come to another block. This one we’re going to spend two weeks on because it has two vital features to it. This is the block of the character of God or specifically, the holiness of God. The holiness of God has created a problem for us in two specific ways. First of all, let’s review the essence of God. You should be able to think through the basic character of God. When you think about God, “what is God like?” you should be able to think through and say, “I know that this is what God is like.” Number one- God is sovereignty. He is absolute sovereignty. That means that He is in complete control of everything. Number two- God is perfect righteousness. There is no lack of goodness in God. He is total goodness. There is no sin, He is perfect righteousness. Three- God is justice. He is absolute justice. That means that God is fair- absolutely completely 100% fair, and God cannot be anything else but fair. Then God is love. This is a mental attitude quality- that is that God in His mental attitude is free of all ill will-constantly, infinitely, and completely.

Then we have the series of “omnis”. We have the fact that God is omniscient. He knows everything. We have the fact that God is omnipresent- He is everywhere. There is the fact that God is omnipotent- He has all power. Then, God is immutable which means that He never changes, He’s always the same, which means that all of the qualities of His character will be the same. Finally, God is veracity. That is, He is truth. He is absolute truth. There is no falsehood, no lies in God whatsoever. These attributes of God never violate one another. They are always in perfect balance. They are always in perfect harmony with one another. They are never antagonistic to each other. So these attributes, must each one be fully respected and be fully operational in whatever God does.

**Righteousness and Justice**

Now it is these two attributes right here that we are looking at this morning. It is the perfect righteousness of God and the absolute justice of God which constitute the holiness of God. When we are called upon to be holy as God is holy, and sometimes the Bible uses the word “perfect.” This is what it is speaking of. We are to be as just as God is just and we are to be as righteous as God is righteous. I had a call the other day from a college student who wanted to know about the verse that says, “… be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” The question was, “If we are in Jesus Christ, it seems to me that we can come to the place where we have full control over sin.” I had to point out to him that in our experience, we will never come to the place where we will have full control over sin, but in our standing before God, we have the absolute righteousness of Christ and we have the absolute justice of God. This is what we are going to look into. But God expects you to be just as holy as He is. If somebody comes up to you and says, “How good does a person have to be to go to heaven?” The answer is, you have to be just as good as Jesus Christ. If you are not as good as Jesus Christ, you will never get to heaven. God says you must be as holy as He is. Which means you must be just as righteous as He is, and you must be just as fair as He is.

**The Glory of God**

This holiness is what the Bible refers to as “the glory of God.” This is the glory of God. In Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” While God is perfect righteousness, you and I are an imperfect righteousness. We have a relative righteousness. You are better than some people, and worse than others. While God is perfect justice, we are fair most of the time and a lot of the time, we are not fair. Many times we are prejudice and our judgments are not absolutely fair. So man’s sin has violated the holiness of God. Now what God’s righteousness demands of us is a perfect righteousness, and what God’s justice demands is that there be a penalty paid for sin. So what happens is that God, who cannot be lenient with sin or lenient with the sinner, finds that His love is restricted. God, who is perfect love and whose attribute of love desires to be expressed, God cannot exercise love toward the person who is unholy-the person who has fallen short of His standard of glory. God is not lenient with sin and He is not lenient with the sinner. God has to act toward sin in such a way that He shows His abhorrence of sin.

The liberal world has completely fouled up on this. They are completely disoriented to the fact that yet while indeed God is love, this is one of His attributes, one of His qualities, His characteristics, yet He is a God of righteousness and of justice. He will not say, “Well, you meant to do well. Let’s just forget your sin, and we’ll try to start all over again.” God has to deal with the fact that for sin there must be a penalty paid. For lack of righteousness, there must be absolute righteousness provided. In spite of all this, God still loves man. Though His holiness has been violated, but His love is still there.

How is He going to express love and still be true to His own character? Human efforts to satisfy the holiness of God always failed. Adam and Eve as soon as they sinned, realized what had happened to them. They didn’t realize the extent of the damage that had been done. But they realized they were in big trouble, so they immediately made fig leaf clothing in order to cover their unrighteousness and the fact that God was going to have to treat them in justice. Cain came along and he tried another way to readjust to God. He tried it with his own human viewpoint of bringing a produce sacrifices instead of blood sacrifices. Well it’s gone down through the centuries, and people today are still trying to invent their own way to satisfy God’s holiness. But, none of the things that men come up with is good enough for what God demands.

**Human Good**

Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all as an unclean thing and all of our righteousness says,” which is another word for human good, “all of our human good are as filthy rags and we all do fade as a leaf in our iniquities like the wind have taken us away.” In the book of Psalm 39:5, “Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreath and my age is as nothing before Thee. Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity, altogether nothing.” So no matter who the best people are in here this morning, in God’s sight, your human good is absolutely, altogether nothing. Worse than that, Romans 4:4 indicates that anything that man does as a works thing, and works can never get you out of debt, “Now to him that works is the reward not works of grace, but to debt.” The implication is that the harder you work, the more you get into debt, because the debt that you owe God is so infinite, that your work only complicates it and doesn’t help it. So God had to come up with a way to express this love that our lack of righteousness and our violation of His justice hinder the expression of His love and have violated His holiness.

**Grace**

So God came up with a plan. This plan is salvation we call a “grace plan.” Grace means is something that you don’t deserve and something that you cannot earn. It means that it is something that God does entirely. All the human element is totally removed. God alone makes all the necessary provisions. So eternal life for sinful man depends entirely on who and what God is, and not on who and what you and I are. You see if it were on what we are, the very wall that separates us would just finish us. There would be no way out. I am happy to say there is a way out. The first step to the way out is to realize that it’s God’s way and you have nothing that you may add to that.

Here’s how God plans to preserve His holiness, and at the same time, to be giving sinners eternal life. God’s righteousness has declared that the penalty of death for sin. His justice requires that a price be paid. God’s grace has made the solution so absolutely certain, that for all the centuries that people died before the cross, but who believed and who trusted in God’s salvation and solution, God’s solution was so such a surefire deal that God could be perfectly righteous and just in forgiving people’s sins of all things on credit. It was one of the original credit systems of the universe. Where God forgave sins on the basis of IOU’s that were constantly signed in our behalf. What God has done for us is provided a justification, provided a covering for sin which was going to be fulfilled in the future. Move over to Romans 3, the end of verse 25, “to declare His righteousness, for the remission or forgiveness of sins in the past, through the forbearance of God to declare I say at this time His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.” You see through the forbearance of God, where God would pass over the sins of man. How could He do it? His plan was so certain of fulfillment that He was just in doing this.

**Propitiation**

Now what can man do? Man can only do what Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Adam and Eve were given a temporary covering. Those animal skins that God gave them were symbolic of the blood sacrifice that was yet to cover their sins. So the solution for all of this is summed up in another great theological word that I want you to learn this morning. It is the word, “propitiation.” Turn with me to 1 John 2:2 please. “… and He that is Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Now the word “propitiation” means “satisfaction”. That’s all it means. It simply means “satisfaction.” Somehow God devised a plan that would satisfy His justice. This is the attribute we are zeroing in on this morning, this part of His holiness.

**The Mercy Seat**

The justice of God had to be satisfied. How is it to be done through the work of propitiation? You will notice that it says that this was done not only for those of us who are believers, but also for the sins of the whole world. There you have again the indication that the atonement of Jesus Christ covers everybody- even the people who rejected. Romans 3:25 also speaks of propitiation. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood.” Now the blood of Jesus Christ represents His spiritual death on the cross which satisfied the justice of God. God says, “My justice says that a penalty had to be paid” and this is how the penalty was paid. For just a moment, hold that place. Turn over to Hebrews 9:5. Look back to the Old Testament where things were symbolically portrayed. Truths were symbolically portrayed through the tabernacle, through the ritual of the ceremonies that the Jews performed. “And over it, the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy seat of which we cannot now speak particularly. “ I want you to notice the word “mercy seat,” because the name “mercy seat” is the same Greek word as the one that you have in 3:25 for propitiation. The Greek word “hilastarion” is the word that means “a covering, a lid.” That would be a good word for it- lid. Now the Old Testament ties exactly the same word that speaks of propitiation, God’s justice being satisfied, to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant—the mercy seat.

**The Tabernacle**

If you remember the furniture in the Old Testament tabernacle, there was this box that was an oblong box called the “ark of the covenant”. This was made of acacia wood and it was covered over with gold. The wood was symbolic of the humanity of Jesus Christ, the gold symbolic of His deity. Within the ark were symbols and reminders of man’s sin. Remember what was in the ark? One, a pot of manna, that heavenly food that fell from the skies every morning while the Jews were in the wilderness wandering, in which they only had to go out and pick up and eat. You remember how they complained against God for the fact that He gave them such a simple, one menu diet. Man’s sin rebelling against God because of the food that He gave them. A pot of this was there as a reminder of that act of sin.

**Aaron’s Rod**

Then there was the rod of Aaron that budded. There was a dead stick and it put out a live shoot. Remember that was in connection with God’s demonstrating to Korah and his associates who were rising up against Moses and Aaron and said, “Who do you think that you are, standing here as authorities within the congregation and speaking as God’s spokesman and telling us what God thinks and what God wants us to do?” The earth opened up, swallowed up Korah, the family, and all of the companions with him. This rod that had budded was another symbol of man’s sin.

**The Ten Commandments**

Finally, the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. The very first commandment about not having false gods, and they made the golden calf and were worshipping it. All of these commandments had been violated and broken. Again, a symbol of man’s sin.

**The Ark of the Covenant**

Now here’s this box, and in it are these symbols of man’s sin. Over the top is this lid, this “hilastarion”, and this is in the holy of holies. Remember there were two places in the tabernacle itself it had a front part called “the holy place”, and then it had a place called “the holy of holies.” There was a heavy veil here, and there was a heavy veil here. Now nobody went into this part, except the high priest, and he only went into there once a year. He went there on the Great Day of Atonement. Once a year, he had to go in there and get the whole nation squared on credit with God in reference to their sins. What he did when he went there, he walked in there and here’s this mercy seat, and he walks in there with the blood of the sacrifice and he sprinkled it on top of this mercy seat. This blood which was symbolic of the covering that God was to bring eventually with the blood of Jesus Christ. Now each end of the mercy seat, there were two angels, cherubim. Their wings were outstretched and they were looking down on this mercy seat.

**Cherubim**

These angels stand for the holiness of God- particularly these two qualities, the righteousness and the justice of God. As they looked at those elements of sin within the Ark of the Covenant, if it were not for the blood, there would be no relationship, no meeting of God and man. Because the holiness of God represented by those cherubim looked down and saw the blood and the sin under the blood, it was possible for the priest to walk back out of that holy of holies and to declare to the people that for one more year, their sins had been covered by God. A credit extended for another year. And so it went from year to year, they could never stop. This constantly had to be done. All of this was symbolic of this great doctrine of propitiation. For God was going to bring one who was going to be His mercy seat. Of course that was His son, Jesus Christ. For He on the cross, in His own body, became sprinkled with blood for us, so that in His death we might have eternal life. 1 John 4: 10 “Here in this love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

**Propitiation**

Now when unbelievers think about God, and when heathen or primitive people think about God, they always think about God as being somebody who is angry, and who somehow must be placated by some human effort if they’re going to secure His blessings. But the Bible reveals to us that God is a God of love. While He is true to His own attributes, He has to love us in a way that does not violate His righteousness or His justice. But God’s attitude toward man is always love. You see He is immutable, His love never changes. So you and I do not have to run around trying to please God, trying to get Him to treat us kindly because God has been propitiated towards sinners. The body of Jesus Christ became the place of propitiation. In the Old Testament in the tabernacle it was that mercy seat that was sprinkled with the blood. In the New Testament, it was Christ Himself on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24, that great verse that tells us, “through His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness. By His stripes, you are healed.”

So the propitiation of Jesus Christ was an act, once and for all. In the Old Testament they had to do it once a year, but the book of Hebrews tells us that when Jesus Christ did it, it was a finished work. Hebrews 9:11, “That Christ become a high priest of good things to come by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands that is to say not of this building. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption for us.“ Verse 23 said, “It was therefore necessary that the pattern of things in heaven should be purified with these. But the heavenly things themselves were better sacrifices than these.” So he goes on to verse 28, “so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time apart from the sin issue unto salvation.”

So propitiation this morning is a reality. God the Father’s justice is satisfied, and He holds nothing against us. This was indicated Hebrews 1:13 that the Father invited the Son to be seated to which the angels said He at any time “sits on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” The priests in the Old Testament had to stand because they had to keep repeating this covering, but Jesus Christ was seated because the propitiation is done once and for all. All of you are acquainted in Luke 18 with the illustration of the publican and the Pharisee. The Pharisee we are told trusted in his own righteousness. He tried to gain fellowship with God by relating all of the good works and all of the things that merited him in God’s sight. Luke 18: 11, “The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself, ‘Thus God I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in a week and I give tithes of all that I possess.‘“ Now the publican on the other hand you notice in verse 13 says something entirely different. “The tax collector standing afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner.’“ And guess what? Merciful is “hilaskomi”. This again is the variation of the form for propitiation. He said “God”, when he stood there and bowed his head and beat his chest he said, “God please, be propitious to me a sinner.”

“Savable”

Now God can’t be merciful to anybody until His justice is satisfied. Then He can extend mercy, which is grace in action. But the publican was saying, “God, when you look at me, please see me through the blood on the mercy seat.” Now two results came from these two prayers. We are told, verse 14, “I tell you this man, the tax collector, the publican, went down to his house justified rather than the other religious man, the Pharisee.” Why? Because the Pharisee says, “God, I’m a good man. I’m a lot better than most people,” and he appealed on his works. Whereas the publican says, “God, just look at me through the blood that has satisfied Your justice- that’s all I ask of You.” You see what God has done for us is that He made everybody in this room “savable.”

Dr. Chaffer told us one time in class that he was lying in bed one night trying to think of a word that described what God had done to solve our problem. He thought of this word, “savable”. He said he jumped out of bed and walked up and down praising God because it was a strategic word. It explained what reconciliation is all about. It is now possible for you to be saved. It is now possible for you to have eternal life. The covering of the mercy seat is complete. Actually what this publican said was, “God be propitiated to me a sinner.” This is not a proper prayer for you to pray today.

A very famous evangelist used to invite people at the close of his meetings to pray a prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” To begin with, it’s wrong to tell people that if they want to go to heaven, they should pray. This violates the word right off the bat because the word tells us that if you want to go to heaven, just believe and accept the fact of what God has provided in removing the wall. God doesn’t say, “Get into your closet and agonize and maybe I’ll let you get into heaven.” You see there is this whole idea that God is some kind of recalcitrant tyrant who has to be talked into blessing us and letting us enter heaven. Nobody can be saved by coaxing mercy from God, but you can be saved by believing His gospel. God can’t be merciful to a sinner, so don’t ask Him. He can only be propitiated and that’s what He is. You see it’s an insult for you to look up to God and say, “God will you please be propitiated to me?” He is propitiated. That’s what His Son agonized on the cross to remove that particular block in the wall that separates you from Him. His justice is satisfied.

So propitiation depends on the character of God alone, not on your character, and the result is that God’s maximum love is now expressed toward you. There is nothing standing away in face of this love having full expression. This is His attitude toward you and me as Christians in our sorriest moments. This is His attitude toward us in our greatest moments. This is His attitude toward the down and outer bum in the gutter. This is His attitude toward the up and outer well-off bum standing on top of the gutter. His love is maximum either way because He is propitiated. God in eternity will not love you any more than He loves you right now. His expression of His love to you will not be more in eternity than it is now. Now you can believe very readily that His love will not be more. You say, “Yes, God is unchangeable. His love will not be more.” But I’m trying to get across to you that God will never express His love more deeply to you than He does at this moment, because that’s what propitiation did. It removed the troubles. It opened the door so that He is just ready to just pour everything upon you that He can. He wants to immerse you in such blessing that you’re going to want to jump up with the excitement of experiencing the joy and the blessings that God has to give you. Because that’s what the love of God wants to do. It wants to bless. It wants to bring joy. It wants to bring happiness. It wants to bring fulfillment. It doesn’t want to bring struggle and trials and unhappiness.

So we’re inseparable from this love that God has given us. Romans 8:38, “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God has made you “savable.” The question is, do you want to be saved? You see just because God has made you “savable,” just because God’s justice has been satisfied, just because His love is free, (now to express itself in grace towards you, doesn’t mean that it will be so), you will not be saved simply because God has made it possible for you to be saved.

**Faith**

In this moment, you must make the act of faith. Take that step of trust and believe this. It is a matter of personally receiving Jesus Christ as Savior. That’s all it is. It is not raising your hand. It is not walking an aisle. It is not being baptized. It is not joining a church. It is not promising to do better. It is not cleaning up your life. It is not going around making things right with people. It is absolutely nothing but believing the gospel. If you believe it, you just unclog the line of blessing. It just bursts out in all of its magnificent glory upon you. This is the doctrine of propitiation. It removed this problem of the character of God. Next Sunday morning, we have to look at another part of the holiness of God and that’s righteousness. That one is even in some respects a little more exciting because I notice that very frequently, even in gospel tracts, they are very careful to explain what God did in redemption. That is you have your sins forgiven. But we’re going to take up a thing in reference to the righteousness of God that I rarely find people explaining to those that they want to lead to the Lord. The real big, tremendous, positive return that God gives to those who believe Him and those who accept His Son as their Savior. God is giving you something that if you have any question in your heart this morning, a little doubt that the fact that you are in the family of God and you are there forever. I’m still running across people who are eating the edge of their hearts out a little bit with the concern that, “Am I sure that I am going to continue to be saved?” Well next Sunday morning when we take up this other part that deals with the holiness of God, I think you’ll put your heart to rest once and for all. I hope that you’ll accept Him. If you’ve never done this, this is the time to do it, because He is satisfied. The issue is, are you satisfied?

“Our heavenly Father we ask Thee to speak to the hearts who may be here this morning, outside of Thy family, who are born into the wrong family, Satan’s family—born on the wrong side of this wall of separation, and who perhaps have been struggling to get through it, who perhaps have been deluded by bad advice and bad information. We pray that now with Bible doctrine in their minds, they have received this that the Spirit of God would bring the conviction necessary to accept this and to act upon it. To receive Christ by the act of believing the facts that Thou has presented to us in reference to Thy work upon the cross for us. We pray Father for those of us who are believers, that we shall have a deepened sense of understanding of our strength before Thee as those who live with Thee as the God who has been propitiated toward us. One with whom we have no fear. One before whom we have no concern that Thy love will ever be less than it is at this moment, nor will it ever be greater. For this we thank Thee, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

John E. Danish, 1971