***The Doctrine of Redemption  
RO27-02***

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Please turn to Romans 3:24-26. We are speaking on the subject of "Justification by Faith." This is number four in the series.

I hope that now you understand very, very clearly the subject of justification, and that you can talk about it with some degree of understanding. We have pointed out to you that this passage is the summit. This is the mountain peak of what Paul has been seeking to do in this book. He deals with some great, magnificent doctrines here in the short space of a few verses. He uses words which we are exploring in detail, because these are words by which Paul is attempting to describe the magnificent thing that God has done for us in providing us salvation.

So, what we have said thus far as to what justification is all about is simply this: that Jesus Christ came into the world as the God-Man to provide eternal life in heaven for sinners. Jesus Christ, because He was personally sinless, as the perfect Lamb of God, was qualified to die spiritually for the sins of the world, which He did. The payment of Christ secured redemption for all sinners so that their sins are now forgiven. For this reason, we say that the issue between an unbeliever and God is not sin, but it is the issue of Jesus Christ – the accepting or the rejecting of the sacrifice already made for the sinner. The sin question has been settled. Sin is not the issue. All sins of the human race: past; present; and, future, have been paid for. That issue as once-and-for-all been settled.

**In Christ**

This provision of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is now offered as a gift to everybody, and to anyone who will accept it. A person can believe the message of the gospel; that is, that Christ has died as a substitute on the cross for our sins. When a person accepts the message of the gospel, he, in effect, accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. At the moment that a person receives Jesus Christ as Savior, the Bible says that God that Holy Spirit takes the person, and He baptizes him into Christ. So now, in the sight of God, he holds the position which the Bible calls being "in Christ." Here is the believer. He accepts the message of the gospel – the death of Christ on the cross. God the Holy Spirit takes that sinner (and that's what he is – he is a believing sinner), and He places him here into this circle, which we will describe as being "in Christ." This happens at the moment that a person believes, and the Bible calls this the baptism of the Holy Spirit. You have this described in 1 Corinthians 12:13, for example.

This happens to everybody who believes in Christ the Savior. This happens at the instant that a person makes the decision: "Yes, I will accept the provision that God has made for my sins. So, every believer now possesses the position which is described in the Bible as "in Christ." Being in Christ is very important, because it means that all of the merit of Jesus Christ now becomes the position of this believer who is in Christ. He possesses everything that Christ is. He shares all that Christ is.

One of the things that Jesus Christ is, is, of course, absolute righteousness. Or we may describe it as "+R." Because Jesus Christ is absolute righteousness, the believer also shares in that absolute righteousness. That means that the person is free from all moral guilt. Possessing absolute righteousness means that you are free from moral guilt. It means that, in God's sight, you have never sinned even once. It is more than forgiveness. Forgiveness means that you did a wrong thing and I'm extending pardon to you. But the guilt is still there. Salvation that God provides, with absolute righteousness, means that you are not only forgiven, but you didn't even sin. Far as God is concerned, you always have been absolutely perfect. How can He say that? Well, it's because you're in Christ, and because Christ has always been absolutely perfect.

This is what happens when you believe in Christ as Savior. This is not complicated. This is not deep theology. This is just simple teaching of the gospel. This is a little more than the average evangelist wants to go into. This is more than the average preacher, who wants to drum up new members for his church, wants to explain. But that's why there's a lot of lack of assurance among Christians. That's why there's a lot of uncertainty on the part of people. That's why there is difficulty on the part of Christians of even explaining the gospel to other people.

So, I want you to have this very, very clear in your mind. You believed the gospel at some point in time when that information was brought to you. When you believed it, you received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and at that instant God the Holy Spirit baptized you into Christ, so that you now share everything that Jesus Christ is.

**Justification**

Now, the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) looks down from heaven upon you, the believer, and he sees you here in Christ. He observes that you, therefore, possess absolute righteousness. The Father, speaking as a judge, officially declares you to be justified. Here we are to the subject we've been studying. As God looks upon you and sees that you share the absolute righteousness of Christ, God the Father makes a pronouncement as a judge concerning you, and that pronouncement (or verdict, if you want to put it that way,) is that you are justified. And then He treats you accordingly. He treats you as one who is justified. Being pronounced justified means that the righteousness of Christ has been credited to your account in the eyes of God, the judge of the universe.

**More than Forgiveness**

Justification is more than having your sins forgiven. You had that done by the redemption that Jesus Christ provided. It is a positive contribution of having your guilt removed in the sight of God.

So, justification is a position which is held by the believer. Because he holds this position, God says, "He is justified." I hope that clarifies for you the major doctrinal theological word "justification," so that you can, at any time, explain this to your children, as you should; and, so that you could at any time explain this to an unbeliever, and say, "Well, I'll tell you what God is ready to do for you, and how God does this, and how God looks at these things." And all of this is explained for us in the Bible, like in the book of Romans. This is what God is ready to do. This is what He has done for you. This is what He will do for you. This is why you know that you're secure, because you can't ever leave this position. Once you are justified, God, having passed this verdict, can never change it, and say, "I've changed My mind. You're no longer justified. A verdict once stated (pronounced by a judge) is irrevocable.

However, justification does not mean that you are sinless in practice. You have been pronounced righteous, but you have not been made righteousness. You will someday be made righteous. That comes in heaven. Now you are simply pronounced as such.

So, don't let it bother you that you still sin. That is obviously the way it is until the old sin nature is removed, which cannot be done until you're in the presence of Christ. So, understand that the fact that you sin in no way affects your justification.

**Being Saved**

This is what it means to be saved. To be saved means to be justified – God regarding us as absolutely righteous.

**The Doctrine of Redemption**

All of this justification has been made possible by another great truth (another great doctrine) which Paul refers to here under the word "redemption." So, now we're going to conclude our review of the doctrine of redemption. The word "redemption." we have already learned, means "release of a slave upon payment of a price."

1. **Christ Paid for Our Sins**

So Romans 3:24 says, "Being justified (being pronounced absolutely righteous) freely (without a cause in ourselves) by His grace (just as a gift of God), through (or on the basis of) the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." It is on the basis of a price that Jesus Christ has paid.

The Bible views everybody under bondage to sin. This position is described as being "in Adam," in contrast to the position of freedom "in Christ." To be in Adam means to be in the slave market of sin. Jesus Christ on the cross provided the price of redemption. In His spiritual and physical death, He has paid the price of redemption so that we could be released from the slave market of sin. Redemption secures forgiveness of sins for the sinner who trusts in Christ.

1. **The Greek Verbs for "Redemption"**

We pointed out that there were three Greek verbs which describe for us, and clarify for us, exactly what's involved in redemption. Let's briefly look at those again.

* 1. **"Agorazo"**

First was the word "agorazo." "Agorazo" teaches that redemption requires a price that had to be paid for God to purchase the sinner of. "Agorazo" means you have to pay something in the slave market in behalf of the sinner.

* 1. **"Exagorazo"**

The second verb was "exagorazo." This teaches that redemption needs to be purchased out from the slave market of sin, and never to be returned to it. That's a magnificent addition. "Ex" means "out of." Not only do you have to pay for a slave, but then you have to take him out of the slave market, never to be returned again.

* 1. **"Lutroo"**

And as if that isn't enough, God the Holy Spirit uses a third Greek word, "lutroo" to describe the doctrine of redemption. "Lutroo" teaches that redemption means that a sinner is made a free man to serve God. Not only is the price paid for him in the slave market, and not only is he taken out of the slave market forever, but then he is given his freedom. He is no longer retained as a slave. That is what redemption means to you and me: God paid the price to redeem us; God took us forever out of the control and bondage of sin and Satan; and, then God set us free to be God's free men, and voluntarily to become the bondslaves of Jesus Christ.

1. **The Mechanics of Redemption**

There's a third point that we want to add to this: the mechanics of redemption – the procedure – the means by which this redemption is achieved. We have this in 1 Peter 1:18-19: "For as much as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold from your vain matter of life, received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." So, redemption is not something that was purchased with material things. Therefore, you cannot buy your way into heaven. You cannot do something with material things to gain eternal life. You cannot buy candles to burn. You cannot pay a priest to say masses over your soul. You can, in no way, contribute money to secure redemption. This was secured instead with the death of Christ on the cross.

Therefore, Acts 16:31 tells us what we are to do to secure redemption personally, and that is simply to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the mechanics of redemption is faith in Christ. The procedure of redemption is to trust in Him as personal Savior.

1. **The Qualifications of a Redeemer**

A fourth point describes for us the qualifications of a redeemer – the qualifications required of a redeemer of mankind. We have this illustrated in the Bible in the book of Ruth, in the story of Ruth and Boaz – how Boaz proceeded to redeem Ruth. In that story, there are four things we learn that must be true about a person who is to redeem another.

* 1. **A Kinsman**

He must be a kinsman. Therefore, Jesus Christ has to become human to pay for our sins. Hebrews 2:14-15 describe how He became a human being in order to be qualified to be a kinsman redeemer to us. In the Bible, the redeemer has to be related to you. Jesus Christ is related to all of us as a human being. He is, by the fact that He was born into the human race, part of our human family, as we are all ultimately brothers and sisters to one another.

* 1. **Able to Redeem**

A redeemer must be able to redeem; that is, he must have the price required to pay for the slave. And Jesus Christ had the price required; that is, He had a spiritual life to give in death for our sins. Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 1:18-19 describe this fact. Jesus Christ was able to pay. He had what was required.

* 1. **A Free Man**

A redeemer must be free from the problem enslaving the slave who is to be redeemed. That is, you yourself cannot be a slave. In the old days of slavery in the United States, one slave could not go and buy another slave, and free him. You yourself had to be a free man to be qualified to buy a slave. So, Jesus Christ was free of the problem. He was sinless. Therefore, He was not in the slave market of sin. Hebrews 4:15 and 1 Peter 2:22-24 teach that. Jesus Christ was free of the slave market problem. Therefore, He was able to buy us out.

* 1. **Willing to Redeem**

A redeemer must be willing to redeem. It does no good that a person is a kinsman; that he has the means whereby to redeem; or, that he is in a position to do so (being qualified to do so) if he will not do it. And in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, He voluntarily chose to die for our moral guilt. Luke 22:42 and Matthew 16:21-23 teach that. Jesus Christ was willing to go to the cross. That's what He chose to do; that's what He wanted to do; and, that's what He did do.

So, the qualifications of a redeemer of mankind are very specific.

1. **The Mission of Jesus Christ**

The Bible tells us that the mission of Jesus Christ, when He came into this world, was very specifically to be the ransom for mankind's redemption. Mark 10:45 teaches us that. Jesus Christ Himself was the price of our redemption, and that's why He came into the world.

1. **Redemption is the Basis for Justification and Propitiation**

Redemption provided by Jesus Christ is the basis for justification and propitiation. That's what we have in the passage we're studying, Romans 3:24-25. It is redemption which is the foundation that enables God to justify us. And it is redemption that enables God to be propitiated, which is a third great doctrine that we're going to look at in the moment – the doctrine of propitiation. Paul just masses these monumental words all in the space of a few verses as he struggles to give us a full-blown picture of what God has done for us in this business of salvation. Well, justification and salvation are both dependent upon this act of redemption – a very important feature of God's work for us.

1. **A Twofold Application**

The word "redemption" has a twofold application, and here is a very happy truth about redemption that you want to always remember.

* 1. **Present**

Redemption first has a present application. Its present application is the forgiveness of our sins. Ephesians 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:18-19 describe the fact that redemption secures forgiveness of sins; that is, that God pardons what you and I have done. That's not enough to get you into heaven. That's only stage one. That's only phase one. You must also have a positive addition of the absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ, so that God must declare you to be justified as well before you can go to heaven. But the first stage is this business (the prison application) of redemption in terms of the forgiveness of sins.

* 1. **Future**

But there is also a future application, and that is to your body – to the deliverance of your body from its presence ability and reliability to decay. A little later on, in Romans 8:23, Paul is going to make reference to this in the words: "And not they only, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit. Even we ourselves grow within ourselves, waiting for the adoption (that is the redemption) of our body;" that is, Paul says, "We're looking forward to the day when, not only as creation looks forward to release from the effects of sin, but we are looking forward to redemption in terms of our body. It is going to be nice not to get sick again. It is going to be nice not to find parts of your body missing as a result of an accident. It is going to be nice not to find your fingers all scrounged up and your knuckles all enlarge from arthritis. It is going to be nice not to find yourself red in the face because of your high blood pressure, and everything else that happens to the human body. It's just going to be nice that everything's always going to work perfectly. And the nicest thing of all about it is that the body will never die. Once that body is raised, it will never, never die again. It will function perfectly for absolutely the rest of eternity.

This was a theme which was very clear in the Old Testament. They looked forward to it as well as we do. You have this in those great verses in Job 25-26, where Job says, "For I know that my redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." That is one of those reoccurring fantastic statements in this first book of the Bible that was written, Job, that shows a depth of theology that just sometimes catches us off guard. It's hard to believe that they had that much insight into theology that far back. But there it was. You couldn't say it in a more definitive way: "In my flesh, I shall see God. There's no doubt in Job's mind that someday he would stand before God in his very physical body that he had at that moment.

So, there are two applications to redemption. There is a present application. Your sins are now forgiven. Therefore, you are now ready for the second stage of being declared absolutely righteous – being justified. And secondly, there is a future application to your body when it too shall be released from the debilitating effects of the decay of sin.

1. **We Will See the Full Effects of Redemption at the Rapture**

The full effects of redemption in our experience await the day of the rapture (Ephesians 4:30). At the day of the rapture, all the full effects of redemption will be experienced: both relative to sin; and, to your physical body.

1. **A Great Personal Cost to God**

The doctrine of redemption emphasizes the great personal cost by which God purchased our salvation. 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 2:6-8 describe the great cost to God personally in order to provide us this redemption. He didn't have to do it. He didn't owe it to us. We didn't deserve it. But it was something that His love moved Him to do. But it required Him to pay a great price. So, again, we remind you that while we say salvation is free, as far as its availability, it was not free as far as God is concerned. There was a great price which he had to pay for it.

1. **The Old Testament Animal Sacrifices Portrayed Redemption**

Summarizing this doctrine, the doctrine of redemption was portrayed in the Old Testament by the animal sacrifices (Hebrews 9:22). As you know, the Hebrew people thought in concrete terms. They didn't think in abstract lines of thought the way we do. For that reason, when the Hebrews thought about somebody being dead, they thought about his breath stopping at his nostrils. And they viewed the nostrils as being the spirit of life breathing in him. When he would breathe his last, they viewed this as his spirit moving out of his nostrils, and leaving the body. And that's, in effect, what Jesus Christ did on the cross. He commended His Spirit to God; then He took one last breath, and He exhaled. What did he exhale?

He exhaled His Soul and Spirit. The Hebrews thought in those very concrete terms concerning all these things that are theological subjects. When they came to this business of redemption, they thought in very concrete terms there, because God had set it up that way. They understood that it took a life to pay for a guilty life. And they understood that a life was being taken by the fact of the blood which was being shed. An animal was not simply taken and quietly strangled upon the altar. An animal was not quietly fed something that was poisonous so that he would die as a sacrifice. When they brought that animal, to represent what Christ was going to do in payment for sin; that is, that a life was to be given, they took that animal; they pulled his head back; they cut the main artery in his throat; and, the blood just rushed out. Of course, when it was a larger animal like a bull, it just spewed out. But one thing was very clear to them. In this very concrete fashion, they knew that the life had been given.

That's why the Bible stresses that the life was associated with the blood. When they saw that that blood was gone, they knew that life was gone, and it was portrayed to them in this very vivid way. So, all of these sacrifices of the Old Testament were in this concrete fashion, demonstrating to these people that the redemption of Jesus Christ on the cross took His spiritual life and His physical life in payment for the sins of the world. And that was the critical feature of redemption as it was portrayed in the Old Testament.

So, then getting back to Romans 3 with that summary, let's move on to Romans 3:25. We immediately come again to some very significant doctrinal summaries – categories of truth. Verse 25 says, "Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed through the forbearance of God." Paul at this point, touches another doctrine, and this is the great doctrine of propitiation. So, let's look at that.

**The Doctrine of Propitiation**

Verse 25 says, "Whom," which refers, of course, to Jesus Christ that he has been speaking up here in verse 24: "Whom God." In the Greek this says, "*The* God," indicating that he means God the Father. God the Father is the one who has done something here that Paul is going to describe in terms of this word "propitiation," a provision that God the Father has made. This is a very critical provision in order for people to go to heaven, just as justification is critical, and forgiveness of sins is critical, and redemption is critical. Here's another one. Propitiation is critical. And the fact that he stresses the God father here as the author of this salvation points out to us that this is not something that came about by itself. This is not something that we provide. This is not something that we sought. This is not something that God stumbled into. This is not something that Jesus Christ did, and then the Father said, "OK, I'll go along with it." This is something that God the Father Himself, was the motivating force behind. It is this loving God who said, "I've got to do something about man's condition in sin."

So, right off the bat, Paul says, "Whom God set forth," and the words "set forth" is the Greek word "protithemi." "Protithemi" is made up of two words put together. This word "pro" is a preposition, and it means "before." This word "tithemi" is a verb, and it means "to place." So literally, this means "to place before" or "to set forth." This word came to connote a public display – to set forth publicly. You might almost describe it as carrying a placard on which you're making a statement. The idea here is that God has given some information about the death of Jesus Christ relative to our sins. Here it is going to be information about the death of Jesus Christ relative to what he calls "propitiation." This word is in the aorist tense, and that means a point in time when Jesus Christ died on the cross as the Lamb of God. That's when God was openly displaying Him in this fashion.

It is interesting that this is in the middle voice, and middle voice means that the person does this for himself. So, here you have the amazing statement that God, for Himself, has set forth Jesus Christ. You thought that God provided salvation through Christ for you. You and I might ask: "Why did God provide the death of Christ on the cross?" Our immediate reaction would be to say, "So that we could go to heaven." But that isn't the reason. That's a secondary reason.

The first reason is for something that God wanted to do for Himself. What he wanted to do for Himself was to release the love that he had for us, which was boxed-in by His own holiness. His Holiness, which is made up of His justice and righteousness, could not permit him to exercise love toward the sinner. God wanted to give you happiness, but He couldn't do it. God wanted to have you spend eternity in the joys of heaven, but He couldn't do it. God wanted to bless your life now with all kinds of material, and spiritual, and intellectual, and emotional, and artistic things of one kind and another, and He couldn't do it, because he was restricted by His own holiness.

So, God, first of all, for Himself (middle voice) showed forth Christ in a certain relationship of propitiation. And we'll see what that means in a moment. But He did it to release His own expressions for us in a way of love. It is indicative mood, which is a statement of fact.

So, this word tells us that God the father took the initiative in securing for us an escape from His own wrath. And He did this because of a reason that he had – a purpose that He had for Himself to release his own love: "Whom Jesus Christ, God the Father publicly displayed." The words "to be" are not in the Greek: "Publicly displayed a propitiation." And here it is. We've come to the great word: "hilasterion." This word means "a means of appeasing." It means "appeasing." This is a noun here. The idea is to do something to turn away the wrath of another person.

We do this in one way or another. We insult somebody, and we smile when we do it. What are we doing? We're giving him a "hilasterion." We're trying to provide him with an appeasement. We're providing a propitiation. We've just insulted him, but we want to divert his wrath from us.

**Jacob and Esau**

You have a beautiful example of this in the book of Genesis, when Jacob, after many years away from home, finally starts back and finds that his brother Esau, whom he treated so shamefully, and from whom he stole the very birthright, was coming to meet him, and he found that the brother was coming with a small army. Jacob was very fearful. He was sure that the brother was going to slaughter him and his family, and take all of his possessions. So, Jacob decides that he must set forth a propitiation to Esau to divert his wrath. He must set forth something to appease the wrath of Esau.

So, in Genesis 32:20, we read about Jacob giving instructions to his servants whom he is sending with gifts to Esau: "And say moreover, 'Behold your servant Jacob is behind us, for he said I will appease him" (and there is the Hebrew word for "propitiation"): "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face. Perhaps he will accept me.'"

Now what Jacob was doing there was appeasing the wrath of Esau. This is the condition that you and I are faced with before God. God has a wrath against us. That wrath requires Him to send us into hell. By the way, you can see why the word "hilasterion," the concept of the doctrine of propitiation, is one doctrine that the liberals despise. This doctrine gets a lot of badmouthing. As a matter of fact, some of the liberal translations don't even use the word "propitiation." They want to use another word. They use the word "expiation," and they want to stress the fact that what man needs is to have his sins wiped out. He needs his sins forgiven. Well, all of that is well and good. And expiation is important. But the reason that they use that word is because when you use the word "propitiation," you automatically refer to "wrath." When you speak of propitiation, you're speaking about appeasing somebodies wrath against you, and they do not like to think of God as a God of wrath.

**God is a God of Wrath**

The unbeliever; the cultist; and, the liberal mentality hates the concept that God is going to punish sin because He is a God of wrath. Yet that is exactly what this word is describing. So, that's why they don't like to even translate "hilasterion" by its real translation: "propitiation." If you check your translations, you'll see how they stick in the word "expiation," just to be able to deemphasize the fact that God is a God of wrath.

This word comes from a verb, and this will tell us a little more about the word. It's the word "hilaskomai." "Hilaskomai" was a word which was commonly used by the ancient Greeks. When they used it, they used it in reference to their gods, and they used it in reference to the idea of earning something from their gods. Remember that the Greek gods were not gracious. They were not inclined to be kind to people. The Greek gods always had to be conned into doing something nice, or they had to be induced in some way into doing something nice. They were just indifferent.

1 Kings 18 gives you the story of Elijah and the Baal worshipers, and that confrontation that they had. And you will notice that the Baal worshipers proceed in the typical way that the pagan people did in reference to their gods in trying to appease them, beginning with the frame of reference that they were indifferent. You just read that story, in 1 Kings 18, and you'll see how they were trying to get an indifferent God to pay attention to them – and indifferent god to do a kindness for them, and light that fire on that altar.

**Satisfaction**

This was behind this verb "hilaskomai," from which we get our word "propitiation." However, the pagan idea is not at all involved in the New Testament use of this word. The idea of man doing something to change God's attitude; to make God gracious; or, to make God's attitude kindly disposed toward Him, is not involved in the New Testament use of the word "propitiation." The Bible makes it very clear that while we were sinners (indifferent – the enemies of God), that's when Christ died for us. So, there's nothing wrong with God's attitude. Propitiation does not mean that we have to change God's attitude so that He will be nice to us. When the word is used in the New Testament, it is simply declaring that God's holiness has been satisfied.

When we say that God is propitiated, it means that God's justice has been met. It means that God's absolute righteousness has been matched. That's how God is propitiated. That's the problem that God had. God looked at a sinner and said, "Now, how am I going to be able to honestly say that I have dealt with his sin, the penalty of which is spiritual death. The wages of sin is spiritual death. I have paid that. How can I say that that price has been paid? And how can I actually say that this person is absolutely righteous, so that I can declare him just?" That was God's problem because God's nature (His essence) refused to accept that. So, God had to be propitiated relative to His justice. He had to be satisfied in justice and in righteousness. His standard of absolute righteousness had to be met. His perfect justice had to be satisfied. That's what Christ did. This divine satisfaction is relative to man's sin which rightly deserves the wrath of God. It's not relative to something that is indifferent in God.

So, Jesus Christ has propitiated the holiness of God in behalf of mankind. Christ bore the penalty for sin which divine justice demanded. And He imputes His absolute righteousness to sinners who trust Him as Savior, which God requires of all who enter heaven. So, the holiness of God has been satisfied, or propitiated. This is why God is free to bring sinners into His Heaven without Himself being guilty of sin in doing so. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are taken in. and God's essence is not violated. What has happened is that God's holy wrath has been diverted from you and me by the propitiation of Jesus Christ to the Son of God Himself. He bore the wrath. And God's grace delivers us, consequently, from that wrath.

There is another thing that's interesting about this word. Let's get back to our noun here that we have in Romans 3:25. This word "hilasterion" is used one other place in the Bible, in the book of Hebrews. I want to read it over there, in Hebrews 9:5, because it's translated in a different way. And it ties back to something very enlightening in the Old Testament: "Now over it." And this is describing the ark of the covenant – the one object of furniture which was in the holy of holies of the tabernacle: "And over it (the ark of the covenant), the cherubim of glory." These were two angels, one at each end of the ark: "Shadowing the mercy seat," and there is our word "hilasterion:" "Shadowing the mercy seat of which we cannot now speak particularly."

So here, the writer of Hebrews describes the lid that was on the ark of the covenant, and he calls it the "hilasterion." Paul, in Romans, uses the same word, and he calls it "propitiation." And that's how it should be translated there. In the book of Hebrews, the author is dealing with the elements of the tabernacle and the articles of furniture. And rightly, the word should be translated "mercy seat" there. But the idea is that it means the same thing.

Let's tie it together. The Old Testament was translated into Greek in that translation called the Septuagint, which is symbolized by LXX, which is the Roman numeral for 70 (purportedly for 70 translators who worked on it). The Septuagint, when it translated the Hebrew Old Testament, every time it came to the word "mercy seat," it used this Greek word "hilasterion." The Greek word that we had in Romans is the one that's used in translating in the Septuagint.

So, what we have here is the idea of propitiation tied to this cover, interestingly enough, on the ark of the covenant. Now, why is that? Well, you remember that the ark of the covenant was an oblong box, probably three-and-a-half by three-and-a-half by two-and-a-half feet high. It was made acacia wood which represented the humanity of Christ, and it was covered with gold which represented His deity. This is described in Exodus 25:10-22 and Exodus 37:1-9.

**A Pot of Manna**

The ark had something in it. It had three items which were evidences of the sin of mankind. This is described in Numbers 17:8-10 and Hebrews 9:4. You'll remember that in the ark was, first of all, a pot of the manna that God used to feed the children of Israel in the wilderness. They complained against this food, and the manna who represented their sin of complaint against God's provision.

**Aaron's Rod that Budded**

It also had Aaron's rod (that dead stick) with a live bud shooting out from it. It budded upon the occasion when God was identifying Aaron and Moses as the legitimate spiritual leaders of Israel. Well, some of the people of Israel were rebelling against God's spiritual leadership that He had appointed. This was again demonstrating man's sin.

**The Ten Commandments of Two Tablets of Stone**

Then there were the two tables of Moses upon which God had written the Ten Commandments. These were the second tables. These were not the broken ones, but the second ones that God gave which were not broken. These, of course, were the epitome of the expression of absolute righteousness that man had failed to meet.

**The Mercy Seat**

So, these three items were there inside this box, the ark of the covenant. On top of this box, covering these three items, was simply a lid. The Bible calls it the mercy seat. The Hebrew word for "mercy seat" means "the place of covering." This lid actually covered these evidences of man's sin. At each end of the box (on the top) were two angels – the highest rank of angels called cherubim. Their wings were outstretched. The wings were touching each other and their heads were bowed forward. They were looking down upon this lid called the mercy seat. And thus they were, through the lid, in effect, viewing man's sin.

This place called the mercy seat was appointed by God as the place where the Jews would commune with Him. Here was the tabernacle. The front part was called the holy place, and the back part was called the holy of holies. And this box, the ark, was the only item of furniture in there, with the angels here at each end. Here, this gold top was the mercy seat, from which God would commune with them.

The mercy seat was approached only once a year, and that was on the day of atonement. Yom Kippur is the Hebrew. And the Jews to this day observe this, and they take a holiday when Yom Kippur comes around, it means the great day of atonement. On that day, the high priest went into the holy of holies to make atonement for the sins of the people for another year. You have described in Leviticus 16:11-17 and Hebrews 10:3.

First of all, he would offer a young bull for himself, and then he would go in there, and he would sprinkle the blood here on top of this mercy seat. Then he would go out and he would kill one of two goats, and he would take that blood in, and now he would sprinkle that in behalf of the people and their sins, and thus symbolically, on this mercy seat, sprinkle what was to represent the blood of Christ, and the propitiation that he was going to make in the future. Then he came back out, and Israel was atoned for one more year.

In other words, God was forgiving sins on credit in this symbolical way, saying, "My Son is someday going to make the propitiation (the satisfaction) permanent. Now it is a temporary satisfaction made by the blood of this animal." So, when these two angels, who on the one hand represented the absolute righteousness of God, and on the other hand, the perfect justice of God – when they look down upon the contents of that ark (representing man's sin), they saw it through the blood of propitiation.

That is the point of tying together this word "hilasterion," on the one hand, with propitiation, and on the other hand, translating it as "mercy seat." The mercy seat was the place where God was propitiated. And the holiness of God, as represented by these angels, was satisfied. In time, the very body of Jesus Christ became the place of propitiation.

So, Hebrews 9:5 says that He is the mercy seat. He is the place where we come back into fellowship with God.

Romans 3:25 looks at "hilasterion" in terms of the sacrifice, but Hebrews 9:5 looks at the same word in terms of the place. So, Romans translates it "propitiation," and rightly so. Hebrews translates it "mercy seat," And rightly so. And Jesus Christ is therefore the true sacrifice where God's holiness is satisfied. And propitiation means that divine wrath has been poured out then on Christ. The work of propitiation, incidentally, is once-for-all (Hebrews 9:11-12, Hebrews 9:23-28).

Dr. John E. Danish, 1975

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