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Sermon Notes

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The Glowing Heart of the Gospel, part 2: Propitiation Through Christ

Romans 3:21-26

I. Classical Illustration: Propitiation in Action

II. Controversy: Is God a God of Wrath?

A. Liberal theology's basic assumption: "It's all a big misunderstanding!"

1. Universal fatherhood of God... universally loving attitude toward all people at all times
2. Humanity's sins do not alienate God... but they harden US against wanting Him
3. Faulty views of the atonement:
 - a. example theory: Socinius, then Unitarians

The real value of the atonement is the beautiful example of total dedication to God... Humans are basically good and just need an example to follow;

b. moral influence theory

Example of God's love for us (as opposed to ours for God)... "See, I really love you, and I will now seek to melt your heart by proving my love for you."

Illus. Burning house, "demonstration of affection"

BUT... what about God's justice??

B. "Guess who moved?"

1. Popular bumper sticker: "I no longer feel close to God... Guess Who Moved?"
2. Same idea related to unbelievers: God is not estranged from you, but you have moved from Him... all you need to do is realize how much God loves you
3. BUT scripture refutes this passionately!

All humans exchange the glory of God for something else, and that exchange makes God very angry

C. Expiation vs. Propitiation

1. C.H. Dodd, 1936: *“The meaning conveyed is that of expiation and not propitiation. Most translators and commentators are wrong.”*
2. Shortly thereafter, 1946, RSV translators chose “expiation” here in Romans 3:25
3. Dodd himself was chief translator of NEB in 1961... also (of course) used “expiation
4. Definitions: Expiation = covering, putting away, rubbing out of sin so that it is no longer an obstacle to fellowship between man and God... expiation is CLEANSING
5. Propitiation = ALL OF THE ABOVE PLUS “pacifying the wrath of God”... difference is the wrath of God
6. Owen’s four components of propitiation:
 - a. an offense to be taken away
 - b. a person offended who needs to be pacified
 - c. a person guilty of the offense
 - d. a sacrifice or some means of making atonement for the offense

D. What is Atonement?

1. NIV chose “sacrifice of atonement” (most readers don’t know what “propitiation” means)
2. KEY: what is “ATONE MENT”? lit. “AT-ONE-MENT
3. Two parties estranged from each other... what does it take to bring them together?

Isaiah 59:1-3 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. ³ For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

Clearly God is offended by sin, and He moves away from fellowship with sinners until the sin is atoned for... God’s wrath then comes to the fore and becomes our biggest problem

Illus. Imagine a massive argument between husband and wife in a stateroom on the Titanic! The conflict is a problem, but the bigger problem is the gash in the side of the ship! So also does the danger from the wrath of God dwarf all other problems in an unbeliever's life

III. Clear Biblical Doctrine: God's Wrath a Past, Present and Future Reality

A. Biblical data: Past, Present, Future

1. Past: Consistent expressions of God's wrath

a. OT: Twenty different words to express God's wrath

b. 580 occurrences of these words... the wrath of God is a MAJOR theme

Illus.: Korah, Dathan, Abiram led a revolt against Moses... the ground opened up and swallowed them whole... the next day all the Israelites gathered against Moses; the glory of the Lord appeared and told Moses to get away from the people so God could put an end to them

Numbers 16:46 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started."

That day, 14,700 people died from a plague, victims of the wrath of God

c. Isaiah's description

Isaiah 30:27-28 See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. ²⁸ His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction

2. Present: Daily expressions of the wrath of God

Psalm 7:11 "God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day."

Psalm 38:3 "Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin."

3. Future: A Wrath to Come is Promised

Colossians 3:6 “Because of these [sins], the wrath of God is coming.”

B. Sin: The constant cause of God’s wrath

1. Clear cause: sin!

Amos 1 & 2 “For three sins of Judah, and even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.”

2. Marching orders for the Teachers of the Law: sin brings wrath

2 Chronicles 19:10 “In every case that comes before you from your fellow countrymen ... you are to warn them not to sin against the LORD; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your brothers.”

3. Shedding of blood, adultery, violence, covetousness, revenge, lack of justice for the poor, affliction of the widow/orphan... ALL LISTED as direct causes of God’s wrath

C. YET God’s Wrath Is His “ALIEN task”

Isaiah 28:21 “The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon-- to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.”

1. God is SLOW TO ANGER, ABOUNDING IN LOVE
2. Totally unlike human anger:
 - a. God’s wrath is always righteous, holy, slow
 - b. human anger is almost always based on pride or inconvenience
3. No direct pleasure in the destruction of the wicked

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’

4. God “LONGS TO BE GRACIOUS”

Isaiah 30:18 “Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion.”

5. BUT no human being has the power or ability to turn away God’s wrath!!! We are so puny

Therefore, God must instruct US on how He is to be appeased

D. God Instructs Israel on Propitiation: the Sacrificial System

1. The Atonement Cover: Where I will meet you

Exodus 25:17-22 "Make an atonement cover of pure gold--two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. ¹⁸ And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover ... There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites."

- a. place also of direct communication between God & man

Numbers 7:89 When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony. And he spoke with him.

- b. therefore, it was placed in the Holy of Holies... could not simply approach

Leviticus 16:2 The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

- c. place where all sacrificial blood poured out for the day of Atonement

2. The Day of Atonement: Sin dead and gone forever

- a. one bull, killed for the sins of the priests... blood sprinkled on the atonement cover

- b. two goats: one to be killed as a sin offering for the people

Leviticus 16:15 "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. ¹⁶ In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been.

- c. scapegoat: the transfer of guilt

Leviticus 16:21-22 He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites--all their sins--and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man

appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

E. The Three-fold Lesson of the Sacrificial System

1. All sin deserves the death penalty

Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death...”

2. The death penalty can be paid by a substitute: i.e. GUILT CAN BE TRANSFERRED
3. Animal sacrifice is just a picture of a future fulfillment [these sacrifices had to be repeated over and over!! They didn't really cleanse anything!!]

Hebrews 10:4 “It was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.”

The core of it all: God has a great wrath against sin, but God's wrath is not His final word... God will make a way to propitiate Himself

IV. Context in Romans

- A. Romans 1:16-18 The Gospel necessary BECAUSE God's Wrath is Revealed

Romans 1:16-18 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." ¹⁸ FOR the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness”

- B. Romans 1:32 God's Righteous Decree: Wrath On the Sinner

Romans 1:32 “Even though they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do those very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

- C. Romans 2:5 Storing Up Future Wrath Every Day; The “Day of God's Wrath” is Coming

Romans 2:5, 8 *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed... for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*

D. Romans 3:5-6 God's Wrath Will Be Poured Out Righteously

Romans 3:5-6 *But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)* ⁶ *Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?*

E. Romans 3:9-20 Universal Danger

Romans 3:10 *"There is no one righteous, not even one."*

"Is there no balm in Gilead???" YES!!! Here in verse 25 is total freedom from the wrath of God

V. Completed Atonement!! Four Key Phrases

A. "God Publicly Displayed Him"

1. Greek: public presentation... God handed Christ over, publicly displayed Him
2. When was He displayed:
 - a. in space and time, outside the walls of Jerusalem, probably 29 A.D.

Acts 26:26 [Paul to King Agrippa] *"These things were not done in a corner."*

- b. every time the gospel is preached properly based on Scripture

Galatians 3:1 *"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified."*

3. Next week: the reason for the public display... a vindication of the justice of God

B. "A Propitiation"

1. Greek: "place of atonement" or "sacrifice which removes wrath"

Traditional translation in OT: "Mercy seat"... the place where the blood is poured

2. Jesus is the one who absorbed the wrath of God

3. Transfer of Guilt & Substitution

2 Corinthians 5:21 “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Isaiah 53:5-6 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

4. Jesus suffered the wrath & curse of God in our place!!

Illus. Lightning rod

5. He is our propitiation

C. “Through Faith”

1. Our connection with Christ is by faith

2. Christ suffered in our place if we are joined to Him by faith

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

3. We look to Christ and to Christ alone to remove God’s wrath... none of our puny “good works” will survive the day of God’s wrath

4. God wants simple trust in Christ: “I deserved to die... Christ died in my place”

D. “In His Blood”

1. Christ is a propitiation in blood

2. Blood = life taken violently... it was the death that God wanted

3. OT sacrifices... blood made atonement

Exodus 12:13 The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

Hebrews 9:22 “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

Why not? Because all sin deserves a death penalty, and the death penalty must be paid

Romans 6:23 “*The wages of sin is death...*”

4. Jesus’ blood represents the payment of the death penalty for all whose place He took

VI. Consequences

A. Human inability

1. God must propitiate Himself... nothing we have or do can remove His wrath
2. We must simply believe and receive, or the wrath will remain on us

B. Christ’s central purpose

1. Christ’s atoning death was the central mission of His life, not some tragic accident

Matthew 20:28 “...*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

2. Propitiation alone explains Gethsemane
 - a. Jesus seems almost weak when facing death

Illus. Many criminals courageously walk up the steps to the gallows; Socrates drank the hemlock without a tremor; even Stephen died full of glory, no fear whatever!

- b. He seems in terror of the Cup He must drink

Matthew 26:38-39 *Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

Luke 22:44 *And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

Why such incredible distress? Why did this incredibly courageous Man suddenly seem so much in terror? What was the Cup?

Revelation 14:10 “...he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.”

C. The incredible peace of faith

1. Jesus' blood is sufficient... God's wrath is taken away for all who believe
2. Peace... a right relationship with God... is now possible

John 20:19-20 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Romans 5:1 “Since we have now been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. No believer in Christ need ever fear the wrath of God

Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Romans 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 1:10 “Jesus... rescues us from the coming wrath.”

D. The incredible danger of unbelief

1. If anyone rejects this message... they must pay the death penalty themselves
2. You must receive all God's wrath which you have stored up
3. Not one sin will be left unaddressed... every bit of wrath will come

John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”