

1 John
The Believer's New Relationship to Sin (Part 5)
1 John 1:5 – 2:6
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Today, I want us to come back then to our study of 1 John, and we find ourselves in chapter 2. Two British authors, Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, wrote a controversial book entitled, The Lost Message of Jesus. Tragically, sadly, in this book, they actually ridiculed the Biblical doctrine of propitiation that we're learning from 1 John, and they even label it as, "The Myth of Redemptive Violence."

Listen to what they write,

The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse, a vengeful father punishing his son for an offense he has not even committed. Understandably, (They write,) both people inside and outside of the church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement that God is love.

That is a tragic quote on many levels. But I think most tragic of all to me is that these men have grossly misrepresented what the Scripture teaches about the biblical doctrine of propitiation. It's important for us that we need to understand what the Bible does teach and to be able to defend it because it's at the heart of the gospel. Well, what we're going to talk about today, a large theological word, a crucial concept, propitiation, is at the very center of the gospel. And, let me put it as bluntly as I can, if you don't understand this truth, you don't really understand the gospel because it is the gospel.

As we're learning in 1 John 2, these two professing Christians from Britain have tragically, not only rejected the doctrine of propitiation, but they have rejected the very heart and soul of the good news of Jesus Christ. We're studying 1 John, chapter 1, verse 5, through chapter 2, verse 6, and here we've discovered the first test of a true Christian. You can know that you have eternal life, that you're a true Christian, because you now have a new relationship to sin. Your relationship to sin is not what it once was if you're truly a Christian, and that's what John is unfolding for us here.

Now, this test is based on two fundamental biblical truths. First of all, the truth of God's essential nature of holiness. Verse 5 says, "God is Light." He is perfectly holy; and because of that, beginning in chapter 1, verse 6, and running through chapter 2, verse 6, it means that if we have a relationship with God, then our relationship to sin has changed as well. So, this is about the believer's new relationship to sin, and that new relationship is shown in several ways. In verses 6 and 7, it's shown by the pattern of his life. True believers are walking in the light as God is in the light, meaning that the pattern of their lives is not sin; the pattern of their lives is obedience and holiness.

It doesn't mean Christians don't sin; we do, but when it comes to the pattern of our lives, it's not marked by sin, but rather by obedience and righteousness. Verses 8 and 9, it's shown by the admission of inherent sinfulness. And then beginning in chapter 1, verse 10, and running through chapter 2, verse 2, this new relationship of the believer has to sin is shown by the admission of his actual sins. Let's read this section again. I'll just read beginning in verse 10 of chapter 1, through chapter 2, verse 2, which is the portion we're dealing with, you follow along. John writes:

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Now we've learned in these few verses, first of all, that a false Christian, that is somebody who says they're Christian but really isn't, denies or downplays his sin. Sometimes, like the false teachers in John's day, they deny it outright, "We've not sinned because sin is attached to the body, the body's matter, it's evil, there's nothing you can do about that; it's only our spirit that matters." That's what the pre-Gnosticism of the first century taught, but it doesn't merely take that form, sometimes it simply downplays sin by redefining it, reclassifying it, passing the blame on to somebody else. False Christians do that; they deny or downplay their sins.

And then in verses 1 and 2 of the second chapter, we discover that a true Christian admits his sin, hates his sin, pursues holiness, and trusts the work of Christ alone as the only solution for his sins. Now, that's a long phrase, but I've tried to capture those first two verses.

We're taking it apart and looking at it more in detail. We've already seen that a true believer admits and hates his sins and pursues holiness. First part of verse 1, "My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin." John didn't want those, to whom he wrote, to sin, and if you're a true Christian, you don't want to sin either. There is, within you a desire not to sin, you hate sin, and you want to be holy like Christ is holy.

But secondly, the true Christian trusts Christ and His work for his sins. That's from the middle of verse 1 and through verse 2. And here in these words, we see two aspects of the work of Christ that true Christians keep coming back to. If you're really in Christ, your mind keeps coming back to these two great realities.

First of all, "His Intercession as Our High Priest." Verse 1 says, "...if anyone sins, (And we do.) we (are having) an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." And we looked at that in great detail, one of the great comforting truths of Scripture. When you sin, remind yourself there's One who stands before God on your behalf, who represents you, who speaks on your behalf to God against the accuser, Satan.

But the second aspect of the work of Christ is in verse 2, and it's "His Propitiation as Our High Priest." Look at verse 2, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." True Christians continue trusting entirely in the work of Christ and, specifically, His work a propitiation as they deal with the ongoing reality of sin in their lives.

Now as I said, this is at the very heart of the gospel, and this is what helps us when we sin. So, it's really important that we understand this, so I sort of hit the pause button on our flow through the text and wanted to look at this in more detail.

Last time, we looked at, “The Meaning of Propitiation.” It occurs in several forms in the New Testament, and what it means is the satisfaction or the turning away of God's wrath, and that happens by means of an atoning sacrifice. The satisfaction or turning away of God's wrath by means of an atoning sacrifice. Now, why is that even necessary? Why do we need this? Well notice verse 2, “...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” There's the problem. Again, we looked at this in detail; I'm not going to develop it again, but let me just give you the propositions we uncovered together.

First of all, God is perfectly holy and entirely without sin. Secondly, that perfectly holy God created moral laws for us that we are supposed to keep, and those laws merely reflect His own holy character.

Number three, in His holy justice, God is righteously angry toward the sin and the sinner. God, by nature, cannot tolerate sin and He is justly, righteously angry toward the sinner and the sin.

And in fact, number four, He must punish our sin and rebellion with spiritual, physical, and eternal death. Death is the wages of sin as Romans puts it.

And then finally, and this is perhaps the most concerning of all; God's perfect, holy, just wrath against our sin is only satisfied when the just payment of death has actually been made. Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 22 says, “...without (the) shedding of blood (That is without the violent death of the person.) there is no forgiveness.” Now, all of that's the bad news.

Fortunately, there's good news and that's where we come to today, to the good news and really the thrust of 1 John 2:2. And it is, “The Accomplishment of Propitiation,” the accomplishment of propitiation.

Notice again, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins,” He is the propitiation for our sins. Now, when we examine the New Testament texts with this word group, we learn several essential truths about Jesus's accomplishment of our propitiation, both how and why and what it

looks like. So, we want to take this work of Christ apart a little bit and understand it more thoroughly. So, let's look at these essential truths about propitiation.

First of all, “It Was Initiated by the Love of God,” it was initiated by the love of God. What prompted God to satisfy His own offended holiness, not by punishing the guilty, but by punishing His own Son? It wasn't as Mann and Chalke say, some sort of vindictive spirit in God, not at all! They've misunderstood the New Testament; they haven't even read it because the truth is the amazing reality of propitiation flows from the character of God and, specifically, the love of God. Look at chapter 4, verse 10, this is a crucial text. “In this is love, (You want to know what love really looks like, how it's really demonstrated? Here it is.), not that we loved God, but that (God) loved us.” And what did God's love for us motivate Him to do? “He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” What motivated God, what drove God was His love for His people! He sent His Son because He loved you, Christian; He loved you. Romans, chapter 3, verse 25 says, “...God (the Father) displayed (Christ) ...as a propitiation.” This was the Father's plan, and it was His plan because He loved you.

In fact, here's the amazing reality. Christian, the Father loves you as much as He loves His only one-of-a-kind Son. Have you ever thought about that? He loves you as much as He loves Jesus Christ! That's what Jesus Himself said in the High Priestly prayer in John 17, verse 23. Jesus is praying to the Father and He says this, “(Father)...You...loved them, even as You have loved Me.” And if you doubt that, think about how the Father proved that love. Romans 5:8, “...God (demonstrated) His...love (for) us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” It's amazing! Before we came to Christ, the wrath of God remained on us as John 3:36 says, like a stain we could never get out. But because of God's great love, He initiated a way to satisfy that just wrath, not on us, but on His own Son. It was initiated by the love of God.

Secondly, “Propitiation was Pictured in the Old Testament Sacrifices;” it was pictured in the Old Testament sacrifices. It's been said that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Old Testament believers had thousands of pictures each year to help them understand why Jesus had to come and what He would accomplish in His death, and those pictures came in the form of animal sacrifices. The book of Leviticus introduces us to that great sacrificial system. The first

16 chapters of Leviticus, where many Christians stop their Bible “read-through” in January, is a crucial part of what God does, because Leviticus 1 to 16, describes this great reality, “Sinful man cannot approach holy God except through sacrifice.” That's the point of those 16 chapters.

In the first 7 chapters of Leviticus, God prescribes five different kinds of sacrifices that were to be part of the worship of every Israelite. Now think about that for a moment. If you had lived in Old Testament Israel, you had five different kinds of sacrifices that you were required to make in addition to those that were done at the national level. Every day, there was a morning and evening sacrifice, and there were countless sacrifices made on the special holidays for the nation. But as an individual, you were responsible to make sacrifice, and those five sacrifices were intensely personal. I don't think living today, we fully understand this.

Let me just take you back, for example, and I want you to imagine with me, for a moment, that you were an Old Testament believer, that you lived in Israel, and that you were required to make sacrifice, and that you had sinned against God, and you needed to bring a sin offering. What would that look like?

Well, it would look like this. You would have brought a physically perfect animal to the forecourt of the temple, one without blemish. And then you would have laid your hands on the head of that animal; you would've been, in so doing, implying that that animal now served as your representative. And often, if it was a sin offering for example, you would confess, over the head of that innocent animal, your sins. It pictured the transference of your guilt to this innocent little animal that had done nothing you had done.

Then comes the most shocking part of all; the priest would've handed you the knife; and with your own hand, you would've slit the throat of that innocent animal, and its blood would have drained out right in front of you. You would have taken its life; and then as the blood poured out of the throat of that animal, the priest would've caught the blood in a wide-mouth bowl, and he would've walked a few steps away to the brazen altar, and he would have slung that blood across the altar. And then he would've taken the appropriate part of the animal, depending on the kind of sacrifice, and he would've laid it on the altar to burn.

It was intensely personal, and it was intended to make clear, think about this, it was intended to make clear that that innocent animal was dying in your place that you deserved to die, but that animal was now dying in your place. God was making it clear that the only way sinful man can ever approach a holy God is through sacrifice.

You see, people often miss the point of the Old Testament sacrifices. The sacrifices were not for the worshiper; they were for God; they were for God! Moses explains this repeatedly in Leviticus 1 to 7, using a phrase that occurs some 42 times in the Old Testament connected to sacrifice. Let me show you. It starts in Genesis, chapter 8, this is the first time we encounter it after the flood, Genesis; chapter 8, verse 20 says, "...Noah built an altar to the LORD, and (he) took (the animals)...and offered (the animals) on that altar." And verse 21 of Genesis 8 says this, "The Lord smelled the soothing aroma." What was the soothing aroma? It was the smell of the burning flesh rising up from that animal, a soothing aroma. And then, "(God) said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.'" The sacrifice that was offered soothed the wrath of God.

Turn over to Leviticus, look at Leviticus, chapter 1. I just want you to see this, Leviticus, chapter 1, verse 9, the end of the verse, "... (the) burnt offering (is) an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD." Verse 13, the end of the verse, "... (it's) an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD." Verse 17, the end of the verse, "... (it is) an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD." Chapter 2, verse 2, the end of the verse, "... (it is)...an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.' Verse 9, "... (it is)...a soothing aroma to the LORD," and so forth. Go over to the sin offering, chapter 4, verse 31, the middle of the verse, "...the priest shall offer it up (and the) smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the LORD."

Do you get it? That's the point of the sacrifices. The phrase, 'a soothing aroma,' literally means, 'a scent that quiets, soothes, or tranquilizes.' You see, the smoke from the burning sacrifice was an aroma that calmed God's just anger against man's sin. That's a disturbing thought, and we don't like to think about it like this, but my sin and your sin so greatly offends

God, it stirs His anger such that His just wrath against our sins must be calmed. We like to think about other people's sin that way, but we tend to give ourselves a 'get out of jail free' card. "Not me, you know I'm like a favorite." It doesn't work like that; the Old Testament sacrifices were for God, to quiet, to soothe, to satisfy His holy wrath against our sin.

Propitiation was pictured in the Old Testament sacrifices.

Number three, "It Was Never Truly Accomplished in the Old Testament Sacrifices." It was pictured, but it was never really accomplished. Turn over to Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 1, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near." They didn't work; the sacrifices didn't accomplish propitiation. Look at verse 4, "...it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Verse 11, "Every priest stands daily ministering an offering time after time the same sacrifices, (in that old covenant system, and those) can never take away sins." They pictured propitiation, but they didn't actually accomplish it.

And that brings us to number four, "Propitiation Could Only Be Accomplished by the Voluntary Death of a Perfectly Holy, Sinless Human." Let me say that again, "Propitiation could only be accomplished by the voluntary death of a perfectly holy, sinless human." If you're still in Hebrews 10, look at this portion I skipped, look at verse 5, or let's go back to verse 4:

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He (That is Jesus.) comes into the world, He says, (And he quotes from Psalm 40.)

**"SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED,
BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;
IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU
HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE.**

**"THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, (This is Jesus talking.) BEHOLD I HAVE COME (IN THE
SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME)**

TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"

Now, the writer of Hebrews beginning in verse 8, interprets this, he says:

After saying above, “SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN, YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them” (which are offered according to the Law), then He (says), “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.” (What does it mean? Verse 9) He takes away the first (animal sacrifices.) ...to establish the second. (And here's the point, verse 10.) By (God's) will we have been sanctified (We've been set apart to God; we've been saved.) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

It's the only way; it's the only way propitiation could have been accomplished by the voluntary death of a perfectly holy, sinless human, and our Lord was! God gave Him a body; He gave Him full and complete humanity. Why? So, He could die in your place. An animal could never die in your place and really satisfy the justice of God, but a perfect human, your substitute could, and that's who Jesus was.

And that brings us to number five, “Propitiation Was Perfectly Accomplished by the Substitutionary Death of Jesus Christ,” propitiation was perfectly accomplished by the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. Go back to our text, 1 John 2, verse 2, “...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” He Himself obviously refers back to the end of verse 1 to Jesus Christ.

Now, do you get the shock of this? If you lived in Old Testament times, it was the priest who offered a separate animal sacrifice; the priest offered the sacrifice, but our priest is the sacrifice! “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.”

Now, to help us really understand what Christ's death accomplished, we have to go back and make sure we understand, one day every year in Israel's history, “The Day of Atonement.” It's recorded in Leviticus 16, but it's interpreted for us in Hebrews, chapter 9. Turn back to Hebrews again; Hebrews, chapter 9. Here's what happened on the Day of Atonement, chapter 9, verse 3:

Behind the second veil (in the temple) there was (an area) which is called the Holy of Holies. (Now in that area, the Holy of Holies, there was) the ark of the covenant, (that box, which was) covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding (some) mana...Aaron's rod which budded, and (This is key.) the tables of the covenant.

In other words, God's Law. You remember Moses, when he came down and found the people in idolatry, he destroyed the first set that had been written by the hand of God, and he was required to come up with two more stone slabs and bring them up again to the top of Mount Sinai; and there again, God wrote with His own finger, He engraved into those stones, the Ten Commandments, the ten Hebrew words. They were in the box; they were in the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, he goes on in verse 5, "And above it (above the box.) were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the Mercy Seat." Now, the Mercy Seat is the name for the lid on the box of the Ark of the Covenant," that box that contained God's Law. And the word 'Mercy Seat,' the Greek word for 'Mercy Seat' here is actually our word for 'propitiation.' It's *'hilasterion.'* Here, it means 'the place' where sins were propitiated. Why would the lid of that box be called "the place where sins are propitiated?" Because of what happened on the Day of Atonement!

Verse 7 tells us what the high priest did, "...into the second (that Holy of Holies), only the high priest enters (and he only enters) once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance." What did he do? You go back to Leviticus 16, and on the Day of Atonement the high priest first went in with the blood of a sacrifice to atone for his sins and the sins of the priests. Then, he came back in with blood from another sacrifice for the people and he sprinkled that blood. What did he do with the blood? He sprinkled the blood of both of those sacrifices on the Mercy Seat, on the lid of that box. Why? Well, as I mentioned to you last week, it was picturing the great reality that the blood of that innocent animal, that substitute for the sinful people, that substitute had died, its blood was spread on the top of that Ark because it pictured that God's view of His broken Law had been covered by the blood. He couldn't see the Law that we had all broken; the death of that substitute had broken his view. That's the picture!

Now, in verses 11 and 12 tell us what Christ did. That's all the Old Testament stuff; verse 11 says:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

First of all, Christ didn't have to offer a sacrifice for Himself and His own sins because he had none. Hebrews 4:15, "(He was) without sin;" Hebrews 7:26, "(Our) high priest (is) holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners." And our High Priest didn't enter into an earthly temple but into the reality that it pictured, God's very presence. And He didn't offer an animal sacrifice for our sins; "He offered Himself," He offered Himself.

Now, go back to 1 John 2, notice John's interesting choice of verb tense. He doesn't say, "He Himself was the propitiation" but, "...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." Now, that doesn't mean what the Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christ is continually sacrificed in the mass; that's contrary to what the writer of Hebrews says later, Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 12, "(Christ), having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."

Instead, what he means here is that Christ's sacrifice is and always will be the only way the wrath of God can be satisfied toward our sins, and it did! Jesus fully satisfied God's wrath against our sin. Turn back to Romans, chapter 3, here's another one of those places where propitiation occurs, and here's what I want you to get. You remember the flow of Romans; the first two-and-a-half chapters are the bad news. Here's why we need the gospel because we are all sinners. When he gets to chapter 3, verse 21, he begins to roll out the good news and he talks about, in Romans chapter 3, verse 21, here's this righteousness that's a gift, it's talked about in the Law and the Prophets; it's the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. All of us have sinned, and this is the way, verse 24, any of us are justified or declared right with God. It's only as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. So, how did

Christ accomplish that redemption? Verse 25, “God...publicly...displayed” Jesus, He’s talking about the cross. God publicly displayed Jesus “as a propitiation in His blood.” Listen, propitiation is not only at the heart of the gospel; it is the gospel. If you don't understand it, you don't understand anything about what Christ was doing or what's offered to you in Jesus Christ.

Now, notice what he says, propitiation was necessary here in verses 25 and 26 for two reasons. Reason number one, it was to vindicate God's justice, verse 25 says, “...This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over sins previously committed.” Now I don’t have time to fully explain that. You can go back and listen as I was teaching the book of Romans, I did that in detail. But, let me give you the big picture. What he’s saying here is Jesus had to die to satisfy God's wrath, even the fact that God lets a sinner live a day longer than his sin. Even the fact that God does good to sinners when they deserve His wrath. God had to vindicate His justice in being good to you in letting you live and in doing good to you, and the only way He could vindicate it was through the death of Christ.

But that isn’t all propitiation was about. Verse 26 says there was another reason, “for the demonstration...of His righteousness at the present time, so that He could be just and (at the same time could be) the justifier of (ungodly people) who (have) faith in Jesus.” Jesus satisfied the wrath of God so that you could be justified; this is the gospel. Don't ever sell propitiation short! Jesus was our substitute.

In what way did He substitute for us? “He Himself is the propitiation;” He is the satisfaction of God's wrath for our sins, He endured the wrath of God that your sin deserved, Christian. Think about it this way, on the cross, God credited to Jesus’s account every single sin that every single person who would ever believe in Jesus would ever commit; and having credited those to Jesus’s account, God declared Him guilty of your sin! And then, for those six dark hours, Jesus experienced the full fury of the wrath of God against every sin of His people. He fully satisfied God's offended justice.

There's a great picture of this in Scripture. It's a picture of a cup, a cup of wine; and in the cup, inside the cup is God's wrath against sin, and Scripture says every single person who has sinned has the cup, and every person must drink it.

For example, Job 21:20, "...let (the wicked) drink of the wrath of the Almighty." Psalm 11:6, "Upon the wicked (God) will rain (coals of fire); Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup." Psalm 75:8, "...a cup is in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams; It is well mixed, and He pours out of this (Listen to this.); Surely all the wicked of the earth (And that's all of us.) must drain and drink down its dregs." In other words, there's a cup in the hand of God that represents His wrath against sin, and every sinner has that cup and will drink it. Isaiah 51:17, Isaiah writes to the people of Jerusalem, "...You...have drunk from the LORD'S hand the cup of His anger; The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs."

This happens in Revelation; turn to Revelation 14, and look at verse 9.

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the...holy angels and in the presence of the...Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night."

This is the wrath of God against sin. If you have sinned, and you have, there's a cup waiting for you, and you must and will drink it!

But here's the good news, our God who is perfectly holy, who is perfectly just, is also a God of amazing compassion and grace! And the God who is so holy and just reconciles sinners to Himself by letting His Son drink the cup that we deserved and had earned.

Matthew, chapter 26, verse 39, you remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, "...Jesus went a little beyond His disciples ...He fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not My will, but Your will be done.'" (Paraphrased.). What was Jesus talking about? What was in the cup? It wasn't His physical suffering. Listen, a lot of

Christian martyrs have died gladly suffering for their Lord. If I could put this respectfully, Jesus wasn't wimping out over the physical suffering ahead of Him. No! He's talking about the cup of the wrath of God, and He says, "Father, if there's any other way for You to be satisfied, then let this cup pass from Me, but if not, Your will be done not Mine." (Paraphrased.)

And Jesus got up from praying in that garden and He went to meet His accusers, and He had three Jewish trials and three Roman trials; He was beaten. He was prepared for execution; He was put up on the cross; and for those six lonely hours, He drank the cup, your cup! And He drank it all so that there's not a single drop, Christian, left for you; it's gone, it's gone forever!

If you're in Christ, you're not under God's wrath today. John 3:36 says, "...He who does not obey the Son...the wrath of God abides on him...He who believes in the Son, (today) has eternal life. (Paraphrase.) In addition, you're not going to experience God's wrath in the future. I love 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "...God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:9, "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved in the future from the wrath of God through Him."

Christian, you're never going to face God's wrath, and you're never going to face God's wrath eternally in the Lake of Fire; it's reserved for those who don't know Christ. Listen to Revelation, chapter 20, verse 14:

This is the second death, the lake of fire...if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

But, if your name is in the Lamb's Book of Life, that will never ever be your future. Why? Because Jesus drank the cup you earned and you deserved, and He drank it all!

There's one final truth about propitiation and that is, "It is the Only Propitiation." Christ's propitiation is the only propitiation for all people everywhere. Look at verse 2, "...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

Now, first of all, we need to be clear on what this cannot mean. It cannot mean that Christ satisfied the wrath of God for every person without exception. Why? Because that leads to two

very un-biblical results, and you end up on one or the other if you believe He satisfied the wrath of God for every person without exception.

First of all, you basically accuse God of injustice because what it means, in the end, is that God will eventually punish people for whom Christ already satisfied His wrath, and that's unjust. Or, it leads you to universalism, believing that every person will eventually be saved which is clearly unbiblical. 2 Thessalonians 1, 7 to 9:

The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

So, it can't mean everybody is eventually going to be saved. There are going to be those who reject the gospel who will suffer eternal destruction, it is called here "...away from the presence of the Lord." So, it cannot mean that.

Secondly, it does not mean that Christ made propitiation possible for all men. Now, let me just say that I understand Christians debate what's called, "The Extent of the Atonement," for whom did Christ die? Let me tell you what we all agree on. We all agree that Christ's death is sufficient to save all men, right? I mean, I hope nobody here would disagree with that.

Secondly, we all agree that not everyone will be saved because the Scripture clearly teaches that. Most of us would agree that there are unlimited aspects to Christ's death as I just showed you in Romans 3. In Christ's death, He purchased the right for God to do good to sinners and to let them live without harming His justice. But when it comes to the question, "For whom did Christ die?" or, "The extent of the atonement?" there is disagreement. Now let me just say, that this isn't the place to deal with that at length, and the elders are agreed that this question is not going to be a source of division in our church body. But if you're interested in following the sort of track my own mind has gone down, what I believe the Scriptures teach, you can listen to a message in "The Anchored Series," it's on-line entitled, "The Atonement, Part II," where I address this issue of the extent of the atonement.

But this verse does not mean that Christ's death provided potential propitiation for everyone without exception, and it can't mean that for two reasons. First of all, John says here that "Christ is the propitiation for the sins" of this other group, whoever they are, in the same way that He is the propitiation for our sins. And Paul explicitly says that Christ is only the propitiation for those who have faith in Him. Romans 3:25, "...God displayed (Christ) publicly (on the cross) as a propitiation (through faith)." So, it can't mean that.

Number three, it could mean that Christ's propitiation is sufficient for all people without exception, and of course, as I said, that's true. If God had intended to save every person on this planet or 10,000 other planets, the death of Christ would've been enough. There didn't need to be any other sacrifice. But of course, Scripture teaches that while the death of Christ is sufficient for all, it is only efficient for the elect, those whom God chose in eternity past. That's a different message or different series for a different time; go listen to Ephesians, chapter 1. It could mean it's efficient for all.

Four, it could mean there is a universal aspect to Christ's propitiation, and as I said from Romans 3:25, that's true. At the cross, God vindicated His justice in extending what we call 'common grace' to sinners.

But, number five, it likely means here in verse 2, that Christ's death is the only propitiation for all people everywhere. Now the reason I say it likely means that is because there's only one other passage in John's writings that's worded like this one. It's John 11, verses 51 and 52. It reads this way:

Now (Caiaphas) did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, (Caiaphas), prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation (Listen to this.), and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

In other words, it's both for the immediate people to whom he is writing and for people all over the world as well. In John 10, verses 15 and 16, Christ says:

I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

So, when John says in chapter 2, verse 2, "...not for our sins only, but also for those of the whole world," he likely means Christ's death is the only way anyone on this planet can be saved from God's wrath, there's no other means. It's like John 4:42, "...this One is...the Savior of the world." It doesn't mean He's going to rescue everybody on this planet, it means He's the only Savior. In 1 John 4:14, "...the Father has sent (His) Son to be the Savior of the world."

Listen, Jesus is the only Savior for this planet, and His satisfaction of God's wrath at the cross is the only propitiation for all people everywhere; there's no other way for God's wrath to be satisfied than that. This is what the Scriptures teach about propitiation.

Now, so what? What do we do with this? How do you apply the doctrine, the great biblical doctrine of propitiation? Let me start with you who are here this morning who are not Christians; if you've never repented of your sins, you've never believed in Christ, let me say this as directly as the Scripture says it, but with no pleasure in it. I just need you to know that somebody's going to drink the cup that your sins have earned, and you only have two choices, only two. Either you will refuse the offer, the gracious offer that God makes in His Son, you'll refuse the Father's love in sending His Son and you will say, "No! I like my sin too much. I'm going to stay where I am, thank you very much," in which case you will drink the cup forever. You heard the passages I read; that's not something in a, you know, a distant past era, that's God's truth for today. That's still as true today as when the Scriptures were written. So, either you're going to drink it or you're going to accept God's gracious offer in the gospel; you're going to repent and believe in Jesus, and God will apply the propitiation Christ accomplished at the cross to you.

You say, "What does that look like?" Well, I can tell you exactly what it looks like because our Lord described in Luke, chapter 18, verses 13 and 14, you remember, He tells the story of two men who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee; the other was a tax collector. And listen to what Jesus says, "...the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling

to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his chest saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’” You know what he was saying? That word, ‘be merciful’ literally he said, “God be propitiated to me, the sinner,” that’s our word.

You see, when did they go up to the temple to pray? At the hours of sacrifice, morning and evening every day. So, he's there to pray at the hour of sacrifice just within his line of sight, he can see the animal being killed, he can see its blood being poured out on the altar, he can see it being burned, and he says, “God, let your just wrath against my sin be satisfied by the sacrifice.” That's exactly what you have to do. You have to humble yourself like that man, acknowledge you have nothing God wants, you have no bargaining chips, all you can do is throw yourself on the mercy of God, beat your chest, and say, “God, I only have one hope. Let the sacrifice of Jesus Christ satisfy your justice against my sin.”

And here's the good news. Jesus said this, “I tell you, that man went to his house justified!” In a moment, you can be right with God, that's what Jesus says. The moment you're willing to humble yourself like that and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you are justified before God, you are declared right with God by God’s act, not yours. And Jesus finishes this, He says, “...for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” You just have to humble yourself before God, and say, “God, be merciful to me the sinner.” I hope that will be true of you today.

If you have trusted in Christ, and most of us here have trusted in Jesus Christ, we’ve repented and believed in Christ, how do you apply what we’ve just learned about propitiation? Well, don't forget the context, 1 John 2:2 is not a doctoral dissertation; it's helping us know how to respond when we sin. When we sin as Christians, we must confess our sins, chapter 1, verse 9. We must trust Christ’s intercession as the assurance of a relational forgiveness with the Father, chapter 2, verse 1. And chapter 2, verse 2, we must trust in Christ’s propitiation as the ground of our justification. You see, at the heart of the gospel that you believe, Christian, is this great exchange. God credited your sins, He knows every one of them, He knows every sinful thought you’ve ever had, every sinful word you’ve ever spoken, He knows every sinful act you’ve ever committed or ever will. And at the cross, God credited every single one of those sins to Jesus

Christ. And on the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had committed your sins, and that's how we can be forgiven.

And when we believe in His Son, God does something else amazing. He credits Christ's perfect obedience, thirty-three years of perfect keeping of God's Law, God takes that from Christ's account, and He credits it to your account, and now and forever, He will treat you like Jesus deserves to be treated. So, on the cross, Jesus was treated like you deserve so that forever you could be treated like He deserves. That's what you have to remind yourself of when you sin. It doesn't change your status; you don't need to be re-justified, you need to come back and say, "Lord, I hate my sin, forgive me for that sin, I never want to commit it again, I hate it, please help me grow in holiness, help me to be more like Jesus, but thank you that the ground of my acceptance is not my obedience, but Christ's. The ground of my acceptance is not that I can satisfy you for the sin I've just committed, but that He did. Thank you, God, that He drank the cup, and He drank it all." That's how we're to apply this truth. You see, when we sin, we find hope in this great exchange. We sing it, and I love those words.

He as though I,
Accursed and left alone.
I as though He,
Embraced and welcomed home.

That's the heart of the gospel. That's propitiation, and that's what we celebrate in this season. God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for these great truths. We are overwhelmed by your grace. Lord Jesus, thank you that you volunteered to drink the cup that we had earned and deserved. And thank you that you drank it all so that there's none left for us. Lord, help us when we sin to come back to the truths of the gospel, to hate our sin, to turn from our sin, to confess it, but to rehearse again what you have done in and through Jesus Christ our Lord, that He is Himself the satisfaction of your just wrath against our sins, and that's why you can receive us.

Father, I also pray for those who are here today who are not in Christ. Help them to be like that tax collector in our Lord's story. May they cry out that the sacrifice of Christ would be applied to them so that your justice toward them would be satisfied. Thank you that you are so gracious to do so, we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.