

# SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

KEY TERMS: RECONCILIATION; PROPITIATION

## RECONCILIATION

The words most frequently used referring to reconciliation with God are *καταλλάσσω* and *καταλλαγή*. *Καταλλάσσω* means to reconcile. God took our sin upon Himself and became the sacrifice for that sin thereby creating the situation in which a relationship of peace may be established which was not possible before that time due to the holy, righteous, and just demands of God in relation to the sinful nature of fallen, rebellious mankind which nature creates an eternal separation between man and God. *Καταλλαγή* means to reconcile encompassing the ideas of reconciliation, restoration, or exchange. It is a change such that the state of enmity between persons becomes a state of friendship instead. The Louw-Nida lexicon defines reconciliation as meaning “to reestablish proper friendly interpersonal relations after these have been disrupted or broken (the componential features of this series of meanings involve (1) disruption of friendly relations because of (2) presumed or real provocation, (3) overt behavior designed to remove hostility, and (4) restoration of original friendly relations)—‘to reconcile, to make things right with one another, reconciliation.’” Scofield defines reconciliation as “that work of God through the death of Christ which renders the world as a whole salvable and effects in the believing sinner a thorough change toward God from enmity and aversion to love and trust.” Unger writes, “When an individual sees and trusts in the value of Christ’s atoning death, he becomes reconciled to God, hostility is removed, friendship and fellowship eventuate” (Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, s. v. “reconciliation”).

In accordance with the Louw-Nida definition, we can see that the original state of peace between Adam and God was destroyed by the provocation of Adam’s rebellious sin. God took it upon Himself to take the action necessary to restore that original state of peace and having done so, peace is again available between man and God. The only way that reconciliation could be affected was by the activity of God; man was and still is incapable of doing anything to bring about this state of reconciliation.

Romans 5:9–11 <sup>9</sup>Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled [*καταλλάσσω*] to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled [*καταλλάσσω*], we shall be saved by His life. <sup>11</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation [*καταλλαγή*].

We are helpless to save ourselves and we exist in an ungodly state that eternally separates us from God. But even while we are in that condition, God loves us and Christ died for us. In Christ, we are justified and saved from the wrath of God. While we were

still enemies with God, God provided the path to reconciliation in and through the cross work of Christ. Once we place our faith in Christ Jesus, we are reconciled with God, that is, we enter into a state of peace and friendship with Him. This is possible only through the person and work of the God-man, Christ Jesus. Once all that happens, we are granted a ministry of reconciliation and we have a part to play in bringing other people into a state of reconciliation with God. We perform that ministry by sharing the gospel with unbelievers so they might believe and themselves be reconciled to God. We have been appointed to be ambassadors for Christ; as such, we speak His words as He has commanded us to speak. It is as though Christ is speaking through us and the message from Him to unbelievers is be reconciled to God and that is accomplished only in and through Christ Jesus. Paul seems to be saying that the gospel is the message of reconciliation. God has not completed the task of reconciling the world to Himself; He is in the process of doing that one person at a time as those who are in Christ preach the gospel to the lost which is a gospel of reconciliation.

A third word for reconciliation is ἀποκαταλλάσσω and it refers to the restoration of a relationship of peace which has been disturbed.

Ephesians 2:14–16 <sup>14</sup>For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, <sup>15</sup>by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile [ἀποκαταλλάσσω] them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

In this Scripture, Paul is documenting the reconciliation that Christ has made possible between Jew and Gentile. Peace is an integral part and result of reconciliation. Jews had the Law and Gentiles could not have cared less about the Law; this difference was a hostile barrier between them. One of the results of Christ's work was to destroy this enmity between the two so they could come together as one resulting in peace between them.

In Colossians, Paul records the truth that all things are able to be at peace with Him due to His work on the cross. Creation was harmed in the Fall and in Christ creation is reconciled to God. Proper order will be restored under the rule of King Jesus.

Colossians 1:20–22 <sup>20</sup>and through Him to reconcile [ἀποκαταλλάσσω] all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. <sup>21</sup>And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, <sup>22</sup>yet He has now reconciled [ἀποκαταλλάσσω] you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

In the King James Version the word "atonement" is sometimes translated "reconciliation" in the Old Testament but that is not a correct translation of the Hebrew word כָּפַר which is properly translated "atonement." The good translations since then, including the NKJV, have corrected this error. The word group for reconciliation is not otherwise used in the Old Testament. The Greek words for reconciliation are not used much in the Septuagint and they do not carry theological significance when they are used to translate a Hebrew word in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the major theological concept of reconciliation is as a component of justification. It is identifying the state of peace brought about between two parties, God and man, who were at complete enmity one with the other prior to being reconciled. Reconciliation is not justification; it is a component part of justification.

The word for reconciliation is also used to refer to reestablishing peaceful relationships between individuals. As always, context has to be taken into consideration when interpreting these words. In Matthew 5:24, Jesus talked about reconciling with one's brother before making an offering on the altar. In 1 Corinthians 7:11, Paul talked about estranged married couples reconciling. In Acts 7:26, Stephen recounts the story of Moses and his attempt to reconcile the two Jewish slaves who were fighting with one another.

Without actually using the words that would be translated "reconciliation," the concept is presented in 1 John 1:9. Once we are saved, we are never again at enmity with God in the same way we were prior to our justification salvation experience, but we can disrupt our fellowship with God within the family unit. Restoring that relationship to fellowship is a form of reconciliation. This seems to be more in the form of sanctification reconciliation available to believers once they have been justified. Perhaps it can be thought of as a lesser included sanctification reconciliation of the overarching justification reconciliation which can never be destroyed.

To sum up, the Bible clearly states the need for reconciliation; right up to the moment we are born again we are enemies of God. This is more than no relationship; it is a relationship in which the parties are in an active state of enmity one with the other. It is a state of war so to speak between the unbeliever and God. Once peace is established through faith, the war is over and peaceful relations are established. The Bible speaks to this hostile relationship in numerous Scriptures.

Romans 5:10 <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...

Ephesians 2:12 <sup>12</sup>remember that you were at that time separate from Christ...

Colossians 1:21 <sup>21</sup>And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

Sin created this hostile situation between God and man. This hostility, in turn, created the need for peace to be restored between the parties so the right relationship God originally desired and created that existed with Adam before the Fall can be restored with Adam's progeny after the Fall.

God is the One who reconciles; it is entirely His work. The incarnation of Christ was the declaration by the Father that He was going to provide the opportunity for reconciliation with mankind.

2 Corinthians 5:19 <sup>19</sup>namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

This reconciliation ministry was accomplished by Christ on the cross. It is "through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10) that reconciliation was and is accomplished. Now that we enjoy reconciliation with God, it is our responsibility to preach the gospel to unbelievers so they may enjoy reconciliation with God.

Although reconciliation has been accomplished, it only becomes effective for each individual human being upon belief in the person and work of Christ on the cross. No longer must any person continue to experience this state of enmity with God. Reconciliation is available to all and it is actuated by faith.

Reconciliation is a ministerial priority. As I noted earlier, we have a God-given responsibility to preach the gospel to people so they have the opportunity to be reconciled to God themselves.

## PROPITIATION

The words for propitiation are related to mercy. God is a merciful God and His mercy was proven on the cross. This doctrine has roots in the Old Testament. The cover placed over the ark and guarded by cherubim was called the mercy seat (Ex. 25:17-21). On the Day of Atonement, the priest would take the blood of the bull and of the goat and enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood of those sacrifices on that mercy seat (Lv. 16:1-34, specifically vv. 14-15). What the mercy seat represented in the Mosaic Law, Christ is in actuality to the believer and to God. "Propitiation is that Godward aspect of Christ's death which satisfies the whole demand of the law upon the sinner, opening the way for God righteously to meet in Christ, God's mercy seat, every sinner who believes" [C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, p. 1296]. God is holy and righteous and He cannot overlook sin; therefore His justice must be satisfied. He

has to be just in justifying those who are otherwise wicked and ungodly and who can do nothing to merit justification on their own apart from God. His anger must be fully satisfied or propitiated on behalf of the individual believer. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross satisfied God. "The word *propitiation* means 'to satisfy the wrath of God.' By means of Jesus' death, God's righteous demands were satisfied by the substitutionary payment of the blood of the Son *for the sins of the people*" [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Messianic Jewish Epistles*, p. 37]. We need to be careful in our understanding of this concept. God's justice was totally satisfied with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and mankind's sin debt was totally paid, however, God's wrath remains to be poured out on the unbelieving world. Believers are not appointed to wrath (1 Thess. 5:9; Rom. 5:9).

Exodus 25:17–21 <sup>17</sup>"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. <sup>18</sup>"You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. <sup>19</sup>"Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. <sup>20</sup>"The cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. <sup>21</sup>"You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.

Leviticus 16:14–15 <sup>14</sup>"Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. <sup>15</sup>"Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 <sup>9</sup>For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 5:9 <sup>9</sup>Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Not only will God's wrath fall on the unbelieving world in a cataclysmic judgment, but it is being experienced by an unbelieving, sinful, and rebellious world right now as Romans 1:18-20 makes perfectly clear. Both concepts are presented in Scripture.

Romans 1:18 <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Revelation 11:18 <sup>18</sup>"And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the

prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

Each individual person requires the application of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ that has already paid the personal sin debt for all who possess the sin nature of their father Adam. Jesus told a parable that illustrated this truth.

Luke 18:9–14 <sup>9</sup>And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>“The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ <sup>13</sup>“But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful [ἰλάσκομαι] to me, the sinner!’ <sup>14</sup>“I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This parable was obviously told pre-cross but there is a clear application here. Each person needs to appropriate by faith the justification salvation available to all. One of these men was relying on himself and on his good works for his salvation but the other was throwing himself on the mercy of God; he recognized his need for propitiation. He was saying, “God propitiate me, the sinner.” The same example today, post-cross, would look the same with the exception that both men would be living in a period when their sin debt has been cancelled but both still have a need to apply the propitiatory sacrifice available only in Christ. One is removed from God’s wrath and one is not.

Hebrews 2:17 <sup>17</sup>Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation [ἰλάσκομαι] for the sins of the people.

Propitiation, ἰλάσκομαι, means to appease, propitiate, conciliate, and be merciful to. It can also carry the idea of being kind, gentle, or gracious. Christ Jesus gave Himself as the sacrifice that would cause God to be merciful (propitious) to sinful mankind. He was merciful and faithful as the satisfaction for God’s justice so that In Him God’s mercy could be demonstrated. Christ satisfied the justice of God through His sacrifice on the cross. God’s holiness and righteousness had to see justice done. That happened in Christ. “Now God has displayed the cross as the new mercy seat by which He declares that He is satisfied with the blood of Christ as a *full satisfaction for sin* and a basis for justification. This is where He demonstrated His mercy” [C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism & Arminianism*, p. 75]. We may think of the Lord’s work on the cross as a satisfying sacrifice to God.

We just examined this concept of mercy as it was displayed in the Scripture of the tax collector imploring God to be merciful to him.

In Hebrews 9:5, the mercy seat is called ἱλαστήριον, which refers to the place where sins are forgiven. Then the author goes on to describe the work of Christ in a "greater and more perfect tabernacle" (Heb. 9:11). Christ's blood is sufficient to do what the blood of animals could not do.

Hebrews 9:12–14 <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, <sup>14</sup>how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The mercy seat, כִּפָּרִית in Hebrew and ἱλαστήριον Greek was the place where God met with sinful man. That physical mercy seat over the Ark has now been done away and God has met sinful man on the cross at Calvary where Christ Jesus became the propitiatory sacrifice.

Exodus 25:22 <sup>22</sup>"There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

The fact that the sacrifice of Christ Jesus was acceptable to God for the sins of the world is clearly true. This defeats the doctrine that Christ died only for the sins of the elect.

1 John 2:2 <sup>2</sup>and He Himself is the propitiation [ἱλασμός] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Christ offered Himself as the substitutionary sacrifice for all sins for all time for all people and not just for the elect. How do the Reformed and Covenant theology advocates of limited atonement justify their theology in light of Scriptures like this? This is an extremely important Soteriological issue.

One way is they deny the word "world" refers to every person; very often the meaning of the word "world" is changed by these theologians to mean the world of believers only. Context is important; many verses refer to the world but in context they are referring to only the lands of the Bible; they are figurative speech. "When God is said to love the world it clearly means the world of men, who are capable of believing in him (Jn 3:16)...In the case of John 3:16 it may not be thought unreasonable to suppose that God's love embraces everyone in the world, although this raises some problems over the statement in John 3:17 that God sent his Son 'that the world might be saved through him', since immediately afterwards salvation is restricted to those who believe. This implies that caution should be used before assuming that the 'world' means

everyone. The general title 'Savior of the world'...may well be intended to indicate the universal scope of the salvation brought by Jesus, i.e. in the sense of extending to all nationalities in the world" [Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 131-132]. Dr. Guthrie is saying that salvation is available to all the nations of the world in the sense that there are some elect people in all the nations of the world but the offer of salvation is made only to those elect people. No other people in the nations of the world other than the elect can or will be saved according to his theology.

Some theologians will also deny that any reference to "all men" means "all men." For example, John 6:33 says that the Bread that comes out of heaven will give life to the world. For the theologian who understands unlimited atonement, this verse poses no problem because it is figurative speech proclaiming the truth that the Lord came to provide the opportunity for life to all men and those in the world who believe will be saved. All the people of the world do, in fact, have the potential to become believers. The limited atonement theologian must interpret this to say that everyone in the world must be saved if unlimited atonement is true. According to their theology, they must interpret this verse to mean the Bread out of heaven will save only the elect of the world; their theology demands that conclusion. If the verse is interpreted literally, then their theology has to change and they cannot allow that to happen. Berkhof makes the claim that unlimited atonement means "that the fruits of the atoning work of Christ are actually applied to all [people]" [Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition*, p. 396]. Notice the untrue sleight of hand here in the way he redefines the issue; we do not say the work of Christ is applied to all people. We say everyone may have it applied to them dependent upon belief and that the possibility of belief is available to all people without exception. That is the biblically accurate position. Berkhof's position may be theologically accurate, but it is contrary to biblical truth; it is not biblically accurate. In order to make their theological system work, they have to interpret the Bible according to theology rather than according to literal hermeneutics, they have to redefine words to conform to their theology, and they have to lie about the position held by those who hold to unlimited atonement. No dispensational theologian has ever said that Christ's death saves all people; we do say His sacrificial death makes all people savable dependent, obviously, on faith.

Referring to Romans 11, Berkhof makes the astonishing claim that "the word 'world' cannot be all-inclusive, since the context clearly excludes Israel." This is the imposition of replacement theology onto the text. My point is that even Soteriology is compromised when God's plan for Israel is denied. Many dispensational theologians, in an effort to be nice, will claim that only eschatology is affected by Reformed doctrines concerning prophecy but that is incorrect. This doctrine effects every area of biblical and systematic theology.