

*Propitiation* is a big word, and the reason it is in the Bible is because there is no little word to use for it. It has to do with turning away wrath by use of an offering. It refers to something that makes a person inclined to be gentle with you and gracious to you when you have acted in a way that deserves judgment. The Bible sets forth the view that the sin of man brings on the wrath of God. The death of Christ on the cross turns away the wrath of God so that He can be gracious and kind to us in regard to our sin. This effect of Christ's death is what we call *propitiation*. We say He propitiated God. Paul writes, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood ..." (Rom. 3:24-25). It is because Christ has borne our sins in His body on Calvary's cross that we can be forgiven. Because He has paid the penalty, we can walk out free. Christ died for us, and God can deal with us as if we had not sinned.

In 1 John we read these familiar words, "If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Why does it say that He is "faithful and just" to forgive us our sins? God does not forgive us our sins because of our confession but because of Christ's death for us on the cross. However, it is not until we confess our sins that we receive the benefit of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we come to God and admit that we have sinned, we can claim from God what Christ has provided for us. God is then faithful and just to forgive.

Christ's having paid the penalty is the basis for our use of the phrase "for Christ's sake." God the Father thinks about the Lord Jesus Christ, sees how He has paid the penalty, and lets me go free. He does not let me go free for my sake or because I have confessed my sins. There is not anything I can do to justify myself in the sight of God. It is only because Christ died for me and God is willing to look on me through Christ's sacrificial death that I can receive the forgiveness of my sins. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. The Bible says, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Christ actually took the curse that belonged to me in His own body in order that I might be set free of the consequences of sin.

Very early in Scripture (Gen. 3:15) we are told that God's plan calls for an innocent substitute to be offered up as a sacrifice to Him for the sins of His people. This does not mean that God is cruel and unfair. It just means that sin is that awful. It is the sin that is cruel and unfair. God so loves us that He gave His own Son to be our sacrifice. The Lord Jesus Christ was the innocent substitute who went to the cross and suffered for our sins. Today the sinner can come to God, openly turn to God, call upon Him; and God is able to forgive him. For this Christ died, and so we speak of His being the "sacrifice for sins" on our behalf.