

EXPIATION / PROPITIATION

- I. Representative Biblical references
 - A. Old Testament

Numb. 35:33 - "no *expiation* can be made for the land" (Heb. *kaphar*)
LXX (Septuagint) uses the Greek *hilasmos* word group to translate the Hebrew *kopher/kippur* word group over 100 times.
 - B. New Testament
 1. Greek words *hilaskomai*, *hilasmos*, *hilasterion*
 - a. from roots of *hilaros* - cheerful (cf. Rom. 12:8; II Cor. 9:7), and *hileos* - kindly, merciful, gracious
 - b. meaning: to appease, to satisfy, to propitiate, to expiate
 - c. If personally satisfied, likely to be cheerful; if dissatisfied, not likely to be cheerful, kindly and merciful
 2. Usages referring to the atoning work of Jesus Christ

Romans 3:25 - "God displayed (Jesus Christ) publicly as a *propitiation* in His blood through faith" (RSV - "expiation")
Heb. 2:17 - "a merciful and faithful high priest...to make *propitiation* for the sins of the people" (RSV - "expiation")
I Jn. 2:2 - "He Himself is the *propitiation* for our sins...for those of the whole world" (RSV - "expiation")
I Jn. 4:10 - "He (God) loved us and sent His Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins" (RSV - "expiation")
- II. Developing a Biblical understanding of "expiation" and "propitiation".
 - A. Hebrew background of redemption and atonement is important for understanding concept of "expiation" and "propitiation"
 - B. The Greek word-group allows for a latitude of meaning.
 - C. Theological debate whether English word "expiation" or "propitiation" best translates the Greek words
 1. English words
 - a. "Expiation"
 - (1) from Latin *ex*=from; *piare*=to make amends
 - (2) meaning: "to make amends, to atone"
 - b. "Propitiation"
 - (1) from Latin *pro*=towards; *petere*=to seek
 - (2) meaning: to appease, to cause to be favorably disposed towards
 2. C.H. Dodd (British theologian - 1884-1973) repudiated the use of "propitiation" on the grounds that it implied a pagan concept of appeasing, placating and pacifying an offended, angry and vindictive god who could be bought-off, bribed and satisfied with the meritorious payment or performance of the offender (or his representative), in order to be favorably disposed, merciful and conciliatory toward them.
 - a. correct in rejecting such an idea in reference to God
 - b. the question is whether "propitiation" necessarily implies such an idea, or can convey a more positive idea of favorable disposition based on adequate and satisfactory removal of the cause of displeasure, wrath, alienation and estrangement, particularly as initiated by God Himself at the expense of His own Son as the vicarious and substitutionary propitiation.

III. Differentiating the concepts of "expiation" and "propitiation"

Expiation

- a sacrifice that satisfies the legal requirements
- satisfies the just consequence of death for sin (justice)
- forensic satisfaction
- legal, judicial, penal, mechanical
- focuses on remedial, restitutive action of God
- death of Christ makes amends for objective guilt of man's transgression of the Law
- correlates closely with ritual-sacrifice concept of redemption and atonement
- looks back at "redemption"
- overemphasis makes God's justice impersonal or mechanical

Propitiation

- a sacrifice that satisfies what God's character requires
- satisfies the just offense and wrath of God toward the violation of His character of holiness
- personal satisfaction
- relational, personal
- focuses on restorative result of God's action in Christ
- death of Christ removes the disfavor of God toward men because of sin
- correlates closely with relational-emancipation concept of redemption
- looks forward to "reconciliation"
- overemphasis anthropomorphizes God's personal attitudes

IV. Biblical balance of "expiation" and "propitiation"

- A. These are two important concepts that provide the transition between redemption and reconciliation.
- B. They should not be separated or divorced into an either/or exclusivism, but be balanced in a both/and synthesis.
- C. Proponents of exclusivistic extremes both cast their concepts in epistemological contexts that fail to adequately recognize the ontological reality of Christ's life and work.
- D. Exclusivists must beware of misrepresenting the character of God.
 1. Expiation only: God is not to be identified only with legal justice of retribution, restitution and reclamation.
 2. Propitiation only: God is not to be identified with inadequate anthropomorphic attitudes unworthy of His character.
 - a. Wrath of God is not irrational, selfish passion of personal pique and malicious vindictiveness. It is the settled unacceptance and intolerance of evil that is contrary to the character of God.
 - b. Love of God is not concessionary, conciliatory sentimentality leading to mushy mercy.
- E. Liberal and conservative theological positions
 1. Liberal theology tended toward "expiation" exclusivism (cf. RSV)
 2. Conservative theology tended toward "propitiation" exclusivism.
 3. Somewhat ironic since conservative theology has traditionally cast redemption in legal, forensic categories (cf. "justification"), and liberal theology has emphasized personal, social categories.
 4. On the other hand, conservative theology wanted to preserve concept of "personal relationship" with God, rather than ritual, intellectual concepts more prevalent in liberal theology.
- F. Need to maintain balanced Christocentric emphasis
 1. Jesus Christ is the expiatory sacrifice
 2. Jesus Christ is the propitiatory satisfaction