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"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expiation</th>
<th>Propitiation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• a sacrifice that satisfies the legal</td>
<td>• a sacrifice that satisfies what God’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>character requires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• satisfies the just consequence of death</td>
<td>• satisfies the just offense and wrath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for sin (justice)</td>
<td>of God toward the violation of His character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• forensic satisfaction</td>
<td>of holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• legal, judicial, penal, mechanical</td>
<td>• personal satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• focuses on remedial, restitutinal action of</td>
<td>• relational, personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>• focuses on restorative result of God’s action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• death of Christ makes amends for objective</td>
<td>• death of Christ removes the disfavor of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guilt of man’s transgression of the Law</td>
<td>toward men because of sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• correlates closely with ritual-sacrifice</td>
<td>• correlates closely with relational-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concept of redemption and atonement</td>
<td>emancipation concept of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• looks back at &quot;redemption&quot;</td>
<td>• looks forward to &quot;reconciliation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• overemphasis makes God’s justice</td>
<td>• overemphasis anthropomorphizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impersonal or mechanical</td>
<td>God’s personal attitudes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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