

# ▸ Leon Morris, “Propitiation”

Chap. 7 of his *The Atonement*

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## I. ▸ Introduction

- A. ▸ hope chapter will not prove too heavy for the ordinary reader
  - 1. ▸ problem: nobody seems to have able to make propitiation simple
  - 2. ▸ To most of us, the term is just plain incomprehensible!
    - a. ▸ result: a pronounced disinclination to make the effort needed to see whether anything much is at stake
    - b. ▸ But there is, in fact, quite a lot at stake.
  - 3. ▸ concept of “propitiation” is important to Biblical religion, so if we are serious about our Christianity we must at least make an effort to understand it
- B. ▸ Notice: Neither the verb nor the noun is of frequent occurrence in the NT.
  - 1. ▸ In many modern translations, the words are not found at all, but instead replacements (e.g., “expiation”).
    - a. ▸ doesn’t matter to most of us because we don’t understand “expiate,” “expiation,” either!
    - b. ▸ our reaction: “Why does it matter?”
      - i. ▸ neither word of common occurrence in everyday speech
      - ii. ▸ easy to come to the conclusion that no great issue is involved
- C. ▸ But the 2 concepts are very different.
  - 1. ▸ “propitiation” -- the turning away of anger
    - a. ▸ is a personal word
    - b. ▸ One “propitiates” a person.
    - c. ▸ = God is angry when people sin, and if they are to be forgiven, something must be done about that anger
    - d. ▸ death of Christ is God’s means of removing His divine wrath from sinners
  - 2. ▸ “expiation” -- the making amends for a wrong
    - a. ▸ is an impersonal word
    - b. ▸ One “expiates” a sin or crime.
    - c. ▸ a process by which the effects of sin are nullified, a “remedy for defilement”
    - d. ▸ = a complete refusal to see any reference to “the wrath of God”
  - 3. ▸ Morris -- “When we are speaking about Christ’s atoning work, it makes a great deal of difference which meaning we understand.” [and] “The issue is far from superficial.” (p. 152)

## II. ▸ The Use of “hiloskomai”

- A. ▸ subject demands a little linguistic work, an examining the meaning of the Greek verb
- B. ▸ verb in common use in Greek, refers to “the turning away of anger”
  - 1. ▸ objection by some scholars

- a. ▶ Before the NT, was often held that the gods became angry with worshippers, had to be appeased by choice offerings
- b. ▶ In NT, more worthy ideas made their appearance; older, cruder ideas fading away
  - i. ▶ We should to along with this, remove “propitiation” from our NT
  - ii. ▶ problem: Wherever the words “propitiate” & “propitiation” occur, they have the meaning of the turning away of wrath.
    - (1). ▶ are only 2 exceptions to this in all of Greek literature
    - (2). ▶ “hiloskomai” words consistently mean “propitiation”
  - iii. ▶ possible that NT writers evolved a new meaning, used this new meaning without telling anyone
    - (1). ▶ question: What evidence is there for this?
    - (2). ▶ If they did this, they certainly concealed what they had done very effectively, because until our day, no one has suspected the new meaning!
- 2. ▶ Morris -- “. . . there cannot be the slightest doubt that the word-group means propitiation in Greek writings generally.” (p. 153)
  - a. ▶ leads us to presume that the NT writers used it in similar fashion

### III. ▶ **The Wrath of God in the Old Testament**

- A. ▶ is this wrath that is called into question when people deny that the Bible speaks of propitiation
  - 1. ▶ thus important to notice that the Bible makes very clear that this wrath is real (and that it says a great deal about it)
- B. ▶ in OT, more than 20 words used of “the wrath of God”
  - 1. ▶ number of references: more than 580
  - 2. ▶ can hardly be said to be “an occasional topic”
  - 3. ▶ is a consistency about God’s wrath in Scripture which we do not find in similar expressions used about the gods of the heathen
    - a. ▶ heathen worshipped capricious gods
      - i. ▶ (worshippers could never guess what the gods would be up to next, could never tell when their gods would be angry *or* what it was that annoyed them)
    - b. ▶ Hebrews were not in such doubt
      - i. ▶ knew that one thing and one thing only aroused God’s anger: sin
      - ii. ▶ knew that God was always angry with sin
        - (1). ▶ generally (Job 21:20) [and]
        - (2). ▶ with specific sins
          - (a). ▶ shedding of blood (Ez. 26:38)
          - (b). ▶ adultery (Ez. 23:25)
          - (c). ▶ afflicting the widow or orphan (Ex. 22:22-24)
          - (d). ▶ violence (Ez. 8:17-18)
          - (e). ▶ covetousness & falsehood (Jer. 6:11-13)
          - (f). ▶ [and most of all] idolatry (Ex. 32:8-10; Deut. 6:14-15, etc.)
- C. ▶ idea of the wrath of God is so widespread in the OT, is so strongly emphasized, that would think that it would be a given that God is always angry when people sin

1. ▶ but no [C.H. Dodd, other theological liberals!]
2. ▶ Dodd's "ingenious" argument
  - a. ▶ expression "wrath of God" frequently found in passages telling of disaster following sin
  - b. ▶ claims it is "shorthand" -- a way of describing an impersonal process in which sin is followed by disaster
    - i. ▶ but ancients speak of "the wrath of god" -- not of some "impersonal process"
    - ii. ▶ Dodd: "wrath of God" taken out of the realm of the mysterious, brought into the sphere of "cause-and-effect"; sin is the cause, disaster the effect.
3. ▶ Dodd's idea has been widely taken up.
  - a. ▶ "wrath of God" *not* a popular concept
    - i. ▶ appeals to us when an outstanding scholar suggests that we may do away with it
    - ii. ▶ Morris -- "We like to feel that we have nothing to fear from God . . ." (pp. 154-155)
  - b. ▶ Morris -- ". . . the trouble is that Dodd's hypothesis will not fit the facts. In the Bible the wrath of God is intensely personal." (p. 155)
    - i. ▶ prophets knew no impersonal, absentee god, but rather One who was sovereign, and active in the affairs of men
    - ii. ▶ prophets sure that the punishment of sin was due to God Himself -- not to some "process"
    - iii. ▶ see Amos 3:6; Is. 45:7; Is. 30:27-30; Ez. 7:8-9; Ps. 60:1-3
    - iv. ▶ Morris -- "It is not easy to see how words could more clearly express the truth that the wrath of God is seen as personal. Such passages telling of the wrath of God are vivid and frequent." (p. 156)
    - v. ▶ Morris -- ". . . is true that in the Old Testament disaster is seen as the inevitable consequence of sin. But that is not because some impersonal process is at work; it is because a moral God will not allow man to sin with impunity. Because God is the moral God [H]e is, [H]e is angry when people sin . . ." (p. 156)
    - vi. ▶ Morris -- "Again and again it is emphasized that God is personally at work in the execution of [H]is anger, just as [H]e is in the showing of [H]is mercy." (p. 156)
      - (1). ▶ Dodd distinguished between God's wrath & His mercy
        - (a). ▶ wrath -- an impersonal process
        - (b). ▶ mercy -- God's personal action
        - (c). ▶ but prophets make no such distinction!
        - (d). ▶ Mic. 7:18; Ps. 85:2-3;
        - (e). ▶ Morris -- "I do not see how it can seriously be contended that in such passages mercy is to be regarded as personal and wrath as impersonal. The same kind of language is used of both." (p. 156)
      - vii. ▶ [repeat] "Such passages are frequent. (p. 156)
        - (1). ▶ is *not* some minor aberration, found occasionally in a few obscure passages
        - (2). ▶ idea of the wrath of God exercised against sin runs through and through the OT

- (3). ▶ to excise more than 580 passages leaves OT with quite a few holes! “The statistics themselves show that the wrath of God is an important OT concept.” (pp. 156-157)
- (4). ▶ Wrath may be God’s “strange work” (Is. 28:21), but it *is* [H]is work.
  - (a). ▶ do ourselves a disservice if we shut our eyes to the fact
- 4. ▶ Conclusion(s)
  - a. ▶ In the OT, the wrath of God receives emphasis.
  - b. ▶ God’s wrath is invariably aroused by human sin.
  - c. ▶ If people are to be forgiven, God’s wrath must be taken into consideration.
    - i. ▶ does not “fade away” with time, or by being given some other name, or by being regarded as some “impersonal process”
    - ii. ▶ are too many vividly personal OT passages for that
  - d. ▶ Morris -- “. . . as the OT writers see it, God’s wrath is not put away by some human activity.” (p. 157)
    - i. ▶ gods of the heathen might respond to bribes
    - ii. ▶ not so the God of Israel
      - (1). ▶ [H]is anger is a grim reality.
      - (2). ▶ If it is to be removed, its removal is due to none less than God [H]imself. (p. 157)
        - (a). ▶ “Time after time [H]e restrained [H]is anger.” (Ps. 78:38)
        - (b). ▶ “For [M]y own {N]ame’s sake I delay [M]y wrath.” (Is. 48:9)
        - (c). ▶ “[Y]ou do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy.” (Mic. 7:18)
        - (d). ▶ “[Y]ou set aside all [Y]our wrath and turned from [Y]our fierce anger.” (Ps. 85:3)
  - e. ▶ Morris -- “The OT is clear about the extent and the seriousness of God’s anger. But it is clear also that God will put that anger away.” (p. 157)
    - i. ▶ paradox here (p. 157)

#### IV. ▶ Propitiation in the Septuagint

- A. ▶ “Dodd has another string in his bow”: In the Bible of the first Christians [the Septuagint], the *hilaskomai* words do not mean “propitiation” at all.
  - 1. ▶ claim: The translators of the Septuagint evolved a new meaning for the old word-group, and the NT writers took it up.
  - 2. ▶ is not easy for anyone without a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek to follow the intricacies of Dodd’s argument. But we must attempt this . . .
    - a. ▶ because a concept of prime importance in the NT is at stake [and]
    - b. ▶ because many scholars hold that Dodd has settled this issue.
- B. ▶ In the Septuagint, *hilaskomai* and its related words are most often the translation from the Hebrew root *kpr* (though this is far from invariable).
  - 1. ▶ Dodd finds 3 groups of passages to consider:
    - a. ▶ passages in which words from the Hebrew root *kpr* are translated by words other than those from the *hilaskomai* group

- b. ▶ passages in which the *hilaskomai* words are the translation of other other Hebrew words than *kpr*
- c. ▶ passages in which *hilaskomai* and related words translate the Hebrew root *kpr*
- C. ▶ third group is the largest, is clearly very important
  - 1. ▶ verb from *kpr* occurs quite often, is the word normally translated into English by “to make atonement”
    - a. ▶ have already looked at this in connection with the offering of a sacrifice
      - i. ▶ will not repeat that material here
    - b. ▶ saw then that the meaning is generally “to put away sin by the death of a spotless victim”
      - i. ▶ does not necessarily mean “to avert the wrath of God” [but]
      - ii. ▶ it is certainly consistent with it
  - 2. ▶ Morris -- “It would be very dangerous to argue that it implies that there is no such thing as a personal wrath of God to be reckoned with. Dodd’s case gets no support from this group.” (p. 158)
- D. ▶ strength of Dodd’s case is in the other 2 groups
  - 1. ▶ Morris: -- “Basically the argument is that you can tell the meaning of a word from the company it keeps.”
    - a. ▶ words that can be linked with *hilaskomai* in the translation process must be of similar meaning to *hilaskomai*
    - b. ▶ Dodd argues (from passages in the first group) that the words other than *hilaskomai* that translate *kpr* have nothing to do with anger
      - i. ▶ have meanings like “to sanctify” or “to cancel sins”
      - ii. ▶ Dodd reasons: *hilaskomai* must have a similar meaning [and that] it likewise has nothing to do with anger. (p. 159)
      - iii. ▶ has the same kind of argument with the passages in group 2 (words other than *kpr* which *hilaskomai* translates)
        - (1). ▶ have meanings like “to cleanse from sin” or “to have mercy”
        - (2). ▶ do *not* mean “to remove anger”
    - c. ▶ Both groups, Dodd says, class *hilaskomai* (and its related words) with words like “grace” or “forgiveness” -- *not* words like “wrath” or “anger.”
      - i. ▶ Morris -- “He [Dodd] finds that *hilaskomai* keeps company with the grace and the mercy words -- not with the anger words.
        - (1). ▶ therefore has a meaning like “be gracious” or “forgive” -- *not* “avert anger”
- E. ▶ argument sounds impressive, is not surprising that many have been convinced
  - 1. ▶ But it has some fundamental weaknesses
    - a. ▶ completely ignores the realities of translation
      - i. ▶ Any word has a range of meaning (is like the area of a circle more than like a point)
      - ii. ▶ is rarely the case that the circle of meaning of a word in one language exactly overlaps that of a word in another language
        - (1). ▶ translator will select one word for the overlapping area, other words for the areas where the 2 do not overlap

- iii. ▶ Dodd is arguing that where the areas do not overlap there still must be a similar meaning
- iv. ▶ But as soon as we examine the way translation is done we see that this is simply not the case.
  - (1). ▶ In many cases, perhaps in most, the meanings will *not* be similar.
  - (2). ▶ example: translating the Greek *kosmos* into English
    - (a). ▶ most often translator rightly renders *kosmos* as the English “world”
    - (b). ▶ but are places where the two words do *not* overlap (e.g., 1 Pet. 3:3, where *kosmos* is translated “adornment”)
      - (1). ▶ Nobody doubts that “adornment” is the correct understanding of *kosmos* in this particular passage.
      - (2). ▶ But Dodd’s method of argument would require us to maintain that in English “world” and “adornment” are of similar meaning, that both can be used as translations of the one Greek word.
      - (3). ▶ But, of course, they are *not* similar. Dodd’s method is fallacious.
- b. ▶ Even if we were to allow a limited validity to Dodd’s method, certainly Dodd goes beyond any limits we can assign to it.
  - i. ▶ Dodd groups words with meanings as diverse as ‘to sanctify’ and ‘to cancel.’”
    - (1). ▶ are not of similar meaning at all
    - (2). ▶ “If *hilaskomai* has a meaning like ‘to sanctify,’ it cannot have a meaning of ‘to cancel.’”
    - (3). ▶ range of meaning is too wide to prove anything
    - (4). ▶ Even then Dodd has not shown how wide the range of words involved in the translation of *hilaskomai* really is. (see WTJ article on subject by Roger Nicole, p. 160, fn. 3 of present volume)
      - (a). ▶ Nicole: We should rewrite Dodd’s conclusion in these words (see p. 160)
      - (b). ▶ Morris: “This, of course, makes the statement meaningless, which is Nicole’s point.”
      - (c). ▶ “Nicole holds that the argument is so inherently defective that it proves nothing. Dodd is ignoring one of the basic truths about translation.” (p. 160)

## V. ▶ Putting Away Wrath

- A. ▶ what we must do to discover the meaning which the Septuagint translators saw in *hilaskomai*: look carefully at the meaning required in the contexts in which the word is found (p. 161)
  - 1. ▶ *not* drag in the meanings of words used when *hilaskomai* is held to be inappropriate
  - 2. ▶ Result? “. . . quite often in the contexts in which *hilaskomai* is used there is a reference to the divine anger.”
    - a. ▶ examples: Lam. 3:42; Ex. 32:14; Ps. 78:38
    - b. ▶ “. . . we could go on. Again and again we find that, however the word is translated, there is the thought of divine wrath in the context.” (p. 161)

3. ▶ Morris' conclusion after examining every occurrence of the verb *hiloskomai* in the Septuagint (he quotes his own *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* on pp. 161-162 of present volume)
- B. ▶ "I do not see how an examination of the way any of the words from this word-group is used can get rid of the thought of the divine wrath.
  1. ▶ Translate how you will, the words are used of situations where God's wrath against sin is being manifested, *but* as a result of the action this word-group denotes that wrath no longer operates." (p. 162)
  2. ▶ "Do you have a better word than 'propitiation' for this?" (p. 162)
- C. ▶ am *not* arguing for a crude, heathen view of propitiation as a process of celestial bribery!
  1. ▶ example: king of Moab warring with Israel, in trouble, sacrificed his firstborn son, Israel withdrew to its own land (2 Kin. 3:26-27)
  2. ▶ Morris -- "This kind of thing is absent from the religion of Israel. There is no crude propitiation of an angry deity in Old Testament religion." (p. 162)
  3. ▶ But there *is* a recognition that the wrath of God is real.
    - a. ▶ God not indifferent to the evil we do; He demands uprightness.
      - i. ▶ Zech. 8:16-17; Ps. 11:5;
    - b. ▶ Morris -- "God is an incurably loving God and a God implacably opposed to evil. And that implacable opposition is what is in mind when the OT writers speak of [H]is anger, an anger that inseparably bound up with [H]is love."
      - i. ▶ "It is because [H]e loves us that [H]e is so opposed to the evil in us, . . ." (pp. 162-163)
      - ii. ▶ [H]is wrath *not* pique at being slighted
      - iii. ▶ [H]is love *not* mindless sentimentality
      - iv. ▶ Morris -- "If we think of wrath as uncontrollable passion, then of course there is no way of applying this concept to the God of Israel. But when we see that there is a wrath that goes with a holy love it is a different matter." (p. 163)
        - (1). ▶ old Prayer Book version of Ps. 36:4 says of the wicked man, "neither doth he abhor any thing that is evil" -- a dreadful condemnation
        - (2). ▶ Hebrews, speaking of "God's wrath," *never* ascribed that kind of moral indifferentism to God.

## VI. ▶ **The Wrath of God in the New Testament**

- A. ▶ have seen that some scholars who think that the concept of the wrath of God should be removed from the OT
- B. ▶ should not be surprised that, even more, this is the case with the NT
  1. ▶ Dodd: In the teaching of Jesus, ". . . anger as an attribute of God to men disappears, and His love and mercy become all-embracing."
    - a. ▶ Dodd imagines that St. Paul agrees with him (that St. Paul uses the concept of God's wrath "not to describe the attitude of God to man, but to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe.")
    - b. ▶ his "charming dogmatism" in his comments on Rom. 3:25
      - i. ▶ "meaning conveyed is that of "expiation, not that of propitiation" [and]
      - ii. ▶ "Most translators and commentators are wrong."

- c. ▶ Many have followed Dodd & concept of the wrath of God is widely questioned in the Christian scene (p. 163)
- C. ▶ Greek has 2 words used of anger: *orge* & *thymos*
  - 1. ▶ often used in the same way
  - 2. ▶ In NT times, would be very difficult to find a consistent difference between them
  - 3. ▶ *is* a distinction in the NT, however -- at least as regards God
    - a. ▶ outside Revelation with its vivid imagery, *thymos* applied to God once only
    - b. ▶ *orge* evidently seen as much more suitable for the divine anger
  - 4. ▶ *orge*
    - a. ▶ meaning: “to be growing ripe for something”
    - b. ▶ points to that which proceeds from the inner nature of a thing (lexicons: “natural impulse”)
    - c. ▶ is the anger that arises from what a man is; it proceeds from a settled disposition or character
    - d. ▶ “When it is applied to God it means that [H]is wrath is due to [H]is settled opposition to every evil thing.” (p. 165)
    - e. ▶ contrast *thymos*
      - i. ▶ connected with word for “to seethe”
      - ii. ▶ anger which is like a boiling over, a sudden loss of control, a passionate outburst
    - f. ▶ 2 words cannot be consistently distinguished, but there is certainly a different feel about them
    - g. ▶ G. Stählin -- *thymus* well adapted for the visions of the author of the Apocalypse, but *not* for St. Paul’s concept of the wrath of God
      - i. ▶ “What is meant is *not* an outburst of passion, but the settled opposition to evil that arises from the fact that God is who and what [H]e is.” (p. 164)
- D. ▶ word “wrath” in Gospels
  - 1. ▶ does not occur often, but it is there; and the idea of the divine anger may be present when the *word* is not
    - a. ▶ Matt. 3:7 -- John the Baptist’s warning
    - b. ▶ Lk. 21:23 -- Jesus’ spoke of “wrath against this people”
    - c. ▶ Jn. 3:36 -- God’s wrath remains on him who rejects the Son
    - d. ▶ Mk. 3:5 -- Jesus Himself is said to have been angry on one occasion
  - 2. ▶ passages which do not use the word “wrath” but which clearly have this in mind
    - a. ▶ Matt. 5:22, etc. -- Jesus spoke of hell quite a number of times (and this implies the outworking of the wrath of God)
      - i. ▶ Matt. 5:22 -- “the fire of hell”
      - ii. ▶ Matt. 18: -- to “eternal fire”
      - iii. ▶ Mk. 9:48 -- Jesus reference to that dreadful place “where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’”
      - iv. ▶ Lk. 12:5 -- spoke of “him who, after killing the body, has power to throw you into hell”
      - v. ▶ passages which speak of judgment, the outer darkness, “weeping and gnashing of teeth”



- vi. ▶ Morris -- “It is impossible to take the Gospels seriously and yet maintain that Jesus did not teach the reality of the wrath of God.” (p. 165)
- 3. ▶ is the same with the rest of the NT
  - a. ▶ passages in which God’s wrath is explicitly referred to
  - b. ▶ places where the term “wrath” is not used but the idea is present
- 4. ▶ objection: expression “the wrath” occurs quite often, but with no explicit connection with God [?? (ed.)]
  - a. ▶ few would speak of an independent entity separate from God [One is thankful for the smallest of things if the source is a theological liberal! (ed.)]
  - b. ▶ a few: was a sense in which “the wrath” operated more or less independently
  - c. ▶ Morris -- overlooks fact that “the wrath of God” is certainly a NT expression (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6, etc.)
    - i. ▶ other relevant expressions:
      - (1). ▶ “[H]is wrath” (Rev. 14:10; 16:19)
      - (2). ▶ “[Y]our wrath,” with reference to God (Rev. 11:18)
      - (3). ▶ “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16) also links wrath with a divine Person
    - ii. ▶ anger denoted by *thymos* linked with God on a number of occasions in Revelation (14:10, 19; 15:1, 7, etc.)
    - iii. ▶ Morris -- “All in all it is pretty plain that the New Testament writers did not hesitate to speak of ‘the wrath of God’ when it suited them. The places where the expression ‘the wrath’ is used without special mention of God do not necessarily point to hesitation about divine wrath. They may mean that the men of the Old Testament had written of God’s wrath so effectively that it was sufficient in New Testament times to say ‘the wrath.’ Nobody doubted whose wrath it was.” (p. 165)
    - iv. ▶ passages which clearly make use of the concept of “the wrath of God” even though the word does not occur
      - (1). ▶ 2 Thes. 1:7-9 -- Paul referring to the return of Christ, “punish those who . . .” “punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord . . .”
        - (a). ▶ same as “the wrath of God” spoken of elsewhere -- even if Paul did not here use the words
        - (2). ▶ compare Rom. 1 with Dodd’s theory (not wrath, but an impersonal cause-and-effect principle)
          - (a). ▶ three times “. . . God gave them over to the result of their sin” (1:24, 26, 38)
          - (b). ▶ Paul could easily have expressed himself *without* this way of speaking of the divine punishment, but instead went out of his way to say it like this.
- E. ▶ “‘The wrath of God’ then is a topic not to be neglected in a study of NT teaching.” (p. 166)
  - 1. ▶ is found sometimes in express words, sometimes in the general thrust of passages
  - 2. ▶ is found in the teaching of Jesus, as well as in that of His followers
  - 3. ▶ Morris -- “The New Testament leaves us in no doubt but that God is vigorously hostile to sin and that [H]e will punish the unrepentant sinner.” (p. 166)
  - 4. ▶ is important to see that “the wrath of God” is a significant category in the NT

- a. ▶ process of salvation must take into account this aspect
- b. ▶ concepts we have covered so far (covenant, redemption, reconciliation) *do not* adequately cover the overcoming of wrath
- c. ▶ propitiation words do not occur very often, *but* in view of the widespread occurrence of “the wrath” they must be given serious consideration as we reflect on what Christ’s death has done for us
- d. ▶ turn now to passages which speak specifically of “propitiation”

## VII. ▶ Christ Set Forth as Propitiation

- A. ▶ Rom. 3:25 -- God has set forth Christ as “‘a propitiation’ [*hilasterion*] through faith in [H]is blood.”
  - 1. ▶ *hilasterion* clearly belongs to the propitiation word-group
  - 2. ▶ Its interpretation in this passage has been subject of dispute. [I’ll *bet* it has! (ed.)]
    - a. ▶ “a sacrifice of atonement” (with margin note “the [O]ne who would turn aside [H]is wrath) (NIV)
    - b. ▶ “an expiation” (RSV)
    - c. ▶ “the means of expiating sin by [H]is sacrificial death” (NEB)
    - d. ▶ “the means by which people’s sins are forgiven” (GNB)
    - e. ▶ variety shows that the meaning of the passage is not obvious [maybe, but maybe not! (ed.)]
  - 3. ▶ Morris -- “. . . one suspects that part of the problem arises from modern objections to using ‘propitiation.’ These days we do not like the idea of the wrath of God.” (p. 167)
  - 4. ▶ Whether we like it or not, it is propitiation to which the linguistics point.” [and] “There is no reason, either in the Greek Old Testament or in non-biblical Greek, for seeing it as meaning anything other than ‘propitiation.’” (p. 167)
  - 5. ▶ form of Paul’s word could give the meaning ‘means of turning aside God’s wrath’ *or* “place of turning away God’s wrath”
    - a. ▶ some argue for *only* the latter (word for the “mercy seat”)
    - b. ▶ but there are substantial reasons for rejecting this, e.g., in the Septuagint *hisasterion* is used for things other than the mercy-seat (ledge on Ezekiel’s altar, an obscure reference in Amos 9; in one translation the word is used of Noah’s ark.
    - c. ▶ is nothing in the context [Rom. 3] to show that “propitiating thing” in question is the mercy-seat. “Means of turning away wrath” is the better rendering.
  - 6. ▶ RSV’s “expiation” seems to be due to nothing more profound than the rejection of the [B]iblical idea of propitiation.
    - a. ▶ have seen this in the writings of Dr. Dodd, and it has been widely accepted
    - b. ▶ But the linguistics are against it.
      - i. ▶ word *hilasterion* is a word refers to the acts of persons
      - ii. ▶ means the turning away of someone’s anger -- not the impersonal expiation of a sin
      - iii. ▶ None of these translations [RSV, NIV, GNB] fits the essential meaning of the word or the way it used in the OT.
  - 7. ▶ some suggest the passage is a reference to Day of Atonement ceremonies
    - a. ▶ Morris: “I find this not demonstrated.”

- b. ▶ rests on *hilasterion* being a reference to the “mercy-seat”
- c. ▶ claim Paul was using the solemn fast day & its ceremonies to illustrate what Christ did for us
- d. ▶ have already noted that there is not sufficient evidence that the word means “mercy-seat”
- e. ▶ Even if word is regarded as “a propitiating thing,” there is nothing to show Paul had this in mind.
- f. ▶ apostle does not make use of Levitical practices in the way that the writer to the Hebrews does; would be out of character for Paul to throw in just one reference to priestly practice without explanation and without anything to follow it up
  - i. ▶ Paul capable of suddenly making use of one concept which he uses nowhere else (“Rock” in 1 Cor. 10:4)
    - (1). ▶ But there it can be easily understood.
    - (2). ▶ not so with “mercy-seat” (an article of temple furniture not in existence in his day) in this verse or context
- g. ▶ Romans 1-3 is a massive indictment of both Gentiles and Jews -- all mankind. All are sinners (Rom. 3:23) and under the judgment of God, are the objects of [H]is wrath.
- h. ▶ In Rom. 3:21 Paul begins a most important section in which he shows how the death of Christ deals with the problem of sin.
  - i. ▶ part of this process is [H]is dealing with the divine wrath
  - ii. ▶ Morris -- “Unless *hilasterion* means “propitiation,” Paul has put men under the wrath of God and left them there.”
    - (1). ▶ Paul uses terms like “redemption” and “justification,” but these have nothing to do with wrath.
    - (2). ▶ Morris -- “Nothing deals with salvation from the divine wrath other than *hisasterion*, which means “the averting of wrath.”
  - iii. ▶ If we reduce *hisasterion* to “expiation,” what has become of God’s wrath?
- 8. ▶ Morris -- “To do justice to what the apostle is saying we must include in our understanding of this passage the idea that part of the meaning of salvation is that God’s *wrath* is averted.” (p. 169)
  - a. ▶ am *not* greatly concerned about the word (if we find another which does the job better, fine!)
  - b. ▶ *am* concerned about the idea it conveys
    - i. ▶ Morris -- “The plain fact is that *hilasterion* signifies ‘the means of averting wrath.’”
    - ii. ▶ new translations miss this, thus pass over a very important [B]iblical concept
      - (1). ▶ do not bring out the truth that in one aspect Christ’s atoning work dealt with the wrath of God against sinners
      - (2). ▶ is too important a [B]iblical theme for us to simply ignore it
      - (3). ▶ Morris -- “So far, the alternative translations suggested do just that.”

### VIII. ▶ The Verb ‘To Propitiate’

#### A. ▶

## IX. ▶ The Propitiation for Our Sins

A. ▶

## X. ▶ Conclusion

- A. ▶ seems clear that the words traditionally understood as “propitiation” should *not* be watered down to “expiation” (p. 172)
1. ▶ are personal words, have to do with the way a person acts, tell us of the wrath of a great Person, whereas “expiation” operates on a sub-personal level
  2. ▶ Suggestions other than “propitiation” give an inferior sense, overlook the personal factor.
  3. ▶ also fail to square with the linguistic facts
    - a. ▶ have seen that in both OT & NT there is good reason to render as “the putting away of the divine wrath”
    - b. ▶ Bible insistent that the wrath of God is the grim reality we sinners must face
- B. ▶ “Probably a good part of the modern objection to the use of “propitiation” arises from the widespread feeling that “wrath” is not a good word to use about God.” (p. 173)
1. ▶ He is above our petty human angers; nobody wants to attribute to God the weaknesses we know so well from human anger.
  2. ▶ Morris -- “I for one feel the strong attraction of such a view.”
  3. ▶ but not fully convincing (p. 173)
    - a. ▶ is no more than a reminder that we cannot attribute to God an anger like our own
    - b. ▶ implied qualification: “. . . of course, without the defects that we seen people even at their best”
      - i. ▶ applies to all attributes of God
      - ii. ▶ cf. what a puny thing human love is with what Bible says of God’s love
        - (1). ▶ use of a term in human life may be a guide to the quality in God -- but in no case can it be said that God exercises the quality with all our human weaknesses
        - (2). ▶ is the same with wrath (p. 173)
          - (a). ▶ “righteous indignation” gives us a glimpse, is something like this that is in mind when we speak of “the wrath of God”
          - (b). ▶ mean “wrath without the human imperfections”
          - (c). ▶ is not ideal, but it is the best we can do (St. Augustine)
          - (d). ▶ have no better word for the divine repulsion against every evil thing
  4. ▶ does *not* mean that we should accept crude ideas about “anger” and “propitiation” (p. 174)
    - a. ▶ Biblical God cannot be propitiated in the way that the pagans held that their deities could be
      - i. ▶ is *not* capricious or arbitrary
      - ii. ▶ does *not* impose punishments without reason on bewildered worshippers who must then bribe him back into a good mood with their costly offerings
    - b. ▶ To argue for “propitiation” is simply to accept the idea that runs through the Bible, NT as well as OT, that God is vigorously opposed to every form of evil.
- C. ▶ charge that wrath in God is incompatible with fact that “God is love” (p. 174)

1. ▶ are so sure of the love of God that they say that there can be no such thing as the wrath of God
2. ▶ is faulty reasoning
  - a. ▶ opposite of love is not wrath; it is hate.
  - b. ▶ can say, “If God is a God of love, [H]e will not hate those [H]e has made
  - c. ▶ can’t say, “If God is a God of love, [H]e will never be angry with those [H]e has made (indeed the opposite may be the case!)
3. ▶ I am arguing that if there is divine hostility to evil, then this must be taken into account in the process whereby forgiveness is brought about. (p. 174)
  - a. ▶ is all the more important in that those who reduce “propitiation” to “expiation” rarely face the questions that result
  - b. ▶ If there is no “wrath of God,” the question arises, “Why should sin be expiated?” [or] “What would happen if sin were *not* expiated?” [or] “Would there be *any* unpleasant consequences?” (pp. 174-175)
    - i. ▶ If there are no consequences, in the end wickedness will triumph. If we reject this, it seems we are shut up to the view that in the end God will take action to deal with sin & sinners?
  - c. ▶ impersonal “expiation” view is up against another difficulty: “What is the meaning of an impersonal process in a genuinely theistic universe?” (p. 175)
    - i. ▶ seems impossible to get rid of the idea that salvation comes about because of God’s personal activity
    - ii. ▶ & that means “propitiation” rather than “expiation”
4. ▶ idea of the wrath of God is a genuinely Christian idea (p. 175)
  - a. ▶ Critics seem to suggest that the wrath of God was imported into Christianity from its pagan environment.
  - b. ▶ But this is not the way of it at all!
  - c. ▶ Greek philosophy had long since abandoned the idea that a deity could experience anger. “Deity” was passionless, quite without disturbing emotions of any sort.
    - i. ▶ Christians held on to the idea of the wrath of God in spite of the criticisms that came from their environment.
    - ii. ▶ was not an idea that penetrated their system from that environment & which they were unable to resist
    - iii. ▶ early Christian writers (e.g., 1 Clement & Shepherd of Hermas) undoubtedly had the idea of “propitiation”
    - iv. ▶ so it’s not only the OT & the NT, but also early Christian writers
  - d. ▶ If Septuagint translators & early Christian writers worked out a new meaning for the word, then nobody understood them until our day. (pp. 175-176)
    - i. ▶ their “new idea” perished with them
    - ii. ▶ do not find it in the literature of the early church or anywhere else until our own day
    - iii. ▶ is a big claim (“Every Christian generation but our own has failed to understand this not unimportant piece of [B]iblical teaching.”)
      - (1). ▶ is difficult to resist the impression that the claim arises basically from the outlook of our generation (p. 176)

- (2). ▶ We do not like the concept of the wrath of God, are happy to accept an argument that enables us to get rid of it.
- (3). ▶ But the wrath of God is real, as seen in the NT writers no less than the writers of the OT. We must reckon with that wrath (“*My* sins are the object of that wrath.”)
- (4). ▶ “God has given us every opportunity, but we have sinned. His wrath is the consequence.”