

Series: What *Really* Happened on the Cross?

Message: "Propitiation: He Endured the Wrath of God" 1 John 2:1-2\*\*

Main Idea: At the cross God provided a propitiation for us. In order to grasp this and appreciate what really happened on the cross, the apostle John says we must understand two truths explained in 1 John 2:1-2.

- I. Our problem is sin (1a).
    - A. Some people deny sin (1:8-10).
    - B. Other people rationalize sin (1a).
    - C. God says sin must be removed (1a).
      1. His Word shows us how.
      2. His Son makes it possible.
  - II. God's solution is Jesus Christ (1b-2).
    - A. Jesus is our advocate (1b).
      1. He is what we aren't.
      2. He goes where we can't.
      3. He does what we need.
    - B. Jesus is our propitiation (2).
      1. God is just and must judge sin.
      2. God is merciful and desires to pardon sinners.
      3. At the cross Jesus endured God's wrath for our sin.
      4. At the cross Jesus provided access to God's mercy for the sinner.
    - C. Jesus is our example (4:10-11).
      1. To know what love is, look at what God did (10).
      2. Then do the same for each other (11).
- A Test: You know that you understand propitiation if...
1. You come to God on the basis of mercy, not merit.
  2. You cherish the cross, not the trinkets of this world.
  3. You treat others the way God has treated you.

A few years ago archaeologists made a startling discovery. They found the remains of a first century person who had been crucified. I saw a picture of the findings. There was, of course, no name attached to the evidence, but the bones told a story, one of horrid pain endured by a nameless first century criminal. Crucifixion was a cruel and rather common means of execution in Roman days.

Answer this. What made Jesus' death different from that of literally thousands of others who spent their final moments nailed to a cross? You say, "Well, Jesus shouldn't have died." Granted, but that could be said for many others who were executed unjustly—Nero crucified many innocent victims just for kicks. "They scourged Jesus." True, but others were scourged. "They mocked Jesus while He hung there." Yes, and others, too.

Please don't misunderstand my question. I am not denying that Jesus endured excruciating physical agony on the cross. He did, more than our minds can fathom. But what made His death unique was not the physical suffering, for others endured that. It was the spiritual torment He experienced, that which Thomas Kelly had in mind when he penned these words in the 1800's:

*Tell me, ye who hear him groaning,*

*Was there ever grief like his?  
Friends thro' fear his cause disowning,  
Foes insulting his distress;  
Many hands were raised to wound him,  
None would interpose to save;  
But the deepest stroke that pierced him  
Was the stroke that Justice gave.*

There's what sets Jesus' death apart, that last line, *the stroke that Justice gave*. On the cross Jesus experienced the stroke of Divine Justice. It's the understanding of that amazing reality to which we now turn our attention.

What really happened on the cross? The Bible uses five key words to answer that question. In the past three weeks we've looked at the cross from the perspective of Paul and considered the first three words. The first word, from 2 Corinthians 5:21, was *substitution*. At the cross Jesus died in our place. Word two, from Galatians 3:13, was *redemption*. By going to the cross Jesus paid the ransom payment to set sinners free. In our last study we pondered another word, this one in Romans 3:21-26, *justification*—by means of His death on the cross Jesus made sinners right with God.

This morning we turn to another expert, an actual eyewitness of the cross, the apostle John. "Tell us, John, what happened on the cross? You were there. Please tell us." And he does. In his first epistle John uses one powerful word to sum up the significance of the cross. In fact, he uses the word in two different passages, in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10. On the cross Jesus Christ died to make a *propitiation*.

"What does that mean?" you ask. "Just what is *propitiation*? What's more, why do I need to know anyway? Will it make any difference in my life?"

Questions, questions, questions! Let me address the last question first. Will it make any difference? There is no subject more life-changing than this one, my friend. If you get a handle on propitiation, better yet, if it gets a handle on you, you'll never be the same again. It will change the way you look at yourself, at your life, at the people around you, at God, and most of all, it will transform the way you look at Jesus Christ.

Fellow believer, if your Christian experience has grown stale, there is no subject that can revitalize it like this one. If you're struggling with sin, nothing can motivate change like a proper understanding of propitiation.

And if you aren't yet a believer in Jesus Christ—and I use the word *yet*, for in time all will believe in Him when they see Him, but for those who rejected Him in this life it will be too late—know this. If you have any concern at all for your soul, you need to understand what really happened on the cross. You need to understand *propitiation*.

Now we turn our attention to the God-inspired words of the apostle John. According to John, at the cross God provided a propitiation for us. 1 John 2:1-2—"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the *atonement sacrifice* for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

You say, "I didn't hear the word 'propitiation' in those verses." No, the folks who translated the NIV felt an average high school graduate would not understand the term and chose a different expression instead,

"atoning sacrifice" (used here) or "a sacrifice of atonement" (in Rom 3:25). That's not a bad translation. It just doesn't capture the fullness of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. In order to grasp what propitiation means and respond appropriately, we must understand two truths from 1 John 2:1-2.

### I. Our problem is sin (1a).

Verse 1 begins, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin." That charge has a background to it. Who were these dear children, and why is John instructing them about sin?

John wrote this epistle towards the end of his life, somewhere between the years A.D. 85 and 95. For perspective, that's 55 to 65 years after Jesus' death on cross. He's writing to believers—"my dear children," he calls them. The readers probably lived in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).

Don't sin, he told them. Such instruction might seem unnecessary. Why such a command? It has to do with a dangerous problem that was attacking the church, a heresy later known as Gnosticism. Gnosticism taught that the spirit is entirely good and that physical matter is entirely evil. God is a spirit and thus the spirit is good. Man possesses flesh bodies and that's the problem. Salvation is escaping from the control of the physical, not by faith in Christ, but by special knowledge (the Greek word for "knowledge" is *gnosis*, hence, Gnosticism).

It's one thing to believe heretical ideas—and that's bad. It's worse to teach those heretical ideas right in the church—and that's what was happening in the first century (and in our day). For instance, some were denying Christ's humanity. Since matter is evil they said that Christ could not have had a real body. Docetism said Christ only *seemed* to have a body (from the Greek *dokeo*, "to seem"). Others said that the divine Christ joined the human Jesus at his baptism but left him before he died, a view called Cerinthianism.

John wrote this letter to put a stake through the heart of that nonsense. In chapter one, he begins by saying, "He didn't *seem* to have a body. He *had* a body! We saw the Christ. We heard Him. We *touched* Him (verse 1).

Those Gnostic ideas also affected the church members view of sin. In fact, at the end of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2 John put on the table three attitudes towards sin.

A. Some people deny sin (1:8-10). "If we claim to be without sin," 1:8 begins. Apparently that's what some were doing in John's day, claiming sinlessness. How did they pull that notion off? They said that since the body was evil, it didn't matter what you did with the body. They denied sin by redefining it. John's conclusion about such thinking, verse 8, "If we claim to be without sin, *we deceive ourselves* and the truth is not in us." So some people deny sin.

B. Other people rationalize sin (1a). John has that kind of person in mind in 2:1, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin." Don't sin. Don't allow any sin to get a hold on your life. Don't give it an inch. Resist it, not only the habitual state of sin but very specific sins, too.

In chapter one John taught that it's wrong to say, "We have no sin." Someone might misunderstand and conclude, "Well, then, you're saying that sin is okay." No. I'm writing this so you won't sin. Don't get the idea that we should get accustomed to sin and regard it as normal. Don't sin.

If we're honest, we tend to do that. We get used to sin in our lives. We're prone to rationalize it. But what does God say?

C. God says sin must be removed (1a). That's the point of verse 1, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

It's wrong both to deny and rationalize sin. God wants sin to go. But how? John gives us two insights as to the removal of sin.

1. *His Word shows us how.* "I write this to you SO THAT you will not sin." Note that the key to overcoming sin is the written Word of God. The Bible shows us how to get rid of sin. We also need the power to get of it. He provides that, too.

2. *His Son makes it possible.* "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

To restate, our problem is sin. That's truth #1. It's to truth #2 to which we now turn.

## II. God's solution is Jesus Christ (1b-2).

Notice two key words in verse 1, "We have." It's a fact. It's true. We have a solution for sin. We have it because God provided it. The God-given solution is *Jesus Christ*. He's the answer to our predicament.

But how so? What is it about Jesus that enables us to gain victory over sin? John informs us of three things about Jesus that reveals the answer.

A. Jesus is our advocate (1b). " But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense [the KJV says, "we have an advocate with the Father"]—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

The term "advocate" is *paraklatos*. The word appears five times in the New Testament, four times referring to the "Comforter" (in John 14-15) and here. By definition, the *paraklatos* is "one who pleads another's cause before a judge; an intercessor."

What's true of our advocate, Jesus? We learn three things about Him here.

1. *He is what we aren't.* He is the *Righteous One*. What are we? Sinners. Here's what qualifies Jesus to be able to defend us. He is the *Righteous One*, the Just One, the innocent, faultless, and guiltless One. He is what we aren't.

2. *He goes where we can't.* Where's that? He speaks "to the Father," John says. Where is the Father? On His throne in heaven. That's a place we can't approach on our own. But the Righteous One can. And He does. He goes where we can't.

3. *He does what we need.* Namely, He "speaks in our defense." He represents us before God's throne. That's what sinners need, a representative, someone to go in their stead to throne of God. That's what Jesus does for those who believe in Him.

Charles Wesley said it well in his hymn, "Arise, my soul, arise."

*He ever lives above*

*For me to intercede,*

*His all-redeeming love,*

*His precious blood, to plead;*

*His blood atoned for all our race,*

*And sprinkles now the throne of grace.*

*Five bleeding wounds He bears,*

*Received on Calvary;*

*They pour effectual prayers,*

*They strongly speak for me;*

*Forgive him, O forgive! they cry,*

*Nor let that ransom'd sinner die!*

Yes, Jesus is our *advocate*. But that's not all. In addition to being the One who defends us in the heavenly courtroom, He provides the basis for that defense.

B. Jesus is our propitiation (2). "He is the atoning sacrifice [the 'propitiation'] for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

Notice He *is* our propitiation. Not was, but *is*. Propitiation is something He did, but also something He *is*. But what does that mean?

Allow me to put a definition on the table, then we'll develop it. It comes from John Stott, "Propitiation is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God." To appreciate the fullness of this doctrine we must address four realities.

1. *God is just and must judge sin.* There are more than twenty different Hebrew words in the Old Testament used to refer to the wrath of God, with over 580 occurrences of these words referring to His wrath. God's wrath is not capricious like ours, but is the consistent and just expression of His holiness towards evil. One example is what He did after Israel made the golden calf, telling Moses in Exodus 32:10, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them."

In the New Testament we find strong language as well, God's wrath referenced in at least 100 passages. One particular Greek term is *orge*, which denotes a settled emotion, "a strong opposition to all that is evil arising out of God's very nature."

The concept of God's wrath doesn't fit into modern theology which views God as a God of love only. God is love but He is also holy. Thus, where there is sin there must be wrath. God must judge what is contrary to His holiness in His universe.

By the way, who is under God's wrath? It's not just the Hitlers and Stalins of the world. Romans 1:18 states, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against *all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*" All who are still in their sins are under the wrath of God.

God is just and He must judge sin. You say, "But He forgives, doesn't He?" Yes, but never at the expense of His justice. God cannot just overlook our sin.

John Piper explains, "We all know that forgiveness is not enough. We may only see it clearly when the injury is great—like murder or rape. Neither society nor the universe can hold together if judges (or God) simply say to every murderer and rapist, 'Are you sorry? Okay. The state forgives you. You may go.' In cases like these we see that while a victim may have a forgiving spirit, the state cannot forsake justice." So it is with God's justice. Since He is just He must judge sin. A second reality...

2. *God is merciful and desires to pardon sinners.* To show mercy is to *not* give someone what he or she deserves. That, too, is God's nature. He is just and must punish sin, but He's also merciful and desires to pardon sinners.

But how can He do both? How can He punish sin and pardon sinners? The answer is *propitiation*. John says, "He [Jesus] is the the propitiation for our sins."

The Greek term translated "propitiation" is *hilasmos*. It's translated in several ways in different versions: an atoning sacrifice ( nrsv , niv , reb ), expiation ( rsv , nab , njb ), propitiation ( kjv , nkjv , asv , nasb ), the remedy for defilement ( neb ).

The verb in the same family as propitiation (*hilasmos*) is *hilaskomai*, which means "to have mercy." In Hebrews 2:17 it's translated, "to make atonement for sins." Another related term, *hilasterion*, appears in Romans 3:25, "God presented him [Christ] as a *sacrifice of atonement* [the KJV says, "Whom God hath set forth to be a *propitiation* through faith in his blood"]." This same term appears in Hebrews 9:5, there translated "atonement cover" (in the NIV) and "mercy seat" (in the KJV). The adjective, *hileos*, means "merciful, forgiving, gracious."

That word study reveals two key themes associated with propitiation: *atonement* and *mercy*. Indeed, atonement is the key that unlocks the door of mercy.

In Old Testament times the high priest entered into the holy of holies on the day of atonement. Once there, where did he sprinkle the blood of the lamb? On the *mercy seat*. And why? God had said that He would show mercy to His people if they approached Him on the basis of atonement. He would not ignore their sin. He could not do that. He *forgave* their sin because of the death of a substitute. Year after year after year lambs died as an atoning sacrifice for sin. God saw the blood and showed mercy to the sinner.

Why don't we still offer lambs on an altar? It's because The Lamb has come.

3. *At the cross Jesus endured God's wrath for our sin.* Again, God is just and must judge sin. And that's what He did at the cross. He judged His own Son. Christ took our sin upon Himself, and God poured out the wrath we deserved upon Christ. Thus, Christ satisfied the demands of God's holiness. John says, "He is the atoning sacrifice, the *propitiation*, for our sins."

At this point we must be careful of a misrepresentation. Roger Nicole describes what propitiation is *not*: "The Father is the one who imposes the demands of justice and thus appears to us in the unlovable character of a judge, an irascible, inflexible person who is going to have his pound of flesh or his pint of blood. And then, Jesus is the one who is gracious and merciful and who therefore comes forward and says, 'All right, I will offer what is necessary. You don't have to hold off in wrath and anger.' He offers himself, according to this view, and the wrath of God is changed into love."

No, no, no! God the Father and God the Son are one. They possess the same attributes, including both a holy hatred of sin *and* a fervent willingness to forgive sinners. The Father demonstrated wrath *and* love at the cross. So did the Son. God's wrath didn't change into love at the cross. God's wrath was satisfied at the cross because of God's love. Justice was served. The penalty was paid. What God required, God provided.

An observation from the Puritans sheds further light. Charnock wrote: "He who once 'quenched the violence of fire' for those Hebrew children, has also quenched the fires of God's anger against the sinner, hotter than furnace heated seven times. The same God who is a God of holiness, and who in virtue of his holiness must punish human sin, is also a God of mercy, and in virtue of his mercy himself bears the punishment of human sin."

A related term is "expiation." Ponder carefully the following quotation from *Tabletalk* which explains the difference:

"The word *expiation* begins with the prefix *ex*, which means "out of" or "from." Expiation means to remove something. In biblical theology it has to do with taking away or removing guilt by means of paying a ransom or offering an atonement. It means to pay the penalty for something. Thus, the act of expiation removes the problem by paying for it in some way, in order to satisfy some demand. Christ's expiation of our sin means that He paid the penalty for it and removed it from consideration against us.

On the other hand, *propitiation* has to do with the object of the expiation. The prefix in this case is *pro*, which means "for." Propitiation has to do with what brings about a change in God's attitude toward us, so that we are restored to the fellowship and favor of God. In a sense, propitiation points to God's being appeased. If I am angry because you have offended me, but you then appease me, the problem will be removed. Thus propitiation brings in the personal element and stresses that God is no longer angry with us. Propitiation is the result of expiation. The expiation is the act that results in God's changing His attitude toward us. Expiation is what Christ did on the cross. The result of Christ's act of expiation is that God is propitiated. It is the difference between the ransom that is paid and the attitude of the One receiving the ransom."

That's what Jesus did. At the cross Jesus endured God's wrath for sinners. But that's not all. A fourth reality...

4. *At the cross Jesus provided access to God's mercy for the sinner.* John Murray states, "It is one thing to say that the wrathful God is made loving. That would be entirely false. It is another thing to say the wrathful God is loving. That is profoundly true."

In other words, the wrath that God demonstrated when He judged His Son was apparent at the cross. But at the same time, so was His love.

Theologian Millard Erickson explains, "Propitiation therefore does not detract from God's love and mercy. It rather shows how great is that love. He could not overlook sin and still be God. But he was willing to go as far as to offer his own Son in order to appease his wrath against sin. Had this wrath not been appeased, there would be no remission of sins. Thus, by requiring the payment of the penalty, God demonstrated how great are his holiness and justice. By providing the payment himself, he manifested the extent of his love."

Perhaps an illustration will clarify. Years ago in a one room school house a new teacher, Mr. Harding, began his duties. The students were mostly farmers' children, for the most part poor but eager to learn. It didn't take long for a strong bond to develop between the new teacher and his young pupils, for although he was a firm disciplinarian, the children sensed his love and devotion for them. And they reciprocated.

On the very first day, Mr. Harding established the class rules, but did so involving the students. He allowed the children to help develop the laws of the classroom, as well as the penalty for any violation. Once finished the laws and the corresponding punishment were written on the chalkboard for all to see.

One of the rules stated, "No stealing anything from another in the class." The penalty for any theft would be five lashes with a leather strap, no exceptions.

One day Walter, a fourth grader, cried out, "Excuse me, Mr. Harding! Somebody got into my lunch. My sandwich is gone!"

An investigation was made. Mr. Harding went from desk to desk. Soon the sandwich was discovered, in the desk of little Billy Roberts, a first grader. When confronted Billy acknowledged he had indeed taken the sandwich, explaining between sobs he hadn't had a meal in two days except for some raw oats from the barn.

Nobody said anything. Everybody in the class knew Billy's situation. His father had died in a farming accident the previous year. His mother was bedfast with pneumonia. He, at the age of six, was the oldest of three children. Furthermore, due in part to his improper diet Billy was the sickliest and scrawniest person in the classroom.

It was with a heavy heart that Mr. Harding glanced at the chalkboard and then reached for the leather strap. Everyone gasped, including Walter, the owner of the sandwich.

"No, you can't whip Billy!" cried Walter. "He'll never survive it. He's too small and sickly."  
"But I have no choice," said Mr. Harding. "You know the class rules. The penalty for stealing is five lashes. No exceptions."

Billy walked fearfully to the front of the room in silence. No one uttered a word, until finally Walter blurted out, "Mr. Harding, wait! The penalty for stealing is five lashes, right?"

"Yes," the teacher responded. "There's no other way. The penalty must be paid."

"Then I'll take the penalty," Walter declared. "Give me the five lashes in Billy's place."

And so it happened. Walter took the punishment in Billy's stead. Justice and mercy met that day in the front of the classroom of Mr. Harding.

Though the illustration is deficient—for unlike Billy, we were indeed rebels without excuse when we violated God's law—this much is true. Justice and mercy embraced the day Jesus hung on the cross.

Consider Millard Erickson again, "The cross is a fitting symbol of the atonement, for it represents the intersection of two attributes or facets of God's nature. Here it is that the love of God meets the holiness of God. The holiness requires payment of the penalty, and the love provides that payment."

A. H. Strong observed, "God requires satisfaction because He is holiness, but He makes satisfaction because He is love." And that's what He did at the cross. In the words of the hymn-writer, William Cowper:

*There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains!  
E'er since by faith I saw the stream  
Thy flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme,  
and shall be till I die.*

That, dear friend, is what happened on the cross. Listen to John again, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

Does that final phrase mean all will be saved? No. It means that God loves all sinners, regardless of race, color, or economic status. There is one Savior for the whole world. His name is Jesus.



John used the term "propitiation" one more time in his letter. By taking a quick look at this passage we discover something else about Jesus. In addition to being our advocate and our propitiation...

C. Jesus is our example (4:10-11). "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an *atonement sacrifice* ['propitiation'] for our sins." That means...

1. *To know what love is, look at what God did (10).* God sent His Son. God sacrificed His Son for us on the cross. That's what love is. Love is giving. God *loved* us and gave. So if you want to know what real love is, look at what God did.

2. *Then do the same for each other (11).* "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." I mentioned at the outset that nothing can change your life like a clear understanding of the cross. It's true. If you want to revolutionize your family, here's the key. Embrace the cross, then do as He did. As the song says, "Give as 'twas given to you in your need, love as the Master loved you."

You see, our problem is sin, but God's solution is Jesus Christ. Jesus endured the wrath of God in our place. He made a propitiation for us.

Has that really gripped you? "How can I know for sure?" you ask. Here's how.

Take A Test: You know that you understand propitiation if...

You pass the test if the following three things are true...

1. *You come to God on the basis of mercy, not merit.* Jesus told a story that explains in Luke 18: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The story represents two kinds of people. Some, like the Pharisee, think they can earn God's favor by their good deeds. But Jesus says they're wrong. Even if we perform a million good deeds, justice must be served for our bad deeds.

Only the tax collector went home justified that day. And why? Because only the tax collector came to God on the road provided by God, the road of mercy not merit. What did he say again, "God, *have mercy on me*, a sinner. God, be propitiated toward me (for that's what the term means; it's our word)." The publican wasn't asking God to overlook his sin. He knew a just God can't do that. But as he saw the smoke ascending from the altar in the temple that day, he placed his faith in the death of a sacrificial lamb. Have mercy on me, O God.

Have you ever prayed that prayer? Be honest. Charles Spurgeon shared this about his own conversion, "When I was in the hand of the Holy Spirit, under conviction of sin, I had a clear and sharp sense of the justice of God. Sin, whatever it might be to other people, became to me an intolerable burden. It was not so much that I feared hell, as that I feared sin; and all the while I had upon my mind a deep concern for the honor of God's name and the integrity of his moral government. I felt that it would not satisfy my conscience if I could be forgiven unjustly. But then there came the question: 'How could God be just, and yet justify me who had been so guilty?'.... The doctrine of the atonement is to my mind one of the surest proofs of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Who would or could have thought of the just Ruler dying for the unjust rebel?"

But He did, beloved, *He did!* John Huss put it this way:

*Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior,  
Turned away God's wrath forever;  
By His better grief and woe  
He saved us from the evil foe.  
Christ says: 'Come, all ye that labor,  
And receive My grace and favor';  
They who feel no want nor ill  
Need no physician's help nor skill.*

You know that you really understand propitiation if you come to God on the basis of mercy not merit. That's the first test. Here's the second...

2. *You cherish the cross, not the trinkets of this world.* There are so many people who say they *believe* in the cross but don't *cherish* it. Oswald Chambers has written, "We trample the blood of the Son of God if we think we are forgiven because we are sorry for our sins. The only explanation for the forgiveness of God and for the unfathomable depth of His forgetting is the death of Jesus Christ. Our repentance is merely the outcome of our personal realization of the atonement which He has worked out for us. It does not matter who or what we are; there is absolute reinstatement into God by the death of Jesus Christ and by no other way, not because Jesus Christ pleads, but because He died. It is not earned, but accepted. All the pleading which deliberately refuses to recognize the Cross is of no avail; it is battering at a door other than the one that Jesus has opened. Our Lord does not pretend we are all right when we are all wrong. The atonement is a propitiation whereby God, through the death of Jesus, makes an unholy man holy."

What's the most important thing in your life? If it's not Christ and His cross, something's wrong, terribly wrong, for either you don't understand what happened on the cross, or worse yet, you *do*, and choose to trivialize it by pursuing trinkets.

A third test. You know that you really understand propitiation if...

3. *You treat others the way God has treated you.* Again, John says, "Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." To experience mercy from God and then to withhold it from others is robbery. But show me a person who loves unconditionally and I'll show you a person who understands the mystery of propitiation, all to His glory!