

Expository Essay: Redemption, Propitiation, And Reconciliation (NIV based)

INTRODUCTION:

In order to better understand the concepts of salvation and fellowship with God, believers must be acquainted with the foundational Biblical doctrines related to these concepts. The following paper will examine the doctrines of redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation as they pertain to salvation and fellowship with God. Additionally, lessons for believers today concerning these doctrines will also be explored.

REDEMPTION:

The doctrine of redemption starts with mankind's universal problem of sin and intrinsic inability to measure up to God's holy standards (Morris p.54). Sin possesses the power to hold mankind in bondage or subjection (Unger p.1068). Along with sin's subjection power, mankind is under the curse or penalty of sin, which is death of the body and subsequent eternal punishment (Romans 6:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Unger p.1069). Obviously, mankind does not have sufficient power to break sin's death grip. Because of both the subjection and penalty of sin, man is in need of something (or someone) to pay the price for sin in order to break sin's power of subjection and cancel its penalty. This needs to be done in a way that satisfies God's righteousness criteria.

So when the time had fully come, God sent His Son to provide 'redemption' for mankind, as Galatians 4:4-5 announces. Redemption is defined as "a 'loosing', particularly by paying a price" or ransom (Unger p.1068; Harrison p.918). Mark 10:45 discloses that Christ's mission was to terminate His life and ministry in an act of self-sacrifice as redemption for mankind and 1 Peter 1:18-19 shows that God 'loosed' or 'redeemed' mankind from the captivity of sin through the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross as a ransom payment (Harrison p.919).

The function of redemption, as clearly stated in Ephesians 1:7, was to buy the present forgiveness of sins and Romans 8:23 says that the future resurrection or deliverance of the body was also redeemed (Harrison p.919). Galatians 3:13, along with Romans 3:25, testify that Christ accomplished this redemption by becoming a curse for us and a sacrifice of atonement. Thus, mankind has been redeemed from the curse of the law and is justified freely by God's grace (Romans 3:24). However, it is very important to note that God's redemption is universal in that it is freely available to all, but yet it is limited in that only those who meet God's conditions for salvation receive His redemption (Unger p.1069; Romans 3:22).

PROPITIATION:

The doctrine of propitiation is inseparably linked to and stems from redemption, but yet they are distinctly different concepts. Whereas the doctrine of redemption focuses on the payment of a ransom or price, the doctrine of propitiation focuses on the resulting change of relationship between God and mankind.

God opposes every conceivable form of evil, as Romans 1:18 discloses, and mankind's sin inevitably provokes the wrath of God in terms of eternal punishment (Morris p.1046). Sinful mankind has severed its favorable relationship with God and has incurred upon itself assured, severe divine judgment (Morris p.1046). Thankfully, the

redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross for the world's sin changed the entire structure of mankind's relationship to God (Unger p.1044).

The relationship between God and mankind changed because God became satisfied with Christ's offering of Himself in payment for mankind's sin (Colossians 1:19-20). Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2 testify that Christ became a "sacrifice of atonement" or "gift which procures propitiation" and thus, Christ had `propitiated' or `regained God's favor or goodwill' toward potentially all of mankind and removed God's wrath from specifically those of mankind who receive the free gift of salvation by faith in Christ (New Scofield p.1179; Webster's p.924; Morris pp.1046-1047). As explained in Romans 8:1, condemnation was removed only from all who have proper faith in Christ Jesus.

RECONCILIATION:

Directly contingent upon both the doctrines of redemption and propitiation is the doctrine of reconciliation. With mankind's sins having been ransomed (redemption) and with God's wrath having been removed (propitiation), `reconciliation' or the "restoration of friendship and fellowship" between God and mankind can now take place (Unger p.1067). Romans 5:10-11 proclaims this concept of reconciliation, that mankind's position in its relationship with God has been thoroughly changed from previous estrangement and hostility to a new position that will meet God's required standard (Unger p.1067). 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (and Romans 8:1) specifies that God no longer counts man's sins against him. Hebrews 4:16 asserts that mankind can now confidently approach God's throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace in our time of need. Likewise, Colossians 1:19-20 substantiates that mankind can now truly have peace with God, who allows mankind to "enter into His blessing now and in the hereafter" (Morris p.55). Again, it is critical to specify here that reconciliation, along with redemption and propitiation, only apply to those humans who properly place their faith in Christ Jesus to pay the penalty ransom for their sins through His suffering, death on the cross, burial, and resurrection from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

VALUE FOR BELIEVERS TODAY:

The doctrine of redemption reminds believers that "salvation has been purchased at a great and personal cost, for the Lord has given Himself for our sins in payment for them" (Harrison p.919). Christians need to contemplate the fact that the Creator of the universe, who possesses so much power that He created whole galaxies by speaking commands (Genesis chapter 1), decided to limit and lower Himself to the status of a human being and then allow other humans to torture and murder Him. Immediately, gratitude should flood the hearts and prayers of believers, remembering the unmerited receiving of forgiveness of sins. Also, believers should be motivated to honor God with their bodies and aggressively avoid becoming re-enslaved to sin (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23).

The doctrine of propitiation should arouse reflection on the impending eternal punishment from which believers have been spared. This should spur believers not only into service for the Lord, but also into urgent evangelism of the countless other humans who are headed for eternal punishment. Propitiation also reminds believers that God is implacably opposed to everything that is evil (Morris p.1047). Therefore, believers must not consider their personal sin as trivial and instead, should strive for holy living and thinking because God regards sin very seriously. Frequently, believers

forget that God is not pleased when believers sin and that eventually He will take disciplinary steps to correct the problem if believers do not first turn from their sin.

The doctrine of reconciliation should encourage believers that access to God's throne of mercy and grace is freely available any time of any day. God is always waiting to hear our prayers. To think that mere, sinful humans can confidently come directly before the Creator of the universe with requests is unfathomable. What a privilege believers have to fellowship with a Being who is infinitely superior. Love for the Savior / Redeemer / Reconciler of mankind should compel all believers into devoted obedience and diligent service for the kingdom of heaven.

CLOSURE:

Consideration has been given here to 3 important doctrines: 1. the doctrine of redemption, which explains God's sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a ransom payment for mankind's sin; 2. the doctrine of propitiation, which explains the subsequent removal of God's wrath from those humans who properly believe; and 3. the doctrine of reconciliation, which explains the resulting restoration of fellowship between God and human believers. These 3 doctrines have been shown to yield several valuable lessons for believers today. Hopefully, believers will not quickly forget the implications that these doctrines and lessons have for daily living.

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