

## A Propitiation Like No Other – 1 John 2:2

**Introduction** – The idea of propitiation exists throughout most pagan religions, especially with arbitrary and capricious gods who have to be bought or bribed to change the course of events, leaving men walking on eggshells wondering what the gods might do next. While God has no bad temper or bad days like the pagan gods, the need to avert God's wrath by an offering runs right through the scriptures, and the whole sacrificial system was a foreshadowing of the perfect propitiation. But this One was like no other.

**The Need for Propitiation** – In Rom 1:18, Paul sets the stage for the gospel by affirming that *“the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”* This wrath is revealed against the Gentiles (Rom 1) as well as the Jews (Rom 2, see Rom 2:5). Jews and Gentiles are all under sin (Rom 3:9-19). This is where the gospel must start: every man in his natural state lives in the reality, whether he is aware of it or not, that he is under the active anger of God and stands exposed to the wrath of God, both in its present and future manifestations. God's wrath is as much a personal quality as His love, for without it, He would cease to be righteous. When we deny His wrath over sin, His love becomes little more than sentimentality. Therefore, in order to act according to His righteousness (His wrath and His love) God set forth Christ as a propitiation, turning aside and appeasing God's holy, righteous wrath (Rom 3:21-26, esp. v25).

**The Nature of the Propitiation** – *“He Himself is the propitiation...”* (1 John 2:2). The nature of the propitiation is Jesus Christ Himself. God *“sent His Son to be the propitiation...”* (1 John 4:10). John has already taught us that it is Christ's blood that cleanses us from sin (1:7). It has always been and always will be only the Son of God's blood that takes away sin. While the OT sacrifices, especially the Day of Atonement, pointed to Christ in shadows, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb 10:4-7). It took One who knew no sin to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21) and in this once for all perfect sacrifice, according to the will of God, His wrath was turned aside from us as it fell upon Jesus in our stead. The purpose of the propitiation was not simply to turn aside God's wrath, however. Now, there was a way to be reconciled to God, to come into a fullness of fellowship with Him with joy. And this is God's desire.

**The Source of the Propitiation** – While it is God's holy anger that demands a propitiation, it is His holy love that is the source of providing a propitiation which we never could provide (and never wanted to). This is the nature of God's love towards the world. *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:10). It was God's pleasure, therefore, to send His Son atone for our sins. It was His glory to send One who would rescue, ransom, and redeem those who were lost and enslaved in their sin and rebellion to Him. This gift was not only the result of His love (John 3:16); it was the very essence of it: *“In this is love...”*  
*“There can, therefore, be no question of human beings appeasing an angry deity by their gifts. The Christian propitiation is quite different, not only in the character of the divine anger but in the means by which it is propitiated. It is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God”* – Stott.

**The Extent of the Propitiation** – But we cannot end there. We've only handled the first half of the verse. Jesus is not the propitiation for our sins only, *“but also for the whole world.”* First we must note that Jesus is not a potential propitiation. He did not send His Son to attempt something, but to accomplish something. *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’”* (John 1:29).

**Whole World** - Abraham was told to try and count the stars (Gen 15:5). Isaiah promised that the nations would stream to God (Is 55:5), and John saw the vision of the elect, a number he could not count (Rev 7:9-10). God is not stingy with His mercy (Psalm 86:15), rather He delights in it. God's wrath remains upon those who will not believe and there will be many who are lost (John 3:36). But grace has judged this race in Christ to such an extent that we preach a ministry of the reconciliation of the world (2 Cor 5:19). God's wrath will not fall upon this world; He will not do what He did in the days of Noah. He is no longer angry with the world as such because a propitiation has been given by Him for Him because of His love for the world. This number cannot be a small percentage, the frozen-chosen. *“But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many”* (Rom 5:15).

Jesus Christ is not a potential propitiation; He is the propitiation. Jesus Christ is not a propitiation only for a small minority of the world, but to such an extent that it may be said that He is the propitiation for the whole world. Both of these truths are the essence of the love of God.