

Propitiatory Shelter

(Essay no 5a)

A pattern of sound words in respect of God's Word is enjoined upon every believer, and no less is this needful in the case of those who teach. With a pattern of sound words, both our faith and our understanding will rest in the words taught by the spirit. Examination of the Scriptures is a spiritual exercise, and is so explained in the word of God (1 Cor. 2). Therefrom must come our knowledge of God, not only of His ways, but also of Himself, as to His character of love and righteousness. A correct and balanced appreciation of Him will aid our worship and generate our thanks to Him.

The spirit of life from His Son, together with God's spirit making its home in the believer, gives a disposition for the things of God. In life, there is nothing more tangible to the believer than God's word. It promotes faith and the reality of God and His Son to our spirit, for by it the believer is instructed, and his outlook is adjusted, as well as enlarged to become the same as the God and Father of His Lord. Moreover, he is encouraged in living for God, and comes to look forward to that wider ministry among the celestials, required by the glory of God's ultimate for His universe. Such matters build up, and they make for growth in the growth of God, and this reflects itself to intensify the study of God's Word and of its words.

The foregoing thoughts will serve as a preface to introduce adjustments in our understanding of some matters around the subject of justification. For many years have we rejoiced in the glory that God was able to actually justify. Indeed, our spirit has been exercised to alertness lest our thinking should ever become confused toward diminishing the glory of this teaching of God's Word. The outcome is that gradually we have moved to even clearer discrimination, and, in this regard, sound words have been invaluable. Herein we wish to discuss some details of the evangel of God in a passage of the Roman epistle, 3:21-28. We shall not deal with the passage as a whole, nor of its general purpose within the epistle, but rather concern ourselves with items therein, so as to define them more perfectly, and so aid our view of justification, in relation to those items. Our special concern is the twenty-fifth verse of Romans 3. Should this verse be a parenthesis? And, if so, for what reason ought it to be so regarded?

A GREEK WORD

The customary English rendering of the Greek term, *hilasteerion*, that is, propitiatory, misses some of the significance which inheres the Hebrew word, Kphr. That there was favour around that expressed by kphr is very true, but the Hebrew word is more definite, for it actually expresses in what the favour consists, viz. SHELTER.

This points a lack in the usual English rendering of the Greek. The fact that this gives a void in our mind has prevented our seeing that the justification of the Greek Scriptures was not at all linked to *propitiatory shelter*. Nor is this a small matter. If attended to, it will contribute to our perceiving that justification is a reality, entirely distinct from matters in the Hebrew Scriptures, other than its relationship to Abram in uncircumcision. It is most true that the Lord Jesus has brought the favour of deliverance, and not merely that of shelter, to those whom God justifies. In this way we reach a position which removes any possibility of diminishing our actual justification.

The verse, Romans 3:25, should be a parenthesis, for it is a deliberate turning aside from the matter of justification. The verse sets alongside justification that which ensued to these believers who remained under law and hence it gives a very definite contrast to that which is the concern of the Roman epistle.

The verse is really given to explain how the death of Christ effects the question of the *propitiatory shelter*, a matter fully related to the law. It remarks also upon the *reason* for a new method or basis of shelter being needed for that under the law. In point of fact, the verse is speaking of the basis of that to which Peter refers in the opening words of his first epistle; obedience and sprinkling of blood (1 Pet. 1:2). To this Hebrews 12:24 also looks. The matter goes back to Lev. 16:14 when the *propitiatory shelter* was sprinkled with blood, annually. Thus, the faith of the circumcision came to be in the blood of Christ. He *was* the *Propitiatory shelter* to them, the favour actually granted and established, as well as the *propitiatory shelter*, that by which the favour of

shelter was effected.

Propitiatory shelter in the Hebrew Scriptures

This was a sheltering from the penalty of the law. It gave shelter, as a favour, to Israel. Such forbearance allowed the possibility of the charge of unjustness against God, so that a basis which exonerated God for that era had later to be provided. Related to the Old Testament sacrifices, *propitiatory shelter* had only a temporary value, and needed constant repetition. Both these features were adjusted by the death of Christ.

Sacrifice was the basis for the favour of shelter from the law for the one who engaged in the sacrifice as directed. By engaging in the divine service, the seeking and the desire for God's favour, which would shelter from the penalty of sins, was indicated. The favour, or the mercy, gave pardon or forgiveness, *for the time being*.

If any one did not engage in the divine service, they indicated their lack of interest in such a matter, and did not seek the favour. To be sure the nation entered the service, yet an individual may be absent himself.

A vital aspect is that, under the law, sin became transgression, and thus, to *pardon did not exactly uphold the law*. Rather it showed leniency. This called for *propitiatory shelter* in the sacrifice of Christ. It is to this that Romans 3:25 refers. Not only has it a value as to the past, but it also gives to the future *Propitiatory shelter* a permanent value, renewal being unnecessary.

The golden lid of the coffer figured the divine interposing over the law contained within the coffer. Sprinkled with blood, it was the place where *propitiatory shelter* was exhibited, for the sheltering actually existed there. Now it does not need to be repeated. This *propitiatory shelter* on the coffer, over the law, allowed all the appointments in the calendar of Israel to be made and entered into.

God's indignation, or concern for the law, was **temporarily** put aside by the *propitiatory shelter*. This putting aside called for a basis which exonerated God, and that was forthcoming in the death of Christ.

In the sacrifices there is displayed God's abhorrence of sin. Suffering, figured by the blood, and death too, were both required by Him in regard to sin. In fact, His own righteousness called for this.

THE FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST

The reference is to the personal faith of our Lord Himself. His faith, it was, which achieved our deliverance, for it led Him into that vital matter which His Father had planned in His ways with His creation. The faith of Christ is the basic fact in our justification, for His faith has involved our faith. In this first statement concerning our justification, no details are given as effecting it, other than His faith. That was the paramount and sufficient matter (Rom. 3:26). Yet His faith covered all the details which can be affirmed of our justification. So it can be said that we are justified by grace and by His blood. The contents of His faith were the vital matter. In effect, His faith was ours, even though we do not understand it.

At the cross there was the supreme expression of the faith of Christ. It was a mature faith, in which He believed that His God and Father would save Him out of that death. Because of the mode of that death, it was under the curse of the law. Hence, His sacrifice was not a work of the law, howsoever it may have been paralleled therein, in type, in respect of some aspects.

His faith enabled Him to undertake His sacrifice in obedience to His Father. It was His own faith which achieved, first His own deliverance from connection with sin, and then deliverance for those who are of His faith, that is, we fellowship His faith in God.

Involved in our deliverance was the establishing of God's righteousness, as to Himself, and the bringing of God's righteousness to those who are to be delivered. These matters called for God to judge sin in Him Who knew no sin. This enigma provided that sin became God's righteous act, that act necessary for Him to become our Saviour. Our Lord was saved out of death and in His deliverance is our deliverance.

From another angle, the dying and the death of Christ effected our deliverance because God's indignation against sin was fully and finally expressed therein. The suffering of His dying is the feature which deals directly with sins. Yet His suffering is occasioned by our sins, and nothing of Himself, for He knew no sin.

By the entrance of sin, two penalties, suffering and death, resulted for humanity. What we do, our acts,

were dealt with in His dying, because this feature, suffering, came to Him in God's judging, and that judging consummated in His death, whereby what we are is lost on the cross. The faith of Christ led Him to the suffering of death in reliance upon the power and the faithfulness of His Father. And here we discern that God's righteousness was involved in His death, for it called also for His rousing from the dead. It is in Him that we become God's righteousness. And to this end He was made the sin offering.

Christ Jesus believed His Father. This He did in order that God may display His righteousness in the current era whilst justifying those who are of His faith.

Those matters are but briefly explained here. In the light now afforded, it is hoped that we may discern more deeply the glory which resides in justification. It is not simply a shelter from God's indignation, nor just a temporary favour. Certainly the need for a shelter shows the reality of God's indignation to Israel. But we see a real justifying of the irreverent by God, a matter which only God can achieve, one which shows Him to be God. A grasp of this will begin to define to us, in clear terms, how lacking is human ability, for humans cannot justify themselves. Yet the whole of God's creation have need of that same righteousness ere they can enter into His love and reciprocate it to Him. And God is able to lead to that. Then will creation see Him as Father and acclaim His glory.

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