



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**  
**Lesson 6.7.2.5 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)**

**Satisfaction, Propitiation, Reconciliation**

The result of Christ's work as our High Priest can be expressed in several different ways, such as by the terms satisfaction, propitiation, and reconciliation.

Our holy God demands holy perfection of His human creatures. Because of Adam's fall into sin and our own many sins, there is no one who can satisfy those demands. But Jesus has satisfied these demands as our Substitute by His holy life and by His sacrificial suffering and death. He has made perfect satisfaction for us. He has paid a sufficient price for us and satisfied God's demands of holy perfection.

We read in Psalm 49 that all the wealth in the whole world would not be a satisfactory price: **"Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means ransom his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him – for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever – that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit"** (Psalm 49:6-9).

Because we are not able to make satisfaction for our sins Christ had to step in for us. **"Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you," says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel**" (Isaiah 41:14) God spoke to His people through His prophet Hosea: **"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death"** (Hosea 13:14). God Himself had to take action to satisfy His own requirements by sending His Son.

The price Christ paid for our redemption satisfied God's demands totally. We **"were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ"** (1 Peter 1:18-19). The believers in Christ in heaven will sing to their Redeemer: **"You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood"** (Revelation 5:9). The blood of Christ is not just human blood, but it is the blood of Him who is God Himself, as the apostle Paul pointed out to the Ephesian elders: **"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"** (Acts 20:28). **"In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins"** (Ephesians 1:7). Some Bible teachers have mistakenly taught that Christ paid the price to Satan to set us free. But satisfaction was made to God, not to Satan, as the Bible clearly teaches: **"Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma"** (Ephesians 5:2).

In a few places the Bible uses the word propitiation to express the results of Christ's work as our High Priest. This means that God is *appeased* by a sufficient or satisfactory propitiatory sacrifice and so He is merciful to us sinners. The Old Testament sacrifices of the priests were propitiatory in the sense that they were symbolically sufficient to cause God to be merciful and to forgive His people for their sins. The first high priest, Aaron, and all the high priests that followed him took animal blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat. This symbolically atoned for the sins of the people on the basis of the shed blood of the animal victim. This act pointed ahead to the only truly propitiatory sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ. God is merciful to us for Christ's sake. That is, God is merciful to us because of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ.

Thus, the apostle Paul says that we are **"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood"** (Romans 3:24-25). Jesus was "a

**merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people”** (Hebrews 2:17). The apostle John adds that the work of Christ as High Priest extends to all people: **“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”** (1 John 2:2). **“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).

A third word used in the Bible to express the results of Christ’s work as our High Priest is the word reconciliation. In the United States the word reconciliation is used in connection with marriage disputes and labor disputes. When there is a problem between two parties in a quarrel, a mediator or go-between attempts to bring the two parties together again. By some means he removes the hostility between the two parties so that they are friends with each other again. He reconciles them to each other.

In the Bible the two parties that are hostile to each other are the holy God and sinful mankind. The barrier between them is sin. In order for mankind to be reconciled to God, the barrier of sin needs to be removed. This is what Christ did by His sacrificial death on the cross. He reconciled the world to God. It is written: **“All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them”** (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Notice that God is the One who takes the initiative and who brings about the reconciliation. Sinful man could not even attempt to reconcile himself to God. The one who accomplished the reconciliation was God through His agent Christ. His method was to take the entire sin of the whole world and transfer this mass of sin with all its guilt and punishment to Christ, and then to punish Christ in our place. This resulted in the reconciliation of the entire world to God, because God no longer imputes the sin of the world to the world, because He has already imputed the sin of the world to Christ, who then was fully punished for this entire mass of sin by His suffering on the cross. This reconciliation means that the relationship between God and man has been changed. The world that had been cursed by God because of its sins has, because of Christ’s work, become the redeemed world, the reconciled world, the forgiven world, the justified world. **“When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”** (Romans 5:10).

Sinful man did not contribute anything to the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation was entirely God’s doing. **“It pleased the Father that in Him (Christ) all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross”** (Colossians 1:19-20). Notice that Paul says God reconciled **“all things”** to Himself in Christ. Because of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, the whole created world was changed. Even the holy angels had to witness the tragic consequences of sin in the world. Sin affected not only human beings but all of creation, including animals, plants, and everything else. Christ’s work on the cross not only reconciled man to God, but all things to God. We shall understand what this means when God ushers in the new heavens and the new earth, where there will be nothing but righteousness (2 Peter 3:13) and everything will be perfect once again.

We should not think of the reconciliation worked out by Christ as changing God. It was God in His love who planned and carried out the reconciliation through Christ (John 3:16). Christ’s reconciliation did not change human beings either, for we are still sinful and we still hate God by nature. What Christ’s reconciliation accomplished was to change man’s legal standing before God. If there had been no reconciliation, the world would be and remain unredeemed, unreconciled, unjustified, unforgiven. Because of Christ’s work of reconciliation as our High Priest, the world has become redeemed, reconciled, justified, and forgiven.

Individually we are changed when the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament brings us or leads us to faith in Jesus Christ and His work in our behalf. In other words, we receive reconciliation through faith, and without faith we lose the benefits of Christ’s reconciliation. That is why Christ’s

representatives on earth – His Christians and their called ministers – say with the apostle Paul: **“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”** (2 Corinthians 5:20). In other words, take for yourself the gift God extends to you in His Word. Receive Christ’s reconciliation. Accept Christ’s forgiveness. Believe what God tells you about Christ and His work. This is the message God has entrusted to us to tell the world.

Even though the Bible consistently speaks of Christ as reconciling man to God, our Lutheran confessions also speak of Christ as reconciling God to man. This can be properly understood as meaning that requirements of God’s Law had to be satisfied, and that God’s wrath had to be vented on human sin. The ransom was paid to God; His justice was satisfied; Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient to propitiate God’s wrath so that God is reconciled.

### Questions

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1. What are the three terms used in the Bible to express the results of Christ’s work as our High Priest that are discussed in this lesson?
2. What is the only price that is sufficient to pay for our sins?
3. Why is it so important to remember that the blood of Jesus is the blood of Him who is God?
4. To whom was Jesus’ sacrifice made?
5. What is a propitiatory sacrifice?
6. What is the difference between the propitiatory sacrifices of the Old Testament priests and the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ?
7. What does the word “reconciliation” mean?
8. Who did the reconciling, and who was reconciled?
9. What did Christ have to do to reconcile the world to God?
10. How do we sinners today receive this reconciliation?
11. What is the main work or privilege of ambassadors for Christ?