

The Wooden Memorial

Sola Fide: Justification By Faith Alone – Part III

Romans 3:24-25

Introduction

Today is Memorial Day in America. It is also known as Decoration Day and was originally established to commemorate the soldiers who died in the American Civil War. Later, it was broadened to honor United States military personnel who have died in war.

Memorials are not unique to American citizens. Several other memorials include:

- Israel observes a Memorial Day as well, to honor its dead.
- Great Britain has recovered ancient documents that reveal memorial ceremonies for Viking warriors who died.
- To this day, France celebrates Bastille Day, which commemorates its own civil revolution.
- Two tenth century jelling stones, which are tall pillars covered with inscriptions, were discovered in Sweden. They were built by the last king of that country to honor his wife, Queen Thyre.

Memorial stones, memorial events, ceremonies, memorial buildings, statues, and museums reveal the nature of the human heart, throughout the world, to remember heroes.

If you have the desire and enough money, you can join the International Star Registry and name a star after your loved one who has died. Among other things, you receive a framed picture of the constellation with your star circled in red, a

dedication date, and the telescopic coordinates of your star. Because these star names are copyrighted, future generations may identify the star name in the directory and locate the actual star you have named for your loved one in the sky. Since 1979, hundreds of thousands of stars have been named for celebrities, dignitaries, and individuals worldwide. What a way to remember!

Perhaps the most famous of all the American memorials is the Lincoln Memorial, which is located in Washington, D.C. On one wall of the memorial is a mural depicting the unity of the northern and southern states. The Lincoln Memorial is a stunning building, which is designed to resemble a Greek temple. It has thirty six Grecian columns, representing the number of States at the time of Lincoln's death. Without a doubt, the greater the hero, the more incredibly beautiful the memorial.

The Memorial of Christ – The Cross

For the believer, however, the memorial of Christ, the hero of our salvation, is not a stone monument or a marble building with columns, it is a hill called Golgotha. The memorial of our gospel and the image of our liberation is a cross which bore the Lord Jesus on its wooden beams.

The apostle Paul writes with great passion, in Galatians, chapter 6, verse 14a,

... may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ...

If you were to visit the Lincoln Memorial, you would discover, inscribed on the south wall, the

words of Lincoln's Gettysburg address. Above those words, you would see a mural depicting the angel of truth freeing the slaves. There is a message in that mural; there is a message in that memorial.

In the same way, according to the apostle Paul, in Romans, chapter 3, we discover that at the cross, there was heard a declaration of liberating freedom. The cross of Jesus Christ is a memorial to at least two great doctrinal truths. These truths are bound in words that are almost forgotten, or at least, no longer understood.

There are two words that God intended to speak and to be forever remembered at the cross. Turn to Romans, chapter 3. Let us begin by looking back at verse 23, where we previously ended, and then continue to verses 24 and 25.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith . . .

The cross is an everlasting memorial of at least two things. You could circle the two words in these verses, "redemption" and "propitiation".

Redemption

Paul writes, in the last part of verse 24,

. . . redemption which is in Christ Jesus . . .

One author wrote that this one phrase could very well represent the theme of the entire book of Romans.¹

The word "redemption" is the Greek root word, "lutron" (λυτρον), which means, "to pay the price to set a prisoner free". It was also used to refer to the price paid to redeem a slave and loose him from his chains, or his bonds, and to set him free.

The lyrics to a hymn refer to this aspect of redemption, when it says,

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.*

In Galatians, chapter 5, verse 1, Paul shouts with praise,

. . . Christ set us free . . .

Again, in Galatians, chapter 5, verse 13, Paul writes,

. . . you were called to freedom . . .

Jesus Christ had earlier promised, as recorded in John, chapter 8, verse 32,

. . . you [believer] will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

You will be set free from the guilt of sin; free from enslavement to sin; free from eternal punishment for sin; free, eventually, from the presence of sin.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew counterpart to "lutron" (λυτρον) is the word "ga'al," which means, "to redeem". The noun form is "g'ullah," which is translated, "kinsman redeemer".

There is a wonderful romance story that has been a best seller for years. It is a love story about a woman who loses her husband to an illness, loses everything she has, and is reduced to begging and foraging in a foreign country just to survive. Then one day, she meets her "Prince Charming". He is a rich land baron who sweeps her off her feet, marries her, and lives happily ever after. The name of the romance narrative is, *The Book of Ruth*, and the name of "Prince Charming" is, Boaz.

According to Old Testament Law, if someone lost their share of land through debt or death, a relative could buy the property and possessions back again. That relative would be called the "g'ullah," or the redeemer; the kinsman redeemer.

Boaz was a relative of Ruth's father-in-law. He could follow Jewish Law and redeem the estate, as well as everything related to it – including Ruth.

The stipulations in the Law for a kinsman redeemer were:

- he had to be a relative of the family,
- he had to be willing to redeem, and
- he had to be able to pay the redemption price.

What a perfect picture of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ! He fulfilled these three qualifications in the following way:

- He became a relative of humanity by being born into the human race,
- He was willing to redeem humanity, and, because He was also God,
- He was capable of paying the eternal redemption price for all of our sin.

The cross is a memorial to our Kinsman Redeemer. He bought us out of slavery when we were impoverished beggars.

Those who are redeemed by Him, become His bride. There will, one day, be the presentation of the bride, and a wedding reception that is called the marriage supper of our Bridegroom, the Lamb. It is going to be a northern wedding reception, with a sit down meal, not a southern wedding reception, with peanuts and a cup of punch. No, this will be a northern style wedding reception – an expensive, sit down meal that costs a fortune for someone. That is one of the main reasons northerners do not smile as much as southerners, they are still paying for their kid's wedding! Okay, I am outside of the text at this point!

I do know that following our wedding reception with the Lamb, we are going to move into the new home that our Groom has prepared for us, and live happily ever after.

Propitiation

Well, that is a little of what the word “redemption” means. Now, Paul continues in Romans, chapter 3, verse 25. Notice what he says,

whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood . . .

Propitiation is a word that we do not use very often. That is probably because we cannot pronounce it! I have never heard a sermon on propitiation. However, according to this text, the cross is not only a public memorial to our redemption, but a public memorial of propitiation.

Propitiation is a word that means, simply, “satisfaction”. It refers specifically to a sacrifice that endures the full and final demands of God's holiness. It is the Greek root word “hilasmos” (ἱλασμος), which refers to the sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God.

This word appears again in I John, chapter 2, verse 2, which tells us,

and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

John used it again in I John, chapter 4, verse 10, when he wrote,

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.

The reason propitiation is nearly forgotten, is simply because we have forgotten that God is holy and just, that He hates sin, and that He will judge all of mankind, for no sinner can satisfy God's holy requirement.

So, mankind has created religions that try to distract God; that try to win Him over with smiles, good deeds, baptisms, church memberships, and a little money as well. God is so loving that we are convinced that these things will satisfy Him and buy our way into heaven. We are convinced that we will arrive and He will look at us and say, “Oh, I know you, you've done some nice things in your life. C'mon in.”

My friends, we do not understand propitiation anymore because we do not understand the need for it. And, we do not understand the need for it because we do not understand God's character.

Remember, Paul began this letter to the Romans, in chapter 1, by introducing us to, in verse 18,

. . . the wrath of God . . .

In II Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 7b through 8a, Paul refers to a future judgment, as he writes,

. . . the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God . . .

Do you know God? Are you sure that when it comes to your sin, that His wrath and holy judgment will never fall on you? Are you sure you know God?

In Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 27, we read of that, *. . . terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume His adversaries.*

Later, in Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 29, the author calls God a,

. . . consuming fire.

Most people like to think of God as a cozy fireplace or a mystical candlelight, not a consuming fire! The truth is, there is nothing you can do to turn His fiery wrath away. Whatever you try will not satisfy the consuming fire of His holiness.

The religions of the world put food on trays for their gods to see; they burn incense to their angry gods; they do all sorts of things to try and appease their angry gods. They are close to the truth, as there is sin, humanity is in deep trouble, and intuitively, they know that some supreme, spiritual being is unhappy with their sin!

However, they are, at the same time, far from the truth. The one true God, who is angry with sin, provided the sacrifice to pay the penalty for sin.

That is the necessity and meaning of Christ's blood becoming our propitiation. It means Jesus Christ was the sacrifice who endured, to the end, the wrath of God and satisfied God the Father's just and holy wrath against sinful humanity.

Did it ever occur to you that Christianity is the only story of salvation in which the God, who was angry, was totally satisfied with an offering that He provided Himself? As John, chapter 3, verse 16, says,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish,

(or, experience the wrath of God),

but have eternal life.

Ladies and gentlemen, the cross of Christ is a monument, not only to the redemption of the believer, but to the satisfaction of God. Against Christ, the fire of God's holy wrath has already burned, and it will never burn again.

I cannot think of a better way to illustrate propitiation than the following illustration.

I will never forget reading about a midwestern fire that swept across the prairie. It devastated crops, houses, and anything else that stood in its path. One particular family saw the smoke a long way off and knew that they could never outrun it. There was nowhere for them to run or hide.

So, the father ran and got a brand from the fireplace. He started their field on fire, knowing it would soon be burned. He also lit fires all around that area and the wind swept the fire along a mile or so ahead of the coming prairie fire. Then, he and his family drove their wagon to the middle of their, now burned, field. There they stopped and waited.

Within a few moments, that great wall of fire came to the edge of their field toward them. Finding nothing to feed its hunger, it licked its way around and along the sides of the field that the farmer had already torched. Then, that huge wall of flame picked its way back up on the other side of them and moved away.

They were safe. Why? Because they were standing on ground that had already been burned. That ground, which they were standing on, was their propitiation. It had already endured the fire, satisfied the demands of the fire, and thus, could not be burned again.

Do you know why you will never have to face the wrath of God in fiery judgment? Because you stand in Christ – He is your propitiation. Against Him, the wrath of God has already burned, and in Him, the fire of God will never burn again.

Would you notice verse 25 again,

whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. . . .

There is the word "faith" again, that we have seen in Romans, chapter 3. We come to Christ, as our Redeemer and Propitiator, not by works, but through faith. My friends, you are either facing the oncoming wrath of God's fire, or you have exercised "Sola Fide," faith alone in Christ, because you have realized that you have nothing in yourself to quench the fire of God's holy judgment. Instead, you have placed your faith in Christ, and since He has already endured the wrath of God, for your sake, now in Him, your propitiation, you are forever safe.

Isn't it incredible that the memorial to these great truths is not a memorial built of marble with Grecian columns or stately pillars of stone etched with royal inscriptions?! Our memorial is made of wood and stained with the royal blood of God the Son. On that wooden cross hung the Son of God, the Redeemer of all who believe; the satisfaction of God's holy justice.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/26/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Baker Book House, 1974), p. 153.