

1 John 4:10

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[0:00] Father, you know how much we want to be free. We want to be free beings and Lord, sometimes in our attempts to be free, we make ourselves captive to our dreams and our hopes and all that, Lord.

Would you open your word this morning to our hearts and our minds? Would you pour out your Holy Spirit upon us so that when we hear your word, Lord, we would hear your word and do it, that we would be free in doing your will.

Lord, would you pour out your Holy Spirit now, in Jesus' name. Amen. So you may be seated. So if you're a guest today, I'm just going to introduce what we're doing in the summers.

We're going through a series of short verses that are memorable and they're succinct. They have a big point. It's something that we want to meditate on. And just earlier, as George read the scripture, he said something that was very helpful.

In the book of John, which we're going to look at right now, there are short sayings. And the verse that I'm going to open today, that we're all going to look together, is a verse that has a world of meaning.

[1:06] So we're going to look at that. Andrew, could you put up, not the first point, but the scripture text. So just a few points down. Great. So let's read that together.

In this is love. Now we all heard the big P word.

Propitiation. What is that? That's a really, really old word that Christians share with other world religions. And it might make you wonder, like, what does that mean?

We're going to look at that. It basically implies that God has wrath. God has wrath. That's not a very popular idea in our day and age, that God has wrath.

So, in reading this in our culture, in our time, we might come up with an objection that sounds something like this. I would not want to believe in a God who is wrathful, needing to be satisfied by blood and sacrifice.

[2:12] I want to believe in a God of love and acceptance. The God of the Bible is wrathful and therefore not loving and accepting of me. There's the objection.

So what does the Bible say to this? Now, first things first, let's not sit here for the next half hour, going through this text, talking about propitiation, and not really coming up with a good definition. So let's look at a definition. Andrew, if we can have the first slide. So to propitiate a God is to offer a sacrifice that turns aside the God's wrath.

So it's also, it basically means satisfying the wrath, making the wrath no more. You do something to appease the God, and the God is no longer angry at you.

And so a God might be angry at you or your tribe and ask for a sacrifice like money or cattle or children to be offered as a sacrifice to just to avert the God's wrath and so that there's no worse consequences.

[3:20] And so this is what the text might be implying here when it's talking about propitiation. So here's the question. Is God like that? Is God like those ancient gods who want to have their wrath propitiated and need to have sacrifices to appease his wrath?

Well, the text here says that God gave his son as a propitiation for our sins. So wouldn't loving a God who is wrathful or grumpy or capricious be like loving someone who is like, say, Jafar from the movie Aladdin?

Andrew, can we have the movie? Can I not?

Give me your hand. First, give me the love. What? He is the last!

What are you doing? Giving you your reward. Your eternal reward. Okay. So many of us in our culture would actually think that God is like that.

[4 : 37] You have no idea. Not Seinfeld. That was two weeks ago. That's okay. So many of us would think that God is like that.

That he is wrathful and that we, like Aladdin, are trying to do everything we can to please God, to do his will. Like Aladdin gets the lamp. He does everything that he's commanded to do. And he's there and he's bringing it to God.

Or to Jafar in this case. But that we're like this. We're doing everything we can for God. And then at the end, God might have mercy on us. He might not. He might say, you're a good servant. He might smite us.

This is basically how we kind of understand God when we think of God as a wrathful judge. Now, if this is what the word propitiation is supposed to represent, then this poses a problem for Christians. So is God like Jafar? Jafar does he put demands on our lives and might or might not reward us in the end? Andrew, can we have the next point, please?

[5 : 40] So God's wrath is not an unsatisfiable blind rage, but a reasonable and willed response to our human rebellion against him.

His wrath flows from his infinite justice and holiness. Okay. I kind of invented a word there when it says unsatisfiable. Maybe a better word is insatiable, but it's a bit of a complicated word.

So unsatisfiable. God's wrath is not an unsatisfiable blind rage, but a reasonable and willed response to our human rebellion against him. His wrath flows from his infinite justice and holiness.

Okay. So God has wrath. Sure. Why does he need to have blood and sacrifice? Like propitiation entails. I don't see how there's any difference between God and Jafar.

Like, why wouldn't he just forgive and forget? Isn't that a better way to think about God? When I was at the University of Ottawa, not too long, maybe a year ago or two years ago, at the Islam Awareness Week, I talked with one of the students, one of the representatives of the Islamic faith.

[6 : 50] And I asked him, or basically, I didn't really ask him. I told him, I don't really think that Allah is a just God. And he kind of backed off and said, what do you mean? Like, Allah is just.

Like, that's one of the characteristics of Allah. And I asked him, how is he just? And so he explained to me, well, there's a story in the Quran about Muhammad who, when people come to him to confess their faults, he turns his face away.

And their sins are dealt with. Now, is that really just? Is that really just? So that when we confess our sins to, well, to Muhammad and ultimately to Allah, that Allah would just turn his face and not deal with the sin and just say, let's just pretend it didn't exist.

Let's just pretend I didn't hear that. Is that really justice? Now, not only is that unjust, but it is a very low standard of what constitutes as sin.

See, the Bible portrays sin as a separation from God. A separation from the very source of all life. Bringing about our death. See, when we're detaching ourselves from anything that gives us life, like food or water, well, eventually we'll die.

[8 : 05] And ultimately, that points to the ultimate source of life, who is God. And that's the currency of sin. That's its value. That's its sting. Sin kills. So to make payment for our sins, we die.

Every single one of us. We will all die. I know as a young man, I don't often think that I will die. I will die one day. Now, maybe you're not familiar with what sin is.

You might be wondering, what exactly counts as sin? Because I don't really feel guilty, you know, from a day to day. I think I'm a good person.

I see I'm tolerant. I'm caring. I don't waste. And all these things, I think I'm a pretty good person. At the root of sin is stealing from God.

So this is a bit of a big picture of what sin is in the Bible. Sin is stealing from God. It's stealing the glory that belongs to God. I see when God created all things in the world, he made all things good.

[9 : 08] And he created humanity in his image with the ability to live in this world. And what do we do with that ability to live in this world? Well, we take advantage of others.

We don't give glory to God. We make everything so that we have the utmost advantage in life. We steal, we cheat, we lie for our own gain.

With everything that God has given us to return to him, we keep it for ourselves. J.C. Ross summarizes the biblical teaching of sin as such.

We have it here. See, maybe I'm the only sinful person here.

Maybe I'm the only one who has, you know, when I plan a day, when I plan an outing, I plan a month, I plan a year, and things don't go the way I planned them.

[10:19] All of a sudden, wrath and anger erupts in my heart and I wonder, what's going on? This is not how I wanted things to go. And here we are in our sinfulness, and probably in the epitome of our sinfulness, we say to God, God, you can't have wrath against me.

Not against me. God, you can't have wrath. That's not just. Yeah, we say that to the creator of all things and the judge of all people, that he is not allowed to have wrath.

So here's the verdict. If this is all true, that God is just and he's holy, that we have taken all the abilities that he's given us to give thanks to him, to praise him, and to bless our neighbors, and we've taken these and we've made gods of ourselves, and that we are sinful, then the verdict is that we are doomed before God if we're left to our own devices.

If we are left alone by ourselves in front of God, we're doomed. If our entire life were to play on this screen here, in front of everyone here that we love so much, we would just become undone.

Can you imagine in front of a holy God, a just God, who sees all things, if he saw our entire lives, how much that would break us and undo us.

[11:47] So, propitiation is needed to avert the wrath of God. God is angry at our sins. We've stolen from God, and we're in desperate need of a savior to save us from God's wrath.

Now, my estimate is that people show up to church to hear good news, right? That's why we go to church. We want to hear good news in a world where things don't go so well. So, to give an illustration, we go to the doctor, and we go because something is wrong.

And if the doctor would tell us that, you know, everything's fine, and you know that everything's not fine, that would not be good news, right? Or if we went to the doctor, and the doctor said, well, there's a problem with you, but we don't know what it is.

Come back and see us another time. That's not really good news either, is it? Now, if we were to go to the doctor, and the doctor would tell us that something's wrong, and here's the medication, but it's the wrong medication.

That's not good news either. But when the doctor diagnoses the problem and provides the right remedy, we are hopeful. And finally, if we go to the doctors and he gives us the right diagnosis and the right prescription, then it was successful.

[13:07] We go to church because we want to hear good news. We live our lives. We listen to the radio. We watch TV. We want to feel good about ourselves. But here's the reality. We need a right diagnosis.

And the Bible tells us that we're all sinful before a righteous God. And so we need to have someone who can provide satisfaction for that wrath that God has against us.

But the Bible has good news for us. It tells us that though God has responded to sinful humanity throughout the ages, throughout the centuries, and that he has poured out his wrath upon the unrighteous people who have lived in history, here in this text, we see that God pours out his wrath on the person of Jesus.

See, it says here in verse 10 that we've been looking at, it says that God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He sent Jesus to satisfy his wrath against us.

And this is why the Christian cliché that the God of the Old Testament is a wrathful judge and the God of the New Testament is very kind, is very tolerant, and accepting does not work.

[14:26] And we see here this is the New Testament, and that we see that God pours out his wrath on Jesus. And just to be sure, we're going to look at this verse in John chapter 3, verse 36, if we can have that on the next slide.

Here's the tender Jesus of the New Testament telling us, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

So even Jesus of the New Testament, the God of the New Testament, gives us that verdict that we are doomed and that we need a Savior.

Let's read the text again. Andrew, if we can have that slide. Let's read that together. In this is love. Now, okay, maybe you're wondering, I can see that God expressed love and wrath, and in this text it talks about love and love and love, and then propitiation, God's satisfaction for wrath.

[15:43] But doesn't that talk about a contradiction? Like, doesn't love drive out wrath and wrath drive out love? Like, isn't this just one of those times when, you know, Christians are told to read the Bible and accept the teachings of the Bible and then skip over something contradictory like this?

Hmm. So in Becky Pippert, in her book, *Hope Has Its Reasons*, she explains this as a paradox. And I'll read this quote to you.

Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it. Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is. And the final form of hate is indifference. God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer which is eating out the insides of the human race.

He loves with his whole being. See, these, this quality of God that he is love, this part of his character, love, and that the outworking of his justice, which is wrath, are not contradictory, but they work together.

[17:01] In fact, if God was not wrathful against evil, then God would not be just. And if God is not just, then he's not good. And if he's not good, then he's loving, he's not loving.

And that poses a problem for how we understand love in our culture. See, we don't really have a point of reference anymore because we so wanted to eliminate the God of wrath in our understanding of God in the culture.

And we wanted to do away with that idea that we will have to give account for our lives in the end. And that's what we're left with. We're left with, instead of love, we're left with tolerance.

Simply bearing, painfully enduring, someone who disagrees with us or someone who annoys us. And that's not love. Here the Bible gives us a pattern for what love is.

When we read that God loved us by sending his son to be the propitiation for our sins, this opens up a world of hope that is based on an event. See, the idea that God loves us is not a pie-in-the-sky idea that has no substance or any implications on our lives, but is found in God leaving the eternal splendor of his glory in heaven, where he is worshipped by the angels.

[18:21] God leaves that place of glory to be incarnate into a human being, to take on the human form in an embryo, living nine months in the womb of Mary, and then being born, just experiencing every possibility, every vulnerability there is to be experienced as a human being.

And then growing up in wisdom, living a sinless life, healing the sick, and teaching the kingdom of God. And yet, this person, Jesus, who is God and man, gave himself into the hands of sinners to die a wicked and vile death on a cross that was not for his sins, but for all of humanity and its opposition to God.

So, Andrew, can we have the next point, please? In his love, Jesus handed himself over to his enemies in order to save his enemies.

We are those enemies and become right with God when we humbly receive and cling to Jesus as the propitiation for our sins. See, this is really what the core of the Christian faith is, is not that we are so lovely that God falls in love with us or admires us for our efforts.

It's not like with Aladdin. We're not the Aladdins who do everything that we can to give glory to God, to accomplish the mission perfectly, to hand over the glory to God.

[19:49] When we're, with one hand, we're handing the glory and the other hand, we're hanging on the brink of hell and hoping that God would give us our due reward. We're not like that. What this is saying is that because of our sins and the depth of our sins and the ugliness of our sins, rather despite our sins, God has shown his love to us despite that.

There's no ground for boasting, no ground for exalting ourselves over others because we're so great in the eyes of God.

But God loves us because of who he is. God loves us in sending his son for us. Now this might be a bit difficult for us to understand.

This concept of love that is self-giving or very inconvenient because we live in an age of, let's say, hyper-convenience. We have technology that we have access to everything and for us, everything in life is just more convenient.

We have microwaves and we have TVs and we have cars and everything is just much easier and we can become complacent. And that can come into or infiltrate into the way that we love.

[21:04] Love has to be convenient, has to be, you know, not too sacrificial. The text here is telling us that love is inconvenient, that when we routinely choose the path of least resistance in life, God chose death on a cross.

In my lifetime, before becoming a Christian and after becoming a Christian, I've really struggled with the fact that, you know, does God love me or the question like, does God love me or does God hate me?

And I've often found myself, you know, when life is going well, when I'm performing well, I'm pleasing others, that, you know, God is probably very happy with me right now. And then when things go really bad, if I'm unsuccessful in my work or in my school or whatnot, that God is probably quite unhappy with me, that he is probably conjuring up some wrath so that he could pour it out on me one day.

And what this text is doing is that despite the fact that we balance ourselves in between pessimism or optimism in life, God shows us not a balance in the middle, not something that brings both together, that equalizes both.

But he brings us into a tension, a tension of the gospel where we are so sinful that God came down to save us and yet we're so loved that he came down to save us.

[22 : 35] It puts us into that, the tension of the gospel where God so loved us despite ourselves and despite our sinfulness.

So some of you might be here believing in Jesus and maybe have believed in Jesus for a long time but you're not really sure what it's like to be a Christian or you know, you have that idea that you know, give your life to Jesus but how do we walk the Christian faith?

How do we walk the Christian life? How do I know God? Well this text is really the center of that, that it shows us the pattern that we are there with hands open to receive God's love.

We're not trying to win God's love but we receive God's love that God has shown his love to us and we are the receiving end of that love and we acknowledge that God indeed has died for our sins in the person of Jesus.

So knowing God is not just a matter of changing our intellect or our perspective in life but it's a matter of living. Andrew, can we have the next slide please? So this is the next verse that follows the text and it kind of, it just follows in a train of thought.

[23 : 52] It says basically that there's an implication to this love that God has for us. It says, Beloved, if God so loved us, if God so loved us in giving his Son as a propitiation for our sins, we also ought to love one another.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. Now, we all know someone who is incredibly talented, incredibly skilled and who doesn't, you know, you can't really tell that they're this world-famous pianist but all of a sudden you go to a party and this person starts playing the piano and you're like, wow, like what are you doing?

Like you should be playing in Vegas or you should be at Carnegie Hall or something like that. We all know someone who's incredibly skilled in that way that their skill could literally change the world and yet they don't use it and we're kind of disappointed with that, aren't we?

Here this text is telling us that God so loved us that we can receive the love of God and not just receive this concept is that we receive the actual love of God, the Spirit of God comes into our hearts when we give our lives to Jesus, when we decide to follow Jesus, he comes into our hearts and changes and transforms us in the very depths of our being and that is what propels us into the world that we have this light, this love to offer the world and this text in verse 11 tells us if God so loved us we also ought to love one another.

God has given us this amazing thing of the gospel, this amazing thing of love like we will not experience anywhere else and his power to transform our lives into something so glorious and that we should reach a hurting and broken world that is ready to ignite in the love of God.

[25 : 50] So here's the question, are we allowing God's Spirit to do the work in us and are we living out or are we living out secret Christian lives?

Have we allowed the sacrificial love of God to move us beyond intellectual conviction or conception into a reality that sets our hearts ablaze for God and for those who are around us?

Andrew, can I have the last slide, please? So this is a prayer that I wrote in light of everything that we kind of looked at today. It's a prayer that is, it can be used as a conversion prayer, it can be used as a perseverance prayer, if you will, that we need God's grace, that God sent his son.

So let's please stand and we're going to pray that. If you've never given your life to Jesus, you can pray this and you can really mean it from your heart, but you have to mean it from your heart and it doesn't have to be these words, you can use other words, but this is essentially what the scripture is moving us to pray and if you've been a follower of Jesus for years and years and you want to really dedicate your life to Jesus.

This is just an example, a template. Make it your own though. So let's pray that together. Dear God, thank you for sending your only son, Jesus Christ, to propitiate your righteous wrath against my

sins.

[27 : 14] Thank you that you paid the price that was not ours to pay for our sins. Press into the depths of my heart how great your love is to me and to all people.

Give me grace by your Holy Spirit to love you and to love my neighbors as you call me to. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father, would you set our hearts ablaze with the love that you so displayed in the giving of your sons to propitiate our sins. Lord, would you make us alive to the gospel this day. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.