

God's Holy Love

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[0 : 0 0] a cross a cross is the universally recognized symbol for Christianity I think we'd agree on that we see crosses put on churches we see crosses put on the front of Bibles we see crosses hanging from necklaces we see crosses hanging from ears and we might see crosses in other places that aren't explicitly churches but that people want to put a cross there because they want to identify themselves as Christians I think we could argue that the cross is the universally recognized symbol of Christianity now on one side there might have been something else that could have been done I mean for some people it might have been a heart it might have been a heart given how much love is talked about in scripture just in the passage that we just read we're to love one another

God is love the famous verse that many people know God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life in the Old Testament we hear over and over and over again how much God's steadfast love is for his people Paul speaks about love Peter speaks about love James speaks about love they all speak about love so it could have been a heart and that heart would nicely represent God's imminence his his nearness and it's inviting it's welcoming it could have been a heart or perhaps perhaps on the other end of things it would have been good to have a symbol that emphasized God's holiness his transcendence his otherness God is unlike any other being he's eternal he's the uncreated one who created everything he has revealed his his will and his divine law this is the being whose presence struck the the heart with unraveling fear of the great prophet

Isaiah woe is me I am undone yeah a symbol that emphasized God's holiness maybe that would be a good choice perhaps something like a cloud with lightning in it remember remember God's presence when he showed up on Mount Sinai he was going to give Moses the law what was there there were clouds there was lightning there was thunder and there was a there was a fear in the people and what had God instructed Moses to do they were supposed to go down and say take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death you see the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark you know I thought Spielberg grabbed the right moment when at the very end when the Nazis finally get the Ark of the Covenant and they stand around and they open it up and you remember what happens this cloud comes swirling out and going around the people's faces start to melt they just begin to dissolve into the ground because they had touched the holiness of God yeah yeah maybe a cloud with lightning that might be an appropriate symbol for Christianity

I mean it keeps us from getting a little too comfy a little too cozy with God should the symbol of Christianity be a heart on one side or a cloud of lightning on the other I think not the cross is perfect the cross is perfect because it is on the cross that the love of God and the holiness of God dwell together where the imminence and the transcendence of God reside revealing God as he is he is holy and he is love in the cross on the cross is God's holy love we encounter God's holy love in our passage from John's first epistle listen again to two verses from that passage in this the love of God was made manifest among us that is God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him in this is love not that we have loved

God but that he loved us and sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins now in those verses we hear about love but holy or holiness doesn't appear so why would I suggest that in this passage we encounter God's holiness well I'm going to suggest to you it is there because of this one particular phrase the propitiation for our sins God loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins we're going to look at those two words for a little bit propitiation and sins we're going to start with propitiation now that's not a word we use all the time is it we don't use propitiation very much unless you've been to church a lot or perhaps you're a scholar of ancient civilizations we don't really come across the word propitiation here's a dictionary definition of it the action of propitiating or appeasing a God spirit or person frankly it doesn't help very much because if you don't know what propitiation means propitiating doesn't mean anything so what does propitiate mean to win or regain the favor of a God spirit or person by doing something that pleases them one of the other words in that propitiation was appeasing to appease means to relieve or satisfy a demand biblically biblically the term has to do with appeasing or turning away the anger of God by satisfying his demand for justice let's ask a question is God angry well if we take

[6 : 30] Psalm 17 to have any direction for us this is how one translation reads God is a judge he is angry throughout the day if a person does not repent God will wield his sword he is prepared to shoot his bow he has prepared deadly weapons to use against him he gets ready to shoot flaming arrows and this is how God speaks to his covenant people Israel through the prophet Ezekiel now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you and spend my anger against you and judge you according to your ways and I will punish you for all of your abominations and my eye will not spare nor will I have pity I will punish you according to your ways while your abominations are in your midst then you will know that I am the Lord who strikes is God angry God's angry but his is a holy anger a just anger it's not him just kind of blowing his top losing his cool like you know it might be for a parent or maybe your boss or some sort of civil authority they just lose it one time

God is righteous and he is just so his anger is righteous and just you might think of Jesus when he goes into the temple and he turns over the tables of the money sellers who were exploiting people who had come to worship there or you might think of the time when he looked upon Pharisees with anger because he knew they wanted to prevent him from healing a sick man he was angry at those times and it was a righteous and just anger I tell you too often Christians particularly Christian men particularly Christian men who are fathers justify their lack of self control when a child doesn't heed their authority by calling it righteous anger no no no it's just a lack of self control but God is not like us he is holy and his holy anger his wrath is just listen to this definition of wrath from the new bible dictionary wrath wrath the permanent attitude of a holy and just

God when confronted by sin and evil is designated his wrath it is inadequate to regard this term merely as a way of speaking of the results of sin it is rather a personal quality without which God would cease to be fully righteous and his love would degenerate into sentimentality in other words he doesn't just fly off the handle when he's in a bad mood and we do something wrong it is a permanent attitude a permanent disposition a personal quality that always looks upon sin with wrath because he is always righteous and he is always just what is God angry about our sins our sins I mean the two examples that I read the one from Psalm 17 the other from Ezekiel if a person does not repent and in Ezekiel now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you for all your abominations see the need to repent is the need to stop doing something which is contrary to God's will and they need to get away with these abominations or these are profane worship that they're doing see sins are the things that we say do or even think that are contrary to what

God justly requires and we learn what God requires of us in the Bible which is his revealed will for us as human beings you see it's in the Bible that he tells us either directly or by clear inference how we are to be and when we say do and think things that are contrary to how we are to be which is something frankly we inevitably do we show ourselves to be hopelessly prone to running afoul of God's law this is our problem when we sin you see it's not just a failing on our part it's an act of law breaking against the holy God so remember I said sins are things that we say do or even think that are contrary to what God justly requires of us see God has the right to set the rules because he is God he is the one who made all things including us and he has a right to say how things are going to be but I said he justly requires them of us he's not only the right to say how things are going to be because he is God the creator of everything he is also the one who has the wisdom the knowledge and the understanding of why things ought to be as he says they are to be that's an aspect of his holiness consequently to do things that are contrary to what

God requires is foolish at best evil at worst when you are training your young child how to safely cross the street telling them to hold your hand wait for the light look both ways and then cross you're justly requiring something of them you are just in doing so because you are the parent and the parents have the responsibility and authority over their children and you also you are just because you know how to cross the street you're requiring nothing of them but what they ought to do and for them to do otherwise is folly and a wise parent would judiciously meet out consequences if the child persists in disobeying their authority if a child as they grow up persists in their folly fighting the authority of their parents their teachers their bosses civil authorities would you not expect that there will be consequences serious consequences for law breaking now we can acknowledge that parents teachers civil authorities they make mistakes they make mistakes in the exercise of their authority even abuse their authority and as a result sometimes they meet out consequences that are unjust but the same cannot be said of a holy god his rules are righteous because he is righteous his judgment is just because he is just and because he is righteous and just his use of his divine authority and his meeting out of consequences for rebelling against his authority is also righteous and just and as harsh as it may sound the heidelberg catechism expresses the nature of the consequences with biblical accuracy when it teaches quote it is his righteousness which requires that sin committed against the supreme majesty of

[13 : 49] God be punished with extreme that is with eternal punishment of body and soul Jesus says as much Jesus says as much when he promises that at the end of the age the son of man will send his angels they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and law breakers and throw them into the fiery furnace and that place will be weeping and gnashing of teeth and the punishment that he describes as will be eternal there is sin and there are consequences for sin remember if a person does not repent God will wield his sword propitiation propitiation as Liam Morris says is a reminder that God is implacably opposed to everything that is evil that his opposition may properly be described as wrath and that this wrath is put away only only by the atoning work of

Christ you sense the need for the turning away of God's wrath the need for propitiation I hope so I do I do I know that I have and that I do run afoul of God's holy law and he has every right to judge me accordingly that's why we must take Jesus warning very seriously but what can be done how shall God's just anger be turned away how shall his wrath be propitiated is it something that we can do I mean what if we just try harder what if we make a decision tonight we will never again transgress God's law and even if that supposedly could happen what are you going to do with everything that happened between time you were born up until the moment tonight when you said you were not going to do it what are you going to deal with those you see it's not something that we can do see even if it were possible to no longer sin from this moment forward what do we do with the sins committed prior today how can we make recompense for them

God states in starkest terms the reality of his justice the soul who sins shall die the soul who sins shall die and if we are to live somehow our sins and their consequences must be dealt with yet we are powerless to do anything about it in truth we increase our trouble every day because every day we sin what can be done what can be done has been done but not by us but by God and this brings us back to the cross and the love of God listen again to 1st John 4 9 and 10 in this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him the soul that sins shall die

God sent his son into the world that we might live in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins that sin see the consequence for law breaking the just anger of God against sin has been appeased not by something that we have done or that we could do but by the very God who in his holiness is justly angry with our sin he appeases his own wrath by sending his only son to be the propitiation for our sins that's what's going on on the cross for our sake he made his only son to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God this is why John the Baptist declares behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world now

God in his grace had set up an entire sacrificial system by which human beings could bring animals to be put to death in their place but as the writer to the Hebrews says it was insufficient because sacrifices had to be offered again and again and again but now Jesus the lamb of God the sacrifice offered by God himself the lamb of God his only son is sufficient to take away the sin of the world and as the writer of Hebrews says securing an eternal redemption every once in a while we sing here for my life he bled and died justice has been satisfied and what does John say about this act it's an act of love that emanates from a God who is love we had a lot to say about the anger of God but what might we say about the love of God well first from this passage we learn that it's unearned it's

[19 : 18] God's love is not generated by our love for him how does John put it in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins his love was not a paycheck for our having loved him in fact it's just the opposite it's true we didn't love him we owed him and yet he loved us anyway as love exists in the God who is love John teaches that it was expressed without first being expressed towards him one commentator says because his very nature is love mercy and goodness flow from God like a beautiful river like sunlight radiates from the sun so the first is that it wasn't earned secondly that it's active John says that his love God's love was made manifest that it is not left unacted upon that is

God didn't just look down at our situation with pity and even love and do nothing about it there was a need and he acted he sent his son and the thing about this it was suited to the task in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins remember not not a but the there had already been a whole lot of propitiatory sacrifices offered up in the sacrificial system that was set up animals were accepted by God in place of human beings but this was not just another propitiation it was the propitiation Isaac Watts not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain but Christ the heavenly lamb takes all our sins away a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they amen it was active and

God's love thirdly is sacrificial God is not some impersonal force or some disinterested deity who turns his back on the image bearers that he has made out of love he purposed to have for himself a people and in order to ransom them in order to redeem them from the clutches of sin and death the father sent the son and the son was obedient to the father's will even to the point of death even to the death of a cross now those terms of god and son or father and son they speak of personal relationship a relationship that existed in love from eternity it was never marred or disrupted by sin it was one of complete love nevertheless the father sent the son knowing that he would have to pour out his just anger upon him he would have to watch him suffer excruciating pain as he was mocked as he was scourged as a crown of thorns was thrust upon his head and when he was nailed to the cross then to have to turn his face away as sin was laid upon his beloved son as he exercised his just penalty of sin what a horror to imagine what a horror to imagine there was sacrifice it's a love that is sacrificial and he did it for sinners such as you and me he did it even though we didn't love him he did it despite the unfathomable sacrifice that it entailed it's an amazing display of his holiness and his love this is why the cross you could put it back up again

Laura this is why the cross is the symbol of Christianity because it's on the cross that the central problem of humanity has been dealt with the central problem the fundamental problem the foundational problem that human beings have sin their rebellion against the holy God and his will the denial of his true existence his authority it's on the cross that all of that sin that is generated by our rebellion is justly accounted for by the love of God now Reverend Dunlop will be preaching Sunday morning on the resurrection and the resurrection is vitally important Paul says that if Christ did not rise we're still in our sins but why is that because the resurrection of Jesus is the proof that the finished work on the cross was done it was real it was sufficient it proves that

Jesus himself was the suitable sacrifice indeed that he was the Lamb of God who takes away is an after the fact affirmation of what took place on Good Friday it proves that not only that Jesus was a sufficient sacrifice because he himself was without sin so he could bear the wrath of God due to our sin but also that his rising from the dead is a guarantee of our rising from the dead that is he had victory over sin and death and we in union with him also have victory over sin and death but the turning point the turning point of sinful humanity's relationship with God is the cross it's in the cross that reconciliation with God resides it's in the cross that propitiation for sin is made it's in the cross that God himself offers us a lamb for our sin all of our sin past present and future and as a result we have confidence that when we approach his throne of grace even now though he is holy though he is omnipotent though he's righteous and true and we're none of that yet nonetheless we have access to his throne of grace because of the cross

[25 : 34] I'm not going to argue that there ought to be a cross in every Christian sanctuary but I am going to argue that the cross cannot be forgotten and imagining or dare I say having a cross before our eyes is a reminder of the holiness of God and the love of God the basis upon which we have hope again the resurrection vitally important for what it proves about what took place on the cross and also our guarantee that we too will rise but that hope was purchased on the cross without the cross human beings are stopped at the door to the throne room of God and there's another sermon to be preached from this passage of 1st John about how God's holy love and its implications for how we are to live together in love but let's close with this good Friday is good because of the cross and what is good about the cross is that it takes the holiness of

God seriously the cross takes the sinfulness of human beings seriously the love of God seriously and so the cross therefore is to be meditated upon seriously for what it is the symbol of God's holy love and as we seriously meditate upon the cross I believe two things are going to happen God will increase and we will decrease we will grow in awe and wonder of the God who not in spite of his holiness but because of his holiness loved us by acting to appease his own wrath by propitiating our sons through the gift of his only son and we will grow less willing to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think John Stott offers this every time we look at the cross Christ seems to be saying to us I am here because of you it is your sin that

I am bearing your curse that I am suffering your death that I am paying your death that I am dying Stott continues nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross it is there at the foot of the cross that we shrink to our true size let me just reiterate one of the verses that we sang earlier from smitten stricken smitten and afflicted ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great here may review its nature rightly here its guilt may estimate mark the sacrifice appointed see who bears the awful load tis the word the Lord's anointed son of man and son of God