

An Exegetical & Theological Note from Psalm 65:3

The Gospel of God's Atoning Work

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TEXTS:

Psalm 65:3-4 [4-5 Hebrew]

4 דְּבַרֵי עֲוֹנֹתַי גָּבְרוּ מִנִּי פִשְׁעֵינוּ אֶתְּהָ תִכְפָּרֵם

5 אֲשֶׁר־יִתְבַחֵר וְיִתְקַרֵּב יִשְׁכֵּן חֲצֵרֶיךָ נִשְׂבָּעָה בְּטוֹב בֵּיתְךָ קֹדֶשׁ הֵיכָלְךָ

Author's Translation:

"The records of the iniquities prevail against me; As for our transgressions, You, You make atonement. O the blessednesses of the one You choose and You bring near to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple."

What is the gospel of God's atoning work? How does this relate to you? What kind of response should God's initiative in providing atonement produce in your heart, affections, and life? Four realities arise in closely observing this text. Behold the beauty of God's gospel!

1. Realize Your Rebellion & Transgressions.

O how many iniquities has man accumulated before the omniscient eye of God! The wording of David emphasizes the plurality of these evil devices. The wording could even delineate the words of iniquities. That is, the words that come from men's mouths are nothing short of iniquity. If words are iniquity, then man's heart must be full of iniquity since out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Regardless, the rendering still stands the same before God's watchful eye: mankind has committed iniquity. The idea of iniquity speaks of that which is crooked or that which is distorted. It is to bend. And, to commit transgressions means that one has trespassed God's righteous Law and, thus, to be a violator, a transgressor, and fully guilty of breaking God's Law. David realized his own rebellion and his transgressions.

2. Wail at the Weight of Your Wickedness.

David did more than simply 'recognize', however. Though recognizing sin entails an essential part of biblical conviction, repentance, and change, the mere recognition of sin is not enough. Judas recognized his sin but never repented. Repentance includes a recognition, a walking of, a bemoaning of, a hatred of one's own sin. Repentance is nothing short of the disgust of one's own sin and a determined resolve to mortify that sin and exchange it for godliness. The wording that David used in bringing out this idea shows the power of sin that was upon him. David said that the records of his iniquities prevailed upon him. To prevail means to make great, to make heavy. His iniquities were too great for him to bear! He could not, in and of himself, bear the thought of his twisted deviations from God's glorious Law. He bemoaned and lamented the fact that all of his iniquities rested upon him like a crushing and a most-powerful weight. True repentance must include this kind of realization of the weight of his sin. He must understand his sin and turn from the putrid and vile wickedness of every single transgression before the holy eyes of God.

3. Glory in God Who Alone Can Fully Atone.

Yet it is at this very point when sin is so stark, when God's punishment seems so pressing, and when God's justice seems crushing to one's soul, in comes the only One who can remedy the hopeless situation. God and God alone intervenes, he invades, he alone has the balm to heal and remedy the situation. In the original Hebrew, David most emphatically brings this out with the personal pronoun: *As for you, You atone for them*. The verb contains the subject ('you', 2nd person masculine), but David underscores the divine nature, the necessity of God's intervention, and the glory of God's invasion with the personal pronoun, "You" — so it could thus be rendered: "You yourself...." At the eternally hopeless moment of despair and at the crushing weight of divine righteousness dispensed upon vile sinners, God Himself interrupts and brings about an atonement.

4. Come to the Cross of Christ, our Propitiation.

The English translations cannot do justice to David's wording in this verse. Some have it: you purge" (KJV), "you forgive" (NASB, NET, NIV), "you cover" (YLT). The ESV comes the closest as it reads: "you atone". The Hebrew word speaks of providing atonement by either covering, expiating sin or wiping it away. The idea is that God provided an atonement by satisfying righteous wrath and thus he expiated sin and wiped it away. God Himself has propitiated His own wrath by providing His Son, Jesus Christ, as the wrath-bearing substitute. God has provided a once-for-all atoning sacrifice whereby He would remain eternally just and punish sin while at the same time he would be the justifier and provide redemption to rebels who hide "*in Christ*." God has displayed Christ publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. By His grace, God draws sinners to Jesus Christ, the One who received the death-blow from the Father, the One who drank the bitter up in full, and the One who became an offering for sin. He made atonement by His blood for all those who come to Him in saving faith. All who cling to Christ and His substitutionary work at Calvary find a full redemption, a perfect propitiatory sacrifice, and a perfect union whereby the sinner is brought into a saving relationship "*in Christ*."

5. Bask in the Blessedness of Dwelling with God.

David exclaims that abundant blessednesses await those who have their sins expiated! How blessed is the one whom God pardons! How abundant is the privilege of being a forgiven 'son of God.' No privilege, no position, no status, no promotion, no prestige can ever begin to compare with the matchless worth of God atoning for a transgressor's iniquity. And, to be sure, the only ones who are "blessed" — that is, those who receive the abundantly and ever-supplying blessednesses — are those who have felt the weight of their iniquities, have seen the rottenness of their transgressions, have melted in fear before God's awful righteousness and wrath, and have received the full atonement, the glorious pardon, the eternal expiation, the once-and-for-all propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ! The gospel produces praise! Atonement propels adoration! Christ's propitiation must prompt submission, exultation, and jubilation! And yet, the verse continues with manifold blessings. Those who are forgiven are those whom *God* has chosen and those whom *God* has drawn near to Himself. The forgiven ones dwell in God's courts and receive full satisfaction in *God* as they worship Him in His holy presence!

**Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
"Full atonement!" can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!**

—Philip Bliss