

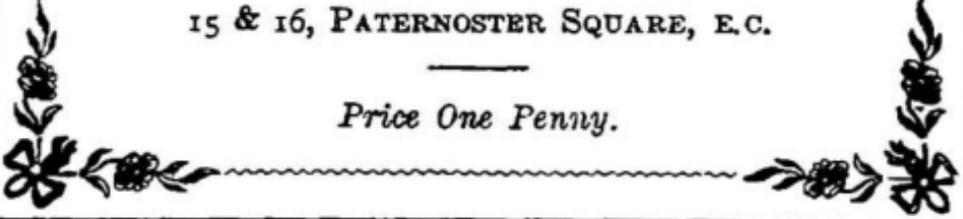
RECONCILIATION.

BY

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RECONCILIATION.

SCRIPTURE never applies this word to God, nor uses it as though He needed to be reconciled to His creatures; neither does the doctrine of reconciliation demand that it should be so applied. Such an application confounds propitiation with reconciliation.

I offer a few remarks as to what appears to be the plain teaching of Scripture on this subject, without pretending to give all the passages in which it occurs.

There are three things we have to bear in mind in considering this question, viz. :

1. The holiness of God, to whom sin is an offence, and calls forth His wrath.

2. The love of God towards the sinner.

3. The enmity of the sinner's heart towards God.

These three things show the necessity and lay the basis of the great work of atonement, which vindicates God's moral being, and renders Him free to act according to His nature.

The first necessitates propitiation ;—that which makes God propitious to us.

The second presents God Himself as the provider of the

only Lamb that could make propitiation, thus laying the basis of reconciliation.

Because of the third He beseeches sinners to be reconciled to Him.

That sin is an offence to His holiness, and calls forth His wrath, is proved by such scriptures as the following, viz.:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” (Rom. i. 18.)

“Because of these things”—fornication, uncleanness, &c.—“the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.” (Eph. v. 6.)

“They that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. v. 21.)

These scriptures, too, are all after atonement had been accomplished.

Again, “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him.” (John iii. 36.) This, if final unbelief, binds all the results of sin upon the soul; the wrath is never lifted.

Wrath certainly is raised in God's heart against sin, which is an offence to His holiness, and this demands propitiation—the lifting up of the Son of man. Only this is never said in Scripture to be “reconciling” God.

The love of God to the sinner is proved by the following, viz. :

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.” (John iii. 16.)

“God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom. v. 8.)

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son a propitiation for our sins.” (1 John iv. 9, 10.)

In these and other similar scriptures the love of God is seen to be in existence *while*

enmity existed in our hearts, and consequently there could be no need of reconciling such a Being, who pitied and loved His fallen creatures, though He could not receive them in their sins, nor at the expense of His holiness; but the way in which holiness and love could both be maintained was devised by Himself, and He never changes, but is always the same—*Himself*.

The following scriptures prove the enmity of the sinner's heart toward God; viz.:

“The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Rom. viii. 7.)

“If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by

the death of His Son," &c. (Rom. v. 10.)

"You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind, yet now hath He reconciled," &c. (Col. i. 21.)

Here man is described as in a state of enmity against God; no movement, no desire towards Him. The language of His heart being, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

Scripture distinctly maintains these three cardinal truths; so that to deny the need of propitiation is to deny the holiness of God.

To say that God needed to be reconciled is to deny the love of God.

To say that man can reconcile God is to deny the state of enmity and powerlessness in which he is by nature.

Man neither *could* nor *would* reconcile God (if it were needed), and this would condemn mankind irrevocably to a state of enmity against Him, which, blessed be His name, is only true of those who refuse what He has provided.

Nor did Christ reconcile God on behalf of man. This thought equally denies God's love, and makes Christ to appease an angry deity ; whereas the scripture that speaks of the necessity of the Son of man being lifted up, speaks also of the love of God, that gave His only begotten

Son, that He, as Son of man, might be thus lifted up.

It does not at all follow because the wrath of God is spoken of that, therefore, God was irreconciled to His creatures. In human affairs a judge may love the criminal he condemns; and a father the son whom he chastens.

Nor does Scripture ever speak of the attributes of God being modified, even one by another, but all are maintained intact, and all meet in the cross. There "righteousness and peace have met together; mercy and truth have kissed each other."

Now God's judicial disapprobation of sin, and of the sinner that cleaves to it, de-

mands atonement; one of the outcomes of which is reconciliation. And it is remarkable that in Scripture the former term is always applied to God, while the latter is always applied to man. Surely there ought to be force in this to the mind of every humble enquirer after the truth.

The claims of God's holiness, of His throne, of His offended majesty against sin, *are* spoken of; and therefore the need of atonement, of making peace, of propitiation for sins, but *never* in Scripture of reconciliation to the sinner.

Sin, our sin, violates God's holiness, and this must be vindicated; but in every case where the wrath of God is expressed

against it, God Himself suggests the way of vindicating His holiness; and His love eventually provides the only meritorious means of doing so—His only begotten Son.

Lev. xvi. gives typically the great work of atonement, where we have three things that appear to form part of it; viz. :

1. Propitiation. The blood of the sin-offering of atonement put upon the mercy-seat; the throne of God; God's character thus vindicated on account of sin, and peace made. (*vv.* 14, 15.)

2. Reconciliation of *things*. The holy place, the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, by the sprinkling of the blood upon *them*. Types of

things on earth and things in heaven. (*v.* 20.)

3. Substitution, or reconciliation of *persons*; *i.e.* of believers; the sins confessed upon the head of the scapegoat, and borne away into the wilderness. (*vv.* 21, 22.)

This order is found in Col. i. 20, 21. Thus:

-1. Having made peace by the blood of His cross.

2. By Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, whether things in earth or things in heaven.

3. And *you* being alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet *now hath* He reconciled. Here unquestionably the act is God's.

Peace is made, yet God's character is not changed; but, His holiness and righteousness being met, His love is free to act. Based upon this, it pleases God to reconcile all things unto Himself; *they* could not reconcile themselves. This is yet to be accomplished. But *you*, believers, hath He reconciled. *Man* could no more do it than *things*. To say this means man reconciled God is clearly opposed to the teaching of this scripture.

In Romans iii. 23-25 it is when all are proved sinners that God justifies freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth a pro-

pitation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness. The love was on God's part, the enmity on ours. In the cross the believer sees Christ bearing the curse of a broken law and sin in the flesh condemned. All his thoughts about God are changed, and listening to the preaching of peace he gives up his hard thoughts of God, accepts the wonderful manifestation of His love, is made nigh, and partakes of all the blessed results of that love and of that death.

Who would willingly limit that love? Not surely those who know its depth!

Who would undervalue that death? Not those who know

anything of the evil of their hearts or of the holiness of God!

A necessity indeed it was, that the Son of Man should be lifted up. No heaven for any of us apart from that, but an unending hell, a never-dying worm, the wrath of God abiding upon us.

How true the hymn—

“Save by the blood He could not bless,
So pure, so great His holiness ;
But He it was who gave the Lamb,
And by His blood absolved I am.”

What a marvellous God!
What untarnished holiness!
What unchanging love! What
admirable wisdom!

Sin offends holiness. Love
guided by wisdom meets all
the claims of holiness on behalf

of sinners, and finds in the very condition of things an opportunity for its manifestation, fixing upon the vilest as the most meet to show out all its depths.

“O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”

While all need to know more of the love of God practically, it is evident that they who insist that God needs reconciling have not yet grasped the character of His love as set forth in the Scriptures.

Take the case of a father and son. The son grieves or wrongs his father, and goes away from him. In whose heart is the

enmity? Does not nature teach that it is in the son and that it is he who has to be reconciled? The father generally is glad enough to get the son back any way. Of course, in the case of God, His holiness must be satisfied; but it is well known that the heart that has done another an injury is far harder to be brought to terms of accommodation than the injured one. It seems part of the fall that, having inflicted injury upon another, the one so doing should add hatred to injury. Blessed be God, His love has quenched it in our hearts who believe in His name.

The meaning of the words translated "reconcile" demands

a momentary glance, but need not detain us long, as it is a matter of Greek.* The English

* There are three Greek words translated "reconcile;" viz., *diallattomai*, *kattallasso*, and *apokattallatto*. These doubtless have each a different shade of meaning, in some cases the use of a different preposition with the same verb completely altering the meaning.

The word "*diallattomai*" is used only once—Matt. v. 24. The force of the "*dia*" may be reciprocal; but that word occurs *only here*, a case between brother and brother. Again, the middle voice *has* a reflective force, and the form is the same as the passive voice, save in the first future and two aorist tenses. But in every case where the active voice is not used (as in 2 Cor. v. 18, 19; Eph. ii. 16; Col. i. 20, 21), it is the distinctive aorist passive that is used.

Kattallasso is used in Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians; and *apokattallatto* in Ephesians and Colossians.

Bible will, however, give us a good idea of the Scriptural meaning and use of the words.

The places where the verb "to reconcile" appears in the English New Testament are as follows, viz. : Matt. v. 24, Rom. v. 10 (twice), 1 Cor. vii. 11, 2 Cor. v. 18, 19, 20, Eph. ii. 16, Col. i. 20, 21.

The noun "reconciliation" occurs in Rom. v. 11, xi. 15; 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

If the occurrences of the verb be carefully examined, it will be seen that of the ten, two are used with reference to man and man; and eight with reference to man and God.

The former are in Matt. v. 24 and 1 Cor. vii. 11, and in both

cases it is the offending party that is enjoined to be reconciled.

In Matt. v. 24 the words are, "First be reconciled to thy brother." Now, if it be remembered that this was said to the *offending* party, against whom his brother had a charge, then it may of course mean "reconcile thyself" to thy brother; *i.e.*, the verb would have a reflective force.

In 1 Cor. vii. 11 it is, "Let her be reconciled to her husband." Here, again, it is the offending party who is to be reconciled, as the married, both being Christians, are not to depart from each other; and in the case supposed one has departed. The verb here also

would have a reflective force. But in every case where God and man are in view this would produce confusion ; for God is always the actor, because it was impossible for man to act.

In Romans v. 10, "We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." Here that which reconciles is given in the sentence, "By the death of His Son," and in that no Christian would say he had any part but his sins. It was God who gave His Son, and it was not to reconcile Himself to us, but us to Himself.

In 1 Cor. v. 18, 19, 20, God is the actor, and the active voice is used in the first two verses ; while in the last God, as it were,

by the apostles, beseeches sinners to be reconciled because of what He has done. Here the language is, "Hath reconciled us to Himself;" and, "Be reconciled to God." The persons who are to be reconciled and the One to whom they are to be reconciled being given, as well as that which reconciles (v. 21), it cannot be understood that God needed reconciling, or that He reconciled Himself.

Ephesians and Colossians both show the same thing.

Let it be observed, that the word "reconcile" in English is never used as between man and God without the means being specified as *having already been provided by God Himself.*

Dictionary definitions show the confusion that exists as to the Scriptural use of the words. In turning to dictionaries for the meaning of Scriptural words, we should remember that they are the works of men who seek to define human language as such, and that in the course of years a language changes. In English some words are obsolete in the sense in which they were used when the Bible was translated; and in some cases where the *words* are retained, they have different or opposite meanings. In the Scriptures the Spirit of God has used human language to convey the mind of God to us, and used it with precision; so that what the student of

Scripture wants to know is, how a word is used in Scripture. He need not be moved by so-called classical and dictionary meanings of words if assured, from a study of their use in Scripture, that such meanings do not convey what the Spirit of God intends. Not that one would set up a Scriptural as opposed to a classical use of words; but if the *rule* is that they are the same, it is not without its exceptions.

Quotations from the Old Testament might be adduced in which God's "anger" and "wrath" are spoken of against certain people, and directions given for sacrifice to turn away that wrath; but these are cases

which bring out the need of propitiation, not of reconciliation. The history of the Old Testament is that of a people in relationship with God according to the revelation which He had given of Himself at the time. Sin allowed in them offended God's holiness, and demanded propitiation, which the sacrifices typified. But Christ being come has by His *perfect* sacrifice done away for ever with the need of repetition. If it is made a question of reconciliation, then God was irreconciled to a people or a person in relationship to Himself at the occurrence of every sin they or he committed. But this can never be the case.

God is never reconciled to sin, and, blessed be His name, never irreconciled to the sinner, or no reconciliation could take place. If the sinner cleave finally to his sin, then his doom is sealed; he must partake of its judgment, for God and sin cannot exist together. He may suffer it for a time to work out His purposes, but it shall eventually be banished from the face of His creation for ever, existing only as an eternal testimony to God's judgment of it.

Let us now look briefly at the Scriptures, where the word is used as between God and man, to endeavour to find what they really teach.

In Romans v. 1-11 we have

two things ; viz. (1) Justification, (2) Reconciliation.

As to the first, the instrumental and the meritorious means of it are indicated ; viz. :

As instrument, faith. “ Justified by faith.” (v. 1.)

For merit, blood. “ Justified by His blood.” (v. 9.)

The merit is in the blood ; faith is the instrument by which that merit is applied to us, and *it* is the gift of God. It is wrought in us subjectively by the Holy Spirit.

As to the second, the source of it, and the means objective and subjective, are indicated.

As source, God’s own peculiar love. “ God commendeth His love to us, in that, while we

were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (v. 8.)

God's love stands out here in contrast to man. Man may devote himself when he has an object which furnishes him a sufficiently weighty motive; but God's love is shown to those who were without strength—sinners, enemies. In this He manifested *His peculiar* love; in this gave proof that all the thoughts of man about Him were the products of his own fallen, wicked heart acted upon by Satan. *Love*, not hatred, was manifested towards man here; though there never was a place where *hatred of sin* found a more stupendous expression. A way of escape *from* wrath, not

the outpouring of it upon man's head—though wrath *was* poured out, and that upon *man's* head, the man Christ Jesus.

As means, we have, objectively, the death of His Son, "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." (v. 10.)

But, secondly, man's eyes were so blinded that he needed to have them opened that he might see. A subjective change must be wrought in him ere he will receive the provision made for him, and our Lord Jesus Christ accomplishes this. "By whom we have now received the reconciliation." (v. 11.) Here the 'by' (*dia* with a genitive) signifies the instrumental means.

Not only did He lay the basis of this reconciliation, but came and preached it; and, further, committed it to men who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, besought their fellows to accept it.

By the death of His Son we are reconciled to God.

We have received the reconciliation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

How beautiful! All is of God. What marvellous love! No room for the devil's lie here—either that God is not love, on the one hand, or that He needed not propitiation to satisfy His offended majesty on the other. All that God is has been revealed and vindicated in the cross.

In 2 Cor. v. 18-21: "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." Here we have again the means of accomplishing the subjective change in us—from being at enmity to being reconciled.

But He (God) has also "given to us (the apostles) the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God *was* in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." During the lifetime of Jesus on earth God was seeking to reconcile the world unto Himself; but there was nothing in man to answer to His love. This

also was brought out by the coming of Christ in grace; that is to say, the moral incapacity of man to appreciate perfect goodness, and the perfect hatred of his heart towards it when manifested. So that the reconciliation proffered to man in the person of Christ was beaten back into the heart of God, whence it came.

He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, but the world knew Him not. Present non-imputation of trespasses availed nothing. Grace and truth came by Him. Grace was despised; truth rejected.

It was not merely Messiah come to the Jews, but *God* was in Christ reconciling the *world*.

The aspect of God's dealings was wider than the Jew's, and the grace of it in contrast with law. Whether Jew or Gentile came to Christ when upon earth, He met their need, temporal or spiritual. Yet the world was not reconciled, nor is it now; for all that is in the world is not of the Father.

But He "hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

Crucified and cast out, redemption was accomplished. That which showed the depth of the hatred of the heart of man brought out the depth of the love of the heart of God, which went beneath and rose above all the hatred of

man and devils. If man with wicked hands crucified and slew Him, God delivered Him, by predeterminate counsel and foreknowledge, to work atonement there, and He hath raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand.

The risen Saviour gave to the eleven their commission, and the ascended Saviour to Paul his—the word of reconciliation. “Now,” says Paul, “we are ambassadors for Christ,” as though God did beseech by us. We therefore, in the stead of Christ, pray, “Be reconciled to God.”

Does any say, “On what grounds”? Because God *hath made* Christ, who knew no sin,

to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. This is the basis, this the objective means of the accomplishment of this wonderful purpose of His love. Who can understand it?—"Be reconciled to God."

Though Christ's mission to the *world*, as well as His mission to the Jews, for the moment was set aside, yet God's *purpose* to reconcile the world, and to fulfil the promises to Abraham, shall be carried out by the very means that seemed to set it aside, and upon a righteous basis which vindicates God in His actings according to Himself, while man's failure excludes him from *claiming* any share in the result.

The ministry of reconciliation, based upon propitiation, and entrusted to His servants, is accomplishing now another purpose, though it is still *towards the world*; that purpose is the calling out of the church—the Bride.

But the world shall be reconciled, and the Jew established in all the blessings promised of old to the fathers, and this upon the basis of the same blessed work. All is of *grace*, and all *by Him*; and all the *praise* is *due to HIM*.

In Ephesians ii. both Jews and Gentiles are seen morally at a distance and at enmity with God.

The Gentiles walking “ac-

according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air." (*v.* 2.)

The Jews "fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and of the mind; and by nature children of wrath, even as others." (*v.* 3.)

Beside this, enmity existed between them on account of the middle wall of partition, the Gentiles "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise." (*v.* 12.)

It was necessary therefore to break down the middle wall of partition, and to abolish the enmity between the two, existing by reason of the law of commandments in ordinances which separated them.

It was necessary also to reconcile both unto God, for both alike needed it.

All was done in the Cross.

Peace was made. The middle wall of partition being broken down, and the enmity abolished, the two were made one. (*v.* 14.)

And both are reconciled to God in one body by the Cross. (*v.* 16.)

But they are one upon new ground, in a new order of things; for Christ hath made *in Himself* of twain one *new* man, so making peace. (*v.* 15.)

Not only so, but the peace was proclaimed alike to those ceremonially "nigh" and to those "afar off," upon the ground of the Cross. (*v.* 17.)

Man had not to make his peace with God, but to accept the proclamation of a peace made, and made by the blood of the Cross; for nothing less could do it.

And the Spirit gives access to both unto the Father; they grow unto a holy temple in the Lord, and are builded together on earth for a habitation of God through the Spirit. (*v.* 18-22.)

In Col. i. 15-22 the double glory of Christ is presented.

1. He is the firstborn of every creature. (*v.* 15.)

2. He is the firstborn out from among the dead. (*v.* 18.)

The first is as born into this world, the image of the invisible

God, because all things were created by Him—pre-eminence, not time, being in question. He is the source of all, and all things subsist by Him.

The second as being Himself the first who got the victory over death, having in grace subjected Himself to it.

All the fulness was pleased to dwell in Him as a man too. (*v.* 19.) But His glory was not recognised by fallen man, amongst whom He walked. The fulness of the Godhead in Jesus, a man amongst men, proved man, as to himself, to be utterly irreconcilable, and the Cross closed that dealing of God with man.

But it pleased the Godhead

too, having made peace by the blood of His cross, to reconcile all things unto Himself. The foundation therefore having been laid in His blood, God carries out His pleasure, which is to reconcile *all things* unto Himself both which are in heaven and upon earth. This answers, as we have seen, to the sprinkling of the holy place and the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar (Lev. xvi.), and is not yet accomplished, although God's good pleasure in respect to this *shall be carried out*, spite of all opposition.

Meantime those to whom he wrote, though before alienated, and enemies in their mind by wicked works, yet *now hath* He

reconciled, as it alone could be done, in the body of *His* flesh through death.

Mighty love of God, that could thus, with wisdom and power, steadily carry out His pleasure, spite of all the hatred and enmity of man; and, working up all the manifestations of that enmity into His own plans, carry them out thereby.

We have glanced at these scriptures, dear reader, together, in order to find the force of the word "reconcile" as used in them. Is it not evident that in *no case nor in any sense* it is applied to God?

It is evident also that the wrath of God against sin is everywhere spoken of, sin being

an offence to His holiness. But if we add to this that God was unreconciled to the sinner, then all that remained was to sweep a guilty race to destruction. The majesty and righteousness of God would have been upheld by such a course; but where His love? It would have vindicated His holiness; but where would the creature of His hands have been? where His character of Saviour-God?

It is no less evident that God is Love, and that His love has devised a way whereby His majesty is equally vindicated by a marvellous atonement, and yet the believing sinner brought nigh to Him in all the fragrance of the Son of His love.

Nothing brought out the enmity of the heart of the sinner more than the presentation of that Son in grace, and now of offered mercy through His death, so that man is proved to be utterly irreconcilable as to himself.

God then again acts. And He who needed and provided atonement, in order that the flood-gates of His love to sinners might be thrown open—God, by His Spirit in His servants, who stand in the stead of Christ, *beseeches*, “Be reconciled to God.”

G. J. S.

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