

## RECONCILIATION.

(2 COR. V. 14-21.)

IN the first epistle we see the way in which the Corinthians were affected by the gifts given to them. They came behind in no gift; they were richly endowed in that way by the Spirit. But they laid hold of the gifts which they had received, and put them on as adornments for the flesh. They used them to exalt themselves. Hence they sought after the gifts which in the eyes of men shone most brilliantly, though really of least value, and paid little attention to those which were of the utmost value and importance. The gift of tongues was very popular amongst them and much sought after, and used without any regard to edification. I suppose that those who were very unlearned and ignorant would naturally take every opportunity to display the power which was committed to them in order to get a little worship from their fellows, thus depriving God of the glory due to Him. But such is the flesh, and we need ever to be on our guard against it. It will lay hold of anything within its reach as a means by which to adorn itself. Even the cross has been

taken up as a decoration. That which is the condemnation of the flesh, and the sign of its fierce and relentless hatred of God, it takes up as an ornament. It has to be watched at every turning. It would clothe itself with the graces of Christ if it were allowed, and rob God of all the glory due to Him. The gifts the Corinthians had received were in the Spirit, whom they had received from Christ on high; but they were losing sight of the Giver and were glorying in the gifts as though they were themselves the source of them. There was one gift which none of them seemed to be grasping after, but which all ought to have coveted more than anything else, and that was the gift of prophecy. This gift would have been a great blessing to the people of God when rightly used. It was not a gift like that which distinguished the "Seer" in the past dispensation; it was a peculiar power given to the servant of Christ by which the heart and conscience were brought into the immediate presence of God. The one that used it spoke to men to edification and encouragement and consolation. (1 Cor. xiv. 3.) It did not puff up the servant, as the gift of tongues might have done, where the speaker was not watchful, but it built up the hearer in the knowledge of God.

But the apostle shews the Corinthians a more excellent way—the way of divine love. It has a

way of its own, unlike any way that the natural man is accustomed to. It has been the pathway of God through this world marked out by the feet of Jesus. It is the way of the divine nature in a world of sin. Without this nature, however eloquent they might be, they could effect nothing, and however powerful they seemed to be they were nothing, and whatever good works they might do they profited nothing. All service to be of any value must be carried out in divine love, and in this self could not intrude. They were to follow after love.

This pathway of love was trodden by the apostles in their service for Christ on earth; and as we saw, when looking at the fulfilment of the promises in Christ, all the second epistle is occupied with these ministers. We have in this epistle set before us the servants and the way they were affected by the service committed to them, and the way in which they carried it out. No doubt all this is brought before the Corinthians that they might see how powerfully the things ministered to them affected the ministers, and that they might also be affected in a similar manner.

In chapter i. we have all the promises of God established in Christ, and made ours by the gift of the Spirit. In chapter iii. we have the new covenant, and the teaching connected with the new covenant is continued up to the intro-

duction of the judgment-seat. (Chap. v.) The effect of being in the benefit of the new covenant is that we come out in this world descriptive of Christ. One great point in it is that Christ is engraven upon the fleshly tables of our hearts in spiritual lines, and the effect of this is that the life of Christ comes out in our mortal flesh. When God takes up Israel again He will put His law in their hearts. It will not then be written upon tables of stone and given to them to do or be cursed; He will give them a heart that will love the law and delight to do it. It will not be presented to them as the demand of God, but by the work of God they will be all that ever was required of them. They will have a nature that will delight in the law; they will love it; it will be to them sweeter than the honeycomb. Psalm cxix. is descriptive of Israel with the law written in their hearts.

Christ is traced in our hearts. We are not really under any covenant; but the terms of the new are ministered to us. We come into the benefit of it by the sealing of the Spirit, and we are sealed by the Spirit when we believe the gospel, and in the gospel is declared the disposition of God toward all men. This is expressed in Christ. Therefore He is the subject of the gospel; it is the gospel of God concerning His Son. The new covenant is expressed in the Mediator the old covenant was not; it was

written upon stones. The new is not written on anything except the hearts of those who have turned to God. It is all expressed in Christ. If I wish to know the terms of relationship between God and man I learn them in Christ, and He is preached to men as the terms upon which man must be in relationship with Him or perish. You learn the disposition of God to you in Christ risen and glorified ; for " By him we believe in God, who raised him up from the dead and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God." The effect of the knowledge of Christ's glory is to produce in the soul faith and hope Godward. What God has done in Christ gives me faith and hope in God. All the kindness and love of God have come to light in Him and this gives me confidence in God and makes Him attractive to me. God was in thick darkness at Sinai, and Moses drew near into the thick darkness where God was, but it was with fear and trembling. God is now in the light in Christ, and we draw near into the clear light where He is. He has not changed in the least, He is the unchanging One, but until Christ came He was unrevealed. In 1 John i. we read that " God is light " and also that He is " in the light." The sun is light before it rises in the east as truly as after it has bathed the earth in its heavenly radiance ; but it is not *in the light*, as far as we are concerned, until it makes

its appearance in the dome of heaven ; but even after it has risen and can be said to be in the light *we* would not be in the light if our eyes were sightless. But we who see can now say, "God is light" and "He is in the light" and "we are in the light." And in that light we become morally transfigured, so that Christ comes out in our mortal body.

But we must come to reconciliation. Here it is not so much a question of the disposition of God to us—what He is to us in His grace and love, but what God has made us in Christ to the satisfaction of His own holy nature. It is here a question of what God has wrought. "We are his workmanship." But both the new covenant and reconciliation are learned in Christ. I must learn the new covenant first, for I must learn what God is toward me in Christ before I can learn what He has made me in Christ. God must come out to me before I can go in to Him ; the new covenant is the *disposition* in which God has come out to me, and reconciliation is the *state* in which I go in to Him. It is the revelation of the grace of God in Christ that attracts me in to Himself, but this does not teach me what kind of man is to stand in the light of that revelation ; this is learned as I learn reconciliation. But all this is learned as Christ is learned, for I can never know the grace of God to man, except as I know Christ.

I can never learn what God is in His infinite compassions, except as I learn the One who is the perfect expression of those infinite compassions; neither can I learn what man is as the workmanship of God, except as I learn Christ, for it is in Christ we are new-created.

The new covenant was expressed in the kiss which was implanted upon the neck of the prodigal; reconciliation is figuratively presented to us in the dress in which he went into the house which rung with music and dancing. Everything there was of God, and came out of the house—the robe, the ring, the shoes, all belonged to the house; and all is set before us in Christ. God had nothing more for man on the ground of nature and the flesh. All He had He gave to man, and man squandered everything. It must now be Christ or nothing. So in reconciliation “all things are of God.”

See how the apostle introduces this ministry. He speaks of the love of Christ constraining him in the preaching. The love of Christ was seen in His going down into death to bring man out of it, that he might live. But this brought to light the great truth that all were in death. He says, “We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.” The death of Christ proved where all men were. If Christ went into death for all, then all were under that judgment. “Death passed upon all men.” But

Christ went into death to remove the judgment, to break the power of that under which man lay. By His death He annulled it; and risen from the dead He has become the source of life for all; He is lifegiving Head to all, and quickens souls who are morally dead by the power of the life that is in Himself, so that they live to Him who died for them and rose again. Those who live are those who live in His life. They are brought out of death by His lifegiving power.

The next thing is: "We know no man after the flesh." Why not? Because all after the flesh are under death, and we are after a new order in the life of Christ. If you take account of yourself as in the life of Christ you are apart from the order of flesh; you have, in that life, parted company with the dead. In the life of Christ you are in new and eternal relationships with God.

Now we are ready for the next statement: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," or better, new creation. A man in Adam or in the flesh is old creation; but God has begun afresh with man in Christ, and a man in Christ is new creation. The new covenant does not bring new creation before us. It is more God's approach to man in Christ. It is, as we saw, more what God is for us, than what we are for God. Hence the teaching of the new covenant winds up with the judgment-seat in chapter v.; but you have

no judgment-seat in connection with reconciliation, for in reconciliation all things are of God. The new covenant is God in Christ manward; reconciliation is man in Christ Godward. We learn both as we learn Christ.

In reconciliation everything is in the life of Christ: "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." This is what is true in Christ. It is not exactly what is true as we view one another in this room; here we have to know one another after the flesh. In our pathway of responsibility through the world we have to do with the old order: we have parents, children, husbands, wives, masters, servants, &c., and we have to walk in these relationships to the glory of God. But this will all come to an end. It will come to an end at death, or the coming of Christ, when He will take us up in glory; but in the meantime we are in them, and we are to walk in them so as to please God. The life of Jesus is to come out in us down here; we are to walk as He walked. But in the life of Christ, as quickened together with Him, we are apart from all belonging to the old. There is nothing of Adam or of the flesh in our life in Christ. Personal identity, of course, abides to eternity, but that has nothing to do with the *order* of man. When I speak of the *old* or *new* it is a matter of relationships, nature and affections. All these

new things are of God. This does not merely mean that He made them. He made the old also, but they became corrupted. But the old was not of Him in this sense; the new is of His nature. They are of God, in the sense that they are of Him morally and spiritually. They are in Christ and of His order.

The ground of all is, that He was made sin for us. Sin has received its judgment in the cross of Christ; it has been condemned in the flesh, and the flesh has been removed in that judgment. God has dealt with sin in unsparing judgment, and His object in doing so was that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. In Christ everything is according to His mind and heart; there He has the most perfect delight in us; we are to His perfect satisfaction, the result of His intervention in grace on our behalf. What a triumph over the enemy! The poor slave of sin and Satan brought into such light and nearness, and so wrought by the power of God that only in the full blaze of the glory of God will it be seen how completely he is to the delight of the heart of God.

