

THE ATONEMENT, OR THE RECONCILIATION.

WE may profitably ask ourselves why atonement, which has so large a place in the law of Moses and in the Old Testament, spoken of some hundred times (though a few times translated reconcile and reconciliation) never forms part of the ministry in the New Testament. The word, however, is found once in Romans v. 11 (in the A.V.), but in the margin "reconciliation" is rightly given, in keeping with its cognate verb used twice in the previous verse. The answer is simple, because the New Testament brings in what is wholly new and different in character and speaks of reconciliation, which, as we shall see, is in direct contrast to atonement, just as in the Epistle to the Hebrews the blood of bulls and goats is contrasted with the blood of Christ. The most distinct thoughts are focused in these two words which demand our attention, although very early the distinction became obscured.

If we stand on "the watch tower," like Habakkuk of old, and get the vision (chap. ii. 2) which he is told to "write ['engrave on stone,' to avoid mistake] and make plain," we shall see how the enemy has succeeded in blurring lines of demarcation divinely drawn, and what should be "plain" has been dulled.

Of this, atonement and reconciliation are a particular example, therefore a little consideration of the two words and the teaching involved should yield food for our thoughts and light for our spirits, as depending upon God in faith we search the scriptures. (Prov. xxiv. 32.)

Influenced by the earlier translations, in the English of Wyclif and of the Reformers, no distinction was made, the two words were used interchangeably as synonyms, meaning the same thing. Since then atonement has somewhat shifted its meaning ; still, primarily the question is, what is the bearing of the words in the originals ; not of those used in a translation. It is there we must seek help as to the force of the terms, and this must modify and colour whatever words translators in their day deemed nearest or sufficient. Seeing the scripture has been written for us in words taught by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. ii. 13) it surely becomes us to examine with care what

is written, as well as to note the way it is put. (See Gal. iii. 16.)

To begin with, the languages of the Western world had no single term to convey adequately the thought of the Mosaic law translated in our Bible by the phrase "to make atonement." But turning to the Hebrew, it becomes most instructive to notice how the Spirit of God makes serve what is to hand and adopts a plain verb having the root idea of 'cover,' though by using it in an intensive or official form in this connection, He gives it a significance of the deepest moral value. This phrase, "the priest shall make an atonement for him," is strictly 'the priest has placed a cover upon the offerer ceremonially,' and is a statement of what had been accomplished in Jehovah's eyes, after the priest had sprinkled the blood of the victim upon the altar (not upon the person), or poured it all out at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, and the remainder of the sacrifice had been dealt with according to the prescribed "manner" or ritual. No one except an anointed priest could sprinkle the blood. The offerer was to slay the victim, but the priest alone might deal with the blood—the evidence of a life surrendered, which typically 'covered' the offerer. As the consequence of the sacrifice, Jehovah could regard the person who had

sinned as 'covered'—the plain meaning of the word, and then the formula, "it shall be forgiven him," follows in the eight instances given in Leviticus iv., v. and vi. The word "forgiven," there used, conveys the idea that the burden is 'lifted off' his conscience.

First, the blood, or life, yielded to meet the righteousness of God : "the soul that sinneth it shall die " ; second, the consciousness of forgiveness for the one who thus drew near to Jehovah. The same thought and order, though in a collective or national way, is in the ritual of "the day of atonement," as set out in Leviticus xvi. The teaching is plain, for the person could know that what had brought in distance and variance had been 'covered' by the blood of the sacrifice, and he was free of it absolutely ; in the prophet's language "he could run who reads it." That ceremony gave rise to the thought in the English word atonement,* at-one-ment, which is just the opposite to distance and variance, but this is the result not the means by which it was reached, whether for the individual, or collectively for the nation, when on the day of atonement the blood was sprinkled upon and before the mercy-seat seven times. The word mercy-seat† is one of the cognate

* First used about A.D. 1512.

† See paper on "The Day of Atonement."

nouns of this verb 'to cover,' and means 'the place where the covering is made,' but that was in the holiest of all under the eyes of the cherubim; so that afterwards "all their transgressions in all their sins" were, by the scapegoat, borne away into oblivion. The nation was thus 'covered' or cleared "once in the year."

We must ever remember, it was by Jehovah Himself that the blood of a victim was given to make an atonement for, or to become a covering upon the soul. (Lev. xvii.) In the type the victim was slain and left in death, because the sin of the sinner was allowed to be passed on to it, figuratively. But what is beyond all human thought and the wonder of God's ways is that "in these last days" Christ, in divine love, has become Himself the Victim "without blemish." He "who did no sin bare our sins in his own body on the tree," Peter says, writing to the Dispersion; and Paul, writing to the Gentile Corinthians, goes to the bottom, saying that God "hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made [become] the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. v. 21.) And though He went into death, it was vicariously or for us; death had no claim on Him and so could not hold Him; therefore He has come forth in the power and glory of resurrection, "the

firstfruits" of another world and the point of reconciliation.

In the resurrection is seen the resource of God, and it is set forth (Eph. i. 19) as the supreme exhibition of His power on our behalf who believe, it is the triumph of the love of God which no created intelligence could have conceived ! In the light of the cross, how the Spirit delights to expound the prophetic utterance of Isaiah lxiv. 4 and say these deep things have never entered into the heart of man, things prepared by God for them that love Him. (1 Cor. ii. 9.)

The past dispensation was all in type, provisional and temporary, so did not nor could not touch the root or "put away sin" ; but this dispensation is based upon "the precious blood of Christ," and so is one of grace—the grace of God bringing salvation to all men has appeared. (Titus ii. 11.)

On the one hand, the law of Moses tells us how, in that day, God met the conscience of a sinner and provided means in order that a measure of approach to Him could be maintained. For weakness and ignorance a sacrifice was permitted, and in that lies atonement ; but for presumptuous or wilful sin, there was no sacrifice or mercy. (Num. xv. 30.)

On the other hand, in this day, by the cross of Christ the whole question of sin and death

has been taken up by God and dealt with finally. The distance, darkness and dominion of death brought into this world by sin, and which will eventuate in "the second death," have all been dissipated for the one who believes "on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." (Rom. iv. 24.) In Him reconciliation has been brought to pass, and therein lies the deepest contrast to atonement.

There can be no difficulty in seeing, even if not fully realised, that the death and the blood of Christ must go far beyond 'a covering,' with the man left unchanged in himself. For if in God's mercy "the blood of bulls and goats" was allowed a measure of efficacy, "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. ix. 14.) In other words, though sins were covered in a way which enabled God righteously to forbear judgment, now, instead of a shifting priesthood with ceaseless sacrifices "which can never take away sins," Christ "has offered one sacrifice for sins, and has sat down at the right hand of God," having "appeared once in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

(Heb. ix., x.) All that was 'covered' under the old covenant, not put away, has been now judged, and with the root sin, condemned in the cross, and put away finally, remitted, blotted out. Nevertheless for the full manifestation and display of the result of His work we, with the whole creation, yet wait. But reconciliation is set forth in Him as risen and exalted, and the ministry of it was committed to the apostles. This brings us to the plain force of the word reconciliation, which in Greek is just 'to make other,' thus to bring about a change—to change. It and atonement were once synonyms in English, but they are never confused in the two languages chosen by the Spirit of God, and it is essential we should grasp the difference, otherwise the line of demarcation between the Old Testament* and the New is lost.

In Bunyan's allegory, good as far as it goes, Christian really does not get beyond the old covenant and atonement, the bundle of his sins falls from his back at the cross and rolls into the empty tomb, still the nature which produced the sins remained unchanged.

In Christ at the right hand of God we see Man in perfect accord with Him and perfectly suited to His presence. It is from that place

* Covenant and testament represent one word.

the Holy Spirit has come in order that the change should be wrought in the believer—"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts," or centre of a man's being. And if *love* instead of *self* is the spring of my being, I am a changed man; no longer governed by sin, lawlessness, but subject to God and through our Lord Jesus Christ have now received the reconciliation. (Rom. v. 11.)

In Peter's words we are become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter i. 4), or in John's, we are brought into the consciousness of having passed out of the death-world into the world of life, because we love the brethren. (1 John iii. 14.) Again, Paul insists, when writing to Colosse, "you *now* hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death." There is now a present perfect result, there will be a universal one.

I think perhaps the nearest illustration is to be found in Naaman, who, after the complete disappearance of himself in the Jordan, morally the acceptance of removal, comes up out of the water, no longer the leper, but "his flesh like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean"—a new vessel was formed and he knew it. Naaman* was a 'changed' man, different in

* Naaman is 'pleasant,' as Psalm cxxxiii. 1, or 'lovely.' He had been great in the eyes of men, now, in figure reconciled, is a delight in the eyes of God.

mind and spirit; before this he had not seen Elisha, the message only, had been sent to him, now as "clean" he sees Elisha, whose name means 'God the saviour.' Foreshadowing, I do not doubt, the Holy Spirit's words in Ephesians ii. 18, "access . . . unto the Father," which we have as being reconciled.

This incident is one of those jewels scattered about the Old Testament, so largely occupied with God's governmental dealings with man in flesh, which only truth as in Jesus (Eph. iv. 21) causes to scintillate. In the New Testament, historically, we find the heathen Thessalonians received the apostles' word and were converted, they turned to God from idols. Their outlook was entirely altered and they waited for His Son from heaven; consequently they became completely changed in heart and spirit, so that outwardly the report of their faith Godward was spread abroad in every place. (1 Thess. i.) There was no half-heartedness or time-serving with them, but a definite break with this world.

Also at Antioch, the change wrought in those taught in the apostles' doctrine was so evident—the traits of "the new man" where "the old man" had been—that they were called Christians. (Acts xi. 26.)

But in the hands of men, the apostles' preaching and teaching (see Acts iv. 2 and xxviii.

31) quickly became dulled, and darkness in God's government fell upon the professing church, which deepened until what is known as "The Dark Ages," when in the ways of God He allowed "remission of sins and justification by faith" to be recovered at the Reformation. And further, in the last century was granted a revival of the truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit indwelling the saints forming the body of Christ on earth, and uniting them to Him the Head in heaven; also the truth of His coming again. This last emphasises the word we are considering, for there exists down here by the work of the indwelling Spirit, that which is reconciled, a change wrought by divine power, and therefore fitted and ready to "be caught up."

Another jewel is discovered by these words atonement and reconciliation, because in themselves and in their teaching both touch in the mercy-seat, already referred to, 'the place of the covering.' The ark with the mercy-seat upon it was the centre of the old system (Exo. xxv.), the point where Jehovah could meet and from off it speak to Moses, the mediator of the old covenant. Now, its antitype is found in Christ Jesus, "whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood." (Rom. iii. 25.) The word occurs twice only in the New Testament, here translated "a

propitiation," and in Hebrews ix. 5 "mercy-seat"—the two fundamental epistles of the gospel. In the old system, which was one of sight, the holiest with Jehovah's presence in the cloud upon the mercy-seat, was forbidden, on pain of death, to all, even the priests, except "the high priest alone once every year," type of "the great priest" who was yet to come. To-day, in "this dispensation which is in faith," that High Priest "being come . . . by his own blood and entered in having obtained eternal redemption," we have "boldness [liberty marg.] to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way"—and the invitation goes forth, "Let us draw near." (Heb. ix., x.) How can this be? For that which is of "our old man" certainly can never enter, it is solely as renewed (made new) in the new nature that we can enter there. So the question is raised, Have I believed Paul's gospel? (2 Tim. ii. 8.) Have I received the reconciliation? (Rom. v. 11.)

In times past, God granted atonement, and a man was allowed to live, although at a distance. In the present time the blood of Christ has been shed, and in His death all the old order was left in death, even "Christ after the flesh," so now "in his name is preached remission of sins" (Luke xxiv. 47)—my responsibility has been met, and God finds His

pleasure in those who draw near, distance no longer exists, but nearness in reconciliation. We are no longer estranged from or opposed to God in thought and deed, but live in the conscious nearness of a life in dependence upon and subjection to Him. This is the teaching of that supreme parable of Luke xv., "it was meet that we should make merry and be glad." In Romans is the unfolding of how God has drawn near to man in grace, yet righteously; in Hebrews how man apart from class or race may draw near to God in holiness.

It is in the Lord Jesus that God has been made known in His nature—love. Not only has He by the sacrifice of Himself met all that the mercy-seat demanded, so that sin and the order of man marred by sin has been judged and put out of sight for ever, but He Himself is the propitiation (1 John ii. 2), as well as the mercy-seat: the antitype altogether eclipsing the type.

In resurrection He is "the beginning of the creation of God" and the point of salvation and of reconciliation. In contrast to Adam, the head of the existing order through whom sin entered into this world, He is Head in "that world" beyond death, and so is preached as "glad tidings" (Acts xiii. 32) for every man on this side of death.

Remission of sins is for *me*—to meet my

responsibility, but reconciliation is for *God* ; it is wholly His side, that He may have His pleasure in responsive affection from His creature man, who had been alienated and was enemy in mind. Redemption therefore comes in first in the four epistles which teach reconciliation.

It was the cross of Christ that the apostle brought to bear upon the Corinthian saints, "the word of the cross" rather than the preaching. (Chap. i. 18.) There was not exactly unbelief on their part, but the flesh being allowed in such ways, was clear evidence that the import of the cross was quite disregarded. He could say to them, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (Chap. vi. 11)—true in God's sight, though what was visible and in practice was the opposite. Therefore they came under the chastening of the Lord. (Chap. xi. 32.) Holiness cannot be ignored with impunity. Adam's race, man of flesh and blood order and this world, still exist for sight, but that is in the patience and longsuffering of God. Faith knows its judgment, pronounced when to man in his responsibility had been presented the most perfect expression of goodness and grace which divine wisdom could devise. "God was in Christ

reconciling the world to himself," but man was hardened in heart and enemy in mind, and Christ was deliberately and with consideration rejected. The princes of this world crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. ii. 8.) "The hidden wisdom" Paul there speaks of is the manner in which God has taken occasion by man's sin to prove that He is love, and to bring to pass the glory of His purpose, for if Christ went to the cross, He went vicariously, that is, He took man's place with the judgment due to him. In that cross man as after the flesh is removed, not covered. He identified Himself with us in such a way that He was "brought into the dust of death." (Psa. xxii.) He laid down His life—beyond our comprehension, but faith bows in adoration, knowing Him as having taken life again on the other side of death. The old was left in death—"the napkin . . . wrapped together in a place by itself and the linen clothes lying" (or 'set down'). Peter wondered, but we know the righteousness and holiness of God having been perfectly upheld, all was left in order. Now He has taken life in resurrection in a world where sin and death can have "no place," where all is new and all of God, and where as reconciled "our life" truly is. (Col. iii. 3.) In the coming day every knee will bow to Jesus, and all

things on earth and in heaven will be reconciled or brought into accord, but Christianity is—"you *now* hath he reconciled* in the body of his flesh through death" (Col. i. 21)—reconciled in mind, for redemption of the body (Rom. viii. 23) is yet future.

"The ministry of reconciliation" is in order that the truth may be brought home to us, and as formed by it we may become conscious of the change in our inmost being, and thus able "to joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation." (Rom. v. 11.)

"New creation" is a moral thought, and goes on as we give the Spirit His place and do not grieve Him, for we have put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph. iv.), nevertheless being still here we have to recognise the obligations of flesh and blood conditions. God can shew mercy to the old, but in grace He has His pleasure in the new. As renewed in the spirit of our mind He can look upon us without taint of sin or spot of unrighteousness—reconciled.

Before we leave the subject, I must point

* Here, and in Ephesians ii. 16, the apostle coins the verb translated "reconcile" so as to enforce the present fact of the absoluteness of the change. He uses it three times, and it is found here only.

out an additional thought flowing from the verb 'to cover,' for in Exodus xxx. two other nouns derived from it are used—one translated "a ransom" (ver. 12), and one "the atonement" money, literally the silver of atonement (ver. 16).

What we have considered is the manner in which God met the distance of death, brought in by sin, in allowing the blood of a specified victim to be 'a cover' typically, in view of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as "the Lamb of God." In other words, how God dealt with the situation prospectively. So it is very noticeable that as soon as the general details for the "dwelling place" were given to Moses with the establishment of the priesthood and the sanctification of the altar, we get immediately the institution of the "continual burnt offering" of the morning and the evening lamb. The primary and fundamental one of the offerings from God's side, and then follows in chapter xxx. that which is wholly on our side. Every man from twenty years old and above, or every responsible person without distinction, rich and poor, was to "give every man a ransom for his soul to Jehovah"; that is, each on his side had to see that the 'covering' was there, that he was covered. Half a shekel, ten gerahs, the number of man's responsibility Godward, was required

from each as "an offering to Jehovah, to make an atonement for your souls" (ver. 15). This offering was strictly "a heave offering," which is first mentioned in Exodus xxv. 2 in margin, and is suggestive of movement in energy Godward—a looking up to God in thanksgiving, which rightly He expects from His creature man.

The point for us is, what was done with this silver of atonement? In chapter xxxviii. 25 Moses received instruction for the employment of its exact amount, and if we look at the uses to which it was put, we shall see how the death of Christ, in further aspects, underlies all the details of the proposed 'dwelling place' for Jehovah—a word significantly used for the first time in chapter xxv. 9, though frequently translated 'tabernacle,' culminating in Revelation xxi. 3. First, the bulk of this silver, one hundred talents, went to make the hundred sockets, "a talent for a socket," in which stood the boards forming "the most holy place" and the four sockets of the pillars which supported the veil dividing "between the holy place and the most holy." (Chap. xxvi. 33.) Of the remaining silver were made the hooks for the hangings of the court, and the fillets or connecting rods of the pillars of the court, and the overlaying of their chapiters.

In that day of the material and typical

system, God gave the blood to make an atonement for their souls (Lev. xvii. 11), and on their side the people had to give the ten gerahs each; now in this day, God "has given his only begotten Son," and in response we gladly "give ourselves." (2 Cor. viii. 5.) The equal amount of ten gerahs from each suggests the same benefit without respect of persons flows to each from the one and the same work. On our side, "all have sinned," but on God's side mercy is for all. (Rom. xi. 32.) Thus, no one individual more than another belongs to the family of God, there is but the one and the same ground upon which we stand, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all [or every] sin" (1 John i. 7)—absolute and comprehensive. Then in the following verses the apostle goes on to speak of our "walk." Within, the sockets of silver formed the one basis, while without, the fine twined linen depending from the hooks of silver would suggest the walk and lives of the saints in dependence and in correspondence with the within. Again, inside were the boards standing up* in the sockets of silver, and overlaid with

* 'A standing up' is the literal force of the Greek word for resurrection. "God hath made man upright." (Eccles. vii. 29.)

gold or fitted for Jehovah's presence, an illustration for us of the saints standing upright in the power of resurrection beyond the power of death under which men fall. On the outward or testimony side, the pillars of the court stood in sockets of brass (copper), speaking of God's claims in righteousness ever to be maintained in the walk of His saints, while the hooks of silver would shew how all depended upon the ransom which had been accepted. Did not Elihu say to Job, "I have found a ransom [atonement in margin]. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's" ? (Job xxxiii. 24.)

I may be allowed to add that the verb "twine," of the fine twined linen prepared for the inmost curtain, the veil, and the hangings, and the priests' garments is found in this connection only, and that just twenty-one times or 3×7 . It was ornamented for the curtain, the veil, the hanging for the door of the tent and the gate of the court, each of which has reference to Christ ; but was plain for "the hangings of the court round about," which finds its answer in the saints—morally the new man—to be displayed in the day of His glory. (Rev. xix. 8.) The hundred cubits of its length gives the idea of a full witness outwardly of the truth enclosed within—compare the hundred-fold fruit of the sowing in Luke's parable. (Chap. viii. 8.)

When writing to Corinth the apostle no doubt refers to the silver sockets in chapter vi. 11 already quoted, but has to shew them how besmirched the hanging had become.

One other beautiful distinction which must not be overlooked is that the veil of the holiest "the veil, that is to say, his flesh," of Hebrews x. 20 depended from hooks of *gold*, not silver, which speak of Christ who "came down from heaven, the Son of man which is in heaven." (John iii. 13.) Also for the "hanging for the door of the tent" the hooks were of gold, which is perhaps answered by "I am the door." (John x. 9.) How careful the Spirit always is to guard the Person of our Lord Jesus when speaking of His close link with His saints !

Is not what we have considered a filling out of Jehovah's word to Abram in Genesis xvii. 1, "Walk before me and be thou perfect," and his name was changed to Abraham? The Spirit brings him before us as the great exemplar of faith (Rom. iv.), "father of all them that believe," and too of him God could say, "Abraham my friend." (Isa. xli. 8.)

May the Lord be pleased to lead each of us into "the full assurance of understanding" (Col. ii. 2) of the completeness of His work on His side, and on our side, as reconciled, help each to keep himself unspotted from the

world (James i. 27) with garments undefiled (Rev. iii. 4), until He takes us entirely out of this scene, where sin still reigns in the power of death.

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