

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

Introduction

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

Introduction

Three considerations have influenced us in the selection of this theme. First, a desire to preserve the balance of Truth. In order to do this it is desirable that there should be an alternation between and a proportionate emphasis upon both the objective and the subjective sides of the Truth. After we had completed our exposition of the doctrine of Justification we followed the same with a series on the doctrine of Sanctification: the former treats entirely of the righteousness which Christ has wrought or procured for His people, being something wholly outside of themselves and independent of their own efforts; whereas the latter speaks not only of the perfect purity which the believer has in Christ, but also of the holiness which the Spirit actually communicates to the soul and which is influential on his conduct. Then we took up the doctrine of Predestination which is concerned entirely with the sovereignty of God, and therefore we followed that with a series of man's Impotency and the Saint's Perseverance, where the principal emphasis was upon human responsibility. It will be well for us now to turn our attention back again to the Divine operations and the wondrous provisions of Divine grace for the recovery of rebels against God. Second, because of a felt need of again bringing conspicuously before our readers "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is His sacrificial work which is prominent, yea, dominant in the reconciling of God to His people. It was by the shedding of Christ's precious blood that God was placated and His wrath averted. It was by Christ's being chastised that peace has been made for us. And it is by the preaching of the Cross that our awful enmity against God is slain and that we are moved to abandon our vile warfare against Him. As it is upwards of twelve years since we completed the rather lengthy series of articles we wrote upon the Atonement, under the title "The Satisfaction of Christ," it seems high time that we once more contemplated the greatest marvel and miracle of all history, namely, the Lamb of God being slain for the redemption of sinners. The doctrine of reconciliation has much to do with what took place at Calvary, yea apart from that no reconciliation with God had been possible. It is therefore a subject which should warm the hearts of the saints and bow them in adoration at the feet of the Redeemer. Third, because it treats of an aspect of the Gospel which receives scant attention in the modern pulpit. Nor has it ever, so far as we have been able to ascertain, been made very prominent. This doctrine has failed to command the notice which it merits even from God's own servants and people. Far less appears to have been preached on it than on either justification or sanctification. For one book written on this subject probably fifty have been published on

either of the others. Why this should be is not easy to explain: it is not because it is more obscure or intricate. In our judgment, much to the contrary. Certainly it is of equal importance and value, for it treats of an aspect of our relationship and recovery to God as essential as either of the others. Our need of justification lies in our failure to keep the Law of God; of sanctification, because we are defiled and polluted by sin, and therefore unfit for the presence of the, Holy One; our reconciliation, because we are alienated from God, rebels against Him, with no heart for fellowship with Him. Though the terms justify and sanctify occur more frequently in the New Testament than does "reconcile," yet the correlative "God of peace" and other expressions must also be duly noted. Not only has this doctrine been more or less neglected, but it has been seriously perverted by some and considerably misunderstood by many others. Both Socinians (who repudiate the Tri-unity of the Godhead and the Atonement of Christ) and Arminians deny the twofoldness of reconciliation, declaring it to be only on one side. They insist that it is man who is alienated from God, and so in need of reconciliation, that God never entertained enmity toward His fallen creatures, but has ever sought their recovery. They argue that since it was man who made the breach by departing from his Maker, he is the one who needs to be reconciled and restored to Him. They refuse to allow that sin has produced any change in God's relationship or attitude unto the guilty, yea, so far from doing so that His own love moved Him to take the initiative and provide a Saviour for rebels, and that He now beseeches them to throw down the weapons of their opposition, assuring them of a Father's welcome when they return unto Him. Such is the view of the Plymouth Brethren. In his work "The Ministry of Reconciliation" C. H. Macintosh (one of the most influential of their early men) declares: "We often hear it said that 'the death of Christ was necessary in order to reconcile God to man.' This is a pious mistake, arising from inattention to the language of the Holy Spirit and indeed to the plain meaning of the word 'reconcile.' God never changed, never stepped out of His normal and true position. He abides faithful. There was, and could be, no derangement, no confusion, no alienation, so far as He was concerned; and therefore there could be no need of reconciling Him to us. In fact it was exactly the contrary. Man had gone astray; he was the enemy, and needed to be reconciled...Wherefore, then, as might be expected, Scripture never speaks of reconciling God to man. There is no such expression to be found within the covers of the New Testament." This is something he calls a "point of immense importance," and consequently all who have succeeded him in that strange system have echoed his teaching: how far it is removed from the Truth will be shown in the articles that follow. Some hyper-Calvinists are also much confused on this doctrine. Through failing to see that God's being reconciled to sinners who believe concerns His official relationship and not His essential character, they have demurred at the expression "a reconciled God," supposing it connotes some charge within Himself. They argue that since God has loved His elect with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3) and that since He changes not (Mal. 3:6), it is wrong for us to suppose that reconciliation to anything more on our side only. They insist that to speak of God's being reconciled unto us implies an alteration either in His affections or purpose, and that neither of these can stand with His immutability. To speak of God's first loving His people, then hating them, and then again loving them, appears to them as imputing fickleness to Him. So it would be if these predictions of God were made of Him considered in the same character and relationship. But they are not. As their Father God has loved His people with an unalterable love, but as the Moral Governor of this world and the Judge of all the earth He has a legal enmity against those who trample His Law beneath their feet. The following question was submitted to Mr. J. C. Philpot:—"What is meant by 'a reconciled God,' an expression which some of the Lord's children, even great and good men, have made use of? I believe that the Lord Jehovah from all eternity foresaw the fall, and provided means to save those whom He had chosen in Christ, consistent with all His attributes, holiness, justice, etc. Now, as love was the moving cause, how can the word 'reconcile' be correctly used in respect of God? Does it not imply a change? If it does, how can it be

correctly used in reference to God?" His answer to this appears in the March 1856 issue of "The Gospel Standard," and though it will make a rather lengthy quotation, yet we might be doing him an injustice not to give it in full. "We do not consider the expression 'A reconciled God' strictly correct. The language of the New Testament is not that God is reconciled to us, but that we are reconciled to God. 'And all things are of God, who has reconciled us unto Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation—that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them; and that He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. We beg you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God.' (2 Cor. 5:18-20). And again 'And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, it pleased the Father to reconcile all things by Him unto Himself—by Him, whether things in earth or things in Heaven. And you, who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight,' (Col. 1:20-22). See also Romans 5:10. "The very nature of God, His very being and essence, is to be unchanging and unchangeable, as James beautifully speaks: 'With Him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' But reconciliation on God's part to us, would seem to imply a change of mind, an alteration of purpose in Him, and is therefore, so far, inconsistent and incompatible with the unchangeableness of the Divine character. It is also, strictly speaking, inconsistent, as our correspondent observes, with the eternal love of God, and seems to represent the atonement as influencing His mind, and turning it from wrath to love, and from displeasure to mercy and grace. Now, the Scripture represents the gift of Christ, and consequently the sufferings and blood-shedding for which and unto which He was given, not, as the procuring cause, but as the gracious effect of the love of God. 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10). See also John 3:16, Romans 8:32, 1 John 4:9. "But though the Scripture speaks of reconciliation, not of God to man, but of man to God, and that through the blood of the cross alone (Col. 1:20); yet it holds forth, in the plainest, strongest language, a real and effective 'sacrifice,' 'atonement,' and 'propitiation,' offered to God by the Lord Jesus; all which terms express or imply an actual satisfaction rendered to God for sin, and such a satisfaction, as that without it there could be no pardon. It is especially needful to bear this in mind, because the Socinians and other heretics who deny or explain away the atonement, insist much on this point, that the Scripture does not speak of a reconciled God. Therefore, though we do not believe that the atonement produced a change in the mind of God, so as to turn Him from hatred to love, for He loved the elect with an everlasting love, (Jer. 31:3), or that it was a price paid to procure His favor, still, there was a sacrifice offered, a propitiation made, whereby, and whereby alone, sin was pardoned, blotted out, and forever put away. "By steadily bearing these two things in mind, we shall be the better prepared to understand in what reconciliation through the blood of the cross consists. Against the persons of the elect there was, in the mind of God, no vindictive wrath, no penal anger (Isa. 27:4); but there was a displeasure against their sins, and so far with them for their sins. So God was angry with Moses (Deut. 1:37), with Aaron (Deut. 9:20), with David (2 Sam. 11:27; 1 Chron. 21:7), with Solomon (1 Kings 11:9) for their personal sins, though all of them were in the covenant of grace, and loved by Him with an everlasting love. Thus the Scriptures speak of the anger and wrath of God, and of that wrath being turned away and pacified (Isa. 12:1; Ezek. 16:63), which it could only be by the blood of the Lamb. "Again, sin is a violation of the justice of God, a breaking of His holy Law, an offence against His intrinsic purity and holiness, which He cannot pass by. Adequate satisfaction must, therefore, be made to His offended justice, or pardon cannot be granted. Now, here we see the necessity and nature of the sufferings and obedience, blood-shedding and death of the Lord Jesus, as also why reconciliation was needed, and what reconciliation effected. By the active and passive obedience of the Son of God in the flesh, by His

meritorious life and death, by His offering Himself as a sacrifice for sin, a full and complete satisfaction was rendered to the violating justice of God, the Law was perfectly obeyed and everlasting righteousness brought in. Satisfaction being rendered to His infinite justice, now God can be just and yet the Justifier of him which believes in Jesus.' Now the jarring perfections of mercy and justice are harmonized and reconciled, so that mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other. Now God can not only be gracious, but 'faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' There is, then, no such reconciliation of God as to make Him love those whom He did not love before, for He loved the elect from all eternity in Christ, their covenant—head. But a breach being made by the fall, and sin having, as it were, burst in to make a separation between God and them (Isa. 59:2), that love could not flow forth till satisfaction was made for sin, and that barrier removed, which it was in one day (Zech. 3:9). And not only so, but the persons of the elect were defiled with sin (Ezek. 16:5,6), and therefore needed washing, which they were in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5, etc.). In this way not only was the reconciliation of the Church effected, but she, the bride and spouse of Christ, was brought near unto God, from whom sin had separated her. "But reconciliation has a further aspect. It comprehends our reconciliation to God not merely as a thing already effected by the blood-shedding of God's dear Son, but as a present experience in the soul. The apostle says 'By whom we have now received the atonement' (Rom. 5:11); and again, 'we pray you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God' (2 Cor. 5:20), that is, by receiving into your hearts the reconciliation already made by His blood. It is with reference to this experience that much is spoken in the Scriptures which has led to the idea of 'a reconciled God.' Thus the Church complains of God's being angry with her (Isa. 12:1), of being 'consumed by His anger and troubled by His wrath' (Ps. 90:7), of His 'shutting up in anger His tender mercies' (Ps. 77:9), and again of His 'turning away from the fierceness of His anger and causing it to cease' (Ps. 85:3, 4), of His 'not keeping anger forever' (Ps. 103:9), of His being pacified (Ezek. 16:63) of His 'anger being turned away' (Ps. 78:38; Hos. 14:4). All these expressions are the utterance of the Church's experience. When God's anger is sensibly felt in the conscience He is viewed as angry, and His wrathful displeasure is dreaded and deprecated; when He manifests mercy this anger is felt to be removed, to be turned away; and it is now as if He were reconciled to the sinner. "Putting all these things together we seem to arrive at the following conclusions: (1) That it is not God who is reconciled to the Church, but that it is the Church which is reconciled to God. (2) That this reconciliation was effected by the incarnation, obedience, sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus. (3) That till this reconciliation be made experimentally known the awakened conscience feels the anger of God on account of sin. (4) That when the atonement is received and the blood of Christ sprinkled on the conscience, then the soul is really and truly reconciled to God." What satisfaction this reply gave to the original inquirer, or how lucid it appears to our readers (even after a second or third perusal), we know not, but to us it seems a strange medley, lacking in perspicuity and betraying confusion of thought in the mind of its composer. First, Mr. Philpot considered that the language of the New Testament does not warrant the expression "A reconciled God." Second, he felt that to affirm a reconciliation on God's part to us would imply an alteration of purpose in Him and as though the Atonement changed His mind "From displeasure to mercy and grace." Then he evidently feared he was coming very close to the ground occupied by the Socinians; so, third, he allowed that the work of Christ was both a "sacrifice" and a "propitiation." But "a propitiation" is the very thing which is needed to conciliate one who is offended! To aver there was "rendered to God for sin an actual satisfaction, and such a satisfaction as that without which there could be no pardon," is only another way of saying that God was alienated and needed placating before He could be reconciled to His enemies. In his next paragraph he virtually or in effect contradicts what he had advanced in the previous one, for he expressly declares "Against the persons of the elect there was in the mind of God no vindictive wrath, no penal anger." Then

wherein lay the need of a "propitiation?" "Penal" means "relating to punishment." "if there was no judicial anger on God's part as Governor and Judge and if His elect were not exposed to the punishment of the Law because of their sins, then why the sacrifice of Christ for them? Clearly Mr. P. felt the shoe pinching him there, for in his next paragraph he brings in the violation of the justice of God and the "satisfaction" this required. Yet toward the end he wavers again by saying "sin having, as it were, burst in to make a separation between God and them." Why such hesitating qualification? Sin did cause a breach on both sides, and the one Party needed to be "propitiated," and the other "converted" before the breach could be healed. Our purpose in quoting from C.H. Machintosh and J.C. Philpot (whose writings served to mould the views of many thousands) is to demonstrate the need for a Scriptural exposition of this doctrine. We are glad to say that in his last years Mr. Philpot was granted a clearer grasp of the truth, as appears from his helpful exposition of Ephesians 2.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-doctrine-of-reconciliation-introduction/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net