

On Reconciliation

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Reconciliation is, to use familiar language, making all straight; and even primarily, I believe, used in money-changing as that which makes the sum even, so that there is satisfaction of the parties in the matter; and thence passing into the more ordinary sense of making all smooth between alienated parties, and reconciling one who is alienated or at enmity. But it is not simply the change of mind from the enmity, though that be included; nor is it justification. It is the bringing back to unity, peace, and fellowship what was divided and alienated. We must not confound in Scripture "making reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2: 17) with "reconciliation" in 2 Corinthians 5, Colossians 1, Romans 5: 10, 11. The former is making propitiation, atonement (*ilaskesthai* and *ilasmos*), propitiation (1 John 2: 7); while on the contrary "atonement" in Romans 5: 11 should be *reconciliation* (*katallage*). Compare 1 Corinthians 7: 11, "Let her be reconciled to her husband." where it is not merely her mind being restored to affection and good feeling, but matters made straight between them—the relationship made good. So it is between us and God; but the alienation was on our part. It was not *alienation* on God's part, but righteous judgment against sin in His creature, and that righteousness must be met in order to bring back the alienated creature into relationship with God. Only now it is much more than bringing back, because of the purposes of God in Christ, and the infinite value of the work by which we are brought back to God. Still it is an establishing a blessed and peaceful relationship with God, and us in it.

Reconciling God to us is quite unscriptural in expression and thought. No act or dealing could change God's mind, either in nature or in purpose, but He acts freely in what is before Him according to that nature, and in bringing about that purpose; and though His mind be not changed, yet the meeting, satisfying, and glorifying His righteousness, is according to that mind and the imperious claim of His nature and authority, is necessary in the highest sense, that is, according to that nature. His holiness, too, is involved in reconciliation. Reconciliation is the full establishment in relationship with God according to His nature and according to the nature of that which is reconciled. It now acts in redemption and a new nature, and as regards all around us, a new state of things, so that it is more than re-establishment. It is re-established inasmuch as the old relationship was broken and forfeited, but it is not the returning to that but the establishing a new one which has the stability of redemption, and is the accomplishment of the purpose of God. Still it is a bringing back into the enjoyment of divine favour that which had lost it. This reconciliation is twofold in Scripture — of the state of things and of sinners. Thus in Colossians 1 all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him, "and, having made peace by the blood of His Cross, by Him to reconcile all things to Himself; by Him, whether they be things on earth or things in Heaven; and you that were sometime enemies and alienated in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight." The force of the word is evident from the first case. Then there is no question of changing the disposition of the reconciled things, because the purposed reconciliation spoken of in verse 20 refers to all created things as to the vast majority of which no such change can take place. It is the bringing of the whole created scene of Heaven and earth into its true order and right relationship with God, and to its right standing and condition in that relationship.

The first passage which suggests itself when we come to inquire into the use of the word in Scripture is 2 Corinthians 5: 18-20, particularly verse 19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world

unto Himself." It is not God is in Christ reconciling. The passage states that the apostolic ministry had taken the place of Christ's personal ministry, founded on the blessed Lord having been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. It is the aspect of Christ's ministry down here. God was in Him reconciling the world. Man would not have Him, but this was the service and aspect of His ministry. He was proposing to the world a return to God in order and blessing, not imputing their trespasses to them. If man had received Him, it would have proved that man in the flesh was recoverable, though he had sinned; though such indeed was not God's thought, the result proved he was not, and the Lord had to be made sin for us. Man had to be redeemed out of the state he was in, and justified on a new footing, not recovered from his ruin as man in the flesh still. Lawlessness and ease had both proved men sinners in fact. God was in Christ saying, I am not come to judge; return, and I will forgive; return to order and to God and nothing will be imputed. But the mind of the flesh was enmity against God, and the true state of man was brought out. The sin of the world was demonstrated by their not believing in Christ; righteousness in their seeing Him no more and His going to His Father. No doubt a change in us is needed to our being in order and peace before God; but reconciling is more than a state of feeling, it is a being brought back to the condition of right relationship with God. In Colossians 1, already quoted, we find it the purpose of God to bring all things in Heaven and earth into this order and condition. All things were created by the Son and for Him, and all the fullness of the Godhead which dwelt in Him will bring all created by and for Him into its due condition and order, into a normal state of relationship with itself. But we, the apostle adds, are reconciled, Christ being our righteousness, and we are the righteousness of God in Him. We are, as regards the very nature of God, in our normal place with God, according to the efficacy of Christ's work. Being moral beings, a new mind was needed for this, and Christ is our life, perfect according to what He was for God, that we may have it. The believer is reconciled in the body of Christ's flesh through death. We are before God with the entire putting away in His sight of our old rebellious nature, and by a work and obedience which has perfectly glorified God Himself, so that we are the righteousness of God in Him. Nothing is wanting to our place and standing in Christ, our old state being gone, quickened together with Him; dead, and the old man put off; risen, and the new man put on, we are in Christ before God according to the efficacy of His propitiation and work. We are so consciously by faith and the presence of the Holy Ghost by which we are sealed, for our being presented "holy, unblameable, and unrepensible in His sight."

Hence in Romans 5: 10 reconciliation is attributed to Christ's death, not to a change of mind in us. "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." And, "We have received the reconciliation" (v. 11). Remark here that the Christian is spoken of as being reconciled. Now it is quite true this does not and cannot take place without a work in man by which the peace Christ has made is appropriated, it cannot take place without faith. The Spirit of Christ works in quickening power in us, makes us know our state, gives new desires, makes us judge our old state, and finally shows us the value of Christ's death and our standing in Him, but peace was made, God glorified perfectly when Christ was made sin, so that His love can seek us and grace reign through righteousness. It is not that God is changed, but He can freely work in love according to righteousness for His own glory in virtue of that which has been presented to Him. Propitiation has been made, and hence, according to righteousness and abounding in love, He can bring back the sinner to Himself according to these, and, faith being there, has brought back-has reconciled. That which is the foundation of reconciliation has been offered to God, but it is not God who is reconciled or brought back into a normal place with man, but who reconciles in virtue of that which has been wrought by Christ and presented to Him. Propitiation is the foundation of reconciliation, the reconciliation of the Sinner, and in due time that of the universe. Thereupon the Gospel beseeches men* to be reconciled to

God, to return to Him in true relationship in Christ, who has been made sin for us. It is not then propitiation, it is not at all reconciling God, nor is it merely a change in man or his feelings; but it is the standing of man (when applied to him) in peace with God according to the truth of God's character in virtue of redemption, man being brought morally back in a new nature which by the Holy Ghost appreciates that redemption and enjoys the peace — joys in God as well as has peace with Him.

*The "You" and "ye" should be left out of 2 Cor. 5: 20.

There is one passage which remains of these wherein the word is used, which has to be considered. But rightly apprehended it confirms and clears the sense given. "If the casting them away be the reconciling of the world" (Rom. 11: 15). Now the sense is more vague here, it is true, but it confirms what we have said. The Jews had been in ordered relationship with God, though unfaithful to it, the world out of all relationship, men were utterly without God in the world, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, without God in the world. On the fall of Israel this state of things ceased. God now called all persons everywhere to repent. God took up the world again, no longer winking at the ignorance. The world was again put in relationship with God, so that His grace and Gospel went out to deal with it as that which thus far stood in relationship with Him, not as it did when Judaism was owned. These are all the passages where the word is used.

It is important to note that the Christian is always treated as being reconciled. It is more than being justified — this is being authoritatively pronounced righteous by God, whether from sins or now actually in Christ. It is more than the restoring of the heart to God, though both have place in order to reconciliation; for to be with God fully revealed in joyful and settled relationship with Himself, all in order between us, it must be as justified according to His righteousness and the objects of His love as those who have tasted it. We have been brought into both by Christ's work, but with hearts livingly renewed and tasting that love, or we should not as moral beings be in it. It is thus a word of great power and blessing. Nor is there an expression more full or more complete connected with God. It supposes God revealed, in all that He is, and man in a perfect place and standing with Him according to this relation-reconciled to God.