

Propitiation

W. Kelly.

It may help souls in danger of being perplexed by words as unintelligent as they are confidently uttered, if it be clearly understood that the same Hebrew expression for "atonement" is used throughout Lev. 16, and that this finds its counterpart in the Greek verb which the Revisers correctly render "make propitiation" in Heb. 2: 17, and its derivative substantive "propitiation" in 1 John 2: 2 and 4: 10.

It is a characteristic of the N.T. that there alone do we find "reconciliation" in the sense of divine grace. The Septuagint never uses καταλλάσσειν or καταλλαγή with any such force. Indeed the verb only occurs in Jer. 48: 39, the substantive in Isa. 9: 5, the one meaning "changed" and the other exchange or "restitution"; so remote is the application from its N.T. usage. We can easily understand that, as with other words, so Christ's presence and-work of grace gave k. an entirely new and blessed character. God was in Christ reconciling, not merely the Jews, but the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them — the very thing the law must do. But the world, though made by Him, knew Him not: its wisdom was its darkness. The Jews more guiltily received Him not. In result both crucified Him. On that cross Him Who knew no sin God made sin for us. This is atonement; for no ignorance can be more pitiable than only looking for the bare word. God has graciously revealed the thing in all variety of forms, for which faith praises Him. On the cross the Saviour was charged with sin and our sins, and bore the judgment of all unsparingly, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Thus the reconciliation which unbelief and hatred refused is now made good; and God has not only reconciled to Himself us who believe, but given us the ministry of reconciliation. Grace reigns through righteousness here also. What do we not owe Him?

Now the fact already stated as to Lev. 16 proves the utter fallacy and sheer heterodoxy of denying that propitiation applies to the blood of the cross, and of limiting it to putting within the sanctuary. For in that chapter, which is the main ground of course of the N.T. references, call it atonement or propitiation, *one and the same term is used of all the work of that great day*. So we find it employed in general, ver. 6, as none can deny, without the least restriction to the sanctuary. It is striking that it is next expressly said of the scape-goat, Azazel (ver. 10), where such a limitation is manifestly absurd. Again in ver. 11 it occurs with presenting the bullock for sacrifice. Afterward it is said, as all agree, of the sanctuary in vers. 16, 17, whatever be judged of ver. 18. What is more, the same term is applied as elsewhere to the burnt offering for the high-priest and for the people. In short the Holy Spirit applies the word for making atonement or propitiation to all the sacrifices of that day, and to each part *without no less than within* (vers. 30-33), so as completely, and without the least arguing, to demolish the human theory that restricts propitiation to the sanctuary alone, and thus excludes the work on the cross from that expression.

The N.T. speaks with no less largeness; and "to propitiate" or "propitiation" there means that God-glorifying work as a whole, not a part only. To limit it to an act in the heavenly sanctuary, to deny propitiation to Christ's work on the cross, is therefore flying in the face of the truth of scripture without the smallest warrant, and to the deep-dishonour of that which gave its righteous efficacy to the blood before God, or to the dismissal of all sins into the land of forgetfulness.

If any one were to say that the Lord on the cross failed to make good the type of the blood put within the holiest, etc., such teaching on Lev. 16 ought surely to be refused as unsound. To set forth

the efficacy of Christ's blood in figure, Aaron had to bring in some of the atoning blood, as well as when he came out to lay the sins on the scape-goat for their total removal out of sight. But the substance of the atonement or propitiation was the sacrifice offered to God. The slaying of the victim, the carrying in of the blood, the dismissal of the confessed sins (to say nothing of the incense at an early point and of the burnt offerings at the close), were each and all aspects of the same one work. What is so painful and new to most of us (certainly to myself in general fairly informed) is the singling out the intermediate portion of this instructive ritual as alone propitiation or atonement, in the face of the scripture which itself so speaks of all the parts composing it. To me this is an irreverent anatomy of atonement, as dangerous to faith in His work as the severing of His person in which other speculators have unholily indulged. All sound in the truth hold that the propitiation or atoning work of Christ is a whole, and "finished" here below as He Himself said. And a most serious slight of His infinite sacrifice I cannot but regard it to deny that to be propitiation wherein sin was judged and God for ever glorified as to it.

But the new doctrine goes farther, and by a mischievous putting together of Heb. 2: 17, Heb. 8: 4, and Heb. 9: 12, assumes that Christ went on high after death and before resurrection (of course therefore in the disembodied state) to effect propitiation; and *that this alone did it!* NOT His sacrifice on the cross instantly owned before God, as the rent veil testified on earth! Propitiation was not even begun then, whatever the Lord cried! The new doctrine boldly tells us that He in the separate state and in heaven alone made propitiation for our sins. Is this the truth of God? or a cheat of the enemy? He that rests in the simplicity of faith on the atoning sacrifice of Christ as prefigured in Lev. 16 rejects the hypothesis of these separate stages of life and death, of earth and heaven. The true force of the types he sees in their combined value, as the inspired text carefully impresses on every soul subject to the word. The interpreting of the blood taken within, as alone propitiation, and never verified till after Christ died and was a separate spirit on high, not only shocks the spiritual sense but dislocates scripture, disparages the cross, and invents a strange unheard-of propitiation in lieu of that which God's elect have hitherto believed in. Familiar as perhaps one may say I am with what has been written on propitiation since the church began, it has not been my lot to hear a whisper of the kind till some four or five years ago, if memory fail not.

But what say the N.T. scriptures whence we are entitled to look for the fullest final light from God? Does Heb. 2: 17 give a hint of a work done after death to propitiate? We hear very simply of Christ "a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation (or atonement) for the sins of the people": a clear reference to Lev 16 and as clearly fulfilled in that complete work in which He stood representatively on earth for the exceptional work of atonement, the basis of all that blots out sin, and glorifies God, before interceding for the saints in their temptations and sufferings. But not the most distant hint of a disembodied priesthood before He was made perfect, saluted of God a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and for ever set down on the right hand of God.

Does 1 John 2: 2 or 1 John 4: 10 give cause for the scheme? The first text simply declares Christ the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the whole world. Thus the essential requirement, the foundation of all the rest based on it, is the death and blood-shedding of the victim; for apart from shedding of blood there is no remission. Now the truth *includes* what is meant by putting the blood before God, but it insists on the sacrifice as the absolutely necessary and most integral part of propitiation. This spurious novelty on the contrary as absolutely excludes it from being *itself* propitiation, which is conceived to be a special action by Christ's presence in heaven for a little while after His death. Just think of the boldness of trusting a bit of reasoning against the plain and

large bearing of God's word in order to pick out, not Jehovah's lot nor the people's, nor yet the bullock, but a manifest result however interesting, instructive and momentous, and contending that this alone is propitiation! Certainly 1 John 2 is ominously silent on any such point.*

* I leave it to the reader to find out what there is in Rom. 3: 25 and Heb. 9: 5 to support the new theory.

Still less does 1 John 4: 10 help the desired inference. It appears distinctly and decisively adverse. The love of God was manifested in our case, that God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Such was the first want of man morally dead, even life Godward; and this life is in His Son. But however precious and eternal, it is not all we want, for we were guilty and lost sinners. Therefore another proof and gift of His grace: — "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us, and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins." He *sent* Christ to be such. The heterodoxy to gain the least show requires His *going* to heaven after death, for the purpose. As far as it speaks, the intimation here is altogether in favour of the large, full, and sound view of propitiation, and against the notion of a retreat to heaven to effect it.

And scripture cannot be broken. Whatever added light may be from other texts (and I am dead against limiting our view to where the mere word literally occurs), no other can undo the certain and simple intimation to our faith that God sent His Son to be propitiation, instead of the dream that He went back to heaven after He died and before He rose for any such purpose. We know that He was that very day of His death in Paradise and the converted robber too; but what scriptural link has this with making propitiation? If ever a time and place could be supposed to forbid such an association, Lev. 16: 17 excludes it. The triumph of grace is seen in such companionship in Paradise. Whatever the importance of our Lord's passing through the separate state, nowhere does scripture connect it with effecting propitiation. And as for Heb. 9: 12, what can be stranger than to lower that grand entry *once for all* into the holy place, *having* obtained eternal redemption, to the imagined brief errand *to make* propitiation? To say that it is not ascension is the merest assumption.

I am not ignorant that some complain because I do not set out other views of the author, such as his faith in the Lord's sacrifice, bearing the curse and judgment, and dying for us. This seems to me wholly unreasonable. I did allow of much truth, and truth altogether inconsistent with his error. The statement that "expiation was made on earth, for Christ suffered on earth, died on earth" (Help, 63, 4), overthrows his system completely. For every scholar knows that expiation means at bottom the same thing as propitiation, and that any real difference is imaginary. In Greek and Hebrew it is the same word.

Nor ought it to be forgotten, by those who feel a difficulty of seeing how the dismissed live goat fills so weighty a place in the rites of atonement that, Aaron was expressly to take the "two he-goats for a sin-offering," and to set both before Jehovah at the door of the tent of meeting (Lev. 16: 5, 7). Indeed it is added, as if to forestall any objection of this kind, that "the goat upon which the lot fell for Azazel shall be set alive before Jehovah, to make atonement over (or, with) him, to send him away as (or, for) Azazel into the wilderness"(10). The removal of our sins, though thus typified, as truly hung on our Lord's death on the cross as the witness to the efficacy of His blood in the sprinkling of the sanctuary. To deduce separate acts *of Christ*, at distinct times and different places, and even in another condition of His person, is foreign to christian truth.

What I affirm (in the face of all special pleading to minimise a mere fable, which lowers the cross by denying its propitiatory value, and draws the mind away to itself from the solid truth of God's word) is that all which is peculiar to Mr. C. E. S. on the most solemn of subjects is unquestionably

false. Therefore I envy not the human feeling that essays to put forward other things that are true, in order to weaken the just indignation which rejects and resents such an error. An outcry from any beguiled by the heterodoxy is natural. What can one think of an apology for it from any that reject it? With such human liberalism one cannot sympathise. God is light and God is love. To predicate of Christ as propitiation a false scheme which diverts from the revealed truth is to my conviction beyond measure grave, though I do not expect to convince all that may read this protest. To palliate it by a show of argument in order to justify fellowship with those in such error one can leave the Lord to judge.

When we are subject to the scriptural testimony to Christ and His work, there is no difficulty. If we take it up in a human way, there is nothing to save us from error one way or another. But it does seem marvellous that one imbued with N.T. truth should fail to see that what gives character to all the accessories of Lev. 16 is the offering to God, the great sin-offering of Aaron, not more the centre of the book than of the entire Jewish system. No doubt, therein were many measures and many manners; but it formed, specially to the christian eye, a unity without parallel among these types. We may study with profit the distinction of the goats from each other, and of the bullock from both (5- 11); so also the censer with its burning coals causing the cloud of incense to cover the mercy-seat, the witness of the personal acceptance of Christ when ever so tried by divine judgment (12, 13); again, the sprinkling of the blood, not only of the bullock but of the goat upon the mercy-seat and before it, and the cleansing and hallowing of the holy places and altar (16-19). We may weigh the dismissal of all the confessed iniquities on Azazel to a land of separation (20-22). We may consider the resumption of the ordinary garb of the high-priest instead of what marked the exceptional action in the previous verses, and the offering of the burnt-offerings as well as the fat of the sin-offering (23- 25). But not even a pious Jew would have singled out one of these many parts as exclusively atonement or propitiation, whilst he would simply, unequivocally, have viewed the sacrifice as not only the grand basis but that which in the highest way gave an atoning character to all that followed.

That Aaron had to enter the sanctuary in order to put some of the atoning blood there according to the word of Jehovah is true. That Christ had to enter heaven before He rose to do something analogous is to beg the question altogether; just as it is to overlook the type of Aaron's coming out again for the transaction of the scape-goat. The force of this last is evaded by making it solely prophetic of future dealings with Israel at Christ's appearing. For it figures what Christ did atoningly, as the ground of that mercy to guilty but repentant Israel by-and-by. It is the removal, rather than the forgiveness, of the iniquities confessed. The two goats are regarded together as a sin-offering. It is valid for every true penitent.

And when the christian looks at Christ on the cross, given in infinite love, yet withal abandoned of God, His God, drinking the cup His Father gave Him, suffering infinitely for sins, sin itself judged on His person, — there it is that both conscience and heart rest by faith according to the fullest revelation of the word. He believes without hesitation that all was made good there and then. He does not limit the work any more than the person of our adorable Saviour: it immediately penetrated heaven, and is the ground of a reconciled universe for eternity. He gladly interprets the shadow of the incense, and of the blood put in the holiest as the highest witness to Christ vindicating God for His own presence, but this solely because the essence of the propitiation was in the sacrifice. He does not admit for a moment another act in the Antitype for the necessarily separate and the subsequent stages of Aaron; and he points not only to the scape-goat as the manifest disproof of it, but to the burning of the fat of the sin-offering as well as the burnt-offerings as assuredly fulfilled in the one great sacrifice of Christ. All were parts of the atonement, as the chapter clearly shows, save to a reasoner bent on his

own will and indifferent to the N.T. key which God graciously affords us in our weakness and ignorance.

It is this holy and beautiful and solemn unity which is infringed by the delusion lately broached of the blood in the sanctuary being alone propitiation; and this in the face of the express statement of the chapter itself which applies the same word, call it atonement or propitiation, to the entire work of the high-priest on that day. So arbitrary a restriction has the effect of denying the sacrifice itself, the ground of what follows, to be propitiation. And this not only does the greatest wrong to Christ's work on the cross but opens the door for the will-o'-the-wisp of a distinct action of Christ in heaven after death and before resurrection which alone claims to be propitiation.

It is by more than one said that in pointing out the unscriptural temerity of this false teaching I am attempting to fasten heterodoxy on its author. But this his own words fasten really on himself. Nor am I in truth unfair or one-sided, as they are who set the true things the author says to screen the error from the abhorrence of all who glory in the cross of Christ. Nothing is easier than for a partisan, if he will, to give good excuses for a bad thing. It is the invariable way of human alliance faithless to Christ and the truth. I have briefly enough exposed a novel intrusion into a foundation of the faith, which is refuted by the scriptures alleged and would supplant the revealed propitiation by a fable. Nor has the author or any friend title to complain of its summary and decided exposure, after venturing in his "Recent Utterances" to attack the faith of all save his own small following, as if others denied propitiation or made it impossible.* For in this respect Mr. P. differs not substantially from all saints known to me. The aim of the enemy is plain. If the only propitiation be something that followed Christ's going to heaven after death, the sacrifice is robbed of that value which scripture gives it in the faith of all outside the Reading fraternity, and must sink into a subordinate place. Some who accept the dream may continue in a measure old habits of speech notwithstanding; better still some having real faith underneath their new creed may retain honour for the cross of Christ. But inevitably where souls are formed only on this notion, they must eventually sink to the level of the heterodoxy that Christ's sacrifice is not the essence of the propitiation, which last is a mysterious and subsequent sprinkling of His blood by Himself in heaven after His death and before His resurrection. To state the view is its truest and strongest condemnation to all single-eyed believers. And any effort to fritter away its seriousness by putting forward other things the author states is, in my judgment, not of God. Error is apt to be inconsistent.

* Neither the author nor his apologists have a just plea against hard measure from others in presence of such words as these, still uncanceled — the first hint of the dogma that came before me (in 1886 I believe). — "Now as propitiation by blood could only be made in the holiest and the Lord never entered that on earth, for He was not a priest on earth, where and when has propitiation been made by Him? The answer is simple — in heaven and after death. Mr. Pinkerton affirms all was done in this world, not in heaven [and in this I should have thought all saints concurred unhesitatingly]. *If so, propitiation by blood the Lord has not made, nor can He make it. The doctrine we are asked to accept* [and I never to my knowledge heard other from an orthodox believer of any age, land, or confession] *sweeps away all hope of salvation*, for atonement is not complete without propitiation, and thus Mr. Pinkerton really denies that the Lord could and did effect [a monstrous conclusion and simply from his own delusion]. His doctrine is in flat opposition to the word of God" (Recent Utterances by C.E.S., p. 42). Either people do not believe such language reprehensible, and then what can one think? or, if they do, they are bound to have the courage of their convictions, and to act as they speak. If the saints at large, who differ as to this from Mr. S. wholly, and not from Mr. P., "sweep away all hope of salvation," and deny true propitiation, are they not in deadly error, or are they

condoned by the author as so ignorant of the truth that their error is a small matter and quite unworthy of raising a question of fellowship or discipline?

It is a fact that the N.T. does not expressly *say* that God was propitiated, but speaks of Christ expiating our sins, of His being a propitiation for them and sent for this purpose by God. Admiring the wisdom that avoids language which heathen, ignorant of divine love and holiness, might from their old habits seriously misunderstand, I believe it quite another thing to *deny* that God needed propitiation. For herein the offended majesty and violated will and outraged nature of God were vindicated. It is therefore profoundly erroneous to confound it with reconciling love. The gift of the Son in God's love in no way negatives the necessity of Christ's blood as a propitiation: it is unbelief to array them in opposition. Therefore one hails these words of C. E. S. in Dec., 1888 (only just seen), "God requires propitiation to be made, because men have sinned, that He may in righteousness be propitious to them," even though the N. T. may not so express itself. But they seem quite inconsistent with, and surely corrective of, the expressions reprobated in "Help and Instruction," which shocked souls by setting the letter against the spirit of all scripture. For the essence of propitiation is Godward, on man's behalf indeed, but in the unsparing judgment of his evil, the ground of divine righteousness as we see so plainly declared in Rom. 3: 25 and elsewhere. Nowhere was it said, thought or implied, that the author believed not in Christ's sufferings on the cross. But *this* doctrine was judged, whatever else was right, to be ruinously wrong: first, in eliminating propitiation from the sin-offerings of atonement to confine it to the blood carried and sprinkled within the sanctuary; secondly and worse, in insisting that Christ only made this type good, and Heb. 2: 17 true, by going into heaven after death and before resurrection, to make propitiation for our sins.

To me it seems no honour to brethren beloved but a real indignity to the Lord, that every question of moment seems of late to drive so many to a departed and honoured brother, as to their living oracle. Have we no Bible? or can christian men not interpret it in the Spirit? are they cast on the safeguard of that tradition? No man had a greater horror of such unbelief in God's word, such idolatry of man. And perhaps I may be allowed to express my personal grief and shame, the more for having given not a few laborious years to collecting and editing what is being so painfully abused. But it seems unobjectionable and called for to say, now that his name is so often invoked for what he detested, that J. N. D. has repeatedly left on record under his own hand (what his life-long ministry proved to all that knew it) his distinct faith that Christ's making propitiation for our sins was here below on the cross (Heb. 2: 17), and by no means after death and in heaven as an action of His priesthood there. Any one who has access to his Collected Writings can verify this without doubt by examining Doctrinal iii. 484, 485, iv. 325. From this conviction I never knew a single godly man in or out of fellowship, still less a teacher, dissent; and if it be true that the Reading error appeared ten or twelve years ago, I can only presume that no man of discernment had read the articles, almost all such at that time being absorbed in the then impending or occurrent sorrow.

W. K.