

Harmony.

## HOLINESS AND LOVE AS COMBINED IN REDEMPTION.

These two attributes preside over the redeeming economy; their harmony in the Atonement, whether in the decree of heaven or in the ministry of Christ on earth, will hereafter appear. Mean while some prospective observations are here demanded as it respects that harmony, which is the topic of most importance. The word must be taken in its strictest meaning, and without fear of any consequences: this is a question on which the light of Scripture is so clear that we ought not to speak timorously.

In God  
Himself.

1. These attributes must need, or must have needed, what we in our human speech call reconciliation in God Himself. But we should be careful how we understand and use the term. It is necessary here to carry up our thoughts into the nature of the Triune God, Who, in relation to the world as sinful, foreordained the Incarnation as the provision or expedient both of holy justice and of merciful love. Redemption is said to have been the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus, and therefore eternal redemption: before the ages in its virtual accomplishment and after the ages in its results. The Lamb was slain *from the foundation of the world*: more than that, *before the foundation of the world*. Therefore whatever exhibition of wrath against sin and love to the sinner we now read in the cross must be only the expression of the same wrath and love in the mind of the Holy Trinity before the world was. Nothing has been added, nothing has been taken away from it, since. The whole matter or word of redemption was *settled in heaven*. The actuality of sin has not aggravated or intensified the holiness that for ever burns against evil; nor has the actuality of human misery deepened in any sense the tenderness of the Divine benevolence. If there was a reconciliation or harmonising of wrath and mercy at the cross, there was precisely the same in the heart of the God Who would create man. All that the Atonement means was transacted in the bosom of the Deity before the world was. Then it was a reality. We dare not think other wise, however hard it may be even to seem to disturb the eternal rest of the Divine nature. There is great danger to many minds of being tempted to soften this away: in fact, to render to heaven all the love of the Atonement, and to make the wrath the offspring

Rev. xiii.  
8.  
1 Pet i  
20Ps. cxix.  
89

of earth ; to regard love as the one only attribute in eternity, and justice as an invention or accommodation of time.

2. But the fact that the Atonement was settled in heaven—the pattern in the Mount of all that was wrought out below—teaches us what is meant by harmony : it is not the reconciliation after contest, nor the agreement after stipulation, nor the accordance on certain conditions, that is meant ; but the perfect concurrence of two eternal principles of the Divine perfection,—which as to a creaturely universe are called wrath and love,—in the mission of the incarnate Son and His union with the guilty world. The purpose of the Atonement was one purpose, which did not require, as we should say, two thoughts : successive, reconciled, and finally one. Hence, in speaking of holiness and love, we must be careful not to assign priority or pre-eminence to either. If God is Love, God also is Light, as has been seen, and that Light even a *consuming fire*. If it was the love of God that sent the only-begotten Son, it was His holiness that demanded the sacrifice. Hence the co-ordination of the two attributes in St. John's words : *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son the Propitiation for our sins* : love sent Him already the expiation required by holiness. Hence also the fact that Righteousness and Grace—the two forms that Holiness and Love assume in redemption—give their names severally to the atoning work of Christ : it is *the Grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men*, and it is also *the Righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith*.

3. But here again arises the necessity of yet another qualification. However perfectly one in their harmony, these attributes or principles of action in the Divine nature are to be kept apart in our thoughts. There is a real distinction between the two. They are not merely, as many have attempted to prove, diverse presentations of the same attribute. It is very common to say that holiness is love guarding the majesty of the Divine nature, and love the same holiness communicating itself ; while justice or righteousness is a combination of the two : as, to quote an illustration, the Apostle following the Septuagint makes *the sure mercies of David* into *the holy things, τὰ ὁσώα, of David*. Some, who find an unreality in this, give love the pre-eminence as expressing the nature of God, and regard holiness as its opposite pole : wrath

Revealed  
in Time.

Heb. xii.  
29.

1 John iv.  
10.

Rom. iii.  
21.  
Tit. ii. 11.  
Rom. i  
17.

Real Dis-  
tinction.

Acts xiii  
34.  
Isa. lv. 3.

Rom. i.  
18.  
Eph. ii.  
3, 4.

is the love of the holy Deity for all that is good in its energy as opposed to all that is evil. There is a sense in which this is perfectly true; but it is a truth which is very liable to be perverted. It is well to remember that each of these perfections is kept distinct in the redemptional language of Scripture, and that we do not find there any justification for this habit of thinking and speaking. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven: not the love of God manifesting its wrath. We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. BUT God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us.* The strongest argument, however, against this absolute unification of the two attributes is the fact that everywhere in Scripture the Atonement is referred to neither alone. Where the one is the other is not far off: so to speak as its necessary counterpart or qualification. Certainly it would be wrong to say that this truth is ever matter of argument in the New Testament. It does not amount to that. But it is abundantly shown, nevertheless, that neither of these attributes alone would have secured the salvation of mankind. Certainly not holiness in itself, which is a consuming fire; nor as righteousness, which would not be just in passing by transgression; nor in faithfulness, which must fulfil its threatening; nor in any form that any of its family of attributes might assume. And love would have been equally powerless; for it is as vehement as holiness itself in chastising its object for his good, and no disciplinary correction could have met the case of sin against God. Hence whenever in revelation we find either of these supreme attributes connected with the Atonement the other is sure to be near at hand. There is no exception to this; no exception, that is, where the atoning work of Christ is mentioned. Take the passage which might seem more than any other to give love the sole honour: *But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* It follows immediately: *Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.* An earlier passage might seem to give the pre-eminence to the justice that required propitiation: *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in His blood, to declare His righteousness.* This is, however, preceded by *being justified freely by His grace.* Some of our Lord's earlier words

Rom. v. 8,  
9.

Rom. iii.  
25, 24.

might appear to make the Father's love the one spring of mercy in His own mission. But we must remember that as He approached the cross He paid the most solemn tribute to the will of the righteous judgment which rested upon Him instead of sinful man. The last attribute He ever gave His Father was **RIGHTEOUS**.

John xvii  
25  
Love Pre-  
eminent

4. But after all there is a most blessed sense in which love must have the pre-eminence. It has been seen that in the records of that accomplished redemption there is undoubtedly an ascendancy given to the love of God which no worthy theological interest is concerned to deny. In a sense the origination of our recovery is ascribed to the Divine charity: *God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son*. It is true that God so hated sin that He sent His Son, the Propitiation: this, however, is never said, however profoundly true. *Walk in love*, St. Paul says, *as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice*: he does not anywhere otherwise than indirectly tell us that Christ so hated sin that He gave Himself. This also is the truth: *He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity; and, Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity: therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows*. But it is rather His love of sinners than His love of righteousness that is appealed to and magnified throughout the New Testament. **GOD IS LOVE**; and we must, in our homage to this perfection, reverently think that it was not the holiness which asked, in the eternal counsel, what love could do, but the love which offered the unspeakable gift: *Χάρις τῷ Θεῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνεκδιηγήτῳ αὐτοῦ δωρεᾷ*. And, as in the origination of the redeeming economy, so also in the process and final issues of it, love has the pre-eminence. It is everywhere magnified by God the Father and His incarnate Son; and we must magnify it. Mercy and judgment are on either side of the cross; they co-operate in all the administration of the Gospel; and they will preside at the final day. But evermore judgment executes the will of mercy, or love, *the royal law*; even when justice may seem to use the ministry of love. Our theology, like David, must *sing of mercy and judgment*. But still *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment*: exults or triumphs not **OVER** it, indeed, but yet **AGAINST** it. The same Moralist among the Apostles who made love the law, says: *κατακαυχᾶται ἔλεος κρίσεως*.

John iii  
16.

Eph. i. 2

Tit. ii. 14.

Heb. i. 9.

2 Cor. ix.  
15.

Jas. ii. 8.

Ps. ci. 1.

Jas. ii. 13