

For the Christian Messenger.

## ON THE SUBJECT OF RECONCILIATION.

Mr. Editor,—

In the *Christian Messenger* on the 17th February I asked the following questions.

“Do the Scriptures of Divine truth teach—

1st That man becomes reconciled to God, or

2nd. That man becomes reconciled to man, or

3rd. That there are two reconciliations. First, of man to God and

Second, of God to man—that is to say, when the heart is changed and man becomes a new creature?”

A correspondent under the signature of M. in the *Messenger* of Feb. 17th and March 17th, favours the public with his views on the subject, and by way of introduction, replies to the questions as follows:

“Without hesitation I would say—there is in this sense—(when the heart is changed and man becomes a new creature)—“only one reconciliation—of man to God. But free from the limitations which *Discipulus* has given to the subject, I would say there are two reconciliations, 1st. God is reconciled to man, 2nd. Man to God.”

M.'s first communication is principally taken up with an extract from the writings of Dr. Hovey, of Newton—his second is, for the most part, an elaborate argument to prove his first proposition, “that God is reconciled to man.”

On the other branch of the case “that man is reconciled to God” when he becomes a new creature, there need be no controversy. M. frankly admits so much, and so do I. The Scriptures would seem to teach this too plainly, to admit of doubt.

Assuming that, I should like now, with your permission, to examine carefully the second proposition, namely, whether “God is reconciled to man.”

First, then, premising that a man is reconciled to God, at the date of his conversion, when is God reconciled to that man? It must be before, at, or after the date of his reconciliation to God.

Now what scriptural evidence have we, that God is reconciled to any man, while he continues in a state of enmity to God?—Can that be? Is it possible? Is it not a contradiction of terms?

Before the fall, may we not fairly assume that the relation of God to man, and of man to God, was such that the term reconciliation could have no application either way? It was at the fall the enmity originated, and every man, (unreconciled by the death of Christ) hath been, and is at enmity with God. If that be so, how can God be in any sense reconciled to any, unless it be to those who are reconciled to him. And what need of that? Or where is any such thing taught as a double reconciliation in cases of “new birth?”

If the word “Reconciliation” is used in the same sense by M. when applied to God, and to man, does it not imply a change in God, if he be reconciled, as it does in man when he is reconciled? I write reverently. But when “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself,” and as the Apostle again says “if when we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, &c.” this, if I read aright, means that man was changed, and his relation to God became changed, in consequence, but it does not follow that God was in any way changed by this reconciliation.

When Paul writes to the Church at Rome, using the pronoun in the first person plural, “we, shall be saved,” again, “If when we were sinners, we were reconciled, &c., we shall be saved, &c.” as cited by Dr. Hovey, it should be borne in mind, that the Apostle is speaking of, and addressing believers in Christ, and such only. So again in his Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul says, “Be ye reconciled to God.” But this is to the Church—to believers.

Every human being unreconciled to God, is, I maintain, in a state of condemnation. God's word plainly teaches it. If so, how is it possible that while man is in a state of condemnation, unreconciled to God, God can be reconciled to, or in a state of reconciliation with him? Where in all the Scriptures of divine truth is that doctrine taught?

The death of Christ and his merits, reconcile sinners to God. But where, by whom, and by what authority, are we taught that God is reconciled to unbelievers?—That is the point to which this disputation leads. M. in his second letter opens thus—“I am pledged to produce scriptural indications, that God was propitiated towards the whole world, by the death of his Son.” The italics are mine.

I think this is hardly logical. Unless M. proves that “God is reconciled to man,” he does not prove the affirmative of the proposition in controversy. This circumlocution, and qualification by introducing the phrase “indications that God was propitiated,” is scarcely dealing fairly with the subject. If that means exactly the same thing as “reconciled to man,” why introduce this new phraseology? If not, it is beside the question.

Again, when M. uses this language, “the intensest solicitude now possesses the mind of God, to have man brought to the knowledge of the truth and into a state of reconciliation with the Father of Spirits,” he writes unguardedly. Why use the word now? Is not God the same yesterday, today, and forever? If by the word man he means the church of God: believers—those embraced in our Saviour's prayer, John xvii. 9, that is one thing. But if he intends by the word “man” the world of unbelievers as well, then he clearly begs the question. I hold, that as with God nothing is impossible, if it be proper or becoming to suppose the mind of God “possessed of the intensest solicitude that any thing should be brought about,” it would be instantaneously accomplished. To doubt it, would not be in harmony with Divine Revelation, and his attributes of omnipotence, &c., as I read my Bible. If I believed that “the intensest solicitude now possesses the mind of God to have man (the whole world) brought to the knowledge of the truth, and into a state of reconciliation with the Father of Spirits,” I should become a Universalist; for the plain reason that I believe that whatever God wills takes place.

The Scriptures plainly and unmistakably teach the doctrine of the reconciliation of man to God by virtue of the application of the atonement through faith of the sinner reconciled. As I read M.'s letter, he teaches the doctrine of God's reconciliation to man, not citing any text of Scripture to prove the position, for none such, I take it, can be found, but by implication—the unsafest of all kinds of proof. If it be admitted that the death of Christ reconciled God to man—meaning all men—then what necessity for reconciling man to God? Unless the term *reconcile* when applied to man as reconciled to God, conveys a different idea to what it does when applied to God as reconciled to man? What possible effect on either party could the second or subsequent reconciliation produce?

Believing as I do in the Election of Grace, in God's Sovereignty, as well as Man's accountability, without pretending to be able to explain or reconcile these truths, I can comprehend how God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, but I cannot understand how or why God should be in Christ reconciling the world to himself—the world—to which he himself was already reconciled.

Perhaps it is my obtuseness, but Dr. Hovey's learning casts no light upon the subject, according to my view of the matter, and M.'s effort to establish the propositions of a double reconciliation, lacks “thus saith the Lord” in proof. No such teaching can I find in the Bible.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, &c. &c. But does it follow that he was reconciled to the world after the death of Christ, any more than before? Was it not one of his eternal purposes to give his Son? There is a point of time, when every believer becomes reconciled to God. Can it be said there is a point of time when God became, or becomes reconciled to man?

To affirm that God ever was, or ever will be reconciled to an unconverted man, or to an unconverted world, is in my humble view an unauthorized and dangerous dogma, an offshoot of modern divinity, and so far as I know but recently begun to be taught in any of our Baptist Churches.

And yet I may be in error on this subject. I think not, however. As a scholar, and not a professed teacher, I may be told it becomes me to speak and write with modesty and proper respect for the opinion of others. I concede so much. And now I take leave of the matter for the present, hoping that others better qualified may ere long be found instructing your readers what the Scriptures of Divine truth teach in reference to so important a subject.

DISCIPULUS.

IS BAPTISM A SAVING ORDINANCE?—Let me say to you, young Christian, if you attend to it, it will save you from disobeying God and incurring his displeasure. You cannot walk with God and yet trifle with his revealed will. The neglect of this duty has been the first backward step taken by a large proportion of the backsliders with whom I have been acquainted.—*J. Hayden.*

## Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, MARCH 31, 1869.

## “THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF BAPTISM.”

The Editor of the *Witness* has some very sensible remarks under the above caption, and deals faithfully with those of his brethren—Pædo-baptists, who administer to their infants what he terms “the sacrament of baptism” and then neglect to give them religious instruction.

He makes no allusion to ourselves personally, yet, as he refers to Baptists and their practices, he would perhaps be disappointed if we were to let his article pass without any notice. We have no wish to cherish any but the most kindly feelings and generous spirit in the few references we may make to the subject. He says:—

“The Baptist parent who is a true Christian brings up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He takes the earliest opportunity to direct their minds to the claims of religion. He instructs them in the Scriptures, and labours and prays for their conversion. When converted they are baptized, and then they receive the Lord's Supper, and enter on the privileges of full membership of the Church. In Baptist Churches very young converts are thus admitted and are thus early taught to confess Christ before men, and to enter on the paths of new obedience.”

If Baptists act thus—are thus in earnest in bringing their children to Christ—surely Pædo-Baptists should not be found lagging behind them in this great duty!”

So far he states what is fair and candid, and we have no reason of complaint. We have no desire for disputation, or we might call in question his next statement, that

“Baptism is the ‘seal of the Covenant,’ we believe that the children of believers have a right to it. If so, then, the children of Baptist believers have a right to it just as surely as we have. The inheritance is theirs although the ‘sign and seal’ is not conferred upon them.”

His logic is a little limping here. His foundation is not well laid. He affirms that “Baptism is the ‘seal of the covenant.’” This is easier affirmed than proved. It is one of the cobwebs which, covered with the dust of ages, and thrown around the teaching of scripture on this subject, hides its beauty and simplicity: and, if swept away would be found just about as useful or substantial as such undesirable accumulations usually are. That the children of Baptists, or even of Pædo-baptists “have a right to it,” is a position for which we have yet to find Scripture authority, unless the children are themselves believers.

Doubtless there is force in the following contrast:

“Infinitely better is the position of the child of a Baptist parent if that parent train him up in the fear of the Lord, than that of a baptized child of Presbyterian parents who neglect their solemn charge. Baptism, if the duties and privileges which it involves are neglected, may prove a deadly curse instead of a blessing—a savour of death unto death!”

Surely “the sacrament of Baptism” administered to a child in a state of unconscionness does not of itself become a curse to the child. If so, parents may well tremble at placing their offspring in such a position of danger, and we need not be surprised at the *decline of Infant Baptism* in many churches.

We have no desire to quote unfairly. We therefore copy the explanation our contemporary gives of the position he assumes on this grave question:

“Baptism avails nothing to your child unless you follow it with your prayers and earnest carefulness in religious training. This Sacrament is a sign and seal of admission into the visible Church. But of what possible use is it if the solemn vows there made are forgotten and neglected? There is no such thing as Baptismal Regeneration. The only security which God gives us with regard to the future conduct of children is in strict connection with their training.”

There are multitudes of irreligious parents in this christian land who have been themselves baptized, and who have a superstitious anxiety for the baptism of their children. But these are simply deluded and deluding. No good is effected. Neither parents nor children are in any way better than those who have never been baptized. No number of sacraments or forms or ceremonies can save the soul of infant or adult. We say therefore that the Presbyterian who brings up his children carelessly, irreligiously, after having them baptized, is doing worse than the Baptist who brings up his children carelessly; and infinitely worse than the Baptist parent who uses all the appointed means (in which he believes) for bringing his offspring to Christ.

The natural tendency of Infant Baptism is, we believe, especially with irreligious

parents, just what our contemporary describes as existing in the minds of “multitudes in this christian land,” a fostering of superstition and a reliance on forms or ceremonies instead of a change of heart, a new life of faith in the Lord Jesus.

The statement that “Baptized children are members of the church, amenable to the discipline of the church” involves Pædo-baptist churches in duties which we believe are seldom performed or recognized by them. It is easy to say that “the responsibility for the training of children does not cease with the parent,” and that “in case of neglect, the church is bound to deal with the parent in order to awaken him to a sense of duty,” but it is not so easy to give it any “practical aspect” or effect. Who ever heard of wicked boys or girls, although profligate and profane, being excluded from a Presbyterian church?

We do not think that Infant baptism really adds anything to the responsibility belonging to parents as such. The obligation of a Christian parent to bring his children to Christ, by instruction by prayer and by example and to give them a religious training is, we conceive, far stronger from his relation as a parent, than it can be from the observance of any religious ceremony by the hands of another person, whether he be a minister or a priest.

In the matter of religious training at home we think many Presbyterian families are models which Baptists might well emulate. The original of the beautiful picture drawn by our contemporary, in our first extract above, of a well-trained Baptist family, would be more frequently met with, if parents realized their obligations more fully.

## LORD MONK ON THE IRISH CHURCH.

The coming in contact with free institutions in this free country, appears to have had a beneficial influence on the late Governor-General of Canada—Lord Monk. He was selected to second the Address in answer to the Queen's speech. The views he propounded in the House of Lords on that occasion are such that they will find an echo in the hearts of the great body of Dissenters and liberal churchmen. His declaration that the disestablishment measure must be so framed “that it would leave no trace of distinction between persons professing different religious views in Ireland” shewed that he—an Irishman and a Churchman understood the case, and the demands of the nation on the question.

He declared that his only dread was lest the opponents of disestablishment, though not strong enough to defeat the measure, might “be sufficiently powerful to retain some paltry shred or shadow of establishment—or endowment which would be of no real substantial benefit to the Church, but would diminish the beneficial effect of the measure in the minds of the population generally, and perpetuate towards the Anglican Church a spirit of hostility.” But he went yet farther, and on the ground of justice to the Anglican Church itself, and for the sake of enabling her to perform the true functions of a Church, he demanded that she should be thrown at once on her own resources. On this head his language is so admirable, and his views so strikingly in accordance with all consistent voluntaries, that we must quote them at length:—

“But he (Lord Monk) did not desire to fight under a false colour, and, quite independently of the special instances which existed in the case of the Irish Church, he confessed that on principle and as a Churchman he was opposed to all connection between Church and State. He believed that wherever that connection existed, the same blighting and numbing influences would be found to affect the Church, which, to borrow an illustration from commerce, protection was found to exercise over those branches of trade to which it was applied. With these views, he need not tell their lordships he did not share the gloomy apprehensions with reference to the future of the Irish Church which were entertained by those who thought that that would be a death-blow to her, and that she could not survive the severance of her connection with the secular power. The experience which he had had in Canada of the beneficial effect upon the Church of her being thrown on her own resources, forbade him to entertain such an idea. He could not bring himself to think so meanly of those who professed the same religious belief with himself, as to suppose that they would not be prepared to make the sacrifices necessary for the maintenance of their Church; and, he said with all reverence, were it otherwise he had too great faith in the vitality of his own religion, and in the source from which that vitality was derived, to doubt for a moment that the means required for the support of the Church would be forthcoming. He might be sanguine, but he looked forward to a noble future for the Irish Church, when, invigorated by a sense of self-reliance, and a consciousness of self-sus-