



Bible Student's Notebook™

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Volume XIII
Issue 322

Newsflash!

GOD IS NOT ANGRY!

by — Andrew Maclarty

By the grace of God I am what I am (I Corinthians 15:10).

Reliable sources in Macedonia report that Saul of Tarsus, in a further letter to the church in Corinth, has declared that,

God is at peace with all mankind – not reckoning their offenses against them.

This will undoubtedly cause a great stir in religious circles. Simon Peter, in an open letter to the Jewish churches in Turkey, while acknowledging the inspiration of Paul's writings, and the wisdom given to him, seems puzzled, and describes them as "hard to understand." Gamaliel, the great Jerusalem scholar, who had Saul as an undergraduate, suggests caution.

Saul of Tarsus is regarded as the outstanding scholar of his generation, and was looked on as a possible future leader of the Jerusalem scholars. From his earliest days in Tarsus, Saul showed great promise, and at an early age he moved to Jerusalem. On completion of his studies in the school of Gamaliel, Saul began a campaign to restore Israel to full observance of the law of Moses.

At this time Saul probably saw himself in the tradition of the great reformers of Israel, who had turned the people from idolatry and lawlessness back to God's law. He soon became aware of the beliefs of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, (those called Christians), and began to persecute them throughout the land. It was while on his way to Damascus to continue this work that he had a vision of the risen Jesus. This so transformed him that, instead of prosecut-

ing the "Christians," he began to preach and teach as they do.

Since then his career has taken a new direction and, indeed, he seems to have become much more radical than even the most fervent Christians. It was reported that on one occasion he even rebuked the apostle Peter. One event in particular which caused astonishment was his speech in the synagogue at Pisidia Antioch, when he announced that through Jesus was the pardon of sins and (quote),

From all from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses. In this One everyone who is believing is being justified.

This is an astonishing statement from one schooled in the law of Moses: certainly the Jews in Antioch were taken aback.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the significance of this statement. There is nothing in the teaching of any other apostle which can rank with it, and these words definitely put his teaching outside of the Law of Moses.

Were it not for his radical teaching, he probably would be tolerated by orthodox Jews. Indeed, Chris-

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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NEWSFLASH! (continued from front page)

tians are now openly tolerated in Jerusalem, as they are zealous of the law. James, the brother of Jesus of Nazareth is a leader among them, and causes no trouble to the orthodox Jews. Yet it seems as time passes, Saul (he prefers to be known as Paul) is becoming ever more radical.

This latest statement to the Corinthians may be the final break with the faith of his fathers, for there is now a greater gap between Paul's teaching and that of the Christians than there is between Christians and Jews.

It is hard to see how there can ever be a reconciliation between Paul and the Jewish Christians. His teachings of justification and reconciliation exclude being justified in law. In point of fact, the law cannot justify, so there can never be peace with God under law, only shelter and pardon; and as there cannot be peace, there cannot be reconciliation.

Paul has written a letter to the believers in Galatia in which he explains that the law is now redundant. He opens that letter by saying that there is no gospel except the one preached by himself and his gentile companions. We understand that he is now at work on a long letter to the believers in Rome, in which these matters are fully examined. After examining the law (and he is a brilliant lawyer), he concludes that there is none righteous, and that God's righteousness is the only basis of justification. Thereby we have peace with God, established in righteousness.

** ** * ** * **

GOD IS NOT ANGRY

Surely that cannot be true! God *must* be angry – angry with the wickedness of humanity – angry because mankind breaks His commands – angry because they fail to give Him the honor and worship that is His due. Most of all, God *must* be angry because He is righteous and cannot tolerate sin. If we are to uphold the righteousness and majesty of God, then, reason tells us, God *must* be angry.

Having reasoned thus far, it would astonish the average person to learn that God is *not* angry. They would

immediately ask, where in the Bible does it say that God is not angry? Let us quote the Scripture at once. It is found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 19. It reads,

*God was in Christ, conciliating the world unto Himself, **not reckoning their offenses to them,** and placing in us the word of the conciliation.*

We suggest that you pause a moment, and read these words again. Read them a third and fourth time. They will remain in your mind when you consider that they are indeed the inspired word of God. Note how they break naturally into four small clauses: (1) God was in Christ (2) conciliating the world unto Himself (3) not reckoning their offenses to them, and (4) placing in us the word of the conciliation.

GOD WAS IN CHRIST

The only unerring source of truth is the inspired Word of God. These words are not our words, nor are they the plausible deductions of learned men, or even religious men. They are part of His revelation to us – God was in Christ! Here is truth indeed, stated in the words of inspiration. Jesus said, "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me." We further learn in Colossians 2:9 that "In Him the entire complement of the Deity is dwelling bodily."

The truth that God was in Christ has been constantly attacked by all manner of men. They will accept Jesus as the Perfect Example, or the Great Reformer, or a Teacher come from God, or as a good Man who died for His beliefs. There is truth in all of these statements, but none of them approach the lofty declaration we are considering: God was in Christ – that He might reconcile us to Himself!

CONCILIATING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF

Conciliation is a form of the better known word "reconciliation." It means being favorably disposed towards a person, even though they have not a friendly disposition towards us: friendship – but a one sided friendship. As an example we might consider two friends who have "fallen out," they have become estranged. Both feel hurt by the words or actions ► ↷

of the other. They have gone separate ways, and no longer spend time together. Yet one friend is determined to do all possible to restore matters to the previous harmony, and realizes that someone will have to make the first move. In his heart he puts aside the hurt he has felt, and speaks to the other in *conciliatory* words, for in his heart he is now conciliated to his friend. However, his friend is not conciliated and will not listen, so the estrangement continues. Then after a few days he also puts aside the hurt he suffered, and is conciliated to the other. *When both are conciliated, then there is reconciliation* – a mutual matter. The enmity, hurt or estrangement is put aside by both parties, and they are reconciled to each other. One alone cannot be reconciled, only conciliated. It takes two to effect reconciliation.

The Scriptures speak of both conciliation and reconciliation, but the subject before us now is conciliation; later we will take note of reconciliation.

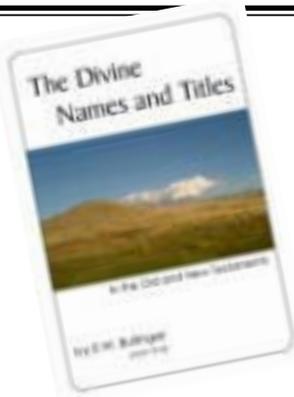
Note that God is conciliating to the *world* to Himself. It is not just the church He is conciliated to, nor an especially good person here and there. God is conciliated to the world, to every human, no matter how bad or undeserving. This defies human logic, for it is God Who is offended by sin. It is He Who has been rejected by His creatures. It is God's Son Who was crucified. It would be understandable if God was estranged, aloof and remote. Indeed, this is the way religion thinks, and men are ever trying to interpose

themselves between God and man, seeking by some ritual or ceremony to appease the wrath of an offended God. Yet such things are foreign to God's gospel of grace, for we read in Romans 5:20 that "*where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*" – grace is unmerited favor to the undeserving.

NOT RECKONING THEIR OFFENSES TO THEM

When something dreadful happens, the first thought coming into mind often is, "Why has this happened to me?" We look around for the cause; we search our conscience and memory to find a reason for our misfortune. The greater the tragedy, the more certain we are that we must have done something to cause it. Because we are so hurt, the cause must be our own doing, for surely God would not afflict us for no cause.

Human reason rebels against the thought that something can happen without a cause, and when humans fail to find any probable cause for their misfortune, they are indignant. Yet such reasonings are not part of God's gospel of grace. Look at our Scripture again – "*God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses against them.*" – Not reckoning their offenses to them! God is not pressing the matter of men's sins, for He is bent on reconciliation – that takes place when the sinner becomes conciliated to God. God is not reckoning your offences against you, for they have already been dealt with in the death of His Son.



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Religion would tell us that we need to do something to placate God, for He is offended by our sinful character; but God's evangel tells us that God is not reckoning our offences against us. It is not us who make the move, but it is God. Just think of it, God is not reckoning our offences against us! He has removed every obstacle between Himself and us, and is entreating us to "*be conciliated.*" Let us note that this peace is established on a righteous basis. The question of sin is not swept under the carpet, but is dealt with by God in the death of His Son.

He [God] has made Him [Jesus] Who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

So it is not us, but God Who is pleading – "*Be conciliated.*" When Christ died, ***sin itself was crucified.*** Nothing now stands between us and our loving Father!

PLACING IN US THE WORD OF CONCILIATION

Paul tells us in another Scripture that he was not ashamed of the gospel. The word of the conciliation is indeed the gospel of which we are not ashamed. It is the gospel of the grace of God, Who is not reckoning offences against the sinner, but is beseeching them to "*be conciliated.*" It is the word of conciliation which turns men's hearts to God – the realization that God is already conciliated to you, through the death of His Son, so that you need to do nothing to make yourself right with Him. He has already done everything necessary to fulfill the demands of His righteousness, and has removed every barrier between Himself and mankind.

Let us now look at how Paul summarizes the gospel in the next verses.

For Christ, then, are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, "Be conciliated to God!" For the One not knowing sin, He makes to be sin for our sakes that we may be becoming the righteousness of God in Him (II Corinthians 5:20-21).

something to show God that we are sorry for our sins – but that is not God's gospel for today. It once was, when God was dealing with His ancient people, Israel; and it will be once more, during the future time known as the millennium. In the verse just quoted, we notice the words "*entreat*" and "*beseech.*" Have you noticed Who it is entreating, and who it is beseeching? It is not sinful humanity, but *God* Who is entreating, "*Be conciliated!*" It is as God's ambassadors that *we* are beseeching, "*Be conciliated.*"

Those who preach God's gospel of grace are God's ambassadors. The apostle Paul was God's ambassador as he declared the gospel to the nations, how that "*God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offences to them.*" Then a remarkable thing happens: God has His [first] ambassador [Paul] shut up in prison in Rome. This is very significant, for God in this is demonstrating that He is not reckoning men's offenses against them. There can scarcely be a greater insult to a country than to imprison an ambassador; yet God's ambassador is put in prison, and while Paul is in chains, God reveals to him the wonderful truths contained in Paul's letters [to the] Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians! God continues to pour blessings on His church to demonstrate that He is conciliated to the world.

Let us now look at the word "reconcile." This precious word is found only twice in Scripture: once in Ephesians, where Jew and Gentile are reconciled, and once in Colossians where we read,

And you, being once estranged and enemies in comprehension, by wicked acts – yet now He reconciles.

Notice who was estranged: us! Who made the reconciliation? God! We were estranged in our comprehension, could do nothing to make the peace, could see no farther than our wicked acts, yet God has reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son.

Law cannot reconcile us to God, nor can sacrifice nor pardon, nor good works. Only God's love can reconcile the creature to Himself. God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself!

There is a common belief that mankind must do

Evil and Sin

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

The basic truth of divine revelation, that “all is of God” (Romans 11:36), is so severe a strain on the faith of some of God’s saints that they instinctively reject it, excusing their unfaith on the ground that it is repulsive to their spiritual natures. They seek to shelve it by making the devil the source of all evil, yet they fail to tell us how the enemy could originate it, unless the power or capacity was given to him by his Creator.



Well might He say to those who deny His creation of evil, “Where were you when evil was created, since you know I had no hand in it?” We admire their zeal for God, but we deplore their denial of His words. What causes the confusion which leads to such dire misunderstanding? It lies largely, we believe, in the lack of discrimination. Instead of the Creator of evil being the Author of sin, we are sure that He *cannot sin*.

We sympathize heartily with the motive of those who shrink from associating evil with God, because we find that their concept of evil and sin is such that they cannot believe God’s plain statements concerning them, but must modify God’s Word to suit their misconception. There is dire need, therefore, of further searching of God’s Word on this subject.

There are many passages in God’s Word which bear out the great truth that all things – the evil as well as the good – find their source in the one and only God, Who alone can originate. Whence are the sufferings of creation, the evil that has perplexed philosophers and confounded the wise? Paul writes that the creation was not subjected to vanity voluntarily. It had no will or choice in the matter. God is subjecting it against its will (Romans 8:20), and the reason is not far to seek. It is only temporary. It is in expectation. Our sufferings will lead to an overwhelming glory, for which these sufferings are essential. Creation is enslaved by corruption with a view to a liberty which can only be enjoyed by that which has tested its opposite.

There is one feature which is common to all opposition to this truth, and that is the failure to distinguish between *evil* and *sin*. We have quoted the words of Jehovah Himself, “I ... create evil” (Isaiah 45:7), and immediately we are accused of teaching that God is the author of *sin*. Now we did not write the passage in Isaiah, nor is the prophet responsible. It is the word of Jehovah Himself, and He ought to know. Speaking of the physical creation, He challenges Job,

Where wast thou when I earth’s foundations laid? Say, if thou know and understandest it! (Job 38:4).

In the language of revelation, evil and sin are clearly distinguished by terms not in any way related to each other. Our translations are only partially consistent, so that there is some excuse for cloudy concepts on these momentous themes. With very few exceptions (Job 24:21; Psalm 41:8; 111:11; Proverbs 12:21), the Hebrew word *rahgag* underlies the English rendering “evil.” A few of its renderings are, “break,” “displease,” “ill,” “effect,” “harm,” “hurt,” “mischief,” “punish,” “vex,” “wicked.” The adjective adds to these “adversity,” “bad,” “calamity,” “distress,” “grief,” “grievous,” “heavy,” “ill favored,” “misery,” “naught,” “noisome,” “sad,” “sore,” “sorrow,” “trouble,” “wretchedness,” “wrong.” It is evident that such diversity of translation will not aid us in forming a correct or concise concept of the real meaning of the term.

What is its exact import? This is best discovered in such passages as Psalm 2:9, where it rendered, “break,” or Daniel 2:40, also translated “break.” Perhaps our word “shatter” is its nearest equivalent. In Daniel it is used with the same force as the Chaldee *d’kak*, “break in pieces,” or “pulverize.” In the Psalm 2 it corresponds to *nahphatz*, which is rendered “dash in pieces.” In its literal root meaning it describes the effect of iron, the hardest of the common metals, when used to shatter and destroy.

It has no moral bias, such as we usually associate with it. In the passage quoted the evil is done by the hands of the Son of God. He shall deal out evil to the nations with a rod of iron when He comes again (Psalm 2:9). The fourth kingdom that will be on earth at the time of the end will deal out evil to the other nations before it, in turn, is the object of His evil work (Daniel 2:40).

The adjective is used of the “ill favored” kine of Pharaoh’s dream (Genesis 41:3-27). They were lean, no doubt; but ↗

of what *moral* evil were they guilty? The wonders done in Egypt were great and “*sore*,” or *evil* (Deuteronomy 6:22). Who doubts that the Lord Himself did this evil? Who would insist that it was morally wrong? The same is true of *all* of the evil brought on Israel in the land (Joshua 23:15; I Kings 9:9; Nehemiah 13:18).

How firmly immorality is associated with evil by theologians is evident from their desire to shield God from all association with it. Our common translation quite correctly states that an *evil spirit from Jehovah* troubled Saul (I Samuel 16:14). Newberry changes this, in his margin, to a sad spirit! This literally shows the “sad” effect of the unfounded fallacy that evil is, in itself, tainted with sin. The evil spirit was not an emissary of Satan, but of God. Our translators have tried to hide this at times, as when, speaking of the waters of Jericho, they say “*the water is naught*” (II Kings 2:19). It was evil.

Job had learned this simple lesson long before his testing. In answer to his wife’s reflection on God, he replied “*What? Shall we receive good from the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*” We can almost hear someone shout “Blasphemy!” when they read this. But the divine comment is, “*In all this did not Job sin with his lips*” (Job 2:10). “*Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?*” (Lamentations 3:38).

The neutral character of evil is evident when both words are used together. Zimri “*sinned in doing evil*” (I Kings 16:19). From this we may freely infer that evil is not necessarily sin.

The claim has been repeatedly made that, since evil is contrasted with peace rather than good, it denotes *calamity* rather than “moral” evil. This method of discovering the meaning of a word is a good one, but, in this case, suffers from unskillful use. First we must be sure of the significance of the contrastive term. Then we must determine its real opposite.

Moreover we must not base our conclusion on a solitary text, but on all available occurrences. Above all, we must not allow one instance to overrule completely the plain teaching of a multitude of others. All of these precautions are thrown to the winds when evil is denied to “moral” evil because it is the opposite of peace. “Peace,” in Hebrew, has a much wider range than in English. “Calamity” is not its antonym, even in English. Evil is seldom contrasted with peace, but often with “good,” which, it is allowed by all, gives it a universal range, to include all species of evil.

While evil and peace are in contrast a few times, evil and good are set over against each other often. The following are most of the occurrences: Genesis 2:9, 17; 3:5, 22; 24:50; 31:24, 29; 44:4; Leviticus 27:10, 12, 14, 33; Numbers 13:19; 24:13; Deuteronomy 1:39; 30:15; I Samuel 25:21; II Samuel 13:22; 14:17; 19:35-36; I Kings 3:9; 22:8, 18; II Chronicles 18:7, 17; Job 2:10; Psalm 34:14-15; 35:12; 37:27; 38:20-21; 52:3, 5; 109:5; Proverbs 14:19; 17:13; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Isaiah 5:20; Jeremiah 18:20; 42:6; Lamentations 3:38; Amos 5:15; Micah 3:2.

If God intends for us to understand “moral” evil when it is contrasted with “good,” here is evidence sufficient for anyone.

We are not trying to prove that God creates “moral” evil, but that the distinction is unfounded and futile. *The word “evil” has no “moral” bias.* It may or may not be wrong. Is it “moral” evil in the following passages, where it is coupled with *good*? “*Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of Jehovah our God*” (Jeremiah 42:6). Moral evil is sin, and God does not demand that His people sin. Much will be gained if the term “moral” is discarded in this discussion, and “moral evil” is given its true name, “*sin*.”

Calamity usually heads the catalogue of evils that are not “moral.” Yet it is impossible to consider a single calamity which has not a moral effect. Take the recent Japanese earthquake. No one doubts that it was a divine infliction, and who can doubt its moral effect? Japan cannot strike back at God. If the destruction had been occasioned by some other nation, however, it would be considered one of the greatest wrongs ever perpetrated against a people. It was much worse than anything done in the great war, for they were given no warning and no chance to defend themselves. So that, in reality, the proposed distinction is not between various classes of evil, but that which is from the hand of God and that which is from the hand of man.

Perhaps the most notable and striking dissimilarity in the usage of *evil* and *sin* lies in their relation to sacrifice. Indeed, that blurred idea, which struggles so unsuccessfully to crystallize in such unscriptural expressions as “moral evil,” may be clearly conveyed in the question, “Does evil require a sacrifice?” A careful consideration of the hundreds of passages in which it occurs will lead to the startling conviction that it is never connected with the altar and the blood. The many occasions where God is said to do evil are, of course, as righteous and holy as all His acts must ever be. In the hundreds of cases where men do evil, ▶ ↪

the presumption is that the evil is also sin and this is pointed out on rare occasions (I Kings 16:19). Nevertheless we have found no passage in which the evil, as such, is to be covered by sacrifice.

In convincing contrast to this, the student who will go over all of the passages in which “sin” occurs, will find “sacrifice” and “sin” such close companions that, in scores of cases, in the feminine form, the word “sin” has been rendered “sin offering.” In Leviticus, “evil” is mentioned scarcely a half-dozen times, and then mostly in the latter part, and never in connection with the sacrifices, while “sin” (including the rendering “sin offering”) occurs over a hundred times.

Never is there the slightest hint that *evil* must be expiated by an offering. This is necessary only when it is sinful. A striking sentence is found in the midst of one of the definitions of the so-called trespass or guilt offering – the very place where we would expect to see evil condemned.

If a soul swear pronouncing with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatsoever it be ... then he shall be guilty ... (Leviticus 5:4).

Until not only the true significance, but the moral bias of our vocabulary agrees with the divine usage, we shall not be able to fathom such truths as the origin

of evil and the source of sin. We have an innate repugnance, an instinctive abhorrence of any suggestion which seems to associate sin with God. So long as we think of evil essentially as sin, the door is barred to an understanding of its introduction into the universe.

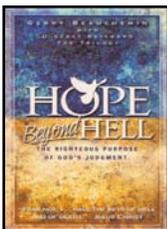
The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, usually uses one of two different Greek words in rendering the Hebrew for *evil*. One is the element *kak* and its derivatives, which we render “EVIL,” and the common text translates as “evil, wicked, harm, ill, bad, vex, hurt,” etc. This corresponds closely with the Hebrew in its usage. The other word is *ponēr*; literally MISERY-GUSH, or *wicked*. This is usually translated *evil, wicked, iniquity*, etc. It carries with it a moral taint. Its contexts, associated with the word “evil,” have given the word the moral bias which has gradually spread until it seems to taint the acts of Jehovah Himself.

We may be sure, then, that evil, as spoken of in the Scriptures, is an act which shatters and demolishes and brings with it a train of trouble and distress; but it is neither right nor wrong in itself. This leads us to consider the subject of sin.

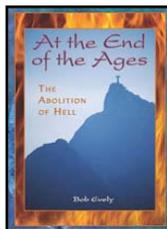
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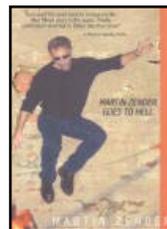
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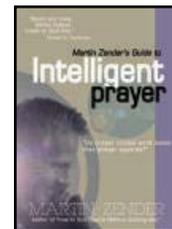
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