

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 11 Its Effectuation-Continued

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Transcript

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

Chapter 11

Its Effectuation-Continued

That which is here to engage our attention is the work performed by the Mediator in order to heal the breach between a righteous God and His sinful people and thus effect a mutual reconciliation. This will bring before us the most wonderful, awe-inspiring and glorious events in all the ways and works of God. It will conduct us to ground which is ineffably holy, and on which it becomes to tread with the utmost reverence and circumspection. The work of Christ is absolutely unique, being without precedent or parallel. Nothing whatever can be known about it save that which is revealed on it in Holy Writ. Neither philosophy, science, nor metaphysics can afford us the slightest assistance in the understanding of it. Carnal reasoning concerning it is utterly worthless and highly presumptuous. The great mystery of godliness is made known unto faith. Yet the utmost diligence and earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit's aid are called for in our searching of the Scriptures and in carefully weighing all they make known on the Death Divine, that faith may lack no part of the foundation on which it is to rest and none of the materials on which it is to feed. In our last we sought to present more or less a general survey of the ground we hope to cover under this particular aspect of our subject. Now we must proceed to more detail. This will require us to examine closely what the Incarnate Son did in order to "make peace" between an offended God and His lawbreaking people, which was the relation. Christ bore to them, the character in which He acted in that stupendous undertaking, and what was the office He discharged. It is all important at the outset to recognize that the Person we are to be occupied with was none other than Jehovah's "Fellow" (Zech. 13:7), co-essential and co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. Though God the Son took upon Him human nature and became the Son of man, yet in so doing He did not cease to be a Divine Person. It was the theanthropic (Divine-human) constitution of His person which qualified Him for His mediation, for as the God-man nothing could be too difficult for Him to effect or too great for Him to accomplish. The dignity of His person gave infinite value to His work. The wrong done by sin unto God was so incalculably enormous and His hatred of the same is so great that only a perfect and infinitely meritorious satisfaction could appease Him, and obviously such a satisfaction could be rendered by none but a person of infinite dignity and worth. Our sins are committed against the infinite Majesty of Heaven and therefore are they infinitely culpable, and unless an atonement of infinite value is made for us, our sins must entail infinite

suffering—therefore the punishment of the wicked is necessarily eternal. Sin, so far as it could do so, struck at the very throne of God. It was an act of high treason, a disowning of His authority, an attempt on the part of the creature to overthrow the Divine government. Sin has made such a breach in the order of things appointed by God that no mere creature could possibly repair it—least of all man, for he is the culprit, guilty and defiled. If then the breach is to be healed, God must "lay help upon One that is mighty" (Ps. 89:19). Writing on "The heinousness of human guilt" Jas. Hervey said, "Ten thousand volumes, written on purpose to display the aggravations of my various acts of disobedience, could not so effectually convince me of their inconceivable enormity as the consideration of that all-glorious Person, who, to make an atonement for them, spilt the last drop of His blood. I have sinned, may every child of Adam say; and what shall I do unto you, O You Observer of men? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Vain commutation, and such as would be rejected by the blessed God with the utmost abhorrence. Will all the potentates, that sway the sceptre in a thousand kingdoms, devote their royal and honored lives to rescue an obnoxious creature, from the stroke of vengeance? Alas, it must cost more, incomparably more, to expiate the malignity of sin and save a guilty wrath from Hell. Will all the principalities of Heaven be content to assume my nature and resign themselves to death for my pardon? Even this would be too mean a satisfaction for inexorable Justice, too scanty a reparation of God's injured honor. "So flagrant is human guilt that nothing but a victim of infinite dignity could constitute an adequate propitiation. He who said 'Let there be light, and there was light,' let there be a firmament, and immediately the blue curtains floated in the sky; He must take flesh, He must feel the fierce torments of crucifixion and pour out His soul in agonies, if ever such transgressors are pardoned." There could be no satisfaction for the sinner without atonement, for God has declared He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:7). Equally evident is it that no atonement can be made by the violator of God's Law, for he can neither provide reparation for past offences—being a moral bankrupt, devoid of any merit; nor render perfect obedience in the present—being a depraved creature. God's Law requires righteousness of character before it will receive righteousness of conduct, and therefore a fallen creature is utterly disqualified to render acceptable obedience. The Law will not compound with our sinfulness by modifying its holy requirements. "Pay that which you owe" is its unchanging demand. After what has been pointed out it should be quite clear that first, in order to save His people from their sins the incarnate Son of God must serve as their Substitute, acting in their stead and rendering satisfaction to the Law for them. By substitution is meant the transference of obligation from those who incurred it to One who willingly shouldered the same in their stead. The substitutionary death of Christ means far more than that He died for the benefit of all who savingly believe in Him. It signifies that He entered their Law-place and received what was due them and that through His sacrificial death He so expiated their sins that nothing can be laid to their charge, that they stand "unblameable and unreprouable" in God's sight (Col. 1:22). "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:4). "For Christ also has suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Though there is no parallel to the greatest transaction in all history, though there is no analogy to the relations sustained to God and to His people in any of the relations of mere creatures to one another, yet God has graciously adapted a series of types, historical and ceremonial, to the illustration of His grand plan of redemption and to adumbrate various aspects of the office and work of Christ, and in them the wisdom of God is signally displayed. Of the first person to whom the Holy Spirit ascribes faith it is recorded that, "Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. by which he obtained witness that he was righteous" (Heb. 11:4). Cain brought of the fruit of the ground (the product of his own toil) an offering unto the Lord, but unto it He "had not respect. "But Abel brought "of the firstborn of his flock and the fat of it"—showing it had been slain. Realizing that

death was his due, but that God graciously accepted a substitute in his place, he put a bleeding lamb between his sinful self and the Holy God. The same elementary yet fundamental truth was taught the Hebrews on that most memorable night in their history. Jehovah had declared, "about midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die" (Ex. 11:4, 5). Sufficient attention had not been paid to the words "all, in." There were to be no exceptions: the firstborn sons of Israel equally with the Egyptians were to be slain. But though no exception was made, a difference was drawn: a substitute was provided for the former, though not for the latter. The Israelites were bidden to take a male lamb, without blemish, to slay it, and sprinkle its blood on the posts of their doors, and the Lord promised, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Ex. 12). The angel of death entered not their houses, for judgment had already been executed there, the Lamb being slain as the substitute. In the light of that we are to understand "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." (1 Cor. 5:7). But it was in the wilderness, after the Levitical priesthood was appointed and the tabernacle had been erected, that the Lord taught His people more fully the grand truth of pardon and cleansing, acceptance and blessing, through a substitute. A wide field of study is here opened to us, but we can only now briefly mention its outstanding lessons. First, in the unblemished animal required for sacrifice, God showed His people the perfections of the substitute in the room of their imperfections. Second, in their being required to bring such an offering, the claims of God were enforced. Third, in the words "he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev. 1:4) there was an identifying of the offerer with his offering. Fourth, on the great day of atonement, Aaron was required to "lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat" (Lev. 16:21), thereby a transfer of guilt being signified. Fifth, an Israelite was not only required to furnish the offering, but "he will kill the bull before the Lord" (Lev. 1:5) was the order: in this way he acknowledged that death was his own due and proof was furnished of God's displeasure against sin. Sixth, "and there came fire out from before the Lord and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces" (Lev. 9:24 and compare 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Chron. 7:1). In that fire we see the holy wrath of the Judge consuming the victim in the sinner's room. Seventh, "And a man that is clean will gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it will be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation. It is a purification for sin" (Num. 19:9). "In the ashes we have the proof that the wrath had spent itself, that the penalty was paid, that the work was done. 'It is finished' was the voice of the ashes" (H. Bonar). Thus was God's mercy expressed in a righteous way. The main thing to grasp in connection with the sacrifices to which we have all too briefly alluded is, that they were not eucharistic but expiatory - not tokens of thanksgiving, but vicarious oblations. The animal or bird was put in the place of the one who brought it and is termed an "offering unto the Lord for his sin" and it would "make an atonement for him concerning his sin" (Lev. 5:6). It was then, a substitutionary sacrifice, slain in the stead of the offerer, to signify what he deserved and by which he was personally saved from undergoing the penalty. It was literally and specifically a life for a life, a life devoted to God in sacrifice. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement (a propitiation or appeasement) for your souls. It is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). Therefore did God enjoin upon His people "No soul of you will eat blood" (v. 5), it was to be held sacred by them. Should it be asked, Why did God appoint the slaying of animals, the bringing of so many costly offerings to His altar, which were so frequently repeated? The answer is simple and conclusive, though it may be stated in a variety of ways. It was to signify that, in the purpose of God, the antitypical Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. It was to inform His people that they must look outside themselves for salvation. It was thus to keep before

them a continual reminder of His righteousness and what sin called for at His hands. It was to educate men for "the good things to come" by shadowing forth the great sacrifice. It was to furnish the N. T. saints with an infallible dictionary, for if we would understand the language which Christ and His apostles used in connection with the Sacrifice of Calvary we must needs define the terms employed of the grand Antitype by the meaning they obviously bear in the types—as 1 Corinthians 5-7 is to be interpreted in the light of Exodus 12. It is the light of the Levitical offerings we should read "the Gospel of Isaiah 53" and regard the N. T. references to the atoning sacrifice of our Savior. Who can fail to see that the words "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquities of us all" (Isa. 53:6) look back to "Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel. ..and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited" (Lev. 16:21,22), and that "who His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24) is an echo of the same language. When we read that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3) are we not to regard the reference as being both' the types and the prophecies of the O. T. When we are told that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8) can it signify anything else than, that as a sacrificial offering was slain in the stead of the offerer, so Christ endured the penalty which our sins call for! It needs to be insisted upon that the death of Christ was something more than an unparalleled act of benevolence, enduring crucifixion for the good of others. It was a penal death, in which He vicariously endured the penalty of the Law in the stead of others. The suffering of martyrs for the good of their cause, of patriots for their country, of philanthropists for mankind, are not "vicarious" for they are not substitutionary. Vicarious suffering is suffering endured in the place of others. Christ's sufferings were vicarious in precisely the same way that the death of animals in the O. T. sacrifices was in lieu of the death of the transgressors offering them. While in many passages of the N. T. the Holy Spirit has used the Greek "huper" which is rendered "for" yet in Mark 10:45 He has employed the decisive "anti." He gave his life a ransom for (anti—in the stead of), many. In Matthew 2:22 "anti" is rightly rendered "in the room of." Compare Matthew 5:38, Luke 11:11, Romans 12:17 where anti is rendered "For." But does not the substitutionary sufferings of Christ raise a difficulty even in the minds of the reverent. Let us face it squarely and state it frankly. Was it altogether just that an innocent person should suffer in the stead of the guilty? At the back of many minds there lurks the suspicion that, though it was amazing grace and surpassing love which gave the Lord of glory to die for poor sinners, yet was it not, strictly speaking, a breach of equity? Was it right that One who perfectly honored God and illustriously magnified His Law by a flawless and perpetual obedience, should have to suffer its penalty and endure its awful curse? To answer, It had to be. There was no other way of saving Os, supplies no direct answer to the question. It is merely arguing on the Jesuitical basis that "the end justifies the means." Far better to remain silent in token of our ignorance than thus to sully the character of God. But such a suspicion is groundless and such ignorance causeless as we hope to yet show. To say that sin must be punished that the penalty of the broken law could not be revoked, is but to repeat what Scripture clearly affirms. But to draw the conclusion that therefore an innocent Substitute had to be penalized in the Stead of the guilty is to impeach the Divine justice. Every regenerated person must feel that it had been infinitely better for the whole of Adam's race to have suffered eternally in Hell, rather than that God should act unrighteously in delivering His people from there. Such a thing could not be, for God "cannot deny Himself" that is act contrary to His own perfections. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works" (Ps. 145:17), and most certainly the greatest and grandest of His works, that which supremely manifested and promoted His glory, is no exception to that rule. He has declared Himself to be "a just God and a Saviour" (Isa. 45:21) and never was His justice more gloriously displayed than at the Cross. Of old the question was asked, "Who ever perished being innocent?" (Job 4:7) and surely we may unhesitatingly reply, No one ever did under the righteous government of God. He who "will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:7)

will by no means afflict the innocent. Startling as it must sound, it was not the innocent whom the sword of Divine justice smote at Calvary. And this brings us to say, second, in order to be our Savior Christ had to act as the Substitute of His people, and in order to be their Substitute He first assumed the office of Surety. As their Surety, as their legal Representative, Christ took upon Him their legal obligations—as the husband assumes the debts of the woman he marries. The guilt of His people's sins were charged to Christ's account, and therefore justice legally and righteously exacted payment from him. Though personally innocent, Christ was officially guilty when He suffered "the Just for the unjust." Much remains yet to be said but here we must stop.

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