

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 13 Its Effectuation-Concluded

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Transcript

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Chapter 13

Its Effectuation-Concluded

In seeking to show what Christ did in order to effect reconciliation between God and His people two methods of presentation were open to us—each warranted by the analogy of Scripture. To begin with the work of Christ as it is usually apprehended by us, working back to its ordination by God; or to start with the Divine appointment and trace out the progressive accomplishment of the same on the plane of human history. In the last three articles we followed the former plan. Now, to aid the reader still further, we will reverse the process. Under our fifth main division we saw how that a Covenant was entered into between the Father and the Son, in which everything necessary for the redemption of His elect was mutually agreed upon and settled; here we are to contemplate what was actually done in fulfillment of that covenant engagement. First, having agreed to become the Mediator or Daysman between God and His people, the Beloved of the Father became incarnate. Oneness of nature was indispensable, for there must be a conjunction effected between the Redeemer and the redeemed if He was to be identified with those on whose behalf He acted. Accordingly, "He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16) that He might have a right of property in us as Man as well as God. In Galatians 4:4, 5 we are told that the Son became incarnate "to redeem them that were under the Law." By the law of Israel the right of redemption belonged to him that was next of blood (Lev. 25:25; Ruth 2:20). It was by being made like His brethren that Christ acquired the human and legal title to pay the ransom-price for His Church. The obedience of man to the Divine Law is that to which "life" is promised (Matthew 19:17; Rom. 7:10). An angel's obeying in our stead would not have been the establishment of the original law, nor could life for men be claimed as the reward of angelic obedience. By man came death, and consequently, by man must come the resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:21,22). It was essential that the Son of God should become incarnate and be in full possession of our humanity that He might obey the Law and bring in everlasting righteousness for His people. It was His becoming flesh which laid the foundation for the imputation of our liabilities unto Christ and His merits, obedience, and sufferings unto us. Second, in becoming incarnate the Son of God "took upon Him (voluntary action!) the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7)—God's Servant, but on our behalf. That service consisted of His entering into the office of Surety. "Suretyship is a relation constituted by covenant engagement, by which parties become legally

one so that they can be dealt with as such in law" (J. Armour). Or to state it in other words, a surety is one who gives security for another that he will perform something which the other is bound to do, so that in case of the failure of the first party he will perform it for him. It was His natural union with His people that made possible and proper Christ's federal oneness with them. Thus, Christ as "the Surety of the covenant" came under obligation to perform the condition of the covenant in lieu of and behalf of His elect. It must be carefully borne in mind that the Covenant was made with the covenantees (the saints) in the person of their Head. Thus when Christ came forth as the Surety of the covenant He appeared as the Representative of His people, assuming their liabilities and discharging their responsibilities, making satisfaction for their sins and bringing in an everlasting righteousness, and that in such a way that the Law was "magnified and made honorable" (Isa. 42:21) and that He (and His people in Him) became entitled to the award of the Law. We shall devote a disproportionate space to this essential point. Third, in becoming our Surety Christ engaged to do all that was necessary in order to restore His people unto the favor of God and to secure for them the right of everlasting felicity. The first of those engagements or terms was His meeting the original and righteous demands which God made of them and in Adam under the Covenant of Works, namely, to render in their place perfect and perpetual obedience to the Divine Law. The second of those terms was that He should endure the penalty of the Law which they had broken, and this He did when He was "made a curse" for them and suffered the wrath of God on their behalf. From the first Adam the law demanded nothing but full conformity to its precept, but from the last Adam it necessarily demanded not only holy obedience but also penal suffering, that He might atone for our sins and blot out our iniquities. It has been rightly pointed out that "In the original institute the whole substance of moral obedience was summed up in the single precept, relative to the fruit forbidden. As the Law is a unity, and he who offends in one point is guilty of all; so when the spirit of obedience is tested in a single point only, and confined to that point, a failure here, brings upon man the guilt of the whole—he is liable to the whole penalty. Now this was the sum total of the Law, as a covenant given to Adam, that he should obey, and as the reward of obedience should receive life. This glorious reward was held up as the motive prompting to choice on the side of law and right. The law was ordained unto life (Rom. 7:10). This is its object, and to this it was adapted. But it failed in the hands of the first Adam, and the last Adam comes in to make it good, to establish its principle and secure its object" (G. Junkin, on "Justification"). When Christ appeared as the Surety of His people it was with the affirmation "Lo, I come, to do Your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). Note well the word to "do" God's will (before He suffered His wrath for our sins)—to "do" what the first Adam failed to perform. The fundamental nature of God's government must needs have been changed had He granted to men "life" on any other terms than what He had presented under the Covenant of Works, and to which man agreed. The Gospel contains no substitute for the Law, but reveals that remedial scheme by which is confirmed and made good the principles of righteousness originally laid down by God to Adam. "Do we then make void the Law through faith (in the gospel)? God forbid. Yea, (is the triumphant answer) we establish the Law" (Rom. 3:31). The unchanging terms of the Covenant of Works is "This do (obey the Law) and you shall live" (Luke 10:28). And since I have broken the Law and am incapable of keeping it, then "life"—the reward of the Law—could never be mine unless the Surety had "this" done on my behalf. Therefore was He "made under the Law" for His appointed and agreed-upon task was not only to "make an end of sins" but also to "bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24), that is, a justifying righteousness for the whole election of grace. The Lord Jesus freely consented to pay His people's debts, both in making satisfaction to the Law which they had broken and in rendering perfect obedience in their stead. That "righteousness" Christ was working out for us from the moment of His birth until upon the cross He cried "It is finished." In executing the great work of our redemption and reconciliation the incarnate Son paid homage to the Divine Law. He was not only "made under" it, but as

He declared "Your Law is within My heart" (Ps. 40:8)—enshrined in His affections, and His whole life was one of complete subjection to it. Christ as the Sin-bearer and Sin-expiator only gives one side of His work. The other is His holy obedience—the two together furnishing us a complete view of the satisfaction which He rendered to God. Christ's obedience was equally the work of the One for the many, the Head for His body, and equally essential as His death. His first recorded utterance "Do you not wish that I must be about My Father's business!" (Luke 2:49) shows clearly that He had entered this world on a special errand, that He was engaged in a specific work unto the Father, that He owed obedience to Him—as the "must" plainly intimates. His first utterance on emerging from His private life struck the same note. When presenting Himself for baptism John demurred, for to comply made Christ appear to be a sinner, for it was "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). But it was not as a private person Christ presented Himself, but as "the Lamb of God which takes (or "bears"), away the sin of the world" (John 1:29-31). To His forerunner's objection the Saviour replied, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). The "now" is emphatic in the Greek. Now that I have "made Myself of no reputation," now that I am discharging My suretyship. It "became" Him to fulfill His engagement. As the One obeying for the many ("us!") it was requisite that He "fulfill the righteousness"—submit to God's positive, institutions or ordinances as well as the moral Law. In His first public address Christ declared "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Those words supply us with a clear-cut definition of His mission and the character of the work in which He was engaged. In what way did He "fulfill" the Prophets? Why, by doing those things which they had foretold—such as preaching good tidings (Isa. 61:1) and healing the sick (Isa. 35:4-6)—and by suffering the indignities and pains which they had announced. In precisely the same way He "fulfilled" the Law, namely, by rendering the obedience which its precepts required, and by enduring the punishment which its penalty demanded. The grand end of the incarnation was that Christ should provide for His people a righteousness which excelled that of the scribes and pharisees (Matthew 5:20). "To satisfy both the requirements of His justice and the abundance of His mercy, God determined that a full satisfaction should be made unto His Law, and such a satisfaction that it was in that way more honored than if it had never been broken, or the whole race damned. In order to do this He appointed that Christ should serve as the Substitute and Surety of His people. He must stand as their Representative and fulfill all righteousness for them and endure the curse in their stead, so that they might be legally reckoned to have obeyed and suffered in Him" (Thos. Goodwin, Puritan). Accordingly we find Christ saying "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work" (John 4:34). The single principle that guided His holy life was obedience to God. In this way He not only left us an example to follow, but was working out for us a righteousness to be imputed to our account and by which we are justified and entitled to the reward of the Law. Calvary was not the beginning but the end of His life of perfect obedience—as the "unto death" of Philippians 2:8 testifies. Fourth, God transferred the sins of His people and placed them upon their Surety the moment He assumed the office. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquities of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Not experimentally, but legally; not the corruption of them, but the guilt; not that He was defiled by them, but that He became subject to their penalty. The sins of His people were charged to the account of the Holy One. So truly was this the case that He acknowledged the actuality of it crying, "For innumerable evils have compassed Me about. My iniquities have taken hold upon Me" (Ps. 40:12); and again, "O God, You know My foolishness, and My sins are not hid from You" (Ps. 69:5). That was the language of the Surety, as the context clearly shows. Fifth, because Christ entered this world charged with the guilt of His people, Divine justice dealt with Him accordingly—as was shown under the first article on Christ effectuating reconciliation as our Substitute. Because Christ had shouldered the awful burden of His people's sins, He must be paid sin's wages. Because the Just had so united Himself to the

unjust, He must suffer "the due reward of their iniquities." He must, accordingly, be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace must be upon Him, if by our stripes we are to be healed (Isa. 53:4,5). It was fore-announced "He shall bear their iniquities" (v. 11) and iniquities and guilt are inseparable, and since guilt signifies liability to punishment, Christ must be penalized in our stead. O that this article may be so blest to some reader that he may, for the first time, be able to truly say: "Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die—Another's life, Another's death, I rest my soul eternally." Sixth, because Christ was "made sin" for His people (2 Cor. 5:21) He was "made a curse" for them (Gal. 3:13)— that curse consisted of the avenging wrath of God. The Sinbearer was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). The august dignity of Christ's person did not avail to any abatement of the Divine curse. God "spared not His own Son" (Rom. 8:32). So far from sparing Him, the Judge of all the earth, the moral Governor of this world, the Administrator of law cried, "Awake O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, says the Lord of hosts. Smite the Shepherd" (Zech. 13:7). Though He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth, yet it "pleased Jehovah to bruise Him. He has put Him to grief" (Isa. 53:9,10). The wages of sin is death, and as physical death consists of the severance of the soul from the body so spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God, and on the cross Christ was forsaken by God. We must therefore look higher than the "band of men and officers" as the servants of the chief priests and pharisees sent to apprehend Christ in the Garden, and see in them the agents of Divine justice, though they knew not what they did. We must needs direct our eyes above the Roman soldiers as they "plaited a crown of thorns and placed it on Christ's head" and see in them the executives of the Divine Law, branding our Surety with the marks of the curse (see Gen. 3:17, 18). We are required to exercise the vision of faith and behold in Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate doing "whatsoever God's hand and counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28) in order that the terms of the Everlasting Covenant should be carried out, the requirements of righteousness satisfied, the holy wrath of God appeased, and the sins of His people forever removed from before Him, "as far as the east is from the west." Seventh, because Christ rendered full satisfaction to Divine justice, He redeemed His people unto Himself, and they are not only absolved from all guilt but are reconciled to God. Not only are they no longer under the frown of the Divine Judge, but His smile rests upon them. Not only are they freed from His displeasure, but they are restored to His favor. Not only do they stand "unblameable and unproveable in God's sight," but they have an inalienable title to everlasting felicity. There cannot be a substitution without a dual imputation. If the debt of the debtor is charged to the surety, then upon his discharge of the same the payment of the surety must be credited to the debtor. Accordingly we are told, "For He has made Him (legally) to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made (legally) the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21)—there is the counter-imputation. Christ's righteousness is reckoned to the account of His people. "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners (legally constituted so, and then as the consequence, experimentally became such) so by the obedience of One shall many be made (legally constituted so, and then as the consequence, experimentally become such) righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Christ took our place that we might take His. Christ removed our sins that we might be clothed with His merits. Because Christ kept the Law for us, we are entitled to "reign in life" (Rom. 5:17). "The Forerunner is for us entered into Heaven" (Heb. 6:20). Observe well how Christ demanded this as His legal right. "Father, I will that they also whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am" (John 17:24). I have fully discharged their obligations, I have wrought out for them an everlasting righteousness, now give them that which, for My sake, they are justly entitled to. "The moment the believing sinner accepts Christ as his Substitute, he finds himself not only cleared from his guilt, but rewarded—he gets all heaven because of the glory and merits of Christ. The Atonement we preach is one of absolute exchange. It is that Christ took our place literally, in order that we might take His

place literally—that God regarded and treated Christ as the sinner, and that He regards and treats the believing sinner, as Christ. From the moment we believe, God looks upon us as if we were Christ. He takes it as if Christ's atonement had been our atonement, and as if Christ's life had been our life; and He beholds, accepts, blesses, and rewards on the ground that all Christ was and did is ours" (G. S. Bishop "Doctrines of Grace"). What a glorious Gospel! Then proclaim it freely and boldly ministers of Christ. From all that has been pointed out it should, we think, be more or less clear to the simplest reader that the breach between God and His sinning people has been righteously healed. That is to say, reconciliation has been effected in a way both gracious and legal. To have brought this suit into the court of Divine Law had availed nothing unless provision had been made for so ordering its process and judgment that the sinner might be honorably accepted and that God might be both "just and the Justifier of him which believes in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The Law must be on the sinner's side. His absolver and not his condemner, his justifier and not his accuser. That provision has been made by means of the Surety-Substitute, by the transference of total indebtedness from those who incurred it to One to incurred it not and fully discharged the same. It is by the principle and on the ground of Suretyship and Substitution that God's justice is displayed in all His transactions with the believing sinner. It is this which is the climacteric in the good news proclaimed by the heralds of Christ. The grand Evangel not only exhibits the knowledge-surpassing love of God, but as the apostle declares "therein is the righteousness of God revealed." Grace indeed reigns, but it does so "through righteousness" (Rom. 1:17; 5:21). "Christ bears the sins of many because in His covenanted identification with those 'many' their sins are sinlessly and truly His. And unto the many sons and daughters of the covenant, the Father imputes the righteousness of the Son, because, in their covenant oneness with the Son, His righteousness is undeservedly but truly their own righteousness. And all throughout 'the judgment of God is according to truth' and equity" (H. Martin, on "The Atonement"). Thus we behold once more that, at the cross, Mercy and Truth met together, Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other (Ps. 85:10). It is not a peace at any price, a peace wherein justice is sacrificed and the law is flouted, but it righteous peace, one that glorifies all the Divine perfections. Such is the wondrous and blessed message of the Gospel.

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