

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 15 Its Meaning-Continued

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Transcript

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Chapter 15

Its Meaning-Continued

In our last chapter we pointed out the needs-be for and the importance of making a clear distinction between the Atonement and reconciliation, that the sacrifice of Christ was the cause and the means of which reconciliation was the effect and end. Some theologians, and good ones too, have demurred against terming the offering of Christ a "means," insisting that it was the procuring cause of our salvation. The fact is, it was both a means and a cause according as we view it in different relations. It was the meritorious cause of re-instating us in the favor of God and of procuring for us the Holy Spirit; the means by which God's mercy is exercised in a way of justice. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). It may be regarded as a mean or medium in respect of the originating cause: thus grace is presented as the source from which it sprang, the redemptive work of Christ the channel by which it flows. In Hebrews 9:15 Christ's death is expressly termed the "means." Some may be inclined to chafe at the "distinctions" we frequently call attention to, considering we are too prone to confuse the minds of the simple by introducing "theological niceties." But did not the apostle pray that the Philippian saints might be moved by God to "try things that differ." We rather fear that such disrelish of these distinctions is a sign of mental slovenliness and spiritual slothfulness. Is it of no significance, or of no importance to us, to take notice of the fact that while the Scriptures speak of "the wrath of the Lamb" and of the "wrath of God" being upon both the non-elect and elect in a state of nature, they never once make reference to "the wrath of the Father!" If any of our readers sneer or shrug their shoulders at that as a mere "splitting of hairs," we are very sorry for them. God's Word is made up of words, and it behooves us to weigh every one of them attentively. If we do not, we shall obtain little more than a blurred impression rather than a clear-cut view of the Truth. The work of Christ was indeed one and indivisible, nevertheless, it is capable of and requires to be viewed from various angles. For that reason, among others, the typical altar was not round but "foursquare" (Ex. 27:1). The nature of Christ's work was fourfold in its character: being a federal work—as the Representative of His people, a vicarious work—as their Surety and Substitute, a penal work—as He took their Law-place, a sacrificial work—offering Himself unto God on their behalf. The work of Christ accomplished four chief things. It propitiated God Himself, it expiated the sins of His people, it reinstated them in the Divine favor, and it estated them an everlasting

inheritance of glory. There is also a fourfold consequence of Christ's work so far as His people are concerned. The guilt of their transgressions is cancelled so that they receive remission of sins; they are delivered from all bondage — redeemed, they are made legally and experimentally righteous; all enmity between God and them is removed—they are reconciled. In our last we also exposed the sophistry of the Socinian contention that if the propitiatory character of Christ's sacrifice be insisted upon, then we repudiate the uncaused love and free grace of God. We sought to show that while the shedding of Christ's blood was an appeasement of the Divine wrath against God's people, it was not an inducement of His love unto them. Thus, in the latter half of our foregoing chapter we dealt more with the negative side in showing what the oblation of Christ was not designed to accomplish, namely, to procure God's good will unto sinners. Now we must turn to the positive side and point out what the Atonement was designed to effect. We need to be constantly on our guard against exalting the wondrous love of God to the deprecation of His ineffable holiness. If on the one hand it is blessed to continually bear in mind that never has there been such love as the love of God—so pure, so intense, so satisfying; it is equally necessary not to forget there has never been a law like unto the Law of God—so spiritual, so holy, so inexorable. Divine love unto sinners originated reconciliation, but the Divine Law required that love to flow in a righteous channel. The method which it has pleased God to employ is one in which there is no compromise between love and law, but rather one where each has found full expression. At the cross we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the spotless purity of the Law, the unbending character of God's government, and the righteous outflow of His mercy unto Hell-deserving transgressors. The same conjunction of Divine light and love appears in connection with our receiving blessings in response to Christ's intercession, as is clear from His words, "I say not unto you that! will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you" (John 16:26, 27)—which was to assure us that we not only have the benefit of Christ's prayers but the Father Himself so loves us that that alone is sufficient to obtain anything at His hands. Think not that the Father is hard to be exhorted and that blessings have to be wrung from Him by My supplications. No, they issue from His love, but in an honorable way, and that we may appreciate them the more. But in our day it is necessary to consider reconciliation more from the standpoint of God's holiness and justice, for during the last two or three generations there has been an entirely disproportionate emphasis on His love. While it is true that at the cross we behold the highest expression of God's love to sinners, yet it is equally true that there we also witness the supreme manifestation of God's hatred of sin, and the one should never be allowed to crowd out or obscure the other. The apostle hesitated not to affirm that God "set forth (His Son) to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare (or demonstrate) His righteousness" (Rom. 3:25)—observe well how those words "to declare His righteousness" are repeated in the very next verse. If the question is asked, Why did God give His Son to die for sinners rather than have them to perish in their sins? the answer is, Because He loved them. But the answer to: Why did He give His Son to be a propitiation for sinners rather than save them without one? is Because He loved righteousness and hated iniquity. To any who have followed us closely through these chapters up to the present point it should be quite clear, we think, that they err gravely who contend that reconciliation is entirely one-sided, that it is sinners who need to be reconciled to God, that in nowise did God require reconciling to His people, seeing that He changes not, that He loves them with an everlasting love, and that it was entirely His good-will and benevolence which provided the Atonement for them. Yet since it is at this very point that so many have departed from the Truth, we must labor it and enter into more detail. It is sin which has caused the breach between the Holy One and His fallen creatures, and since He was the One wronged and injured by sin, surely it is self-evident that reparation must be made unto Him for that offence and outrage. Why, every passage in which "propitiation" occurs is proof that God needed to be reconciled to sinners, that His wrath must be averted before peace could be made. It is of first importance to recognize that "reconciliation"

necessarily implies alienation, and that both reconciliation and alienation connote a relationship between God and us. Alienation signifies that a state of enmity and hostility exists between two parties, reconciliation that the cause and ground of the alienation has been removed, so that amity now obtains between them. It is therefore essential that we define carefully and accurately the changed relationship between God and His people which was brought about by the entrance of sin. Though the everlasting objects of God's eternal favor have been chosen in Christ from all eternity and blest with all spiritual blessings in Him, nevertheless the elect (in Adam) apostatized from God, and in consequence of the Fall fell under the curse of His Law. Considered as the Judge of all, God became antagonistic to them; considered as fallen creatures (what they were in themselves) they were by nature enmity against Him. The entrance of sin into this world brought the Church into a condition of guilt before the Holy One, yet because of the Lamb being slain in the purpose of God, the Father's love never ceased unto His people, without any injury unto His justice. There could be no thought of reconciliation between a holy God and a polluted rebel until full satisfaction had been made to His broken Law. Sin raised a barrier between God and us which we could in no wise surmount. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you" (Isa. 59:2). Sin resulted in alienation between God and man. This was made unmistakably plain right after the Fall, in Eden itself, for we are told, "God drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). Let it be carefully remembered that God was not there dealing with Adam simply as a private person, but as the federal head of the race, as the legal representative of all his posterity—both of the elect and the non-elect. The "flaming sword" was emblematic of the vindictive justice of God. The natural man as such was excluded from Paradise and effectually barred from the tree of life. That it turned "every way" precluded any avenue of approach. The reconciliation must be mutual because the alienation was mutual. Christ had to remove God's wrath from us, as well as our sins from before God. If God were not reconciled to us, it would avail us nothing to lay aside our enmity against Him. The fact that the flaming sword "turned every way" to bar man's access to the tree of life signified that by no effort of his could the sinner repair the damage which his capital offence had wrought, and declared in the language of the N.T. that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). By nature we are "the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), and by practice "alienated and enemies in our mind by wicked works" (Col. 1:21), and unless peace be made and reconciliation effected we should neither have any encouragement to go to Him for mercy nor any hope for acceptance with Him. The throwing down of the weapons of our rebellion would avail nothing while we were obnoxious to the curse of the Divine Law. How then shall we be delivered from the wrath to come is thus the all-important question, for His wrath is "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18). The fallen sons of men have not only removed themselves to a guilty distance from God, but He has judicially and morally removed Himself from them. "The Lord is far from the wicked" (Prov. 15:29). And men have wickedly departed from Him, God has righteously withdrawn from them, and thus the distance is mutual, and ever increasing. While Adam remained obedient, his Creator admitted him to near communion with Him, as is intimated by His "walking in the garden in the cool of the day," but when he transgressed the commandment, He withdrew His favor and thrust him out of Paradise. Had no Atonement been provided there had never again been any communion with God—any more than there is between Him and the fallen angels. This awful state of distance from God is still the condition of all the unregenerate—elect or non-elect, the interposition of Christ availing them not while they continue rejecting Him, as is made unmistakably plain by "he that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). While they remain in a state of nature the elect, equally with the non-elect lie under the guilt of sin and the condemnation of the Law, and are therefore obnoxious to God—considered

as the moral Governor and Judge of all. "God hates sinners as they hate Him, for we are children of wrath from the womb, and that wrath abides on us till we enter into God's peace; and the more wicked we are, the more we increase His wrath. 'He is angry with the wicked every day' (Ps. 7:11); they are under His curse. Whatever be the secret purposes of His grace, yet so they are by the sentence of His Law, and according to that we must judge of our condition" (Manton vol. 13, p. 257). So too, J. Owen: "Reconciliation is the renewing of friendship between parties before at variance: both parties being properly said to be reconciled, even both he that offended and he that was offended. God and man were set at distance, at enmity, and variance by sin, man was the party offending, God offended, and the alienation was mutual on every side" ("The Death of Death" chap. 6, 2nd para.). But how may God be said to love or hate believers before their reconciliation since He is the Author of it? Let us give a condensation of Charnock's reply. "First, God loves them with a love of purpose or election, but till grace be wrought in them not with a love of acceptance. We are within the love of His purpose as we are designed to be the servants of Christ, but not within the love of His acceptance till we are actually His servants—'He that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God' (Rom. 14:18). They are alienated from God while in a state of nature and not accepted by God till in a state of grace. There is in God a love of good-will and a love of delight. The love of good-will is the root, the love of delight is love in the flower. The love of good-will looks upon us as afar off, the love of delight is itself in us, draws near to us. By peace with God we have access to Him, by His love of delight He has access to us. God wills well to them before grace, but is not well pleased with them till grace. "Second, God does hate His elect in some sense before their actual reconciliation. (A) Not their persons, though He takes no pleasure in them, neither their persons nor services. (B) But He hates their sins. Sin is always odious to God, let the person be what it will. God never hated, nor ever could, the person of Christ, yet He hated and testified in the highest measure His hatred of those iniquities He stood charged with as our Surety. He hates the sins of believers, though pardoned and mortified. (C) God hates their state. The elect before conversion are in a state of enmity, of darkness, of slavery, and that state is odious to God, and makes them incapable while in that state to 'inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The state of the elect before actual reconciliation is odious because it is a state of alienation from God. Whatever grows up from the root of the old Adam cannot be delightful to Him. (D) God hates them as to withholding the effects of His love. His frown rather than His smile is upon them." In Eph. 2 the apostle informs us how this mutual alienation is removed, namely, by Christ "Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace, and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity by that means" (vv. 15, 16). As Owen pointed out, "It is evident the reconciliation here mentioned consists in slaying the enmity so making peace. Now what is the enmity intended? Not that in our hearts to God, but the legal enmity that lay against us on the part of God." This passage will come before us again when we consider the scope of reconciliation, suffice it now to point out while verses 14, and 15 refer to that which was effected between believing Jews and Gentiles, verse 16 has in view that which relates to God Himself, and as Owen well pointed out this enmity of God against Jews and Gentiles alike was a legal one, that which the Divine Law entailed. "And having made peace through the blood of His cross to reconcile all things unto Himself., and you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight" (Col. 1:20-22). Since "peace" was made, there must have been enmity or hostility, and since the peace was made "through the blood of His cross" then the shedding of it was in order to the placating of God, by offering a satisfaction to His outraged Law. Thus, when theologians use the expression "a reconciled God" they signify that a change in His relationship and attitude toward us has been effected, from one of wrath to favor. It is the removal of

that estrangement which was produced by our offence. In consequence of His atonement Christ has pacified God toward all who believe and brought them to God. Our reconciliation unto God is the same thing as our conversion, when we surrendered to His just claims upon us, and in heart desired and purposed to forsake all that is opposed to Him.

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