

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 16 Its Meaning-Continued

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Transcript

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Chapter 16

Its Meaning-Continued

In our last chapter we pointed out that reconciliation is an attitude or relation, and dwelt upon the fact that it is a mutual affair. This is so obvious that it should need no arguing, yet since so many have denied that God required to be reconciled unto sinners, we must perforce dwell upon it. Where one has wronged another and a break ensues between them, then just as surely as "it takes two to make a quarrel" so it takes two for a friendship to be restored again. If the one who committed the injury confesses his fault and the other refuses to accept his apology and forgive him, there is no reconciliation effected between them; equally so if the injured party be willing to overlook the fault, desiring peace at any price, yet if the wrong-doer continues to bear enmity against the other, the breach still remains. There must be a mutual good-will before a state of amity prevails. That holds good in connection with God and His sinning creatures. We dwelt upon the fact that the entrance of sin brought about a changed relationship between God and man. Since Adam stood as the federal head of the race and transacted as the legal representative of all his posterity, when he fell, the whole of mankind apostatized from God. In consequence of the fall, all mankind came under the curse of the Law, and therefore the elect equally with the non-elect are "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3). Loved by God with regard to His eternal good-will, but born under His wrath in regard of His Law and its administration—let those words be carefully pondered. "Accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6) from all eternity, yet entering this time-state under Divine condemnation. Holy and without blame in Christ by election, yet guilty and depraved in ourselves by sin. We must distinguish, as Scripture does, between how God viewed His people in Christ in the glass of His decrees, and how He regards them as in Adam, participating in the consequences of his transgression and continuing in sin by their own course of constant rebellion against Him until they are regenerated. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1) clearly implies that before they came to be "in Christ Jesus" the elect were under condemnation. As Romans 5:18 declares "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." If it is asked, But were not the elect "in Christ" from all eternity? The Answer is, In one sense yes, in another sense no. "In Christ" always has reference to union with Him. The elect were mystically united to Christ, being "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), yet until

that decree is actualized, they are "without Christ" (Eph. 2:13). At regeneration the elect are vitally united to Christ: "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19 and 2 Cor. 5:17). Therefore Paul speaks of those who "were in Christ before me" (Rom. 16:7). Having been brought from death unto life, the elect embrace the Gospel offer and become fiducially united to Christ ("fiducial" is from the Latin "fido" to trust) for they then savingly "believe in Him" (John 3:15). "But He that believes is not condemned already" (John 3:18). The members of Christ's body the Church, are in a state of guilt and condemnation until they personally exercise faith in the atoning blood of Christ. We have labored this point because some of our readers have been taught the contrary. It was the entrance of sin which caused the breach between God and us, but in this connection particularly it is important to remember what sin essentially consists of. While in some passages sin is regarded as a "debt" and God in connection with it as the Creditor, in other places as an "offence" and God in connection with it as the injured Party, and in still other verses as a "disease" and God in connection with it as the great Physician, yet none of those terms bring before us the primary element in and basic character of sin. The fundamental idea of sin is that it is "a transgression of God's Law"(1 John 3:4) the Rule which He has commanded us to observe, and this should therefore be the leading aspect in which it is contemplated when we consider how God deals with it. Proof of that is found in connection with the origin of human sin, in Genesis 2 and 3. God gave man a commandment which he transgressed: "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom. 5:19). Now as the essential idea of sin is not that it is merely a debt or injury, but a violation of our Rule of conduct, then it follows that the particular character in which God ought to be contemplating when we consider Him dealing with sin is not that of a Creditor or injured Party, who may remit the debt or forgive the injury as He pleases, but in His office as supreme Lord. Sin as transgression of the Divine Law has for its necessary corollary God as the Judge. Since He has promulgated a Divine Law which prohibits sin under pain of death, He is bound by His veracity to maintain the honor of His Law and establish His government by strict justice, and thus He cannot pardon sin unless adequate provision is made for accomplishing those objects. As the Judge of all the earth and Rector of the universe, His own perfections require Him to insist that if the penalty of the Law is remitted it must be by another suffering it vicariously, in that way meeting the claims of His Law. There could be no reconciliation between an offended God and His apostate people until the breach between them had been healed, until His righteous wrath as the Governor of this world had been appeased, and until they also throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him. As the Judge of all, His honor required that His Law should receive full satisfaction, and since His fallen people were unable to make reparation, He graciously provided a Surety for them, who magnified His Law by rendering to it a perfect obedience and by dying in their stead, and thus enduring for them its unmitigated curse. In this way God's legal "enmity" or wrath was appeased and the sins of His people were blotted out, so God was propitiated and their guilt expiated. Though His atoning sacrifice Christ removed every legal obstacle which stood in the way of God's being merciful unto transgressors and receiving them into His favor, and by His merits Christ procured the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) who, by His effectual operations in the elect, slays their enmity against God, and brings them into loving and loyal subjection to Him, and thus (at their conversion) they are reconciled to God. Socinians have objected that it was neither necessary nor just that Christ should both obey the Law in His people's stead and yet suffer punishment on the account of their transgressions, seeing that obedience is all that the Law requires. Such a demur would be valid had Christ been acting as the Surety of an innocent people who were under probation, but since He entered the Law-place of transgressors the objection is entirely without point. Obedience is not all that the Law requires of guilty creatures, for they are not only obliged to be obedient for the future, but to make satisfaction for the last. the covenant which the Lord God made with Adam had two branches: obey and live ["the commandment which was ordained to life" (Rom. 7:10)]: sin and die (Gen. 2:17). And therefore

since Christ was "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4)—which, in the final analysis, signified "under the Covenant of Works"—and since He was acting and transacting as "the last Adam" and "the Second Man" (1 Cor. 15:45, 47) it devolved upon Him to meet the requirements of both branches of the Covenant. As we discussed that at length earlier there is no need to further enlarge upon it. Since the will of God changes not and the requirements of His government remain the same forever, then if a Surety engaged Himself to discharge all the obligations of God's elect, He must necessarily meet all those requirements on their behalf. The Son therefore became incarnate and subjected Himself unto the full demands of the Law and was dealt with according to its high spirituality and rigorous justice. First He honored the preceptive part of the Covenant by rendering a perfect obedience to every detail. But that of itself would make no satisfaction for His people's transgressions nor afford ally expression of the Divine displeasure against sin; and therefore after a life spent in unremittingly doing the will of God, must also needs lay down His life. "Such a high Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:24). His compliance with the precepts was preparatory to His enduring the penalty of the Law, when He stood at the bar of God in the room of the guilty, and before God as the offended Lawgiver and angry Judge, executing upon Him what was due them. Some are likely to still have a difficulty at this point. How could Christ be the gift of God's love if that Gift had for its first end the removing of His judicial "enmity" and the placating of His wrath? But such a difficulty arises from failure to distinguish between things that differ: between God in His essential and in His official character, between the elect as He views them in Christ and as He sees them as the fallen descendents of Adam. To affirm that God both loved and hated them at the same time and in the same respect, would indeed be a palpable contradiction; but this we do not. God loved His people in respect of His eternal purpose, but He was angry against them with respect to His violated Law and provoked justice by sin. There is no inconsistency whatever between God's loving the saints with a love of good-will and the hindrances to the outflow and the effects of it which their sins and His holiness interposed in the way of peace and friendship. Though the holiness of God's nature, the righteousness of His government, and the veracity of His Word, placed barriers in the way of His taking sinners into communion with Himself without full satisfaction being made to His Law, yet they did not hinder His love from providing the means to remove those barriers, and they were recovered from their apostasy. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you" (Jer. 31:3); "I will call them My people, which were not My people; and her, Beloved, which was not beloved" (Rom. 9:25). It should be quite evident to every candid reader that if we are to avoid a contradiction in those two passages we must make a distinction in the interpretation of them, that in them the love of God is viewed in entirely different aspects. In other words, we must ascertain the precise meaning of the terms used. The former speaks of His paternal love or good-will towards them, the latter of His judicial favor or love of acceptance; the one concerns His eternal counsels, the other relates to His dealings with us in a time-state. The former is His love of philanthropy or benevolence, the latter of His love of approbation. The one has to do with His loving us in Christ, the other with His loving us for our own sakes—because of what the Holy Spirit wrought in us at regeneration and conversion. The one concerns our predestination, the other our reconciliation. That distinction reveals the confusion in the piece from Mr. Philpot, quoted in "The Introduction" of this series. The same distinction has to be observed again when we contemplate God's dual attitude toward Christ, the Son of His love, whom He both loved and poured out His wrath upon — yes, and at the same time, though in entirely different relations. When the Father declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17), He was expressing Himself paternally, as well as testifying to His approbation of both Christ's person and work. But when we are told that "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him" (Isa. 53:10) and cried "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd and against the Man that is My Fellow, says the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 13:7), it was as the Law-administrator or Judge He was

acting. Never was God more "well pleased" with His beloved Son than when He hung upon the cross in obedience to Him (Phil 2:10), yet He withdrew from Him every effect or manifestation of His love during those three hours of awful darkness, yea, poured out His wrath upon Him as our sin-bearer, so that He exclaimed "Your wrath lies hard upon Me and You have afflicted Me with all Your waves" (Ps. 88:7). The very men who object to God's loving and yet being antagonistic to the same person at one and the same time, perceive no antagonism between those things when they are adumbrated before their eyes and illustrated in their own experience on this lower plane. Love and anger are perfectly consistent at the same moment and may in different respects be terminated on the same subject. A father should feel a double affection or emotion toward a rebellious son. He loves him as his offspring, but is angry with him as disobedient. Have we not read of a judge who was called upon to pass sentence on his own child? Or of a military officer who was required to court-martial his son for insubordination in the ranks? Why then should we have difficulty in perceiving that, while in their lapsed state, God loved His people with a love of good-will, yet loathed and was angry with them as rebels against His government. As the injured Father He laid aside His anger, but as the Preserver of Justice He demanded full satisfaction from them or their Surety. Equally pointless is another objection made by Socinians and Arminians, namely, that such a doctrine as we are propounding represents God as changeable, as a fickle Being—first angry and then pacified. But precisely the same objection might be well brought against repentance! If it be granted that sin is displeasing to God, then obviously He is no longer displeased when the sinner repents and He forgives him! "The atonement did not make God hate sin less than He did before, or excite feelings of compassion towards us which did not formerly exist. He loved us before He gave His Son; and sin still is, and ever will be, the object of His utmost aversion. The effect of the atonement was a change of dispensation, which is consistent with immutability of nature" (J. Dick). The fact is that God demanded an atonement because He does not change, and would not rescind or modify His Law, revoke His threatening, nor lay aside His abhorrence of sin. They who represent God as being mutable are the very ones who assert that He pardons sin without satisfaction to His justice. The precise nature of "reconciliation" can be ascertained clearly from the Levitical offerings. Unless those O. T. types were misleading, then they definitely exhibited the fact that the sacrifice of Christ pacified God, made peace and procuring His favor.. Personally we unhesitatingly adopt the words of Principal Cunningham when he said, "The whole institution of Levitical sacrifices and the place which they occupied is the Mosaic economy, were regulated and determined by a regard to the one sacrifice of Christ." Those sacrifices set forth the principles on which the effects of the Redeemer's work depended, and provide the surest and best materials for interpreting and illustrating the character and bearing of the Atonement. Those typical sacrifices demonstrated beyond any doubt that the sacrifice of Christ was vicarious and expiatory, that it was presented and accepted in the room and stead of others, that it propitiated God and averted His wrath, and therefore that it procured the exemption of His people from the penal consequences of their sins and effected their reconciliation unto God. Earlier we quoted Numbers 16:46 in proof that "an atonement" is made in order to turn away the "wrath of the Lord;" let us now allude to further examples. "And David built there an altar unto the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord was entreated for the land and the plague was stayed from Israel" (2 Sam. 24:25)—the occasion being when "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" because David had numbered the people (v. 1). The same incident is mentioned again in 1 Chronicles 21, where we are told that "God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it" (v. 15), which was in addition to the "pestilence" or "plague" which slew seventy thousand Israelites mentioned in 2 Samuel 24. Then, after David had built an altar there unto the Lord and had offered appropriate sacrifices and "called upon the Lord," and He had "answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar" (in token of His acceptance of the same), we read that "the Lord commanded the

angel, and he put up His sword again into the sheath" (vv. 26, 27). What anointed eye can fail to see in that incident a vivid anticipation and adumbration of what occurred at Calvary. There is a striking case of alienated friends being reconciled by means of sacrifice recorded in Job 42. "The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoke of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job has. Therefore take unto you now seven bulls and seven rams and go to My servant Job and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering, and My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept, lest I deal with you after your folly" (vv. 7, 8). Upon which Owen pointed out: "The offenders are Eliphaz and his two friends, the offence is their folly in not speaking aright of God. The issue of the breach is, that the wrath or anger of God was towards them; reconciliation is the turning away of that wrath; the means by which this was done, appointed by God, is the sacrifice of Job for atonement. This then is that which we ascribe to the death of Christ when we say that as a sacrifice we were reconciled to God. Having made God our Enemy by sin, Christ by His sacrifice appeased His wrath and brought us into favor again with God." The more closely that example in Job 42:7, 8 is examined the more clearly should we perceive the meaning and significance of the antitype. There was a declaration of God's anger against those three men, yet also a revelation of His love to them, by directing them to the means by which His anger might be put away and they restored to His favor. Clearly, He had good-will unto them before He directed them what to do, yet He was not then reconciled to them—otherwise there was no need of an atonement for appeasing Him. There was a cloud upon God's face, yet the sun of mercy peeped out through that cloud: as He acquaints them with His anger, so He also shows them the way to pacify it. Though His wrath was truly kindled, yet He was ready for it to be quenched by the means of His prescribing. God could not find complacency in them till He was reconciled to them. In acting on their behalf, Job was a type of Christ, whose propitiatory sacrifice God both appointed and accepted.

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