

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 22 Its Reception

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

Chapter 22

Its Reception

This brings us to the manward side of the subject, and that will present more or less a difficulty unto some of our readers; not because of its abstruseness, but in seeking to ascertain its consistency and harmony with some other aspects presented previously. It concerns the ever-recurring problem of adjusting in our minds the conjunction of the Divine and human elements. Because that conjunction cannot always be stated with mathematical exactitude or in language fully intelligible to the average mind, the great majority are inclined to cut the knot and reject either the one or the other of those elements or factors. But if both be clearly set forth in the Word, whether or not we can perceive the precise relation between them or the definite point at which they meet, it is our bounden duty to believe and hold fast to both. If on the one hand Scripture teaches that Christ has effected reconciliation with God, Scripture just as plainly calls upon us to "be reconciled to Him." And it speaks of our "receiving the reconciliation." It is this latter aspect we must now be occupied with: what God requires from the sinner if he is to enter into the good of what Christ did for sinners. There ought to be no need to labor this point at any length, and there had been none had not certain men—true servants of God we doubt not, who were thoroughly sound on almost every other part of that Faith once delivered to the saints, and whose ministry has deservedly been held in high esteem by the generations who succeeded them—departed from the Truth thereon and influenced many since their day to perpetuate a serious error. As we have previously pointed out, mutual alienation requires mutual reconciliation. The reconciliation of God to us and of us to God must answer the one to the other, for unless each party lay aside his enmity no real amity is possible. If peace were on one side only and hostility on the other, there would still be a breach. God must be propitiated; we must be converted: the one is as requisite as the other. As we have already shown at length how Christ reconciled God unto us, we must now enter into some detail of how we may be reconciled to God. That we are not about to depart from "the old paths" (Jer. 6:16) will appear from the following quotations. "Although God the Father has transacted all these things from eternity and Jesus Christ has long since performed all that which might pacify and reconcile His Father and procure our atonement with His Father, yet it was withal agreed mutually then by Them that not a man, no, not any elect man, should have benefit by either, until they came to be reconciled . . . He that will be reconciled to God must part with and forsake all other friends

and lovers, renounce and break off all interests and correspondence with them, and choose God for his sole Friend and Portion — he must choose God forever, to cleave to Him with full purpose of heart" (T. Goodwin vol. 6, pp. 122, 129). "We are actually justified, pardoned, and reconciled when we repent and believe. Whatever thoughts and purposes of grace God in Christ may have towards us from all eternity, yet we are under the fruits of sin till we become penitent believers ... That these are conditions which alone make us capable of pardon is evident" (T. Manton, vol. 12, 266). "This reconciliation, purchased by the blood of Christ, is offered unto men by the Gospel upon certain articles and conditions, upon the performance whereof it actually becomes theirs, and without which, notwithstanding all that Christ has done and suffered, the breach still continues between them and God. And let no man think this a derogation from the freeness and riches of grace, for those things serve singularly to illustrate and commend the grace of God to sinners. As He consulted His own glory in the terms on which He offers us our peace, so it is His grace which brings our souls to these terms of reconciliation. And surely He has not suspended the mercy of our reconciliation upon unreasonable or impossible conditions. He has not said, If you will do as much for Me as you have done against Me I will be at peace with you; but the two grand articles of peace with God are repentance and faith" (J. Flavel vol. 1, p. 476). "To make perfect reconciliation (which Christ is said in many places to do) it is required, first, that the wrath of God be turned away, His anger removed and all the effects of enmity on His part toward us. Secondly, that we be turned away from our opposition to Him and brought into voluntary obedience. Until both these be effected reconciliation is not perfected" (J. Owen, "The Death of Death." bk. 3, chap. 6, para. 1 on "Reconciliation") "A mediator must be accepted by both parties that are at variance, and they must stand to what the mediator does. As where two princes are at difference and a third interposes to make an agreement between them, they must both consent to accept of that prince for mediator and both put their concerns in his hand: he can be no mediator for him that does not accept of him in that relation . . . God has declared Himself fully contented and has complied with all the conditions of the first agreement (the everlasting covenant); it only remains now that man will accept of Him for those purposes for which God did constitute Him and comply with those conditions which God has settled. This is necessary: God saves no man against his will" (S. Charnock, vol. 3, p. 164). Those excerpts supply a clear if brief idea of what was the almost uniform teaching of the Puritans on this subject. Probably they will come as a real surprise unto a considerable number of our readers who are wont to regard those men as the champions of orthodoxy and as the best-instructed scribes of the Gospel since the days of the apostles. If so, it is because they have imbibed subversive teaching which came from other men that followed the Puritans in the eighteenth century, men who though they upheld the banner of Truth, previously erected, yet in other things departed from the foundations laid down by their better-balanced predecessors. Though we highly respect these men too and freely acknowledge our indebtedness to many good things in their writings, yet we dare not and cannot follow them in those things wherein they relied more on logical reasoning than on the teaching of Holy Writ. And for the sake of those who have been misled by the errors of men who otherwise taught the Truth, it devolves upon us to at least make an attempt to lead them back into "the good way" (Jer. 6:16). "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). That is the ringing call of the Gospel as it is addressed unto the unsaved. "Be reconciled to God:" cease your hostility against Him, throw down the weapons of your rebellion, turn from your wicked ways, abandon your idols, repent of your sins, sue for mercy in the name of Christ, receive forgiveness through His blood. But in certain more or less influential circles that is flatly rejected. It is blankly denied that the Gospel called upon the unsaved to be reconciled to God, or that He requires anything from sinners in order to the forgiveness of their sins. Nay it is argued that such an assertion as ours repudiates the free grace of God and denies the finished work of Christ, by inculcating

salvation by works and making man in part his own Saviour. If that were so, then it would necessarily follow that the most eminent and godly of the Puritans (quoted above) were guilty of those very crimes! But we deny that any such conclusion follows. "Be reconciled to God" is both the demand of Divine holiness and the enforcement of human responsibility. But because that Gospel call clashed with the views of certain men, they attempted to explain away its real force, insisting that those words are addressed to saints and not to the unconverted. A certain air of plausibility is given to that view by an appeal to the fact that this verse is found in a church epistle, but if due attention be paid to its setting, and the scope of the apostle in the whole passage be rightly ascertained, then the seeming "plausibility" disappears and the untenability of such an interpretation is at once exposed. But in order to discover and exhibit the scope or design of the apostle here, careful attention has to be paid to the context and considerable ground must be covered by the expositor to make the same clear. We fear this may prove rather tedious to some of our friends, yet beg them to bear with us for the sake of others who need and for those who earnestly long for the opening-up of this passage. Let us give first, in few and simple words, what we are convinced is the force of 2 Corinthians 5:20 and then state why we so understand it, setting forth the grounds on which our conviction rests. When the apostle wrote those words "Be reconciled to God" he was not exhorting saved or unsaved: rather was he giving a brief account of the evangelical message which he had been called to deliver to the latter. In the light of the immediate context we can come to no other conclusion. In the second half of v. 18 the apostle expressly declares that there had been given to him and his fellow-evangelists "the ministry of reconciliation," and then in verses 19-21 (and 6:1, 2) he tells us—as the opening "to wit" unequivocally shows—what that "ministry of reconciliation" consisted of, what were its principal elements and contents. Before proceeding further, let the reader carefully ponder verses 18-21 for himself, and see if he does not concur. If the meaning of verse 20 is still not clear to him, let him read again from verse 18 and omit the repeated "you" in verse 20, and all should be plain. But we will attempt a more thorough analysis of the passage. As we pointed out in the opening paragraphs of the chapters on "the Prayers of the Apostles," certain false teachers were very active against Paul at Corinth, seeking to undermine his apostolic authority and destroy his influence and usefulness. It is that which accounts for what he says in 1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:1-5; 15:9-11, and 2 Corinthians 5:1,2; 10:2; 11:5, 12-16. It is that which explains why he was forced (by his adversaries) to vindicate his apostleship and point out that in authority, knowledge and effective grace, none excelled him: see 11:22-23 for his credentials. It seems quite evident from a close reading of those two epistles that his enemies had succeeded so far as to shake confidence in himself of some of his own converts there, and thus his appeals in 1 Corinthians 5:14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:14, 13:3 etc. From those passages it will be seen that Paul was on the defensive and obliged to justify himself and do what his modesty and humility detested—say much about himself and appear to resort unto boasting and self-laudation (2 Cor. 11:16-18). In the light of those references the apostle's scope in the epistle should be more easily perceived. Throughout the third chapter he gives an account of how he had discharged the commission which he had received from his Master, acknowledging, tacitly, that he was no Judaiser (as were his opponents), but rather an able minister of the new testament or covenant (v. 6). In the fourth he continues the same subject, and makes mention of some of the trials which a faithful discharge of his commission had entailed (vv. 1, 8-14). Then, as was so often the case, his heart and mind (so to speak) ran away with him and he digressed to describe the rich compensation which God had provided for His servants and people in general—their afflictions being abundantly counterbalanced and recompensed by the glory awaiting them, which he continues to 5:10. But in 5:11 he returns to the subject of his own ministerial labors, making known the springs from which they issued. Having alluded to "the judgment-seat of Christ," he declared "knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Nothing is more calculated to

stir the soul of Christ's minister and make him earnest and faithful in dealing with his fellows than the solemn realization that naught but the "everlasting burnings" await all who die out of Christ. It is that which makes him cry to his hearers "flee from the wrath to come." (1) "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord (2) we persuade men:" the one was the cause, the other the effect. The "terror of the Lord" was not something of which the apostle stood in any doubt of, but a thing he knew—of which he was fully assured. And therefore he "persuaded men" at large, reasoning with, pleading with, urging them to flee for refuge and personally lay hold of the hope which he set before them in the Gospel. An illustration that this was the course which he followed, is supplied us in Acts 24:25, where we are told that, even when before one of his judges, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come," so that "Felix trembled." Alas, how little of such zeal and fidelity is there today on the part of those who profess to be the servants of God; how little is there in their preaching which makes the hearer "tremble!" How little does the twentieth-century evangelist resemble those of the first. If the reader of this paragraph is a preacher, let him honestly measure himself by this verse and ask, Is the awful truth of the eternal punishment of the wicked in the Lake of Fire impelling me to so preach that in the day to come I shall be "pure from the blood of all," or am I deliberately withholding what I know would be unpalatable unto my congregation? "But we are made manifest unto God" (v. 11). That was a solemn appeal by the apostle unto the Searcher of hearts of his sincerity and fidelity. And then he added, "and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences" (5:11): I cherish the hope that such zeal and honest dealing with souls will make it evident, to your conscience at least, that I am indeed and in truth an accredited servant of God. Can the reader, if he be a preacher, make the same appeal both to the Omniscient One and the conscience of his auditors? "For we commend not ourselves unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf that you may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance and not in heart" (v. 12). It was not that the apostle would seek to ingratiate himself in the esteem of these unstable Corinthians, but that he reminded them of what they had already witnessed and experienced when he labored among them, and that, in order that they could effectually close the mouths of his detractors, who sought to take advantage of his absence by destroying the confidence of those who were his own children in the Faith. "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause" (v. 13). Here he replies to one of the charges which his adversaries had brought against him—that he was a wild fanatic. Says the apostle, even if I am mad, it is for God's glory that I have been so zealous; and if I had restrained myself within the bounds of sobriety, it was for your sakes. Whether he succeeded the limits of discretion as his enemies asserted, or whether he conducted himself decorously as men judged, it was not for himself: he had in mind only the glory of God and the good of His Church. "For the love of Christ constrains me" (v. 14): that was the second dynamic or motive-power of his ministry. That was what caused him to set aside all considerations of ease or self-aggrandizement and made him willing to be counted "the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4:13). Here again we see a blessed balance: the "terror of the Lord" and "the love of Christ" inspiring him in all his ministerial labors. The love of Christ for sinners for himself: the love of Christ filling his heart and engendering a love for sinners, made him willing to "spend and be spent" in labors "more abundant," and to get little more than misunderstanding and misrepresentation, jealousy, and bitter persecution for his pains. Cannot the impartial reader see for himself the drift, the scope, the line of things of Paul in this passage? Having mentioned "the love of Christ" as constraining him to diligence in the ministry of the Gospel, he went on to enlarge upon the nature of that love: it was the One dying for the all (v. 14), and then to the end of verse 17 he describes some of the consequences and fruits of that love, upon which we must not now enlarge, as originally intended. The final fruits of Christ's love here enumerated are, that God "has reconciled us unto Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18). What that "ministry" consisted of he tells us in verses 19-21. It

"consists of two parts. 1. A reconciliation wrought on God's part toward us, in the effecting of which Christ was concurrent with Him (v. 19). 2. A reconciliation on our parts, enforced from what God and Christ had done (v. 21), and this is equally necessary unto man's salvation as that reconciliation on God's part and Christ's part" (T. Goodwin vol. 6, p. 117). "The end of the ministry is to reconcile us to God, to prevail with us to lay down our enmity against Him and opposition to Him" (Owen on 2 Cor. 5:20). "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us, we pray in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God" (v. 20). We trust it is now clear that in those words the apostle was "evidently giving an account of his commission and general ministry" (T. Scott). That he should here do so is quite in accord with what he had done in the previous epistle: see 1 Corinthians 2:2 and 15:1-3. Thus in this instance we believe that that most able expositor J. Gill erred in his interpretation of this verse—following as he did James Hussey rather than the earlier Puritans. So far from exhorting the saints unto "submission to providence and obedience to the discipline and ordinances of God," the apostle was stating how he exhorted the unsaved when preaching the Gospel to them. Had Gill's interpretation been valid, the twice stated "you" had been in the text! If any supplement be needed, it should be "men." "Be reconciled to God" is the imperative demand of the Gospel to all who hear it being parallel with "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him" (Isa. 55:7). The apostle continues the same subject in chapter 6. "In this chapter (verses 1-10) the apostle gives an account of his general errand to all whom he preached to, with several arguments and methods he used" (M. Henry). It should be carefully noted that- not until 6:11 did the apostle directly address himself to the Corinthians! Now if Paul had been addressing the saints in 5:20, then in the opening verses of chapter 6 he must have been addressing their ministers, which is how Mr. Gill understood him. But in such case he would not have said "approving ourselves as the ministers of God" (v. 4) but "yourselves!" Thus it is manifest he was still vindicating himself and his fellow-apostles against the Judaisers. Not only were all who heard him preach the Gospel exhorted "be reconciled to God," but to "receive not the grace of God in vain," urging them not to procrastinate with the overtures of Divine mercy, but to recognize and realize that "now is the accepted time" (vv. 1, 2). Having been favored with the Gospel, let them not spurn it. On 2 Corinthians 6:1 Owen said, "The grace of God may be considered two ways. 1. Objectively for the revelation or doctrine of grace, as in Titus 2:11, 12. So we are said to 'receive' when we believe and profess it, in opposition unto those by whom it is rejected. And this is the same with receiving the Word preached, so often mentioned in the Scriptures: Acts 2:41, James 1:21, which is by faith to give it entertainment in our hearts, which is the meaning of the word in this place." The "we" of 6:1 is the "we are ambassadors" of 5:20, and the "you receive not the grace of God in vain" (His gracious overture in the Gospel) are the same "you" as "be you reconciled to God." The meaning of "giving no offence in any thing that the ministry be not blamed, but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God" (6:2, 4) is, that the apostles comported themselves in such a manner that there was nothing in their conduct which would hinder their Gospel preaching.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-doctrine-of-reconciliation-chapter-22-its-reception/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net