

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 24 Its Reception-Continued

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Transcript

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Chapter 24

Its Reception-Continued

On this occasion we propose to treat of the present aspect of our subject in connection with the Covenant. There is a pressing need for this today, for while on the one hand most professing Christians are woefully ignorant about the Covenant, some others have been very faultily instructed in them. As on almost every other doctrinal and practical subject, the Puritans were much sounder than many of the outstanding Calvinists of the nineteenth century, for the sermons of the latter were sadly lacking in perspective. Those of men like Joseph Irons, and James Wells, were thoroughly lop-sided. While they rightly emphasized Divine sovereignty, they remissibly ignored human responsibility; while they had much to say about God's grace, they had little to say about the demands of His holiness: while magnifying the finished work of Christ, they were silent upon what God required from sinners before the benefits of it were applied to them. They were very fond of quoting "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordering in all things and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5), but they scarcely ever cited, and never expounded, "Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you" (Isa. 55:3). A covenant is a compact between two parties in which there is mutual stipulation and restipulation, the one promising certain benefits in return for the fulfilling of certain conditions by the other. Thus it was in the covenant or agreement entered into between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:28, 29) and between Jonathan and David (1 Sam. 20:16, 17). God entered into covenant with Christ as the Head of the elect, and to that covenant He attached the demand of repentance, faith, and obedience from them. Let us first consider the passage we quoted above from Isaiah 55 and which is so much ignored by many Calvinists. That chapter opens with a most blessed Gospel invitation, though there are one or two things in it which have been both misunderstood and disregarded. "Ho everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters" has been restricted unto a spiritual thirst, as though the invitation is made only unto souls Divinely quickened. That is an unwarrantable limitation. The Gospel call goes forth freely to all classes and conditions of men, addressing them simply as sinners—guilty, lost, needy sinners. Since they are sinners, they have no satisfying portion, yet they have a thirst for something more contenting, and therefore their quest for happiness. But since they are blinded by sin they know not what that satisfying portion consists of or where true happiness is found. They seek it, but seek it wrongly and in vain. Therefore the question is

asked them, "wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not." In this way is the Gospel called enforced. "Come to the waters" which can quench your thirst and satisfy your heart. "And he that has no money, come you, buy and eat." The Inviter is a generous Benefactor who makes no charge for His benefits and bars not the poorest from a welcome to them. Nevertheless, those who would partake of them must "buy." That does not mean they must give something for those benefits and purchase them. But it does signify they must part with something, or otherwise the word "buy" would have no force. There are two things which the sinner must part with if he would be a participant of the Gospel feast: he must abandon his idols, and he must renounce his own goodness or righteousness. That which his idols, and he must renounce his own goodness or righteousness. That which Christ requires from the sinner is that he come to Him empty handed. If on the one hand that means he must bring no price with him, nothing seeking to merit his acceptance; on the other hand, it also means he must drop the world, and no longer cherish and cling to those objects or pleasures in which until this time he has sought to delight himself. "Come you, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." Three times over in that first verse is the word "come" used. It is the response which is required to the invitation made. It is a word calling for action, for voluntary action. It is a word too of clear yet necessary implication. One cannot come to a place without leaving another! The prodigal son had to quit the "far country" in order to turn unto the Father's house. The sinner must (in his affections and resolutions) turn his back upon the world if he would embrace Christ. Twice is the word "buy" found in it, to emphasize the fact that it is a definite and personal transaction which is here in view, and as we have already pointed out, to denote that something must be relinquished or parted with—whatever stand in opposition to Christ as seeking to hold the sinner's heart. While the "no money," "without money and with out price" stresses the truth that eternal life is not to be obtained by the works of the Law, but is a free gift, that we bring nothing with us to commend ourselves to God's favorable regard, but come simply as poverty-stricken beggars. "Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (v. 2). Listen to the voice of Wisdom which pleads with you to waste no more of your money on that which ministers not to your spiritual and eternal needs and your efforts after what has no power to afford you real and lasting satisfaction. Appropriate unto yourselves the riches of Divine grace as they are spread before you in the Gospel, and let your soul delight itself in that which will bring no disappointment with it or regrets afterward. "Incline your ear, and come unto Me." Too long have you hearkened to the sirens of your lusts and to the false promises of this world. Too long have you been deaf to My counsels and precepts, to My expostulations and warnings. Incline your ear "as you do to that which you find yourselves concerned in, and pleased with. Bow the ear, and let the proud heart stoop to the humbling methods of the Gospel; bend the ear this way you may hear with attention" (Matt. Henry). "Hear," that is, heed, respond, obey, comply with My demands. "Hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you." (v. 3). Here, then, we learn plainly and definitely who are the characters with whom God proposes to make an everlasting covenant, and the terms with which they must comply if He is to do so. They are those who have freely sampled the lying vanities of this world and, like the poor prodigal, have found them to be naught but "husks." They are those who hitherto had closed their ears against Him, refusing to meet His requirements and steeling themselves against His admonitions. "Incline your ear" signifies. cease your rebellious attitude, submit yourselves to My righteous demand. They are those who are separated and alienated from the Holy One, at a guilty distance from Him—away in "the far country." "Come unto Me" means, throw down the weapons of your warfare and cast yourselves upon My mercy. They are those who are unquickened, destitute of spiritual life, as the "hear, and your souls shall live" clearly shows. Comply with those terms, says God, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you. It is human responsibility which is there being enforced. It is but another way of saying

to sinners "Be reconciled to God." As we pointed out in a former chapter, this enforcing of man's responsibility is most meet for the honor of God, and as the honor of the Father lies nearer to the heart of Christ than anything else, He will not dispense the benefits of His atonement except in that way which is most becoming to God's perfections. There is a complete accord between Christ's impetration of God's favor and the application of it. That is, between Christ's purchase of it and our actual entrance into the same. As the justice of God deemed it meet that His wrath should be appeased and His law vindicated by the satisfaction made by His Son, so His wisdom determined and His holiness ordered it that the sinner must be converted before pardon be bestowed upon him (Acts 3:19). We must be on our guard here, as everywhere, against extolling one of God's attributes above another. True, the Covenant is entirely of grace—pure, free, sovereign grace—nevertheless, here too grace reigns "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21) and not at the expense of it. Christ died not to render any sinner secure in his carnality. God will not disgrace His grace by entering into covenant with those who are impenitent and openly defying Him. To do so would make Him the Condoner of sin, instead of the implacable Hater of it. It is not that the sinner must do something in order to earn the grand blessings of the covenant, or that he must add his quota to the redemptive work of Christ. No, no he contributes not a mite to the procuring of them. That price, and infinitely costly it was, was fully paid by the Lord Jesus Himself. But though God requires naught from us by way of purchasing or meriting those blessings, He does in the matter of receiving them. "The honor of God would fall to the ground if we should be pardoned without our submission, without confession of past sin, or resolution of future obedience. For till then we neither know our true misery, nor are we willing to come out of it; for they that securely continue in their sins, despise both the curse of the Law and the grace of the Gospel" (Manton). "And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David" (v. 3). It is of course the Messiah, the spiritual or antitypical David of whom God there speaks—as He is also called "David" in Psalm 89:3, Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24, Hosea 3:5). If proof is needed that it is the Lord Jesus who is in view, Acts 13:34-37 supplies it. "The sure mercies of David" are the special and distinguishing favors which are reserved for and in due time bestowed upon God's elect. They are the grand privileges and benefits of the Covenant which God pledged Himself to impart unto Christ and His seed upon the completion of His engagement. They are "sure" because the promises of One who cannot lie, and because they are now dispensed by the victorious and risen Redeemer. They are revealed in the Gospel and presented for the acceptance of faith. "Behold I have given Him (the spiritual David) a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people" (Isa. 55:4). That tells us those "sure mercies" are dispensed in a way of righteousness and holiness. The Gospel presents Christ to us not only as a Redeemer, but a Teacher and Ruler. We are required to surrender to Him as our absolute Lord and voluntarily take His yoke upon us before He becomes our Saviour and imparts rest unto our souls. "For thus says the Lord, unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; even unto them will I give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off Also the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every, one that keeps the sabbath from polluting it and takes hold of My covenant" (Isa. 56:4-6). Here we have spiritual and eternal blessings presented under the imagery of the Mosaic economy. It was an O. T. prophecy announcing the distinctive favors of the N. T. dispensation. Under the Mosaic law "eunuchs" were barred from entering the congregation of the Lord, and the "stranger" or Gentile was barred by the middle wall of partition; but under the Gospel era these restrictions would no longer abstain, for the grace of God should flow forth unto all without distinction. That which we would specially observe is the clause placed in italics, which sets forth the human side of things. Let us notice carefully what is here predicated of those who "take hold of" God's covenant. They "keep the Sabbath

from polluting it," that is, they have a concern for God's honor and a respect for His Law, and therefore keep holy that day which He has set apart unto Himself, requiring us to act as per the instructions of Isaiah 58:13. They "choose the things that please" the Holy One. They are not self-pleasers, or gratifiers of the flesh, but earnestly endeavor to abstain from whatever God has prohibited and to perform whatever He has enjoined; and this not by constraint or fear, but freely and cheerfully. They "join themselves to the Lord." They seek unto and cleave to Him. they do so in order "to serve Him and to love His name, to be servants." "Serve" Him means to be subject unto Him, to take their orders from Him, to promote His interests. They are resolved to "love His name." Their service is that of friends and not slaves, their faith is one which works by love and their obedience prompted by gratitude. Unless our service proceeds from love it is valueless. They had given Him their hearts, and therefore their faculties, talents, time and strength are dedicated and devoted unto Him. Such are the ones who "take hold of His covenant." "In every covenant there is something given and something required. To take hold of God's covenant is to lay claim to the privileges and benefits promised and offered in it. Now this cannot be done unless we choose the things that please Him. That is, voluntarily and deliberately, not by chance but by choice, enter into a course of obedience wherein we must be pleasing or acceptable to Him: this is the fixed determination of our hearts" (Manton). And we never enter upon that course of obedience and do the things which are pleasing unto God until we have first chosen Him as our absolute Lord, our Supreme End, our highest Good and our everlasting Portion. Negatively, they can be "no taking hold of the covenant" until we cease all opposition to God. Positively, it is to embrace the Gospel offer and to comply with its terms. The covenant of grace is proffered to us in the Gospel and to take hold of the former is to heartily consent unto the latter and meet its requirements, giving ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5)—freely, unreservedly, for time and eternity. Consent there must be, for none can enjoy the privileges of a charter which they never accepted and agreed to. What has just been before us in Isaiah 56 is virtually parallel with 27:4 and 5. "Fury is not in Me (unless I am provoked by the rebellion of My creatures. In such case): Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, and I would bum them together." Such opposition against the Almighty is utterly futile. If they stir up His wrath, naught but the Lake of fire can be their portion, unless they avail themselves of His amnesty, throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him and be reconciled to Him, which is what is signified by "Or (as the only alternative to burning) let him take hold of My strength." Let him grasp My arm which is uplifted to smite and crush him. And how shall that be done? Thus, "that he may make peace with Me." That he may cease this sinful fighting against Me; "and He shall make peace with Me." God is ready and willing—on the ground of Christ's satisfaction—to lay aside His vengeance and be reconciled, if the sinner is willing to lay aside his awful enmity and become friends. "This (Isa. 27:4, 5) may very well be construed as a summary of the doctrine of the Gospel, with which the church is to be watered every moment. Here is a quarrel supposed between God and man: for here is a battle fought and peace to be made. It is an old quarrel, ever since sin first entered. It is on God's part a righteous quarrel but on man's part most unrighteous. Here is a gracious invitation given us to make up this quarrel. Let him that is desirous to be at peace with god take hold on God's strength, on His strong arm, which is lifted up against the sinner to strike him dead; let him by supplication keep back the stroke. Pardoning mercy is called the power of the Lord; let him take hold of that. Christ crucified is the power of God, let him by a lively faith take hold on Him, as a sinking man catches hold of a plank that is within his reach, or as the malefactor took hold on the horns of the altar...it is vain to think of contesting with Him. It is like setting briers and thorns before a consuming fire. We are not an equal match for Omnipotence. This is the only way, and it is a sure way to reconciliation. Let him take this way to make peace with Me, and he shall make peace" (From. M. Henry). "In those days and in that time, says the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going

and weeping. They shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces toward it, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten" (Jer. 50:4, 5). The historical reference is to the liberty which Cyrus gave to the Hebrews to return unto their own land, consequent upon his overthrow of Belshazzar. Unacquainted with the road, the exiled Jews on leaving Babylon for Palestine, made inquiry about it. Their case supplied a type or adumbration of the spiritual experiences of God's people. "In those days" is an O. T. expression which pointed forward to this Christian era. It was therefore one of many evangelical prophecies couched in the language of an historical event. Whatever fulfillment that prophecy may or may not yet have for the Jewish people (and on that matter we refrain from any dogmatic statement) its present application is to sinners who have been awakened and convicted by the Spirit so that they are concerned about their spiritual and eternal interests. Like those in the historical type, these seekers are issuing forth from a lifelong bondage—in sin. Convicted of their guilt and resolved to reform their ways, they are represented as "going and weeping" and determining to "seek the Lord their God," which in N. T. language would be "repenting" and being "converted." As Matthew Henry says "This represents the return of poor sinners to God. Heaven is the Zion they aim at as their end. On this they have set their hearts, toward this they have set their faces, and therefore they ask the way to it. They do not ask the way to heaven and set their faces to the world, nor set their faces toward heaven and go on at a venture without asking the way. In all true converts there are both a sincere desire to attain the end and a constant care to keep in the way." Their desire and design was to "join themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." That was something they must do, and it is to that particular expression we would ask careful attention, for it has been totally ignored by hyper-Calvinists, who say nothing at all upon the human-responsibility side of the subject—what we must do before the benefits of the Covenant are actually made over to us.

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