

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 4 Its Need-Continued

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Transcript

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Chapter 4

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This doctrine of Reconciliation presents to our view that which is both indescribably horrible and also that which is inexpressibly blessed. The dark background of it is formed by the fearful calamity of Eden, when the entrance of sin into the world involved the ruination of our race and its alienation from God. The sin of Adam (and of ours in him) was a revolt against God's authority, a contempt of His government, a declaration of war against Him. Man is a rebel, an outlaw, an enemy of God, cut off from access to Him. This has already been before us in previous articles. Now we turn to contemplate the blessed contrast wherein God determined to deliver a part of Adam's descendants from the effects of the fall, and this in such a way that His absolute sovereignty, His free grace, His inexorable justice, unsearchable wisdom, ineffable holiness, all-mighty power, infinite goodness and rich mercy, might be equally honored. This is actually accomplished in the saving of His elect by Jesus Christ. The Author of reconciliation is God. Most distinctly, it is God the Father, for there is an order of the Divine Persons in this work, as in all others. "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we by Him" (1 Cor. 8:5). "God who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9). As that was the order of Their operation in connection with the old creation, so it is with regard to the new creation—the Father has effected reconciliation by the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10). Distinct offices are ascribed to each of the Eternal Three. The Father is the Deviser, the Son transacts the part of Mediator, being the One by whom the work of reconciliation is performed; the Holy Spirit is the Recorder of the Father's plan and of the satisfaction offered by the Son and of the peace He has made, and is also the One who sheds abroad Their love in the hearts of the redeemed. The order pointed out above is still more observable in connection with our approach to God. It is through Christ and by the Holy Spirit that we have access unto the Father (Eph. 2:18). All the spiritual blessings we have in Christ are expressly attributed unto the Father (Eph. 1:3), by no means the least of which is reconciliation. Our election is ascribed particularly unto the Father (Eph. 1:3, 4) and so is our regeneration (James 1:17, 18). It is the Father who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, having delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). In accord with this Divine order we find the opening salutation in the Epistles is "grace unto you and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore the Father is due

the same honor and love from us for the sending of His Son, as the Son is for His willingness in being sent. Scripture represents the Father as the One directly wronged by sin, for we are told that Jesus Christ is "an Advocate with the Father"(1 John 2:1). 1. His will. When accountable creatures rebel against their Maker and King, they cut themselves off from all right to claim any blessing or benefit at His hands, for they deserve nothing from Him but wrath and punishment. If they are recovered from the ruin which they have brought upon themselves and are made partakers of Divine salvation, it is solely from the good pleasure of His will, and must be in a way that does not injure any of His perfections; but if they are left to suffer the direful consequences of their apostasy, God is in nowise unjust, for He inflicts no more upon them than they deserve. When a large company of the angels and their chiefs, under Satan's lead, conspiring against the Most High, proudly aspiring to a higher position than had been allotted them, God promptly cast them down from their exalted state, banished them from His presence, and doomed them to suffer everlasting woe (2 Pet. 2:4). He had not a thought of mercy toward those celestial creatures when they revolted against Him. In view of that unspeakably solemn example, it ought to be unmistakably clear to each of us that God might, without the slightest stain upon His own honor, without any unbecoming severity, have left the whole of Adam's guilty race to suffer eternal destruction, for certainly they had no more claim upon His favor than had the fallen angels. That He did not immediately consign the entire family of fallen mankind to irremediable woe, was due alone to His imperial will. That He was pleased to appoint a remnant of them to obtain salvation and eternal glory, is to be attributed solely to His sovereign and amazing grace. That such a concept is no invention of harsh theologians, but is plainly taught by the Word of God, is clear from His own declarations. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:5, 6). "Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9). "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He has purposed in Himself" (Eph. 1:9). The mystery refers to the everlasting covenant in which God arranged and provided for the recovery and salvation of His people who fell in Adam. In proof of which assertion we cite 1 Corinthians 2:7: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" amplified in verses 9 and 10. Now that which is germane to our present design is, that God "purposed in Himself" or resolved to reconcile some of the sons of men to Himself, even though they had become guilty rebels against Him, and this purpose He purposed "before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). One portion or aspect of that purpose is expressly stated in what immediately follows. "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him" (Eph. 1:10). Sin alienates and separates, but the putting away of sin by Christ healed the breach between God and man, between believing Jews and Gentiles, and between them and the holy angels. Now "The whole family in heaven and in earth" (Eph. 3:15) is one —see Revelation 5:11, 12. The restoration and reconciliation of His guilty and alienated people is attributed to God's "good pleasure" whereof no reason is given save that He purposed it in Himself which means that the idea was suggested by none other and that no external motive influenced Him. There was no necessity put upon Him for this resolution. Without the least dishonor to Himself He might have destroyed the entire apostate race, yea, and have been glorified in their destruction. He who was able out of stones "to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9), could have consigned Adam and Eve to eternal woe before they produced any children, and have made a pair from the dust of the ground. There was nothing whatever in the creature that moved God to show mercy unto him. But there is another concept conveyed by this expression, namely, the certainty and powerful efficacy of what He has decided upon. God cannot possibly be disappointed in the accomplishment of His purpose, for none can overthrow it; nor will He ever alter it. "My

counsel shall stand and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. 46:10); "I am the Lord. I change not" (Mal. 3:6). Here is sure and solid comfort for the spiritually awakened sinner. The simple fact that God is merciful in His nature is not sufficient. Satan knows that, but such knowledge affords him no peace! But the Divine assurance "I will show mercy" (Ex. 33:19) opens a real door of hope. Suppose that Christ had died and there had been no Gospel revelation and proclamation of the Divine purpose of His death. The mere knowledge of His crucifixion avails me nothing unless I am assured that it was the will of God to accept Christ's death in lieu of the death of believing sinners: "by which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). The will of God is not only the foundation of the mystery or plan of redemption, but it is also its blessedness. This is the very pith and preciousness of the Gospel. That it is the revealed will of God to save and accept every sinner who puts his or her trust in the atoning blood of Christ. "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from (the corruption and doom) of this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal. 1:4).

2. His love. A few may be surprised that we should distinguish between the will and love of God, but probably a far greater number will wonder why any explanation should be required from us for so doing. Yet John Owen in his "Arguments against Universal Redemption" (chap. 8, para. 5) said, "The eternal love of God towards His elect is nothing by His purpose, good pleasure a pure act of His will, whereby He determines to do such and such things for them in His own time and way." And again, in his "Vindiciae Evangelicae" (chap. 29), after referring to John 3:16 and other passages: "Now the love of God is an eternal free act of His will, His purpose." Such a cold and bare definition may suit philosophers, and metaphysicians, but it will scarcely appeal to the hearts of the regenerate. When Scripture affirms that Christ is the "Son of His love" (Col. 1:13) we are surely to understand something more than that the Son is merely the Object on which the Divine will is set. Rather do we believe, with many others, that the Son is the Darling of the Father's heart. How, too, are we to understand the Savior's representation of the Father in His welcome of the returning prodigal. He "ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). While we are far from believing that God's unfathomable love in anywise resembles ours, as an emotion or passion, subject to fluctuation, yet we refuse to regard it as a mere principle. When the voice of the Father audibly declared "this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," He gave expression to the language of deep and warm affection. When the Lord Jesus affirmed "The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18), we grant that He employed an anthropomorphism (ascribing to God what pertains properly to man), nevertheless we cannot allow that it was a mere figure of speech devoid of real meaning. "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and no refinements of the most eminent theologians must be suffered to rob us of the blessedness and preciousness of that fundamental truth. All things issue from the will of God (Eph. 1:11), but Scripture nowhere tells us that all things proceed from God's love. The non-elect are the subjects of His will, but they are not the objects of His love. Thus there is a clear distinction between the two things. We greatly prefer the statement of Thos. Goodwin. Near the beginning of his massive work on "Christ the Mediator," he shows what was done by God the Father from all eternity in connection with our salvation. First, He points out His eternal purpose and grace, and then inquires "If you would further know, What should be the reason of this strange affection in our God (that is, exercised unto those who had rebelled against Him): why the Scripture gives it. Our God being love, even love itself." Love is an essential perfection in God's very nature, and as it has pleased Him to exercise the same unto His elect. It is an act of His will, yet not of His will absolutely considered but of "the good pleasure of His will" toward them. All the acts of God unto His people in Christ; all the blessings which He has bestowed upon them in Christ, all His thoughts concerning them, all the operations of His grace in them, and the workings of His providence for them, all the manifestations of His kindness and mercy unto them, proceed from His love for them. Love is the fountain from which flows every stream of His goodness unto them. The wondrous

love of God for His people can only be known by its blessed manifestations toward them. As the effects which it produces discovers to us the nature of the cause which produces them, so the love which God bears unto His elect is revealed by His acts unto them and bestowments upon them. God's love for us does not commence when we first respond to His gracious overtures unto us through the Gospel, nor even when He capacitates us to respond by first quickening us into newness of life, for His very calling of us out of darkness into His own marvelous light proceeds from His love for us. Nor did God's love for the Church begin when Christ died for her and put away her sins, for it was because God so loved her that He gave up His beloved Son to die in her room and stead. "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:2) is God's own ringing declaration. Therefore it was in love that He "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself" (Eph. 1:4, 5), which is the foundation of all our blessings. Nor did our fall in Adam produce the slightest change of God's love unto His elect. Though our sin in Eden did not quench God's love for His people nor even chill it to the slightest degree, yet that horrible disobedience of theirs raised such formidable obstacles from the holiness of His nature and the righteousness of His government, yea opposed such a barrier against us as appeared to all finite intelligences, an insuperable one to prevent the exercise of God's compassion unto His guilty and corrupted people. In a word, the Law of God with its inexorable demand for satisfaction, seemed to effectually prevent the operation and manifestation of His love toward its transgressors. Consider carefully an example on the human plane. Darius was induced to sign a decree, that if any person asked a petition during the next thirty days from any save himself, he should forfeit his life (Dan. 6). Daniel himself defied that decree, making supplication of his God as before. His watchful enemies promptly reported this to the king and demanded that Daniel should be cast into the den of lions. Darius was displeased with himself "and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him, and labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him" (v. 14). But in vain. The honor of his law barred the outflow of his love; justice triumphed over mercy. Consider still another case. Absalom committed a grievous offence against his father, for he sought to rob him of his sceptre and wrest the kingdom from his hands, and furthermore, murdered another of his sons. His attempt to gain the kingdom failed, and he fled the country, and remained an exile for three years. David mourned for his son every day and "longed to go forth unto him" (2 Sam. 13:39), but the honor of his throne clearly prohibited such an action. When Joab perceived "that the king's heart was toward Absalom" (14:1) and that he knew not how to make an advance toward him without disgracing his character and government he decided to further his own plans. Accordingly the unscrupulous Joab resorted to guile and employed a woman to speak to David, pleading that Absalom's crime might be pardoned, his attainder reversed, and be released from banishment. Strangely enough she reminded the king that God "doth devise means whereby His banished be not expelled from Him" (v. 14). But such a task of restoring his son without sully his own honor was quite beyond David. The best he could devise was "Let him turn to his own house; and let him not see my face" (v. 24). 3. His wisdom. Where the wit of Darius completely failed before the requirements of human law, the wisdom of God gloriously triumphed over the obstacles interposed by the Divine Law. Where the wit of David could contrive nothing better than a wretched compromise, for which he later paid dearly, the omniscience of Deity found a way whereby His banished sons are restored and which redounds unto His everlasting honor. In pursuance of His gracious design to recover and reconcile His elect from their fall and alienation, the love of God set His consummate wisdom to work in contriving the fittest means for accomplishing the same. Therefore it is that we read in connection with God's grand purpose concerning our salvation that He "works all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). "He works all by counsel to effect and bring to pass what His will is pitched upon, and the stronger His will is in a thing, the deeper are His counsels as to it" (Thos. Goodwin).

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