

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 7 Its Arrangement-Continued

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Transcript

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

Chapter 7

Its Arrangement-Continued

A solemn covenant was entered into between the Father and the Son before ever the world was. A compact was made in which the Father assigned the Son to be the Head and Saviour of His elect, and in which the Son consented to act as the Surety and Sponsor of His people. There was a mutual agreement between Them, of which the Holy Spirit was both the Witness and Recorder. It was in there that the Son was appointed unto the Mediatorial office, when He was "set up" (or anointed as the Hebrew signifies), when He was "brought forth" from the eternal decree (Prov. 8:23,24) and given a covenant subsistence as the God-man. It was then that Christ as a lamb without blemish and without spot "verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). It was then that every thing was arranged between the Father and, the Son, concerning the redemption of the Church. It is this which throws such a flood of light upon many passages in the N.T. which otherwise are shrouded in mystery. As the One more especially offended (1 John 2:1) the Father is represented as taking the initiative in this matter: "I have made a covenant with My Chosen" (Ps. 89:3), yet the very fact that it was a "covenant" necessarily implied the willing concurrence of the Son in it. Before the covenant was settled there was a conference between Them. As there was a conferring together of the Divine Persons concerning our creation (Gen. 1:26), so there was a consultation together over our reconciliation, as to how peace could be righteously made between God and His enemies and as to how their enmity against Him might be slain; and thus we are told "the counsel of peace shall be between Them both" (Zech. 6:13). The terms which the Father proposed unto the Son may be gathered from the office He assumed and the work He performed, for the relation into which He entered and the task He discharged were but the actual fulfilling of the conditions of the covenant. The Son's acceptance of those terms, His willingness in entering office and discharging its duties, is clearly revealed in both Testaments. This covenant was made by the Father with Christ on behalf of His people: "Your seed will I establish forever" follows immediately after Psalm 89:3. So again "My covenant shall stand fast With Him: His seed also will I make to endure forever" (vv. 28,29). In the next verses His seed are termed "His children" and should they be unruly God says "I will visit their transgression with the rod, nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not take from Him"— showing their covenant oneness with Him. The elect were committed to Christ as a charge or trust so that He is held

accountable for their eternal felicity: "Of them which You gave Me have I lost none" (John 18:9). Since the covenant was made with Christ as the Head of the elect it was virtually made with them in Him, they having a representative concurrence therein. The terms of the covenant may be summed up thus. First, it was required that Christ should take upon Him the form of a Servant, be made in the likeness of men, and act as the Surety of His people. Second, it was required of Him that He should render a full and perfect obedience to the Law and thereby provide the meritorious means of their justification. Third, it was required of Him that He should make full satisfaction for their sins, by serving as their Substitute and having visited upon Him the entire curse of the Law. In consideration of His acceptance of those terms the Father promised Him adequate supports; and on fulfillment of the task prescribed, specified rewards were promised Him. Let us briefly amplify these points. Little needs to be said on the first, for it should be clear to the reader that in order for the Son to render obedience to the Law He must become a subject of it and be under its authority. Equally evident is it that to be the Substitute of His people and suffer the penalty of their sins. He must become partaker of their nature—yet without sharing its defilement. It was required from our Surety that He should comply in every respect with the precepts of the Divine Law. Such obedience was required of man originally under the Adamic covenant, and since the nature of God and His relation to the creature changes not, that requirement holds good forever. If then a Surety engages to discharge all the obligations of God's elect then He must necessarily meet that requirement on their behalf, which is only another way of saying that He would thereby provide or bring in an everlasting righteousness for them. "There was no possibility that man could obtain happiness unless this obedience was performed by him, or by another whom the Law should admit to act in his name. 'If you will enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17) is the answer which the Law returns to the sinner who asks what he shall do to inherit eternal life. It is evident the same obedience was required from our Saviour when acting as our federal Head" (J. Dick). The Father required from our Surety full satisfaction for the sins of His people. Since they had broken the Divine Law its penalty must be inflicted, either on them or on One who was prepared to suffer in their room. But before the penalty could be inflicted the guilt of the transgressors must be transferred to Him. That is to say, their sins must be judicially imputed to Him. To that arrangement the Holy One willingly consented, so that He who "knew no sin" was legally "made sin" for His people. God laid on Him the iniquities of them all, and therefore the sword of Divine justice smote Him and exacted satisfaction. Without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sins. The blotting out of transgressions, procuring for us the favor of God, the purchase of the heavenly inheritance, required the death of Christ. The Son's free acceptance of those terms is revealed in Psalm 40. All the best of the commentators from Calvin to Spurgeon have expounded this Psalm throughout of Christ as the Head of His Church. Its opening verses contain His personal thanksgiving for deliverance from death and the grave, but in His new song He makes mention of "our God" (v. 3)—His people sharing His glorious triumph. In verse 5 Christ owns Jehovah as "My God" and speaks of His thoughts to "Uward," that is, to the elect as one with Himself. But it is in verses 6-10 we have that which is most germane to our present subject—a passage quoted in Hebrews 10, and which looks back to the far distant past. The force of "sacrifice and offering You did not desire" (v. 6) is given us in "it is not possible that the blood of bulls, and goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). "My ears have You digged" speaks in the type of Exodus 21:5, 6 and tells of our Lord's readiness to serve and His love to His Father and His children. "A body have You prepared Me" (Heb. 10:5) announces the Son's coming into this world equipped for His arduous undertaking. "Then said I:" when alternatives had been discussed and it was agreed that animal sacrifices were altogether inadequate for satisfying Divine justice. "Lo, I come" willingly of My own volition—from the ivory palaces to the abodes of misery. Those words signified His cheerful acceptance of the terms of the covenant. "In the volume of the book it is written of Me:" thus it was

recorded at the very beginning of the Divine decrees—of which the Scriptures are a faithful transcript—that I should make My advent to earth. Thus it was registered by the Holy Spirit who witnessed My solemn engagement with the Father so to do. Thus it was formally and officially inscribed that in the fullness of time I should become incarnate and accomplish a purpose which lay beyond the capacity of all the holy angels. "I delight to do Your will, O My God" tells us first of the object for which He came—to make good the Father's counsels; second, His freeness and joy in it; third, the character in which He acted—as covenant Head: "My God." "I delight to do Your will, O My God." Here consists the very essence of obedience: the soul's cheerful and loving devotion to God. Christ's obedience, which is the righteousness of His people, was pre-eminent in this quality. Notwithstanding unparalleled sorrows and measureless griefs our Lord found delight on His work. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). "Yea, Your Law is within My heart" He declared. No mere outward and formal subjection to the Divine will was His. That Law which is "holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12) was enshrined in His affections. "O how love I Your Law" (Ps. 119:97) He averred. The Law did not have to be written on His heart, as it has on ours (Heb. 8:10), for it was one with the holiness of His nature. Then what a horrible crime for any to speak disparagingly of or want to be delivered from that Law which Christ loved! The two things—the Father's proposing the terms of the covenant and the Son's free acceptance of them—are brought together in a striking yet rarely considered passage. "And their Noble (the Hebrew is in the singular number) shall be of themselves and their Governor shall proceed from the midst of them, and I will cause Him to draw near, and He shall approach Me: for Who is this that engaged His heart to approach Me, says the Lord" (Jer. 30:21). That is one of the great Messianic prophecies, and it is closely parallel with Psalm 89:19, 20, 27. In it we see the Father taking the initiative, and equally so the Son's cheerful compliance. The Son is to become incarnate, for He was to "proceed from the midst of" the people of Israel. He was to be their "Governor," and in order thereto is seen "approaching" the Father, or voluntarily presenting Himself to serve in that capacity. His free consent and heartiness so to act appears in His "that engaged His heart to approach Me." We cannot now enter into the connections of the above verse, but if the reader compares verse 9 of the same chapter and ponders what follows, he will find confirmation of our interpretation. There the Father announced, "They shall serve the Lord their God and David their King, whom I will raise up (not from the grave, but exalt to office, as in Deut. 18:15; Luke 1:69 etc.) unto them." That can be meant of none other than Christ, the antitypical David, for "serve" includes rendering Divine homage (Matthew 4:10), and worship will never be performed to the resurrected son of Jesse. Now it is the antitypical David, the Father's "Beloved," who is the King and Governor of the spiritual Israel and to whom Divine honors are paid. And He is the One who before earth's foundation was laid "engaged His heart," or as the Heb. signifies "became a Surety in His heart" (for so the word is rendered in Gen. 44:32, Prov. 6:1 etc.) and that is the ground of the covenant which follows: "and you shall be My people and I will be your God" (v. 22). Before looking at some of the assurances made by the Father of adequate assistance to His incarnate Son in the discharge of His covenant engagements, we must consider closely the office in which He served. In previous articles we pointed out the needs be for a Mediator if God and His people were to be reconciled in a way that honored His Law, as we also intimated His consummate wisdom in such an arrangement, and showed the perfect fitness of Christ for such an office. As the Mediator He was to serve as our Surety and also fulfill the functions of Prophet, Priest and King. As the Mediator He was "set up" or "anointed" from the beginning (Prov. 8:23): that is, was given a covenant subsistence as such before God, in which He acted all through the O.T. era. The prophets (equally with the apostles) were His ministers, and therefore the Spirit who spoke in them is termed "the Spirit of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11). In Zechariah 1:11, 12 and 3:2 we find Him interceding: and in anticipation of the incarnation He appeared as "Man" (Josh 5:13, 14; Dan. 12:6, 7). Christ is Mediator in respect of His

person as well as office. Only thus could He be the Representative of God unto us, the Image of the invisible God, the One in whom He is seen (John 14:9), the light of whose glory shines in His face (2 Cor. 4:6). It must be ever remembered that it was a Divine person who became flesh, and it is equally necessary to insist that the whole of His mediatory work is inseparably founded on the exercise of both of His natures. It is quite unwarrantable to predict certain things of His Divine nature and others of His human, for though not confounded there is perfect oneness between them. It was the God-man who was tempted, suffered and died—"the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:26). This is indeed a subject beyond human comprehension, nevertheless, thought "great is the mystery of godliness" yet it is "without controversy" (1 Tim. 3:16) unto all those who bow to the all-sufficient authority of Divine revelation and receive the same as "little children." As the Mediator Christ became the Father's "Servant" (Isa. 42:1; Phil. 2:7). Yet in so doing He ceased not to be a Divine person, but rather the God-man in whom "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). As our Surety Christ became subordinate to the Father's will, nevertheless He still retained all His Divine perfections and prerogatives. When the Holy Spirit announced that unto a Child should be born and a Son given, He was careful to declare that such an One was none other than "the mighty God" (Isa. 9:6). When the Father brought His Firstbegotten into the world He gave orders "Let all the angels of God worship Him" (Heb. 1:6). Yet as our Surety and the Father's Servant He was sent into the world, received commandment from His Father and became obedient unto death. Retaining as He did His Divine perfections He could rightly say "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30), co-equal and co-glorious; yet as the Servant "My Father is greater than I" (John 4:28)—not essentially so but officially, not by nature but by virtue of the place which He had taken. This distinction throws a flood of light upon many passages. To be Himself "the true God" (John 5:20) and yet subject to God—owning Him as "My God;" to be the Law-Giver and yet "under the Law" (Gal. 4:4), to be one with the Father and yet inferior to Him, to be "The Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8) and yet "made both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), are, according to all human reason and logic, inconsistent properties: nevertheless Scripture itself expressly predicates these very things of one and the same Person—yet looked at in different relationships! In the days of His flesh Christ was "over all, God blessed forever" (Rom. 9:6), yet as our Surety "the Head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). While walking this earth as the Man of sorrows the disciples beheld His glory "as of the Only-begotten of the Father" (John 1:4), yet as our Substitute He was "crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 3:4). As God manifest in flesh He both laid down His life and took it again (John 10:18). but as our Shepherd God "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus" (Heb. 3:20). There is perfect harmony amid wondrous variety. Christ's entrance into covenant engagement was entirely voluntary on His part: there existed no prior obligation, nor was there any authority by which He could be compelled to it. As the Father's "Fellow" He was subject to no law and acknowledged no superior, supreme dominion was Him, and He "thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. 2:6). But having freely entered into the covenant and agreed to fulfill its terms, the Son became officially subordinate to the Father, and as our Surety He "sent Him into the world" (John 13:7), and as our Surety he was "anointed" with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38), was "delivered up for us all" (Rom. 8:32), was raised from the dead (Acts 2:24), was "given all power" (Matthew 28:18), was elevated to the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3), was exalted "to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31), and was "ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead" (Acts 10:42). Thus, the very passage over which "Unitarians" have stumbled and broken their necks speak of Christ not in His essential Person but in His mediatorial office: the former giving value to the latter, the latter endearing the former to our hearts.

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