

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 10 Its Effectuation

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Transcript

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Chapter 10

Its Effectuation

To refresh your memories we will here epitomize what has been presented in previous chapters. First, we pointed out the distinctions which require to be recognized if confusion is to be avoided. (1) That in connection with reconciliation God acts both as a loving Father and as an inflexible Judge. (2) That His elect are viewed both in the purpose of His grace and under the condemnation of His Law. (3) That they are viewed by Him both in Christ as their covenant-Head and as the depraved descendents of fallen Adam: in the one case as "His dear children," and in the other as being "by nature the children of wrath" (4) That though there is no change in God yet there is in His attitude unto and His dealings with them. (5) That God's purpose concerning His elect in eternity and the actual accomplishment of that purpose in a time-state must not be confused. Failure to observe these distinctions has caused many to err in their preaching and writing on this important subject. Next, we demonstrated the need for reconciliation. Therein we dwelt upon the fearful breach which the entrance of sin made between God and man, the creature casting off all allegiance to his Maker, revolting from his rightful Lord, despising His authority, trampling under foot His commandments. We showed that while the original offence was committed by Adam, yet he was acting as the federal head of his race, and therefore that the guilt and consequences of his transgression are justly imputed to all his descendants. Moreover, they take sides with him by perpetuating his evil course. The life of the unregenerate is one unbroken course of rebellion against God. The consequences of that breach are that fallen man is separated from God, he is an object of abhorrence to God, he is under the wrath of God, he is in bondage to Satan and so under the reigning power of sin that he hates God. Obviously such an one is in urgent need of being restored to His favor and having his vile enmity removed. Then, we saw that the Author of reconciliation is God, and more particularly, God the Father. In the development of which we pointed out that the recovery of His fallen elect proceeds from the good pleasure of His will or "the eternal purpose which He purposed in Himself" That gracious design was suggested by none other, and no external motive influenced Him. No necessity was put upon Him to form such a resolution: it was simply His own sovereign design—"I will show mercy" Yet it was His own nature which prompted His decision: it originated in the everlasting love which God bore to His elect—a love so great that even their awful sins could not quench nor produce any change in it. Nevertheless, since the

Divine holiness was infinitely antagonized by sin, Divine justice required that full satisfaction should be made for the dishonor it had wrought. Naught but Divine wisdom could find a way in which Love and Law were perfectly harmonized and solve the problem of how mercy and justice might alike maintain its ground without the slightest compromise, yea, issue from the conflict honorable and glorious. Under the last division of our subject we turned our attention to the Divine arrangement for the accomplishment of reconciliation, namely, "The Everlasting Covenant," in which is displayed the Divine perfections in their blessed unity. In that covenant God gave His elect to Christ as a trust or charge, holding Him responsible for their everlasting felicity. In that covenant all the details of the wondrous plan of redemption were drawn up and settled. In that covenant the Father made known unto the Son the terms which He must fulfil and the task He must perform in order to the saving of "that which was lost;" while the Son voluntarily concurred therein and gladly consented to carry out its stipulations. In that covenant we have revealed the office which Christ was to assume and the nature of the work He was to do, namely, to serve as the Substitute and Surety of His people in the full discharge of all their obligations unto the Divine Law. In that covenant the Father gave assurance of rendering adequate assistance to the Mediator in the performing of His engagement and the guarantee of the glorious reward upon the successful completion thereof. We are now to see how the eternal purpose of God was effected, how the mutual engagements of the everlasting covenant were fulfilled. "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption (or "status") of sons" (Gal. 4:4,5). The "fullness of time" means more than that the ordained hour had arrived: it signifies when all the preliminary operations of Divine providence had been completed, when the stage was thoroughly prepared for this unparalleled event, when the world's need had been fully demonstrated. The advent of God's Son to this earth was no isolated event, but the climax of a lengthy preparation. That He was now "made of a woman" was the fulfillment of the Divine announcement in Gen. 3:14 and Isa. 7:14. That He was "made under the Law" which His people had broken is what supplies the key to that which is otherwise an inexplicable mystery, in fact, throws a flood of light upon the experiences through which He passed from Bethlehem to Calvary. The very circumstances of Christ's birth at once made unmistakably manifest that God had sent forth none other than His own Son and clearly intimated the unique mission upon which the Beloved of the Father had then entered. Nothing less than a supernatural birth befitted so august a Person, and such was accomplished by the miraculous conception of His virgin mother, by means of which a "holy" humanity became His (Luke 1:35)—a real human spirit, and soul and body, yet without the slightest taint of our corruption. The amazing event of the Incarnation and the Divine dignity of the One who had become flesh was signaled by the appearing again of "the Shekinah" (which had left Israel in the days of Ezekiel—10:4,18; 11:23), for "the glory of the Lord (namely, the Shekinah) shone round about" the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains, so that they were "sore afraid;" and an angel announced to them that the One just born was none other than "Christ the Lord;" while suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the "heavenly host" praising God and saying "glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:9,14). But, if what we have just alluded to were clear proofs that God had indeed "sent forth His Son, made of a woman," there were other attendant circumstances which no less plainly intimated (to an anointed eye) that His Son was also "made under the Law," and that, as the Surety of His people, as the One who had entered their Law-place, He must receive what is due them. This has not been sufficiently recognized. In that same second of Luke we read that Mary "brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (v. 7). The force of that is better perceived if it be linked with "so He drove out the man" (Gen. 3:24) from Eden, for he had become an outcast from his Maker. Do we not behold then in His exclusion from the inn and birth in a cattle shed a definite shadowing

forth of the fact that Christ had vicariously entered the place of His outcast people! In the circumcising of Him on the eighth day (v. 21) there was an evident prefigurement that He had been made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3). That was unspeakably solemn, but amazingly wonderful. A little later it was made evident that the One cradled in the manger was more than human. The wise men saw "His star in the east" and came to Jerusalem inquiring "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" That extraordinary star "went before them until it came and stood over where the young Child was." Entering the house where He abode, they "fell down and worshipped Him" (Matthew 2:11), presenting gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh — thus were Divine honors paid Him. Yet immediately after a determined effort was made by Herod to slay Him, as though to show us from the beginning that His life was forfeit and that a death by violence awaited Him! But His hour had not then arrived and Joseph was warned to flee with Him. His sojourn in Egypt was not without significance, for it intimated that as the Surety of His people He had taken His place alongside of them in the typical house of bondage. With what awe and astonishment should we contemplate these things! What we sought to point out unmistakably opens up to us the deeper meaning of much that is recorded in the Gospels, supplying the key to the strange mingling of the lights and shadows in the earthly career of our Lord. That key lies in the distinction which must ever be drawn between the adorable Person and the awful place which He took, between the Son of God incarnate and the office He was discharging. Though His essential glory was veiled by flesh, yet that glory frequently broke forth in splendor. Or to put it in another way: God had suffered His Beloved to "make Himself of no reputation" in this world, yet He was so jealous of His honor that again and again He afforded proof that the despised One was Immanuel. Thus if Christ—to the amazement of His forerunner—submitted to the ordinance of baptism, yet at that very time the heavens were "opened unto Him," and the Spirit descended like as a dove upon Him and the voice of the Father was heard saying "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Yes, the key to the deeper meaning of much in the Gospels is found in keeping before us the distinction between the Person and the place He took. He was the Holy One, but He took the place of His sinful people. As the Holy One ineffable joy, unclouded blessedness, the love and homage of all creatures was His legitimate due. Treading the path of obedience, the smile of God and the ordering of His providences accordingly was what He was justly entitled to. Wisdom's ways are "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," and Christ ever trod Wisdom's ways without any deviation—why then did He encounter so much unpleasantness and opposition? "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7), and Christ always pleased Him (John 8:29); yet the Father was far from making His enemies at peace with Him. Why? Ignore the office which Christ had taken (and was discharging from Bethlehem onwards!) and we are left without any possible solution. "The foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has no where to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). The real force of that pathetic statement can best be perceived by grasping the meaning of the particular title which the Savior here employed. It has its roots in the following O. T. passages: "The stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm!" (Job 25:5,6); "What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him" (Ps. 8:4; and cf. 146:3), from which it will be seen that it is a term of abasement and ignominy, expressive of lowly condition. In its application to Christ it connotes not only His true humanity, but also the humiliation and shame into which He descended. It is descriptive of His person, but more especially of His office; in other words, it points to Him as "the Second Man," the "last Adam," and as such, entering our lot, sharing our misery, serving as our Surety. Christ appropriated this title unto Himself as marking His condescending grace and as displaying the condition which He had taken to Himself. A certain scribe had offered to follow Jesus wherever He went, and "the Son of man has no where to lay His head" was His response. It was not only a word bidding him count the cost, but an announcement that His path led to the place where none

could accompany Him. It was more than a declaration that He who was rich for our sakes became poor in order to reinstate us: it was an intimation that He had voluntarily subjected Himself to the consequences of sin, that He would therefore be treated as a sinner both by God and by men, that He had entered the place of His disinherited people (driven out: Gen. 3:24) and therefore that He had no claim to ought in this world. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Thus it is clear that this "Son of man" title contemplates Christ as the humbled One. Confirmatory of this it is the fact that He is never referred to by it after His resurrection, though as "the Son of man" He appropriately receives His reward (Dan. 7:13; Matthew 26:64; John 5:27). Justice demands that each one shall receive his due. Now the Lord Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners:" then to what was He lawfully entitled at the hands of a righteous God? Does not the Judge of all the earth do right! then how shall He order His governmental dealings toward the One who eminently honored and glorified Him? Must He not show Himself strong on His behalf? Must He not shower upon Him the ceaseless tokens of His favor? Must He not turn the hearts of all men unto Him in loving homage? Certainly—but for one thing! Though personally holy, yet officially the guilt of His people rested upon Him. In view of Psalm 37:25 how can we possibly account for the righteous One Himself being forsaken by God in the hour of His acutest extremity? Only one answer is possible, and that is furnished by what we have sought to set before the reader. "Bearing the shame and scoffing rude In my place condemned He stood." Blessed be God if the reader can, by sovereign grace, respond with us "Sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah, what a Saviour!"

If we shut our eyes to the solemn fact that the Son of God entered this world charged with the guilt of His people, then are we confronted with the supreme anomaly, the most flagrant injustice of all history. For on the one hand, we have the Personification of all virtue and moral excellency; and on the other, God suffering Him to be traduced as One possessed of a "demon" (John 10:20). On the one hand we have the supreme Benefactor of mankind ever going about and doing good, and yet God so ordering His lot that He "had no where to lay His head." On the one hand we have Him preaching glad tidings to the poor and binding up the broken hearted, and on the other hand God allowing Him to be so dealt with by those whom He befriended that He cried "reproach has broken My heart" (Ps. 69:20). On the one hand we have Him manifested as Love incarnate, yet on the other, God permitting His enemies to vent their bitterest hatred upon Him. In the case of all others we discern the principle of sowing and reaping, of the connection between conduct and the consequences which it righteously entails; but in the case of our Lord there was not, so far as He personally acted and was treated. Yet bring into account the relation which He sustained to His guilty people and the anomaly and seeming injustice vanishes. Perhaps some readers are inclined to say: I can see why it was necessary for Christ as our Substitute to endure the wrath of God, but I am rather at a loss to understand why He should have to suffer such cruel treatment at the hands of men; true, their vile conduct against the Lord of glory demonstrated as nothing else has the fearful depravity of human nature, but why did the Father, under His righteous government of the world, permit His Son to be so unjustly dealt with by Jews and Gentiles alike? Though it was ordained that He should be crucified and slain by wicked hands (Acts 2:23), yet wherein lay the necessity for Him to be so mistreated by His own creatures? and that not only during "the Passion week" but throughout the whole course of His ministry? In the light of what we have sought to point out, there should surely be no difficulty at this point: it is only a matter of giving a wider application to that basic and illuminating principle. As the Surety of His people Christ entered this world charged with all their guilt, and therefore He had to suffer not only for their sins against God but also against their fellows. We have broken both tables of the Law, and therefore the Redeemer must endure the penalty of both. See then in the treatment meted out to Him by men, what we deserve because of our woeful failure to love our neighbor as ourselves. As our Substitute a life of

reproach among men was His due. Therefore "He came unto His own and His own received Him not," but instead, despised and rejected Him. Therefore was He, throughout His course, "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" subjected to contempt, constantly persecuted by His enemies. The very next verse in Isaiah 53 explains why He was the Man of sorrows: "surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Therefore was the sin-Bearer deserted by all His apostles (Matthew 26:56) as well as forsaken by God. It is indeed in the closing scenes of "the days of His flesh" that we may perceive most clearly Christ occupying the place of His people and receiving both from man and God that which was due unto us. As we view Him before Caiaphas and Herod we must not be occupied only with the human side of things, but look higher and see Divine justice directing all. The Romans were renowned for their respect of law, their equity of dealings, and their mild treatment of those they conquered. Then how shall we account for the conduct of Pilate and his soldiers? and especially, why did God require His Son to be mocked with a trial that appears worse than a farce. Because though personally innocent, He was officially guilty.

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