

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 18 Its Scope

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Transcript

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Chapter 18

Its Scope

Who are the ones from whom the wrath of God has been turned away and to whom He is reconciled? Who are they whose enmity against God has been slain and are actually reconciled to Him? Though those questions are quite distinct, yet are they intimately allied the one to the other; though they relate to separate transactions, yet really they are but parts of one whole. Those inquiries signify much the same as though we asked, On whose behalf did Christ satisfy God? Who are the ones who must eventually partake of the saving benefits of His mediation? Theologians have been by no means agreed in the answers they have returned, for those questions necessarily raise the fundamental issues which have divided Christendom into Calvinists and Arminians. That issue may be more clearly drawn if we make our question yet more definite and specific. For whom did Christ act as Surety and Substitute? For all the human race, or for the Church only? What was the scope of the Everlasting Covenant? Did it embrace the whole of Adam's posterity or did it respect only a chosen remnant of them? Who are the ones who will eternally benefit from the great Propitiation? Probably most of our readers would reply, all who truly exercise faith in the blood of Christ. Nor would their answer be incorrect, though it would be more satisfactory to frame it from the Divine side of things rather than from the human side. As it is made from the latter, we have to push the inquiry further back and ask, Who are the ones who savingly trust in the blood of Christ? Not all who hear the Gospel, for even the majority of them turn a deaf ear unto it, so that its preachers have to exclaim "who has believed our report?" (Isa. 53:1). Perhaps the reader will return answer to this last inquiry, Those who are willing to receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Correct: but who are they? By nature none are willing to do that. "No man can come to Me except the Father which has sent Me draw him" (John 6:44) that is overcome his reluctance. "Your people shall be willing in the day of Your power" (Ps. 110:3) gives the Scriptural answer. From the Divine side, the reply to our opening question is, Those on whose behalf the great propitiation was made— God's people. If there were no explicit statements in Scripture there are many implicit ones in it from which we may determine with certainty the precise scope of reconciliation. The ordination, imputation, (accomplishment) and application (bestowal of the benefits) of Christ's work must of necessity be coextensive. We say "of necessity" for otherwise we should be affirming that the ways of God were "unequal"—inconsistent, inharmonious. What God the Father

purposed that God the Son effected, and what He effected God the Spirit applies and bestows. The only other possible alternative is to predicate a defeated Father, a disappointed Christ, and a disgraced Holy Spirit—which is the kind of "God" the Arminians believe in. But there are clear and decisive statements in Scripture which reveal to us the extent of the Father's purpose and the scope of the Son's purchase.. Says the Father concerning His Son, "for the transgression of My people was He stricken" (Isa. 53:8). "You shall call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Said the Son "the good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11)—and not the goats. The idea of a mere conditional "provision" for the reconciliation of all mankind is a theory which sets aside the absolute purpose of God respecting the work of Christ. That theory renders of no account the promises of God concerning the death of His Son, for by pleading that it made the salvation of all men possible, in actuality it denies that it made the salvation of any man certain. God the Father promised His Son a definite reward upon the successful accomplishment of His work. "He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:10,11). How could He be satisfied if any of those for whom He was their sin-offering were finally lost? "By the blood of Your covenant I have sent forth Your prisoners out of the pit in which is no water" (Zech. 9:11). But what security could there be for the fulfillment of those promises if no infallible provision was made for the regeneration of those persons, and instead, everything was left contingent on the wills of men! Consider the special character in which Christ died. "Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:20, 21). In serving as the Shepherd Christ died for the sheep and not for the goats. Said He "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11), and mark it well, they are represented as being His "sheep" before they believe. "And other sheep I have (as the Father's gift and charge), which are not of this (Jewish) fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice (when the Spirit quickens them) and they shall be one fold, one Shepherd" (John 10:16). But all men pertain not to the "sheep" of Christ: said He to those who rejected Him "you believe not, because you are not of My sheep" (John 10:26). The "sheep" are the elect, God's chosen people. Christ Himself declared that His "flock" is a little one (Luke 12:32), and therefore not the whole human race. Christ laid down His life as a Husband. "Your Maker is your Husband, The Lord of hosts is His name, and your Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, The God of the whole earth shall He be called" (Isa. 54:5). Note this comes right after Isaiah 53! Equally clear is the teaching of the N. T.: "Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church" (Eph. 5:25-27). As the Husband He died for His Wife (Rev. 19:7). It was His love which caused Him to do so, and it was a discriminating love—set upon a definite object. And again we say, note this well, that the Church for whom Christ gave Himself is not here viewed as a regenerated and believing company, but as one whose members needed to be "sanctified and cleansed." He died not for believers as such, but "while we were yet enemies" (Rom. 5:10). Nor can Christ be foiled of His design, for He will yet present the Church to Himself "a glorious Church" and not a mutilated one—as it would be if any of its members were finally missing. Christ served as a Surety. He is expressly denominated the "Surety" of a better covenant (Heb. 7:22), and unless we are prepared to believe that Christ is defeated in His undertaking, then we cannot extend the persons for whom He was Sponsor beyond those who are finally saved. To speak of a "surety" failing is surely a contradiction in terms. If he does not, with certainty, prevent loss how can he be a "surety!" To remove any doubt on this point Scripture declares "He shall not fail" (Isa. 42:4). He shall yet triumphantly exclaim, "Behold land the children which God has given Me" (Heb. 2:13). Christ's suretyship

was no fictitious one, but real. Under that office He engaged Himself to make satisfaction for certain people, and by His engagement to cancel all their debt and fulfill all righteousness in their stead, and since He has perfectly performed this, as much and as truly as though those for whom He acted had themselves endured all the punishment due their sins and had rendered to the Law all the obedience it required, the consequence is clear and inescapable. Those for whom He engaged and satisfied are they who are actually saved from their sins and pronounced righteous by God, and none else. The very nature of Christ's satisfaction determines to a demonstration those who are the beneficiaries of it. It was a federal work. There was both a covenant and legal oneness between Christ and those for whom He transacted. The Saviour stood as the Bondsman of a particular people, and if a single one of those whose obligations He assumed received not a full discharge, then Divine justice would be reduced to a farce. It was a substitutionary work. Christ acted not only on the behalf of, but in the stead of, those who had been given to Him by the Father; therefore all those whose sins He bore must of necessity have their sins remitted—God cannot punish twice. First the Substitute and then the subject. It was a legal work. Every requirement of the Divine law, both preceptive and punitive was fulfilled by Christ. Therefore all for whom He acted must receive the reward of His obedience, which is everlasting life. It was a priestly work: He presented Himself as an offering to God, and since God accepted His sacrifice its efficacy and merits must be imputed unto all those for whom it was offered. The intercession of Christ defines the scope of His atoning sacrifice. The death and intercession of Christ are co-extensive. Define the extent of the one and you determine the extent of the other. That must be so, for the latter is based upon the former and is expressive of its grand design. Scripture is too plain on this point to allow of any uncertainty or mistake. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that dies, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33,34). "Wherefore He is able also to save those to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). To make assurance doubly sure on this important matter our great High Priest has expressly declared "I pray not for the world" (John 17:9). Thus there must be a "world" for whom He did not die. For whom did He say He prays? "But for them which You have given Me, for they are Yours." There are those who suppose that the doctrine of particular redemption detracts from the goodness and grace of God and from the merits of Christ, and therefore conclude it cannot be true. But this mistake becomes manifest if we examine the alternative view. Surely it is not honoring the goodness and grace of God to affirm that the whole human race has nothing but a bare possibility of salvation, yea, a great probability of perishing, notwithstanding all that He has done to save them. Yet that is exactly what is involved in the Arminian scheme, which avers that Christ died to make the salvation of all men possible. That love and grace must indeed be greater which infallibly secures the salvation of some, even though a minority, than that which only provides a mere contingency for all. To us it seems to indicate coldness and indifference for God to leave it a second time to the mutable will of man to secure his salvation, when man's will at its best estate ruined Adam and all his posterity. If infinite love and goodness was shown to all men in giving Christ to die for them, would it not also give the Holy Spirit to all of them to effectually apply salvation—to subdue their lusts, overcome their enmity, make them willing to comply with the terms of the Gospel and fix their adherence to it? The Scriptures set forth the love and kindness of God as one which makes not merely a bare offer of salvation to sinners, but as actually saving "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4,5). The Word of Truth declares that the "God who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ. By grace you are saved" (Eph. 2:4,5). How would God's love and mercy toward men appear if He gave Christ for all only to make it possible that they might be saved, and then left by far the greater part of them ignorant of even the

knowledge of salvation, and a large number of those who are acquainted with it, not made willing to embrace it in a day of His power? But over against all that has been set forth in the above paragraphs some will quote "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19), and suppose that by so doing they have completely overthrown the whole of what has been brought out. But surely the candid reader can perceive for himself that what has been presented in the whole of the foregoing is not the theories of Calvinistic theologians, nor the subtle reasoning of metaphysicians, but rather the plain and simple teaching of Holy Writ itself. Thus, whatever 2 Corinthians 5:19 does or does not mean, it cannot annul all the other passages which have been appealed to. God's Word does not contradict itself, and it is positively sinful for any of us to pit those verses we like against those we dislike. If we humbly look to God for wisdom and patiently search His Word, it should be found that 2 Corinthians 5:19 can be interpreted in perfect harmony with all other Scripture, and that, without any wresting or straining, namely, by the same principles of exegesis which we apply to all other passages. Like every other portion of the Word 2 Corinthians 5:29 needs interpreting, by which is meant, its terms explained. Perhaps some demur and say, No explanation is necessary. The verse says what it means and means what it says. We fully agree that it means what it says, but are we sure that we understand what it means? The meaning of a verse is not obtainable from the sound of its words, but rather from the sense of them, and that can only be ascertained from the way in which they are used and by comparing other passages where the same subject is in view. If we take general and indefinite terms and understand them in an unlimited sense, then we soon land ourselves in the grossest absurdities. For instance, when the apostle said, "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22), he surely did not include duplicity, unfaithfulness, or the use of carnal means. When we are exhorting "in every thing give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18) we must exclude a course of sinning, for God condemns the one who blesses himself in a wicked way (Deut. 29:19). Now just as all things and all means in 1 Corinthians 9:22 are general expressions, which other passages (and considerations), require us to qualify, so the term "world" in 2 Corinthians 5:19 is an indefinite one, and its scope is to be determined by the tenor of the passage in which it occurs and its meaning understood in a way harmonious with the teaching of Holy Writ. Any one who has taken the trouble to make a concordant study of the word "world" will have discovered that it is a most ambiguous term, that it has widely different significations in Scripture, and therefore no definition of its extent can be framed from the bare mention of the term itself. Sometimes the "world" has reference to the material world, and sometimes to its inhabitant; it is used in both these senses in John 1:10. In some cases it refers to only a very small part of its inhabitant, as in "show Yourself to the world" (John 17:4) and "the world is gone after Him" (John 12:19), where the references are to only a portion of Judea, and cannot signify "all mankind." Other passages will be noticed in the article which immediately follows, where further proof is given that the term "world" is far from being used with one uniform significance, and that it rarely means the whole human race.

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