

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 2 Its Need

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Transcript

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Chapter 2

Its Need

The word reconciliation means to unite two parties who are estranged. It denotes that one has given offence and the other has taken umbrage or is displeased by it, in consequence of which there is a breach between them. Instead of friendship there is a state of hostility existing, instead of amity there is enmity, which results in separation and alienation between them. This it is which makes manifest the need for peace to be made between the estranged parties, that the wrong may be righted, the cause of the displeasure be removed, the ill-feeling cease, the breach be healed and reconciliation accomplished. The parties at variance are man and God. Man has grievously offended the Most High. He has cast off allegiance to Him, revolted from Him, despised His authority, trampled upon His commandments. The enormity of such an offence it is impossible for us to fully conceive. The heinousness of it can only be measured by the exalted dignity of the One against whom it is committed. It has been committed against the Almighty against One who is infinite in majesty, infinite in excellency, infinite in His sovereign rights over the creature of His own hands; and therefore it is an offence of infinite magnitude and turpitude. The original offence was committed by Adam in Eden, but that fearful transgression can only be rightly understood as we recognize that Adam acted there not as a private individual but as a public person. He was Divinely constituted to be not only the father but also the federal head of the human race. He stood as the legal representative of all mankind, so that in the sight of the Divine Law what he did they did, the one transacting on the behalf of the many. The whole human race was placed on probation in the person of the first man. His trial was their trial. While he stood they stood. While he retained the approbation of God and remained in fellowship with Him, they did the same. Had he survived the trial, had he fitly discharged his responsibility, had he continued in obedience to God, his obedience had been reckoned to their account, and they had entered into the reward which had been bestowed upon him. Contrariwise, if he failed and fell, they failed and fell in him. If he disobeyed God his disobedience is imputed unto all those whom he represented and the just but fearful curse pronounced upon him falls likewise on all for whom he transacted. What has just been pointed out by us above, was amplified at some length in our articles on the Adamic Covenant, which appeared in this magazine some ten years ago, but as many of our present readers have never seen them it will be necessary for us now to give a brief summary of what was then

said. The legal relation between Adam and his posterity may be illustrated thus. God did not deal with mankind as with a field of corn, where each stalk stands upon its own individual root; but He dealt with it as a tree, all the branches of which have one common root and trunk. If you strike with an axe at the root of a tree, the whole tree falls—not only the trunk, but also the branches and even the twigs on the branches. All wither and die. So it was with Adam in Eden. God permitted Satan to lay the axe at the root of humanity and when he fell all his posterity fell with him. At one fatal stroke Adam was severed from communion with his Maker, and as the consequence "death passed upon all men." This is not a theory of human speculation but a fact of Divine revelation. That Adam was the federal head of the human race, that he did act and transact in a representative character, and that the judicial consequences of his act was imputed to all those for whom he stood, is clearly taught in Romans 5. "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, in whom all sinned" (v. 12). "Through the offence of one many be dead" (v. 15). "The judgment was by one to condemnation . . . By one man's offence death reigned . . . By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation . . . By one man's offence many were made sinners" (vv. 16, 17, 18, 19). Such repetition and emphasis intimates the basic importance of the truth here revealed and also hints at our slowness or rather reluctance to receive the same. The meaning of these declarations is too plain for any unprejudiced mind to misunderstand. It pleased God to deal with the human race as represented in and by Adam. "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). There is the plainly-revealed fact, and they who deny it make God a liar. Here, then, we learn what is the formal ground of man's judicial condemnation before God. The popular idea of what it is which renders man a sinner in the sight of Heaven is altogether inadequate and erroneous. The prevailing conception is that a sinner is one who commits and practices sin. It is true that this is the character of the sinner, but it certainly is not that which primarily constitutes him such before the Divine Law. The truth is that every member of our race enters into this world a guilty sinner, alienated from God, before ever he commits a single transgression. It is not only that he possesses a depraved nature but that he is directly "under condemnation" the curse of the broken Law resting upon him, and from God he is "estranged from the womb" (Ps. 58:3). We are legally constituted sinners neither by what we are nor by what we are doing, but by the disobedience of our federal head, Adam. Adam acted not for himself alone, but for all who were to spring from him, so that his act, was forensically, our act. Here also is the only key which satisfactorily opens to us the meaning of human history and explains the universal prevalence of sin. The human race is suffering for the sin of Adam, or it is suffering for nothing at all. There is no escape from that alternative. This earth is the scene of a grim and awful tragedy. In it we behold misery and wretchedness, strife and hatred, pain and poverty, disease and death on every side. None escape the fearful entail. That "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" is an indisputable fact. But what is the explanation of it? Every effect must have a previous cause. If we are not being punished for Adam's sin, then, coming into this world we are "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), beneath the Divine judgment, corrupt and defiled, on the broad road which leads to destruction, for nothing at all! Who would contend that this was better, more satisfactory, more illuminative, than the Scriptural explanation of our ruin? Genesis 3 alone explains why human history is written in the ink of blood and tears. The objection that such an arrangement is unjust is invalid. The principle of representation is a fundamental one in human society. The father is the legal head of his children during their minority. What he does binds the family. A business house is held responsible for the transactions of its agents. Every popular election illustrates the fact that a constituency will act through its representative and be bound by his acts. The heads of a state are vested with such authority that the treaties they make are binding upon the whole nation. This principle is so basic it cannot be set aside. Human affairs could not continue nor society exist without it. This is the method by which God has acted all through. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. The

posterity of Canaan were cursed for the single transgression of their parent (Gen. 9), the whole of his family stoned for Achan's sin (Joshua 7). Israel's high priest acted on behalf of the whole nation. One acting for others is a basic principle both of human and Divine government. Finally, let it be pointed out that the sinner's salvation is made to depend upon this very same method. Beware, then, my reader, of quarrelling with the justice of this principle of representation—the one standing for the many. On this principle we were wrecked, and by this principle only can we be rescued. If on the one hand, the disobedience of the first Adam was the judicial ground of our condemnation, on the other hand the obedience of the last Adam is the legal basis on which God justifies sinners. The substitution of Christ in the place of His people, the imputation of their sins to Him and of His righteousness to them, is the central fact of the Gospel. But the principle of being saved by what Another has done is only possible on the ground that we were lost through what another did. The two stand or fall together. If there had been no Covenant of Works there would have been no Covenant of Grace. If there had been no death in Adam there had been no life in Christ. The Christian knows that such an arrangement is just because it is part of the revealed ways of Him who is infinitely holy and righteous. Here, then, is the Divinely-revealed fact: "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Rom. 5:19). Here is cause of humiliation which few think about. We are members of an accursed race, the fallen children of a fallen parent, and as such we enter this world "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18), exposed to His judicial displeasure. In the day that Adam fell the frown of the Most High came upon His children. The holy nature of God abhorred the apostate race. The curse of His broken Law descended upon all of Adam's posterity. It is only thus we can account for the universality of human depravity and suffering. The corruption of human nature which we inherit from our first parents is a great evil, for it is the source of all our personal sins. For God to allow this transmission of depravity is to inflict a punishment. But how can God punish all, unless all were guilty? The fact that all do share in this common punishment is proof that all sinned in Adam. Our depravity and misery are not, as such, the infliction of the Creator, but are the retribution of the Judge. If we now repeat some of the statements made above it is that the reader may not form a wrong conception or draw a false conclusion. We are very far from teaching here that the human race is suffering for an offence in which they had no part, that innocent creatures are being condemned for the action of another which could not fairly be laid to their account. Let it be clearly understood that God punishes none for Adam's sin (if considering him as a private person), but only for his own sin in Adam. The whole human race had a federal standing in Adam. Not only was each of us seminally in his loins when God created him, but each of us was legally represented by him when God made with him the Covenant of Works. Adam acted and transacted in that Covenant as a public person, not simply as a private individual, but as the surety and sponsor of his race. The very fact that we continue breaking the Covenant of Works and disobeying the Law of God demonstrates our oneness with Adam under the Covenant. Our complicity with Adam in his rebellion is evidenced every time that we personally sin against God. It is nothing short of downright hypocrisy for us to murmur against the justice of this arrangement of constitution while we follow in the steps of Adam. If we have nothing to do with him and are not in bondage through him, why do we not repudiate him—refuse to sin, break the chain, stand out in opposition to him, and be holy? This brings us to the second chief count in the fearful indictment against us. We take sides with Adam. We perpetuate his evil course. We make him an exemplar. The life of the unregenerate is one unbroken curse of rebellion against God. There is no genuine submission to Him, no concern for His glory, no disinterested love for Him. Self-will is our governing principle and self-pleasing our goal. Whatever religious deference may apparently be shown God, it is rendered out of self-interest—either to curry favor with Him, or to appease His anger. The things of time and sense are preferred before Him, the lies of Satan are heeded rather than the Word of Truth, and instead of humbling ourselves before Him because of our original

offence in Eden, we multiply transgressions against Him. However unpalatable it may be to proud flesh and blood the fact is that the natural man is engaged in a warfare against God. He hates the things God loves, and loves the things He hates. He scorns the things God enjoins and pursues the things He has forbidden. He is a rebel against the Divine government, refusing to be in subjection to the Divine will. The moment his own will is crossed by the dispensations of Providence he murmurs. He is unthankful for the mercies of which he is the daily recipient, and less mindful of the Hand that so freely ministers to him than the horse or the mule to the one who feeds him. He continually growls at his lot, constantly grumbles at the weather, and is a stranger to contentment. In short "the carnal mind is enmity against God and is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Cor. 2:14)—contrary to his corrupted mind, at variance with his vitiated desires. "There is none that seeks after God" (Rom. 3:11). There is then a breach—a real, a broad, a fearful breach—between God and man. In the very nature of the cause it cannot be otherwise. That breach has been made by sin. God is holy, so holy that He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil and can not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). Sin has given infinite offence unto God, for it is that "abominable thing" which He hates (Jer. 44:4). Sin is a species of spiritual anarchy, a defiance of the triune Jehovah. It is a saying in actions "Let us break Their bands, and cast away Their cords from us" (Ps. 2:3)—let us disregard the Divine laws and be lords of ourselves. Not only is sin highly obnoxious to the infinitely-pure nature of God, but it is flagrant affront to His government, being rebellion against it, and therefore as the moral Rector of the universe He declares His displeasure against the same "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18)—an open display of which was made of old when the flood swept the earth clean of His enemies. Here then is the black background which discovers to us the need for reconciliation. "your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you" (Isa. 59:2). He is displeased with us and His justice cries out for our destruction. "They rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit; therefore He was turned to be their Enemy" (Isa. 63:10). Unspeakably solemn is that, the terrible import of which is utterly beyond our powers to conceive. That the great I am, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe has become man's "Enemy" so that His anger burns against him. This was evidenced at the beginning, for right after God had arraigned the guilty culprits in Eden, we are told that "He drove out the man. And He placed cherubims at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way—to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). Man was now cut off from access to the One whom he had so grievously offended and turned to be his Enemy. And man is also at enmity with Him. How little is it realized that there is an immeasurable gulf between God and sinner. And little wonder that so few have even the vaguest idea of the same. All human religion is an attempt to gloss over this fearful fact. And with exceedingly rare exceptions the religion of present-day Christendom is but a studied effort to hide the awful truth that man has forfeited the favor of God and is barred from His holy presence, yea that "the Lord is far from the wicked" (Prov. 15:29). The religion of the day proceeds on the assumption that God is favorably disposed even unto those who spend most of their time trampling His commandments beneath their feet. That providing they will assume an outwardly devout demeanor, they have but to petition Him and their supplications are acceptable unto Him. Priests and parsons who encourage such a delusion are but throwing dust in the eyes of the people: "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord" (Prov. 15:8). The religion of our day deliberately ignores the fact of sin, with its terrible implications and consequences. It leaves out of sight that sin has radically changed the original relationship which existed between God and His creatures. It conceals the truth that man is outlawed by God and is "far off" (Eph. 2:11) from Him. It tacitly denies that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8), that He "hears not sinners" (John 9:3 1). Yea it insists that they can please Him with their hypocritical piety and

sanctimonious playacting. But the Holy One cannot be deceived by their pretences nor bribed by their offerings. Nor can they so much as draw nigh unto Him while they despise and reject the One who is the only Way of approach to Him. Make no mistake upon this point, my reader. Until that awful breach which sin has made be healed, you can have no fellowship with God; until He be reconciled to you and you to Him, He will accept nothing at your hands nor can you obtain audience with Him. Unless reconciliation is effected you will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord"(2 Thess. 1:9). The need for reconciliation is unmistakable. A fearful breach exists, brought about by the entrance of sin, and continued by the perpetuation of man to God. Not only had man now forfeited His favor but he had incurred His wrath. God could no longer view him with approbation, but instead regarded him with detestation; while man ceased to be a loyal and loving subject, becoming a rebellious outlaw. And "what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?" "And what communion has light with darkness?" None. They are opposite, the one antagonistic to the other. That breach between God and man, between righteousness and unrighteousness, will be demonstrated in the distance between Heaven and Hell. Therefore did Christ represent Abraham as saying to Dives in the place of torment, "between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from here to you cannot; neither can they pass to us" (Luke 16:26). It is only by God's reconciliation to us and of our reconciliation to God the fearful breach can be healed. How that is effected we hope to show in future articles.

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