

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 20 Its Scope-Continued

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Transcript

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Chapter 20

Its Scope-Continued

"And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, whether things in earth or things in heaven" (Col. 1:20). In the final paragraphs of our last we touched upon this aspect of our subject, pointing out that the mediatory work of Christ not only effected a reconciliation between God and the whole election of grace, but also closed the breach which existed between the celestial hosts and the Church. But our remarks on it were all too brief for a subject so blessed, so important, so honoring to Christ, yet so little understood. The relation which exists between the holy angels and the Church which is the mystical body of Christ has not received the attention that it deserves, and failure to perceive that the basis of this fellowship lies in the person and work of Christ obscures one of the distinctive honors which God has placed upon His beloved Son and loses sight of one of His mediatorial glories. "On His head are many crowns" (Rev. 19:12), and that which is now engaging our attention is by no means the least of them. According to the principle of "the process of doctrine" or the orderly unfolding of the Truth (first the blade, then the ear, etc.), in the earlier epistles of Paul (Thess., Rom., Cor., Gal.,) we see more the individual effects and blessings of Redemption. The truth of justification, so prominent in it, brings each person face to face with his own sin and salvation. In that supreme crisis of the soul, the crisis of spiritual life and death, there is consciousness of but two existences—God and self. But when we come to the prison epistles (Eph., Phil., Col., etc.), it is no longer the individual as such which is prominent, but rather as he is part of a greater whole—a member of the body of Christ. True, in the earlier epistles the Church is recognized, as in later epistles the individual believer is never for a moment ignored. But the proportion of the two aspects is changed—what is prominent in the first becomes secondary in the other. This is the natural order in the development of Truth. The Christian unity is directly the unity of each soul with Christ, the Head, and indirectly the unity of the various members in the one Body. When the Gospel of salvation speaks it must speak to the individual, but when the Saviour has been found by each soul as the Christ "who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), then the question arises, What is my relation to other believers? The answer to which is, fellow-members of the Church, fellow-members of the family of God. Accordingly, when taking up the doctrine of reconciliation, the apostles first placed the emphasis upon "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), though

even there he indicated the basis on which the call is made. But it was reserved for his later epistles to bring out the reconciliation or unity which Christ has effected between believing Jews and Gentiles—which he shows at some length in Ephesians 2; while in Colossians he goes still further and presents Christ as the Head of all created beings and the new relation which He has established between the Church and the celestial hosts. It is much to their loss that so many Christians advance no further than the epistle to the Romans in their apprehension of the Truth; I must beware of being so wrapped up in what Christ has done for me, that I fail to glory in the wider results of His work. There was a particular reason why this reference to the larger scope of reconciliation was made in the epistle to the Colossians (rather than in Eph. or Phil.) for as the Judaisers were corrupting the Galatians, so the Gnostics were seeking to seduce the saints at Colosse. The word Gnostic means "one who knows" (the opposite of agnostic) and that which characterized this sect (which to a considerable extent exerted a powerful and pernicious influence upon early Christianity) was an Orientalized form of Grecian philosophy—a modern though more Buddhistic species of which is "Theosophy." Gnosticism was an attempt of carnal reason to show the relation between the Infinite and the finite, the Absolute and the phenomenal, the "first Cause" and the universe. They argued that the gulf could only be bridged by a series of creatures rising in the scale of being, the highest of them being semi-personal emanations, of which Christ was the first (yet only a creature), and then many orders of angels which intervened between God and men. Therefore it was that in the Colossian epistles the apostle insisted that by Christ "were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (1:16, 17), and that he bids the saints there "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (2:8). Here too he insisted that "in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and again warned them "that no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" (2:9, 18). Having stated in 1:16 that the angels were created by Christ, he then went on to show how they were also the gainers by the blood of His cross, for that blood had "made peace" not only with God, but it had also restored to amicable relationship the two great branches of His family—the angelic hosts and the Church. There was originally a union between the holy angels and unfallen men, for they existed as fellow-citizens in the kingdom of God, but upon Adam's apostasy that union was broken. Sin is rebellion, and the holy angels could have no fellowship with rebels against their God. "Things in earth" and "things in heaven" became at variance through sin. When men became the enemies of God, they became at the same time the enemies of all His faithful subjects. Take this analogy on a lower plane. Suppose that one country in England should cast off allegiance to King George and disown his government at Westminster, then all lawful communion between the inhabitants of that country and the loyal subjects of the crown in all other parts of the country would be at an end. A line of moral and patriotic separation would at once be drawn between the two companies, and all friendly intercourse would be forbidden. Nor would it less accord with their inclination than the duty of all the friends of the throne to withdraw their communion and connection from those who were in revolt against the supreme authority and the general good. But now suppose one possessing the necessary dignity and qualifications, say a member of the royal house, should voluntarily undertake to make adequate reparation unto his majesty for the injury done him by the rebellious country, and that he was pleased to acknowledge that reparation as a full satisfaction to his honor. And suppose that his plenipotentiary succeeded in removing all enmity against their king from the members of that county, so that they sincerely repented of their insubordination and threw down the weapons of their hostility against the throne and government; as soon as it became generally known that company had been restored to reality, would not the remainder of the country rejoice and all the loyal subjects of the crown be ready to

resume fellowship with them again? That is as close a parallel as we can think of. Having made peace between God and the Church by the blood of His cross, Christ has also united the Church unto all who love God throughout the whole extent of creation. Things or creatures on earth have been reconciled to things or creatures in heaven. The redemptive work of Christ has done something more than "gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" by the fall (John 11:52). It has also united a disrupted universe. As we are informed in Ephesians 1:9, 10 it was God's eternal purpose "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one (kingdom and family) all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, in Him." It was unto the accomplishment of this end that God was working all through the preceding dispensations. He had ordained that unto the last Adam should pertain the honor and glory of repairing the great breach made by the first Adam's sin. Christ could say "I restored that which I took not away" (Ps. 69:4). He restored honor to God in the scene where He had been so grievously dishonored, He restored glory to the Law in the very place where it had been trampled underfoot. He brought blessing to the fallen Church by restoring it to the judicial favor of the Judge of all, He restored harmony to the broken universe by reconciling the two most important sections or members of it. Ephesians 1:9 and 10 makes known to us the entire range of God's eternal purpose of grace. It was to gather together in Christ not only the elect from the sons of men on earth, but also the elect from among the angels in heaven, uniting all into one harmonious whole, and this with the grand design of making more manifest the glory of the God-man Mediator. Under His eternal foreview of the entrance of sin, God purposed the reunion of the two great portions of the moral universe, bringing them into one holy and happy commonwealth under Christ as their glorious Sovereign. If it is asked, Why are the persons of angels and men referred to as "things?" The answer is, This is the Scriptural form of expressing them. As when the apostle said "all things are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas" (1 Cor. 3:21,22), or, "the Scripture shuts up all things under sin" (Gal. 3:22) which is explained by "God has shut them all up in unbelief" (Rom. 11:32). As the "all men" of 2 Timothy 2:1, 2 signifies men of all stations, so the "all things in heaven" of Ephesians 1:10 means angels of all ranks—"thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers," etc. (Col. 1:16). The word for "dispensation" (oikonomia) contains no time element and has no reference to an age or era. Literally it means "the arrangement of a house" (Young's Concordance), or as we should say today, the administration or management of a household. Its force may be clearly ascertained from its first occurrence in the N. T.: "give an account of your stewardship" (Luke 16:2), that is of your administration of my household—the same Greek word is again translated "stewardship" in the next two verses. Thus the "Dispensationalists" have no warrant whatever for their arbitrary partitioning of the Scriptures. When Paul said "a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me" (1 Cor. 9:17), obviously he is to be understood as meaning, an administration or dispensing of the Gospel is entrusted to me in my apostolic labors. The "fulness of times" signifies the termination of the times or "seasons," namely, this final Christian season, which is the culmination and termination of all preceding ones—as Hebrews 1:1, 2; 1 John 2:18 make evident. The "gathering together of one" is a single (compound) word in the Greek occurring nowhere else in the N.T. except Romans 13:8, where it is rendered "briefly comprehended." There, after quoting several of the Commandments—"You shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal," etc., —the apostle added and if any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying namely, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," that is, all these precepts of the second table are summed up in that single injunction. It is an arithmetical term, where many items are added together in one total sum. It is also a rhetorical term, to recapitulate, as an orator does at the close of his discourse. Thus it contains (in its prefix) the idea of repetition, as "gathering together" implies an original unity and then a scattering, before the unity is restored. In Christ God has re-gathered and re-established in a new condition of stability and blessedness the previously disrupted elements, forming

them into one kingdom, under one Head, having restored to harmony and mutual love the alienated portions of His empire. Christ is not only "the Head of the Church" (Eph. 4:23), but He is also "the Head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10), "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him" (1 Pet. 3:22). Thus He is "the Head over all" (Eph. 1:22). Christ is the gathering Center of all holy creatures, they being united into one great commonwealth under His sovereignty. Elect angels and elect men make up one household. This is clearly brought out in, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14, 15). Since Christ is the Head of all (Eph. 1:22), the whole family receive its name from Him. They all own Him, and He owns them all. So too, together they make up one City, the new Jerusalem, of which Christ is the Governor and King. "You are come unto Zion and unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). There is the general description, but who are the inhabitants? The same verse goes on to tell us "and to an innumerable company of angels, to the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn" they all make up one united company of worshippers, for the angels worship Christ as the redeemed do. As Goodwin showed at length in his masterly exposition of Ephesians 1:10, this honor was due Christ. First, as the God-man and "Heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2) it was right that He should be the Head over the highest of God's creatures—of the celestial hosts as well as the Church. Second, this unity of the holy angels with the redeemed into one family and commonwealth is greatly to the honor and splendor of the Church. Third, angels and men are capable of being thus knit together under one Head, for they each have an understanding, affection, will and spiritual nature, and therefore are suited to the same happiness, dwelling together in the same place. As Matthew 22:30 tells us "In the resurrection they.. are as the angels of God in heaven!" Fourth, by this arrangement there is constituted a complete parallel in opposition to Satan, who is the head both of wicked men and demons. The Devil is the head of the evil angels (Rev. 12:7), called "the Prince of the Demons" (Matthew 12:24), and he is the head of the wicked (1 John. 5:19) and termed "the Prince of this world" (John 12:31). Answerably to this, God has made Christ the Head of the Church and of angels. "You are come unto . . . an innumerable company of angels" (Heb. 12:22). We are come to them as our fellow-citizens, in consequence of our faith in Christ. Our access to them is spiritual. We come to them now, while we are on earth and they in heaven. But we come to them not with our prayers, which is the doting superstition of Rome, and utterly destructive of the communion here asserted. For although there is a difference and distinction between their persons and ours as to dignity and power, yet as to this fellowship we are equal in it with them; as one of them expressly declared to the apostle John "I am your fellow-servant and of your brethren that have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 19:10). Upon which John Owen Said "nothing could be more groundless than that fellow-servants should worship one another"—nor absurd. We have access to all of them, not simply to this or that tutelar [guardian] angel, but to the whole company of them. We are come to them by virtue of the recapitulation of them and us in Christ, they and we being members of the same heavenly family and associated together in a common worship. "What was the reason that the tabernacle was so full of 'cherubim?' Read Exodus 25:19 and observe there were two of them over the mercy-seat in the holy of holies. Read. Exodus 26:1 and mark how all the curtains of the tabernacle had cherubim wrought on them. Cherubim are angels (1 Pet. 1:12). Go from there to the temple of Solomon. There you have the cherubim again—on the mercy-seat, all the walls of the house, and its very doors (1 Kings 6:23, 29, 32). All this indicated that angels still fill the temple as well as men. Little do we think it, but the angels, as well as human beings, fill our churches and are present in our assemblies. Therefore are the women bidden to be modest and have their heads covered—the sign of their subordination—not only because of men, but because of the angels (1 Cor. 11:10), for surely that is the meaning of it. Because we are to be with them hereafter and to worship God together, therefore they come down and are present at the worship of God

here with us" (T. Goodwin—slightly changed). In Revelation 5, under the representative emblem of the "twenty-four elders," we behold the Church worshipping, singing a new song: "You are worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it, for You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and have made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." Immediately after which the apostle tells us "And I behold, and I heard the voice of many angels, round the throne and the living creatures and the elders . . . saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (vv. 9-12). The ascription of praise from the angels is mingled with the praise of the Church so as to comprise one entire worship. Thus the "gather together in one" of Ephesians 1:10 also included one great Choir or company of worshippers. The holy angels are the adversaries of the wicked, for since such are the enemies of God they are their enemies too. Thus we read of the angel of the Lord standing in the way of perverse Balaam as "an adversary against him" (Num. 22:22). They were sent to destroy wicked Sodom (Gen. 19:1,13). One of them smote the camp of the Assyrians and slew nearly two hundred thousand of them in a night (2 Kings 19:35). Another slew the blasphemous Herod (Acts 12:23) in N.T. times. Observe how prominently they figure in the Apocalypse as the agents of God's judgments and the executioners of His vengeance. See Revelation 8:7-13; 15:1; 16:1-12. So also at the day of judgment "The Son of man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matthew 13:41, 42). How blessed the contrast to behold the ministrations of the angels unto the saints! "He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways" (Ps. 91:11)—a promise not only to Christ personally, but also to all the members of His mystical body. When the beggar died, his soul was "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). An angel delivered Peter from prison (Acts 12:7-10). In the Day to come Christ "shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds" (Matthew 24:31). In an earlier paragraph we called attention to the cherubim with the flaming sword barring our first parents from the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). But, in consequence of Colossians 1:20 and Ephesians 1:10, they now stand at the entrance of Paradise to admit the redeemed into it! The holy Jerusalem has "twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels" (Rev. 21:12) and in that city is "the tree of life." (22:2). "Behold, a ladder set up on earth and the top of it reached to heaven. And, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (Gen. 28:12). "Hereafter shall you see (with the eyes of faith—enlightened from the Scriptures) the heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). Here we are shown plainly the grand Medium for uniting heaven and earth, the Foundation on which rests the intercourse between the angels and the redeemed. "The Son of man" views Christ as the last Adam, and is the Mediator's title of humiliation, while bearing sin. It is brought in here to emphasize the fact that it is His atonement, "the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20) which is the meritorious ground of the restoration of the long-forfeited fellowship between the two branches of the one family in Christ. "If the partition wall between Jews and Gentiles is removed by the cross, and the enmity slain by it, the same thing holds true in reference to angels and men" (Geo. Smeaton).

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