

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 21 Its Scope-Concluded

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Transcript

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Chapter 21

Its Scope-Concluded

It is not sufficiently realized that sin is the one great divisive, disrupting and destructive agency at work in every part and stratum of our world. It was sin that separated man from God, which produced a breach between him and the holy angels, and which operates to the alienating of one man from another. Among the many and dreadful effects of the Fall (which was itself an expression of enmity against God) is the enmity between man and man which has issued from it. That abominable thing which caused Adam to be driven out of Eden swiftly exhibited itself in the murderous hatred of Cain for Abel. Sin has not bred a quarrel with God, but between man and man, between brother and brother, between nation and nation. Not only do the unregenerate hate the regenerate, but they "live in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). The whole of human history is little more than a sad record of man's enmity against man—modified (though not eradicated) only where the Gospel has taken root. As one has truly said, "There is in every man, if his nature were let out to the full, that in him which is 'against every man' as was said of Ishmael." Self-love is the greatest monopolist and dictator in this world, "for men shall be lovers of their own selves." What immediately follows? "Covetous . . . disobedient to parents . . . without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of them that are good" (2 Tim. 3:2,3). Self-love is the regulating principle in every natural man. Self-love breaks all bonds and overrides all other considerations. And self-love is but another name for sin, for so far from seeking God's glory or the good of my fellows, it selfishly considers only my own interests. Since each nation is but an aggregate of individual sinners, self-interests regulate it, and therefore the nations are kept in a state of continual suspicion, jealousy and enmity one against another. Now since Christ is the Saviour, and the only Saviour from sin, to Him was appointed the honor of healing the breaches made by sin. We have already seen how He reconciled God unto the Church and the Church unto Him, as we also dwelt at some length on His reconciliation of the Church to the celestial hosts, forming them into one holy and harmonious company. We are now to consider how He brought into the Church, welding them into one Body, two diverse peoples who had for many centuries been widely separated, and bitterly hostile to each other. That was indeed a miracle of grace, constituting as it does one of the greatest and grandest triumphs of the Atonement. We refer of course to the making of the Gentiles "fellow-heirs and of same

Body and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel" (Eph. 3:6) with Jews. To appreciate that marvel let us carefully behold the awful and age-long alienation that existed between them. We begin by contemplating that of the Jews against the Gentiles, for the quarrel originated with them. This is clearly intimated by "Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision" (Eph. 2:12), for the word "called" there signified "dubbed." It was the Jews who first began using nick-names! Out of their carnal pride, they misused the privilege bestowed upon them by God as His peculiar people, to scorn the poor Gentiles, and this almost from the beginning. The sons of Jacob said, "To give our sister to one that is uncircumcised, that were a reproach to us" (Gen. 34:14), and afterwards the whole race of Jews, good and bad, used the term "uncircumcised" as a stigma. As by Samson (Judges 15:18), by Jonathan (1 Sam. 14:6), David (17:26, 36), Saul (31:4). Yea, they regarded it as worse than death itself to "die by the hands of the uncircumcised" or have "the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph" (2 Sam. 1:20). When they would accurse to the most degraded death, it was, Let him die the death of the uncircumcised. This enmity of the Jews was expressed in their attitude toward and dealings with the Gentiles. Not only was there no communion between them in sacred things, but they deemed it an abomination to have any social intercourse with the Gentiles. In the latter they erred grievously, through perverting a particular precept, given upon a special ground, and making it of general application. Concerning the Ammonites and Moabites the Lord had said "You shall not seek their peace nor prosperity all your days forever" (Deut. 23:6), but as though foreseeing that the evil spirit in them would develop into a hatred of all nations and to prevent a wrong use of that precept, in the very next verse God bade them, "You shall not abhor an Edmonite, for he is your brother; you shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land" (v. 7). Yet the Jews ever carried themselves toward the Gentiles as though they were the scum of the earth. It was for this reason that when our Saviour asked water from the woman at the well, she was astonished and said, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria, for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). Yea, so intense was their animosity against the Gentiles, that the Jews would have' killed Paul for no other crime than this that he "brought Greeks also into the temple and has defiled this holy place" (Acts 21:28,31). Malice could not rise higher in any people against another than it did in the Jews for the Gentiles. They carried it so far that the apostle tells us "they please not God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to preach to the Gentiles that they might be saved" (1 Thess. 2:15, 16). What hope was there of such enmity being removed, and of peace, love and concord displacing it? How strong the Jewish prejudice was, how powerful the working of his enmity against the Gentiles, appears in him even after his conversion. This is forcibly illustrated in Acts 10, where we find God giving Peter a special vision in order to overcome his disinclination to carry the Gospel to those outside the pale of Judaism. When he arrived at the house of Cornelius he frankly admitted, "You know how that it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come into one of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (v. 28). When this good news reached Jerusalem that "the Gentiles had also received the Word of God" and Peter returned to the brethren there, we are told that, so far from rejoicing over these new trophies of Divine grace, "they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, you went into men uncircumcised and did eat with them" (11:1-3). Naturally the Gentiles resented their being held in such contempt by the Jews and were not slow to retaliate, though it must be confessed they were the more moderate of the two. And this was a righteous judgment upon them from God: "I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt: to be a reproach, and a proverb, and a taunt, and a curse in all places where I shall drive them" (Jer. 24:9). In the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, amongst which the Jews were scattered and in which they had enemies in all, it was only by special letters of appeal from the king that the Gentiles were restraining from

falling on them (Esther 8:9). They were accused of being "hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time" (Ezra 4:15). When the apostles were arrested in Philippi the charge preferred against them was "these men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city" (Acts. 16:20). But more. God Himself has made a distinction and difference between them, having dealt with and favored Israel as no other nation upon earth (Amos 3:2). He had assigned them their own special land, giving them a particular code of laws—moral, civil and religion—and set up His own exclusive worship in their midst. He had made of them a peculiar polity, having great privileges exclusive to itself, such as no other people ever enjoyed. From all of that the Gentiles were Divinely barred. As the apostle declares, they were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Those consequences followed from their being "without Christ," for He is both the substance and end of the covenants of Israel and the Revealer of God, and so of spiritual life. But in Christ all fleshly distinctions disappear, and through His mediation the Gentiles have been made partakers of Israel's "spiritual things" (Rom. 15:27). This is shown at length in Ephesians 2:14-22, unto which we now turn. In approaching that passage it needs to be borne in mind that, the Spirit's principal design in it, as in all His ministrations, is to exalt Christ in our esteem. The incarnate Son glorified the Father on earth as He was never glorified here before or since, and therefore He was entitled to ask "Father, glorify Your Son" (John 17:1). That request received answer not only in His exaltation on High, not only in a redeemed people being quickened and united to Him to show forth His praises, but also in the further revelation made of Him in the N. T. An illustration of that is now to be before us. The Spirit's object in it is to give us an eminent instance of the efficacy of Christ's mediation by bringing to pass that which the united efforts of all men could never have accomplished, namely, the slaying of an age-long and inveterate enmity which existed between the two great branches of the human family, from each of which God takes a remnant to exemplify His sovereign grace. Ephesians 2 shows us how Christ abolished that which was the means or occasion of alienation between them. "For He is our peace" (v. 14) objectively, what He is in Himself: as He is "our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6), "our life" (Col. 3:3), "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1)—though there is that which is correspondent to each wrought in us. He is "our peace" because He is Himself "the Prince of peace" and because He is the great and glorious Peacemaker. Christ is at once the Author, the Substance, and Center of peace. In what follows the apostle supplies proofs or exemplifications. Christ is our peace between ourselves mutually, and He is our peace between God and us. The key to a right understanding of what follows lies in bearing in mind that duality. As verses 11-13 exhibit a dual alienation—of Gentiles from Jews, of both from God, so verses 14-17 treat of a double reconciliation opposite to it. And accordingly in verses 18-22 we are shown the grand twofold privilege which results from it: access into the favor of God (v. 18), the introduction of a new and united worship of Himself (vv. 19-22). "For He is our peace: who has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of partition" (v. 14). He who is not only the Giver of Peace, but the Peace itself, has united together believing Jews and Gentiles. Those who previously were alienated, are reconciled by Him, because He has broken down that which divided and separated them. Of old God had "fenced" His vineyard (Isa. 5:1,2; Ps. 80:8; Matthew 21:33-43), or as the margin reads it "made a wall about it" which had barred the Gentiles from an entrance into Israel's spiritual things. The "middle wall of partition" is an expression which connotes the separating cause which existed between Jew and Gentile, but which was demolished by Christ when He had—as the Representative and Surety of each alike—"made both one" in Himself. As Christ's death rent the veil of the temple — the innermost barrier to God — so it destroyed the middle wall of partition. "Having abolished in His flesh the enmity—the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (v. 15). This tells us how Christ broke down that which divided. The middle wall of partition is now designated "the enmity," and that in turn, is described as "the law of commandments, etc." Here, too,

there is a double reference: first to the ceremonial law of Moses which excluded Gentiles from the Jews. Second to the Covenant of works which excluded both from God. "In His flesh" is the same as "by His blood" (v. 13) and "by the cross" (v. 16). By His sacrificial and atoning death the Law—both as a ceremonial system and as a rule of justification—was annulled. In the parallel passage (Col. 2:14) the word ordinances is connected with "the handwriting that was against us," that is, to a legal bond of indictment, which Christ took out of the way "nailing it to His cross." "For to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace" (v. 15). In 2:10 the believer is declared to be "the workmanship of God," but there the glory of the creation is directly attributed to Christ, who is its Head and Life. The "twain" or "two" were the Jews and Gentiles, who were separate and hostile bodies, alike the children of wrath and dead in trespasses and sins. They are created anew so as to become "one new man" (collectively) and this by virtue of their federal union with Christ—therefore the "in Himself" "So making peace." the present participle is used because the operation is a continuous one the work is done, but the fruit of it is progressive. The long feud in the human family is healed. In Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28)—both disappearing when the "enmity" that sundered them was abolished. There is now one fold, one Shepherd. "And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity in this way" (v. 16). Here the "enmity" which Christ slew is the barrier which existed between God and men—created by sin; and not the enmity in our hearts against God, for it was slain by Christ's death and not by the working of His Spirit. To "reconcile" is to effect peace and unity between parties at variance. Christ reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto God by propitiating Him, by satisfying the demands of His Law, in this way making it possible for Him to be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. There is no room for any uncertainty here. It was "by the cross" that Christ effected the reconciliation. The proximate design of a sacrifice is to appease God, and not to convert those for whom the offering is made. "Having slain the enmity" both amplifies and explains "by the cross." Christ's death removed God's wrath or judicial enmity from sinners. And came and preached to you that were afar off (the Gentiles) and to them that were (in outward privileges) near (v. 17). As the "enmity" of verse 16 is the legal enmity of God, so the "peace" here is that "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1) into which Christ has brought all His redeemed. His "preaching" of it is after the cross, and therefore through His apostles (see 2 Cor. 5:20). It is the proclamation to those who savingly believe the Gospel that since the Law has been satisfied God is no longer hostile to us. Proof of that is "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (v. 18)—which had been impossible unless His wrath had been removed or His enmity slain. Christ has done something very much more than simply "open a way to God" He has actually brought us to God (1 Pet. 3:18), inducted us into His grace or favor (Rom. 5:2). As God determined to magnify the exceeding riches of His grace by permitting the most heinous sins in the lives of some of those whom He chose unto salvation for the glory of His Son He suffered the strongest and bitterest animosity to possess the hearts of Jews and Gentiles, that the efficacy of His mediation might be displayed in constituting them one new man in Himself—blessedly exemplified when those, who formerly would not eat with one another, sit down together to partake of the Lord's Supper!

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