

# THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 25 Its Reception-Concluded

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## Transcript

### THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

#### Chapter 25

#### Its Reception-Concluded

There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2), and the ecclesiastical history of the last three centuries supplies many sad examples of same. In opposing the Papist fiction of human merits, some went too far in the opposite direction and failed to enforce the necessity of good works. In protesting against a general or indefinite atonement and in contending for particular redemption, not a few hyper-Calvinists repudiated the free offer of the Gospel. Many handled the total depravity and spiritual inability of the natural man in such a manner that his responsibility was completely undermined. In their ardor to magnify the sovereign grace of God, men often lost sight of the moral requirements of His righteousness. There has been a lamentable lack of balance in presenting the inseparable truths of justification and sanctification, and the privileges and duties of believers. The perseverance of the saints in faith and holiness has not received nearly so much emphasis among Calvinists as has the Divine preservation of them, nor have they said one-tenth as much on repentance as on faith. The same grievous defect appears in many of the sermons preached on the Covenant. The Puritans were thoroughly sound and symmetrical on it, but some who followed them, though posing as the champions of Truth, were very lopsided. "Gather My saints together unto Me: Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:5). This is still another verse which has been greatly if not totally neglected by those against whose partiality we complain. It also deals with the human side of things. There is a human side in connection with the Covenant. It is just as true that men must enter into covenant with God, as it is that He deigns to enter into covenant with them. In this verse we learn that one of the distinguishing marks of God's saints is that they have made a covenant with Him: That speaks of human action and not of Divine operations. The saints make a covenant with God "by sacrifice," for no valid paction [agreement, compact, bargain] can be entered into with Him apart from the intervention of a sacrifice. At the beginning of their national history Israel entered into a solemn covenant with Jehovah, and they did so by sacrifice. A graphic account of the same is furnished in Exodus 24. There is much there of outstanding interest and importance which we cannot now dwell upon; only a bare notice of the salient features will here be in order. After Moses had received the ten commandments from the Lord, he returned and "told the people all the words of the Lord" (v. 3)—that obedience which He required from them. Their response was prompt and proper: "all the

people answered with one voice and said, All the words which the Lord has said will we do." Moses then gave orders for oxen to be sacrificed unto the Lord: half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar, half he put into basins. Having written the words of the Lord in what is specifically called "the book of the covenant" he then read it unto the whole of the congregation, and they again vowed to be obedient (v. 7). Next Moses "took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the covenant." Thus was the covenant formally ratified: God binding Himself to the fulfilling of His promises and they binding themselves to His precepts, that they might avoid the penalty threatened and obtain the blessings promised. To that transaction the apostle refers in Hebrews 9:19, 20—"testament" should be "covenant." those slain oxen prefigured the sacrifice of Christ and the benefits accruing from there. The congregation represented "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), and their compact with the Lord adumbrated the full surrender which believers make of themselves unto God when they respond to the call of the Gospel. Christians also make a covenant with God, and they do so "by sacrifice." Christ's death was a real and true sacrifice: see Eph. 5:2. In all the sacrifices there was a shedding of blood without which there was no remission of sins, and as their antitype Christ's blood was poured out. Christ's death was a mediatory sacrifice, a propitiatory sacrifice, an accepted sacrifice,, and therefore an effectual one. It has all the virtues of a sacrifice. As the Rector and Judge of the universe God was pacified, as the party offended, by Christ's oblation. Christ made His soul an offering for sin and God accepted the same as a full satisfaction to His justice. So too His blood expiates the offences of His people: "when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." When rightly appropriated His blood removes both the guilt and pollution of sin. So too it is adequate for the sinner himself, the offending party. When he avails himself of the preferred remedy and trusts in Christ's atonement, he is reconciled to God. No other sacrifice is needed by God nor is it by the sinner. By His sacrifice Christ made and confirmed the new covenant. By virtue of His oblation Christ is authorized to offer the terms and dispense the benefits of it. "Now tile God of peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). Observe carefully the "blood of the everlasting covenant" has a double reference there. First, to God, as "The God of peace," that is, to God as pacified—His wrath appeased and His justice satisfied by a full recompense being made for our offences. Second, to Christ Himself: having satisfied to the uttermost farthing, God brought Him back from the dead and invested Him with His office of "the great Shepherd of the sheep." That is, as the One who had the right to rescue His strayed sheep out of the power of the roaring lion, and bring them into the fold to enjoy the privileges of the flock. And by Christ's sacrifice the benefits of the covenant are ratified and conveyed to us. That is evident from His own words at the institution of the Lord's supper: "this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28)—the principal blessing. It is by the blood of the covenant we are pardoned, sanctified and perfected forever. As Manton showed, our manner of entering into covenant with God is by the same moral acts as which Israel of old were conversant about the sacrifices and what they imported. Those sacrifices represented the defilement they had contracted by sin: by the killing of the beast, they owned that they deserved to die themselves. The oblations they brought to the tabernacle or temple were public testimonies of their guilt and pollution, an acknowledgement that their life was forfeit to God. As the apostle informs us "in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins" (Heb. 10:3); they kept before their offerers what they were as violators of the Law. Now the same obligation lies upon us if we would make a covenant with God by virtue of the great sacrifice of Christ. There must be the recognition that the curse of the law binds us over to eternal wrath and a subscription to that solemn fact by our conscience. There must be an acknowledgement of our guilt and pollution, and that, with broken heartedness. Unless we be deeply affected by our sinfulness and ruin Christ will be little valued by us. The sacrifices appointed by God in the OT. era told forth His abundant mercy: that God had

no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live. And in order that His mercy might be on a righteous basis, His love provided that which His justice demanded. That has been lost sight of by the dispensationalists, who erroneously represent the Mosaic economy as a stern regime of unrelieved justice. But it should ever be remembered that side by side with the moral law was the ceremonial, with its oblations and ablutions, where forgiveness and cleansing were obtainable for those who availed themselves of it. All through the O.T. era "mercy rejoiced against judgment" (Ex. 34:6, 7; Ps. 103:8; Isa. 1:18). That "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy" was shown and believed in David's time (Ps. 145:8), for those blessed attributes were clearly revealed in the sacrifices—types as they were of Christ. So today the sinner who would enter into covenant with God should realize that He is merciful and in Christ has made full provision for his deep need. This is to be acknowledged by us with thankfulness and joy. Those O.T. sacrifices were also so many obligations unto duty, for they instructed the offerer of that worship and obedience which he owed unto God. Since God required propitiation for sin, they were shown the need for conforming to His law, and whereas His mercy made provision for their past failure, gratitude should prompt them unto future subjection. Moreover, by offering a ram or an ox unto the Lord the one who brought it did in effect devote himself, with all his strength, unto Him. In this way the offerer was taught to yield himself unto His service. And so unto those who would make or renew a covenant with God, the N.T. word is "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). That, as we showed at some length in a recent article, supplies an interpretation of the rites of the Law and of the "reasonable" part of the O. T. order of things. Thus, he who would make a covenant with God is required to give up himself wholly unto God with a sincere and firm resolution—unto a new life of obedience to Him. If there is any reservation the covenant is marred in the making of it: "Their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant" (Ps. 78:37). As the Puritan Win. Gurnall so faithfully remarked upon Psalm 50:5, "We are not Christians till we have subscribed this covenant, and that without any reservation. When we take upon us the profession of Christ's name, we enlist ourselves in His muster-roll and by it do promise that we will live and die with Him in opposition to all His enemies. He will not entertain us till we resign up ourselves freely to His disposal, that there may be no disputing with His commands afterwards, but as one under authority, go and come at His word." So too Manton: "You have no benefit by the covenant till you personally enter into the bond of it. It is true, God being pacified by Christ, offers pardon and acceptance on the condition of the covenant, but we do not actually partake of the benefits till we perform those conditions. Though the price is paid by Christ, accepted by the Father, yet we have not an actual interest, through our own default, for not accepting God's covenant. What shall we do? Bless God for His grace. Own Christ as the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, and the Fountain of our life and peace. Devote yourselves to God, to serve and please Him." Not only are we required to take hold of God's covenant (Isa. 56:4,6), to make a covenant with God by sacrifice (Ps. 50:5), and to "join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant" (Jer. 50:5), but we are enjoined "Take heed unto yourselves lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God" (Deut. 4:23) and "Be mindful always of His covenant" (1 Chron. 16:15). We are required to abide faithfully by the promises we made and the agreement we entered into when we chose Him to be our God and gave up ourselves unreservedly unto Him, for the promises of the covenant are made only unto such: "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies" (Ps. 25:10). Of old the Lord complained, "His people have transgressed My covenant" (Judges 2:20). "Israel and Judah have broken My covenant" (Jer. 11:10). They themselves acknowledged "the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant" (1 Kings 19:10). "They kept not the covenant of God" (Ps. 78:10). So it is with the Christian when he departs from the Lord and enters upon a course of

self-pleasing. Therefore, in order for a backslider to be restored, he must needs renew his covenant with God, for the recovery of such an one is a new "conversion" (Luke 22:32). And so he is required to "do the first works" (Rev. 2:5). Now cannot certain of our readers see for themselves how unfair and unfaithful it is for preachers and writers to make so much of and quote so frequently such verses as 2 Samuel 23:5, Jeremiah 31:33,34; 32:40,41, and utterly ignore Isaiah 56:4-6, Jeremiah 50:5, Psalm 50:5 and those cited in the preceding paragraph. Cannot they perceive it is handling God's word deceitfully, and utterly misleading unto souls to be constantly comforting them with the "I wills" of God, yet remaining silent upon the "Be you," "you shalls" and failing to press such exhortations? Cannot they see how dishonest it is to treat only of that covenant which God enters into with the elect before time began in the person of their Head, and say nothing of the covenant which we must make with God during this time-state? We ourselves should be guilty of the very partiality against which we inveigh were we to publish in booklet form the last four of our articles on Reconciliation in the 1944 volume and the first four in 1945 entitling them "The Covenant of Grace." if we failed to add to them what has been adduced in this chapter and the three preceding it, in which we have set before the reader the human side of things—what God requires from us. God has appointed a "due order" or connection—a moral and righteous one—between the blessings purchased by Christ and the actual conveyance of them unto us, in which our responsibility is enforced. To quote from yet another of the able and godly Puritans: "Holiness is God's signature upon all heavenly doctrines, which distinguishes them from all carnal inventions. They have a direct tendency to promote His glory and the real benefit of the rational creature. Thus the way of salvation by Christ is most fit to reconcile God to man by securing His honor, and to reconcile man to God by encouraging his hope. . . The grace of the Gospel is so far from indulging sin that it gives the most deadly wound to it, especially since the tenor of the new covenant is that the condemned creature, in order to receive pardon and the benefits that are purchased, must receive the Benefactor with the most entire consent for his Prince and Saviour. Thus the Divine wisdom has so ordered the way of salvation that, as mercy and justice in God, so holiness and comfort may be perfectly united in the reasonable creature" (Win. Bates, "The Harmony of the Divine Attributes" 1660). The death of Christ is not only the surest ground of comfort, but the strongest incentive to obedience. We are advocating no new or strange doctrine when we insist that the Everlasting Covenant and the Gospel requires from us repentance and faith, full surrender unto God and the steadfast performance of obedience unto the end of our lives. "The obligation on us unto holiness is equal as unto what it was under the Law, though a relief is provided where unavoidably we come short of it. There is, therefore, nothing more certain than that there is no relaxation given us as unto any duty of holiness by the Gospel, nor any indulgence unto the least sin. But yet upon the supposition of the acceptance of sincerity, and a perfection of parts instead of degrees, with mercy provided for our failings and sins, there is an argument to be taken from the command unto indispensable necessity of holiness, including in it the highest encouragement to endeavor after it. For together with the command there is also grace administered, enabling us unto the obedience which God will accept. Nothing therefore can avoid or evacuate the power of this command and argument from it but a stubborn contempt of God arising from the love of sin" (J. Owen). Probably there is another class of our readers who have never heard anything on the subject, as well as those who are acquainted only with the Divine side of it, who are ready to exclaim, If it is an imperative condition of salvation that man enters into a definite covenant with God, then that cuts me off entirely, for I have never made one with Him! Alas, it is sadly true that, through the laziness or unfaithfulness of the preachers they have sat under, many of the Lord's people know nothing, or next to nothing, about the Covenant of Grace. On the other hand, it is blessedly true that, in the mercy of God, though all unconscious to themselves, they had been led to comply with the terms of the Covenant. Though they knew not that they were truly (though not formally) entering into Covenant with

God when they repented, believed the Gospel and received Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, yet such was the case. Each one who has really responded to the call in Isaiah 55:3 with him God has "made an everlasting covenant"—Nevertheless his ignorance of that fact does not excuse the Christian's failure to have learned from the Scriptures what they teach on it. Let us now seek to remove one or two difficulties which may have been raised in the minds of our friends. When we affirm that God's ministers are to make a free offer of the Gospel to every creature and that they are to call upon all who hear it "be reconciled to God," that does not imply that the results of Christ's death are rendered uncertain, that the success of His redemptive work is suspended on the caprice of man's will. Not at all. It has been far too little recognized that God has more than one design in sending forth the Gospel. First, it is for the glory of Christ—a worldwide proclamation of His excellencies. God intends that a universal testimony shall be borne to the person and work of the One who so superlatively honored Him. Second, the preaching of the Gospel is made a further test of corrupt nature, demonstrating that men love darkness rather than light. Third, God uses the Gospel as a remedial agency in curbing the wickedness of the world, for many are reformed by it who are never savingly transformed in this way, making this scene a safer place for His people to pass through. It is also the means by which He calls out His elect: the sieve in which the wheat is separated from the chaff. But if Christ be the Head and Representative of His people, and as their Surety fulfilled every requirement of the Law, in their stead and earned its reward, must not every one of them be made partakers of that reward? Most assuredly, yet still in the order or way God has appointed. We must have the requisite qualification to make us meet for that reward. "This qualification is faith. As grace in God qualified God (if I may use the expression) for effecting reconciliation, so faith in us qualifies us for applying and enjoying it. Though Christ be the Purchaser, yet faith is the means of instating us in it. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Not a man has peace with God till justified by faith. This inestimable favor is not conferred but upon men of good will, that value and consent to it. We must lay our hands upon the head of the sacrifice and own Him for ours. This is the bond which unites us to Christ the Purchaser, and by Him to God as the Author of reconciliation. It gives us a right to this peace, and at the last the comfort of it" (S. Charnock). But does not God's requirement of faith from us leave the outcome of Christ's redemption uncertain? In no wise. Why not? Because Christ by His merits procured the Holy Spirit to work in His people what God requires from them to meet the terms of His covenant and to fulfill the conditions of the Gospel. "The purchase was made by Christ alone upon the cross, without any qualification in us; the application is not wrought without something in us concurring with it, though that also is wrought by the grace of God. God has ordained peace for us. There is a work to be wrought within us for the enjoyment of that peace: 'Lord, You will ordain peace for us, for You also have wrought all our works in us' (Isa. 26:12). The one is the act of God in Christ, the other is the act of God by the Spirit. Though the fire burn, if I would be warmed I must not run from it, but approach it" (Charnock). It is that work of Christ's Spirit within the elect which capacitates and causes them to abandon their idols, put forth faith, and makes them willing to be wholly devoted to God. That was admirably set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith—the joint and studied production of many of the ablest of the Puritans. "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by the first covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace: by which He freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they might be saved, and promising to give unto all those who are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe." The grand change in our legal relation to God, secured by Christ's satisfaction, is infallibly followed by the great change in our experimental relation to God, as that is wrought in us by the Spirit's work of regeneration and sanctification, the one being the fruit of the other—the reward assured the Surety on behalf of those He represented. Our reconciliation to God (through the renewing of the Spirit) is the sure consequence of

His reconciliation to us, and a faith which works by love, which goes out in acts of holy obedience, is the evidence of our new birth and of our having entered into covenant with God. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:11). It is through Him, by the working of His Spirit, that we have, by faith, been enabled to "receive the reconciliation" which the Mediator wrought out for us. From the Divine side of things the evangelist goes forth on no uncertain errand, for the invincible operations of the Spirit God makes the Gospel effectual unto each hearer chosen unto salvation. Yet from the human side of things the evangelist is required to enforce the responsibility of his hearers, calling on them to "be reconciled to God," to repent and believe the Gospel, to make a covenant with God, and so far from assuring them that God will work in their hearts what He requires of them (which would encourage them to remain in a state of inertia), he is to enforce God's righteous demands, press upon them the claims of Christ, and bid them flee for refuge to the hope set before them.

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