

# THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 27 Its Need Revisited-Continued

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## Transcript

### THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

#### Chapter 27

#### Its Need Revisited-Continued

Up to this point we have dealt, almost entirely, with the expository side of our subject. Now we turn to what is more the experimental aspect of it. Some of our readers will consider this the most important and vital part, while to others it will make no appeal, being in their judgment better omitted. Those who read principally for intellectual information must appreciate that which supplies new light on things, explains to them what is obscure, or opens to them a difficult passage of Scripture, and often look with disfavor on that which calls upon them to diligently inquire what use they are making of the light they have received, to what practical ends are they turning their new knowledge. Yet this should be the principal concern of each of us. The interpretation of a passage of Scripture is but a means to an end. The personal appropriation and application of it to my own heart and life is the great desideratum. The value of a book, or of an article, lies chiefly in this: does it help to deliver its reader from the evil powers of this world and serve to assist him in his journey Heavenwards? Though the other aspects of this grand truth which have been before us may both interest and instruct the mind, yet they will afford little real comfort and lasting peace to the heart until I am personally satisfied that I am reconciled to God, and He is reconciled to me. It deeply concerns each one of us to ascertain whether the wrath of God or the smile of God is upon him, whether the Law curses him or pronounces him righteous. It is a matter of utmost moment for us to determine whether we are the serfs of Satan or the friends of Christ, whether we are in a state of nature or of grace. We are plainly warned in Scripture that "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12), and if I really value my eternal interests then I shall seriously and solemnly inquire, am I one of that deluded company? Am I numbered among those who sincerely believe that they have been cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ, but are sincerely mistaken? More than a mere inquiry needs to be made: there should be an earnest and definite investigation. "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith, prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5), yet that is the very task which the great majority of professing Christians refuse to undertake, and if it is pressed upon them, they see no need for engaging in it, firmly assured that all is well with them spiritually. It is natural for us to think well of ourselves, yet just to the extent that we are influenced by self-esteem will our judgment be prevented from forming a true estimate of ourselves. And while self-love and self-flattery rule our hearts,

we shall decline this essential duty of self-examination. Pride produces presumption, so that its infatuated victims are secure in their conceit that they are heirs of Heaven, when in fact they have neither title nor meetness to it. Those thus bewitched cannot be induced to prosecute a course of self-examination, nor will they tolerate a searching and probing ministry, be it oral or written. What madness has seized those who treat lightly what should become of their souls in eternity! And those who are unwilling for their profession to be thoroughly tested, are as truly numbered in that class as those who make no religious profession. Do you say, There is no need for my profession to be tested for it is a valid one, seeing that for years past I have been resting on the finished work of Christ. But my reader, God Himself bids those claiming to be His people "give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10), and He has given no needless exhortations. O pit not your vain confidence against infinite wisdom. Bare your heart to the Sword of the Spirit: shrink not from a faithful and discriminating ministry. Know you not that Satan employs a variety of tactics seeking to keep a firm hold upon his captives? And one of them is to prevent his deluded victims engaging in this very investigation—lest they should discover that, after all, their hope has rested on a foundation of sand. "For every one that does evil hates the Light, neither comes to the Light, lest his deeds should be discovered" (John 3:20). Does not that place those who refuse to examine themselves whether they are in the faith and decline to be "weighed in the balances of the Sanctuary?" It certainly does. It ranks them among evil-doers. Despite all their religious pretensions, the solemn fact is that they "hate the Light" which exposes an empty profession, and therefore they "come not to the Light" to be tested by it. And why is this? Because they lack an honest heart, which desires to know the truth about themselves, no matter how unpalatable it is. Therefore it is that they find most distasteful and discomfiting those sermons or articles which point out the differences between hypocrites and the sincere, and which show how closely the former may, in many ways, resemble the latter. Even if they began the work of self-examination it would prove so obnoxious as soon to be abandoned, and being under the power of a "heart that is deceitful above all things" would give themselves the benefit of the doubt. But different far is it with those in whom a work of grace has been wrought. They have been made to realize something of the deceitfulness of sin and the awful solemnity of eternity, and therefore refuse to give themselves the benefit of any doubt, being determined at all costs to find out where they stand before God. Of each of them Christ declares "But he that does truth (is genuine and sincere) comes to the Light, that his (profession and) deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in (by) God" (John 3:21). He longs to know whether he is in a state of nature or of grace, and if his assurance of the latter is based on a conjectural persuasion or well-authenticated evidence, whether his faith in Christ is a natural one or "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1), whether his repentance is "the sorrow of the world" which "works death," or that "godly sorrow" which "works repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Cor. 7:10). There is hope for a man who is deeply exercised over such matters; but there is none for those who are complacently satisfied with a false peace. Readiness to be searched and probed by the Word of God, willingness to go to much pains to learn whether I am treading the Narrow Way which leads unto Life, or whether I am on the clean side of that broad road which terminates in destruction, is a good sign. As there is nothing that a hypocrite dreads more than to have his rottenness exposed, so there is nothing which an honest heart more longs to know than the real truth about his state before God. The earnest prayer of such an one is, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart" (Ps. 26:2). But alas, those who are filled with a carnal confidence feel no need of begging the Lord to "prove" them, for they are quite sure that all is well with them. Many, so completely deceived are they by Satan, they imagine it would be an act of unbelief to do so. Poor souls, they "call evil good, and good evil," and "put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isa. 5:20). "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me." Is that the cry of your soul, my reader? If it is not, then there is strong reason to fear you are yet fatally enthralled by Satan. One of the

surest marks of regeneration is that such a soul cries frequently, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thought: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23,24). Yet it should be pointed out that this must not be made a shelving of our responsibility, a substitute for the performance of our own duty. God has bidden us, "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith," and every possible effort must be made by us to do so, taking nothing for granted, but resolutely and impartially scrutinizing our hearts, measuring ourselves by the Word, ascertaining whether or not we have the marks and evidences of regeneration. Like the Spouse we should say, "Let us get up early. . . let us see if the vine flourish" (Song of Sol. 7:11). "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith" clearly implies that a knowledge of our spiritual state is possible. As the natural man perceives his own thoughts, knows what views and motives regulate him, and is acquainted with his own designs and aims, so may the spiritual man. "Reflection and knowledge of self is a prerogative of a rational creature. We know that we have souls by the operations of them. We may know that we have grace by the effects of it, if we are diligent. As we may know by the beams of the sun that the sun is visible, if we shut not our eyes" (Charnock). Grace discovers itself in its affections and actions, in its operations and influence on the heart and life. If we observe closely the springs of our actions and "commune with our own heart" (Ps. 4:4), we shall have little difficulty in becoming acquainted with the state of our souls. "For what man knows the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him"(1 Cor. 2:11). In His parable of the Sower and the Seed our Lord likened those who hear the Word unto different kinds of soil which received the Seed, and the various results or yields from them. His obvious design was to supply us with criteria by which we may measure ourselves. If, then, I would properly examine myself, I must ascertain if I am no better than the wayside hearer, who heard the Word and "understood it not;" or the shallow-soil hearer, who received the Word with an evanescent "joy" and yet had "no root in himself" and soon fell away; or the thorny-ground hearer, who suffered the "care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches" to choke the Word and render him unfruitful. Or, if by grace I am a good-ground hearer, of whom it is said—not simply that he "believes the Gospel," but—"which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). That is the test: not knowledge, orthodoxy, or happy feelings, but FRUIT. Unless a man knows himself to be a child of God he cannot rationally or lawfully take comfort from the promises which are addressed unto the saints. It is madness and presumption for me to flatter myself that God has declared He will do this and that for me, unless I am reliably assured that I am one of those to whom such declarations are made. It is the height of folly for me to believe that all things are working together for my good, unless I really love God (Rom. 8:28). On the other hand, if I am regenerate and decline to take comfort from the promises, I forsake my own mercies and allow Satan to deprive me of my legitimate portion. That it is not God's will for His people to remain in uncertainty is unmistakably clear from 1 John 5:13. He moved one of His apostles to write a whole Epistle for the express purpose that they might know they had eternal life, and that they may believe on the name of the Son of God. Realizing full well that this is the most momentous investigation that any mortal can ever undertake, that sincere souls—conscious of how much is involved—will proceed carefully and cautiously, and making full allowance that an honest heart will be fearful of being deceived in the matter, yet we have never been able to understand why a regenerate soul should find it so difficult to determine whether he is in a state of nature or of grace. We are very much afraid that not a few of God's dear people have been hindered by the teaching they sat under and the general custom which prevailed in the circle where they were. It is indeed deplorable that many Protestants have echoed the dogma of Popery that it is presumptuous for any Christian to aver he knows that he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. The N. T. contains not a word in support, but much to the contrary. For a saint to doubt his acceptance by God is not a mark of humility but the fruit of unbelief. We have been dealing with the Christian's assurance

of his state before God in a more or less general way, let us now be specific and ask, How is an exercised soul to ascertain whether he has really been restored to the favor and friendship of God? By what criteria or rules is he to test himself in order to discover whether God is at peace with him? By what evidence may he be rationally assured that he is reconciled to the moral Ruler and Judge of this world? Surely that should not be difficult to determine. Is it possible for a truly converted person, who has passed through a radical change in his heart and life, in his thoughts, affections, and actions, to yet know nothing about it? Surely a person cannot be awakened out of a state of security in sin, to realize what a vile, unclean rebel he is, and to mourn over the same, and yet perceive nothing about it. For one to radically change his selfish and worldly pursuits, to lose relish for his idols, and to live a life of communion with God, and yet be uncertain such is his case, is impossible. Grace is as evident in its own nature as corruption is, and its operations and fruits are as manifest and unmistakable as are those of sin. Not only so in ourselves, but in our fellow-saints too. In a time like the present it is particularly easy to recognize those who are truly reconciled to God. The few friends of Christ stand out conspicuously among the vast multitude of His enemies. In a day when lawlessness abounds and every man does "that which is right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25), those whose lives are ordered by God's Word cannot be mistaken. They "shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation" (Phil. 2:15). Noah "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9) though he lived in the midst of the reprobate antediluvians. Elijah was jealous for the glory of God and faithful in maintaining His cause, though his lot was to dwell amid a people who had forsaken God's covenant, thrown down His altars, and slain His prophets (1 Kings 19:14). It may be easier—we are by no means sure it is so—for one to serve God faithfully in a season of revival than in one of declension, and to journey Heavenwards in the company of a goodly number than to stand alone; but it is more difficult to identify the saints. As the fire evidences the pure gold, so a day either of bitter persecution or of wide-spread apostasy, enables us to discern who are out and out for the Lord, and those who have nothing more than a thin veneer of religion. When many of Christ's nominal disciples went back and walked no more with Him, He turned to the apostles and asked, "Will you also go away?" Whereupon Simon Peter acting as their spokesman said, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). "They have made void Your Law, therefore I love Your commandments above gold" (119:127). Such is the effect upon a true child of God of the defection of his fellows. But returning to the individual who would ascertain whether or not he is reconciled to God. That problem may be reduced to a simple issue. You are either an enemy of God or the friend of God, plainly manifesting the one or the other in your conduct. It should not be difficult for you to determine in which class you are. "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled" (Col. 1:21). The implication is inescapable. If you have been reconciled to God then you are no longer fighting against Him, and though as yet you are very far from being perfect, or all that you should be, nevertheless, no longer is your mind enmity against Him—ever engaged in wicked works. Nay, if reconciled, the very opposite is the case: you yearn for closer fellowship with Him, you love His Word, honestly endeavor to be regulated by it in all things, and in your measure, are bringing forth good works. Yes, the issue is a very simple one: to be reconciled to God is for there to be mutual peace between Him and you, and peace is the opposite of war, as love is of hatred. It therefore follows that no soul who is at peace with sin can possibly be at peace with God, for sin is the open enemy of the Holy One. The question to be decided then is, Have I thrown down the weapons of my warfare against the Most High? Have I enlisted under the banner of a new Captain? If I am honestly and resolutely fighting against sin, then I must be reconciled to God: said Christ to His disciples, "he that is not against us is on our part" (Mark 9:30). There is no third condition: you are either for or against God, His friend or His foe. God's enemies are opposed to Him, leagued with all that is hostile to Him, doing what He forbids and flouting what He enjoins. If then I desire

to please Him, am on the side of His friends, hating what He hates and loving what He loves, must I not be one with Him!

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-doctrine-of-reconciliation-chapter-27-its-need-revisited-continued/>

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