

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 5 Its Need-Concluded

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

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Chapter 5

Its Need-Concluded

In our last we were only able to barely mention that the wisdom of God was engaged in the salvation of His people. Before we attempt to illustrate this particular aspect let us point out that it was in His character of Judge that the Father then acted. It is most important that this should be recognized, yea, essential if we are to view our subject from the correct angle, for reconciliation was entirely a judicial procedure. In Hebrews 12:23 God the Father is expressly spoken of as "the Judge of all," which is an official title. He it was who passed sentence upon sinning Adam and all whom he represented as a federal head. None but "the Judge of all," could have "made Christ to be sin" for His people, or them to be "the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "It is God that justifies" (Rom. 8:33). That is, it is the Father as the Judge who actually and formally pronounces righteous in His sight the sinner who believes on Christ. It is on this two-fold ground that the apostle there argues the irreversibility of our justification: that the sentence of justification is pronounced by the Supreme Judge, and that, on the basis of the full satisfaction which has been made to Him by Christ. We closed our last by calling attention to the fact that the determination of the Father to recover His lapsed people is described as the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will which signifies there was an exercise of His infinite understanding in devising how that resolve should be made good to His own glory. To speak after the manner of men, the Father consulted with Himself, called His omniscience into play, and drew up a plan in which His "manifold wisdom" (Eph. 3:10) is exemplified. That many sided plan is termed the mystery because it has to do with the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:7, 10). "There is variety in the mystery and mystery in every part of the variety. It was not one single act, but a variety of counsels met in it: a conjunction of excellent ends and means" (Charnock). What those excellent ends and means were we shall now try to set forth, yet knowing full well that our utmost efforts can convey only a most inadequate and fragmentary idea of what will be our wonderment and admiration for all eternity. God's consummate and manifold wisdom is seen. 1. In Love's triumph over the Law. We begin here because it the better links up with the closing paragraph of our last and the opening one of this. Continuing that line of thought, be it said, the solution to the problems raised by sin and the harmonization of Love and Law is termed a "mystery" because it transcends human reason and can only be known by Divine revelation. it is called "the hidden wisdom" of God because it

remained an impenetrable secret until He was pleased to disclose it. No discovery of it was made in creation. Though "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork" yet they gave no indication it is His will to show mercy unto rebels: rather does the universe exhibit an inexorable reign of law. If a devoted mother gives her child medicine from the wrong bottle, the result would be the same as if an enemy poured poison down its throat. Break one of Nature's laws, even in ignorance, and no matter how deep our regret, there is no escaping the penalty. Divine Love has triumphed over the Law not by trampling upon it, but by fully meeting its demands and rendering it honorable. Divine wisdom contrived a way in which there was no compromise between Love and Law, but each was given fullest expression. The way in which God has dealt with what to human wit appears insolvable, both manifests His perfect wisdom and greatly redounds to His glory. He has dealt with the problem raised by sin by taking it into the court of His Law and settling it on a righteous basis. The needs-be for that is evident. Sin is far too great an evil for man to meddle with and every attempt he assays in that direction only makes bad matters worse—as appears in both the social and international spheres. Still more is this the case when man attempts to treat with God. His very efforts to remove sin do but aggravate it, and any attempt to approach God in spite of it only serves to increase his guilt. None but God is capable of dealing with sin, either as a crime or as pollution, as that which is a dishonor to Him or as it is a barrier to our access to Him. Moreover as sin is too great an evil for us to deal with, so righteousness is too high for the fallen creature to reach unto, yea too high for holy creatures to bring down to us. Only God Himself can bring near His righteousness (Isa. 46:13). Yes, God has dealt with the momentous issue raised by sin by taking it into the court of His Law. For fallen man to have taken it there would have inevitably meant the losing of his case, for he is a transgressor of the Divine statute and a moral bankrupt utterly unable to make any reparation for his offence. But His consummate wisdom enabled the Judge of all to deal with it in such a manner that the honor of His Law has been maintained unimpeached, and yet the case has been settled on a basis equally favorable to God and the sinner! Settled in such a way that the wondrous love of God is free to flow forth unto His elect, children of disobedience though they be in themselves, without ignoring or condoning their disobedience, and so that His love remains a holy love. It is on that judicial settlement that an all sufficient and final answer has been furnished to man's anguished and age-long questions, "How then can man be justified before God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" (Micah 6:6). 2. In exercising two Contrary principles in Redemption. This is an achievement worthy of Omniscience. God is love, nevertheless, He is "light" (1 John 1:5) as well. Not only is He full of kindness and benevolence, but He is immaculately pure and holy. God is abundant in mercy, but He is also just and "will by no means clear the guilty." Here then are two of the Divine perfections moving in opposite directions. How can such contraries be reconciled? Love goes out unto the prodigal, but Light cannot look upon iniquity (Hab. 1:13). Mercy would fain spare the offender, but justice demands his punishment. Grace is ready to bestow a gratuitous salvation, but righteousness insists that the defaulter cannot be released until he has "paid the uttermost farthing" (Matthew 5:26). Shall then the tenderness of the Father yield to the severity of the Judge? Or shall the rights of the Judge give place to the desires of the Father? Each must be satisfied. But how? Admire and adore that wondrous wisdom which devised a means whereby "Mercy and Truth have met together, Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10). It is said God loves the sinner, but hates his sin. Yet that provides no solution to the problem. For the question still returns, Will God sink His love to the sinner in His hatred of his sin or allow His love for the sinner to override His hatred for sin? God has sworn "The soul that sins it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). But He has also sworn "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11). The oath of justice and the oath of pity appear irreconcilable. Must then one yield to the other? No, both must stand. But how? In redemption God has

manifested two opposite perfections at the same time, and in one action, in which there is shown supreme hatred of sin and superlative love of the sinner. Justice and mercy are alike maintained its ground without compromise, yea, has issued from the conflict honorable and glorious. Divine wisdom contrived a plan whereby God has punished transgression without scourging the transgressors, and has repaired the ruin of the sinner without condoning his sin. 3. In appointing a suitable Mediator. Clearly this was the first step necessary in order to a solution of the intricate problems to which we have alluded. The fall of man placed him at an immeasurable distance from God—"your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isa. 55:2). Not only so but the fall produced an infinite moral difference, man becoming polluted and a hater of God, God Himself ineffably holy and at legal enmity with man. Such a breach appeared unbridgeable, for on the one hand it became not the glory of His nature nor the honor of His government for God to make any direct advance towards rebellious subjects; and on the other hand, man had no desire to be restored to His image of favor, and even if he had, was barred from any, access to Him. Thus all intercourse between God and men was at an end, an impasse was created, an utterly hopeless situation seemed to exist. "Our God is a consuming fire" and who was there that could interpose himself between Him and us? But Divine wisdom provided a means and remedy, decreeing there should be a Mediator who would bridge the distance and heal the difference between them, affecting a mutual reconciliation. But where was such an one to be found? One capable of laying his hand upon both (Job 9:33). He must be entirely clear of any participation in the offence. He must, on account of his personal excellence, stand high in the esteem of the injured One. He must be a person of exalted dignity if the weight of his mediation was to bear any proportion to the magnitude of the crime and the value of the favor he would confer. He must be able to fully maintain the interests and subserve the honor of God. He must also possess a tender compassion towards the wretched offenders or he would not cordially interest himself on their behalf. And to give greater fitness to such a procedure it would be eminently proper that he should be intimately related to each of the parties. But where was one with so many and so necessary qualifications to be found? There was no creature worthy of so high office and so honorable an undertaking, no, not "in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth" (Rev. 5:3). None but Omniscience had ever thought of appointing God's own beloved and co-equal Son to take upon Him our nature. 4. In the union of such diverse natures in the person of Christ. It was necessary that the Mediator should be a Divine person in order that He might be independent and not the mere creature of either party; in order that He might reveal the Father (John 1:18; 14:9), in order to render unto the Law an obedience He did not owe for Himself (as all creatures do) and be one of infinite value. And in order that He might be capacitated to administer the realms of providence and grace, which are committed to Him as Mediatorial Prince (Matthew 28:18; John 17:2). None other than God can forgive sins, impart eternal life, restore the fallen creature to true liberty, or bestow the Holy Spirit. Yet it was equally necessary that the Mediator should be Man. In order that He might truly represent men as "the last Adam," in order that He might be "made under the law" to obey it, in order that He could suffer its death-penalty, and in order that, in His glorified humanity, He might be Head of the Church. He was to be "The Apostle and High Priest" (Heb. 3:1). God's Apostle unto us, our "High Priest" with God, for He must both pacify God's wrath and remove our enmity. But how furnish the Son for His office? How become partaker of human nature without contracting its corruption? How unite Godhood and manhood, the Infinite with the finite, Immortality with mortality, Almighty with weakness? How produce such a union that the two natures were perfectly wedded in one Person and yet preserve their distinctness, conjoined yet not confounded? So that the Deity was not changed into flesh nor flesh transformed into God? Before the Word's becoming flesh, must we not exclaim "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:33)! By that unique and wondrous union Christ was fitted to be "the Mediator of a better covenant" (Heb. 8:6).

There was nothing that belonged to Deity which He did not possess, and nothing that pertained to humanity but He was clothed with (Heb. 2:17). He had the nature of Him that was offended by sin, and of him that offended. "As sin was our invention (Eccl. 7:29) so Christ alone is God's and therefore is He called 'The Wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:24), which is not spoken of Him essentially as Second Person, but as Mediator, because in Him God's wisdom to the utmost is made manifest" (Thos. Goodwin). 5. In constituting Christ the federal Head of His people. "When God in wisdom had found a suitable Person, yet since thus must be His only Son, here was a greater difficulty to be overcome: how to give Him for us" (Thos. Goodwin). To satisfy both the requirements of His justice and the abundance of His mercy, God determined that a full satisfaction should be made unto His Law, and such a satisfaction that it was thereby more honored than if it had never been broken, or the whole race damned. In order thereto, He appointed that Christ should serve as the Surety and Substitute of His people. He must stand as their Representative and both fulfill all righteousness for them and endure the curse in their stead, so that they might be legally reckoned to have obeyed and suffered in Him. By transferring their guilt to the Surety, God both punishes sin and pardons the sinner. In the same stupendous Sacrifice God has upheld the claims of His Law and lavished His kindness on His people. "The depths of God's love are seen here, as of His wisdom before, in not sparing His own Son, but exposing Him to all the rigors of justice, which Would not make the least abatement" (Thos. Goodwin). Christ then was made the "Surety of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22). There could be no thought of reconciliation between a holy God and polluted rebels until sin had been put away and everlasting righteousness brought in, and as our Surety the Lord Jesus accomplished both. But O my reader, marvel at and stand in awe before what that involved. It involved that He who was in the form of God should take upon Him the form of a Servant. That the Lord of angels should be laid in a manger. That the Maker of the universe should not have anywhere to lay His head. That He should be constantly engaged in doing good and injuring none, yet be cast out by the world and deserted by His own followers. That the Lord of glory should be condemned as a malefactor, His own holy face fouled by the vile spittle of men and His back scourged by them. That the King of kings should be nailed hand and foot to a convict's gibbet. That the Beloved of the Father should be smitten and forsaken for Him. Such contrasts transcend the wit of man and could never have been invented by him. Must we not exclaim "O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep" (Ps. 92:5). 6. In overruling sin to our gain. What a marvel of Divine wisdom is this: that God has not only removed the reproach which the entrance of sin brought upon His government, but that He made sin to be the foil for the greatest and grandest display of His perfections, and that He has not only devised a plan whereby His people are completely recovered from all the direful consequences and effects of the fall, but that they obtain a vastly superior inheritance than was the portion of unfallen Adam. God would have His people not only saved from Hell, but also brought into Heaven, yet in such a way as should be to the most honor of Himself and of His Son. The apostle speaks of "the salvation which is in Christ with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). Not only salvation, but a glorious one: one that is to the glory of Him who contrived it, of Him who purchased it, of Him who applies it, and of them who enjoy it. What a truly amazing thing is this that shame should be the path to glory, that fallen sinners are enriched by the Redeemer's poverty, that those groveling in the mire of sin should be advanced to the highest dignities by Christ's making Himself "of no reputation." What honor it brings to God's wisdom not only to restore fallen men, but to make the fall issue in their superior excellence. If they had only been restored to their forfeited estate and the enjoyment of that happiness which they had lost, it had been a remarkable triumph of grace, but to make them "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17) and partakers of His glory (John 17:24) leaves us lost in amazement. It is a mystery of nature that the corruption of one thing is made to minister to the generation of another (as the bones of animals fertilize vegetation), but it is a grander mystery of grace that our fall in Adam should occasion a nobler

restitution. Innocence was not our last end. A superior felicity awaits us on High. Human nature is raised to a far higher degree of honor than had man retained his innocency, for through redemption and regeneration the elect are vitally united to the God-man Mediator and made members of His Body. The devil's empire is overthrown by the very same nature as he overthrew (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20). 7. In winning rebels unto Himself. Having contemplated something of the wisdom and love of the Father, the willingness and work of the Son, here we are to behold (more distinctively) the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. When He first draws near to the elect in their unregenerate state He finds them in a most deplorable condition. Their understandings are darkened by sin, their hearts are filled with enmity toward God, their wills are steeled against Him. Not only have they no regard for His glory, but they are without any desire for His so-great salvation, yea positively and strongly averse to it. Here too are obstacles which need removing, obstacles so formidable that nothing short of omniscience and omnipotence could overcome the same. How shall captives be delivered who are thoroughly satisfied with their prison? How shall slaves be freed who are in love with their bonds? Particularly, how shall that be effected while treating them as rational and responsible beings, without offering violence to their wills and reducing them to mere machines? Some may regard the above as a very exaggerated statement of the case, supposing that a complete solution is found by presenting the Gospel to them. But Scripture teaches, and experience and observation verifies it, that the natural man has no eyes capable of beholding the beauty of the Gospel, and that his heart is so desperately wicked he will not receive the Saviour that it offers him. How then are such creatures to be saved from themselves? How shall those who detest holiness be brought to desire it? The dead in sins made to walk in newness of life? That such a miracle is performed we know, but how it is wrought we know not. Christ Himself declares it is a mystery as inscrutable to man as the workings of the wind (John 3:8). All we know is that life, light, love and supernaturally communicated, by which the unwilling are made willing. Not by compelling them to do what they abhor, but by sweetly overcoming their aversion. "With lovingkindness have I drawn you" (Jer. 31:3). 8. In making our holiness and happiness conserve each other. This is yet another of the marvels of God's wisdom: that He has contrived that the same Gospel which secures our everlasting felicity shall also promote our present purity. The sanctity of God is not comprised by His clemency to sinners, for the Redeemer is Himself both the principle and pattern of holiness unto all who are saved by Him. Moreover, the same grace to send His Son to die for us gives the Holy Spirit to renew us according to the Divine image and thereby make us meet for communion with Him. What a wonder of Divine wisdom to so highly exalt those who are so utterly unworthy in themselves and yet at the same time effectually humble that they cry "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory, for Your mercy and for Your truth's sake" (Ps. 115:1). God's lovingkindness unto His people neither loosens the bonds of duty nor breaks that relation in which they stand to Him as their sovereign Lord and Governor. The Gospel does not permit its beneficiaries to return hatred for love nor contempt for benefit, but lays them under deeper obligations of gratitude to obedience. Those chosen to salvation are also "predestinated to be conformed unto the image of God's Son." The law of faith requires us to submit to Christ's sceptre as well as depend upon His sacrifice.

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