

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES
VOLUME ELEVEN

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New-Covenant Articles

Volume Eleven

The covenant of which [Jesus] is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises... By calling this covenant 'new', he has made the first one obsolete

Hebrews 8:6,13

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Scripture quotations come from a variety of versions

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can be found at davidhjay.com

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Note to the Reader

This is the eleventh volume in my collected articles on the new covenant. Although such pieces will continue to be posted on davidhjay.com, once again I not only want to set my work in a more permanent form for those who have already discovered it, but in the hope of reaching a new audience. The fact is, there is a growing body of believers who, having had more than enough of the bondage and fear produced by the law teachers and their clever tricks with Scripture, are displaying a voracious appetite for the liberating gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am thinking of them. If they find any value in these articles, they might like to explore my full-length books, the links to which are on davidhjay.com

I express my continued gratitude to Ace and Peggy Staggs for all the internet work they do behind the scenes. I also record my debt to those believers who support me in prayer. Mere words inadequately express what I feel about my brothers and sisters who encourage me in all these ways and more. God will remember them and their labour (Heb. 6:10).

New-Covenant Theology: A Summary

This summary represents my understanding of new-covenant theology. Scriptural justification for these statements may be found throughout my works.

New-covenant theology takes full account of the progressive nature of revelation, and thus it sees the new covenant as the goal and climax of the previous biblical covenants. The Bible is not flat but is progressive in revelation; ‘but now’ is a critical scriptural phrase marking the disjoint between the old and new covenants. The Old Testament (old covenant) must be interpreted in light of the New (new), not the other way about.

God has one eternal plan centred in Jesus Christ.

The law of Moses was one. It cannot, must not, be divided into three bits. God gave Israel the old covenant as a temporary measure, as a shadow of the person and work of Christ who fulfilled it and rendered it obsolete.

Believers are not under the law of Moses, but under the law of Christ. Having died to the Mosaic law, they are not under that condemning letter, but, by the Spirit, they are in union with Christ, married to him, and thus are enabled, empowered and motivated to live to his glory in obedience to Scripture.

Christ is all. He is his law. He is the covenant.

Believers use the law of Moses as a paradigm (pattern or typical example),¹ as part of ‘all Scripture’, but not as a list of detailed rules.

Sinners do not have to be prepared for Christ by first being taken to the law.

¹ See, for instance, 1 Cor. 5:6-13; 9:8-14; 10:1-11,18; 14:21; 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1; 8:15; 13:1.

New-Covenant Theology: A Summary

There is one body of the redeemed, the eschatological Israel, ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16), comprising the redeemed from the time of Adam to Pentecost, and redeemed Jews and Gentiles from that time until the end of the age.

The word ‘active’ plays a major role in new-covenant theology, and in two respects. *First*, while the redemption of the elect is accomplished through the passive obedience of Christ – that is, through his death on the cross – it is Christ’s active obedience – that is, his life-long obedience to his Father in fulfilling the Mosaic law – which is imputed as righteousness to the believer.² The believer’s justification – that is, his righteousness in Christ by faith alone – is this fulfilment of the law, and not merely pardon from sin. *Secondly*, the believer is enabled by the Spirit to be active – and not passive – in his progressive sanctification; that is, in his obedience by faith to the law of Christ, and proceeding from his faith in Christ.

² Although I have serious reservations about the words ‘active’ and ‘passive’ in this regard, I let the common usage stand.

Points to Ponder on Christ's Active Obedience

These are just headings, brief points. See my previous articles for detailed arguments.³

1. Christ accomplished justification on the cross (Rom. 5:18; Heb. 10:10,14). This is not in dispute. Even so, we must not forget the part played by the resurrection (Rom. 4:25) – taking full account of the double *dia* – nor by Christ's subsequent life (Rom. 5:9-10).

2. The real issue is not the means of the believer's justification, but what precisely is imputed to the believer at the point of faith. The Bible calls this 'righteousness'. The new covenant draws very heavily on the old covenant. What was 'righteousness' in the old covenant? It was obedience to the law: 'It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us' (Deut. 6:25; see also Deut. 24:13). Righteousness in the old covenant was far more than pardon. It was something positive, something actually done (see Ps. 106:30-31). This principle must not be jettisoned when we come to the new covenant. As Christ is the believer's sabbath, priest, temple, sacrifice, so he is his righteousness. Whatever such things were in shadow in the old covenant, in the new covenant they are the believer's actual experience in Christ.

3. Of course, no man is justified by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16), righteousness does not come by the law (Gal. 2:21), nor could the law impart life, and thus 'righteousness is not based on the law' (Gal. 3:21), but this does not in any way nullify point 2. The fact is, no sinner can keep the law; that is why there is no justification by the law. But, if someone did keep the law,

³ 'Into the Lions' Den: Christ's Active Obedience Re-Visited'; 'Observations on a Colloquy'.

Points to Ponder on Christ's Active Obedience

that would be a very different story (Rom. 7:10; 10:5). Christ was born and lived without sin (Acts 3:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26-27; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5) under the law (Gal. 4:4) to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17), and he did what the law was too weak to accomplish, too weak because man is a sinner (Rom. 8:1-4).

And thus Christ, by his obedience to the law in both life and death, laid the basis for Paul's assertion:

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith [that is, by the gospel, especially justification by faith]? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law (Rom. 3:31; see Matt. 5:17; Rom. 8:4).

4. 'Righteousness' must be more than 'pardon'. Take this:

One will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:7-8).

'Righteous', having 'righteousness', is equivalent to 'good', to being good, not merely 'pardon' or being 'pardoned'. The unconverted are not merely unpardoned sinners. Similarly, saints are not merely pardoned sinners.

As John said:

If you know that he [Christ] is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him (1 John 2:29; see John 7:18).

Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he [Christ] is righteous (1 John 3:7).

Christ is not 'pardoned', but he is 'righteous', and 'righteousness' is something done.

5. Those who think 'righteousness' means 'pardon' must read the following texts this way:

Unless your *pardon* exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

Gentiles who did not pursue *pardon* have attained it, that is, a *pardon* that is by faith; but... Israel who pursued a law that would lead to *pardon* did not succeed in reaching that law.

Points to Ponder on Christ's Active Obedience

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works... Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the *pardon* of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's *pardon*. For Christ is the end of the law for *pardon* to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the *pardon* that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the *pardon* based on faith says... (Rom. 9:30 – 10:6)

For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the *pardon* of God (2 Cor. 5:20).

I cannot!

6. Union with Christ is the key. All that Christ, as Mediator, is and all that Christ has done, as Mediator, is the believer's by reason of union with Christ. This must not – cannot – be confined to Christ's work on the cross.

7. If the active obedience of Christ is not imputed to the believer, it means that his obedience to his Father under the law was simply a preparation for the cross, leaving only his work on the cross to be imputed. In which case, at what point precisely did the work of Christ that is imputed to the believer start?

Has it Really Come to This?

Comments on a Banner Article

Part 1

For convenience, I divide my article into two.

Here is an extract from the current issue of *The Banner of Truth*, taken from an article which, in itself, is an extract from J.Gresham Machen's *The Christian View of Man*, which the Banner published in 1965:

Consider for a moment, my friends, the majesty of the law of God as the Bible sets it forth. One law over all – valid for Christians, valid for non-Christians, valid now and valid to all eternity. How grandly that law is promulgated amid the thunderings of Sinai!... The whole universe is beneath his holy law... God's law embracing all!... Liberty under the law of God...⁴

Machen, let us be clear, is talking about the law of Moses.

What's your reaction to what he said? 'It's just what we need today, with its flippancy, superficiality, lack of the sense of sin! This is the material to give them! Especially with the rise of this new-covenant theology and its antinomianism. Well done Banner! Well done!' Is that your response?

Well, it's not mine! Here is my reaction: 'Really, Banner, this takes the biscuit! Such a towering Bible teacher as Gresham Machen, too! How the gold has dimmed (Lam. 4:1)! How did you come to re-publish this in 1965? How did you decide to re-publish it again in the current magazine? Really, your readers deserve better than this! And if it does represent an effort at stemming the tide of new-covenant theology, it is, I must say, a signal failure'.

⁴ J.Gresham Machen: 'The Majesty of the Law of God', *The Banner of Truth*, Nov. 2017, pp1-6.

Why am I so categorical? I can answer that very easily. I find Machen's words grievously at variance with Scripture. Indeed, I cannot recall ever having read something so obviously unbiblical in so prestigious a magazine. In saying this, I am not breathing a word against the perfect law of God. Not a word! But Machen's sentiments fall far wide of the scriptural mark.

The law of Moses is valid for Christians. Really?

The law of Moses is valid for non-Christians? Really?

The law of Moses will be valid in eternity? Really?

Where does one start!

Let me begin with this fact – this scriptural fact; the old covenant, the law, was given to Israel, and only to Israel (Deut. 4:1 – 5:33; 7:8-12; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:12-14; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21). It was not given to Adam. It was not given to all men. It was not given to Abraham. It was given to Israel – and only Israel – through Moses on Mount Sinai.⁵ Nothing illustrates this better than the sabbath. The sabbath was the main distinguishing marker of the law, separating Israel from all other people (Ex. 31:13-17; Ezek. 20:12-24). Clearly, the sabbath as a weekly observance, being an integral part of the law of Moses, was entirely Jewish.⁶ The Jews, and only the Jews, were under the law. It was given to them as an integral and inseparable part⁷ of a temporary covenant, introduced, added by God, alongside the Abrahamic covenant, and was planned by God to last only until the coming of the Seed, Christ, who would abolish it by fulfilling it and rendering it obsolete (Matt. 5:17-22; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 7:12,18-22; 8:13). These scriptural facts must not be

⁵ The law was given to Israel at Sinai, and repeated almost at once after Moses broke the tables of stone. The law was repeated to Israel about forty years later near Beth Peor, just before Israel entered the promised land.

⁶ The sabbath was not given to Adam; it was not given to all men. Gen. 2:1-3 and Mark 2:27-28 do not prove the contrary. See my *Sabbath Questions; Sabbath Notes; Essential*.

⁷ See my 'What God Has Joined... Covenant and Law Inseparable'.

dismissed, glossed or blurred. Being cavalier with Scripture inevitably and rightly carries a high price tag. The *Banner* article is cavalier in the extreme. All men (whether believers or unbelievers) are not under the law of Moses.⁸

And what about the law of Moses ruling in eternity? The mind boggles. Will the inhabitants of the new heaven and the new earth be worried about whether or not they should seethe a goat in its mother's milk? Will they be concerned about the wearing of garments of different materials? What need will they have for commandments against adultery, when there is no marriage or giving in marriage in eternity (Matt. 22:30)? Does the *Banner* – and did Machen – really believe that there will be need for commandments against murder, theft and lying in eternity?⁹ Really? What a strange view of eternal bliss! After all, are we not explicitly told of the sort of people for whom God introduced the law of Moses? Paul could not have put it more clearly:

The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted (1 Tim. 1:9-11).

Is this a description of those who will live for ever in the new heaven and the new earth, and is this a description of the way they will be carrying on in that age? Really?

And so it goes on. Machen tells us the law of Moses was given 'grandly' on Sinai. Yet Exodus 19 and Hebrews 12 tell us that it was given with terror, and frightened everybody – including Moses – out of their wits. And quite right, too.

⁸ See my *Believers; Christ Is All*.

⁹ Incidentally – see below – these commandments are part of the so-called moral law, not the ceremonial or civil, allowing for the moment this non-scriptural division of the law.

Machen speaks of liberty under the law. Really? 2 Corinthians 3 tells us that the old covenant (and, that included the law),¹⁰ was a condemning covenant and law,¹¹ and this is confirmed by many scriptures (see, for instance, Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10-11). Some liberty!¹² One offence brought condemnation. Does the Banner really want to talk about ‘grandly’ and ‘liberty’ and ‘eternity’ in light of this? Really?

We have heard from Machen, and you have heard from me. It is high time we heard from Scripture. To my mind, the following passages destroy Machen’s case.

Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

My brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code... For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 6:14-18; 7:4-6; 8:3-4).

You are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.

¹⁰ See my ‘What God Has Joined... Covenant and Law Inseparable’.

¹¹ Paul was referring explicitly to the ten commandments, the so-called moral law. See below.

¹² Jas. 2:12 speaks of the law of Christ, not the law of Moses. See my *Believers; Christ Is All*.

For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory (2 Cor. 3:3-11).

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:19-20).

If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before [the] faith [that is, the gospel] came, we [that is, the Jews] were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith [that is, the gospel] would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian [better, child-custodian] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that [the] faith [that is, the gospel] has come, we are no longer under a guardian (Gal. 3:22-25).¹³

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother... Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him

¹³ For the justification of my interpolations, see my *Three*.

who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman’. So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’... But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 4:21 – 5:1,13-16,25).

[Christ]... having abolished in his flesh the enmity; that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances... putting to death the enmity (Eph. 2:14-16).

[Christ] having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Col. 2:14).

Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds,¹⁴ and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying: “Know the Lord”, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more’. In speaking of a new

¹⁴ The ‘law’ in question is the law of Christ, not the law of Moses. See earlier note.

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covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:6-13).

You have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given: 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned'. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said: 'I tremble with fear'. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:18-24).

I submit that the Banner has laid down one stick, and I have laid down another; namely, Scripture. I say further that the two are clearly at variance with each other. They are poles apart! Banner has got 'the law' wrong. It is not only Banner, of course. Machen has gone astray. Above all, covenant theology cannot survive.

I can imagine only one response. If there is another solution, I should like to hear it. But I can imagine only one. And it is one I have heard on countless occasions.¹⁵ Here it is: 'Ah! But you've made a dreadful mistake, an elementary mistake! You've forgotten one of the most basic points in this debate. You've forgotten that the law is divided into three parts. As long as you remember and apply this basic hermeneutic, all the above falls into place, and Banner, Machen, covenant theology and Scripture neatly dovetail. The law is to be divided into three parts – moral, ceremonial and civil. Christ has fulfilled, abolished and rendered obsolete the second and third parts of the law, leaving the moral law as "the law". And that is how Machen and Scripture can be reconciled'.

¹⁵ I have read it in the *Banner*. See my 'Misleading, Sad, Revealing: "Relevant Today" by Jeremy Brooks.

Well, if that *is* the response, I have just two things to say.

First, as I have noted in passing, even if the tripartite division of the law is called upon, it does not get round such things as laws against murder, adultery, theft and lying in eternity. Moreover the law's curse applies to all the law, including the so-called moral law.

But, *secondly*, the tripartite division of the law is not a scriptural hermeneutic. It is nothing but a conjuring trick. It is unscriptural! The Bible never makes such a division. Never! Certainly the Jews never did. So where did it come from? It is a traditional assumption taken over from an invention of the medieval Church. In particular, it came from that 'prince of schoolmen', Thomas Aquinas, the orthodox theologian *par excellence* of the Roman Catholic Church, whose influence even today in Protestantism, let alone Romanism, is greater than ever. Forming his views by drawing upon Aristotle, Augustine, Paul, classical antiquity, Arabs and medieval Jews – what a combination! – Aquinas devised a system which, though sophisticated, was vague and obscure. It is his labelling of the ten commandments as 'the moral law' which has come to play such an important role in Reformed theology.¹⁶ Sensitive to Papist accusations over antinomianism, the Reformers countered by using Aquinas' tripartite division of the law, claiming that believers are under the moral law for progressive sanctification.

And so to conclude the first part of my response to Banner's extract from Machen. I make a suggestion; indeed, I issue a friendly challenge to the Banner. Produce an article establishing the tripartite division of the law, and do it by Scripture alone, without mentioning any theologian, book, theology, Confession or catechism. Just Scripture. It is, after all, one of the key issues between covenant theology and new covenant theology. Now, what an invaluable service you would provide, if you could show the world that the tripartite division of the law really is scriptural! It would kill two birds with one article. It would stop new-covenant theology in its tracks, and establish one of the

¹⁶ See my 'Reading the Bible'.

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leading fundamentals of covenant theology. Without the tripartite division of the law, covenant theology collapses. So I put it to my friends at the Banner: ‘How about it? Will you do it?’ As I say, it would do a world of good.¹⁷

¹⁷ If you have already done so, please let me know, and if you really have established the biblical proof of the tripartite division, I will publicly apologise and admit my error.

Has it Really Come to This?

Comments on a Banner Article

Part 2

This is the second of two pieces in response to an article in the current issue of *The Banner of Truth*, the article itself being an extract from J.Gresham Machen's *The Christian View of Man*, which the Banner published in 1965. In my first piece, I dealt with Machen's words in a general sense. I now want to home in on one particular point. Here is the relevant extract from Machen's article:

How, then, shall [men] be right with God? Oh, you say, there is the gospel; there is the sweet and comforting teaching of Jesus Christ. Yes, but do men come to Jesus Christ? Do they come to him for the salvation of their souls? No, they patronise him as a fine religious teacher, and then they pass him by. How, then, shall they be brought to him? The Bible gives the answer. 'Wherefore', it says, 'the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith' (Gal. 3:24). That was true of the Hebrews in Old Testament and post-Old Testament times, about whom Paul is speaking in that passage; it is also true of everyone who really and truly comes to Jesus Christ as the Saviour from sin. The consciousness of sin alone leads men to turn to the Saviour from sin, and the consciousness of sin comes only when men are brought face to face with the law of God... Do not fear, you Christians. The Spirit of God has not lost his power. In his own good time, he will send his messengers even to a wicked and adulterous and careless generation. He will cause Mount Sinai to overhang and shoot forth flames; he will convict men of sin; he will break down men's pride; he will melt their stony hearts. Then he will lead them to the Saviour of their souls.¹⁸

Machen is here preaching unadulterated preparationism. And he is basing his case for it on one verse from Galatians 3. One

¹⁸ J.Gresham Machen: 'The Majesty of the Law of God', *The Banner of Truth*, Nov. 2017, pp1-6.

verse! Well... there is no end to the sort of nonsense that can be dragged out of, or foisted on, one verse of Scripture. What is more, and most important of all, Machen's case is founded on one of the worst, most glaring, mis-translations of any verse in the entire Bible.

Before I get to that, let me explain the terms. The advocates of Reformed preparationism¹⁹ say that sinners must be 'prepared' for Christ, 'made fit' for Christ, fit to receive him, or use some such jargon, and that this is accomplished by preaching the law to them. Sinners will trust Christ only after they have been prepared by the law; that is, after the law has sufficiently convicted them of their sin. This is the only way they can be saved.

This is quite wrong, and has been the source of endless misery for countless sinners and saints.²⁰ But it is precisely what Machen is teaching here, in this *Banner* article:

How, then, shall [sinners] be brought to [Christ]? The Bible gives the answer. 'Wherefore', it says, 'the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith' (Gal. 3:24)... [What] Paul is speaking in that passage.. is... true of everyone who really and truly comes to Jesus Christ as the Saviour from sin. The consciousness of sin alone leads men to turn to the Saviour from sin, and the consciousness of sin comes only when men are brought face to face with the law of God... The Spirit of God has not lost his power. In his own good time, he will send his messengers even to a wicked and adulterous and careless generation. He will cause Mount Sinai to overhang and shoot forth flames; he will convict men of sin; he will break down men's pride; he will melt their stony hearts. Then he will lead them to the Saviour of their souls.

Preparationism by the law. And, please note, preaching the law to sinners is not an option; it is not *one* way of bringing sinners

¹⁹ There is, in addition, a hyper-Calvinistic preparationism, according to which sinners cannot even be invited or commanded to come to Christ until they have had 'a thorough law work'. See my *Assurance*.

²⁰ I have fully documented this. See, for instance, my *Christ; Assurance*; 'Was Isaiah a Preparationist?'; 'Preparationism in New England'; 'The Law and the Confessions'.

to Christ. Oh no! It is *the* way. The law must be preached, the full force of Mount Sinai must be laid upon sinners, shooting its flames upon them, and all this must be preached to prepare sinners for Christ:

The consciousness of sin alone leads men to turn to the Saviour from sin, and the consciousness of sin comes only when men are brought face to face with the law of God.

Not until sinners have had ‘a thorough law work’ will they be brought to Christ. But once they have been preached into that state, then the Spirit ‘will lead them to the Saviour of their souls’. But not before! Machen has left nobody in any doubt. Nor have the Banner. This is preparationism of a high order!

I am not saying Machen is alone in this. Both he and the Banner are repeating centuries-old legal teaching. Calvin made precisely the same mistake.²¹ It was carried over by the Puritans into the Westminster and 1689 Particular Baptist Confessions, but not, I am delighted to record, into the 1644 Particular Baptist Confession.²² Listen to what its compilers stated:

The tenders of the gospel to the conversion of sinners, is absolutely free, no way requiring, as absolutely necessary, any qualifications, preparations, terrors of the law, or preceding ministry of the law, but only and alone the naked soul, as a sinner and ungodly to receive Christ, as crucified, dead, and buried, and risen again, being made a Prince and a Saviour for such sinners.

If only the Banner would publish that, and not Machen on the law! Wishing for the moon, alas!

Before I move on, let me just say that I am not saying that the law should never be preached in the days of the new covenant. I would not dream of saying such a thing! The law is a part of all Scripture, and, if used properly (1 Tim. 1:8) it is profitable (2 Tim. 3:15-17). But that means it must only be

²¹ See my *Christ Is All*.

²² See my ‘The Law and the Confessions’.

preached as warranted by Christ and the apostles,²³ not Reformed theology. To demand the preaching of the law before preaching Christ, however, is not to be countenanced. It has no scriptural basis.²⁴

And that takes me to the central point. Machen's argument for preparationism by the law is based on an appalling and utterly misleading mis-translation of Galatians 3.

Let me quote the passage in the AV or KJV, that which has caused untold damage to a countless number:

Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24-25).

This translation, alas, repeats (whether deliberately or not, I do not know) the mistake of the Geneva Version:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be made righteous by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Tyndale, however, got much closer. Alas, the AV translators failed to take proper account of Tyndale here. This is how he translates the passage:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto the time of Christ that we might be made righteous by faith. But after that faith is come, now are we no longer under a schoolmaster.

Now these versions, as I say, are guilty, to a varying degree, of one of the most glaringly bad translations of any passage in the entire Bible. It has caused immense harm. Machen, in this present *Banner* article, is perpetuating that bad translation and the consequent damage it has inflicted on countless souls. I find

²³ See, for instance, my 'Separation Essential: No Mixture! Deut. 22:9-11'.

²⁴ Gentiles are not under the law of Moses, but under their own law. See my 'All Men Under Law'. For Paul addressing Gentile unbelievers, see Acts 14:14-18;17:1-34; Rom.1:16-32.

it hard to credit that such a scholar as Machen, who published notes on part of Galatians,²⁵ did not realise this. Likewise, I also find it hard to credit that the *Banner* publishers are ignorant of it. Ah, well...

Let us get nearer to what Paul actually wrote:

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made... Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian (Gal. 3:19-25).

This translation is a great improvement on the others. It is much closer to Paul's words. But let me set out what the apostle actually did say:

If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before [the] faith [that is, the gospel] came, we [that is, the Jews] were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith [that is, the gospel] would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian [better, child-custodian] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that [the] faith [that is, the gospel] has come, we are no longer under a guardian [that is, a child-custodian] (Gal. 3:22-25).

Having elsewhere fully set out my arguments for this rendering of the apostle's words,²⁶ I will not stop to repeat those arguments here. But the truth is, this passage has nothing to say about personal experience. It has nothing to say about preaching the law to prepare sinners for Christ. The words 'to bring us' are a downright imposition on the text. The translators (and those

²⁵ J.Gresham Machen: *Machen's Notes on Galatians: Notes on Biblical Exposition and Other Aids to the Interpretation of the Epistle to the Galatians From the Writings of J.Gresham Machen*, John H.Skilton (ed.), Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., New Jersey, 1977.

²⁶ See my *Three*.

who argue on the basis of the inserted text) are guilty of putting words in the apostle's mouth. It ought to stop. I am amazed that the *Banner* contains such material, perpetuating a falsehood. Yes, I use the word. The evidence of the mis-translation is there for all to see. There is no excuse for the publication of this kind of misleading material. It should be immediately withdrawn, and never repeated.

In Galatians 3, Paul teaches us that the Jews were under the law – an integral, inseparable,²⁷ part of a temporary covenant which was introduced, added by God, alongside the Abrahamic covenant, this Mosaic covenant to last only until the coming of the Seed, Christ, who would abolish it by fulfilling it and rendering it obsolete (Matt. 5:17-22; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 7:12,18-22; 8:13).²⁸ During the time that Israel was under the Mosaic covenant with its law, it served as a child custodian to discipline and imprison Israel. The passage has nothing to do with the idea of a schoolmaster and education!²⁹ Nor does it have anything to say about personal experience of conversion.³⁰ Paul is concerned with epochs – the epoch of the law, the time of the law, and the epoch or age of the gospel, the new covenant. The time of the law is over and done with. That age, the epoch of the law, has passed, all by God's design. Shadow has been

²⁷ See my 'What God Has Joined... Covenant and Law Inseparable'.

²⁸ See my *Christ Is All; Believers*.

²⁹ The Greek word is *paidagōgos*. The word is a combination of *pais* (child) and *agōgos* (leader), derived from *agō*, 'to drive, to lead by laying hold of, to conduct' with the idea of discipline. As Thayer explains: 'The name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys... The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them, before reaching the age of manhood... The name carries with it an idea of severity (as of a stern censor and enforcer of morals)'. And the child-custodian's job was not to *bring* the immature boy anywhere; rather, he had to discipline and protect the boy *until* he reached maturity. During that time, the Jews 'were held prisoners by the law, locked up' by the law (Gal. 3:23, NIV), 'kept under guard by the law', confined by the law.

³⁰ Of course, the apostle moves on to personal experience in verse 26, but this is beside the material point here. In Gal. 4 he returns to epochs.

superseded by reality, fulfilment, by the bringing in of the new covenant, the better or superior covenant (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 9:23; 10:1; Hebrews *passim*).

Galatians 3 gives no warrant for preaching the law to sinners to prepare them for Christ. None whatsoever! For those who still think it does, or that preparation by the law is the way to address Gentile unbelievers today, in the days of the new covenant, I have a question or two. Could we given one example – one example – in all the Bible where any non-Israelite was brought to Christ through the law? Did any preacher, as recorded in Scripture, ever preach the law to Gentiles to prepare them for Christ? Why not? If Machen and the Banner are right, no sinner can ever be saved without first having been taken to Moses and given a thorough law work. Preachers who do not preach the law, who do not preach the law before they preach the gospel, must, therefore, be going about their work in completely the wrong way. And the ‘conversions’ they see must be false.

I close by reminding us all of what Christ declared:

When [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin... concerning sin, because they do not believe in me (John 16:8-9).

And we know why sinners will be condemned:

Whoever believes in [Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:18,36).

For conviction and condemnation in the days of the new covenant, therefore, not a whiff of Moses, but all to do with Christ.

And we have Paul’s assertions which are clarity itself. How these do not silence the preparationists, once and for all, I simply cannot fathom:

Christ did not send me... but to preach the gospel... For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us

who are being saved it is the power of God... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men... And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 1:17 – 2:2).

Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:16).

What we proclaim is... Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5).

If I may accommodate the apostle's words, this is my reply to all preparationists – Calvin, Puritans, Westminster, 1689, Machen, Banner, whoever – every gospel preacher can declare, ought to declare: 'Christ did not send me to preach the law but to preach the gospel... Preparationists demand law, but I preach Christ... I do not come proclaiming to you the law... For I am determined to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified'.

How Great? How Small!

God, in his word, reminds us how brief our life is, how small, how insignificant, we humans are. Alas, we too often forget this, and get inflated ideas of ourselves and other men. Here are some salutary words drawn from the Bible:

When I look at your heavens [O LORD], the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Ps. 8:3-4).

O LORD, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow (Ps. 144:3-4).

Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? (Isa. 2:22).

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes (Jas. 4:14).

And yet, as I say, man can ignore God's perfect estimate, to get inflated views of himself. The Dorset poet, William Barnes (1801-1886), captured this superbly in a poem he penned about himself and his thoughts. Here it is:

How Great? How Small!

How Great Do I Become!

*How great do I become! How great!
With all my children now full-grown,
And settled, each a wedded mate,
And all with children of their own.
I first was one, and then one more
Well-wived; and children made me ten;
And they with all their wives or men,
And children, now make me two score,
With children's children, far or nigh,
How great I am become! Am I?*

*I own a share of Weston folk,
On Norton work I have some hands,
At Beechley I send up a smoke,
My surname sounds on Ashridge lands.
In Meldon church my voices sing,
Yes, there I have young tongues to pray,
And I have boys and girls at play
Below the rocks, at Clewewell spring,
With all the souls that I may claim
How great I am! How great my name!*

*But oh! how little can I track
The longsome team of father men,
That runs, from me to elders, back
A chain of links beyond my ken.
O'er what dear heads, by one and one,
My name at length came down on me
I know not now, nor may I see
Below me one child's child's sweet son.
No. I am only one of all
Those links of life. But one. How small!*

‘To Christ’: My Response to Bertrand Russell’s ‘To Edith’

Following my ‘Arrogant Atheism Answered’, which was based on Dorothy Day’s ‘Conquered’, the poem she wrote in response to William Ernest Henley’s bragging poem, ‘Invictus’ (‘Unconquered’), and my ‘The Unbeliever’s Lament’, which was based on poems by Matthew Arnold and Thomas Hardy,³¹ I thought I would use Bertrand Russell’s poem ‘To Edith’ – which he wrote to his fourth and last wife, Edith Finch Russell – to produce the following poem of my own. Russell, of course, like Henley, was a militant atheist. It is my conviction that the first half of Russell’s poem, full of self-confessed disappointment leading to wretchedness, captures more than ordinary grief; I am sure it expresses what every unbeliever will have to confess in a Christless eternity. Consequently, in hope of helping some of those who are facing such a bleak prospect, in hope of encouraging them to come to Christ before it is too late, I have accommodated the second half of Russell’s poem to speak of a believer addressing Christ.³²

³¹ See my *New-Covenant Articles: Volume Ten*.

³² Both versions appear on the following page.

To Christ: My Response to Bertrand Russell's 'Edith'

Bertrand Russell's 'To Edith':

*Through the long years I sought peace,
I found ecstasy,
I found anguish,
I found madness,
I found loneliness,
I found the solitary pain that gnaws the heart,
But peace I did not find.*

*Now, old & near my end,
I have known you,
And, knowing you,
I have found both ecstasy & peace,
I know rest.*

*After so many lonely years,
I know what life & love may be.
Now, if I sleep,
I shall sleep fulfilled.*

My 'To Christ':

*Now, convicted & converted,
I have known you,
And, knowing you,
I have found both lasting joy & peace,
I know rest.*

*After so many wasted years,
I know **that** life & love which only truly is
Both life & love.
And though I come, as come I must, to die,
I know I shall, in your returning day,
And by your grace alone,
Arise to everlasting bliss divine.*

A Harp with One String?

No doubt most of us have heard of Bach's 'Air on a G String' – a tune played entirely on one string of a violin.³³ Is this a good model for a gospel preacher?

What a silly question!

Read on.

The answer is both 'No' and 'Yes'. Let me explain.

Take the negative. Some preachers seem to spend most of their time, devote most of their energy, and expend most of their labours in promoting one theme. One string to their harp, you see!

For instance, some men are endlessly declaiming on creationism. In particular, they major on demonstrating creation's reasonableness as a matter of design, attacking the theory of evolution, defending the construction and logistics of Noah's ark, explaining dinosaurs, and the like. This about sums up their life's work.

Then again, there are those who rarely move from the prophets.³⁴ In particular, such men are professed experts on the visions of Daniel and Zechariah, and are – in their own eyes, at least – masters of the Revelation, especially the times and the seasons referred to in those books. They are forever calling their hearers' attention to the news from the Middle East or to developments in the shenanigans of the Common Market,

³³ The German violinist August Wilhelmj (1845-1908), taking the second movement of Johann Sebastian Bach's Orchestral Suite No.3 in D major, arranged it for violin and piano. By changing the key into C major, and transposing the melody down an octave, he was able to play the piece on only one string – the G string.

³⁴ I am not sure if this still applies as much as it did way back in the days of my youth, but I certainly recall men who were forever preaching prophecy; that is to say, preaching what they understood to be the burden of the prophets.

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showing how all has been predicted in Scripture. Above all, the fate of Israel is their constant theme.

Some men seem to be consumed with a study of the tabernacle, even down to the finest detail, often using an intricate model to make their points.

Other preachers seem to have a harp of five strings, but in reality it has only one: 'The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened [or blinded]' (Rom. 11:7). A truth, of course, but hardly the whole truth.

Others seem to spend their days arguing the truth of new-covenant theology, showing that both covenant theologians and dispensationalists are wrong.

Some exhaust their energy declaiming against Rome and all its endless errors.

Some devote their strength to advocating what they see as the merits of the Received Text (whatever they think this to be), and the King James (or so-called Authorised) Version of the Bible (whatever edition is currently available).

And so on.

I am convinced this is a mistake. And a big one.

First, it is wrong for a preacher to concentrate on anything but Scripture. I am not nit-picking. I think it is wrong to start with a subject. I am not saying that a preacher should not have a purpose in mind, but it is vital that he should preach Scripture, and be seen to be preaching Scripture. We need to be confronted with the mind of God, not the mind of man. We are to preach the word, Scripture, as Paul tells us:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word (2 Tim. 3:16 – 4:2).

Not theology. Not a subject. Not a doctrine. Not a system. The word. 'Preach the word'. And we know what the apostle meant

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by ‘the word’. He was speaking of the entire Scriptures. In particular, the gospel. Above all, Christ. As he told the Romans:

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written: ‘The righteous shall live by faith’ (Rom. 1:14-17).³⁵

Do not miss Paul’s stated eagerness to preach the gospel to believers as well as unbelievers. This he made clear right at the start of his letter to the Romans. And then, having got close to the end of his treatise, the apostle declared:

I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel (Rom. 15:19-20).

When he was at Corinth:

Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus (Acts 18:5).

As he told the Ephesian elders:

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ... I do not account my life of any value nor as

³⁵ And we have: “‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’”. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ’ (Rom. 10:13-17). There is a manuscript variant: ‘the word (*rēmatos*) of Christ’, or ‘the word (*rēmatos*) of God’. I think the former, and take it to mean Scripture, preached at the command of God, and centring on Christ himself.

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precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God... I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom... I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:18-27).

Notice the interchangeability of ‘declaring... profitable... testifying... repentance toward God and... faith in our Lord Jesus Christ... the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God... proclaiming the kingdom... declaring... the whole counsel of God’. Putting it in a nutshell, the apostle preached the gospel:

Christ did not send me to baptise but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power (1 Cor. 1:17).

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:16).

And this was just as Christ commanded:

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation (Mark. 16:15).

In all this, Paul preached Christ:

We preach Christ crucified... And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:1-2).

What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor. 4:5).

I say it again: we should not preach a subject, a theory, a doctrine, a system, a theology. We must preach the word, the entire body of Scripture. If we do, we are bound to preach Christ, as he himself demonstrated in his conversation with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus:

Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Christ] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

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Do not miss how Christ began with Moses and the prophets; that is, the Scriptures as they then were. Here is our pattern.

So, should a preacher have only one string to his bow? If that string is Scripture, and that man is looking to preach Christ from Scripture, yes. But if that string is a theology or a system or whatever, no. We must preach Christ. For in preaching Christ, we preach all, because Christ is all (Col. 3:11). In preaching Christ as he is set forth in Scripture, we preach him in all his scriptural balance. And that, and that alone, is saving for sinners, and edifying to saints. Above all, it is in this way that God is glorified.

C.H. Spurgeon, addressing his students, and, incidentally, all preachers who will listen to him:

Of all I would wish to say this is the sum; my brethren, preach CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world needs still to be told of its Saviour, and of the way to reach him. Justification by faith should be far more than it is the daily testimony of Protestant pulpits; and if with this master-truth there should be more generally associated the other great doctrines of grace, the better for our churches and our age. If with the zeal of Methodists we can preach the doctrine of Puritans a great future is before us. The fire of Wesley, and the fuel of Whitfield, will cause a burning which shall set the forests of error on fire, and warm the very soul of this cold earth. We are not called to proclaim philosophy and metaphysics, but the simple gospel. Man's fall, his need of a new birth, forgiveness through an atonement, and salvation as the result of faith, these are our battle-axe and weapons of war. We have enough to do to learn and teach these great truths, and accused be that learning which shall divert us from our mission, or that wilful ignorance which shall cripple us in its pursuit. More and more am I jealous lest any views upon prophecy, church government, politics, or even systematic theology, should withdraw one of us from glorying in the cross of Christ. Salvation is a theme for which I would fain enlist every holy tongue. I am greedy after witnesses for the glorious gospel of the blessed God. O that Christ crucified were the universal burden of men of God. Your guess at the number of the beast,

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your Napoleonic speculations, your conjectures concerning a personal Antichrist – forgive me, I count them but mere bones for dogs, while men are dying, and hell is filling, it seems to me the veriest drivel to be muttering about an Armageddon at Sebastopol or Sadowa or Sedan,³⁶ and peeping between the folded leaves of destiny to discover the fate of Germany. Blessed are they who read and hear the words of the prophecy of the Revelation, but the like blessing has evidently not fallen on those who pretend to expound it; for generation after generation of them have been proved to be in error by the mere lapse of time, and the present race will follow to the same inglorious sepulchre. I would sooner pluck one single brand from the burning than explain all mysteries. To win a soul from going down into the pit is a more glorious achievement than to be crowned in the arena of theological controversy as Doctor Sufficientissimus; to have faithfully unveiled the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ will be in the final judgment accounted worthier service than to have solved the problems of the religious Sphinx, or to have cut the Gordian knot of apocalyptic difficulty. Blessed is that ministry of which CHRIST IS ALL.

Others must speak for themselves, but if I have to have an epitaph, I would settle for this, hoping that it might be true: ‘Here lies a man whose life was spent proclaiming Christ’.

As Charles Wesley put it:

*O that my Jesus' heavenly charms
Might every bosom move!
Fly, sinners, fly into those arms
Of everlasting love.*

*Him I shall constantly proclaim,
Though earth and hell oppose;
Bold to confess his glorious name
Before a world of foes.³⁷*

³⁶ 19th century references. In the early 20th century it would have been the Somme and Passchendaele. In the 50s it was Russia and Nasser. In the 70s and 80s it was the Common Market. And so on.

³⁷ In this verse, I have changed Wesley's second person into the third person.

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*His only righteousness I show,
His saving grace proclaim;
'Tis all my business here below
To cry: 'Behold the Lamb!'*

*Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp his name,
Preach him to all and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'*

And, finally, if may slightly adapt the words of Paul, I hope I can say at the end that 'I have fulfilled [my] ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I [have satisfied] my ambition to preach the gospel' (Rom. 15:19-20).

Justification: The Make or Break Doctrine

Whether or not Martin Luther actually said, in precise terms, that ‘justification is the article by which the church stands and falls’,³⁸ the sentiment is right. And it is because I am convinced that it is right, and because I am further convinced that justification by faith alone on the basis of grace is under attack – both heavy and insidious – today, that I publish yet again on this subject.³⁹

Justification is a declaration or pronouncement that someone is righteous; for example, in court after due trial (Deut. 25:1). Such declarations are made in everyday life, also. For instance, when the tax collectors ‘justified God’ (Luke 7:29), they declared him righteous. Justification, I repeat, is a declaration. To ‘justify’ does *not* mean ‘to *make* righteous’. This is most important. Judges do not *make* defendants righteous or wicked – they *declare* them so (Deut. 25:1). The Spirit did not *make* Christ righteous – he *declared*, demonstrated him righteous (1 Tim. 3:16). The crowd did not *make* God righteous – they *declared* him righteous (Luke 7:29). Of course, if a human court could *make* the guilty righteous, it would be highly commended, to say the least – but that is an utter impossibility, and not what we are talking about. Likewise, condemnation – the opposite of

³⁸ See Justin Taylor: ‘Luther’s Saying: “Justification Is the Article by Which the Church Stands and Falls”’. Taylor: ‘From what I’ve been able to find, the first use of this exact phrase was by Lutheran theologian Balthasar Meisner who said that it was a “proverb of Luther” (1615)... In 1618 Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Alsted wrote: “The article of justification is said to be the article by which the church stands or falls”... Luther: “If this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses”’.

³⁹ This article is a lightly edited version of the chapter ‘Justification’ in my *Eternal* pp17-29. For more, see, for instance, my *Four; Conversion; Hinge*.

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justification – is a pronouncement or declaration. To condemn a man does not make him guilty; it declares him guilty.

But what about the gospel? What about justification in gospel terms? God, in the gospel, speaks of ‘justification’, and he speaks of it – he always speaks of it – in its forensic or legal sense, as a declaration. And, as in everyday life, justification in a gospel sense is the opposite of condemnation (2 Chron. 6:22-23; Prov. 17:15; John 5:24; Rom. 5:16,18; 8:1,33-34; *etc.*).

No human legal system can adequately illustrate every aspect of gospel justification, however. In fact, there are major dissimilarities – indeed, striking contradictions – between the two. In particular, in the gospel, God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). This is an utter impossibility in a human court (Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15) – or ought to be! Remember, justification is a declaration. So, in the gospel, God declares the ungodly righteous! Now if a human court *declares* the blameworthy righteous, it is an abomination (Prov. 17:15; 24:24-25; Isa. 5:23; Matt. 27:4), as it is if men condemn the righteous (Ps. 94:21). Rational people want the courts to condemn the wicked, and justify the righteous, do they not (1 Kings 8:32)? Well, then, God himself will not, cannot, justify the wicked under such a system (Ex. 23:6-7). Yet, in the gospel, he does justify the ungodly. Yes, he does! What is more, he does it justly (Rom. 3:26)!

That is to say, under certain circumstances, God, by his grace (Tit. 3:7), does justify sinners. In other words, he declares them righteous in his sight. He does this in a most remarkable way – but not by ignoring their sin and guilt, or by *making* them righteous. Let me say it again. In justifying sinners in the gospel, God declares them righteous – he does not make them so. Certainly not! *That* is one of the cardinal errors of Rome. Rome teaches that, in justification, God imparts righteousness to sinners, infusing it into them, making them righteous.⁴⁰ All sorts of dreadful consequences flow from this mistake.⁴¹

⁴⁰ In short, Rome confuses and confounds justification and sanctification: ‘Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man,

No. In justifying sinners, God graciously pronounces them righteous by *constituting* them righteous in union with or ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 6:1-5; 8:1; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Tim. 1:9). What does this mean? In his grace, God regards the sinner in question as united with Christ so that Christ’s obedience is reckoned to the sinner, imputed to the sinner – the sinner’s sin having been reckoned to the Saviour (Rom. 5:9,12-21; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 Pet. 3:18). Imputation, putting to the account of, crediting with – like the deposit of credit in someone’s bank account, say – is one of the great principles of the gospel.

Leaving aside all illustration, just as Christ bore the sin and guilt of the sinner (Gal. 3:13) – all having been laid by God to Christ’s account – so the sinner is accounted righteous by God because God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. And all is brought about in the experience of the sinner by his believing, trusting God in Christ for salvation. As he believes, as he trusts God in Christ, the sinner receives his justification. This is what the Bible means by being justified by faith (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20-31; 4:1-25; 5:1; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:8-14; 5:1-5; for instance). The sinner is accounted righteous because he is clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

I have just introduced two major topics – ‘the righteousness of Christ’ and ‘union with Christ’. I must pause to say a little more about each of them.

The righteousness of Christ

This phrase, or its equivalent, ‘Christ’s righteousness’, appears repeatedly in countless books, hymns, sermons, Confessions of Faith, *etc.*, yet, remarkably, ‘the righteousness of Christ’, as a

through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend, that so he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting’ (Council of Trent).

⁴¹ Although almost all versions translate Rom. 5:19 as ‘by one man’s obedience many will be *made* righteous’, this is not the best translation. ‘Constituted’ is far better: *kathistēmi*, ‘to set down as, constitute, to declare, show to be’ (Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991).

phrase, never once appears in Scripture. As may be imagined, many have held strong opinions about this expression, what it means, and whether or not it is right to use it. Needless to say, nobody – among those I am talking about – questions the sinlessness of Christ; *that* is not the point at issue. Rather, what righteousness, precisely, does God account to his elect when they believe?

Here we come face to face with the much-debated topic of Christ's so-called active and passive obedience. While I do not wish to open a lengthy discussion on this subject here – having done so at length elsewhere⁴² – and while I have some reservations about using the two words themselves,⁴³ let me explain the terms: Christ's *active* obedience is his entire life of obedience to the law; his *passive* obedience is his death on the cross under the curse of the law. I take 'the righteousness of Christ' to encompass both. Let me briefly say why.

The righteousness of Christ, that which is accounted to the believing sinner, is not Christ's intrinsic righteousness. No! I am talking about Christ's obedience to the law, culminating in his sacrifice on the cross, all of which was vindicated by his resurrection. Christ was born under the law (Gal. 4:4). Christ, in his life, was fully obedient to the commands of the law, and, in his death, suffered its penalty, curse and condemnation, and so established that righteousness which would justify the elect. God the Father demonstrated his total satisfaction – pleasure – in, by and with this completed work of his Son, and his full acceptance of it, by raising him from the dead, receiving him back in exaltation into glory, crowned in triumph (Ps. 24:7-10; Is. 52:13; 53:12; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Christ *himself* is the believer's righteousness (Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Pet. 1:1) – Christ and his work, his obedience to the law and his death under the law. Take Philippians 3:8-11. Paul, speaking passionately of his love of 'the righteousness which is from God by faith', explained:

⁴² See my *Christ's Obedience Imputed*.

⁴³ Christ was active, not only in his life, but in his death. He positively laid down his life (John 10:18).

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‘Righteousness... which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know him [Christ]...’. This is what the apostle was referring to. It can be summed up in a word: Christ! Christ is the believer’s righteousness.

Now there is no question but that the weight of Scripture comes down heavily on Christ’s blood-sacrifice as God’s justifying act (Rom. 3:24-26; 5:6,8-10; 6:1-10; 7:6; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:12-15,28; 10:1-14; 13:12; 1 Pet. 3:18; and scores of others). As Paul told us, this is at the heart of the Lord’s supper: ‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes’ (1 Cor. 11:26). Above all, we have the cardinal text: ‘Through one man’s righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life’ (Rom. 5:18). That ‘one righteous act’ can only be Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, the shedding of his blood. Scripture always lays massive emphasis on the death of Christ, under the curse of the law, as the justifying righteousness which God accounts to the believer.

But this does not mean that Christ’s life of obedience under the law had no place in establishing this justifying righteousness. After all, justification is more than forgiveness, more than pardon; it is God accounting righteousness to the one to be justified. There is a negative aspect – the removal of sin, its guilt, condemnation and power, but there is also a positive aspect – the reckoning of righteousness. True, the penalty of the law was death, but the way of righteousness under the law was: ‘Do and live’ (Lev. 18:5; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 20:11,13,21; Rom. 10:5); as Moses declared to the Israelites: ‘It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us’ (Deut. 6:25). For this very reason, Christ was born under the law (Gal. 4:4). This means far more than that he was a Jew. He was, of course, but he was born under the law in order to obey it so that he might redeem his people (Gal. 4:5). And this he did perfectly, without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26), thus earning salvation for his people – his entire obedience culminating in the offering of himself a perfect,

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spotless sacrifice on the cross. The law's regulations fully typified this – the sacrificial beast had to be without blemish (Ex. 12:5; 29:1; and scores more) – and Christ, fulfilling the law in every aspect, was without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19). His obedience under the law fitted him to be the perfect sacrifice (Heb. 5:9).

But there is more to it even than that. He became a man for the very purpose of living a life of obedience to the law, which culminated in the offering of his body on the cross. And he underwent all this in order to establish the righteousness that would justify his people. He became, therefore, the perfect Saviour for sinners for ever (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28).

So, although Scripture lays heavy stress on the death of Christ, the shedding of his blood in atoning sacrifice, as the justifying act, it also speaks of his obedience (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8-9; 10:5-14,19-20). 'By one man's obedience many will be made [constituted] righteous' (Rom. 5:19). Without question, this obedience, as I said, culminated in his death (Matt. 26:39; John 10:18; Rom. 5:18-19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8; 10:10), for 'Christ... offered himself without spot' – 'without blemish' (NASB); 'unblemished' (NIV) – 'to God' (Heb. 9:14). Nevertheless, his entire existence as a man leading up to the cross is also a vital and integral part of this 'righteousness of Christ'. Hence:

Mary... will bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:20-21). The word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Jesus Christ... was born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law... (Gal. 4:4-5). Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the

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cross... (Phil. 2:5-8). God was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same [their humanity – NIV], that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14-15). When he came into the world, he said: ‘... a body you have prepared for me... “Behold, I have come... to do your will, O God”...’... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:5-10).

When he was twelve, Jesus told his parents that he must be ‘about [his] Father’s business’ (Luke 2:49). And when he came to John to be baptised, he spoke of fulfilling ‘all righteousness’ (Matt. 3:15). While we must avoid speculation, we may surely say that, right from his baptism, the Lord Jesus was on that path of public obedience which would lead him inexorably to the cross. And in the years following his baptism, right up to his crucifixion, how often he spoke of the will of his Father, of his doing that will, of his finishing the work his Father had given him to do (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:4; 17:4), all culminating in his triumphant cry on the cross: ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30). Truly, as his Father’s ‘servant’ (Is. 42:1; 52:13), he kept his vow to him (Ps. 40:6–8; Heb. 10:5-9).

In short, I agree with Augustus Toplady:

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and off’ring to bring;
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour’s obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

And with John Gill, citing William Ames:

The righteousness by which we are justified... is not to be sought for in different operations of Christ, but arises from his whole obedience, both active and passive; which is both satisfactory and meritorious, and frees from condemnation and death, and adjudges and entitles to eternal life; even as one and

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the same disobedience of Adam, stripped us of original righteousness, and rendered us obnoxious to condemnation.⁴⁴

Mention of Adam reminds us that Christ is ‘the last Adam’ (1 Cor. 15:45). The first Adam failed to obey God, and therefore died, bringing all men down with him. Christ, ‘the last Adam’, lived a life of perfect obedience to God his Father, and then offered that perfect life in sacrificial death to atone for the elect, thus uniting his active and passive obedience.

And, as I have said, Christ’s entire obedience of life unto death was completely vindicated by his resurrection:

Righteousness... shall be imputed to us who believe in him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. 4:22-25; see also 1 Cor. 15:17; 2 Cor. 5:15). Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name... (Phil. 2:5-9).

In this way, Christ’s *entire* work in his obedient life, culminating in his atoning sacrifice, leading to his vindication by the resurrection, all combined to weave that robe of righteousness which justifyingly clothes the believer in the sight of God (Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:4). Moreover, as the apostle declared – and note the double ‘much more’ – ‘much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life’ (Rom. 5:9-10).

Consider: ‘Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma’

⁴⁴ John Gill: *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity...*, W. Winterbotham, London, 1796, Vol.2 p247.

(Eph. 5:2). Without doubt, the apostle is referring to the sacrificial death of Christ at Calvary. Now look at the context – both immediate and extended (Eph. 4:17 – 6:24). Once again, there is no question; the context is progressive sanctification.⁴⁵ Let me quote the verse *in full*: ‘And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma’. ‘Walk’ is a word of progressive sanctification. The apostle is commanding believers to live a life of love, not only *because* Christ loved them and gave himself for them, but *as – even as, just as* – he loved them and gave himself for them. In light of the point I am making, this tells me that Christ’s obedience, while it was supremely his sacrificial *death*, also comprised his sacrificial *life*. In other words, ‘the righteousness of Christ’, which is accounted to the believer for justification, embraces Christ’s obedience – both in life and death.

Finally, while I am, myself, convinced that ‘the faith *of* Christ’ (Rom. 3:22,26; Gal. 2:16, twice; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9; all in the Greek) should be thought of as ‘faith *in* Christ’ (as NKJV, NIV, NASB – but see NASB margin in Rom. 3:26; Eph. 3:12), and not ‘the faith *of* Christ’ (AV – except Rom. 3:26), I realise that the point has been debated for centuries, and is still fervently contested today. If the ‘of’ is right – and, as I say, I am not persuaded it is – then perhaps ‘the faith of Christ’ could be thought of as ‘the faithfulness of Christ’. As such, it would lend even more weight to the claim for justification by Christ’s obedience in life, as well as his obedience in death.

Be that as it may, it is my conviction that Christ’s life of obedience, culminating in his sacrificial death, all under the law, constitutes the justifying righteousness for believers – ‘the righteousness of Christ’.

And when the sinner believes – trusts Christ – he receives this perfect righteousness of Christ. It is imputed to him. It is

⁴⁵ Sanctification is both positional and progressive. In his positional sanctification in Christ, the believer is perfectly separated unto God. The believer’s progressive sanctification is the lifelong working out of his positional sanctification in practical godliness under the law of Christ. See my *Fivefold*.

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reckoned to him. It is credited to his account. He receives it at once. Upon his believing, he is absolutely justified. This righteousness, being Christ's perfect and unchangeable and unchanging righteousness, never wanes, never alters. It is fixed, absolute, complete, and knows no variation. The perfect righteousness of Christ clothes the sinner, and the sinner, therefore, is for ever, from the instant he is justified, perfect beyond all condemnation in the sight of God. God sees no sin in the believer. I am not for a moment suggesting that the believer is sinless. I am not talking about progressive sanctification! I am concerned here with justification. I am not talking about the sinner's lifestyle, but his standing before God.⁴⁶ As the sinner believes, he is at once and for ever free of condemnation, whoever might accuse him, and whatever offence they might accuse him of (Rom. 8:1,33-34). *Christ* is his righteousness!

Gill:

It is an individual act, done at once, and admits of no degrees; the sins of God's elect were altogether and at once laid on Christ, and satisfaction for them was made by him at once; he removed the iniquity of his people in one day, and by one sacrifice put away [their] sin for ever; all [their] sins were pardoned at once, upon this sacrifice offered, and satisfaction made; and the righteousness of Christ was accepted of, and imputed to his people, at once.⁴⁷

Thus the gospel can truly be said to 'establish the law' (Rom. 3:31). All the law's commands were fully met by Christ. All the law's penalties were fully paid by Christ. All the Father's will was accomplished (John 19:30) by Christ who fulfilled the

⁴⁶ I am not saying, I hasten to add, that there is no connection between the two. Sanctification is an inevitable consequence of justification. See Eph. 2:8-10, for example. See also Col. 1:22-23. No sanctification? No justification (Heb. 12:14)! See my 'Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death'.

⁴⁷ Gill pp251-252. Gill was saying this of God's decree and Christ's death. He changed his tune radically when he moved immediately to 'justification by faith'. See my *Eternal*. The point here is that, as Scripture makes plain, Gill's words (though he himself would have profoundly disagreed) apply to justification at the point of faith.

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prophet's words: 'The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will exalt the law and make it honourable' (Isa. 42:21).

And this is what I mean by 'the righteousness of Christ'.

Now for the second of those two topics I mentioned.

Union with Christ

As we have seen, God, because of his grace, on the basis of his grace, justifies, declares righteous in his sight, all those sinners who trust the merits, the person and the work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, in the gospel, God does not merely declare the sinner righteous, arbitrarily, simply by decree. He certainly does not declare the sinner righteous contrary to fact. If he did that, he would be breaking his own law. No. God declares the sinner righteous by taking steps to ensure that the sinner *is* righteous, constituting him righteous – not in himself, needless to say, but in Christ. That is, God reckons and regards the sinner as righteous as Christ – not in himself, but in Christ. He does this by putting the righteousness of Christ to the sinner's account.

How can this be? Union with Christ. That is the answer. Union with Christ. This, it goes without saying, is a breathtaking thought, far beyond our ability to grasp. So much so, if it had not been revealed to us by God, we should never have dreamed of it ourselves; we could never have dreamed of it. Having dealt with the matter at some length in other books,⁴⁸ I will be brief.

'God... made [Christ] who knew no sin, to be sin [or a sin offering, NIV footnote] for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him' (2 Cor. 5:20-21). By Christ's righteous act, 'by one man's obedience', God constitutes, declares many righteous (Rom. 5:17-19). But this speaks of more than God reckoning the sin of his elect to Christ, and reckoning Christ's righteousness to them. Rather, Christ and the elect are one (Rom. 6:1-11, for instance). 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?... He who is joined to the

⁴⁸ See my *Christ's Obedience Imputed; Amyraut; Infant; Baptist Sacramentalism*.

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Lord is one spirit with him' (1 Cor. 6:15-17). Believers are 'in Christ'. This phrase is no makeweight: it appears nearly 250 times in the New Testament, so important is the concept.⁴⁹ Nor am I forgetting the corresponding 'Christ in you' (John 17:23; Rom. 8:10; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27). To put it as plainly as I can: As Christ is to God, so are the believing elect.⁵⁰ What Christ accomplished on their behalf, God declares to be fully theirs.

In short, in gospel justification by faith through union with Christ, we come up against something absolutely unique and astonishing. The sinner who is justified can say: 'Christ is mine, and I am his. We are one. All that he is to God, I am. All that he has, is mine. He took all my sin. By his righteousness, I am accounted righteous. God sees me only in and through his Son. As God the Father regards his Son, so he regards me'. It is amazing. Truly! No wonder the hymn-writers, in describing it, have used expressions such as 'amazing grace', 'I stand all amazed', 'the grace of God amazes me', 'grace – 'tis a charming sound', 'how free, how glorious is the grace', 'how wonderful the sovereign love', 'I am his, and he is mine', and so on. Amazing! This is the very word to use when thinking of God's plan for the justification of his elect through their union with Christ.

John Newton:

*Great God! From thee there's nought concealed,
Thou seest my inward frame;
To thee I always stand revealed
Exactly as I am!*

⁴⁹ The GNB translates 'in Christ' as 'in union with Christ'. Excellent!

⁵⁰ In saying this, I am most decidedly not going down the 'deification' route adopted by the Finnish/Orthodox school (see James K. Beilby & Paul Rhodes Eddy (eds): *Justification: Five Views*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, 2011). For Calvin's rebuttal of Osiander on this, see John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, James Clarke and Co., Limited, London, 1957. Vol.2 pp40-51.

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*Since I can hardly therefore bear
What in myself I see,
How vile and dark must I appear
Most holy God, to thee!*

*But since my Saviour stands between
In garments dyed in blood,
'Tis he, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.*

*Thus, though a sinner, I am safe;
He pleads before the throne
His life and death in my behalf,
And calls my sins his own.*

*What wondrous love, what mysteries
In this appointment shine!
My breaches of the law are his,
And his obedience mine.*

The 1644 Particular Baptist Confession:

Those who have union with Christ are justified from all their sins, past, present and to come, by the blood of Christ; which justification we conceive to be a gracious and free acquittal of a guilty, sinful creature, from all sin, by God, through the satisfaction that Christ has made by his death; and this applied in the manifestation⁵¹ of it through faith.⁵²

The Westminster documents:

The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and

⁵¹ 'Manifestation' figures heavily in eternal justification. Read it as 'display, revelation, exhibition, appearance, materialisation, something obvious, visible, apparent, brought to light, observed or discerned'. I am convinced the 1644 Particular Baptists, by 'justification... [is] applied in the manifestation of it through faith', meant that the sinner receives his actual justification in experience through faith. Note the 'applied'. Hyper-Calvinists, however, use 'manifestation' in a very different way. See my *Eternal*.

⁵² William L.Lumpkin: *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 1989, p164.

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husband; which is done in their effectual calling... Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.⁵³

So much for the second topic. The believing sinner is accounted righteous because he is 'in Christ', and, therefore, all Christ's obedience is reckoned his. He is forever beyond condemnation, clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Now let me make a vital point: *this must not be weakened, allowed to shrivel*. Justification is a legal declaration, yes, but the New Testament could not be more explicit about the believer's actual standing, his real standing, before God:

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:19).

For he made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water⁵⁴ by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

For by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:14).

These statements must be allowed to speak with their full voice. They must not be muted, or mentally postponed to eternity to come. Every believer, the moment he believes, the moment he trusts Christ, is perfectly righteous in God's sight, made so, constituted so, appointed so, declared so, by God washing away

⁵³ Westminster documents in *The Confession of Faith, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms...*, The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967, pp160-161,163.

⁵⁴ This does not refer to water baptism. See my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

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all his sin in the blood of his Son, and clothing him with his Son's perfect righteousness. From that moment on, and for ever, God sees no sin whatsoever in his saints, viewing them as he does, in and through Christ. *This* is the biblical doctrine of justification.

Justification is, indeed, the article by which the church stands and falls. Nothing must be allowed to impinge on it. If I am a believer, I am one with Christ, and God sees me as perfect as his Son. This is what justification by faith means. The sinner is justified by union with Christ the moment he trusts the Redeemer, and is so for ever. And it is all through faith alone on the basis of God's free and sovereign grace. Glory to his name!

What Is Justifying Faith?

Justifying (or saving) faith is the act of a sinner, from his heart, resting his soul upon Christ and his finished work, and thus receiving the imputed righteousness of Christ.⁵⁵ By my use of ‘act’, I do not imply that the sinner can exercise saving faith by his own power or will. Not at all. As Jesus said: ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... No one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father’ (John 6:44,65). Man is naturally unwilling, resentful, even hating God, regarding spiritual things as foolish (Rom. 1:18 – 3:23; 5:10; 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:11-14; Col. 1:21). He has no power to believe: he is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13). As for Christ, the natural man, in essence, has but one response: ‘We will not have this man to reign over us’ (Luke 19:14). ‘You were not willing’, ‘you are not willing’, is the constant complaint of the Saviour to sinners (Matt. 23:37; John 5:40). Even so, the unbeliever has to believe. Moreover, *he* believes; not God. As John Gill put it: ‘It is the convinced sinner, and not God or Christ, or the Spirit, who repents and believes’. ‘Faith... as a principle, is purely God’s work; [but] as it is an act, or as it is exercised under the influence of divine grace, it is man’s act’. ‘Faith, as it is our act, is our own; hence we read of *his* faith, and *my* faith, and *your* faith, in Scripture’. Thus said Gill,⁵⁶ and rightly so.

And this believing has three parts. *First*, there is knowledge, a knowledge of certain facts – the gospel (2 Tim. 3:15). *Then*, there must be mental assent – agreement with those facts. And, *thirdly*, this must lead to trust.

⁵⁵ This article is a lightly edited version of the chapter ‘What Is Justifying Faith?’ in my *Eternal* pp101-105. For more, see, for instance, my *Secret; Saving*.

⁵⁶ John Gill: *The Cause of God and Truth*, W.H.Collingridge, London, 1855, p112; *Gill’s Commentary*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1980, Vol.5 p654; *Sermons and Tracts*, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, Vol.4 p185, emphasis his.

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Saving faith is believing with the heart. Above all, it is heart-trust in and on Christ, not mere facts – however glorious those facts may be. It is a trust of Christ, his person and work, a leaning upon him, a reliance upon him, a calling upon him, a coming to Christ, a believing ‘on’ him, not merely ‘about’ him (Matt. 11:28; John 6:35,40,44-45,51-56; Rom. 6:17; 10:8-13; Heb. 6:12-19; 1 Pet. 1:21; and so on). As a sinner so comes to Christ, he is justified.

Let me stress the vital point once more. Justifying faith is resting oneself from the heart upon Christ. Not doctrine. Not feelings. Not an experience. Not church. No rite or ceremony. Christ. Christ only and Christ completely. A man who so trusts Christ will never be disappointed, never be confounded, never be put to shame (Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6).

And, even though, in eternity, God has decreed the salvation of his elect, and given them to Christ, and, at the appointed time, Christ died and rose again for them, the elect – as much as the non-elect – are born in Adam into this world, and live out their ungodly lives under the wrath of God until they actually come to faith, and so receive the justification which God decreed and Christ accomplished for them.⁵⁷ It is in the act of believing, and through that act of believing (all by the power and grace of the sovereign Holy Spirit, and only by that power and grace), that the elect sinner is actually united to Christ and thus justified. Let me put this in the negative. Until the sinner believes, he is not actually justified.

Why is faith such an appropriate – indeed, the only – means of justification? Well, for a start (and finish), it is the means of salvation because God has said it is:

By [Christ] everyone who believes is justified (Acts 13:39).

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe... that [God] might be... the justifier of

⁵⁷ See my *Eternal* pp75-99.

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the one who has faith in Jesus... A man is justified by faith (Rom. 3:22,26,28).

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart... you will be saved... 'Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? (Rom. 10:9,13-14).

A man... is... justified... by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16).

For by grace you have been saved through faith (Eph. 2:8).

And that's just a sample. God has said it – faith is the means of justification. Faith is the only way in which a man can or will receive his justification.

We may take this question of faith further. Saving faith is *not* the persuasion that Christ died for me. Not at all! I exercise saving faith when I cast my soul upon Christ to save me. Let me say it again. We must get it right! A sinner is not justified by believing or being convinced that Christ died for him, or that he is elect. He is justified only by trusting Christ to justify him. Trust! And before he so trusts Christ he is under God's condemnation and wrath. In saying this, I am not quibbling. It is only as he trusts Christ that he is actually free of condemnation.

Saving faith is not believing the facts of the gospel. It is not believing that I am elect. It is not believing that Christ died for me. It is not looking for a manifestation in my conscience that I am already justified, having been so from eternity. Rather, it is a fleeing to Christ for deliverance. 'We... have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us... even Jesus'. Hebrews 6:18-20 is, of course, based on Joshua 20, the six cities of refuge for the Israelites. In those days, it was all well and good for an Israelite, who was in dire trouble, in fear of his life, to know he would be safe in one of the cities. He might know the way to get there. He might be able to describe all the benefits of being there. *But he was only safe if he got there in time.* He had to flee for his life and get to the place of safety. Above all, *he had to get into the city of refuge.* Thus it is with the sinner under the gospel. He must flee to Christ. Until he does so flee, he is anything but safe. He may believe the gospel from A to Z. He may enjoy preaching. He may enjoy discussing its finer points.

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He may be persuaded that he is elect. But until he trusts Christ, he is under the wrath of God.

The gospel bids us ‘turn’. We have to turn. The gospel bids us ‘repent’. We have to repent. The gospel bids us ‘believe’. We have to believe. The gospel bids us ‘come’. We have to come. The gospel bids us ‘call’. We have to call. The gospel bids us ‘receive’. We have to receive. Until we turn, repent, believe, come, call, receive, we are not justified. But if we do so close with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are, in that very instant, united to him and justified.

Nothing could be of greater importance for the unbeliever, therefore, than that he should trust the Saviour at once. Whatever else he has, whatever he has done, whatever experience of feelings he may claim for himself, unless he trusts Christ he will perish. Delay is not an option!

C.H.Spurgeon drew a lesson from the tragic sinking of the ‘Eurydice’ in 1878:

On March 24th [1878]... her Majesty’s training ship ‘Eurydice’, which had returned from a cruise to the West Indies, was rounding Dunnose headland, off the Isle of Wight, with all plain sails and also her studding sails set. Those on board were all naturally anxious to reach their homes, and having only to round the coast and to anchor off Spithead, they were making the best of the wind. The noble frigate was plainly seen from the lovely village of Shanklin; but one who was watching the fine vessel suddenly missed it; and wondered why. She was hastening along with all sails set, except her royals, and her ports open, when in a moment the fierce wind pounced upon her. It was in vain that the captain ordered sail to be shortened; the ship lurched till her keel was visible, and, in less time than it takes us to write it, the ship capsized, and more than three hundred brave seamen perished.

Spurgeon drew a valuable application from the catastrophe:

[A] lesson which lies upon the surface of this sad event is this – *never feel perfectly safe till you are in port*. Many awakened souls are almost within the haven of peace, and are at this time rounding the headland of thoughtfulness, with the sails of earnest inquiry all displayed to the breeze. Their condition is very hopeful, but it is not satisfactory to those who are anxious

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about their eternal welfare, nor should it be satisfactory to themselves. They are steering for the harbour, they enjoy favouring winds, they have all sails set, but still they have not quite believed in Jesus, nor surrendered themselves to his grace. We who watch them can see that their ports are open, and we dread lest they should be overtaken by a sudden temptation and should suddenly be overturned at the very moment when our hopes are at their best.

Spurgeon drove the point home in a direct and personal way:

Is the reader in such a case? Then let us beseech him not to be content till he has found Christ, and so by faith has anchored in the harbour of 'eternal salvation'. Do not be happy, dear friend, till you are moored to the Rock of Ages, under the lee of the everlasting hills of divine mercy, through the atoning blood. It seems very wonderful that a ship which had been to sea so many times and had just completed a long winter's cruise in safety should at last go down just off the coast in a place where danger seemed out of the question. It is doubly sad that so many men should be within sight of a shore upon which they must never set their foot. To perish in mid-ocean seems not so hard a lot as to die with the white cliffs of Albion so near: to die with the gospel ringing in our ears is still more sad. Never reckon the ship safe till it floats in the haven: never reckon a soul safe till it is actually 'in Christ'. The 'almost persuaded' are often the last to be fully persuaded. Aroused, impressed, and moved to good resolutions, to tears, and even to prayers, yet men postpone decision, and by the force of Satan's arts are lost – lost when we all hoped to see them saved. O that seekers were wise enough to be distressed until they are thoroughly renewed.⁵⁸ Any position short of regeneration is perilous in the extreme. The manslayer would have been cut down by the avenger had he lingered outside the walls of the refuge-city; it would have been all in vain for him to have touched its stones or sheltered near its towers: he must be within the gates or die. Seekers after salvation, you are not safe till you actually close in with Jesus, place all your confidence in him and become for ever his. Shall it be so now, or will you abide in death? Rest not an hour. Trifle not for another moment; for death may seize you, or a spiritual lethargy may come over your soul from

⁵⁸ For my objection to the notion of 'the seeking sinner', see my *Seeking*.

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which you may never again be aroused. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till your anchor has entered into that within the veil and you are saved in Christ Jesus.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ C.H.Spurgeon: 'A Voice From the Sea', *The Bible and the Newspaper*, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1878, pp9-14, emphasis his.

*A Timely Reminder from
Fred R. Leuck:
Historical Baptist Works Must Not
Be Forgotten*

In 1853, the American, John Quincy Adams, published his *Baptists: The Only Thorough Religious Reformers*.⁶⁰ When Adams was in London in 1868, Charles Haddon Spurgeon told him that he (Spurgeon) had used Adams' volume as a textbook in his College because he thought it the best manual of Baptist principles he had come across. In 1980, Backus Book Publishers, Rochester, New York, reprinted 3200 copies of the work and, two years later, a further 3000 copies under the title *Baptists: Thorough Reformers*. Fred R. Leuck of Metamora, Michigan, in his Preface for the 1982 reprint, expressed his preference for the original title, undaunted by the fact that his stance might lead some to call him 'narrow'. Nearly forty years too late, alas, I applaud his spirit!

Moreover, Leuck's Preface contained material that should not be lost – and for the very reasons he himself expressed in that Preface. He drew attention to the importance of the publication of historical Baptist works. I wholeheartedly endorse this sentiment. Many invaluable Baptist works are, sad to say, often unknown, forgotten or ignored, simply gathering dust on shelves or buried in the archives of the academic world. Now since I myself have been privileged to do something towards putting such works before a wider audience,⁶¹ I was moved to produce this little selection of extracts from Leuck's

⁶⁰ In this article I allow Adams' use of 'religious'. I would have preferred 'spiritual'.

⁶¹ See my *Bunyan; Exalting; Collier; Anne Dutton Speaks Today; The Spirituality of Anne Dutton; Govett; Horne; Clarity; Purnell; Spurgeon*.

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Preface, laced with a few comments of my own.⁶² May the resultant article punch above its weight. I believe it can. I believe it should.

While Leuck acknowledged that ‘many old works [have been] reprinted which are of great value to the church’, he deplored the fact that:

...few... if any of the reprints have come from the pen of Baptists who wrote *for* Baptists and who were totally committed *to* Baptist theology and church polity [that is, Baptist church constitution]. Indeed, Baptists themselves have all but forgotten their historical roots, and have opted instead to rely upon the Puritans and the infant-baptiser Reformers for their understanding of theology and local church structure. This has produced a ‘strange animal’ which, though adhering to believer’s baptism by immersion, has practically adopted, in total, the strong covenant emphasis and ecclesiastical rule so characteristic of infant baptisers. It is as though men have assumed that the Reformation began and ended with the infant-baptiser Reformers.

What a percipient observation! How true! How sad! How grievous it to see many Reformed Baptists flirting with covenant theology! And how few Baptists are interested in Anabaptist history! And not a few of those who do have some knowledge of such men and women only know of them through Reformed prejudice and ignorance. Since 1982, when Leuck was writing, I am glad to record an increase in the momentum of the long-overdue rescue of the Anabaptists from the consequences of Reformed misinformation, misinformation which has been promulgated for the best (rather, worst) part of four hundred years. Alas, however, with the welter of Reformed works now available, many continue to capitulate to the philosophical system of covenant theology, and all that that involves; not least, infant baptism has a growing attraction for many. I deplore this. I deplore it, not because I am a Baptist. No! But because infant baptism – more properly, baby sprinkling – is

⁶² I have replaced Leuck’s ‘pedobaptism [paedobaptism]’ with ‘infant baptism’ (or their equivalents).

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manifestly unscriptural, as I have argued in many works. Going down the road to infant baptism is not a trivial matter. As I have documented in detail, its consequences are dire. The reading of Scripture, the understanding and appreciation of the new covenant, the gospel itself, and conversion are all at stake.⁶³ And that is why Leuck's reminder is timely.

He continued:

John Quincy Adams (1825-1881) in [his] little book... ably demonstrates that it was (and by principle ever will be) the Baptists who carried the work of reformation to its fullest and purest extent – from the corruptions of Roman Catholicism back to the New Testament Scriptures. This does not mean that reform is finished, for by the very nature of things the church is constantly being corrupted by heresy, tradition, prejudice, *etc.*, which must be exposed by all God-fearing men.

Leuck has hit the bull's eye once again. In some of my works, though I have gone back to the past, I have urged my readers (and I include myself) not to live there. We have been brought to the kingdom for such a time as now (Esther 4:14), and now is when we must raise our testimony for Christ.

Leuck moved on to make a subtle point, subtle but very necessary:

Even though the cry of the Reformation was *sola scriptura* (the Scriptures alone for faith and practice), Adams shows that the infant-baptiser brethren had adopted that principle only insofar as it did not disturb and challenge their traditional practice of infant baptism. Nowhere in Scripture can it be shown that infants were the objects of Christian baptism, or that any but converted, born-again believers were made part of the New Testament church. The Baptists were bold enough, not only to teach believer's baptism by immersion, but to refuse to comply with the [retained, that is, retained by the Reformers]⁶⁴ Romanist doctrine of infant baptism practiced by other Protestants. The courage to stand on the Bible alone cost some of them their lives. They were slaughtered not only by the

⁶³ See my *Infant*.

⁶⁴ Leuck had 'hold-over'.

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sword of Rome, but also by the sword of infant-baptiser Protestants.

And so they were!⁶⁵

Leuck went on, making the point that he was not saying this to open old wounds, but to raise awareness of the vital principles which are involved and are at risk. We are not talking about the age of a person to be baptised. Nor are we concerned merely with the amount of water. We are talking about *believer's* baptism by immersion or dipping as against any other sort of baptism. And, as I have said, massive issues are tied up with this. We are not discussing something optional. The New Testament could not be more explicit. Following conversion, immersion – that is, dipping or plunging – is Christ's law for the believer. It is an essential mark of obedience to Christ for those who are saved. Two passages will suffice to make the point:

Jesus came and said to them [that is, his disciples]: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:18-20).

[Christ] said to them [that is, his disciples]: 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:15-16).

With Christ's words ringing in our ears, let no man dismiss this topic as trivial!

As I say, Leuck was not trying to open old wounds for the sake of it. As he made clear:

All of the above-mentioned is said not to incite anger against infant baptisers, but to point out that believer's baptism by immersion is not the insignificant matter most assume it to be. [Adams] points out that the corruption of this one doctrine [and its practice] has been responsible for unbiblical and erroneous doctrines of church membership, wrong definition and practice

⁶⁵ See my *Battle*.

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of religious liberty, corrupt church order and government, and even deliberate mistranslation of the Scriptures. Something as far-reaching as this cannot be dismissed as being an ‘insignificant matter’.

Alas, many Baptists are losing their grip on this. Leuck issued a clarion wake-up call. Forty years later, sad to record, this call is still needed as much as ever it was. Far too many Baptists are living virtually in the old covenant, adopting the errors introduced by the Fathers – clergydom, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism (priestcraft), living under Moses rather than Christ, and so on. Some are even adopting Baptist sacramentalism.⁶⁶ These are serious matters, serious in the extreme.⁶⁷

As Leuck expressed it:

Yet for many Baptists, the significance of their doctrinal position *has* eluded them. Baptist churches are being ruled by a religious hierarchy of pastors, elders, or deacons every bit as stifling to self-rule as that hierarchy found in infant-baptiser churches... Adams’ point is well-taken: ‘Man thirsts for power. He loves to be elevated above his fellows, and occupy a position of acknowledged superiority. He delights to be clothed with a little brief authority, which would enable him to look on all around him as inferiors. It is the working of the spirit of arrogance and assumption that has created so many grades among men, both in the world and in the church’.

Too true, I am sorry to say.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

⁶⁷ Sacramentalism is the idea that certain men can convey grace to others by their actions, by their observance of rites and ceremonies. Sacerdotalists delegate their worship into the hands of others, who they feel are better able, more qualified, to carry it out for them. In such a system, worship is a specialised task best left to a special class – priests. Hence has arisen the unbiblical notion of the clergy and the laity. But in the new covenant there is no justification for sacerdotalism, or any notion of clergy and laity. The priesthood of all believers, as interpreted by the New Testament, certainly gives no warrant for sacerdotalism or its twin sister, sacramentalism.

⁶⁸ See my *Pastor; The Priesthood*.

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That's not all. Even today, Baptists are among those looking to get governments on their side, hoping that the political powers-that-be will bolster a decaying Christianity for them. But the weapons of our warfare are not only not military; they are not political either:

Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

But as Leuck had the courage to point out:

More than a few Baptists are enamoured, though at a loss as to how to achieve it, with the idea of establishing a State religion, a society in which the government becomes 'Christian', and thus the protector and defender of the church. They have forgotten the past persecution from government-backed Protestant brethren who did not share the same doctrinal views as the Baptists. They have not distinguished between religious toleration and true religious freedom. Adams remarks: 'Toleration is the allowance of that which is not wholly approved. As applied to religion, the term is objectionable, because it presupposes the existence of some mere human authority, which has power to grant to, or withhold from, man the exercise of freedom in matters of religion – and this is Popery'. The Baptists have always sought for religious liberty for all men, including their enemies.

How true! It is the spirit of the new covenant.

Leuck, quoting Adams, then addressed the American scene, but their words have a far wider resonance than America in the 19th and 20th centuries. They need to be weighed by American believers today. Indeed, they need to be heeded by all believers:

[Adams] points out that it was the Baptists who were responsible for the First Amendment to the United States Constitution which guaranteed that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for a redress of grievances'. This is

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most relevant for today. Can we not see in our country, not only the intrusion of the government into the affairs of the church, but a denial and even a reversal by Baptists (and other believers) of this principle of religious freedom and separation of church and State?

What a salutary question! How relevant!

May Leuck's 'reminder', and my publication of this selection from his Preface to John Quincy Adams' book, with my added comments, do something to promote the truth for which our Baptist forebears stood so resolutely, and stood for at such tremendous personal cost. May this little piece encourage many to look more closely into these vital principles.

A Theology By Any Other Name...

I am merely musing aloud, you understand, not setting out detailed arguments. They, of course, may be found in my works. Nevertheless, even though what follows consists only of thoughts, I have a purpose – a good, a significant purpose, I believe – in getting my musings down on paper (and out on audio). What I want to do is to stimulate thought and start a conversation.

Some advocates of new-covenant theology have long since had misgivings about the label ‘New Covenant Theology’. For my part, at the very least I have a linguistic difficulty with it; new-covenant theology is not a new version of the old covenant-theology which started in the late 16th century. No! Hence my (no doubt, some would say) pedantic use of the hyphen: ‘New-Covenant Theology’. Ah well...

Some of us would prefer no label at all, for while labels can be a convenient shortcut, the baggage they usually bring with them can greatly outweigh their benefit. Especially does this apply in theology, where nuances can have a very important role to play. But, it’s no use griping over spilt milk; we are, alas, stuck with labels. (No pun intended). And if we advocates of new-covenant theology don’t choose one for ourselves, our opponents will readily step into the breach and ‘kindly’ do it for us – and almost certainly come up with ‘Antinomian Theology’, or somesuch pejorative term.

It is along these lines that I am thinking aloud. But thinking is allowed is it not?

How about the tag ‘Fulfilment Theology’? ‘Fulfilment’ is a massive New Testament word. It is used far, far more times than the phrase ‘new covenant’. It occurs scores and scores of times. And this surely strikes a chord with new-covenant theologians; we want to be scriptural, do we not? As for frequency of use, when searching for it my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the*

Law, I admit I was taken aback at the number of times I myself had used the word in that work.

And it is not just its frequency. ‘Fulfil’ is pregnant with meaning in the New Testament. It is a rich word, very rich indeed.

Christ set the tone right at the start: ‘Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled’ (Matt. 5:17-18). As Paul said in Galatians 5:14, the Spirit is the ‘fulfilment’ of the law, its goal, end or aim – which is, to bring about righteousness. The law, though holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7:12), being weak, could not bring about the righteousness that God required. It is the Spirit who has been given to believers in order to effect, to ‘fulfil’, the law in them, and so establish that righteousness which the law demanded but was unable to produce. Paul was not talking about ‘law-works’, law-observance, but conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29), renewal of mind so that the believer can live to God’s pleasure (Rom. 12:1-2). This is why Paul, when spelling out the details of the believer’s obedience (Rom. 12:1 – 15:13), declares that ‘the righteous requirement’ of the law is love of neighbour – which ‘fulfils’ the law (Rom. 13:8). And that touches only the tip of the iceberg. Yes, ‘fulfilled’ is a massive New Testament word.

Take Matthew’s very frequent use of *plēroō* (fulfil) – 16 times. This makes it probable – I would say, certain – that he was thinking in terms of the eschatological. Let me explain. In Matthew 5:17-18, Christ was not abandoning the law, but was bringing out what the law had pointed to. He ‘fulfilled’ it – the very word he used! Christ was showing continuity with the old covenant, yes, *but also discontinuity*, in the sense of shadow giving way to reality as the new age came in. Moses anticipated Christ, foreshadowed him, but Christ was unique, and so was his teaching. It was new: ‘No man ever spoke like this man!’ (John 7:46). He alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

There is a further point. Christ said he had not come ‘to destroy the law or *the prophets*. I did not come to destroy but to

fulfil'. Notice: as with the law, so with the prophets. Just as the prophets (speaking of Christ's first coming) have been fulfilled by Christ, and, therefore, their day is over, so with the law. Consequently, in the same way as we read and use the prophets where Christ has now fulfilled them, so must we read and use the entire law, since he has fulfilled it all. This has an all-important bearing on our understanding of the Old Testament prophecies of 'the law' in the new covenant. Yes, 'fulfilment' is the key.

Of course, in the new covenant, the law and the prophets continue to play an important role in the law of Christ. The law of Christ embraces all Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17), including the law (all of it, not just the so-called moral law) and the prophets, but as nuanced by Christ and the apostles. The law and the prophets are 'fulfilled', but, being living Scripture, they still speak today.

Moreover, I am convinced that the concept of 'fulfilment' is vital in the matter of justification. No doubt it is vital in other areas, too, but let me explain what I mean about 'fulfilment' and the cardinal doctrine of justification. We know that when the sinner believes he is united to Christ (Rom. 6:1 – 7:6). The blood of Christ washes him from all sin, from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). He is pardoned. But there is more. Righteousness is imputed to him (Rom. 4:11,22-24; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23). And righteousness is more than pardon. This is where 'fulfilment' comes into play. To understand apostolic use of 'righteousness', we must remember that the apostles had been brought up under the old covenant yet now saw the new covenant as fulfilling the old. What was righteousness in the old covenant? It was obedience to God's commandments, his law (Deut. 6:25; Rom. 10:5). Although Israel failed to keep the law, God did not abandon his demand. 'Do and live', he had said (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11,13; Matt. 19:17; Luke 10:25-28; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12), and that is how it had to be. Perfect obedience would merit life (Rom. 7:10). Alas, no sinner could do the work. But Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), being born under the law (Gal. 4:4), expressly to do his Father's will (Heb. 10:1-18). And this surely included his honouring of

the law, his obedience to the law, his fulfilment of the law – both in his life and death. Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom 4:25; 5:18-19) secured the justification of the elect, and upon their believing, sinners are perfected forever (Rom. 8:1-4; Heb. 10:10,14), being washed in the blood of Christ, and imputed with his righteousness, he having been imputed with their unrighteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).⁶⁹ While not all advocates of new-covenant theology would go along with this,⁷⁰ for my part I see the label ‘Fulfilment Theology’ playing very strongly into this imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

Again, ‘Fulfilment Theology’ reminds us that God’s purpose is always fulfilled, that God’s way and timing is perfect – even to the very day (Ex. 12:41; 2 Sam. 22:32; Ps. 18:30; Mark 1:15; Gal. 4:4). It also tells us that the progress of God’s plan, as seen through his eyes, is always serene. The history of redemption does not consist of God trying one covenant after another, each one ending in a sense of failure. Not at all! Nor are we left to cope with some kind of hybrid of the old and new covenants.

⁶⁹ I admit there is no text which states that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the sinner. But neither is there a text which states that the sinner’s unrighteousness is imputed to Christ. Even so, ‘the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6) gets pretty close. And sin is imputed to the sinner (Rom. 4:8; 5:13), but not to the believer (Rom. 4:8). As for the exchange between the sinner and Christ – namely, the imputation or transfer of the sinner’s unrighteousness to Christ, and Christ’s righteousness to the sinner – the law (and before) pictured it admirably (Gen. 22:13; Lev. 1:4; 16:21-22). Christ fulfilled this in reality (Matt. 8:17; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:23-25). In other words, Christ bore his people’s sin or unrighteousness; they bear his righteousness. See Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 3:18. Linking this with Rom. 3:26; 5:10, I am convinced it is right to speak in terms of the great exchange: Christ was imputed with the sin of the elect; the believer is imputed with the righteousness of Christ. And as for no explicit text for it, there is no text which states that justification is on the basis of grace through faith alone. But what evangelical would question that this is the teaching of Scripture?

⁷⁰ See my ‘Into the Lions’ Den: Christ’s Active Obedience Re-Visited’; ‘Observations on a Colloquy’; ‘Points to Ponder on Christ’s Active Obedience’.

No! The old, have fulfilled its purpose, has gone; the new has come. Christ has accomplished it all; he is all (Col. 3:11).

All this would be superbly covered by the label ‘Fulfilment Theology’.

So why do I not fall in with it?

The label ‘Fulfilment Theology’ fails to capture the essential point that we are talking about something that originated with God’s decree in eternity, is progressing at his appointed pace and time through history, until in God’s purpose all things will be consummated in eternal glory. This is a very powerful principle; it is, perhaps, the most fundamental principle of the lot.⁷¹ We, living in the days of the new covenant, are at this particular stage in God’s determined course for the revelation of Christ in all his glory in the salvation of his elect. The days of the old covenant have gone – Christ having fulfilled it and rendered it obsolete (Heb. 8:13), inaugurating the new – but this in itself is only an intermediate stage. Christ will return and usher in the eternal glory (1 Cor. 15:24-28). I suggest that ‘Fulfilment Theology’ does not sufficiently capture this vital principle. Indeed, it could give the impression that we have reached the end of the road, when we have not! There is more to come (Rom. 8:18-25); work in progress, as it were. Things are not yet ‘fulfilled’. We still await the eternal.

So what about ‘Progressive-Covenant Theology’; or, to use a term already coined, ‘Progressive Covenantalism’? While this is not the zippiest tag in the world – a six-syllable word following one with three syllables is a bit of a mouthful – this certainly has some advantages over ‘Fulfilment Theology’. Its stress on the ‘progressive’ nature of the history of redemption revealed by means of covenants is invaluable. And it certainly implies there is more to come. But, there are for me, at least two serious drawbacks with adopting this label.

‘Progressive Covenantalism’ is admirably set out in an article by Stephen Wellum and Brent Parker, in which they

⁷¹ See my *Redemption*; ‘Watershed of the Ages’.

include the work of Peter Gentry.⁷² Now, while there is much that is excellent in their article, much that chimes in with my musings here, I have some serious doubts. Yes, they are clear on the imputation of Christ's active obedience; indeed, they draw particular attention to it. Unfortunately, however, they also want to speak of a pre-fall covenant with all creation. I am not convinced. Moreover, I fear this might leave the door open to the notion of a covenant of works with Adam (and hence all mankind). If so, I would disagree.⁷³ Furthermore, in my opinion, they leave too much wriggle room for a Jewish kingdom in a millennium after the return of Christ. This introduces a confusion over the land promise: Is this shadow not fulfilled in Christ now, in the new covenant (Col. 2:17), when all the other shadows – sabbath, priest, sacrifice, temple (tabernacle), altar, feast, and so on – are? Once again, Christ is all (Col. 3:11). This confusion over the land promise, I am sure, will lead to difficulties in the future. Further, the idea of a Jewish kingdom raises the spectre of sacrifices being offered yet again, which, if it did rear its head, I would find abhorrent.⁷⁴ I do not accuse the originators of the label 'Progressive Covenantalism' of holding these things, but I fear that the troubles I have mentioned might well arise under that label. Consequently I am unwilling to adopt it.

In which case, it seems I am stuck with – if that is the right way of putting it – 'New-Covenant Theology', especially when it includes the hyphen.

As I say, I have just been thinking aloud, and thinking is allowed is it not? May I further remind you that I want to open a conversation? What do you think?

⁷² Under B&H Academic Blog, see Stephen Wellum and Brent Parker: 'What Is Progressive Covenantalism?' (bhacademicblog.com/what-is-progressive-covenantalism/).

⁷³ See my 'The Covenant That Never Was'.

⁷⁴ See my *Ezekiel; Romans 11*.

The Pope Gets It Right!

Well, as far as he goes.

Although I have made my position clear in many of my works, let me state it once again: I am convinced that the Church of Rome is utterly corrupt, and that millions upon millions have been – and are being – eternally deceived by its teachings.

But for once I can quote the pope with approval. At least, as far as he goes. This is what he has just⁷⁵ said:

There is no such thing as harmless disinformation; trusting in falsehood can have dire consequences.

Too right! Especially in the realm of eternal salvation. Fake political news is one thing, but in the spiritual realm fake news, disinformation and lies is an eternal disaster. And who is the biggest purveyor of spiritual disinformation and falsehood the world has ever seen? The papacy!

And so I urge all Roman Catholics to pay close attention to the pope's words. And act upon them. Stop trusting in the Vatican's lies and listen to God.

Long ago, when Israel was turning to nonsense instead of the word of God, the LORD addressed the people through Isaiah the prophet. And what he said then, he says today:

To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (Isa. 8:20).

That is, go to Scripture. If they don't speak according to Scripture, it is because they are in the dark. Rome in a nutshell!

Again, as Paul told Timothy:

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood

⁷⁵ January 2018.

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you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

There you have it. Do not trust the teaching of men. Go directly to Scripture. As the apostle went on to say:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

It's all here: Scripture is the authority. The time will come – it has come – when men will turn away from Scripture, and listen to fake news and lies. Rome in a nutshell.

So I strongly urge all Roman Catholics to heed the pope's words on this issue. Give up the fake news the Vatican hands out, and turn to Scripture.

In closing, let me tell you the first thing you will find when you actually read Scripture and believe it. You will find all that Roman nonsense about Mary and saints and salvation by works is the fakest of all fake news. Here is the truth. Peter, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, declared:

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

As Paul told the Romans:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith'... The righteousness of God has

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been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus... Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 10:13).

So, for once, the pope got it right – as far as he went. Don't trust fake news. Go to Scripture. Go to Christ. For your everlasting salvation, trust the Lord Jesus and his saving sacrifice now.

Asking the Wrong Question

For centuries, when a believer has met a passage which speaks about the law – in Romans or Galatians or wherever – he has generally asked himself a question.

A man living in the late 13th-century might well have asked himself: ‘This Bible passage, when it says “law”, does it mean the moral, ceremonial or civil law?’ Thomas Aquinas had just set out his threefold division of the law, and so, naturally, it would be a question that would spring to many a mind at that time.

A man living in the mid 16th-century might well ask another question on top of the first: ‘This Bible passage, is it speaking about the first, second or third use of the moral law?’ John Calvin had just set out his threefold use of the law, and so, naturally, it would be a question that would spring to many a mind at that time.

A man living a few years later – towards the end of the 16th century – would ask yet another question: ‘This Bible passage, is it speaking about the Mosaic administration or the new-covenant administration of the moral law?’ Kaspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus had just set out their scheme of covenant theology, and so, naturally, it would be a question that would spring to many a mind at that time.

And some it goes on, even until this present day. Put a biblical passage on the law in front of a believer, and more often than not he starts asking these questions and more.

How wrong this is! Wrong? Yes, indeed. These believers are asking the wrong question.

So what is the right question? Nothing could be easier to answer. Think! How did the early believers read (or, rather, hear) the words we are talking about? And what questions would they have asked? Well, they wouldn’t have been asking

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the questions I spelled out! That's for certain! They would never have raised questions which involved the moral law, the threefold use of the law, covenant theology and all the rest. Such wheezes had not been invented in their day! Oh no! Those early believers knew that Israel, and only Israel, had been given the Mosaic covenant including law (Deut. 4:1 – 5:33; 7:8-12; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:12-14; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21). They knew that the law was one indivisible law. They knew the Mosaic and new covenants were contrasted covenants ('administrations' would not have entered their heads in this connection). They knew, further, that the Mosaic covenant had been rendered obsolete by Christ's fulfilment of it (Matt. 5:17-18; Heb. 8:13).

And that is how believers today should think. This obvious point is vital. When we, today, read Scripture, we should always ask ourselves: 'How did the first recipients read or hear it?' We ought to do this, whether we are reading the law, the prophets or the New Testament. We must not blunt or warp Scripture by imposing upon the text clever schemes invented by men.

The trouble is, we are all inclined to repeat that very mistake. And when we do repeat it, it costs us dear.

A Must-Listen Podcast

I am talking about the podcast produced by the Collective Cast, 5th September 2017: ‘Against New-Covenant Theology with Jim Renihan’. Here is the blurb attached to it:

On this episode of the Collective Cast, Josh and Jason bring on Dr James ‘Jim’ Renihan to talk about New-Covenant Theology vs. Covenant Theology from the right [that is, I presume, correct according to the Collective Cast] (Baptist Covenant Theology) [point of view]. Dr James Renihan is the President of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies.

I start by paying tribute to the balanced, fair way this conversation is conducted. Renihan rightly speaks of the difficulty – actually, the impossibility – of talking about new-covenant theology as a single entity. It is not. I myself have freely admitted this, making the point that this is not its weakness; quite the reverse.⁷⁶

Even so, before I get to my main point, there are one or two misleading implications, misunderstandings or errors of fact that need to be put right.

Who ‘cuts off’ the Old Testament? I don’t.⁷⁷ I don’t know of any new-covenant theologian who does. New-covenant theologians have nothing to do with Marcion’s dismissal of the Old Testament.⁷⁸

New-covenant theology did not begin in America in the 1970s.⁷⁹

New-covenant theologians are not immoral because they do not use the term ‘the moral law’.

Now for my main point. As I said in a previous article – ‘A Must-See Debate’ – any discerning listener tuning into this

⁷⁶ See my ‘New Covenant Theology Isn’t Monolithic’.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, my ‘Separation Essential: No Mixture! Deut. 22:9-11’.

⁷⁸ Marcion flourished about AD144. He rejected the Old Testament.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, my ‘Covenant Theology – New Kid on the Block?’

podcast would gain much from it. Why? Because, as so many times with covenant theologians (of whatever stripe), Renihan and his friends cannot help giving the game away. Whatever the rights and wrongs of new-covenant theology, the main feature that distinguishes new-covenant theologians from covenant theologians is that whereas the former read Scripture unfiltered by man-made constructs – theology, confessions, catechisms or tradition – covenant theologians simply cannot shake themselves free of such things. They cannot stop themselves talking about theology, confessions, catechisms or tradition. In this podcast for instance, ‘theological construct’ plays a dominant role in the defence of covenant theology. This, of course, comes as no surprise, because covenant theology is, from first to last, a man-made construct imposed on Scripture. All talk of ‘the covenant of grace’, ‘the covenant of works’, ‘the moral law’, ‘the tripartite division of the law’, and so on, is glaringly non-scriptural. Such language cannot be found in the Bible. This, in itself, should make all its advocates pause for thought. Of course, the ideas – though not the language – may be scriptural, but this needs proof, not bald assumption or assertion based on a ‘theological construct’ or confession. I am not arguing against the use of the language as such; it is the ideas behind the language that matter. If the concepts of covenant theology can be established from Scripture, well and good. Otherwise the invented jargon can only confuse, with consequent detrimental effect on those who adopt it.

I will not stop to argue that it is not only the language of covenant theology that is unscriptural, but its very principles, having done so in many works.⁸⁰ No, my aim here is much more limited; limited, but, even so, highly significant. It is basic. I challenge the advocates of covenant theology to allow themselves, for once, to read Scripture unfiltered, and let Scripture speak without being adjusted by the ideas of mere men, uninspired men. I am not saying that we should ditch all theology, burn every confession, forget every tradition, but I am

⁸⁰ See, above all, my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law*. See also ‘The Covenant that Never Was’; ‘Covenant Theology Tested’.

saying that we must always judge such things by Scripture; not the other way round. We must establish our position from Scripture, and then turn to the works of men. This would seem self-evident, to say the least. But covenant theologians conspicuously fail at this point. They begin with the theological construct, and then ransack the Bible for proof texts to try to bolster their system. Look at the Westminster and 1689 Confessions for a start.

This podcast exposes all this to perfection. Yes, we are given plenty of ‘theological construct’, ‘traditionally speaking’, citation of Calvin’s threefold use of the law, and so on, but a signal lack of Scripture. Where do we find any exposition of Galatians, Romans 6 – 8, 2 Corinthians 3, Philippians 3, and the like? Yes, Hebrews 7 and 8 are briefly discussed, but, alas, only to dismiss the glorious truth taught in these two chapters by calling on the usual Reformed conjuring trick of dividing the law from the covenant.⁸¹ But, speaking scripturally, a covenant and its law cannot be divided. Actually, it cannot be done in everyday affairs. But above all, to say that the law stands independent of its covenant is unscriptural.⁸² The consequence of this is that the plain doctrine of Hebrews 7 and 8 is swept aside by an unscriptural ploy, depriving believers of one of their greatest privileges in Christ in the new covenant. How sad!

One thing, however, towers above all: the tripartite division of the law is absolutely key in this debate. Indeed, it is absolutely key to covenant theology, full stop! Without this construct, covenant theology does not have a leg to stand on. I am sure Renihan fully appreciates this. So much so, he highly recommends Philip Ross’ *From The Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* as providing, from his perspective, the clinching – that is, the scriptural – justification for the tripartite division of the law. I am delighted! From Renihan’s point of view, I must say, it is an unwise choice, but I thank him for it. Nothing could better make my case. Nothing.

⁸¹ For more such tricks, see my ‘The Law: Reformed Escape Routes’.

⁸² See my ‘What God Has Joined... Covenant and Law Inseparable’.

Before I explain, let me say a word or two on this tripartite division of the law. The Reformed say that the law can be divided into three parts – the moral, the ceremonial and the civil. They further claim that Christ has abolished the second and third parts, leaving the moral law – the ten commandments – as ‘the law’. Thus, they radically alter the meaning of ‘the law’ and are left with less than 1% of it, and yet still call it ‘the law’, and argue as though this is what the apostles were doing when they wrote Scripture. The apostles, of course, were doing nothing of the sort!

The tripartite division of the law is not merely a clever device. Oh no! It is a most powerful tool for covenant theologians to make Scripture fit their preconceived theology.⁸³ There is, however, a fatal flaw with it. It is unscriptural! The Bible never makes such a division. Never! Certainly the Jews never did. So where did it come from?

It is a traditional assumption taken over from an invention of the medieval Church. In particular, it came from that ‘prince of schoolmen’, Thomas Aquinas, the orthodox theologian *par excellence* of the Roman Catholic Church, whose influence even today in Protestantism, let alone Romanism, is greater than ever. Forming his views by drawing upon Aristotle, Augustine, Paul, classical antiquity, Arabs and medieval Jews – what a combination! – Aquinas devised a system which, though sophisticated, was vague and obscure. It is his labelling of the ten commandments as ‘the moral law’ which has come to play such an important role in Reformed theology. Sensitive to Papist accusations over antinomianism, the Reformers countered by using Aquinas’ tripartite division of the law, claiming that believers are under the moral law for progressive sanctification. So much for the background.

Taking up where I left off, I was claiming that Renihan, by referring to Ross’s book as setting out the scriptural proof of the tripartite division of the law, has shot himself in the foot. Let me prove it.

Listen to Ross himself as he ‘admits’ his failure:

⁸³ See my ‘Reading the Bible’.

No single passage of Scripture clearly states the threefold division of the law. It cannot be demonstrated by... appeal to a particular Scripture, only by a progressive reading of the Old and New Testaments as the coherent source of Christian theology. Theologians, churchmen and believers who read Scripture in that way were justified in receiving the threefold division of the law as the 'orthodox' position. They did not yield blind allegiance to an untested ecclesiastical dogma, but gave thoughtful acceptance to the threefold division of the law with its practical-theological implications. They embraced it as catholic doctrine because it is biblically and theologically valid. They were right to do so. And we are not ashamed to follow.⁸⁴

What a frank admission by the author, himself, of a book which claims to give us the *biblical* basis of the tripartite division of the law! It is not Scripture, but theologians and their theology, their dogma, that is called on to do the job, and all is sanctioned by succeeding generations buying into the received wisdom handed down to them! Q.E.D., I think?⁸⁵

Do not miss my ellipsis. It is deliberate. Now let me remove it. Ross says: 'It [that is, the tripartite division] cannot be demonstrated by simplistic appeal to a particular Scripture'. Ross, in my opinion, is being pejorative here. What is this talk about a 'simplistic appeal to a particular Scripture'? I demand passages of Scripture, not mere texts, to prove any point. Mind you, is it simplistic to assert that the believer, being in Christ, being justified, is beyond all condemnation? Is it simplistic to say that Romans 8:1 puts this beyond all doubt? I must confess that Ross, with his talk of 'simplistic', puts me in mind of a captain of a battleship during the Second World War who was coming under heavy attack; namely, make smoke and get away as fast as possible.

Putting that to one side, Ross, as I have just shown, in his own words, admirably makes my case for me.

For the truth is, as Ross himself admits, his book does not live up to its subtitle. He might talk of setting out the *biblical*

⁸⁴ Ross p353.

⁸⁵ Stands for *quod erat demonstrandum*; proof of what was claimed.

basis of the tripartite division, but that is just what he does not do. Rather, he opens by appealing to tradition, not the Bible. In his first chapter ‘A Catholic Doctrine’ – that is, ‘A Universally-Held Doctrine’ – he starts by appealing to the majority opinion of what he calls ‘the church’s most prominent theologians’, drawing on men from both branches of the Catholic Church, East and West, depending on theologians whether Papist or Protestant, both liberal as well as conservative, the Fathers, the Puritans, all of whom, he claims throughout the history of the church have either openly argued for the tripartite division of the law, or else assumed it, and based their theology on that assumption. So much for the *biblical* basis of the tripartite division. Now, whatever this is, it contravenes the Trade Descriptions Act;⁸⁶ that is, it does not do what it says on the tin. Rather, it reinforces the fact that covenant theology is nothing but a theological construct imposed on Scripture.

Ross trots out the usual covenant-theology’s presuppositions or assumptions. Take one example. He quotes the Westminster Confession to ‘show’ that Adam had the law in the covenant of works. Well! The various Confessions might claim this, I agree, but can we be given the scriptural proof of it?⁸⁷

When it comes to the sabbath, Ross admits it is key to the issue. Very well! If it is true that the tripartite division of the law is challenged by the sabbath – and I certainly do not dissent from the idea since the sabbath is the main marker dividing Israel from all other people, and therefore right at the heart of the law – then Ross (and all covenant theologians) have their work cut out to show that Adam had the sabbath, and all men today are under obligation to observe it. And was the sabbath moral, civil, ceremonial or what? In trying to sort that out, Ross is not able to call on Calvin, is he? See my works on the sabbath

⁸⁶ A UK law which makes it illegal to mislead consumers over goods for sale.

⁸⁷ Ross is not alone in doing this, of course. Indeed, they all do it! They can do nothing else! See my ‘Misleading, Sad, Revealing: ‘Relevant Today’ by Jeremy Brooks’. See also my ‘A Lesson from William Tyndale’.

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for other interesting questions for covenant theologians.⁸⁸ The theologians have their system, but where is Scripture?

So much for Ross. But, don't forget, Renihan called upon Ross as one who provides the clinching biblical argument, from his standpoint, for the all-important – vital – the tripartite division of the law.⁸⁹

I urge you to listen to this conversation. It is conducted in a good spirit. And it lays bare the basis of covenant theology for all to see. And that basis lies not in not Scripture, but in tradition, theology, confession or catechism. And that is why I am not a covenant theologian. I am delighted that Renihan has set this out so clearly.

Finally, I have not written this article, or recommended listening to this podcast, for the fun of it, or to score debating points. Very, very serious issues are at stake here. If any words of mine can help any believers to come to see the glorious liberty the saints have in Christ in the new covenant, and they then begin to experience the joy that that brings them, their gain will be immeasurable, and my purpose will have been met.

⁸⁸ See my *Sabbath Questions; Sabbath Notes; Essential*.

⁸⁹ It reminds me of my father who would tell me that if I was supposed to be one of the best of the class at school, he did not want to be shown the worst!

Sanctification: Jesus and the Believer

Since I have already published extensively on sanctification,⁹⁰ I will only say that in this article when I speak of ‘sanctification’ in connection with Christ, I mean separation or consecration, but when speaking of believers, I go on to include holiness.

Christ is the believer’s positional sanctification; the believer is positionally sanctified because he is united to Christ. Take Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, which he addressed to ‘the church of God that is in Corinth... those sanctified in Christ Jesus’. The apostle went on to explain:

Christ Jesus... became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption... You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11).

And what was true of the Corinthians – the Corinthians, of all people (not the most spiritual of people; see the first letter in full) – is true for every believer throughout this age.

As I say, the believer’s sanctification derives explicitly from Christ. Indeed, it derives directly from Christ’s own sanctification. As he himself declared, when praying for his people:

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth (John 17:17-19).

Christ made this statement in his great prayer just before his death. It is clear, therefore, that the ‘sanctification’ he had in mind was his work on the cross. In his prayer, he was sanctifying himself, devoting himself, separating himself to God to go to the cross to shed his blood to redeem his people by his

⁹⁰ See my *Fivefold; Positional*. In addition, see my *Christ Is All; Sanctification in Galatians; Sanctification in Jeremiah; Sanctification in Philippians; Sanctification in Romans*.

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sacrifice. As a consequence, we can say that the believer is sanctified by Christ's atoning work at Calvary. Indeed, Paul plainly told us so:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession (Tit. 2:13-14).

And then we have these all-important passages from Hebrews:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said: "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book"'

When he said above: 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law), then he added: 'Behold, I have come to do your will'. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. *For by a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being*

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*sanctified.*⁹¹ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying: ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days’, declares the LORD, ‘I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds’, then he adds: ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin...

Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood (Heb. 10:1-18; 13:12 see also Heb. 10:29).⁹²

So far, so good. Christ, by his work on the cross, sanctified his people. End of story? Far from it! Although Christ did speak of his sanctification – by himself, his own sanctification to the Father – in his great prayer in John 17, and although he was in that prayer referring to his impending death, even so John 17 was not the first time Christ spoke of his sanctification. In John 10, he had already spoken of his sanctification by the Father – the Father’s separation of him to the work to which he had been appointed by the Father from eternity past. Christ referred to himself as:

...him whom the Father consecrated [sanctified] and sent into the world (John 10:36).

So it is clear that Christ’s sanctification did not begin at the cross. But neither did it begin in John 10! As Christ declared in that passage, he was sanctified by the Father before his incarnation. Indeed, Christ’s incarnation was a vital aspect of his sanctification by the Father. Christ’s sanctification cannot be confined to his work at Calvary. In short, his sanctification originated in God’s decree in eternity past, and came into actual and active experience at his incarnation, and went on without a

⁹¹ That is, the believer is not only positionally sanctified in Christ, but he inevitably goes on to be progressively sanctified. This is borne out by Heb. 12:14. See my ‘Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death’.

⁹² At the appropriate time I will explain why I quote this passage in full. But so as to bring out the point I am now making, I have stressed the key words to show that it is by the atoning work of Christ on the cross that the believer is sanctified.

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break until and including the cross. All this is part and parcel of his 'sanctification'.

Moreover, the ground had been well and truly prepared, this truth having been laid out in Scripture long before. For a start, Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied the coming of the servant:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law (Isa. 42:1-4).

The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name... the LORD... formed me from the womb to be his servant (Isa. 49:1).

The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion – to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified (Isa. 61:1-3).⁹³

There is no doubt as to whom these prophecies refer. Christ made it abundantly plain that he himself was their living embodiment:

[Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and

⁹³ See also Isa. 11:1-10; 48:16.

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recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour'. And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them: 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:16-21).⁹⁴

Clearly, before his incarnation Christ had been set apart as the Father's Servant, sanctified to the work appointed for him.

Then we have the glorious statement at the opening of Hebrews – that momentous book on the glories of the new covenant, and its superiority over the old:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say: 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'? Or again: 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says: 'Let all God's angels worship him'. Of the angels he says: 'He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire'. But of the Son he says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions'. And: 'You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end' (Heb. 1:1-12).⁹⁵

Once again the point is made: the Father had appointed Christ to his work, sanctified him, long before his incarnation.

⁹⁴ See also Isa. 35 with Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22.

⁹⁵ See my 'Watershed of the Ages'.

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What God said to Jeremiah could also be said of Christ, but with a much greater significance:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5).

In Christ's case, he was the fulfilment of Moses' prophecy:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him (Deut. 18:15-19).

And then we have the episode with Simeon in the temple:

There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the LORD's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 'LORD, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel'. And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother: 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed' (Luke 2:25-34).

Anna, too, joined in and 'began to give thanks to God and to speak of [Jesus] to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38).⁹⁶

⁹⁶ See my 'Watershed of the Ages'. See also Matt. 21:11; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 1:21,25; 4:19; Acts 7:37.

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Of John the Baptist it was said:

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).

John was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb, filled with the Spirit to do the work to which had been appointed by God. In other words, John was 'sanctified' from the womb. How much more so in the case of Christ.

And Paul could speak of it for himself:

He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16).

In other words, Paul had been 'set apart' – sanctified, in this sense – to his life's work. As the Lord said to him:

I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:15-18).

All this was true of Christ himself: he had been appointed – sanctified – by the Father to his great work as Mediator.

In a general – but far lesser – sense, every child of God can say this sort of thing:

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them (Ps. 139:15-16).

Yes, but all this is true of Christ in the highest possible sense of the words. Christ had been sanctified by the Father from eternity past.

Let me underline this. Christ's sanctification – the sanctification we are talking about in connection with the

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believer – did not begin at the cross. It began in eternity; more especially, it came into effect in his incarnation in Mary's womb. Consequently, we may with confidence say that Christ was sanctified by the Father in the manger, sanctified in the carpenter's shop, sanctified in his baptism, sanctified in his itinerant preaching, sanctified in his miracle working, all this culminating in his sanctification to the work the Father had for him to do on the cross. Throughout his life he was always the Holy One of God, always dedicated or sanctified to his Father's work. As he said as a lad in the temple: 'Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' Or: 'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?' (Luke 2:49). There never was a time when Christ was not doing his 'Father's business'.⁹⁷

This is the very point that had been revealed to Peter. How clearly we see this in his reply to Christ, who had challenged his disciples about joining the crowd and forsaking him:

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God (John 6:68-69).⁹⁸

And we have this:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples: 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said: 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'. He said to them: 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. And Jesus answered him: 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 16:13-17).

Peter put the matter beyond doubt when he told the Jews of:

...Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said: 'The LORD God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen

⁹⁷ See also John 4:34; 5:36, which I will quote below.

⁹⁸ See also Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; Acts 3:14.

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to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people' (Acts 3:20-23).

Nor must we forget that all this had been securely rooted in the principles of the old covenant given to Israel through Moses at Sinai, clearly set out (for those with eyes to see) in Scripture in the law and prophets. I have already referred to Deuteronomy, and to Isaiah and his extensive prophecies. As Christ told the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

Later that same evening, addressing the fearful disciples gathered in secret in Jerusalem, Christ declared:

'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled'. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

The point needs to be broadened. To state the obvious (but, alas, not always remembered) fact, the New Testament did not start from scratch. God, from the beginning of time, had been revealing his master-plan of redemption, revealing it in history through a series of covenants, unveiling it progressively from stage to stage according to his eternal decree, bringing each stage to its appointed end or fulfilment. As soon as man fell, God had issued his glorious promise of redemption. In cursing Satan, in ringing tones God had set out his promise to send the Redeemer to accomplish redemption for his people. Addressing the serpent, God solemnly but triumphantly declared:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

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And throughout the rest of the Old Testament, God progressively set this out again and again in types and shadows, increasingly revealing to men the glorious work that the sanctified Redeemer would come and do for his people. Take Abraham with Isaac on Moriah. When Isaac questioned his father concerning the sacrifice they were about to offer:

Abraham said: 'God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son'.

And this led to the glorious culmination that day:

Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place: 'The LORD will provide' (Gen. 22:8,13-14).

Nowhere was all this more fully set out than in the covenant God gave to Israel through Moses at Sinai. Of the scores and scores of illustrations to make the point, consider the way the old covenant typified or foreshowed this concept of Christ's consecration to the priesthood, his separation to the work decreed for him by the Father:

You... shall anoint them [Aaron your brother... his sons with him] and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests... This is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests... (Ex. 28:41; 29:1).

Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments, and also on his sons and his sons' garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him (Lev. 8:30).

And so on, and on.

We must never forget that the Old Testament (the old covenant, in particular) permeates the New Testament (the new covenant). We shall never fully understand the latter unless this fundamental fact is taken into account. Take the Sermon on the Mount. Whatever else may be said about that discourse, it depends absolutely on the old covenant.

Coming closer to the issue in hand, consider ‘righteousness’ in Romans. I raise this because, when thinking about the believer, righteousness and sanctification are intimately linked. ‘Righteousness’ (with its family members) appears scores of times in Romans. Trying to come to an understanding of Paul’s use of ‘righteousness’ in Romans, without bearing in mind the principles of the old covenant, is bound to lead to disaster. The number of references to the Old Testament throughout the book, on its own, is enough to knock that scheme on the head. Moreover, the apostle’s detailed arguments based on the Old Testament – see Romans 3, 4, 9 and 10, for instance, but throughout the book – put the point beyond doubt. Coming at it from the other direction, when reading Romans, it is essential to wear the same spectacles (or hearing aid) as the first readers (hearers) of the letter. What did the believers at Rome hear when Paul’s letter was read to them? What did they bring to what was being said? What were their presuppositions? There is no doubt as to the answers to those questions. Paul could say with confidence: ‘I am speaking to those who know the law’ (Rom. 7:1).⁹⁹ Working on that fact, he could develop his argument – as he did (Rom. 7:1-6) – assured in the knowledge that his readers would be following him all the way.

And that is how we must read Romans (or any other portion of Scripture). We forget this elementary principle at our peril.¹⁰⁰ And as for ‘righteousness’ in this regard, see Romans 9:30 – 10:5.¹⁰¹ This passage, on its own, tells us what Paul meant by ‘righteousness’ in Romans. Paul was certainly not limiting ‘righteousness’ to pardon! God’s revealed mind in the old covenant – the principle, God’s demand, being carried over into the new – would never allow that! God is unchanging and unchangeable: ‘I the LORD do not change’ (Mal. 3:6; see Rom.

⁹⁹ For more on this point, see my *Christ Is All*.

¹⁰⁰ See my ‘Asking the Wrong Question’.

¹⁰¹ See my *Peter Masters*’.

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11:29). He demanded perfection in the old covenant; he obtained it in Christ in the new.¹⁰²

Pulling all this together, we see that God's eternal decree separated Christ ('Christ' means 'anointed') to his life-long work as Mediator. As Peter told Cornelius and the crowd that had gathered in his home:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:38-43; see also Isa. 32:1; 61:1; Dan. 9:25-26; Matt. 26:6-13; Luke 7:37-50, and so on).

God foreshadowed this through the history of redemption set out in a series of covenants – specially the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic.¹⁰³ In the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), God sent his Son into the world born of a woman under the law in order to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17-18; Heb. 8:13). God sent his Son! Do not miss the way in which John stressed this very point:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16-17).

¹⁰² See my 'Into the Lions' Den: Christ's Active Obedience Re-Visited'; 'Observations on a Colloquy'; 'Points to Ponder on Christ's Active Obedience'; 'Asking the Wrong Question'.

¹⁰³ See my *Redemption*.

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On him [that is, Christ] God the Father has set his seal... This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent... The living Father sent me (John 6:27-29,57).

I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me (John 7:28-29).

I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me (John 8:42).

...him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world (John 10:36).

Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me' (John 11:41-42).

This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me... As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me... O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me (John 17:3-8,18-21,25).

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you (John 20:21).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ This list does not exhaust the point in John's Gospel – see below.

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In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:9-14).

So Christ's sanctification – which, I remind you, leads directly to the believer's sanctification – must not be confined to the cross. Right from his incarnation, Christ's entire life was spent doing the will of God. Take one example. Christ's baptism. The Lord's response to John's unwillingness to baptise him was no makeweight; it set the tone for his entire life and ministry:

Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15).

And what Paul declared of David (who was a dim foreshadow of Christ – see Ps. 2:6; Is. 11:10; Matt. 2:2; 27:11,29,37; Luke 1:32; John 12:15; 19:19; Acts 2:30; Rom. 11:26; Rev. 5:5; 22:16), could well be said of Christ:

[God] raised up David to be their [Israel's] king, of whom he testified and said: 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will' (Acts 13:22; see 1 Sam. 15:22; Acts 7:46).

The point is, Saul had been rejected because he had not kept God's commandment, whereas David would. As God could declare to Saul:

Your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you (1 Sam. 13:14).

And David's words in Psalm 18 are surely Messianic:

The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his rules [just decrees] were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt. So the

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LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight (Ps. 18:20-24).

And this is precisely why I quoted Hebrews 10:1-18 in full. Yes, the cross is the climax of that passage, but it is the culmination of a section of massive significance setting out Christ's obedience to the Father's will and commandment throughout his entire life on earth. This life-long sanctification of Christ must not be brushed aside as a mere preparation for the cross.¹⁰⁵

As Christ said, time and again throughout his life on earth (and he was not confining his remarks to the cross, please note):

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work (John 4:34).

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me...The testimony that I have is greater than that of John [the Baptist]. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me (John 5:30,36-37).

I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:38-40).

He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him (John 8:29).

Addressing his Father, Christ declared:

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do (John 17:4).

Jesus, knowing that all was now finished... he said: 'It is finished' (John 19:28-30).

¹⁰⁵ See my 'Observations on a Colloquy'.

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So where is this going? What is my concern in going into all this? It all points to one conclusion. Which is? The entire life of Christ plays a vital part in his work of redemption for his people. Yes, Christ on the cross accomplished redemption, but Christ's life, his doing of his Father's will, his completing the work he had been given, culminating in his glorious tetelestai – 'It is finished' (John 19:30) – all this is the fulfilment of the old covenant's foreshadowing of his separation or consecration to his Father's will. Christ was sanctified by the Father; Christ sanctified himself; and all that he might sanctify his people. And all is fulfilled in Christ's complete life from the moment of his incarnation. His active obedience before the cross was not just a preparation for the cross. Rather, that entire obedience was an integral part of his sanctification which is imputed to the sinner as he trusts Christ for salvation. In his believing, the sinner is united to Christ, and receives the imputation of Christ's perfect sanctification, so that he himself is immediately positionally sanctified in Christ, perfected for ever (Heb. 10:10,14).

In short, it is not simply what is known as the passive obedience of Christ (his death) that is imputed to the believing sinner. No! Imputed righteousness and sanctification comes from the whole Christ, his entire, life-long, obedience to the Father in his sanctification from eternity as Mediator, culminating in his death and resurrection. This was Christ's sanctification. And it is every believer's sanctification.

Comments by others

First, the general point.

John Calvin in his *Institutes*:

Christ was sanctified from earliest infancy, that he might sanctify his elect in himself... For as he, in order to wipe away the guilt of disobedience which had been committed in our flesh, assumed that very flesh, that in it he might, on our account, and in our stead, perform a perfect obedience, so he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that, completely pervaded

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with his holiness in the flesh which he had assumed, he might transfuse¹⁰⁶ it into us.

Then John 17:19, taking it as Christ's sanctification in the sense of his work on the cross.

Charles J. Ellicott:

The consecration here thought of is that to the work which was immediately before [Christ] – the offering [of] himself as a sacrifice. The word was in frequent use in the special sense of an offering or sacrifice set apart to God. As a New Testament example of this, compare Romans 15:16. By this consecration of himself... he will, as both priest and sacrifice, enter into the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple, and will send the Holy Ghost, who will consecrate [those for whom he was praying].

Matthew Poole:

I sanctify myself, here, is no more than, I set myself apart, as a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing in the sight of God: and

¹⁰⁶ I allow the word to stand. 'Transfuse' can mean 'transfer' or 'transmit'. In other words, Calvin might have been speaking of imputed or imparted holiness. Both are scriptural. Here, by his use of 'into', I take it that he meant 'imparted'. Rome confuses the two, but Scripture is clear. 'What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son... that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:3-4); that is, believers. Echoes here of Gal. 4:4-5. By Christ's work, "the righteous requirement of the law" is "fulfilled in us". "Fulfilled", "fulfilled in us"! Clearly, this is something which God in Christ has done *for* and *in* believers, not something to be done *by* believers trying to keep the law. Paul here *describes* believers; he does not tell them to fulfil the law. God, by his Son, Christ Jesus, accomplished the fulfilment of the righteous requirement of the law, and it is this perfect obedience of Christ, his righteousness, which is imputed and imparted to believers. Thus Christ fulfilled the law, and believers have fulfilled it in him. Christ's work imputed to them by the Spirit accomplishes their justification [and positional sanctification]. Christ's work being imparted to them by the Spirit accomplishes their [progressive] sanctification. And it is this [progressive] sanctification which is the evidence and fruit of the fulfilment of the righteous requirement of the law in believers in and by Christ' (quoted from my *Christ* pp174-175).

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indeed sanctifying, in the ancient notion of it under the law, did ordinarily signify the setting of persons and things apart to the special service of God; which was done legally by certain ritual performances and ceremonies, and is still done inwardly and spiritually by regeneration, and renewing of the hearts of men and women by the efficacious working of the Holy Ghost. Christ says that for his disciples' sake he sanctified himself, being both the priest and the sacrifice. Christ set apart himself as a sacrifice for his people.

John Gill:

This may be meant of his [Christ's] being separated, and set apart for his office as Mediator, which, though done by the Father, and is ascribed unto him (John 10:36), yet may also be attributed to himself, since he voluntarily devoted himself to this work, and cheerfully accepted of it: though it seems best to understand it of his offering himself a sacrifice for, and in the room and stead of his people, in allusion to the offerings under the law, the sacrificing of which is expressed by sanctifying (Ex. 13:2); and because his sacrifice was an holy one, what he sanctified or offered was himself... his body and his soul; and these as in union with his divine person; which gives his sacrifice the preference to all others, and is the true reason of its virtue and efficacy; and this is expressive of his great love. He himself is also the sanctifier or offerer, which shows him to be a priest, and that he had a power over his own life, and that he sacrificed it voluntarily; and this he is said to do at that present time, because the time was very near that he was to be offered up, and his present prayer and intercession were a part of his priestly office.

Take John 10:36, Christ's sanctification speaking of more than his work on the cross.

John Calvin:

This refers strictly to the person of Christ, so far as he is manifested in the flesh. Accordingly, these two things are joined, that he has been sanctified and sent into the world.

In his *Institutes*, Calvin (alas, too gently) drew attention to a vital distinction about the 'righteousness' that is imputed to the

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believer; namely, that it is Christ's life-long obedience under the law, not his intrinsic righteousness:

Although righteousness comes to us from the secret fountain of the Godhead, it does not follow that Christ, who sanctified himself in the flesh on our account, is our righteousness in respect of his divine nature (John 17:19).

Charles J. Ellicott:

The tense refers to the time of [Christ's] consecration to his Messianic work, and to the incarnation, which was the commencement of it.

John Gill:

Sanctification here designs... and respects the eternal separation of [Christ] to his office, as Mediator, in the counsel, purposes, and decrees of God... being pre-ordained thereunto before the foundation of the world... and sent into the world in human nature, to obtain eternal redemption and [the] salvation [of] his people: to save them from sin, Satan, the world, law, hell and death, which none but God could do.

Albert Barnes:

God has consecrated or appointed his Son to be his Messenger or Messiah to mankind.

M.R. Vincent:

Consecrated. The fundamental idea of the word is separation and consecration to the service of Deity.

John Trapp:

Sanctified, that is, anointed, and that in both his natures, as whole Christ. For his anointing imported, 1. His consecration or ordination to the office of a Mediator, and so the Godhead also was anointed. 2. Qualification or effusion of fullness of graces; as the holy oil was compounded of [various] spices, so the manhood, and that without measure, as far as a finite nature was capable of.

C.H. Spurgeon on Hebrews 10:10:

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We shall, *first*, speak of the eternal will. *Secondly* of the effectual sacrifice by which that will has been carried out. And *thirdly*, of the everlasting result accomplished by that will through the sacrifice of the body of Christ. May the Holy Spirit who has revealed the grand doctrine of justification now enable us to understand it and to feel its comforting power.

First, then, the eternal will – ‘By the which will we are sanctified’. This will must, first of all, be viewed as the will ordained of old by the Father – the eternal decree of the infinite Jehovah that a people whom he chose should be sanctified and set apart unto himself..

His will is the Alpha and the Omega of all things. It was according to this eternal, invincible will of God that he chose, created, and set apart a people that should show forth the glory and riches of his grace – a people that would bear the image of his only-begotten Son, a people that should joyfully and willingly serve him in his courts forever and ever – a people who should be his own sons and daughters, to whom he would say: ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them and they shall be my people and I will be their God’. Thus stood the eternal will of old. ‘For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren’.

But, of course, by nature the elect are dead in sins, utterly polluted:

But the people concerning whom this will was made were dead in sin, defiled with evil, polluted by transgression. The old serpent’s venom was in their veins. They were fit to be set apart for the curse, but not to be set apart for the service of the thrice holy God. And the question was, how then should the will of the Immutable Invincible ever be carried out? How shall these rebels become absolved? How shall these fountains of filth become clear as crystal, pouring forth floods of living water and divine praise? How shall these unsanctified and defiled ones become sanctified unto the service of God? It must be – but how shall it be?

Spurgeon turned to the old covenant, the priests and the sacrifices. But the Mosaic covenant, though instituted by God, provided no effectual salvation, never effectively sanctified any sinner:

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[God's] will was not fulfilled in them. It was not his will that they [that is, the old-covenant priests and their sacrifices] should sanctify the people. They were inefficacious to such an end for, as the Holy Spirit has said, it was 'not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins'. And so, if these offerings had been all, centuries of the house of Aaron and of the priests of the tribe of Levi might have come and gone, and yet the will decreed by the eternal Father would not have been an accomplished fact.

Even so, God had always planned it thus; he always planned to sanctify – separate – his Son, and send him into the world, under the old covenant, in order to fulfil it and render perfect obedience to the law, and so establish the new, superior, better, effective covenant in Christ.

Spurgeon:

Thus we are landed at our *second* point, which is, that this will by which we are sanctified was performed by the ever-blessed Son. It was the will of God the Father, but it was carried out by the divine Son when he came into the world. A body was prepared for him and into that body, in a mysterious manner which we will not attempt even to conceive of, he entered and there he was – the incarnate God. This incarnate God, by offering his own blood, by laying down his own life, by bearing in his own body the curse, and in his own spirit enduring the wrath was able to effect the purpose of the everlasting Father in the purging of his people, in the setting of his chosen apart, and making them henceforth holiness unto the LORD. Do you not see what the will of the Father was – that he should have a people that should be sanctified unto himself? But that will could not be carried out by the blood of bulls and of goats. It must be achieved by the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Our Lord Jesus Christ has done whatever that will of the Father required for its perfect achievement. This is our satisfaction.

Spurgeon spoke of the essential work of the Spirit in applying Christ's work:

Thus it is by the will of the Father, carried out by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit that the church of God is regarded as sanctified before God and is acceptable unto him.

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Spurgeon then addressed:

...the effectual sacrifice of Christ by which the will of God with regard to the sanctity of his people has been carried out: 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ'.

Spurgeon:

This implies, first, his incarnation, which of course includes his eternal deity... The gospel of his incarnation is not a spiritual idea, nor a metaphor, nor a myth. In very deed and truth, the God that made heaven and earth came down to earth and hung upon a woman's breast as an infant. That child, as he grew in stature and wisdom, was as certainly God as he is at this moment in glory. He was as surely God when he was here hungry and suffering, sleeping, eating, drinking as he was God when he hung up the morning stars and kindled the lamps of night, or as he shall be when sun and moon shall dim at the brightness of his coming. Jesus Christ, very God of very God, did certainly stoop to become such as we are and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. It is a truth you all know, but I want you to grasp it and realise it. It will help you to trust Christ if you clearly perceive that, divine as he is, he is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh – your kinsman, though the Son of God.

Spurgeon tackled a vital nuance in all this:

All this is implied in the text, because it speaks of the offering of the body of Christ. But why does it specially speak of the body? I think [it is] to show us the reality of that offering – his soul suffered and his soul's sufferings were the soul of his sufferings, but still, to make it palpable to us, to record it as a sure historical fact, the Holy Spirit mentions that there was an offering of the body of Christ.

But this is not all. And here Spurgeon came close to the point I have been trying to make in this article:

I take it, however, that the word means the whole of Christ – that there was an offering made of all of Christ, the body of him or that of which he was constituted... I look upon our Lord Jesus as in his very Godhead stooping down to bear the weight of human sin and human misery, sustaining it because he was

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divine and able to bear what else had been too great a load. Thus the whole of Christ was made a sacrifice for sin. It was the offering, not of the spirit of Christ, but of the very body of Christ – the essence, subsistence, and most manifest reality and personality of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High.

He probed deeper:

And this was wholly offered. I do not know how to bring out my own thoughts here, but to accomplish the will of God in sanctifying all his people, Christ must be the offering and he must be wholly offered... as our sin-offering, making expiation for guilt, our blessed Lord and Master gave himself wholly for us as an atoning sacrifice and offering for sin – and that ‘himself’, sums up all you can conceive it to be in and of the Christ of God, and the pangs and griefs which, like a fire went through him, did consume him, even to the uttermost of all that was in him. He bore all that could be borne, stooped to the lowest to which humility could come, descended to the utmost abyss to which a descent of self-denial could be made. He made himself of no reputation. He emptied himself of all honour and glory. He gave up himself without reserve. He saved others, himself he could not save – he spares us in our chastisements, but himself he spared not. He says of himself in the twenty-second psalm: ‘I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people’. You do not know, you cannot imagine how fully the sacrifice was made by Christ. It was not only a sacrifice of all of himself, but a complete sacrifice of every part of himself for us. The blaze of eternal wrath for human sin was focused upon his head! The anguish that must have been endured by him who stood in the place of millions of sinners to be judged of God and smitten in their stead is altogether inconceivable. Though himself perfectly innocent, yet in his own person to offer up such a sacrifice as could honour the divine justice on account of myriads of sins of myriads of the sons of men was a work far beyond all human realisation. You may give loose to your reason and your imagination and rise into the seventh heaven of sublime conception as with eagle wing, but you can never reach the utmost height. Here is the sum of the matter – ‘Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift’, for unspeakable, inconceivable it certainly is when we view the Lord Jesus as a sacrifice for the sins of men...

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Spurgeon, having spoken of expiation and reconciliation, moved on:

Moreover, they [that is, believers] are not only accepted and reconciled, but they are purified – the taint that was upon them is taken away. In God's sight they are regarded no more as unclean. They are no longer shut outside the camp – they may come to the throne of the heavenly grace whenever they will. God can have communion with them. He regards them as fit to stand in his courts and to be his servants, for they are purified, reconciled, expiated through the one offering of Christ. Their admission into the closest intimacy with God could never be allowed if he did not regard them as purged from all uncleanness and this has been effected not at all by themselves, but only by the great sacrifice:

*Your blood, not mine, O Christ,
Your blood so freely spilt,
Has blanched my blackest stains,
And purged away my guilt.
Your righteousness, O Christ,
Alone does cover me.
No righteousness avails
Save that which is in thee.*

Spurgeon contrasted, on the one hand, the sanctification or consecration (in shadow) of the Levites and the priests under the old covenant, with, on the other hand, the reality of the sanctification or consecration of believers in Christ. In the new covenant, under Christ, in Christ, every believer is positionally sanctified, and from the moment of his conversion should be assured,¹⁰⁷ and so begin to live a life of progressive sanctification:

You and I are not typically, but truly and really, his people. Through Jesus Christ's offering of himself once and for all, we are really set apart to be the LORD's people henceforth and forever and he says of us – I mean, of course, not of us all, but of as many as have believed in Jesus and to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed his finished work – 'I will be their God and they shall be my people'. You, believers, are sanctified in this

¹⁰⁷ See my *Assurance*.

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sense, that you are now the set-apart ones unto God and you belong wholly to him. Will you think that over? 'I am now not my own. I do not belong now to the common order of men, as all the rest of men do. I am set apart. I am called out. I am taken aside. I am one of the LORD's own. I am his treasure and his portion. He has through Jesus Christ's death made me one of those of whom he says: 'They shall dwell alone, they shall not be numbered among the people'. I want you to feel it so that you may live under the power of that fact, that you may feel: 'My Lord has cleansed me. My Lord has made expiation for me. My Lord has reconciled me unto God and I am God's man, I am God's woman. I cannot live as others do. I cannot be one among you. I must come out. I must be separate. I cannot find my pleasure where you find yours. I cannot find my treasure where you find yours. I am God's, and God is mine. That wondrous transaction on the cross of which our minister has tried to speak, but of which he could not speak as he ought – that wondrous unspeakable deed upon the cross – that wonderful life and death of Jesus, has made me one of God's people, set apart unto him and as such I must live'.

When you realise that you are God's people, the next thing is to reflect that God, in sanctifying a people set them apart for his service, he made them fit for his service. You, beloved, through Christ's one great offering of his body for you, are permitted now to be the servants of God... In fact, he bought for us a sanctification which has made us the LORD's people and has enabled us to engage in his service. Do we not rejoice in this?

Next to that we have this privilege that what we do can now be accepted. Because Jesus Christ, by the offering of his body once has perfected the Father's will and has sanctified us, therefore what we do is now accepted with God...

And now we are privileged to the highest degree, being sanctified – that is to say, made into God's people, God's servants, and God's accepted servants. Every privilege which we could have had, if we had never sinned, is now ours and we are in him as his children...

'Trust in the LORD and do good; so shall you dwell in the land and certainly you shall be fed', till he comes to catch you away where you shall see what Jesus did for you when he made his body once for all a sacrifice that he might fulfil the will of the eternal Father and sanctify you and all his people unto God

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forever and ever. May the best of blessings rest upon all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

But I have omitted a vital portion from Spurgeon's sermon, because I wish to close with it. Spurgeon, in his usual pithy way, here states what I have been trying to say:

We will not enter at this time into a detailed account of our Lord's active and passive obedience by which he magnified the law and set apart his people. I pray you, however, never fall into the error of dividing the work of Christ as some do and saying: 'Here he made atonement for sin and there he did not'. In these modern times, certain brethren have invented refinements of statement of so trivial a character that they are not even worth the trouble of thinking over and yet, like babes with a new rattle, they make a noise with them all day long. It is amusing how these wise professors make grave points out of mere hair-splitting distinctions and if we do not agree with them they give themselves mighty airs, pitying our ignorance, and esteeming themselves as superior persons who have an insight into things which ordinary Christians cannot see. God save us from having eyes which are so sharp that we are able to spy out new occasions for difference and fresh reasons for making men offenders for mere words. I believe in the life of Christ as well as in his death, and I believe that he stood for me before God as much when he walked the acres of Palestine as when he hung on the cross at Jerusalem. You cannot divide and split him in sunder and say: 'He is so far an example and so far an atonement', but you must take the entire Christ and look at him from the very first as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. 'Oh, but', they say, 'he made no atonement except in his death', which is, let me tell you, an absurdity in language. Listen a minute. When does a man die? I cannot tell you. There is the minute in which the soul separates from the body, but all the time that a man may be described as dying he is alive, is he not? A man does not suffer when actually dead. What we call the pangs of death are truly and accurately pangs of life. Death does not suffer – it is the end of suffering. A man is in life while he suffers and if they say: 'It is Christ's death that makes an atonement and not his life', I reply that death, alone and by itself, makes no atonement. Death in its natural sense and not in this modern non-natural severance from life, does make atonement – but it cannot be viewed apart from life by any unsophisticated mind. If they must have

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distinctions, we could make distinctions enough to worry them of such an unprofitable business, but we have nobler work to do. To us our Lord's death seems to be the consummation of his life, the finishing stroke of a work which his Father had given him to do among the sons of men. We view him as having come in a body prepared for him to do the will of God once – and that 'once' lasted throughout his one life on earth. We will not, however, dwell on any moot point, but unfeignedly rejoice that whatever was wanted to make God's people wholly sanctified unto God, Christ has worked out. 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once'. It is finished. Does the divine law require for our acceptance perfect submission to the will of the LORD? He has rendered it. Does it ask complete obedience to its precepts? He has presented the same. Does the fulfilled will of the LORD call for abject suffering, a sweat of blood, pangs unknown, and death, itself? Christ has presented it all, whatever that 'all' may be. As when God created, his word effected all his will, so when God redeemed, his blessed and incarnate Word has done all his will. In every point, as God looked on each day's work and said: 'It is good', so, as he looks upon each part of the work of his dear Son, he can say of it: 'It is good'. The Father joins in the verdict of his Son that it is finished – all the will of God for the sanctification of his people is accomplished.¹⁰⁸

I have not quoted C.H.Spurgeon to prove my point, of course, but I am heartily glad to have his support.

¹⁰⁸ Spurgeon sermon 1527.

Does Acts 21 Confirm Sabbath Keeping for Believers?

Introduction

I have to confess I have a problem with James.¹⁰⁹ No, not the book. I don't have Martin Luther's difficulty.¹¹⁰ But I do have a problem with James' attitude and actions towards Paul in Acts 21, when Paul returned to Jerusalem after his work among the Gentiles. It was all to do with the law, the law of Moses, in connection with converted Jews and Gentiles. And the way James spoke to Paul, and dealt with him, does leave me in a bit of a quandary.

Having said that, at one time Peter and Barnabas had a problem over the very same issue at Antioch, and it needed Paul to sort them out. Which he did. See Galatians 2. Indeed, as is evident from the number of references to it in the apostolic writings, the law of Moses was a very hot potato for believers in those early days. And, for many believers today it still is. At least, many get it wrong. Which, when you come to think about it, is very odd.

Let me explain. Because of the raging dispute over the law in the churches at the time, the writers of the post-Pentecost Scriptures – especially Paul and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews – tackled the issue, dealing with it once and for all. Scripture, as only to be expected, sets out the definitive position on the matter. Paul, in nearly all his letters, had to deal with churches which in one way or another were being confronted by it. And deal with it he did! His letters (along with other apostolic writings, the letter to the Hebrews in particular) laid down the

¹⁰⁹ The substance of this article first saw the light of day in my *Sabbath Notes & Extracts* pp92-96.

¹¹⁰ Because he did not understand Jas. 2:14-26, and could not reconcile it with Paul's teaching in Romans on justification, and because he was under heavy attack from Rome on the issue, he dismissed the book of James as so much hay or straw.

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final word on the subject and put it to rest. Or so one would think!

But no! Sad to say, as the centuries passed, some clever men – philosophers – rolled their sleeves up, got to work and devised a logical system which got round the teaching of Scripture on the law. One man in particular played a very important part in this fandango. I am, of course, talking about Thomas Aquinas. His disastrous legacy lives on even to this day. And not only in Romanism. Protestants, too, have been heavily influenced by him; albeit unwittingly in most cases, they still are being heavily influenced by him.¹¹¹

For, alas, the medieval Roman church bought into Aquinas, big-time. But that's the way of Rome, is it not?

Even more sadly, John Calvin never threw off his Romanism in this regard. Indeed, on the question of the law, Calvin set his thinking in concrete in his *Institutes*. And that has spelled trouble with a capital T for many Reformed and evangelical believers ever since. Covenant theologians, many Puritans in particular, took Calvin's views, developed them into a rigid legal system, with catastrophic results, results which are with us to this very day.¹¹²

Let me briefly set out the salient scriptural facts.

We know that Israel, and Israel alone, out of all the nations, was privileged to be given God's law through Moses on Sinai. We have an abundance of scriptures which put it beyond doubt (Deut. 4:1 – 6:25; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5, and so on). In this, Israel was unique among all the nations:

[God] has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws (Ps. 147:19-20).

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God (Rom. 3:1-2).

¹¹¹ See my *Christ Is All*.

¹¹² See my *Christ Is All*.

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[Consider] the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen (Rom. 9:4-5).

Although God could say: 'All the earth is mine', he chose to declare to the Israelites: 'You shall be a special treasure to me above all people'. But there was a condition: 'Now therefore, *if* you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, *then* you shall be a special treasure to me above all people' (Ex. 19:5). 'Keep my covenant'; in other words: 'Keep my law'. In giving this new nation – this nation of Israel, his nation – his law in order to mark them out as his people, in particular God gave them a special – unique – sign that they were his people. This sign belonged to no other people, since only Israel was his nation. And this sign was his sabbaths: 'Moreover I also gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between them and me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them' (Ezek. 20:12); that is, separates them from all other peoples. God commanded the Jews 'to hallow my sabbaths, and they will be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God' (Ezek. 20:20). And the same applied to their following generations (Ex. 31:13). By 'sabbaths', of course, God meant the weekly sabbaths in particular. In short, on delivering them from Egypt, God commanded the Hebrew people, from that time on, until he brought that epoch to its appointed end in Christ, to keep his law, especially the sabbath, *and especially the sabbath as a sign that they were God's nation, distinct from all others:*

Surely my sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that it is the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death... Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for

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ever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed (Ex. 31:13-17).

Comment is surely superfluous. Under the Mosaic covenant, Israel was given the law; Israel alone, of all the nations, was given the law; the law was given to Israel for Israel and for no others. The sabbath, at the very heart of the old covenant and the Mosaic law, was the hallmark of Judaism.¹¹³ And the sabbath was the simple, clear-cut marker that, at a glance, guaranteed kosher behaviour under the law. Obedience to the entire body of more than 600 commandments could be distilled into sabbath keeping in accordance with the fourth of the ten commandments. That, and dietary laws, marked out the Jews.

Such is the background to Acts 21.

As for today, sabbath observance is the reddest of all red buttons in some circles.

What of Acts 21?

In Acts 21, James and all the elders in Jerusalem told Paul (on his return after several years) that they knew ‘many myriads of Jews... who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law’. In this we can hear echoes of Ananias – ‘a certain disciple’, ‘a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews’ in Damascus (Acts 9:10; 22:12). In addition, as James explained, he and the elders were afraid that, since Paul had taught ‘all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses’, his presence would upset the Jerusalem believers. To forestall this, they urged him to make a public display of his loyalty to the law. And the apostle complied (Acts 21:18ff).

What can be made of this? Was it fair of Samuele Bacchiocchi, writing to advocate sabbath keeping by believers

¹¹³ In those days, dietary laws came into it also. But this is not an issue in the current debate since Aquinas, with his clever but unscriptural tripartite division of the law, has provided an escape route for those who buy into his system. See my *Christ Is All*.

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today, to claim: ‘The profound loyalty of the leadership of the Jerusalem church to Jewish religious traditions is self-evident’, and to further argue that the believers there circumcised their infant sons, ate kosher foods, ‘retained a deep attachment to Jewish religious customs such as sabbath keeping’, and so on? Was he right to say, quoting W.D.Davies, these observances ‘must have been so strong that right up to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70 they were the *dominant* element in the Christian movement?’¹¹⁴

Let me say at once, Bacchiocchi’s assertions may be right; may be. If they are, then of course, I concede the point; namely, Jewish believers in Jerusalem at that time clung with enthusiasm to Judaism (but not just one or two aspects, mark you – the lot!). But, of course, we know that Gentile converts did not adopt Judaism (indeed, they were forbidden to do so).

Inevitably, therefore, if Bacchiocchi and his fellows are right, we are faced with the proposition that both groups of believers – those who were trying to fulfil the law, and those who were resting in the finished work of Christ who fulfilled the law on their behalf (Matt. 5:17-18; John 19:340; Rom. 8:1-4; 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Galatians; Hebrews, for instance) – must have been perfectly acceptable (at least in Jerusalem). I find this very hard to accept. But, allowing that it was so, James was clearly living on a knife edge, and he was, to put it mildly, fearful that Paul’s coming to the city would spell nothing but trouble. However, Paul did nothing at the time to sort out the mess (for that is what it was, allowing it was happening). Of course, he had little time in which he could do anything of the sort since he was very rapidly whisked off his feet, detained in custody, and carted away from the city, making it impossible for him to sort the matter out. Nevertheless, if he had acted as did everywhere else, we are in no doubt about what would have

¹¹⁴ Samuele Bacchiocchi: *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome, 1977, pp148-149,151. His quotation was from W.D.Davies *Paul and Jewish Christianity*, 1972, p72, emphasis mine.

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been his attitude to it. Wherever the issue arose, and whoever was involved in it, Paul immediately stepped in to put a stop to the nonsense. Nonsense? To go back to the law was an offence to Christ, an attack upon his finished work, and a diminishing of the grace and power of God in the age of the Spirit.

And that takes us to the letter to the Hebrews. In his letter, the sacred writer bent over backwards to instruct, urge, press, exhort Jewish believers not – under any circumstances whatever – to go back under the old covenant. Indeed, he rebuked them for even thinking of it, let alone doing it. He positively argued, and argued with majestic cogency, that Christ had carried out his manifesto (Matt. 5:17-18), fulfilled every shadow of the old covenant and its law, thus rendering the old covenant obsolete. Read the entire letter of Hebrews to see the point. Hebrews 8:13 could not be more explicit.

Consequently, if Acts 21 really does belong to that very short time when Judaism was acceptable – kosher – for believers, whether they had been Jew or Gentile before conversion, certain facts inevitably follow. Such a view poses very serious, far-reaching questions – questions which must be faced by those who hold to Bacchiocchi's view.

Above all, the many clear statements in the New Testament, which are very damaging to the idea that Judaism was perfectly acceptable in the early churches, have to be explained. What do *they* mean? How do *they* fit in with the notion that it was perfectly acceptable for ex-Jews (and Gentiles) to be zealous for the law?

Nevertheless, I admit I find the events recorded in Acts 21 very puzzling. As Bacchiocchi himself said: 'This excessive attachment of the Jerusalem church to Jewish regulations may perhaps perplex' certain people. I agree. It certainly perplexes me. Before I concede Bacchiocchi's point however, may I offer some food for thought?

For instance, notice the abrupt way James and the elders responded to Paul – and James must bear the responsibility for it since he was in the driving seat. Paul came to Jerusalem with wonderful news – wonderful news, I stress – God was calling

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the Gentiles, forming churches, far and wide. True, James and the others ‘glorified the Lord’ at the news. But immediately – I emphasise this – *immediately*, sharply, abruptly, they turn from Paul’s marvellous news to... to what? To the scruples of believing Jews about Jewish customs! What a feeble welcome this for Paul, after many years away (Acts 24:17). Paul must have felt that a bucket of cold water had been thrown in his face. Indeed, James and the elders seem to fear that the church would meet on hearing of his arrival. What an alarming thought! What might happen? The leaders looked on Paul as a likely embarrassment; he would cause difficulties; his teaching among the Gentiles was not liked (Acts 21:19-22).

What is to be made of this meeting between James and Paul? I am convinced it was James who did not altogether like or appreciate Paul’s teaching – that was the real problem.¹¹⁵ This raises a question: can we take James’ words at face value? Please do not throw my article down in disgust. Remember Galatians 2:11 ff; even Peter and Barnabas got things wrong, and on this very issue. And it was teachers who came from James (Gal. 2:12) who were the cause of the trouble in Antioch.

And notice another thing; James told Paul about the decision made at the Acts 15 church meeting (Acts 21:25).¹¹⁶ In so doing, he spoke as though Paul knew nothing about it. Yet it was Paul himself who had first raised the issue among the churches. Let that sink in! James was talking as if Paul knew nothing about it, and yet it was Paul who raised the issue at Jerusalem. He did it at Antioch. Indeed, it was Paul who had rightly brought it back to where it belonged – the Jerusalem church, and with James. Furthermore, it was Paul and others who had been commissioned to take the decision by letter to all the churches. And yet, despite this catalogue of facts, James now treated Paul as though he did not have a clue about the issue. Talk about teaching grandmothers to suck eggs!

¹¹⁵ See Ben Witherington III: *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on... Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, p269.

¹¹⁶ This was *not* a Church Council. It was a church meeting. See my *Battle* pp85-90. We must not read Christendom back into the New Testament. See my *Gadfly; Pastor*.

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There is another possibility. It could be that James was telling Paul that he was willing to leave Paul to get on unhindered with the Gentiles in the wider world, and he would appreciate it if Paul would reciprocate and let him get on with the Jews in Jerusalem, and do so without interference. In other words, in a nice way, was he telling Paul to keep off the grass? Was he forestalling what he feared might happen – namely, that Paul would upset the apple cart in Jerusalem?¹¹⁷

Whichever it is, it seems to me, as I have said, James had a problem – not Paul. And maybe the problem was more than theological; maybe it was personal.¹¹⁸ I suspect James found it very hard to come to terms with the end of Judaism. In Galatians 2:12 he was implicated; in Acts 15 he wanted to hold on to as much Judaism as he could; and here in Acts 21 he is still at it. Paul had long since seen the glorious truth – the old covenant had gone, the new had come. Galatians 2:11-14 furnishes more than enough proof of this.¹¹⁹ It looks as though old habits died hard with James. They certainly did with Peter (Acts 10:9-17,28-29,34-43,47; 11:5-12,17; Gal. 2:11). And not only with Peter – ‘the apostles and brethren who were in Jerusalem’ needed convincing that Peter had not gone off the rails when he went to Cornelius. Happily, they were convinced when after ‘those of the circumcision contended with him... Peter explained it to them in order’ (Acts 11:1-18).

Despite this, Peter sadly slipped at Antioch, dragging others with him (Gal. 2:11-13), *but it was a slip, a mistake, a failure*;

¹¹⁷ Although I am responsible for this paragraph, it was a comment made by Steve Guest which gave me the idea, for which I am grateful.

¹¹⁸ Did James, perhaps, not understand Paul’s teaching? Was his criticism deliberate? Rordorf: ‘It is... certainly a calumny when in Acts 21:21 Paul is reproached for having taught all Jewish Christians living among Gentile Christians to forsake Moses’, and so on (Willy Rordorf: *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*, SCM, London, 1968, p138). See Acts 25:8; 28:17. James’ blanket criticism is easy to make; simplistic, indeed. But things need much more nuancing than this!

¹¹⁹ If any more proof is required, look at Rom. 3 – 8; 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 3 – 4, and so on. See my *Christ Is All; Three*.

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Paul could remind him of his true conviction: ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as the Jews?’ (Gal. 2:14). Indeed, Peter had learned the lesson so well, he had gone public on it, challenging the false teachers and their sympathisers at the Jerusalem church-meeting called to deal with the issue: ‘Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?’ (Acts 15:10). We know Paul’s view: Christ has ‘abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances’ (Eph. 2:15), ‘having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross’ (Col. 2: 14). This is of the utmost importance. Paul and Peter, it is clear, though *ex-Jews*, were not keeping Jewish ordinances, customs and laws; converts from the ‘sinners of the Gentiles’ (Gal. 2:15) certainly were not – nor were they expected to. This definitely involved eating habits (Gal. 2:12). It probably also involved circumcision – otherwise, why is it mentioned? As it is (Gal. 2:3; 5:3).¹²⁰ Who, in the light of Galatians 4:9-11,¹²¹ will argue it did not also include sabbath observance? Paul would not yield to bondage, not ‘even for an hour [better, a moment, NIV], that the truth of the gospel might continue with’ the Galatians (Gal. 2:4-5); and by his action, he stopped Peter in his tracks.

For such reasons as these, I cannot believe the Jewish converts were still keeping the Mosaic law after Pentecost, and doing so with apostolic approval.

So why did Paul do as James asked in Acts 21? Paul, I think, saw the bigger picture. He was willing to accommodate James. He was, perhaps, carrying out his principles expressed in this passage:

¹²⁰ It also seems to be emphasised in verses 7,8,9,12. I realise, of course, that ‘the circumcision’ means ‘the Jews’.

¹²¹ See my *Christ Is All; Sanctification in Galatians*.

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For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23).¹²²

And:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:31-33).

But this does not mean that he retracted his teaching, or tolerated sabbath observance, let alone elevated it to the status of being the very summit of spirituality.

Yet another possibility remains. Paul, himself, may have made a mistake here. It appears he had come to Jerusalem with the intention of fulfilling a vow which he had already begun (Acts 18:18,21). Was he right in this? Is it significant that he was never allowed (by God's providence) to complete it? True, he did not try to hide what he had done – quite the opposite (Acts 24:17).

So, what is my conclusion? I simply do not know. Perhaps Paul should have stood up to James as he did to Peter in Galatians 2.

Whatever the reason, however, Paul yielded. Nevertheless, if James had hoped to avoid a fuss, he was disappointed. True, there is no mention of trouble in the church,¹²³ but what an outcome his scheme produced in the city – a riot, a lynch mob, Paul's attempted torture, his imprisonment, his trials and so on!

¹²² See my *Believers*.

¹²³ Which makes me wonder if James had been right in saying what he did in the first place.

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And where was James then (and the many converted Jews who, according to James, were zealous for the law)? What comfort did he – or they – offer to Paul? I know it is very dangerous to argue from silence, but to all appearances it looks as though once James had got Paul to toe the line, he lost all interest in him.¹²⁴

In concluding this brief look at Acts 21, I repeat my admission that I find the passage very puzzling on many counts. But one thing I do not find; I find no mention of sabbath keeping in the Jerusalem church. Nor does anybody else. Indeed, throughout the apostolic writings there is not a single passage which speaks of believers observing the sabbath. Yes, Paul would go to the synagogue or elsewhere on a sabbath wherever Jews assembled so that he might address them with the gospel (Acts 9:20,29; 13:5,14-52; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1-2,10; 18:4; 19:8; see also Acts 18:24-26; 28:17-31), but this is a far cry from saying that, as a believer, he observed the sabbath in accordance with the Mosaic law.

Thus, in answering the question in my title, I state that Acts 21 does not confirm the claim that believers should keep the sabbath. Not at all!

To end on a positive note. Christ is the believer's sabbath (Matt. 11:28-30; Rom. 5:1; Heb. 4:9-10). In this article, I simply state the fact, but for those who wish to read more of the arguments behind my claim, they should see my *The Essential Sabbath*.

I close by saying that to argue for the observance of the sabbath is to argue for an obsolete shadow which belonged to Israel in that temporary time of the law under the Mosaic covenant. All those old-covenant shadows, not excluding the sabbath, have been fulfilled and rendered obsolete in and through Christ. The abiding – eternal – reality of it all is Christ himself.

¹²⁴ As I say, silence *is* dangerous – I take to heart Turner's warning (Max M.B. Turner: 'The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts', in D.A. Carson (ed): *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, Zondervan, 1982, p154).

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And that is the point. Do not set your heart on a day; that is, do not to cling to the shadow and miss the substance. To do that is to make a very serious mistake indeed.

As Joseph Hart put it:

*To all God's people now remains
A sabbatism,¹²⁵ a rest from pains,
And works of slavish kind;
When tired with toil, and faint through fear,
The child of God can enter here,
And sweet refreshment find.*

*To this, by faith he oft retreats;
Bondage and labour quite forgets,
And bids his cares adieu;
Slides softly into promised rest,
Reclines his head on Jesus' breast,
And proves the sabbath true.*

*This, and this only, is the way,
To rightly keep the sabbath day.
Which God has holy made.
All keepers that come short of this,
The substance of the sabbath miss,
And grasp an empty shade.*

In short, set your heart on Christ (Col. 3:1-4). Christ is all (Col. 3:11).

¹²⁵ 'Sabbatism'. Hart clearly spotted the significant change the writer to the Hebrews made in Heb. 4:9. He had been using *katapausis* and *katapauō* ('rest', noun and verb), and doing so frequently, but changed to *sabbatismos*, 'a keeping sabbath, the blessed rest from toils and troubles', the only time the word is used in Scripture.

*Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian'
Last Rites for Unbelievers.
Disturbing Thoughts Prompted by
the Recent Church Farewell to
Stephen Hawking*

In this article I want to speak plainly. Some will, no doubt, say I have spoken bluntly. Some might well say I have spoken far too bluntly, even cruelly, callously – hitting people when they are down, attacking them when they are at their most vulnerable, snatching away their innocent morsels of comfort.

I disagree. I am not being unfeeling. I am not being heartless. Indeed, it is the love of souls which stirs me. Nor is what I write against 'innocent' or 'harmless'. Far from it. So, while I want to speak the truth in love, I do want to speak the truth, however painful that may be. The issue I am dealing with demands absolute clarity. No fudging will suffice. Lies offer only false comfort. Nothing but the truth will do. As the Lord Jesus Christ himself announced:

The truth will set you free... If the Son [of God] sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:32,36).

Having said that in the positive, he was soon turning to the negative, and he issued a solemn assertion. Speaking of the devil, Christ declared:

When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

In light of this, as I say, nothing but the truth will do.

It is the recent death and funeral of Professor Stephen Hawking that has prompted me to put pen to paper. It has reminded me of the macabre fandango which followed the death of Thomas

Hardy in 1928.¹²⁶ And it has moved me to address an issue which has long disturbed me, and disturbed me more than I can say, one which I should have addressed long ago. I am talking about the way funerals, and associated rites, of avowed unbelievers are so often conducted and supported by true believers; or at least, by professing believers.¹²⁷

Stephen Hawking. Let's be clear about him and the point I want to make. Let's not beat about any bush. Stephen Hawking was a self-confessed atheist. He made no bones about it. Although I do not believe there is anybody who can truly be called an atheist,¹²⁸ for the sake of this article I will accept the terminology: Stephen Hawking was an atheist. Nevertheless, his funeral service was conducted by the Church of England at Great St Mary's, Cambridge, and (at the time I write, April 2018) his ashes are to be interred at Westminster Abbey. For obvious reasons, I was not present at the service at Cambridge, of course, but, according to press reports, the family 'felt a traditional Anglican service' would be the most fitting way for Cambridge to bid farewell to Hawking. And the *Cambridge News* announced the service thus:

Despite his avowed atheism, Stephen Hawking's funeral at Great St Mary's Church will be a traditional, Church of England service... His family is holding the customary service used many hundreds of times before at the Cambridge University Church, featuring hymns and prayers, among them the [so-called] Lord's Prayer... The Very Reverend Peter Judd, priest in charge at Great St Mary's, said: 'At the request of the

¹²⁶ In this article, I say more on Hardy than Hawking. As I write (April 2018) Hawking's rituals are not yet completed.

¹²⁷ Church weddings, too, are implicated, but I confine this article to funerals. Christenings, of course, are the *crème de la crème* in unscriptural grimness. See my *Infant*.

¹²⁸ I am sure that all men have a god, every man and woman worships something or someone – self, reason, science or whatever. Idolatry abounds, even in – especially in – the most 'sophisticated' circles. Sex, entertainment, money, possessions, food, drink, fame, power, reputation, self-esteem... the list is endless.

family, it will be a traditional service tailored to the family's requirements...'.¹²⁹

I take it that by 'traditional', we are to understand 'according to the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*', or something very like it, which is still the official liturgy of the Church of England. For those who are not familiar with an Anglican funeral service, the rubric is supposed to open by saying that only those who were baptised (that is, almost without exception, sprinkled as a baby) and did not die excommunicate may have the 'Office' done for them. I am given to understand, however, that the established Church does not enforce this rubric, even if it is still in place. In 2016, the following explanation was posted on the internet by those who should know:

In England almost one third of all deaths are followed by a Church of England funeral service. That equates to 2,800 funerals a week on average. Yet despite this popularity, many people still have misconceptions about the Church and how it can help them after a loved one dies.

We spoke to Reverend Canon Doctor Sandra Millar, head of project and development, and award-winning celebrant Reverend Juliet Stephenson about the reality of a Church of England funeral. Sandra and Juliet explained eight key things that people often don't know about Church-of-England-led funerals:

Anyone can have a Church of England funeral.

Not everyone realises it, but if you live in England, you are automatically living in a Church of England parish and its clergy will lead a funeral service for anyone living within their parish.

'Because you live in a Church of England parish, there are certain things that you can access', Reverend Canon Sandra Millar explains. 'For example, you can get married, you can have your baby christened in your parish church, and you can have a funeral led by a Church of England minister'.

'The church will not turn anyone away', says Reverend Juliet Stephenson, 'however religious or irreligious they are. Everyone gets the exact same treatment'.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ '8 things you may not know about Church of England funerals'.

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

The 'Office' opens with the minister processing before the coffin, calling out the following scriptures:

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die (John 11:25-26).

I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27).

We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world (1 Tim. 6:7).

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).

And so the service goes on.

At the interment at the graveside (or at the equivalent in the cremation ceremony), these words are to be said by the minister:

Forasmuch as it has pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.

This is the sort of thing that is said during the 'traditional' burial (or cremation) service of the Anglican Church, conducted for all and sundry. Hardy and Hawking were each afforded such a service by the Church of England.

As for Thomas Hardy, virtually nothing about his 1928 funeral and interments (yes, the plural is right) was as he had wished. His heart was buried in the graveyard at Stinsford Church, Dorset, while the rest of his remains were cremated privately at

Woking crematorium, and the ashes were later interred with pomp and immense flummery¹³⁰ at Westminster Abbey.

Objections to the interment at Westminster Abbey were raised on the grounds that Hardy was an atheist. Which he undoubtedly was. He had been an atheist since his early manhood, having from that time abandoned any thought of real faith in Christ, abandoned real acceptance of the gospel and the Scriptures, and so on. He certainly liked hoary tradition, yes, and he retained a strong affection for the old habits of his village childhood, and he was willing to go along with the externals of Anglicanism. But that is all.¹³¹ All gospel meaning for him had long since been sucked out of such rituals. He was no believer.

These were the grounds on which the aforesaid objections were raised. The Dean of Westminster, very anxious and wanting to stave off the objections, appealed to the vicar of Fordington, R.G.Bartelot, seeking some sort of assurance from him. This was readily forthcoming. But the assurance Bartelot was able to offer the Dean was weak in the extreme. In fact, weighed in the balance of Scripture, it was no justification at all.

As Claire Tomalin reported it:

Bartelot wrote back at once testifying to Hardy's having been 'at heart a Christian and a Churchman', although he had not actually attended his Church once in twenty-one years. His grounds for saying so were that he gave donations to Church funds, had been observed joining in the Lord's prayer and the Creed on occasion, had never formally recanted the Christianity conferred by christening, and had lived a life of absolute moral rectitude.

¹³⁰ The ten pall-bearers for the urn were the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, the leader of the Opposition, Ramsey MacDonald, the heads of Magdalen College, Cambridge, and Queen's College, Oxford, A.E.Houseman, Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw, J.M.Barrie, John Galsworthy and Edmund Gosse. In a letter to T.E.Lawrence, describing the performance, Charlotte Shaw commented: 'The clergy came first and shocked me. All except one looked full of worldly pomp and disdain, self-conscious jacks-in-the box' (Tomalin pp373-375).

¹³¹ Vera Brittain was cast in a similar mould, as she made clear in her *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, Fontana Paperbacks (in association with Virago Ltd.), 1979.

As Tomlin wryly observed: '[This] testimonial would have made Hardy smile'.¹³² Hardy lived and died an unbeliever.

Even so, writing in 1989, Timothy Hands was determined to defend the interments:

The dual ceremonies, though contentious, were, symbolically, not altogether inappropriate... Thomas Hardy never entered the Church, but it is generally agreed that the Church most assuredly entered Thomas Hardy.¹³³

Once again, weak in the extreme.

Even more recently – in 2006 – Pamela Dalziel,¹³⁴ calling on Hands' work, tried to argue that Hardy remained 'profoundly Christian' all his days. This will take some proving! George P.Landow, Professor of English and the History of Art, Brown University, probed her claim. Summarising her work, Landow presented her 'evidence' for Hardy's 'Christianity' thus:

His family's associations with the established Church... 'his lifelong love of Church music and the language of the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer*'... his continued attending religious services... his poetry's occasional expression longing for belief (for example, 'The Oxen')... 'his conviction that the Church was and should remain – the social, ethical, and educational centre of a community'.¹³⁵

As with Hands, the evidence Dalziel garnered to support her claim is weak in the extreme. She was trying to argue black is white; or at the best, grey. But it cuts no ice. Rather, it shows that she herself has no concept of what real Christianity is. I readily admit that Hardy hankered after what he had lost, yes; see my 'The Unbeliever's Lament'. And in his young days

¹³² Claire Tomalin: *Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man*, Penguin Books, 2007, pp375-376.

¹³³ Timothy Hands: *Thomas Hardy: Distracted Preacher? Hardy's Religious Biography and its Influence on his Novels*, Palgrave Macmillan, St Martin's Press, Inc., New York, 1989, p1.

¹³⁴ Pamela Dalziel: 'Strange Sermon: The Gospel According to Thomas Hardy', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17th March 2006, pp12-23.

¹³⁵ George P.Landow: 'Thomas Hardy's Religious Beliefs'.

Hardy had come close – perhaps very close – to evangelicalism, but for the bulk of his life all that remained but a dim and distant dream, a faded memory, the reality of which, from time to time, he almost wished he could regain. But such feelings were fleeting. He never was willing to turn to Christ in saving trust and repentance.

Hardy's true position can be distinctly heard in an epitaph for G.K.Chesterton which he dictated to his second wife, Florence, as he (Hardy) lay dying. As Tomalin says, the short verse was 'ungrammatical, but clear in its intentions'. Too right! From his deathbed Hardy spoke in highly dismissive terms of 'the literary contortionist' who refused to accept 'Darwin's theories'. Tomalin explained:

It was his [that is, Hardy's] final word against Church doctrine and in favour of rational thinking, exemplified by Darwin.

Tomalin offered her own opinion of this dying Hardy thunderbolt. It was, she said, 'a magnificent blast from the sickbed';¹³⁶ that is, in her (and Hardy's) terms, a defiant tirade in death against Christ, against the gospel, the Scriptures, and the like, an exaltation of human reason and science over submission to the revealed word of God. Hardy lived and died an unbeliever.

Landow again, in part quoting Dalziel:

Despite [his] lifelong connections with the Church of England – connections much firmer and more numerous than most Victorian authors who lost their belief – 'Hardy repeatedly articulated both his conviction that the Cause of Things must be unconscious, "neither moral or immoral, but unmoral", and his hope that this Unconscious Will was evolving into consciousness would ultimately become sympathetic'. Nonetheless, Dalziel argues that however far Hardy moved from his evangelical sermon of 1858, its three main points remain the 'central preoccupations' of his life: the emphasis 'on the law as curse, on suffering, and on the saving force of love'. She therefore argues that Hardy the atheist remained 'profoundly Christian' in many ways.

¹³⁶ Tomalin p369.

How vague can one get? How thinly must the barrel be scraped? Yet again, the evidence proffered is not worth the paper it is written on. This 'Christianity' is nothing but philosophical Christendom-speak, nothing to do with Christ, far removed from Scripture. Dalziel argued in vain. Hardy was no believer.

Landow was much more cautious. Even so, he ventured only the weakest of observations on Dalziel's verdict:

The question remains, of course, if one retains some of the cultural, emotional, and even ethical attitudes of Christianity, as so many Victorian non-believers did, but does not have any faith in a personal god, much less in the divinity of Christ and salvation through him, can these attitudes still be considered Christian? Wouldn't it be less tendentious and a lot more convincing simply to state that Thomas Hardy might have wished he could have remained a Christian, but that he didn't, or that he always retained many ideas and attitudes associated with Christianity (and, of course, with other religions as well) but not the fundamental beliefs that grounded them? Such a characterisation of Hardy would seem more true to the Victorian frame of mind than would overemphasising Hardy's Christian-ness. For me the point remains not that, like so many other Victorians, he retained habits of mind associated with Christianity after he abandoned it, but that he abandoned it for a belief in some Unconscious Will.

Well, as my father used to say to me and of me when commenting on my time at school: 'If you're one of the best, don't show me the worst!'¹³⁷

¹³⁷ For another vague endorsement of Hardy's 'Christianity', see Yasir Allawi Abed: 'Desperate Faith: A Study of Selected Poems by Thomas Hardy'.

While this (to me unknown) author on the Shodhganga website was outlandishly enthusiastic about Hardy's 'evangelicalism': 'Thomas Hardy's stand against the orthodox sacraments and his endorsement of reforms in the Church make him a true evangelical'. Really? This author's definition of 'evangelical' is way off target. Hardy must, in the colloquial sense, 'be turning in his grave'! Shodhganga is 'a reservoir of Indian theses... a digital repository of theses and dissertations submitted to Indian universities' (Wikipedia).

I want to call a spade a spade. Nobody should be offended by it. Hardy and Hawking were free-thinkers, men who gloried in free speech.¹³⁸ So let's have it here. They pulled no punches. They both spoke their minds when they had the chance. So may I. So must I. So will I. The blunt truth is both Hardy and Hawking lived and died atheists, avowed unbelievers. Notwithstanding, the Church of England was prepared to give them the last rites of a professing believer, and to justify it.

Why am I bothering? Why am I raising all this now? Because, as I say, Stephen Hawking's recent death and the subsequent rites of the Church of England have prompted me to action. I have been remiss in not speaking before. The time for silence is past, long past. So now to speak. That is what I want to do, what I feel I must do, what I intend to do.

These shenanigans are sinister. I say it with deliberation. I meant what I said in the title of this article: 'Christendom in the Raw: "Christian" Last Rites for Unbelievers'. I am talking about priestcraft, sacerdotalism, sacramentalism.¹³⁹ And not only for the so-called 'great' – famous authors, statesmen, royalty, and the like. The appalling farce is being played out day in, day out, for and by the relatives of countless unbelievers who have died. In the funeral service (whatever form it takes these days), the relations of almost every Tom, Dick, Harry, Mabel, Enid or

¹³⁸ Hardy hated the way he was restricted by editors and publishers acting in line with the *mores* of the day, and chafed against it.

¹³⁹ *Sacramentalists* believe that, under certain circumstances, spiritual grace is conveyed (or made effective) by an outward act.

Sacerdotalists believe that certain men have the ability, the gift, the power and the right to administer the actions in question, and thereby convey the grace, the gift or whatever inherent in those actions. Naturally, therefore, they happily delegate vital parts of their religion – even their spiritual life – into the hands of these men, who, they believe, because they have been consecrated or ordained, are better able, more qualified to carry it out for them. In such a system, worship and spiritual service is a specialised task best left to a special class – priests – who do it on behalf of the rest. Hence arose the unbiblical notion of the clergy and the laity – with all its attendant and well-documented curses of priestcraft.

Tracey – uncle Tom Cobley and all – want and are afforded the assurances which belong only to those who have lived and died trusting in Christ. And they are given these comforts by professing believers, those who ought to know better, often by those who do know better. The harvest of such a calamitous procedure will be dire, dire for all concerned.

Let me speak distinctly and to the point. I have more than the established Church of England in mind. Dissenters, nonconformists, evangelicals of every hue, the Reformed, Baptists, and the like – all are implicated. Many such are prepared to give 'Christian' last rites to the unbelieving dead, in order to comply with the requests of relatives of a deceased member of the family, even though the dead person lived and died an unbeliever.

Furthermore, this plays into Christendom's practice of 'churchifying the unchurched'; that is, evangelising unbelievers by attracting them to church attendance in the hope that they will be converted. This is something utterly foreign to the New Testament, completely contrary to new-covenant principles. And it comes with a very high price tag. Specifically for my purposes here, I suspect that when the fateful time comes, the vast majority of churches which welcome, and to a large extent assimilate, unbelievers in this way, are willing to play out the charade to its devastating conclusion; that is, they conduct the last rites for such unbelievers treating them as though they had been converted. Those who do not, will have to admit that (maybe even) for years they have been treating the person in question as a virtual believer, but now, at that person's death, they have to pull the plug and publicly own their mistake (I would use a much stronger word), and refuse to take the final step. Phew! If so, what an eye-opener for the other unbelievers who are being 'churchified' at the time! It seems to me that this must sound the death knell for the entire system. Does this catch-22 not make it almost inevitable that such churches will be willing to 'do the necessary' even for unbelievers?

As I have explained in several works, this basic, gut feeling for someone 'to do the necessary' is widespread. Indeed, the desire for the ministrations of a priest at vital stages in life and

death is endemic. It is ingrained in us. The natural man has an inbuilt craving for 'rites of passage' to be administered by a 'proper' person. Nowhere is this more true and evident than at death.

Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁴⁰ God has written the need of a priest deep in our hearts. Sadly, however, instead of the one, the true, the only-effective priest – the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Heb. 4:14 – 5:10; 6:13 – 10:18) – most people would rather trust a visible priest, a 'Minister', to, as they like to think, 'put it all right for them at the end'. And countless numbers of professional ministers are prepared to take the glorious words of the gospel, words which offer assurance and hope (that is, confident expectation) in and through Christ to believers, and only to believers, speaking of their eternal salvation, their resurrection to everlasting bliss, and apply those precious words of comfort and reassurance to unbelievers.¹⁴¹ They dare to prostitute the glorious words of Scripture, written to and for believers, and apply them to those who have lived and died without an atom of saving faith in Christ, even to those who have openly defied the faith all their life. What an appalling travesty! How tragic!

Travesty? Tragic? Yes, indeed. The consequences for those who engage in the abominable practice will be unspeakable. They cannot shuffle out of their responsibility. They carry the can for it now, and will have to carry the can after their own death. And for those who watch it all, those who try to fool themselves that all is well because some priest has mouthed some mumbo-jumbo over the corpse of their dead relative, the shattering of their delusions will be painful in the extreme. And those who die, not trusting in Christ, but trusting in the ministrations of some official to 'make it all right at the end', will find themselves grievously mistaken at horrendous cost.

¹⁴⁰ See my *Priesthood; The Priesthood*.

¹⁴¹ Often a fee is involved. Indeed, I have heard of an undertaker who got phone calls from irate ministers complaining if he had not called on their services recently.

When? When will these particular chickens come home to roost? At the day of judgment.

Nothing could be more apt than Paul's address to the free-thinkers of Athens. Although the event I speak of took place nearly two thousand years ago, the same is going on today. The first-century Athenians prided themselves on the clarity of their thinking, their sharpness of mind; they boasted of their rationality, their willingness to learn, their curiosity for ideas, their legendary thirst for knowledge. Sophisticated is the word! But professing themselves to be wise, they showed themselves to be nothing but fools (Rom. 1:22). Sophisticated? They were superstitious! So much so, among their countless gods, and the altars they erected for them – safety in numbers, you see – they even included an idol to 'the unknown god'. Think of that! Belt and braces! Fingers crossed! Just like men and women today. Today? Yes, today! Even though they have not believed a word of the gospel all their lives, when they die, many want some priest to send them safely on their way to what they are sure will be their everlasting bliss. And even if they say they are convinced that there is nothing after death, that 'when you die you snuff it', they still want to make sure... just in case. *And many believers are willing to fall in with the diabolical nonsense, and go along with the deception.* And in so doing, they confirm the world in its unbelief. A vicious circle if ever there was one.

For the fact is, when churches, pastors, ministers or priests provide comforting services to grieving relatives of an unbeliever who has died, services which speak of the comfort the gospel brings to true believers only, they cause immense harm. They confirm all and sundry that trust in Christ does not matter, that judgment is a myth – that talk of judgment is something to terrify the feeble-minded, but nothing more – that the biblical warnings which tell us that those who die without Christ will perish are meaningless, a laughable nonsense, nothing but old-wives' tales. Forget about such drivel!

Moreover, it does not matter what caveats are included in the service. That won't allow the participants to get off the hook. It may dull a conscience or two, but it won't make the pantomime

right. The officials have officiated and 'done the job'. And the grateful relatives can post 'a thank-you' in the local press to the official for his or her 'nice, lovely service'. It is what people perceive that counts. And, for those who take part in the charade, like the sprinkling of babies, the administration of funeral rites by a professional minister means that 'something has been done'.¹⁴² That is what they think. Or like to think. That is what they perceive to be going on. Reality? Don't worry about that! Perception rules the roost! In the day of judgment, however, all delusions will be stripped away.

If I am wrong, why do so few unbelievers have the courage, the honesty, to make it clear that when the time comes they want to have a funeral like the man I heard of who, living and dying an unbeliever, requested the congregation to sing 'Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye' as they stood to watch his coffin conveyed to his cremation? Which they duly did! I know that some believers who heard the story were horrified. I, on the other hand, was anything but! I was delighted. I remain so. I admire the man.¹⁴³ He was consistent. As he lived, so he died – trusting in luck. And so, as his earthly remains were disposed of, he wanted his friends to wish him luck. Luck in life, luck in death, luck in the final farewell.

Let us get back to biblical reality. Paul, addressing the men of Athens, set out the stark truth. He put it like this:

Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the

¹⁴² After the sprinkling, most people think the baby has 'been made a Christian'. After all, he now has his 'Christian name'. Similarly, with funerals. The rites performed by the proper official have 'sent the deceased on his or her way to heaven'. This is what people like to think. This is what the official has 'guaranteed' for them. So they believe.

¹⁴³ As D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones, when he was in South Wales, would say to those who preferred to spend their Sundays at the Barry Island fun park instead of hearing the gospel, when they come to die, let them go to Barry Island.

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).

Coming to the end of his discourse, he drew the proper application:

God... commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed [that is, the Lord Jesus Christ]; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Of course, many, if not most, will dismiss this. I do not kid myself. I can hear the retorts, the snarls: 'Rubbish!' Some took that line in Athens (Acts 17:32). But Christ *has* been raised from the dead, he *will* return, and all of us *will* have to face him in judgment. You will! No last rites performed by a priest will avail on that day! Moreover, those who were prepared to take words written to believers and apply them to unbelievers will have to answer to Christ at that time. Above all, those unbelievers who die, clinging to the delusion that some priest will make it right with God for them, will be sorely disillusioned.

As for believers who go along with this sort of funereal performance, there is only one response. They should steer clear of it, cease being a party to the deceit. I am well aware that this will be painful and costly, but do believers fear men more than they fear God?

As for the personal, we all have to die. It is the one certainty of life. And if we have any sense, we will prepare for it, make sure we are ready for it, whenever the Reaper calls for us. People prepare for holidays, they make sure they are insured against all sorts of things that will never happen, and yet, when it comes to the one certainty of life, the fatal certainty, most men and women die utterly unprepared; they sleep walk into eternity. There is only one thing to say: Wake up, you sleepers! Repent and trust Christ. At once! If you will listen to his voice, that is what God is telling you even now, at this very moment. Hear the word of God. Heed the word of God. Act on the word of God:

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:6-7).

And that means now:

[I] appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain... Now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1-2).

For as Samuel Medley put it:

*Great Judge of all! that day will come
When mortals must receive their doom;
Oh, hear our cry, and grant we may
Of you find mercy in that day!*

*The wicked [that is, unbelievers] tremble, saints [that is,
believers] rejoice,
One dreads, the other loves the voice;
The wicked fear, believers sing,
The coming of their God and King.*

*Think, O my soul, you must appear,
And pass the judgment at this bar!
What now does God and conscience say –
Will you find mercy in that day?*

*Do you, by faith, to Jesus flee?
Is his dear image stamped on thee?
If so, let nothing you dismay,
You shall find mercy in that day.*

*Eternal Judge! Almighty Lord!
Seal home and bless your solemn word;
And oh, that we poor sinners may
Of you find mercy in that day!*

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

William Gadsby penned some wise and salutary words on the subject:

*Pause my soul! and ask the question –
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?
Have I union
Have I union
With the church's living Head?

Am I quickened by his Spirit;
Live a life of faith and prayer?
Trusting wholly to his merit;
Casting on him all my care?
Daily panting
Daily panting
In his likeness to appear?

If my hope on Christ is stayèd,
Let him come when he thinks best;
Oh, my soul! be not dismayèd,
Lean upon his loving breast;
He will cheer thee
He will cheer thee
With the smilings of his face.

But, if still a total stranger
To his precious name and blood,
Thou art on the brink of danger;
Canst thou face a holy God?
Think and tremble,
Think and tremble,
Death is now upon the road.*

I close with something a dear friend of mine, a believer in Christ, used to say while he was alive. Thinking of his funeral, he was clear: 'I don't worry what kind of exit I have, so long as I have an abundant entrance'. He was, of course, referring to Peter's words, addressed to those trusting in Christ, as rendered in the Authorised (King James) Version:

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

There will be richly provided for you an [abundant] entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11)

So, don't worry over-much about your exit. Think about your entrance. 'Prepare to meet your God' (Amos 4:12).

John Bunyan: Antinomian? An Introduction

These are just the outline notes to accompany the audio version (with the same title) of a paper I delivered in Norwich, Norfolk, April 2018.

1628-1688.

Humpty Dumpty.

Sketch the times. Westminster Assembly. 1649 Act. Tobias Crisp 1600-1643 (works published). William Dell (c1607-1669) *The Crucified and Quickened Christian*. John Eaton (1574/5-1630/1) *The Honeycombe of Free Justification*. John Saltmarsh (died 1647) *Free Grace*.

Richard Baxter *The Scripture Gospel Defended* (1690) listed Paul Hobson, John Saltmarsh, John Bunyan. Northill Edward Fowler *Design of Christianity* (1671). Bunyan described Fowler's work as 'a mixture of Popery, Socinianism and Quakerism'. Fowler replied with his defamatory pamphlet *Dirt Wip'd Off*.

Luther *Galatians*. Richard L. Greaves. Roger Pooley. *Christian Behaviour*.

Practical Antinomian

Agnes Beaumont 1674. Mr Lane.

Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners Whores, two wives, bastards.

Doctrinal Antinomian

Covenants. Two covenants distinct. Not CT. Not mainline Puritan. But covenant of works.

A Few Sighs from Hell. The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded; or, A discourse touching the law and grace; the nature of the one, and the nature of the other; showing what they are, as they are the two covenants; and likewise, who they

be, and what their conditions are, that be under either of these two covenants: wherein, for the better understanding of the reader, there are several questions answered touching the law and grace, very easy to be read, and as easy to be understood, by those that are the sons of wisdom, the children of the second covenant. Questions about the Nature and Perpetuity of the Seventh-day Sabbath and Proof that the First Day of the Week is the True Christian Sabbath. Of the Law and a Christian.

Bunyan:

If one should ask you what time you spend, what pains you take, to the end you may understand the nature and difference of these two covenants [old and new], would you not say, if you should speak the truth, that you did not so much as regard whether there were two or more? Would you not say: 'I did not think of covenants, or study the nature of them'?

Spurgeon:

I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scripture are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenants of law and of grace.

Preparationism

Some Gospel Truths Opened. A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification. Pilgrim's Progress (Slough, Interpreter's House, Faithful). Doctrine of Grace... The Saints' Knowledge of Christ's Love. A Treatise of the Fear of God. The Holy War.

Progressive Sanctification

Pilgrim's Progress (Interpreter's House). Justification by an Imputed Righteousness. Doctrine of Law... 2 covenants but one law A Vindication of Gospel Truths good on assurance Idiosyncratic on two givings of the law. A Confession of my Faith. Israel's Hope Encouraged. The Holy War. A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith. A Holy Life the Beauty of a Christian. If only.

Sabbath

Questions... Sabbath Ex. 16. But ‘the law of nature’ includes the sabbath. Two covenants but essence of the law the same. Did he contradict himself not in my view. *Grace and Law...* (1659); *Questions... Sabbath...* (1685). But essence of the law the same consistent. Idiosyncratic.

Eternal Justification

A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification (1672) biblical. *Saved by Grace* (1676) elect saved before called, played with fire. *The Pharisee and the Publican* (1685). *The Desire of the Righteous* (posthumous) gets to it – but does not get as far as limiting invitation to sensible. If he had, he would have had to rewrite a whole mass of material.

Not a verdict, but I say ‘No’ to all except Eternal Justification, and then not full-blown. But hope I have stimulated you to read for yourself – above all, Scripture.

The Battle for the Church: 1517– 1644: Constantine to Christ

These are just the outline notes to accompany the audio version (with the same title) of a paper I delivered in Honiton, Devon, May 2018.

Introduction

Explain title. Christ's *ekklesia*. The corruption produced by the Fathers. Attempted recovery before the Reformation. The Reformation and the aftermath.

The Corruption

Fathers' Corruption? 2nd to 5th centuries. Going to the old covenant. Hierarchy. Clergy/Laity. Sacraments and sacramentalism. Sacerdotalism. The withering of the priesthood of all believers. Infant baptism and baptismal regeneration. The fusion of church and State. Enforced uniformity. Political councils. Christendom. See, for instance, my *The Pastor: Does He Exist?*; *The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?*; *Infant Baptism Tested*; *Battle for the Church: 1517–1644*; *Letting Loose a Gadfly: Edward Miall Speaks Today*.

During the next 1000 years, triumph of Rome in the West, sacral society, popery, the mass, Mary worship *etc.*

Protest

Ambrose of Milan in the 4th century; in the 6th century, Laurentius of Milan; in the 7th century, Mansuetus of Milan; Claude of Turin (who died in 827); the Waldensians of the 11th century and beyond; Arnold of Brescia (1110-1155); the followers of the French priest, Peter of Bruys, who lived in the 12th century; the Albigenses, who were crushed in the early 13th century; William Sawtrey (who was martyred in 1401); John Wycliffe and the Lollards, John Huss (14th century); and John Colet (1466/7-1519); and many, many more. See my *John Colet: A Preacher to be Reckoned With*; 'The Long Night'.

The Reformation and Beyond

1509-1547 HENRY VIII

- 1517 Martin Luther nails his theses to the door at Wittenberg
- 1521 Henry burns Luther's works
- 1525 First Anabaptist church formed in Zurich
- 1526 William Tyndale's New Testament reaches England
- 1527 Felix Manz the first Anabaptist martyr
- 1534 Henry's Act of Supremacy
- 1535 First Anabaptist executed in England
- 1536 John Calvin settles in Geneva
- 1539 Henry's Act of Six Articles

1547-1553 EDWARD VI

- 1549 The First Act of Uniformity
- 1550-1551 John Hooper argues against vestments
- 1552 The Second Act of Uniformity

1553-1558 MARY

- 1553-1558 Many Christians executed
- c1555 Two separated conventicles discovered

1558-1603 ELIZABETH I

- 1559 The Third Act of Uniformity
- 1560 The Geneva Bible
- 1563 Puritans defeated at Convocation
- 1567 Secret church at Plumber's Hall
- 1567 Secret church at White-chapel Street; Richard Fitz as pastor
- 1570 Thomas Cartwright lectures on Acts at Cambridge
- 1571 Presbyterian congregation at Northampton

The Battle for the Church: 1517–1644: Constantine to Christ

1572 Wandsworth Presbytery

c1580 First Congregational church formed at Norwich;

Robert Browne as pastor

1588-1589 The Marprelate Tracts

1590s William Perkins at Cambridge

1592 The Ancient church formed in London;

Francis Johnson as pastor

1593 Henry Barrowe, John Greenwood and John Penry hanged

1593 The Ancient church emigrates to Amsterdam

c1602 Congregational church formed at Gainsborough

1603-1625 JAMES I

1603 The Millenary Petition

1604 Hampton Court Conference

1604 Three hundred Puritans ejected from the Church of England

c1604 Gainsborough church divides into two, one at Scrooby

1604 John Robinson joins Scrooby church and becomes teacher

1606 John Smyth joins church at Gainsborough and becomes pastor

1606-1607 Gainsborough church emigrates to Amsterdam

1608 Scrooby church emigrates to Amsterdam

1609 Scrooby church moves to Leyden. John Robinson as pastor

1609 First General Baptist church formed in Amsterdam;

John Smyth as pastor

1611 The Authorised King James Version of the Bible

1611-1612 First General Baptist church formed in England;

Thomas Helwys as pastor

1616 First Independent church formed at Southwark;

Henry Jacob as pastor

The Battle for the Church: 1517–1644: Constantine to Christ

1620 Leyden (Scrooby) church emigrates to New World

1625-1649 CHARLES I

1633-1641 Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury

1633-1638 First Particular Baptist church formed

1640 Long Parliament begins

1642 First Particular Baptist church formed with baptism by
immersion. Richard Blunt as pastor

1642 First Civil War starts

1643-1649 The Westminster Assembly

1644 First Particular Baptist Confession of Faith

The Gains

- Scripture was the sole authority in their churches in 1644, not the Fathers, tradition and the pope, as it had been in the one Catholic Church in 1517.
- Christ was King in their churches, whereas the pope had been the Supreme Pontiff over all the Church in 1517. The Particular Baptists were firm advocates of Christ's unique right to rule his people by his Spirit through his word.
- The New Testament was the pattern, the rule and order of their churches and the way they saw the advance of the gospel in the world – not the theories based on Constantine. I do not say they perfectly attained their goal, but the New Testament, and only the New Testament, was their pattern.
- Their churches were free of State control in 1644, whereas the Church and State were one in 1517.
- They preached the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace, not salvation by works and merits through man's free will.
- They baptised believers only, and that by immersion, in place of the almost universal practice of the baptismal regeneration of infants by sprinkling in 1517. And they

accepted as members of their churches none but baptised believers who lived consistently with their profession.

- The simple, symbolic remembrance of Christ in his Supper had replaced the abomination of the Mass.
- Religion was a voluntary matter for them, not something to be enforced by kings and parliaments and magistrates and armies. Spiritual discipline was a church matter and the concern of the church alone. The means to be used were spiritual; not carnal, such as prison, the sword and the stake.
- Instead of one all-embracing Church, their churches were separate and independent.

Can we not learn from this history before it is too late? What lessons should stay with us? If we choose not to remember, we shall forget; if we forget, we shall lose what was won for us, we shall lose our gospel liberty. And if we lose that, we shall have to fight the battle all over again.

First, the Bible tells us plainly that God is sovereign in all things, over all men, and in all affairs.

Secondly, though God is sovereign, we still have to do our part.

Thirdly, the Bible tells us that the way of Christ is the way of suffering.

Fourthly, let us remember the emphasis which Scripture puts upon the *ekklēsia*.

Fifthly, another very important lesson we have learned is that Constantine was a disaster.

Sixthly, we have been reminded, surely, that men are but fallible mortals.

Seventhly, we must always bear in mind that what we do affects the generations following on behind us – for good or ill.

Eighthly, and finally, the *ekklēsia* is God's *ekklēsia*.

Last Word

Let us never forget that, being open to the Spirit and holding an open Bible, we must always be reforming. So many, alas, stop at 1647 or 1689. Let us never forget – nor fail to act on – John Robinson’s word on the 21st July, 1620, to the departing believers at Delft Haven:

I am confident the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word. I bewail the state and condition of the Reformed churches, who have come to a full-stop in religion, and will go no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn beyond what Luther saw; the Calvinists, they stick where Calvin left them. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were shining lights in their times, yet God did not reveal his whole will unto them, and if they were alive today they would be as ready to and willing to embrace further light, as that they had received. Keep in mind our church covenant, our promise and covenant with God and one another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written word. But take heed what you receive for truth – examine it well and compare it and weigh it with other scriptures of truth before you receive it. It is not possible that the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-Christian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.¹⁴⁴

To close with Scripture:

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world

¹⁴⁴ See my ‘A Thanksgiving Day Thought’.

was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 11:32 – 12:2).

