

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES  
VOLUME THIRTEEN

Books by David H.J.Gay referred to in this volume:

*Attracting Unbelievers to Church: Points to Ponder.*

*Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists.*

*Battle for the Church: 1517-1644 (second edition).*

*Believers Under the Law of Christ.*

*Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law.*

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*Three Verses Misunderstood: Galatians 3:23-25 Expounded.*

*To Confront or Not to Confront?: Addresses to Unbelievers.*



# **New-Covenant Articles**

*Volume Thirteen*

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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## *Note to the Reader*

This is the thirteenth volume in my collected articles on the new covenant. Although such pieces will continue to be posted on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page, 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.

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),<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

## *A Very Dangerous Word*

Of all the books and articles I have written or sermons I have preached, none cuts me – personally – deeper than this brief article. As I write it, as I read it, I sense the force of it. I want to. I need to. I must.

And, reader, so must you.

Even though I do not want to fault anybody for a word, nevertheless, there is a word which, if used in the wrong place, leads to extremely serious consequences. Indeed, I do not see how it could be more serious.

The word I have in mind is ‘about’. Of course, ‘about’ is a perfectly good word, and can be used in admirable ways, but there are occasions when, as I say, this little word ‘about’ poses immense problems. I have two issues in mind.

Take preaching.

We know what we should be doing when we stand to preach; we know what we should expect when we listen to a preacher. Or we ought to! Scripture tells us plainly enough.

Consider Paul. He spelled it out to the Corinthians:

We preach Christ crucified... Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 1:23; 9:16).

Take Philip. Scripture records that when he met the Ethiopian eunuch – who was reading Isaiah 53 – then:

...Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus (Acts 8:35).

And we have Christ’s standing manifesto for his people throughout the age:

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

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Following the dispersion of the early believers (apart from the apostles) from Jerusalem:

...those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ... When [Peter and John, who had been sent to look into the work] had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-5,25).

Further afield:

There were some... men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:20).

And:

When [Barnabas and Saul] arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews (Acts 13:5).

When Paul stood before the Areopagus in Athens, he was blunt:

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

As he told the Romans:

I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome... I make it my ambition to preach the gospel (Rom. 1:15; 15:19).

And, in concluding his letter to the Romans, the apostle rounded it off by speaking of:

...the preaching of Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:25).

As he explained to the Corinthians:

I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 2:12).

I leave it there. The point is made. Quoting scores of other scriptures would only further enforce the point. Our duty, our privilege, is to preach the gospel, to preach the word of God; above all, to preach Christ. Various words are used to describe the activity – preach, herald, declare, announce, proclaim, and

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such like<sup>1</sup> – but our duty is plain: not to beat about the bush and preach, declaim, herald *about* the gospel, *about* Christ, but to get straight to it and preach the gospel, preach the word of God; above all, preach Christ.

The point is this:

*We are to preach the gospel, preach Christ; we are not to preach **about** the gospel, preach **about** Christ.*

There is a world of difference between the two. In this context, the word ‘about’ ruins all. Ruins it, I say.

I know of no text which tells me I must ‘preach about’ Christ.

So much for preaching in this regard. We are to preach Christ and not preach about Christ.

The second issue cuts even deeper. Preaching is one thing; personal experience is another. I am talking about the difference between knowing Christ and knowing ‘about’ Christ.

Remember what Christ declared in his great prayer of intercession:

This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).

God had made it clear in the prophets:

Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows me [the LORD] (Jer. 9:23-24).

No wonder, then, that Paul prayed for the Ephesians:

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him (Eph. 1:17).

Hence he could speak of the purpose of the gospel ministry for every believer:

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Preaching*.

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...[that] we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood (Eph. 4:13).

So much so, as he told the Philippians:

I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... that I may know him (Phil. 3:8,10).

And Peter spoke of it:

[God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence (2 Pet. 1:3).

As did John:

By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments... We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 2:3; 5:20).

This last extract holds the key. Understanding – knowledge, in that sense – is involved, but this knowledge or understanding must lead us to a felt knowledge, a personal experience, of Christ. Otherwise, it amounts to nothing. The biblical use of ‘know’ certainly carries this intimate sense (cf. Gen. 4:1,17,25; for instance).

Just like preaching – that it must not be preaching ‘about’ – so with knowing. There is a world of difference between knowing Christ, knowing God in Christ, and knowing ‘about’ God, knowing ‘about’ Christ.

The other week, a man in the congregation, wanting to encourage me, spoke to me after my sermon. And he succeeded: he did encourage me. Driving home what I had said, he exclaimed: ‘It is not knowing *it*, experiencing *it*; it is knowing *him*, experiencing *him*!’ or words to that effect. First class!

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones spoke about ‘the danger of knowing “about” a subject rather than knowing it’:

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What a difference there is between preaching about the gospel and preaching the gospel! It is possible to preach round the gospel and say things about it without ever presenting it. This is quite useless – indeed it [is]<sup>2</sup> very dangerous. It may be true of us that we know ‘about’ these things, but do not really know them. And this, of course, becomes all-important when we realise that the whole end and object of theology is to know God! A person! Not a collection of abstract rules, nor a number of philosophical propositions, but God! A person! To know him! – ‘The only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent!’<sup>3</sup>

Again:

We are to preach the gospel, and not to preach about the gospel. That is a very [*sic*] vital distinction, which one cannot easily put into words, but which is nevertheless really important. There are men who think that they are preaching the gospel when actually in fact they are simply saying things about the gospel... [Some] talk constantly about ‘the word’, and say things about ‘the word’. But that is not what we are called to do; we are called to preach the word and to present the word, and to bring the word directly to people. We are not simply to say things about it, we are actually to convey it itself. We are the channels and the vehicles through which this word is to pass to the people.<sup>4</sup> Another way I can put that is to say that we are not called just to say things about the gospel. I remember a type of preaching fifty years ago and more,<sup>5</sup> which was often described as ‘praising the gospel’. The comment on the sermon and the preacher was, that he had praised the gospel. He had been saying wonderful things about it, or showing how wonderful it was. I suggest that that is wrong. [It

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<sup>2</sup> Lloyd-Jones had ‘can be’.

<sup>3</sup> D.M.Lloyd-Jones: ‘Knowledge – False and True’, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, pp31-32.

<sup>4</sup> This must not be taken to mean that hearers must accept the preacher’s words as absolute truth. Every hearer is responsible for testing the preacher’s words against Scripture (Acts 17:11).

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones was speaking in 1969, so he was referring to the opening decades of the 20th century.

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is wrong! – DGJ].<sup>6</sup> The gospel is wonderful, the gospel is to be praised, but that is not the preacher's primary task. He is to 'present', to declare, the gospel.

Or let me put it like this. The business of the preacher is not to present the gospel academically. This again is done frequently. The preacher can analyse it and show its parts and portions, and show how excellent it is; but still he is saying things about the gospel, whereas we are called to preach the gospel, to convey it, and to bring it directly to the individuals who are listening to us, and to bring it to the whole man. So let us be clear that we are not to talk about the gospel as if it were something outside us. We are involved in it; we are not to look at it just as a subject, and to say things about it; it itself is being directly presented and conveyed to the congregation through us.<sup>7</sup>

Lloyd-Jones recorded the deplorable way in which he had been treated as a young man when the minister suggested – suggested, mark you – that he become a church member:

I was received into the church because I could give the right answers to various set questions; but I was never questioned or examined in an experimental sense.<sup>8</sup>

Alas, despite Lloyd-Jones' popularity, despite his clear warning fifty years ago, nowhere is this confusion of 'knowing Christ' and 'knowing about Christ' more clearly manifest than in much of today's preaching,<sup>9</sup> and in evangelism-by-courses-in-Christianity. The doling out of facts, often tediously reinforced by PowerPoint, the learning of facts, the ability to repeat facts is not the same as preaching Christ, and calling for a personal, felt knowledge of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Not by a long chalk!

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<sup>6</sup> It did not die out all those years ago! How often I hear a preacher telling me how wonderful the gospel is – or asking me in a weak way if I agree that it is wonderful. Oh that they would actually preach it to me, actually preach Christ!

<sup>7</sup> D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Preaching & Preachers*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1971, pp67-68.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Preaching* p152.

<sup>9</sup> See the note just above.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, my 'Beware of Parrots'; *Relationship; Secret; No Safety*.

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As Joseph Hart said, true belief is more than notion:

*Let us ask th'important question,  
(Brethren, be not too secure),  
What it is to be a Christian?  
How we may our hearts assure!  
Vain is all our best devotion,  
If on false foundations built:  
True religion's more than notion;  
Something must be known and felt.*

Just so! Something must be *known and felt*. In fact, I would improve Hart: *Someone* must be known, and our relationship to him must be felt!

Let me remind you of how I began this article:

Of all the books and articles I have written or sermons I have preached, none cuts me – personally – deeper than this brief article. As I write it, as I read it, I sense the force of it. I want to. I need to. I must.

And, reader, so must you.

There is no neutrality. We either know God or we simply know something about him. Eternal consequences hang on the difference. One is saving; the other is not. Remember the words of Christ:

This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).

Listen to Paul:

To the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work (Tit. 1:15-16).

Reader, do you know – know in a felt sense – do you know God in Christ? Or do you merely know some facts about him, and that is all?



## *The Divine Alchemist*

In this article,<sup>13</sup> I want to spend a few minutes thinking about the Divine Alchemist. What am I talking about? Better: Whom am I talking about?

I remind you that an alchemist was one of those men – most of whom lived in medieval times – who were looking for a panacea, a cure for every disease. Alchemists were also trying to find a substance which would turn base metal into gold. When George Herbert, in his poem *The Elixir*, spoke of ‘the stone that turneth all to gold’, he was referring to the alchemist’s quest for that elixir. But, of course, alchemy was doomed, a forlorn hope. There is no such elixir; there is no substance that will turn base metal into gold.

However, a real alchemist does exist. In fact, he is the only true alchemist. He is the Divine Alchemist. The Divine Alchemist can actually perform the miracle – and that is what it is: a miracle! – of changing base into precious. Indeed, the Divine Alchemist can do something far greater than turn lead into gold; he can take dead sinners and turn them, change them, make them into living saints.

I am, of course, speaking of the Holy Spirit. And what I’m talking about is what the Bible calls regeneration, being born again, being born of the Spirit, being born from above, being born anew.

All men, women and children need this regeneration; and we – each and every one of us – need it from birth. For we – all of us – are born dead in sin (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:1-3). As Jesus told Nicodemus: ‘You must be born again’. He explained: ‘You can be religious’ – indeed, Nicodemus, being a member of the ruling

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<sup>13</sup> This article or tract began its passage through this world as a very short audio. See my ‘Gospel Snippets’ on my sermonaudio.com and YouTube pages.

Jewish council, was very religious – ‘but religion, even the Jewish religion, is not enough; you need to be born again, you must be born again. Unless you are born again, regenerated, born from above, born anew, born of the Spirit, you will never enter the kingdom.<sup>14</sup> What is more, you will never even see the kingdom. Spiritually speaking, you are blind; you can’t see. You’re deaf; you can’t hear. You’re dumb; you can’t speak. You’re dead. You must be born again, born of the Spirit’.

So said Christ to Nicodemus. Here is the actual record:

Jesus answered [Nicodemus]: ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God’. Nicodemus said to him: ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered: ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water<sup>15</sup> and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you: “You must be born again”. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit’ (John 3:3-8).

Here we have it – rather, here we have him: the Divine Alchemist, the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, he is so powerful that he can take dead sinners and make them into living saints. In his sovereign power, he does it by removing the heart of stone from the sinner, removing the deadness, and implanting a living heart, a living mind, a new mind, a new disposition, a new attitude, a new spirit. He makes the spiritually dead to live. As God declared through the prophet:

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and

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<sup>14</sup> The kingdom in question is Christ’s realm of indescribable bliss for all who belong to it. See my ‘Thoughts on the Kingdom’ on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page.

<sup>15</sup> This ‘water’ does not refer to baptism. As ‘fire’ (Matt. 3:11), it speaks of the purifying, cleansing power and effect of regeneration. See my *Infant*.

## *The Divine Alchemist*

give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my just decrees (Ezek. 36:26-27).<sup>16</sup>

So, combining John 3:3-8 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 (among other passages), it is clear that nothing but this sovereign regeneration will do. Unless we're born again, we will never see the kingdom. It's only born-again sinners who feel and know that they are sinners. That's one mark of regeneration – conviction of sin (John 16:8-9). But it does not stop there. It is only regenerate sinners who actually repent of their sins before God. Again, only regenerate sinners can, by God's grace, by the work of the Divine Alchemist, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trust him, and receive him as their Saviour and Lord, and so love and obey him. Moreover, not only can they trust Christ; by God's Spirit that is what they do. They are made a new creation (Matt. 19:25-26; John 1:10-13; 6:63-65; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:13; Tit. 3:4-7; 1 Pet. 1:2-3,23-25; 1 John 3:9-10; 4:7-8; 5:1-5, for instance).

Nothing but regeneration by the Spirit will do the work; nothing else, nothing less than regeneration by the Spirit, can effect it. Nobody but the Spirit can change dead sinners into living saints. Churchianity will not do it; churchianity can't do it. Sadly, today, many people (including many evangelicals) are becoming more and more accustomed to thinking that church attendance, that churchianity, will somehow do the job. It won't! No! Not religion, but regeneration! Regeneration by the sovereign grace and power of the Divine Alchemist, the Holy Spirit – the only one who can take dead sinners and turn them into living saints – is essential: 'You must be born again'.

So, I ask you: Have you been born again? Are you conscious that you're a sinner? Are you aware that you must repent? Do you repent? Will you turn to Christ and confess that you're a sinner? Will you trust him? Will you believe upon him? Will you receive and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Unless you do, you will never enter the kingdom; you

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<sup>16</sup> In new-covenant terms, these 'just decrees' are gospel commands.

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will never even see it. Only God's Spirit can effect the change. Don't think reading the Bible is enough. Don't think that praying will do it. Don't think that church attendance will do it. Don't think that baptism will do it. Don't think that completing a course of instruction will do it. Nor will mere imitation. Don't think that learning the lingo will do it. It won't. Religion won't do it. Being decent won't do it.

You must be born again. And the Divine Alchemist, the Holy Spirit, is the only one who can regenerate dead sinners; in particular, he is the only one who can regenerate you. Never forget: *you must be born again*.

If my words have not been sufficient, perhaps those of Joseph Hopkins might be:

*Sinners! this solemn truth regard;  
Hear, all you sons of men!  
For Christ the Saviour has declared:  
'You must be born again'.*

*Whate'er might be your birth or blood,  
The sinner's boast is vain;  
Thus says the glorious Son of God:  
'You must be born again'.*

*Our nature totally depraved,  
The heart a sink of sin;  
Without a change we can't be saved,  
'You must be born again'.*

*That which is born of flesh is flesh,  
And flesh it will remain:  
Then marvel not that Jesus says:  
'You must be born again'.*

## *Any Thoughts?*

Judging by the amount of time, energy and money spent on sermons – their production, delivery and absorption – and judging by the priority evangelical churches give to the sermon, most evangelicals must think that listening to sermons is the prime way for them to grow in knowledge of Scripture and spiritual experience.

Judging by the number of sermons delivered by past and present preachers which are freely available on the internet, and which can be heard at all hours, night and day,<sup>17</sup> and judging by the number of downloads and likes that these sermons are awarded, this generation of evangelical believers certainly must be the most sermon-saturated ever.

Putting all this together, contemporary evangelicals must be the most informed, the best taught, the most scripturally literate believers ever.

Are they?

I don't think so. Take doctrine. Doctrinal understanding is at a very low ebb, and declining. Doctrinal curiosity is becoming virtually non-existent. Doctrinal distinctives, thought to be divisive, are played down, withering on the vine. Doctrinal principles and practices are no longer key when choosing a church. Or so it seems to me.

Maybe I am wrong, wrong on all counts.

But if there is any substance in what I say, how can this be? Is it the fault of the preachers? Is it the fault of the hearers? Or is the basic idea wrong; that is, sermons are not the best way, the

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<sup>17</sup> It might be pointed out that I am shooting myself in the foot. Let me reply by saying that while I want my discourses to be informative, dispensing information is not my prime purpose in preaching; no, not by a long way! I aim to reach the heart through the mind, move the will and so change the experience on the basis of Scripture.

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scriptural way, for believers to grow in knowledge and spirituality? Or is it some combination of all three? Or is there something else we should be looking at?

What do you think?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For my views, see my *Preaching; Sowed*.

## *The Church Attacked: When, and Without or Within?*

### *The church – the *ekklēsia* – is under attack*

The gospel and the *ekklēsia* are always under attack. The devil sees to that! As Hugh Latimer put it in 1548:

And now I would ask a strange question: Who is the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England, that passes all the rest in doing his office? I can tell, for I know him who it is; I know him well. But now I think I see you listening and hearkening that I should name him. There is one that passes all the other, and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will you know who it is? I will tell you: it is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure [that is, his spiritual responsibilities]; you shall never find him unoccupied; he is ever in his parish; he keeps residence at all times; you shall never find him out of the way, call for him when you will, he is ever at home; the [most] diligent preacher in all the realm; he is ever at his plough: no lording nor loitering can hinder him; he is ever applying his business, you shall never find him idle, I warrant you.

And what is the devil's business? Latimer again:

His office is to hinder the gospel and the *ekklēsia*,<sup>1</sup> to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery [as one among countless errors]. He is [as] ready as he can be wished for to set forth his plough; to devise as many ways as [he] can... to deface and obscure God's glory.<sup>2</sup>

For 'England' read 'the world', and for 1548 read 'throughout the gospel age'. Satan began his attack right from the start, and until the end of time he will never let up. Believers, consequently, must always be on the *qui vive*, keeping a weather

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<sup>1</sup> Original 'hinder religion'.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Latimer: 'Sermon of the Plough' before King Edward VI in 1548.

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eye open for the latest threat. This is the responsibility of each and every believer; above all, it is must be the special concern of the elders of the local *ekklēsia*.

Satan is at the bottom of such attacks:

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:10-20).

Satan uses men, of course. As Paul was constrained to write:

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive (Rom. 16:17-18).

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be

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rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed...

Command and teach these things... Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Tim. 4:1-16).

So far, so good. There is no question but that believers – especially elders – must always be on the watch, always taking steps to protect the *ekklēsia* and maintain the gospel. This does not mean that we should be heresy hunters, quick on the draw, shooting from the hip, but neither is it right for us to be sleepwalking, or as easy as an old shoe. God has not left such instructions and warnings on record to no purpose. The fact that there are these passages in Scripture dealing with false teaching and those who promulgate it – even whole books (Galatians, for example) – shows us the importance of what we are considering. The Spirit, by setting the above-quoted principles and commands in Scripture, has left us in no doubt where our duty lies.

But here we need to stress that *the attack we have to deal with is the attack that is being made now.*

### ***The attack is always now***

Why do I say this?

Believers, alas, can so easily concern themselves with the wrong time; that is, some protagonists relish the slaying of old dragons, dragons long since put to death, while ignoring contemporary issues, especially those right under their nose. So that they can sidestep problems in the present to get on with attacks in the distant past, not a few keep a powerful broom handy, along with a plentiful supply of carpets under which to brush awkward questions. It is worse than useless, however, to be adept at dealing with yesterday's defeated attacks, while ignoring problems much closer to home – in the very bosom of the local *ekklēsia*, indeed. Of course, it can be a very pleasant task

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grappling with old, long-dead dragons – dealing with errors which have no relevance to the local assembly – but today’s attacks need to be faced today. Like charity, watchfulness begins at home.

There is a further question that must be asked – and answered: Which direction should we especially face?

### ***Which direction?***

Let me explain my meaning by way of illustration. During the Second World War, everybody (not least the Germans) knew that the allies had to invade mainland Europe – first across the Mediterranean from North Africa, and then across the English Channel from Southern England. As Winston Churchill said about the first, any fool (I paraphrase) knew it had to be Sicily (as the allies were planning). Moreover, a glance at the map shows at once that across the Straits of Dover was the obvious, the shortest, route into northern France, the closest to Berlin. (The allies, however, were planning to invade Normandy). Consequently, the best the allies could hope for was to persuade Hitler that they had chosen Greece and not Sicily for the southern invasion, and had agreed and settled on the Pas de Calais in the north for D-Day, and get him to move top-quality divisions to defend the wrong places, facing the wrong way, facing the wrong (that is, non-existent) enemy. In both cases, Hitler was deceived – by Operation Mincemeat over the invasion of Sicily, and by Operation Bodyguard over the invasion of Normandy. Fooled by the deceptions which had been foisted upon him, to counter each supposed invasion, he moved and kept crack troops to defend non-existent points of attack. He was utterly misled over both, and the allies successfully invaded Europe while saving the lives of many men who would otherwise have been lost in the assault.

Such is the danger of getting ready for the enemy, but expecting the attack in the wrong place.

The point is, should we expect attacks on the *ekklēsia* (and, hence, the gospel) from without or within?

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The question is invidious, of course: the *ekklēsia* (and, hence, the gospel) is always under attack from both directions – from without and from within.

But which is the more dangerous?

From within.

***An internal attack is worse than an external – every time***

Take Israel.

Right from the start, at Kadesh Barnea, it was the defeatists from within, among the spies – not the Canaanites – which caused Israel so much trouble.

True enough, Israel had to cope with enemies from without, but it was the internal enemies that were the more dangerous; namely, the false prophets, who led – or at least, encouraged – Israel away from the Mosaic covenant. Encouraged by the false teaching and flattering promises of such prophets, Israel and Judah sinned and were consequently taken into captivity.

And, following Judah's return from exile, the leaders Ezra and Nehemiah had to keep their eyes open for infiltrators and fifth columnists,<sup>3</sup> as well as external enemies (Ez. 4:1-3; Neh. 6:1-14,18-19).

As with Israel in the old covenant, so with the *ekklēsia* in the new: internal attacks are more dangerous than external – and they are bad enough!

I am not alone in saying this.

Take James S.Stewart (speaking and writing seventy years ago):

The greatest drag on Christianity today, the most serious menace to the *ekklēsia*'s<sup>4</sup> mission, is not the secularisation without, [but] it is the reduced Christianity within, the religious

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<sup>3</sup> A fifth columnist is a member of an internal group working for the enemy.

<sup>4</sup> Original 'church's'.

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generalities and innocuous platitudes of a pallid, anaemic Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

And (bang up to date) Michael Youssef:

The greatest threats to the *ekklēsia*<sup>6</sup> have always been internal. The greatest threats have come from those who claim to be Christians, who are leaders in the *ekklēsia*,<sup>7</sup> but whose teachings and doctrines are at odds with God's word.<sup>8</sup>

Above all, we have Scripture.

As Paul told the elders of the *ekklēsia* at Ephesus:

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

As he said to the *ekklēsias* of Galatia, warning them about the preachers they were so fond of:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:6-10).

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<sup>5</sup> James S.Stewart: *A Faith to Proclaim*, being book which came from his Lyman Beecher lecture at Yale, 1951. See also Francis C.Lightbourne: 'One Gospel', *The Living Church*. July 5th, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Original 'church'.

<sup>7</sup> Original 'church'.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Youssef: *Saving Christianity?: The Danger In Undermining Our Faith – and What You Can Do About It*, Tyndale Momentum, Carol Stream, 2020, p4.

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Having explained how these men had penetrated the *ekklēsia*, and having set out the havoc they were wreaking, the apostle reminded the Galatians what he had done about it (and, consequently, what they should do about it if and when it erupted again):

Because of false brothers secretly brought in – who slipped in [had infiltrated our ranks, had sneaked in among us] to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery – to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you (Gal. 2:4-5).

As he warned Timothy:

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Tim. 4:16).

The apostle explained why constant vigilance is necessary:

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. 4:3-4).

Do not miss the heavy emphasis upon internal attack in those five extracts.

Paul made much the same point when writing to Titus:

There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach... Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth (Tit. 1:10-14).

Nor was Peter slow to warn his readers of the same:

False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1).

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And then we have Jude:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in [secretly slipped in, wormed their way in] unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude 3-4).

So watch!

Believers must not fall asleep, must not be gullible about how and what they listen to, expecting attack but looking in the wrong direction for it. Some so-called Christian preachers pose a far greater danger than avowed agnostics or atheists. A nice bedside manner is no guarantee that the physician is a safe physician, let alone a good one. The cults have to be guarded against, yes, but we need to keep our eyes and ears open for enemies within the gates.

### ***Why issue the warning now?***

That's the wrong question. The real question is: Why *not* draw attention to the danger now? The warning is always relevant, always necessary. Right from day one, it has been so – witness the scriptural warnings throughout this article. Moreover, we have Paul's plain statement:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1).

Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

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And by ‘last days’, ‘later times’, or ‘last times’, we are to understand the entire gospel age from Pentecost until Christ’s return. ‘The last days’ started with the first coming of Christ (Heb. 1:1-2). Peter knew he was in ‘the last days’ when he preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-17). John could say ‘it is the last hour’ (1 John 2:18). ‘The last days’ or ‘the latter times’ or ‘the last time’ or ‘these last times’ all refer to the gospel age (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18). Christ has come ‘at the end of the ages... to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Heb. 9:26); ‘the ends [fulfilment] of the ages have come’ upon us (1 Cor. 10:11). All that was said nearly 2000 years ago!

That’s why the warning is necessary today. Indeed, it could be argued that the warning has never been more badly needed than it is at the present time. Let me list some of the reasons.

The general level of spiritual discernment among believers is very low, and sinking all the time.

Doctrinal distinctives count for less and less for most believers; stressing doctrine gets in the way of the great shibboleth; namely, the re-engineering of the church for evangelism.

Reliance on ‘the pastor’, ‘the man of God’, and his pulpit ministrations – with the concomitant ‘touch not the Lord’s anointed’ – shows no sign of diminishing.

Conditions like these – and, no doubt, others could be added to the list – make the *ekklēsia* ripe for attack. And from within.

### ***Above all***

Yes, we have to keep our eye open for attacks upon the *ekklēsia* and the gospel, and yes, we must be concerned for our fellow-believers individually. We must not doze off, but keep a prayerful watch (Matt. 24:42-43; 25:13; 26:41; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21:36; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:6; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 3:2-3; 16:15, for instance). Yes, all that is true.

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But there is one above all we should be concerned about – self (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul was explicit:

Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

Do not misread the ‘let’ – it has all the force of apostolic command.

Peter, too, as he closed his second letter, spelled it out:

Therefore, beloved... be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Pet. 3:15-18).

May we never have to echo this lament:

They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept! (Song 1:6).

## *The BBC Gets It Wrong Again!*

An article, written by Keiligh Baker, concerning Prince Archie's sprinkling, appeared on today's (July 6th 2019) BBC website. It was entitled: 'What can we expect from Archie's christening?'. Alas, it contains an error of massive proportions. I quote:

Baptisms [that is, baby sprinklings] are a must for Windsor babies... Royal infants are often welcomed into the Christian faith [that is, made a Christian] within weeks of being born.

Not so!

The fact is, no amount of water applied to a baby will make that baby a true Christian, a real believer. What it will do is welcome that baby into Christendom.

Now Christendom and real Christianity are chalk and cheese.

To be made a real Christian, a sinner has to be born again, regenerated by the sovereign act of the Spirit of God. That regenerate sinner then, being convicted of his sin, repents and trusts Christ, his blood and righteousness. As I say, no amount of water, applied by any so-called priest, using whatever form of words he chooses, however seemingly hallowed by hoary tradition, will accomplish that!

Sad to say, this is not the first time the BBC has made the same mistake. Just before Prince George was sprinkled, the BBC reporter had the gall to announce that Prince George would be made a Christian at three o'clock that afternoon! Far from it! He was made a member of the Church of England, a fully-paid up member of Christendom – and that is all. He had been born in sin – as all of us are – and unless he repents and calls upon Christ, he will die in his sins. As will Prince Archie.

As will you!

Do not make the BBC's mistake!



## *In Church or in Christ?*

In their turn, both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ bluntly confronted the Jews over their descent from Abraham; specifically, the Jews' presumptuous boasting about their physical descent from the patriarch.

Take John the Baptist:

Do not presume to say to yourselves [he told them]: 'We have Abraham as our father', for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up [spiritual] children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matt. 3:9-10).

In other words, John was telling the Jews that while they were indeed physical descendants of Abraham, it did not mean that they were necessarily his spiritual descendants. A man might be a Jew, but this did not mean that he was, as Abraham was, a believer, a child of God. And that wasn't all: the Jews had to realise that physical descent wasn't the issue: it was a man's spiritual state which counted. And as for spiritual descendants for Abraham, rubbing salt into the wound (as his hearers would have thought it), John told them bluntly that God could raise spiritual children for Abraham from the most unlikely material – lumps of rock!

Strong meat!

The Lord Jesus Christ took a similar line when addressing the Jews who had nominally believed in him. He opened thus:

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).

His listeners didn't like that, not one bit! Having been touched on the raw, they snapped back (you can almost see their index fingers jabbing their puffed-out chests):

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We are [the natural] offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say: ‘You will become free’? (John 8:33).

Jesus told them straight:

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are [the natural] offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father (John 8:34-38).

The Jews resented this, and how! They retorted:

Abraham is our father (John 8:39).

Jesus came back, spelling it out:

If you were Abraham’s [spiritual] children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did (John 8:39-40).

They exploded:

We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father – even God (John 8:41).

Jesus again:

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires... Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God (John 8:42-47).

Yet again, strong meat!

## *In Church or in Christ?*

What was it about this issue, this spiritual connection of the Jews with Abraham, that caused John and Jesus to be so confrontational, so direct, so passionate?

As both men knew, regeneration was the number-one issue. It was the absolute necessity of regeneration that moved Jesus to cut across Nicodemus in so stark a manner:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you: 'You must be born again'. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8).

And that brings us to the point. We are not dealing with some local, temporary issue which concerned the Jews some 2000 years ago, something of little or no consequence to us today. Taking that line would be to make a mistake of the first magnitude.

We have to remember that both John and Jesus were ministering at the watershed of the ages,<sup>1</sup> that breakpoint – that discontinuity – between the old covenant and the new. As Christ stated:

The law and the prophets were until John [the Baptist]; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it (Luke 16:16).

John the apostle put it this way:

The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

This supersession of the old covenant by the new signalled many major changes: the outward gave way to the inward; shadows were replaced by reality; ceremonies gave way to

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<sup>1</sup> See my 'Watershed of the Ages' on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page.

Christ; the weak<sup>2</sup> and ineffective was removed, and the effective established; and so on.<sup>3</sup> While there is a measure of continuity between the two covenants, it is their essential discontinuity which is vital. Nobody should try to cobble them together, as Christ's wineskins' parable makes clear:

No one puts a piece of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved (Matt. 9:16-17).

God gave the old covenant to Israel, and Israel only (Deut. 4:6-45; 5:26; 7:6-11; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 9:4), and he gave it to them as a temporary covenant, lasting only until Christ came, fulfilled it, and rendered it obsolete (2 Cor. 3:6-13; Gal. 3:19-24; Heb. 7:18-19,22; 8:13).<sup>4</sup> Sadly, Israel always was a mixed body, the majority being unregenerate, with only the minority – by anticipation in the new covenant – being regenerate.

And herein lies another two major differences between the old and new covenants. The new covenant is not confined to physical Israel, but extends worldwide, to all nations. More than that, membership of the new covenant has nothing to do with physical descent: the beneficiaries of the new covenant are the regenerate, and the regenerate only. And this is the point here.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In Christ, in the new covenant, 'God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do' (Rom. 8:3). In his *Commentary*, Calvin wrongly limited this to justification: The apostle 'means that the law has no power whatever to justify'. True, the law cannot justify, but that is not what Paul is asserting here. The context, from Rom. 6:1, has been about justification leading to progressive sanctification. Indeed, Paul's argument goes on until Rom. 8:39 and includes glorification. Trying to limit 'the law' to 'the ceremonial law' (a covenant-theology invention imposed on Scripture) is refuted by Heb. 7:18-19,22; 8:13. The old covenant in its entirety, not just some part of it, was weak and has been rendered obsolete.

<sup>3</sup> Read Hebrews.

<sup>4</sup> See my *Three*.

<sup>5</sup> For all this, and more, see my *Christ*.

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We must be clear: the issue is not a question of natural relationship to Abraham. That is not the point! Ever since the fall of Adam – long before Abraham – the human race has been divided into two, into two families, two seeds. And the consequences of this division are eternal. Apart from the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, every one born into the world has been – and (until the end of time) will be – born fallen in Adam, born under the wrath of God (John 3:36; Eph. 2:1-3). That means me; and it means you. And unless we are born again and transferred (Col. 1:13-14) or adopted (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:3-7; Eph. 1:5) out of Adam into Christ, we will eternally perish (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22,45-49). Nothing could be more serious than that! And that is why John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ were so passionate about the issue.

For the Jews, all this was couched in terms of their descent from Abraham – whether physical or spiritual. For Gentiles, the issue has nothing to do with physical descent from Abraham, but is a purely spiritual matter. Abraham is, in Scripture, the archetypal believer – ‘the [spiritual] father of all who believe’ (Luke 19:9; Rom. 4:11,16-17; Gal. 3:7). All who believe, therefore, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, are the spiritual children of Abraham.

*But the fundamental issue for us all is whether we are in Adam or in Christ.*

Let me prove it. I start with the Jews – those who can trace their physical descent from Abraham. Paul clearly laid out the issue:

No one is a [real, spiritual] Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a [real, spiritual] Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God (Rom. 2:28-29).

In other words, a real, spiritual Jew is one who is regenerate. A man may be a physical descendant of Abraham, but unless he is regenerate and so brought to saving faith he is not a spiritual descendant of Abraham. And that is what counts! He is not trusting Christ! And that’s fatal!

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As for Abraham himself, as Paul put it:

We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the [spiritual] father of all who believe without being circumcised [that is, believing Gentiles], so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the [spiritual] father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our [natural and/or spiritual] father Abraham had before he was circumcised [that is, he is the spiritual father of believing Jews].

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his [spiritual] offspring... (Rom. 4:9-16).

I break off. It is in this crucial passage that Paul takes the argument beyond the Jews and their physical and/or spiritual descent from Abraham, broadening it to encompass all men – whether Jew or Gentile. And the apostle states what really matters; namely a person's spiritual descent from Abraham, his trust in Christ:

... it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his [spiritual] offspring – not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one [who is a Gentile] who shares the faith of Abraham... In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the [spiritual] father of many nations, as he had been told (Rom. 4:16-18).

A little later, Paul set out the fundamental principle:

Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his [natural] offspring, but: 'Through Isaac shall your [spiritual] offspring be named'. This means that it is not the children of the flesh

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who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring (Rom. 9:6-8).

In other words, the great essential is election producing regeneration leading to saving trust in Christ. It is not a question of physical descent from Abraham, but of a spiritual relationship with God:

[Christ] was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own [that is, the Jews], and his own people [that is, the Jews, by and large] did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:10-13; see also John 11:52).

And this applies to all men – whether Jew or Gentile:

It is those of faith [whether Jew or Gentile] who are the [spiritual] sons of Abraham... If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's [spiritual] offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:7,29).

Being a Jew or Gentile is irrelevant:

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15).

The fact is, if a man is in Christ it is because he is elect and has been regenerated and brought to faith. He is, therefore, no longer a child of the devil but is a child of God (John 1:11-13; 8:47; 10:26; Rom. 11:5-7).

In short, each one of us is a child of Satan or of God (Matt. 13:38-39; John 8:44; 1 John 3:8-10), in the flesh or spirit (or Spirit) (John 3:6; Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 5:16-21), and we are living (spiritually speaking) on one of two mountains – Sinai (the law, by works, in Adam) or Zion (grace, by faith, in Christ) (Heb. 12:18-24), in one of two covenants – Hagar (law, by works, in Adam) or Sarah (grace, by faith, in Christ) (Gal. 4:21 – 5:1), in

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darkness or light (Luke 16:8; John 12:36; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5), far off from God or near (Eph. 2:13); and so on.<sup>6</sup>

This fundamental division governs all humanity.

No wonder John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ were so passionate about it, so direct. Clearly such a truth must never be brushed aside.

\* \* \*

*First*, let me directly address fellow-believers about the effect this doctrine must have on our evangelistic efforts. We must make sure that the reality of this fundamental division governs the way we approach sinners with the gospel. It, and its consequences, must be clearly set out in our addresses to them. This inevitably means confrontation. The preaching of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ, plus the preaching of the first believers as recorded in Acts, leaves no room for doubt on that score.<sup>7</sup> The people we address today are unregenerate or regenerate, and until they are regenerated and thus brought to conviction of sin, repentance and trust in Christ, they are utterly without God and without hope in the world (Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:13). As Christ told Nicodemus, unless a sinner is born again he will never see, let alone enter, the kingdom (John 3:3,6). No amount of surface tinkering will alter this solemn truth: until a sinner is taken out of Adam and brought into Christ, until he has passed from death to life and become a new creature (or creation) in Christ (John 5:24; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; 1 John 3:14), that sinner is lost, ruined.

Joseph Hopkins set Christ's words in a hymn:

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<sup>6</sup> Scripture constantly highlights the division – goats or sheep, on the left hand or right, walking the broad or narrow way, with lives built on sand or rock. Eternity seals it permanently in outer darkness or eternal bliss.

<sup>7</sup> See my *To Confront*.

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*Sinners! this solemn truth regard;  
Hear, all you sons of men!  
For Christ the Saviour has declared:  
'You must be born again'.*

*Whate'er might be your birth or blood,  
The sinner's boast is vain;  
Thus says the glorious Son of God:  
'You must be born again'.*

*Our nature totally depraved,  
The heart a sink of sin;  
Without a change we can't be saved,  
'You must be born again'.*

*That which is born of flesh is flesh,  
And flesh it will remain:  
Then marvel not that Jesus says:  
'You must be born again'.*

This vital distinction has not always been clearly made.

After the apostles came the Fathers. Although the Fathers knew that Christ had fulfilled the old covenant and rendered it obsolete (Heb. 7:18-19,22; 8:13), and although they were not ignorant of the parable of the wineskins (Matt. 9:16-17) (see above), even so they drove a chariot and horses through Scripture by going back to the old covenant, and bringing its principles into the new. They turned to the levitical priesthood in order to establish a theology and a practice which would eventually lead to a hierarchical clergy/laity split within a State-Church sustained by the abominable rite of baby sprinkling, with baptismal regeneration never far below the surface – if that! In a word, the Fathers, in cahoots with the Roman Emperors Constantine and Theodosius, invented the monstrosity of Christendom,<sup>8</sup> a hybrid Judaistic, paganised Christianity. This produced a catastrophic breakdown of the division between the unregenerate and the regenerate. Indeed, the advocates of Christendom gladly embraced both in one Church, thus setting up an institution which continues, to this day, to ruin a countless

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<sup>8</sup> See my *Pastor; Infant; Battle*; Appendix 2 in my *Relationship*.

number. For the Reformation, alas, while it accomplished much, invented a theology (Covenant Theology) which actually bolstered the confusion of the old and new covenants, and systematised the diabolical doctrine and practice of baby sprinkling, which, many, despite the tortuous metaphysics and double-speak of their teachers, think regenerates the baby. In this way, the Reformers solidified the concept of mixed – unregenerate and regenerate – churches. Indeed, not a few have gloried in such, and derided those – like the Anabaptists – who demand churches made up of the regenerate only.<sup>9</sup>

Sad to say, in their efforts to attract the unregenerate into ‘public worship’ ‘in church attendance’ (unmitigated Christendom-speak and practice) so as to evangelise them, a growing number of evangelicals have adopted programmes, devised schemes, and set up systems which inevitably further erode any clear distinction between the unregenerate and the regenerate; so much so, unless the tide is soon turned, virtually no separation between the *ekklēsia* and the world will be left.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, a generation of believers is being produced which knows little or nothing of this vital biblical principle of separation, and a generation of unbelievers is being produced which mistakes religion for regeneration, mistakes being ‘in church’ for being ‘in Christ’.<sup>11</sup> Conversion, instead of being a crisis (I do not imply a dramatic crisis), is becoming a process: evangelism is becoming a call to ‘attend – complete – a course of instruction in the elements of the faith’. Instead of: ‘Flee to Christ’, the cry is: ‘Come to Church’. Instead of unbelievers being confronted with Christ, no effort is spared to make them feel comfortable and at home among the saints. In this way, sinners are being made religious, when they need to be regenerated. Conformity not conversion will be the disastrous result.

And that is why I have written this article. Nothing could be more relevant. As a matter of urgency, we must recover the

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<sup>9</sup> See my *Infant; Battle*

<sup>10</sup> See my *Relationship; Attracting*.

<sup>11</sup> See my *Public Worship; Evangelicals Warned*.

## *In Church or in Christ?*

biblical, new-covenant principles which undergirded the way John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the first believers confronted sinners with the gospel. We mute the biblical ‘You must be born again’ at our peril, and to the ruin of a countless number.

Finally, let me address any reader who is mistaking religion for regeneration. I urge you not to rest content in church attendance: trust Christ alone for salvation.

If my words have failed to reach you, perhaps these from C.H.Spurgeon might:

So long as you trust in ceremonies, prayers, or good works, you shall not find eternal grace; but when stripped of all strength and power, you shall gain a glorious salvation in the Lord Jesus. If morality can join the pieces of a broken heart, the cement shall soon cease to bind, and the man shall again be as vile as ever. We must have a new heart and a right spirit, or vain will be all our hopes... It is easy enough to get religious notions and fancy yourself safe, but a real saving work is the work of God, and God alone. Seek not to the priest; he may console, but it is by deluding you. Seek not to your own self; for you may soothe yourself into the sleep of perdition. See that your heart be washed in the blood of Jesus; be careful that the Holy Spirit has his temple in it; and may God, of his great and sovereign grace, [awaken]<sup>12</sup> you that you don't deceive yourself.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Original ‘look to’.

<sup>13</sup> C.H.Spurgeon sermon 53.



## *Dichotomy False & True*

It is often said that unless a believer is under the ten commandments as his rule of life, he is an antinomian. Here is the dichotomy: under the ten commandments, or antinomian; under the law – the law of Moses – or lawless.

This dichotomy is false.<sup>1</sup>

I say this because Paul said as much:

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) (1 Cor. 9:21).

That is to say:

When addressing those outside (that is, not under) the law of Moses – Gentiles, pagans – I became as one outside (that is, not under) the law of Moses – but, of course, I am not outside the law of God – that is, I am not lawless, I am not even lawless – because I am under the law of Christ (John 14:15,21,23; 15:10 Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 1:25; 2:12).

That is why the dichotomy is false. No matter how many times it is parroted, false it remains. Just because a believer is not under the law – including the ten commandments – and, indeed, being in Christ he *is* freed from the law (Rom. 6:14 – 7:6; Gal. 3:25; 4:21 – 5:1) – he is not lawless or law-less; he is not an antinomian because he is not under the ten commandments as his rule of life.

Now Paul had already stated that, as a believer, though he had been raised a Jew, he was no longer under the law of Moses:

To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) (1 Cor. 9:20).

That is to say:

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<sup>1</sup> For my full argument, see my *Christ*.

## *Dichotomy False & True*

To those under the law of Moses – the Jews – I became as one under the law of Moses – even though not being myself under the law of Moses (1 Cor. 9:20).

And this leads to the true or real dichotomy which, alas, is sadly obscured by those who will persist in trotting out the false dichotomy.

At the time Paul was writing, the dichotomy was whether a person was a Jew or a Gentile, a pagan.

But the real dichotomy at that time – and so it is today – is whether a person is an unbeliever or a believer.

Reader, whether you are an unbeliever or a believer, you are under one law or another. If you are an unbeliever, you are under that rudimentary law written in every man's conscience (Rom. 2:14-15). If you are a believer, you are under the law of Christ.

So... which are you? Do you trust Christ – his blood and righteousness – for your salvation, having repented of your sin, and do you now live in submission to Christ under his law? Or are you still in your sins, under the wrath and condemnation of God under the law of death?

This is the real dichotomy – your dichotomy.

## *Evangelism: Then and Now*

This brief article is based on my short discourse on Acts 2:41-47 entitled 'The Early Church & Evangelism'.<sup>1</sup>

Here are the relevant words from Acts 2:

Those who received his [that is, Peter's] word were baptised [that is, dipped, plunged, immersed in water], and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The day of Pentecost was unique. Even so, while certain things that happened on that auspicious occasion belonged to the very early days of the gospel, and I, for one, do not expect to see them repeated, nevertheless, other aspects of the day showed abiding principles which are directly applicable to us. More than that, those principles are mandatory for us. Indeed, that is one of the main reasons why the Spirit moved Luke to record the day's events in Scripture.

Here, in short compass, we have a succinct account of the early church and evangelism; or, to put it the other way, evangelism and the early church. By 'evangelism', I mean the advance of the gospel in the world in the conversion of sinners.

Evangelism *and* the early church, I said. Words are important; small words are often the most important.<sup>2</sup> I did not say evangelism *in* the early church. As far as I can see, the New Testament is silent on evangelism within the *ekklēsia*.

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<sup>1</sup> The discourse may be found on my pages on sermonaudio and YouTube, and on my webpage (davidhjgay.com).

<sup>2</sup> Donald Barnhouse: 'In studying the word of God, we must never underestimate the importance of little words' (Donald G. Barnhouse: 'The Meaning of the Term "Baptism"', in Herbert F. Stevenson (ed.): *The Ministry of Keswick*, Second series, Marshall Morgan and Scott, London, 1964, p157).

Evangelism in those days took place *outside* the church. Startling as it may sound to many, it is the case.<sup>3</sup>

We are all very familiar with the thrilling story of the day of Pentecost. Out of a clear blue sky, the Holy Spirit came upon a handful of obscure, nervous, timid, doubting believers, and so stirred them that they began to speak. They could do nothing else. A crowd rapidly gathered. The Spirit then moved Peter – an unschooled (Acts 4:13) fisherman – to preach. And how! He did not stop at a mere recital of facts. He did not read prepared notes. No! He really preached Christ; that is, he freely proclaimed him, exalted him, pointed the crowd to him, uplifted him. He bluntly confronted his hearers with their sin, spelling out their personal responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ. By the Spirit, the apostle's preaching was convincing, convicting, piercing. So much so, many cried out in their anxiety to know what they should do. Without the slightest hesitation, Peter commanded them to repent and openly profess their repentance by being baptised – that is dipped, plunged, immersed in water – assuring them that all who did so would be saved, forgiven of all their sins. He went on pleading with the crowd, urging them again and again to repent and be baptised: 'With many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them' (Acts 2:40). About three thousand did believe – they 'received his word' – they did repent, and they were baptised, and in this way they were added to the band of believers.

What marked this glorious event? It was nothing but a demonstration of the absolute sovereignty of God; it was entirely spontaneous; it was effective in the conversion of sinners simply and entirely because of the power of the Spirit. It was not a church 'service'. There was no human scheme, no plan, no programme. It was, from first to last, a sovereign, spontaneous intervention by the Spirit who used obscure, untutored believers to bring about a glorious awakening in the conversion of sinners by the preaching of the gospel.

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<sup>3</sup> I will return to this. See my *The Evangelical Dilemma*.

What happened next?

The believers – both old and new – immediately settled into the fullest enjoyment of their *ekklēsia* life; that is, ‘they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers’. Indeed, they were occupied with *ekklēsia* life; I might say they were preoccupied, utterly taken up, with it: ‘they devoted themselves to’ it!<sup>4</sup>

The question that I want to raise is this: How did they continue to evangelise?

On this occasion, we don’t know – we are not told. But what we are told is that ‘the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved’; once again, we see the sovereignty of God in action. And everything points to this spread of the gospel as a side effect of the *ekklēsia* life of the believers, something additional to it: the believers were devoted to *ekklēsia* life, fully active in it, ‘and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved’.

We can go further. All the evidence (Act 2:14-41 and Acts 3 and on) leads to one conclusion: leaving aside the extraordinary signs which marked Pentecost – although, on certain occasions (Acts 8 and 10, for instance, at highly significant milestones in the spread of the gospel)<sup>5</sup> they were repeated – additions to the *ekklēsia* occurred in a similar way to the day of Pentecost; namely, the gospel was advanced by the sovereign, spontaneous intervention of the Spirit demonstrated in the effective preaching of the gospel, leading to the conversion of sinners. In other words, as in Acts 2:14-41, the Spirit, in his sovereignty (1 Cor. 12:4-11), made use of believers, as he gave them opportunity, to preach the gospel to the unconverted in order to bring them to salvation in Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> The Greek word speaks of a steadfast, intense, continuous perseverance.

<sup>5</sup> See my *Baptist*.

It is what we do not read that interests me. And it is at this point that the contrast with today is so stark. Hence my title: ‘Evangelism: Then and Now’.

Of course, arguing from silence carries a risk. But not in this case. For in what follows, there is not a whiff of a hint of a suggestion of anything to contradict the abundant positive evidence which supports it.<sup>6</sup>

As I have said, the believers were preoccupied with *ekklēsia* life, ‘devoted... to’ it! As the rest of the New Testament makes clear, this meant the fullest practical exercise of the priesthood of all believers under the principle of ‘members one of another’.<sup>7</sup>

The fact is, the first believers did not sinfully waste their time doing what Christ never commanded, trying to work out how to do what they had no warrant to do; namely, as so many do today, devising and refining schemes and programmes to attract pagans into *ekklēsia* life. Not a bit of it! Within the life of the assembly,<sup>8</sup> the believers nurtured themselves to the glory of God, while, as all the evidence shows, as they had opportunity *outside* the *ekklēsia* they preached the gospel to all who would give them a hearing, and did so in the power and demonstration of the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:18,23-25; 2:1-5).

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this, see my *The Evangelical Dilemma*. If unbelievers did assemble with the believers in the early days, it was an oddity, unsought by the saints (1 Cor. 14:23-25). This is not to say that the gospel should not be preached within the *ekklēsia*. See the Appendix ‘Gospel Preaching in Church: Eight Reasons’ in my *Relationship*. The apostolic letters – written to believers – are full of the gospel.

<sup>7</sup> See my *The Priesthood*.

<sup>8</sup> I think it almost certain that, with so many converts, and with the apostles all resident in Jerusalem at the time, they assembled in several places – homes, the temple courts, or wherever. Place, in the new covenant, is irrelevant (John 4). See my ‘The Place of “Place” in the New Covenant’. What is more, for the proper exercise of *ekklēsia* life, relative smallness of numbers is essential, and is the pattern we see repeated throughout the New Testament. See the chapter ‘Numbers and their Management’ in my *Relationship*.

In stark contrast, things are very different today; very different, indeed. The gold has become dim (Lam. 4:1). Today, evangelicals do all they can to attract the so-called unchurched into church attendance in the hope that, in the passage of time, something or another might happen to them. Such an idea never entered the heads of the first believers.

The contrast between the New Testament and today could not be greater.

### ***Conclusion***

In light of the above, I appeal to all evangelical believers – especially to elders – to get back to Scripture. We make the claim that Scripture is our authority. Let it be more than slogan!

Finally, I address any unbeliever who may be reading this: if you are being attracted into church attendance, you should understand the following vital point, and act upon it without delay: it is not church that you need; it is Christ! Church attendance will not save you. Indeed, as long as you remain unconverted, it will only add to your eternal danger. Nothing is more fatal, spiritually speaking, than religion. Only by repenting of your sin and trusting in Christ will you be saved. So trust him now. And having trusted him, be baptised (that is, dipped, plunged, immersed in water) in obedience to him, and so assemble with your fellow-believers and fully enter in to the life of the *ekklēsia*, and, by the Spirit, play your part in it.



# *Getting Galatians Right*

## *Introduction*

Ever since the time of the Reformation, most evangelical commentators and preachers have followed the path marked out by Martin Luther and taken the main subject of Paul's letter to the Galatians to be justification – justification by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone. Of course, justification is by faith through grace in Christ alone; I'm not for a moment suggesting otherwise. What is more, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul does make this very clear. Nevertheless, justification does not exhaust the teaching of Galatians. Far from it! The main topic – the burden – of Paul's letter to the Galatians is not justification, but justification leading to inevitable progressive sanctification in the life of the believer.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, there was something else which preoccupied the apostle in writing to the Galatians, and that was the rise and spread of false teaching among early believers. Paul's first letter – to the Galatians – plays a very important role in his response to this danger, but it does not stand alone: apostolic resistance to false teaching and false teachers is written large across the rest of the New Testament (Acts 15:1-35; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; 11:1-15; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 6:3-10; 2 Pet. 2:1-22; 1 John 2:18-27; 4:1-6; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3-23, for instance).

Paul knew that the Galatian believers had been infiltrated by false teachers and had been infected by their teaching, and he did something about it. Calling a spade a spade, he let his readers know that he was staggered that they were deserting the one who had called them, and taking up a false gospel – and doing it so rapidly:

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<sup>1</sup> There are two aspects of sanctification – positional and progressive. For both, see my *Positional* and my *Fivefold*.

## *Getting Galatians Right*

I am astonished [he wrote] that you are so quickly deserting him who called you<sup>2</sup> in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel (Gal. 1:6).

Moreover, he spelled out what had caused this rapid apostasy: false teachers – Judaisers, professing believers (please note) who wanted to impose the Mosaic law on believers – had infiltrated many of the *ekklēsias*, including those in Galatia, and they were wreaking havoc in the lives of the believers. The apostle had already come across the perpetrators, and confronted them:

False brothers secretly brought in – who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery – to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you (Gal. 2:4-5).

Paul, as I say, was utterly staggered by this rapid apostasy in Galatia; hence his letter, with its early ‘outburst’ following hard on the pointed absence of any complimentary introduction. Whatever criticism he might get for it, the issue was so pressing that he was not going to stand on ceremony or mince his words:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:6-10).

Strong stuff! But that’s the tone of the apostle’s letter. Dealing with false teaching, dealing with the false teachers, he went for

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<sup>2</sup> There has been much debate over ‘him who called you’; I take this to be God the Father, by the Spirit, effectually calling sinners to Christ (John 3:3-8; 6:37,40,44; Rom. 8:26-30; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:15-16; 5:5,6,8; 1 Thess. 2:12; 5:23-24).

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the jugular, exposed the cardinal point, and set out a powerful argument, one which never must be forgotten or sidelined. Nor did Paul confine his response to writing – he spoke openly, directly and personally about it, even to the extent of a public rebuke for Peter, a fellow-apostle, and Barnabas:

When Cephas [that is, Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all: ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’ (Gal. 2:11-14).

And it was not only the law; the believers were returning to their pre-regenerate days and adopting pagan principles and practices. Consequently, the apostle did not pull any punches over the law or paganism when he wrote to the Galatians. As for the law, see the entire letter; as for the law mixed with paganism, he said:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain (Gal. 4:8-11).

But it wasn’t only the apostasy of the believers in Galatia that alarmed the apostle; he could speak of ‘the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches’ (2 Cor. 11:28). Witness, therefore, the same earnestness, the same inward torment, evident in his rebuke to the Colossians over a similar issue:

[Christ] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

## *Getting Galatians Right*

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments... See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ...

Let no one pass judgment on you [that is, let nobody impose his own rules on you] in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations – 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used) – according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 1:28-29; 2:1-4,8,16-23).

That's the background to what follows.

### ***The precise point***

What, precisely, is the significant point, the cardinal point which concerned Paul so greatly, and which must be the concern of every believer throughout this age, not least for us today? This is the age of the new covenant. That is the cardinal point. It governs everything. And the ever-present danger is that, just as Israel transgressed the old covenant, adulterating it by the

## Getting Galatians Right

importation of pagan ideas and practices,<sup>3</sup> so in this present age, men always want to adulterate the new covenant. How? By going back either to the old covenant and importing old-covenant principles into the *ekklēsia*, or by doing the same with pagan principles and practices. And that, let there be no doubt about it, amounts to deserting ‘him who called you’ (Gal. 1:6), and adopting ‘a different gospel – not that there is another one’ (Gal. 1:6-7).

Adulterating the new covenant with either Judaism – the law – or paganism – or a mixture of both – that was and remains the issue. The false teachers did it in Galatia (and in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and elsewhere) – hence Paul (and other apostles) dealt with it in letters to those churches;<sup>4</sup> the Fathers, in cahoots with the Roman Emperors Constantine and Theodosius, did it in the 2nd-5th centuries, establishing Christendom to the permanent damage of the *ekklēsia* down to the present day; the Reformed, since the days of John Calvin and his threefold use of the law, have majored on the law in the life of the believer;<sup>5</sup> and modern evangelicals are increasingly adopting pagan principles and practices.<sup>6</sup> Whether the old covenant – the law – or paganism, from start to finish all this was – and remains – a direct contradiction of Christ’s clear warning:

No one puts a piece of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved (Matt. 9:16-17).

This is nothing trivial or academic about this attempted cobbling together of the new covenant with the old covenant and/or paganism. Hence the amount of time Paul spent on it in his

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<sup>3</sup> See my *Evangelicals Warned*.

<sup>4</sup> See my *Christ*.

<sup>5</sup> See my *Christ*.

<sup>6</sup> See my *Pastor; Battle; Relationship; Attracting; Evangelicals Warned; Public Worship; In Church*.

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letters, and the frequency of his return to it. I cannot overstate its importance and relevance to today's churches.

Clearly, since Paul was so moved, so direct about all this, we can afford no confusion when we find it rearing its head among us. We dare not be half-hearted in dealing with it. The issue is always of the highest significance.

Hence this article.<sup>7</sup> To limit the teaching of Galatians to justification, and thus miss its main emphasis on progressive sanctification, and, above all, to fail to see how importing the old covenant, the law, and/or paganism into the new covenant spells ruin to the gospel – producing ‘a different gospel – not that there is another one’ (Gal. 1:6-7) – and the *ekklēsia* is to make a very serious mistake indeed, with severe losses for all – both believers and unbelievers.

These are no small indictments.

### ***Paul's anguish***

Paul's anguish over the issue is palpable, and the point he makes is unmissable. In order to capture the full force of Paul's anxiety, I include an earlier extract:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain...

Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They [that is, the false teachers, the Judaisers and (to coin a word) paganisers] make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them... My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you [that is, until you transformed into Christ-likeness by progressive sanctification – see Romans

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<sup>7</sup> I have based this article on my *Christ* pp123-127,416-419. See also my *Sanctification in Galatians*.

## *Getting Galatians Right*

8:29]! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?... 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 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.. You were called to freedom, brothers (Gal. 4:8-11,16 – 5:13).

And so on.

Alas, as I have said, many fail to see this. By looking in a little more detail at the apostle’s argument in Galatians 3:1-5, I hope that this short article will do something to correct it.

### ***The argument***

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you...?... Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now<sup>8</sup> being made perfect by the flesh? (Gal. 3:1-5).

The major topic of the Judaisers at Galatia was, naturally enough, the law, though paganism was also included: the Judaisers were urging the Galatians to come under the law; otherwise, the false teachers said, believers could not be justified or progressively sanctified. Both justification and progressive sanctification needed the law. Without the law, neither! Consequently, Paul, having dealt in detail with the question of justification, especially in chapter 2 (and would briefly return to it in Galatians 5:2-12) – justification is not by the law – now turned to progressive sanctification.<sup>9</sup> He wanted to shake the Galatians out of any complacency, bring them to their senses (Luke 15:17), make them think more deeply about

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<sup>8</sup> Note the ‘now’.

<sup>9</sup> In Gal. 2:19. Remember, there are no chapter divisions in the original.

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progressive sanctification, and especially its alleged connection with the law. So he adopted the device of a linguistic explosion closely followed by a series of rapid-fire bullets in the form of sharp questions,<sup>10</sup> six in all. Consider the fourth of these: ‘Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?’

Paul reminded his readers that they had not only ‘begun in the Spirit’, but they had actually received ‘the Spirit’, not ‘by the works of the law’, but ‘by the hearing of faith’ (Gal. 3:2-3). Begun what? Begun their Christian experience – that is, they had been regenerated, they had been justified by grace through faith in Christ – by the work of the Spirit, and not by the works of the law. The Galatians were believers. There is no question of it. Paul was clear about it. He could confidently address them as such:

In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were spiritually immersed<sup>11</sup> into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:6-7).

Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God... Brothers... my little children... (Gal. 4:9,12,19).

And all this was by the Spirit, not by the law. So far, so good. All modern law-men – covenant theologians<sup>12</sup> – will agree;

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<sup>10</sup> Questions are always far more potent than a statement of facts, and a very common way of teaching in Scripture. It is God’s own way. See Job 38:1 – 42:1-6, especially Job 38:3; 42:4. Paul frequently resorted to questions.

<sup>11</sup> See my *Infant*.

<sup>12</sup> Although there are several variants of covenant theology, briefly we may say that it was devised in the 16th century, just after the death of

except, as so often, their usual qualifications and glosses appear.<sup>13</sup> Paul was not asking, for instance, if the Galatians had received the Spirit by ‘rigorous’ bondage to the ‘ceremonial’ law.<sup>14</sup> He was referring to obedience to the Mosaic law in its entirety. ‘Did the law bring you the Spirit?’ The law, I stress! And the rhetorical answer was a resounding ‘No!’

*But the point of Paul’s question was not confined to – or, indeed, strictly about – justification. It was about progressive sanctification:* ‘Having begun in the Spirit’, he asked, ‘are you now being made perfect by the flesh?’ (Gal. 3:3). They had ‘begun’ – been justified – ‘in or by the Spirit’. So when Paul spoke of ‘now being made perfect’ (fully accomplished, fully complete), he was speaking about progressive sanctification, was he not? This is the force of his use of ‘now being’ when he moved on from their initial experience, to ask the Galatians, having been justified, ‘are you *now being* made perfect by the flesh?’ This is of such importance, I must say it again. When the apostle asked: ‘Are you now being made perfect?’, what was he talking about? Justification? There is no ‘being made’ about justification! It is instantaneous. No! The ‘now being made perfect’ clearly refers to progressive sanctification.

Justification – a once-for-all act of God – precedes, and inevitably leads to, progressive sanctification – a life-long process: ‘And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now<sup>15</sup> he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and

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Calvin. It closely adheres to Calvin’s threefold use of the law, and treats the old and new covenants simply as different administrations of ‘the covenant of grace’ – a theological invention imposed on Scripture with devastating results. I have dealt fully with all this in many of my works.

<sup>13</sup> See my *New-Covenant Articles: Volume Two*.

<sup>14</sup> Part of the tripartite division of the law – an invention of Thomas Aquinas adopted by Calvin, and hence a bulwark of covenant theology, and serving as a ploy or escape route to avoid passages of Scripture which destroy the theology behind the system.

<sup>15</sup> Note the ‘now’.

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blameless, and above reproach in his sight' – that is, justification – 'if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel' – that is, progressive sanctification (Col. 1:21-23). The link between the two is unbreakable:

For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).<sup>16</sup>

The way to glory is through holiness; no progressive sanctification, no glory:

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with

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<sup>16</sup> The link between justification and progressive sanctification was one of the bones of contention between the Anabaptists and the Reformers. The latter taught the inevitable link between the two, but practice did not always go hand in hand with theory. Luther, for instance, though he rightly emphasised justification by faith, failed to give enough weight to progressive sanctification as essential evidence of it. Hence his attitude to the letter of James, dismissing it as so much hay or straw. In general, Anabaptists rightly demanded progressive sanctification as evidence of justification – so much so, the Reformers falsely labelled them with the stigma of perfectionism; Calvin, repeatedly so. As for the Anabaptists, there is abundant testimony as to their godliness of life. They insisted on it. Although the Reformers tried to dismiss the Anabaptists, they longed that their own churches might be as spiritual. Luther, envying the Anabaptists' godliness, admitted his followers lived as badly as Papists. He coped with it by saying doctrine (light) and life have to be distinguished, thus providing a pragmatic excuse for his followers – with dire consequences. Although I have introduced this historical note, the issue cannot be relegated to the mists of history; it is with us today. Reformed teachers (covenant theologians) rightly argue that justification and progressive sanctification cannot be separated, but when it comes to the believer and the law they often break their rubric.

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godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:17-18).

This means, of course, that it is a very serious mistake to suggest that Paul's great concern in this letter is justification, though, as I have observed, it is commonly believed and said. No! The apostle was speaking to believers (who were, therefore, already justified!) about *advancing* in Christian experience, not *entering* it. He was speaking not only of the basis of faith, but progress in it – not the ground of salvation, but the way to grow in it. Paul's use of the present continuous tense, 'now being made perfect' (Gal. 3:3), must not be overlooked. He was speaking of the process and progress of progressive sanctification, of transformation into conformity to Christ. More precisely, it was not the *ground* or *standard* of the believer's progressive sanctification which concerned him here. Rather, *it was the way the believer is to be progressively sanctified*. Judaisers – then and now – want to concentrate on the 'what' of progressive sanctification. The real question is the 'how'. What is more, of even greater importance is the 'who' will be progressively sanctified, and 'why'.

So how, according to Paul, are believers progressively sanctified? How does he argue his case? He presses his case by asking these bullet-like questions, not issuing a series of bland statements. As always, he is making his readers *think*. Building on their experience of justification, Paul calls on the Galatians to

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think, and to think clearly, about *how* they were justified, and, now, *how* they are being progressively sanctified: ‘Having begun [justification] in the Spirit’, demands Paul, ‘are you *now being made* perfect [progressive sanctification] by the flesh?’ And when he dismisses the possibility of being ‘made perfect by *the flesh*’, is he referring to natural powers and abilities? Certainly! He is denying any hope of progressive sanctification by human effort, yes. But Paul is saying far more than that. In the context, the expressions ‘by the flesh’ and ‘in the flesh’ are virtually one and the same with ‘under the law’ and ‘by the works of the law’. A reading of Galatians 3:2-3 will prove it. In addition, these verses show that to be ‘living by the flesh’, ‘in the flesh’, ‘under the law’ and ‘by the works of the law’, is diametrically opposed to ‘living, walking in [or by] the Spirit’. So important is this point, Paul returns to it (more than once) and drives it home:

Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh... If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are... But the fruit of the Spirit is... Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in [or by] the Spirit... He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Gal. 5:16-25; 6:8. See also Rom. 8:1-17; 13:14; Gal. 4:5-6).

Finally, Paul’s question in Galatians 3:3 – ‘Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?’ – is, as I have hinted, clearly rhetorical. There is no doubt about the answer. The expected answer, the obvious answer, is a resounding: ‘No! Of course not!’ Progressive sanctification most decidedly is not by the flesh, is not by works of the law. Just as justification is not by the works of the law,<sup>17</sup> but by the work of the Spirit, *so it is with progressive sanctification*. In asking them about their experience of the Spirit, Paul’s purpose is not to shine the spotlight on how the Galatians received the Spirit, but rather to get them to grasp the Spirit’s role in their

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<sup>17</sup> Note the emphasis in the Greek upon ‘works of the law’ (Gal. 3:2).

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ongoing life as believers. They had started the Christian life without the works of the law, he reminds them. Well, then, so they must go on, and go on to the end. There is no more place for the works of the law in the continuance of the believer's experience than there was at its start. In other words, the law could not justify; it cannot sanctify. And just as the unbeliever should not go to the law for justification, neither should the believer go to the law for progressive sanctification. Both should go to Christ! Christ is all (Col. 3:11)! As Paul declared to the Corinthians: 'What I received I passed on to you as of first importance'. What was that? Strictly speaking, it was not 'what'; it was 'whom' – 'Christ', his death, burial and resurrection, all according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4); in other words, the scriptural Christ (1 Cor. 3:11; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-12; Col. 1:28).

In Galatians, Paul's point about progressive sanctification is *not* secondary compared to the primary thrust of justification, as is claimed. In any case, even if it is, it does not alter the fact: progressive sanctification is not by the law. But secondary, this is not! From Paul's sixth rhetorical question – 'Therefore he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' (Gal. 3:5) – we can see that faith, not the works of the law, is the vital element in the ongoing Christian life. Galatians 3:3 demands detailed exposition since it strikes at the heart of the Reformed thesis. Unfortunately, it does not always get it. Indeed, it is sometimes made to say the opposite of what the apostle actually did say! Paul was *not* saying that the law is the way God gives his Spirit to his people when they are justified. Far from it! The fact is, the law cannot justify, nor does it enable the believer to reach that standard of life which must accompany justification. In short, the law can neither justify nor sanctify.

There are two dangers if we get the connection between justification and progressive sanctification wrong. *First*, if we mistakenly put them into separate compartments, forgetting that progressive sanctification can only come after and from the same source as justification – that is, by the power of Christ –

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we shall become legalists, trying to be holy by our own power, by obeying the law (or man-made rules). Read again Galatians 4:8-11 and Colossians 2:16-23. The *second* danger occurs when justification and progressive sanctification are treated as one and the same. This leads us to ignore our responsibility to obey God in his word, and thus to work out that which he has worked in us. ‘Let go and let God’, or ‘God does it all’, is a tragic misunderstanding of the way to attain a holy life:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

The believer does not become holy by ‘taking it by faith’. He is under the law of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The Mosaic law is to do with sin. It has nothing to do with grace. Indeed, it stands in striking contrast to it (John 1:17; Rom. 3:19-22; 4:15-16; 5:20; Gal. 3:19-25). The Mosaic law cannot save. It cannot bring grace. While ‘grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17), ‘the law brings about wrath’ (Rom. 4:15). Of course it does, since ‘the carnal [fleshly] mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God’ (Rom. 8:7-8). So much for the natural man, the sinner outside of Christ. This is what being ‘in the flesh’ means. This is Paul’s way of speaking of those outside of Christ. They cannot, they do not, they will not, submit to God’s law. And they are in this state because they do not have the Spirit. So, as Paul reminded the Galatians (and, later, the Romans), justification is not by the flesh, not by the law, but by the hearing of faith, by the work of Christ through the power of the Spirit. No sinner can be justified by the law; he hates it, he will not be subject to it (Rom. 8:7)! The law arouses ‘the sinful passions’ (Rom. 7:5), it makes sin live (Rom. 7:8-9), and kills the sinner (Rom. 7:10-11). Justification can only be by grace through the Spirit. There is no middle way between ‘the works of the law’ and ‘the

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<sup>18</sup> See my *Christ; Believers*.

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hearing of faith'. It is one or the other (Gal. 3:2). And justification is not by the law. So much for justification.

*But in Galatians 3:2-3, I reiterate, Paul was going further than this.* 'How stupid, how wrong of you believers', he was saying, 'to imagine for a moment that, having begun in the Spirit, you might now go to the flesh – that is, to the Mosaic law – to progressively sanctify you! The law could not save you; nor can it progressively sanctify you'. *This* is what the apostle was teaching. As before, as with justification, so with *growth in the Christian life* – neither is by the works of the law.

To conclude: the believer began his spiritual experience – he has been justified – in the Spirit, not by the law, and just as he began, so he continues – by the Spirit, and not the law. In short, as with justification, so with progressive sanctification. Both are by the Spirit, and not the law. This simple though crucial point, if firmly grasped and fully worked out, would go a long way to sorting out the issue of the believer and the law. The law does not sanctify. The law cannot possibly be the believer's perfect rule of life. Paul's rhetorical questions have ruled it out once and for all.

And, it must not be forgotten, behind all these questions lies the fundamental point: believers must never adulterate the new covenant by importing the law or paganism into it, or allowing it to happen by default. Alas, today, in one way or another, this adulteration is going on, and at breakneck speed. Sleeping believers must wake up – before it is too late! Not only that! We must learn from the apostle: whenever and wherever we see the new covenant being adulterated, we must remind ourselves of what is at stake, and do what we can to put a stop to the adulteration. Unless we return to the principles and practices of the new covenant the damage will be immense and long lasting.



## *The Breakfast, the Politician, the Preacher, and Paul*

As I write, the dust has more or less settled on Sajid Javid's reaction to Les Isaac's sermon at the Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, sponsored by *Premier* at Westminster on 5th July 2022. As is the way with such news items, the powers-that-be in the media rapidly lose interest, and public memory soon fades. But before the episode passes into oblivion, there is a vital lesson which evangelicals must draw from it. And not only here, in the UK. But a lesson, I suspect, many evangelicals will fail, or be unwilling, to grasp.

First, a word about the characters in my title. Take the politician: although his resignation from the government, and the reason he gave for it, kindled the media's interest, he is the least important of the three; the preacher – or, more particularly, his sermon – is much more important than the politician; but it is the final character – Paul – who is by far the most important of the three. Yet, in what I have read, nothing has been said about his role in the episode. I want to put that right.

Can you imagine – is it remotely conceivable – that 2000 years ago the citizens of Rome would have been booting up their laptops to discover that Paul had addressed a meeting of 700, including 150 senators, and encouraged humble collaboration between believers and politicians for the common good? And that as a result, one senior senator in the governing elite, was sufficiently moved by what he heard to decide he could no longer go on serving under the present Emperor – a man who clearly lacked integrity – and, as a result, the conscience-stricken senator had gone back to his office and penned his resignation letter?

To ask such questions is to answer them.

But just in case ignorance of basic Bible teaching is far wider and far deeper than even I suspect, let me show – from Scripture

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– that the answer to my (supposedly rhetorical) question about Paul’s preaching is an unequivocal ‘No!’ If Paul had been invited to speak to 700, 150 of whom were politicians, he would not have addressed any political issue whatsoever.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, he would not have called for humble collaboration between believers and politicians in public affairs. When he was given the opportunity to address gatherings where unbelievers were present, such concerns were never on his agenda.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although Paul always took full cognisance of the people he was addressing, and would adjust the way he got their attention (1 Cor. 9:19-23), the central point and purpose of his discourse never varied. The apostle was driven by the fact that all his hearers were sinners and needed to be converted. D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones hit the right note in Oxford in 1941. After he had preached, a student complained that Lloyd-Jones had failed to take into account that he had been speaking to students, academics, and the like. Lloyd-Jones: ‘I confessed freely, that though I might be a heretic, I had to admit that until that moment I had regarded undergraduates and indeed graduates of Oxford University as being just ordinary common human clay and miserable sinners like everybody else, and held the view that their needs were precisely the same as those of the agricultural labourer or anyone else. I had preached as I had done quite deliberately!... There is no greater fallacy than to think that you need a gospel for special types of people’ (D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Preaching & Preachers*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1971, pp129-130).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Acts 17:16-34. Indeed, read Acts in its entirety to see how the first believers addressed unbelievers. See my *To Confront*; ‘Evangelism: Then and Now’. Despite the previous note, sad to say, in 1957, Lloyd-Jones preaching at a Civic Service in Cardiff, failed make the proper application of Isa. 22:8-14 (see D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Sound An Alarm: Report of a sermon delivered at a Civic Service on first of January, 1957*; ‘Sound an Alarm...’ in D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1995, pp208-223). The prophet was addressing God’s people in his day, and doing so in the name of the Lord God Almighty, and delivering God’s complaint concerning their thinking and behaviour, and, in no uncertain terms, letting them know what God required of them. Furthermore, the prophet was recording the appalling reaction of the people to his preaching. The application today is not to pagan society but, as Paul so clearly explained, it is to believers, the

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Wait a minute! Didn't Paul have something to say about issues like, for example, sexual sin within the family? He certainly did! Of course he did. Yet, as he well knew (see, for instance, Romans 1:18-32; 2 Timothy 3:1-9), while there was no shortage of sin – of all sorts, not only sexual – in the Jewish, Greek and Roman societies all around him, even so he never called for believers and politicians to collaborate for the good of society. But when he found sin in a local *ekklēsia*... then he spoke; and how! Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 – read it aloud – and see how he addressed the Corinthian *ekklēsia*.

Above all – and here is the key point – in rebuking the Corinthians and authoritatively demanding their obedience to apostolic command, the apostle made a dogmatic assertion in which he laid out, for all time, the governing principle for dealing with such questions when facing unbelievers:

What have I to do with judging<sup>3</sup> outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you' (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

On such questions, within the *ekklēsia*, Paul was blunt; in the public square, he was silent.<sup>4</sup> When it came to unbelievers, Paul knew what his responsibility was: it was to preach the gospel, to preach Christ, in order to see sinners saved; nothing more, nothing less. He knew, and felt very deeply, that unconverted

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*ekklēsia* (see 1 Cor. 10:1-33). See my 'An Alarm to the Converted' on my sermonaudio.com page.

<sup>3</sup> A word on Paul's use of 'judge'. Think of 'getting involved in a lawsuit for or against, condemning, passing an opinion on, pronouncing sentence on'. In other words, Paul would not get involved in trying to improve fallen society. This was none of his business. He wanted to see sinners converted. That was Christ's commission, and he intended to stick to it.

<sup>4</sup> I am not denying that believers are light and salt in society (Matt. 5:13-16), but they are so incidentally. In any case, in terms of the new covenant, personal conversion has to precede public service. Though Caesar has his God-given role (Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), he comes a very poor second to Christ (Mark 12:13-17; Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

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sinner would perish, and he longed for their conversion (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1; 11:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:16 – 6:2). At the moment of his conversion, Christ had given him his marching orders. As Paul told Agrippa – a politician, please note – Christ had at that time spelled out the apostle’s life-work for 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 26:16-18).

From then on, Paul knew what he had to do, and how he had to go about it:

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

Ah, but what is ‘the gospel’? What – specifically – did Paul mean by it? What did he have to preach? What did he have to call for? Humble collaboration between the Church<sup>5</sup> and politicians in furthering the good of society? Not at all! It was this:

I decided [determined, resolved] to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

And:

We proclaim... not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5).

And that was it! As he reminded the Ephesian elders, his work could be summarised thus:

...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 (Acts 20:21).

The truth is, Christ had already made this clear to his disciples:

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<sup>5</sup> I talk of ‘the Church’ because Isaac did; see below.

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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).

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).

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:47-48).

It has to be recognised that not all gospel preaching can be said to be preaching the gospel – in the biblical sense. And that is the only sense which counts. No confusion can be tolerated here. It is vital to let Scripture speak. Paul, writing to the Galatian believers made the position clear:

I am astonished [he exploded] that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

The apostolic gospel is the only gospel; all other gospels are false.

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In light of the above, what of the prayer breakfast?

If we could have read that Les Isaac had preached the gospel to the 700, and that time showed that many had been truly converted to Christ under that address... Ah... if... if only...

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*But we did not! Nothing like it! And on both counts – the discourse and the result!*

What Les Isaac preached at the breakfast fell far short of the apostolic gospel. In fact, it was nothing like it. Here is a flavour of what he said, the burden of what he was appealing for:

Many men and women are quietly demonstrating service, humbly and compassionately, for the common good of the community, of society, of their city and their nation.

There's a challenge for us, whether we're politicians, whether we are church leaders, there's a challenge for us to work in a collaborative way. To work where we can work for the common good with everyone within our community, to bring hope. We recognise that as we work together, we are bringing hope but, equally, we recognise that we cannot do it on our own. I'm so glad to see so many parliamentarians here, coming with their local church leader, sitting together, eating together. And I pray that they are asking the question: 'What can we do together in our constituency?'

I want to remind us today that all of us have influence. All of us have the ability to influence and to make a difference. And we are called to serve. We are called to work together for the common good – not just for the party, not just for the denomination, but for humanity. My words of encouragement to us this morning: Give hope a chance. Let hope flourish as you seek to lead and as you seek to have influence and as you seek to exert your influence across the world, across the city, across our community. Let us recognise it's together we will make a difference. It's together the common good of our community would be realised. May the Lord help us as we continue to serve.

And Javid's response:

I made my decision then, sitting there listening to his sermon, and I just thought, it's about integrity, it's about a duty. If you haven't got confidence in the boss, you owe it to yourself and the country to tell the boss nicely that you can't serve and that was it.

Isaac made no attempt to convince sinners of their sin, he did not warn them that they were under the wrath of God, and he issued no call whatsoever for their conversion. Javid's decision

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to resign from the government – although (it might well be thought) very commendable – falls very far short of conversion to Christ.

What passage of Scripture was Isaac proclaiming? None! He quoted two verses – Psalm 23:4 and Philippians 2:8 – neither of which remotely gets near the case he was trying to make. Indeed, he misused the latter:

Humility is the absence of pride and the ability to be down-to-earth and modest under all circumstances. This is Jesus in his life. Jesus came into this world to serve; to serve us, to serve humanity. But Jesus also expects us, as the Church [all 700, including Javid?– DG], to serve in humility. ‘And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!’ (Phil. 2:8).

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians to – naturally enough – the Philippians; that is to say, to the *ekklēsia* at Philippi, the believers in that city. Isaac, addressing a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers, took God’s word to believers regarding their behaviour within the *ekklēsia*, and, without hesitation, inclusively misapplied it to all and sundry about community service, even addressing the entire audience as ‘the Church’. How aptly this gels with the contemporary slide from the biblical doctrine of the *ekklēsia* to a Christendom Church which is in danger of becoming little more than an all-inclusive social-political-environmental-postmillennial pressure group, or a club to promote the well-being of society.

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Even so, in this article I am not primarily concerned with Isaac’s sermon, or Javid’s response. Rather, what concerns me is the reaction of moonstruck evangelicals who are thrilled to think that such a sermon led to a politician’s resignation from the government. In the dark days in which we live – spiritually speaking – what a welcome shaft of hope and encouragement!

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Somebody – and somebody in the public eye, at that – actually responding to a sermon! Phew!<sup>6</sup>

Not at all! Evangelicals who take that line are acting like desperate mariners cast into a rising sea – clutching at any passing piece of splintered-driftwood. It is, as Alfred Bunn (1796-1860), said: ‘The heart bowed down by weight of woe, to weakest hope will cling’.

Javid has resigned as a result of a prayer-breakfast sermon. OK. Very good. But... we need to get our brains in gear: Javid attended that breakfast as a non-active Muslim, and, now that he has resigned, he remains a non-active Muslim, describing himself as one with no religion. Whether or not he is in the cabinet has some importance, of course, and integrity in the public square does matter. Having said that, writing as an evangelical believer, as a preacher of the gospel, my concern in events like these must be – as it was with Paul – that sinners should hear the gospel and be converted to Christ. That is the point moonstruck evangelicals need to grasp. They must stop clutching at things which will make matters worse. Worse? Evangelicals who are enthusiastic about the ‘Javid Prayer-Breakfast’ episode are encouraging – maybe even settling for –

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Danny Webster... director of advocacy for the UK Evangelical Alliance, working to represent evangelical Christians to government and inspire them to engage in all areas of public life’ was delighted with what happened (see Danny Webster ‘Can Prayer Breakfasts Change Politics? UK Resignations Suggest Yes’, *Christianity Today*, 12th July 2022). ‘Christians in Politics executive director Andy Flanagan, who led the gathering in worship, said the event had “clearly had an impact” on Javid. He said that there was a problem with the current “culture” in government and that the Church had a role to play in inspiring good leadership. “We have to challenge the violation of ethics that we have seen in the political leadership of this land – and also those who went along with it for many years”, he said’ (*Christianity Today*, 10th July 2022). He ‘told *Premier* the presence of the Holy Spirit was palpable: “It’s quite remarkable. It felt really significant. There were what you might describe as holy moments where God’s presence was just irresistible. It was profound and powerful”’ (Donna Birrell: *Premier Christian News*, 10th July 2022).

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something far less than the apostolic gospel, and something very different to apostolic aims in preaching that gospel. In so doing, they are encouraging an even greater loosening and blurring of the *ekklēsia* and its biblical role – which is already in a perilous state. If this drift continues, a coming generation of evangelicals will find itself with no biblical distinctives whatsoever.

Calling for humble collaboration in the public square is not the business of the *ekklēsia* or a gospel preacher; calling sinners to Christ, is. Humility and integrity in the public square, while excellent in its way, is no substitute for conversion to Christ.



## *An Invaluable Hint for Preachers Drawn from the UK Courtroom*

Someone involved in a UK court case might well use a lawyer; or, rather, two lawyers – a solicitor and a barrister. Over-simplifying the system, the solicitor, by drawing up the legal argument, prepares the case before it reaches the courtroom, while the barrister, inside the courtroom, using the solicitor's work, pleads the case; that is, he argues it before the court, advocates his client's cause, doing all he can to secure a favourable outcome for him.

Now, lurking within this legal nicety, there is an invaluable hint for preachers,<sup>1</sup> one which, in my experience, is badly needed. Too many preachers, it seems to me, think their responsibility begins and virtually ends with setting out a case, presenting it in clinical detail as clearly and as thoroughly as they can, and that is about all – perhaps with a token amount of application (usually in the muted terms of 'we' and 'us') at the end. If I am right, then they have sadly mistaken their duty.<sup>2</sup> Of course, a preacher must explain and expound the words of Scripture in their context, and, yes, of course, he must set out its spiritual logic; all that is true, yes. But that's far from the finish of it. Indeed, his real business has only just begun when he has got that far. As a preacher, he ought to know that his work is to plead with men, press them for a verdict, urge them to make the

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, when I speak about 'preachers', I am thinking of 'men who are engaged in pulpit work'. As I repeatedly try to make clear in my works, all believers are ministers (see, for instance, my *Priesthood of all Believers: Slogan or Substance?*); nevertheless, as I say, in this article I concentrate on 'preaching' in the usually-accepted, but too-limited, sense of the word. Such preaching has an important role to play in the spread of the gospel; getting it wrong spells disaster. Having said that, the principles set out here apply across the board, to all gospel ministry, private as well as public.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Preaching*.

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right choice on the basis of the scriptural argument which he has put before them. He wants a verdict, and a favourable verdict at that. And, I would add, he wants it now.

The point is that the preacher is not merely a solicitor, preparing and presenting a case; he is a barrister, pleading a suit. Indeed, he is like a barrister in a capital case,<sup>3</sup> one who knows that the life or death of his client hangs on what he says and how he says it. The barrister, consequently, does all he can to move the jury to decide in his client's favour. He longs for it, and he aims for it, concentrating all his powers on that one end. *And he leaves nobody in any doubt about it.*

This is how it should be with the preacher. He must want his hearers – believers and unbelievers – to feel and act in accordance with the scriptural argument he is proclaiming. And shouldn't he always bear in mind that at least some of his hearers might be unbelievers?

Consider, then, the preacher addressing unbelievers. Does he not want them to be converted? Does he not want them to know it? I recall that it was said of Robert Murray M'Cheyne that 'you felt he was a dying to have you converted'. That's the point!

Or, as Richard Baxter famously vowed:

*I preached as never sure to preach again,  
And as a dying man to dying men.*

That quotation comes from Baxter's *Poetical Fragments*. The thought of imminent death (and, of course, judgment to come) – not least, his own – struck him so forcibly that he penned verses to express his feelings, including the making of the following vow to God:

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<sup>3</sup> I am using the phrase to mean the possibility of a death sentence for the guilty.

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*This called me out to work while it was day;  
And warn poor souls to turn without delay:  
Resolving speedily your word to preach;  
With Ambrose,<sup>4</sup> I at once did learn and teach.  
Still thinking I had little time to live,  
My fervent heart to win men's souls did strive.  
I preached, as never sure to preach again,  
And as a dying man to dying men!  
O how should preachers men's repenting crave,  
Who see how near the church is to the grave?<sup>5</sup>  
And see that while we preach and hear, we die,  
Rapt by swift time to vast eternity!  
What statues, or what hypocrites are they,  
Who between sleep and wake to preach and pray?  
As if they feared awakening the dead!  
Or were but lighting sinners to their bed!  
Who speak of heaven and hell as on a stage!  
And make the pulpit but a parrot's cage?  
Who teach as men that care not much who learns;  
And preach in jest to men that sin in earnest.<sup>6</sup>  
Surely God's messenger, if any man,  
Should speak with all the seriousness he can;  
Who treats in the name of the Most High,  
About the matters of eternity!  
Who must prevail with sinners **Now** or **Never**,  
As those that must be saved **Now**, if **Ever**:  
When sinners' endless joy or misery,  
On the success of his endeavours lie!  
Though God be free, he works by instruments,  
And wisely fits them to his intents;  
A proud unhumiliated preacher is unmeet  
To lay proud sinners humiliated at Christ's feet:  
So are the blind to tell man what God says,  
And faithless e'en to propagate the faith.  
The dead are unfit means to raise the dead;  
And enemies to give the children bread:  
And utter strangers to the life to come,  
Are not the best conductors to our home:  
They that yet never learned to **Live** and **Die**,*

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<sup>4</sup> Ambrose was the 4th century bishop of Milan.

<sup>5</sup> I prefer: 'Who see how near are sinners to the grave?'

<sup>6</sup> I prefer: 'And preach in jest to men that earnest sin'.

## *An Invaluable Hint for Preachers*

*Will scarcely teach it others feelingly:  
Or if they should preach others to salvation,  
Unhappy men that preach their own damnation.*

Now there's a solemn thought for any – and every – preacher.

But let Paul bring this article to a close. We know what he did, and why, when he was addressing unbelievers:

Therefore, knowing the terror [or, the fear] of the Lord, we persuade others (2 Cor. 5:11).

And:

The love of Christ constrains us (2 Cor. 5:14).

Briefly (keeping this article in bounds), the apostle knew that he would have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and account for his life – including his gospel ministry: 'For we must all [that is, we believers, all of us, must] appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil' (2 Cor. 5:10). He also knew that the unbelievers he was addressing would have to face judgment (Acts 17:31; Heb. 9:27) and suffer God's eternal wrath (John 3:18,36; Rom. 1:18; 2:5,8; 5:9; 9:22; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Rev. 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:8-19; 15:1,7; 19:15). In addition, he was moved by the love of Christ; that is, either (probably) the sense of Christ's love to him, or his love for Christ in return; or both, of course. This is what drove Paul when addressing unbelievers.

As for the way he went about it, Paul knew that he had to persuade men; that is, he had to seek to persuade them, persuade them to repent of their sin, and turn in saving trust to Christ (Acts 13:43; 18:4,13; 19:26; 20:21; 26:28). And it was more than a duty; it was his passion, his heart's desire. He was a driven man. We know how he felt about the Jews:

I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit – that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh... My

## *An Invaluable Hint for Preachers*

heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved (Rom. 9:1-3;10:1).

Can there be any doubt that he felt the same about the Gentiles? See, for instance, Acts 13:46-47; Romans 1:14; 3:29; 2 Timothy 1:11.

'What ifs' are tempting, but always fraught. Even so, in light of the above, I am convinced that if Paul were alive today, he would not be wasting his time polishing a PowerPoint presentation and titivating some hand-out notes so that he might deliver an impeccable gospel-lecture! Nothing of the kind! Driven by that sense of accountability and love which he spoke of, he would doing the same today as he did two thousand years ago – passionately and urgently pleading with sinners for their salvation:

God... gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore [beg] you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God... We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain... Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry... (2 Cor. 5:15 – 6:3).

We should not rest until we can say the same.



## *Missing Notes in the Covid Chorus*

As I write, the Covid crisis still casts its shadow over everyone of us, with the death rate never far from the daily agenda set by the government and the media.

I know I am taking an enormous risk in writing this article – the risk of being misunderstood, if not misrepresented. Let me say, therefore, and say as plainly as I can, that I do not belittle any death, nor am I commenting on the precautions in place to minimise the number of fatalities from the virus.

Having said that, I do want to draw attention to two missing notes in the furore; or, to put it another way, to draw attention to the two elephants in the room.<sup>1</sup>

I will not beat about the bush. Most people are being irresponsible and irrational over death from the virus.

Take ‘irresponsible’. I could use another word: hypocritical.

The public, at the very time it is worrying so much about the number of deaths from Covid, turns a blind eye to the astronomical – and growing – number of deaths by abortion. Not to mince words, the majority, while up in arms about Covid fatalities, are ignoring the abomination of the slaughter of almost countless unborn babies.<sup>2</sup> Where’s the outcry, the daily briefing, about that?<sup>3</sup>

And now the ‘irrational’.

Death is inevitable. For us all. Everybody knows it. Experience confirms it. The Bible asserts it, and tells us why: death came in

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<sup>1</sup> An elephant in the room is an obvious problem or difficulty that people do not want to talk about.

<sup>2</sup> I except the tiny minority of abortions which are sadly necessary for vital reasons.

<sup>3</sup> See Glen Scrivener: ‘Highest Death Toll During Corona: Numbers Poem’.

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through Adam's fall, each of us is a sinner from conception, and so every last one of us will die (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-24; Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22; Eph. 2:1-3). Whether from the virus, old age, cancer, cardiac arrest, a car crash, or whatever, death is certain. For all of us. For me. For you.<sup>4</sup>

It is not morbid to say so. It is only realistic and sensible to think about the one certainty in life; namely death. I know I must die. You know you must die. It is madness not to recognise it – and prepare for it.

But here we come face to face with the irrationality I spoke of. The government and the media make sure that the possibility of death from Covid is never allowed to slip from the public's mind. Yet, while everybody knows that he or she must die – whether from Covid or not – even so, apart from the virus, most people prefer to ignore that fact. Oh, many do think about death in connection with money and property, inheritance taxes, and all that. But as for their soul – not a thought!

Well, not a conscious thought. Deep down, we all know we are going to die, and, fearing this enemy, instinctively we do all we can to stave it off (Heb. 2:15). But that's as far as it goes. No serious thought about death itself. Indeed, the subject is taboo.

But, when it comes to the virus we have seen something bordering on mass-hysteria, even though for most of us the probability that Covid will prove fatal – even if we get it, or, rather, it gets us – is, relatively speaking, small.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See my 'The Real Virus' and my 'A Fearful Funeral Text: Yours?'

<sup>5</sup> I am not being callous, but we need to keep a sense of proportion. In a normal year, about 600,000 die every year in the UK; in other words, 1600 per day. The Great Smog of 1952, which lasted 5 days, was responsible for the death of about 12,000 (2400 per day of the actual smog) in London – London, not the UK. On 22nd June 2020, the total number of Covid-19 *associated* deaths in the UK stood at just under 43,000 (300 per day) (Gov.UK website), not a few of those who died having had previous medical problems. Those statistics should put the Covid death-rate into some sort of perspective. I acknowledge that playing with statistics is fraught with risk, especially in this case, but

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In stark contrast to the fevered concern over Covid, who spares a thought for death itself?

That's not the worst of it.

The Bible tells us that death is not the end but the beginning:

It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb. 9:27).

After death, please note; after death, judgment. Think of that!

And after the judgment? Eternity! An eternity of misery for those who are not right with God; an eternity of bliss for those who are (Rom. 5:1; 8:1):

These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matt. 25:46).

No wonder the prophet counselled:

Prepare to meet your God (Amos. 4:12).

But herein lies the heart of the irrationality, the folly, the madness I speak of: while millions are going to enormous lengths and tolerating all kinds of inconvenience to avoid the relatively small possibility of death by Covid, they ignore every warning about the certainty of death itself, and laugh at the biblical call to prepare for it.<sup>6</sup>

And when we do meet death – as all of us must – in the overwhelming majority of cases of those who have taken no

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the 'ball-park figures' are valid. Moreover, I have not written this article for readers of a learned statistical journal. As for death by Covid, Paul Nuki (*The Daily Telegraph* Global Health Security Editor, London) reported: 'Sir David Spiegelhalter, a statistician and Chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication, Cambridge... found that for the majority of us, the risk was so small that it "would normally be deemed an acceptable part of life"' ('Crunching the numbers: what are the real risks of dying from Covid-19?', *The Daily Telegraph*, 20th June 2020).

<sup>6</sup> The Greeks had a saying that those the gods want to destroy they first drive mad.

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step to prepare for it, no stone is left unturned to sanitise it, a minister or priest assuring everyone that all is well – when it is not.<sup>7</sup>

Hence my talk of irrationality.

I close with an appeal. I do so in the words of a hymn by William Gadsby. Except for a very tiny minority, none of you will know it. Indeed, your first reaction might well be to wish you had never seen it, and then go on to question the sanity of those who are actually prepared to sing the words! But this only serves to demonstrate the truth of what I have been saying.

Gadsby began by addressing himself:

*Pause, my soul! and ask the question,  
Are you ready to meet God?  
Am I made a real Christian,  
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?  
Have I union  
With the church's living head?*<sup>8</sup>

Having posed that vital question, Gadsby moved on to those who could answer in the affirmative. After addressing them, speaking of the hope – the confident expectation, the assurance – the believer has in Christ, he then turned to the unbeliever:

*But, if still a total stranger  
To his precious name and blood,<sup>9</sup>  
You are on the brink of danger  
Can you face a holy God?  
Think and tremble,  
Death is now upon the road.*

Sadly, Gadsby did not add a verse urging all to trust the Lord Jesus Christ – his blood and righteousness – to save them from their sins and so be ready to die, ready to face Christ's judgment, ready for the eternity to follow.

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<sup>7</sup> See my *Deceit*.

<sup>8</sup> The church's head is the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>9</sup> That is, 'Christ's precious name and blood'.

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Let me do so now – in prose.

Are you worried about Covid? Spare a thought – at the very least – for what I have been saying. And act upon it, I urge you. Do so now, I appeal to you. Trust Christ. It is the only way – he himself is the only way (John 6:68; 14:6; Acts 4:12) – to prepare for the one great certainty in your life – your death.



## *Missing the Point – Badly*

On 18th October, 1966, D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the opening speaker at the conference on ‘Christian Unity’ called by the Evangelical Alliance at the Central Hall, London. The subsequent controversy over his now famous discourse – or, some would say, infamous discourse – still rages.

I have no interest in re-hashing that controversy. My purpose is altogether different, altogether more fundamental. My title says it all: ‘Missing the Point – Badly’.

Let me explain. Nearly everything I have read about that discourse and the ensuing debate wastes ink on an absolutely futile issue. I choose my words deliberately. I see a parallel with the scholastic debate that used to occupy so many minds in the medieval Church: How many angels can be got onto the head of a pin?<sup>1</sup> Actually, it is worse than that!

To make my point as clearly – and as briefly – as I can, I refer to Iain H.Murray’s analysis of the affair in his response to the many critics of Lloyd-Jones; namely, the chapter “‘The Lost Leader’ or ‘A Prophetic Voice’?” in his book *Lloyd-Jones – Messenger of Grace*, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2008. The question which occupies so many is this: Did Lloyd-Jones call for evangelicals – evangelical Anglicans, in particular – to separate from their mixed denominations? And, as a corollary, if he did, was he right to issue that call?

All parties are deeply concerned about such issues as ‘denominations’, ‘visible churches’, ‘associations’ and so on. All parties, it seems to me, accept such terms and principles without question. Moreover, concepts such as ‘separation’ and

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<sup>1</sup> Whether or not this debate actually took place as prominently as is commonly thought is itself debated. The fact is, however, in 1270, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* raised the issue by asking: ‘Can several angels be in the same place?’

‘sectarianism’ are, by most parties, thought of as theological swear words.

But all this is to think and speak on the basis of Christendom. If we stick to Scripture, there is no debate about any of these things; the issue is cut and dried, settled once and for all. Indeed, from a scriptural point of view, there is no issue in the first place! Notions such as ‘denominations’, ‘visible churches’, ‘associations’ are entirely of Christendom’s making, and constitute Christendom-speak. And Christendom is probably the greatest curse Satan ever inflicted on the people of God!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As for Lloyd-Jones, himself, alas, there can be no doubt that, over many years, he made it clear that he was confused, ambiguous and self-contradictory over church life, denominationalism and the like (For full documentation, see my *Battle* and *Infant*). So much so, I think it is impossible to make a consistent case for Lloyd-Jones’ position on any of it. How muddled can one get? Take this from Murray: ‘The BEC [that is, the British Evangelical Council] was not a denomination, but an association of denominations. In 1967 Lloyd-Jones encouraged Westminster Chapel to move from its Congregational Union to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches [that is, the FIEC]. Although he had long since ceased to be involved in the denominational affairs of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, his ministerial status formally remained with that denomination’ (Murray p177). The FIEC was a subset of the BEC (see John Brencher: *Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) and Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism*, Paternoster, Carlisle, 2002, p116). While, at the start, the FIEC was anti-denominationalism (see Brencher p83), its recent development, to my mind at least, has the appearance of the FIEC itself moving towards becoming a denomination. Westminster Chapel’s move to the FIEC was not an easy passage. It was the BEC that gave Lloyd-Jones his best ‘platform’ (see Brencher pp123-125,199-200). Murray: ‘Lloyd-Jones’... call [in 1966] was not separation from denominations as such; it was for separation from error and unbelief’ (Murray p187). In 1974, Lloyd-Jones told Pentecostals: ‘Don’t stand in denominationalism. Belong to a denomination but don’t stand fast in it’ (Brencher p84). Murray admits Lloyd-Jones’ support for *historical* separatism (Murray p187. For abundant confirmation, see D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, reprinted 1991).

As for separatism, far from being a term of abuse, it speaks of a principle that is entirely biblical – entirely biblical, I say again; it is written right across the Bible. In the old covenant, Israel had to be separate from all other nations – that is, pagans – and in the new covenant – which concerns us as believers today – the principle of separationism is patently scriptural. Christ spelled it out for his people:

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:19).<sup>3</sup>

As he said to his Father in his great intercessory prayer just before his crucifixion:

I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world (John 17:6).<sup>4</sup>

Paul was unequivocal about the issue, uncompromising in his assertions and commands:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said: ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty’ (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

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<sup>3</sup> Has not Christ told us in the bluntest of terms that just as the world had hated him and his words, they will hate us and our words (John 15:18-27; 16:2-4,33; 17:14-18)?

<sup>4</sup> Do not miss the unbreakable and indispensable link between God’s word and separation (the root meaning of ‘sanctification’) in Christ’s prayer (John 17:17-19). The two stand or fall together; any weakening of separation can only involve a corresponding weakening of our hold on, and obedience to, God’s word.

## *Missing the Point – Badly*

We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things (1 Cor. 4:13).

If [since] with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations...? (Col. 2:20).

James could not have made the position any clearer:

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4).

John was explicit:

You are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:4-6).

Indeed, the very word chosen by the Spirit to describe the local church and its gatherings – *ekklēsia*, ‘the called-out ones’ – shouts ‘separationism’ from the housetops.

If it is objected that the ‘separation’ in question is separation from the world – as in the scriptures just quoted – then the answer is self-evident. Yes, separation is separation from the world, of course, but the passages definitely encompass denominationalism and the like:

*First*, since denominationalism is totally unknown in Scripture – it being, as I say, an invention of Christendom – it can be no surprise that Scripture does not directly address the subject.

*Secondly*, what are the denominations which the participants in the debate are concerned with? All are agreed that they are mixed bodies – some members being regenerate and others not, some members and their churches standing on the gospel and others not. If association with – union with – such bodies is not covered by the scriptures quoted, what is?

*Missing the Point – Badly*

Let me deal with the old chestnut: ‘You are calling for a perfect church!’ While I am not daft enough to think that any local church can be perfect, every believer and every church must strive to be as perfect as possible; that is, to be as scriptural as possible. In other words, believers and their churches are forbidden to have fellowship with all forms of darkness. If the above-quoted scriptures do not teach this, what do they teach?

Let me illustrate how the debate badly misses the point. Murray objected to the allegation that in his 1966 address Lloyd-Jones had made:

...a forceful appeal in the words of Revelation – ‘Come out of Babylon’.

Murray responded:

I have seen the original copy of the address, taken down from the tape recording, and no such words were spoken.<sup>5</sup>

But the call is entirely biblical:

Come out of her [that is, Babylon], my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues (Rev. 18:4).

The fact that some accuse – and criticise – Lloyd-Jones for saying such a thing (if he did!), and others have to deny (out of embarrassment, it seems) that he did say it, speaks volumes, and makes my point!

In short? Let us drop Christendom-speak now! Even more, let us give up Christendom principles forthwith! Let us get our churches into the biblical separation so clearly set out in Scripture, and let us obey the unequivocal command for us to be separate from all manner of darkness.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Murray p171.

<sup>6</sup> For more of my work on this topic, see, for instance, my *Relationship; Battle; Infant; Deceit*.



## *Moses' Law for Moses' People*

Although my chosen title leaves a lot to be desired, I can't think of a better. The law in question, while it can be called – indeed, is called in Scripture – ‘the law of Moses’ (Luke 2:22; 24:44; John 7:23; Acts 13:39; 15:5; 28:23; 1 Cor. 9:9), strictly speaking was God's own law given to Israel at Sinai by God through Moses. And while the people of Israel can be thought of as Moses' people, nevertheless, strictly speaking, they were God's own old-covenant people. But if I had used the title ‘God's Law for God's People’, a real ambiguity would have immediately arisen – one which would have confused the very point I want to make in this article.

And there is just one point – just one – that I want to make.

Without repeating all the arguments undergirding what I say here (which I have set out in numerous works),<sup>1</sup> contrary to what some have taught – and contrary to what many simply assume – the law in question – the law of Moses – was given to the nation of Israel, and given only to Israel, when in the exodus, under Moses, that nation was formed by God in his miraculous deliverance of Abraham's descendants from Egyptian slavery. The law was not given to Adam. It has not been given to all men. It was God's law in the old covenant for Israel, and only for Israel, until that covenant was fulfilled (and thus rendered obsolete) by Christ.

If that paragraph startles, I repeat that my full supporting arguments are set out in my aforesaid works. I am sorely tempted to justify my claims at this point, but I resist that temptation because I want to confine this article to that one simple point; namely, that God's law, the Mosaic law, was given at Sinai to Israel, and Israel only, until the old covenant was fulfilled by Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Christ, Three; Sabbath Notes; Sabbath Questions: Essential Sabbath; Horne*, for instance.

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This is no trivial matter or academic nicety. As I have said, many teach or simply assume that the law of Moses has had universal jurisdiction since the time of Adam, and is still in place, applicable to all men. Moreover, those of us who dare question this – to put it no stronger – are dismissed out-of-hand as antinomians. This is a travesty on several grounds, not least for those who make this blanket – and, in many cases, frankly ridiculous – unjustified accusation.<sup>2</sup> Failure to grasp the scriptural point I am making in this article leads to many other errors, some of which have disastrous consequences. Hence, this article, I hope, will, at the very least, start some people rethinking the stance over the law which they have adopted until now, either by conviction, or more commonly, simply by default.

I propose to make my point simply by repeating some relevant scriptures, adding only the briefest observations. The fact is, these scriptures speak for themselves. If only believers would submit to Scripture – and not Scripture glossed by a theological template, system or Confession – this endless debate would be brought to a speedy end.

The point is that God chose Israel as a special – unique – people (1 Kings 8:53), and that he dealt with that nation as he dealt with no others; in particular, he gave his special law to them as his special people, and gave it to them alone. The sabbath, at the very heart of the law, was a special – indeed, unique – sign to mark this people as special – indeed, unique – and separate from all others. I have found about 170 scriptural references to ‘sabbath’ in connection with Jews, none before Exodus, none urging sabbath observance on Gentiles. Just as separation was

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, real antinomianism has existed, and almost certainly still does exist somewhere, but a blanket, unthinking dismissal of those who dare to question a ‘revered’ Confession’s position on the law is too convenient. *Moreover, it is also wrong and unworthy.* The subject demands a far more serious attitude than that! See my *Four*, for instance.

## *Moses' Law for Moses' People*

one of the key marks of Israel, its covenant and law, separation is a key mark of the *ekklēsia* in the new covenant.<sup>3</sup>

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The relevant scriptures:

[God] declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules [or just decrees] to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules [or just decrees] (Ps. 147:19-20).

Moses, addressing the children of Israel just before they entered Canaan, declared:

What great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?... [God] declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess...

But notice how Moses immediately drew Israel's attention to the fact that God – uniquely – gave them the law, in contrast to the giving of the stars, planets, and so on, universally to all men:

Beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven...

And Moses drove home the obvious lesson to be drawn from this:

‘Ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of

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<sup>3</sup> See my *Evangelicals Warned*.

## *Moses' Law for Moses' People*

another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you... Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today...'. This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel. These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the rules, which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt (Deut 4:8,13-14,19,32-36,40,44-45).

Speaking of Sinai, Moses demanded of the children of Israel:

For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived? (Deut. 5:26).

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today. And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples (Deut. 7:6-14).

## *Moses' Law for Moses' People*

The LORD came from Sinai... he loved his people... Moses commanded us a law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob (Deut. 33:1-4).

When Deborah and Barak praised God in their jubilant song for delivering his people, his unique people, from Sisera's horde, they described God in a way which emphasised Israel's uniqueness and privilege in connection with his giving them the covenant and the law:

The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel (Judges 5:5).

As the psalmist said:

God made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel (Ps. 103:7).

[God] gave [Israel] the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil, that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws (Ps. 105:44-45).

And that takes us back to where we started:

[God] declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules [or just decrees] to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules [or just decrees] (Ps. 147:19-20).

Until, at the very end of the Old Testament, we have God's command to his old-covenant people:

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules [just decrees] that I commanded him at Horeb [that is, Sinai] for all Israel (Mal. 4:4).

And what about the New Testament?

Peter, addressing the Jewish crowd on the day of Pentecost, pulled no punches:

Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of

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lawless men [that is, men – Gentiles, Romans – who do not have the law] (Acts 2:23).<sup>4</sup>

[The] Gentiles... do not have the law... they do not have the law (Rom. 2:14).<sup>5</sup>

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).

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 9:4-5).

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<sup>4</sup> The Jews were responsible for crucifying Christ but, to do the dirty work, they used Roman hands, Gentile hands, 'lawless hands'. The NASB, translating the phrase, 'by the hands of godless men', has a marginal note: 'Lawless hands, or, men without the law; that is, heathen'. The NIV correctly notes: 'Of those not having the law (that is, Gentiles)'. Christ had already foretold this is what would happen: 'The Son of Man... will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge him and kill him' (Luke 18:31-33). Peter, steeped in Jewish thought, was using the phrase, 'lawless men', in the Jewish sense. The men he was talking about were 'men without the law'. That is to say, they were law-less, outside the law of God, Gentiles. The Jews boasted of their having the law. They were the only people to have it. All the rest were 'law-less'. So, as Peter said, Christ was crucified by the Jews (who had the law) making use of the Gentiles (who did not have the law, the without-the-law people) to do the work. See also Matt. 20:18-19; and Gal. 2:15, where 'Jews by nature' are contrasted with 'sinners of the Gentiles' or 'Gentile sinners' (NIV). 'Sinners' and 'Gentiles', in such a context, means those who are law-less, outside the law, beyond the pale.

<sup>5</sup> Here is the full extract: 'Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus' (Rom. 2:14-16). Gentiles have 'the work of the law on their hearts', but they are not under the law of Moses; it was not given to them. See my *Christ; Believers*.

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In setting out his approach to unbelievers with the gospel, Paul clearly distinguished between those who had the law – the Jews – and those who did not have it – the Gentiles:

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 (1 Cor. 9:19-21).

So much for the law in general; now for the sabbath – the very heart of the law – given to Israel marking Israel as a special – unique – people. Those who claim that sabbath observance is of universal obligation make a nonsense of God's designation of the sabbath as Israel's special sign:

Surely my sabbaths<sup>6</sup> 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 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).

I made myself known to [Israel] in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. [At Sinai,] I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know

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<sup>6</sup> The use of 'sabbaths' must not be misread; God is not speaking only of 'special sabbaths', but all sabbaths, including and especially, the weekly sabbath.

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that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness. And I said to their children in the wilderness: 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols [that is, your ancestors' adulteration of the covenant].<sup>7</sup> I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, and keep my sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God'. But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols. Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD (Ezek. 20:9-26).

My point once again:

God chose Israel as a special – unique – people, and that he dealt with that nation as he dealt with no others; in particular,

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<sup>7</sup> See my *Evangelicals Warned*.

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he gave his special law to them as his special people, and gave it to them alone. The sabbath, at the very heart of the law, was a special – indeed, unique – sign to mark this people as special – indeed, unique – and separate from all others.

If this weight of scriptural evidence does not convince those who are determined to cling to a Confession or theological system in defiance of clear Scripture, then I fear that nothing will.

Those who wish can stop reading here and let the point sink in. For those who would like a little more, I append two lightly-edited extracts from my *Christ is All*, pp27-29,33-35.<sup>8</sup> Please see that volume for the way I go on to develop the important conclusions to be drawn from what I have said here.

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### ***Extract 1***

The principle – that the Mosaic law was given to Israel only – underlies Romans 9:30-32. We are told expressly that the Gentiles do not have the law (Rom. 2:12-14), but that it was given to the Jews, being ‘the statutes and judgments and laws which the LORD made between himself and *the children of Israel* on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses’ (Lev. 26:46), God immediately reiterating the point with the closing verse of Leviticus: ‘These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses *for the children of Israel* on Mount Sinai’ (Lev. 27:34).<sup>9</sup> Right from the start, while the people were

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<sup>8</sup> I have resisted the temptation to include similar extracts from my sabbath books, proving the sabbath is unique to Israel. Otherwise, this article would have become a booklet.

<sup>9</sup> This is not to be confined to the so-called ‘ceremonial law’ – see chapter 7 of my *Christ*. For now, notice how this blanket description in the closing verse of Leviticus includes at least the second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth and ninth commands (Lev. 19:3,4,11-13,16,30; 20:9,10; 23:3; 24:10-23; 26:1,2) of the so-called ‘moral law’. As for the rest, the first commandment is implied throughout Leviticus – see in particular Lev. 26:1, the sixth in Lev. 19:16-18, and transgression of

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camped in the wilderness of Sinai, even as Moses was called up to the mountain to receive the law, God prefaced it all: 'Thus you shall say to *the house of Jacob*, and tell *the children of Israel...*' (Ex. 19:3-6). God opened the ten commandments thus: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought *you* out of the land of Egypt...' (Ex. 20:2). And after the re-giving of the law, God could declare to Moses: 'According to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with *Israel*' (Ex. 34:27). (See also 2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chron. 5:10; 6:11; Neh. 9:1,13-14; *etc.*).

Nor was it the last time Israel was reminded of the fact. Solomon called Israel to 'take care to fulfil the statutes and judgments with which the LORD charged Moses *concerning Israel*' (1 Chron. 22:13). When Israel was removed from the land and taken into captivity, the king of Assyria replaced the children of Israel in Samaria with foreigners. These foreigners, it is recorded, brought their own gods, and their own 'rituals'. Rejecting the law of the Hebrews, they did not 'follow *their* statutes or *their* ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded *the children of Jacob*, whom he named *Israel*' (2 Kings 17:34). Addressing Israel, God could speak of 'the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which he wrote for *you*' (2 Kings 17:37), promising Israel they would not 'wander any more from the land which I gave *their* fathers – [but] only if *they* are careful to do according to all that I have commanded *them*, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded *them*' (2 Kings 21:8). As with the land, so with the law – both had been given to Israel, and no others. When God revealed his law to Israel, he expressly commanded them not to do as the pagans did, but to 'observe my judgments and keep my ordinances... [to] keep my statutes and my judgments' (Lev. 18:1-5,26-30). Centuries after Sinai, God had to complain that Israel had not done this: 'You have not walked in my statutes nor executed my judgments, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all

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the tenth is pervasive – Paul found it so (Rom. 7:7), since the Jews thought it summed up the law, and to break it to be the root of all sins.

around you' (Ezek. 11:12), they had 'conformed to the standards of the nations around' them (NIV), breaking God's law (Deut. 12:29-32).<sup>10</sup> This makes sense if, and only if, God's (and Israel's) laws were different to the laws, principles, statutes, norms, judgments and standards of the pagans.

Asaph reminded Israel that the LORD 'established a testimony in *Jacob*, and appointed a law in *Israel*, which he commanded *our fathers*' (Ps. 78:5). Daniel, when praying for the children of Israel, could speak of God's 'laws, which he set before *us* by his servants the prophets' (Dan. 9:10-13). God reminded Hosea, concerning Israel: 'I have written *for him* the great things of my law' (Hos. 8:12). And 'God, the one of Sinai... God, the God of *Israel*' (Ps. 68:8, NIV), commanded Israel to 'remember the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb *for all Israel*, with the statutes and judgments' (Mal. 4:4). In Numbers 15, God said the law applied to the Jews, and those who would be reckoned Jews – proselytes and sojourners.

***To say that the law applies to the entire human race, is to render these statements and demands utterly superfluous and meaningless. What is more – and a glance at the passages quoted above will confirm it – we are talking about the law, the law of God, the law of Moses, the whole law, the law in its entirety. The law was given to Israel, for Israel, to distinguish Israel from all others.***

Nor was this a mere quirk of history. As I have noted, God treated the Jews as special, showing special regard for them in giving them his law. This was his *purpose*. He gave his law to the Jews *in order to* distinguish them from all others. Division was God's intention in giving the law to the Jews. Division! Separation! Distinction was God's great concern for Israel (Lev. 20:24,26).<sup>11</sup> And it was the law that especially marked the Jews out from the Gentiles, serving as a dividing wall, a partition, a demarcation between them and the pagans (Gal. 3:23-25 – note

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<sup>10</sup> Israel was worse than the pagans (Ezek. 5:5-7; 16:47).

<sup>11</sup> God's presence also distinguished them from all other people (Ex. 33:16).

## *Moses' Law for Moses' People*

the 'we' and 'our'; Eph. 2:11-16). The law regulated their national and personal life in every respect. Finally, it was a temporary measure confining Israel until the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19-24).

Moses, when repeating God's law in Moab, made it plain to whom it was given, declaring: 'Hear, O *Israel*... The LORD our God made a covenant with *us* in Horeb... He said: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"' (Deut. 5:1-2,5-6). God said 'Israel', and he meant Israel, and only Israel. It was only Israel whom he had delivered from Egypt.<sup>12</sup> But not only was the preface to the ten commandments peculiar to Israel. The fourth commandment concerned the sabbath which was a special sign for Israel (Ex. 31:13,16-17; Ezek. 20:12,20), and the fifth commandment referred to the land promised to Israel. In addition, the overwhelming bulk of the hundreds of other commandments contained in the law were spelled out in terms which belonged only to Israel. In short, Gentiles were not brought out of Egypt – in fact many of them (that is, the Egyptians) perished in Egypt or the Red Sea.<sup>13</sup> Gentiles were not given the sabbath as a special sign that they were the people of God. Gentiles were not given the pillar of cloud and fire. Gentiles were not given the manna. Gentiles were not given the promised land – the truth is, they had to be removed from it. Gentiles were not given the ordinances of the tabernacle. And so on. As just one example of how these things are linked, take Nehemiah 9:5-15.

Sadly, all this has too often been forgotten, and the law which was given uniquely to Israel, and applied only to them, has been mistakenly applied to Gentiles in the gospel age, to the confusion of both law and gospel.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The exodus from Egypt continued to preface references to the law. See 2 Kings 17:36, for instance.

<sup>13</sup> Some pagans had joined the Israelites as proselytes (Ex. 12:38,48-49; see Neh. 10:28; Est. 8:17; Isa. 56:3).

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 7 of my *Christ*.

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What is more, not only did God at Sinai give his law to Israel, and only to Israel, but prior to Sinai, nobody had the law – not even the patriarchs (Deut. 5:3; Rom. 5:13).<sup>15</sup> Notice how explicit Moses was at the repetition of the law in Moab, when reminding the Israelites of the first giving (and its re-giving) of the law at Horeb (Sinai): God did not make the covenant ‘with our fathers, but with us’ (Deut. 5:3). Who were these ‘fathers’? and who were the ‘us’? The ‘fathers’ were the patriarchs and their descendants who had died before the giving of the law at Sinai; God did not give his law to them. The ‘us’ were the Israelites – the people (with their children) who, having been delivered from Egypt, were gathered as the nation of Israel at Sinai – it was to them that God originally gave the law, and it was to their children that he was now renewing it in Moab. That generation of Hebrews at Sinai, therefore, was the first to receive the law. The patriarchs – the ‘fathers’ – who lived before the children of Jacob even entered Egypt, let alone left it – did not have the law. The song of Moses, when he ‘blessed the children of Israel before his death’, is plain: ‘The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir... from his right hand came a fiery law for them... Moses commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob... Levi... shall teach Jacob your judgments, and Israel your law’ (Deut. 33:1-4,8,10).<sup>16</sup> (See also Deut. 11:1-7; 29:9-15).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Israel *as a nation* did not exist before the exodus and the giving of the law. The giving of the law was a vital aspect of *making* them into a nation.

<sup>16</sup> Not only did the law have a beginning on Sinai; it had an end-point also, and that by God’s intention. Paul said the law ‘entered’ the Jewish world at the time of the exodus (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:17,19), as a temporary system for the Jews, to last only until Christ came (Gal. 3:19), when he fulfilled it, thus bringing it to the end God had designed for it (Matt. 5:17-18; Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:7,11; Heb. 7:18; 8:13; 9:8-9). Right from the start, it was ‘fading away’ (2 Cor. 3:11,13, NIV).

<sup>17</sup> The words, ‘him who is not here with us today’ (Deut. 29:14-15), refer to the descendants of the Israelites, not to all the rest of the human race.

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That nobody had the law before Sinai is clear – since Paul expressly pointed out that the law came – ‘was added’ – 430 years after God’s covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:16-17,19). It was *revealed* at Sinai; it was not *renewed*. How can it be claimed that God gave the law to Adam at creation, or to the patriarchs? Yet many do say it! No! As Christ said, when replying to the Pharisees’ question over the divorce-certificate regulation introduced by Moses (Deut. 24:1-4): ‘From the beginning [Adam] it was not so’ (Matt. 19:7-8). The law was given to Moses 430 years *after* the promise to Abraham, not given to Adam hundreds of years *before* Abraham. In stressing this, I am not straining out arithmetical or historical gnats. To say that Adam was given the Mosaic law is to miss a point of major consequence, contradicting Paul’s argument in Romans 5 and Galatians 3.<sup>18</sup> The law was given to Moses long after God had revealed his saving purpose in and to Abraham.

### ***Extract 2***

When the Jews wanted Christ put to death, they could tell Pilate: ‘*We* have a law, and according to *our* law he ought to die’ (John 19:7; see Lev. 24:16), but the Roman governor had already told them: ‘*You* take him and judge him according to *your* law’ (John 18:31). When the Jews of Corinth brought Paul to court before Gallio, accusing him of persuading ‘men to worship God contrary to the law’ (Acts 18:11-16),<sup>19</sup> Gallio refused to entertain the case, on the grounds that it was none of his business. He roundly told them he would not get involved in ‘a question of words and names and your own law’; ‘*your own* law’, I emphasise. With a dismissive, ‘Look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters’, he cleared the court. Claudius Lysias spoke in a similar way when writing to Felix, calling the accusation laid against Paul by the Jews, ‘questions of *their* law’ (Acts 23:29), no concern of his, something outside his jurisdiction, comprehension and

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<sup>18</sup> Adam, of course, was given his own commandment which he broke (Rom. 5:14).

<sup>19</sup> The law of Moses, they meant, not the law of Corinth.

competence. The Jews confirmed this by telling Felix they had 'wanted to judge [Paul] according to *our* law' (Acts 24:6). Festus was in the same quandary as Felix. While he was familiar with 'the custom of the Romans', he was 'uncertain of such questions' as he was now being asked, 'questions... about *their own* religion' (Acts 25:16,19-20). Paul, standing before Agrippa, was happy to think his judge was an 'expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews', including the words of the prophets. '*Our* religion', he called it (Acts 26:1-5,26-27) – with the clear implication that Gentiles generally speaking had at best only a limited knowledge of God's revelation to the Jews, and their customs, religion and *law*. All this is strange, to put it mildly, *if these Gentiles had been as much under the law as the Jews*. I realise these Gentiles were politicians as well as magistrates, soldiers or kings, and I would not treat their words as the final authority on biblical principles, but they do nothing to contradict the claim that the law was given only to the Jews.<sup>20</sup>

And what of Hebrews 7:11? We are told that 'under [the levitical priesthood] the people received the law'. While it is not easy to determine precisely what the writer meant, at the very least we may speak of a link between the levitical priesthood, the Israelites and the law. In fact, it is much stronger than this. It was *under* the levitical priesthood that Israel received the law. The NIV and the NASB use the word *basis*; Israel received the law *on the basis* of the levitical priesthood. Now who received the levitical priesthood? The Jews. The Jews and no others. No Gentiles had the levitical priesthood. Consequently, only the Jews could have received the law, since no people could have the law without the levitical priesthood, and *vice-versa*. The two were inextricably linked (Heb. 7:11-12,14,18-19,22,28). The two stood or fell together: 'The priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law' (Heb. 7:12). Under this system – unique to the Jews – the law required Levi to

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<sup>20</sup> In chapter 7 of my *Christ*, I deal with the objection that such passages are concerned with the ceremonial or judicial law. They are not! We are talking about the whole law.

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collect the tithe from his brothers – not all men (Heb. 7:5). And so on.

Therefore, of all nations, Israel alone received the law.

## *A Response to Michael Myers*

In a recent article, Michael Myers writes:

I will begin by defending the uniqueness and permanence of the moral law (*a.k.a* the ten commandments)... God *himself* speaks all the words of the ten commandments... While there is usefulness in studying the ceremonial and civil applications of the moral law, those aspects have either been abrogated or have expired. The moral law is different... God spoke it; Moses either wrote or spoke all the others (Deut. 4:33; Ex. 20:22). God wrote the law with his own finger in tablets of stone (Ex. 31:18; 32:16; 34:1); Moses wrote the other words by hand (Ex. 17:14; 34:32). Interestingly,<sup>1</sup> the book of the covenant was placed beside the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:26), whereas the two tablets containing the moral law were placed *inside* the ark (Deut. 10:2). In the new covenant, God would write the words of this moral law, not upon tablets of stone, but upon the heart (Jer. 31:33).<sup>2</sup>

My response, I am afraid, has turned out longer than I intended, but the issues Myers raised call for a thorough examination and exposure.<sup>3</sup>

I start by drawing attention to a very serious confusion at the heart of the extract in question. Let me quote the relevant words:

While there is usefulness in studying the ceremonial and civil applications of the moral law, those aspects have either been

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<sup>1</sup> But Myers' argument implies that this is more than 'interesting'; he clearly regards it as highly significant.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Myers: 'The Law is a Light', *The Banner of Truth*, Aug.-Sept., 2022, pp4-5, emphasis original.

<sup>3</sup> My supporting arguments can be found in my *Christ; Psalm 119 and The New Covenant; The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry; Assurance in the New Covenant; Believers*; and so on. In addition, several relevant articles can be found in the various volumes of my *New-Covenant Articles*. See also my video-series 'New-Covenant Theology Made Simple' on YouTube.

abrogated or have expired.<sup>4</sup> The moral law is different... God spoke it; Moses either wrote or spoke all the others...

In order to expose this confusion I will, at this stage, accept Myers' use of Reformed terminology. He admits that 'the moral law' (in his terms, the ten commandments) contains 'ceremonial and civil' aspects which are not permanent. This, of course, leaves us with a serious problem. How can we know which parts of this permanent 'moral law' are 'moral' and therefore permanent, and which are 'ceremonial or civil' and therefore temporary and now abolished? Scripture does not use a magic marker to make this vital distinction clear. This is no idle question or mere debating point. As Myers knows, Reformed teachers have always had huge difficulties with Calvin's interpretation of the fourth commandment, for instance.<sup>5</sup>

But this does not exhaust the confusion; far from it! According to Myers, God himself wrote 'the moral law' on stone tablets, thereby distinguishing the ten commandments from 'the ceremonial and civil law' written by Moses in a book. He continues: 'The moral law', written by God, is permanent; 'the ceremonial and civil law' is not. Yet some of that 'moral law', written by God, which is permanent, is not actually 'moral' at all, but is 'ceremonial or civil', and, consequently, not

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<sup>4</sup> Myers justifies his claims by two references to the Westminster documents. In fact, he misrepresents the Westminster Confession, claiming that 19.3 supports his claim that the moral law contained ceremonial and civil aspects. It does not: '*Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel... ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship... and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties... All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament [better, covenant – DG]'. Clearly, according to the Westminster Confession, 'the moral law' stands quite separate and distinct from 'the ceremonial and civil law'. The Confession does not state (as Myers does) that any part of 'the moral law' is ceremonial or civil and therefore temporary. The most that can be said is that it leaves the question open – open for theologians to fill the gap.*

<sup>5</sup> In addition to my other works already listed, see my *Sabbath Notes; Sabbath Questions; Essential Sabbath*.

permanent. So says Myers. Accordingly, it's not only a case, as in the previous paragraph, of how we are to decide whether or not any commandment is 'moral, ceremonial or civil': the real confusion is this: When is 'the moral law' 'the moral law'? When is 'permanent' 'permanent'?

So much for the confusion. Putting that to one side for the moment, I now want to tease out the consequences of Myers' claims. They are serious.

But before we get carried away by all this talk of the law being 'moral, ceremonial or civil', we need to keep in mind that this is not Scripture-speak; it is Reformed-speak. Myers' theological standpoint, the presupposition with which he approaches Scripture, is the covenant theology encapsulated in the Westminster Confession and associated documents. On what grounds do I say that? *First*, he is a Presbyterian minister.<sup>6</sup> *Secondly*, on the very first page of his article, Myers refers four times to the Westminster documents. Clearly the covenant theology of the Westminster Confession underlies his approach. I am saying nothing pejorative; I am simply stating a fact. But it is vital to remember that our presuppositions can so easily – almost inevitably – determine how we interpret Scripture. We can read out of Scripture – *exegesis* – what we have first read in – *eisegesis*. This is as true for me as it is for Myers. The fact is, if a man is convinced of the Westminster Confession and committed to its underlying system of covenant theology, inevitably he will read Scripture in light of that Confession based on that theology. And so on. Believers, of course, should read Scripture unfiltered. While this is not so easy as it sounds, unless we do, we shall risk arguing in a circle; our reading will tend to confirm our underlying presuppositions. In other words,

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<sup>6</sup> On the inside cover of the magazine referred to earlier, Myers is listed as 'Pastor of Heritage Presbyterian Church, Royston, Georgia, USA'. 'We are part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church ([OPC](#)), a denomination that holds to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as its confession of faith. While certainly not equal with the Bible, we believe it accurately summarises what the Bible teaches' (Heritage website). See the following note.

our authority, though we may claim it to be Scripture, though we may sincerely believe it to be Scripture, will in fact be our theology or Confession. Notice how often the advocates of the Westminster Confession stoutly claim that the Confession is only a secondary standard, yet their works frequently belie them.<sup>7</sup> Myers' use of covenant-theology terms – phrases and concepts such as 'the moral law', 'the tripartite division of the law', and Calvin's 'threefold use of the law' – is a sure indication of where he is coming from.<sup>8</sup>

Let us remind ourselves that the phrase, 'the moral law', and defining the ten commandments as 'the moral law', are human inventions, devices imposed by theologians on Scripture. Although Confessions, Systematic Theologies and Reformed theologians make frequent use of such language, Scripture itself never does – not once.<sup>9</sup> As can be seen, Myers, typical of the Reformed approach, simply states or assumes that the ten commandments form this 'moral law'.

Now for the extract.

Myers is right in saying that Scripture records that God wrote the ten commandments with his own finger directly on the stone tablets, but Moses wrote or spoke the book of the covenant. He is also right in stating that the stone tablets were placed within the ark of the covenant, while the book of the covenant was

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<sup>7</sup> See the previous note. See also my 'Is it Me? Or The Cat Let Out of the Bag'; 'No Confession? Nothing to Debate!'; 'A Must-See Debate'; 'A Must-Listen Podcast'.

<sup>8</sup> Myers is quite open about the fact that his talk of the threefold use of the law is based on Calvin's teaching: 'Following Calvin's order, let us explore the [Note the definite article, implying that this really is established – leaving no hint of doubt – DG] three uses of the law' (Myers p5). Let me be blunt. This statement reads as though 'the threefold use of the moral law' is scriptural. It is not. What Myers is really saying is: 'Following Calvin's order, set out in his *Institutes*, let us explore Calvin's system (adopted from Thomas Aquinas and others) of the three uses of the law'.

<sup>9</sup> The issue, of course, is not whether Confessions or theologians assert anything. Rather, does Scripture state it?

placed alongside the ark. Scripture offers no explanation of these facts; it simply records them.

Myers, however, regarding these facts as hugely significant, draws far-reaching conclusions from them. He argues for the permanence of ‘the moral law’ as opposed to the temporary nature of the book of the covenant; he also asserts that when God used Jeremiah to predict that in the new covenant ‘I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts’ (Jer. 31:33), he was saying that ‘the moral law’ would be written on the believer’s heart. In both cases, by ‘the moral law’ Myers means the ten commandments.

Let us get down to brass tacks.<sup>10</sup> Myers is drawing a clear and permanent distinction between the ten commandments and the book of the covenant. I am not trying to put words into his mouth, and I admit that he does not explicitly state it, but Myers really is speaking of two distinct laws – the law of God and the law of Moses. The law of God was written directly by God, but the law of Moses (though it came from God) was written or spoken by Moses. The former was permanent; the latter, temporary. God gave both, but he deliberately made a clear distinction between the two, and had that distinction recorded in his word. And in the new covenant, God writes ‘the moral law’ (God’s law), but not ‘the ceremonial and civil law’ (Moses’ law), on every believer’s heart. I cannot see how this can be described as anything other than two distinct laws. To my mind, it is the inevitable conclusion to be drawn from Myers’ arguments.

I apologise for labouring the point, but we must be clear about what is being said. If Myers is right, ‘the law’ is not a single law; it consists of two separate and distinct laws. On the one hand, we have the law of God (that is, the ten commandments written by God on tablets of stone) applicable to all men for all time (apart from those aspects of this permanent law which are not in fact permanent – see above); and, on the other hand, we

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<sup>10</sup> For American readers, ‘cut to the chase’.

have the law of Moses applicable to Israel only and only during the time of the old covenant, and consisting of two parts – ceremonial and civil. Two very different laws. This, it seems to me, is what Myers' argument amounts to.

Once again we need to cut to the chase.<sup>11</sup> The truth is, Myers is setting out his understanding of yet another theological invention, one which is vital to the Reformed system; namely, 'the tripartite division of the law'.<sup>12</sup> As before, while this phrase is loved by theologians, it never appears in Scripture.

Let me repeat the cardinal point. If Myers is right, then he has actually established far more than the tripartite division of the law: the law is not a single law in three compartments, moral, ceremonial and civil, but two distinct laws – the law of God and the law of Moses, the former being moral with some ceremonial and civil aspects, the latter being entirely ceremonial or civil.

We are not playing word-games. If Myers is right, his argument must assume a major role in our understanding of Scripture. For instance, when we come across the phrase 'the law', we have to gloss the text by adding explanatory words in line with Myers' doctrine. Let me illustrate. Take the words of John:

*The law* was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

This could mean:

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<sup>11</sup> American for 'getting down to brass tacks'.

<sup>12</sup> While, as so often with man-made systems, there are variations, putting it simply, covenant theologians usually teach that the law comprises three parts: moral, ceremonial and civil. The first is binding on all men from creation to the end of time; the other two applied to Israel, and ended with the new covenant. As we have seen, Myers seems to be teaching something different: the law comprises two laws; namely, on the one hand, the law of God (the ten commandments) which contains some ceremonial and civil elements, which, apart from these ceremonial and civil elements, is permanent and applies to all men, and, on the other hand, the law of Moses, which is entirely ceremonial and civil, and applied only to Israel in the days of the old covenant.

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*The law of God in the ten commandments written by God on the stone tablets* was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Or:

*The law of Moses, the book of the law written by Moses as distinct from the ten commandments,* was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Or:

*The entire law comprising both of its two separate laws (the law of God in the ten commandments written by God on the stone tablets, and the law of Moses written by Moses in the book of the law)* was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

How are we to determine which of these possibilities John meant? Sometimes it may not matter; at other times, the consequences may be far-reaching. Who can tell? Who will let us know?

And so on.

Space forbids the setting out of similar treatment with passages such as Romans 2:12-27; 3:19-21; 6:14 – 8:7; 9:4,31-32; 10:4-5; 13:8-10. And that's only Romans! Having said that, I cannot resist quoting two other passages where these glosses will have a vital role to play:

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*... There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from *the law of sin and death*. 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*

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*law* might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:1-4).

We know that a person is not justified by works of *the law* but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of *the law*, because by works of *the law* no one will be justified... Through *the law* I died to *the law*, so that I might live to God (Gal. 2:16-19)

According to Myers' teaching, 'the moral law' (the ten commandments shorn of its ceremonial and civil elements) applies to all men, but Moses' law, 'the book of the law', (that is, the ceremonial and civil laws, rendered obsolete with the establishment of new covenant), applied only to Israel. So, who are the 'we' and 'us' in such extracts as the above? And which law is meant in each case?

Then again, what about the very frequently used phrase 'your law' or (AV) 'thy law'? Should we understand this to be restricted to the law of God – the ten commandments, written directly by God on the two stone tablets – or what?

There is more.

Why did no scriptural writer ever make the major point Myers has set out? Why did nobody draw Myers' conclusions from what happened at Sinai? No judge, no king, no prophet in the days of the old covenant ever did. Christ didn't; nor did any apostle. Why not? Seeing it must have been such a major point for Israel in the days of the old covenant, and no less for believers' understanding of Scripture in the days of the new covenant, why does Scripture itself not plainly – unequivocally – put the issue beyond doubt?<sup>13</sup>

Consider this account of the giving of the law. I quote it in full to give the sense:

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<sup>13</sup> As I have argued, even the Westminster Confession doesn't make Myers' point.

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The LORD said to Moses... The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed... And he said: 'Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed. Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In ploughing time and in harvest you shall rest. You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year. You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning. The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk'.

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And the LORD said to Moses: 'Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel'. So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments... He commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face (Ex. 34:1-36).

Clearly, the old covenant comprised all God's commandments, whether or not they appeared on the tablets of stone inscribed directly by God's finger, or in Moses' book written by his hand. Again, whether any commandment was moral, ceremonial, civil – allowing these terms for sake of argument – was irrelevant: all – all – formed one covenant. Did God give the merest whiff of a hint that he expected theologians – rabbis in Israel, or covenant theologians in the 16th and 17th centuries – to break this covenant into convenient bits?

How does any chopping up of the law – by whatever method (Myers' or any other Reformed system) – fit with such passages as these:

Every man who accepts circumcision... is obligated to keep the whole law (Gal. 5:3).

If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it [Does that mean guilty of breaking the ten commandments or breaking the entire law? – DG]. For he who said: 'Do not commit adultery', also said: 'Do not murder'. If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (Jas. 2:8-11).

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 (1 Cor. 9:20-21).

Note that while covenant theologians like to say that the ten commandments are the moral law, in contrast, Scripture states that the ten commandments and the old covenant are one:

[God] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments (Ex. 34:28).

Again:

The LORD spoke to you... and he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone (Deut. 4:12-13).

In trying to gather all this together, let me ask and answer an important question: What is the scriptural connection between the ten commandments, Moses' book, and the old covenant? My own view is that the ten commandments were a summary of the entire law, but the entire law (with the ten commandments as its summary) formed the old covenant. As the writer to the Hebrews explained, the old covenant, the priesthood and the law were intimately connected:

The Levitical priesthood (...under it the people received *the law*)... When there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in *the law* as well (Heb. 7:11-12).

There is more.

Myers argues that 'the book of the law' and 'the law of God' are distinct and separate; Scripture says they are one and the same. Take the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah at the time of the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon – an exile brought about by their stubborn and prolonged breaking of the covenant (the entire covenant which included the stone tablets and Moses' book) (Lev. 26:14-46; Deut. 4:25-31; 8:19-20; 28:15-68; 2 Chron. 36:11-20; Isa. 6:8-13; Jer. 1:13-16; 5:14-31; 6:1-30; 7:1 – 11:17; 12:14-17; 13:15-27; 17:1-4; 20:4-6; 32:23; Ezek. 7:1-27; 16:1-63; 44:5-13; Mic. 4:9-10, for instance). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah make no distinction whatever between moral, ceremonial and civil commandments; they never distinguish between the law of God and the law of Moses.

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Indeed, they quote (with equal weight) from all parts of the entire covenant:

Ezra... was a scribe skilled in *the law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given*... Ezra had set his heart to study *the law of the LORD*, and to do it and to teach *his statutes and rules* in Israel... Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of *the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel*... Ezra the priest, the scribe of *the law of the God of heaven*... You are sent by the king and his seven counsellors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to *the law of your God*, which is in your hand... Ezra the priest, the scribe of *the law of the God of heaven*... Whatever is *decreed by the God of heaven*, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven... Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges... all such as know *the laws of your God*. And those who do not know them, you shall teach. Whoever will not obey *the law of your God*... (Ez. 7:1-28).

And when Ezra heard that the Jews were, yet again, breaking the covenant, even after their return from Babylon:

Then all who trembled at *the words of the God of Israel*, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice (Ez. 9:4).

And Ezra, making Israel reform over their intermarriage with pagans (something forbidden in the covenant – see Deuteronomy 7:3 and Joshua 23:12, for instance) said:

Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel... of those who tremble at *the commandment of our God*, and let it be done according to *the law* (Ez. 10:3).

Then, Nehemiah's prayer:

O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep *his commandments*... We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept *the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses*.

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Remember *the word that you commanded your servant Moses* (Neh. 1:5-8).

Again:

All the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring *the book of the law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel*. So Ezra the priest brought *the law* before the assembly... And the ears of all the people were attentive to *the book of the law*... And Ezra opened *the book* in the sight of all the people... [Various men] helped the people to understand *the law*... They read from *the book*, from *the law of God*... All the people wept as they heard the words of *the law*...

On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of *the law*. And they found it written in *the law that the LORD had commanded by Moses* that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month... And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from *the book of the law of God*. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to *the rule* (Neh. 8:1-18).

And so it went on:

The Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from *the book of the law of the LORD their God*... [Addressing God, they said:] 'You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them *right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses* your servant.

But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey *your commandments*...

They were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast *your law* behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies... You warned them in order to turn them back to *your law*. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey *your commandments*, but sinned against *your rules*...

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Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept *your law* or paid attention to *your commandments* and your warnings that you gave them... (Neh. 9:1-34).

The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to *the law of God*, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in *God's law that was given by Moses* the servant of God, and to observe and do all *the commandments of the LORD* our Lord and *his rules and his statutes*... (Neh. 10:28-29).

Then follows precise details of their commitment to the law, including the rejection of marriage with pagans, keeping the sabbath, leaving fields fallow, feasts, tithing, material support for the temple, sacrifices, the priesthood, and so on, 'as it is written in *the law*'.

And:

Men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by *the law* for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns, for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered (Neh. 12:44).

And so to the final reforms:

On that day they read from *the book of Moses* in the hearing of the people... As soon as the people heard *the law*, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent (Neh. 13:1,3).

Nehemiah brought his work to a close by praying against those who had transgressed the covenant:

Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites (Neh. 13:29).

Does Myers think that in all this, Ezra and Nehemiah had with them the two stone tablets and the book of the law of Moses, and that they repeatedly switched from one to the other and back

again? Did anybody distinguish between the ten commandments, the book of Moses, the law and the covenant?

Consider this from Daniel:

To the LORD our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed *the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets*. All Israel has transgressed *your law [that is the law of God]* and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in *the law of Moses* the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. As it is written in *the law of Moses*, all this calamity has come upon us (Dan. 9:10-13).

What about the New Testament? We read:

When the time came for their purification according to *the law of Moses*, they [Joseph and Mary] brought him [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the LORD (as it is written in *the law of the Lord*: ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in *the law of the Lord*: ‘A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’ (Luke 2:22-24).

Consider:

‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ And [Christ] said to [the lawyer]: ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets’ (Matt. 22:36-40).

Where do we find these two great commands? Not in the ten commandments – which Myers defines as the abiding law written by God (that is, the law of God) – but in the law which was written by Moses, and which, as Myers acknowledges, was

temporary, and applied only to Israel. I refer, of course, to Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5.

Why are there countless passages of Scripture where various commandments from all parts of the law are jumbled together, with never a hint that this matters in the slightest?

Here are some lightly-edited words from my *Christ is All*:

At the end of Leviticus, after God had given Israel a whole host of laws on all sorts of matters, including idolatry, adultery, disrespect for parents, the weekly sabbath, harvest, resting the land every seven years, the year of jubilee with all its regulations for redemption, and so on, Moses recorded: 'These are the statutes and judgments and laws which the LORD made between himself and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses... These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai' (Lev. 26:46; 27:34). It did not matter whether or not any particular law was found in the ten commandments or the regulations for the tabernacle or the statutes for the ordering of Jewish society. No Jew ever asked which part of the law any commandment came from. It simply would not have crossed his mind. It was all the law of God, all the law of God given for Israel on Sinai. Compare Exodus 20 – 23. Note how the later 'laws' amplify what is given in the ten commandments. These passages demonstrate that the giving of the laws and commandments at Sinai is all of a piece. Together, they form 'the law'.

Take Numbers 15. The stoning of the man for transgressing the law of the sabbath (Num. 15:32-36) is sandwiched between – on the one hand, the laws of sacrifice and offering for sin (Num. 15:1-31) – and on the other, the sewing of tassels on the corners of garments (Num. 15:37-40), this last to remind the Israelites to 'remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them' (Num. 15:39-40). And the chapter concludes with words remarkably similar to the preface to the ten commandments (Num. 15:41; Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). My point is that *it is impossible to detect any biblical difference in the designation of any of these laws*. Sacrifices, offerings, sabbath and tassels all – *all* – come under the one umbrella: 'Ordinance... law... custom... all these commandments... all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses... the LORD gave commandment... law... the word of the LORD...

his commandment... So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation [obeyed]... Remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them... remember and do all my commandments' (Num. 15:15-16,22-23,29,31,36,39-40). Similar biblical evidence is abundant. Take Deuteronomy 4 – 6; 26 – 30, and so on...

Centuries later, Jehoshaphat did not seem to be fazed by Myers' notion. He felt free to instruct the judges to deal faithfully with all cases which came before them, 'whether of bloodshed or offences against law or commandment, against statutes or ordinances', including murder – the sixth commandment (2 Chron. 19:8-11). Once again, the laws, commandments, regulations, ordinances and statutes constituted one law, the law of God given to Israel through Moses. The Jews never divided the law into two laws or three parts. Never!

Nor did Christ! And neither did Paul. If he had introduced such a root-and-branch change to the meaning of 'the law', such a radical break-up of 'the law', it is unthinkable that he would not have spelled it out, giving his reasons very fully. It is such an important issue. At a stroke, the tripartite division of the law virtually solves the New Testament conundrum over the law, and breaks its tension. The apostle's silence speaks volumes. The thought never entered his mind. The tripartite division is neat; it is convenient; but it is wrong.

Indeed, as for 'the law' in the New Testament, its very frequent use is almost indiscriminate... Reformed teachers might like to have everything neatly sewn up into three little packets (Myers might want two distinct laws) so that they can dispose of awkward verses and passages, but when Paul uses the word 'law', he overwhelmingly means the entire Jewish law, the law given to Israel by God through Moses, as recorded in the first five books of the Bible.<sup>14</sup>

Let us turn to the new covenant.

We know that Christ set up the new covenant at the last supper with the disciples before his death:

This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20).

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<sup>14</sup> See my *Christ* pp101-103.

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This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me (1 Cor. 11:25).

We know, further, that God, by bringing in this new covenant, replaced, superseded the old covenant, making it obsolete:

A former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God... This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant (Heb. 7:18-22).

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... In speaking of a new covenant, [God] makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:6-13).<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the letter to the Hebrews is entirely taken up with the contrast between the old and new covenants.

And Paul's dogmatic assertions about this contrast should remove any lingering doubt:

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. 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... To this day, when [the Israelites] read the old covenant, that same veil remains un-lifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

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<sup>15</sup> 'What is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away' is a general principle: when something is rendered obsolete, it is obsolete.

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Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts (2 Cor. 3:5-15).

Clearly, the ten commandments, ‘carved in letters on stone’ was ‘the ministry of death’, ‘the ministry of condemnation’, and it was ‘brought to an end’, having been replaced or superseded by the ‘new covenant’, ‘the ministry of the Spirit’, ‘the ministry of righteousness’.

How can Myers claim, therefore, that the ten commandments are not only permanent, but they form the law written on the heart in the new covenant, as promised through Jeremiah? As he does:

I will begin by defending the uniqueness and permanence of the moral law (*a.k.a* the ten commandments)... In the new covenant, God would write the words of this moral law, not upon tablets of stone, but upon the heart (Jer. 31:33).

Is Myers right? Are we to understand that the ten commandments, ‘carved in letters on stone’, which was ‘the ministry of death’, ‘the ministry of condemnation’, and which has been ‘brought to an end’ by Christ in establishing the new covenant, is the very law written on every believer’s heart by the Spirit? Could we be shown proof? Scriptural proof I mean, not mere assertion based on a Confession! Did the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 8:6-13) understand the law written on the heart in that way?

Ezekiel also predicted the new covenant:

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules [or just decrees] (Ezek. 36:26-27).

Are the ‘statutes... [and] rules [or just decrees]’ of the Mosaic covenant written on the believer’s heart?

What confusion! Is it not much more likely – to put it no stronger – that the law of the new covenant, written on the heart of every believer, must be a new law – the law of Christ (1 Cor.

9:20-21; Gal 6:2)? All the shadows of the old covenant – including sabbath, passover, priesthood, sacrifice, temple – are replaced, superseded by, fulfilled in and through Christ in the new covenant (Col. 2:16-17; Hebrews *passim*). The parable of the wineskins (Matt. 9:15-17) absolutely rules out any attempt to mix the old and new covenants. Surely a new covenant – *kainos*, freshly-made, new quality, of a different nature to the old – by definition absolutely demands a new law!

I leave it there. In my opinion, Myers has only added further confusion to the long-standing confusion caused by Reformed attempts to force Scripture into the template of covenant theology. Christ told us plainly that the new wine cannot be forced into the old covenant. When will the Reformed give up their vain efforts to force it into the mould of the Westminster Confession?

\* \* \*

In conclusion, I take up the way in which Myers opened his article: ‘The law of God has fallen on hard times. Perhaps more accurately, it has fallen on hard hearts’.<sup>16</sup>

I hope this is not true of me. I know ‘the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good’ (Rom. 7:12). I hope that ‘I delight in the law of God’ (Rom. 7:22), that I love and meditate in God’s law, precepts, statutes, word day and night (Ps. 1:2; 119:15,48,78,97,148,159).

But this does not mean that the ten commandments are my heart’s love, nor are they the sum and horizon of my perpetual mediation. Living, as I do, as a believer during the days of the new covenant, it is the entire word of God from the first verse of Genesis to the closing verse of Revelation, including the entire law written on the stone tablets and in Moses’ book, all of it read in the light of the new covenant, which is God’s word, God’s law, statutes, precepts and judgments for me. Above all, it is Christ himself, the one who is to be found in all the

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<sup>16</sup> Myers p4.

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Scriptures (Luke 24:27,44-45), the one who is the very word of God (John 1:1,14-18). As John said: ‘The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17). And as Paul put it: ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11).

This, in short, is what I understand by the law of Christ, the law under which (1 Cor. 9:20-21; Gal. 6:2) I seek to obey the apostolic command (yet another vital part of Christ’s law) to ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ in order that the apostolic end might be reached: ‘To [Christ] be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen’ (2 Pet. 3:18).

Finally, I suspect that this is not only true of me but, despite what they teach and write when defending and advocating their system, it is the underlying reality for most Reformed teachers – Myers included. Does Myers confine his love, study, obedience and preaching to the ten commandments?<sup>17</sup> I doubt it!

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<sup>17</sup> I admit that covenant theologians are adept at reading the rest of Scripture into the ten commandments, and then reading it out – usually with many subdivisions. But why do it? Why not let all Scripture speak in its context?



## *Pots, Kettles and Glasshouses: A Response to Austin Walker's Review of McGrane*

In this article, I speak only for myself. While I am confident that other new-covenant<sup>1</sup> theologians would agree with the point I make, obviously I cannot speak for them. Hence my use of the singular first-person pronoun.

Kevin McGrane wrote a series of articles which were published in *The Gospel Magazine*, which he then expanded to produce a book that was published by The Gospel Magazine Trust in 2018, entitled *New Covenant Theology Weighed and Found Wanting*.

The *Banner of Truth* has recently published Austin Walker's review of McGrane's book.<sup>2</sup>

As in my previous response to McGrane (brought about by Kevin Bidwell's review of McGrane's book),<sup>3</sup> even though I am privileged to be mentioned by name both in the original book and the reviews, I am not responding to Walker's review to defend new-covenant theology; certainly not to defend myself. Though it might seem I am trying to do the latter, I have far bigger fish to fry. Indeed, defence of any kind could not be further from my mind. I am on the attack!

The fact is, I want to try yet again to push a rock uphill and, on this question of the law, make Reformed writers actually mean *and do* what they are so fond of saying – parroting, more like;

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<sup>1</sup> I have introduced the hyphen; it is vital. NCT is not a new form of covenant theology, but is the theology of the new covenant. The two are radically different. Indeed, the difference lies at the heart of this debate. See my 'A Theology By Any Other Name...'

<sup>2</sup> Austin Walker: 'New Covenant Theology Weighed and Found Wanting', *Banner of Truth*, Aug.-Sept. 2020, pp61-62.

<sup>3</sup> See my 'A Breath of Fresh Air Wanted: A Brief Review of McGrane on NCT'.

namely, that they regard their Confessions and Catechisms as subsidiary standards whereas Scripture is their true authority.

If only! Their works belie them!<sup>4</sup>

Specifically, according to Walker, McGrane's position is that:

New-Covenant Theology (NCT) has been established on unsound exegesis and a faulty hermeneutic [that is, way of interpreting Scripture] determined by particular presuppositions... NCT effectively imposes a hermeneutical grid on texts of Scripture based on an *a priori* theological position; namely inductivism [that is, using a particular set of facts or ideas to form a general principle]... [McGrane] is critical of a theology resting on a single phrase from Galatians 6:2.

Well! Talk about the pot calling the kettle black! Would Walker (and/or McGrane) like to tell me what 'particular presuppositions' 'determine' my 'faulty hermeneutic'? The only presupposition I make is that Scripture is the authority, and I must read and interpret every biblical passage in its context. As evidence, see my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law*, where I expound every New Testament passage on the law – not just Galatians 6:2. So I find it a bit rich to read such accusations from Reformed writers who, whatever they say to the contrary, make a Confession their touchstone, that Confession depending on mere proof texts for a presupposed theological template, which proof texts pretty often are glossed or are irrelevant to the point being made.

The truth is – as everybody knows, and Walker's short review is brim-full with proof – that the Reformed simply cannot read the Bible on the law without a Reformed Confession open before them, and that Confession and its theology telling them how to

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<sup>4</sup> See my 'A Must-See Debate'; 'The Law and the Confessions'; 'Is it Me? Or: The Cat Let Out of the Bag'; 'The Law: Reformed Escape Routes'; "'No Confession? Nothing to Debate!'"'; 'Misleading, Sad, Revealing: "Relevant Today"' by Jeremy Brooks'; 'A Must-Listen Podcast'; and, of course, 'A Breath of Fresh Air Wanted: A Brief Review of McGrane on NCT'.

interpret what they read in the Scriptures. In short, they make Scripture conform to the Reformed theology presupposed in the Confession. Walker owns McGrane's position at the very start of his review:

McGrane writes as a man committed to traditional Reformed covenant-theology as expressed in the Reformation Confessions of faith.

*Q.E.D.* for McGrane.

And Walker tells us his own position as he closes his review:

The reviewer [Austin Walker] is a persuaded Reformed Baptist, who, like his seventeenth-century forefathers,<sup>5</sup> is firmly committed to covenant theology and rejects the tenets of NCT.

*Q.E.D.* for Walker.

While this is commendably honest, it must serve as a health warning. One can hardly expect a scriptural assessment of NCT from men who are completely committed to a system that will only – can only – interpret Scripture by a Reformed Confession! And yet they have the gall to accuse me (and others like me) of having ‘a faulty hermeneutic determined by particular presuppositions!’ Really!

I appeal to the Reformed to stop this pot/kettle nonsense. It is worse than nonsense. Their accusations about my approach are false. And that's putting it politely!

Consequently, once again I issue the challenge to Reformed writers and teachers: just produce a work on the law, establishing the apostolic doctrine from Scripture without starting with a Confession. Just let Scripture speak for itself. Do it for all the key passages – passages, not mere individual verses

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<sup>5</sup> Not all of them! Walker should weigh the evidence I present in my Four ‘Antinomians’ Tried and Vindicated: *Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton and John Saltmarsh; John Bunyan: Antinomian, New-Covenant Theologian, or...?; Exalting Christ: Thomas Collier on the New Covenant*; ‘The Law and the Confessions’, for instance.

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– passages such as Romans 6:1 – 8:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6 – 4:6; Galatians; Ephesians 2:1-22; Philippians 3:2-16; Colossians 2:9-23, Hebrews. If you want to introduce the so-called threefold division of the law (moral, ceremonial and judicial), or any other Reformed gloss, establish such by Scripture.

Moreover, Walker actually (and, I am sure, inadvertently) made my case for me when he exposed McGrane’s failure (and it is a failure of all the Reformed):

A further chapter [in McGrane’s book] explaining more fully the significance of Jeremiah 31:31-34, and the way in which that passage is used in Hebrews 8:7-13 and 10:15-18, would strengthen the whole.

This won’t do! It goes far wider than that. Yes, these are key passages, but only some among many. It is not a question of ‘strengthening the whole’. As I have said, let the Reformed scrap their unscriptural way of measuring everything in Scripture by a Reformed Confession, forcing Scripture into a Reformed template, and simply expound all – all – the relevant passages of Scripture on the subject of the law. I have done it. Now let these glasshouse stone-throwers do the same.

When can we expect that?

I’m not holding my breath. After all, as I have just shown, Walker openly rejects the tenets of NCT. In which case, alas, it is impossible for him to rise to the challenge. Why? Because, as I have said, and have made as clear as noonday in my works, one tenet which I hold to (and this will be true of all who advocate the theology of the new covenant) – and, in this context, it is the principal tenet – is that Scripture – and nothing else – is our authority. Since Walker rejects the tenets of NCT, he must reject that.<sup>6</sup> If so, my appeal must fall on deaf ears.

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<sup>6</sup> Again, I am convinced – and it is a tenet of NCT – that Christ fulfilled the old covenant and brought in the new. Does Walker reject that? I am also convinced – and it is a tenet of NCT – that believers are children of the new covenant, not the old. Does Walker reject that? And so on. And on.

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Let me close by referring the Reformed to their own Confession when it makes a point I wholeheartedly endorse. If only – if only – the Reformed would not only endlessly repeat, but act in accordance with their Confession:

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.<sup>7</sup>

Quite! So let Scripture speak on the law, and speak unfettered by man-made Confessions.

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<sup>7</sup> Westminster Confession 1.10.



## *Priorities and Power: Lessons from Deuteronomy*

Imagine it.<sup>1</sup> You are a Hebrew, standing in Moab, shoulder to shoulder with your fellow-Hebrews, poised to cross the Jordan. All your life thus far – this past forty years or so – has been spent – wasted – in a nomadic existence, wandering in a howling wilderness until the last of the adults who had come out of Egypt under Moses (except Caleb and Joshua) died (as God’s judgment for their unbelief and rebellion, especially at Kadesh Barnea). Now, at last, you have reached the east bank of Jordan. What thoughts are racing through your mind?

The crossing of that river, and doing so without Moses! How heavily you have depended on him this past forty years – and now, when you need him most, no longer will he be there! But that’s not all! Having got across the river – if you do! – what horrors are waiting for you on the other side? Militarily speaking, you know that you are totally unprepared to face the enormous odds confronting you: walled cities occupied by a settled people with hostile armies who know you are coming.

Imagine it! Especially if you are one of the leaders; Joshua, above all – see later.

Your pulse is racing, your heart thumping, a thousand anxious thoughts hurtling through your fevered brain. Numbed with paralysing fear, you take some deep breaths, trying desperately to pull yourself together to clear your mind so that you can sort out the necessary tactics you need to come up with, the schemes you need to devise in order to survive the coming days – let alone come through it all victorious. True, God has given you copper-bottomed guarantees; true, he has never failed you; true,

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<sup>1</sup> For the background to this article, see my ‘Thoughts On Deuteronomy’ on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page.

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he has rescued and blessed you again and again as you have met disaster after disaster ever since those days in Egypt. Even so...

Pure speculation!

Is it? These Hebrews were real people, real men and women like us, men and women (with their children) made of flesh and blood, real people who had the same feelings as us, facing real, huge obstacles. Have you never known what it is to sit in a dentist's waiting room, knowing that within a few minutes you will be undergoing a serious piece of oral surgery? Have you ever gone to bed, keyed up because you know that tomorrow morning you will be taking your final exam, the culmination of years of study, so much hanging on it? Have you ever been all-fingers-and-thumbs as you tried to open some letter that contains life-affecting news? Perhaps you have never been sitting across from a medical consultant who is giving you a fateful prognosis – but you almost certainly know somebody who has.

Of course you have; we have all been through this – or something very like it.

As for the Hebrews, we have their track record written out for all to see. How quickly they descended from the heights of euphoria to the depths of darkest depression, and that right from the start of the exodus (Ex. 15)!

Hush! Moses is speaking. God, through Moses, is addressing you all. What's he saying?

You can hardly believe your ears! Not a word about any of this – as far as tactics go. Not a word. No! God is spelling out your priorities, the things you must have uppermost in your mind, the settled principles you must fix on when you get into the land he promised Abraham and his descendants. This – not any of the above – has to be your concern. Forget the river, forget the enemy, forget their armies, forget the walls, forget the difficulties. Think about your real priorities.

And what are these priorities? The law, the covenant – the centrality of that covenant, the keeping of the covenant and its

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law – that has to be your priority. What? Yes, indeed – the covenant, the law. This must be uppermost in your mind. Not the crossing of the river, not the coming wars, not the fear of being wounded. The covenant, the law: you must keep it; you must be careful to keep it. This is what you must be thinking about, this is your duty, this is your responsibility. This must be your concern, even now – and top of the list!

This has been God's constant theme throughout the entire book of Deuteronomy, the message he has been reinforcing time and again in his addresses to the Hebrews through Moses just before they crossed the Jordan (Deut. 8:11-20; 29:2-9; 31:1-13,23, for instance). The covenant, the law – above all else, keep both!

According to God, the great concern for the Hebrews was not how they were to conquer the land and subdue their enemies. Plans, tactics, strategies, programmes and schemes? None of that! Leave all that to me, he was telling them. Think of the covenant and the law. And be determined to keep fast to both, thus keeping close to me. Such was God's word to his people just before their crossing of the Jordan. No need of a committee to devise the best way to cross the river and subdue the land, and all the rest of it. Leave that to me! Make me, my covenant and its law your number-one priority.

Let me stress this – as God did, again and again, during all the events recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. The problem for the Hebrews was not the river, not the walled cities, not the enemy hordes. It was themselves – their failure to keep the covenant and its law, their turning to pagans, their adoption of pagan principles and the worship of their gods. The Hebrews were to remember at all times that they were to be a separated people: God had drawn them clear of Egyptian slavery, giving them his covenant and its law, something he had done for no other people (Deut. 4:1 – 6:25; see also Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5, and so on). Although they were entering a pagan land to settle it, their great concern was to be careful to avoid all pagan contamination.

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Not only that – they had to remember that it was not by their cleverness, their schemes and plans that they would succeed in all that lay before them – it was the presence of God – and, consequently, the power of God: that was key. As Moses made clear to Joshua (the new leader) and all Israel:

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed’ (Deut. 31:7-8).

The point could not be missed: Israel must keep the covenant; God would keep his promise. God reinforced it right from Joshua’s inauguration, telling him:

Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go (Josh. 1:2-9)

However, despite all the encouragements and warnings he was now giving them, God knew that the Hebrews would, almost from the word ‘go’, utterly corrupt themselves, abandon him

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and the covenant, and turn to paganism and idolatry. He not only told them about it – he put it into a song which he made them learn, a song they had to repeat to themselves down the coming years (Deut. 32:1-47).

\* \* \*

So what? All that was more than 3000 years ago – old hat!

True, all this did take place three millennia ago, but the lessons of this history outlast the experience of Israel under the old covenant: those lessons apply to us evangelicals today. Paul told us so:

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction (Rom. 15:4).

Moreover, the apostle, when addressing the Corinthians, took them back to Israel's history as recorded in Scripture – especially Israel's sinful failure and consequent judgment. God recorded these things, the apostle declared:

...as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did... These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:6,11-12).

And we have the cardinal passage:

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. 3:16-17).

All Scripture – including Deuteronomy – is profitable for us today!

Believers are in a covenant: the new covenant. Believers are under a law: the law of Christ. Just as God's priority for Israel was their keeping of the old covenant and its law, so believers

are under obligation to obey Christ in his covenant and law.<sup>2</sup> In particular, they have no right to tamper with the *ekklēsia*: as God spelled out the covenant and its law for Israel, he has done the same for believers and the *ekklēsia*. Moreover, just as Israel was facing a huge task – subduing and settling the land, and, throughout, steering clear of paganism, observing the covenant – so believers are faced with the huge responsibility of taking the gospel into all the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8), while keeping Christ’s covenant and law intact.

Contrary to common practice today, there is no scriptural evidence that this evangelism ever took place within the *ekklēsia*. Nor was it accomplished by the apostles setting up a committee to devise a plan of action. Not at all! As for the adoption of pagan ideas, consulting Greeks and Romans for advice and tips on how best to fulfil Christ’s command...! As the book of Acts shows, the advance of the gospel overwhelmingly was through spontaneous conversations, personal witness and preachings (using the word ‘preaching’ in its widest, new-covenant sense) *outside* the meetings of the *ekklēsia*, under the direction and empowering of the sovereign Spirit. Indeed, it could be argued that persecution of the saints was one of the main means the Spirit used to advance the spread of the gospel (see Acts 4:1-31; 5:12-42; 8:1-40, and so on). And all was in accordance with Christ’s promise (I paraphrase): ‘Stay... until you are clothed with power from on high... You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and [only after that and in this way] you will be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:4). There was nothing of human planning about it. The apostles did not control the way the events of Acts unfolded. Indeed, the evidence tells us that the advance of the gospel took the early believers completely by surprise. Spontaneity is the word; not professional organisation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I have written and spoken extensively about this. See, for instance, my *Christ; Liberty not Licence*.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Relationship*.

To return to Israel: within a few short years of their entering the land, as God had foretold them (and, as we have seen, made them sing about it in order to drive home the sense of their sin), the Hebrews utterly corrupted themselves, abandoned God and his covenant, turned to pagans and paganism, and became idolaters. Eventually, after repeatedly refusing faithful prophet after faithful prophet who warned them of their sin and impending judgment, after repeatedly closing their ears to those prophets who called them back to repentance – preferring instead the smooth talk of the false prophets – the northern kingdom was taken into captivity under Assyria, and the southern kingdom into captivity under Babylon.

Alas, as with Israel under the old covenant, so for believers under the new. Believers – like Israel – very quickly became guilty of breaking their covenant and law. The New Testament clearly warned of it (Matt. 24:5,24; Acts 20:29-30; Rom. 16:17-19; 2 Cor. 11:13; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, for instance); Christ's searching and solemn words to the churches (Rev. 2 – 3) leave no room for doubt. Church history is replete with the record of the apostasy of believers, and the consequences of it – the Fathers, the years under Constantine and Theodosius, the rise of Rome, the fate of the once-thriving churches of North Africa, the Dark Ages... As for our day, many contemporary evangelical churches are playing fast and loose with the covenant – blithely remodelling the *ekklēsia* to make it suitable for their schemes, plans and programmes to maximise what they consider to be evangelistic opportunity – attracting and holding pagans in long-term church attendance.<sup>4</sup> The cost of this betrayal of the covenant will be immense. The price will have to be paid – it may take a generation or more, but chickens have not lost the habit of coming home to roost.

The question is, will we – before it is too late – come to our senses, trust God, trust his word, trust his promise, rely upon his power? We are becoming more and more adept at organising

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<sup>4</sup> I have written and spoken extensively about this. See, for instance, my *Evangelicals Warned: Isaiah 30 Speaks Today; Attracting; Relationship; The Evangelical Dilemma*.

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and administrating the church and evangelism as we see fit – so much so, we soon won't need the Spirit! Yet we know the scriptural principle – that it takes God's sovereign intervention in power to prosper his cause:

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts (Zech. 4:6).

The cleverest schemes of human devising are spiritually impotent. Vain is the help of man.

Take Israel, once more. The spiritual men and women among the Hebrews would sing the following with understanding and feeling:

You are my King, O God; ordain salvation for Jacob! Through you we push down our foes; through your name we tread down those who rise up against us. For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But you have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hate us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever (Ps. 44:4-8).

Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go forth, O God, with our armies. Oh, grant us help against the foe, or vain is the salvation of man! With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes (Ps. 60:10-12).

Oh, grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man! (Ps. 108:12).

It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes (Ps. 118:8-9).

Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God (Ps. 146:3-5).

The same goes for the new covenant. As Paul declared:

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the

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power of the Spirit of God – so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:18-19).

I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:3-5).

The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power (1 Cor. 4:20).

Not ‘by the cleverness of our plans, schemes, courses, organisation’!

If I may accommodate the words of Charles Wesley – the quicker we learn to sing such words as these the better:

*Schemes and plans and programmes fall;  
'Tis the Spirit's all in all!*<sup>5</sup>

Here is the question we need to answer: Will we go on, depending on God alone, preaching the gospel to the ungodly – that is, biblically preaching the biblical gospel, the only true gospel – despite its inbuilt seeming foolishness? Foolishness? Yes, indeed! To confront sinners, to probe sinners, to insist on the necessity of their regeneration, to warn them of judgment and condemnation – both a present reality and an impending eternity – to seek to convict and persuade them to repent and trust Christ alone, seems utterly counter-intuitive today, when the great shibboleth is doing all we can to attract pagans to church, and hold them in life-long attendance.

The truth is, plans, schemes, strategies, courses and programmes may attract pagans, amuse and entertain them, instil ‘Christian principles’ into them, boost their self esteem, but it is only the biblical gospel preached in the power of the Spirit that can effectively regenerate dead sinners who are under the wrath of God (Eph. 2:1-3), regenerate and convert sinners who naturally

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<sup>5</sup> Wesley, of course, wrote: ‘Names and sects and parties fall;/ Thou, O Christ, art all in all!’

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and inevitably dismiss the gospel as foolish (1 Cor. 2:14), sinners who hate God and all to do with him (Rom. 8:7). Here is Paul's persuasion:

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. 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... 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... I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. 1:17-18,23-24; 2:2-5).

Until – unless – we get back to that, all will be lost.

## Who's Number One?

In this article,<sup>1</sup> I want to look at two closely-connected words, each of which is used only once in Scripture – *prōteuō* – ‘to be pre-eminent’, ‘to be first’ (Col. 1:18), and *philoprōteuō* – ‘to love to be pre-eminent’, ‘to love to be first’ (3 John 9).

Here is the context of the first:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything **he might be pre-eminent**. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-20).

And here is the second:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who **loves to have the pre-eminence** among them, does not receive us (3 John 9).

The first passage, of course, refers to the Lord Jesus Christ: Paul is declaring that Christ is pre-eminent, Christ is first. And, please note, the apostle specifically includes the *ekklēsia*<sup>2</sup> in this pre-eminence of Christ: ‘He is the head of the body, the church [*ekklēsia*]. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent’. As he puts it later in the same letter: ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Rick Petersen: ‘In His Image: Sola Christos or Alter Christus’.

<sup>2</sup> I use the new-covenant term, *ekklēsia* – ‘the called-out ones’ – to distinguish it from the man-made institution called ‘the Church’,

<sup>3</sup> ‘In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge... the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through

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In the second passage, however, John is clearly talking about a man called Diotrephes, one who has carved out a primary position for himself within a local *ekklēsia*: John says he loves to be first, loves to be top dog, loves to be pre-eminent among the believers in that place.

Now that's a remarkable thing! Even in apostolic days, men were usurping Christ within the *ekklēsia*, seeking to sideline Christ, wanting to be pre-eminent, grasping after the chief seat over the people of God!

John might have been referring to this attitude in his second letter:

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God (2 John 9).

As M.R.Vincent observed, some think that John was referring to:

...those who would set themselves up as teachers, or take the lead.<sup>4</sup>

John was not the only apostle who had spotted what was going on. Peter saw the danger, and wrote against it:

I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow-elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not *domineering [lording it]* over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Moreover, Paul felt the Satanic temptation for himself – but resisted it. Even though he had apostolic authority – and exercised it – he was meticulous in ensuring that he could, without fear of contradiction, say to the Thessalonians that:

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its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God' (Col. 2:3,19).

<sup>4</sup> M.R.Vincent: *Word Studies*.

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Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.<sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed – God is witness. ***Nor did we seek glory from people,***<sup>6</sup> whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess. 2:4-8).<sup>7</sup>

As he told Philemon:

Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you (Philem. 8-9).

And as he could remind the Corinthians, though he had apostolic authority, he would never use it to ride roughshod over the people of God:

...not that we ***lord it over*** your faith (2 Cor. 1:24).

But he well knew that the Corinthians were, in fact, yielding to men who did lord it over them:

You tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours you, if anyone takes advantage of you, ***if anyone exalts himself***, if anyone hits you in the face (2 Cor. 11:20).

They were 'tolerating' this abuse! That is, they were bearing it, putting up with it. I very strongly suspect that Paul was doing

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<sup>5</sup> He had said the same to the Galatians (Gal. 1:10).

<sup>6</sup> Christ had said the same to the Jews: 'I do not receive glory from people... You [however] receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God' (John 5:41,44).

<sup>7</sup> In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul illustrated what he was saying: 'We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate' (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

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here what he does elsewhere (Acts 21:39; 2 Cor. 11:19; 12:13, for example): namely, using *litotes*, a deliberate understatement, or irony. (Indeed, Paul's use of irony is nowhere more prevalent than in his second letter to the Corinthians). The truth is, the Corinthians loved top men! Their cult of man was Paul's opening complaint against them in his first letter (1 Cor. 1:10-17), and little had changed in this regard when he came to write his second. You can almost hear them talking: 'We've just got a super-apostle as our new Minister!'

The truth is, the early believers were facing the same temptation as Judah of old, and some of them, at least, were committing the very same sin<sup>8</sup> as the men of the old covenant:

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes? (Jer. 5:30-31).

'My people love to have it so'! Yes, indeed, but as the prophet went on: 'But...'. There's always a 'but'!

Christ explicitly warned his disciples against grasping after pre-eminence:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25-28).

Again:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they

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<sup>8</sup> I use the word 'sin' because I am reminded of the first commandment of the decalogue in the old covenant: 'You shall have no other gods before [besides] me' (Ex. 20:3).

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themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matt. 23:2-12).

Clearly there is – note my use of the present tense (see below) – a temptation among the people of God to lust after men who want to climb the greasy pole to reach the top. So Christ warned. The apostles repeated the same. Pre-eminence, and the love of it – other than the pre-eminence of Christ – should be utterly unknown among the people of God.

Despite these clear prohibitions, alas, the evidence is incontrovertible: the first believers, even in the time of the apostles, were not free of the sin of putting men – often, a man – in top position, and thus, in effect, replacing Christ as pre-eminent within the *ekklēsia*.

What happened after the apostles? I will be very brief and simply summarise what I have fully argued elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

After the apostles came the Fathers. What contribution did they make to this sinful, disastrous exaltation of man? Although they knew that Christ had fulfilled the old covenant and rendered it obsolete (Heb. 7:18-19,22; 8:13),<sup>10</sup> even so the Fathers went back to the old covenant to call upon the levitical priesthood in order to establish a theology which would eventually lead to a clergy/laity split within a State-Church. In time, this institution would be ruled by a hierarchical clergy, kitted-out with ranks, titles and vestments. This would eventually produce a

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<sup>9</sup> See my *Pastor; The Priesthood*; See also my *Battle; Relationship*; and so on.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Christ*.

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multiplicity of 'chief men' at the local level, with one overall top dog – the pope, the so-called Vicar of Christ ('one who stands in place of Christ and has his authority in the Church') – ruling over Christendom.

This appalling state of affairs held sway until the Reformation which, although it accomplished a great deal – especially in the recovery of much scriptural ground in the matter of soteriology – essentially left intact the institution of the clerical, hierarchical, State-Church. The Anabaptists, rejecting both Rome and the Reformed (and detested and persecuted by both), tried to get back to scriptural principles, but were not altogether successful. And so it went on. Despite various efforts to get back to Scripture, this institutional corruption – Christendom – has endured to this day. Endured? It has grown fat!

Like those who went before them, contemporary evangelical leaders who have found a comfortable niche within the system, when faced with the scriptural warnings against this cult of man, often make strenuous – but pathetic – efforts to explain things away, to gloss their unscriptural practice, and so try to justify their blatant disobedience to Christ. But in vain.

This leaves most believers today locked in an unscriptural system. Christendom is the norm, the clergy rules, and the overwhelming majority of local churches hanker after the 'chief man' – the Senior or Head Pastor. Notice boards, prominent outside Christendom-buildings, unashamedly proclaim it for all to see, titles and all. Indeed, with the internet/social-media explosion, the cult of the super-star preacher in a global big-buck business, which is increasingly shown to be corrupt and lordly-manipulative, has reached dizzy heights, to become the settled order of the day.

*In saying this, I stress I am talking about evangelicals. We must rid of ourselves of the notion that the offence in question is confined to Rome, and only Rome. That is nothing but a convenient cop-out, a passing of the buck. Nor is the corruption confined to the mega-church. Both Rome and the mega-church*

stand convicted, of course. But wherever the single-pastor<sup>11</sup> – or the head-pastor as chief among several (this being one of the evangelical ploys to get round Scripture) – reigns, there we are have come face to face with one of the many sons of Diotrephes. Moreover, I wonder how many ‘little’ pastors have within them a ‘bigger’ pastor struggling to get out.

‘Hang on! That’s too strong! You’re claiming to be able to read men’s hearts!’

I can hear the objection.

Let me reply. Will the same accusation be levelled at John? Or are we to understand that he, being an apostle, was able to read men’s hearts whereas we, of course, cannot? If so, 3 John 9, while it is an interesting glimpse into a historical episode two millennia since, has nothing to say to us. We can’t read men’s hearts so we need not worry our heads with questions about the cult of man and the love of pre-eminence. All the warnings I have quoted amount to nothing more than wallpaper. Really?

In any case, are we not told that elders must have their heart in their work? I have already quoted this from Peter for another purpose, but listen once more to what he says about leadership and men’s hearts:

I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow-elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but **willingly**, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but **eagerly**; not domineering [lording it] over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

And Paul was explicit:

If anyone **aspires** to the office of overseer, he **desires** a noble task (1 Tim. 3:1).

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<sup>11</sup> I exempt an *ekklēsia* where there is only one able man, but the aim is a scriptural plurality of elders.

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The words used by these apostles speak of a willing, earnest desire, a craving for, a coveting of, a reaching out for, a stretching out for the work of an elder. No elder can be outwardly compelled to do the work, constrained by threat or whatever; he must want to do it, be eager for it, love to do it. So said the apostles.

The idea that a 'pre-eminent' elder loathes doing his work, that his heart is not in it, that he is repulsed by it, that he detests being pre-eminent, is ludicrous. The stubborn fact remains that God still has to rebuke his people over this matter of pre-eminence: 'My people love to have it so!' Are we to believe that a 'pre-eminent' man in the *ekklēsia* hates the very idea of it? That he cannot stand the *kudos* (and, it might well be, the financial perks) involved? Well, the remedy is in his own hand, is it not? Let him step aside, kicking the nonsense into smithereens. If he doesn't, at the very least he gives the impression that – as John says – he *loves* pre-eminence, he *loves* being top dog!

For a start – but only a start – he could always take C.H.Spurgeon's advice:

There are some companies into which you will go... where everybody will be awed by the majesty of your presence, and people will be invited because the... minister is to be there. Such a position reminds me of the choicest statuary in the Vatican. A little room is screened off, a curtain is drawn, and lo! before you stands the great Apollo! If it be your trying lot to be the Apollo of the little party, put an end to the nonsense. If I were the Apollo, I should like to step right off the pedestal and shake hands all round, and you had better do the same; for sooner or later the fuss they make about you will come to an end, and the wisest course is to end it yourself. Hero-worship is a kind of idolatry, and must not be encouraged. Heroes do well when they, like the apostles at Lystra, are horrified at the honours done to them, and run in among the people crying: 'Sirs, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like passions with you'. Ministers will not have to do it long; for their foolish admirers are very apt to turn round upon them, and

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if they do not stone them nearly to death, they will go as far as they dare in unkindness and contempt.<sup>12</sup>

And while I don't agree with all that was in Spurgeon's mind when he was saying this,<sup>13</sup> this much I do agree with:

It is true that God has a church, that that church has been redeemed and will be preserved for his glory, and it is equally true that everything that is done to the church, in the church, or for the church either with the permission or by the power of God, is for God's glory, as well as for the church's weal. You will notice, in reading Scripture, that whenever God has blessed [his people], he has secured himself the glory of the blessing, though they have had the profit of it... God is jealous of his own honour; he will not suffer even his church to be delivered in such a way as to honour men more than God; he will take to himself the throne without a rival, he will wear a crown that never head did wear, and sway a sceptre that never hand has grasped, for as truly as he is God, the earth shall know that he, and he alone, has done it, and unto him shall be the glory. Now, my object this morning will be to glorify God, by showing to you, who love the Saviour, that the preservation and the triumph of the church are both of them to be accomplished, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God, in order that all the honour might be to God, and none of it to man.<sup>14</sup>

The sooner we recover this attitude the better it will be.

But, alas, I do not publish this article with any expectation of making any impression on – let alone stopping – the Gadarene descent I have tried to highlight. I do it, rather, to try to assuage my sense of frustration at the continued reign of Christendom. And not only a sense of frustration. I want to warn. Alarmist I may well be dismissed as, but I foresee an impending disaster if evangelicals maintain their present course with its cult of man, its stress on global business with the rule of the mega-buck, promoting a thinly-disguised entertainment-circus which passes

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<sup>12</sup> C.H.Spurgeon: 'The Minister's Ordinary Conversation' in *Lectures to My Students*, Vol.1.

<sup>13</sup> His view that Israel was the church, for instance.

<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon sermon 149.

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for *ekklēsia*-life, with its galaxy of 'chief men', and all the rest.  
We are sowing the wind, and will surely reap the whirlwind.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See my *Attracting*.

## *The Real Virus*

As I write (March 2020), all around me in the UK many are in a state of near panic, a panic stirred up by wall to wall media coverage of the draconian measures which are being announced by the government almost by the hour, and all to cope with the Coronavirus. Something similar is going on worldwide.

In this article, I will say nothing about the medical, social or political aspects of all this. I have my views, and though there is a great deal that I could say, that I might like to say, I forbear.

Rather, I want to make a spiritual point, to draw attention to the vital issue in all this. I want to talk about the real virus.

The virus I am referring to infects all the human race; it infects us now. It has been with us since the fall of Adam, and it has infected every one of us, 100%, without exception. And the death rate from this virus is 100%, without exception – spiritual death, physical death and eternal death. Even so, most men and women don't want to hear anything about it, and they don't want to be told of the only cure – the guaranteed cure – for it. They simply ignore the virus; they live and die without giving it a moment's thought. And yet now – when this Coronavirus erupts – look what happens!

The Greeks had a saying: 'Whom the gods intend to destroy, they first drive mad!' Quite!

The virus I am talking about is sin. It affects every one of us from birth. No! From conception:

I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Ps. 51:5; see also Job 15:14; Ps. 58:3).

David wasn't saying he was born out of wedlock, of course. He was saying that from conception, he was in Adam, a child of flesh, a sinner, under the wrath of God. Moreover, he was speaking for all of us:

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You [that is, even believers] were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph. 2:1-3).

Unpalatable as it may seem, this is the truth. Every human being is born a sinner under the wrath of God:

Whoever does not believe [in Christ] is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil... 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 3:18-19,36).

We – all of us, 100%, without exception – have been infected from conception by this virus of sin. And it is fatal. It has killed us spiritually. It is certain, 100% certain, that it will kill us physically; we shall all die as a result of it.<sup>1</sup>

But it gets worse, far worse.

After death, we face the third stage in this virus' effect; namely, judgment by the Lord Jesus Christ:

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son... Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment (John 5:22-27).

[Christ] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

God... has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

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<sup>1</sup> Unless Christ returns before we die.

## *The Real Virus*

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Christ Jesus... is to judge the living and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1)

It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb. 9:27).

[All men and women] will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:5).<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we know what the permanent consequence of this virus is for all who die without having sought the cure for it:

Their end [destiny] is destruction (Phil. 3:19).

The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying: 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (1 Thess. 5:2-3).

...the righteous judgment of God... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

There is only one cure for this virus:

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

Jesus said...: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6).

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).

This cure has 100% success rate. All who turn from their sin and trust the Lord Jesus Christ will, at once, be fully saved for ever:

Whoever believes in [Christ] is not condemned (John 3:18).

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<sup>2</sup> See also Ps. 9:8; 96:13; 98:9.

## *The Real Virus*

Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him [has] eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:40).

Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:43).

‘What must I do to be saved?’... ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:30-31).

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:9,13).

### ***Conclusion***

So... with the eruption of this Coronavirus, the world goes into panic mode and does all it can to stave it off, and this, even though, for each individual, it is far from certain that he or she will get it, and even if he or she does succumb to it, the effect is almost certain to be minimal and of short duration. I am not belittling the effect of the virus on the specially vulnerable, but, as I write, as things stand this is the reality.

In stark contrast, everybody has already been infected with the lethal virus of sin, a virus which carries the certainty of eternal death. Despite this solemn fact, and despite God sending his Son into the world to save sinners, the vast majority of men and women could not care less, and blithely go on towards the day of judgment.

Is this not madness, madness of the highest order?

Although he was talking about persecution, Christ set out the principle that eternal death is infinitely worse than physical: ‘Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell’ (Matt. 10:28). The majority do the very opposite. And though, in his earthly ministry, Christ cured all kinds of disease, it was to vindicate and illustrate his power to save from sin (Mark 2:8-11; Heb. 2:1-4). It is the virus of sin that we should be most concerned about.

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The lesson is clear:

Prepare to meet your God (Amos 4:12).

How do you do that? In this way:

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!

In other words, you must repent and turn to Christ. Do it now! I appeal to you to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners – trust his name, his person, his merit, trust his blood sacrifice to propitiate the wrath of God for you, trust Christ's righteousness to cover you in his own perfection – and you will be saved, at once, from all your sin. Nothing else will do.

It is not a question of catching this virus. You've got it! You've had it since conception. And eternity gets closer every day. There is no time for delay!



## *Don't Be Fooled by the Window Dressing*

In the 1960s, my father-in-law was looking around Leek market when he came across a costermonger selling damsons – particularly fine damsons, at that. After negotiating a price, my father-in-law said he would take a box. The stall holder bent down behind the counter. ‘No’, said my father-in-law. Pointing to the box right at the front of the stall, he went on: ‘I’ll take that one’.

I have just watched as fine an example of window dressing as anybody could wish for: ‘Inside the Vatican’, a two-part series on the BBC. We are assured by the narrator – the hallowed-toned Paul McGann (who comes from a Roman Catholic family) – that we are privileged to see the Vatican from the inside, to see it as it has never been seen before.

That may well be true. But the big question is, do we see the Vatican as it really is or do we see it as the PR experts in the Vatican want us to think it is? In other words, are we being treated to an exercise in window dressing?

You know my answer!

In this two-part series, we are shown a bevy of Vatican lesser-fry going to or doing their jobs – office workers, typists, gardeners, men engaged in recycling cardboard and cooking oil, statue-cleaners, banner hoisters, security guards, a tailor specialising in clerical vestments, and the like. We meet priest after priest processing with his retinue to take masses in various chapels; one priest is shown to be one of the lads on the football pitch. We are treated to a host of top brass, seemingly endlessly perambulating along immense, interminable and vastly-ornate corridors, parading in all their finery in set-piece display. (There appears to be an inordinate amount of walking involved in working in the Vatican). We meet Pope Francis delivering un-charismatic speech after un-charismatic speech in his bland

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tone, discourses often larded with pious platitudes. He is shown to be one of the common people with his closing remark: 'Have a good lunch!' – which I take to mean something matey, something along the lines of: 'Have a good day!' One of the blokes, you see, one of us!

Oh, yes, thorny issues are raised – the paedophile scandal, in particular – but it could hardly be otherwise, could it? Even in this, however, we are reassured: the Vatican has set up a postgraduate course in child protection. And although the Pope's speech to clergy on the subject does contain some strong sentiments, it is delivered in his usual weak way, and ends on a bright and cheery note as he wishes his hearers a Merry Christmas. This, one of his closest colleagues assures us, is a Christian message!

Let's cut to the chase. Let's get past the window dressing.

The Vatican we are fobbed off with is whiter than white – all one jolly family, it seems. Yes, we hear that some officials suffer some small – but minor – inconveniences, and there is some unrest over recent exposure of the sins of the clergy and papal authorities – called a 'mistake', by the Church – but, in truth, all is sunshine. Yes, trouble is probably just over the horizon with the next Conclave to elect the next pope after the demise of Francis, but even this is exciting, part of the papal plan!

Far more serious – of the utmost seriousness, in fact – in all our perambulations through the hallowed precincts, there is not a Bible in sight; mass books aplenty, but no Bible. Tradition, endless tradition, comes up as the basis of practice after practice, but of biblical argument to justify it, not a whisper. For all Rome's talk about the Bible and tradition being the authority for its system, it's as clear as noon-day that the Bible comes a very, very poor second. In fact, judging by these two programmes, the Bible has no place at all in the thinking and practice of the Vatican.

That's not all.

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Where is the authentic Vatican? Where is the real work done? Where are we let into the power-broker discussions? Where are we shown the disagreements within the curia-mafia? Where do we meet policy being hammered out? Where is the probing of the root cause of the paedophile scandal – namely, celibacy and the culture of secrecy it engenders?

We are told the Church has always to be reforming – even though this runs absolutely counter to the Vatican boast of *semper eadem* – Rome never changes. The truth is, Rome knows how to morph, but keep its ethos constant.

We meet historical revisionism. We are assured, for instance, that Pope Francis has put the Church and paedophilia on the world's agenda. Really? I thought it was brought to the world's attention through the work of reporters such as the Spotlight group on the *Boston Globe*. As everybody knows, Rome was well-aware of what was going on in Massachusetts, successfully keeping it under wraps until the reporters did their job. Indeed, even after exposure by the *Globe*, the Boston cardinal who presided over the appalling scandal in that city was smartly moved upwards by Rome, elevated to one of the highest ranks within the Vatican itself. I admit it did not happen on Pope Francis' watch, but happen it did. Will Rome face up to it? Will they stop revising history, and admit their culpability? Francis appeals in the programme for those guilty to say '*mea culpa*'.<sup>1</sup> Will the Curia start the ball rolling, followed at once by the rolling of more of the heads of those responsible – the rolling of all of them?

Wouldn't be nice if we could see the Vatican in the cold light of day, not through a fog of sentiment? Not much hope of that, I'm afraid! But what else can we expect with the first Jesuit pope in charge? That fact, in itself, speaks volumes, and blows the gaffe<sup>2</sup> right from the word Go.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *mea culpa*: plead guilty, own up.

<sup>2</sup> 'Blows the gaffe': British slang meaning 'gives the game away'.

<sup>3</sup> See David Gibson: 'To Understand Pope Francis, Look to the Jesuits', *National Catholic Reporter*, March 12th, 2014.

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True, we do meet some critics who call for reform, not one of which, however, is given much space – and even less credence.

One critic regrets the present Pope's 'laxity' with his introduction of novelties, and appeals for a return to tradition; in fact, he wants a restoration of mediaeval papal-authoritarianism. It wouldn't surprise me if he really wants a return to the Inquisition.

Another critic – he makes even less of an appearance in the programme, sad to say – refers to Christ's great commission, and wants the Church to get back to the gospel. By this, he means, of course, the gospel as pedalled by traditional Romanism. But at least he argues that the Pope has no scriptural warrant to set up conferences on global warming, whereas he does have Christ's standing command to preach the gospel in all the world.

Incidentally, that last critic is raising a vital point. As I say, he was given only a tiny amount of oxygen by the BBC – a mere token amount – and nobody paid the slightest attention to what he was saying. But he does address the root issue with his guarded demand for a return to Scripture. It is the key point. If only Rome would shine the searchlight of Scripture on itself! Wishing for the moon, alas!

Coming closer to home, it is not just Rome which needs to do this. Modern evangelicals – those who are re-engineering the church, re-modelling the *ekklēsia* – they need to face Scripture too.<sup>4</sup>

I began this article with my father-in-law in Leek market. I have never forgotten the wise way in which he dealt with the damson seller. But, alas, I have to confess my folly: I have not always acted on what I knew. I recall how I, myself, came across a market trader selling some superb pickling-onions. I snapped up a bag! But when I got home, I found the onions I had paid good

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<sup>4</sup> See my *Attracting; New-Covenant Articles: Volume Twelve; Relationship*.

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money for did not match the quality of the ones on display. The trader had gained his end. I had been duped. Indeed, I had allowed myself to be duped!

I appeal to all my readers: don't make that mistake here.



