

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES  
VOLUME TWO

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

*Assurance in The New Covenant.*

*Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists.*

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

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

*Eternal Justification: Gospel Preaching to Sinners Marred by Hyper-Calvinism.*

*Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated.*

*Infant Baptism Tested.*

*New-Covenant Articles: Volume One.*

*No Sacerdotalism: A critique of the laying on of hands.*

*No Safety Before Saving Faith.*

*Particular Redemption and the Free Offer* (second edition).

*Psalms 119 and The New Covenant.*

*Sabbath Questions: An open letter to Iain Murray.*

*Sanctification in Galatians.*

*Sanctification in Romans.*

*Septimus Sears: A Victorian Injustice and Its Aftermath.*

*The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry: Its Basis and Practice.*

*The Gospel Offer is Free.*

*The Pastor: Does He Exist?*

*The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?*

# New-Covenant Articles

## *Volume Two*

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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**BRACHUS**

BRACHUS 2014  
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## *Note to the Reader*

This is the second volume in my collected articles on the new covenant. Although such pieces will continue to be posted under the eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry ([sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com)), and on [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com), once again I not only want to set my work in a more permanent form for those who have already discovered it, but I hope to reach 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, which are available on Amazon and Kindle.

I express my continued gratitude to Ace and Peggy Staggs for all the internet work they do behind the scenes, and to Moe Bergeron for the way he presents my material on [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com). My thanks also to Ed Trefzger for his Foreword, this being his latest contribution in his effort to make my work more widely known.





## *Foreword*

The Latin motto *semper reformanda* or ‘always reforming’ dates back to the time of the Protestant Reformation in the late 16th century. But it seems that since then it largely has been more slogan than creed.

The Reformation itself failed to return the church to its first-century roots. The result of that Reformation was a continued persecution (at that time) of the free, credobaptist church. Since then, Protestantism, and Reformed Protestantism in particular, has retained many of the trappings and structures of Rome: a devotion to sacrament, a hierarchal church polity, and a clergy/laity separation that is not biblical.

Meanwhile, Reformed theology has come to a standstill and is, for the most part, no longer reforming. Seventeenth-century creeds are treated for all intents as if infallible. The theologians of the Reformation and the ‘divines’ are revered as if they spoke to modern-day Reformed churches *ex-cathedra*.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a new movement came along to challenge the presuppositions of Reformed theology, particularly among Reformed Baptists in the United States. This movement came to be known as New Covenant Theology (or NCT), and its understandings of the Christian’s relationship to the law of Moses has freed many from the burden of legalism. Yet even that new movement has seemed destined to fall into the same two traps as the Reformation: not going far enough and stopping its development after its initial advocates laid its foundation.

His spirit of ‘always reforming’ and his desire to get directly to what the Bible teaches are why I’ve found the words of David H.J.Gay so compelling, both for a continued reformation of our understanding of Scripture and for the growth of a strong theology of the new covenant.

I first became acquainted with David when I was lent a copy of his book *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law*. I was encouraged by my fellow elder to read it immediately because I had written and spoken on the topic at a New Covenant Theology ‘Think Tank’ in upstate New York in 2010. I had scarcely

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finished the first chapter before I ordered my own copy, because I knew I'd want to keep it and refer back to it often! David's views allied closely with what a small group of us in the U.S., U.K., and Canada had been discussing online and in small conferences – some of the very things we saw lacking in the NCT movement.

David's approach to the topic of law and sanctification in that book was refreshing. He clearly looked to the words of Scripture for his thesis and was not bound by the forced presuppositions of creeds, confessions or systematics. There was no sense of, 'Well, what Paul is really saying here', to twist the clear statements of the epistles to fit a Thomistic doctrine of a threefold division of the law or a Calvinistic doctrine of three uses of the law. David's understanding of the New Testament is one that would lead many a believer from bondage to the letter to freedom in Christ and a fuller realization of his Spirit's direction and guidance were it taught more widely.

It was also a break from many of the New Covenant Theology books of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. While some of David's book was polemical, too many NCT proponents have spent far too much of their writing focused on what NCT was not: it was not Covenant Theology and it was not Dispensationalism. For example, when NCT declared that the sabbath was not binding on New Testament believers, writers spent much time and ink defending themselves against antinomianism ('we still follow nine of the 10'). Instead, they might better have made a biblical case for why believers are not under law or why there are two very different covenants – old and new – and not one theologically-constructed covenant of grace. There is no need to be on the defensive when Scripture is on your side.

In addition to failing sufficiently to provide a basis for its arguments upon a robust biblical theology (though several authors have recent works repairing that deficiency), NCT has also failed sufficiently to advocate for reform in church practice. And it is in *praxis* that this collection of essays by David most urgently calls the church and the New Covenant Theology movement to continue to reform. Too often, churches who are in the 'NCT camp' continue with practices that hew too closely to Reformed traditions, which in turn have held too closely to

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Rome. The New Testament has no concept of a separation of clergy and laity; instead there is to be a priesthood of all believers. There is no first-century church practice of sacramentalism given to us in the Bible, but two clear ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table. Our practice and our polity should reflect this.

I hope these articles will move you as they did me to reflect upon how we can adopt New Testament practice to our 21st-century world, remembering most importantly that *all* Christians are ministers of the new covenant. Christ 'gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Eph. 4:11-12, ESV). Let all saints be focused on service to Christ's church. Let all elders be motivated to teach and equip the saints whom Christ, the great Shepherd, has entrusted to them.

Most of all, let us reform by returning to the freedom, love, and service that the Spirit-filled church knew abundantly in New Testament days.

Ed Trefzger  
Rochester, N Y.  
November 28th, 2014



## *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, 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.

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.



# *Flesh & Spirit for Law Men*

The format of this very brief article is simple. In the first part, I draw attention to the way Scripture always *contrasts* FLESH and SPIRIT.<sup>1</sup> In the second part, I draw attention to the way Scripture applies this contrast to the two covenants – the old and the new. In the third part, I draw the obvious conclusion. I urge all law men to think about it.

## **1. Scripture always *contrasts* FLESH and SPIRIT**

My **Spirit** shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed **flesh** (Gen. 6:3).

The Egyptians... their horses are **flesh**, and not **spirit** (Isa. 31:3).

The **spirit** indeed is willing, but the **flesh** is weak (Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38).

A **spirit** does not have **flesh** and bones as you see I have (Luke 24:39).

That which is born of the **flesh** is **flesh**, and that which is born of the **Spirit** is **spirit** (John 3:6).

It is the **Spirit** who gives life; the **flesh** profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are **spirit**, and they are life (John 6:63).

Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the **flesh**, that his **spirit** may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5).

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the **flesh** and **spirit**, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

He who was born according to the **flesh** then persecuted him who was born according to the **Spirit** (Gal. 4:29).

Walk in the **Spirit**, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the **flesh**. For the **flesh** lusts against the **Spirit**, and the **Spirit** against the **flesh** (Gal. 5:16-17).

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. 6:8).

For though I am absent in the **flesh**, yet I am with you in **spirit** (Col. 2:5).

God was manifested in the **flesh**, justified in the **Spirit** (1 Tim. 3:16).

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<sup>1</sup> In this short article, I do not distinguish between ‘Spirit’ and ‘spirit’. It has no bearing on what follows.

Christ... put to death in the **flesh** but made alive by the **Spirit** (1 Pet. 3:18).

Be judged according to men in the **flesh**, but live according to God in the **spirit** (1 Pet. 4:6).

By this you know the **Spirit** of God: every **spirit** that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the **flesh** is of God, and every **spirit** that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the **flesh** is not of God (1 John 4:2-3).

## 2. FLESH and SPIRIT in the old and new covenants

‘I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the **covenant** I made with their forefathers...’, declares the LORD. ‘This is the **covenant** I will make with the house of Israel after that time’, declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law<sup>2</sup> in their **minds** and write it on their **hearts**. I will be their God, and they will be my people... I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’ (Jer. 31:31-34).

I will put a **new spirit** within them, and take the **stony** heart out of their **flesh**, and give them a heart of **flesh** (Ezek. 11:19).

I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new spirit** within you; I will take the **heart** of **stone** out of your **flesh** and give you a **heart** of **flesh**.<sup>3</sup> And I will put my **Spirit** in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws<sup>4</sup> (Ezek. 36:26-27).

I will pour out my **Spirit** on all **flesh** (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the **law** through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the **flesh**, the sinful passions which were aroused by the **law** were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the **law**, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the **newness** of the **Spirit** and not in the **oldness** of the **letter** (Rom. 7:4-6).

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the **flesh**, but according to the **Spirit**. For the law<sup>5</sup> of the **Spirit** of life in Christ Jesus has made me

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<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the prophet is using old-covenant language. Whether or not ‘law’ here means the law of Sinai is at least open to question. Since the ‘Israel’ has changed, so has ‘law’. See my *Christ* pp299-311,543-555.

<sup>3</sup> This clearly means ‘living’, ‘spiritual’. Is it a play on words?

<sup>4</sup> See previous note.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Law’ here means ‘principle’, ‘regime’.



free from the **law** of sin and death. For what the **law** could not do in that it was weak through the **flesh**, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful **flesh**, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the **flesh**, that the righteous requirement of the **law** might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the **flesh** but according to the **Spirit**. For those who live according to the **flesh** set their minds on the things of the **flesh**, but those who live according to the **Spirit**, the things of the **Spirit**. For to be **carnally** minded is death, but to be **spiritually** minded is life and peace. Because the **carnal** mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the **law**<sup>6</sup> of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the **flesh** cannot please God. But you are not in the **flesh** but in the **Spirit**, if indeed the **Spirit** of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the **Spirit** of Christ, he is not his. And if Christ is in you, the **body** is dead because of sin, but the **Spirit** is life because of righteousness. But if the **Spirit** of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your **mortal bodies** through his **Spirit** who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors – not to the **flesh**, to live according to the **flesh**. For if you live according to the **flesh** you will die; but if by the **Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the **body**, you will live (Rom. 8:1-13).

You are a letter<sup>7</sup> of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the **Spirit** of the living God, not on tablets of **stone** but on tablets of **flesh**, that is, of the **heart**... God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the **new covenant**, not of the **letter** but of the **Spirit**; for the **letter** kills, but the **Spirit** gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on **stones**, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the **Spirit** not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious (2 Cor. 3:3-11).

O foolish Galatians!... This only I want to learn from 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 being

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<sup>6</sup> Whether 'law' here is limited to the law of Sinai is at least debatable. I think it means the entire revelation of God.

<sup>7</sup> 'Letter' here does not mean 'law'. Paul's love of word play is clearly evident. See Rom. 8:2-4; 9:6; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 11:3-16; Gal. 3:24 with 5:18; 6:2,16, and so on.

made perfect by the **flesh**?... 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. 3:1-5).

If you are led by the **Spirit**, you are not under the **law** (Gal. 5:18).

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the **Spirit**, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the **flesh** (Phil. 3:3).

I have highlighted the text to draw attention to the way in which Scripture clearly places 'law' and 'old covenant' (and associated words) on the side of 'the flesh', while it places 'new covenant' (and associated words) on the side of 'the Spirit'.

### **3. Conclusion**

The conclusion is obvious. Law and Spirit do not mix; they are clear contraries. Believers are in the new covenant, in the Spirit. They are not in the flesh, under the letter, under the law. The old covenant was the covenant of the flesh. The new covenant is the covenant of the spirit, of the Spirit.

## *Old-Covenant Ruin of 'Church'*

In spiritual things, how big can be the effect of small changes! It may take time, of course – it usually does take time for the full effect to be seen – but little sins cast long shadows. Beware of little innovations in the things of Christ! 'A great work', as Andrew Fuller rightly said, 'may be hindered and stopped by little things. Little follies will spoil the whole (Eccles. 10:1)'.<sup>1</sup> It is *little* foxes, let us not forget, which spoil the vines (Song 2:15). C.H.Spurgeon pointed out that it is usually a dead fly which spoils a pot of ointment, not a dead camel.<sup>2</sup>

As David Clarkson put it:

A small evil in itself may become a great evil in consequence; by giving way to the least we may make way for the greatest... The least evils [ignored] are wont [liable] to draw us into the greatest. This is evident in all experience. The greatest abominations in the Christian world have had their rise from small beginnings, and such as it would be counted a nicety to scruple at... So that... it is manifest that a small and seemingly innocent thing may make way for a dreadful mischief.

Clarkson made a penetrating observation. It is not only bad practice which causes trouble, he said, but it is the misuse of (biblical) words which has a lot to answer for:

Some words, though less material than things, being incautiously used, have been the foundation of pernicious errors... There is a danger in words, not only in rites and actions. Change in words may occasion some change in religion... If the ancients [the Fathers]<sup>3</sup> had foreseen that their [lack of caution] in some smaller matters would have been of such pernicious consequences to after-ages, they would have kept closer to the rule, both in rites and words, though they had

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Fuller : *Sermons and Sketches of Sermons in The Complete Works of... Andrew Fuller...*, Henry G.Bohn, London, 1866 p696.

<sup>2</sup> C.H.Spurgeon: *Second Series of Lectures to my Students*, Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1885 p152.

<sup>3</sup> The Fathers were the leading theologians who came after the last of the apostles had died, starting with the beginning of the 2nd century and going on to the 6th century (or thereabouts).

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suffered for it. And we, being warned by such experiences, will be left inexcusable, if we do not endure the cross rather than yield to the least thing which may be of dangerous consequence either to the present or future generations... Small things may be accompanied with such circumstances, effects and attendants, as may swell them into a monstrous and very formidable bigness. Those things which seem small, when you consider them in themselves simply, yet behold them in their concomitants, and you may discern them to be exceeding great evils.<sup>4</sup>

What was Clarkson referring to? The changes introduced into the ordering of the churches of Christ by the Fathers!<sup>5</sup> And this is what I wish to explore in this article.<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Fathers***

The Fathers, starting with Clement of Rome, introduced changes to the rule and order of Christ's churches. So much so, before long those churches were changed out of all recognition. One of the cardinal marks of the Fathers' defection was the introduction

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<sup>4</sup> David Clarkson: *Of Taking up the Cross* in *The Works of David Clarkson*, Vol.1, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1988 pp504-510.

<sup>5</sup> I have difficulty about church and Church. By the former, I mean the New Testament concept; by the latter, I mean one of the many inventions of men. I have found it impossible to be consistent – just one of the consequences of Constantine and Christendom; of both, more later. And when I speak of 'the New Testament concept' of the church, I mean local, independent churches. The New Testament knows nothing of the traditional visible/invisible approach. It speaks in terms of local churches and the whole body of the elect. In fact, we should not talk about 'the New Testament church' – unless we mean a particular local church; rather, we should talk of 'the New Testament churches'. Indeed, I would like to drop 'church' and use *ekklēsia*, but I feel I ought to continue to use the language familiar to the overwhelming majority. I say this because 'church', today, is largely part and parcel of institutional Christianity – Christendom. And Christendom has done much harm, over many centuries, to the cause of Christ in general, and to the individual believer in particular – to say nothing of the appalling affect it has had on unbelievers.

<sup>6</sup> For more, see my *Pastor*.

of an unbiblical hierarchy, a worldly hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> They reached this position by going back to the old covenant, and applying its principles to the church.

The rot set in very quickly. It was inevitable – as one of the consequences of the fall. The history of Israel only too readily confirms the universal tendency of God's professing people to break his word (see Josh. 24:31; Judg. 2:7,10-15, and so on). Thus it was, even in apostolic days, some elders were beginning to lord it over the churches; hence the need for Peter to denounce the practice (1 Pet. 5:1-5), and for John to warn of Diotrophes (3 John 9-10). Note the fact. The apostles saw the problem as it arose, exposed it, tackled it head-on, and denounced it. The Fathers, naturally, in their time, had to face similar issues. But, of course, when they met their problems, they had the apostolic template, ready-made, to hand. They had no need, they had no warrant, to dream up solutions of their own. The same goes for us, of course.

But if Christ's system was abused during apostolic days, around the end of the 1st century with the death of the last apostle – John – things began to move, and move with a vengeance with the dawning of the age of the Fathers. Seemingly small changes were introduced which quickly led to a system of church government which would have been totally unrecognisable to New Testament believers. And the legacy is with us still. We

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<sup>7</sup> There is, of course, a New Testament hierarchy in the churches of Christ. Within clearly defined limits, as long as the apostles were alive, they were over the entire people of God, over all the churches of Christ, with elders, overseers, bishops, leaders (the names are virtually synonymous), rulers over local churches. Paul, writing to believers, spoke clearly about those 'who are over you in the Lord' (1 Thess. 5:12; see also Heb. 13:17). So there is, *in this sense*, a New Testament hierarchy. But in this article I am going to look at the Fathers' corruption of the New Testament pattern, and one of the cardinal marks of their defection was the introduction of an unbiblical hierarchy, a worldly hierarchy. This was, and remains, abhorrent in the churches of Christ. So, when the word 'hierarchy' appears in the rest of this article, the context must decide whether or not we are talking about its proper New Testament use, or the deformed – abominable – idea which has done so much harm to the church of Christ these past two millennia.

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have not been able to shake it off. In most cases, the churches don't want to shake it off (Jer. 5:30-31). Even though most are unaware of it, the overwhelming majority of today's churches are largely affected by – infected with – unbiblical ideas which were introduced in those far-off days.

Let me very briefly sketch the course of this diabolical transformation for ill in the church of God. It all began with the notion of apostolic succession. Then the idea of a single pastor, the bishop, came into play. The next move was to say that apostolic succession comes through this single pastor. Then this bishop was raised to become a monarch, a prince, in the Church. The Fathers then went to the old covenant, liked what they saw there, and applied old-covenant principles to the Church, including the introduction of priests and hierarchy. If this wasn't enough for them, they turned to pagans, liked what they saw there, and brought in the abomination of sacraments. It was not long before the whole was sewn together – the notion of clergy/laity being firmly rooted in the Church, with sacerdotalism (priestcraft) confirmed by the notion of ordination. The universal priesthood established by Christ – the priesthood of all believers – had been joined by the special priesthood of the few.

The two, of course, could not live together. Only one could be top dog. The special priesthood of the few triumphed. In this way, the simplicity of the New Testament was corrupted, and a spiritual monster put in its place.

Once again, reader, I remind you of Clarkson's warning about seemingly small and trivial departures from Christ's rule. It is highly dangerous – it is wrong – to let unscriptural things come into the church. The consequences will be horrendous. When a railway track divides at points, at first the change is minute, hardly perceptible. But two trains, taking different lines, will end up in very different places. It is the terminus which counts. But it is the set of points which is the cause.

As Clarkson pointed out:

The first step to the Pope's throne was the inequality introduced among ministers, by one degree after another, rising to a papal height. There was granted to one person, first a presidency over others, then a sole power of ordination, then a sole power of

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jurisdiction over the rest; and that first over all in a city or diocese, then over all a province, then over all in several provinces, then at last over the whole world. If this inequality, in the former degrees of it, had not been yielded to, the man of sin could never have advanced himself above all that is called God. If that egg had never been laid, or had been crushed when it first appeared, this cockatrice had never been hatched; it had never become a dragon, or such a fiery flying serpent as we now find it.<sup>8</sup>

Listen to Sir Henry Vane the younger, speaking in Parliament on the Root and Branch Bill, June 11th, 1641. Vane argued:

The hierarchical structure of episcopacy grew from a spirit of pride... first exalting itself above its fellow-presbyters under the form of bishops; then over its fellow-bishops under the title of archbishops, and so still mounting over those of its own profession, till it came to be Pope... Episcopacy was not established by Christ and must therefore represent the spirit of Antichrist. Through it, superstition and corruption in worship and doctrine have been introduced.<sup>9</sup>

And while the Papacy has continued to develop the warped system, refining it until it has reached its present state of abomination, many others still fondly hope they can steer clear of Rome and yet build on the misguided notions introduced by the Fathers, tradition and speculation. They still try to argue black is white: episcopacy involves no new principle, they say. Oh? The Church has the right to increase the powers of any particular office, they claim. Does it? The power of the episcopate today is not quite the same as during the time of the Fathers, they allege. Does this make it right? And in any case, leaving aside the Fathers, what, I ask, about the churches of the New Testament? Is their order not to be ours?

Yet, even as I write, Reformed and evangelical teachers, scholars, writers and publishers are increasingly turning to the Fathers and encouraging their followers to do the same. Baptists are doing it. It is incredible.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Clarkson p505.

<sup>9</sup> J.H.Adamson and H.F.Folland.: *Sir Harry Vane: His Life and Times 1613-1662*, The Bodley Head, London, 1973 p157.

<sup>10</sup> I mean 'incredible'. I know it happens, but I can hardly credit it.

### ***Enter Constantine***

Let Ronald E. Diprose spell out the pivotal role played by the 4th century Emperor Constantine. It was Constantine who began the process which led to the establishment of that diabolical monstrosity that would come to be known as Christendom – Christendom, which would prove such a massive blight of the gospel:

Constantine reorganised the Church, using as his model the administrative structures of the Roman empire. This factor, wedded to the hierarchical structure inherited from Alexandria and from Cyprian, radically changed the concept of the church from that of a body whose leaders were servants, to that of 'a fixed order where some were permanently set over others'... The 'people' were counted as part of the Church only through their link with the bishop who incarnated the Church's true substance. Constantine believed that his religious role as 'pontifex maximus' (supreme priest) included being high priest of the... Church as well as of pagan religion. Hence he felt it his duty to maintain order in the Church; for example by convening Councils to resolve doctrinal disputes.

And the upshot? Just this:

By such interference, and the creation of ecclesiastical regions, [Constantine] left an indelible mark on the Church... Constantine's religious policies... favoured the concept of the territorial Church; they consolidated the division between clergy and laity; and they contributed to the development of a medieval theocracy... Constantine gave architectural<sup>11</sup> expression to the separation of the clergy from the laity. He also rendered<sup>12</sup> the idea that the main function of the clergy was the administration of the sacraments, in particular of the Eucharist [the Lord's supper], on an *altar of sacrifice*, in the *most holy place*. Baptisteries were usually built separately. While proclamation [preaching] was still important, it was shown not to be central. From this point on, in the popular understanding, the basilica with its officiating ministers, would be perceived as *the Church* while the laity, who received the

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<sup>11</sup> I am somewhat at a loss with 'architectural' in this context. Did Diprose mean 'byzantine', 'bureaucratical', or 'structural' or what?

<sup>12</sup> I am somewhat at a loss with 'rendered'. Did Diprose mean 'put forward' or 'whitewashed'? Or could it be 'tendered' – 'held out'?



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ministrations offered by the hierarchical Church, become the *faithful* who *attended* Church.<sup>13</sup>

And so it went on.

Let the Anabaptist, Sebastian Franck, have the last word in this brief account of the ruin of the governance of the churches: 'The outward church of Christ was wasted and destroyed right after the apostles. This is what the wolves, that is the Fathers, amply prove'. Just in case his use of 'wolves' should not be a clear enough indication of how he viewed these men, Franck was far from squeamish in spelling out what he thought of those 'highly famous doctors... [whose] works, especially [those] of Clement, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Hilary, Cyril, Origen and others which are... quite unlike the spirit of the apostles, that is, utterly filled with commandments, laws, sacramental elements and all kinds of human inventions'. Franck castigated them as 'wolves, the doctors of un wisdom, apes of the apostles and antichrists'. Speaking warmly of the so-called heretics, he asserted that in the days of the Fathers – but distinct from the Fathers – there were those:

Who understood the truth of these things [but] their writings and instructions were suppressed by these as godless heresies and nonsense; and in their place in esteem came foolish Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory... [who] mix the New Testament with the Old, as also today their descendants do. And when they have nothing with which to defend their purposes, they run at once to the empty quiver – that is, the Old Testament – and from it [attempt to] prove [the legitimacy of]... priesthood, and praise everything and ascribe this all forcibly to [the church of] Christ without his will. And just as the Popes have derived all from this, so also many of those who would have themselves called evangelicals [the magisterial Reformers]<sup>14</sup> hold that they have nobly escaped the snare

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald E. Diprose: *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought*, Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, Rome, 2000 pp129-130,132,134-135, emphasis his. For more on Constantine and others, see my *Battle; Infant; Baptist*.

<sup>14</sup> They were 'magisterial' because they wanted the magistrate to enforce true religion – yet another old-covenant principle applied to the church of Christ!

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of the Pope and the devil, [yet they] have nevertheless achieved... nothing more than that they have exchanged and confounded the priesthood of the Pope with the Mosaic kingdom!<sup>15</sup>

So much for the corruption of the New Testament order of the rule of the church. Very quickly after the death of the apostles, the church had fallen from its original condition. By the close of the 15th century, it had become a very different body indeed. Moreover, it had been in that wretched state for centuries. Could anything be done about it? It had fallen – but had it fallen beyond repair?

Before I get to that, a word or two on the corruption of the priesthood of all believers. As the Fathers brought in the special priesthood – the clergy – so they allowed the universal priesthood to wither on the vine. It was inevitable. Ultimately, the two cannot co-exist.

### ***The corruption of the priesthood of all believers***

Make no mistake about it. Just as the doctrine and practice of church rule was ruined, so the doctrine and practice of the priesthood of all believers. As I have said, it was bound to happen. As the one rose, the other had to fall. As the New Testament rule of the church was twisted into a monstrosity, so the New Testament priesthood of all believers fell into disuse and decay. Very largely it remains so to this very day. And this has brought corresponding damage to the new-covenant concept of an all-body ministry in the church. Let me sketch the history of this dreadful and costly decline.

After the death of the apostles, the priesthood of all believers continued more or less intact for about 150 years – until the time of Cyprian. And just as he was the major figure in the ruination of the New Testament church rule, so he was responsible for starting the breakdown of the priesthood of all believers. The early

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<sup>15</sup> Sebastian Franck: *A Letter to John Campanus* (1531, but ‘the date is in dispute’) in George Huntston Williams (ed.): *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1957 pp148-152. I have omitted even stronger sentiments.

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Fathers, until Cyprian's time, had largely held to the principle of the priesthood of all believers.

But then came Cyprian. It was Cyprian who introduced the concept of the levitical priesthood into the Church. In so doing, he shattered the New Testament way of treating the old covenant, turning the Bible on its head. Instead of the Church taking old-covenant principles and shadows and applying them in a spiritual way within carefully nuanced limits as defined by the New Testament, Cyprian introduced into the Church the notion of a *special* priesthood – ministers, priests, the clergy – thereby fatally weakening the new-covenant priesthood of *all* believers. Not only so, as I have explained, the Church went to the pagans and the Roman Empire, grabbing any passing practice or terminology that took their fancy, and, lo and behold, it was not long before steps were being taken which would lead to wholesale priestcraft, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism – with the offering of a real sacrifice in the Mass – and Popery. A carnal monstrosity had replaced the new-covenant principle of the priesthood of all believers. The new-fangled unbiblical priests were all. The people (citizens of Christendom) – whether true believers or pagans – were ciphers.

It will come as no surprise to learn that the priesthood of all believers, once lost, was far from easy to find again. And, even when it has been found, it has proved even harder to reinstate in all its New Testament glory. As a result, the churches in general, and believers in particular, both corporately and individually, have been immeasurably the poorer. Not only so. Unbelievers, too have suffered immense loss. How? They have too often been confronted, not with the vibrant effects of the priesthood of all believers, but with the stultifying, professional and institutionalised Fathers' invention of the special priesthood of the clergy. As a result, they have not been shown Christ, but Christendom. It has been a tragedy of colossal proportions.

Of course, throughout the long, dark medieval years, there were those who protested at the ruin of the church of Christ. And what about the Reformers? Did they not get things back to Scripture?

## ***The Reformation***

I take up the story at the start of the 16th century with Martin Luther. But before I do, let us remember that protest against the mutilation of Christ's church was not unknown during the dark ages. Men and, no doubt, women – men like Claude of Turin (died 827), Tanchelm (died 1115), Peter of Bruys (flourished c1117-c1131), Henry of Lausanne (flourished c1116-c1148), Arnold of Brescia (1110-1155), John Tauler (c1300-1361), John Wycliffe (c1328-1384), John Hus (c1369-1415), the Lollards and their like, should never be forgotten. They all made their protest against Rome, and in one way or another called for a return to the New Testament. I am not pretending that they had full gospel light. But, in their various ways, they all prepared the ground for the approaching Reformation.

And so to the dawn of the 16th century. When they came onto the scene, the magisterial Reformers did a sterling job in getting back to New Testament teaching on salvation. They also re-established the principle of the final authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and conduct, thus enabling subsequent generations to reform in areas where the Reformers themselves did not understand Scripture, or failed to apply it to their own Churches. For the fact is, sadly, the Reformers left a great deal to be desired in the matter of church life. They made bad mistakes in this area. They failed to jettison much of the corrupt medieval way of looking at the church, the old-covenant way of looking at the church, and so failed to return to the New Testament pattern. If only they had! Alas, it is a case of what might have been. Grievously, many, treating them as virtual oracles, have fallen foul of John Robinson's observation, and ground to a halt where Luther and Calvin left them.

On the matter of the priesthood of all believers, for instance, while the Reformers did resurrect this New Testament doctrine, they failed to appreciate its full importance and scope, limiting it far, far too much to the personal, the individual. Yes, of course, it was a mighty weapon in the battle against Rome – to be able to tell sinners, as individuals, to go straight to Christ; that there was no need of, no place for, an intermediary – yes, this was liberating indeed. Again, to be able to assure believers that they

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had the right of private judgement, that they could and should think for themselves – yes, another tremendous advance over despotic Rome. But, as for the corporate aspect of the priesthood of all believers, too often the Reformers limited it to responsive reading and participation in psalm or hymn singing – all far too heavily institutionalised. Nevertheless, to bring the language of worship into the vernacular was an immeasurable gain. And to allow participation in worship by the congregation, not to limit the laity to gawking at priests doing it for them, was another huge advance.

But, as I say, it was all too liturgically structured and stereotyped. As 'new presbyter' had replaced 'old priest' – as John Milton so pithily noted – so a Reformed liturgy had replaced the Roman tradition. Even so, it continued stylised, stultified, prescribed and institutional. Gains there were; beyond question, there were gains. Nevertheless... as Samuel Mather noted: 'The Reforming Churches, flying from Rome, carried, some of them less, all of them something, of Rome with them'.<sup>16</sup> Sadly, the Reformers held on to the Roman medieval principle and practice in church life. With heavy consequences.

The mainstream Reformers, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, among others, like Rome, were all steeped in this mistaken application of the old covenant to the church. One of the outcomes – just one of the outcomes – of going back to Moses, and trying to impose the old covenant on the church, is the notion that true religion should be enforced upon the people by the State. Thus the Reformers believed that the magistrate (the State) has the right and duty to enforce true religion upon its citizens. As I have explained, this is why the Reformers are known as 'magisterial'. The end results were, and are, appalling. Many Reformed people still hold to the disastrous idea. There it stands in the Westminster documents.<sup>17</sup> I

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<sup>16</sup> Samuel Mather: *Appendix to An Apology for the Liberties of the Churches in New England*, ([idahobaptist.com/landmarkism/old-12.htm](http://idahobaptist.com/landmarkism/old-12.htm)) p149.

<sup>17</sup> I understand that some of the Reformed have renounced this, but most of them seem to regard any critical look at (let alone adjustment to) the Westminster documents as tantamount to committing the unforgivable sin, and will have no truck with it.

wonder, for instance, how many would like the UK government to put a stop to the building of mosques? Those who badger the government to take such a step are playing with fire. For a start, such laws passed today against, say, Islam, may well be used tomorrow against Christians. In any case, there is no New Testament warrant for the practice. The radicals of the Reformation – the Anabaptists – quite rightly, vehemently disagreed with the magisterial Reformers over the attempt to enforce true religion by the State.<sup>18</sup>

Thus the Reformers and their spiritual children by and large did not throw off the *essence* of Popery as far as church government and care is concerned. True, they spoke of the priesthood of all believers, but, as I have just pointed out, this was largely confined to individual salvation in opposition to sacerdotal priestcraft, but with little reference to corporate church life – apart from setting up a Reformed institution instead of Roman. What is more, just as reaction against the Anabaptists caused the Reformers to go wildly astray on baptism, so their reaction to Rome coloured their view of the priesthood of all believers. And this came at large and lasting cost. The vast majority of Reformed and evangelical churches have been embroiled – bogged down – in these consequences ever since. They are still with us.

Just one instance. How few of us read the letters of the New Testament as letters to the people as a body, to the people as a whole? I get the impression – I may be wrong – do we not nearly always read them as letters to *me* as an individual? I am not saying we should not do the latter. Of course not. But what about the former? Were not the vast majority of the New Testament letters written to *churches*, not to individuals? I have to confess that having to think about these penetrating questions has found me wanting.<sup>19</sup>

Now for a sketch of the history of these events.

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<sup>18</sup> See the extract just quoted from Franck, and my *Battle (passim)*.

<sup>19</sup> Note the plurals in the commands and exhortations in Ephesians. William Hendriksen helpfully distinguished the singular (you, your) from the plural (y o u, y o u r). See William Hendriksen: *Ephesians*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1976 pp149-286.

### ***Martin Luther***

While Martin Luther, in the main, threw off Popery, he was sadly muddled over church government, and failed to work out its New Testament order. He wanted new-covenant results, of course, but failed to see that to get them he had to go back to the New Testament template. Clinging to various Roman customs and forms, he reacted badly against the Anabaptists, whom, underneath, he envied, and remained a thorough-going Erastian, putting the Church under princes and civil magistrates.<sup>20</sup>

The catalogue of his very serious mistakes in this area did not stop there. True, he plumped heavily for the priesthood of all believers, but he did this because he rightly saw it as a bastion against medieval Rome and its sacerdotalism. However, when he said that baptism is the means by which sinners are consecrated to the priesthood of all believers – and not, as the Bible does, saying that saving faith and repentance, leading to union with Christ, are the way sinners are made members of the universal priesthood – Luther, in steering sharply away from the Scylla of sacerdotalism, came to grief in the Charybdis of sacramentalism. He has dragged millions with him.

Luther also held to ordination to the professional ministry, but he wanted to have his cake and eat it by striving to rid the rite of any thought of sacramentalism.

The fact is, although he argued for the priesthood of all believers, Luther drew back, treating it as little more than a slogan; for the sake of 'public order', a few should do the work 'on behalf of the rest', he thought, with a bishop in some sort of overall control.

### ***The Anabaptists***

Since they were anything but a homogeneous body, it is not possible to say 'the Anabaptists did this or that'. Moreover, as with so many others, their positions changed and developed as time passed. But some things are fairly clear.

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<sup>20</sup> He was magisterial, as above.

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The Anabaptists and the magisterial Reformers were at loggerheads over the nature and structure of church life – this being a main bone of contention between them. The Anabaptists, certainly in the early days, by and large rejected both Papist and Reformed division of the church into clergy and laity, even though they did come to recognise shepherds in the local congregation. It was not that they had no clergy; the truth is, they had no laity, since all of them, so to speak, were the clergy. Recognition of ministers was another issue. Since their ministers had already been 'ordained' under the papal system, should they submit themselves for 're-ordination'? A number of Anabaptists felt the need of this; they could not rid themselves of the notion that without this they would not be 'proper ministers'. The magisterial Reformers, however, in the main were happy to continue with their ministers as previously ordained by Rome.<sup>21</sup>

But, along with baptism, the heart of the issue between the Anabaptists and the Reformers in this area was the priesthood of all believers. Though both parties accepted the concept, the Anabaptists, at least in the beginning, made it a fundamental of great practical importance, pushing its corporate observance far beyond the institutionalised limits imposed by the Reformers. In the early days, the Anabaptists stressed its fundamental and practical importance, rejecting the notion of hierarchy altogether. In this, they exceeded their warrant, and ended up falling short of the New Testament and Christ's gift of stated and recognised ministers to his church.

But this phase was short-lived. Within a mere twenty-five years – by the middle of the 16th century – the old ideas began to re-appear, and the Anabaptists then went beyond the New Testament, in that they began to make use of pastor, elder (sometimes called bishop) and deacon, along with a passive laity. This threefold ministry became the Mennonite pattern, and a professional clergy quickly emerged. The old, wrong-headed hierarchy was thus re-established. Nevertheless, Anabaptist congregations chose their own leaders, and, in general, professionalism was taboo. And, with their emphasis on the

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<sup>21</sup> Compare Calvin's justification of infant baptism by Rome (see my *Infant* pp212-215).



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priesthood of all believers, authority resided in the congregation, not the theologians.

### ***William Tyndale***

William Tyndale denied episcopacy. But his greatest contribution to biblical recovery on church governance is, perhaps, to be found in his English translation of the New Testament, even though it met with severe opposition from the powerful in Church and State. Just one example – his use of ‘elder’ was bitterly opposed by those who wanted ‘priest’. It is no accident that, under James I, the authorities wanted, and got, reinstatement of ‘the old ecclesiastical words’ in the AV of 1611. Sad to say, in the seemingly endless debate about the use of the AV, far too few of those who, resolutely upholding what they consider to be its superiority over all other versions, have taken account of its Preface, and the explanation afforded us by the ‘Translators’. For instance:

We have... avoided the scrupulosity of the Puritans, who leave the old ecclesiastical words, and betake them to other, as when they put WASHING for BAPTISM, and CONGREGATION instead of CHURCH.<sup>22</sup>

Alas, if only the proper words had been used, it would have saved a world of trouble.

### ***The Anglicans***

The Anglicans went to the Fathers, and argued for, got, and have kept, episcopacy, even though it was attacked at the start by mainstream Puritans – both conforming and non-conforming – and has been criticised by many dissenters down the centuries. In recent years, however, this dissenting confrontation with episcopacy has virtually died out. Indeed, episcopacy seems to

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<sup>22</sup> *Baptizō* ought not to have been transliterated into ‘to baptise’, but have been translated ‘to dip’. As Tyndale noted, it is not the only casualty by a long way. Such mistranslations and transliterations have caused immense harm in the church. See my *Battle* and my *Infant*. See, for instance, [jesus-is-lord.com/pref1611.htm](http://jesus-is-lord.com/pref1611.htm)

grow in importance as the search for an ecumenical Church gathers pace.<sup>23</sup>

### ***John Calvin***

John Calvin, it has been claimed, has given the fullest and most accurate exposition of the scriptural scheme of church government and ordination.<sup>24</sup> Let us see. I, for one, question it. I cannot see how such a claim can be maintained in light of his own words: 'We know that every Church has liberty to frame for itself a form of government that is suitable and profitable for it, because the Lord has not prescribed anything definite'.<sup>25</sup> Really?

What did he think of episcopacy? He was not much bothered about it. As long as the bishop was willing to be under Christ, episcopacy did not indicate any superiority of one bishop over the rest. The bishop, said Calvin, was simply a president over the elders. *Just* a president? I ask you!

Pause for a moment. Is such a disgraceful, unbiblical move to be dismissed so lightly? Is it nothing, a mere bagatelle, that a man-made bishop is a *president* of the elders, of a church? A president, indeed. Should we just shrug our shoulders? Surely not. Yet Calvin, knowing full well what this step had led to – the Papacy – adopted the same line of defence as the Fathers for this unscriptural move, saying that men introduced this to suit the need of the times! To this effect, he cited Jerome, even though Jerome himself had tacitly acknowledged the unscriptural nature of the innovation.

Calvin tried to draw the line. Conceding there is no hierarchy in the settled New Testament pattern of church government,<sup>26</sup> he called the notion 'improper'.<sup>27</sup> Even so, the Fathers, he claimed,

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<sup>23</sup> See my *Infant* pp204-210,214; *Baptist* pp153,315,324-325; *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> A very big job indeed. The New Testament knows nothing of 'ordination' as commonly practised. See my *No Sacerdotalism*.

<sup>25</sup> John Calvin: *Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979 Vol.20 Part 1 p352.

<sup>26</sup> See my earlier remarks on 'hierarchy'.

<sup>27</sup> How mild a criticism of something so abhorrent and so contradictory to the mind of God revealed in his word.

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in introducing their changes, did not want to set up church government different to God's word!

What! How could Calvin say such a staggering thing? After all, he had conceded that the Fathers went beyond Scripture yet, he contended, they were cautious and hardly strayed from it. Really? I cannot comprehend how he could make such a preposterous statement. Allowing that the very first move of the Fathers was not a large step away from Scripture, one step away from Scripture – however small – is one step too many. What is more, look where these small steps ended up. Take a glance at my summary of the decrees of the (pre-Calvin) 1438-39 Council of Florence and the (post-Calvin) 1870 Vatican Council:

Climbing to new heights (or, perhaps it would be better to say, plumbing new depths), the Council of Florence (1438-39) proclaimed the Roman Pontiff supreme over all the world, the true Vicar of Christ, and head of the whole Church, the Father and Teacher of all Christians, the Successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. In short, the Council of Florence asserted that Christ has committed the full power of feeding, ruling and governing the Universal Church into the hands of the Roman Pope. In 1870, Pius IX took the Papacy to even dizzy heights. From that time, the Pope speaking *ex cathedra* has been infallible. That is, when he says so, in his arrogated possession of supreme apostolic authority, what he pronounces is unquestionable and unalterable. Those who dare to question this pretended absolute power and authority of the Pope over the entire Church are anathematised. A remarkable insight into what the Pope means by claiming to be 'servant of the servants of Christ'.<sup>28</sup> Even to this day, if he pronounces that the moon is made of green cheese, over a billion men and women believe it. And if, tomorrow, he says it is made of blue cheese, those same millions change their mind. Or so they pretend.<sup>29</sup>

Besides which, Calvin contradicted himself – was the bishop greater in dignity or not? He spoke against hierarchy in the abstract, but was sympathetic – to put it no stronger – to a system which was riddled with the abominable notion. I ask again: How could Calvin adopt such a grossly unbiblical system? Did Mather

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<sup>28</sup> Coined by Gregory I (590-604), and assumed exclusively by the Pope since the 12th century.

<sup>29</sup> My *Pastor* pp76-77.

– with his: ‘The Reforming Churches, flying from Rome, carried, some of them less, all of them something, of Rome with them’ – not hit the nail squarely on the head in Calvin’s case? Didn’t Calvin prove it when, evolving his own scheme of church government, instead of going back to Scripture, he retained essential features of practices introduced by the Fathers, practices which had been later encapsulated in the papal system? Had Calvin not witnessed the blossoming *and harvest* of such pernicious weeds in the Roman Church?

Coming to his own ideas, Calvin proposed a fourfold order of ministers; pastors – whom he reckoned to correspond to apostles<sup>30</sup> – to discipline, administer the so-called sacraments, admonish and exhort; doctors or teachers to interpret Scripture and catechise; elders to rule the congregation; and deacons to look after the material concerns of the church. He not only distinguished between these ministerial orders as to their duties, but he also made a radical – and unjustified – distinction between these officers as to their appointment; while the pastors and doctors are normally elected by the pastors and elders of *other* congregations, the deacons and elders are elected by the individual congregations concerned. This unwarranted distinction carried sinister overtones. As did his division of the church into clergy (even though he conceded the idea is ‘improper’) and laity; only ministers are clergy; ruling elders and all other church members are not. Calvin also vested church power upwards through various committees (synods) to an overall General Assembly.

Calvin’s fundamental problem was that he never threw off the medieval Roman view of the Church. Oh, he spoke of the priesthood of all believers, yes,<sup>31</sup> but it was, for him, largely an individual, private matter. In his view, it played little or no part in the corporate life of the church, except to justify the laity’s participation in a structured Reformed liturgy. As a result, in its

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<sup>30</sup> Note the link with the thinking of the Fathers. This link between ‘pastor’ and ‘apostle’ plagues the system still.

<sup>31</sup> John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957 Vol.1 p432.

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place, he emphasised the institution of the church, its officers and structure. Take his famous dictum:

Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the ordinances [Calvin had sacraments] administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from 'sacraments', I am not saying I quarrel with this – but it is what Calvin fails to say that is vital. What about the members? Aren't the members the living parts of the body, the living stones of the building, and so on? Of course, Calvin, with his unbiblical view of a mixed regenerate-and-unregenerate church membership – based on a misunderstanding of the parable of the wheat and tares, coupled with infant baptism – was bound to flounder here. Indeed, given his unscriptural approach to the subject, he was bound to *founder* on the issue.

But this is the point. Calvin did not appreciate how far-reaching the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is. It is not merely the icing on the cake. It is an essential ingredient of the cake itself. The illustration breaks down. The priesthood of all believers is one of the leading fundamentals of church life. Calvin missed this point entirely, with grievous results. The index to my copy of his *Institutes* – Calvin's primary source book according to his own words – has no entry whatsoever for the priesthood of all believers – an amazing omission. I realise that Calvin was not responsible for the index, of course, but the fact remains that his editors did not discover sufficient emphasis on the subject within Calvin's more than 1300 pages to merit such an entry. This can be accounted for only by his dependence on the legacy from the medieval Roman Church, and by his blind and obsessive prejudice against the Anabaptists. One of those consequences was the formation of a new priesthood – the Reformed clergy – over a new institution – the Reformed Church, with its Reformed liturgy.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p289.

<sup>33</sup> See my *Battle; Infant*.

I leave the story there. It did not stop there, of course. It is still unfolding. In the late 20th century, believers began to recover the glories of the new covenant, declare those glories, explore and set out the underlying theology.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Conclusion and application***

Sadly, however, the special priesthood of the few still buttresses the institutional church, leaving the new-covenant principle of the priesthood of *all* believers, in a corporate sense, to languish as a forlorn and forgotten museum piece. It is high time this great new-covenant principle was reinstated, understood and *practiced*. God would be glorified, the saints would be edified and unbelievers would be confronted with the gospel of Christ in a vibrant, living way.

Let me take one illustration to make my point. Consider these words; first of Christ, then of Peter:

By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35).

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (1 Pet. 3:15-17).

So what is my point? I suggest that many believers think the church best bears its testimony before the world by the pristine nature of its creed, by its hoary tradition, and by the qualifications, status and preaching ability of its 'pastor', coupled, above all, with a panoply of 'events', attractive entertainments, meals, jamborees, and all the rest of it, put on for pagan delectation. This, it seems to me, sums up what many

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<sup>34</sup> Reformed critics like to claim that hardly anybody taught 'new-covenant theology' before about 1980. This silly criticism displays the ignorance of those who make it. Have they never heard of the Anabaptists? the 'antinomians' in New England in the 1630s? the 1644 Particular Baptists? John Brine? William Gadsby? the early Brethren? Robert Govett? And so on.

### *Old-Covenant Ruin of 'Church'*

believers feel constitutes the church's role in showing Christ to sinners. At least, in many cases, this is what it amounts to in practice.

But what do Christ and Peter tell us? It is as believers show mutual love, mutual love towards each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, as they live sanctified lives for Christ before pagans, and do so despite suffering – indeed, even showing patience through their suffering at the hands of those very pagans – that they really 'impress' the ungodly. In other words, it is as believers appreciate what they have become in Christ, grasp their priestly status in the new covenant, and exercise that priesthood day by day, that they best reveal the glories of Christ to a fallen world.

If we could recover this, the benefits – both to us as believers, and to pagans – would be immense.





## *Old-Covenant Ruin of ‘Clergy’*

I freely acknowledge that the word ‘clergy’ – or its counterpart, ‘laity’ – is not used by all evangelicals. Reformed Baptists<sup>1</sup> – at least, as far as I am aware – do not use it.<sup>2</sup> Yet. This is not the case in all Reformed circles, however. But the word – surprising as it may seem to many – *is* a biblical word, and we *should* use it – in the right, the biblical, way. Sadly, the way it is commonly used is anything but right. What is more, the corrupt notion of ‘clergy’ has spread far wider than its overt use, and its insidious use is as damaging as its overt – if not more so.

So, taking the word as it is commonly used, let me start by saying, with John Calvin, that the word ‘clergy’ is ‘improper’ – even though he contradicted himself and continued to use it! Surely, we can do better than that! A man like Oliver Cromwell saw the point, and rightly called ‘clergy and laity’ an ‘antichristian and dividing a term’. Frank Viola and George Barna paraphrased James Dunn: ‘The clergy/laity tradition has done more to undermine New Testament authority than most heresies’.<sup>3</sup> And, as C.H.Spurgeon declared: ‘The distinction between clergy and laity has no excuse in Scripture’.<sup>4</sup> In fact, ‘laity’ never appears in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, Spurgeon was not quite right. Scripture *does* know of a clergy/laity split. *But not in the New Testament*. In the Old Testament, yes, but not in the New. In the old covenant, yes, but not in the new. Why, the phrase ‘the lay people’ is actually used in 2 Chronicles 35:5,13 (NKJV, NASB, NIV verse 5), as

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<sup>1</sup> A better terms for ‘Reformed Baptists’ would be ‘Particular Baptists’.

<sup>2</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Pastor* pp134-138; see also pp288-294.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Viola and George Barna: *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices*, BarnaBooks, 2008, p127.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Hill: *God’s Englishman*, Penguin Books, London, 1970, p122; John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol.2, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957, p453; Spurgeon: *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol.29, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1971, p625.

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distinct from the priests. Quite right, too. There was a clergy/laity split in the old covenant. *But not in the new.*

Let us get our feet planted squarely on the right foundation. According to the New Testament, even though there is structure in the churches, and everything must 'be done in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Cor. 14:40), and some men are gifted and recognised teachers to rule and instruct the church – even to the extent that some are supported financially to let them devote their lives to such work – there is no clergy/laity split; none whatsoever. It is utterly wicked,<sup>5</sup> blatantly unbiblical, to speak as though there is; it ought to be anathema to every believer. The New Testament is clear. All God's people are holy and consecrated ministers or priests of the new covenant; all engage in priestly ministry. All believers are teaching ministers.

In saying that, I am not suggesting that all are able to address a congregation, but no child of God is without some ability to pass on a word of experience, a word of encouragement, instruction, comfort, reproof... to a fellow-believer. Let me emphasise this, even though I know it will sound startling to some, perhaps many. But Scripture is rich on the subject:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith... For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith [or, in agreement with the faith]. If it is serving [ministry, NKJV], let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully... I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 1:11-12; 12:3-8; 15:14).

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<sup>5</sup> I do not apologise for the word.

## *Old-Covenant Ruin of 'Clergy'*

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge... Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift... There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service [ministries, NKJV], but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... The same Spirit... gives... to each one, just as he determines... God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:1-31, especially 4-7,11,18).

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people, and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit... But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... It was he who gave some... to prepare God's people for works of service [for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, NKJV], so that the body of Christ may be built up... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work [by which every part does its share, NKJV]... Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit [impart grace to, NKJV] those who listen... Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21).

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:15-17).

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing... warn those who are idle, encourage the timid,

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help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else (1 Thess. 5:11,14-15).

Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living stone – rejected by men but chosen by God, and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... Pray. Above all, love each other deeply... Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace [minister it to one another, NKJV] in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves [ministers, NKJV], he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 2:2-5; 4:7-11).

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh (Jude 20-23).

Is that not proof enough?

All the saints are ministers, priests; all engage in ministry; all are responsible and gifted to be able to be a part of the mutual nourishing of the body of Christ. Note the emphasis, 'to each one'. To each believer, Christ gives a gift or gifts so that each might serve the church.<sup>6</sup> The passages I have just quoted tell us that *all* the saints are ministers, *all* are engaged in the ministry. Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors-and-teachers (the first three were extraordinary) are given by Christ to the churches, and

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<sup>6</sup> I would like to drop 'church' and use *ekklēsia*, but I feel I ought to continue to use the language familiar to the overwhelming majority. I say this because 'church', today, is largely part and parcel of institutional Christianity – Christendom. And Christendom has done much harm, over many centuries, to the cause of Christ in general, and to the individual believer in particular – to say nothing of the appalling affect it has had on unbelievers.

are used by him in order to equip the saints for this work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16). But do not miss the vital point: Christ gives such teachers to his people *for the very purpose of fitting believers – all of them – to engage in profitable ministry*. The stated and authoritative (not authoritarian!) ministry is designed by Christ to produce believers who are able to edify each other, not to make them grow spiritually obese and, at the same time, increasingly dependent on the pulpit. Imagine, in a physical sense, always eating four square meals a day, and never doing any work, never doing anything productive with all the digested calories and proteins. The very suggestion is laughable. Or very sad! So it ought to be in a spiritual sense. To each believer, Christ gives a gift (or gifts) so that each might serve the church. In short, there is no clergy/laity split among believers, none whatsoever. So where does the idea come from?

The word ‘clergy’ is derived from *klēros*, ‘allotted portion’. Judas had ‘shared’, ‘obtained a part’ (*klēros*) (NKJV) in the apostolic ministry, lost it, and Matthias was chosen to take the vacant position, Judas’ share (*klēros*) (Acts 1:17,25).<sup>7</sup> Even so, neither Judas nor Matthias was a cleric; they had a share, a part, they had been allotted a part, they had been chosen to be a part of the apostolic band and engage in apostolic ministry. But the first believers did not apply the word to apostles only. Peter told Simon the sorcerer: ‘You have no part or share (*klēros*) (portion, NKJV) in this ministry’ (Acts 8:21). Peter was not telling Simon he had been defrocked, that he was no longer a cleric. He was telling him he had no part in Christ; he was an unbeliever. Clearly, every believer has his allotted part in Christ, and in the priestly ministry under Christ.

*klēros* also means ‘inheritance’: Believers ‘receive... an inheritance (*klēros*) among those who are sanctified’ (Acts 26:18, NKJV). They ‘share in the inheritance (*klēros*) of the saints in the kingdom of light’ (Col. 1:12).

Beyond that, *klēros* is the church, the people of God, God’s flock, who have been entrusted to the care of the elders (1 Pet. 5:3). The people of God are God’s *klēros*, God’s ‘clergy’, God’s

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<sup>7</sup> In verse 25, *klēros* is a variant reading for *topos*. In verse 26, *klērous* and *klēros* appear as ‘lots’ and ‘lot’.

## *Old-Covenant Ruin of 'Clergy'*

part, God's portion, his elect, his inheritance, 'his own special people' (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV).

The Fathers, however, turned all this completely on its head – not the first time they had done such a thing. They did it with 'minister' and 'bishop'.<sup>8</sup> So how did they turn 'clergy' on its head? By speaking of the clergy as 'those to whom the care (the allotted charge) of churches has been assigned'! In the new covenant, the clergy are the people who belong to God. In Father-speak, the clergy are the men who 'own' the people. First the Fathers spoke about 'clerical appointment or office', then the 'clergy' itself. It was Tertullian, followed by Cyprian, who first used the term in this sense.<sup>9</sup>

If it were not so serious, we should surely be amused by the irony of the apostle's words not 'to lord it over God's clergy' (see 1 Pet. 5:3). Of all the upside down interpretations of Scripture (of which there is no risk of shortage!), the nonsense the Fathers dreamed up on 'the clergy', and which they foisted on Peter's words, must surely take the biscuit. Whatever else the 'clergy' have done these past 1800 years, they have, in the main, 'lorded' it over God's people!

Let me underscore the point I am making, since it is so important. In the old covenant, there was a clergy, a distinct class of men who served as priests, yes. Certainly. *But not in the new.* In the new covenant, the clergy are *all* God's people. It was the Fathers who, without warrant – indeed, in flat contradiction of the principles of the new covenant – went back to the old covenant, and applied its principles to the church, and thus invented a class of men who are over the church, a class of men who are of a different order to the rest of the members. And not only that. In doing such an abominable thing, they had the effrontery to take a New Testament word, *klēros*, and twist it to define this invented class of clerics. Humpty Dumpty had a field day!

Wait a moment, says an objector. Didn't some of the Fathers speak of the priesthood of all believers? Yes, they did, especially

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<sup>8</sup> For 'bishop', see my *Pastor (passim)*; for 'minister', my *Pastor* pp119-134,280-288.

<sup>9</sup> See my *Pastor* pp66-67,204-212.

in the very early days.<sup>10</sup> Some also acknowledged that all Christians are ministers. But even so, the Fathers soon came to hold to the clergy/laity split, contradictory though it is. Actually, and to be fair to them, they were not contradictory. They simply let the priesthood of all believers wither and die. It was Cyprian who set the course for the elevation of the special priesthood, the clergy, the special priesthood of the few, and the corresponding elimination of the universal priesthood of all believers. And he got his way!

What is more, it must be remembered that the concept of the threefold ministerial order *evolved*; so much so, the Fathers could make biblical statements with one breath, yet sweep them away in a torrent of nonsense in the next. In any case, the Church<sup>11</sup> – especially the bigwigs – liked the idea of a clergy, and so they went on their way regardless, saddling the following generations with the special priesthood of the few, the privileged.

This should not surprise us. Sadden us, yes, but not surprise us. It happens all the time. 'The priesthood of all believers' appears in almost all church Statements of Faith. But how little it is acted upon and worked out in practice. In everyday terms, it has become virtually meaningless, not much more than an evangelical slogan.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See my *Pastor* pp81-82,220-227.

<sup>11</sup> I have difficulty about church and Church. By the former, I mean the New Testament concept; by the latter, I mean one of the many inventions of men. I have found it impossible to be consistent – just one of the consequences of Constantine and Christendom; of both, more later. And when I speak of 'the New Testament concept' of the church, I mean local, independent churches. The New Testament knows nothing of the traditional visible/invisible approach (see my *Infant* pp237-276). It speaks in terms of local churches and the whole body of the elect. In fact, we should not talk about 'the New Testament church' – unless we mean a particular local church; rather, we should talk of 'the New Testament churches'. Indeed, as I have explained, I would like to drop 'church' and use *ekklēsia*.

<sup>12</sup> See my *Priesthood* (*passim*). As for self-contradiction and double-speak, see my *Infant* pp26-27,46,49-51,109-110,226,230-231,258,269-270, for examples of it from Reformed sacramentalists, and pp225,335-336 for Augustine.

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As for 'clergy', the common practice is all wrong, dreadfully wrong. Ministers are not the clergy; God's clergy is the church itself. The elders are not the clergy; the church itself is. God's people are God's clergy. The Bible says so. After all, elders are commanded not to lord it over the clergy, *ho klēros*, the church (1 Pet. 5:3). How this simple statement needs to sink in. But, according to Church theory, this can only mean that the clergy must not lord it over the clergy. Nonsense! The elders must not become a clergy and thus lord it over the rest of the believers; *that* is what Peter meant. And, in the early church, when sinners were converted, they 'joined' – *proseklērōthēsan* – God's people, God's clergy (Acts 17:4).<sup>13</sup> That is to say, as soon as a sinner is converted he becomes a clergy-man – or she becomes a clergy-woman. Each and every believer is a part of God's clergy (*klēros*).

But these same converts are laymen as well as clergymen. They are both at the same time. As for 'laity', the word comes from *laos*, 'people'. All God's people – all of them, elders included – are his people, his laity (Acts 15:14; 18:10; Rom. 9:25-26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). All God's people, *laos*, are gifted (1 Cor. 12:7,11,18; 14:24-29; Eph. 4:7,16; Col. 4:17; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Nor is this the end of it. All God's people are stewards, ministers, servants of God (1 Pet. 4:10). All believers are sacred to God. All of them are his royal priests (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

Thus all God's people are at once both his clergy and his laity, his ministers, stewards, kings and priests, *all* of them without exception. Not only is there no clergy/laity split in the New Testament, the clergy and the laity are one and the same people. They are God's elect (his clergy), his chosen portion, marked out and separate (his laity) from the world.

Can we not get back to the New Testament, the new covenant, in this? What a daft question! Can we? We must!

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<sup>13</sup> When it says they 'joined Paul and Silas', they did not join two clergymen in the non-biblical sense. No! They joined Paul and Silas, all of them as members of God's people, all of them being clergy! By being converted, they were 'clergyfied'.



## *Old-Covenant Ruin of ‘Minister’*

‘Minister’ is a biblical word. We must use it. But we must use it in a biblical way. Far too often, however, it is used *unbiblically*.<sup>1</sup>

How? For a start, Christians must stop talking about preachers as though they, the preachers – and only they – are ministers. It is the ‘only’ that is wrong. Those whom God has gifted as preachers *are* ministers – in a very real sense – and nothing I say here must be taken to mean that I want to denigrate the public and stated ministry of the gospel. But to confine ‘minister’ and ‘ministry’ to the man in the pulpit, and to what he does there, is a travesty of the new covenant. To go down that route is to insult the church of God,<sup>2</sup> belittling as it does, the biblical principle, the new-covenant principle, of the royal priesthood of all believers, of every-member ministry. Sadly, many who should know better, including the Reformed, do talk in such an unbiblical way. On what authority did William Hendriksen, for example, claim that ‘in Paul’s days a distinction began to be made between those whom today we call “ministers” and those we still call “elders”’? None. None whatsoever. It is simply not true. It is utterly false. But there it stands, unrepealed, in a Reformed commentary, published by one of the great Reformed publishing houses, and used by thousands. Again, in the same volume, without any justification, Hendriksen defined a ‘minister’ as one ‘who spends all his time and effort in kingdom work’.<sup>3</sup> This is wrong, utterly wrong. All believers, *all of them* – both male and female – are

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Pastor* pp119-134; see also pp280-288.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to drop ‘church’ and use *ekklēsia*, but I feel I ought to continue to use the language familiar to the overwhelming majority. I say this because ‘church’, today, is largely part and parcel of institutional Christianity – Christendom. And Christendom has done much harm, over many centuries, to the cause of Christ in general, and to the individual believer in particular – to say nothing of the appalling affect it has had on unbelievers.

<sup>3</sup> William Hendriksen: *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1959, pp180-181.

ministers, whether or not they are engaged full-time 'in kingdom work', whatever that may be.<sup>4</sup>

Let me prove it. There are three main New Testament words for 'minister' – *diakonos*, *leitourgos*, and *hupēretēs* – plus various others which the AV, in particular, translates by 'minister' or its equivalent.<sup>5</sup> None of these words, however, carry the connotation of THE MINISTER; none speak of any elevation in rank or importance. Quite the opposite. The opposite, I repeat. As Christ said: 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant [minister, *diakonos*]' (Matt. 20:25-26). (The AV has 'minister'). Indeed, Christ went on to use the word 'slave' (*doulos*). The Corinthian church, with its highly developed cult of man, more than any other church in the New Testament, failed in this regard. *In this respect*, it is the one church in the New Testament which is most like many Reformed and evangelical churches of today, where minister-cultism is rife. And Paul plainly told the Corinthians that their teachers are ministers, not masters. What is more, he told them that they are *only* ministers (1 Cor. 3:5). And Paul tells today's churches the same – if they will only listen.

Let me spell this out a little more. The Corinthians were carnal, ignorant and divided. The church was riddled with strife. Why? In part, because they made too much of men, particularly 'ministers' (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:1-4). And what was the cure? First, the Corinthians had to get a proper sense of what these 'ministers' were, get it all into proper perspective: 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers...?' (1 Cor. 3:5, NKJV). Note the vital word *but* – 'only'. This is a word which needs to be thundered throughout Reformed and evangelical churches today – every bit as much as it was at Corinth, two thousand years ago.

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

<sup>5</sup> As always, the AV has a lot to answer for in this area. The authorities stipulated that the translators had to retain 'the old ecclesiastical [Church] words'. They complied. See my *Battle* pp255-256; *Infant* pp305-306. On this issue, at least, would that we had gone back to Tyndale, and allowed the AV to sit quietly in the museum.

## *Old-Covenant Ruin of 'Minister'*

So-called Ministers are *only* ministers; they are *but* ministers. How few talk like this today. Quite the reverse. Ministers are often referred to with bated breath. We must get back to the New Testament; that is to say, the new covenant! If we do, of course, we shall discover the cure for the cult of man, the cult of ministers. Which is? The proper view of the Lord himself, God, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:13 – 4:1, for example). Let me tease this vital point out of that passage. Note the apostle's emphasis: 'Is Christ divided?... Christ... Christ... Christ... God... God... God... God... Christ... God... God... God... God... Christ Jesus... Jesus Christ... Christ... the Lord... God... God... God's... God's... God's... God... Jesus Christ... God... the Spirit of God... God, God... God... God... the LORD... Christ's... Christ... God's... Christ... God'.<sup>6</sup> Look at the apostle's climactic command and statement:

So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death, or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God (1 Cor. 3:21 – 4:1).

Is that not clear enough?

Ministers! Because of the corruptions foisted upon the word by the Fathers and others, I am tempted to make the vain and foolish suggestion, the wrong-headed suggestion, that we drop the word 'minister' altogether.<sup>7</sup> But it *is* a biblical word – let us therefore learn to use it biblically. Let us remember what we ought to mean by it, and stick to it.

In the New Testament sense, the new-covenant sense, a minister is a servant, and that is all. For example, in the following, compare the AV, NKJV, NIV and NASB: magistrates are ministers (Rom. 13:4,6), as are Satan's minions (2 Cor. 11:15), angels (Heb. 1:7), Jewish synagogue officials (Luke 4:20), waiters (John 2:5,9), attendants or assistants (Acts 13:5) and deacons (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8,12). All are ministers. I say it

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<sup>6</sup> And still I have omitted some!

<sup>7</sup> The NIV, rightly, often uses 'servant' – almost consistently – but falls back into 'minister' on occasion. The AV, NKJV and NASB often, if not always, use 'minister'.

again. All these are, in New Testament and new-covenant terms, ministers.

Take the last case. How many churches look upon a deacon as a minister? But this is exactly what he is. This is precisely what the word means. Speaking biblically 'minister' does *not* mean 'the man in charge of the church, the preacher, the pastor'. Of course preachers *are* God's servants or ministers (Luke 1:2; Acts 26:16; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7,23,25; 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:6).<sup>8</sup> Yes, of course. I am, for example, perfectly content with the AV, NKJV and NIV rendering of 1 Timothy 4:6. But *all* believers are ministers; all are priests of the new covenant. Preachers and elders have their ministry, yes. But so do all believers. So does *each* believer! The priesthood of all believers is not a figment of the imagination – nor a mere evangelical slogan!

The truth is, the *corrupt* notion of 'a minister' is more akin to the Old Testament than the New; that it is to say, more akin to the old covenant than the new. And that fact is fatal when talking about the church – a new-covenant organism, if ever there was!

I do not want to be misunderstood. But I fear I shall be. So let me do what I can to spell it out. Let me glance at the misapplication of the old covenant to the church.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The misapplication of the old covenant to the church***

Let me say it straight away. The Old Testament is as much a part of Scripture as the New. I hope I have said it plainly enough. The Old and New Testaments comprise the one word of God. But, having said that, we must get to grips with the subject of the continuity/discontinuity between the covenants.<sup>10</sup> The point here is this: It is to make a mistake of mammoth proportions to apply, to the church, the old covenant which Christ fulfilled and thus abolished (Heb. 7:18; 8:7-13; 9:1-15). Reader, if you stand aghast

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<sup>8</sup> Even so, some of these passages might apply to all believers in general, and might refer to something other than stated preaching.

<sup>9</sup> For my arguments, see my *Battle; Infant; Baptist; Priesthood; Christ*.

<sup>10</sup> See my 'Covenant Theology Tested' (eDocs link on David H J Gay [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com); [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com)). See also my *New*.

at my words, may I ask you: Would you discipline your stubborn and rebellious son by the principles of Deuteronomy 21:18-21? Let me remind you of the old-covenant procedure:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders: 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is profligate and a drunkard'. Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

And that, of course, is but one example out of scores and scores which could be chosen. Bearing in mind what Scripture means by 'sabbath', will you discipline sabbath-breaking church members by the principles of Exodus 31:12-17 and Numbers 15:32-36? Would you like church disputes to be sorted out according to Numbers 16? And so on and on.

If any reader is still appalled and deeply offended by what I have said, and think my arguments too thin, I can only respectfully ask that you read my *Christ is All*,<sup>11</sup> where I fully work out all my arguments. But to try to get off the hook of what I am alleging by falling back to Aquinas' proposal that the law should be divided into three parts (moral, ceremonial and judicial), abolishing two of them and retaining the third, is nothing but a convenient, face-saving invention, an imposition foisted on Scripture. It will not wash! It is useless as well as wrong. I make bold to say this, even though Calvin retained the notion when quitting the medieval Roman Church, enlarged upon it, and set it in concrete, so that it has become virtual canon law for the majority of Reformed and evangelical believers ever since. It is still wrong. As I say, I set out my detailed arguments in *Christ is All*.

Reader, do *you* realise that to apply the old covenant to the church, is grievously mistaken, and misguided in the extreme? I am sorry to have to record that, in regard to the ordering of a church, many – most – believers today are following the

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<sup>11</sup> See also my *Psalm 119*.

principles laid out by Cyprian,<sup>12</sup> and applying old-covenant concepts to the church, not least, in the matter of 'ministry'. But, in moving from the Old Testament into the New, we cannot fail to be struck by the significant change in the idea of 'ministry'. This is only to be expected, of course, since under the old covenant there *was* a priestly class to whom God delegated much of the practice of religion for the Hebrews (Heb. 5:1-4; 8:3), but this system has been utterly abolished in the New Testament, under the new covenant (Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7,13).

Why have I gone into all that? The reason is, it has a direct bearing on the misunderstanding over the word 'minister'. In particular, the mammoth alteration involved in the change of covenants is highlighted and emphasised by the way the New Testament uses one of the words often translated as 'minister'; namely, *leitourgos*. The *leitourgoi* are those through whom God executes his will. That is the essential quality of *leitourgia*. It is the way in which the Bible uses this word which is so interesting and instructive.

In the Septuagint, the word is used to denote 'the priests and Levites who were busied with the sacred rites in the tabernacle or the temple'. In other words, such men formed a special class of professionals who had specified religious duties among the Hebrew people, as distinct from the ordinary people. Quite!

Nevertheless, when the New Testament uses the word to speak of the ministry, it says that *all* believers are *leitourgoi*, and *all* perform *leitourgia*. On that last, it is not obvious to a non-Greek reader that, for instance, Paul uses the word in Acts 13:2; 2 Corinthians 9:12; Philippians 2:25,30. The NIV – rightly, I stress – avoiding the loaded 'ministry', preferred 'worshipping', 'perform', 'take care of' and 'help', thus giving a far better idea of the range of meaning we should attach to *leitourgos* and its derivatives. In the New Testament, the word most definitely does *not* speak of a special, distinct and professional class engaged in religious duties, separate from the mass of the people – except when referring to the abolished Jewish priesthood (Luke 1:23) or the unique priesthood of Christ (Heb. 8:2,6; 9:21). Not only so;

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<sup>12</sup> See my *Pastor* pp63-70,81-82.

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magistrates, angels, as well as preachers, are all 'ministers', *leitourgoi* (Rom. 13:6; Heb. 1:7) – for which the NIV rightly uses 'servants'.

But now for an objection. What about Romans 15:16? Doesn't Paul call himself a *leitourgos*, one who was 'administering in sacred service', 'ministering in the manner of a priest, ministering in priestly service'? He certainly does. And the word he uses (*hierourgounta*) comes from *hierourgeō*, in turn from *hierous*, a priest. So what is this 'priest', and what is this 'priestly activity'?

In answering that, it is important to note that this is the only place in the New Testament where *hierourgounta* is used. But what did the apostle mean by it? Let me quote the verse in both the NIV and the NKJV:

To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NIV).  
That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NKJV).

Clearly, the apostle was speaking spiritually – the 'offering' was the Gentiles; that is, he regarded those Gentiles who were converted, under his ministry, as an 'offering' to God. But, as Charles Hodge said: 'Paul... no more calls himself a priest in the strict sense of the term, than he calls the Gentiles a sacrifice in the literal meaning of that word'.<sup>13</sup> The verse is best understood in the context of the priesthood of all believers (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:4-12; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

A preacher, therefore, is a minister, one of the *leitourgoi*, yes, but preaching is but one, and only one, of the many diverse aspects of being a 'minister'. Romans 15:16 is but one item in that list which speaks of the believer's spiritual sacrifice and worship to God (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16). To try to build a fabulous structure of a priestly, sacerdotal episcopacy

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Hodge: *A Commentary on Romans*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1972, p438.

upon this one verse would seem, at best, somewhat excessive and highly speculative.<sup>14</sup>

The significance of the fact that all God's people are 'ministers' must not be missed, ignored, glossed over or suppressed. In the context of which I am speaking, all God's people – all of them – are ministers, ministers through whom he fulfils his will. This must not be reserved to a designated special class of men. This change between the two Testaments is one of the great glories of the new covenant. It is tragic when it is lost or forgotten, as it is so often today.

Moving on, let me now summarise the New Testament use of the two other words for 'minister', *diakonos* and *hupēretēs*.

The first, *diakonos*, speaks particularly of one who carries out the commands of another, especially the commands of a master. It is used of one who is a servant, an attendant, a minister; or a servant of a king; or one who promotes the welfare and prosperity of the church; or, in truth, anyone through whom God carries out his will. Magistrates, teachers of the gospel, deacons and servants – all are *diakonoι* (see above).

The other word, *hupēretēs*, is widely understood to mean a subordinate rower in a galley – one who strained at his oar on the lower decks – a servant, a menial, an assistant or a helper, an attendant, 'anyone who serves with his hands', with a special emphasis on subordination, an official, guard or officer under authority (Matt. 5:25; 26:58; Mark 14:54,65; Luke 1:2; 4:20; John 7:32,45; 18:3,12,18,22,36; 19:6; Acts 5:22,26; 13:5; 26:16; 1 Cor. 4:1).

It is clear. All three words for 'minister' speak, above all else, of service and subordination, of being under orders. Consequently, when we speak of a minister, we should keep to this biblical notion of service and subordination. We ought not to impose upon the word any notion of dignity and rank – a minister is a servant, not a lord. Ministers are *under* orders, not *in* (so-called) holy orders! Ministers are servants of the Lord *and the church, the people of God*. Ministers are to be like Christ. He came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:35-45; Luke 17:10;

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<sup>14</sup> See my *Priesthood*.



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22:25-27; 1 Cor. 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:24; 3:5; 4:1,5; 12:11; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim 1:12-16). Ministers are not dignitaries, VIPs. They are servants, workers – even slaves, helpers and stewards – nothing to do with personal worth or rank. I must emphasise this, since it is so little understood.

It is, in fact, far worse. The way the word is commonly used today is the exact opposite of the New Testament. To foist upon the biblical word 'minister' any idea of importance, specialness, differentness, to give the word 'minister' or the man himself any hint of rank or elevation, is to go diametrically against the principles of the new covenant. Those who do it – many (most?) believers, I am sorry to say – could not be more wrong. It turns the new covenant on its head. Christ, through his people, in fulfilment of the prophet (Hag. 2:6-9,21-23; Heb. 12:18-29), 'caused trouble all over the world' (Acts 17:6), 'turned the world upside down' (NKJV). We, it seems, now are bent on turning it downside up.

What is more, we must never forget the universality of the New Testament (new-covenant) concept of the believer's priesthood and ministry; *every* believer is a priest, a minister, *every* believer without exception. But how often this is forgotten; or worse, ignored, with dreadful loss both to the church and to the individual believer. Most believers really do think that ministers form a special class and are engaged in a special way in special duties. And they do this despite protesting the opposite.

In short, we must rid ourselves of the idea of THE MINISTRY, as dreamed up by the Fathers. If we don't, we will find it impossible to speak of THE MINISTER without thinking in terms of his special call, education, ordination, title, dress, rank, dignity and power. We will find ourselves caught up in all the ministerial apparatus and jargon – clergyism – which surrounds us and threatens to smother us. Sadly, many Christians like having a professional ministry, even though professionalism is a curse in the church. They like the trappings of THE MINISTRY. Why do we have a particular education system for MINISTERS? Why do we have conferences for MINISTERS?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> If anyone should plead the lack of time for those employed in 'normal' work, I would note the 'normal', and call the pleading

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Why do we have fraternalists for MINISTERS?<sup>16</sup> Why is there a peculiar dress for MINISTERS, both official and unofficial? Why have we invented titles for MINISTERS? Why do we have ranks for MINISTERS – emeritus ministers, senior ministers, associate ministers and assistant ministers? Is there an ounce of Scripture for any of it? If not, why do we do it? Why do some sing hymns like this:

*Great Lord of all thy churches, hear  
Thy ministers' and people's prayer...*

*Thus we our suppliant voices raise,  
And weeping, sow the seed of praise,  
In humble hope that thou wilt hear  
Thy ministers' and people's prayer.*<sup>17</sup>

Who gives men the right to differentiate between the prayers of the minister and the people? Does God? Do you see what I mean, reader, when I say that believers, without realising it, can think their minister is a special man, a member of the clergy, even when they deny they do any such thing? Do they think that his prayers are special to God? All God's people are his ministers.

Let me say that again: *All God's people are his ministers*. When Paul told Timothy to 'keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen' (2 Tim. 2:14), to whom was he referring? Who shouldn't quarrel in this way? Is it only

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'special'. I do not think for a minute that time is the fundamental reason underlying ministerial conferences.

<sup>16</sup> The assembly recorded in Acts 20:17-38 does not support the notion; it was a meeting of the elders of the Ephesian church, called by the apostle. It most definitely was not a gathering of 'ministers' from various churches. Compare the mis-designation of Acts 15 as the Council of Jerusalem. It was nothing of the kind. It was a meeting of the local church – with apostolic overtones – called to deal with a problem which originated in the church at Jerusalem, and was causing trouble throughout the churches; namely, the imposition of the law on believers. See my *Infant* p116; *Battle* pp85-89.

<sup>17</sup> *Gospel Hymns*, The Strict and Particular Baptist Society, Robert Stockwell, London, 1915, number 813; *The Presbyterian Hymnal*, Philadelphia, 1874, number 585; [ehymnbook.org](http://ehymnbook.org)

'ministers' who should not quarrel? Or all believers in general? Is it not obvious? Incidentally, it shows that the believers in their day were talking and listening to each other.<sup>18</sup> The trouble was, they might drop into striving or quarrelling about words. Paul did not want that. But his solution was not to call for silence. He wanted them to go on speaking to each other about spiritual matters, but not to quarrel. It is just the same as the way in which he approached the Corinthians and their excesses. He was talking about *believers*, and to *believers*; all of them. That is the point.

But for many, I fear it is not; that is, judging by the remarks on the passages by commentators such as John Gill and William Hendriksen, for instance.<sup>19</sup> But it is not only 'ministers' in preaching who can 'strive about words to no profit' (2 Tim. 2:14, NKJV)! Is it only a 'minister', who is 'the Lord's servant', who 'must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful', and so on (2 Tim. 2:24)? Of course, preachers and teachers can strive and quarrel – but so can every believer. Hendriksen, once again, however, when commenting on this verse, talked about the 'minister' in the professional sense.

The fact is, it is difficult to see how most 'ministers', in their public teaching and preaching today, could ever be said to quarrel with the congregation. A quarrel, surely, involves two parties. In the vast majority of meetings today, the congregation is mute, and the preacher is six feet above and twenty feet away from contradiction. Nor, in my experience, is it usual for the 'minister' and 'his' church to discuss doctrine – let alone quarrel about it! What is more, in this age of inclusivism and user-friendly churches, à la Bill Hybels and Willow Creek, Rick Warren and Saddleback, it would be more likely to have a man from Mars in the pulpit than a *quarrelling* minister!

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<sup>18</sup> The same might be said about the Corinthians. True, they were talking in the wrong way about men, boasting about gifts, and questioning truth, and so on (1 Cor. 1:11-12; 3:4; 4:19-20; (probably) 12:14-21; 14:1-40; 15:12). But they were talking, and not merely about the weather or recipes!

<sup>19</sup> Gill on 2 Tim. 2:24: 'By "the servant of the Lord" is not meant any believer in common, but a minister of the word, as Timothy was; such an one ought not to strive about words to no profit...'

Hmm!

So why do so many believers think only of preaching when they use the word 'ministry'? Some New Testament references, of course, can only mean 'the ministry of the word' in the sense of (probably) public preaching and teaching (Luke 1:2; Acts 1:17,25; 6:4; 26:16; 2 Cor. 5:18; 6:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:12). *Some*, I emphasise. But, in the majority of cases, 'ministry' can and does refer to service far wider than preaching; sometimes it may not even include preaching; and sometimes it definitely excludes preaching; and sometimes it is impossible to decide.<sup>20</sup> Was John Mark a preacher? Did Paul and Barnabas take him along with them so that he could preach to them? I ask this (stupid) question because he was, after all, their minister (Acts 13:5, AV). I say 'stupid', by the way, simply because so many believers do think if someone is called 'a minister' then it inevitably means he must be a preacher. The truth is, Mark was their 'assistant' (NKJV), 'helper' (NASB), their 'gofer'. The same goes for Timothy and Erastus – they were not Paul's private preachers or chaplains even though they 'ministered to him' (Acts 19:22, NKJV). The truth is, they were his 'helpers' (NIV), his travelling companions (Acts 19:29). What is more, Paul had 'ministered' to himself and them (Acts 20:34, NASB, AV). Did he preach to himself and them? Of course not!<sup>21</sup> With his 'hands' he 'supplied [his] own needs and the needs of [his] companions' (NIV), 'provided for [his] necessities, and for those who were with' him (NKJV). He did manual work to put bread on the table for himself and his travelling companions – thus fulfilling, in this instance, his 'ministry' as a 'minister'. Think about Tychicus. He was a 'minister' (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7, AV, NKJV), yes, but was he a

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<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, the AV, NKJV, NIV, NASB for Acts 1:17,25; 6:1-3; 11:19; 12:25; 13:2,5; 20:24; Rom. 11:13; 15:25-28,31; 1 Cor. 12:5; 16:15; 2 Cor. 3:3; 4:1; 8:4; 9:1,12-13; Eph. 3:7; 4:12; 6:21; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7,23; 4:17; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:18; 4:11; Philem. 13; Heb. 6:10; 1 Pet. 1:12; 4:10-11; and so on. Sometimes 'ministry' is used; sometimes not – also making the point.

<sup>21</sup> I am not saying they did not talk about spiritual things – but did he act as a professional minister or preacher *to himself* and them? Of course not!

'preaching minister', in the sense almost universally understood today? Can we be sure? Epaphroditus 'ministered' to Paul's need (Phil. 2:25, AV, NKJV; see Phil. 4:18). Did he prepare his meals, do his laundry, do his shopping, run his errands and such like – or did he preach to him? Did Paul take 'preaching ministers' along with him in his travels? (See Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 3:12). I am not saying he did not, but is it absolutely certain that is what they were, all of them? And what about that oft-neglected list of saints in Romans 16:1-16? They were servants of the church (Phoebe was a *diakonos* of the assembly), helpers, workers, labourers... In other words, they were all ministers – every man-Jack, and every woman-Jill, of them. Ministers, all of them. Note the number of women who got an honourable mention in Romans 16:1-16.

Angels *ministered* to Christ (Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13, AV). Did they preach to him? They 'attended' him. Women *ministered* to Christ (Matt. 8:15; Mark 1:31; 15:41; Luke 4:39; 8:3, NKJV). Did they preach to him? The prophets and teachers at Antioch '*ministered* to the Lord' (Acts 13:1-2, NKJV). Did they preach to him? They 'worshipped' him. And so on.

All God's people are holy and consecrated ministers of the new covenant. Indeed, they are, all of them, royal priests (1 Pet. 2:4-12; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). The words 'not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant' (2 Cor. 3:5-6), apply to more than apostles, to more than stated preachers.<sup>22</sup> They apply to all the saints. The biblical pictures of the church as a body and a building speak of the one-ness of the ministry of *all* God's people; that is, the vital ministerial contribution made by *every* member, the competence, by God's Spirit, of all believers as priests and ministers. Please see Romans 12:3-8; 15:14; 1 Corinthians 1:4-7; 12:1-31, especially 4-7,18; 2 Corinthians 3:5-6; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21; Colossians 3:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:11,14-15; 1 Peter 2:2-5; 4:7-11; Jude 20-23. Are they not proof enough?

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<sup>22</sup> See my *Priesthood* pp138-141.

It is not only 'ministers' who have 'to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 3). Each and every believer has to know enough, and be committed enough, to be able 'to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in [their] way that are contrary to the teaching [they] have learned', and to 'keep away from them' (Rom. 16:17). And this is but a sample of such scriptures. The New Testament writers did not write such things to 'ministers', as commonly delineated today. They said what they said to the *believers* as ministers, as priests; and they said it to all of them. Moreover, they said what they said to all believers of every age. Above all, they said it to us! They said it to me. Reader, if you are a believer, they said it to you. It is, I say, abundantly clear: All the saints are ministers; all engage in ministry.

Not all see it in this way, however. Not all? Very few, I am afraid. Especially is this so among 'ministers' themselves! Paul, apparently, in Ephesians 4:12, is not talking about 'the ordinary, average members', but 'those, and those only, who hold ministerial offices', and, furthermore, the New Testament generally uses 'ministry' in this way. So we are told by D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones.<sup>23</sup> I am quoting him verbatim. With respect, as I stated earlier, the facts just do not support this assertion. And this is putting it kindly. He was very wide of the mark. Paul states the position precisely: Christ gives stated 'pastors-and-teachers' to carry out their work. And that work is 'the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry' (Eph. 4:11-12, NKJV). It is 'the saints' – all the saints – who are to be equipped 'for the work of the ministry'. Moreover, Lloyd-Jones was guilty, as many others, of imposing a formal structure on the word 'ministry'. He was making the mistake of reading back into the New Testament the principles dreamed up, and foisted on the churches, by the Fathers. As Richard Hanson said: 'All have been long accustomed to reading their own structures of ministry [back] into the earliest period of Christianity'. We all do it. It is wrong. We should, at the very least, be aware of it. Otherwise we end up,

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<sup>23</sup> D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16. Christian Unity*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, p200. See my *Pastor* pp280-288.

like Lloyd-Jones here, losing the new-covenant concept of 'ministry', and confirming, in a self-fulfilling way, our preconceptions, and turning 'ministry' into a formal office. The new covenant is far more spontaneous. Allowing for the extraordinary, and without in any way sanctioning the Corinthian excesses, glance again at 1 Corinthians 14. Hanson again: 'The Christians of the earliest age were able, in a manner which we find difficult to understand, and more difficult to recapture, to reconcile and combine freedom and authority, spontaneity and consent'.<sup>24</sup> It would help if we used 'service' instead of 'ministry' for the vast majority of the New Testament.<sup>25</sup> Certainly we must eliminate this hushed-breath mentality when speaking about THE MINISTRY!<sup>26</sup>

As for reading back, we dare not forget that:

For us the words bishops, presbyters and deacons are stored with the associations of nearly two thousand years. For the people who first used them, the [words] can have meant little more than inspectors, older men and helpers. It was when unsuitable theological

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Hanson: *The Christian Priesthood Examined*, Lutterworth Press, Guildford, 1979, pp18-19.

<sup>25</sup> The English translation of *diakonos* has enormous repercussions. 'Minister', for centuries, has been used in reference to 'someone who is authorised by a church or religious organisation to perform functions such as teaching of beliefs; leading services such as weddings, baptisms or funerals; or otherwise providing spiritual guidance to the community'. In other words, 'minister' means someone in some sort of clerical office. As such, the word has carried huge unbiblical overtones. Sadly, the AV, NKJV and NASB often, if not always, use 'minister'. Take the 1611 King James version of the Bible. As I have noted, the authorities stipulated that the translators had to retain 'the old ecclesiastical [Church] words'. They complied. And that led to far-reaching damage – to this very day. For, in the New Testament, the word means 'servant', having been derived from 'less' or 'minus', *and it should be translated 'servant'*. The NIV rightly does it – almost consistently – but falls back into 'minister' on occasion. So, I say again, *diakonos* ought to be rendered 'servant'.

<sup>26</sup> But, and the point must not be missed, if 'ministry' is insisted upon, then all the saints are 'ministers'. As they are – in the new-covenant sense.

## *Old-Covenant Ruin of ‘Minister’*

significance began to be attached to them that the distortion of the concept of the Christian ministry began.<sup>27</sup>

And at the risk of over-egging the pudding, I must stress again that which is nearly always overlooked: The ministry which every saint engages in may include one form or another of practical service, yes, but the main element of the ministry which every believer should engage in is that of *teaching* (Eph. 4:12-13,16; 5:19; Col. 3:16). I want to underline this. Every believer is a *teaching* minister, and edifying minister (1 Thess. 5:11). So let us get rid of this notion of THE MINISTRY and get back to the new covenant where every church member is a minister of God.

Note how in Acts 2:42, apostolic teaching, doctrine, instruction led the early church to fellowship. Now ‘fellowship’ means sharing. Let me make it clear. ‘Fellowship’ does not mean sharing a cup of coffee in order to swap recipe suggestions, pass round some holiday snaps, or gossip about others (‘rock-cakes and back-stabbing at the manse’), and such like. I am not saying the mundane details of our life are unimportant, or do not have a bearing on much bigger things, but when ‘fellowship’ is confined to such, it ceases to be fellowship in the new-covenant sense. Allowing for the extraordinary, see Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-37 for the sort of things the early church called ‘fellowship’.

Let me sum up: ‘Minister’ plays a very important role in the New Testament, and *getting it wrong leads to much trouble, and produces grievous loss*. Yet *this* is precisely what has happened. The sad tale began with the Fathers, and has continued until now. Many of today’s churches have adopted the Fathers’ invention of THE MINISTRY, which is very different to the concept of the New Testament; unwittingly it is done by most, by others in vehement denial that they do it. Nevertheless, this misuse is well-nigh universal and deeply entrenched.

So what? After all, if nearly every Christian talks in this way, and it has been the practice of the churches for centuries, how can it be wrong? and why does it matter?

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<sup>27</sup> Frank Viola and George Barna: *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices*, BarnaBooks, 2008, pp107-108.



It is wrong because it is unscriptural. And it matters because of its grievous consequences – not least the Fathers' invention of 'the clergy' as opposed to 'the laity', which notion has held almost all the churches in its grip for eighteen hundred years. Not a few Christians, however, are so short-sighted – not to say, blind – in this matter, that they deny they hold to a clergy, even though they do! Is it not true that many of them look up to 'their pastor' as someone special, an 'ordained' man, one who has 'received a special call' from God to become a minister, marking him out from the ruck of fellow-believers? Of course it is! Though, as I say, they would deny it, many – most – think of their minister, their pastor, as a member of what amounts to 'the clerical order, the body of men set apart by ordination for religious service in the church'. In addition, it is not unknown for believers to talk quite openly about a *lay* minister or a *lay* pastor, as opposed to a professional. In other words, they do believe in a clergy, although they deny it. Furthermore, they seem unaware of the origin of the term; namely, 'the Catholic Church'.<sup>28</sup>

How much we would gain if we could recover the new covenant – where every believer, each believer, is regarded as a fully-fledged, competent, spiritual minister of Christ. Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you (and I include myself), let us arise and exercise our God-given ministry in the new covenant. Let us encourage each other in it. Let us receive it from each other. The returns would be immeasurable. And how much more telling would be our witness to Christ among the pagans! Who knows what benefits might accrue to them? I say it again: Let us enjoy one of the great privileges Christ has granted us in the new covenant. Indeed, Christ bought it for us with his precious blood! Let us fetch it out of its glass case and put it to use – as Christ intended.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Shorter Oxford.*



## *Old-Covenant Ruin of ‘Ordain’*

There are several Greek words in the New Testament translated ‘ordain’, none of which has the dreadful connotations introduced by the Fathers, and which have been in vogue ever since.<sup>1</sup> Frank Viola and George Barna drew attention to the way in which the AV perpetuated the fault: ‘Translators of the AV have used “ordain” for 21 different Hebrew and Greek words. 17th century ecclesiastical mis-understanding influenced this poor word choice’.<sup>2</sup> Grievously, by using ‘ordain’, the AV – because of the commanding position it has maintained for centuries, and because many have regarded it as the ‘original’ word of God (‘it was good enough for Paul!’) – has given unwarranted support for, and some sort of credence to, the wrong-headed but commonly held notion of ‘ordination’, to ‘confer holy orders on; appoint to the Christian ministry’.<sup>3</sup>

This is a great error. I cannot say it too strongly. It is an error of enormous dimensions.

When Paul told Titus to ordain (AV) elders (Tit. 1:5), he used *kathistēmi*, ‘to set down, to set one in charge of something, to appoint one to administer an office, to constitute, to declare’. This is a long way from *ordain* as generally understood. Seven men were *given* the responsibility or *appointed* to take care of the arrangements for the widows (Acts 6:3); Pharaoh *made* Joseph governor over Egypt (Acts 7:10); the Hebrews would not let Moses be *made* a ruler over them (Acts 7:27,35); by Adam’s sin, many were *made* (that is, constituted) sinners (Rom. 5:19); man was *made* a little lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7); a steward is *put* in charge or *made* ruler over a household (Luke 12:42,44). Is

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Pastor* pp138-142; see also pp295-310. See also my *No Sacerdotalism*.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Viola and George Barna: *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices*, BarnaBooks, 2008, p124.

<sup>3</sup> *The Concise*. The authorities stipulated that the translators had to retain ‘the old ecclesiastical [Church] words’. They complied. See my *Battle* pp255-256; *Infant* pp305-306.

any of this *ministerial ordination*? And yet 'ordain' is the original word.

Similarly, according to the AV, Christ ordained twelve, but the truth is, he *appointed* twelve (Mark 3:14); *poieō* means 'to make, to appoint', once again an act far removed from today's notion of ordination. All the saints are *made* kings and priests to God (Rev. 5:10). If anything, this tells us that only God can *make* a man such. Certainly, no ceremony carried out by men can do it.

How devoted is fallen man to the distortion of God's word, even to the extent of twisting it on its head. Humpty Dumpty never wants for followers and champions. How many times the Church has warped biblical words out of all recognition!<sup>4</sup>

Let me go on. According to the AV, Christ chose and *ordained* his apostles (John 15:16), and Paul was *ordained* a preacher (1 Tim. 2:7). But *tithēmi* means 'to make, to set in place, to appoint' (see 2 Tim. 1:11). It has nothing to do with *ordination* in the sense adopted by the Fathers and usually accepted by the vast majority of Christians. Christ's enemies will be *made* his footstool (Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13; 10:13). Abraham was *made* a father of many nations (Rom. 4:17).<sup>5</sup>

Further, Paul and Barnabas 'ordained' (AV) 'elders in every church' (Acts 14:23), but *cheirotoneō* means 'to vote by stretching out the hand, to appoint by voting, to elect, appoint, create'; nothing to do with *ordination* in the clerical sense.

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<sup>4</sup> I always have enormous difficulty in deciding when to use 'Church' as opposed to 'church'. Although this may appear to be a trivial matter, it actually illustrates much of what I want to say. The New Testament knows only 'church'. It is men who have invented 'Church'. I realise the Greek has no distinguishing mark, but the New Testament gives no warrant for all that is meant by 'Church'. If only men had stuck to the New Testament! Indeed, I would like to drop 'church' and use *ekklesia*, but I feel I ought to continue to use the language familiar to the overwhelming majority. I say this because 'church', today, is largely part and parcel of institutional Christianity – Christendom. And Christendom has done much harm, over many centuries, to the cause of Christ in general, and to the individual believer in particular – to say nothing of the appalling affect it has had on unbelievers.

<sup>5</sup> See the AV, NIV, NKJV and NASB in all the verses from 2 Tim. 1:11 on.

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Moreover, in this verse even the idea of hand movement is lost; the verb means simply 'to vote, elect, appoint'. The NKJV, NIV and NASB all got it right – 'appoint'. A brother was *chosen*, 'appointed' (NASB), by the churches to travel with Paul (2 Cor. 8:19, AV, NKJV, NIV); that is, chosen probably by vote, by common suffrage of the people. An associated word, *procheirotoneō*, means 'to choose or designate beforehand', as the witnesses of Christ's resurrection had been *chosen* before by God (Acts 10:41). And, when all is said and done, it is elders – not pastors or ministers only – who were ordained.

All this is of the utmost importance. I am not straining out a gnat. Many believers think of ordination as something which is 'done' to make or turn a man into a professional minister or pastor. What is more, many think it is something which can be 'done' to the man in question only by those who themselves have had it 'done' to them – in that they themselves have been ordained as professional ministers. This is wrong. It is appalling. It comes from the Fathers who, lifting the principles of the priesthood from the old covenant, and cobbling them together with the invented rigmarole of apostolic succession, forced the new covenant into their fantasy world, and thus foisted the diabolical nonsense, the dangerous nonsense, onto the churches of Christ.

And it is without a vestige of New Testament support. It ought to be abominated by all believers. Yes, the old-covenant priests were *appointed* (Heb. 7:28; 8:3), and they were also consecrated – with the full panoply of sacrifice, ritual and external glory. Such was life under the old covenant. Yes, indeed. *But not under the new*. While elders are appointed, there is no notion of ordination into a distinct priestly class in the new covenant. True, Jesus was *made* both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), *appointed* heir of all things (Heb. 1:2), but is this the way we are to think about men who are *made* ministers? We dare not take consecrating principles which apply to Christ alone, or the priestly principles of the old covenant, and apply them to a special class of men in the new covenant. We have no warrant for such a prostitution of

Scripture. Cyprian greatly erred when he started the ball rolling almost 1900 years ago.<sup>6</sup>

New Testament ordination is nothing more – and nothing less – than a recognition of men gifted by Christ for work in his church. No power is conveyed, none whatsoever. No change of class or status occurs, none whatsoever. It certainly does not move a man from the laity and put him into the clergy! Since, as I have proved, there is no such division in the churches of Christ in the New Testament, there can be no such move.

We must not interpret Scripture by Christendom; rather, we should judge Christendom by Scripture. Nowhere does this dictum apply more decisively than in this matter of ordination and laying on of hands. The fundamental scriptural point of ordination is appointment. Christendom's notions on this subject – as on so many subjects – are completely foreign to the new covenant.

In short, we should drop the patristic notion of ordination, drop it altogether. It should not be so much as named among us. We ought to stop holding special services for ordination, services taken by special men who we think have the power to ordain another. It is utterly wrong to think that, after a man has been ordained, and thus has become a minister or a pastor, he himself is now able to ordain others to the professional ministry. Yet, as I read it, the overwhelming majority of believers simply cannot get it out of their heads that their pastor is an ordained man, that this makes him special, and qualifies him to officiate at other ordinations.

This is no harmless practice. The shocking farrago from beginning to end is patristic and unbiblical. I am not hunting gnats. Gnats? Are we not supposed to be governed and directed by Scripture alone? If this is to be anything more than a mere slogan, mere cant, for us – if we mean it, in other words – then let us drop all foolish notions of ordination, have no more to do with it, and start thinking about ordination as it is in the New Testament – simply(!) as recognition of a man as appointed and equipped by Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> See my *Pastor* pp63-70,81-82.

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I say 'simply'. But what are we talking about? Christ saving, Christ raising up, Christ equipping sinners so that, by his Spirit, he might graciously use them to edify his saints. 'Simply' indeed! How much devilish lumber we have 'gained' by patristic ordination, and what dignity and privilege we have lost by undervaluing Christ and the way he gives gifts to the church.

So let us divest ourselves of the slightest thought that any power is conveyed to a man by any use of patristic ordination. Let us never for one moment imagine that somehow or another the ordination of a layman has turned him into a clergyman, has turned him from being a lay preacher into a pastor. When talking of ordination, too many believers think that ordination has conveyed power to the man, and has turned him into someone or something different to the rest of us.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

There are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their priest as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... Oh take care [beware] of priestcraft, take care [beware] of mancraft, of ministercraft, of clergycraft. All God's people are clergy, we are all God's *klēros*, all his clergy, if we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit, and are saved. There never ought to have been a distinction between clergy and laity. We are all clergy who love the Lord Jesus Christ... No priestly hand, no hand of presbyters – which means priest written large – no ordination is necessary!<sup>7</sup>

I cannot put it any better. So I won't try.

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<sup>7</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon: *The New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol.3, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, pp268-269.





# *Preparationism in New England*

## *The historical background*

The ‘Mayflower’ settlers reached New England in 1620, and within a few years the Puritans among them had established the Massachusetts Bay Colony, with about 20,000 additional migrants swelling the population during the 1630s. The Colony’s founding fathers were very clear as to their purpose: they wanted to form a Puritan Commonwealth, one which would serve as a model, an example for all others. As John Winthrop (a later Governor) put it: ‘We shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us’. To bring about this model Puritan colony, the citizens were heavily policed by the ministers, men who were committed to the enforcement of Calvin’s threefold use of the law, and, in prosecution of their aim, highly intolerant of all dissent.

For a short time, things seemed to go well. But, although they did not realise it, the settlers had, in fact, set in place a series of time-bombs. And they were ticking. Issues such as the long-term consequences of covenant theology and infant baptism, tests of assurance, legal qualifications for church membership and so on – all these, one after the other, would explode in the faces of the people during the remaining years of the 17th century, culminating in the dreadful scandal of the witch trials in the 1690s. By applying old-covenant principles – the law, the power of the magistrate, clergycraft – to the church, the founding fathers had created a spiritual monster. And that monster had teeth and would use them!

Let those, today, who are flirting with covenant theology and infant baptism, take a good look 25 years down the road, and do so with unclouded eye, *before* they leap into something which seems to hold such promise at the start.<sup>90</sup>

It wasn’t long before the spiritual monster in Massachusetts took its first bite. I am talking about what became known as ‘The

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<sup>90</sup> See my *Infant* pp277-299.

Antinomian Controversy in New England, 1636-1637'. Mrs Anne Hutchinson was tried for antinomianism. I explore this, not because of antinomianism, which strictly speaking I do not think the struggle was about, but because 'preparation is the hidden issue in the [New England] antinomian crisis of 1637'.<sup>91</sup> In this article, I sketch an outline of the crisis as it concerns preparationism, and try to draw some practical lessons for us today. Before I do, a few words about the theological background.

### ***The theological background: antinomianism***

An antinomian is, literally, one who is against law; he is lawless; he does what he wants. Whether the law of Moses, or any other law, the real antinomian has no regard for it whatsoever. Such antinomians have existed, and, no doubt, still do exist. Indeed, I have met several of them on my travels, but all of them have been between the covers of a book. And many of them are known as antinomians only because their opponents smeared them as such. It has proved a handy rod with which to beat the doctrinal opponents. To change the figure, it has proved effective dust for covenant theologians to throw into the eyes, and so avoid facing up to awkward passages of Scripture. The fact is, the slur has gained credence too often more by rumour and association than by hard evidence. It is almost always false, as most covenant theologians know, even though they continue to level the accusation against anyone who dares to question Calvin's threefold use of the law, or suggests that covenant theology is wrong.

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<sup>91</sup> Perry Miller: *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961, pp53-67, especially p57. See Norman Pettit: *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966, pp86-157; R.T.Kendall: *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Paternoster Press, 1997, pp167-169,177-182; Edmund S.Morgan: *The Puritan Dilemma. The Story of John Winthrop*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1958, pp134-154.

***The theological background: preparationism***

What is this ‘preparationism’? There are two sorts.

*First*, there is Reformed preparationism. Its advocates say that sinners must be prepared, made fit to receive Christ, and that this is accomplished by preaching the law to them. Sinners may trust Christ, will trust Christ, only after they have been prepared by the law; that is, after the law has sufficiently convicted them of their sin. And this is what we are concerned with here.

*Secondly*, there is hyper-Calvinistic preparationism. This is similar to Reformed preparationism, but with one vital difference. The hyper-Calvinist says that until sinners are sufficiently prepared, they may not even be invited or commanded to come to Christ.<sup>92</sup>

Preparationism, contrary to the inflated and unscriptural claims of its advocates, is a deadening doctrine. Deadenng? Preaching law produces sorrow right enough, but it very frequently produces it in ways covenant theologians would prefer to ignore or forget. In my works just cited, I have given abundant evidence of the bondage, sorrow, fear, lack of assurance that law preaching produces. Both sinners and saints can be seriously damaged by it, and for a long time. Whenever men stray from the apostolic way: ‘I resolved to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2:2) – in this case, mixing gospel and law – watch out for trouble!

Do I hear anyone asking: ‘Why are you spending time dealing with a controversy which shook New England nearly 400 years ago? Nobody thinks about preparationism nowadays, do they?’ Oh? Sadly, preparationism is (forgive the oxymoron) very much alive. Note the ‘produces’ in what I said: ‘I have given abundant evidence of the bondage, sorrow, fear, lack of assurance that law preaching produces’. Produces! Now! Today! Here is an email which I received just before getting this article ready for publication:

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<sup>92</sup> I have tackled both sorts in my *Christ* pp51-61,348-358; *Gospel; Septimus; No Safety; Eternal; Four*.

## *Preparationism in New England*

You do not know me but I bought three of your books in the last month and I understand that you are not a pastor but I am in need of some counsel and I live \*\*\*\* with not many churches.

I am living in fear because I am not a Christian (I know this as I do not have love God or really fear him among other proofs), and, as I have been exposed to the gospel and not believed for such a long period, I may have now been sealed up in final hardness. Although I am not a Christian, I am generally convinced of predestination and Particular Baptist views.

I am 25 year old married man that has been seeking God in the Puritan (Reformed) manner of preparation as advised by a few Christian contacts as I had recently slipped in to a state of despair and depression[-]like symptoms as I am intellectually convinced that I am going to be punished and sent to hell if I do not receive saving grace from God. I say this because on many occasions in my life whilst having gospel light and knowing about the grace of God and the death of Jesus, I have fallen back in to habitual and wilful patterns of sin... Although in those periods I acknowledged that Christianity was the truth, I still stopped attending church, and walked away from the true faith in a sense (although I know I was never a true Christian as I never loved God and hated my sin). I do not know what to do, I [am] feeling down about the fact that I am not a regenerated Christian. Sometimes I am loathing my hopeless situation, and I feel awakened to spiritual things in a sense as I cannot enjoy even the secular life like I used to, because I can see the vanity in it. Also now this is affecting my marriage as I am miserable and cannot fake happiness to my wife, but I know the problem is I am fearing the result of sin, and not the actual heinousness of sin such as a genuine seeker of God would do, so I can see I only have a worldly remorse. I do not know how to get a real sorrow for sin. What can I do[?] I have never felt so desperate to get in a converted state. The problem is I am so dead to any religious affections I feel no drive or motivation to prayer or seek as I should. I know in my heart that Christianity is true and I have an intellectual head knowledge of Christianity, but I am 100% sure that I am not a Christian and born again as I do not love God at all or desire him in the true Christian sense.

Sorry for all of the information but I just wanted to give some of my background. The purpose of my email was to ask please could you help me with some counsel? Can I ask what directions would you advise to an awakened sinner like me? (I know normally people would say just repent and believe in the cross and the gospel, but I obviously just don't have it in my heart to do so, otherwise I would be born again already). Should I conclude that the day of salvation

## *Preparationism in New England*

has passed for me? and do you think God would like some people to accept it is too late for them? At times I think the Spirit has stopped striving with me, although I can honestly say that I can't recall having anything that felt like convictions. Is there realistically hope left for somebody so past feeling as me? For example, I watch sermons about the real gospel of grace, and my heart is still unchanged, I feel nothing! Except a fear of death and hell.

The strange thing is I know intellectually that the Bible is true and its claims about Jesus. I can't deny this as I have spent years seeking the truth and the conclusion I came to was biblical Christianity being the truth. Yet with these convictions I am still not a born again person, is there still hope for me with this hardened unbelief?

How can I repent and believe the gospel? I mean what do I need to do? What does true repentance entail? Does it also involve past sins that we committed against other people or crimes we have committed in the past unknown to others? In your book *Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated* you mention preparationism and people like Tobias Crisp's opposition to it. However, what would you say to a person like me that accepts that Christianity is true, but doesn't have it in him savingly believe and rest in Christ?

I know I NEED to savingly believe in Christ and the cross, and I have tried but I don't have it in me to do so. Worst, I don't feel conviction of sin, and guilt and sorrow towards God. However I am obsessed with seeking salvation and I cannot go back to a vain life of worldliness. No, I won't! I know that will only lead to hell. I appreciate any help and counsel you can provide.

Thanks

You see? The issue *is* very much alive and pressing. This man may be special: not only does he have the symptoms in large measure, *but he is prepared to speak about it*. I am convinced that there will be many people who will be in bondage, in one way or another, over preparationism, *and yet will be suffering in silence*. This is why I explore the 1637 crisis. I want to draw lessons from it. I want to try to help (if that doesn't sound patronising) Reformed teachers and writers stop leading others into the slough of despond. If I cannot do that, I hope my warning may at least challenge them to think again, to search the Scriptures, and discover the signal lack of evidence for their law preaching in the age of the new covenant – both to sinner and saint. Oh, there are a handful of references where we find Paul using the law, but, in Scripture we never read of a new-covenant preacher applying the

law in the way covenant theologians advocate, either to unbelievers or believers.<sup>93</sup>

### ***The New England Antinomian Controversy 1636-1637***

Let me start with one or two cautionary notes. The controversy is very complicated; according to Perry Miller, ‘a thicket of scholastic distinctions and metaphysical dispute’.<sup>94</sup> He could say that again! The complications of Puritan preparationism arose out of intractable dilemmas over their covenant theology,<sup>95</sup> coupled with, and bolstered by, the inevitable consequences of infant baptism.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, to get to grips with the issues involved, due allowance must be made for the religious and political background of the New England of the time. Church and culture were one; the spiritual and the social were inseparable. Hence, as Harry S. Stout noted, sanctification became indistinguishable from

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<sup>93</sup> Those who want to argue with this may write to me – *after* they have read my *Christ*. See also: ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’ (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

<sup>94</sup> Miller p67.

<sup>95</sup> ‘More than any other preparationist, either in England or in America, [Thomas Shepard] was caught in the dilemma of covenant theology’ (Pettit p105).

<sup>96</sup> See Pettit’s *passim*. For the sinister part (I use ‘sinister’ advisedly, since the evil notion of baptismal regeneration became involved) played in preparationism by the link between infant baptism and covenant theology, see the many references to ‘baptism’ in Pettit’s index p238. ‘As Puritan divines relied more and more upon the Old Testament exhortations to return to God’s covenant and upon the [supposed] analogy between external covenants [professors] and Israel, they had necessarily to attribute a high degree of efficacy to the sacrament [I allow this objectionable word to stand in the covenant context] of baptism; for the purer their covenant notions became, the more “abilities” the “circumcised” [those who had been sprinkled as babies] required... In order to supply man with the will to return, Puritan divines had somehow to provide for this grace; and this they did through the efficacy of [infant] baptism’ (Pettit pp123-124). ‘In [Peter] Bulkeley, the efficacy of [infant] baptism is brought to its highest point... The baptised, while not effectually converted, are effectually called through baptismal grace’ (Pettit p117). Reformed Baptists (of the 1689 variety) are ultimately illogical over these issues, and I suspect they know it.

following ‘the New England Way set forth by the civil and ecclesiastical “fathers”. [While] civil obedience and corporate loyalty could not earn salvation, [they] could be taken as a positive “sign” of election’. This intermingling of things which ought to have been kept separate produced a different sort of preaching in New England to that which prevailed in Old England, and gave rise to a different sort of tension. It fell to Mrs Hutchinson, a short while after her arrival in America, to cause this latent New England boil to erupt.<sup>97</sup>

Anne Hutchinson’s views were out of step with the majority of the ministers in Massachusetts, but it was they, of course, who defined orthodoxy. They were the gatekeepers. They held the reins of power. Even so, doubtless knowing the risk she was taking, at meetings held in her house to discuss the sermons of the ministers, Anne gave free expression to her views to her gathered friends.<sup>98</sup> According to Mather, the controversy arose out of ‘a distinction between such as were under a covenant of works, and such as were under a covenant of grace’.<sup>99</sup> This, of course, is one of the many intractable problems, vexing questions and dividing issues which occupied covenant theologians at the time. They still do. They will never go away.<sup>100</sup> In this hotbed of

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<sup>97</sup> Harry S. Stout: *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England*, Oxford University Press, 1986, p24. Just because I show sympathy to Mrs Hutchinson here, it does not mean I agree with her and John Wheelwright in everything. For instance, I distance myself from her talk of direct revelation.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel Wait Howe: *The Puritan Republic of Massachusetts Bay in New England*, The Bowen-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, 1899, p215.

<sup>99</sup> Cotton Mather: *The Great Works of Christ in America: Magnalia Christi Americana*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1979, Vol.2 p508. See also pp509,511,513,516. In 1700, when Mather tried to distance New England from the neonomian controversy in England, he claimed ‘the two covenants, that of works, and that of grace, are not here so confounded, as in many other places’ (Miller p222). Oh? A neonomian is one who believes that God has changed his mind about the law, that he has established an easier law in the gospel, and that men keep this new law in order to be justified.

<sup>100</sup> See my *Christ* pp75-98,369-391; ‘Covenant Theology Tested’ (*New*; eDocs on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com; christmycovenant.com).

scholastic debate, Mrs Hutchinson was free with her opinion about which ministers 'were familiar enough with the covenant of grace to qualify for their jobs', and this opened the sluice to a torrent of trouble.<sup>101</sup> She knew of only two able ministers in the colony, she said: John Cotton, her former teacher in England, and John Wheelwright, her brother in law. The rest she dismissed as 'a company of legal professors' who 'lie poring on the law which Christ has abolished'.<sup>102</sup>

This, of course, was rank heresy to the Massachusetts bigwigs, and they were determined to put a stop to it. They would not tolerate such a clear challenge – let alone denial of – Calvin's threefold use of the law, leading to criticism of ministers.

There has been no cease-fire in this war. Covenant theologians still insist on the absolute necessity of the preaching of the law – or, rather, 'the moral law', as they like to define it, limiting 'the moral law' to the ten commandments (or, in truth, 9.5 of them). This, it goes without saying, is utterly at variance with the new covenant, as Scripture makes plain (Rom. 6:14-15; 7:4-6; 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 2:15-21; 3:1-5, 17, 19, 23-25; 4:1-7, 21-31; 5:1, 18; Heb. 7:18-22; 8:6-13; 12:18-28, for instance).

Such was the febrile atmosphere in which Anne Hutchinson found herself. She was hauled to trial, being charged with antinomianism. It was a falsehood. Let us be clear. She was never accused of immoral behaviour. Quite the reverse. Known for her kindness and nursing skills, she 'gained a ready entrance to many homes'.<sup>103</sup> This is not to say she was flawless – according to Brooks Adams, she could be vain and knew how to use a bitter tongue at times – but, in general, she was 'a gentlewoman of spotless life'.<sup>104</sup> In other words, the authorities were really trying her on the grounds of 'doctrinal antinomianism'. In truth, they wanted to nail her for her attacks on Calvin's doctrine and its

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<sup>101</sup> Kai T. Erikson: *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1966, p78. See also pp83, 86, 90, 95, 97.

<sup>102</sup> See Brooks Adams: *The Emancipation of Massachusetts: The Dream and the Reality*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Sentry edition 1962, p219.

<sup>103</sup> Kendall p177.

<sup>104</sup> Brooks Adams p217.



subsequent development into covenant theology. They wanted her silenced. In so doing, they were putting light (as they saw it) above life. The woman was godly, but that was not enough. She was thinking and speaking against the party line, and that was unforgivable.

But light and life should not played one against the other; it must be both. We should not put creed above life, thinking that, if a man ticks the right boxes, he must be kosher. Paul knew his readers were elect because he saw the fruits of election (faith, repentance and godly obedience) in their lives (1 Thess. 1:4-10). And we have the plain words of Christ: 'By their fruit you will recognise them' (Matt. 7:16-20). 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:35). Let me hasten to add that I am not playing 'the Spirit' (or 'the spirit') against 'the word',<sup>105</sup> but it is typical of law mongers to go back to 'the letter', and play down, if not ignore, 'the Spirit' (Rom. 7:4-6; 2 Cor. 3:6-18). This was the course adopted by the clerics, the law men, in 1637 when confronted by Anne Hutchison.

Mrs Hutchinson was not only exemplary in life. She had other assets – 'intelligence and sprightly wit' – which she gladly applied to theological questions, forming 'very decided and original religious views of her own, which she did not hesitate to express'.<sup>106</sup> And that was the trouble: she talked! And people listened! It was these decided views, which once expressed, aroused the authorities, and she was brought to trial. She lacked political skill, however, and although she put up a spirited defence – in fact she defeated the court – it was to no avail, and she was eventually isolated and crushed. On being sentenced to banishment, she asked for the reason. Governor Winthrop obliged. He did not mince his words: 'Say no more, the court knows why, and is satisfied'. These ten words tell all. The authorities had gained the verdict, but failed to establish their case. It was, as Daniel Wait Howe put it, a 'miserable judicial farce'.<sup>107</sup> Or as Edmund S.Morgan expressed it: 'Anne Hutchison was [Winthrop's] intellectual superior in everything except

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<sup>105</sup> See my *Christ* pp255-256; *Assurance* p50.

<sup>106</sup> Howe p215; Morgan: *Dilemma* pp134-135.

<sup>107</sup> Howe p224-231.

political judgment... Winthrop's victory at the trial had been an unsavoury triumph of arbitrary power'.<sup>108</sup>

How had all this come about? What was the issue? Preparationism! On his arrival in Massachusetts in 1633, John Cotton had become teacher of the church in Boston. He was 'by common consent the leader of the clergy... the most brilliant, and, in some respects, the most powerful man in the colony'.<sup>109</sup> But Cotton presents something of an enigma as far as preparationism goes. He certainly believed and preached it. After all, before retiring to his bed, he 'sweetened his mouth every night with a morsel of Calvin'.<sup>110</sup> According to R.T.Kendall, 'Cotton's favourite phrase in connection with preparation is "fit for Christ"'. Cotton could speak of our being 'made fit for Christ to come into us... such an heart is fit for Christ'. A sinner 'must be "fit" before Christ will come to dwell with him'. How do sinners get this 'fitness'? Kendall again: 'Cotton imputes an enormous power to the law to accomplish this fitness'.<sup>111</sup>

But what, precisely, did Cotton mean by 'preparation'? Pettit argued that before 1632, while Cotton was still in England, he 'in a sense, developed a concept of preparation... The more he read Calvin, the more he began to insist upon the uses of the law'. Eventually, he came to argue that 'the law of God is of marvellous use in the days of the gospel... to break their hearts and drive them to Jesus Christ'. 'Cotton's descriptions of man under the law, devoid of mercy, are perhaps the most severe in Puritan thought'.<sup>112</sup> Yet, according to Kendall, there are two

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<sup>108</sup> Morgan: *Dilemma* pp147,153.

<sup>109</sup> Brooks Adams p217. 'If Boston be the chief seat of New England, it was Cotton who was the father and glory of Boston... In him were combined all the excellencies which we admire separately and singly in other men' (Mather Vol.1 pp252-253). Brook made the point that Boston in Massachusetts was so-named in Cotton's honour; it previously had been called Trimountain on account of its three hills. Cotton had been minister in Boston, Old England (Benjamin Brook: *The Lives of the Puritans*, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, Morgan, reprinted 1994, Vol.3 p157).

<sup>110</sup> Miller p58.

<sup>111</sup> Kendall pp114-117.

<sup>112</sup> Pettit pp131-132,135-136.

Cottons – before and after the mid 1630s. Kendall maintained that at one time Cotton held the mainstream Puritan view of preparation for faith by the law, but ‘Cotton later takes a radically different line’. He ‘underwent a significant change of mind at some stage of his career prior to the antinomian controversy in America (1636-1637)’. In particular, he changed his view of preparation. So much so, in New England during the antinomian controversy, Cotton was contradicting ‘the prevailing concept of preparation for grace’, when, Kendall argued, Cotton now believed in preparation for assurance.<sup>113</sup> Pettit: ‘As antinomianism<sup>114</sup> flared in Massachusetts, Hooker and Cotton were already at odds on the subject of preparation’. ‘From the day Cotton delivered his first sermon in [the New England] Boston, the differences between his own doctrine and that generally held by his fellow ministers became increasingly apparent’.<sup>115</sup>

But the claim of Cotton’s change of doctrine, does not sit easily with other evidence. There is, for instance, the letter that Cotton himself wrote in 1636, in which he said he had preached the same way ‘these many years in old Boston and in new’.<sup>116</sup> The fact is, he used the terminology ‘fit for Christ’ in both periods. Kendall countered this by saying although Cotton used the same phrase, he meant different things by it;<sup>117</sup> in his early career he meant preparation for faith, but at the time of the New England crisis he meant preparation for assurance. Support for this comes from Mrs Hutchinson herself in that she used Cotton in defence of her ‘denial of preparation’, and she meant denial of

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<sup>113</sup> Kendall pp110-111; see also pp113-117,131,169-171,174,181. See also Pettit pp135-139. For the stages in Cotton’s system of preparation – the Spirit of bondage, of burning, and of adoption – see Kendall pp172-177. See also Stout p322.

<sup>114</sup> Remember, we are talking about ‘doctrinal antinomianism’ – the charge which is laid against virtually everybody who questions the Reformed use of the law.

<sup>115</sup> Pettit pp90,133. Differences over such matters as conversion, sanctification, assurance, church membership and baptism, all connected with preparationism (Pettit pp90-91,133-135).

<sup>116</sup> Quoted by Kendall p170.

<sup>117</sup> Kendall pp114-117,174.

preparation for faith.<sup>118</sup> And this interpretation accords with the view expressed by Stout: 'Hutchinson had come to spiritual maturity under Cotton's Old World preaching, which was rigorously evangelical and unequivocal in its insistence that there is "no condition...<sup>119</sup> before faith... whereby a man can close with Jesus Christ"<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, we know that Mrs Hutchinson had emigrated in order to follow Cotton because of his teaching.<sup>121</sup>

Pettit raised an important point, however; the so-called antinomians, he said, 'denied preparation on grounds that were clearly an off-shoot from Cotton's views, although they were significantly different and more extreme'.<sup>122</sup> But on the other hand, as Stout noted, Cotton could declare: 'God never calls any unto fellowship with himself in a covenant of grace, but ordinarily he first brings them into a covenant of works'. This, as Stout said, 'served to convince people of their inability to obey God's law perfectly and of their utter dependence on a Saviour'.<sup>123</sup> In other words, preparation for faith!

But whatever the ins-and-outs of Cotton's change of view, the fact is, in the mid 1630s, he was rowing against the tide in New England, the 'orthodox' line being preparation by the law is essential before faith. When Cotton spoke of 'saving preparation', he was speaking of a *consequence* of saving faith, not its antecedent,<sup>124</sup> that is, he was preaching preparation for assurance, not for faith. 'Reserving due honour to such gracious and precious saints as may be otherwise minded', he declared, 'I confess I do not discern that the Lord works and gives any saving preparations in the heart *till* he give[s] union with Christ'.<sup>125</sup> In

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<sup>118</sup> Miller pp57,59.

<sup>119</sup> Stout added 'of obedience'.

<sup>120</sup> Stout p25.

<sup>121</sup> Brooks Adams p217; Howe p215; Miller p59; Kendall pp111,169-170.

<sup>122</sup> Pettit p141.

<sup>123</sup> Stout p41. Stout was quoting Cotton's *Covenant of Grace* published in London in 1671.

<sup>124</sup> Miller pp58,60,63-64.

<sup>125</sup> Quoted by Pettit p139, emphasis mine. Here is an 'inviting path which beckons' that I must not take. Is there a beginning of a hint here

other words, it is after a man is converted that he needs the law to prepare him for assurance. This, which I have called ‘legal assurance’, is the common view of many Reformed teachers today, though it is not stated, acknowledged or, perhaps, even realised by most of them. Whether or not their teachers are aware of this history, many believers are taught in this way and, as a result, are languishing, poring over their sanctification by their works under the law, and doing so in the vain hope of getting an assurance, which they are told, is almost bound to be beyond them.<sup>126</sup>

Over the other ministers involved in the controversy, and their views on the subject, there stands no such question mark as the one against Cotton’s name. They were staunch advocates of a law work as preparation for faith, and their names have come down as synonymous with preparationism. Thomas Hooker, a preacher of immense importance in the New England of the time,<sup>127</sup> having sailed with Cotton for America in 1633, was ‘the most exquisite diagnostician of the phases of regeneration, and above all the most explicit exponent of the doctrine of preparation’. He published very extensively on the subject,<sup>128</sup> including *The Soul’s Preparation for Christ* published in Chelmsford, England, in 1632, and *The Unbeliever’s Preparing for Christ* published in 1638. Hooker was adamant: ‘The soul of a poor sinner *must* be prepared for the Lord Jesus, before it can receive him’.<sup>129</sup> He held ‘to the absolute necessity of preparatory activity’. As he put it: ‘No faith can be infused into the soul before the heart be prepared... No preparation, no perfection’. ‘The preparatory phase was by far the most important single activity in Hooker’s conception of conversion’.<sup>130</sup> He spared no pains in setting out

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of the hyper-Calvinistic view of union with Christ? See my *Eternal*. See below for my musing over what the 1637 controversy was all about.

<sup>126</sup> See my *Assurance* pp71-95.

<sup>127</sup> Miller called him the ‘dictator of Connecticut’ (Miller p57).

<sup>128</sup> See Kendall pp125-128. I have followed Brook Vol.3 p70, and used *Soul’s* and not *Souls*.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted by Miller p64, emphasis mine.

<sup>130</sup> Pettit pp96,100.

his 'intricate doctrine of preparation',<sup>131</sup> 'the process' of which, said Kendall, 'is expected to be long and hard'.<sup>132</sup> Miller spoke of Hooker's 'consummate probings of these preliminary motions', his 'elaborate study of preparation', and the way he 'marked off chronological' stages in the process.<sup>133</sup> Pettit: 'Each stage becomes... a point of elaborate introspection... The first stage [is]... contrition [which] is essentially the work of the law'.<sup>134</sup>

Hooker had been told. Nathaniel Ward had warned him he had gone too far: 'You make as good Christians before men are in Christ, as ever they are after... Would I were but as good a Christian now, as you make men while they are but preparing for Christ'.<sup>135</sup>

About thirty years after the antinomian crisis, Giles Firmin 'criticised preparation... for the barriers it placed in man's way. The manner in which Hooker, Shepard, and others had preached the concept, said Firmin, made the standards of grace too high. Their demands for preparatory activity... put salvation beyond the reach of all ordinary mortals'.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Kendall pp133-138. Pettit: 'Hooker, it is safe to say, wrote more on preparation than any other pastor in New England' (Pettit p101).

<sup>132</sup> Though, oddly, the end is only a step away (Kendall p135). For more details, see Kendall pp125-138.

<sup>133</sup> Miller p57.

<sup>134</sup> Pettit pp96-97.

<sup>135</sup> Quoted by Kendall p125; Pettit p188. In 1843 John Bickerton Williams spoke of the effect of Hooker's and Shepard's 'routine of tedious preparation needful before coming to the Saviour. Qualifications... unknown to the word of God were prescribed, and rules laid down, which... concealed great and precious promises', 'checking the freeness of salvation', causing 'stumbling blocks' and producing 'mental trouble' (Pettit pp87-88). The ramifications of Hooker's and Shepard's teaching were complex – especially Shepard's – and there were differences between the two. Pettit, however, concluded that 'the "great and precious promises" [were] not, in the end, concealed'; both Hooker and Shepard 'could be accused of lowering the standards of grace as well as of raising them' (Pettit pp105,108-114,133). For Peter Bulkeley's development of preparationism, see Pettit pp114-124.

<sup>136</sup> Pettit pp183-184. See Pettit pp185-189 for a summary of Firmin's arguments. Firmin still held to preparation but without the 'legal terrors', 'anxiety', 'tyrannical demands' *etc.*, which the 'rigid men' required.

Mather, it is only fair to point out, later came to the defence of Hooker by saying he ‘entertained a special inclination to those principles of divinity which concerned the application of redemption... [At Chelmsford] he preached more largely on those points... the product of which were those books of preparation for Christ... Many wrote after him in short-hand, and some were so bold as to publish many of them without his consent or knowledge; whereby his notions came to be deformedly misrepresented in multitudes of passages’.<sup>137</sup> Even so, Hooker did publish in his own right, and in these works he was clear enough. Hooker, without doubt, was an adamant preparationist.

Thomas Shepard, who became Hooker’s son-in-law, arrived in New England in 1635. Shepard had been converted under John Preston, who himself had been converted under Cotton in Cambridge in 1611.<sup>138</sup> According to Miller, Shepard was a ‘relentless searcher of souls, and acute divider between the states of grace and reprobation’.<sup>139</sup> He ‘put the efficacy of the law at the centre of his experience... [Although] Hooker, to be sure, was greatly concerned with the use of the law’,<sup>140</sup> Shepard ‘intensified’<sup>141</sup> Hooker’s work, and it was these two, along with

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<sup>137</sup> Mather Vol.1 p347. See also Iain H.Murray: *D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1990, pp721-726, for the controversy which erupted out of Kendall’s paper at the 1974 Westminster Conference, and the part played in it by Lloyd-Jones. In 1976, Lloyd-Jones took one view of Hooker (D.M.Lloyd-Jones: *The Puritans: The Origins and Successors: Addresses delivered at The Puritan and Westminster Conferences 1959-1978*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1991, p350) but, according to Murray, by 1981 he changed his mind.

<sup>138</sup> Kendall p178.

<sup>139</sup> Miller p3.

<sup>140</sup> Pettit pp107-108. ‘Shepard, in reaction to his own antinomianism, felt compelled to reassert the preeminence of the law’ (Pettit p113). But he was caught in the conflict of preparation by the law (Calvin) and by God’s love (Bullinger) (Pettit p113).

<sup>141</sup> For instance, Shepard broke Hooker’s ‘first stage’, contrition, into two (Pettit p108). In his influential book, *The Sincere Convert*, Shepard marked out the path of preparation (see Stout p42). For the book’s chequered career, see Mather Vol.1 pp389-390.

## *Preparationism in New England*

Peter Bulkeley,<sup>142</sup> who became, using Miller's phrase, the three 'most vindictive prosecutors of Mistress Hutchinson',<sup>143</sup> when she was tried for antinomianism.

As a result of the trial, the preparationism of Hooker and Shepard won the day. Cotton suffered 'utter defeat upon the issue of preparation' so that 'preparation [for conversion] was now the peculiar badge of New England's theology'. 'Because [Anne Hutchinson] was smashed, the New England mind was thenceforth committed to it irrevocably'.<sup>144</sup> But Mather saw it in a different light; the errors produced by antinomianism, he said, had been 'most happily crushed'.<sup>145</sup>

Cotton had entered the trial with some confidence: 'How could he, of all preachers, be held responsible for the rise of antinomianism? Did he not, after all, preach the efficacy of the law more vigorously than most?'<sup>146</sup> Not for preparation, of course, as I have shown, but preach the law he did. Even so, things went badly astray for Cotton as the trial proceeded, and he escaped intact only by the skin of his teeth. But as just another of the complications in this affair, there are two constructions which have been placed on this. For those who are interested, there is an abundant literature on the ramifications, explanations and

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<sup>142</sup> For Bulkeley, the law was not the principal agent in preparationism (see Pettit pp121-123). See Pettit's important remark on Cotton's (and others') view of Bulkeley as a legal preacher; that is, not that he preached the law as such, but that he preached salvation by merit (Pettit p147).

<sup>143</sup> Miller p57. For the hair-splitting at her trial, see Rosemary Radford Ruether & Rosemary Skinner Keller (General Editors): *Women & Religion in America*, Vol.2, *The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods. A Documentary History*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1983, pp167-169,174; Brooks Adams pp235-248.

<sup>144</sup> Miller pp57,58,63. For a sociological interpretation of the subsequent events, see Erikson pp71-107.

<sup>145</sup> Mather Vol.1 p386. That is to say, there was to be no more question of the Reformed use of the law! As all show trials are meant to do, this one did its job and served as a warning to other would-be dissidents.

<sup>146</sup> Pettit p148.



counter-explanations of this sad episode.<sup>147</sup> But I have said enough on the subject for my purposes in this article.

What of the consequences of the trial?

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<sup>147</sup> For a pro-Cotton view, see Mather Vol.1 pp266-268. For Miller's assessment of Mather, see Miller pp61-62. Brook (Vol.3 p157) was undecided. For an anti-Cotton view see Howe pp233-234; Brooks Adams pp230-231; James Truslow Adams: *The Founding of New England*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1939, p170; Miller pp58-63. For Cotton's *volte-face* – what Stout calls his “adjusted” outlook – and whether or not he had really changed his view, see Stout p25,322-323; Edmund S.Morgan: *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1963, pp96-97; Kendall p182; Brooks Adams pp230-231; Pettit pp148-157. Cotton ‘had backed [Hutchinson] initially because she had denied preparation’; it was her attack upon Scripture, and efficacy of the law in particular, which he could not stomach. She concentrated on no preparation for faith (which Cotton agreed with), but Cotton had to let her be defeated on this while keeping hold of the law. ‘In his preaching after the controversy Cotton stressed the efficacy of the law as he had done before’. But he also realised he had to watch his back (Pettit pp153-157). Shepard was not convinced: ‘Mr Cotton repents not, but is hid only’ (Pettit p156; Kendall p182). ‘Cotton, in 1637, had lost on the issue of preparation... This is not to say that Cotton himself complied with Shepard’s concept of preparation. In the privacy of his study he still wrote against it. But once he had publicly given in to the concept, it became a part of the New England Way’ (Pettit pp161-162). However, it is only fair to point out that, in their Foreword to *Puritan Political Ideas 1558-1794*, edited by Edmund S.Morgan, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis, 1965, v, Leonard W.Levy and Alfred Young, the General editors of The American Heritage Series, commented on the opinions of, among others, James Truslow Adams: ‘The historical reputation of Puritanism in America has vastly and deservedly improved since the time of... James Truslow Adams... [among others]. They [wrongly] depicted the Puritan fathers as joyless, dark-minded, petty entrepreneurs who... tyrannised their subjects within an inch of their lives’. As I say, the whole affair is exceedingly complex. Those who are toying with the idea of falling in with covenant theology would do well to ask themselves if they really want to spend their days wrestling with such scholastic conundrums.

### ***The consequences***

As I have shown, as a result of the trial of Anne Hutchinson, preparation for faith had now become the norm in New England. And it exacted its heavy price for countless men and women, and for many years to come. Stout illustrated how this worked out in practice. In 1644, Shepard came to believe that ‘while obedience did not automatically “move the Lord” to save, an obedient will “made me capable and fit for to receive it and love it and be thankful for it” when it appeared. To “deny this preparation” would be to “shut out the communication of God’s grace”’.<sup>148</sup> At about the same time, another New England minister, one Thomas Allen, was preaching a series of sermons in which he:

Divided the sequence of stages through which most souls passed in their spiritual pilgrimage from death-in-sin to life-in-Christ.<sup>149</sup> Stages were, Allen recognised, an analytical construct and did not bind the work of the Holy Spirit. If God so chose he could collapse the stages into one shattering moment of self-revelation such as Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. But this was not God’s usual practice: ‘The soul does not ordinarily immediately receive [Christ]<sup>150</sup> without any more ado, without some agitations to and fro... and this is God’s ordinary way’. The saint might not be able to recall every stage in salvation... yet the stages were there and discernible in retrospect if the saint looked closely enough at his or her spiritual experience. Typically, the ‘agitations’ of the soul began with a deep sense of ‘humiliation’ when the [sinner]<sup>151</sup> discovered his sinful and lost condition... The stricken but still unregenerate soul turned to pious works and ‘will be abundant in duties and performances both towards God and man seeking how it may obtain that [which]<sup>152</sup> it desires’. Such a ‘legal obedience’ or ‘covenant of works’ proved unavailing and drove the soul into even more despair. At that point, when the soul was stripped of all its pretensions and stood in abject misery before God, the Spirit prepared to do his healing work...

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<sup>148</sup> Stout p37.

<sup>149</sup> See my *Eternal* p70; *No Safety* pp79,153-154,245-246, for instance.

<sup>150</sup> Stout’s addition.

<sup>151</sup> Stout had ‘saint’. But the person is not yet converted.

<sup>152</sup> Stout’s addition.

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The work was not finished after conversion and assurance, however. ‘The process of self-condemnation was apt to recur and the whole sequence of salvation had to be re-enacted’. Stout called this system ‘the methodical gospel preaching’ whereby:

New England congregations... learned to label every stage of their spiritual experience from humiliation, to saving faith, to true obedience. Such labelling gave them a vocabulary for self-examination and a basis for personal hope in the knowledge that guilt and anxiety were necessary pre-requisites to the healing work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, the language of stages provided an objective standard by which ministers and congregations could judge the claims of aspiring members... Before appearing for their public testimonies... prospective members understood the mysterious order of salvation as it had been instilled over many years of Bible study, introspection and gospel preaching.<sup>153</sup>

There might be exceptions – *might* – but what exceptions they were – like Saul approaching Damascus, no less. No! The usual way of conversion was as specified by these various stages. And what was the effect? Stout pointed out ‘how thoroughly ordinary men and women mastered’ this process.<sup>154</sup> It would be more accurate to say they were *mastered* by the process! Stout outlined the case of a certain maid, Katherine. She recognised her sin; she came into profound misery; she knew the Lord could pardon, ‘but yet I question would he’ pardon me? She turned to some Bible promises and invitations, ‘but yet I was under terror,’<sup>155</sup> and I followed the word and loved saints dearly, yet I was doubtful of what would become of me’; her doubts lasted for two years; sometimes she was hopeful, at other times not; then she was blessed by a sermon by ‘Mr Rogers... [on] the just shall live by faith’; ‘I had abundance of comfort from the word’; but she continued to agonise over ‘whether I was truly humble or no’; satanic temptations and blasphemous thoughts now plagued her; she received comfort from the Bible; she sought the Lord; at last

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<sup>153</sup> Stout pp38-40. I dissent from some of the construction Stout placed on this. Again, all this, in essence, could be written about many hyper-Calvinists today.

<sup>154</sup> Stout p40.

<sup>155</sup> See my *Christ* p51.

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she felt ready to 'close with Christ'; now she was a believer; but even so, she never got beyond doubts and the 'need for renewed conversion'.<sup>156</sup>

I have hinted at the long shadows this controversy cast, far beyond the life-times of the people involved. Let me illustrate with just one example.

Jonathan Edwards, well into the 18th century, at one stage doubted his 'interest in God's love and favour... because', he said, 'I cannot speak so fully to my experience of that preparatory work, of which the divines speak... [and] I do not remember that I experienced regeneration, *exactly in those steps*, in which divines say it is generally wrought'. Later, he felt some relief concerning his 'trust and affiance in Christ, and with delight committing of my soul to him, of which our divines used to speak, and about which I have been somewhat in doubt'. Yet, later still: 'Whether I am now converted or not...'. Even so, he vowed to use 'for helps some of our old divines'.<sup>157</sup> In other words, he turned back to the very teachers who had got him into trouble in the first place! Incredible, is it not? He should have heeded the commonsense advice: When in a hole, stop digging! In a more biblical vein, he should have looked to Christ.

Listen to Richard Baxter: 'For those doubts of my own salvation, which exercised me many years, the chiefest causes of them were these... because I could not distinctly trace the workings of the Spirit upon my heart *in that method* which Mr Bolton, Mr Hooker, Mr Rogers, and other divines describe... I was once [inclined] to meditate on my own heart... I was continually poring either on my sins or wants, or examining my sincerity... but now, though I am greatly convinced of the need of heart-acquaintance... yet I see more need of a higher work, and

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<sup>156</sup> Stout pp40-41. As for 'renewed conversion' and Shepard, see Stout pp35,324.

<sup>157</sup> Jonathan Edwards' *Diary* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Revised and Corrected by Edward Hickman*, Vol.1, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974, xxiv,xxxv,xxxvi, emphasis mine.

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that I should look often upon Christ, and God, and heaven, [rather] than upon my own heart'.<sup>158</sup> Spot on!

The preparationists ought to have listened to John Wheelwright: 'To preach the gospel, is to preach Christ... and nothing but Christ'.<sup>159</sup>

So much for preparationism in the New England antinomian crisis.

Let me for a moment return to my correspondent, the man I spoke of at the start of this article. I was advised that he had previously consulted a Reformed website with his problem. I found it, and here is the reply he had received:

If you are convinced of the Reformed understanding of Scripture I would say you are off to a good start. The only real, honest advice I can give you online (without knowing you personally) is to suggest you visit a Reformed church that clearly states its faith and convictions. Set up some time with the elders of that church so they can speak with you and give godly advice according to your needs. Until you speak to the elders of a Reformed church I would recommend praying and reading your Bible, especially the Gospels and Romans. Do not delay in seeking out a church. I will pray for you as you seek God's will for your life. Do you believe we are justified by Christ alone through faith? If so, you must seek [to] attend church with brothers and sisters that are as similar in belief as possible. I'm not suggesting you attend a J.W. or Mormon church, but a classical Arminian church is better than no church. We are justified by Christ alone through faith so this excludes the possibility of finding or attending a perfect church. Lead your home with faithful prayer, devotional time and Bible reading. Is your wife a believer? Go to church my friend. Attend the preaching of the gospel. Speak with the elders, read your Bible. Is your hope in Christ? Do you not only want to escape hell and the torment to come but also long to be free from sin? I'll include a tract for you to read...

While I do not say that the reply was all bad, it was, in my view, utterly inadequate, woefully so. In the main, it was wrong. I can summarise what I told the man. I told him to trust Christ at once.

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<sup>158</sup> Richard Baxter: *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*, J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1931, pp10,113, emphasis mine.

<sup>159</sup> Miller p60.

Sadly, at the time of writing, I have I had no success. But I certainly did not tell him to go to church and start a series of works. And I know I have the Scriptures behind me. After all we are told what Paul and Silas said when they were asked what a man should do to be saved: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31).

## **Conclusion**

Before I leave this brief account of such a momentous episode as the 1637 New England trial of Anne Hutchinson, which brought the consequences of covenant theology, and the attempt to force the law on sinners and saints, into the public arena, and sowed the seed of so much misery, I add a personal footnote. I return to my doubt that the New England controversy was really over antinomianism after all; I suggest it was over hyper-Calvinism. Bremer: 'Inclined toward what would later be labelled hyper-Calvinism, Cotton was less fearful of antinomianism than of Arminianism'.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, according to Pettit, Cotton moved away from Calvin to reach the place where 'he was unable even to accept the divine exhortations to preparation as "useful"'.<sup>161</sup> The so-called antinomians really believed that an unbeliever, 'for his part, must see nothing in himself, have nothing, do nothing; only he is to stand still and wait for Christ to do all for him'.<sup>162</sup> As Miller summarised it: 'It was wrong to call the elect to their duty'.<sup>163</sup> If Miller was precise here, this is not antinomianism; it is hyper-Calvinism. Calvinists<sup>164</sup> call *sinners* to their duty; hyper-Calvinists – though some do not like the word 'duty' – in theory are prepared to call *the elect* to their duty. Elsewhere, I have drawn attention to New England's problem, post-1637, with the

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<sup>160</sup> Francis J. Bremer: *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610-1692*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1994 p113.

<sup>161</sup> Pettit p139.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted by Miller p59.

<sup>163</sup> Miller p59.

<sup>164</sup> Calvinists in the sense of hold to the doctrines of grace, (the 'five points', if you will) – but not in the sense of Calvin's threefold use of the law, infant baptism, church government, and so on.

Westminster Confession Chapters 9 and 10.<sup>165</sup> The fact is, the Colonial preparationists rejected the notion that man could not prepare himself in any way for salvation, and that he was altogether passive in effectual calling.<sup>166</sup> ‘Hooker and Bulkeley were especially concerned that man should have a part to play of his own’.<sup>167</sup> Hooker and Shepard were even accused of Arminianism.<sup>168</sup> The issue became clear twenty years later, when the dust was settling, with John Norton: ‘It is the duty of everyone that hears the gospel to believe’; and forty years later still with Mather’s constant urging upon his hearers to ‘make a trial’, ‘do what [you] can’, ‘try whether you can’t give that consent’.<sup>169</sup>

However, as much as I agree with duty faith, I nevertheless deplore the ‘unnecessary anguish’ which Hooker and Shepard, by their ‘polluting doctrine’ of preparation for faith, caused sinners in their approach to Christ.<sup>170</sup>

Finally, I warn all who advocate the preaching of the law in order to prepare sinners for Christ today: You are playing with fire. You are flying in the face of Scripture. Stop it at once! Follow the apostle:

I resolved to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:16).

By setting forth the truth plainly... our gospel.. the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ... We... preach... Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:2-5).

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<sup>165</sup> See my *Infant* pp75-76,277-289,298-299.

<sup>166</sup> See my *Christ* pp51-61,348-358; Pettit p164.

<sup>167</sup> Pettit p221.

<sup>168</sup> Miller pp57,64. On the connection between preparationism and Pelagianism, see Pettit pp23-24,34. On the ‘significant, if subtle, distinction between the Arminian conception of conversion and that maintained by the English [Puritan] preparationists’, see Pettit pp125-130. For post-1637 conflicts with Arminianism in New England, see Pettit pp176-177,189,205,210-211.

<sup>169</sup> Miller pp 66,67,214.

<sup>170</sup> Quotes from Firmin, 1670, by Miller p57. See my *Offer; Christ* pp51-61,348-358; *Septimus; No Safety; Eternal; Four*.

If you fail to do this, if instead you persist in mixing law and gospel, you are going against Scripture, and you will lead sinners and saints into bondage and misery. Furthermore, you will be taking a big step in ‘preparing’ sinners to know what boxes to tick, what language to use, and so pass muster as believers when, in fact, they are unregenerate men and women who have enough wit to be able to read and memorise the script, and so pick their way through the labyrinth of covenant theology. And when this is well and truly established, the harvest will be grim. Take a glance at how things developed in New England and beyond.<sup>171</sup>

I find it incredible that those who know of these events, nevertheless persist in doing all they can to encourage preachers to use Calvin’s whip to lash both sinners for preparation and saints for assurance and sanctification. I urge such men to read Scripture without their covenant-theology glasses, and to come into that liberty of the new covenant which is so plainly taught in the word of God.

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<sup>171</sup> See my *Infant* pp277-299.



## *The All-Body Ministry*

By going back to the old covenant, and applying its principles to the church,<sup>1</sup> the Fathers ruined church rule and care, twisting it into a monstrosity.<sup>2</sup> In tandem – the one feeding off the other – they allowed the priesthood of all believers to dwindle into practical neglect, so that it became the poor relation of the Christian religion. In fact it died out. The Reformers recovered this priesthood, it is true, but only to a limited extent – as an individual thing, a personal thing: I can go directly to God for myself. A wonderful truth, of course, but one that fails to exhaust the breadth and depth of meaning of this new-covenant priesthood. And for most believers, this is how it is to this very day – something which is rarely discussed, let alone thought about, least of all acted upon. And, as I say, at best, for those who do have some concept of it, too frequently it is thought of simply in terms of the individual.<sup>3</sup>

This is heart-rending, representing a massive loss – to the church, the individual believer, and to the sinner. For the priesthood of all believers is intimately connected with the all-body ministry of the church. And the decay of the one has led to the demise of the other. Consequently, since this priesthood in exercise, this all-body ministry, should be a vital factor of church life, yet, sadly, it is so often the missing factor, I feel I must raise

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to drop ‘church’ and use *ekklesia*, but I feel I ought to continue to use the language familiar to the overwhelming majority. I say this because ‘church’, today, is largely part and parcel of institutional Christianity – Christendom. And Christendom has done much harm, over many centuries, to the cause of Christ in general, and to the individual believer in particular – to say nothing of the appalling affect it has had on unbelievers.

<sup>2</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Pastor* pp157-171; see also pp316-325. For the opening paragraph, see my *Pastor* pp43-82,194-227.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Pastor* pp85-105,228-272.

it again.<sup>4</sup> If we are to see a revival of church life according to the new covenant, its recovery is essential.

The fact is, for all practical purposes the overwhelming majority of believers act as though this priesthood is *the priesthood of **no** believers*. I am not saying that this is deliberate. Rather, it happens by default, by a failure to cultivate the biblical priesthood of *all* believers. But, in effect, we end up with a priesthood of no believers. Oh, I know we parrot the phrase, and, of course, it features in most Confessions of faith: ‘We believe in the priesthood of all believers’. Oh, yes. But too often it has become a mere slogan, a mantra. A form of words without real content or implication, it makes no practical difference to most believers whatsoever. The result is tragic. The priesthood of *no* believers is the truth of the matter for many, I am afraid.

It gets worse. Worse? Yes, indeed. Millions really believe in *the priesthood of **some** believers*. This is what happens when, failing to cultivate the biblical priesthood of *all* believers, churches lay an unbiblical stress on professional ministers. And this, sad to say, is far from uncommon; in fact, it is virtually the norm. Many believers have espoused, albeit unwittingly, the ideas of the Fathers who, taking the old covenant, as worked out in the levitical priesthood, and applying it to the church, ended up with the special priesthood of the few. And this has come at a very heavy cost. As Cyril Eastwood pointed out: ‘The transition in the meaning of priesthood is one of the most important landmarks in the history of the church’.<sup>5</sup> And that for ill! Most believers have lost a far-reaching principle of the new covenant, and finish up with the priesthood of the few.

It gets even worse. Having got this far, it is but a short step to *the priesthood of **one** believer in each church!* Really? Yes, for millions, adherents of the Church of Rome and the Church of England, chief among them. But not only they! No, indeed! Most evangelicals (not excluding the Reformed) hold to the priesthood

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<sup>4</sup> See my ‘The Priesthood of All Believers’ (*New*; eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

<sup>5</sup> Cyril Eastwood: *The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful: An Investigation of the Doctrine from Biblical Times to the Reformation*, The Epworth Press, London, 1963, p88.

of *one* believer in each church. Oh yes, they do! When they break Christ's express command (Matt. 23:1-12), and describe and define a certain man among them by giving him a highfalutin title, such as Reverend, Pastor, Minister, and the like, when they look upon him as an ordained member of a set-apart clerical class – which they often do, even while vehemently denying that they believe in a clergy! – they are in danger, to put it no stronger, of believing in the priesthood of *one* believer. And this is the high road to sacerdotalism, priestcraft.

The pastor system has a lot to answer for. Marjorie Warkentin: 'The creation of a privileged class of believers presents a danger to the priesthood of all believers'.<sup>6</sup> I agree – except I would put it more strongly. And the outcome of that 'danger' is all too evident, I am afraid. Many are content to let their 'pastor' get on with church affairs which, after all, is 'the minister's work'.<sup>7</sup> And, in my experience, it frequently appears that 'the pastor' is happy to have it this way. So much so, many churches have developed a dependency culture in which the members are content to be spectators watching their pastor do the work. Routinely, there seems to be a notion that church life – if not Christianity itself – is, for the majority, a 'spectator sport'. A few get 'involved' – they are especially 'keen' – while the majority can watch (and criticise) from the safety of the sidelines. But God's word, with its priesthood of all believers, cuts right across all such sinful goings on. A return to Scripture, with the proper reinstatement of that priesthood, is the only cure.

In asserting this, of course, I am not going back on the New Testament and what it tells us about a stated ministry. That is, I am not denying the patent biblical principle that God has set apart certain brothers for the rule of the church under a stated teaching/preaching ministry, under the authority of Christ, and, where appropriate, for them to receive financial support in the discharge of that ministry. Not at all. How could I deny it? I wouldn't dream of doing such a foolish thing. It is written large

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<sup>6</sup> The words of Marjorie Warkentin: *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, p181.

<sup>7</sup> This has been said to me.

in Scripture.<sup>8</sup> Not only that. I have myself participated in it for over 50 years. Nevertheless, the unbiblical – but almost ubiquitous – emphasis upon ‘the minister’ or ‘the pastor’ has done much to undermine the vital biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers; or *vice-versa*.

But while I am not speaking against a stated ministry, neither am I advocating an every-man (or woman) public teaching ministry. That would be unbiblical and daft. We must recognise stated teachers and leaders. We need them. They are, after all, Christ’s gift to his church (Eph. 4:11-13). Believers are to be taught by stated, able teachers. But what for? So that they can be edified, established in the faith! Yes, indeed! *But this is not an end in itself*. It is, of course, but, in addition, believers must be taught so that they grow in knowledge and understanding in order to enable them to take their part in the teaching ministry among themselves – as members of the priesthood of all believers. I am not for a moment suggesting that each and every believer is qualified to occupy a stated ministry in the public sense. Nevertheless, one of the great ends of the stated ministry is the enrichment of believers to help them to carry out the all-body, mutual teaching ministry among themselves, and to do so with increasing profit.

*But it is not what happens in the majority of churches today.* And it is a disaster of mammoth proportions, hard to overstate. The church is a body (1 Cor. 12:12-31). How sadly neglected is Paul’s statement of the obvious: ‘The body is not made up of one part’ (1 Cor. 12:14), ‘not one member’ (NKJV). The system, so prevalent among us today, blurs this obvious point – and worse. Are believers taught to feed themselves and feed others – or are they taught to be increasingly dependent upon the pastor? In most cases, the answer needs no spelling out! And this, I say, is very serious, and very sad.

If, say, a quarter of a man’s body remains inactive, he is to be pitied – he is suffering massive paralysis. How hard the medics work to try to stimulate the dead part into life and action! A quarter, did I say? Imagine the awful condition of a paralysed

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<sup>8</sup> See my *Pastor* pp19-40,189-193.

## *The All-Body Ministry*

man who can do nothing but exercise one organ – his mouth; all he can do is talk. Too often this is a valid description of the average church. The pastor preaches, and all the rest remain largely inactive – *spiritually* inactive, I mean. Yet the New Testament envisages all believers having a teaching and preaching ministry!

Just because a man is *not* gifted to preach or teach in a pulpit, it does not mean he has *no* preaching or teaching gift *at all*. We must rid ourselves of the notion that preaching always means declaiming from a pulpit. In saying this, I repeat, yet again, I am not casting any aspersion on pulpit work, or trying in any way to diminish its importance. Not at all. Able public preachers and teachers, I am convinced, are a principal gift of Christ to his churches, and, as such, must be highly valued and appreciated. But they are only one gift among many. *And one of the main functions of the stated ministry is to nurture all the other gifts.*

Every believer a priestly minister? Yes, it is so. All are gifted by God to be such. The new covenant guarantees it (Isa. 54:13; 61:6; Jer. 31:31-34; 33:14-22; Ezek. 40:46; 44:10-31; Zeph. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:1-4; John 6:45; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 8:8-12; 10:15-18; 1 Pet. 2:4-12; 4:10-11; 1 John 2:20-21,27; 5:20; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). All the saints are ministers; all engage in ministry. Note the emphasis in this string of passages: Romans 1:11-12; 12:3-8; 15:14; 1 Corinthians 1:4-7; 12:1-31, especially 4-7,11,18; 2 Corinthians 3:5-6; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21; Colossians 3:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:11,14-15; 1 Peter 2:2-5; 4:7-11; Jude 20-23. On each believer, Christ bestows a gift so that *all* might serve the church.

These passages tell us that *all* the saints are ministers, *all* are engaged in the ministry, and that apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors-and-teachers are given to the churches – and used by Christ – in order to equip *all* the saints for this ‘work of the ministry’ (NKJV); that is, for ‘works of service’ (Eph. 4:11-16). This ‘work of the ministry’ is something *all* the saints are to do. It is not something reserved for an ordained minister. If I may pick just one verse from the above, may I stress: ‘Therefore encourage *one another* and build *each other* up, just as in fact you are doing’ (1 Thess. 5:11)? Could Paul say this to the majority of believers

in the majority of churches today? I especially note the ‘just as in fact you are doing’. We are not talking about mere theory; ‘just as in fact you are doing’. Not ‘just as you used to do’; not ‘just as you once did’; not ‘just as you would like to do’. But ‘just as in fact you *are* doing’.

In the very early days, the gospel was advanced throughout Judea and Samaria by preaching – preaching which was carried out, we are expressly told, without the apostles (Acts 8:1,4,14). And this was before elders were being recognised. And it was surely done by both men and women, not only by preachers in the usual sense of the word; possibly, not at all by the common way we think of preaching today. By women? Really? Certainly!

According to Scripture, women play a vital part in witnessing for Christ in the gospel – or should do. How about 1 Peter 3:1-6? What about chatting over the garden fence, having a natter while waiting for the children to come out of school, at the clinic, standing in the queue, and so on? ‘Gossiping the gospel’ must not be allowed to die. It is a potent weapon in the advance of Christ’s cause. John Bunyan was seriously affected, was he not, by overhearing three or four women sitting in the sun at Bedford, discussing spiritual matters?<sup>9</sup> Women of Bedford, women of Much-Dozing-By-The-Pulpit... arise! Spiritual talk can work wonders. God can make it so.

Again, the writer to the Hebrews could make the claim that all his hearers – not just ‘pastors’ – needed to be mature in order to be teachers (Heb. 5:12). *All*, please note. *Teachers*, please note. All the saints teachers? Of course. Why ever not? A believer can teach without ever standing in a pulpit, you know. Have I not made it clear enough? Private, conversational instruction from the Bible, whether with sinners or saints, is proper preaching and real teaching! In the interest of practical illustration, may I make a suggestion? Why give a recording of the sermon to someone who cannot get to the service? Why not visit the person, repeat the sermon in your own words, and then the pair of you discuss it, with an open Bible, and then pray over the matter? Could this not be a vibrant teaching ministry? Would it not be mutually

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<sup>9</sup> See *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* on Google Books.

edifying? From many years' experience, I can assure you that the best way to learn a subject is to try to teach it to others.

Consider the words of Joel, quoted by Peter at Pentecost. God did *not* say: 'On your pastors, upon your ministers, I will pour out my Spirit'. Not at all! It was 'on all people' that God promised to pour out his Spirit. On *all* people! And he did it! Furthermore, as he said, it was 'your sons and daughters' who would 'prophesy' (Acts 2:17). Your sons *and daughters*!

And this ministry must be something more than *preaching* and *teaching* in the ministerial, as commonly understood, sense of the word, otherwise women are excluded – since they cannot teach in this *official-ministerial* sense (1 Cor. 14:33-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). Yet, according to the many passages I have quoted or cited, women still need to be equipped to play their part in the ministry of the church. And that does not mean that the role of women in the church – as has so very often been the case – is to be relegated to practical, domestic chores, limited to tea making, cake baking, sandwich cutting, meeting house cleaning, flower arranging, and so on. I am not saying a word against such – although, apart from the cleaning, I am not saying much of a word in favour, either<sup>10</sup> – but I am appealing for what the New Testament speaks of; namely, women as well as men are teaching ministers – *in the sense in which I have been using the word*.

Reader, can you sense my difficulty in the previous paragraph? A believing woman (as well as a believing man) is a 'minister', and can preach and teach. Indeed, she must preach and teach (Tit. 2:3-5). Priscilla certainly did (Acts 18:24-28). Every believing woman is gifted by Christ to preach and teach (*in the sense in which I have been using the words*). But since we have so corrupted these words – 'preach' and 'teach' – I am forced to qualify them by the term *official-ministerial*. I hope I make my concern clear at this point. Our perversion of the biblical word 'minister' has ruined our understanding of the glorious work of ministry which Christ has entrusted to *all* his people in the new

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<sup>10</sup> And since the New Testament gives us no warrant for church buildings, I can barely manage this word.

covenant.<sup>11</sup> And not only our *understanding* of it; the *experience* of it has sadly suffered. The churches must recover new-covenant ground here. It is a vital necessity.

Consider: ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God’ (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Read on to the end of verse 7 for the mutuality of suffering and comfort between believers. Who is it, in the average traditional church, the institutional church, who is expected to do the visiting and comforting? Although there have been exceptions, in my experience, one man (and, maybe, his wife) has the job – the pastor! Words fail. In many churches, I admit, this is somewhat extended by the appointment of a band of specially designated sick-visitors. But even here, in this delegated approach, this mechanical or institutional way of doing things, while I do not go so far as to call it ‘wrong’, and while it is a big improvement on the one-man band, it surely falls short of the principles behind this passage in 2 Corinthians 1. Who experiences troubles? Don’t *all* believers? God comforts – whom? Does he not comfort *every* believer? Who then can use that comfort, that experience, to comfort others? On the delegated system, who comforts the pastor?<sup>12</sup> I am sure that the apostle’s words in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, especially 13-15, are of far wider application than financial support – which, of course, it certainly includes.

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<sup>11</sup> See my ‘Old-Covenant Ruin of “Minister”’ (in this present volume; eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

<sup>12</sup> Some called D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones the ‘pastor’ for ‘pastors’. So... where did *he* go? See my *Priesthood* p35 for the futile circular motion involved in the Roman system. It is just as much a part of the evangelical and Reformed world, however! There is a good circular motion, I hasten to add. As in any healthy body, there ought to be a mutual dependence and assistance between all believers. Good advice is to be sought wherever it may be found. This biblical ‘circular motion’ is excellent. To institutionalise it, however, is to give it the kiss of death. And to turn ‘the pastor’ into ‘the great and only adviser’ is to go a long way to giving *him* the kiss of death!



## *The All-Body Ministry*

This is how the New Testament churches functioned – in spontaneous spiritual activity leading to mutual edification. Sadly, this mutual teaching concept was quickly lost by the churches, and, once lost, was not – is not – easily regained. John Owen complained of the churches which, in his day, had departed from the New Testament in this respect. Their members, he said, were content to hear, but make no effort to be teachers themselves. How very different, Owen observed, to the New Testament:

Our hearers do not look upon it as their duty to be teachers; at least not in the church, and by means of the knowledge to be attained therein. They think it enough for them, if at best they can hear with some profit to themselves. But this was not the state of things in [New Testament] times. Every church was then a seminary, wherein provision and preparation was made, not only for the preaching of the gospel in itself, but for the calling, gathering and teaching of other churches also.<sup>13</sup>

I wish that last sentence could be said of us today.

Let me dramatise the point. There is a sense in which it could be said that a very real test of an elder's service is to see how close he can get to doing himself out of a job! What? You can't be serious! Oh yes I am! Under an elder's care, the body should be becoming more and more mature, more and more able and willing to rule and teach itself (Eph. 4:11-16).

By way of illustration, let me remind you of one of the fundamentals in the rearing of children within the family. Surely one of the major aims in the up-bringing of our children is to produce mature, (in the right sense) self-sufficient adults. What parent would want a thirty-year-old son as dependent as a three-year-old? The pedagogue disciplined the boy until he was mature – but no further (Gal. 4:1-2).

Shouldn't something similar apply to church life? Yet why is it – how is it – that so many believers are no more able to open their Bible in order to instruct, edify, rebuke, encourage, refute,

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<sup>13</sup> John Owen: *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 7 Volumes in 4, Sovereign Grace Publishers, Evansville, Indiana, 1960, Vol.3 Part 1 p568. Owen was commenting on Heb. 5:12.

or whatever, after thirty years of Reformed expository preaching than they were at the start? Is it worse than that, in fact? Is it possible that believers become more dependent on ‘the pastor’ as the years pass – not less?

In saying this, common sense need not be jettisoned. I have, as I indicated, purposely dramatised the point. Because the church needs constant and consistent teaching, because it is a living body, a growing body, because new converts are (we hope) being added to the church, and need to be built up, because old errors in new dress constantly appear – elders can never be redundant, and those whom God has gifted as pastors-and-teachers must continue to exercise their gift and ministry. Even so, every elder ought to ask himself: After all the years I have been teaching and ruling in this church, is it more mature, more able to fend for itself, than when I started, or would the church be left in chaos if I died? Have I mollicoddled the people, and made them increasingly dependent on me, or are they now more able to read and grasp Scripture for themselves – compared to when I started? Are they growing more and more skilled at edifying one another? Are they growing more mature in facing trial and affliction, or less? Are they spiritually stimulating to me? And are they more so now than when I started?

The sad truth is too often the wrong alternative to the answers to those questions. So another question suggests itself. As R.Paul Stevens put it: ‘Who could have designed a system, as has surely happened, by which people can hear two sermons a Sunday for the whole of their lives, and [yet] not be able to open up the Bible to others publicly?’<sup>14</sup> And how often, when the great preacher leaves, the church falls to pieces, drifts aimlessly, or swings wildly to the opposite end of the theological spectrum! Surely no believer living during the closing quarter of the 20th century and on can have forgotten the dramatic change at Westminster Chapel in the years after Martyn Lloyd-Jones left.<sup>15</sup> And what of the

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<sup>14</sup> R.Paul Stevens: *The Other Six Days...*, William B.Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000, pp169-172. This was previously published, in 1999, as *The Abolition of the Laity*.

<sup>15</sup> I am thinking *post* Glyn Owen.

changes at the Metropolitan Tabernacle after C.H.Spurgeon?<sup>16</sup> And it does not happen only to well-known churches; the phenomenon is widespread.

The almost total lack of understanding, let alone practice, of an all-body ministry, means that many churches today are little more than preaching centres spiced with social networking – or *vice-versa*; increasingly, I think, the *vice-versa*. And as for the spiritual work, too often, believers are content to watch ‘the pastor’, or the elders, or some specially dedicated people, see to that side of things, while they engage, if they engage at all, in the social round of the church. In fact, most church members are happy not to think things through for themselves, but to leave church policy, church decisions, and church direction to the hierarchy above them. The ‘rubber stamp’, however, is *not* a New Testament picture of the believer in the local assembly.

It gets worse. Unwilling to think through Scripture for themselves – or not expecting or expected to think through Scripture for themselves – many believers ask no questions, discuss no spiritual issues. As for those who do, not infrequently they can find themselves dismissed as ‘trouble-makers’. This lack of curiosity about spiritual questions among believers is one of the saddest marks of the decline of spiritual life today. In my experience, the average believer is far too accepting, displaying a remarkable lack of concern about spiritual matters, along with a highly-developed unquestioning attitude to what he is told. And when – if – he is confronted by some idea he has never met before, he seems signally uninterested in finding out what is right or what is wrong with it. I say ‘he’ but I also include ‘she’! A spiritual apathy, a spiritual disinterestedness – not to say, uninterestedness (boredom) – is prevalent – *within the church*, I mean. There is hardly any curiosity about spiritual things – even among ministers and prospective ministers.<sup>17</sup> Spiritual passivity,

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<sup>16</sup> See Iain Murray: *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, second edition, 1973, pp208-249. Do not miss Spurgeon’s own (inadvertent?) contribution, as ‘The Pastor’, to the catastrophe.

<sup>17</sup> I simply cannot understand lack of spiritual inquisitiveness among young men who aspire to be preachers of the gospel. But I not infrequently meet it. How is it that curiosity about spiritual matters is at

which leads to the surrender of spiritual thought and activity to a specially devoted individual or group, is quite wrong. It is nothing other than having a ‘clergy’. And I make no bones about it: I am pointing the finger both at the system *and* the people who like it.

Furthermore, let me remind you, reader, that in all this, I am not confining my remarks to Romanists or Anglicans. Far from it! The fault can be found much closer to home, despite ingenious attempts to disguise it by Nonconformist verbiage. Although it is easy to see how Spurgeon was not always consistent in this area, in this extract, at least, he pressed the right button:

There are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their priest as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... Oh, take care [beware] of priestcraft, take care of mancraft, of minstercraft, of clergycraft. All God’s people are clergy... There never ought to have been a distinction between clergy and laity.<sup>18</sup>

Take the central act in most churches today – the preaching service. What are its chief characteristics? I am afraid that where the priesthood of all believers is not emphasised as it should be, the preaching, if no other part of the service, can tend to the soporific. Yet, as Eastwood pointed out: ‘Luther did not regard worship as a soporific; on the contrary it was a mighty activity of the spirit [and Spirit – DG] which made heavy demands upon those who were partakers in it’.<sup>19</sup>

Just a minute! Why should the down-playing of the priesthood of all believers help to turn the sermon into a sleeping pill? Because, putting aside pioneer gospel-work, the stated teaching and preaching ministry is really founded on the priesthood of all believers. Where that breaks down, all sorts of troubles follow. Let me explain.

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a premium among *them*? If *they* are not asking questions, how do they expect their ministry to encourage believers to do it?

<sup>18</sup> C.H.Spurgeon: *The New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol.3, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, pp268-269. See also my quotation of the letter printed in the *Evangelical Times* (my *Pastor* p114).

<sup>19</sup> Cyril Eastwood: *The Priesthood of All Believers: An Examination of the Doctrine from the Reformation to the Present Day*, The Epworth Press, London, 1960, pp50-51.

All that I have argued for is built upon the presupposition that the church is made up of believers who have a living relationship with each other. The church is, or is meant to be, a living body. In a very real sense, a stated preacher can only fulfil his ministry, and believers can only mutually instruct, comfort and warn, and so on, if a living relationship, built upon trust, exists between them all. And this can only thrive where spiritual love reigns. Yet this is one of the leading features of the new covenant: ‘You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Gal. 5:13-14). The working out of this love and trust takes time and effort, of course, and can be costly. The benefits, however, are enormous. We invent institutions because we want the benefits without the difficulties. Institutions have their place, but they can never make up for the need and lack of grace. In fact, institutions can get in the way of grace.

And institutionalism abounds among us. Sadly, it is not unknown for the pastor to be content if the members attend, as grateful spectators, the delivery of his sermon, and, after the midweek sermon, take part in public prayer, largely for the success of his preaching. This seems to be the sum total of what is expected of them – or, in many cases, welcomed from them. The members must open their spiritual mouths to be spoon-fed, but not to contribute to any form of teaching ministry. They are to be receivers, but not givers, mere sponges absorbing preaching delivered from the pulpit. It brings to mind misguided famine relief which encourages the hungry to depend on hand-outs, instead of producing men and women who can feed themselves. If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, and encourage him to stand in the queue, with his hand out, for more of the same tomorrow. If you give him a fishing rod or net, and teach him how to fish, you enable him to feed himself and his family for the rest of his life.

Churches which have little or no concept of the priesthood of all believers, but have a corresponding unbiblical emphasis upon ‘the pastor’ who retains the sole prerogative of teaching, effectively stifle the apostolic practice of Ephesians 4:7,11-16.

They lose, they neglect, the New Testament emphasis; namely, what should be the expectation of the members – more, the *demand* of the members – to be edified by the stated teaching ministry with a view, not simply to absorbing more and more facts, but to be fired up to engage in mutual edification, and to equip them for it. And everybody – both pastor and people – are much the poorer for it. How stimulating it would be for the pastor, for instance, if his sermon was met with enthusiastic curiosity, a barrage of questions, interesting suggestions, and animated conversation between the members! Or, calamity of calamities, if someone should disturb the sermon by responding from the floor! Grievously, the man has usually stood six feet above question, let alone contradiction.

This is what I mean by saying that when we do not exercise the priesthood of all believers as we should, we weaken the power of stated preaching.

Let me offer some evidence to support my case. Take the apostolic discourses as recorded in Acts. Do we not get the sense that these discourses were marked by interruptions and responses from the hearers? It would seem that such a reaction was not unknown or unwelcome in those days (Acts 2:37-41; 13:42-48; 26:24). Again, we know that when he preached, Paul ‘reasoned’ with his hearers (Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-9; 20:7; 24:25; 26:24-29; 28:23-29); that is, he disputed with them, discussed with them, discoursed with them, argued with them. Here again, we have this sense of two-way traffic. As for his letters, they abound with questions, clearly giving the very strong impression that he can picture an opponent at his side raising objection after objection – which he stops to answer. To cite passages would be superfluous. If this is so – and I think the evidence is irrefutable – surely when he stood before a congregation, he would have expected something of the sort to happen, would he not?

I think, therefore, it is fair to say that when the New Testament preachers preached, they were met – not with a silent, acquiescent audience – but with a definite reaction. If unbelievers were present, they would, from time to time, object. And the believers, curious and eager, would want answers to their questions. Anything more in contrast to a semi-comatose,

funereal, dentist-waiting-room assembly, would be hard to imagine. The meetings in these early days were alive, and things happened! Read again 1 Corinthians 14. Stripping away the excesses, we are left with a picture of vibrant curiosity, eagerness to participate and an insatiable demand for answers to questions. I am sure that, as the meeting broke up, the teachers were not dampened with inane comments about the weather!

Just in case it needs saying, when I advocate this stimulating, disputing atmosphere, I am not saying that preaching is nothing more than debate. Not at all. It is not a debate at all, in the usual sense of the word. The preacher must speak with authority, he is the teacher, and he must exercise a grip on the hearers. But the idea that a congregation is perpetually passive and silent under an unbroken monologue is, I am sure, foreign to the New Testament.

Again, I do not want anybody to run away with the idea that preaching is all about the mind, mental stimulus and such like. The truth has to penetrate the man through the mind, yes, but the end result must be the glory of God in practical obedience (Rom. 6:17; Jas. 2:14-26; 1 John, for instance).

In all this, I am saying that new-covenant preaching and teaching requires the proper implementation of the priesthood of all believers.

‘But wait a minute’, someone says. ‘Where your recipe has been tried, the one sure-fire result has been to diminish the stated ministry’.

Let me respond at once. Sadly, I have to admit, very often this has been the result. And this is to make an error as bad as the first. But it need not be – it should not be – nor will it be – if the entire biblical package (it is not *my recipe*) is adopted. Nothing I have said in any way diminishes the role of the stated teacher – men whom God has especially called and equipped for the work of teaching. How can it, if it is – as I have shown – biblical? Both principles – an all-body ministry, and a stated ministry – are equally biblical. Each feeds off the other. Each requires the other. They are symbiotic. Therefore, when both are carried out properly, the one must complement the other.

But I do not minimise the difficulties. Indeed, I go further. I have to confess that Eastwood was right: ‘No single church has

been able to express in its worship, work and witness, the full richness of this doctrine' of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, let us try. Biblical church life is difficult. Of course it is! In fact, I believe that one of the drivers behind the popularity of 'the pastor' system is that, superficially at least, it makes life easier. But I cannot recall a text urging us to alter God's word to make things simple for us.

Yes, what I am proposing is full of snags, snares and pitfalls. Satan knows them better than we do! And he won't doze the time away. He will try to lull us to sleep, but he won't make that mistake for himself. In one way or another, he will do what he can to spoil new-covenant church life. It is bound to be. But the same could be said of every biblical principle, worked out by fallen men and women. What else should we expect? Of course it is not easy to recognise a man as gifted by the Spirit as a stated teacher, and to pay him for his labours, and do it without turning him into an icon. Of course it is not easy for each believer to recognise that he is gifted in a measure by the Spirit, and has a duty to exercise that gift and competence, without falling foul of the apostle's rebuke of the excesses of 1 Corinthians 14. Of course it is altogether too easy for a man who is paid as a regular teacher among God's people to find the money corrosive – to the extent of warping his judgement, clouding his eye and stilling his tongue – or at least trimming it. Yes, new-covenant life is difficult. Whoever thought it was easy? But then, isn't life itself difficult? There aren't many problems in a cemetery, at least not among the tombstones!

In any case, doesn't James 4:6 have the answer? God 'gives us more grace'. Do not miss the 'more'. Note the number of references to 'God giving his people grace' at the opening and closing of most of the New Testament books (Rom. 1:7; 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:3; 16:23; 2 Cor. 1:2; 13:14; Gal. 1:3; 6:18; Eph. 1:2; 6:24; Phil. 1:2; 4:23; Col. 1:2; 4:18; 1 Thess. 1:1; 5:28; 2 Thess. 1:2; 3:18; 1 Tim. 1:2; 6:21; 2 Tim. 1:2; 4:22; Tit. 1:4; 3:15; Philem. 3,25; Heb. 13:25; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2; 3:18; 2 John 3; Rev. 1:4; 22:21). Such expressions are not 'apostolic padding' or

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<sup>20</sup> Eastwood: *Believers* p238.



sentimental makeweights! The apostles knew that believers need grace to carry out their new-covenant roles, and that is why they spoke of it and prayed for it.

By getting back to the New Testament, we would get rid of the present cult of men, and replace it with the biblical estimate of the church. Surely that is a purpose worth striving for? This is what I am writing for. That is why I appeal to you, my reader, to reform your thinking more and more to Scripture, and to do what you can to get your local church to come as close as possible to the New Testament. In saying this, I do not mean only in order, of course. I mean also in life and love. Let us be men and women of the new covenant – in practice as well as in name. Let us begin to take the priesthood of all believers – with its corollary, an all-body ministry – seriously. Let us put it to work! We will make mistakes, no doubt, but the biggest mistake of all would be to go on as though the priesthood of all believers has little or no practical consequence for the life of the church.

Christ shed his blood for it. He poured out his Spirit for it. So let us prove ourselves to be as worthy of it as we can, and show that we truly are royal priests of Christ in the exercise of an all-body ministry within the local *ekklēsia*.



## *The Curse of Titles in the Church*

Now to grasp another nettle. Titles.<sup>1</sup> The New Testament never uses any title for any man in the church. What is more, it categorically forbids it. Nowadays, however, most Christians do use titles – or one in particular – and do so without turning a hair, even though it contradicts Christ’s plain command. Complaining of the scribes and Pharisees who loved ‘to be greeted in the market-places and to have men call them “Rabbi”’, Christ said:

But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father’, for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher’, for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matt. 23:1-12).

But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for one is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father... And do not be called teachers... But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (NKJV).

I confess that I do not see how Christ could have expressed himself more clearly. No titles in the church of God. Full stop! I am not saying today’s believers generally use the actual title ‘Rabbi’, of course. It is the principle I am concerned with. And there is a principle here, make no mistake. No titles in the church.

In light of this, why do most church members use a title – as they do, for instance, when they address a man as ‘Pastor Bloggs’, ‘Pastor Fred’ or merely ‘Pastor’? I have noticed the rising trend in Reformed and evangelical circles to speak of ‘Pastor Tom’, aping the Church of England with its (to me, at least) nauseating and pseudo-friendly ‘Bishop Tom’. How often do we hear: ‘Would Pastor like a cup of tea?’ ‘Would Pastor give thanks?’ ‘Would Pastor sit here?’ ‘Pastor Bill said this or that’. I

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Pastor* pp145-154; see also pp311-315.

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know from experience that a wife can refer to her husband as ‘Pastor’! Allowing the word for the moment – which we ought not, because, as I explained, the New Testament does not – why is it so very rare to find ‘a pastor’ addressed as other men? It seems as though most Christians think – to judge by the words they use – ‘a pastor’ is something other than an ordinary mortal. They give him a title, ‘pastor’. It is as simple as that.

Now to speak of a man as ‘Mr X, who is an elder of such and such a church’, is one thing, it is right; to call a man ‘Pastor X’ or ‘Elder X’, however, is very different. *It is to give a man a title.*<sup>2</sup> ‘Paul, the apostle’, is biblical; ‘the apostle Paul’ (contrary to the practice of the overwhelming majority of believers), is not. Although the apostles were never addressed with a title, Paul, for instance, is nearly always referred to as ‘the apostle Paul’ these days. In Scripture, however, he is called ‘Paul an apostle’, or ‘the apostle’, but never ‘the apostle Paul’. I have repeated this because I know to the overwhelming majority of Christians it will sound utterly incredible; ‘the apostle Paul’ is an unbiblical phrase. I am not nit-picking. The first Christians did not use titles.

I am not making it up. My words *have* been dismissed as ‘nit-picking’. Very well. Except I really do think that ‘Pastor Bill’ really has become a title which carries a massive status within the limited circles of the churches. I recognise that I am probably in a minority of one, or close to it,<sup>3</sup> but the fact remains – nit-picking

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<sup>2</sup> Peter was a saint, but I abhor the use of ‘Saint Peter’.

<sup>3</sup> Since writing this, I have come across Arthur W. Pink saying the same thing (in “‘Doctor’ or ‘Brother’?”). That makes two of us! Pink gave his reasons for refusing a complimentary doctorate: ‘*First*, to the false comforters of Job, Elihu (God’s representative) said: “Let me not, I pray you, accept any man’s person, neither let me give *flattering titles* unto men” (Job 32:31). *Second*, “Be *not* ye called Rabbi” or “teacher” (Matt. 23:8), which is what “Doctor” signifies. *Third*, John 5:44 reproves those who “receive honour one of another” and bids us seek “the honour that cometh from God *only*”. *Fourth*, none of the Lord’s servants in the New Testament ever employed a title. “Paul, an apostle”, but never “the apostle Paul”. *Fifth*, the Son of God “made himself of no reputation” (Phil. 2:7); is it then fitting that his servants should now follow an opposite course? *Sixth*, Christ bids us learn of him who was “meek and lowly” (Matt. 11:29). *Seventh*, one of the marks of the apostasy as

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or not – we never read that Paul described himself, or was described as, ‘the apostle Paul’. So, if nothing else, why do we not abandon a habit for which there is no biblical precedence whatsoever, and copy that which does have a biblical precedent?

I hear the cries of protest going up; I sense hackles rising. Talk about a typhoon in a thimble! Does it matter? Let me respond.

As to the smallness of my subject, many would say I am trying to ‘strain out a gnat’ (Matt. 23:24). I disagree. Appearances can be deceiving. I am of the same mind as these following three believers. ‘A great work’, as Andrew Fuller rightly said, ‘may be hindered and stopped by little things. Little follies will spoil the whole (Eccles. 10:1)’.<sup>4</sup> It is *little* foxes, let us not forget, which spoil the vines (Song 2:15). C.H.Spurgeon pointed out that it is usually a dead fly which spoils a pot of ointment, not a dead camel.<sup>5</sup> And as David Clarkson put it:

A small evil in itself may become a great evil in consequence; by giving way to the least we may make way for the greatest... The least evils [ignored] are wont to draw us into the greatest. This is evident in all experience. The greatest abominations in the Christian world have had their rise from small beginnings, and such as it would be counted a nicety to scruple at... So that... it is manifest that a small and seemingly innocent thing may make way for a dreadful mischief... Small things may be accompanied with such circumstances, effects and attendants, as may swell them into a monstrous and very formidable bigness. Those things which seem small, when you consider them in themselves simply, yet behold

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“having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage” (Jude 17). *Eighth*, we are bidden to go forth unto Christ outside the camp “bearing his reproach” (Heb. 13:13). For these reasons it does not seem to me to be fitting that one who is here as a representative and witness for a “despised and rejected” Christ should be honoured and flattered of men. Please address me as “BROTHER PINK”.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Fuller: *Sermons and Sketches of Sermons in The Complete Works of... Andrew Fuller...*, Henry G. Bohn, London, 1866, p696.

<sup>5</sup> C.H.Spurgeon: *Second Series of Lectures to my Students*, Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1885, p152.

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them in their concomitants, and you may discern them to be exceeding great evils.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, I don't accept that what I am dealing with here is a small matter. Allowing for the moment that there is such a church officer as 'the pastor',<sup>7</sup> if we used this form of address for everybody else in the church it would not be so bad, perhaps: 'Milkman Smith', 'Rodent-Officer Black', 'House-wife Johnson', and so on. How about 'Teacher Robinson', 'Deacon Brown', 'Helper Smith', 'Bishop Green', or 'Meeting-House-Toilet-Cleaner Jones', or even 'One-Who-Clears-Up-The-Mess-Which-Is-Left-Over-After-Everybody-Else-Has-Vanished-Following-Yet- Another-Church-Jamboree Smith'? But this sort of thing is just what we do not do! We give a title to one sort of man and one sort only. Why? By giving titles to pastors – and nobody else – Christians effectively separate ministers from the rest of the church, and divide believers into two groups, reinforcing the notion of a clergy and laity, and thereby taking a huge step towards the breakdown of the new-covenant principle of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>8</sup> And all despite the fact that Christ forbids his people to use any titles in the church, and despite the fact that he does it plainly, even categorically.

There is no scriptural warrant for the use of titles in the new covenant. Consider 2 Corinthians 8:23. 'Titus... is my partner and fellow-worker... As for our brothers, they are representatives [messengers, NKJV] of the churches and an honour to Christ'. So said Paul. Were Titus and these others ever addressed as 'Partner Titus', 'Fellow-Worker Titus', 'Representative Gaius', 'Messenger Quartus', 'Honour-To-Christ Onesimus', or whatever? I fully concur with the apostle's dictum: 'Such men deserve recognition' and 'honour' and 'respect' (1 Cor. 16:18; Phil. 2:29; 1 Thess. 5:12). But that does not mean that we give

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<sup>6</sup> Clarkson pp504-510. By way of illustration, he pointed out that the Papist invocation of saints is a massive corruption, but 'the beginnings of it seemed modest'.

<sup>7</sup> Which I don't. See my *Pastor (passim)*.

<sup>8</sup> All believers are ministers; every believer, each believer is a minister. See my *Priesthood (passim)* and my 'Old-Covenant Ruin of "Minister"' (in this present volume; eDocs on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

them titles, along the lines, of, say: ‘Devoted-To-The-Service-Of-The-Saints Stephanas’, ‘Joiner-In-The-Work-Of-The-Gospel Fortunatus’, or whatever, does it? How about: ‘Labourer Achaicus’, ‘Riskier-Of-His-Life-For-Christ Epaphroditus’? See the context of the verses just quoted. Paul could not have put greater dignity upon such men – but he never resorted to the use of titles to do it. Why, giving them a title would have robbed them of the very honour he wished to bestow upon them. Rather like the old days when the rule in postage stamps was that the more banana the Republic, the more showy its stamps – the bigger the ecclesiastical title, the smaller the honour, I suggest.

I am doing this deliberately. It’s utter nonsense, isn’t it? Of course it is. So how about ‘Pastor Bloggs’?

No doubt, many Christians will plead they only use ‘Pastor’ or ‘Minister’ or ‘Reverend’ as courtesy titles, and they mean no harm by it. I realise they will be offended by my strictures. I cannot help it. The practice is a cause of great mischief in the churches of God, since it is nothing less than disobedience to Christ, albeit unwitting in many cases. And disobedience to Scripture is sin, and it carries large consequences (Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49; Rom. 2:13; Jas. 1:22-25; 2:14-20; 1 John 3:4).

So what of Christ’s command? Amazingly, some otherwise excellent Reformed commentators argue black is white on this issue. They are quite prepared to say, in print, that Christ does not forbid calling ‘ministers’ ‘masters and fathers’. With respect, this is precisely what Christ does forbid! It is staggering to read such words from Matthew Poole in a Reformed commentary.<sup>9</sup> One would expect to find them in a papistical book, but not in a Reformed work. Nor is it enough to argue that all Christ forbids is a *chasing after* (‘hunting’ was Poole’s word) a title. Far from it! Christ forbids the *use* of titles. John Calvin thought it ‘absurd’ not to give teaching ministers a title, as long as they do not exercise lordship over God’s people. I agree, of course, teachers should not lord it over God’s flock, but this is not what Christ is dealing with at this point. He is teaching the opposite of Calvin. Christ says it *is* absurd to entitle men in the church; worse, it is

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Poole: *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Vol.3, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1975, p108.

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utterly wrong. Calvin, however, undeterred, ploughed on regardless.<sup>10</sup> It is readily agreed that *boasting and glorying* is forbidden in the church, yes, but that is not the point Christ was making. It is not the *boasting* about titles which Christ condemned, nor the *seeking* after them. It is their *use*.

Clearly Christ's commands concerning titles apply to the church, and only to the church. We need not worry about the use of titles in the world. This is perfectly acceptable for Christians in a civil sense. Paul used them on occasion, when addressing titled rulers like king Agrippa or Festus, for instance (Acts 26:2,7,13,19,25,27), giving them due honour, as he should (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:7; 1 Pet. 2:17). But, as Christ said, this sort of thing must never be brought *into the church*. Never! Hence, if a king or a president, say, is converted, baptised and becomes a member of a local church, within the life of that church he is but a man. He is not to be treated as, nor addressed as, a king or president; he has no status or title above any other member. He is a member of Christ, a member of the new covenant. No greater dignity can be placed upon him than that. When James VI was told precisely this by some preachers in Scotland – that he was a man – he didn't like it, not one bit!

On this point, just because a man has a certain status in the world – in his profession, or whatever – it does not automatically qualify him to be an elder in the church. Nevertheless, in my experience, it was not unknown for a bank manager, say (in those dim and distant days when we still had bank managers), to be automatically considered 'elder material' – simply because he was a bank manager. Something similar might be said of a university lecturer or a school teacher becoming a teacher in the church, simply because he is a success in the world of education.

I say it again, while it is perfectly right to use titles in the world, *in the church it is not so*. The love of titles is deeply ingrained within men, however – the Pharisees of old were smitten with it (Matt. 23:1-12) – and their use is almost universal today. Some ministers seem to love to be addressed as 'Pastor'. What is more, many Christians seem to revel in it; they want

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<sup>10</sup> John Calvin: *Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979, Vol.17 Part 1 pp79-81.



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titles in the church; they crave them. I return to the point I made just now: Do they not appreciate the dignity of being a member of Christ, a member of the new covenant?

Paul, it is true, described himself as a ‘father’ and ‘mother’ (1 Cor. 4:14-15; Gal. 4:19; 1 Tim. 1:2). *But he was not using a title.* He was stating a fact; he acted *like* a father and a mother (1 Thess. 2:7,11); he showed the qualities of a loving parent. But he was never addressed as ‘father’ or ‘mother’. Indeed, the very idea of the latter shows the ludicrous nature of the entire business. Can you imagine any Christian talking about ‘Mother Paul’? He was ‘a teacher’ (1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim. 1:11), an apostle, but he was never entitled thus, he was never known as ‘Teacher Paul’, or, as I have noted, ‘Apostle Paul’. Nor was he ever called ‘Pastor Paul’, even though never did mere man have a more pastoral heart. Of course he did not use a title – seeing that Christ ruled it out in the church. Paul, therefore, refused to ‘seek glory from men’ (1 Thess. 2:6-11, NKJV). He who was determined to boast or glory in nothing except the cross (Gal. 6:14), would never have used titles – since this is a sure-fire way of seeking (and getting!) glory (and worse!) from men. Christ, it is clear, wants his people to shun the use of titles. The reason is obvious. The use of titles engenders a sinful sense of eminence and rank among his people.

So much for ‘Pastor’ and such like. As for ‘Reverend’, words utterly fail. It should only be applied to God. He is the one person who has the name of ‘Reverend’ – for ‘holy and awesome [reverend, AV] is his name’ (Ps. 111:9). It should never be used of men. Does this need to be said? Some believers, perhaps, accustomed to the AV, think Scripture justifies the practice. For instance, wives are commanded to reverence (AV) their husbands (Eph. 5:33). This translation is unfortunate, to put it no stronger. The word used here comes from *fear* or *deference*. I admit it is used in Scripture to speak of the veneration of God, but the context must qualify its use. No wife should greet her husband with the title ‘Reverend’, surely? Which wife did so in Scripture? The NIV (and NKJV) quite properly uses the word *respect*.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> If titles *were* allowed, ‘Pastor Bloggs’, ‘Reverend Bloggs’ would have to be entitled ‘Respect Bloggs’.

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wife is to *respect* her husband, not reverence him. She is to respect her husband, but reverence her God.

But what of the command to believing women to copy ‘Sarah [who] obeyed Abraham, calling him lord’ (1 Pet. 3:6, NKJV)? Did Sarah address Abraham as ‘Lord’? Was Peter not pointing out that Sarah habitually respected and obeyed her husband, and submitted to him as ‘lord’, ‘master’ (NIV)? I think the answer is self-evident. The Greek, *kurios*, can mean someone with ‘authority... the power of deciding’; it is a word ‘expressive of respect’. Surely it means that here.

Another possible misdirection comes from the AV translation of Hebrews 12:9 – we give our earthly fathers *reverence*. The verb really means ‘to show deference to, to be submissive to, to respect’. See also the NKJV. But no child should ever address his father as ‘Reverend’, should he?<sup>12</sup> And if this much is self-evident, what possible justification can there be for believers to address ministers as ‘Reverend’?<sup>13</sup> It is utterly obnoxious. Even if believers claim they are only showing respect, it is still wrong to use the title. A wife must *respect* her husband, yes; a son must *respect* his father, yes; a believer must respect his elders, yes (1 Cor. 16:18; Phil. 2:29; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7,17,24). Nevertheless, no father or husband – *and no elder* – should ever be saluted as ‘Reverend’. The idea is preposterous.

Furthermore, experience shows that the misuse of the word soon leads to the actual reverence of men in practice. And this in turn becomes a bulwark of the priestly system, so beloved of Papists.<sup>14</sup>

According to *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, ‘Reverend’ means ‘worthy of deep respect or reverence on account of rank, age or character’. Its application ‘to members of the clergy’ dates from 1485, and the attaching of the prefix ‘to the name and designation of the person’ dates from 1642. ‘Reverence’ itself

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<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge that a son used to call his father ‘Sir’. It comes from the Old French, *messire*, ‘mylord’, *sieur* (‘lord’), Latin *senior* (‘elder’). It has been used for ‘male parent’ since the 13th century. But he was not giving him a title. He was not knighting him!

<sup>13</sup> As I have said, every believer is a minister.

<sup>14</sup> See my *Pastor* pp43-82,194-227.

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means ‘deep respect and veneration for some... person regarded as having a sacred or exalted character’. If this standard English definition is not sufficient to put an end to the practice of addressing men as ‘Reverend’, one wonders if anything will. Note the dates. In 1485, Popery reigned in England. In 1642, Laud’s Episcopalianism was at the start of its life-and-death struggle with Presbyterianism for political mastery of State religion in England. We need be in no doubt as to the stable from which ‘Reverend’ came.<sup>15</sup>

To say that the use of ‘Reverend’ causes ‘a *very slight* difficulty’, as Peter Masters did,<sup>16</sup> is far otherwise. I find such a comment staggering. The use of ‘Reverend’ for a man is an abomination. And whatever men may say to the contrary, ‘Reverend Bloggs’ *is* accorded great respect and fawned upon because people think, as Masters admitted: ‘Certainly the literal meaning calls for the holder of the title to be revered or accorded with great respect because he has been invested with religious authority’. Reader, I suggest that this is not only the literal meaning; in practice it is precisely what happens when a man is called ‘Reverend’. He *is* accorded great respect and fawned upon because people *do* think he has religious authority. Indeed, he *does* have it! He is special, different. And it is repugnant.

And as for Masters’ defence of the use of ‘Reverend’ based on its long use in the church – four hundred years – the mind boggles. This sad fact does not justify his claim that to use the title does not go against the law of Christ: ‘In such a context, it

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<sup>15</sup> See my *Battle* pp348-368.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Masters: ‘The Use of Titles in the Church’, an article in *Sword and Trowel*, 1992 no.1, p34, emphasis his. This the fullest defence of the use of titles in the church, at least as far as I have seen. Masters based his arguments, strangely enough, upon the very passage which forbids the practice, Matt. 23:8-10. Even so, he very properly made the point that Jesus was referring to titles of honour and position in the church, and only in the church. ‘The Lord’s words are... about titles used in the church, and not in the world at large,’ he wrote. This is true; whatever Jesus here forbids, he forbids in the church. In other words, something which is perfectly acceptable in the world, as far as the use of titles is concerned, is totally unacceptable in the church. This is the position in Matt. 23:8-10.

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can hardly be regarded as a breach of the rule of Christ'. I disagree; it can be so regarded. I go further. It *is* a blatant breach of Christ's command. I called it a *sad* fact; rather, it is a *shameful* fact. Just because an abuse of Scripture is popular, and has been so for four hundred years, does not make it right. Such an argument would justify almost every heresy and abomination which has been foisted on the church (many such having a far longer pedigree). Take infant baptism, baptismal regeneration, the rigmarole of a State Church, the Mass... Isn't that enough to be going on with? They are all long enough in the tooth.

What is more, by Masters' own admission, the use of the offensive title for gospel ministers is a mere four hundred years old. What happened in the previous sixteen hundred years? Let us get back to the New Testament. Why do we have to put up with these 'modern' abominations and inventions in the church? How can those who contend for the Regulative Principle use them?<sup>17</sup> What Christ expects from his people is obedience to what he has commanded:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (Matt. 7:24-27). Blessed... are those who hear the word of God and obey it (Luke 11:28).

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 13:17).

The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does (Jas. 1:25).

What Christ does not expect, and what he will not tolerate, is for his people to do – and try to justify doing – what he has

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<sup>17</sup> In brief, while there are nuances, the Regulative Principle states that God may be worshipped only as directly commanded by Scripture.

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forbidden. To contradict Christ is to offer will-worship, the miserable invention of man.

Although it is a bit rich, coming from an Anglican bishop ('my Lord', and all that), nevertheless, as J.C.Ryle rightly pointed out, while we must have a proper esteem for those over us in the Lord (1 Thess. 5:12-13):

But still we must be very careful that we do not insensibly give to ministers a place and an honour which do not belong to them: we must never allow them to come between ourselves and Christ... They are not mediators who can undertake to manage our soul's affairs with God... Let us never forget these things. Such cautions are always useful: human nature would always rather lean on a visible minister, than an invisible Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Take Ryle's last sentiment. 'Human nature would always rather lean on a visible minister, than an invisible Christ'. Now we are getting to the heart of the matter. For Ryle was right. The disease was endemic in Israel of old, its symptoms clearly seen in their preference for the attractions of visible idols as opposed to the true and invisible God himself (Isa. 44). It is with us today. Smallpox may have been eradicated, and the dodo be extinct, but not *this*, this love of an entitled minister. Let's call a spade a spade. We are talking about priestcraft. And priestcraft is a scandal in the new covenant; it is an utter contradiction of it.

As for Ryle's main point, in the churches today, pastors are spoken of with bated breath, they are treated as a class apart, and they are put on a pedestal. How wrong this is. I acknowledge elders have a mandate from God, and they must exercise their ministry with proper authority, as the apostle commanded Timothy and Titus to exercise theirs (1 Tim. 4:11-12; Tit. 2:15). This, however, must not be done in a domineering spirit. They dare not exercise lordship over the flock of God (Mark 10:42-45; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). I suggest, to put it no stronger, that the common use of titles like 'Pastor' and 'Reverend' encourages and bolsters the evil of elevating a class of men to a position in the church which

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<sup>18</sup> J.C.Ryle: *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (Matthew)*, James Clarke & Co. Ltd., London, 1954, pp299-300.

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no human being ought ever to have. In light of this, it is grievous that so many (any!) in the church like to have it so.

I am not splitting hairs over this matter of the use of titles in the church. I am also aware of the derivation of ‘Mr’, but ‘Mr’ has lost all sense of distinction with the passing of the years – every man is now a ‘Mr’; it is no title at all. But ‘Pastor’ is. It gives kudos. It divides the man from the rest of the church, elevates him above them. And it is abhorrent.

As I have said, church members must acknowledge, recognise, respect, esteem very highly, honour and obey their elders and preachers, in accordance with Scripture (1 Cor. 16:18; Phil. 2:29; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7,17,24), but this must never degenerate into transgression of Christ’s command. In any case, to give a man a title is easy. To truly carry out New Testament instructions is difficult, and needs much grace. To give an elder a title is to give him a tawdry bauble. To give him biblical respect is to offer him a glorious crown. If only the churches would realise what wonderful gains – spiritual gains – would accrue from following Christ and rejecting the world in this matter, they would change their ways.

It cuts no ice to try to distinguish, as Masters did, between ‘titles of *authority* and *power*, and... titles of *function* or *qualification*’, the latter being acceptable, the former unacceptable.<sup>19</sup> Well, I wonder if the average church member really does appreciate just when he can use a title in the church, and when he cannot – according to this. Does the average Christian really understand the distinction between ‘authority and power’ on the one hand, and ‘function and qualification’ on the other? I doubt it. And it is not surprising, since *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* actually lists ‘function’ as part of the definition of ‘power’!

Yet it is acceptable, apparently, happily to address a man in the church as ‘Pastor’, as long as everybody understands that there is no talk about the man’s authority, but about his function. Once again, how many understand this distinction? What is more, I suggest that the vast majority of Christians, if they think about it

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<sup>19</sup> Masters p34, emphasis his.

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at all, are doing the very thing which it is said they ought not – they *are* referring to the man's authority and status. To suggest otherwise is incredible.

It reminds me of the Papist argument to get round the second commandment. Apparently 'the faithful' realise they are not offering worship to an idol when they worship it, because they are merely worshipping it! For readers who are not aware of the ins-and-outs of the Papist argument, it involves a play upon words. 'The faithful' are supposed to be able to distinguish between two sorts of worship as delineated by two distinct Latin words. Some hope! For those who have actually witnessed 'the faithful' bowing, scraping and crossing themselves in front of a statue, and observed how smooth the idol is worn by the countless hands and lips which have caressed it down the years, there can be no doubt what 'the faithful' *think* they are doing.

I hasten to add that I do not suggest that the same is going on when men are using titles in the church – at least I hope not – but I am asserting that to believe the average Christian can sort out the logic necessary to keep within the bounds of Christ's rules, according to the definition laid down by some Reformed teachers, and to claim that he does it, is too much to swallow. So let us drop the use of titles in the church.

But let me conclude on a positive note. Is it not enough that Christ has taken us ruined sinners and renewed us by his Spirit, washed us in his blood, elevated us to the royal priesthood, given each one of us a ministry to God and among his people, equipped us for the exercise of that ministry, and promised us everlasting reward and honour for its faithful discharge? Of course it is! Enough? It is one of the greatest glories of the new covenant! Brothers and sisters, let us keep in mind both the horizontal and the vertical aspects of all this. What am I talking about? We are members one of another, members of Christ (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; Eph. 4:11-16,25). That is the horizontal aspect. Let us exercise it in our assemblies. As for the vertical aspect, let us reserve every title for the triune God who alone is worthy of all distinction, rank and worship. When we recover these spiritual attitudes, *and put them into effect*, we shall see better times than we do today.





## *The Law: Reformed Escape Routes*

We all meet awkward biblical statements, texts which are hard to fit into our theological system. We all do, I say. The temptation is to trim the text, pare off awkward corners, insert words, or by some other scheme find a way round the text to leave our system pristine. This is wrong. We must always take full account of the context, and do all we can to avoid imposing our template on Scripture. We must trim our system, not Scripture. ‘Let God be true but every man a liar’ (Rom. 3:4). When it comes to the law, the Reformed are particularly prone to the glossing, escape-route, waste-paper basket approach. Indeed, they fail badly in this area.<sup>1</sup>

Let me summarise these Reformed escape routes on the law:

1. The Reformed are not averse to ignoring context to conflate passages which use ‘the law’ in different ways, treating them as though ‘the law’ means the same throughout.
2. They say the law is divided into three parts – moral, ceremonial and social or civil. Having divided the law into these three, they say the last two are abrogated for believers, but not the first.
3. They say that certain biblical statements, which do not fit their system, do not refer to the law itself, but to Jewish misunderstandings of the law, or to Jewish glosses on the law, or to legalism.
4. They say that the law must be viewed either as a covenant or as a rule. When it suits them, they play one against the other.
5. They gloss certain biblical statements by wrongly limiting them to justification.
6. Failing all else, they mitigate the severity of the law by pulling its teeth. The believer is under the commandments of the law,

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ* pp99-110; see also, *and especially*, pp392-408.

they say, but not its curse. In any case, God accepts a sincere effort, even though the believer inevitably fails to keep the law.

These are the six escape routes adopted by covenant theologians which I want to examine.<sup>2</sup> While I will not burden this article with extensive extracts, I am tempted! For I assure you, reader, there are plenty to be had, as I have shown elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Please consult them, I urge you. If you an advocate of the Reformed use of the law for sanctification, but have had little acquaintance with the actual works of the covenant theologians you follow, I think such a look might well make your hair stand on end! It will definitely open your eyes!

Now for the six Reformed escapes routes.

### ***1. Conflate texts which speak of ‘the law’ in different ways***

At best, this is slipshod exegesis. Some writers and teachers cite biblical verses which contain the word ‘law’, and treat these verses as though they are talking about precisely the same thing. *This must not be assumed.* Attention must always be paid to the context, and we must always try to do all we can to make sure that the verses we have conflated really do address the same issue, and really do use ‘law’ in the same way.

Let me cite an example of an advocate of covenant theology engaged in what I am criticising. Take Peter Masters, commenting on Galatians 5:18. He quotes Romans 7:22.<sup>4</sup> Now, for a start, the latter verse appears in a very difficult context (Rom. 7:7 – 8:4), as all must admit. That should make us pause. Masters, however, did not even draw breath. What is more, ‘law’

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<sup>2</sup> While I talk about ‘covenant theology’, this in itself is yet another complication. The fact is, there are very serious differences of opinion – among covenant theologians themselves, I mean – as to all the ins and outs of their system. The truth is, we are faced with what might more properly be known as ‘covenant theologies’.

<sup>3</sup> If ever there was need to stress this point, it is here. Please see my *Christ* pp392-408.

<sup>4</sup> See my *Christ* pp436-437.

is used even in that context in a variety of ways.<sup>5</sup> And then there is the new-covenant use of ‘law’.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Romans 7 and Galatians 5 are speaking about very different matters – though, superficially, they appear to be speaking about the same thing.<sup>7</sup> All I am saying here is that if a writer or teacher does not take sufficient care, but uses ‘law’ with cavalier disregard to the context, it really amounts to the pulling of a conjuring – not to say, confidence – trick. So while not strictly an escape route, this slipshod exegesis is a very effective way of making Scripture say what anybody wants it to say. Watch out for it!

## **2. Break the law into three parts**

Almost all<sup>8</sup> Reformed teachers divide the law into three parts – the moral law, the ceremonial law and the judicial (or social or civil) law.<sup>9</sup> It is an axiom<sup>10</sup> with them; and it is a catastrophe.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See my *Christ* pp158-177,448-468, especially pp171-172; *Sanctification in Romans* pp32-33; *Psalm 119* pp57-61.

<sup>6</sup> See my *Christ* pp214-219,481-487.

<sup>7</sup> See my *Christ* pp148-156,436-446; *Sanctification in Galatians* pp61-78.

<sup>8</sup> A.W.Pink proposed an idiosyncratic division of the law, which does not stand scrutiny.

<sup>9</sup> Reformed teachers have a predilection for adjectives to qualify biblical words and so bolster their inventions. For example, *visible/invisible* church, *Jewish/gospel* church, *infant* baptism. The words *moral*, *ceremonial*, *judicial*, *social* and *civil* are not in the Bible.

<sup>10</sup> I use the word in the sense of ‘a widely accepted principle’, ‘self-evident’; in other words, something taken for granted, incapable of proof, but upon which everything which follows is built.

<sup>11</sup> The Reformed threefold division of the law is not merely ‘misleading’; it is wrong. Nor will it do to engage in damage limitation by talking of three *dimensions* instead of three *kinds* of law. Whether or not some Reformed teachers talk of three dimensions rather than three divisions, the effect is the same. It reminds me, I am afraid, of the Roman Catholic attempt to explain away the adoration of images by talk of three kinds of worship. Interestingly, this, too, owes much to Aquinas: ‘*Latria* is sacrificial in character, and may be offered only to God. Catholics offer other degrees of reverence to... Mary and to the Saints; these non-sacrificial types of reverence are called *hyperdulia* and *dulia*, respectively... *Hyperdulia* is essentially a heightened degree of *dulia*

What is the *scriptural* warrant for it? None. The Bible never makes such a division. Never! Certainly the Jews never did. So where did it come from? It is a traditional assumption<sup>12</sup> taken over from an invention of the medieval Church.<sup>13</sup> In particular, it came from that ‘prince of schoolmen’, Aquinas, the orthodox theologian *par excellence* of the Roman Catholic Church, whose influence even today in Protestantism, let alone Romanism, is greater than ever. Forming his views by drawing upon Aristotle, Augustine, Paul, classical antiquity, Arabs and medieval Jews – what a combination! – Aquinas devised a system which, though sophisticated, was vague and obscure. It is his labelling of the ten commandments as ‘the moral law’ which has come to play such an important role in Reformed theology. Sensitive to Papist accusations over antinomianism,<sup>14</sup> the Reformers countered by using Aquinas’ tripartite division of the law, claiming that believers are under the moral law for sanctification.

Thus the Reformers, following Aquinas – certainly not Paul – divided the law into three bits – moral, ceremonial and judicial law – calling the last two mere temporary appendages or appendices of the permanent moral law (which they limited to the ten commandments). These appendages were abrogated by

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provided only to the Blessed Virgin. This distinction, written about as early as Augustine... and... Jerome, was detailed more explicitly by... Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, AD 1270... “The reverence which we pay to God, and which belongs to *latría*, differs from the reverence which we pay to certain excellent creatures; this belongs to *dulia*...” (Wikipedia). Whether the average Romanist can distinguish these three, I have my doubts.

<sup>12</sup> See my ‘axiom’ above.

<sup>13</sup> The Reformed seem shy at owning the source of this major aspect of their thesis on the law. Why?

<sup>14</sup> Compare the way Calvin allowed his reaction to the Anabaptists to colour his view of baptism, the way the Reformers in general allowed their reaction to Rome to colour their view of the priesthood of all believers, and the way the Westminster Assembly’s hatred of antinomianism moved them to produce statements skewed by a heavy emphasis upon law. Out of 196 questions, the Larger Catechism has more than 60 on the law, a staggering ratio for the age of the new covenant. See my *Pastor* pp85-96,240-253; *Infant* pp44-48,53-54,213-215; *Glorious* p219.

Christ, they said, leaving the first part to govern believers as their rule of life. In this way, most believers began to speak about ‘the law’, when they were actually talking of a minute portion of it – less than 1% – the ten commandments taking up just thirty-two verses of the Bible, counting the repeat! – this tiny fraction of the Mosaic law, now being called ‘the moral law’, the perfect rule of life!<sup>15</sup> All this is said to be ‘clear’. History, tradition, creeds, pastors, teachers are said to support the system, while those who question it are labelled and then dismissed as legalists, antinomians, quibblers and lazy-minded.<sup>16</sup> But the fact is, Reformed teachers have their doubts, make vague claims, usually adducing precious little scripture in support, and manifestly misapply references or arbitrarily adjust the meaning of the word ‘law’ where necessary!

This Aquinas-logic does not stand up. The law is not a menu, a list from which theologians can pick and choose. The law must be used properly: ‘We know that the law is good *if one uses it lawfully*’ (1 Tim. 1:8), otherwise, the consequences will be dire. Even so, right from the earliest days of the church, men have been trying to treat the law as a list from which they may select one or two favoured bits; circumcision being a prime example (Acts 15:1,5,24; Gal. 5:2-6; 6:12-13). The same could be said of the sabbath, and other days. But the law must be taken as a whole. It is all or nothing (Gal. 5:3). Scripture speaks of the law as an entity.

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<sup>15</sup> All advocates of the system say the ceremonial law is now abrogated. As for the judicial law, according to some Reformed teachers, some parts of it have ceased, but some parts remain, while others say all the judicial law came to end in AD70.

<sup>16</sup> This raises a point of massive importance. When will the Reformed start putting the Bible before their creeds and Confessions? If any take offence at my question, let them answer this: How many Reformed men preach the Confession or the Catechism – Heidelberg, Westminster, 1689 or...? Every man that has done it makes one too many! Even as I write, the *Banner of Truth* (Oct. 2014 pp9-10) records, with delight, the fact that at the graveside, mourners were comforted by the minister exhorting from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. And these are the men who boast of *sola Scriptura*! Does it need to be said? Exhort and comfort from, say, John 11 or 1 Cor. 15!

How did the Old Testament speak of ‘the law’? Did it divide it into three parts? Certainly not! Let me demonstrate this from two places – Leviticus and Numbers. 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 judgements 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 which are 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. Is it not significant that when Israel was about to enter Canaan, and God told them to write and repeat the law's blessings and the curses, and do so in a very public way (Deut. 27), he did not adopt the Reformed view – and stress or stick to the ten commandments?

Centuries later, Jehoshaphat did not seem to be fazed by the Reformed 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 three. 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. See any concordance.<sup>17</sup> Check for yourself how interchangeably 'the law' is used in the Bible. Reformed teachers might like to have everything neatly sewn up into three little packets 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.

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<sup>17</sup> See also my *Christ* pp25-26,336.

Some, who insist on the law as the believer's rule, are prepared to admit that believers have to do what the Jews (or Christ or Paul, I would add) never did; namely, divide the law into three parts. This is honest, but devastating to the Reformed position! And why *have* covenant theologians *had* to divide the law? What biblical imperative can they produce? Their system demands it, but what of Scripture? What biblical warrant can they produce? Is there any possibility that such divisions of the law might fall foul of Malachi 2:9? that is, is there any inherent risk of showing 'partiality in the law'? I am well aware that this 'partiality' takes in far more than picking and choosing which bits one will keep and which one will ignore. But the principle stands. And it carries a heavy price. God is not 'partial' (Deut. 10:17-18). And Christ had some strong things to say on the subject (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42).

I break in at this point, reader, to say, yet again, that it is most important that you consult the extracts from Reformed writers. I am not making these things up!

The Reformed way of dividing the law does not pass muster. It is artificial from start to finish. And that's the best to be said for it. Simplistic, it is demeaning to Paul (the main New Testament writer on the law). The apostle simply will not allow himself to be explained away by cramming his doctrine into neat watertight packages. Speaking bluntly, these artificial, simplistic, divisions are an imposition on the text, and are illogical. How are we to know whether or not any particular commandment, statute, law or regulation is moral, ceremonial or social? Take the sabbath. Is the fourth commandment moral, ceremonial or social? Or is it a combination of all three? What did Calvin think? Those who do not know, may well be surprised – staggered – to discover his view. He certainly would fall foul of Reformed teachers today!<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In brief, while Calvin was (as so often) ambiguous and somewhat self-contradictory, he rightly asserted 'that the substance of the sabbath [is]... in Christ', referring to Heb. 4:10. 'Christ... abrogated the sabbath... The sabbath, although its external observation is not now in use, still remains eternal in its reality'. In other words, the sabbath is fulfilled in Christ – and the rest it typified is now the possession of believers – they are at



Notwithstanding these fatal flaws in covenant theology, I am afraid it is almost impossible to cite a Reformed work on the law which does not make liberal use of the terms moral, ceremonial and judicial law, even though they are foreign to the Bible, and ambiguous. A term ambiguous among theologians and non-existent in the Bible! Hardly a recommendation! But almost universally assumed!

Lest I be misunderstood, just because I do not talk about the *moral* law, and just because I point out that the Bible does not use the phrase, it does not mean I advocate immorality! A man is not an antinomian just because he does not use Reformed jargon! After all, no biblical writer ever used the phrase. Indeed, if the biblical writers came back and heard somebody extolling ‘the moral law’, they wouldn’t have a clue what the speaker was talking about. Nor am I arguing over mere words. Reformed teachers do not divide the law into three parts for the fun of it. Oh

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peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1ff). Calvin went on: ‘The stability of [the sabbath] was best confirmed by [its] abrogation; since, if God now required the same of Christians, it would be putting a veil over the death and resurrection of his Son... The Jews... calumniate us falsely, as if we disregarded the sabbath; because there is nothing which more completely confirms its reality and substance than the abolition of its external use’ (John Calvin: *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979, Vol.2 pp435,443-444). Again, when concluding his argument on the sabbath, as found in his *Institutes* – he spoke of getting ‘quit of the trifling of the false prophets, who in later times instilled Jewish ideas into the people’. He explained what those teachers with their trifling Jewish ideas were doing. They were ‘alleging that nothing was abrogated but what was ceremonial in the commandment... while the moral part remains – viz. the observance of one day in seven. But this is nothing else than to insult the Jews [and, above all, God himself!], by changing the day, and yet mentally attributing to it the same sanctity; thus retaining the same typical distinction of days as had place among the Jews. And of a truth, we see what profit they have made by such a doctrine. Those who cling to their constitutions go thrice as far as the Jews in their gross and carnal superstition of sabbatism’ (John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A New Translation by Henry Beveridge, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.1 pp343-344). *Touché* the Reformed! See my *Sabbath* pp65-67.

no! A very serious objective is at the back of this. The threefold division of the law is a very effective escape route when the Reformed are confronted by scriptures which will not fit their system. They simply dispose of unpalatable texts by dropping them into the appropriate waste-paper basket! As a result, Reformed teachers can put forward an unbiblical view of the believer and the law. And this has large consequences.

### ***3. Blame Jewish misunderstanding***

Another Reformed escape route is to argue that when Paul says something that clashes with their claim that the law is the perfect rule for believers, he is actually doing no such thing. Rather, he is dealing with a Jewish misunderstanding. The law and the gospel only *seem* to be opposed. It is not so, really. Wherever did the confusion arise, then? It was all the fault of Jewish teachers. Paul was writing against those who use the law *amiss*. Paul, when seeming to speak against the law, was actually writing against the nonsense introduced by false apostles. So it is claimed.

Let me give a few instances. It has been alleged that Romans 4:13-15 and Galatians 3:17 speak of the law's function within the Mosaic covenant, and even then only as the Jews misunderstood it. Reader, notice the glosses here introduced. The passages refer to the law, full stop.

Take Romans 4:13-15: 'For the promise.. was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void... because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression'. Paul is speaking of the law, not the law qualified by this or that. And notice what he says: 'The law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression'. It will not do to say he is talking about some supposed Jewish misunderstanding. Was it *Jewish misunderstanding of the function of the law* which brought about wrath? Are we to believe that where there is no *Jewish misunderstanding of the function of the law* there is no transgression? Are we really to believe that Christ came into the world and died in order to set his people free from a *Jewish*

*misunderstanding of the law?* Christ came to set his people free from the law, not some supposed misunderstanding of it!

As for Galatians 3:17, Paul is saying that the law came 430 years after the promise to Abraham. He is not remotely thinking of any Jewish misunderstanding of the law!

Take 2 Corinthians 3:7 as another example. When Paul speaks of ‘the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones’, at the very least he is referring to the ten commandments – not the ten commandments as misinterpreted by Jews. The apostle’s words in 2 Corinthians 3:11 are clear enough. It wasn’t a Jewish misunderstanding that was ‘the ministry of death’, ‘the ministry of condemnation’. It was the law, the law itself, including – and in the context, especially – the ten commandments (2 Cor. 3:7,9).

Again, believers, while in their unregenerate state, weren’t married to a Jewish misunderstanding of the law, were they? Nor, in coming to Christ, did they die to a Jewish misunderstanding of the law in order to be married to Christ and so be sanctified, did they? No! Every believer, in coming to Christ, has died to the law – *the law* – to be married to Christ (Rom. 7:4-6).

Nor will it do to say that when Paul has strong things to say about ‘law’ he really means ‘legalism’; that is, it is not ‘the law’ itself that the apostle is concerned with, but the *abuse* of the law. Now, it is true that Paul does address legalism, but when he does so, he uses appropriate phrases (see Rom. 9:31-32; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9; *etc.*). Consequently, this does not in any way justify the shunting of ‘awkward’ texts into limbo, writing them off as Jewish misunderstanding! Law and legalism are not the same thing at all.

Once again, reader, a serious issue is at stake in all this. Labelling passages – which they find awkward – as a Jewish misunderstanding, or Rabbinism, or legalism, or some such dismissive term, allows Reformed teachers to put forward an unbiblical view of the believer and the law. It is yet another handy waste-paper basket for any tricky passage! Tricky for covenant theologians, that is.

#### ***4. Distinguish between the law as a covenant and a rule***

Many Reformed writers argue that believers are delivered from the law in its covenant form, but not as a rule of life. And in this way, the law is said to be binding on believers, with all that that entails!

May I ask Reformed theologians: Christ came under the law (Gal. 4:4). Did Christ come under the law as a covenant, but not as the moral law? Or did he come under the law in both forms? Again, the believer has become dead to the law (Rom. 7:4). Dead to the law as a covenant, but not as a rule? How can a believer be dead to the law as a covenant, yet alive to it as a perfect rule?

The fact is, *the Scripture never distinguishes between the law as a covenant and a rule*. The law does not wear different hats. It must be taken as a whole, all or nothing, as it is, a covenant and a rule, and all its regulations must be kept. If one commandment, rule or regulation is broken, the entire law is broken. This is the biblical position. And it is the way we work in everyday life<sup>19</sup> – for example, in buying and selling a house. If a man agrees to buy a house, he has to keep the rules of the covenant under which he secures the purchase, the rules and the covenant forming but one document. The purchaser, signing the deed, accepts, and has to abide by, all the regulations and stipulations about mineral rights, fences, trading, and so on, as spelled out in the deed of covenant. The covenant and the rule are one.<sup>20</sup>

And thus it is with the law of God. The Israelites were under the law – under the law both as a covenant and a rule, in every one of its stipulations. Where, in Scripture, can the Reformed find the teaching that states that, unlike the Jews, believers are under the law as a rule but not a covenant? In fact, Scripture expressly states that believers are not under the law at all! Take Romans 6:14; 7:4-6; 8:2; Galatians 2:19; 4:31; 5:1,18, for instance.

In any case, it is a tragic mis-exegesis to distinguish between a rule and a covenant when speaking about the law. It will not stand up. Take the experience of the Jews when they discovered

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<sup>19</sup> Paul uses this very comparison (Gal. 3:15).

<sup>20</sup> I speak of English law. But I guess the principle is well-nigh universal.

the book of the law in the time of Josiah. This book was spoken of as law, *covenant*, *commandments*, testimonies and statutes, and these terms were used interchangeably (2 Kings 22:8,11; 23:2-3,21,24-25). Again, take these terms: the ark of the *covenant*, the ark of the *covenant* of the LORD, the ark of the LORD's *covenant*. These terms are used repeatedly. What was in the ark? 'Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a *covenant* with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt' (1 Kings 8:9; see also 2 Chron. 5:10). In other words, the ten *commandments* constituted the *covenant*, and this was reinforced when the commandments were placed in the ark of the covenant. The commandments and the covenant were one and the same. Joshua warned the Israelites that when they 'transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you... then the anger of the LORD will burn against you' (Josh. 23:16). In other words, when they sinned he would punish them. But what is sin? It is the breaking of God's law: 'Where there is no law there is no transgression' (Rom. 4:15). Does this not show that the covenant was the law, and that the law was the covenant? And so it was that Joshua 'made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. Then Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God' (Josh. 24:25-26). Law, covenant, commandment – all one and the same.

In short, the distinction in the law drawn by Reformed writers between covenant and commandment is a distinction without a difference or meaning. It is nothing more than a clever ploy. And it is high time it was dropped. Many passages could be cited to show that the covenant stands for laws commanded by God (Ex. 24:4,7; 34:27-28; Num. 15:31; Deut. 29:1-9; Josh. 23:16; Judges 2:19-20; 2 Kings 17:15; Hos. 6:7; 8:1, for instance). So much for the Jews.

Many Reformed, however, want to accept their teachers' assurance that the believer is under the law, not as a covenant, but as a rule. The Reformed wedge between the law as a covenant and a rule is bolstered by tortuous logic, not by Scripture. I ask again, may we be given the plain scripture to assure us of this

‘fact’? Moreover, when is the law a covenant but not a rule, and *vice-versa*? How can we tell? And when the law is a covenant, which of their covenants is it – grace or works? As I have shown elsewhere, covenant theologians cannot come to a consensus about it – after more than 400 years!<sup>21</sup>

Even so, Reformed teachers are prepared to take difficult texts and slap one of two labels on them; one marked ‘covenant’, the other ‘rule’ – one to which the believer is dead, the other to which he is very much alive. It is, of course, yet another convenient escape route, even though the distinction cannot be justified. And that puts it mildly. The scheme is nothing more than a clever construct to get round Scripture, and allow covenant theologians to keep their system intact.

### ***5. Gloss statements on the law by wrongly limiting them to justification***

Of course, there are many statements in Scripture which plainly teach that by the law no sinner will be justified (Rom. 3:20-22; 10:5-6; Gal. 2:16; 3:11-12; 5:4, for instance). But, equally, there are many statements in Scripture which teach that a believer is not sanctified by the law (Rom. 6 – 7, for example). I will not stop to look at these passages now – having done so at the appropriate places in my *Christ is All* – but it is wrong of Reformed teachers to gloss these by saying they refer to justification – when clearly they refer to sanctification. It will not do. But, yet again, it proves a handy waste-paper basket when any passage proves difficult. Slap the sticker ‘justification’ on to it, and carry on regardless. It will not do!

Take these apostolic words as just one example of a passage that simply will not allow this kind of misrepresentation to stand:

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to

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<sup>21</sup> See my *Christ* pp88-98,401-408; ‘Covenant Theology Tested’ (*New*; eDocs on David H J Gay [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com); [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com)).

death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Rom. 7:4-6).

If ever there was a passage that teaches that the only way for a believer to be sanctified is to be married to Christ, and in order to be married to Christ he has first to die to the law, this is it. A clearer annihilation of Calvin's third use of the law could not be wanted or found. And here it is: in Scripture! When will covenant theologians begin to take seriously the difference – the chasm – the apostle opened between living 'in the flesh' and living 'in the spirit or Spirit'?

### **6. Pull the law's teeth**

When all else fails, Reformed teachers say believers are under the law, but God will never exact its sanctions upon them. He will accept a good try, doing one's best, a sincere effort, even though, obviously, it must fall short of the standard required. Once again, human logic or philosophy bolster this far-reaching claim, but Scripture justification for it is noticeable by its absence.<sup>22</sup>

And what if the law has *not* lost its teeth?

*The law, of course, has **not** lost its teeth!* It always demands perfect obedience, and curses the smallest breach. Thus it has always done, and it is still the same today. Let me clear the decks: 'You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you... Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it' (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). So runs the command of God when declaring his law through Moses. These are very serious stipulations. I urge the advocates of covenant theology to weigh them.

What is more, curses are an integral part of that law. 'For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them"' (Gal. 3:10).

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<sup>22</sup> See my *Christ* pp64-110,360-408, especially 360-408. Once again, I can only appeal to readers who doubt my claims to read the extracts – and the original Reformed works.

## *The Law: Reformed Escape Routes*

This, of course, comes from Deuteronomy 27:26. (See also Deut. 11:26-28; 27:15-26; 28:15-68; 2 Chron. 34:24). As a consequence, ‘the law brings about wrath’ (Rom. 4:15). There is no getting round these plain statements.

Even so, the Reformed claim, all such dreadful sanctions are abolished under the gospel. In Moses’ hands, yes, the law is severe; but not in Christ’s. And when Paul contrasts the law and the gospel, he is referring, not to the law, but to its threats, nothing else. So it is claimed. If so, what remains? Not much, I should say. What is a law without punishment? What is a commandment without penalties? The law less severe in Christ’s hands? Where are we told this? How does it fit in with Luke 16:17? ‘It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail’. What about Matthew 5:17-20? Scripture never tells us the law is in force as the rule of life for believers, but conveniently shorn of its sanctions. Never in Scripture is there any hint that the *claims* of the law can be separated from its *curses*. In the Bible, the law’s *precepts* are never separated from its *penalties*.<sup>23</sup> In the Bible, I reiterate, never! The mere suggestion is appalling. I use the word advisedly.

Yet, flying in the face of such biblical facts, it is said that even though no believer can keep the law, which demands perfection, God relaxes his law for his children. What an utterly unbiblical notion! For the Reformed to accuse others of antinomianism is nothing but a classic case of beams and motes. I ask every person who holds to the Reformed uses of the law to find one place in Scripture where the inspired writer states that the law remains a rule for believers but shorn of its sanctions. If a law is deprived of its sanctions, surely it ceases to be worthy of the name *law*! It might be a *recommendation*, but hardly a *rule*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The law stands absolute in its entirety, curses and all. And as a paradigm – see my *Christ* pp289-294; ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’ (see my *New*; on the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com; and on christmycovenant.com) – its curses may be used to illustrate the glories of the gospel.

<sup>24</sup> Is Calvin’s whip for sluggish asses cordless after all? See my *Christ* pp73,108,249,367,414,500, for Calvin’s reduction of the law from a whip to a ‘kind adviser’.



Yet, covenant theologians want it both ways. In contradiction of the above, some insist that not only is the unchanging and unchangeable law of God the rule which every man, and this includes the redeemed, lies under for time and eternity, but that its authority – far from being curtailed – is stronger for the believer than the sinner. The obligation to the law is said to be *more intense* for the saved man. Now what can be more intense than the curse and eternal perdition for breaking the law? After all, as is admitted, the law, though broken, never lowers its terms.

So which is it? Are the redeemed under the law as much as they were before conversion – more so, we are told – yet that same law has its penalties reduced, even removed, for them? Or is their obligation to the law, as believers, more intense than it was before? Which is it? More intense or not? When is ‘more intense’ more intense or less intense? The argument defies reason.

Though Reformed teachers like to think a believer can be under the law but avoid its penalties, it is an impossibility. This truly is to ‘make void the law’ (Rom. 3:31). Though they might like to accuse others of doing it, the truth is they themselves are guilty of that very thing! *All* who are under the law must keep *all* the law, or else they will suffer *all* its curse. Moses always accuses all those under him. So said Christ: ‘There is one who accuses you – Moses’ (John 5:45). Can we be shown a man whom Moses does *not* accuse – apart from Christ? Moses could not accuse Christ, because Christ kept the law perfectly. But Moses accuses every sinner, because every sinner has broken his law. And this includes the saints!

To say that the law has lost its teeth is not only wrong. It carries important and heavy consequences. It bolsters the mistaken Reformed view on the believer and the law. It is the last but not least of the Reformed waste-paper baskets.

### ***Reformed escape routes: Summary***

Let me gather together the six main escape routes so beloved of covenant theologians. In order to maintain their system, Reformed teachers are not averse to conflating two or more passages, disregarding the way the original writers used ‘law’ in

those passages. Or, if a verse or passage does not fit their system, they neatly dispose of the difficulty by means of one or other of their waste-paper baskets. Instead of facing up to the teaching of the passage in question, they say it speaks against the ceremonial law, Jewish glosses or misunderstanding, legalism, or the law as a covenant, or the inability of the law to justify. If all else fails, they say that the law still stands but shorn of its sanctions and punishments.

There is not the slightest justification for the Reformed to ‘modify’ the law in such ways.<sup>25</sup> The law is not a lump of plasticine to be pulled and twisted to fit into our system. We cannot cut bits off, and stick them back on in any way we choose. To put it no stronger, the Reformed give the impression that that is what they are prone to do. It is quite wrong. Nor should they pick-and-mix. God has always insisted on total obedience to all his commandments, to all his law. I remind you of his demands through Moses: ‘You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you... Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it’ (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). God never allowed Israel to divide his law into various bits, and so set in train the process of rejecting the majority of his law.

The Reformed should not play word-games with the law of God. They should not make inexplicable changes to Scripture, thereby rewriting ‘the law’ in Bible texts as ‘the moral law’ or ‘the ceremonial law’ or ‘the social law’, ‘the Mosaic economy’, and so on when it suits them.

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<sup>25</sup> I admit, of course, that there is ‘modification’ and ‘modification’. See my *Christ* pp211-298,481-542, where I show that whereas the Reformed want to modify the law by dividing it into bits, or cutting out its punishment – for which there is no biblical warrant – the believer must read and apply the entire law, but do so through Christ, interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New. He must do so because he has New Testament warrant for it. That is what Christ and the apostles did. We may, we must, *nuance* the law in accordance with the new covenant. But neither Christ nor any apostle ever spoke of a toothless ‘moral law’.

I call these changes ‘inexplicable’, but this is not strictly accurate. These changes are perfectly understandable – if Scripture has to be trimmed or adjusted to fit a logical system invented by men, which is what covenant theology is. It is a human construct – clever, yes, but complicated, and nothing more than a metaphysical<sup>26</sup> template imposed on Scripture.

Such shenanigans are perfectly *understandable*, I repeat, but *totally unacceptable*. With respect, I say to covenant theologians, as Christ said to the Pharisees and the scribes, you are ‘making the word of God of no effect through your tradition’ (Mark 7:13). The truth is, by saying on the one hand the law is permanent and unchanging, but saying on the other the law has been changed, and teaching believers to keep this different law, you expose a fundamental contradiction at the very heart of your system. Indeed, to speak frankly, you make a mockery of the law.

### ***Illustrations of the point***

Let me illustrate the consequences of these glosses, by considering passages which have nothing to do with the law. Would Reformed writers apply their gloss technique in these passages? Believers have ‘died with Christ from [to, NIV] the basic principles of the world’ (Col. 2:20). This is what Paul said. If we used the Reformed glosses, I suppose we should think that believers have died to *certain aspects* of the basic principles of the world, or to *a part of* the basic principles of the world, or to the basic principles of the world *as understood by false teachers*, or to the basic principles of the world, yes, but *only in regard to certain ends*. Paul told us that saints have died to the basic principles of the world, full stop!

Again, what about Galatians 6:14? Should the believer say that by the Lord Jesus Christ ‘the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’ *in part* or *in regard to certain ends*?

Should the same be said of Galatians 2:20? Perish the thought! The believer has been ‘crucified with Christ’, not crucified with Christ *in part* or *to certain ends*. It would be utterly wrong to trim

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Abstract, abstruse, or subtle’.

Scripture to fit it into a human system. The same goes for passages on the law.

## ***Conclusion***

Enough of this! ‘To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them’ (Isa. 8:20).<sup>27</sup> Let us ‘give ear to the law of our God’ (Isa. 1:10). We ‘have Moses and the prophets; let [us] hear them’ (Luke 16:29). Let us ‘search the Scriptures’ (John 5:39). For it is not the theories of theologians which count, but the word of God, and, in the end, it is only the word of God which counts (2 Tim. 3:16 – 4:4).

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<sup>27</sup> As far as we stray from Scripture, we move into darkness. As for Reformed believers, I am confining my remarks to these escape clauses on the law. While I do not agree with their system of handling the law, and am prepared to say so in no uncertain terms, I have nothing but the highest regard for their persons and their spirituality. The sharp-eyed reader will have noticed that I urge us to go to the law (Isa. 8:20) for instruction, and then immediately explain my understanding of ‘the law’ in this context. This seemingly small detail admirably makes the point I am trying to press home. Who would think that, in order to gain instruction on this vital topic, we should confine our studies to the ten commandments? In this context, ‘the law’ is the entire word of God, especially the New Testament. See my *Christ* pp222-224,491-493.

## *The Pastor: The Missing Man*

Down the centuries, starting with the Fathers, men have distorted the system of church care, rule and order as instituted by Christ. One way in which they have done this is by distinguishing one of the elders and giving him a special name or title. What is this name or title? Today – and for many years past – that name or title is ‘the pastor’. But the turning of one of the elders into ‘the pastor’ is quite wrong.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, and sad to say, this unbiblical practice has won the day. Even in most churches which have a plurality of elders, there is still a single pastor who has a higher rank, with greater authority. Most believers are utterly convinced that a pastor is ‘the minister in charge of a church or congregation, with particular reference to the spiritual care of his flock’.<sup>2</sup> They simply cannot imagine things in any other way; their pastor is their minister in charge of (his) their church. Contrary to what almost all believers think, however, and despite the almost universal acceptance and love of this practice, there is no scriptural warrant whatsoever for it, none whatsoever. Although most believers do not realise it, ‘the pastor of so-and-so church’ is a character unknown in the New Testament. He simply does not exist in the sacred pages, even though he appears in nearly every book on church order, and is an everyday phenomenon of the vast majority of churches. Why is ‘the pastor’ not even mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31? That the New Testament never speaks of *a* pastor of a church, let alone *the* pastor of a church, may surprise some readers.

Surprise? I am afraid even daring to point it out will offend them. In raising this issue, I have not set out needlessly to offend,

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<sup>1</sup> I have lightly edited this material from my *Pastor* pp107-119; see also pp145-154,273-280,311-315.

<sup>2</sup> *The Shorter Oxford*. Not the Bible, please note. In other words, to get the definition, it is no use going to Scripture. *It is not there*. We have to refer to the standard English dictionary. Something, surely, must be wrong.

## *The Pastor: The Missing Man*

but I am sorry to say I think offence is inevitable – as is the consequent reaction to it. The reason is, of course, I am approaching, pointed stick in hand, one of the most sacred of all sacred cows in this entire business.

So, taking a deep breath, in light of the fact that no man in the New Testament is ever called ‘the pastor’ of a church, because no church had a man they called ‘the pastor’, and no church member ever talked about this non-existent man as ‘our pastor’ – why is the practice so common today? How can we explain it? Why do we see a proliferation of ‘pastors’ – emeritus pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, student pastors, youth pastors, music pastors, education pastors, senior-citizens’ pastors, singles’ pastors, pastors of pastors,<sup>3</sup> and so on? Is it not incredible? Where does it all come from? The New Testament or... what? Where does the movement, the transfer (often, ‘promotion’) of pastors from one church to another come from? The rigmarole smacks of the transfer market in professional football managers. Which passage of Scripture do the churches and the men involved turn to in order to get apostolic instruction on the matter?

This is worth pursuing. Where, in the New Testament, do we read of, say, the pastor at Troas, moving to replace the pastor of Puteoli, who had moved to replace the pastor at Antioch, who moved to replace the pastor at Troas...?<sup>4</sup> Is it not odd that there is no New Testament record of any such movement – when it plays such an important and commonplace role in today’s churches? I might say, all-important role. How is it that the New Testament is silent on the matter – giving today’s churches no guidance, no instruction, no pattern to follow? How did those (non-existent) pastors know that they ought to move? How did they know the place to which they ought to move? What was the procedure?

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<sup>3</sup> Some pastors called D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones their pastor, the pastor of the pastors; some pastors dreaded his retirement and death – they felt they would be without a pastor. Really? I do not mean to say that it was wrong for men to consult Lloyd-Jones. In fact, one of the things I most admire about him was his willingness to give advice on difficult questions. Even so, I think my point still stands.

<sup>4</sup> For reasons I give, I do not think Paul’s use of Timothy and Titus constitutes a pattern for ‘pastors’.

And so on. I am not trying to be ‘holier than thou’. I realise we all have decisions to make, every day of our life, for which we have no direct precedent in Scripture. But we are not talking about ‘every-day’ decisions. We are talking about what seems to be an absolute fundamental in the life of most churches today. Surely we should not be left without biblical warrant for *that*? All I am asking is, where in the New Testament are we given the thought process of a pastor coming to realise that his work at A was over, and he should now move to be the pastor of B? On the other side of the coin, how did the churches know what to do about finding a new pastor, and how to do it? Was there a clearing house system? Did the old-school cloak play any part? Where are we let into the way church B knew that the man from A was ‘God’s man’ for them? All this is of such importance to today’s churches, and today’s pastors, I cannot help wondering why there’s not a glimmer of biblical instruction about it.

The attempted biblical defence of the pastor’s office is, in effect, based upon two New Testament verses only; namely, Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Timothy 5:17. Let me quote both verses in full:

It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11).

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17).

Take the second. As I have shown, some use the verse to argue first of all for a distinction among the elders – between teachers and rulers.<sup>5</sup> After all, it says: ‘The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching’ (1 Tim. 5:17). They then turn to the other verse to argue for a further distinction among the teachers – between pastors and teachers. After all, it says: ‘It was he [Christ] who gave some to be... prophets, some to be

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<sup>5</sup> Presbyterian churches based on the Westminster documents, for example. Take the Presbyterian churches in Scotland as a case in point.

evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers' (Eph. 4:11). Let us look at these arguments, fair and square.

Before we start, note the plurals – not a singular in sight – in both verses. In particular, 'pastors and teachers' and 'elders'; not 'pastor and teacher', 'elder'; all plurals – 'pastors and teachers', 'elders'. It may or may not be important – we shall see – but it is a fact, is it not? Not a single pastor or elder in view. How very different today. In fact, virtually the opposite.<sup>6</sup>

Now for a closer look at the verses. Take the word 'pastors'. The word 'pastors' appears but once in the New Testament – in Ephesians 4:11. Only once in the New Testament, I stress. And in the plural. Judging by its ubiquity today, and nearly always in the singular, one would think the word was written on almost every page of the New Testament. But no. It occurs only this once. *And then only in this phrase 'pastors and teachers'*. Note the apostle's words. Paul did not say Christ gave the church *some* pastors, and, in addition, gave the church *some* teachers, but that he gave the church *some pastors-and-teachers*; that is, men who are pastoral teachers, teachers who teach with a pastoral heart, pastor-teachers, the double designation describing two aspects of their work – as most commentators agree. This is why I use the hyphens.

As for 1 Timothy 5:17, note that the verse does not talk about 'pastors' at all; it mentions only elders. Nor does it divide elders into two distinct groups, rulers and teachers. All elders rule (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17; Heb. 13:17),<sup>7</sup> and all elders must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:5-9). I think we may go a little further. All elders rule, and all elders have to be able to teach. That must mean, surely, that can only mean, that all elders both

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<sup>6</sup> I am not, of course, saying a word against pioneer work, and such like, where there may be only one man capable of leadership. As long as the aim is to move to plurality as soon as possible, then such men deserve nothing but respect, sympathy, support and understanding. Even so, the exceptional must not be made the norm. Hard cases make bad law.

<sup>7</sup> I recognise the NIV does not always use the precise words in some of these references. But 'manage' and 'direct' are clearly referring to 'rule'. And I have already conceded that 'leaders' (Heb. 13:17) might be apostles.



rule *and* teach, *all* of them. If not, it would seem odd to stipulate that all must be able to teach, yet not expect them all to do it. It would seem odder still to set up one of the elders as ‘the pastor’ and teacher to the virtual exclusion of all the others. It would seem to make a nonsense of the apostle’s stipulations.

Indeed, in Titus 1, Paul made it clear that one of the tasks of an elder – an elder, please note – is to be able to ‘refute’ false teachers (Tit. 1:9). He has to be able to expose and confute false teachers and their teaching, and this involves speaking. That does not mean that an elder must be nimble with his mobile phone and call ‘the pastor’ so that *he* can come round and do the job!

I am not saying that all elders are equally gifted to teach in a public way. But all elders must be able to explain and apply Scripture to those under their care, and to refute false teachers and their error. The fact is, *all* the elders rule by their teaching. According to Ephesians 4:11, if there is any distinction to be made it ought to be between pastors and teachers, not between pastors and elders. But there is no distinction. There is no distinction, and no hierarchy within the eldership, none whatever.

As for financial support, Paul did not say *pastors* should be supported. He said elders who are separated to the work of teaching, and do it well, must be rewarded with double honour.

All this is a far cry from setting up a pastor as the president of the church and over the elders. It is perfectly right – necessary, vital, wherever possible – to separate men to the teaching ministry within the local church. *But they are still elders*. They do not move up a class by being financially supported. Moreover, if it is still insisted that pastors, teachers and elders *are* three different officers, then elders do not play any part in the edification of the church (Eph. 4:11-12), and pastors ought not to be financially rewarded (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Is this something the advocates of ‘the pastor’ system can live with?

I am not playing with words. No verse in the New Testament says that *the pastor* should be paid. How could it? As I have explained, no verse even talks about the pastor, let alone paying him!

Some claim to see ‘the pastor’ in Acts 14:23: ‘Paul and Barnabas appointed elders... in each church’. But, please note, the

verse speaks of ‘elders’, not ‘pastors’. Furthermore, note, once again, the plural. I keep on about it because Paul, on another issue it is true, makes much of the singular as opposed to the plural (Gal. 3:16). It is without warrant to suggest, as it is suggested (by Calvin, for instance),<sup>8</sup> that Paul and Barnabas chose two men, following which the church indicated by show of hands which of the two they preferred, ending up with the patristic notion of presidency, and then further distinguishing between the election of elders and pastors. What scripture justifies these claims?<sup>9</sup> Why should elders be appointed in one way, but pastors in another? Calvin’s misguided comments encourage the notion of a *single* pastor coupled with the spectre of hierarchy and clericalism, and all is based on a verse which does not even mention pastors!

Let me sum this up. The New Testament does not distinguish between a pastor and an elder. The fact is, as I have said, it never speaks of the pastor of any church. What was the name of the pastor of the church at Rome or Ephesus or wherever? Nobody knows, it has not been recorded. No apostle ever wrote to him. He couldn’t. He didn’t exist. I am not trying to be clever. A massive principle is at stake. Paul wrote to the saints, the believers at Rome, Ephesus, and so on. Furthermore, he never wrote to the bishop of any church. He couldn’t. He didn’t exist. Peter addressed the elders (1 Pet. 5:1-4), and Paul wrote to the saints, bishops (overseers, elders) and deacons at Philippi (Phil. 1:1), for example. He did not write to the pastor of the Philippi church. He couldn’t. He didn’t exist. In passing, note Paul’s order! The saints come first!

Here, of course, we bump into our old friend, ‘arguing from silence’. And this friend, as we know only too well, brings a lot of baggage with him, awkward baggage, including something like Pandora’s box – without, as far as I can see, the fabled compensation at the bottom. It *can* be right to argue from silence,

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<sup>8</sup> See my *Pastor* pp274-275.

<sup>9</sup> If Acts 1:15-26 is thought to justify it, is it not strange that no reference is made to it in Luke’s record in Acts 14? Besides which, as I have already noted, there are some interesting but unanswerable questions to be thought about in regard to the proceedings in the earlier passage, which are, in many senses, unique. For a start, they are pre-Pentecost.

yes. *But it can also be very wrong, not to say very dangerous.* I have fully dealt with this elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> so I will not digress to develop the point here.

Except to say this about it: Arguing from silence. Am I doing this in the wrong way here? I do not think so. After all, I made the claim: ‘The New Testament does not distinguish between a pastor and an elder. The fact is, as I have said, it never speaks of the pastor of any church’. Silence, yes. But in this case it is the silence which is the biblical point. Those are indisputable facts. It is for those who do think we should be talking about ‘the pastor’ of a church, to explain how *they* can argue *against* the silence. It is for those who so strongly advocate ‘the pastor’ system to explain why they cannot turn up any New Testament passage to explain the practice they staunchly agree with. And that takes me on to the next point.

Is this important? Well, things are very different today. Glaringly so! Almost invariably in my experience, Christians refer, not to the church in any given place, but to the pastor. ‘Pastor Bloggs is a good man; our friends go to his church’. Do they, indeed! It is Christ’s church, isn’t it? Why do almost all churches see fit to put ‘Pastor Blank’ or whatever on their notice board outside the meeting house, or on the website? Why do they usually make it prominent? Why is the pastor’s name put on the letter-head of the church notepaper? Why is it the pastor addresses the people as ‘my people’? Why does he frequently use a special language and talk about himself as ‘your pastor’ – when he asks them to pray for him, or whatever? ‘Please pray for your pastor as he goes to hospital this week’. Why does he frequently talk like this? Why do churches put up with it? Examples of this sort of goings on are legion. Yet nobody, but nobody – nor any church – in the New Testament talked like this. Why should we?

I realise my words will infuriate many, but I am convinced they need to be said, and I deplore it. Here are two examples of how frightening this unacceptable emphasis on ‘the pastor’ can be. The first concerns a Reformed Baptist church where ‘the pastor’ was away, and the service was to be taken by a deacon – a

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<sup>10</sup> See my *Particular* pp242-243; *Infant* pp178-187.

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man who looks upon ‘the pastor’ in the way I have deplored. This deacon was approached on the way into the meeting by a stranger who asked if there was a service there that evening. The deacon replied to the effect, No, since ‘the pastor’ was not present; upon which the stranger walked off. What a catastrophe that might turn out to be – on the basis that without ‘the pastor’ the church could not possibly hold a proper meeting. In what spiritual state was the stranger – was he seeking after salvation? Was he turned away, not only from the meeting but from... what? Who knows?

The second example concerns a letter printed in the *Evangelical Times*, October, 1994. The letter from ‘a sin-sick soul’ was a virtual confession of sin to ‘the pastor’ with the urgent request that ‘the pastor’ should pray for this ‘sin-sick soul’. The writer could not even address ‘the pastor’ by his name. The letter and what it represented boiled down to unadulterated priestcraft. Confession of sin to ‘the pastor’? Desire for ‘the pastor’ to pray? Could the man (or woman) not pray for himself? I am not suggesting that it is wrong to ask a fellow-believer to pray for one, but I do not think the above is as innocent as that! Christ was not mentioned once! And the man knew what was wrong in his life but instead of putting it right, he shuffled his responsibility onto God and ‘the pastor’. The letter, and its publication, was an offence to all those who reject Popery, or it ought to have been.

So this is what ‘the pastor’ business comes to. Pastor and priest are not so very different in spelling, and when men and women hold the kind of views illustrated by the letter just quoted, pastor and priest are virtually the same in more ways than mere spelling. Milton was right, was he not? Presbyterian can be priest writ large.

Paul, I am convinced, would have had no truck with such shenanigans. For a start, I do not recall he ever wrote to the pastor of any church. And let me remind you of how he opened the letter to the Philippians: ‘To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers [bishops, traditionally and footnote] and deacons’ (Phil. 1:1); note the biblical order. (See also Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1; Rev. 1:4). I

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know the seven angels (Rev. 1:20) are traditionally taken to be the seven pastors of the churches, but it takes a bit of proving in light of the rest of the New Testament. Of course, *if* the Revelation had been written 200/300 years later than it was... *But it wasn't!* Whatever view we take of the seven angels – and I have no more insight than anybody else – we must not read the 3rd century back into the New Testament. Rather, we must expose the 3rd century to the New Testament. How different to today's practice.

I am not kicking up a fuss about nothing. Reader, if you still think I am, I suggest you put 'pastor poems' or 'pastor appreciation' into a search engine. Did you know there is an annual 'Pastor Appreciation Day'?

I am convinced that priestcraft is at the bottom of all this. Or at least that is what it leads to. Overwhelmingly, I am prepared to concede, this is unwittingly so, but there it is, all the same. Those who are appalled at my language, should read again the history of the Fathers. And if the Reformed and evangelicals claim they have no thought of priestcraft, perhaps they might care to ponder on Spurgeon's words:

One idea which conflicts with [Scripture] is this, that a priest or a minister is absolutely necessary to assist men in salvation. That idea is current in other places besides the Romish Church; there are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their priest as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... The minister and the priest are mixed up with it...

We have, even in Protestant churches, too much priestcraft.

Priestcraft assumes to be the divinely appointed channel of communicating with heaven, and this monstrous pretence is so abominable that we would sooner have the curse than the blessing of a man hardened to such an imposture.

There is a notion among some people that the priest is to save them, alias the minister, for men easily in these charitable days make even dissenting ministers into priests. I have heard people say: 'Just as I employ a lawyer to attend to my temporal business, and I do not bother my head any more about it, so I employ my priest or my clergyman to attend to my spiritual business; and there is an end of it'. This is evil talk, and ruinous to the man who indulges in it... O

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sirs, do not be deluded by priestcraft and sacramentalism, whether it be of the school of Rome, or of Oxford.<sup>11</sup>

Or, I would add, of any dissenting academy, not excepting the Reformed Baptist variety. Substitute the word ‘pastor’ for ‘priest’ in those extracts, and you have my meaning in a nutshell. ‘Pastorcraft’ is nothing but ‘priestcraft’ writ equal. Let me show you what I mean:

One idea which conflicts with [Scripture] is this, that a pastor or a minister is absolutely necessary to assist men in salvation.<sup>12</sup> That idea is current in other places besides the Romish Church; there are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their pastor [priest] as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... the minister and the pastor are mixed up with it...

We have, even in Protestant churches, too much pastorcraft.

Pastorcraft assumes to be the divinely appointed channel of communicating with heaven, and this monstrous pretence is so abominable that we would sooner have the curse than the blessing of a man hardened to such an imposture.

There is a notion among some people that the pastor is to save them, alias the minister, for men easily in these charitable days make even dissenting ministers into pastors [priests]. I have heard people say: ‘Just as I employ a lawyer to attend to my temporal business, and I do not bother my head any more about it, so I employ my pastor or my clergyman to attend to my spiritual business; and there is an end of it’.<sup>13</sup> This is evil talk, and ruinous to the man who indulges in it...

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<sup>11</sup> C.H.Spurgeon: *The New Park Street Pulpit*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, Vol.3 pp268-269; Vol.4 p176; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* Vol.17 p243; Vol.32 pp31-32; see also pp450-451. ‘Oxford’ is a reference to the Tractarians.

<sup>12</sup> If anybody thinks that Spurgeon was (or I am) making this up, remember what Cyprian said about no salvation outside the Church. And since ‘the pastor’ and the Church are virtually one and the same... See also my quotation of the letter printed in the *Evangelical Times*. And so on...

<sup>13</sup> I have been told that my complaint – against unbelievers employing ministers to give them reassurance at a funeral for a fellow-unbeliever – is unjustified on the ground that all they are doing is something similar to calling in a plumber to fix a leak. As for the oft-repeated ‘taking the opportunity’, I am not fully convinced that funerals for unbelievers are a golden opportunity for preaching the gospel, nor am I sure how often it

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O sirs, do not be deluded by pastorcraft and sacramentalism, whether it be of the school of Rome, or of Oxford.

Sadly, many churches – most churches – repeat the error of the Fathers in this regard. Who today bats an eyelid when he is told that a church which is in between pastors is in one of its periodic ‘interregnums’? An interregnum, I ask you! ‘The period of time between the end of one reign or regime and the beginning of the next... a period of time during which there is no government, control, or authority’. Phew! Why does the pastor take the chair at meetings? Why is the pastor always telephoned when a member is ill, and so on? Why is it, that when two church members – husband and wife – were ill, the wife complained that ‘no-one from the church had visited us’? In fact, I have been assured, church members *had* visited – but not the pastor! In her eyes, evidently, ‘pastor’ equated to ‘church’. *Q.E.D.* Why is the pastor (or his wife) the clearing station for virtually all church news? Why is the pastor the mainstay, the king pin, the focal point of the church? If the pastor leaves, does the church really believe it cannot carry out all its necessary functions? Why, as soon as a pastor resigns, does the all-consuming business of the church centre on finding a new man, and without delay? Could somebody who is in the system give me a scripture which shows a New Testament church in such a flap? Reader, before you dismiss my question, think! How many would say that some important decisions must await the appointment of the new pastor? I am not making it up, I assure you. Some, who are sympathetic to what I am saying, can testify that in their experience the church actually functioned better when they were without ‘a pastor’, and the church was ‘forced’ into getting closer to the New Testament priesthood of all believers in which each part did its work. This view, however, in my experience, is the exception – the rare exception, at that.

Let me give one example in response to the anticipated howls of horror. Take a glance at those booklets which are published on

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is really preached at such times. Every man has to answer for himself, of course. By the way, I am not blaming the unbeliever for asking. My remarks are directed at an altogether different target!

the history of any particular local church. What do you find? Not what it says on the cover! What you find in most cases is not a history of the *church*, but a history of the *pastors*.

It reminds me of Calvin's misguided emphasis (of which I have already spoken) upon the institution, the structure and the officers of the church, to the neglect of the members and their priesthood as believers. Pastoral responsibility is a responsibility which devolves upon all the members, not just the man at the top. My stomach, for instance, knows when I have sciatica – and it doesn't like it. It doesn't shrug it off by saying: 'That's the responsibility of my head; leave it to him; nothing to do with me'.

Then again, it wasn't only the Fathers who thought there is no salvation apart from the Church and its pastors – the institutional Church, that is. Oh no! Calvin thought it. Calvin? Calvin had a grossly inflated view of pastors and the institutional Church, yes.<sup>14</sup> Listen to him, dealing with 'the forgiveness of sins':

In the communion of saints, our sins are constantly forgiven by the ministry of the Church, when presbyters or bishops, to whom the office has been committed, confirm pious consciences, in the hope of pardon and forgiveness by the promises of the gospel... This benefit is so peculiar to the Church, that we cannot enjoy it unless we continue in the communion of the Church... It is dispensed to us by the ministers and pastors of the Church, either in the preaching of the gospel or the administration of the ordinances [Calvin had sacraments – with all the grim overtones that entails], and herein is

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin: 'To those to whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother... The visible Church, let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, nay, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government... Moreover, beyond the pale of the Church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for...' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp281,283). 'The visible Church... out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation' (Westminster pp102-103). 'We believe that... this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it...' (Belgic Confession Article 28, [deafreformed.org/BelgicConfession.pdf](http://deafreformed.org/BelgicConfession.pdf)). Bearing in mind what the Reformed mean by 'visible Church' (see my *Infant* pp237-276), such statements are frightening. One question suggests itself: Which 'visible' Church is the church?



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manifested the power of the keys, which the Lord has bestowed on the company of the faithful.<sup>15</sup>

Pure Cyprianism! After that, how can any follower of Calvin complain if those who take his teaching seriously have an inordinate – unbiblical – view of ‘the pastor’ over the institutional Church? By the way, how can we find out which ‘Church’ is *the* essential Church? Is it the Presbyterian Church? If so, which one?

In closing, let me glance at a very common practice – but a very seriously misguided practice – in the churches. It is altogether too easily done, and too commonly done, to take New Testament passages which refer to apostles and to apply them to ‘the pastor’, virtually without pause. This is highly dangerous. We must never forget the obvious. The apostles were unique. Not in everything, I admit, but we have to be very sure of our ground when taking passages which speak about an apostle in a personal way and applying them to men today. To act like a bull in a china shop – or, to mangle another cliché, to barge in where angels tiptoe on eggshells – is to be in danger of making a direct link between an apostle and an elder (or a pastor) – whether or not this link is put into words. This is not infrequently done! And it can lead to apostolic succession and all that that entails – with a vengeance.

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<sup>15</sup> John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.2 pp298-299. As for ‘the keys’ (Matt. 16:19), see Eastwood: *The Priesthood of All Believers: An Examination of the Doctrine from the Reformation to the Present Day*, The Epworth Press, London, 1960 pp66-67,90, quoted in my *Pastor* p241.



## *The Sabbath in the New Covenant*

In a stupendous demonstration of power and mercy, God delivered Israel from the slavery of Egypt. But that deliverance, wonderful though it was, was only a shadow or picture of the redemption that, in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), Christ would accomplish for his elect. Israel was delivered from Egyptian slavery; in Christ, the believer is delivered from sin, law and death.

Within a few weeks of the exodus, on their entrance into the wilderness (Ex. 16:1-36), God gave Israel the sabbath as the special marker and sign of the covenant he was about to make with them at Sinai. Not only that, this weekly rest (along with the other sabbaths of the law) was to be one of the shadows of the redemption Christ would accomplish for the elect.<sup>1</sup>

In God's providence, it fell to the writer to the Hebrews to deal with the sabbath (along with all the other old-covenant shadows), and tell us plainly how it is fulfilled in Christ. From the letter to the Hebrews, we are left in no doubt as to the sabbath's place in the new covenant. As with every other shadow, it is brought to reality in Christ. The true sabbath is found in him, it is experienced in him, and only by those who have faith in him. Indeed, in the new covenant, the sabbath *is* Christ. Just as Christ is his law,<sup>2</sup> so Christ is the sabbath. Far from being a day of the week to be observed by all mankind – which it never was; it was a day for Israel and Israel only in the old covenant – the sabbath is a spiritual experience which is enjoyed by believers now, and by believers only, and enjoyed permanently by them from the moment they trust Christ. Christ is their sabbath; he is their rest. So says the writer of Hebrews 3:7 – 4:11. Here are the relevant words:

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<sup>1</sup> I have edited this material from my *Sabbath* pp71-83. For more, see my sermons 'Sabbath'; 'Sabbath Rest For Believers'; 'Christ The Believer's Sabbath' (sermonaudio.com).

<sup>2</sup> See my *Christ* pp258-261,509-510.

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There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works, as God did from his. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest.

While the sabbath, as a day of rest for Israel in the old covenant, has been fulfilled and abolished by Christ, there *is* a sabbath – a ceasing, a rest – for saints in the new covenant: ‘There remains therefore a rest for the people of God’. Before coming to faith, the elect, as all men, are bound in their sins, engaged in a futile working of an endless treadmill to get themselves out of bondage into freedom – and always failing. But, praise be to God, having come to faith in Christ, the believer *is* at rest, having been ‘taught by God’ (Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:33-34; John 6:45; Heb. 8:8-13; 10:15-18), and so having learned to cease from his works, and rest in Christ the true and only sabbath.

And this is true not only for justification. Sadly, covenant theologians try to limit the rest to that. But Scripture shows us plainly that the believer’s rest includes assurance which leads to sanctification (and in that order). Both assurance and sanctification are by Christ, through his Spirit, in the gospel – and not by the law. I will not confirm these points here, having done so at length elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

This rest for believers, therefore, most definitely *is not* a day of the week. It is Christ. The believer must keep his eye on Christ, looking to Christ, listening to the witness of the Spirit taking him to Christ. In this way, he will enjoy his rest in his Saviour. This is the teaching of Hebrews 4:9-11. This is the real, true sabbath, the only sabbath; namely, the believer’s present spiritual rest which is a foretaste of God’s purpose culminating in that eternal rest which all the elect will enjoy in and through Christ. The sabbath is Christ. The sabbath of the new covenant is the salvation he wrought for his people, the salvation they enjoy at this moment, and above all the eternal rest he is preparing for them. To try to use Hebrews 4:9-11 to talk about a weekly sabbath under the gospel is tragic. Throughout Hebrews, priest, sacrifice and altar are all nuanced into Christ. So why do covenant theologians persist in making an exception of the

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<sup>3</sup> In both my *Christ* and my *Assurance*.

sabbath, and try to impose sabbath observance on believers (and all men, even nations)? On what biblical grounds do they do it? As I have shown, they have none.<sup>4</sup>

Take the person spoken of in Hebrews 4:10. To whom was the sacred writer referring when he said: ‘He who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works, as God did from his’? Who is the person ‘who has entered his rest’? Who is it that has ‘ceased from his works’? Amazingly, many claim Hebrews 4:10 describes *Christ* resting after *his* work of redemption. They do not think the verse is speaking of the unbeliever coming to trust in Christ, and finding rest in him. Yet this is the very point of the passage! There is rest ‘for *anyone* who enters God’s rest’, since he ‘also rests from his own work’ (Heb. 4:10). That is, when we believe in Christ, at that moment *we* enter into rest – *we* are freed from the burden and toil of our sin, *we* are freed from trying to justify ourselves before God, *we* are freed from sin, law, fear and death. And *we* enter into rest. Hebrews 4:3 says so: ‘For we who have believed do enter that rest’. This surely speaks of the sinner who believes – not Christ! We enter God’s rest by faith (Heb. 3:18-19), by believing (Heb. 4:2-3); to enter this rest is to become one of the ‘partakers of Christ’ (Heb. 3:14). This must be speaking of the sinner who believes, not Christ. Furthermore, it is the disobedience of unbelief which keeps the sinner out of rest (Heb. 3:12-19; 4:1-6), and condemns him (Mark 16:16; John 3:18,36).

Could anything be more clear? Believers can look back and see that as sinners they used to toil in bondage. Whether it was the law, which held them in prison, ‘kept under guard’ under its prying eyes as the child custodian, rod in hand to smite (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:2), or ‘the elements of the world’ which held them ‘in bondage’ (Gal. 4:3), or false gods (Gal. 4:8), they were outside of Christ (Eph. 2:11-12), and ‘under sin’ (Gal. 3:22), ‘committed... to disobedience’ (Rom. 11:32), trapped in ‘the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will’ (2 Tim. 2:26), under the wrath of God (John 3:36; Eph. 2:1-3), condemned already (John 3:18).

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

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But, having believed, having come to Christ, they have been liberated from all such slavery and misery, having died to the law (Rom. 7:4-6; Gal. 2:19-20). As the apostle declares: 'You were the slaves of sin yet you... [have] been set free' (Rom. 6:17-18). How many scriptures speak of this rest, this liberty, this freedom from sin, law and death, this ceasing from works! Here is but a selection:

If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed... It is finished (John 8:31-32,36; 19:30).

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord... Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace... But God be thanked, that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness... But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life... For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out: 'Abba, Father'... Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us... Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1; 6:11,14,17-18,22; 8:15,33-34; 15:13).

God has called us to peace (1 Cor. 7:15).

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:17).

So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. For freedom Christ has made us free... For you, brethren, have been called to liberty (Gal. 4:31; 5:1,13).

[Christ] himself is our peace... making peace... And he came and preached peace (Eph. 2:14-17).

In short, instead of labouring under the old covenant, in bondage to sin, the flesh and the law, the believer in Christ is in the new covenant, free, at liberty, at peace, enjoying ease of conscience, knowing he is perfectly sinless in the sight of God, beyond all

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risk of condemnation (Rom. 5:1; 8:1; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:14). And he *rests* in it.<sup>5</sup>

I know I repeat myself, and that this annoys some, but I cannot refrain here. This glorious truth needs to be shouted from the rooftops. The believer has ceased from his own works. He has come to rest in Christ. Instead of keeping the weekly sabbath as a shadow of true rest, as did Israel, he enjoys real rest in Christ, he enjoys a permanent peace with God. He has the Spirit, the one who, removing his fear and bearing witness with his spirit, assures him that he belongs to Christ (Rom. 8:14-17,23; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 John 2:20-27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:6,9-11). He has died to the law, the killing letter, the condemning ministry of the law, and he is alive in Christ, he is alive by the Spirit (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 2:19; 5:18). And he rests in this assurance, because he rests in the Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

I say to all believers: ‘It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery’ (Gal. 5:1).

And I would address all men, not just believers: Listen to Christ. Hear what he offers in the new covenant:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden [who work to exhaustion, NASB margin], and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me... and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

This is the glory of the new covenant: ‘For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul’ (Jer. 31:25), precious words written in the context of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). This is true of every believer, now!

So much for the present sabbath. Think, for a moment, of the ultimate rest for the child of God; namely, the *eternal* sabbath. What must that be! Indescribable! This, too, is held out to us in Hebrews 4. Yes, although I reject the *limitation* of Hebrews 4 to

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<sup>5</sup> See my *Four (passim)*. I am not, of course, teaching sinless perfection. But the believer *is* utterly beyond condemnation in Christ.

<sup>6</sup> See my *Assurance* pp23-59.

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the believer's eternal rest, nevertheless such a rest is guaranteed to every child of God:

Behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying: 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'... These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger any more nor thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat, for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes... And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away'. Then he who sat on the throne said: 'Behold, I make all things new' (Rev. 7:9-10,14-17; 21:3-5).

And it will not only be the saints who enjoy this eternal rest or sabbath, 'for we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs until now'. And it does not groan in vain. It, too, will enjoy its sabbath, for 'the creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom. 8:18-23), when 'mortality' shall 'be swallowed up by life' (2 Cor. 5:1-6). For:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:6-9).



Consequently, as believers: ‘We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’ (2 Pet. 3:13).

It is true, of course, that ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him. But God has revealed them to us through his Spirit’ (1 Cor. 2:9-10). What are these ‘things’? Such things as these:

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 22:3-6).

And all is in and through Christ: ‘For it pleased the Father that in him all the fullness should dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to himself, by him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross’ (Col. 1:19-20).

This is what the sabbath was teaching Israel in the old covenant – if only they had listened. That is, the law of Moses, all the law, including the ten commandments – specifically, the fourth, the sabbath – continually pointed the Jews to the fulfilment of all the shadows; namely, Christ and the glories he would bring in with the new covenant. All the prophets spoke of it (1 Pet. 1:8-12).<sup>7</sup> It was *rest* which the repeated sabbath of the old covenant was pointing to. It was *rest in Christ* which the law and the prophets were constantly proclaiming – in every daily sacrifice, in every weekly sabbath, in all the sabbaths, in the settlement and enjoyment of the fruitful land of Canaan. Indeed, God had given a clear indication of it in his own rest after creation (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:3-4), and the promise of rest for Israel in Canaan (Heb. 3:7-19). Creator-rest, Canaan-rest and ceasing-rest typified Christ-rest for believers.

Sadly, the majority of Jews never understood this, nor did they enter into the spiritual meaning of their repeated observances,

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<sup>7</sup> There are well over 200 references to ‘rest’ in the Old Testament.

including and especially, the sabbath. They saw the shadow and clung to that – and frequently not even that! If only they had seen Christ, and trusted him, and entered the rest he offered! Some did; Abraham (pre-dating the law) for one (John 8:56) – and many others (Hebrews 11). Grievously, the Jews, by and large, did not. The overwhelming mass of the Jews who left Egypt would not, could not, enter God's rest because of unbelief (Heb. 3:7-19). The failure was still prevalent in David's time (Ps. 95:7-11; Heb. 3:7-19; 4:1-8). The same goes for the time of Christ on earth: 'He came to his own, and his own did not receive him' (John 1:11). Christ would have gathered them, but they would not (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34; John 5:40).

But by God's grace, others did receive him (John 1:12). In words pregnant with meaning, 'Simeon.. this man... just and devout', who was 'waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him', on seeing and holding the Christ, 'blessed God and said':

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:25-32).

This is true of all who receive Christ, and enter into rest by him. 'There remains therefore a rest for the people of God', which rest is entered by faith in Christ. 'Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest' (Heb. 3:12-15; 4:1-11).<sup>8</sup>

In light of all this, how can anybody think that the inspired writer would have encouraged believers, in such strong terms, to make sure they did not falter on the weekly sabbath! The notion

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<sup>8</sup> This is not salvation by works. The writer is making it clear that we must have all our hope fixed on Christ alone, we must abide in him, and never drift away from him. We must never allow ourselves to have any old-covenant shadow imposed on us (Col. 2:16-17), which, with respect, Iain, is precisely what you are trying to do. As for the eternal element of this 'rest', the believer must persevere, as Hebrews tells us repeatedly (Heb. 4:1,11; 6:4-8; 10:19-30; 11:1-40; 12:1-29; *passim*).

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is risible! The believer, having the reality in Christ, has no need of the shadow. He has Christ. And Christ is all (Col. 3:11).<sup>9</sup>

Listen to Calvin on Hebrews 4. He was clear that the writer:

Designedly alluded to the sabbath in order to reclaim the Jews<sup>10</sup> from its external observances; for in no other way could its abrogation be understood, except by the knowledge of its spiritual design. He then treats of two things together; for by extolling the excellency of grace, he stimulates us to receive it by faith, and in the meantime he shows us in passing what is the true design of the sabbath, lest the Jews<sup>11</sup> should be foolishly attached to the outward rite. Of its abrogation indeed he does [not] expressly speak, for this is not his subject, but by teaching them that the rite had a reference to something else, he gradually withdraws them from their superstitious notions. For he who understands that the main object of the precept was not external rest or earthly worship, immediately perceives, by looking on Christ, that the external rite was abolished by his coming; for when the body appears, the shadows immediately vanish away. Then our first business always is to teach that Christ is the end of the law.

As one hymn writer expressed it:<sup>12</sup>

*The sabbath day, that day of rest,  
Was sanctified and blest  
To point us to our Saviour Christ,  
In whom alone is rest.*

*That legal sabbath ended when  
Christ died and rose again;  
Yet there's a sabbath that remains,  
A rest that's found in him.*

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<sup>9</sup> Take Christ's discourse on the manna (John 6:30-58). The message is plain: Do not cling to the shadow; look for the reality, Christ; cling to him. Bearing in mind Ex. 16:1-35; Neh. 9:13-15, there is a powerful parallel with the sabbath.

<sup>10</sup> What Calvin says fits present-day sabbatarians like a glove.

<sup>11</sup> As previous note.

<sup>12</sup> Don Fortner ('Christ Is My Sabbath Rest', donfortner.com); the cover of *New Focus*, Go Publications, Eggleston, August/September 1999, Vol.4 No.2.

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*'Come unto me', the Saviour said,  
'And I will give you rest'.  
O weary sinners, cease from works,  
Trust Christ and find sweet rest.*

*Ah, sweet refreshment for my soul,  
The rest of faith is rest!  
Ceasing from works, I trust God's Son –  
Christ is my sabbath rest!*

And as Joseph Hart put it:

*To all God's people now remains a sabbatism,<sup>13</sup>  
A rest from pains,  
And works of slavish kind;  
When tired with toil, and faint through fear,  
The child of God can enter here,  
And sweet refreshment find.*

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

*This, and this only, is the way,  
To rightly keep the sabbath day.  
Which God has holy made.  
All keepers that come short of this,  
The substance of the sabbath miss,  
And grasp an empty shade.<sup>14</sup>*

In Hebrews 4:9-11, we have set before us one of the greatest glories of the new covenant, one of the greatest privileges God grants his people here and now: rest in Christ. Believer, enjoy it! Do not lose it by allowing yourself to be browbeaten into mixing

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<sup>13</sup> 'Sabbatism'. Hart clearly spotted the significant change the writer to the Hebrews made in Heb. 4:9. He had been using *katapausis* and *katapauō* ('rest', noun and verb), and doing so frequently, but changed to *sabbatismos*, 'a keeping sabbath, the blessed rest from toils and troubles', the only time the word is used in Scripture.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Hart: *Hart's Hymns*, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, 1965, number 31; Gadsby: *Hymns* number 358; *Gospel Hymns* number 1026.

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law and gospel, old covenant and new, letter and Spirit, flesh and spirit. You are in Christ. You have rest in Christ. So rest in him! When Satan, the flesh, the world, other believers or conscience accuses, remember and apply these words. Repeat them to yourself – aloud:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:33-38).

Do it again, replacing ‘us’ and ‘we’ by ‘me’ and ‘I’. Let me show you. Every child of God can, should and must say:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for me. Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things I am more than conqueror through him who loved me. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now that’s what I call rest! More, it’s what the Bible calls rest! And it’s all yours believer – now – in Christ. So enjoy it because you enjoy him. This is the real sabbath. This is sabbath observance in the new covenant.



## *The Two Covenants in Hebrews*

The two covenants are, of course, the old and the new.<sup>1</sup> Now, if any book in the New Testament disproves the claim of covenant theologians that the Sinai covenant and the new covenant are one and the same,<sup>2</sup> it must be the letter to the Hebrews. The writer of this letter makes it clear beyond a shadow of doubt that these two covenants are very different – indeed, that they are contrasted, mutually exclusive. Moreover, as he argues with invincible cogency, the Mosaic covenant has been abolished, having been fulfilled by Christ. Whatever view we come to concerning the believer and the law, therefore, we have to take full account of what the letter to the Hebrews says on the two covenants. In particular, all who hold to John Calvin's threefold use of the law must get to grips with what the inspired writer says here; or, rather, let his letter get a grip on them and their thinking.

With that in mind, before I get to individual passages, may I suggest, reader, that you read (aloud) Hebrews 7:11 – 10:18? May I further suggest that you read it again, in a version or two different to the one you normally use? To my mind, the argument set out so clearly in this passage is overwhelming. We have a new covenant, a new priesthood, a new order, a new system, a new sacrifice, a new commandment... new everything. Except, according to Reformed teaching, the law! And yet the law is the covenant, and the covenant is the law!<sup>3</sup> Whatever else is new under the new covenant, therefore, it must be the law! And the law, the old covenant, has been fulfilled by Christ, and thus rendered obsolete. Hebrews 7:11 – 10:18, I say, is irrefutable evidence that it is so. Please read it aloud.

Now for individual passages.

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ* pp196-199; see also pp476-477. See also my *Infant* pp78-113.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Christ* pp75-98,369-391; 'Covenant Theology Tested' (my *New*; also on the eDocs link on David H J Gay [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com); also on [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com)).

<sup>3</sup> See my *Christ* pp105-106,401-404.

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Take Hebrews 2:1-4, which reads:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?

Note the contrast drawn between what ‘we have heard’ and ‘the word spoken through angels’. The writer, clearly, was referring to the gospel and the law. As a consequence, let me start again. Note the contrast drawn between the two covenants, and note, further, just how stark this contrast is. And we are talking of the contrast between the gospel and the law, between the new and the old covenants. One covenant is ‘the things [which] we have heard... so great a salvation’, which is the gospel. The other is ‘the word spoken through angels’, which is the law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). The old covenant was concerned with ‘transgression and disobedience’ in that every sin ‘received a just reward’ or retribution or penalty. The new covenant is also concerned with sin, but instead of bringing punishment, it brings salvation. The contrast could not be more sharply made. The new covenant is far superior to the old, and that is why ‘we must give the *more* earnest heed to the things *we* have heard’, since these things are so much better than what Israel heard under the Mosaic covenant. This point must not be ignored or glossed away. The two covenants, far from being one and the same covenant – different administrations of one so-called covenant of grace – are shown by the sacred writer to be in clear contrast with each other.

Take Hebrews 7:11-22 and 8:6-13:

Of necessity there is also a change of the law... On the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God... Jesus has become a surety of a better



covenant... But now<sup>4</sup> he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, he says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt... This is the covenant that I will make... I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts...’. In that [God] says: ‘A new covenant’, he has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

If these words are not plain enough, I fear nothing will suffice. Once again, a clear contrast is drawn between the two covenants. On the one hand, we have ‘the first covenant’, ‘the law’, ‘the former commandment’; and, on the other, ‘a second’, ‘a better covenant which was established on better promises’, ‘a new covenant’. Christ, in bringing in the new covenant, has abrogated the old by fulfilling it (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 8:3-4; 10:4). Why do we have a new covenant, if the old covenant, the obsolete covenant, is still up and running? What place is there in the day of the new covenant for another covenant that has vanished away? In particular, how can there be three *new-covenant* uses (*à la* Calvin) for something which is obsolete, grown *old*, and has vanished?

Take Hebrews 9. The same contrast between the covenants is drawn yet again. The old covenant, the law, was done away with at ‘the time of reformation’ (Heb. 9:10), ‘the time of the new order’ (NIV); that is, by the work of Christ. And, as far as benefits go, the new covenant is on a totally different plane to the

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<sup>4</sup> Note the ‘but now’, a phrase of massive importance. See my *Christ* pp76-79,113-115,122, 160-162,165-166,169-170, 176-177,197,218-219, 227-232,241-248, 283,287-288,299-321,323, 378-379,426,543-555. In their works on the law, covenant theologians, in general, prove themselves singularly inadequate when faced with this recurrent biblical phrase. Advocates of Calvin’s uses of the law must let the full weight of the ‘but now’ bear on their covenant theology. In a sense, the phrase is the key to the debate on the believer and the law.

old. The first covenant was all outward, it accomplished no salvation, it made nothing perfect (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20; 8:3; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:21; Heb. 7:11,18-19; 10:1), and it has been done away with. But when we come to the new, how very different the story. God has always required blood sacrifice since ‘without [the] shedding of blood there is no remission’ (Heb. 9:22). Consequently, in the old covenant, blood was continually offered ‘according to the law’ (Heb. 9:22); namely, ‘the blood of goats and calves... the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer’ (Heb. 9:12-13). How pointedly this is contrasted with the blood sacrifice of the new covenant, ‘the blood of Christ’, ‘his own blood’ (Heb. 9:12-14). Note the double contrast. *First*, the many sacrifices under the law are contrasted with the one sacrifice of Christ (see also Heb. 10:1-4,10-14). *Secondly*, the blood of animals is contrasted with the precious blood of Christ (see also 1 Pet. 1:18-19). What conclusion ought to be drawn from such contrasts? ‘How much more shall the blood of Christ... cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason he is the mediator of the new covenant’. Furthermore, it was necessary that Christ should redeem from ‘the transgressions under the first covenant’ because the first covenant was useless to save. It was weak; it could not do the job (Rom. 8:3-4). Hence, it was necessary for Christ to come and work salvation. It was more than ‘necessary’ that Christ should redeem, however; it is the very thing which Christ *did* in bringing in the new covenant (Heb. 9:11-15). He accomplished redemption (John 19:30). In light of all this, how is it possible for covenant theologians to claim that these two covenants are one and the same? How can the weak and ineffective covenant – too weak to accomplish redemption – be thought of as an administration of the so-called covenant of grace?<sup>5</sup>

Take Hebrews 10:1-20,28-29.

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<sup>5</sup> I cast no aspersion on the old covenant when I say this. It was too weak by reason of the flesh (Rom. 8:3). Christ accomplished redemption under the old covenant, as God promised (see Isa. 40:10; 59:16; Rom. 10:3-13).

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things... He takes away the first that he may establish the second... The Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after he had said before: ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD... then he adds: ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more’... Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy... Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Omitting the ‘and’ in Hebrews 10:1, which is not in the original, the verse reads: ‘For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never...’. Once again, we have a contrast, and more than a contrast. They – the shadow (old) and the image (reality in the new) – were *opposed* to each other. See Colossians 2:17. And the contrast, the opposition, is between the law and the gospel. There is a large, basic, fundamental difference between the two covenants. And that puts it mildly.

The rest of Hebrews 10 goes on to draw the same contrast between the two covenants, and comes to the same conclusion as earlier passages, but from the opposite point of view; namely, punishment, not mercy. The two covenants both carried punishments, but since the new covenant is superior to the old, it is only to be expected that the punishments under the new covenant are far more serious than those under the old.<sup>6</sup> And they

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<sup>6</sup> Consider all the warning passages (Heb. 6:4-20; 10:26 – 11:1; 12:14-29)? I take these warnings as real, and apply them to sanctification as an essential mark of conversion (Heb. 6:11-12; 10:14) (see my *Assurance* p19). See John 15:1-8 in the context of John 13 – 16, Christ giving his law to his disciples. ‘Loving obedience to me, said Christ... is the badge of all true believers, the evidence of their spirituality: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). “Abide in me... By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples” (John 15:4,8) – and in no other way! “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” – and in no other way! – “just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10)... To keep the law of Christ is to cleave to him; to break his law is to desert him. Here is the proof. “Abide in me!”’ (quoted from my *Christ* p245).

certainly are: ‘Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy... Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?’ (Heb. 10:28-29). Yes, ‘of how much worse punishment’? See once again Hebrews 2:1-4. How can the covenants be the same? Their punishments are as different as their benefits.

In addition, do not miss the import of the ‘shadow’. The word is used by artists to denote either a rough outline of an object which they mean to draw or paint, or its silhouette. God gave Israel the old covenant as a shadow of Christ, an outline or picture of him and his work. And all the shadows of the old covenant were fulfilled in him. The New Testament is explicit, unequivocal, as a consequence. How wrong it is to give up the substance and go back to the shadow (Col. 2:17)! How strongly Scripture speaks against it (Heb. 8:1 – 10:18). It would be akin to offering sacrifices. Believers have Christ, they are in Christ, and Christ is in them – they must not cling to the shadow. This, of course, is because the reality is in Christ; the old covenant was merely a shadow of it. Who would want the shadow when he has the real thing? To go to the shadow, when in the new covenant the reality is here, is an insult to God! Thus the two covenants could not be shown to be more different and contrasted. They are united by Christ, yes, but while the old was merely the shadow of him, the new is the reality. The old covenant was physical; the new is spiritual. The old was concerned with the flesh, of the letter, being the condemning ministry of death; the new is of the Spirit, spiritual, bringing life and righteousness (Rom. 7:4-6; 2 Cor. 3:6-9). What a contrast!

Hebrews 12:18-29 stresses exactly the same distinction between the two covenants. Mount Sinai is sharply contrasted with Mount Zion (Heb. 12:18,22). The old covenant, at Sinai, was issued with burning and blackness, darkness and tempest (Heb. 12:18); the new, on Zion, is full of joy and happiness. The old brought terror, fear and trembling – even for Moses (Heb. 12:19-21); the new brought peace and salvation. The old said: ‘Stay away, keep off’ (Heb. 12:20); the new cries: ‘Come and welcome’. It is utterly

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impossible for these two covenants to be the same. Flesh and letter are in complete contrast to spirit and Spirit; condemnation and death are in complete contrast to life and righteousness.

Isaac Watts:

*Curs'd be the man, for ever curs'd,  
That does one wilful sin commit;  
Death and damnation for the first,  
Without relief, and infinite.*

*Thus Sinai roars, and round the earth  
Thunder, and fire, and vengeance flings;  
But Jesus, thy dear gasping breath  
And Calvary, say gentler things:*

*'Pardon and grace, and boundless love,  
Streaming along a Saviour's blood;  
And life, and joy, and crowns above,  
Obtained by a dear bleeding God'.*

*Hark! How he prays (the charming sound  
Dwells on his dying lips): 'Forgive!'  
And every groan and gaping wound  
Cries: 'Father, let the rebels live!'*

*Go, ye that rest upon the law,  
And toil and seek salvation there,  
Look to the flame that Moses saw,  
And shrink, and tremble, and despair.*

*But I'll retire beneath the cross;  
Saviour, at thy dear feet I'll lie!  
And the keen sword that justice draws,  
Flaming and red, shall pass me by.<sup>7</sup>*

The Mosaic covenant, fulfilled by Christ, was abolished by him. And since the Mosaic covenant, the law, has been abolished in Christ, how can it be the perfect rule for the believer? Does the believer live on Mount Zion for justification, and, at the same time, live on Mount Sinai for sanctification? We are expressly

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<sup>7</sup> *Gospel Hymns*, The Strict and Particular Baptist Society, Robert Stockwell, London, 1915, number 394.

told that as believers we have not come to Sinai (Heb. 12:18)!<sup>8</sup> How can covenant theologians maintain that the ministry of death and condemnation, the ministry of the letter and the flesh, is the perfect rule for the believer, the man of the new covenant, the man who is spiritual, one who lives in the realm of the Spirit? The notion is ludicrous!

On a personal note, when opening a discourse on Hebrews 12:18-29, I started by asking the congregation what mountain they are living on. I then set out the two mountains in question, and asked them yet again: ‘Which of these two are you living on?’ The answer makes all the difference in the world – and in eternity! Make no mistake! All of us are living on one of the two mountains – not both! Not both, I say again.

How anybody can read Hebrews and come away with the impression that the law and the gospel are the same covenant, or that believers are under the law as their perfect rule, utterly baffles me. There can be only one conclusion from a fair reading of Hebrews. Believers are in the new covenant, having died to the old covenant, which is now obsolete – it having been rendered so by Christ. Believers are not under the law. They live in the realm of the Spirit.

Do not forget the reason why the sacred writer wrote his letter to the Hebrews. He knew that these believers were in danger of going back to the old covenant, to the law. That is why he wrote – to put a stop to it, to challenge the doubters, to warn them, to instruct them in the glories and superiority of the new covenant

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<sup>8</sup> I would not press it, but Heb. 12:18 has all the appearance of destroying preparationism by the law, too. Believers do not live on Mount Sinai, nor did they have to get to Zion *via* Sinai! Preparationism? The advocates of Reformed preparationism say that sinners must be prepared, made fit to receive Christ, and that this is accomplished by preaching the law to them. Sinners may trust Christ, will trust Christ, only after they have been prepared by the law; that is, after the law has sufficiently convicted them of their sin. See my *Christ* pp51-61, 348-358; *Gospel; Septimus; No Safety; Eternal; Four*; ‘Preparationism in New England’ (in this present volume, and on the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

### *The Two Covenants in Hebrews*

compared to the old, and to encourage them to abide in Christ, and not go to the law.

How relevant all this is today. The message is clear: Do not mix law and gospel. Do not mix letter and Spirit. Christ is all (Col. 3:11).





## Reviews



## *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*

Dr John S. Waldrip

\*\*\*\*\***Life changing!** July 20, 2013

David H.J. Gay writes in a way most can easily follow to show that an error concerning the Mosaic Law has found its way through Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin into mainstream Protestant thought. Gay shows the error of this and points the reader ever and always to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Object the divine Means by which the believer's sanctification is accomplished. I would give this book six stars if the author had left out the final chapter of the book.

Terence Clarke

\*\*\*\*\***Deals thoroughly with Christian sanctification in Christ rather than Moses (Law)** 16 August 2013

David Gay thoroughly deals with the biblical concept and application of sanctification (imparted righteousness) which he reveals is in Christ alone. He demolishes the teaching of the reformers and those that follow on this issue that sanctification is by the 10 Commandments. He shows that just as in justification Christ is all and as far as the sanctification of believers is concerned 'Christ is in all'. This is anything but an antinomian approach but emphasises the power of Christ in the Christian's life. David's style is unusual in that it displays a preacher's approach to delivery but is fresh and direct. He does repeat his arguments throughout the book so that the reader should be in no doubt of them or misunderstand them. He introduces briefly his amillennialist view on Israel which, I find, is not argued with the same biblical thoroughness as the main subject. Recommended for all those who have a true interest in biblical sanctification and the whole work of Christ.

Moe Bergeron

\*\*\*\*\***At last a view of 'New Covenant' Sanctification** August 30, 2013

'Antinomian!' is a hideous charge that is levelled at those who do not believe in any use of Sinai's Law for the saint's sanctification. The fact of the matter is that anyone who subscribes to such a use, including a third use, of Sinai's Law denies the clear biblical teaching of Romans 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3. The written code and the way of the Spirit are opposed to one another. In the apostle Peter's 2nd letter and in the 1st chapter he explains New Covenant sanctification. Learn of Christ! David Gay's work is a must read for all who understand that the Lutheran/Reformed debate is not Law vs. Gospel. It truly is Letter vs. Spirit.

Mr Rod Angus

\*\*\*\*\***Insightful, courageous and clear** 27 August 2013

The Reformed teaching that the OT law, especially the 10 Commandments, is the Christian's standard and perfect rule for obedience, when not overtly taught, is nevertheless the incipient ingredient lurking in the minds of many believers. The belief that the Law is an aid to sanctification is a lie. The law dis-empowers and condemns, but never sanctifies. David Gay has written a unique book exposing this Reformed spell that has been cast over the Church. As he writes 'The same grace that saves... also sanctifies'. Grace wins the love of the heart in a way that the law never could. 'The Law of Christ' is 'a real law. Love is its goal, love is its motive'. My only real problem with David's wonderful book is his continued allegiance to the Augustine-Calvin Christologically deficient teaching on election. I have already contacted him over this, to which he graciously replied. I hope he sniffs this one out in the same way as he has exposed the lie concerning the believer and the law. Nevertheless, this is an outstanding piece of writing. Thank you David.

Amazon customer

\*\*\*\*\***Demolishes Reformed view of sanctification by law**

November 12, 2013

Best and most thorough book on New Covenant Theology I have ever seen. Completely demolishes the erroneous Reformed doctrine of sanctification by law.

Tom Knotts

\*\*\*\*\***The best book I have ever read next to Bible on the law and grace** April 30, 2014

This book was recommended to me by my former pastor and I have to say it is the best book I have read on the law and grace. Gay takes the time to break each and every passage down dealing with the subject but the beauty is that he goes beyond that and ties in things I had never considered. A great book.

James M.Kray 'Lewis Fan' reviewed *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*

\*\*\*\*\***So good, I read it 2 times in a row** June 27, 2014

A real challenge to the typical 'use the Law for your sanctification' view held in most Reformed circles. Very readable style too. I wonder how many are trapped in their doctrinal statements and/or confessions. Have you ever noticed that Paul never says 'Walk in the Law'? and this by an ex-Pharisee! I bought the Kindle AND the paperback.

James M.Kray 'Lewis Fan'

\*\*\*\*\***A Very Good Presentation on Law/Gospel** August 13, 2014

This book will get you thinking hard about the Law/Gospel relationship. If you are Reformed or think that the Law of Moses can be broken down into civil, ceremonial and moral, think again. Even non-Reformed have adopted this 3 way division. So good, I had to read it two times in a row.

Audio book (may be downloaded from [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com))

JamesC. (Fallbrook, CA)

**Great Audio Book!** August 29, 2014

Thank you for providing this free audio book. I am benefiting greatly from the material in it. It is eye-opening – as radical as the biblical doctrine of election. I am seeing things that I once glossed over. Coming out of Way of the Master evangelism and Reformed thinking, the information in this book is causing a welcomed paradigm shift for me.

J. Duncan

\*\*\*\*\***Great!** October 7, 2014

I am becoming very impressed with Gay's writing. He uses and quotes a wide array of sources (demonstrating he is well versed with differing viewpoints), and most importantly, allows the Bible to guide his thinking. This book is largely a refutation of Covenant Theology, though Gay is not a dispensationalist (see last chapter). He mentions that, while he doesn't prefer to be labelled, many have said he would fit under 'New-Covenant Theology' in his biblical theology. I would agree. I was especially impressed by his demonstration of the new covenant along with its 'law' being the 'Law of Christ.' Many strong points are made demonstrating this is not simply the 'moral law' such as many covenant theologians (including 1689 Baptist federalists) hold. However, the bulk of the book was geared towards proving the subtitle of the book, that sanctification does not come through the law, as taught by Calvin and many of the reformers. But, in case that last sentence was misleading, Gay believes (though I can't remember if it was explicitly stated) in the doctrines of grace (5 points of 'Calvinism'), although this doesn't have a major purpose in the book. A tremendous read for just \$1. I am looking forward to checking out more of his books, as most centre around this topic.

James

\*\*\*\*\***Paradigm-Shifting book!** October 14, 2014

I listened to the audio book on sermonaudio. This book really threw me for a loop since I was heavy into the Way of the Master 'Have you kept the 10 commandments?' Evangelism. It was so revolutionary to my thinking that I was left questioning what I really believed. The information helped tear my focus from the Law onto where it should be – Christ. The author does an excellent job of backing up his claims from Scripture. Through the author, the Spirit revealed to me things that were plain as day. I highly recommend this book.

