

FOUR 'ANTINOMIANS' TRIED AND VINDICATED

Reformed writers, in their church histories and volumes on the law and antinomianism, almost invariably vilify the men whose works are annotated in this publication. It has been so ever since the 1640s, and it is still going on today: the works of these men are dismissed as heretical and highly dangerous. So why has David Gay published this book? Because he could not more strongly disagree with the Reformed! Even so, reader, intending no patronisation, just in case you have never come across Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton and John Saltmarsh, he feels it only right to caution you: it is very likely that many would advise you to have nothing to do with this volume. You have been warned! Anticipating this, Gay responds thus:

*Of course, reader, if, without looking into the matter for yourself, you are prepared to accept the verdict of the aforesaid Reformed writers, then this book is not for you. If, however, having read the small print, you are still disposed to take the risk, read on. If you do, and if your experience is anything like mine, your heart will be warmed. Your eyes will be opened to what you have been missing. In perusing the works of these four 'antinomians', I have found Christ, and the free grace of God in justification, set before me in a way I had not known before. As a consequence, I have come to realise that, as a believer, being in Christ makes me far richer than ever I had thought. For decades, I have had a dry, technical, academic – altogether too low and impoverished – view of justification. I simply had not realised how vast a treasure we believers have in Christ's free justification of us. Time and again, of course, I had sung: 'How vast the treasure we possess' and 'How vast the benefits divine which we in Christ possess!', but I had simply not appreciated what I was singing about! In producing this volume, that has been changed; permanently, I hope. What is more, I have found these four men, as the New Testament, repeatedly calling me to godliness. But – and here's the rub – I have found them telling me again and again that sanctification is not by the law. No! They have one theme, the theme of the New Testament. Which is? Christ is all! These men have driven me to Christ, and made me see that I must look to him – not to the law, not to my works, but to Christ – for everything: for justification, sanctification, assurance and glorification. **And for this these men should be commended, not vilified.** In publishing this volume, therefore, besides doing good to others, I hope I have gone some way towards repaying the great debt I owe them.*

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Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated

*Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton
and John Saltmarsh*

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out (John 6:37)

By one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:14)

David H.J.Gay

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Scripture quotations, unless otherwise stated,
are from the New King James Version

We... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified... I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ... I do not set aside the grace of God

Galatians 2:15-21

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ... 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... 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... 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 of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me 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

Romans 6:14; 7:4-6; 8:1-4

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Glossary

Duty faith is the biblical doctrine that it is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility of all sinners to trust Christ, even though they have no ability to comply. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe.

The free offer is the biblical doctrine that, even though Christ's atonement was neither intended for all, nor accomplished for all, we must invite all sinners to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, promising them salvation if they do.

A **hyper-Calvinist** does not hold with the free offer or duty faith. Some hyper-Calvinists are knowingly so, but many are 'incipient', unwitting or *de facto* hyper-Calvinists; that is, while they accept the principles of the free offer, in practice they fail to preach it.

Justification. The elect are justified in God's decree in eternity, justified with and in Christ in his death on the cross and in his resurrection, but only actually justified when they are united to Christ by faith. In fact, the complete justification of the elect will only take place in eternity when they are glorified in and with Christ for ever.

According to hyper-Calvinists, a **sensible** or **seeking sinner** is a regenerate sinner who, conscious of his sin and need of salvation, repents, and desires Christ. He is not trusting Christ, however. Even so, such a sinner is demonstrating that he must be elect. Although I use the term – I have to, since it is ubiquitous in the literature – I do not think the Bible warrants us to speak of such a sinner, certainly not as denominated by hyper-Calvinists. How such a sinner can be repentant and desirous of Christ – without trusting him – beats me, I am afraid. Those who use the term, 'seeking sinner', often misapply Matthew 7:7-11 (Luke 11:9-13) to the unconverted, when it is, in fact, a set of commands and promises to believers.

The hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of **eternal justification** is this: the elect are actually justified in God's decree in eternity, actually justified with and in Christ in his death on the cross and in his

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resurrection. When the sensible sinner believes, he receives the manifestation (confirmation, revelation, realisation) of his eternal justification, in his conscience. But he is no more justified after believing than before. He never was under the wrath of God. Whereas before believing, he had no assurance that he was right with God, he now has the felt sense of it.

Reformed preparationism teaches that sinners must be prepared, made fit to receive Christ, and that this is accomplished by preaching the law. Sinners may trust Christ only after they have been prepared by the law; that is, after the law has sufficiently convicted them of their sin.

Hyper-Calvinistic preparationism is similar to Reformed preparationism 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.

A **Sandemanian** thinks saving faith is nothing more than mental assent. If a sinner accepts the facts of the gospel, he is saved. To talk about the heart, or feelings, is to introduce works, and ruin the grace of God in salvation. Sandemanianism was developed by the Scots, John Glas (1695-1773) and his son in law, Robert Sandeman (1718-1771), more especially the latter.

An **Amyraldian** thinks that God intended the atonement to be general in that he designed it to be efficient for the elect but sufficient for the world, provisional for every sinner, sufficient to save them all – on condition that they believe. It is named after the Frenchman, Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664), who was taught by the Scot, John Cameron (1580–1625).

When I speak of the **eschatological** aspect of the gospel, I am referring to the New Testament phrase **‘but now’** (Rom. 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 (NIV, NASB); 16:26; see also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10). ‘But now’ carries enormous overtones. It refers to the massive change that God brought about in the coming of Christ, his death and resurrection, his ascension, and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The age of the law has gone. The age of the gospel has

come. The truth is, God, in time, works out his eternal decree to save his elect, and thus exalt his Son in their final glorification. God decreed the redemption of his elect – the purpose, means and ends of their redemption – in eternity, but he is accomplishing it in time, as a part of history. Adam, the promise to Abraham, the law at Sinai, the coming, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, Pentecost, the return of Christ, and so on, are mile-stones in this historical process which is divided into two great ages, two great eras, two great dispensations or epochs – before Christ and after Christ, leaving aside the eternal age following the second coming of Christ. Everything centres on Christ and his work. He is the watershed of the two ages, the climax of all history, especially salvation history.

Calvin promulgated **three uses of the law** of God. *First*, the law prepares sinners for Christ, and leads them to him. *Second*, the law restrains sin in the unregenerate. *Third*, the believer is under the so-called moral law (that is, the ten commandments) for sanctification.¹ Likening the law to a whip with which to beat lazy asses, Calvin argued it is the standard and motive of the believer's holiness. These three uses of the law have dominated Reformed and evangelical theology for the past 500 years or so, and to question, let alone deny, Calvin in this – especially the third use – invariably elicits the retort of 'antinomianism'!

The **Levellers** arose during the English Civil Wars. They wanted democratic rule by a wider suffrage, a fairer legal system and religious toleration. They put their views forward in their manifesto: 'Agreement of the People'.

And an **antinomian** is... Ah, well, that's the issue, isn't it? Read on!

¹ In this book, 'sanctification' nearly always refers to progressive sanctification; that is, the believer's (sadly, imperfect in this life) outworking of his (perfect) positional sanctification in Christ. If my subjects had included positional sanctification when speaking of justification, and differentiated that from progressive sanctification, but linking it to it, they would have given an even fuller picture of the believer's new-covenant experience in Christ. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12.

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It was the first day of the opening term (semester). Entering the room with purposeful air, the lecturer plonked her books on the table, moved round to its front, leant back – half sitting, half standing – her hands by her side, resting on the table. The conversational buzz quickly died away. The students looked up, open-faced.

‘This term we’re going to look at 19th-century literature. Anybody got any thoughts on the subject? Any thoughts they’d like to share with us?’

A young lady raised her arm.

‘Yes?’

‘I don’t like Walter Scott!’

A nervous laugh broke out among the students, followed by a low murmur of approval.

The lecturer slowly pushed herself upright, and, brushing the palms of her hands against her skirt, raised her eyes. ‘So... you don’t like Walter Scott’, she repeated deliberately. ‘Tell me... tell us all’, waving her hand slowly round the room, ‘what is it about Scott that you don’t like?’

‘Well...’. The young lady hesitated. She went on, a little nervously: ‘I haven’t actually read any of his works... But...’.

I wonder, I can’t help wondering, with the necessary slight change of accidentals, if there might not be many who could say much the same about Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton and John Saltmarsh: ‘I’ve never read any of their books, but I know they’re heretics, and their works are dangerous. They’re antinomians, aren’t they?’

Now... here’s a problem! Actually, there’s more than one! Who says they’re antinomians? And why do they say it? And what’s their definition of an antinomian? May I suggest a little experiment? Lock six theologians in a room; lock any six believers in a room; tell them they can only come out when they agree on the definition of an antinomian. How long would they be in captivity, do you suppose? How many different definitions of an antinomian

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would they end up with? Six? Maybe even more! For some, an antinomian is a hyper-Calvinist. For another, an antinomian is utterly lawless. For another, an antinomian is somebody who thinks the believer is not under the law of Moses, but is under the law of Christ. Another thinks an antinomian is somebody who believes that the more we sin and break God's commandments, the more holy we are. For another, an antinomian is one who is convinced that the more we break God's commandments, the more grace God can show us, and therefore the more we glorify God. And so on, *ad infinitum*.

Let me leave that for now. We haven't finished with it, but let's move on.

In publishing this volume, I realise that I leave myself open to misunderstanding and heavy criticism. Indeed, I'm sure I'll get it! Getting my defence in first, therefore, let me make it quite clear what I am doing in this book. I am concerned with the believer and the law – the believer both before his conversion and after; particularly after. *That* is what I am concerned with. Nothing else. With this in mind, I have chosen four men, men who have been bitterly, though (in my opinion wrongly) attacked as antinomians, and taken certain books which they wrote – works which have been unfairly written off as promoting antinomianism – and distilled those works in order to do what I can to clear the men and their works of the calumny.

In so doing, I have two reasons in mind. *First*, these men support what I tried to say in my *Christ is All*, and to a certain extent, enforce and enlarge upon what I said in my *Eternal Justification*.¹ *Secondly*, because these men and their books have been dismissed out of hand,² many believers down the years have been sadly unaware of the existence of these Christ-exalting works on the believer and the law, the volumes being allowed to gather dust on the shelf, unread. The church of God has suffered as a result. By publishing this brief distillation of certain of their books, I hope to introduce them to others, and so do good to a new and

¹ I will try to avoid constant references to my previous works, but the background to this volume can be found in both those volumes.

² Indeed, as I have mused, I wonder how many who have blackballed them have actually read the works in question.

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wider public. Indeed, I feel very much like the prestigious Ursidean philosopher, Жінніе-Же-Пoo, who confessed: ‘It isn’t much good having [discovered] anything exciting, if you can’t share it with somebody’.³

Of course, I’m not saying that these men were sinless. I’m not saying they were always wise and guarded in what they said and wrote. I’m not saying I agree with everything they ever wrote – not even in the works I have chosen. I’m not saying I agree with their stance on every doctrine. Far from it! Nor am I setting myself up as an expert on their lives, their works or their times. My aim is much more limited than that. All the same, it is not an insignificant aim. I am saying *of the works I have distilled in my book*: if this is antinomianism, then we want a good deal more of it, and quick!

The truth is, the lives of the four men in question were exemplary – as is universally admitted – and they should never have been called antinomians. That is why my title has the word in inverted commas. But it is not only their lives that need to be rehabilitated. The works in question, if they were known and read – and put into practice – would be of huge and vital benefit to this largely spiritually dry and barren generation. We need such works as these! We need such preachers as these!

‘Just a minute! What about their doctrine? If the men and their doctrine have been vilified so much as they have, and almost-universally written off by men of unquestioned eminence and impeccable Reformed credentials, can they really be as profitable as you have claimed?’

Well, reader, you must be the judge of that – but judge it for yourself, is all I ask. Do not take your opinion second-hand. If you read these works and find them unscriptural, so be it. If you find no profit in them, so be it. All I can say is, I know I have been blessed by them. What is more, if you do find them profitable, is it too much to hope that, despite the aforesaid critics, you will have the courage of your convictions and tell others of your experience?

Nevertheless, as I have hinted, I have some reservations about these men and their doctrine. Let me deal with these first, and in this way: I will now set out what these four men believed about

³ Winnie-the-Pooh *aka* A.A.Milne.

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certain controverted points in connection with the antinomian debate,⁴ and say where I do or do not agree with them. It goes without saying that, in doing this, I am being highly simplistic. An entire volume could be written on each point! Nevertheless, bearing that in mind, of these men it could be said:

1. Most of them were opposed to preparationism; that is, they did not believe that preaching the law was necessary, or the right way, to bring sinners to Christ, to make men 'fit' for Christ. *I agree with them in this.*

2. They did not accept Calvin's third use of the law; that is, they did not believe the law is the believer's rule of life.⁵ *I agree with them in this.*

3. Most of them held that faith follows justification. In other words, they preached eternal justification. *I strongly disagree with them in this.*

4. They had reservations about making sanctification the supreme evidence of justification. *In the main, in this I think they were right.*

5. Most of them held that assurance is primarily by faith and the witness of the Spirit. *I have considerable sympathy with them in this.*⁶

6. They held that God sees no sin in believers, no matter what sin they commit. This was, perhaps, the doctrine that most exposed them to the charge of antinomianism. *I think there is precious truth in what they said, but it needs to be carefully nuanced. In this, perhaps, they were not always wise.*

As I say, for preaching sermons and writing books in which they promulgated such doctrines, these men were accused of antinomianism. It was a slur. But the accusation is still being levelled at them. And it is wrong. Let me explain.

⁴ Immediately, I leave myself a hostage to fortune. How can I know what all these men believed on every point in precise detail? I am speaking generally.

⁵ As I will show, Crisp was somewhat self-contradictory on the matter.

⁶ For more on this very important point, see the Appendix.

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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 men 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 backs of doctrinal opponents! To change the figure, it has proved effective dust to throw into the eyes, and so avoid facing up to awkward passages of Scripture. But the slur has gained credence too often more by rumour and association than by hard evidence.

The fact is, antinomianism has had a bad press. Sadly, that press has not always been fair press. It is still the same. The word has been sprayed about far too freely. False accusation, sly innuendo and snide remarks abound, and from many who ought to know better,⁷ many who do know better. True, the word has proved elusive and remarkably susceptible to a variety of definition, but too often heat is more apparent than light when antinomianism is the topic under discussion. So much so, not only has the character of good men suffered, but – and far more serious – real gospel preaching has been dismissed with a quick slap of the label ‘antinomianism’ across it. And *that* is a tragedy.

That being said, true antinomianism has always existed. Some say John Agricola was the first to be called one, so-labelled by Martin Luther who coined the term when engaged in controversy with his fellow-German. But antinomianism started long before. Paul was accused of it (Rom. 3:8; 6:1,15), even though it was not called such in his day. And Jude had some very strong things to say about it (though it was not called such in his day); more

⁷ As one example, take John Gerstner’s suggestion that people like me sing: ‘Free from the law, O blessed condition, I can sin as I please and still have remission’, when the hymn actually reads: ‘Free from the law, O blessed condition, Jesus has bled and there is remission’ (‘The Antinomian Way of Justification’, ligonier.org). Does this kind of annihilation by association not break the ninth commandment? And is it not, itself, approaching antinomianism?

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particularly, he had some strong things to say about those who pedalled the evil doctrine:

Certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ... These dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries... These speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying: 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him'. These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

Peter also spoke of it – see 2 Peter 2, for instance. Oh yes, even in New Testament times, antinomianism was preached and practiced; the apostles hated it and did all they could to contend against it (Jude 3-19) and stamp it out.

Coming to modern times, as I said, Agricola was called such by Luther, who himself was accused of it by some of his opponents; Calvin, who attacked the Anabaptists for it, has himself been called an antinomian, as have many of his followers; Calvinistic Baptists have not escaped, nor have the Independents; the Puritans of New England did not avoid it, nor did their counterparts in Old England. Spurgeon was another to be called an antinomian, and rejoiced in it, but stoutly denied he was any such thing. The list of those accused

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of antinomianism, it seems, is endless. The accusation goes on, even until today.

*The truth is, **not** to be accused of antinomianism is the **real** concern!*

Let me explain what I mean by that. Consider this pivotal text: ‘Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more’ (Rom. 5:20). Paul’s startling statement ought to provoke an immediate response from an objector: ‘That’s all very well, but surely such teaching inevitably leads to antinomianism, doesn’t it? Have you thought this out, Paul? Haven’t you been irresponsible, to say the least? Think, man, think! What safeguards will your teaching raise against sin? More sin – more grace! Really! What bulwark will this raise against antinomianism? How will it produce holiness? Can a believer do what he wants, how he wants, when he wants, live careless of questions of sin and godliness, even saying sin brings more grace? Surely you need to spell out very clearly – and do it now! – that the believer is under the law for sanctification. If you don’t, antinomianism must be the result’. In short: ‘What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?... Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?’ (Rom. 6:1,15); or: ‘Why not say: “Let us do evil that good may come”? – as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say’ (Rom. 3:8).

Paul has one dismissive, short reply to all such talk: ‘Certainly not!... Certainly not!’ (Rom. 6:2,15). Perish the thought! God forbid! It is utterly unthinkable. But notice, reader, what Paul does not go on to say. It is his silence which is so important here, so telling. *He does not say that the believer is under the law, after all!* Certainly not! In fact, it is the believer’s very freedom from the law of Moses which leads to his deliverance from the dominion of sin, and produces a godly life! And that is precisely – precisely – what the apostle does say. Please read Romans 6, 7 and 8 aloud, especially Romans 7:4-6; 8:1-4.

Even so, *this* is the sort of question which Paul’s doctrine *must* provoke; that is, if this is what Paul was saying. Do we find such questions? We certainly do! A glance through Romans 6 and 7 will prove it. We know, therefore, we are drawing the right conclusions

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from Romans 5:20, because it is precisely this sort of objection and question which led to Paul's response in Romans 6 and 7. Seeing this is such an important point, let me repeat myself: to get the force of what I am saying, please read the entire section, aloud, and in more than one version.

The question in Romans 6:15, though bluntly dismissed by Paul, needs to be asked, and inevitably will be asked of all who teach scripturally on the law, since the biblical teaching on the matter sounds so startling: 'What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?' Legal preaching, of course, would never, could never, can never, provoke such a question. And this is as fatal a mark against it as anybody could wish. Biblical teaching on the law and sanctification – that is, gospel preaching – *must* provoke such a response, such a question, such an accusation. Sadly, those who advocate the biblical position on Romans 6 and 7 are dismissed as antinomians, but the fact is, unless a man can be accused of antinomianism he is not preaching the gospel properly. Truth to tell, the advocates of the law are legal preachers rather than gospel preachers, and their doctrine tends to outward conformity, not to say, legalism.

The point I am making is this: Paul met the accusation of antinomianism. Many others have faced it. Every man who preaches free grace will come up against it. Even so, the unjust accusation hurts! *Not* to get it, however, ought to hurt far more!

Coming to the substantial issue: the antinomianism, real and so-called, that we are faced with, started with the Puritans of the 17th century. Let me quickly paint the background to the four works in this present volume. The New England antinomian controversy flared into life in Massachusetts during the years 1636-1638, the main participants being Anne Hutchinson, John Wheelwright and John Cotton – all originally from Old England. Although I will say no more about it here,⁸ the ripples were felt back in the old country. In the 1640s, the Scot, Robert Baillie, who chronicled the Westminster Assembly debates, deplored what he saw as antinomianism rearing its head at the time. Samuel Rutherford was another to write against it and its advocates. Furthermore, the books

⁸ See my *Christ*.

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of Henry Denne, John Eaton and Tobias Crisp were cited in a petition to the House of Commons, and the affair reached the Star Chamber.

Now I admit at once that real antinomianism existed in the time of my chosen subjects. So much so, the Rump Parliament of 1649/50 felt it necessary to pass an Act to try to stamp out the practice. While I am convinced that the passing of laws will never make men godly – it is only the gospel made effectual by the Holy Spirit that can do that – Parliament at the time clearly thought such an Act would go some way at least to stemming the rising tide of antinomianism. Leaving that to one side, I quote from the Act in question,⁹ simply to show what real antinomianism is:

9th August, 1650. Declaration of 27th September 1649: Any person maintaining any of the opinions here enumerated, shall suffer six months imprisonment without bail... Whosoever shall presume... to profess that... these acts of denying and blaspheming God, or the holiness or righteousness of God; or the acts of cursing God, or of swearing profanely or falsely by the name of God, or the acts of lying, stealing, cozening [artful coaxing, wheedling] and defrauding others; or the acts of murder, adultery, incest, fornication, uncleanness, sodomy, drunkenness, filthy and lascivious speaking, are not things in themselves shameful, wicked, sinful, impious, abominable and detestable in any person, or to be practiced or done by any person or persons; or shall... profess that the acts of adultery, drunkenness, swearing and the like open wickedness, are in their own nature as holy and righteous as the duties of prayer, preaching or giving of thanks to God: or whosoever shall... profess that whatsoever is acted by them (whether whoredom, adultery, drunkenness or the like open wickedness) may be committed without sin; or that such acts are acted by the true God, or by the majesty of God, or the eternity that is in them; that heaven and all happiness consists in the acting of those things which are sin and wickedness; or that such men or women are most perfect, or like to God... which do commit the greatest sins with least remorse or sense; or that there is no such thing really and truly as unrighteousness, unholiness or sin, but as a man or woman judges thereof...

⁹ ‘August 1650: An Act against several Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions, derogatory to the honour of God, and destructive to humane Society’ (Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660 pp409-412) (british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56410).

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And so on... Well, here it is – in the raw: antinomianism. With such real (or approaching real) antinomians, both past and present, I am in total disagreement. I can say what I think of their doctrine in a very few short words. Such teaching, with its consequent practice, comes from the pit of hell. It will deceive thousands and harden them to the gospel of Christ. The harvest will be horrific. I abhor it. Let those who have the energy and time to ravage it, do so. Let them trace its errors and expose its consequences in the minutest detail. Let them tear it to pieces. I, for one, will not say a word against their action. Except... the truth is, I have only a little talent and, with the passing of each day, less and less time at my disposal, and I am determined, therefore, to cast my mite into this debate *on the positive side*. I want to draw wholesome and profitable lessons from this controversy.

And there is profit to be had!

My four chosen subjects were participants in the controversy during the 1640s. While many other works were involved, the leading publications were those by John Eaton in 1642, Tobias Crisp in 1643, and John Saltmarsh in 1645. Crisp and Eaton were the principal ‘antinomian’ writers, but under John Saltmarsh and William Dell so-called antinomianism flourished in Cromwell’s New Model Army. With the coming of the Levellers, however, and their drive towards communism, the antinomian controversy died down. For a while.

It burst into flame again in the 1690s, with Samuel Crisp’s republication of his father’s sermons – eight further sermons in addition to the fifty already published in the 1640s. Twelve ministers (six Presbyterian, five Independents and one Particular Baptist), men of the stamp of Hanserd Knollys, John Howe, Isaac Chauncey, Increase Mather and George Cokayn authenticated these sermons. Following the re-publication of Crisp’s works, controversy immediately broke out – Richard Baxter and John Flavel leading the attack – whereupon seven of the ministers tried to row back by saying they only signed to certify that the eight extra sermons were authentic! Hmm!

So much for the historical background to this present volume. By confining my attention to those days, I do not wish to give the

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impression that antinomianism – real and imaginary – died out three hundred years ago, but I have to keep my book in bounds.

The men that I write about have been defined as *moderate* antinomians. That is to say, they themselves lived godly lives, and preached for the godliness of all who professed to be believers. Indeed, they unequivocally demanded it, categorically stating that if a man shows no measure of sanctification, he is not justified – whatever his profession! As such, they were not *practical* antinomians; they were known as *doctrinal* antinomians. The fear was – by those who opposed them – that the latter would lead to the former. The answer is, of course, if so-called doctrinal antinomianism is in fact pure gospel, then we must have faith here as everywhere else, and trust God to look after his truth and his people. We dare not play at being Uzza and think we have to protect God’s ark (1 Chron. 13:9-10). ‘Let God be true but every man a liar’ (Rom. 3:4). We must preach the gospel as it is revealed in Scripture, and leave the consequences to God.

In my view, my four chosen subjects were commendably zealous for the free grace of God in Christ. They wanted to exalt Christ, and Christ alone. They wanted sinners to look to Christ for salvation. They wanted to encourage saints to look to Christ for sanctification and assurance. Christ is all! Take note of the titles of the works in question:

Christ Alone Exalted

The Crucified and Quickened Christian

Free Grace; or, The Flowing of Christ’s Blood Freely To Sinners...

The Honeycombe of Free Justification by Christ Alone...

Doesn’t it stand out a mile? These men were driven men – driven by the desire to exalt Christ in the freeness of his grace. In particular, they rightly stressed that both justification and sanctification are the work of the Holy Spirit who applies the person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus to the believer, and does so apart from the law. In this they were right. And for this they should be commended, not censured.

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Enough! By now, reader, I shouldn't be at all surprised if you find yourself agreeing with my aforesaid Ursidean mentor when he said: 'Perhaps the best thing to do is to stop writing introductions and get on with the book'.

Tobias Crisp was born in 1600, matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge, remained at Cambridge until he had taken his BA, after which he moved to Balliol College, Oxford, graduating MA in 1626. About this time, he married the daughter of a London merchant, an MP, and future member of the Council of State, by whom he had thirteen children. In 1627, having been a Church of England minister at Newington Butts for a few months, he settled at Brinkworth in Wiltshire, where he became a popular preacher. When he obtained the degree of DD is not known, but it was before 1642, in which year, because of royalist persecution, he retired to London. While at Brinkworth, he had been suspected of antinomianism, and as soon as his opinions became known from his preaching in London, his doctrine of free grace was bitterly attacked. So much so, towards the close of the year, he was involved in a confrontation on the subject with fifty-two opponents. Crisp died of smallpox on 27th February 1643. Robert Lancaster immediately published his discourses as *Christ Alone Exalted*. In 1690, this, with additions, was republished by one of his sons, Samuel, as Crisp's *Complete Works*. In 1755, John Gill republished the volumes, appending his own notes. And it was this last edition that was republished towards the end of the 20th century, along with another edition of selected portions. Benjamin Brook, in his *Lives of the Puritans*, describes Crisp's doctrine as 'spiritual, evangelical, and particularly suited to the case of awakened sinners, greatly promoting their peace and comfort'. Yet Crisp is, even to this day, constantly dismissed as a dangerous antinomian!

Tobias Crisp

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you

Titus 2:11-15

Tobias Crisp stands accused of being an antinomian. Indeed, he is notorious for it, being regarded as a foremost exponent of the error. What is more, in the 1640s so strong was the feeling against him for his *Christ Alone Exalted*, and because that work was having so great an influence, the Westminster Assembly considered burning it. Crisp excites strong antipathies even to this day. On the other hand, Crisp has not lacked judicious supporters who have thought highly of his character and works, and praised them.¹ But, as I say, the accusation of antinomianism has not died, even until today. Crisp himself, however, struggled to clear himself of the insult, denying ‘the foul blur of antinomianism’ with which he and his doctrine were mired. But as he said: ‘And no marvel it goes for such now; for in the apostle’s time it was accounted so... It was objected against the apostle himself as direct antinomianism’.²

Was Crisp an antinomian? No! I assert that categorically, despite the prestigious Reformed writers and publishing houses which continue to claim that he was. But I am not interested merely to clear this good man’s name. This study will be more than defensive; I intend to take the attack to the critics. I will show that

¹ Among them, William Twisse, John Howe, Elisha Cole, Benjamin Brook, John Brown of Haddington, James Hervey, Augustus Toplady, John Gill, John Rippon, William Gadsby and C.H.Spurgeon. Although Howe recommended Crisp’s book, he later admitted he had not read it, and he and six of the other original signatories publicly disclaimed support (Sell, Alan P.F.: *The Great Debate*, H.E.Walter Ltd., Worthing, 1982, pp49-50).

² Crisp Vol.1 p143. See also Crisp Vol.4 pp124-125.

not only was Crisp not an antinomian, but in those areas where he is accused of it, he was in fact a true preacher of the gospel.

I do this, first of all, because there is too little real preaching of the true gospel these days. Sadly, the recovery of the Reformed faith in the second half of the 20th century has not been matched by a recovery of the free way in which men in the past have preached the gospel. And the grievous consequences are only too evident all around us, I am afraid. For too long, we have suffered under legal preaching; we need preachers of free grace!

In addition, and in particular, I want to highlight the nature of the antinomian controversy, look at the criticisms Crisp faced on that score, and so provide further support for the main thesis of my *Christ is All* concerning the law and the believer.

Why Crisp? I take Crisp not only because he has been – and still is – accused of being a leading proponent of antinomianism, but because his writings are freely available today.³

By my support for Crisp, I do not for a moment intend to give the impression that I agree with all he said. Certainly I do not. For my reservations about him, see the Appendix.

Now to get to grips with Crisp and antinomianism. While Crisp made some alarming statements which, taken out of context, have enabled his critics to show him in a bad light, yet in many cases he was actually teaching the gospel, and doing so in a powerful, biblical way. I will bring this out under four headings.

First, sometimes Crisp was preaching to sinners and rightly showing them Christ's willingness to receive them as sinners, assuring them they need no preparation to be invited or to come to Christ. *Secondly*, sometimes Crisp was preaching for the comfort of the saints, rightly assuring them of their position in Christ, safe from Satan's power, far beyond all risk of condemnation. *Thirdly*, sometimes Crisp was rightly smiting down self-righteousness. *Fourthly*, sometimes Crisp was rightly setting out the doctrine of

³ Besides the publication by Old Paths Gospel Press to which I am referring, a selection of his sermons can be found in *The Sermons of Tobias Crisp with John Gill's Notes: Tobias Crisp Series: Issues 1 & 2*, The Christian Bookshop, Ossett, 1995, the publishers having added their own notes in places.

free justification, in order to convince sinners that no works of theirs can make them right with God. All this is pure gospel, and should be part of the aim of every gospel preacher. None of it is antinomianism, none.

1. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when he was, in fact, preaching the willingness of Christ to receive sinners as sinners; in other words, when he was refuting preparationism

Crisp was very free in offering Christ to sinners and inviting such to come to the Saviour. He ought to be commended for it, not censured! We don't have enough of such freeness in gospel preaching today! The way is free to sinners, he said:

It is a free way indeed, free for man, without any cost or charge; free, as he is a way to all sorts of men, none excepted, none prohibited; whoever will may set footing in Christ. There is nothing that can bar one person more than another from entering Christ as a way. I know, beloved, this seems harsh to the ears of some people, that there is no difference to be made among men, not only poor as well as rich, but that the wicked, as well as the godly, are admitted; that is strange. But let me tell you, Christ is a free way for a drunkard, for a whore-master, for a harlot, an enemy of Christ; I say, Christ is as free a way for such a person to enter into him, as for the most godly person in the world.

Such preaching left him open to attack. He met it head on:

But do not mistake me; I do not say, Christ is a free way to *walk* in him, and yet to *continue* in that condition; for Christ will never leave a person in such filthiness, to whom he has given leave to enter into himself: mark well what I say; but for *entrance* into him, Christ is as free a way for the vilest sinners, as for any person under heaven.⁴

In this, Crisp was right. Before I get to the main point, do not miss Crisp's proper emphasis upon the necessity of sanctification – *at the right place*. Let me spell it out: *after* a sinner has come to Christ, he will not, he dare not continue in sin; he cannot go on in ungodliness; Christ never converts a sinner without beginning to sanctify him. So declared Crisp. In this, whatever else he was, he

⁴ Crisp Vol.1 pp34-35, emphasis mine.

was not an antinomian! To accuse him of it is nothing but a downright lie!

But now for his main point. Note Crisp's emphasis upon 'entering' Christ, the invitation to come to Christ, being converted to Christ. It is in this light that Crisp's 'godly' must be seen. He was encouraging those who considered themselves the worst of sinners, telling them that they are as welcome as the most 'godly' – that is, the seemingly righteous, the religious, the respectable, the self-righteous.

The fact is, Christ came for and died for the ungodly, for sinners. Christ calls the ungodly. He himself declared: 'I did not come to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance' (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17). 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance' (Luke 5:31-32). 'The Son of Man has come to save that which was *lost*' (Matt. 18:11). 'Christ died for the *ungodly*... While we were still *sinner*s, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:6,8).

Now by 'ungodly', the New Testament means such as 'the wicked... the sexually immoral... idolaters... adulterers... male prostitutes... homosexual offenders... thieves... drunkards... slanderers... swindlers' (1 Cor. 6:9-10, NIV). *But it also includes the unbelieving respectable, self-righteous, proud, religious, and so on.*⁵ Christ came for, died for, and calls sinners as sinners – the ungodly. And Christ receives the ungodly as they are brought to repentant faith. Christ 'receives sinners' (Luke 15:2). I say it again, for preaching this as freely as he did, Crisp deserves our commendation. More, we need such preaching today. This is *gospel* preaching. Needless to say, once a sinner is saved, the question of sanctification is inevitable (2 Cor. 5:17)! But at the point of calling

⁵ Take for example the words of Christ: 'What comes out of a man is what makes him "unclean". For from within, out of men's hearts, come *evil thoughts*, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, *greed, malice*, deceit, lewdness, *envy, slander, arrogance* and *folly*. All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean"'. (Mark 7:20-23, NIV). A man may avoid all the gross outward sins, and cultivate, say, respectability, but fall foul of these inwards sins. The fact is, every man is a sinner (Rom. 3:23).

sinners to Christ, utter freeness is essential. Clearly, Crisp was a preacher who showed such freeness.

Furthermore, as Crisp went on to say, Christ does not leave sinners in their ungodly condition. ‘And such were some of you’, Paul reminded the Corinthians, ‘but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6:11). Nevertheless, sinners are washed *after* coming to Christ – *as* they come to him – *by* coming to him – not *before* they come.

How right Crisp was in this! And how this generation ought to pay attention to the good man at least in this regard! Those of us who preach need to emulate him. And those of us who hear ought to encourage and require our preachers to preach like him! We need this freeness in gospel preaching. In other words, Crisp was facing up to Reformed preparationism, and rightly denying it!

Again, take Crisp, arguing with sinners, seeking to persuade them to yield to Christ: ‘The gospel is therefore called the gospel, because it is glad tidings unto men... The poor sinner, he is a broken creature... he is a dead creature... That life now is reached out unto such a person, that is a dead person’. This is too free for some: ‘It may be you do suspect, saying within yourself, Christ is not my portion; I am not fit for Christ; I am a great sinner, I must be holy first’.

Preparationism? Crisp did not like it; he did not like it at all. And he was right! Crisp had his answer ready for the preparationists, arguing Isaiah 55:1-3. This preparationism ‘is bringing a price to Christ’. ‘I have had a law work. Therefore I am fit to come to Christ. I am prepared!’ Not so, said Crisp. It will not do! Crisp:

You must come without money, and without price: and what is this to come without money, and without price? It is nothing but to take the offer⁶ of Christ, these waters of life, to take them merely and simply as

⁶ The Christian Bookshop, Ossett, added their own note (Ossett Vol.1 n6, p48): ‘Careful reading of Tobias Crisp’s sermons will reveal that he did not offer the gospel to unregenerate persons’. Later they explained that he did offer Christ but only in the sense of inviting the awakened. This is patently false. In addition to Crisp’s words quoted in the body of the text above, consider this: ‘It is as sufficient for the satisfaction of a man, the

a gift bought, and this is sure mercy indeed: These are the sure mercies of David, when a man receives the things of Christ, only because Christ gives them; not in regard to any action of ours, as the ground of taking them... that we must bring along with us, that must concur that we may partake of this gift.⁷

Crisp knew he faced ‘cavilling’ for such preaching:

Some are offended that I should say Christ is a way even to the drunkard and to the whoremonger; and the vilest sort of persons have as good a right to Christ... as any... I know the objections of persons against what I have delivered... but observe, you shall find the whole strain of the gospel runs continually thus: ‘Christ came to save the lost’; ‘he died for the ungodly’; ‘while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’; ‘he received gifts for the rebellious, that the Lord might dwell among them’; and such like are the terms of the gospel, upon which Christ is tendered [offered] to our souls. Now, then, I say, to every afflicted soul, are you rebellious, an enemy, ungodly, an harlot, lost? Indeed, are you worse than enmity itself? if you are not worse, Christ came for you,⁸ while thus, though no better: he comes to tender himself unto you to take him, while you are thus, before you are any better... Well, but you will say, this is a way to lead men to a licentious course of life.

And so on. But he did not budge: ‘I say the contrary: it is the only way to lead men into a more enlarged way of holiness, than any way in the world’.⁹

What a statement! How true! The best way to lead men to Christ is to preach Christ and the freeness of grace. Not the law! No: the best way to produce godliness in believers is to preach Christ and the freeness of grace, not the law! How this needs to be preached today! Let the legal preachers cavil at it: ‘It will produce antinomianism; it is antinomianism!’ No! It is the gospel.

general tender of free grace and pardon of sin to all sinners, as if his name in particular were set down in that tender’ (Crisp Vol.3 p40). ‘To all sinners’ – not just the awakened! Such notes tell us as much about the publishers as they do Crisp. Crisp was right; the publishers are wrong.

⁷ Crisp Vol.1 pp37-38.

⁸ I would have preferred ‘such as you’. But, it seems to me, Crisp was addressing ‘sensible’ sinners at this point. Of course, Christ came for the sick (Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31).

⁹ Crisp Vol.1 pp43,46,47. This is the very point of my *Christ!*

Moreover, unless a man can be accused of antinomianism because he preaches like this, then he is not preaching the gospel as freely as he ought!

Arguing Isaiah 55:1, Crisp again:

God looks for nothing in the world of men; be they what they will, be they in the worst condition, no matter what it is, they are the men to whom Christ offers himself... Every one that has but a mind to come to him, every one that would take him, may have him... Though men have no hands to take Christ, yet they may receive him... God... will show pity and mercy to us, and reach out his Christ to those who have no hands to receive him, no faith to believe in him... Consider the conveyance in which he is made over to men... The terms of the conveyance... are only such as in a deed of gift, and a deed of gift universally exhibited and reached out... There is no better way to know your portion in Christ, than upon the general tender of the gospel, to conclude absolutely he is yours, and so, without any more ado, to take him, as tendered to you, on his word; and this taking of him, upon a general tender, is the greatest security in the world, that Christ is yours... Christ has reached out himself to sinners as sinners... Question it not, but believe it... He belongs to sinners as sinners; and if there be no worse than sinfulness, rebellion and enmity in you, he belongs to you, as well as any in the world¹⁰... He receives sinners as sinners.¹¹

How right Crisp was! The offer *is* general. The offer *is* free. Praise God it is so! Sinners, and only sinners, are invited to Christ. All sinners are invited and commanded to come to Christ. Sinners and only sinners come to Christ, and they come as sinners, and nothing other than sinners. But when they come as sinners, Christ then turns them all into saints. There is a vast difference between coming to Christ, and continuing in him. And Crisp was here dealing with the former, not the latter. The gospel invites sinners – not sensible sinners – it invites sinners, all sinners as sinners, to come to Christ: ‘God looks for nothing in the world of men; be they what they will, be they in the worst condition, no matter what it is, they are the men to whom Christ offers himself’. It was such free offers of Christ which got Crisp into deep trouble: ‘I know I may speak that which be offence to some, but I must speak the truth of the Lord,

¹⁰ ‘Belongs’ in the offer of the gospel, of course. Crisp was not saying that sinners are saved because they are sinners, even the worst of sinners!

¹¹ Crisp Vol.1 pp101,105.

whatever men say'. What was it his critics found so objectionable? Words such as these:

Whatever you are in this congregation, suppose a drunkard, a whore-master, a swearer, a blasphemer and persecutor, a madman in iniquity, could you but come to Jesus Christ; I say, come, only come, it is no matter though there be no alteration in the world in you, in that instant¹² when you come; I say, at that instant though you are thus [as] vile as can be imagined, come to Christ; he is untrue [a liar] if he puts you out: 'In no wise, (says he) will I cast you out'.¹³

Crisp, of course, was saying that no preparation whatsoever is needed in the sinner before an invitation may be given to such, nor is any preparation whatsoever required to make a sinner fit to come to Christ. He was right in this. And it was this that many did not like. Nevertheless he stood his ground, and rightly so: 'Must we be changed first, and then being changed, come to Christ?' he demanded.¹⁴ Of course not! In other words, Crisp was not speaking of the inevitable change of heart and life *after* coming to Christ; he was referring to the sinner *before* coming to Christ.¹⁵ As he himself had asserted: 'I do not speak this [sort of thing] to the intent that any should conceive that God leaves persons rebellious, vile and loathsome, as he finds them, when he closes with them'.¹⁶

¹² Crisp went too far at this point. The instant a sinner comes to Christ there *is* a change in his attitude; before he came he was an unrepentant unbeliever, but as he comes to Christ he turns from his sins and turns to Christ in faith. I cannot – dare not, will not – venture into a minute tracing of the exact process of regeneration, conviction, repentance and faith, but obviously there must be a change as and when a sinner comes to Christ.

¹³ Crisp Vol.2 pp17-18.

¹⁴ Crisp Vol.2 p32. See also Crisp Vol.4 pp225-232.

¹⁵ See Gill's note (Crisp Vol.2 pp17-18).

¹⁶ Crisp went on: 'But, I say, at that time, when the Lord closes with persons, he closes with them in such a state of rebellion' (Crisp Vol.2 p27). I would not use that last word 'rebellion'. In his effort to pull down preparationism, Crisp was going too far. I once met a man who, trying to magnify the grace of God, foolishly claimed God saved him *against his will*. Not so. Christ makes his people willing, submissive and obedient when he brings them to faith and repentance; this is the nature of saving faith. If Crisp had said that Christ closes with his people *as sinners*, I would have agreed wholeheartedly.

Crisp was well aware of the dangers of preparationism, and knew the target he needed to hit: ‘It is a common doctrine among the rigid troublers of the Israel of God, that men must have many legal preparations, and they must sensibly find [these preparations] wrought in themselves, before they may dare to apply Christ¹⁷ by faith for justification,¹⁸ otherwise their faith is mere presumption’.¹⁹ He illustrated the point. According to the preparationists:

Suppose a sinner has lived in all manner of licentiousness... before he may believe that Christ has justified him,²⁰ he must forsake and find... that he has forsaken all his former evil ways, and must be stricken with inward terror; and feel the pangs of the new birth, as they call it; and be, I know not how much or how long, (for their expressions intimate a strange depth) under the bondage of a kind of hellish conscience tormenting and racking them; indeed, more, they must be changed too, and find a delight in the law of the Lord, and a ready cheerfulness in obedience thereunto; and that not by a fit [whim, impulse, passing phase], but constantly, till they find all this and much more of a like nature. Their time of believing in Christ is not yet come.

What are the consequences of such an insistence upon such preparation for Christ? Just this: ‘All which, occasions so much fear, as keeps many poor souls in bondage all their lives long, suspecting still that the humiliation is not deep enough’. ‘All their lives long’, please notice. As I showed in my *Christ is All*, preparationism had a devastating, debilitating effect on men like

¹⁷ ‘Apply Christ’ and ‘apply to Christ’ are one and the same.

¹⁸ For once, Crisp got to the biblical position on justification by faith! Sinners do have to apply to Christ for justification; until they trust Christ, they are not justified. Crisp, as I have explained, mistakenly believed in eternal justification; that is, sinners apply to Christ for the sense, the manifestation, the assurance, that they have always been justified.

¹⁹ Crisp Vol.4 p226. This, to my mind, answers Gill’s vain attempt to limit the freeness of Crisp’s address to sinners in another sermon by saying they were ‘such who are deemed sensible of their rebellion and vileness’ (Crisp Vol.2 p27). Likewise, see above for comments on the publishers’ note in the Ossett edition of Crisp’s sermons (Vol.1 n6, p48). Crisp rightly offered Christ to sinner as sinners!

²⁰ Crisp believed in eternal justification. As I have already said, in this he was mistaken, but the fact is at this point he was speaking about conversion *as he saw it*.

Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards – *even for years after their conversion!* What did Crisp think of this preparationism business?

Is not this to put the cart before the horse, or rather to send the cart a going, and the horse must come after? [Is not this] to have men sanctified before they can be justified[?]²¹ If men must be thus qualified before they believe to justification, how can Christ be said to justify the ungodly? By this rule he rather justifies the godly... Is this not an adding of the works of the law to the righteousness of Christ for justification? If not, why may not a man be justified without all this addition? And if he may be justified without these works of the law, why may he not apply²² it?

Crisp knew the reply he would receive: ‘Some may say they make none of this [the] cause of justification, but [merely] preparatives to it’. He was ready: The fact is, he said:

They will not allow men to be justified without these works, and that justification belongs not to them, they may not apply it till it be thus;²³ whereas the apostle’s gospel is, we are justified by believing in Christ, for righteousness, without works... These men contradict the gospel of free justification by faith without works, while they not only require the being [existence, experience] of such works before justification, but also make them a main, and immediate ground of believing it; for they usually affirm that such who apply Christ²⁴ without such qualifications, [that] their application is groundless, and built upon sand; but being thus wrought upon and changed, the ground work is laid, they have a foundation, [they say,] and therefore they need not fear; as if any foundation or ground work for justification can be found, saving Jesus Christ himself alone.

What a perceptive man! What a mighty statement! Nothing must come between the sinner and ‘Jesus Christ himself alone’. Christ *is* all!

²¹ Nathaniel Ward warned the arch-preparationist Thomas Hooker 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’.

²² I would prefer ‘apply for’. Crisp’s eternal justification is prominent once again.

²³ As before, Crisp was speaking of conversion – coloured by his view of eternal justification.

²⁴ As before, ‘apply Christ’ and ‘apply to Christ’ are one and the same.

Crisp took the preparationists and their teaching to task:

He that has any ground to believe besides Christ himself, does he not make Christ imperfect, by adding some other thing to him? If they say they make not these works the ground properly, but the reason of believing, I answer that as there is no foundation, so no reason without [that is, other than, besides, in addition to] Christ of [better, for] believing. [The fact is, they argue]... that these works sincerely wrought in a person may serve as reasons that they do believe; but [this is wrong...] they cannot be reasons that they may believe.

Crisp drew attention to the outcome of the teaching he was opposing:

You will observe, where such legal observances are required to application of justification,²⁵ there is an hundred times more poring on such qualifications, than on Christ and his free grace; the thoughts, cares and passions are infinitely more racked and intense about *them*, than *him*; *their* absence, or presence, work more strongly by far on the spirit and affections, than *his* presence, or *his* absence; Christ in a manner is forgotten and neglected in comparison of *them*; almost all comfort, and all peace, stand upon *their* presence.²⁶

How relevant all this is today. Reformed teachers can be strident in their demands for a law work before coming to Christ – even before preaching Christ! They should listen to men like Crisp and not ostracise him. Sinners ought to be made to look, not to themselves in any way, but to Christ – and to do so at once and for everything.

Crisp realised the ‘old cavil’ would come: ‘Some may say, what use is there then of works?’ To this he gave the old, the biblical, answer: ‘The truth is, this gospel is the only establisher of good works’.²⁷

I must pause. What a statement! How right Crisp was. Here he is, flying directly in the face of Reformed teaching on the believer, the law and sanctification. What will make a believer holy? The law? No! Christ! For his ‘gospel is the only establisher of good

²⁵ That is, *in Crisp’s terms*, before a sinner may trust Christ. The biblical position is that the sinner’s coming to Christ is an application *for* justification, not *of* it.

²⁶ As I say, see my *Christ* for the experiences of Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards.

²⁷ Once again, my point in my *Christ*.

works'. Crisp hit the bull's-eye here! Again, I will come back to this.

Crisp had a word of advice for 'ministers of the gospel'. He warned them against:

This desperate shelf [reef] of preaching a different doctrine to the apostle's, which will swallow up all such [sinners?] mercilessly; and let us choose rather to lie under the heavy censure of men, with the apostle himself, than to lie under his curse, by giving the freeness of grace its own due dimensions, without stinting it to the pleasure of men, for fear of a licentious abuse of it. In Paul's time, men were apt to wrest and abuse free grace to libertinism, as now, yet he feared not to impart to them to the full the good pleasure of Christ for all that. Some while they are busy with the whip to keep off dogs, fetch blood at the hearts of children with their ceaseless cautions, and then rejoice to see them in their spiritual afflictions, which I think is an inhuman cruelty. Some say men grow very presumptuous by such liberty preached... I grant that we ought not to preach continuance in sin that grace may abound, which cannot be truly inferred from this doctrine; for there is a vast difference between Christ's showing grace [to sinners] in the worst condition, and an allowing of men to wallow in sin still.

Reader, do not miss the vital statements that are coming thick and fast. Note Crisp's reference to Paul. As I have shown, the apostle was accused of virtual antinomianism in his day, and men in New Testament times abused the grace of God, as Peter and Jude tell us in their letters. But none of this stopped the early believers from preaching the free offer, and the freeness of grace, without pressing the law upon sinners. Note also Crisp's point about the cruelty of Calvin's whip. See, further, how he was clear that, while no sanctification whatsoever is required in sinners before they are invited to Christ or before they come to Christ, once they have come to Christ sanctification is essential. This man an antinomian? The suggestion is ridiculous! He was, in fact, an admirable preacher of Christ and his gospel to sinners. We need more men of his calibre today!

Finally, Crisp warned all his hearers:

Beware of men that come in sheep's clothing, pretending to lay a sure foundation by laying it deep... while indeed they are ravenous wolves, tearing and racking poor souls, frightening and torturing poor consciences about the matter of justification. I speak not against the

utmost discovery [making plain] of the sinfulness of sin, to make it odious to men, but [I do speak against it] for requisites, and I know not what qualifications (besides faith in Christ alone) to justification.²⁸

This, I submit, is clear enough, and thoroughly biblical. Antinomianism it is not; pure gospel it is. And, I stress once more, we need to resist – and resist stoutly – Reformed demands for a law work before conversion. Let us be *gospel* preachers, preachers of free *grace* – not men of the law.

Crisp again: ‘But, some will say, men must be fitted for Christ, before he will ever own them’. How did Crisp reply? ‘All the fitness of persons to communicate or participate of Christ is their desperate sinfulness; I say, nothing but sinfulness is that which is the fitness that Christ looks for in men’.²⁹ In saying this, Crisp was not belittling sin or encouraging it. He was stating nothing more than Christ did, when he pointed out what ought to be the obvious; namely, that it is the sick who need a physician. As Christ went on to say, he came to be a kind physician to sinners, seeking them out (Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31). This, of course, did not make Christ a minister of sin or an encourager of it. The physician does not look for illness; he does not produce it; he looks for ill patients that he might cure them. So it is with Christ, sinners and sin.³⁰ Crisp was emphasising that it is not a *sense* of sinfulness which fits a sinner for Christ; it is the sinfulness itself. ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*’ (1 Tim. 1:15), not fit sinners, not sensible sinners, not believers. Sinners! Naturally, it is only those who feel their sinfulness who will come to Christ, but they must come as sinners. This is not splitting hairs!

Joseph Hart:

*Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, joined with power.
He is able, he is able;
He is willing; doubt no more.*

²⁸ Crisp Vol.4 pp226-228,230-232, emphasis mine.

²⁹ Crisp Vol.2 pp23-24.

³⁰ Crisp Vol.2 p24.

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*Come ye needy, come, and welcome,
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.
Without money, without money
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requires
Is to feel your need of him.
This he gives you, this he gives you,
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.*

*Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Bruised and mangled by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.
Not the righteous, not the righteous;
Sinners Jesus came to call.³¹*

Of all the many excellent things in Hart's hymn, do not miss: 'All the fitness he requires/ Is to feel your need of him'. 'Just so', say the Reformed, 'just so. And he gives it by the law'. Oh? Where did Hart say that? Hart ascribed conviction of sin – as Christ did – to Christ by his Spirit: 'This he gives you, this he gives you,/ 'Tis the Spirit's rising beam'. I see no mention of Moses or the law whatever. Forgetting Hart, where in the New Testament do we find any preaching, addressing Gentiles, using the law to prepare them for Christ? How would such a practice fit with the apostle's categorical statement in 1 Corinthians? Hear him:

Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

³¹ *Gospel Hymns* number 402.

Listen to Crisp yet once more, addressing sinners:

Oh, look upon the brazen serpent, the Lord Jesus; look not upon any other plaster but him to heal your wounded souls... Fix your eyes here, cast yourselves here, rest here, let the weight of your souls lean here... Oh, go not to Christ, as if there were not enough in him to answer your transgressions; that you must carry something else with you to him, that may be a help to your discharge.³²

Let others think and say what they will: I wish I had been hearing men of Crisp's stamp these past fifty or sixty years. More, I wish I myself had been preaching all that time as freely as he did. I ought to have been!

To sum up: Offering Christ freely to sinners as sinners, as Crisp did, assuring them that no preparation is required, telling them they may come to Christ – must come to Christ – as they are, is preaching the gospel as it ought to be preached. It most definitely is not antinomianism. Crisp, however, is not the only man to have been accused of it when in fact he was doing what every preacher ought to do; namely, offer Christ freely to sinners. Crisp, I say, preached the free offer. In so doing, some have argued he was an antinomian. They were wrong. He was not. Their comments tell us more about them than about Crisp!

What is more, please do not miss that, while speaking of the freeness of the gospel offer, Crisp was also stressing the necessity and inevitability of sanctification after the sinner has come to Christ. I cannot refrain from observing that to call this man an antinomian is either wilful character assassination or crass ignorance. It not only tells us of Crisp's gospel freeness, and his warmth in addressing sinners; it speaks volumes of the dryness and coldness of his critics.

2. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when he was, in fact, preaching that the saints will never be condemned

When Crisp said: 'Though [a believer] sins, yet he is not to be reckoned a sinner', he meant, of course that 'God reckons not his

³² Crisp Vol.4 pp39-40.

sin to be his; he reckons it Christ's... You have sinned [but] Christ takes it off [you if] you have received Christ... God reckons sin to Christ, and charges sin upon him'.³³ In other words, until a man comes to Christ he is a sinner, but after he has come to Christ he is a saint; that is to say, God sees no sin in him because, in Christ, he has no sin. Rather, he has had all his sins – past, present and future – washed away in the Redeemer's blood, and been clothed in his Saviour's perfect righteousness. This, it goes without saying, is an amazing doctrine. *But it is pure gospel!* The truth is, a believer, sadly, may still sin – grievously, indeed, he does, often – but he will never come under condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Even so, I admit Crisp's words sound alarming. Perhaps he meant them to be. Oh that we had such alarming preaching today! Our view of justification is desiccated by comparison.

We sing Horatio G.Spafford's words lustily enough; oh, that we might feel and enjoy them:

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

Crisp again: 'Though a believer, after he is a believer, sins often,³⁴ yet... God no longer stands offended and displeased with him, when he has once received Christ'. But as Crisp explained: 'I have not said, God is not offended with the sins that believers commit; but God stands not offended with the *persons* of believers, for the sins committed by them. He has [of course] that everlasting indignation against sin as ever [he had]'.³⁵

This is a vital distinction. In the believer's justification, he is absolutely sinless before God. *But not in his personal*

³³ Crisp Vol.1 p8.

³⁴ Crisp at times went further than this, too far: A believer 'can do nothing but commit sin... If he does anything that is good, it is the Spirit of God that does it, not he; therefore, he himself does nothing but sin; his soul is a mint of sin' (Crisp Vol.1 p8). 'Beloved, you must not expect to live a moment in this world, wherein some sin will not be committed by you' (Crisp Vol.3 p22). As I say, this is going too far. But, whatever he may be accused of, Crisp was not preaching sinless perfection.

³⁵ Crisp Vol.1 pp15-17, emphasis mine.

sanctification. The fact is, however, we today too often concentrate on the second of these two statements to the detriment of the first. That is why Crisp's words sound so startling to us. The question is of course: On which side does the New Testament come down? What weight is given, on the one hand, to the saint's perfection before God – as he sees him in Christ – and, on the other, to his present state of defective sanctification? It is not one or the other. It is both. Even so, there can be no doubt that the New Testament comes down heavily on the glories of the believer's justification, his liberty in Christ. And this truth about the believer's sinless state before God as he sees him in Christ is a treasure of so great a worth that the believer must never allow himself to be robbed of it. Of course in himself he is a sinner still – though Scripture never calls him such, calling him a saint.³⁶ The truth is, he really is in Christ, he is actually completely righteous in God's sight.³⁷

Here is another statement which some will find frightening; as it stands it needs correction: it is not possible, said Crisp, that sin shall hurt believers: 'For any hurt which sins shall do us, it is not possible; for Christ has made satisfaction'. And, quoting Romans 7:25, he declared: 'The apostle... thanks God... that sin could not do him, or others, any hurt'.³⁸ Whatever did Crisp mean? Was he saying that believers can sin with impunity? Was he encouraging believers to live carnally? Of course not! He was speaking of the fact that since Christ has suffered for his people, paid the price of their sins, and suffered the punishment for them, believers shall never come under condemnation; they are gloriously righteous in Christ. Once again, this high – but biblical – view of justification needs preaching today, far more often than it is. As I have said, we think too much of what we are in ourselves, and too little of what we are in Christ.

Crisp declared:

³⁶ See Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 1:1,18; Phil. 4:22; Jude 3; *etc.* Even though he uses 'am' in 1 Tim. 1:15, Paul may be talking of what he was before conversion.

³⁷ I will return to this important question when looking at the works of William Dell and John Eaton.

³⁸ Crisp Vol.1 pp166-167; Vol.3 pp113-114.

There is nothing [that] hinders the joy of God's people, but their sins; these, as they conceive, stand as a separation between God and them... but when they return to Zion, they shall rejoice in that they see that the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God has cleansed them from all sin; in that the Lamb of God has taken away all their sins, the scape-goat having carried them away into the land of forgetfulness; in that all their transgressions are blotted out as a cloud, and God will remember their sins no more; in that they are all fair, having no spot before the Lord in them... Why, then, may not a believer say as David did: 'The Lord has been very bountiful to me, that I may return to my rest'? [He can go on to say to himself:] 'God has done everything in Christ, and taken away all things that can disturb my peace and comfort'.³⁹

Startling as these words may sound to many today, Crisp was right. He was declaring the truth of the new covenant. Since God sees the believer only in and through his Son, he sees him as righteous as his Son. Always! As Paul declared: 'Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:25-27).⁴⁰

Even so, when Crisp said that 'the people of God need not be afraid of their sins', he knew he had to explain himself at once: 'Let me not be mistaken; I do not say, they must not be afraid *to* sin, but they need not be afraid *of* their sins; they that have God for their God, there is no sin that ever they commit can possibly do them any hurt'. He recognised 'some will be ready to say, this is strange'.⁴¹ Too right! And I agree with Gill: 'Such expressions should be disused'. Sin cannot hurt the believer in the sense of condemning him, true, but it damages him immensely. As Gill observed, it will 'damp his spiritual joy, break his peace... [It will] interrupt communion between God and him, dishonour Christ, grieve the Spirit, and cause him to depart for a season'.⁴² A believer's joy *is* lost by his sin – it is not simply a misconception on his part.

³⁹ Crisp Vol.1 p168. See the context (Crisp Vol.1 pp165-168).

⁴⁰ One of the main texts used by John Eaton, as we shall see.

⁴¹ Crisp Vol.3 p111, emphasis mine. See also Vol.3 pp114,135-137.

⁴² Crisp Vol.3 pp112-113. Gill wrote: 'Yet it *may* damp...'. I prefer *will*. See note below.

The fact is, Crisp was his own worst enemy. It certainly appears as though he liked to make his hearers sit up, take notice and remember what he said. After all he was a preacher, and there is need to use interesting and awakening expressions to serve as relish accompanying the meat. Preaching should never be boring, the ‘unforgivable sin’ for preachers! Don’t we know it today! But Crisp was too fond of taking risks. He was hooked on it. Take this:

Suppose a member of Christ, a freeman of his should happen to fall, not only by a failing or a slip; but also by a gross failing, a heavy failing; no, a scandalous falling into sin. Christ making a person free, disannuls, frustrates and makes void every curse and sentence that is in the law that is against such a transgressor; that this member of Christ is no more under the curse when he has transgressed, than he was before he transgressed.⁴³

This was a very unwise way of putting it. Of course, although sin can never separate a believer from Christ, it always spoils the believer’s enjoyment of the Saviour.⁴⁴ In any case, sin is sin, and the saint ought to abhor it; indeed, under the provisions of the new covenant he will abhor it; he must abhor it (Rom. 6:14,18; 7:4; Heb. 8:10; 9:16). And those of us who are preachers need to bear in mind that what people hear, and take away, can be quite different to what we actually said and intended.⁴⁵ Crisp seems to have forgotten, ignored or been unaware of this.

Nevertheless, the point is plain enough: Crisp was speaking of the curse of the law. And in this he was right. In Christ, the believer is delivered from the curse of the law. In fact, at this point Crisp

⁴³ Crisp Vol.1 pp130-131.

⁴⁴ Gill: ‘Sin often separates between God and his own people, with respect to communion, but never with respect to union to him or interest in him.. Now this does not suppose that God loves sin, nor does it give any encouragement to it; for though it cannot separate from interest in God, yet it often does from the enjoyment of him’ (Crisp Vol.1 p131). I would alter *often* into *always*. See also the note below.

⁴⁵ I was reliably informed that in a sermon I had told the congregation that it was perfectly acceptable for believers not to pray. What I *had* said was that my prayer life was a weak and pitiful affair. The ‘message’ received however was that if the preacher can pray so poorly and still go on, then so can we. We do not need to pray!

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actually adopted the Reformed position on the law: ‘I do not say the law is utterly abolished, but it is abolished in respect to the curse of it, to every person that is a freeman of Christ; so though such a man sin, the law has no more to say to him than if he had not sinned’.⁴⁶ Crisp quoted Romans 8:33-34, declaring: ‘Paul does not say that the elect never transgress; he confesses that there is transgression: but that which he triumphs in is, that though they transgress, there is nothing to be laid to their charge; no curse can come against them, nor be executed upon them; there is no clapping them in gaol for their transgression’.⁴⁷ Yes, Crisp was right in preaching that the believer is free of condemnation, but, as I say, he did not express himself with sufficient prudence. Nevertheless, this high note of the freeness and fullness of God’s grace in justification in the new covenant, this glorious redemption from all condemnation from every sin, is a note than should not be muted – as it so often is today. John Newton got it right when he spoke in unmistakable terms about his sin and the unbearable thought that God saw him as he really was. Nevertheless, as he went on to say:

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

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

*What wondrous love, what mysteries,
In this appointment shine!
My breaches of the law are his,
And his obedience mine.⁴⁸*

⁴⁶ Crisp was wrong on this, as are the Reformed today. The old covenant has been fulfilled and brought to an end by Christ in the new covenant.

⁴⁷ Crisp Vol.1 pp131-132.

⁴⁸ *Gospel Hymns* number 52.

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Or as S.Barnard wrote:

*No condemnation can be brought
Against the sons of God;
Christ hath for them a clothing wrought,
And washed them in his blood.*

*They righteous are in what he's done,
And evermore will be:
They stand complete in Christ the Son,
From condemnation free.⁴⁹*

And, of course, Augustus Toplady:

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring.*

*The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

*The work which his goodness began,
The arm of his strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet.*

*Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below or above,
Can make him his purpose forgo,
Or sever my soul from his love.*

*My name from the palms of his hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on his heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.*

*Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is giv'n;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heav'n.⁵⁰*

⁴⁹ *Gospel Hymns* number 472.

⁵⁰ *Gospel Hymns* number 553.

Let us not just sing it; let us feel it, let us enjoy it, and let us talk and act like it!

When Crisp told every believer that he ‘ceases to be a transgressor from the time [his transgressions] were laid upon [Christ], to the very last hour of your life’, he was making the biblical point that though the believer commits sin, Christ has borne the charge and punishment of them, and therefore there is no condemnation to the believer since he is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). ‘Reckon what sin soever you commit... you are all that he was, he is all that you were (2 Cor. 5:21)’.⁵¹ In this, Crisp was teaching that which is too infrequently taught, and even less frequently understood; namely, the union of Christ and the believer, and the inevitable consequence of it. But once again, Crisp was yielding to his love of the astonishing.

‘Suppose a believer falls into some scandalous sins, and notorious sins, it may be to commit murder and adultery together’. Will Christ ‘send him packing’? What was the point Crisp was trying to make? Was he preaching antinomianism? It sounds very much like it, but he was not. Not at all! Rather, he was preaching the glorious gospel doctrine that believers are free of condemnation, fully clothed in Christ’s spotless righteousness. He was not encouraging murder or adultery. Far from it! He was declaring the glory of the saint’s position in Christ: ‘Believers cannot commit those sins that may give just occasion of suspicion to them, that if they come to Christ he would cast them out’. Was he unwise in his expression? Yes. Very unwise. He was starting at the wrong end. If he had been dealing with a believer who was under conviction because of sin, and repentant of it, Crisp’s words would have been the right medicine. But to tell believers who had not committed adultery that Christ would receive them if they did – or to imply it – was playing with fire. And he knew it: ‘Let me not

⁵¹ See Crisp Vol.2 p77. I would add a rider to Crisp, however. The believer is in Christ, and his sins are removed, only from the time of his believing. Crisp, with his view of eternal justification, saw this in a very different way. But this does not affect the point I am making here: Crisp was not guilty of antinomianism by making such a statement. Rather, he was declaring gospel truth, but doing it in a provocative way, a too provocative way.

be mistaken in [what] I say; I know the enemies of the gospel will make an evil construction of it'.⁵² Too right! Was Crisp sailing too close to the wind? Yes! But antinomian? Of course not! As he said elsewhere: 'I am far from imagining any believer is freed from acts of sin; he is freed only from the charge of sin'.⁵³

Let me stress this. Crisp was not encouraging sin. He was encouraging the believer to maintain a proper, biblical, view and sense of what and who he is in Christ. I am afraid too many of us have lost this!

Or else reduced it! Note what Crisp said: believers should never fear that 'Christ... would cast them out'. He was right! Take these words of Christ: 'The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out' (John 6:37). This truth is commonly applied to unbelievers, assuring them that if they come to Christ, he will never drive them away (NIV). Glorious truth indeed! But we can go further, much further; indeed, we should go much further: 'The one who comes to me' – the believer – 'I will by no means cast out'. The Greek has the double negative – *ou-mē* – and is thereby much strengthened – 'not at all, never, never under any circumstances' – cast out, reject or drive away. Moreover, the context puts it beyond doubt: 'All that the Father gives me [the elect] will come to me, and the one who comes to me [the believer] I will by no means [under any circumstances] cast out'. Thus declared the Lord Jesus. And this is precisely what Crisp was teaching! So if Crisp was an antinomian...

3. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when in fact he was preaching that self-righteousness keeps a sinner from Christ

Here is another startling statement from Crisp: 'Righteousness is that which puts a man away from Christ'.⁵⁴ Whatever did he have in mind? Crisp was speaking of sinners coming to Christ. He had already made his meaning clear: 'Men think [their] righteousness brings them near to Christ'. They are wrong, of course. Quite the reverse! Such 'righteousness is that which puts a man away from

⁵² Crisp Vol.2 pp28-29. See also Crisp Vol.1 pp130-133,178-181.

⁵³ Crisp Vol.1 p10.

⁵⁴ Crisp Vol.1 p104.

Christ'. Crisp went on almost at once: 'Doing duty and service to expect acceptance with Christ, or participation in Christ, this kind of righteousness is the only separation between Christ and a people'.⁵⁵ This, reader, is not antinomianism. Indeed, it is nothing less than what Christ meant when he declared: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance' (Matt. 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32). The sinner's addiction to attempting to appease God by good works has to be broken; he has to come to Christ empty-handed and receive all from Christ without his (the sinner's) 'good' works. This is what Crisp was aiming for. As was Toplady: 'Nothing in my hand I bring'.⁵⁶ But this is one of the hardest things to get sinners to mean and to do. Of course, there is a right way of asking: 'What must I do to be saved?' (John 6:28; Acts 2:37; 16:30; 22:10), but, the fact is, sinners are ingrained workers when it comes to salvation. And it has to be broken.

Consequently, how needful is Crisp's kind of preaching today! Let me give just one example of where it is sorely needed. Not a few unbelievers attend meetings for years, yet remain in a state of unbelief. All too often they are 'confronted' – what a misuse of the English language! – smoothed down, rather, both with the preaching and, above all, an atmosphere of inclusivism, being made to feel welcome, completely at home and at ease, at all costs – and that cost, not least, being their eternal damnation. I do not see how such complacent sinners could long continue under Crisp's preaching. They would either be convicted and converted, or else they would leave in high dudgeon. Or, if they did remain unconverted, at the last day they could never accuse Crisp of pulling the wool over their eyes.

4. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when he was, in fact, preaching that justification is all of God's free grace

When Crisp stated: 'Before a believer confesses his sin, he may be as certain of the pardon of it, as after confession',⁵⁷ he did not mean

⁵⁵ Crisp Vol.1 p104.

⁵⁶ *Gospel Hymns* number 273.

⁵⁷ Crisp Vol.2 p29.

that confession is not important, not essential. As he had previously said: 'I deny not, but acknowledge, when a believer sins, he must confess these sins'.⁵⁸ The point is, the believer must never think that the confession of his sin is the basis on which Christ forgives him, nor the cause of that forgiveness. As Crisp himself immediately added: 'What is the ground of the pardon of sin?... What is it that discharges a believer?' Is it the sinner's confession? Certainly not! 'Pardon'? 'The fountain of it is in God himself... Pardon of sin depends upon the unchangeableness of God... [and] is revealed in the word of grace'. As Crisp thundered, rhetorically: 'Is pardon... held out to sinners, as they are sinners?'.⁵⁹ Of course it is! And just as he preached the free gospel to sinners as sinners, so Crisp continued with the saints. God pardons sin for Christ's sake – whether we are talking about the sinner *before* conversion, or the saint *after* conversion. It is all of grace, grace which is absolutely and amazingly free.

In saying such things, Crisp was not preaching antinomianism. But he was not alone in being accused of it. As Michael Watts records: 'John Rogers', an Independent in Dublin in the early 1650s, 'saw the danger... [of] the legalism which threatened... converts' under an opposing system, but 'in emphasising "the sweet doctrine of free grace" which made salvation independent of any action of the believer, Rogers opened himself to the accusation of antinomianism'.⁶⁰

Reader, we desperately need preachers who will stress 'the sweet doctrine of free grace'. We need preachers who leave themselves open to the charge of antinomianism for doing it. We need it for sinners; they will be saved by no other means. We need it as believers; we will be sanctified by no other means. If we are preachers, let us preach free justification more and more, and do so in all its biblical freeness. Let us be men of the new covenant, gospel preachers! Let us not fear the harsh remarks of those who will ostracise us as antinomians for our pains. Indeed, if such

⁵⁸ Crisp Vol.2 p29.

⁵⁹ Crisp Vol.2 p30.

⁶⁰ Watts, Michael R.: *The Dissenters*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, pp98,179,183.

preaching makes us ‘vile’ in the eyes of some, then let David’s reply to Michal be our response: ‘I will be yet more vile’ (2 Sam. 6:22, AV).

But, even so, was Crisp an antinomian?

Let me get closer to the nub of the question. Crisp was certainly leaving himself open to attack, if not inviting it, when he said: ‘To be called a libertine [an antinomian] is the most glorious title under heaven’.⁶¹ However, he did not mean what it sounds like when snatched out of context. Crisp was speaking of the abusive names men are called for proclaiming the liberty believers have in Christ. For this, he declared, he was willing to suffer such attacks; he even gloried in them. As he said: ‘This... liberty [so-called antinomianism] has been given an ill name in the world... reproachful, ignominious and shameful names... [such as] libertinism’. Even so, he was determined to make his hearers understand the difference between liberty and libertinism: ‘Now because liberty and freedom are thus brought into reproach and disgrace, the true freedom, which Christ has purchased and given, requires some clearing’. It was in this context that Crisp maintained:

To be called a libertine is the most glorious title under heaven; take it for one that is truly free by Christ. To be made free by Christ, in proper construction, is no other but this, to be made a libertine by Christ; I do not say, to be made a libertine in the corrupt sense of it, but to be one in the true and proper sense of it. It is true, indeed, that Christ does not give liberty unto licentiousness of life and conversation... A licentious liberty is nothing else but this... when men turn the grace of God into wantonness, and abusing the gospel of Christ, continue in sin that grace might abound... Christ who has redeemed from sin and wrath has also redeemed from a vain conversation... All that have this freedom

⁶¹ Crisp Vol.1 p122. Spurgeon was another to be *called* an antinomian, and rejoiced in it, ‘but’, he said, ‘I should not be fond of *being* an antinomian... None shall charge us truthfully with being antinomians’ (Spurgeon, C.H.: *New Park Street Pulpit Containing Sermons Preached... During... 1856*, Vol.2, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1963, p132, emphasis mine).

purchased by Christ for them have also the power of God in them, which keeps them [so] that they break not out licentiously.⁶²

This is no lawless man speaking. The truth is, he is setting out the glory of the new covenant: Christ not only justifies, but he sanctifies; he not only delivers from condemnation, but he gives spiritual power to the believer so that he may live a godly life in obedience to his Saviour and Lord.

But, as I say, Crisp did not mind playing with fire; in fact, he seemed to like it. Yet, as Gill noted: ‘This paragraph, as well as a multitude of others, shows that [Crisp] was no friend of licentiousness, and what a madness it is to charge so worthy a person with holding licentious principles’.⁶³ I endorse this. If Crisp is to be accounted an antinomian because he gloried in the name ‘libertine’, Paul ought to be dismissed as an idiot for calling himself a fool (2 Cor. 11:17,21,23; 12:11), which label the apostle gloried in (1 Cor. 4:10).

Crisp faced up to the objection that the way he preached gospel liberty leads to immorality; in other words, that he *was* an antinomian in his doctrine: ‘Does not this take off all manner of obedience and all manner of holiness?’ He had his reply ready: It all depends on the ‘ends which they aim at in their obedience’. If the questioner is speaking of ‘justification, consolation and salvation... we have our justification, our peace, our salvation only by the righteousness Christ has done for us: but this does not take away our obedience, nor our services, in respect of those ends for which such are now required of believers’. In other words, no obedience by the sinner can earn his justification, but every justified sinner will seek to be sanctified. This is the exact opposite of antinomianism. Indeed, it is pure gospel. Crisp listed several of ‘the ends’ of obedience of which he spoke. The believer by his obedience seeks to glorify God, to show his gratitude, to be profitable to others, and so on. ‘So, then, the freemen of Christ, having him and his Spirit for their life and strength, may go

⁶² Crisp Vol.1 pp122-123.

⁶³ Crisp Vol.1 p123.

infinitely beyond the most precise legalist in the world, in more cheerful obedience than they [the legalists] can perform'.⁶⁴

In saying this, Crisp was directly challenging those who say that the law produces sanctification. In effect, he was arguing that those who are moved to holiness by the sense of Christ's free grace towards them, will show a more cheerful and willing obedience to God in his word than those who aim for holiness under the lash of Calvin's whip. Who can deny it? Is it not self-evident?

Consider this: 'I speak not against the doing of any righteousness according to the will of God revealed'. He was vehement against those who 'shall be the means to discourage people from walking in the commandments of God blameless'.⁶⁵ In light of such a statement, I ask, with Gill: 'Is this antinomianism? Or, can such a preacher be called an antinomian?'.⁶⁶

To be specific, at bottom it was Crisp's view of the law which stuck in the gullet of his critics. It is for this that he has been falsely accused. This, after all, is the red rag to the Reformed. Yet, staggering as it may sound to some, Crisp got very close indeed – far closer than I – to the Reformed on the law and sanctification. I think he was self-contradictory at times, but... well, let him speak for himself...

When referring to 'the fruits of sanctification, that are properly the righteousness of man after or according to the law', he distinguished between the man who 'walks by such a rule for his peace' and the man who 'walks by such a rule for his conversation'; that is, his way of life. He had his reason: 'Because the best sanctification... is not able to speak peace to the soul'.⁶⁷ In saying this, Crisp was arguing for his view of assurance. Since the law demands exact obedience, those who base their assurance on their sanctification inevitably find that one offence of the law robs them of their peace. Crisp thought the inner witness of the Spirit,

⁶⁴ Crisp Vol.1 pp134-135.

⁶⁵ Crisp Vol.1 p145.

⁶⁶ Crisp Vol.1 p145. I tried to emphasise this vital point in my *Christ*. 'New-covenant theology', allowing the term, exceeds Reformed covenant-theology in the standard required, the power to enable obedience, and the joy which accompanies sanctification.

⁶⁷ Crisp Vol.3 pp62-64.

and not sanctification, is the main way of assurance. And in saying this, as I have observed, I think he has a great deal in his favour.

Having already looked at this, I move on to show that Crisp was arguing that while no man can keep the law for his peace, nevertheless the believer *is* under the law for his way of life, his sanctification; in short, he was setting out Calvin's third use of the law! Inasmuch as he was supporting Calvin on the law, I disagree, of course, with Crisp; I do not think sanctification is by the law. I quote Crisp on this point merely to show that he is falsely accused of being an antinomian and denying that the law is to be kept by believers. Far from it! On the law being the rule for the believer, Crisp was an orthodox Puritan, and no antinomian.⁶⁸ Indeed, how could he be when he devoted an entire sermon to 'The Use of the Law'?

Listen to Crisp's own words once more: 'Where are good works?' he demanded. 'Must we not work? Yes', he replied, since 'you are bought with a price... therefore glorify God in your bodies and spirits: Being delivered... out of the hands of our enemies, we serve in holiness and righteousness'.⁶⁹ Again:

Thus, beloved brethren, you have heard the admirable grace of God. Oh! let there not be such a heart in any, as to turn it into wantonness! Oh! let not any one continue in sin, because so much grace has abounded; but let it 'teach you to deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live righteously and soberly in this present world'. For my own part, whatever others may think, I abhor nothing so much as a licentious undertaking to continue in any sin, because such fullness of grace has abounded... And I recommend to them (if there be any such here) the reading of the letter of Jude, where they may see the fearful wrath of God upon such persons as abuse the grace of God to sin.⁷⁰

This is not the language of an antinomian! Nor is this:

I never heard from any person of credit that there are any such monsters as these that dare make it their practice to be drunk, to break the [Lord's day], to curse and swear and live in uncleanness and all manner of vileness, because all their sins are laid upon Christ... There are many that are taxed for such... And if there are such let me deal

⁶⁸ Crisp Vol.3 p64.

⁶⁹ Crisp Vol.1 p43.

⁷⁰ Crisp Vol.3 p99.

plainly with them. For my part, I must account them the greatest monsters upon the face of the earth, the greatest enemies to the church that ever were; and, I say of such dishonourers of the church, and disturbers of the consciences of God's people, that they are carnal, sensual and devilish. They are the greatest enemies to the free grace of God, the greatest subverters of the power and purity of the gospel, and the greatest hinderers of the course of it, that are under heaven. And I dare be bold to say, open drunkards, harlots and murderers, that profess not the gospel of Jesus Christ, come infinitely short of these in abomination. None so wound the sides of Christ as he that professes the gospel, and yet lives wickedly. And if there are any such here, let me tell them their faith is no better than that of devils.⁷¹

Nor is this:

Men commonly dream of a strange kind of gospel that never came into God's mind; that seeing Christ has died, they may live as they want, fighting against God and godliness, letting themselves loose to all impiety, and yet [still] go to heaven... Some licentious ungodly wretches... reply... that Christ justifies the ungodly, and we are saved without works; but, alas! they observe not how cunningly the devil equivocates to lull them asleep in their ungodly practices... Though [it is] faith only [which] saves, yet that faith must not be alone... but must be attended with fruits, to wit, denying ungodliness; else it is so far from saving [faith] that it is but a dead faith... The person believing must deny ungodliness, though this denial works not his salvation; as the apple makes not the apple tree, but the apple tree brings forth the apple, and not the apple the tree; yet the apple tree must bear apples, or else it is no apple tree.⁷²

First class!

Preaching the same theme, Crisp spoke of 'the general rule of Christ and his apostles... that what we do, we must not only do it in the name of Christ, but also to the Lord, and for the Lord'. Quoting, first, Luke 1:74-75: 'We, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness' – he made the point: 'It is not, let us serve *ourselves* in holiness and righteousness, but let us serve *him*'. Quoting 1 Corinthians 6:20: 'You were bought at a price; therefore glorify

⁷¹ Crisp Vol.3 pp178-179.

⁷² Crisp Vol.4 pp144-146.

God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's', Crisp went on:

[Paul] does not say, being bought with a price, let us now seek our *own* good, as if we were still our own men; as if we had now liberty to trade for our own selves; you are 'not your own', and therefore not your own, because you are 'bought with a price'; therefore 'glorify God in your bodies and spirits'. It is most certainly true, that God having provided through Christ all things appertaining to life and godliness for his people, thereby calls them off from all self-ends, and by-respects in his service, to have only respect to *him* in them... It is most true, that all the righteousness of man cannot prevail with God to do us good.

'All this while I desire not to be mistaken', said Crisp, conscious of the attack he would meet for such doctrine. 'Some', he said, 'it may be, will desire to know then to what use this righteousness of ours serves, seeing it is not of power to prevail with God'. He had his answer to hand: 'Our righteousness is appointed for excellent uses, if we could be contented with those God has ordained it unto'.

And what are these 'excellent uses' which Crisp spoke of? To express our thankfulness, to serve our generation, and because it is the way God blesses us.⁷³ 'Are we saved by grace? Then may we live as we want?' he asked. 'No', he retorted. Why not? Because: 'This grace, that brings salvation, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world'. Crisp was clear: 'I speak not this to bolster any man in any manner of wickedness; for when the Lord gives faith, he will certainly change the heart, and that will work by love'.⁷⁴

As for the passage to which Crisp made reference in that last paragraph, Titus 2:11-12 – one of the vital passages of Scripture in this entire debate – he preached four sermons on it (the best part of eighty pages!), published as one work, entitled: 'Free Grace the Teacher of Good Works'.⁷⁵ A moment or two ago I quoted from it, and though I would like to do so at great length, I forbear, because I fear I might weary you, reader. Having said that, I hope you will not grow weary of such savoury gospel-statements as these:

⁷³ Crisp Vol.1 pp148-151, emphasis mine. See also Crisp Vol.2 pp31-32.

⁷⁴ Crisp Vol.2 pp109-113. See also Vol.2 pp122-123; Vol.3 p100.

⁷⁵ Crisp Vol.4 pp110-189.

The end of that free love of God, in giving salvation, or the inseparable fruit which follows from this grace [is] it teaches to deny ungodliness... Wheresoever the grace of God brings salvation, it is not bestowed in vain, but inclines the heart to new obedience, and makes him fruitful in his life, in all well-pleasingness... You must understand in what sense good works... are necessary attendants on free grace; necessary they are... consequently... They necessarily follow the free grace of Christ, in that God in Christ has engaged himself to establish and set up obedience in the heart and life of such on whom he entails salvation by grace, as appears in Isaiah 35, 40, 41 and Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 20. Now where God himself has inseparably joined salvation and a holy life, and has promised the one as well as the other, they must of necessity go together; for what God has joined together, who can separate? No man can disjoin what [God] has united.⁷⁶

For the above-mentioned reason, I also forbear to quote from Crisp's sermon 'Of Self-Denial',⁷⁷ but how a man who could preach such a sermon can be called an antinomian, I cannot fathom! As for his being 'against law', what of his afore-mentioned sermon 'The Use of the Law'?⁷⁸ Crisp preached this on Galatians 3:19. Despite his idiosyncratic interpretation of 'until the Seed should come', I refer to the sermon again because Crisp said things which any Reformed teacher of the law might well have said.⁷⁹ Indeed, he contradicted what he said elsewhere – namely, that grace is the best teacher for good works. The fact is, however, how he could be called an antinomian in light of that sermon, I know not.

To make my point, let me first set out a 17th-century preacher, whose name I withhold for the moment, using the same text to set out standard Reformed teaching on the law. He spoke of the agreement of the law and the gospel; they are not contrary to each other, he claimed. The law keeps men from sin. 'The rules and precepts of the law are very subservient to Christ, as they adorn the life with a conversation seemly for a companion of Christ, who calls us not to uncleanness, but to holiness... The law, in the rules of it, maintains a part fitting our communion with Christ'. Of

⁷⁶ Crisp Vol.4 pp124-127.

⁷⁷ Crisp Vol.4 pp196-212.

⁷⁸ Crisp Vol.4 pp212-221.

⁷⁹ Indeed, he said things which I opposed in my *Christ*, things from the Reformed school!

believers, he declared: ‘The law is... a rule to order their conversation in [Christ]... In respect of the rules of righteousness, or the matter of obedience, we are under the law still; or else we are lawless, to live every man as seems good in his own eyes, which I know no true Christian dares so much as think’. ‘Christ’, he claimed, ‘has given no new law diverse from this, to order our conversation aright by’.

As I say, that was taken from a sermon of a 17th-century preacher, contemporary with Crisp. Is it not standard Puritan teaching on the law? Very well. Now let me name the preacher. It was Tobias Crisp!

That is what Crisp said. Here it is again, with references: As to the agreement of the law and the gospel; they are not contrary to each other, he claimed.⁸⁰ The law keeps men from sin.⁸¹ ‘The rules and precepts of the law are very subservient to Christ, as they adorn the life with a conversation seemly for a companion of Christ, who calls us not to uncleanness, but to holiness... The law, in the rules of it, maintains a part fitting our communion with Christ’.⁸² Of believers, he declared: ‘The law is... a rule to order their conversation in [Christ]... In respect of the rules of righteousness, or the matter of obedience, we are under the law still; or else we are lawless, to live every man as seems good in his own eyes, which I know no true Christian dares so much as think’. ‘Christ’, he claimed, ‘has given no new law diverse from this, to order our conversation aright by’.⁸³

Reader, as you know, I strongly disagree with some of these points made by Crisp concerning the law, but I have quoted them as proof that, though I am convinced Crisp was at times misguided, he was not an antinomian; indeed, *he erred towards the Reformed viewpoint*. Antinomian, in the light of such sentiments, he was not. If I had not attached his name to the words, they could have been

⁸⁰ Crisp Vol.4 p215. Of course, he saw ‘the excellency of Christ’s gospel above the law’ (Crisp Vol.4 p220).

⁸¹ Crisp Vol.4 p216. But Crisp knew the law is inadequate to show the sinner his sinfulness (Crisp Vol.1 p25).

⁸² Crisp Vol.4 p217.

⁸³ Crisp Vol.4 p219.

drawn from the works of any Reformed teacher of Calvin's third use of the law! Crisp was no more an antinomian than they!

As I have shown, Crisp repeatedly felt it necessary to rebut false charges against him and his preaching. Here is one charge he called 'more strange than all the rest':

The charge is, that I should affirm that should an elect person live and die a whoremonger and an adulterer, and in all kinds of profaneness, and, though thus living and dying, shall be saved, which, how contrary it is to the whole course of my ministry, you are witness. I dare be bold to say, you all know it to be a gross, notorious and groundless slander... I said before, and so I say still, there is no elect person... shall die before he is called; that is, before the Lord gives faith to him to believe, and in some measure frame him to walk by the Spirit according to his rule; in a word, this person is changed in conversation [lifestyle]. The principle is this... 'No unclean thing shall enter the kingdom of heaven'. Every soul, therefore, being elected... shall in time be called and enabled to believe and walk as a child of light. If this is not true doctrine, then I desire that my mouth may be stopped.⁸⁴

And, may I add, if this is antinomianism, then we are living with Alice – but in a Reformed Wonderland! It's high time we came into the real world! May the Lord raise up many preachers of the ilk of Tobias Crisp!

Crisp: An evaluation

Opinions of the worth of Crisp's works vary widely. On the one hand, he is regarded as an enemy of the gospel; on the other, he has been highly regarded by highly judicious men, some even to the extent of valuing his works second only to the Bible. Jealousy – 'so many were converted by his preaching and so few by ours' – by other ministers in his time, has been suggested as the possible motive for those who abhorred his doctrine.⁸⁵

Reader, as I have explained, I have quoted at length from Crisp for two reasons. First, I wish to do what I can to rescue this good

⁸⁴ Crisp Vol.4 pp49-50.

⁸⁵ By William Twisse, prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, no less (Hill, Christopher: *The Collected Essays*, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1986, Vol.2 p149).

man from some of the abuse which has been heaped upon him; the pile is growing still. I cannot say that such criticisms are libellous, since one cannot libel the dead. But the criticisms are unjust; they are false! For those who are still not convinced, may I ask you to read Crisp for yourself before you join in the mud-slinging? Maybe there is too much truth in the suggestion that perhaps some have attacked Crisp, and dismissed him as being in error and a danger – *even though they have never read him!* Be that as it may. For you, reader, there is no excuse since his works are currently in print.

But the second reason is far more important. I believe Crisp did stand for and preach the gospel of God's grace. I think his works are aptly titled: *Christ Alone Exalted*. As such, I value his testimony as support for the claim I made throughout my *Christ is All*. In fact, if I had thought of it – and if Crisp had not used the title already – I would have been delighted to call my book: *Christ Alone Exalted*.

In short, I have tried to play a fairer light upon Crisp than is often done. While I have admitted Crisp had his faults,⁸⁶ and while I would not breathe a word in favour of real antinomianism, I have tried to show that too often genuine gospel preaching is dismissed as such. And as I judge the contemporary scene, even though I am delighted to have witnessed a recovery of the doctrines of grace this past fifty years, I am deeply saddened by the lack of real gospel preaching today. I shall not be liked for saying it, but say it I will: there is a dryness about the academic approach adopted by so many. As I have indicated, I've had more than my fill of being bored by the pulpit! Many so-called preachers are lecturers, reading virtual magazine articles. Frankly, I fear the gospel is not being preached in many pulpits. There is too little gospel, and too little preaching. Change is needed urgently; change is desperately needed. We don't need legal preachers; we must have gospel preachers.

In my opinion, Crisp can teach us a great deal about the way we should go about bringing sinners to Christ, and the way to encourage and assure doubting saints. It was this desire to teach believers into assurance which led to so much of the alleged antinomianism among the Puritans. Crisp was a man of that stamp

⁸⁶ See the Appendix.

– a caring man. He, I believe, longed to see those under his preaching receive the full benefit of the gospel. He loved sinners and he wanted them to be saved. He loved saints and he wanted them to be assured and sanctified. And he used all his powers, all his gifts, every spiritual weapon at his disposal, to truly preach the gospel and so reach his ends. It is a travesty to dismiss him as an antinomian. He is, of course, now far beyond harm from such criticism. The losers are those who are unwilling to learn from him, and – above all – the hearers who sit under such.

I think it is fitting to let Crisp have the last word. Listen to him in his sermon on 1 John 2:1-2, entitled: ‘Revelation of Grace, No Encouragement to Sin’.⁸⁷ What a title! This is what he said:

[John] would not have men mistake, as if his revealing [that is, revealing and publishing, opening, preaching, teaching and declaring the doctrine of the] pardon of sin intimated that people did not sin any more... Sin we do; but the grace of God stands in this, that when we sin, it is forgiven, and it is an act of justice for God to forgive it.⁸⁸ Beloved, I perceive the world clamours extremely against the fearful fruits (as they conceive) of such publishing grace to men. Tell men their sins are forgiven, whatever they commit, being believers, they shall do them no hurt; this is the way, say they, to bring all manner of licentiousness into the world: this opens the flood-gates for floods of sins to overflow the church. But the apostle prevents this great objection, and not only so but establishes the direct contrary to the inference men make from the free grace of God, in the words of my text. And observe it well, were it not an apostle that spoke these words, there are many zealots in the church would condemn it, not only for heresy, but for the greatest absurdity...

How true this is! Read on!

The apostle... [argues] I would have you not to sin; now, the only, and the best way, to prevail with you, is, if you commit sin, there is an advocate with the Father, that shall take care that the sin you commit shall do you no hurt: though you sin, he is become the propitiation for your sins... Now, what an absurd argument seems this, not only to the

⁸⁷ Crisp Vol.3 pp164-187.

⁸⁸ This is the point I made in my *Christ*, when looking at Gal. 4:5. Since Christ earned salvation for the elect, it is, therefore, an act of justice (as well as mercy) for God to forgive their sins.

world, but to zealous professors, to prevail with men to the forbearance of sin, to tell them beforehand, that if they sin, there is an advocate for them, and he is the propitiation for their sins? There is nothing so vilely calumniated, as publishing this free grace to men, in this way, as being the highway to break out into all manner of sin whatsoever. This, say men, is that which lets go the reins on the neck of libertinism: and makes men take liberty without control, freely to commit any sin. Whoever is of this mind, I must tell him before I go on, [he] directly crosses the wisdom of God, and gives the lie to the apostle here...

That you may see the doctrine is no fancy, nor opinion of men, but the clear truth, it appears plainly, that the apostle's business is to take men off from sinning: 'These things I write unto you that you sin not'; and then immediately follow these words: 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father'. To what purpose are these words, if not as a motive to prevail with them to the thing he persuades them unto? No, he tells us plainly, he writes [to] them on purpose that they sin not. What was it that he wrote to them before? that 'the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin'; and 'if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins'; and now 'these things I write unto you that you sin not'... Indeed, this favour revealed is the spur to cause him to comply, so the apostle says...

In short:

It is plain, therefore, that the knowing what shall become of our sins beforehand, that they shall do us no hurt, is not the opening [of] a sluice to provoke [us] to sin, but [is] a bridle to restrain [us] from it; for you find, by consulting the Scripture, that the Holy Spirit is not rare, but very plentiful, in opening this very truth; that the free grace of God, and the security of believers from sin, are therefore made manifest, that they might not sin.⁸⁹

Crisp then took some of these 'very plentiful' passages, and expounded Romans 3:24-26, Romans chapters 4 and 5 leading to Romans 6:1, Romans 11:33-34 leading to Romans 12:1, Titus 2:1-10 leading to Titus 2:12-14 and I John 3:9.⁹⁰

Why did he labour the point? Why do I? 'Because', said Crisp:

I know it sticks so in the hearts of cavillers that are ready to spit fire in the faces of those that are asserters and maintainers of the free grace of

⁸⁹ Crisp Vol.3 pp165-168.

⁹⁰ Crisp Vol.3 pp168-175.

God, and the publishers of it to his people...⁹¹ I know there are many objections raised against this truth. I shall briefly run through some of them, and if it is possible, clear it to you, and vindicate the gospel from those abominable untruths cast upon it. And that I will do the rather, because thousands turn away from the grace of God and dare not venture themselves upon it, because they fear, if they should, they should presently [soon, at once] take liberty to sin, and so fall away. Oh! how many have refused their own mercies, and have not received the gospel to this day upon such conceits [fanciful notions], that the receiving of it should make them break out unto ungodliness... that it will make them live loosely.⁹²

Crisp knew some objected to those who, they said, ‘take liberty to themselves’. He was ready with his reply:

If believers, from this grace published, take liberty, they take but what God gives them; the end of Christ’s coming, and preaching the free grace of God to men, is to proclaim liberty to the captives, which are his own people... Therefore, says Christ: ‘If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed’; that is, if the Son give you liberty, then you shall have liberty indeed. So that, if believers do take this liberty, upon this ground, they take but that which is their own, purchased for them by the blood of Christ, and given to them freely by God their Father.⁹³

Crisp faced yet another objection: ‘Some will say the preaching of the terrors of law, the wrath of God, damnation and hell-fire to men, is a safer way to take men off from sin, than to preach grace and forgiveness of sin beforehand. It is better [say they] to lay the foundation first in preaching wrath and damnation’.⁹⁴ Once again, he was ready. Do such objectors really believe that if as ‘believers... they commit such sins, they shall be damned, and so come under the wrath of God; and unless they perform such and such duties, walk thus and thus holy, they shall come under the wrath of God, or at least he will be angry⁹⁵ with them’? This, said Crisp, is to ‘abuse the Scriptures’. As he observed, if we say such a thing:

⁹¹ Not the only time he felt under such attack. See Crisp Vol.4 p226.

⁹² Crisp Vol.3 pp174-175.

⁹³ Crisp Vol.3 pp175-176.

⁹⁴ Crisp Vol.3 p181.

⁹⁵ Here again, Crisp was playing with fire. Of course, the believer will never be condemned, but he incurs God’s displeasure by his sin.

We undo all that Christ has done. We injure and wrong the believers themselves. We tell God he lies to his face. For if we tell them that unless they do these good works they shall come under the wrath of God, what is this, but to tell [them] that God lies, and to bring the faithful under a covenant of works?⁹⁶

Crisp drew his sermon to a close:

This... batters down to the ground that way of urging men to holiness which some men hold forth; that if men do not do such good works, and leave such sins, then they must come under the wrath of God; and the wrath of God is hidden all the while they do these good works, but if they fail in any of them, then the wrath of God will break out upon them; whereas they ought rather, after the example of the apostle, to excite them to these good works, because they are already freed from wrath. Certainly, this that I have delivered, proves it sufficiently, that the grace of God teaches men to do the will of God effectually; the love of God constrains the faithful, and not the fear of wrath.⁹⁷

Let me borrow Crisp's word, 'batter'. In all the above, Crisp was indeed biblically battering down the Reformed way of sanctification by whip and fear – the law.

But, said Crisp, it is true, the wrath of God must be preached to believers 'as the deserts of sin, and the means to keep from sin'. This sounds contradictory, does it not? Indeed it does! 'But now, some may say, this seems to be against and to overthrow all that you have delivered'.⁹⁸ But no, replied Crisp. The wrath of God must be preached:

So they should fear to commit sin, not for fear of coming under wrath, but out of love, because God has been so gracious to them, as to deliver them from the weight of so heavy wrath and displeasure... And so their walking with God in a holy conversation is a fruit of the mercy already shown... They serve God because they are delivered from wrath, and not because they might receive deliverance from it. It proceeds from joy... and not from fear... The wrath of God is preached to them... that they may see what they are delivered from... that they may see God's love to them... that this [the sense of deliverance] may draw them to obedience, and restrain them from sin... They... will... sing and rejoice... and triumph in him... leading a life answerable to the

⁹⁶ Crisp Vol.3 p182.

⁹⁷ Crisp Vol.3 p185.

⁹⁸ Crisp Vol.3 pp185-186.

love of God [in] bestowing such a deliverance upon [them]. And so, by this preaching of the wrath of God, as being freed from it, the more one sees what he is freed from, the more he sees what Christ has done in bearing the wrath [for and away] from him. And consequently the more he is stirred up to walk before God in more cheerful and comfortable obedience, and the more thankful he will be. And the more he sees what God has done for him, the more obedience he sees he owes to him.

Here we reach a vital difference between the new-covenant system of sanctification and the Reformed system. As I showed in my *Christ is All*, as advocates of Calvin's 'third use of the law', the Reformed think believers are lazy asses who have to be lashed by the whip of the law in order to produce sanctification; in other words, sanctification by fear – the direct opposite of the doctrine of Crisp and – above all – the doctrine of the New Testament.

In conclusion, reader, I do as Crisp and lay down this challenge:

And now, if any persons [reading this] have an evil opinion of the grace of God, as a thing of dangerous consequence, as a licentious doctrine, let them learn... to mend their minds, and correct their judgements, knowing that the Holy Spirit is of another mind: that the revealing of the grace of God is the best way to take men off from sin; so far is it from letting loose the reins to break out into all manner of sinfulness.⁹⁹

And this 'best way' is what I tried to set out in my *Christ is All*. That was what I argued for there, and it is what I argue for here. It is nothing less than the doctrine of the new covenant as set out by the apostles.

⁹⁹ Crisp Vol.3 pp186-187.

William Dell (c.1607–1669), Master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge from 1649 to 1660, was a leading radical Parliamentarian. A Bedfordshire man, Dell went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, graduating MA in 1631. He became a chaplain in the New Model Army, being a radical preacher. Following a controversial sermon to the House of Lords, Dell's 1646 sermon to Parliament – in which he attacked the Westminster Assembly, spoke up for the poor, and told the politicians to keep out of religious reform – was considered too extreme, and the House of Commons reprimanded him. Notwithstanding, in 1649 he dedicated to the House of Commons the publication of his sermon *The Way of True Peace and Unity in the Churches*, in which he argued that congregations should choose their ministers, and the State should keep out of church and theological matters. Dell, opposed to enforced uniformity in church practice, made a clear distinction between unity and uniformity, regarding the latter as an inappropriate exercise of State power in spiritual matters. This brought him into controversy with the Presbyterians. Further, for his preaching of free grace, Dell was falsely attacked – personally as a libertine, and his doctrine for antinomianism – by, among others, Samuel Rutherford in his *Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648). Rutherford was libellous: 'Come and learn at Mr Dell to keep the heart right, and violate all the ten commandments'. Even so, the Rump Parliament appointed Dell to the Mastership of Caius. Nevertheless, he was prepared to criticise those on the Parliamentarian side who had done well out of the war, and, while he supported Oliver Cromwell, he did not go along with the making of him king. He was a friend and supporter of John Bunyan, whom he invited to preach in his parish church. As for the work which now follows, John Gadsby, favourably reviewing its republication, stated: 'We have gone right through the work and have been well repaid for our labour, though we may differ on some points... Dell was, we believe, one of Cromwell's ministers, and this gives us another proof that, notwithstanding that great man's [Cromwell's] mistakes, he was one of the Lord's living family, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world' (*Christian's Monthly Record* 1892 pp304-305).

William Dell

I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me

Galatians 2:19-20

In 1652, William Dell published his *The Crucified and Quickened Christian*, being a ‘discourse on Galatians 2:19-20’. This passage, of course, is vital for the right formation of the biblical doctrine of the believer and the law. Right at the start, Dell told the reader that his purpose was to bring understanding of ‘that great mystery of Christ which was kept secret all the time of the law, [but] was clearly opened by the Father and the Spirit in the first beginning of the gospel’.

Dell divided his sermon into two. *First*, he dealt with the crucified Christian. *Second*, he moved on to the quickened Christian.

The crucified Christian

Dell enlarged upon the apostle’s words: ‘Now, says Paul... I am so far from seeking righteousness by the law, that I am wholly dead to the law; and as a dead man [I] have no more to do with the law, as that has no more to do with me. I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God (Gal. 2:19-20)’. Dell suggested two possible meanings of the words. First, he said, it might be that believers are dead to the law through the law itself:

I, says Paul, through the law, am dead to the law; that is, the law itself makes me dead to the law... And, therefore, how can the law any more give laws and commands to a dead man; indeed, to one whom itself has slain? or how can it expect obedience from such a one? And this [is the] sense Chrysostom gives of these words.

But that is not the only possibility. It might be, said Dell, that believers are dead to the law – the law of Moses – through another law, a new law, the law of Christ:

But, secondly, we conceive these words in another sense, after this manner – I through the law am dead to the law; that is, I through a new law, am dead to the old law (which was the law of the letter written on tables of stone) by a new law, which God has written on my heart and inward parts. And this is the law of grace, or the law of the Spirit of life that is in Christ Jesus, which is not a law consisting of letters, words and sentences, but it is the living word of God written in our hearts by the living Spirit of God, according to that of Paul, touching believers (2 Cor. 3:3): ‘You are the letter of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God’; and the living Spirit writes a living law. And this law makes us dead to the [old] law. And a man is never truly dead to the law of the letter, till the law of the Spirit of life be written in his heart, by the finger of God. But, when we have the law of grace, which is a living and almighty law, in our hearts, we are then safely dead to the law of the letter.

For my part, while I fully appreciate the point Dell was making in his second possibility, and agree wholeheartedly with it, going back to the text, Galatians 2:19-20, and its context, I find it a leap too far to think that Paul would use the phrase ‘the law’ throughout the passage (and, virtually, throughout the entire letter to the Galatians), and yet radically alter its meaning at this vital juncture, and for this one purpose, without making it plain by setting out a full explanation of what he was doing. According to Dell, we have to understand ‘the law’ to be ‘the law of Moses’ except when we have to read it as ‘the law of Christ’; and this without a glimmer of an explanation within the text!

I am afraid, therefore, much as I would like to accept Dell’s interpretation, and as strongly as I endorse it, it is not what the apostle is saying at this point. Paul, of course, could perfectly well have introduced ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2) here. In fact, I go so far as to say that he should and would have introduced the phrase here – if Dell had been right in his second suggestion. So, although Dell was right in the sentiment, I think he fixed it to the wrong text.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of that, on the main point, Dell was spot on: the believer is dead to the law, the law of Moses. And, of course, he has the law of the Spirit of life written in his heart, he is under the law of Christ. What are the consequences of this? Dell:

When a believer has in him the law of the Spirit, the law of the letter has no more power over him; that is, so far as he is taken up into that other law of the Spirit, but no further.¹

This sort of talk, as Dell well knew, is a red rag to the Reformed. While they argue vehemently that the believer is still under the law of Moses (having, without biblical warrant, reduced this to the ten commandments, which they call ‘the moral law’), here we have Dell claiming that ‘the law of the letter has no more power over him’ since he is dead to the law, and that he is governed by the law of Christ. A more direct clash you could not wish to see! Dell knew how the Reformed would react. He met it head on:

And there is no danger to this doctrine, that the new law makes us dead to, or delivers us from, the old, as ignorant and carnal Christians think there is – inasmuch as this new law imprints in our souls the love of righteousness, and hatred of iniquity. And he that is thus freed from the [Mosaic] law is the only man that keeps it [the law of Moses], and fulfils it, through the law of love, put into his heart by the Spirit. And this law of love does fulfil the other law, but never breaks or violates it. Wherefore, says Paul: ‘I through the law am dead to the law that I might live unto God’; that is, he that through the law of grace is freed of [from] the law of the letter, is not set free from the law that he may thereby have opportunity and liberty to live to sin and himself, but that he may thereby live unto God. And when a man is born of God, and lives the life of God from the nature of God, there is no danger at all in declaring this man to be free from the law of Moses by the law of Christ. For how otherwise should he come to know the high privilege of the gospel, and the excellent prerogative of the sons of God, and the glorious liberty and freedom into which Jesus Christ has exalted him?²

¹ I am not sure of Dell’s meaning here. If, in ‘so far as he is taken up into that other law of the Spirit...’, the ‘he’ is replaced by ‘it’, he could be saying that the law of Moses has relevance for the believer in so far as it is taken into the law of Christ – which is, of course, the biblical position. As it stands, however, Dell seems to be saying that the more the believer is governed by the law of Christ, the less power the law of Moses has over him. If so, I find it inexplicable and without scriptural support. I will return to this.

² Dell pp6-8.

In passing, do not miss the way Dell described those who want to make the law the rule of sanctification: ‘as ignorant and carnal Christians’. I will return to this, as Dell himself did.

More important, of the utmost importance, Dell was making a point of major significance. He was arguing that it is only by the law of Christ that the believer can fulfil the law of Moses – and that, by meeting the goal of the commandment, which is love. In the new covenant, the child of God is not merely free from the old law, he is under the law to Christ. And there is no danger in making such an assertion. In fact, it has to be preached, taught and believed, so that saints can fully appreciate the glorious liberty they have in Christ. The believer is under the law to Christ, not the law of Moses, and it is only because he has this new relationship that he can possibly be sanctified (Rom. 7:1-6). As I say, Dell was making a point of huge significance, showing, moreover, that he was no antinomian.

But, of course, he was flying in the face of Reformed teaching. But not only Reformed! Dell knew he faced two opponents to what he was saying. First, he knew he would offend real antinomians. He did not shirk the battle! He described them as:

They who would be dead to the law that they might live unto sin, and not unto God; who would have no law, that all things might be lawful, though ever so wicked and abominable, and ever so contrary, both to the light of grace and nature. And these are the true antinomians and libertines, who would be free from the law of Moses, they being not under the law of Christ; who would take away, and quite abolish, the law of the letter, they being not under the law of the Spirit; and so would be free from all... law, both old and new, both of Moses and Christ, that they might live as they like, and take their full swing in all their lusts.³

Dell had no time for such lawless, fleshly professors. None whatsoever! To dismiss him as an antinomian – as he was in his own day, and still is – is an utter falsehood and a travesty. Listen to him expatiating against antinomians. Pulling no punches, he advocated punishment by the magistrate for all such, if their antinomianism was open enough; that is to say, ‘when they

³ Dell p8.

transgress wickedly and presumptuously against their neighbour, and against civil society'. If, however, their antinomianism did not impinge on public society, knowing that the authorities have no ability to read the mind or heart of a man, Dell advocated that such antinomians should be left to God to deal with in his own good time: 'In other things, that are more secret and inward, or that are of their own notions and apprehensions, though concerning the things of God, they are to be left, with other unbelievers and misbelievers, to the righteous judgement of God'.

So much for the first of Dell's opponents; the antinomian Scylla. Notice what he thought of them. They are 'unbelievers and misbelievers', whatever their profession. This man an antinomian? Never!

But what of the Reformed Charybdis?

The other sort [of Dell's opponents]... are such who are so Jewish and so zealous of the honour of the law, that they will by no means endure to hear that the gospel of the Son of God comes to abolish it, or that the new law is given us to make us quite dead to the old. For they think that such a doctrine as this will open a floodgate to all manner of wickedness and licentiousness.

I said that Dell would return to his claim that those who argue that the law is the way to sanctification are 'ignorant and carnal Christians'. Note, now, his use of 'Jewish'. He was, of course, talking about advocates of Calvin's third use of the law of Moses for sanctification; in other words, the Reformed. Quite right too! Such men are legal preachers rather than gospel preachers. But Dell was not interested in name-calling. He explained what he was talking about. Those who advocate the law for sanctification actually shoot themselves in the foot, he declared. They might call such as Dell an antinomian but, in reality, they ought to be thinking about and removing the beam from their own eye:

For such men, being carnal themselves, and knowing no restraint from sin but the law of Moses, do verily think that if that curb be taken out of the jaws of men they must needs rush headlong into all manner of evil, as the horse into the battle; and this is true enough where men free themselves, or are freed by others, from the old law, before the new be written on their hearts.

I pause. Dell was preaching that sanctification comes not from the law of Moses, but the law of Christ. The Reformed are quite mistaken over this matter, thinking, as they do, that unless a man is under the law of Moses he must fall into gross sin. Of course, as Dell argued, it is useless – and worse than useless – for a man to argue that he is not under the law of Moses – unless he is fully persuaded that he is under the law of Christ! Dell had made it as plain as plain could be that this was his doctrine. But, having died to the law of Moses, he is under the law of Christ, and, having come under the law to Christ, all will be well with the believer. The Reformed just do not understand this biblical doctrine. They simply do not appreciate what the law of Christ is, nor its inherent power and grace. Thus argued Dell:

But this they understand not, that when the new law comes, it is a sufficient discharge from the old, since the law of grace within us is infinitely more powerful to keep us from sin than the law of Moses without [outside] us; and the love of righteousness, and hatred of iniquity, put into our hearts by the Spirit, is infinitely more able to make us do righteousness, and avoid sin, than any outward commands and threatenings whatsoever. And so, when the gospel prevails in truth and power, men need not fear the taking away the law [of Moses] from such men, seeing they, through the new law [the law of Christ] are dead to the old that they may live unto God... Saints, God dwelling in them, and they in God, do by this means live unto God; and God himself, who dwells in them, is the new law according to which they live, they doing all in God, and for God, and so live unto God indeed.⁴

The law of Moses will never sanctify. Only the law of Christ can produce godliness. Moreover, said Dell, the law of Moses is utterly incapable of producing holiness. It is only the gospel, the law of Christ, that can do that. In fact, as I have said, in the spirit of Romans 7:1-6, it is only because a man has died to the law of Moses that he can be united to Christ, and it is only by being united to Christ that he can possibly bear fruit to God, and so be godly. To be godly, he must be liberated from the law of Moses – as the apostle makes clear:

Do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the

⁴ Dell pp8-9.

woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband... she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. 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... 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 of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me 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 (Rom. 7:1-6; 8:1-4).

In short, as Dell put it:

Nothing does so truly and thoroughly restrain, hamper, mortify, crucify, kill and destroy the flesh, and all the corruptions, lusts and affections of it, as the living word and the Spirit do.⁵

Dell, fully aware of the abuse he would meet for such preaching, got his defence in early: ‘That... these things are so in truth, and that they are no fond notions, speculations and glosses of my own devising, I will yet make it more evident by some few other plain scriptures’; that is, in addition to his chosen text (Gal. 2:19-20). He quoted Romans 2:13; 6:5-6,11; 8:10,13; Galatians 5:16,24-25, arguing out the apostle’s teaching in those places, showing that it is all of a piece with the principles and deductions that he, Dell, had drawn from his chosen passage:

The presence of Christ, that is the living word of God, within us, is the killing and crucifying of the body to all sin... by the presence of the Spirit... by the baptism of the Spirit... So it is plain that the destruction of sin in our bodies, by the living word and Spirit of God, is our crucifying with Christ... The apostle would have those who are

⁵ Dell p14.

crucified with Christ to reckon themselves dead to sin... As far as the same word and Spirit of Christ prevail in us, they will make us dead to sin for the time past and present, and for the future will preserve us from sin.⁶

In other words, the law of Christ – the word and the Holy Spirit, the gospel, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, our union with Christ – is the cure for all sin; all sin, past, present and future. It cures the past – sin’s condemnation (justification). It cures the present – sin’s power (sanctification). Above all, it cures the future – sin’s presence (glorification).⁷

Let me pause. This man was no antinomian! What he was, was a true preacher of ‘the glorious gospel of the blessed God’ (1 Tim. 1:11)! How much we need preachers like Dell today! We have had more than enough of ‘recipe preachers’: ‘conform to these rules and you will be sanctified’. We, as believers, need to hear the law of Christ fully expounded and applied until it grips our minds, until it moves from our heads into our hearts, and from our hearts into our lives.

To continue: Dell came to ‘make some use of’ his doctrine. In his first ‘use’ he struck a worthy blow at what, in the following century, would come to be known as Sandemanianism. This is an error which plagues us to this day, perhaps none more so. Dell’s words ought to be weighed by all believers in this generation, seriously weighed as a matter of urgency:

First... let us know that it is not enough to salvation to believe that Jesus Christ, according to his human nature, was outwardly crucified on a cross at Jerusalem for us, except we also be crucified with him, through his living word and Spirit dwelling in us, through which we must be powerfully planted into a true likeness of his death, in such sort that we must be dead unto all sin whatsoever, even to all our own corruptions and lusts, and to all the corruptions that are in the world through lust. And we must be dead to ourselves, to our own fleshly reason, understanding, will, desires, ends, and to our own human life; we must be dead to the world, and to all that is in it, and of it, to all the pleasures, profits, and honours of it. We must thus truly be dead with

⁶ Dell pp15-16.

⁷ I have put it like this even though it is far too simplistic. In broad outline, however, it is the truth.

Christ, ere we can live with him. And with this kind of crucifying must the whole Christ be crucified, from the head to the lowest members. And thus also must we be crucified with him, if we will have any part in him; I say we must have fellowship with him in his sufferings, and be made conformable to him in his death, ere we can attain to his resurrection from the dead.⁸

That is to say, mental assent to the gospel is not enough; belief is more than head knowledge; it is a heart work; true faith is a crucifying faith; it is only those who are united to Christ in his death who can be united to him in his resurrection and life. Let me repeat myself. This thumb-nail sketch holds within it teaching that is desperately needed in our day. It sounds the death-knell to Sandemanianism – and that death-knell needs sounding! This man an antinomian? If he was, may God send us more ‘antinomian’ preachers!

The question is: How can we be crucified with Christ? Dell did not leave his readers in suspense:

Now if any desire to know how we may attain to be thus crucified with Christ, I answer that the true faith of God’s elect is the only way through which we can attain to this crucifying. For, through faith we receive the living word of God to dwell in us; and in this word we partake of the Spirit; and this word and Spirit dwelling in us, do (as has been declared) crucify us with Christ.

In other words, it is by saving faith that we can be united with Christ, and thus come under his law, being married to him, having died to our former husband, the law of the old covenant. Excellent!

Dell gave short shrift to the idea that we can have Christ as Saviour but not as Lord:

Indeed, hypocrites and carnal Christians receive and profess a word that will not crucify them with Christ, but do receive a word and doctrine that will still allow them to live their own lives, and after their own lusts. For the word they receive, is only an outward word, consisting of various questions, opinions and doctrines; and is also without the Spirit, and so it leaves them as it found them, in reference to their natures and corruptions.

⁸ Dell pp16-17.

We urgently need such discriminating preachers today! Notice how Dell would not leave men content with an outward believing; that is conformity to the gospel. Unless we have the Spirit, unless we are united with Christ, unless we are crucified with Christ, and unless we have died to the world, we have nothing, and we are nothing! How much the churches have lost, how grievously they have been diminished, because such men as William Dell have been dismissed! This is gospel preaching! May God raise up such men in our generation!

True faith, said Dell, is a spiritual faith, a crucifying faith:

But the word that faith receives, is the word of righteousness and life; a word that is always accompanied with the Spirit. And when this is engrafted into the soul, and abides in it, it presently mortifies and crucifies it, and destroys a man's self out of himself. And therefore (1 Cor. 1:18), it is called the word of the cross; and that, not only because it exposes us to afflictions in the world, but also because it, dwelling in our hearts by faith, crucifies us. And this crucifying word, in the same verse, is called, also, the power of God. For that word that crucifies our flesh, and subdues and destroys the whole strength of corruption out of us, must be such a word, as is also the power of God. And so it is not only [so] in itself, but also, because the Spirit of God dwells in it. And this word, thus apprehended, will crucify us with Christ.

Dell spelled out what he had in mind:

Now this word of faith, which is the word near us, even in our hearts, will crucify us:

1. Thoroughly: it will crucify the whole man throughout, and that according to his mind, will and affections... This will crucify us till... our outward and inward man be wholly and fully subject to the only will of God.
2. Daily and constantly: as Paul witnesses, saying: 'I die daily' (1 Cor. 15:31).⁹

Dell, knowing that the flesh shrinks from this, set out several 'encouragements':

Now, because this our crucifying with Christ is so contrary to the flesh, that the flesh is always mourning under it, and murmuring against it, therefore for our encouragement in so difficult a work as this, I shall

⁹ Dell pp17-19.

propound some choice and excellent advantages that believers have, by being truly crucified with Christ.

We now come to a rich passage, a passage in which Dell sets out the glories of the gospel. Oh, that it might be said to us present-day believers, ‘the Israel of God’: ‘On Mount Zion... the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions’ (Obad. 17)! May we more feelingly possess what we have in Christ. Listen to Dell spelling out, for believers, the glorious consequences of the gospel, the superabundant blessings of justification in Christ. Let his words melt our hearts and move us to obedience. ‘For by this means’ – that is, by our union with Christ in his crucifixion – Dell said:

1. We are freed from the law... And this, Paul does plainly teach us (Rom. 7:1)... When he is once crucified with Christ, and dead with Christ, the law has no more dominion over him. So then, as long as we live our own life, the law has power over us. But when we are dead to ourselves, through the life of Christ, we are set quite without the reach of the law. And the law has no more to do with us, the members, than with Christ, the head.

2. By being crucified with Christ, we are freed of sin. For one of the chief ends of the indwelling of the word and Spirit in believers is, to free them, and save them from sin... (Rom. 6:6,12)... And so you see, that through our being crucified with Christ, we are dead to sin also. For it is impossible that Christ and sin should live together in strength, in the same flesh, but if sin lives in our flesh, it will crucify us to Christ; and if Christ lives in our flesh, he will crucify us to sin.

3. By being crucified with Christ, we are freed from death... And so being crucified with Christ, death has no more dominion over us.

4. By being crucified with Christ, we are also freed from the power of the devil... When our flesh is united to Christ, and is crucified by the word and Spirit, then Satan comes, and has nothing in it [our flesh], as he came to Christ, and had nothing in him. The devil then can find nothing in us to do us harm, or whereby he may prevail against us, when we are truly crucified with Christ.¹⁰

How can a man know that he is truly united with Christ in his death and resurrection? that is, how can he be assured? Dell argued that ‘there are many trials of this, some of which I will name very briefly, and so conclude this matter’:

¹⁰ Dell pp19-21.

1. If you find your own heart or disposition¹¹ truly subdued and changed by another heart that is from God, and if you find your own life put to an end by another life that is from God, then are you crucified with Christ indeed.
2. If you deny yourself in all things of flesh and blood, and find a new self within you, to have power over your own self, which is daily withering and decaying at the presence of the new creature, then are you crucified through the word.
3. If you are dead to sin, even to all those corruptions and lusts which have delighted themselves in you, and you again in them, if you find yourself dead to them, and they killed in you, then are you crucified by the word.
4. If you are dead to the world, and to the things of it, which are the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, then are you crucified by the word.
5. If you do not mind [are not swayed by] the praise and applause of men on the one hand, nor their reproaches and indignities on the other hand, but are truly dead to both, then are you crucified by the word.
6. If you are deceased and departed from your own will and works, and can do, and delight to do the will and works of God, then is his law within your heart, and you are crucified by the word.
7. If you are ready prepared to bear and endure any sufferings and persecutions for Christ with patience and, over and above, with willingness and joy, and do not draw back for [because of] any evils, but stand to them and overcome them; then also are you crucified by the word; and that is, crucified with Christ.¹²

In short:

Now this our crucifying with Christ is the chief and greatest matter that we are to mind in this world; wherefore Paul says to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:2): ‘I did not judge it worth the while to “know anything among you” (or to behold anything in you), “but Jesus Christ, and him crucified”’. Seeing in this present state of ours this is our chief business, to be crucified with Christ, and to be taken out of ourselves, and all our own things, till we be altogether reduced to nothing, that we may receive [perceive?] ourselves, and all things, anew in Jesus Christ. This is the chief work of God, by his word and Spirit upon the faithful here in this world... And so this also is to be the chief business of our lives, after we do believe, even to be daily crucified, and mortified, and killed by the word and Spirit of Christ, till our will be perfectly

¹¹ Dell had ‘nature’ – I will not repeat this every time.

¹² Dell pp25-26.

subdued to God's, and by these means we be fitted and prepared for that tribulation and cross, whatever it is, that the Lord shall please to appoint unto us either in life or in death.¹³

This man an antinomian? I ask you!

Dell, 'having [thus] spoken something of the *crucified* Christian', then moved 'to speak, in the next place, of the *quicken*ed Christian, from the following words: "Nevertheless I live"¹⁴."

The quickened Christian

As Dell said:

Every true believer is as much quickened with Christ, as crucified with him: 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live'... so also it is with all Christians. And therefore Paul says, out of his own experience: 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live' – as if he had said: 'I am not crucified to death, but to life; my crucifying with Christ is my quickening. For by this I am so killed, that I live the more; indeed, now only I do truly live, being formerly dead. My own proper life, in myself, was my death; but Christ's life in me is my true life. For I was dead with the worst death – namely, in trespasses and sins – but now I live in the best life, even the life of righteousness'.¹⁴

Dell argued that no man can have the one without the other – he must be crucified with Christ if he is to live with him:

Whence it is manifest, that the living word and Spirit of Christ in a Christian, do so kill the life of his flesh (which is a life of sin and sorrow, and darkness and death) that at the same time they communicate to the same man, to the same soul and body, a true and spiritual, and holy, and heavenly, and eternal life. For no man is crucified with Christ, but he also lives with him – seeing the same word that kills our life, communicates Christ's. And Christ crucifies us with himself, not that he may kill us, but that he may quicken us, and our quickening is the end of our crucifying, and our crucifying is the way to our quickening. Indeed, the killing of the flesh by the sword or famine, or the law, or any way else, is death indeed, or death unto death, but the killing of the flesh by the living word and Spirit, which is its crucifying with Christ, is death unto life.

¹³ Dell pp26-27.

¹⁴ Dell p27.

And here again we may note this also, that the true life of a Christian begins from his crucifying and dying with Christ. And also the true crucifying and dying of a Christian begins from his life in Christ. For both these inseparably go together; namely, our crucifying and our quickening with Christ. But our crucifying with Christ is named first in order, because it is first in manifestation – seeing after we believe, Christ’s death is first manifested in us, before Christ’s life – though Christ’s life be first in us in order of nature, the crucifying of our flesh, flowing from the life of his Spirit.¹⁵

In conclusion:

This, then, is the sum of this matter... A man, in union with Christ, has his own life destroyed out of him, and Christ’s own life communicated to him, so that, in the true believer, the soul and body of man live in the life of the Son of God... And thus the flesh lives a life that is not of the flesh; indeed, thus the creature lives in itself the life of God. For as that eternal life, that was with the Father, was manifested in the Son – that is, in his flesh or humanity – and all believers have seen and known it, so also that very life of the Father and the Son, is both communicated to the saints, and also manifest in them, as faith very well knows. And this is the great mystery of the gospel. Let them receive it that can receive it.¹⁶

In other words, Dell was setting out the great gospel-mystery, which – as Paul declared – is: ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27). So much so, the apostle longed earnestly that Christ might be ‘formed in’ the Galatians (Gal. 4:19). As he declared: ‘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... if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you...’ (Rom. 8:9-11). No wonder, then, that Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus – indeed, for all believers, everywhere, for all time:

I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may

¹⁵ Dell pp27-28.

¹⁶ Dell pp28-29.

be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:15-21).

And all stems from these words in Christ's great high-priestly prayer: 'I in them' (John 17:23).

Dell expanded his doctrine: 'Now this new and spiritual life, which a crucified Christian partakes of, he has it: 1. *In Union*. 2. *In Manifestation*':

1. A Christian has this life in *union*, when, through faith of the operation of God, he is really knit unto Christ, and engrafted into him, and made one with him. For before we are united to Christ, we are without life, but as soon as we are united to him, we have life from him. As John says in his letter: 'He that has the Son has life' (even that life which the Son has), and 'he that has not the Son, has not life'. Now this life and union which a Christian has through faith, is more hidden and secret, as that life is that proceeds from the first real union and compliance between the stock and scion or graft; and this is the life of justification. For as soon as ever we are, by faith, made one with God in Christ, the righteousness of God is made ours,¹⁷ truly and everlastingly; and in this we are justified, even before God.

2. A true Christian has this life of Christ, not only in union, but also in *manifestation*. For when a Christian partakes of Christ's life by faith, this life will not be idle in him (which is against the nature of all life, but especially of this) but most active and operative. And it will manifest itself especially two ways, namely, BOTH IN HOLINESS AND COMFORT.¹⁸

Do not miss Dell's order – holiness, then comfort. This was no accident. Dell deliberately chose this order, and enlarged upon it. First, he set out what he meant by holiness:

1. This life will manifest itself in holiness, in the very holiness of Christ, which is the holiness of the divine nature communicated to the human nature; the Spirit himself, which is given to a believer, as the

¹⁷ Clearly, Dell did not believe in eternal justification. His use of 'manifestation' is manifestly not of the hyper-Calvinistic variety.

¹⁸ Dell pp29-30, emphasis his.

outgoing of the life of God within him, works his own works of grace and sanctification in him, and communicates the same holiness to him, a member, as to Christ the head, though in a far different degree.

No lowering of the standard here! Indeed, how low is our standard today. What little preaching, what little understanding, is there of our union with Christ. And not only in doctrine: Dell was spot on when he asserted that those who are in Christ will, by the Holy Spirit, bear fruit to Christ, even Christ-likeness. This is what the new covenant does! And this is what only the new covenant can do! The law of Moses cannot do it. 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17).

Now for the Christian's comfort. Note how Dell stressed that this comfort comes after holiness *and from it*:

2. This life of Christ in a Christian will manifest itself in comfort as well as in holiness. And this is the life of our life, and the next and necessary result of holiness. Wherefore it is said, that the kingdom of God stands first in righteousness, and then presently in peace and joy; and the same Spirit that is given for a sanctifier, is also given for a comforter. And Paul says, Romans 8, that to be spiritually minded is not only life, but life and peace. For when a believer finds in himself a new heart or disposition through a new birth, and the law of God within his heart, and some strength to obey God, and to do his will, then he begins to find also a sweet and heavenly peace within him, and many times, joy unspeakable and glorious. And thus is a crucified Christian's new life manifested, both in holiness, and also in spiritual peace and joy.¹⁹

Dell has surely hit the nail smack on the head: new life leads to holiness; holiness leads to comfort. This is new-covenant theology! That is, it is the theology of the New Testament. And this man is dismissed as an antinomian? In this sermon, I fail to see that he is.

Quite the opposite! The truth is, Dell could be read as saying that if a professed believer lacks holiness leading to spiritual peace and joy, then he clearly is not a true believer. Think of that! Let that sink in! What does that say about a good many of us professed believers today?

¹⁹ Dell p30.

Let me pause here.²⁰ Dell's claim, as it stands, would run contrary to various scriptures which show that it is quite possible for a genuine believer to sin, and, moreover, to pass through times of doubt. John, for example, wrote his first letter precisely to deal with such believers: as to the first, see 1 John 1:8 – 2:2; as to the second, see 1 John 5:13 (indeed, see his entire letter). So what now of Dell's claim, and the high standard which he set? I do not think that Dell *was*, in fact, setting out such a high (unbiblical standard); he was not 'breaking the bruised reed' or 'snuffing out the smouldering wick' (Matt. 12:20, NIV; Isa. 42:3). Let me explain. Do not miss Dell's inbuilt qualifying phrases: 'some strength... and many times'. There is, moreover, an important point here. I will say what I mean by way of a personal note. Having come to see something of the believer's glorious liberty and confidence, as spelled out in the pages of Scripture, I try to put it before others, both in preaching and in my books. Yet, at the same time, even as I preach and write, I have to confess my own falling short of it in practical terms and experience. But what can I do? Should I preach and write at my low level? Should I make my poor spirituality the standard that I set before myself and others? Surely not! I must proclaim Scripture – not because I have attained, but because I aspire! In any case – surely it may be taken as read – that I must not preach anything but Scripture, certainly not my level of attainment! In saying such things, I am not trying in the least to excuse my spiritual poverty. Am I not reflecting what the apostle himself felt and declared?:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14).

In short, I'm sure that Dell was right to press the biblical standard and experience upon his readers: the believer's holiness leads to his

²⁰ I am grateful to Andrew Rome for drawing my attention to the vital point in this paragraph.

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comfort. In any case, my main point stands: if this is antinomianism, we sorely need more of it today!

Yet again, Dell came to application:

And now (to speak one word by way of application) let us, each one, seriously consider, whether he do indeed partake of such a life as is risen to him out of death? whether he find that he has parted with his own life, and gotten another life than his own, in his own soul and body? and whether the life of the first Adam be crucified in him, and he live the life of the second Adam? that is, not a natural, but a spiritual life; not a human, but a divine life; not an earthly, but a heavenly life; not a temporal, but an eternal life. For thus do all live that are truly crucified with Christ.

I pause. Note his use of questions – always more probing than mere statements. Note, further, that Dell allows no exception! All! ‘Thus do *all* live that are truly crucified with Christ’! Dell was unequivocal. No lowering of the standard here! A man may profess what he will, but unless he shows by his life that Christ is formed within him, his profession is worthless. And Dell said so! Moving on, he showed what was in his heart, how he thought of the sinners who heard and read him:

And I desire we all would the rather mind this, because if we part with this life ere we partake of that [union and crucifixion with Christ], the second death, which is everlasting death in sin, and the wrath of God, must needs swallow us up, and because, if we do not partake of Christ’s life here, we can never live with him in his kingdom, and also because we can never have true and immediate communion with the Father, but in the life of the eternal Son. Wherefore let all such whose hearts God has touched by his word, make it their business to seek from God in Christ another life than their own, a life infinitely better and stronger than their own, and a life which, at the will of God, will offer up their own, that we may say in our experience, as Paul in his: ‘We are crucified with Christ, yet nevertheless we live’.²¹

Is this not right? ‘Pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord’ (Heb. 12:14). Do we not need to hear such preaching as this, and plenty of it? Do not fail to see how Dell was challenging all his hearers not to rest short of a real saving interest in the

²¹ Dell pp30-31.

Redeemer. Note his clear and solemn warnings to those who have no such saving interest.

Yet more is to come. Lest anybody should get the wrong end of the stick, though holiness is the believer's duty, when all is said and done, no believer, whatever his accomplishments, has any ground for boasting:

That a believer must be so taken up into Christ by faith, that as Christ must work all in him, so he must attribute all Christ's works unto Christ, and none to himself, still saying, in the midst of the exercise of all graces and virtues: 'It is not I. It is not I that live, but Christ himself that lives in me' this life of grace, righteousness, wisdom, meekness, goodness, humility, patience, power, love, *etc.* It is not I that live in myself, but Christ that lives it [this life of grace...] in me. As [Paul] says elsewhere: 'I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God that dwells in me' [1 Cor. 15:10]. After the same manner, as every Christian must keep his rest in Christ, and must suffer Christ to work all his own works in him, so he must still attribute all Christ's works unto Christ, and be still saying: 'It is not I, but Christ in me, that has done these works, that has endured and overcome these evils'.²²

Dell then showed himself a master-theologian, getting right to the heart of the new covenant. Which is? Christ in his people; Christ is all in all to those who are in him; the law, the law of Moses, will never justify or sanctify; it is Christ, looking to Christ, that justifies a sinner; it is Christ, looking to Christ, that moves the believer to holiness of life; Christ is all. This is what new-covenant theology is all about: Christ!

Listen to Dell:

We may learn that Christ in a believer, is to him instead of all created habits of grace. Christ, who is the true God, is all in all in [to] a Christian. And so a Christian partakes of that righteousness which is Christ – of that wisdom which is Christ, of that power, truth, goodness, *etc.*, which is Christ. And Christ that dwells in believers, is truly all grace to them.²³ And herein they are like unto Christ's humanity, unto

²² Dell pp34-35.

²³ Note it well: Christ does not merely give the believer righteousness, wisdom, power, truth, goodness, and so on. Christ gives himself, and Christ himself is the believer's righteousness, wisdom, power, truth, goodness, and so on. Christ is all!

whom the fullness of the Godhead that dwelt in him was instead of all created grace. Wherefore let us know, that the created habits of grace in a Christian, which the schoolmen have invented and taught, and others have received from them, are nothing but the empty notions and vain speculation of carnal and unbelieving hearts, ignorant of the true mystery of the gospel. For Christ, that lives in a believer, is all grace to him. And thus the apostle Paul expressly teaches in 1 Corinthians 1:30, where, speaking of Christ, he says: 'He is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption'. And so a Christian has that wisdom, righteousness, *etc.*, which is Christ himself. And this grace, which is Christ himself, is infinitely more high and holy than all created habits of grace; and this is the only grace that is acceptable to God, and that makes us accepted in itself. And this is the only grace against which the gates of hell cannot prevail, and the only grace that can make us meet for the Father's kingdom. And thus you see that Christ, who lives in a believer, is all grace in him, and all sufficient grace for him.²⁴

Let me make the point again. And that point is what? Not *what*, but *who*! Christ! Here we reach the heart of the new covenant. By the Holy Spirit, Christ is formed in every believer, working all necessary grace in him to enable the believer to produce a life of Christ-likeness. More, the Spirit ensures that every believer will produce such fruit to Christ. Note the biblical emphasis in all this. All believers, every believer, each believer; no exception! The law of Christ, not Moses, is the spur for holiness, and the way to get it, and that for all believers. Christ is all! Christ is all in all for all believers. In what way?

He frees them from their evil things. And in reference to those, he lives in them as their Redeemer and Saviour. And so Christ within them abolishes the law, takes away sin, and destroys death, for none of these things can dwell in his presence, in that soul wherein he lives. For he is our new law, to make void the old. And he is our new righteousness, to take away sin; and our new life, to destroy death. And the law, sin and death, can have no place nor power, where Christ our new law, righteousness and life, dwells and lives.²⁵

²⁴ Dell pp37-38.

²⁵ Dell p38.

Once again, Dell put his finger on the spot. Christ himself is the law of Christ. Dell has certainly caught the apostle's meaning in Romans 8:1-4.

Finally:

Seeing Christ himself lives in all true believers, let us all, who profess ourselves to be such, so live, that Christ may be seen to live in us, more than ourselves – that they that have known us, may know us no more, but may know Christ in us; and that they that have communion with us, may acknowledge Christ himself speaking, working, and living his own life in us, in all self-denial, humility, holiness, love, resignation of ourselves to the will of God, and in all diligence to do the work of God, and readiness to suffer the will of God. For thus Christ lived in his own flesh, and thus also he will certainly live in ours, if he lives there at all. And when Christ lives in our flesh, as he did in his own, something of his glory will be seen upon us.²⁶

And this man is supposed to be an antinomian?

Dell concluded: 'Now from this union, which we have with the Son of God through faith, do flow many excellent advantages to believers; some of which I shall name now; as':

1. Hereby they are made the sons of God; as John says (John 1[:12]): 'As many as received him', that is, the word that was with God, and was God, and was made flesh. As many as received him by believing, 'to them he gave power to become the sons of God'...

And so through faith, we have not only the name, but also the nature of sons. For faith, uniting us to Christ,²⁷ changes us into a new disposition, and takes from us what we are in regard of sin, and makes us what Christ is in regard of righteousness; and so it makes us new in heart, mind, will, affections, ends, and in our whole conversation. For it brings God's nature into ours, and this changes our heart into its own likeness, so that whatsoever we do, or whatever our condition in the world is, we shall still carry ourselves in all things as the children of God, in some demonstration of the divine nature.

2. Through this faith in the Son of God we are made, not only sons, but 'heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ' [Rom. 8:17]...

3. This true faith, carrying us into the Son of God, and placing us in him, to abide in him, does truly carry us out of the utmost reach of all

²⁶ Dell p39.

²⁷ Once again, Dell was showing that he was no advocate of eternal justification or of actual eternal union with Christ.

evil things – out of the reach of the law, sin, death, and hell – seeing these can have no place nor presence in the Son of God. And though these evils may reach us while we dwell in ourselves, yet we are got out of their reach, so far forth, as by faith we dwell in him.²⁸

4. This right faith carries us into the Son of God, and carries us into all his perfections and excellencies, into his nature and life, and wisdom, and power, and glory, and into all the fullness of the Son of the living God. And so true faith enriches a believer in Christ, with greater treasure than the heart of a carnal Christian²⁹ can possibly give credit to. For through faith we are carried into the Son of God, to have all that he has, and he again comes and fills us with all that he is and has.

5. True faith carries us into Christ, and makes us one with him, as the author and original of all our good works. For through this, God dwells in us, and works his own works in us. And we again dwell in him, and work his own works in him. And those only are true good works, which God, that dwells in us, works in us, and which we, dwelling in God, work in him. Indeed, a believer who is one with Christ, not only does good works, but does them continually: for Christ in him is always active. And while he is in Christ,³⁰ he must be always active. And therefore, says Christ: ‘He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit’ (John 15[:5]). For, through this mutual abiding of Christ and a Christian in each other, a Christian as naturally and as necessarily does the works of God, as the fire burns, or the sun shines.³¹

In short: ‘And these are some of the advantages a Christian has, through faith in the Son of God’. But do not miss Dell’s emphasis: ‘A believer who is one with Christ, not only does good works, *but does them continually*’. No fits-and-starts believing and consequent holiness for Dell!

²⁸ I said I would return to this point. Was Dell talking about a believer’s *sense* of being in Christ? In other words, the more we realise what we are in Christ, the more we triumph?

²⁹ Including – by Dell’s terminology (see above) – the Reformed. Dell was making the excellent point that the Reformed way of sanctification, by whip and fear under the law, fails to match (indeed, it runs contrary to) the New Testament emphasis on sanctification flowing from the believer’s gratitude to God, and the joy arising to the believer through his liberty from the law through the redemption of Christ.

³⁰ Once again, was Dell talking about a believer’s *sense* of being in Christ? Once a sinner believes, he is actually in Christ and in him for ever.

³¹ Dell pp44-47.

Dell, in his parting shot, gathering all together, went for the jugular:

By all which we may perceive, that true faith is a greater matter than the most are aware of. For men usually think, that when they hear the gospel in the outward ministry, and assent to it that it is true, that this is faith, and that then they do believe; but the true faith of God's elect is a greater matter than this; for through that we are truly made one with the Son of the living God, and do abide and live in him for ever. And so this right faith is a most high and precious grace, and is the first manifestation of the Father's eternal love to the soul, and the first grace whereby we have entrance into the kingdom of God. It is the sabbath of sabbaths.³² It is the greatest and highest worship of God. It is infinite and everlasting righteousness. It is the mortification of the flesh, the quickening of the Spirit, our mighty victory over the law, sin, death, hell, the world and the devil. It is the first and last, and all in all, in the kingdom of the Son. And he that believes, as the Scriptures have said, is already truly passed from sin to righteousness, from death to life, and from Satan to God.

In short:

So that right faith is a most precious grace, and is found in very few of the common professors of the worldly church; so that Christ himself makes this question: 'The Son of man, when he comes, shall he find faith upon earth?' [Luke 18:8]. And therefore it concerns all to inquire and try: Whether we partake of this faith or not? And whether the life we live in the flesh, be in the faith of the Son of God? Otherwise we must know, that as he that believes shall be saved, so he that believes not shall be damned [Mark 16:16].³³

Reader, if this is antinomianism, then, speaking for myself, I wish to be an antinomian – in my preaching, in my writing, and, above all, in my living, day-by-day experience. May God grant that we may soon have many such 'antinomians' in the pulpits of our land. How acute is our need of them. And may all who read these words be such 'antinomians'. Let the Reformed hack and hew as they will. Dell has got to the core of the new covenant. Due allowance must be made, of course, for his 17th-century style, but Dell has surely got to the heart of the gospel here. Oh for preachers of like stamp! I

³² I take this to indicate that Dell rightly understood that the new-covenant fulfilment of the sabbath is the believer's rest and delight in Christ.

³³ Dell pp47-48.

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know I've said it before, but I've had more than my fill of hearing boring lectures, when I was supposed to be under the preaching of the gospel. Oh, for men like Dell to preach Christ to us, to preach us into Christ, and to preach Christ into us! Oh for the New Testament emphasis on the exuberant joy that is the lot of all believers through their liberty from the law through the redeeming work of Christ! May we know, may we love, may we feel, what it is to be united to Christ! Above all, may we live in the good of it.

I have no doubt but that this sort of preaching will prove saving for sinners and sanctifying for saints. It is the sovereign elixir for both the unconverted and the converted, God's appointed way of dealing with both. Consequently, and above all, it will glorify God – for purposing so great a salvation for us ruined, helpless and polluted sinners, for accomplishing it through the work of such a glorious Saviour, and for applying it to us so freely and graciously by the power of the sovereign Holy Spirit.

John Eaton (1574/75–1630/31) was born in Kent. In 1604, he became the vicar of Wickham Market, Suffolk, where he preached the fullness of God’s free grace and the uselessness of the law in man’s salvation; that is, by Christ’s redemption, God can see no sin in those who have been justified; true believers are clothed with ‘the wedding garment of Christ’s perfect righteousness’, and God no longer sees their iniquities. And it is this, not the law, that stirs the believer’s sanctification, which sanctification is essential in those who are justified. Being dismissed as an antinomian, Eaton quickly found himself in conflict with fellow ministers and the ecclesiastical authorities, and he was deprived and imprisoned for his views. Undeterred, by 1621 Eaton was in London, where he disseminated his ideas from the pulpit, in conference, and through a series of unpublished manuscripts, which circulated widely during the 1620s and 1630s. Through these efforts, he won a considerable following, and became the leader of an increasingly vocal ‘antinomianism’ in the capital, soon attracting other dissident ministers who shared his dissatisfaction with the ‘legalistic’ doctrine and preaching of the Puritans. Heated conflicts rapidly ensued, these controversies quickly spilling over into the Church courts, resulting in the prosecution of several well-known antinomians before the High Commission. Eaton was spared this fate only by his death, some time between August 1630 and July 1631. Eaton’s death did not, however, signal the end of his influence. His admirers in London wanted to publish his manuscripts, though they had been adjudged heretical by the Church authorities. In 1632, Eaton’s widow was called before the High Commission for trying to publish his *magnum opus*; nevertheless, she refused to hand over her manuscript copies, and for this she was gaoled for several months. Meanwhile, Eaton’s Puritan enemies published several books in the attempt to counteract his influence and doctrine. With the collapse of censorship in the early 1640s, in 1642, Eaton’s followers swiftly moved to publish his *The Honeycombe of Free Justification* and his *Discovery of the Most Dangerous Dead Faith*. Although he was accused of being ‘an incorrigible divulger of errors and false opinions’, the ‘father of English antinomianism’, even his opponents had to admit that Eaton’s life was beyond reproach. In what follows, reader, you may judge for yourself whether or not Eaton was an antinomian or a biblical preacher of the new covenant. I, myself, have no doubt.

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

Ephesians 5:25-27

Sadly, John Eaton died before he could put the final touches to his *Honeycombe*. Nevertheless, his printer, Robert Lancaster, went ahead with publication, adding an explanatory note: Eaton, by reason of his death, had been unable to fulfil his self-appointed task in that he had not been able to provide as many quotations from ‘the faithful interpreters’ as he had wished, nor had he been able to provide full references for those he had quoted. Even so, as Lancaster explained:

The testimonies of the learned are not... urged that our faith should be built upon them, which were idolatry in a high degree... and not to believe God upon his own word, without the attestation of false and sinful man. But they are alleged that they may be helps to evidence, and apply unto us the word of God, in the evidence whereof alone... we are to rest, and to stop the mouths of those who cast an imputation of singularity upon the truth of God, whereby many are deterred even from an examination of it.

Turning from the general to the particular, Lancaster went on:

But unto you (Christian reader) concerning this following discourse, I have two, as it seems to me, very reasonable requests. *First*, that you would pass no censure upon the book or the author until you have fully and carefully examined it by that unerring rule of God’s word... *Secondly*, that after you have done so, you would not let yourself to be swayed from judging according to that rule, by any respect whatsoever.

I endorse those sentiments wholeheartedly.

‘As for the author himself’, continued Lancaster:

His faith, and zeal, and diligence in doing his calling, and his faith, patience and cheerfulness in suffering for the same, were so exemplary, that they are worthy to be set forth as a pattern, not only to

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God's people and ministers now, but even to all succeeding generations. And the Lord grant that by his example, not only all his people may have their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), [but] even with a readiness, both to embrace it for themselves, and to declare it unto others. But especially that the feet of [God's] ministers may become beautiful by preaching the gospel of peace, and bringing glad tidings of good things (Rom. 10:15).¹

Lest this should be dismissed as a biased report, given by one so obviously a supporter of Eaton, let me add that as far as I have discovered, nobody has ever tried to say anything different about Eaton's character and manner of life. If he was an antinomian – which, on the evidence I have seen, I stoutly deny – he was certainly no antinomian in life.

Coming to the *Honeycombe*, right from the start, in his 'Preface', Eaton himself sounded a note which is too much muted these days, if not altogether absent from much current preaching; namely, he distinguished between true and dead faith: 'Christian reader', he opened, 'dead faith goes very far in the profession of the gospel, and is very like the true, lively, justifying and saving faith'. But he was soon warning his readers:

We ought not... to content ourselves (as too many do) with the bare name of free justification, and know it (as they that are in the dead faith do) with a carnal knowledge only... We, but especially God's ministers, must labour (they by preaching, and you by hearing, reading and meditating upon it) to get a true, lively and rejoicing knowledge of it; for when it works joy, peace and content [contentment] with God in the heart, then has a man the true and right knowledge of it... What other salve [medicine] is there then to cure the cold disease of this dead faith, and self-loving zeal, than to lay forth the excellency of free justification, that may enflame the heart so with the fiery coals of God's love towards us, that it may flame forth with the right zeal of keeping within our lists of obedience... to do them thankfully and zealously to the glorifying of God, and benefiting of our brethren and neighbours, of so excellent, and glorious, and full sufficient a benefit?

How needful, I say again, are these words today!²

¹ Eaton ii-iv, emphasis mine.

² See my earlier remarks on Sandemanianism.

Turning to his chosen subject, justification:

Let us know for a certainty that free justification is the very head, heart and soul of all Christian religion and true worship of God; without the true and joyful knowledge whereof, our religion is headless, our profession and worship is heartless, and our very zealous conversation is a mere corruption of the gospel, and rottenness, like a body without a soul that stinks before God. Briefly, in a word, as the perfect righteousness of Christ, alone, is worthy to be acknowledged for the wedding garment – because all the righteousness of our imperfect sanctification³ is... as filthy, menstruous, stained rags (Isa. 64:6) – so true faith of [that is, true believing and true experience of] free justification, being the having-on of this wedding garment, because it alone truly abolishes all the filthy nakedness of our sins out of God's sight, and it alone makes us perfectly holy and sufficiently righteous in the sight of God freely, without works.

He concluded: 'God respecting no worthiness in you to deserve it, nor any unworthiness in you to hinder your free-taking of it, but, only pitying your misery, gives it [to] you freely to this end – to declare the glory of his free grace, and to heal freely all your unworthiness, and to make you freely worthy of all other benefits and blessings of God, both temporal and eternal'.⁴

Thus, in his opening remarks, even in his 'Preface', Eaton could not have been clearer. He intended to set out what he saw as the biblical fullness of free justification by grace, his view of which could not have been higher. More, he was convinced that there was nothing in any sinner that could prevent him receiving this free justification in Christ – if only he believed. The question is, granted Eaton had a high view of justification and the freeness of it, was that view too high and too free?

If I may answer that right at the beginning, by giving my own experience of Eaton's work, I can only say that in reading it, and then preparing it for this publication, I have discovered that for over fifty years I have had too low a view of justification by faith, altogether too dry a view of it. Of course, I knew the doctrine. Yes, I could argue the texts. But the depth, the fullness, the sheer wonder

³ Throughout this chapter, by 'sanctification' Eaton means 'progressive sanctification'. I will not always note this vital point.

⁴ Eaton v-xviii.

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of free justification simply had not penetrated my heart as it ought to have done. I had not realised how God sees me in Christ. Oh! I had sung about it, I had preached it, and I had written about it. But until I read John Eaton's work – a true honeycomb indeed – I had far too academic a view of this most wonderful truth of free justification; namely, that the weakest believer, trusting Christ, is absolutely sinless in the sight of God, and sinless for ever. Far too often, I had taken marvellous New Testament statements about justification, and the effects and benefits of it, and shuffled them off to eternity to come. But those statements are true of me, NOW! *That* is what I have come to feel, and to feel in a way I have never felt before.

The nearest experience I have had of this kind of discovery came about in this way: after the death of my first wife, I found myself saying, in the pulpit, that she now enjoys joy unspeakable and full of glory. As I was saying it, it hit me! We do not have to wait to reach the eternal state for *that!* Peter says it is true of us NOW (1 Pet. 1:8-9). Yes, it will be fully so in eternity, but – and this is the apostolic point – it is true now!

So much for my testimony. Reader, read on, and see what you think. I will let Eaton speak for himself as much as I can, although I have modernised his grammar where necessary. Some might wish I had gone further in modernising his English, but I think his meaning is clear enough. If you like what you see, perhaps you might care to get the original, and peruse it for yourself. I admit it is old-style print ('f' for 's'), and his style is rather tortuous at times and repetitive,⁵ but at least you will then have the unfiltered Eaton. After all, I have distilled his work (the best part of 500 pages) into a mere forty pages, omitting many arguments, illustrations and extracts.

I say again, whatever others may think about Eaton, I owe a huge debt to the man, and I hope I never lose the heart-warming view he has given me of my salvation in Christ.

Before I set out my distillation of Eaton's work, let me say where I disagree with him. He had too high a view of baptism, and he brought this up on several occasions, using Christ's ordinance in a

⁵ Who am I to speak?

way that the New Testament never warrants. Besides which, of course, he held to infant baptism. Since I have dealt fully with this in other works,⁶ I will say no more about it now. I also disagree with Eaton's view of preparationism by the law.⁷

But, I am pleased to be able to record, Eaton was out of step with many other so-called antinomians in that he did not hold to eternal justification. As he stated:

Before we are justified, and while we are in the state of nature, we are the children of the devil and of wrath (Eph. 2:3), but when we are justified with this internal and secret justification, and made thereby the children of God, then...⁸

None are made... perfectly holy and righteous, but such of the elect as are actually called, because although all the elect shall be justified in their time, and none but the elect shall be justified (for whom he justifies, these he glorifies – but he glorifies none but the elect), yet the very elect are not actually and really justified, but are darkness, and live in sin and darkness, until they are effectually called... (Rom. 8:30).⁹

Excellent. Many other 'antinomians' got this wrong. Eaton did not.

Now for the main work. Let Eaton set out his stall, defining what he understood by 'free justification':

Justification is when... clothed with the wedding garment of Christ's own and pure righteousness that of unjust we are made just before God:¹⁰ that is, all our sins are utterly abolished out of God's sight, and we are made from all spot of sin perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely [Eph. 5:25-27]. And this is God's pardon or forgiveness (which few understand) great above man's, and glorious

⁶ See my *Infant, Baptist Sacramentalism*.

⁷ See, for instance, Eaton pp105,122-123,135-136,158-163,463-464. Eaton asserted that the law should be preached to sinners and the gospel to saints (Eaton pp122-126,135-136), but this sort of division of a congregation is impossible. Compare the hyper-Calvinistic differing ways of addressing sensible and non-sensible sinners (see my *Offer; Septimus; Eternal*).

⁸ Eaton pp156-157.

⁹ Eaton p270.

¹⁰ This terminology comes up time and again. Read it as: 'We who were unjust (ungodly) are made just (righteous) before God'.

and wonderful, like God himself (Acts 13:38-40), the joyful faith whereof sanctifies us, and makes us to do the duties of our vocations faithfully, and to walk to the glory of God in the spiritual meaning of all God's ten commandments zealously (Tit. 2:14).¹¹

It is all here, in embryo. As I will show, Eaton worked it out in detail: the glorious nature of justification; the two parts to justification – before God and before men; justification is received by faith, contrary to reason, sense and feeling; justification and sanctification are inseparably linked; justification always leads to sanctification, being its spur and motive; the law is not the motive of sanctification – in fact, preaching the law actually hinders sanctification; the nature of saving faith; the joy of the justified; and the way of assurance. For ease of understanding, I will distil the mass of material under various headings, but it surely goes without saying that it is impossible to take such a large work and tie it into neat little, self-contained packages. Nevertheless, I will try.

The glory of justification by faith through Christ

One of the great issues with Rome is the unbiblical way in which she conflates justification and sanctification, taking justification to mean that God not only imputes Christ's righteousness to believers, but he actually makes them righteous *in their own persons*. It follows, therefore, since no man on earth is perfect, no man on earth can know he is justified! Indeed, it means that no man can be justified in this life! This is wrong, diabolically wrong, and has very serious consequences. One, perhaps unforeseen, consequence is that too often the Reformed, overreacting to Rome, have not always grasped the fullness of the grace in justification. The Reformed view of justification, while rightly stressing the biblical position that it is a legal declaration by God, too often leaves us with a rather dry view of the subject. I have already spoken of this in my own personal experience. Much hinges on the word 'made' in Romans 5:19, and such like places. This definitely means 'constituted'. Having said that, however, the believer really is perfectly and absolutely constituted righteous in the sight of God,

¹¹ Eaton p7.

utterly sinless, washed in the Redeemer's blood and clothed with his righteousness. Eaton certainly – rightly – stressed this, arguing cogently for it from Scripture, as I will now show.

The believer is truly made righteous in Christ

Eaton:

The word, that we are justified, is not to be taken only in the judicial signification; namely, that God only reposes, accounts and pronounces us just and righteous, and so quitting us from all guilt and punishment only – in which judicial signification some do barely rest – but it also must be taken in the natural and proper signification... that is, truly and in very realness, [the Lord's imputation of righteousness] makes us just and righteous... And that also [in] two manner of ways.

First, by imputing to us his Son's righteousness, [God] utterly abolishes from before himself all our sins, and freely makes us passively just and righteous; which serves to make us truly and in very deed perfectly just and righteous in God's own eyes: and this is called justification.

And *secondly*, he renews us by his Spirit unto inherent and active holiness and righteousness; which... is imperfect in this life, and serves to approve us righteous to the eyes of men, and is called sanctification. Thus when God has both these ways... truly and in very deed made us righteous, then he reposes, accounts, and pronounces, and calls us righteous, absolving us thereby from all guilt and punishment... Therefore, God justifies no wicked man, but first makes him just and righteous in and by Christ, and then accounts him so.¹²

Eaton knew men would quarrel with him over the word 'made'. He was ready:

By another man's [Adam's] sin we are made sinners, lost and damned, so by another man's [Christ's] righteousness we are made righteous and saved, and therefore I call this righteousness an essential righteousness and eternal... Only Christ is everlasting, and therefore his righteousness is everlasting, and yet [it is] ours, and [it] makes us everlasting [in righteousness]. This is the mercy of God the Father; this

¹² Eaton pp22-23, emphasis mine.

is the grace of the new covenant,¹³ wherein the Lord is sweet to them that taste him. In this we must be saved, and in no other.

So much for justification. Eaton went on:

But... there is a righteousness called actual righteousness, flowing from faith and from the aforesaid essential righteousness. And this is our righteousness, and our own proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work together with the aforesaid first righteousness...¹⁴

That God, by the power of his imputation, conveying his Son's righteousness to be in us and upon us, does, in his own sight, so clothe us, body and soul, both within and without, with the wedding garment of his Son's perfect righteousness, that we have our sins hereby not only utterly abolished out of God's sight, but also are evangelically and freely formed; that is, are in truth and... very deed made, although not inherently and actively (as... the Papists would have it), yet objectively and passively perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely.¹⁵

Let me pause. It is all here. Eaton has rightly set out the glory of free justification, showing clearly, and beyond contradiction, that God views his believing people as absolutely sinless in Christ. But this glorious justification never – never – comes alone. It is always – always – accompanied by the believer's actual sanctification. God the Father, through Christ's redeeming work, applied by the Spirit's power, ensures that it is so.

¹³ Eaton had 'Testament'. As I argued in my *Christ*, it is better to read this as 'covenant'. The same applies from time to time in what follows, but without this note. I have left 'Testament' where this is obviously right.

¹⁴ Eaton pp265-266. Eaton quoted Zanchius: 'The righteousness wherewith we are justified or made righteous is twofold – the one by which we are reputed and also are truly and perfectly righteous to God-ward... (Rom. 5:[19])... But there is another righteousness, which, being communicated unto us by the Spirit of Christ, and indeed inherent in us, and showing itself outwardly by works, consists of the mortification of the old man, and quickening of the new man, of a hatred of sin and love of righteousness, by which we are just... before men, and acknowledged and counted to be righteous before them'. Eaton added: 'And this righteousness we affirm to be an effect of the former'.

¹⁵ Eaton p271.

Eaton, yet again, asserted that justification is more than a declaration (the commonly-held Reformed view – in effect, if not in theory), arguing this from the ‘made’ of Romans 5:19:

The apostle, not speaking of sanctification until he comes to the sixth chapter, but only of justification, says thus: ‘By the obedience of one shall many be’ what? ‘be *counted* righteous’? No, but ‘*made* righteous’... It is mystically above sense and feeling that [we] may be by faith of God’s power made so truly and really righteous to Godward, that [we] cannot but in time, by discerning Christ’s love inherently and actively, declare the same afterwards to man-ward by sanctification.¹⁶

That is to say, in Romans 5, the apostle is dealing with justification. It is only as he moves into Romans 6 that he begins to expand upon sanctification. But, just as the two chapters are joined as one continuous passage in one book, so in personal experience. Every justified sinner must go on to be, and will go on to be, a sanctified sinner. This is what God accomplishes in and through the new covenant.

Eaton continued in the same vein with Ephesians 5:25-27:

Mark how [the apostle] says not that he might *count* it a glorious church, but ‘*make* it to himself a glorious church’. And where as some have objected that the word (‘might’) imports that this place is to be understood of our making righteous by our sanctification,¹⁷ by which we shall be made so righteous, that we shall have no spot or wrinkle in the life to come,¹⁸ I answer that although our sanctification is now inseparable from our justification, and yet will not be perfect until the life to come, and then it shall be so perfect that we shall not have one spot or wrinkle of sin to ourselves, and [to our] own sight, sense and feeling, yet, notwithstanding, all interpreters that I have read do understand the place to be meant [speaking] of justification also, by which it is verified upon us, that we have, not even in this life, one spot or wrinkle of sin in the sight of God freely. And I think that this place is properly and chiefly to be understood of free justification.

¹⁶ Eaton pp293-295, emphasis mine – although Eaton had some (confusing) emphasis.

¹⁷ In other words, ‘our progressive sanctification’.

¹⁸ Until I had read Eaton, my position to a ‘T’.

This is a statement of immense importance. Immense, I say! Eaton was arguing that Ephesians 5:26-27 must not be confined to eternity. It is the truth about every believer *now*. Eaton gave his reasons, including:

Our sanctification is wrought by us and by the Spirit of God enabling us thereunto. But this example [Eph. 5:25-27] is appropriated to Christ alone, in giving himself to shed his blood to effect it [that?], which properly belongs to the work of our free justification... [Further,] the apostle speaks in the aorist,¹⁹ betokening... that [Christ] *has* [emphasis, Eaton's] made us clean; importing a thing already perfectly done... [Further,] because the apostle says that [Christ] might make us to *himself* a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, he says not to *ourselves*, which will be verified indeed by sanctification in the life to come, for *then*, even to ourselves, and to our sense and feeling, we shall not have one spot or wrinkle of sin or any such thing. But he says to 'make us to himself' – that is, above our own reason... and contrary to ourselves, and to our own sense and feeling, has Christ *already* made us fit brides for so glorious a bridegroom, which is only in this life by free justification... [Lastly,]... the participle of the present time immediately following... the church is now in such a case as that it shall not have one spot or wrinkle of sin hereafter... not having *now* at this present time one spot or wrinkle of sin or any such thing, which is only true truly in this life, not man-ward by sanctification, but... God-ward by free justification.²⁰

Let me unpack this. From the point of view of sanctification, the believer will be perfect only in eternity. But from the point of view of justification, the believer is perfect the moment he trusts Christ, without spot, without wrinkle, without anything of the sort, in the sight of God.

Eaton knew that some would object, and object strongly, to his exegesis. He had his defence ready:

But if any object... saying that in some translations the original word is not translated 'that he might *make* us to himself', but [rather] 'that he might *present* us to himself'; to which I answer that it is all one, or rather confirms more fully what I say, because God does not present to

¹⁹ A Greek tense which indicates an action, completed with permanent effect. It can be more complicated, but that is how Eaton is rightly using the word here.

²⁰ Eaton pp295-298, emphasis mine, except where indicated.

himself a false thing like a thing represented on a stage, but in deed and truth does the thing, and then presents it to himself... that is promise of free justification and sanctification in Christ... showing that the church is without spot or wrinkle, but inchoatively [beginning of an action; that is, imperfectly] to men-ward by sanctification, but made so perfectly to God-ward by justification... We see that beside other equivalent phrases... Christ does not barely *count* her, but has *made* her, clean and righteous.²¹

In other words, believers truly are sinless in the sight of God. This is what justification means. Eaton continued, taking to task those preachers who fail to expatiate on the fullness of God's grace in the justification of his people by faith:

All of which declares what a powerful, operative and wonderful and glorious work God's forgiveness is, and how short we ministers come in laying forth, as the apostle does, the excellency of God's remission and forgiveness of sins, being both perfect and glorious in its own nature, and also making believers perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely.²²

Moving on, Eaton further argued his case from 2 Corinthians 5:21:

Christ so truly took our sins upon him, and was so really in the sight of God clothed in the same, that although not inherently and actively... but yet really, he was made a true sinner, and so God, having made him, by his imputation, really a sinner in his sight, did count him a sinner...²³ Thus mighty is God's imputation of our sin upon his Son, Christ. And as Christ, by the power of God's imputation, though not inherently and actively, yet objectively and passively, was made in the sight of God, really a sinner and cursed, so on the other side, are we, by the power of God's imputation of his Son's righteousness, made, though not inherently and actively, yet objectively and passively, really

²¹ Eaton pp298-299, emphasis mine. He cited Col. 1:22, later (Eaton pp318-330) arguing it out in full. See also Eaton pp330-334 for Col. 1:28.

²² Eaton pp313-317.

²³ Eaton quoted the well-known passage from Luther on 2 Cor. 5:21 and Isa. 53: 'We must not make these words less than they are... We must know [Christ] to be wrapped in our sins, in our malediction [curse], in our death, and in all our evils, as he is wrapped in our flesh and in our blood. For unless he had taken upon himself my sins... the law had no right over him, which condemns none but sinners, and holds them under the curse'.

righteous and blessed... that is, perfectly righteous in the sight of God freely.²⁴

Eaton continued to argue his case from Hebrews 10:14:

Christ 'with one offering has made perfect for ever them that are sanctified'; that is, such as are put apart unto salvation, and declare the same by sanctification. Although their sanctification be very imperfect, yet by justification God does not imaginarily count them righteous, but has made them in the sight of God perfectly righteous, and for ever...²⁵ Now that God's imputation and spiritual clothing with his Son's righteousness does so really make us righteous...²⁶

In short:

What can be more required to make a true Christian? I grant that where this is, there will follow infallibly a renewed sanctified life with zeal of God's glory, but this makes not a Christian, but consequently declares and outwardly shows that he is already, before, thus freely made a Christian... They are [to God-ward] righteous, just, and saints to man-ward by sanctification. The first way to God-ward is perfect, otherwise it is no righteousness to God-ward, who cannot love anything but that which is perfect; but the second way to man-ward is imperfect, which yet, being done in sincerity... is... exceeding imperfect.²⁷

²⁴ Eaton pp300-303.

²⁵ In saying this, Eaton was careful, once again, to separate himself from the Papists.

²⁶ Eaton pp303-304. See above, p231 for Crisp on the same theme; namely, that imputation is real not imaginary.

²⁷ Eaton quoted (or paraphrased) Calvin: 'Saints are called righteous declaratively of their inherent holiness of life, yet for as much, by all their endeavour, they do not fulfil righteousness itself, it is meet that this inherent righteousness, such as it is, gives place to the being made righteous by faith'. He also quoted Downham: 'Neither are we imaginarily righteous, but God makes us perfectly righteous indeed, by washing away our sins with the precious blood of Christ, and by appropriating and applying unto us his Son's righteousness, by virtue of his Spirit principally, and a lively faith instrumentally, and so being made really and in truth partakers of Christ's righteousness, God reposes us not imaginarily, but as we are and that in truth, perfectly just and righteous' (Eaton pp307-309). Eaton had more to say on Heb. 10:14 (Eaton pp334-343).

Thus, Eaton argued, there is a fullness to justification which must not be diminished by emphasising the legal aspect of it – even though the legal aspect is a truth. It is equally true that the believer is, even now, perfectly sinless in the sight of God, and he must never forget this amazing truth about himself.²⁸ On the other hand,

²⁸ Let me quote two recent commentators on Rom. 5:19. ‘Debate surrounds the exact meaning of the verb Paul uses here. Some argue that it means nothing more than “make”. But this translation misses the forensic flavour of the word. It often means “appoint”, and probably refers here to the fact that people are “inaugurated into” the state of sin/righteousness. Paul is insisting that people were really “made” sinners through Adam’s act of disobedience, just as they are really “made righteous” through Christ’s obedience. This “making righteous”, however, must be interpreted in the light of Paul’s typical forensic categories. To be “righteous” does not mean to be morally upright, but to be judged acquitted, cleared of all charges, in the heavenly judgment. Through Christ’s obedient act, people become *really* righteous; but “righteous” itself is a legal, not a moral, term in this context’ (Moo, Douglas J.: *The Epistle to the Romans*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1996, p345).

‘Justification means our involvement in the obedience of Christ in terms of the same principle by which we are involved in Adam’s sin. Nothing less is demanded by the analogy instituted in this verse. Again, the involvement in the obedience of Christ is not that of our personal voluntary obedience nor that of subjective holiness. This would violate the forensic character of justification with which the apostle is dealing. But we must not tone down the formula “constituted righteous” to any lower terms than the gracious judgment on God’s part whereby the obedience of Christ is reckoned to our account, and therefore reckoned as ours, with all the entail of consequence which righteousness carries with it’ (Murray, John: *The Epistle to the Romans...*, Two Volumes in One, Marshall Morgan and Scott, London, 1974, Vol.1 p206).

And take these words from C.H.Spurgeon: ‘The [justified] man stands a guiltless man in the sight of God, accepted in the beloved. “What!” say you, “do you mean that literally?” Yes, I do. That is the doctrine of justification by faith. Man ceases to be regarded by divine justice as a guilty being; the moment he believes on Christ his guilt is all taken away. But I am going a step further. The moment the man believes on Christ, he ceases to be guilty in God’s esteem; but what is more, he becomes righteous, he becomes meritorious... It is the doctrine of holy writ, that none can condemn whom God justifies, and that none can accuse those for whom Christ has died; for they are totally free from sin. So that, as one of the prophets has it, God sees no sin in Jacob nor iniquity in Israel. In the

his justification before men – that is, his sanctification – is always imperfect in this life. Even so, granting that his sanctification is always imperfect in this life, it is equally true that his justification in this life is perfect. And the weight of the New Testament falls, beyond all question, on the perfection of the believer's justification. The believer must never forget this truth about himself.

But the believer has a battle on his hand, for, as Eaton did not fail to stress, the biblical doctrine of justification exceeds all human reason. If we judge by feelings and sense, we will fail to grasp what we really are in being justified. Let me show how Eaton dealt with this. He made the point that the doctrine of justification by faith, being so amazing, defeats human reason. Moreover, if we look at ourselves, the New Testament claims for justification run directly contrary to what we can see and feel about ourselves. What is the answer? It is the same old remedy. How are we saved? By believing, of course: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31). How do we receive any biblical doctrine? By reason? By feeling? No! By faith! (See John 11:26; 2 Cor. 4:13; 1 Thess. 4:14; Heb. 11:6, for instance). Well, then, this is how we are to receive and come into the full benefits of all the grace of God in his free justification of us. We have to take God at his word, we have to trust him in our hearts! We are believers!

Justification is contrary to our reason, sense and feeling

Eaton:

If we could believe that God is able, above reason, sense and feeling, by his Son's blood and righteousness utterly to abolish out of his own sight all our sins, being the work and image of the devil, which Christ came purposely to destroy, and that he makes us whiter than snow, from them all, so that we have not now one spot or wrinkle of sin that defiles us, nor any such thing in the sight of God, and that he is faithful to do this, as he has spoken it (Eph. 5:26-27) contrary to our reason, sense and feeling, then have we true faith. Then should we truly glorify

moment they believe, their sins being imputed to Christ, they cease to be theirs, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to them and accounted theirs, so that they are accepted' (Spurgeon, C.H.: *New Park Street Pulpit...*, Vol.3, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, pp156-158).

God and Christ and find sanctification, and all other blessings, both spiritual and temporal, with a fuller hand than we do. Which people do much fail of because they mark not that there is a twofold making of us clean and abolishing of our sins made mention of in God's word.

Eaton spelled out this twofold aspect:

First, a mystical and secret abolishing of our sins, wrought by Christ and his righteousness, in the sight of God only (John 1:29; 1 John 1:7)... which is called mystical because it is wrought, seen and apprehended above reason, sense and feeling; that is, by faith only, and is the mere and sole glory of Christ's Godhead (Heb. 1:3).

And:

Secondly, a gross and palpable abolishing of our sins, wrought by us, by the help of God's Spirit, to our sense and feeling by sanctification... (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 John 1:3)... which latter we shall never *feel* to be perfected in us until the life to come, that there may be place for the first way, and for faith. For, as I said before, what place would there be left for faith, to believe that Christ has made us perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely, if we could *see* and *feel* ourselves to be so in God's sight?²⁹

And, while I do not want, at this time, to enter the debate about 'the man of Romans 7', Eaton's view of the passage showed what he thought about a believer's feelings about his justification:

Paul's intent [in Romans 7:14-24 is not]... to describe in what state he and the justified children of God do stand in the sight of God, but what he and all the true children of God, by the imperfection of their sanctification, do feel in themselves... while they look into themselves and compare the imperfection of their sanctification with the perfection of the law of God... Whereby all those sins and imperfections of their sanctification, that they feel in themselves [to be] as a menstruous cloth, are above their sense and feeling utterly abolished out of God's sight by justification, and they are made from all spot of sin perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely... (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 7:25; 8:4; Rom. 5:2; Col. 2:10).³⁰

In other words, while the believer, looking at himself, sees an imperfect sanctification, in looking to Christ, he sees the perfection

²⁹ Eaton pp50-51, emphasis mine.

³⁰ Eaton pp87-88, emphasis mine.

of his justification. Where should the stress fall? Where does the New Testament lay the weight? Eaton had no doubt. Keep looking to Christ! Glory in your justification!

How did Eaton set out the glories of free justification, notwithstanding our own imperfect sanctification? By stressing the God-ward aspect of our justification – our standing before God in Christ.

The God-ward aspect of justification

Eaton:

The first part of free justification is that whereby we, being by the power of God's imputation, so clothed with the wedding garment of Christ's perfect righteousness, that of unjust we are made just before God [and] have thereby all our sins, that we feel daily dwelling in us, so (above reason, sense and feeling, that it may be of God's power) quite taken away from before God, and so utterly abolished out of his sight, that we have not one spot or wrinkle of sin, or any such thing in the sight of God, because the blood of Christ makes us clean from all sin, as the Scriptures so abundantly testify... (Jer. 50:20; John 1:29; Isa. 43:25; 44:22)... For Christ taking upon him our sins, they could not remain and abide upon him. What then became of them? They must needs vanish away, and be utterly abolished and brought to nothing. Whereby, faith works so mightily, that he that believes that Christ has taken away his sins,³¹ is as clean without sin as Christ himself... And therefore although the feeling of sin is left in us, only to the end to drive us to faith, and to make faith more abound, yet has Christ taken away our sins from before God and abolished them... (Heb. 10:14).³²

The fact is:

God casts all the sins of the faithful [believing] into the bottom of the sea, like a talent of lead, from our eyes, that from thenceforth they may never appear before God any more. For God does so remove away the sins of the faithful [believing] out of his sight, that they may never return into his sight any more... Christ gave himself for us to make us holy; and he has made us clean, that he might make us to himself a

³¹ This, as it stands, is Sandemanianism. I am sure Eaton did not mean to convey that doctrine. True faith is trust in Christ, not the mere acceptance of facts.

³² Eaton pp24-26; see also Eaton p73 plus many others.

glorious church... The church³³ has not one spot or wrinkle of sin, but is perfectly righteous by free justification and faith only in Christ.

But:

How can we be made in the sight of God purer and whiter than snow, when, yet, notwithstanding, the relics of sin do always cleave unto us?... Say not therefore: 'I have sinned very much; how can I be healed of this load of sin which I feel in me?' You cannot [do it], but your God can. Indeed, and [he] can so do it, that he can clean put out and abolish your sin. Mark diligently this saying, for God does [indeed] put out and abolish sin so clean, that there remains no print of them... God, when he puts out sins, he abolishes them so clean, that there remains no scar or any print thereof, but with the healing, he gives the fresh colour, because he not only puts out and extinguishes the sin, and makes it not to be – indeed, and as if it had never been – but also supplies, in place thereof, and puts in righteousness, and so takes [sin] altogether, and so clean away from before himself, that there appears no scar, nor print, nor sign of scar.

How necessary it is to stress this vital point! Very often today believers are taught that justification is 'as if you had never sinned'. Not at all! It is as though you had never sinned, but had always been perfectly righteous!

As Eaton declared:

This then is the glory of God in me, that I being a sinner in myself (for what should he remit and abolish, if I were not a sinner?) do yet notwithstanding believe that heaven and earth shall sooner fall, than that I am not by the blood of Christ, from all my sins in the sight of God, more pure and white than snow. If you believe not this, you make God, with your highest and most horrible reproach and blasphemy, a liar... Truly all our sins are utterly abolished out of God's sight... Perfectly clean the blood of Christ makes us from all sin... God himself... sees no sin in his justified children... The blood of Christ has made us so perfectly clean that we are in the sight of God from all sin whiter than snow. And all this, because we are by the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness made from all spot of sin perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely... For God sees no spot in her [the church], because he sees nothing in her but his Son's righteousness,

³³ That is the elect in God's decree and Christ's work, but every believer in actual experience. I will not repeat this note every time. See my opening remarks on Eaton not holding to eternal justification.

wherewith his church is clothed, and whereby she has salvation, life and glory; for seeing she has put on Christ himself, to God-ward by justification, and to man-ward by sanctification, although she has some sin in the imperfections of her sanctification, that the devil sees, and every one of us in our consciences feels it. But God sees none, for by reason of Christ, with whom she is clothed, she is all fair, without spot or wrinkle.

High doctrine this, but not too high. In my view, Eaton is hitting the biblical note; namely – whatever cavillers may say – that ‘God himself... sees no sin in his justified children’ because ‘Christ’s righteousness [has] made [them] from all spot of sin perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely’. See Romans 8:33-34.

But as he went on, Eaton was very strong, I think too strong:

Whosoever, therefore, has not confidence in this one point, that our sins are so taken away by the blood of Christ, that God does not see our sins in us, without doubt they are damned, as long as they continue to rob Christ of this honour, and his wedding garment of this glory... (Isa. 43:25).

Let me say why I think this is too strong, and oversteps the mark. I am certain, myself, that weak believers do exist, weak because they, looking too much within themselves and, seeing the poverty of their sanctification, cannot see their glorious perfection in Christ. I would encourage any such who might be reading this: look to Christ. Do not look within, look to your Redeemer. Imperfection you will find in yourself; nothing but perfection – and all is laid to your account – is in the Lord Jesus.³⁴

Nevertheless, Eaton was right to press on:

We being hereby of unjust made just – that is, perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely in his righteousness only, now as God looks upon us in this justified estate, he remembers no sin in us... (Jer. 50:20; Heb. 9:26) And therefore that there is no more sin, *etc.*, in the church, since Christ now reigns... for

³⁴ In mitigation, see my earlier remarks on William Dell and the difficulty for every preacher or writer when faced with the conflict between the scriptural standard and his own attainment. I also referred to Phil. 3:12-14. That being said, Eaton still went too far in the above. Once again, I express my thanks to Andrew Rome who made me think more deeply about this point.

they which do believe in Christ are no sinners (Rom. 5:8-9), but are holy and righteous, lords over sin and death, and living for ever... If I look upon my own person, or the person of my brother, it shall never be in God's sight so absolutely holy. But if I behold Christ, who has sanctified and made clean his church, then it is altogether holy.

Eaton stressed the importance of what he was saying: 'Nothing therefore concerns us more than that we do securely and joyfully assure ourselves that our sins come no more into remembrance before God'.³⁵

Eaton turned again to the undoubted fact that our inevitably imperfect sanctification always contradicts these amazing statements about our standing before God in Christ:

We all have sin in us, and... in many things we sin all. Indeed... we all sin, not only in many things... but even in all things, and... that all our righteousness of sanctification and holy walking is as a menstruous cloth, that is mortal and damnable sin, if God should behold it out of justification.³⁶

Even so:

God has made his children so perfectly holy and righteous in his sight that he sees no sin in them, in and by their justification... Even so, the children of God, terrified more with the horribleness of sin, in the sight of God, than with punishment, although they flying to Christ, he... does not only cover [their sins]... but also, in respect of God, has utterly abolished [their sins] out of his Father's sight, by making them of unjust just...³⁷

Eaton, unwisely, pushed this to its logical conclusion:

³⁵ Eaton pp30-43. Eaton had a remarkable view of 1 John 3:5, but it shows yet again his high view of justification: 'As... John testifies that in Christ (that is in the body of his church) is no sin... for here he speaks not of the person of Christ, but his whole body... There is no sin in the church any more... By Christ's dying upon the cross, he has purged and made us so clean from all sin in the sight of God, that God sees nothing else in the whole world of true believers but a mere cleansing and righteousness... (Jer. 31:31-32,34; Heb. 10:14-17)' (Eaton pp41-42). As I say, exegesis odd; sentiment spot on!

³⁶ Eaton p47.

³⁷ Eaton p56.

For the justified children of God, and all their thoughts, words and deeds, are exceedingly good in the sight of God, not to their sense and feeling by the perfection of their sanctification... but because although that is a good foundation of a godly life, inseparable from justification (1 John 3:6,9)... that is, [they] cannot but choose and wrestle against all sin both in [themselves] and others, and zealously follow holiness (Tit. 2:14), yet this foundation of their sanctification is too weak to make them, and all their thoughts, words and deeds exceeding good in God's sight, because all their righteousness and goodness of sanctification is by reason of the imperfection thereof, if it should be beholden out of our justification, but as a menstruous cloth that is very wicked and mortal sin... How then come all the thoughts, words and deeds of God's justified children to be exceeding good in God's sight? I answer, by the perfection of their justification, whereby not only their persons are justified – that is, of unjust made just; that is, perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God... – but also... all their words, and all their deeds are justified in the sight of God – that is, all the evil of all their thoughts, words and deeds, and all the imperfections of their sanctification, are mystically – that is, above reason, sense and feeling – utterly abolished out of God's sight, and all their thoughts, words and deeds are made so perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely... All is pure in the sight of God.³⁸

Yes, Eaton was right, but – and it is a big 'but' – the plain fact is when the believer sins, he really does sin. David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, and Peter's denial of Christ, were far from being 'perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God'. David and Peter were justified men, but they also sinned in these respects, and both lost their joy as a result. If Eaton had warned that sin is sin, and sin is abhorrent to God, and then gone on to say that, even so, nothing can hinder the believer's justification, he would have been on New Testament ground. Sin does rob the believer, however – not of his justification, but of his sense of joy at the loss of God's approval.

Nevertheless, Eaton was right to keep pressing home the truth of the new covenant: if we look at our sanctification, we are wretched sinners in ourselves, yes, but, as believers, we must keep our eyes upon Christ and our justification in him. Looking to Christ by faith, we must believe what God has said about us in his word:

³⁸ Eaton pp76-78.

True it is that Paul and all the true children of God both have and feel the remnants of corruption dwelling in them. Indeed, the more grace they have, the more, by their true hatred of sin and love of righteousness wrought in them by their sanctification, do they feel sin to be like a thorn or splinter run into their flesh. Whereby they cannot but choose, but pray thrice and thrice and thrice – that is continually groan by the vigour and force of their evangelical, continual, true repentance – and still sigh to be freed from the same, of which, although God does not, for the exercise of their faith, free them from their sense and feeling until the time of their appointed change [their death], yet he calls them by his word and Spirit to be better and better by the eye of faith, that he has perfectly healed them thereof in his own sight, before they pray. As if he said: ‘Indeed I have healed you with a twofold or double advantage, both to you and me’.

Eaton went on as if God were addressing believers directly:

‘For first, my grace (of justification, which is the mother and abundant grace of graces, Rom. 5:15,17) is sufficient for you. That is, although mystically above your sense and feeling, that you may not live by sense and feeling, but by faith in my power, yet truly it makes you sufficiently righteous in my sight...’ (Eph. 5:27)...

Again: ‘You are not only made sufficiently righteous in my sight, but also the second advantage is that hereby my power is made perfect in your weakness. That is, when you feel nothing but weakness and infirmity in yourself, then for me notwithstanding, to make you sufficiently and perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in my sight freely, herein my power is mightily magnified...’.

Eaton drew the conclusion:

Thus it is plain, that although God knows the sin that dwells in his sanctified children, yet he sees them [the sins] abolished out of his own sight, and sees them [his children] sufficiently and perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in his own sight, and sees and defends his power to be therein greatly magnified.³⁹

Eaton turned on his opponents, warning them not to keep hammering believers with their wretchedness and miserable level of sanctification. You must not, he said, keep telling:

Humbled ones, terrified with the horribleness of the least sin, and now by justification made glad, joyful and zealous, that they are not made

³⁹ Eaton pp95-96.

perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely, but that God sees sins in them, and is ready to correct and punish them for the same.⁴⁰

This is not so, said Eaton, for:

By the power of God's imputation, clothed with the wedding garment of Christ's perfect righteousness... we have, not only all our sins, together with the imperfections of our sanctification, ever (while we are in this life) dwelling in us, incomprehensibly swallowed up and utterly abolished... but also we are, without the help of any good works to make us righteous, made perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely.⁴¹

For 'the possessors' of free justification, Eaton set out 'what an inestimable jewel they have' in 'the utility and majesty of it' in its 'fruits and effects': 'Justification truly enlightens us, and brings us into a wonderful light'; it reveals sin in its true colours; it further shows 'the perfection of God's justice against sin, and his implacable displeasure and anger against the same'. Then again, 'the right knowledge of free justification brings a man to see and understand... the spiritual meaning of the ten commandments'. Further, 'this right knowledge of free justification opens unto us the very closets of heaven'. Moreover:

Justification... not only delivers us from the... punishment belonging to the least sin... but also it is the only cause that brings upon us, and puts us in possession of, all the contrary, great and glorious benefits of the gospel. [One of these] excellent [benefits] is our wonderful union into Christ, whereby we are by the power of the Holy Ghost, though mystically and spiritually, yet truly, really and substantially, so engrafted and united into Christ, that we are made one with him, and he one with us. [Further, another] excellent benefit of free justification is our most glorious adoption, whereby we are made true sons and daughters of the living God. [Again,] this free justification is the only immediate cause and means of our final glorification, and of setting us in the right and assurance of eternal life. [Yet again, just as] the want or ignorance of it is the loss of all true peace and joy in God, so the right knowledge and apprehension thereof is the lively spring of joy, and of a good conscience, and glorifying of God, both in heart and

⁴⁰ Eaton p136.

⁴¹ Eaton p257.

tongue. [It also] works a good judgement, and right discerning of all religion, works and worship to the overthrowing of all superstitions, sects and schisms, and reduces people from their contentious and dangerous by-paths, and rectifies their blind legal zeals... (Rom.10:3).⁴²

Reader, at this point, once again we run into a difficulty which must face us all.⁴³ On the one hand, we have the New Testament speaking so clearly of our justification, our freedom from condemnation, and our perfection before God in Christ. On the other hand, we have certain other passages which show that believers can be weak and sinful – and our experience certainly chimes in with this! What is the answer? As I see it, we have suffered too much, and for too long, in stressing our weakness and failure, and we have thought too little about our liberty in Christ. To be specific: I am convinced that far too much weight has been given to Romans 7:14-24. Let me quickly explain myself. Please note the exact reference. Note further that the passage is highly controverted. That being so, we should be far more cautious than many are in pronouncing it to be the norm for the believer – indeed, making it the pinnacle of spirituality. Above all do not miss the way the apostle goes on. Having asked the question: ‘What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?’, Paul thunders out: ‘I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ True, he does admit: ‘With the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin’. Even so, he immediately draws this glorious (and extended) conclusion to it all:

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 of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me 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

⁴² Eaton pp401-457. As can be seen, if ever my remark about this work being but the briefest of digests was true, it must be so here. I have condensed nearly 60 pages into these few lines. This applies not only to Eaton’s statements, but to his detailed supporting arguments.

⁴³ Here is another place where Andrew Rome made me think more deeply about things. I am grateful to him.

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 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 (Rom. 7:24 – 8:11).

And so on – right to the end of the chapter. And is this not the thrust of the New Testament, rather than the wretchedness of our spirituality? I ask, therefore, of John Eaton, does his kind of preaching not warm your heart? It does mine! If this man is an antinomian, God make me one! If this is antinomian preaching, let us have more of it! What better encouragement could a believer want to stir him to live for God's glory – than to let the full glories of God's free grace in justifying him in Christ sink deep into his soul? Calvin might drive men to the law for sanctification. Eaton, in line with the New Testament, drives us to Christ, and our glorious liberty in the Redeemer.

The inseparable connection between justification and sanctification

Here we reach a crucial point. In light of what follows, how this man could ever have been written off as an antinomian beggars belief. Those who do it, especially if they have not actually read – let alone studied – his work, need to examine their heart. The man who could baldly state in print: The 'grace of justification, bringing forth also sanctification, truly converts... to God', as he did⁴⁴ – that man, I say, is no antinomian!

Now for a more detailed explanation. Eaton was nothing if not clear when showing how justification leads inevitably to

⁴⁴ Eaton p122.

sanctification. Moreover, he was rightly dogmatic in asserting that the motive and spur for sanctification is a proper sense of justification. This, do not forget, is a direct contradiction of the Reformed way of sanctification by the whip of the law:

[God] has... given his own Son for us unto death that he might, both from [Adam's] sin, and from all sins flowing from this original sin, free us by his blood, and so make us clean. *Then hereupon do arise in us good and holy desires and affections*, contrary to former depravity and corruption – as namely, humility, purity, gentleness, and all other virtues; and then all good works are practiced, and that also with a willing heart. The author and cause of all which is this grace of justification, by which alone this original sin is done away, and we are made clean and acceptable before God... This first part of justification... calls us out of the dead faith, and *makes us give ourselves wholly to God by faith, and to our neighbour by love, to walk in all God's commandments zealously*; this excellency (I say) of this first part of free justification – namely, how truly and utterly our sins are abolished out of God's sight, and how perfectly clean the blood of Christ makes us from all sin – the Holy Ghost expresses it unto us by six principal and most emphatic phrases and similitudes...⁴⁵ [so that] we may ascend... by certain steps or stairs to the full height of comfort and joy... For thus teach we: that the church has not one spot or wrinkle of sin, but is perfectly righteous by free justification and faith in Christ only, which serves to approve her to the eyes of God. Again, she is holy in life and conversation, but this latter way [progressive sanctification] is imperfect, and [yet] [this (imperfect) holiness of life and conversation] serves to approve her to the eyes of men.⁴⁶

No unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of Christ... for except a man be born again – that is, made a perfect new creature to the eyes of God by justification, and to declare the same by being made a new creature to the eyes of men by sanctification – he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).⁴⁷

Is this man supposed to be an antinomian? In light of the above who dares to assert it?

Again:

⁴⁵ Over several pages, Eaton worked out these 'principal and most emphatic phrases and similitudes'.

⁴⁶ Eaton pp27-30, emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ Eaton pp65-66.

[By justification,] all is pure in the sight of God, which inseparably and infallibly brings forth sanctification also, a manifesting and declaring this justification more and more to their sense and feeling, and also to the eyes of others, to the glorifying of God for the same outwardly also (Matt. 5:16).⁴⁸

Furthermore:

Justification... not only clears your conscience from all sin and condemning terrors for the same, but also makes you and your consciences perfect in holiness and righteousness freely to God-ward, and in the sight of God... (Heb. 9:9,14; 10:2,14)... And as our consciences are thus made good to God-ward by justification, so... they are made good to men-ward by sanctification, because when we see that the least sin is such an infinitely horrible thing in the sight of God that we must needs be made clean from all spot of sin in the sight of God, though it cost the blood of the Son of God to effect it, then we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing to God, zealously in the sight of men also. Therefore to conclude with... [1 John 3:23]: this is the commandment of all commandments, that we believe in the name or power of Jesus Christ, that of unjust he makes us just – that is, perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely – by which we practice all commandments, and so do manifest that we have the Holy Ghost, and are not hypocrites either towards God by justification, or towards men by sanctification.⁴⁹

This, reader, is pure gospel. Antinomianism? Not at all!

Again:

Although, being by their faith once justified, they [believers] are ever justified, having all the imperfections of their sanctification that they daily feel in themselves, ever abolished out of God's sight... (1 John 1:7), and they, ever perfectly holy and righteous from all sin and rebuke before God, and in his sight (Col. 1:22), yet the trials and exercising of that faith, that has made them such before God, makes them full partakers of God's holiness and righteousness, both of justification and sanctification, more and more experimentally in themselves, by the increase of their faith... (Rom. 1:17).⁵⁰

Eaton showed that Ephesians 5:8 contains both elements, justification and sanctification, *and in that order*:

⁴⁸ Eaton p78.

⁴⁹ Eaton pp90-92.

⁵⁰ Eaton p134.

‘You were once darkness but now are light in the Lord’. Mark how [the apostle] says, not light in themselves, but light in the Lord – there is the lantern made light with the candle of justification... ‘Walk as children of light’ – there is sanctification, as the beams showing and declaring that the candle of justification is in us.⁵¹

Again:

If God, by the power of his imputation, so clothes us with his Son’s righteousness that it makes us in his sight perfectly holy and righteous, then all our sins must needs be abolished out of his sight... If it puts away all our iniquities like a mist... (Isa. 44:22), [and] abolishes all our sins like darkness out of God’s sight, then it leaves us of necessity only and perfectly righteous in the sight of God... [Eph. 5:8]... free justification making [us]... perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God – not by [our] doings and holy walking, but in the Lord... There is sanctification inseparably following, and showing that we, before our justification, were darkness... are now, by justification, changed and removed out of that condition... and nothing else but righteousness in the sight of God...

When we are justified we are both righteous and sinners also in the sight of God... (Eph. 5:8). ‘You were once in times past darkness’ – there is the time of our being sinners... past and gone. ‘But now are light in the Lord’ – there is the time of our justification, and being righteous in the sight of God now present... ‘Walk as children of light’ – there is sanctification showing and declaring to men our new condition and state that we are now only in before God.⁵²

Do not miss the clear contrast with Calvin’s whip. The point is, of course: which is biblical? I have no doubt myself. What about you, reader?

Eaton was uncompromising with the professors of mere outward religion. Catching the spirit of Romans 2:28-29, Galatians 5:6; 6:15 and Philippians 3:3, as he came to the conclusion of his treatise, he left none of his hearers in any doubt:

⁵¹ Eaton p167.

⁵² Eaton pp254,375-376. He moved on immediately to 1 Cor. 6:11: ‘What can be more plain, that the time, state and condition wherein they were foul and sinful was past and gone, but the time, state and condition, wherein they were washed and made righteous to God-ward by justification, and also to men-ward by sanctification was... present, and abiding for ever’. He then moved on to Rom. 5:8-9.

John Eaton

Let every one of us remember that saying of Paul, that circumcision, that is all our outward form of true religion, and of the true worship of God, avails nothing... That is, all outward wisdom, polity [form, system, structure] and excellency whatsoever avails nothing before God, but only 'faith that makes a new creature'. First new, before God by justification. Secondly, new to one's own self, by sanctification. And thirdly, new to our neighbours by love out of a pure heart.

Still moving to his conclusion, Eaton:

Thus a Christian first fulfils and accomplishes the law inwardly by faith (for Christ is the perfection and fulfilling of the law unto righteousness to all that believe – Romans 10:4), and then outwardly by works. Thus is he justified in heaven and earth. The gospel justifies him in heaven, and the law⁵³ on earth, and thus is this new creature created unto the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, which inwardly is perfectly righteous in the sight of God with a heavenly righteousness by justification, and outwardly is holy and clean in the flesh by sanctification. 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be upon them, and mercy as upon the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16).⁵⁴

Again:

This true faith of free justification (contrary to the judgement of popish and carnal reason) inseparably brings the Holy Ghost to dwell in [his] people (Gal. 3:2; Acts 10:44; 13:38-39,52), which Holy Ghost infallibly enflames our hearts with true love (Gal. 5:6), and makes true believers in right zeal of God's glory, and in true thankfulness, to break off from sin, and to mortify, by true repentance, their former profane life and ungodly conversation, and brings forth a declarative obedience, righteousness and readiness to every good work, now made good works indeed freely by free justification, and so brings forth a sincere, and, though an imperfect, yet a free and cheerful, walking in, and keeping of, all God's will and commandments, declaratively to man-ward, which is true sanctification. And thus the law is not destroyed by free justification, but established (Rom. 3:21,31), and written in the hearts of true believers, and they are fulfillers and keepers of the law [in] two manner of ways. *First*, perfectly making

⁵³ I take this to mean 'the law of Moses' or even, with the Reformed, 'the ten commandments'. If so, how can the Reformed call him an antinomian? I disagree with Eaton's statement as it stands; it needs nuancing. See my *Christ*.

⁵⁴ Eaton pp483-484.

their hearts perfectly righteous, freely, to the full content and satisfying of God by faith... of free justification... (Rom. 10:4-6,10; Acts 15:8-9; Heb. 8:10). *Secondly*, it is written in their hearts,⁵⁵ and they are fulfillers and keepers of the law inchoatively [beginning of an action; that is, imperfectly], actively and declaratively to man-ward, by love and true sanctification... (Gal. 5:13-14; Rom. 13:8-10). Indeed, this true faith in free justification, deeply, truly and soundly learned, is a thing of perfect virtue and wonderful operation, strength and power to bring forth all good motions [impulses] inwardly, and all good works outwardly, or else it is not the true lively justifying faith, but the blind dead faith, that leaves men in sin, death and double damnation... (Rom. 5 – 6; Tit. 2;11-15; 1 John 3:3-10; Eph. 2:10; 4 – 6; Matt. 5:16; 2 Pet 1:9).⁵⁶

Eaton had a warning for preachers and their hearers:

But if the Sun of Righteousness is so clouded from us that the beams of justification, which exceed in glory, are by want of preaching or receiving it, stopped, that it shines not into our dark hearts, then our souls can return back again no beam of sanctification. Thus we see how this joyful knowledge of justification, the worth and glory of the same being discerned, seen and enjoyed with a true and right faith, makes both elders⁵⁷ and people to shine forth with the bright shining beams of great glorifying of God.⁵⁸

In other words, Eaton was making his application of the New Testament (new-covenant) doctrine: the preacher must preach Christ to saints, and saints must look to Christ. That is the way of sanctification. To do anything else – for example, I would say (and so would Eaton), such as preaching the law – will do the opposite. The only way I can be sanctified is for me to set my heart on Christ.

In light of such unequivocal testimony, how Eaton ever found himself so badly treated as an antinomian defies belief. Justification always leads to sanctification; if it does not, the professor was never justified; believers are moved to sanctification by their sense of the freeness of God's grace in their justification; if they lose

⁵⁵ I disagree with Eaton here. The law which is written on believers' hearts is the law of Christ, not the law of Moses, not even restricted to the ten commandments. See my *Christ*.

⁵⁶ Eaton pp488-489, emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ Eaton had 'pastors'.

⁵⁸ Eaton p481.

sight of their justification, their sanctification consequently suffers. So Eaton maintained, over and over again. And *this* is antinomianism? If it is, God make me an antinomian – both as a believer and as a preacher!

And this takes us on to the next point – and a vital point, at that. Although we have met it in passing, it merits a more detailed look, for we are now reaching the heart of the question in hand.

The motive and spur for sanctification is not the law; it is the gospel, the grace of God in justification

As I say, here we reach the crunch. Without naming him, Eaton now squares up to Calvin's third use of the law; namely, that the law is the whip that lashes believers, like lazy asses, into holiness. This, according to Eaton, is utterly misguided, quite wrong. Let him speak for himself. The question is, of course, which way is right – according to the New Testament? Eaton had no doubt:

The... main point showing the majesty and utility of this benefit of justification is that the true joyful knowledge of the same is the only powerful means to regenerate,⁵⁹ quicken and sanctify us, and to make us truly to love, fear and trust in God, working in us the true evangelical repentance, in sincerity hating sin because it is sin, and truly loving all holiness and righteousness. And thus it is God's holy fire that enflames his people with right thankful zeal for God's glory, in careful and diligent walking in all God's commandments, by willing, cheerful and ready practicing of all duties of love, both towards God and your neighbours, and so making it manifest that justification and sanctification are inseparable companions that go infallibly together, making every true believer a double saint, or rather a true saint two manner of ways.

Further, in a complicated passage:

We cleanse and mortify and purify ourselves only declaratively in the sight of men; that is, we only declare both to ourselves and to others, in the way of thankfulness, that the Holy Ghost has, by clothing us with the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness, purified, mortified,

⁵⁹ That is, preaching free justification is the way to bring sinners to regeneration. See below, where Eaton shows that this is precisely what Christ did in John 3:1-17.

cleansed and utterly abolished all our sins out of God's sight freely. Whereby, the Holy Ghost sees us not properly mortifying, cleansing and purifying our sins out of the sight of God, ourselves, for then he should see us robbing Christ of that glory which his blood has freely done... but the Spirit (we first being clean in his sight) enters into us to dwell in us, which otherwise he would not do, but being entered and dwelling in us, he enables us by walking holily and righteously to avoid and purify out of our own sight, sense and feeling, and out of the sight of other men, that sin which the wedding garment has purified and abolished before, out of God's sight... (Rom. 6).⁶⁰

Let me translate. Eaton was arguing that willing sanctification demonstrates our justification – both to ourselves and others. But, and this is Eaton's point, only the Holy Spirit can enable us to be sanctified. Our willingness – desire – to be sanctified, and any attainment in it, is entirely due to the Spirit's work in us. Left to ourselves, we would not seek to be sanctified, let alone grow in Christ-likeness. So Eaton stoutly maintained. Perhaps he was a little too categorical in this – after all, from a plethora of scriptures we know that we are responsible for our obedience: 'As you have always obeyed... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling', for instance. Even so, as the apostle immediately adds in that place: 'For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose' (Phil. 2:12-13; see also 1 Cor. 12:6; 15:10; Heb. 13:20-21). Why was Eaton so adamant? He would allow nothing – nothing – to detract from the glory of Christ. What a motive! And undeniably scriptural. Let me prove it by quoting that last reference:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

Now for a statement of huge import: 'A faithful minister... [must] not mix and mingle the law and the gospel, as one would mingle black and white together, and mar both'.⁶¹ This, it goes without saying, is precisely what happens when men adopt Calvin's third

⁶⁰ Eaton pp164-165.

⁶¹ Eaton p124.

use of the law. Without mentioning the name of the Reformer, Eaton warned against those preachers who do it. He wasn't mealy-mouthed about it, either. While I do not endorse every last expression that he used, Eaton, I am glad to say, certainly did not fail to make his point, one which I wholeheartedly approve of:

Not feeling how powerful the treasures of the gospel alone are, both to abolish all sin from before God, and by joy and zeal thereof to mortify all sin in ourselves, they go to borrow help by fear from the whippings of the law, as if the gospel... were not able to increase that life begun... except it borrow help of the whippings of the law, and so make a miscellany and mixture of the law and gospel, and thus preach (as Luther truly says) neither true law nor true gospel, but a miscellany and marring of both, and thereby make miscellany Christians; that is, mere hypocrites (Gal. 4:25)... By this mixture and mingling of whipping to the righteousness joined with free justification in the faithful, as Luther truly says... (Gal. 1:7): 'The preachers of the gospel' (says he) 'become the apostles of the devil', because this mingling not only blemishes and darkens the knowledge of grace, but also it takes away Christ, with all his benefits, and it secretly undermines, and utterly overthrows, the gospel. And yet... they glory above others in the name of Christ, and boast themselves to be the most sincere preachers of the gospel. But because they mingle the law with the gospel... they must needs be perverters of the gospel, because... they deny Christ to have by himself alone made us whole; that is, perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely.

I would soften this. The Reformed are certainly not 'apostles of the devil'. Nevertheless, using Eaton's words, I would say that law-preaching tends very seriously to 'blemish and darken' the believer's sense of grace; and so on. Above all, it does not produce the sanctification God requires.

Reader, although you may well be offended by Eaton's intemperate language, please bear in mind the age in which he lived. Furthermore, do not forget similar language used by the Reformers when dismissing Anabaptists, for example. I do not say this to condone either party, just to put such words in context. Above all – and this, after all, is *the* point – go to the New Testament yourself and see if it was Eaton or the legal preachers who were right. And then replace the word 'was' with 'is', and 'were' with 'are' – for we are not talking merely about a bygone age; these things are relevant today, and of high significance.

Eaton spelled out the reason: What effect does this law-and-gospel preaching have upon men?

This mingling of the law and the gospel, and saying that God sees sin in his justified children to correct and punish them for the same, must needs trouble the conscience of God's children (except they are hypocrites) exceedingly... Seeing sanctification is but the lively stirring about that comes of this healing of justification, can we then stir lively in the duties of sanctification before we feel ourselves healed of the deadly sickness of our sins by justification?... The lessening of the glory of our justification extinguishes the vigour of our sanctification; both hindering our joy, lessening our love, and quenching our zeal, that otherwise, by the exceeding greatness of Christ's benefits, would exceedingly abound (Isa. 61:3; Tit. 2:14).

Eaton was making the vital biblical point that it is only those who have a felt sense of their justification that can be 'lively' in sanctification. In scriptural terms, it is only those who have died to the law who can be married to Christ and bear fruit for God's glory (Rom. 7:4,6; Gal. 2:19-20). It is they who most clearly see and feel that they are truly beyond condemnation who will most cheerfully and willingly seek to be Christ-like. Preaching the law, said Eaton, actually stultifies sanctification; it does not produce it.

What is the fundamental flaw in this law-and-gospel preaching?

This doctrine, that God sees sin in his justified children, to whip, correct and punish them for the same, is the very instrument and engine that confounds the new covenant... with the old that is finished (Heb. 8:9,13)... it brings back the full-grown heir to be whipped under the schoolmaster...⁶² (Gal. 3:25)... to beat them with the whippings and

⁶² Greek *paidagōgos*, 'tutor' (NKJV), 'schoolmaster' (AV), 'in charge' (NIV), 'tutor', literally 'child-conductor' (NASB). Sadly, some of these translations ('schoolmaster' and 'tutor'), even the transliteration 'pedagogue', give the misleading impression that the law was an 'educator', much like *didaskalos* (Rom. 2:20; Heb. 5:2, for example). *This* is not the meaning of *paidagōgos*. The word comes from *paidos*, genitive of *pais* (child), and *agōgos* (leader), derived from *agō*, 'to drive, to lead by laying hold of, to conduct' with the idea of discipline. As Thayer explained: 'The name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys... The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them, before reaching the age of manhood... The name carries with it an idea of severity

corrections of the law... But they are not taught... as people that are made perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely, so that all that they do must be done for joy and thankfulness that they are made so perfectly holy and righteous from all spot in the sight of God freely...

The remedy? ‘To preach powerfully the glad tidings of good things (Rom. 10:15)’. Preachers who mingle the law and the gospel ‘not only patch... the wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness... [with] the old patches of the duties of the [so-called – DG] moral law to make them good, and better and better, and more holy, and more righteous every day in the sight of God by the holy walking of sanctification (as they call it), but also by the lashes of the law do whip them thereunto, hereby secretly laying the foundation of meriting works’. They do that which Christ precisely declares is impossible – or at least, ought not to be attempted; namely, patching old and new garments into one, or putting new wine into old wineskins (Luke 5:36-38).

Furthermore:

This doctrine that the justified children of God must be kept from sin, and driven to holy walking, for [that is, by] fear of correction and punishments, quite mars the true nature of sanctification. For... it is true sanctification [only] when it is done with a willing cheerfulness and mere sincere thankfulness for free justification and the other great benefits of the gospel freely bestowed and already possessed, and thereupon brings great joy and zealous obedience. But if we are driven thereunto by corrections and whippings, it is not free and cheerful obedience, but it is made compulsive. But all that thankfulness – whereunto we with whippings are compelled – is no thankfulness, and, indeed, all such obedience is not worth a button, except it be willing and cheerful for joy of free justification, and then it is true sanctification indeed (Ps. 110:3; Isa. 55:5).

Spot on! So, what was Eaton’s conclusion?

The upshot of all this: that when we preachers of the gospel, not feeling in our hearts the vigour and power of the free-given treasures of Christ, do not trust to, nor rely upon, the pressing of them as sufficient

(as of a stern censor and enforcer of morals)’ (Thayer, Joseph Henry: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991).

(where they are felt and enjoyed) operative causes of all holy walking and godly conversation, then we degenerate and decline thereby to the legal teaching of the old covenant... and constraining men to holiness and righteousness with legal arguments of large blessings if they do well, but with terrors of corrections and punishments for all their evil doings, which either does little good at all, or at best makes but self-deceiving legal zealous hypocrites, and so goes not with a right foot to the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14), and [the] purity of the first apostolic preaching of constraining men to holiness and righteousness by joy and love, by preaching with joyful enflamed hearts and fiery tongues (Acts 2:4)... (Acts 8:8,38-39,42,44,52; 1 Pet. 1:8; Eph. 3:8)... Not only... the Papists... but also some of us Protestants, by lisp[ing] the language of Ashdod do go about... to undermine the very root of the Lord's vine – that is free justification – by going about to prove... that we are not, by the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness, made perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely, full-sufficient of itself (the more it is rightly known) to constrain us with all joy to holiness and righteousness, not by fear, but by love, and evangelical zeal... (Song 8:6-7; Tit. 2:14).⁶³

Eaton has set out a vital truth here. Law-preaching will produce slave-works and outward conformity, yes, but it is only the new covenant that can produce real sanctification – sanctification from the heart. It is not only Papists who get this wrong; so do the Reformed. Those who 'lisp the language of Ashdod' badly miss the mark.⁶⁴

Eaton, of course, knew very well that he was stirring up a hornets' nest, and he was fully awake to the reaction he would provoke. He knew that he would be told that he was in a tiny minority for such outlandish and dangerous teaching, that he was flying in the face of the received wisdom of the day. He could already hear his critics telling him that:

Other ministers, being both zealous preachers, and such teachers as are of great knowledge and excellent learning, hold the contrary; namely, that the children of God are not freely, without works, made so

⁶³ Eaton pp136-147.

⁶⁴ As I explained and showed in my *Christ*, the Reformed, though they stoutly argue for the law as the motive and spur for sanctification, when they actually come to preach for it, they go – as the New Testament always does – to the gospel.

perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God that God sees no sin in them.

Not in the least apologetic, Eaton was ready with his reply to his critics: It is necessary 'to ground [ourselves] in the perfect distinction between the law and the gospel, faith and works... and thereby to keep free justification pure and in her true glory, without any mixture, as the alone soul-saving grace, and the only soul-saving glory of Christ'.⁶⁵ What is more, he repeated his warning to those who keep the people 'with a legal zeal of holy walking for fear of punishment or hope of reward'.⁶⁶

He then turned to the account of the sinful woman who, when Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, kissed and anointed the Saviour's feet (Luke 7:36-50). Eaton drew several vital lessons from the episode:

That justification works in us the true love of God is plainly testified by Christ himself (Luke 7:47), saying: 'To whom little is forgiven, he loves but a little, but to whom much is forgiven he loves much'.

For no man is righteous but that he has a true feeling of his sins; neither, except he feels them with a true touch, can he else embrace this righteousness – but whoever has this knowledge that his sins through Christ are (so richly) forgiven him, it must needs be that he loves God much.

Then of this true love of God arises the true evangelical repentance, grieving at all sin, not in fear of punishment, but through love, becoming zealous against all sin, both in himself and in others... The woman [in question]... was wholly enflamed with the love of [that is, love to] Christ... She endeavoured to perform all duties of godliness carefully. Thus it appears by the whole similitude brought in by Christ, that justification is the cause of love, and love is the effect of justification.

Hence through love and admiration... the prophet cried out, saying: 'Who is a God like you, that takes away iniquity, and casts all our sins into the bottom of the sea?' (Micah 7:18)... For everyone, by how much the more he feels the rich forgiveness of his sins, and apprehends the glory of free justification, so much the more vehemently he loves God. And the more feeling of love we have, by so much we shall know that we have profited in the knowledge of justification.

⁶⁵ Eaton pp208-212.

⁶⁶ Eaton p223.

By faith therefore we attain the making of us righteous, and by love we are thankful, and testify the bountifulness of God towards us...

It is the joyful knowledge of justification that works in us the true fear of God, and in thankful zeal of God's glory cheerfully to obey him... 'For with you there is propitiation, mercy or forgiveness... and plentiful redemption, therefore you shall be feared' (Ps. 130:4)...

Eaton lifted his eyes to take in the big picture.

First, he spelled out the new-covenant position: 'Thus the true fear of God, the true worship of God, true reverence, indeed, the true knowledge of God, rest wholly upon this grace, that we are confident that God by Christ's justifying us is reconciled and made favourable to us'.

Eaton then went for the jugular. What is the consequence of confounding the law and the gospel?

Whereupon... I think and teach that is a pernicious kind of teaching by which men are taught to repent by beholding the punishments of sin and the rewards...⁶⁷ Paul [in Gal. 3:17]... foresaw in spirit that this mischief should creep into the church, that the word of God should be confounded; that is to say, that the promise should be mingled with the law, and so the promise should be utterly lost. For when the promise is mingled with the law, it is made nothing else but the very law, for whosoever does not perfectly understand... justification, must needs confound and mingle the law and grace together.

To mingle the law and the gospel, as Eaton saw, is to preach the law and not the gospel! Then he returned to his point that the gospel – the sense of one's free justification in Christ – is the great, the only, spur to godliness. 'Then... will follow':

Works of love and thankfulness, in a manner of their own accord (with a little help of direction and exhortation),⁶⁸ flowing from a true, right

⁶⁷ Eaton was here paraphrasing Luther on Ps. 130. I realise that Eaton was here speaking of believers, but, incidentally, the same applies to unbelievers – the law does not lead to repentance. The grace of God does that (Rom. 2:4).

⁶⁸ Bayes quoted this from Eaton, making this comment: 'The phrase in parenthesis is noteworthy; it is unclear how direction and exhortation differs from the preaching of the law' (Bayes, Jonathan F.: *The Weakness of the Law: God's Law and the Christian in New Testament Perspective*, Paternoster Press, Cumbria, 2000, pp11-12). Well, if Bayes couldn't see

and thankful zeal of God's glory, making them [believers] willing and ready to grow, and cheerfully to walk, in all the holy duties of all his commandments. Thus is justification, making us perfectly holy and righteous freely, in the sight of God, and works, safely taught and not confounded the one with the other,⁶⁹ but both in their due bounds powerfully established, works thereby joyfully flowing forth... (Tit. 2:14). You cannot in this case be idle, for surely that love of God and pleasure, which you enjoy in him, will not allow you to be idle. You shall be enflamed with a marvellous study and desire to do what things soever you can know will be an honour unto your God, so loving and bountiful unto you, and will turn to praise, glory and thanksgiving unto him. You will *** [pause?]⁷⁰ for no precept, you shall feel no compulsion of the law, having a most ready will and pleasure to do whatsoever things you shall know to be acceptable unto God.

In what way will the desire to please God show itself? First of all, said Eaton, we shall want to see other sinners converted. In other words he was answering the question: What is the best motive for evangelism? He got it in one: Our sense of the fullness of grace in our own justification by Christ:

the difference between, on the one hand, gospel directions and exhortations for sanctification – which are ubiquitous in the New Testament – and, on the other, the commands of the law to believers for sanctification – which are completely absent from the New Testament – what hope was there that he could come to a right view of ‘the weakness of the law’ in his book? For myself, I am sorry that Eaton used the word ‘little’; I would replace it with ‘scriptural’. The believer, as I showed in my *Christ*, needs instruction and calibration by the entire word of God, not simply the ten commandments!

⁶⁹ Another vital point. Legal preachers are at risk, to put it no stronger, of driving men to the law – not only for sanctification but for justification. What is more, new-covenant liberty, rejoicing in free justification, is severely endangered by making men cringe under the whip of the law for sanctification. Exulting in liberty and cringing in fear make uneasy bed-fellows, to say the least of it. Incidentally, my spell-checker has just thrown up an interesting alternative to the misspelling of ‘sanctification’: ‘scarification’! Almost a Freudian slip when thinking about the Reformed way of sanctification?

⁷⁰ Eaton had ‘passe’. Was he saying you will not stumble over any precept?

But first of all, it shall be your desire that this blessed knowledge of God, and rich benefits and treasures by Christ, may be common to all others. Whereupon your love will show itself, and will try all means to make this truth of salvation manifest unto all...

How relevant is this to us today. If ever there was a time for the churches to need conversions – let alone for the sinners themselves – it is now. If Rachel felt the need for children (Gen. 30:1), how much more should we? Eaton can help us here. The best means of stirring us to seek conversions, and the best of all subjects in our ‘preaching’ – using the word in its full New Testament sense – is free justification in Christ. The more we feel *that*, the more we shall want to see others converted. And the more we preach free justification, the more likely it is that we shall see conversions (see 1 Cor. 1:17-31; 2:1-5).

Do not run away with the wrong impression: Eaton had no rose-tinted view of evangelism. Oh no! He knew well enough what is involved, what it will cost us, and what opposition we will have to face for such a view as his:

Whereupon your love will show itself, and will try all means to make this truth of salvation manifest unto all, rejecting and condemning whatsoever others either teach or say that agrees not with this truth. Whereby it comes to pass that Satan and the world, which hear nothing so unwillingly as this truth, will rise against you with all might, will by and by trouble you. The great, learned, rich, and mighty of the world will condemn you of heresy and madness. Howbeit, if you are endued with this joyful faith, it cannot be, but that your heart being thereby cheered, should even, as it were, laugh and leap for holy joy in God, being void of all care and trouble, and be made above measure confident.⁷¹

There speaks a man who had experienced how painful it can be when ‘the great, learned, rich, and mighty of the world... condemn you of heresy and madness’!

⁷¹ Eaton pp457-467. On re-reading this in preparation for publication, I was encouraged to see how Eaton has admirably encapsulated what I am trying to say in a book I am writing concerning ‘the glorious new-covenant ministry’, being an exposition and application of 2 Cor. 3:1 – 4:6.

So much for evangelism motivated by our sense of our free and full justification in Christ. And what of other duties? What will move us to serve God in every way we can?

As the joyful knowledge of justification... enlarges the heart to Godward, so it enlarges the heart with true love, and willing and ready practice, doing all the duties of love to man-ward, not drawn thereto with the terrors of the law... but cheerfully and freely. For when I believe this undoubtedly, that Christ's blood and righteousness have freely made me perfectly holy and righteous, so enriching me with all the riches of Christ, bestowing upon me whatsoever he has, whereby I want nothing, I burst forth and say: 'If God shows unto me so great benefits and favour in his beloved Son, that he allows him to bestow all things upon me, I also will do the like again, and bestow all things whereby I may do good to my neighbours, and the members of Christ'.

Eaton went back to the source; namely, justification: justification is the root which produces sanctification, assurance and present felt glory in the soul for the believer:

And thus in these two, faith and love, all, both doctrine and life worthy of Christ, consist... We are children of the Most High by being righteous by faith, whereby, of nothing, we are made the heirs of God, and we are God's by love, which makes us beneficial to others. Thus never any taught more sound and godly doctrine, as touching good works, than we do today.⁷² For if a man feels in his heart a sweetness in this promise of God, 'that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, makes him clean from all sin', and so is undoubtedly persuaded that he is of the company of them whom Christ has made to himself a glorious church, 'not having spot, or wrinkle of sin, or any such thing', he is assuredly such a one, and Christ's spouse indeed. For as we believe, so comes it unto us.

Eaton spelled out what he meant by 'love for neighbour'. He pulled no punches:

Then will such a man by and by have regard for his neighbour, and help him as his brother, care for him, give unto him, lend unto him, comfort him; briefly, do no otherwise unto him than he desires to be done unto himself. And all this proceeds from hence – for that the bountifulness and goodness of Christ has replenished his [the

⁷² That is, by his teaching that sanctification flows from the sense of justification.

believer's in question] heart with sweetness and love, that it is a pleasure and joy unto him to do good unto his neighbour.

And that is not all: 'And besides all this he is tractable, and lowly towards all men'.

Reader, do not forget Eaton's main theme in all this. Which is? The new covenant! How is godliness produced? By preaching the law? Not at all! By preaching free justification by God's grace in Christ; above all, by feeling and enjoying it:

Thus where the gospel is truly in the heart, it makes a man to be such a one as does not look while the law comes [that is, he does not keep his eye out for the law to sanctify him], but is so full of joy in Christ, that he is with speed carried unto all good works (Tit. 2:14), doing well to all men, as much as he is able, and that of his own accord, before the law comes into his mind... And so he is full of good works which voluntarily flowing, as it were, out of a continual fountain, are derived unto many.

And all this... is effected because it is the joyful knowledge of justification that... sanctifies us. Justification is like the fire, so that he that is not zealous in holiness and righteousness by sanctification, it is to be feared that he never had the fire in his breast of justification, or lets the fire go out forgetting... 'that he was purged from his old sins' (2 Pet. 1:9). And that knowledge of free justification... which regenerates⁷³ and sanctifies us is not only manifest by the doctrine taught in the first six chapters of Romans, but also by the example of Nicodemus who, at first, was neither regenerate, nor knew, nor could learn, what it meant... but after that Christ had taught him free justification...⁷⁴ then he was a new man, enflamed with zeal to defend Christ before the faces of the rulers, even at mid-day (John 7:50-52).

For Christ first makes us righteous by the knowledge of himself in the holy gospel, and... he creates a new heart in us, bringing forth new motions [inward impulses], and gives to us that assurance whereby we are persuaded that we have peace with the Father for his sake. Also, he gives unto us a true judgement whereby we prove and try those things which before we knew not, or else altogether disliked.

⁷³ Here is the place I was speaking of in an earlier note. As Eaton now shows, Christ in the same breath as he speaks of regeneration addresses Nicodemus with free justification (John 3:1-17).

⁷⁴ John 3:1-17.

Yet again, what goes wrong when men preach the law for sanctification?

But if we call unto people for sanctification, zeal, and works, the fruit of the same, only with legal terrors, not putting under [them] the fire of justification, we shall either but little move them, or else, with a constrained sanctity, make them worse hypocrites, ‘twofold more the children of hell than they were before’ (Matt. 23:15). But if we put under [them] the fire of Christ’s love, in freely and gloriously justifying us, this burns up all hindrances, and makes us hot indeed, and zealous to good works (Tit. 2:14).

Once more, back to the main point:

Again, how inseparably justification, as the cause, and sanctification, as the effect, go both together... We being wrapped by the mighty power of God’s imputation in the righteousness of Christ, it does not only take away the stink of sin (Joel 2:20) from the nostrils of God, but also makes us, little by little, to leave this corruption, and sanctifies us more and more to all holiness of conversation [way of life]. So that our works do not purify us, but when, as before, we are pure, justified and saved, we work those things which may bring profit to our neighbour, and honour to God.

This joyful knowledge of justification is that freeing truth whereof Christ spoke, saying: ‘You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ (John 8:32).

For by the law is the knowledge of sin; by faith is the obtaining of the grace (of justification) against sin. By the grace (of justification) is the healing of the fault of sin. By the healing of the soul is the freedom of the will. By the freedom of the will is love of righteousness. By the love of righteousness is the doing of the law.⁷⁵ All these things which I have knit thus together, have their testimonies in Scripture... How then can a man, being justified (that is, made just and righteous) by faith, choose but [to] work justly and righteously?

This is the liberty wherein Paul also testifies... ‘Stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free’ (Gal. 5:1). He speaks... of a spiritual and divine liberty reigning in the conscience... It is a spiritual and divine liberty reigning in the conscience... It is a freedom from the law, sin, the displeasure of God, death, hell and damnation. Indeed, this Christian liberty swallows up at once, and takes quite away, the whole

⁷⁵ Eaton, in common with the Reformed, was too restrictive here. In the new covenant, the believer is enabled to obey *all* God’s word from the heart, not only the law, certainly not only the ten commandments.

heap of evils, the law, sin, death, God's displeasure, and [to put it] briefly, the serpent himself with his head and whole power. And in the stead thereof, it places righteousness, peace, everlasting life, and all goodness. Now since those enemies are overcome, and we are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, it is certain that we are righteous before God, and whatsoever we do pleases him. By which means, the schoolmaster [pedagogue]-like⁷⁶ bondage and terrors of the law are changed into the liberty of the conscience, and consolation, or joyful news of the gospel, revealing the righteousness of Christ, wherewith we are... justified.⁷⁷

I can see why the Puritans were so appalled at Eaton, and why the Reformed have no time for him today. But, reader, I urge you, as you read your New Testament, keep an eye open for the countless passages which speak in Eaton's vein. I ask you, when calling for sanctification – which it does on every page – does the New Testament speak of the law or does it speak of Christ, free grace and God's overwhelming love for us as sinners?

As for me, I wish I had sat under such preachers as Eaton this past 60 years, and, in all those years, I wish I had preached like him. If this is antinomianism...

Note that Eaton's doctrine – the doctrine of the New Testament – also rightly answers the 'new atheists' when they claim that believers do good works to placate an angry and reluctant God, and so merit his kindness. Not so, says Scripture! The believer seeks to be holy out of gratitude, not fear – Eaton's very point!⁷⁸ Law preachers are, in fact, playing into the hands of the 'new atheists'. It is the gospel which will silence such critics, not law.

As we have seen, Eaton was rightly vehement against mingling the law and the gospel. And he had more to say on this important matter. Of course he did – to distinguish the law and the gospel is of the utmost importance. Luther, for instance, spoke of two sermons in Scripture:

⁷⁶ Here Eaton's understanding was distorted by the mistranslation 'schoolmaster', *paidagōgos*. See my earlier note and my *Christ; Sanctification in Galatians*.

⁷⁷ Eaton pp471-478.

⁷⁸ Once again, I am grateful to Andrew Rome for drawing my attention to this point.

Now the first sermon, and doctrine, is the law of God. The second is the gospel. These two sermons are not the same. Therefore we must have a good grasp of the matter in order to know how to differentiate between them. We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things. The law is thus directed solely to our behaviour and consists in making requirements. For God speaks through the law, saying: ‘Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you’. The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says: ‘This is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake’. So, then, there are two kinds of doctrine and two kinds of works, those of God and those of men. Just as we and God are separated from one another, so also these two doctrines are widely separated from one another. For the gospel teaches exclusively what has been given us by God, and not—as in the case of the law—what we are to do and give to God.⁷⁹

And that leads us nicely to the next point:

We must distinguish the law and the gospel

Here we come face to face with the much-disputed topic of the continuity or discontinuity of the covenants. Eaton was clear on the issue. The weight unmistakably falls on discontinuity. Having cleared that point, it follows, as night follows day, that preachers must be scrupulous to avoid mingling and confounding the law and the gospel. Heavy consequences follow failure in this regard.

Let Eaton work this out. He began well, but because he thought the law should be preached to bring men to Christ, he soon found himself in a tangle. But let me start with where he got it right:

The true cause of stumbling... is for want of discerning, and rightly distinguishing between, the voice of the law and the voice of the gospel; between the voice of God’s children judging themselves in their temptations according to their sense and feeling, and the voice of faith... By the law... the children of God consider themselves in themselves, and do judge themselves, according to sense and feeling,

⁷⁹ See the article: ‘A Brief Introduction to Law & Gospel’ (taken from lutherantheology.wordpress.com/.../a-brief-introduction-to-law-gospel).

which is contrary to faith... And [yet] now, by the blood of Christ... all our secret sins are utterly abolished out of his sight...

If we ministers of the gospel... do not wisely discern and heedfully distinguish between [the voice] of the law and the voice of the gospel, especially in this essential difference: that the law only teaches what we ought to do, but the gospel teaches what we ought to receive; therefore the law and the gospel are two contrary doctrines. For Moses with his law is a severe exactor, requiring of us by fear, and hope of reward: briefly, it requires by precepts, and exacts by threatenings. Contrariwise, the gospel gives freely, and requires of us nothing else but to hold out our hands, and to take that which is offered. Now to exact and to give, to take and to offer, are clean contrary, and cannot stand together, because the voice of the gospel stands only in freely receiving good things of God to the praise of the glory of his grace. Contrariwise, the law and works consist in exacting with threats, in doing by works, and in giving to God; but faith and the voice of the gospel require no works of us, or that we should yield and give anything unto God, but that we believing the promise of God, should receive of him... Whereupon the voice of the law exacts and constrains men to holy walking by fear of punishment, and hope of reward, and makes hypocrites; but the voice of the gospel constrains us to holy walking by love, and makes true Christians. And if this difference is not marked in reading Scripture, and distinctly applied to due persons in preaching, the law and the gospel are mixed and confounded together, and so neither true law [is] preached, nor true gospel, but a hotchpotch of both to the marring of both, just like the mingling and mixing together of water and wine, which makes flash,⁸⁰ and is rejected of God (Isa. 1:22).

So far, excellent. But it was not long before Eaton was running into trouble. Having previously emphasised the biblical distinction between the law and the gospel, and writing strongly against mingling the two, because of his acceptance of the Reformed doctrine of preparationism, he strayed from his own marked path. He tried to keep law and gospel apart, but found it impossible: he had marked out a path impossible to follow. Nevertheless, let Eaton make a start:

The law and the gospel are joined together in both the Testaments, as well in the new as in the old, so they ought in a mixed congregation to

⁸⁰ A watery drink, tasteless, insipid, neither one thing or the other (see the *Oxford English Dictionary* p1012 col.3).

be joined in preaching, but yet distinguished to various persons, applying the law to whom the law belongs, and applying the gospel to whom the gospel belongs, and so divide the word of God aright... Revealing sin and threatening punishment do... belong to the doctrine of the law. So then to know when the law speaks, and when the gospel speaks, and skilfully to discern the voice of the one from the voice of the other, that neither preachers nor hearers take the law for the gospel, nor the gospel for the law, this rule is to be observed, that when there is any moral work commanded to be done upon pain of punishment, or upon promise of any reward either temporal or eternal, there is to be understood the voice of the law.⁸¹ Contrariwise, where the promise of life, favour, salvation or any blessings and benefits are offered to us freely, without all our deservings, and simply without any condition annexed of any law... all those places, whether they be read in the Old Testament or in the New, are to be referred to the voice and doctrine of the gospel.⁸²

As I say, Eaton, because of his acceptance of preparationism, found himself in a quagmire here. How a preacher is to determine who or who is not to have the law preached to them, I am at a loss to fathom. I suppose he could say: 'If the cap fits, wear it', but, in my experience as a schoolmaster, the wrong person nearly always picks up that kind of instruction. Moreover, it hardly seems to be preaching – the preacher should be in the driving seat, not the hearer; he should be commanding the congregation, not letting them take it or leave it – which, sadly, too often just about sums up too much of today's preaching. It also smacks of the hyper-Calvinistic approach to sinners which, as I have noted, depends on whether or not they are 'sensible'. How anybody is to resolve this sort of conundrum is utterly beyond me. And, of course, those who attempt such things ought to bear Eaton's strictures in mind; mixing the law and the gospel, and applying the law or gospel to the wrong hearer, is fatal. If I believed such a principle, I should never dare to enter a pulpit. I am relieved that the New Testament knows nothing whatsoever of such a rigmarole.

Nevertheless, Eaton ploughed on, drawing attention to what he called 'two excellent uses' of this:

⁸¹ Eaton argued that Matt. 5 and 18, Luke 12 and 16 belong to the law (Eaton pp84-85).

⁸² Eaton pp81-86.

First, it serves to apply the law and the gospel rightly, as not to give the mourning gown to a marrying person, and the wedding garment to the funeral corpse, but [*vice-versa*].

Secondly, it serves to give each their due proper force, strength and power, as to the law her due terrors and severity, being altogether killing, and the gospel her due sweetness and glory, being altogether quickening.

Very well! But what of this:

But if preachers neglect this rule, and so taking the law for the gospel, and the gospel for the law, do confound them by mixing and mingling them together... either directly and professedly, as the Papists do,⁸³ or indirectly by preposterous urging men to a constrained righteousness by legal terrors,⁸⁴ then (as Luther truly says) they pervert the gospel, and become ministers of the devil. And yet (says he) such perverters of the gospel can abide nothing less than to hear that they are perverters of the gospel, and apostles of the devil; no, rather they glory above others in the name of Christ, and boast themselves to be the most sincere preachers of the gospel. But because they mingle the law with the gospel, they must needs be perverters of the gospel, because it does not only blemish and darken knowledge of grace, but also it takes away Christ, with all his benefits and utterly overthrows the gospel.⁸⁵

Phew! I repeat my earlier remark: ‘I am relieved that the New Testament knows nothing whatsoever of such a rigmarole’.

Even so, there is positive good to be salvaged from all this. While I do not endorse Eaton’s every last sentiment, he was right to argue vehemently against mingling and confounding the law and the gospel. The doctrinal passages of the New Testament are clear on the matter. The overwhelming weight is given to the gospel, and when the law is occasionally referred to, it is always interpreted in light of the new covenant.

As I have remarked, underlying this issue is the continuity/discontinuity debate. Eaton was very clear where he stood. Of course, his mistaken view of preparationism by the law

⁸³ And not only Papists!

⁸⁴ Calvin’s third use of the law. Remember, Calvin drew heavily from the Fathers, Aquinas and the medieval Church.

⁸⁵ Eaton pp86-87.

played its part here, but, even so, excepting this, and excepting his over-violent language, overall he set out the biblical divide.⁸⁶

Eaton, asserting that some, when faced with the biblical doctrine of perfect, free justification of believers, ‘do greatly stumble to the overmuch dignifying and extolling of works’, made it clear that he had in mind ‘not only Papists... but also some Protestants [who] do dangerously halt [stumble] herein’. Eaton, arguing the discontinuity of Scripture, said that it is necessary to notice ‘a threefold distinction and difference of time...; that is, [to] distinguish the times, and the places and things, that seem contrary’:

Now these three different times were these: First, the time of the law. Secondly, the time of John Baptist. And thirdly, the time of the gospel. The difference whereof is this that the first time was glorious, the second more glorious, and the third time was most glorious of all.

Eaton argued that in the time of the law:

[First,] God kept the people of the old covenant under... bondage of fear with such severity... to show that nothing pleased him but that perfect righteousness revealed in his law. And therefore, if their foot did step a little away from the same, they were presently, for their disobedience, severely punished. Secondly, to make them by the burden hereof to groan for the coming of the Messiah, that should freely clothe them with that perfect righteousness... (Rom. 3:21)... (Gal. 3:24)... the law, executed with such severity, was the Jews’ schoolmaster [pedagogue]⁸⁷ to drive them to Christ, that they might be made righteous by faith. Hence it was that, although they were the true children of God, as well as we, and heirs of the same blessings that we be, yet... (Gal. 4:1-3), they were in comparison to us like little children, and like wards in their nonage [immaturity], and thereby under these [following] three infirmities of little children, from which we are now freed.

Eaton set out these three ‘infirmities’: First, the (believing)⁸⁸ Jews did not have ‘a clear sight and a ripe understanding by the death of Christ of the greatness of the riches of the gospel and of the worth of their spiritual treasures... (Heb. 11:13)’. Secondly, they were ‘like heirs in their nonage that have not their whole inheritance,

⁸⁶ When I say ‘excepting’, I mean ‘excepting’; I do not mean ‘accepting’.

⁸⁷ See my earlier note on this.

⁸⁸ I have added this vital word – see immediately below.

but... little pittances thereof administered to them... (Heb. 11:13; 9:9; 10:1-2,4,11; 7:19)'. Thirdly:

As a little child, while he is a child, is under tutors and governors – that is, in fear and terrors of the rod of the schoolmaster [pedagogue], and of sharp corrections... so they were under such severity of the law, that if they did... but step a little away, they had the law as a schoolmaster [pedagogue] that took notice of their sins, and sharply scourged them for the same, thus constraining them to holiness and righteousness by fear, as a schoolmaster does children to virtuous education (Gal. 4:1)...⁸⁹ No, more... Paul is not content to liken them to little children under the schoolmaster's rod, but also to men shut up in prison,⁹⁰ and to servants under a hard apprenticeship, eagerly longing for their freedom by the coming of Christ, that might fully reveal the making of them perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely (Gal. 3:23-24). Thus was the glory of free justification hid and veiled under the rod of the law... and such were the children of the old covenant.

Eaton seriously over-stated Galatians 3:23-24. The law imprisoned the Jews until the coming of the Messiah, and some Jews, under the old covenant, were looking forward by faith to the coming of the Messiah, yes, but Eaton went too far in ascribing as much as he did to the Jews as Jews. He went too far in asserting that the Jews, as Jews, were 'eagerly longing for their freedom by the coming of Christ, that might fully reveal the making of them perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely'. Galatians 3:23-24 does not teach *that*. And that is why I added the word 'believing' in brackets just above. Eaton's words applied to men like David – a Jew who was looking to Christ – not to Jews in general.

Moving on to John Baptist, the time 'between the law and the gospel', that 'was more glorious than the time of all the prophets

⁸⁹ Eaton quoted Calvin: 'Although they feeling the oppression and bondage of the law did fly to the succour of the gospel, then twinklingly and glimmeringly shining afar off, yet we deny that they were so endued with the Spirit of freedom and assurance that they did not in some part feel both fear and bondage by the law; indeed, in such measure, that in comparison to us, they were both children and under the testament [covenant] of bondage and fear'.

⁹⁰ This is the meaning of Gal. 3:23-24.

before, by reason of the glory of his ministry. For although he [John Baptist] revealed sin terribly by the law... yet... he pointed with his finger to the Messiah that was come, and preached... and... by baptism [gave]⁹¹ a more full exhibition of free justification... (John 1:29; Gal. 4:4; Matt. 3[:1-11]; Hos. 2:29; Luke 16:16; Matt. 11:13)'.

Eaton, still talking of John's time, actually moved, confusingly, to the full revelation under Christ (Gal. 3:25), somewhat anticipating the 'third time':

[The] people of God under the old covenant were in times past children under the law, as under a schoolmaster...⁹² But Christ, being exhibited and come, now being by faith grown to full age, we are under the schoolmastership of the law no more, as not needing that legal schoolmastership, being emancipated by our full grown age. The law, therefore, has that use of direction no more, and therefore it ought not to be joined and mingled with faith. After this manner does the apostle lay forth not only the use of the law, but also shows why it ought to be but for a time... Now... the rising... of the Sun of Righteousness had dispelled the mist of this pedagogue.

Although he was muddled about the law as a pedagogue, Eaton was right to keep on insisting that law and gospel should not be mixed; now that the new covenant has come, the law has gone.

Finally, Eaton moved fully to the 'third time':

From which Christ groaned out his blood and life upon the cross, crying out: 'It is finished' (John 19:30) – namely, that both... the sin itself, and... the guilt and... punishment, and all, by the full exhibiting of the wedding garment, by this infinite means of his own death on the cross, are so utterly and infinitely abolished, and such an everlasting righteousness is so fully brought in upon God's children, and his glorious resurrection manifesting this righteousness to be fully wrought upon us, that this time is the most glorious of all... (2 Cor. 3:9-11). For now is fulfilled and finished that prophecy of Zechariah saying: 'In that day there shall be a fountain opened to wash away sin and uncleanness' [Zech. 13:1]. Why, were not the sins of God's people washed away before that day that the prophet speaks of? Yes, but whereas before they had vessels like the brass sea, and such like, to

⁹¹ Eaton talked of 'sealed'. This is wrong. See my *Infant*. As I have explained, Eaton had far too high a view of baptism.

⁹² See above.

wash in, signifying [typifying] their spiritual washing, then at that day of Christ's death, the full flowing fountain of Christ's blood should so abundantly wash them clear from all their sins, that they should, from all their uncleanness, be made in the sight of God, whiter than snow...⁹³ Now is fulfilled Daniel [9:24]... They which believe in Christ are no sinners, but are holy and righteous, lords over sin and death, and living for ever... (Jer. 31:34).⁹⁴

Eaton spelled out three ways in which we are richer under the gospel, then they were under the law:

First we are more capable to conceive by the death of Christ, and ripe of understanding thereby, the greatness of the rich treasures of the gospel (if preachers are faithful to lay out the worth and glory of the same)...

The second privilege is that we are emancipated, freed from that schoolmaster-like government and pedagogical whippings that held the old people of God in bondage and fear, like children and servants...⁹⁵ (Gal. 3:24-25)...

The third prerogative of heirs come to their full age [is] that we are now... entered into... a fuller enjoying, and real possession of the fuller revealed riches and treasures of the gospel... (1 Cor. 1:30)... fully exhibiting the righteousness of Christ making the children of God perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely... (2 Cor. 3:3,7-10).⁹⁶

⁹³ That is to say, if they believed. Eaton's words, as they stand, seem to imply that Jews as Jews were going to be washed in the Redeemer's blood. He should have been more careful at this point.

⁹⁴ Eaton pp97-108. Eaton quoted Calvin: 'Now, therefore, under the new covenant, God does not so much as remember our sins, because there is now made one cleansing for them all, once making us perfect for ever'. And Luther: 'Whosoever has not confidence in this one point, that his sins are so perfectly taken away and utterly abolished out of God's sight, that God sees no sin in us, without doubt they are damned' – Eaton adding, that is 'so long as they continue to rob this third time of her glory, and Christ of this full revealed efficacy of his blood'. The originals had 'testament' for 'covenant', and this applies to the following note.

⁹⁵ Eaton quoted Calvin: 'This being the sum of difference between the old covenant and the new: that the old covenant did strike into men's consciences trembling, and did drive to obedience with fear; but the new carries us to the glorifying of God with fullness of joy'.

⁹⁶ Eaton pp110-112.

Sadly, Eaton knew that many mingle the law and the gospel, thereby failing to preach the fullness of free grace:

We ministers of this glory of the gospel, too many among us do not only limp in our practice, and lisp in our speech, but even halt downright... We slide back to the legal teaching of the old covenant, from which, we, not understanding the... sharp exacting of works and legal righteousness, do fetch our principal vein of preaching, and do make it our common and chiefest manner of teaching, only a little... to glance at free justification, mercy and grace in general terms. But all our main labour is to command things that are right, and to forbid wicked doings, to promise rewards to the followers of righteousness, and to threaten punishments to the transgressors, which seems both in preachers and people a good and plausible course to flesh and blood. Because it is the teaching of reason, and the light of nature (Rom. 2:14-15)... this kind of teaching the people like and applaud as agreeing with that light of nature.

There can be no doubt as to who it was Eaton had in his sights. As he asked: 'But what comes hereof?'

Truly we sew up again... the veil that was rent in two pieces from the top to the bottom. We shut up again the holy of holies. We hide and darken, if not put out, the benefits of Christ, preaching as if the children of God were not made perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely. We confound the old covenant with the new. We bring back the full grown heir to the school again to be whipped of his schoolmaster, contrary to the express doctrine and direction of the Holy Ghost, saying that after faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:25). And if we do not pull off the wedding garment over the bride's head, yet we bring forth rods to whip the queen... We do hinder sanctification, and either with legal threats or rewards do cause but a constrained hireling sanctity which is hypocritical legal holiness, or else cause the people to run, though more cautiously, yet the faster into the iniquities and sins so vehemently with legal terrors forbidden, according to that old true saying... namely: 'We rush the faster into things forbidden, and always desire the things denied us'. And all this because we do not first establish and root them in the assurance and joy of free justification without works... and so [make them] to labour after the supposed works of sanctification, more than after faith, that should give to Christ only the sole glory of our assurance.

Eaton's teaching needs to be seriously pondered today. His important statements have come thick and fast: legal preaching does not produce sanctification; sanctification and assurance come from a right view of justification. He went on:

Therefore, they should first have assurance and then do that which they do in thankfulness for the assurance... The having of Christ alone and his righteousness, with his other free benefits, depending thereupon, must assure me. And these are they that are only able to change men's hearts and to amend the natural preposterous perverseness, and to carry them with all joy, and love and zeal as strong as fire and death, to glorify God in all holy and zealous conversation [way of life]. Which nothing, but the seeing of the bounty of God in the riches freely bestowed, with the excellency and unsearchable worth and glory of them powerfully preached with joy and zeal, can effect and bring to pass. Which for preachers now to fail in, is bad enough.⁹⁷

Eaton, himself, certainly did not fail in proclaiming 'the bounty of God in the riches freely bestowed, with the excellency and unsearchable worth and glory of them'! He set out eight particulars in which we, under the gospel, are privileged above any who went before. Arguing from many – and I mean many – scriptures (including, Jer. 50:20; Dan. 9:24; Zech. 13:1; Matt. 11:11; Luke 16:25; Rom. 8:5; 14:17; Gal. 4:1-5; 3:23-25; Heb. 7:19; 8:6; 9:9,13-14; 10:1-2,14,17-18,22; 11:39-40; 12:18,21-24; 1 John 1:7; 4:18), he declared repeatedly that 'God saw sin in them... but he sees none in us'. He concluded:

Oh that our tongues were untied, and our lips touched with the burning coal from the altar Christ! Then should he make our feet beautiful, by bringing these glad tidings of good things, not confounding but truly distinguishing between the glory of the old covenant, and the exceeding glory of the new. Yet I end this point, saying, with Calvin, 'that this distinction Christ himself meant when he said the law and the prophets are [until] John, and that from thence the kingdom of heaven' (that is, the fullness of the treasures of the gospel) 'is preached, and every man presses into it' (Luke 16:16).⁹⁸

Oh, that we today, *were* preaching 'the fullness of the treasures of the gospel', and that 'every man was pressing into it'.

⁹⁷ Eaton pp113-116.

⁹⁸ Eaton pp117-119.

The difference between justification and progressive sanctification

Eaton listed ten differences between justification and progressive sanctification:

1. Justification serves to approve us for true saints to the eyes of God. [Progressive] sanctification serves to approve us true saints to the eyes of men.
2. Therefore our justification is perfect... but [our progressive] sanctification is imperfect...
3. Our justification is perceived by faith only. [Our progressive] sanctification is perceived by sense and feeling.
4. Our justification is heavenly, and more spiritual. Our [progressive] sanctification is fleshly... and as a menstruous cloth... in comparison.
5. Justification dignifies our [progressive] sanctification. [Progressive] sanctification is dignified of [by] justification.
6. Justification is merely passive to us, and freely given of God, and is the... glory of Christ [only]. [Progressive] sanctification is active, and rendered to God in way of [that is, for] thankfulness, and is the glory of man.
7. Justification is the cause of [progressive] sanctification. [Progressive] sanctification is the effect of justification.
8. Justification is meritorious of all the favour and blessings of God. [Progressive] sanctification of itself merits nothing at all.
9. Justification is the cause of enriching us with all other benefits and treasures of the gospel. [Progressive] sanctification shows that we are so enriched.
10. God leaves our [progressive] sanctification so imperfect in this life, that all our rejoicing and joy unspeakable and glorious may be in justification.⁹⁹

Is this supposed to be antinomianism?

What is justifying faith?

We must not take this for granted; we dare not. As I have said time and again (and I hope to publish on it), Sandemanianism is, perhaps, the greatest curse afflicting us today. Do not forget that Eaton opened his *Honeycombe*, even in its 'Preface', by distinguishing between dead and true faith. Remember also the title

⁹⁹ Eaton p459.

of his other major work: *Discovery of the Most Dangerous Dead Faith*. Today, I fear, too many talk about ‘faith’ without defining what they mean by it. ‘Believe in Jesus’! Ah! But what is it to believe? We must be clear at this point. Eaton certainly did not fail in this respect.

Hear him on Philippians 3:9. It must be remembered that he was, at this point, speaking of believers – not sinners coming to Christ. He was saying that believers must believe that Christ has washed them clean. As Paul declared: ‘I count all things but loss, and do judge them to be dung [rubbish], that I may be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness of sanctification by my walking after the law, which is but dung [rubbish], but the righteousness of God by the faith of Jesus Christ’. Eaton, using these words, spoke on behalf of all believers, along with the apostle:

That is, they believe that the blood of Christ has made them in the sight of God from all sin whiter than snow (Ps. 51:7), and so has made them perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely.¹⁰⁰

Eaton then enlarged upon this when dealing with sinners coming to Christ. He explained what is meant by ‘coming to Christ’ or believing in him:

To receive Christ and his benefits truly necessarily includes in it these four particular points. First, to know the time when we were without Christ, and had him not, therein feeling our misery and our lost state by the least sin, and what need we had to receive him. Secondly, to see the excellency and worth of having Christ and his benefits... Thirdly... having Christ and his benefits to one’s own self in particular... Fourthly... he that has received to himself the enjoying of Christ and his benefits, of such excellent worth, is filled with great joy... and becomes, to the giver of the same [God in Christ], full of thankful zeal.¹⁰¹

In a purple passage, Eaton could not have been clearer:

Sinners must first be shown how they may be delivered from their sins and made righteous, which, when they have obtained, they then begin

¹⁰⁰ Eaton p94.

¹⁰¹ Eaton pp199-200.

to rejoice in the Lord. And being delivered from remorse of conscience, they are full of boldness, trust and confidence... But herein let him not begin at his own works and righteousness, as the deceitful Papists teach, but remember that ‘being made righteous’ by faith, ‘we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:1). Whereby we commit ourselves wholly to God, casting all our care upon him, and stand with a strong and bold confidence, feeling nothing but a joyful, quiet and omnipotent trust in God and in his favour. Which emboldens the heart of the true believer, that, trusting to have God on his side, he is not afraid to oppose himself along against all creatures... (Rom. 8:38-39). Thus the word of Christ, by which we are now clean (John 15:13) – that is, which justifies us, by the righteousness of Christ – is the only thing which brings us to the Father.¹⁰²

Finally, Eaton loosed a broadside against the ever-present, stifling curse of Sandemanianism:

And thus also we put a difference between a counterfeit faith and a true faith. The counterfeit faith is that which hears of God, of Christ, and all the mysteries of his incarnation, and our redemption, which also apprehends and bears away those things which it hears; indeed, and can talk goodly thereof. And yet there remains nothing else in them but ignorance of the worth and excellency of Christ’s benefits... whereby there remains nothing else in the heart but a naked opinion, and a bare sound of the gospel, for it neither renews or changes the heart. It does not make a new man, but leaves him in the vanity of his former opinion and conversation. And this is a very pernicious faith.¹⁰³

It is not only ‘pernicious’. A dead faith, a mere assent to the gospel, is far more widespread than many recognise or are prepared to admit. Indeed, I am grieved to say, in my view, such a faith is far more widely preached than is recognised today. And in saying this, I am not – not – excluding Reformed pulpits.

Assurance is not to be sought, primarily, by progressive sanctification; indeed, assurance precedes progressive sanctification and leads to it

¹⁰² Eaton p471.

¹⁰³ Eaton pp481-482.

Even though, more than once, we have met Eaton making this point,¹⁰⁴ nevertheless, seeing it is of such importance to the spiritual welfare of believers, it deserves a section all of its own.

Let me start with an objection to Eaton's doctrine: If all that Eaton had claimed for justification is true, why should believers ask for the forgiveness of their sins? For three reasons, said Eaton:

First, because the more faith any child of God has, the more he prays for this glorious forgiveness, because the more grace he has, the more he feels by his daily slips the imperfection of his sanctification...

Secondly, by daily praying for this glorious justifying forgiveness, the more they grow to fuller assurance, and more comfortable feeling that they are by God's glorious forgiveness made perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely... not subject to any alteration, never increasing nor diminishing. Yet our faith being weak, gives at first but weak assurance... It grows stronger and stronger, to a plerophory [full persuasion, full confidence] and full assurance unto joy unspeakable and glorious...

Thirdly, by daily praying for this benefit, we come to further experience of the fruits and effects depending and belonging to the same, that we may see invisible justification by its visible fruits and effects... (Ps. 32:1-2)... But for the exercise of our faith... we still live in misery and much sorrow, and seem wholly strangers to all claim to a blissful estate; therefore [it] being still [the] case as if our sins were not forgiven... we still pray for the forgiveness that effects the same praying that we might not only... possess it, but also... enjoy it; that is, not only certainly have the benefit itself, but also reap the fruits, effects and blessings...

Eaton continued:

Before we are justified, and while we are in the state of nature, we are the children of the devil and of wrath (Eph. 2:3), but when we are justified with this internal and secret justification, and made thereby the children of God,¹⁰⁵ then... we say rightly 'forgive us our trespasses'; that is, show by granting and giving us the blessings that you have justified us – that is made us freely righteous from all our sin... Good works of prayer, or any such like, do not go before a man is justified, but they follow after that a man is... justified... The promise

¹⁰⁴ For instance: 'Therefore, they should first have assurance and then do that which they do in thankfulness for the assurance' (Eaton p115).

¹⁰⁵ Once again, Eaton showed he was no believer in eternal justification.

of God justifying us is not fulfilled by praying, but only by believing. But when we believe, then we pray and do any other good work.¹⁰⁶

On assurance, one of the ways ‘to overcome doubting, and to grow strong in faith is’:

To set often before our eyes the dignity, glorious nature, and exceeding excellency of believing – namely, that the belief that the blood of Christ makes us clean from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely – is such a good work in the sight of God as passes all other good works whatsoever... [John 6:29]. [Christ] said: ‘This is the work of God’; that is, the work of all works, ‘that you believe on him whom he has sent’, namely to justify and make you freely righteous in the sight of God.

As above, it must be remembered that Eaton was here addressing believers, not unbelievers. For their assurance, believers must believe the word of God, his promise to them, that all their sins are truly abolished in Christ. Unbelievers, of course, cannot believe any such thing. They have to trust Christ, have their sins washed away, and then they must, for their assurance, trust God’s promise to them. All this, Eaton said, gives:

Exceeding honour and glory... to God the Father... If we believe that Christ by washing us in his own blood has made us whiter than snow from all spot or wrinkle of sin in the sight of God freely... then we give to Christ, his Son, his due glory... [Further] we, believing the plain and naked word of God, speaking simply and plainly to the weakest capacities, without wresting and wringing it... do greatly glorify the Spirit of God and Holy Ghost speaking in the Scriptures.¹⁰⁷

On Romans 8:4, that vital verse for establishing the relationship between the believer and the law, Eaton deplored that:

Many, granting that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, yet they do not sufficiently mark the cause why, expressed in [Rom. 8:4]; that is, the ground and full assurance of establishing the conscience why there is ‘no condemnation’ or judgement ‘to them that are in Christ Jesus’ – namely, ‘because the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4) – ...([but not] as the Papists pervert this place)... bringing forth this effect in us ‘not to walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit’... [God], by the power of imputation, so truly clothes

¹⁰⁶ Me!!! Eaton pp154-158.

¹⁰⁷ Eaton pp235-239.

us both within and without with this his Son's doing and fulfilling of the law perfectly, that we also continue in all things to do them in the sight of God, not inherently and actively, by our own doing, but because of his Son's perfect doing all things is objectively and passively so truly in us that we are made perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God with that doing freely. And so the rigour of his law is satisfied and fulfilled truly in us, and God continues correspondent to [consistent with] his most excellent nature, true, just, constant and unchangeable in his law, because we continue in all things to do them in his sight... in ourselves, and yet doing nothing... actively in ourselves.¹⁰⁸

Eaton, surely having captured the apostle's doctrine in Romans 8:1-4, addressed those preachers and teachers who fail to set it forth as they should:

That all such ministers as do not diligently teach and cause people diligently to observe and keep this established true Protestant doctrine, but do deny, sophisticate and wrangle against the same, must be like the false brethren among the Galatians, in the dead faith, doting about questions and making controversies about the law and works, and cannot but seduce the people from Christ – that is, the simplicity of the faith that is in Christ Jesus – to depend and hang for assurance of their salvation upon the law and works, and cannot but be troublers of the church (Gal. 1:7), and of people's consciences... setting the cart before the horse.

He explained his meaning:

That is, calling for works and a good life before people have the right knowledge, joyful faith, and true assurance of their full and perfect justification, and free salvation by Jesus Christ, whereby good words and good works and good life may follow, as the good fruits of their thankful hearts for the same.¹⁰⁹

Summing up

Granting he made his mistakes, granting that he, at times, used over-strong language, even so, Eaton could not have been more explicit on the unbreakable connection between justification and

¹⁰⁸ Eaton pp286-289.

¹⁰⁹ Eaton pp489-490.

sanctification: ‘Justification is like the fire, so that he that is not zealous in holiness and righteousness by sanctification, it is to be feared that he never had the fire in his breast of justification’. How such a man could be called an antinomian defeats me.

Nevertheless, Jonathan Bayes had no doubt. He made his position clear in what I can only call a ridiculous statement: ‘That Eaton was fairly labelled a doctrinal antinomian is evident. He teaches that the joyful sense of free justification at the cost of the blood of God’s Son is the sufficient motive to holiness’.¹¹⁰ How that can be called antinomianism, I am at an utter loss to comprehend. And if that *is* antinomianism, doctrinal or any other sort, put my name down! By the way, you will have to put Paul’s name down too!

What is more, I go further than Bayes alleged for Eaton. I say that the grace of God in justification, with all its attendant blessings, constitutes more than a *sufficient* motive; the grace of God is the *great* motive for the believer’s sanctification. With Eaton, I am convinced that the law is not the motive for sanctification. In fact, the preaching of the law to believers, in order to whip them to sanctification, actually hinders it! That is what he declared! And I am sure he was right! It is certainly what I hope I have said clearly enough in my *Christ is All*. And, after all, Paul told us as plainly as any man could wish, that unless we have died to the law, we will never produce fruit to Christ, that it is only by dying to the law that we can be sanctified (Rom. 7:4-6).

So, reader, why worry about what Bayes or Gay might think? Read Eaton himself, read him for yourself. Indeed, why worry about Eaton? Read the New Testament! What does the New Testament set out as the believer’s rule and way of sanctification? Whatever you find there, hold on to, and seek to put into practice. For my part, I have no doubt that Eaton got it right: the New Testament sets Christ before me, and sets him before me for all – for justification, for sanctification and for glorification.

¹¹⁰ Bayes p10.

John Saltmarsh, having studied at Magdalene College, Cambridge, became a Church of England minister at Heslerton in North Yorkshire in the late 1630s, then, for a very short time, at Brasted in Kent in 1645, but he gave up each position in turn because of his disenchantment with tithes. In the Civil Wars, he was a chaplain in the army of Thomas Fairfax, where he advocated religious toleration, liberty of conscience, and freedom of speech, but was accused of antinomianism. In June 1646, he preached at St Mary's after Oxford had been taken by the army. According to Richard Baxter, who was shocked by his influence, John Saltmarsh and William Dell were the dominant voices in the army's move to a more radical Protestantism, particularly over the doctrine of free grace. On the title-page of his *Free Grace*, Saltmarsh alludes to a spiritual crisis he had experienced some twelve years previously (about 1634), now resolved because his conscience has been relieved of the burden of the Mosaic law. With such views, he naturally attracted the attention of the Presbyterian heresy-hunters of the 1640s, Samuel Rutherford, in his *Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648), noting 'the antichristian doctrine of John Saltmarsh and Will. Dell' on the title-page. Saltmarsh, in his turn, attacked the Presbyterians (when they had power) for opposing toleration – when only a few years earlier they had pleaded for it on their own behalf. He, like Dell, denying that degrees or ordination should be the qualification for ministry, pleaded instead for 'the infinitely abounding Spirit of God'. Consequently, in his popular works, he showed himself a master-teacher, shunned show of scholarship (such as marginal notes or Latin quotations), preferring a clean page, aiming to use simple, accessible language liberally endowed with witty aphorisms to drive home his point. His arguments, however – perhaps because he was rather too spare with words – can be convoluted, and capable of being misunderstood. Near the close of 1647, even though he was dying, Saltmarsh, convinced he should confront the army, rode from Ilford to Windsor in order to admonish Fairfax about his backsliding. He kept his hat on while addressing both Fairfax and Cromwell, explaining that he could no longer honour them because they had imprisoned the saints (by which he meant the Levellers). He returned home to die, and that within days. In his time, Saltmarsh was one of the most influential of the radical preachers and writers in England.

John Saltmarsh

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified

1 Corinthians 2:1-2

Right from the outset, in his opening ‘Epistle Dedicatory’, addressing the two baronets to whom he dedicated his *Free Grace*, John Saltmarsh let everyone know what to expect from his book:

The truths... I here present to you, are of free grace... There is one thing appears to us in the discovery [revelation] of this, which is love, God loving us freely, and sending out his Spirit of love into our hearts. This should be [the] only principle of power in believers now under the gospel: love began all the work of salvation in God, and love should carry on this work of salvation in men. This is a way of service which none know but those whom the Son has made free indeed.

Saltmarsh realised, of course, that, in the spiritual climate of the time, by teaching such doctrines, he was sure to meet with a hostile reaction. So much so, in a sort of prologue, ‘An Occasional Word’, he expressed the (vain) hope that discussion of the issue in hand could be conducted without name-calling and mud-slinging:

It would be [a] matter of much peace among believers if the names of ‘antinomians’ and ‘legal teacher’, and the rest, might be laid down [aside], and no mark or name to know one another by but that of ‘believers’ who hold thus and thus for distinction. Surely, carnal suspicions and jealousy do much to increase our differences.¹

Saltmarsh spelled out the problem. He knew he would be attacked from two sides at once:

Some [the Reformed], hearing the doctrine of free grace, think presently there will follow nothing but looseness and libertinism. And

¹ ‘Vain’ in that he himself used the questionable terms! As do I! Sadly, however, in debates of this kind, we have to use the accepted terminology; otherwise chaos ensues. What we must guard against, surely, is false accusation and character assassination. This *ad hominem* approach, sadly, is too common.

the other [real antinomians], hearing of holiness, of duties and obedience, think there will follow nothing but legalness and bondage, and self-righteousness. And upon these jealousies, each party over-suspecting the other's doctrine, bends [applies the mind] against one another in expressions something too uncomely for both, and there are some unwarrantable notions to be found on all sides.

By means of a series of questions (always the most potent way of teaching), rhetorical questions in this case, Saltmarsh summarised his doctrine:

Can the free grace of Jesus Christ tempt anyone to sin? Can a good tree bring forth evil fruit? And shall we call everyone 'antinomian' that speaks free grace, or [speaks] a little more freely than we do?

Saltmarsh then issued a categorical statement – one which should, once and for all, have put a stop to those who try to dismiss him as an antinomian:

If any man sin more freely because of forgiveness of sins, that man may [that is, he ought to] suspect himself to be forgiven [in the first place], for in all [the] Scriptures and all scriptural examples, [we see that] the more forgiveness, the more holiness. Mary [for instance] loved much because much was forgiven her.²

Using the illustration of the miser who wanted to be thought generous with his wine, but who had secretly heated it to make it too hot to drink, Saltmarsh gave notice of his approach: 'I with the wine of the gospel... be not overheated by the law, and conditions and qualifications, that poor souls cannot taste of it freely... Antichrist goes never rightly down, but when Christ is lifted up'. In saying this, he was going straight to the point of his book. What place for the law of Moses in the age of the new covenant, in the gospel? What place for that law in addresses to sinners? What place for the law in the lives of believers? Above all, which law is it for believers? Saltmarsh rightly (in light of John 1:17) polarised what was at the heart of the issue: Is it the law of Christ, or the law of Moses? Commenting on the Reformed way of preaching, Saltmarsh complained that though 'Jesus Christ has appeared more of late,

² Saltmarsh A2-A4. The 'A' pages are double-sided.

and his glory has been more abroad, than this kingdom ever saw before', nevertheless:

If Jesus Christ had been more in the divinity of these latter times, and in their preachings for reformation, and Moses less, we had not only had more of his grace, but more of his glory than we yet see.³

Turning 'to the reader' of his book, Saltmarsh declared:

The more Christ is known, [along with] that love of God to the sons of men which was manifest in the flesh, the more glorious liberty from the law, sin and Satan is manifested in that soul. This made Paul desire to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. And the more this light of the gospel shines in the face of Jesus Christ, the more does the ignorance of flesh and blood dissolve; and the shadows of the law, as doubts, fears, terrors which are cast in, vanish before it. For the day breaks, and shadows fly away.⁴

That is to say, right from the start, Saltmarsh was making it clear to his readers that he was not dealing with an academic subject, handling it in a detached way. Far from it! The more believers are taken to the law of Moses, the more bondage they get. That is what Saltmarsh was leading up to; that is what he feared. On the positive side: the more Christ is exalted in the preaching they hear, and the more Christ is exalted within them by faith, the more gospel liberty they enjoy. Pursuing this further, Saltmarsh left nobody in any doubt as to why he wrote his book. He was deeply concerned with those believers who are afflicted with 'a spirit of bondage... made poor in spirit [in the wrong way] through the ignorance of the riches of grace, and by a legal faith... [being kept] both under grace and the law at the same time. Surely', he went on, 'such legal believers are as much subject to death and bondage in their own apprehensions of the gospel as they were before under the law'.⁵

So, how did Saltmarsh propose to set about helping such afflicted believers? Convinced that the source of their trouble lay in their lack of appreciation of the freeness of grace, and the glorious liberty there is in Christ for all who are truly united to the Saviour, there was only one aim he could have, and there was only one

³ Saltmarsh A5.

⁴ Saltmarsh A8.

⁵ Saltmarsh A7. See also Saltmarsh pp177-179.

cordial in his cabinet. He did not mince his words: ‘The only scope of this discourse and observation is to hold forth the glory of free grace’.⁶ That was the way – that *is* the way – to bring these afflicted believers into the gospel liberty they so sadly lacked. The title of Saltmarsh’s book says it all:

*Free Grace; or, The Flowing of Christ’s Blood Free To Sinners. Being an experiment of Jesus Christ upon one who has been in the bondage of a troubled conscience at times, for the space of about twelve years, till now upon a clearer discovery [revelation, understanding] of Jesus Christ and the gospel... and by way of observation concerning[?] a natural condition, and a mixed condition of law and gospel, with a further revealing of the gospel in its glory, liberty, freeness and simplicity for salvation.*⁷

Would to God we had more such ‘antinomians’ both in the pulpit and at the writing desk these days! Let me spell it out. We suffer too much from ‘academic’ presentations of truth, we have to endure too many lectures on the gospel, and all delivered with far too little passion. Saltmarsh had his faults, and he got some things wrong, but what a man! What a desire! What an aim! To exalt Christ, and so bring believers out of their bondage into gospel liberty!

Let me summarise his book before I distil its essence, and try to tabulate the points to which I wish to draw particular attention. Remember Saltmarsh’s declared aim – to give gospel relief to distressed souls; that is, to those who were in bondage because they lacked assurance. Having opened with a glance at the natural man’s bondage, he came to conversion – and the first mistake made by the advocates of the law; namely preparationism by the law. He showed how this stores up problems, not only for the sinner coming to Christ, but for the child of God after conversion. Some of these problems can be long-term. Saltmarsh then expanded on the wrong way of assurance, and its consequences. In an extended section, he applied gospel ointment to the sore of the believer’s doubt – speaking of true faith, the believer’s glorious freedom, the glories of the new-covenant ministry compared to the temporary, passing,

⁶ Saltmarsh A7.

⁷ Clearly, Saltmarsh was talking about his own experience, which I have already noted.

and now-passed, obsolete Mosaic economy, the freeness of the offer of the gospel – Christ offered to sinners as sinners – all the while exalting the freeness of grace. Lest anyone should run away with the idea that, as a result of what he was teaching, there is no place for practical godliness, he argued that even though the law of Moses is not the believer's rule, Christ, in the new covenant, rules the believer by his Spirit, and this inevitably leads to the believer's progressive sanctification.

So much for the synopsis. Now let me draw attention to several particular points, even though, it surely goes without saying, it is quite impossible to do what Saltmarsh himself did not do; namely, set out a simple cut-and-dried list. Indeed, he was prepared to move from one topic to another in the course of his book, often including elements which are equally relevant under another of my headings. The upshot is, there will be some overlap and some repetition. While I will do all I can to avoid it, I must let Saltmarsh speak for himself.

To save awkward circumlocution, let me say I shall be moving to and fro between the historical (with Saltmarsh), and the present (with us). In other words, I will not only say '*that* was the way to bring these afflicted believers into the gospel liberty they so sadly lacked', but that it *is* still the way today. As with all my writing and preaching, I want to be useful. I am not an antiquarian, nor am I an academic. My *penchant* is for usefulness.

Saltmarsh on the atonement

Before we examine Saltmarsh's view of the free offer and the way to address sinners in the gospel, we need to be clear about his concept of the atonement. What did he think about its nature and extent? In particular, how did his view of redemption affect the way he addressed sinners in the gospel? Alas, in all this, we must bear in mind that Saltmarsh held to eternal justification, and this, naturally, had a serious bearing, a sad bearing, on the issue in hand.

He set out what he described as the 'purest' way of describing the atonement; namely:

That God the Father for [the] manifestation of his mercy and love, purposed [to bring] some to glory whom he loved freely, and gave his

Son to be a [the] way to them for [salvation]⁸ and righteousness, knowing that they would fall under sin and condemnation in Adam, where he might justly have left them, as the rest, in their blood and pollution, had it not been for that free grace in himself.⁹ And therefore that Son is called the second Adam or quickening Spirit, and this mystery of salvation is free, infinitely free; the Father loving freely, and giving his Son; the Son loving freely, and giving himself freely; and the Spirit working from them both freely for the manifestation of this salvation in the souls of his elect, and through the ministry of a free gospel, even to sinners as sinners, and children of wrath in themselves.

In addition to Saltmarsh's undoubted emphasis on the particular nature of redemption, do not miss his stress on 'free'. This is the point Saltmarsh is after; he wants to extol free grace.

He then turned to 'the Reformed opinion', which he did not accept. Let me try and unravel the point he was making. The Reformed, rightly rejecting eternal justification, take the scriptural position and argue for the necessity of faith for actual justification. Saltmarsh recognised this (not that he himself believed it): 'None are actually justified, nor partakers of free salvation, but by faith'. So far, so good. Unfortunately, because of his eternal justification, as Saltmarsh went on setting out the Reformed view, he did so in a loaded (I mean, of course, 'unfair') way: 'And the gospel [is a]¹⁰ ministry of conditions or qualifications [for]¹¹ this salvation'.

I pause. That word 'condition' needs careful nuancing, and the word 'qualification' carries heavy overtones in this debate. As I say, at this point Saltmarsh failed to show necessary care. The biblical position is that sinners need no qualification whatsoever to be invited to Christ, but unless they repent and believe they will never be saved – as Saltmarsh knew full well. But what are repentance and faith, if not 'conditions'? Mistakenly holding to eternal justification, however, Saltmarsh stigmatised the Reformed view of the atonement, and their way of addressing sinners.

He then turned to the Arminian and the Amyraldian scheme, rightly not liking either. Why not? Because they say: 'Christ [must

⁸ I cannot make out the print.

⁹ I have had some difficulty in determining the best punctuation here.

¹⁰ I cannot make out the print.

¹¹ I cannot make out the print.

have] died for all, else the gospel cannot be preached [offered] to all'. In this, they are mistaken!

In short, in that Saltmarsh was convinced of the particular nature and extent of the atonement, he was right, but in that he held to eternal justification, he was adrift from Scripture.¹²

The question is: in light of particular redemption, how should we address sinners with the gospel?

Saltmarsh and the free offer of the gospel

Scripture shows us that we should offer Christ to all because God has commanded us so to do, and he has given us biblical examples of men doing it – not excluding himself in his Son. We do not need to try to justify the free offer by logic. Indeed, we ought not to try to do it.

Saltmarsh set out his view – the biblical position:

Christ died only for his [elect], and it [the benefits of his death] is [are] offered to all [in order] that his [the elect] who are among this all [among the total mass of humanity] might believe. And though he died not for all [mankind], yet none are excepted [from the offer], and yet none are accepted [by God] but they that believe, and none believe but they to whom it is given. And in this way of salvation lies more mystery, which is more suitable to a divine work. Great is the mystery of godliness. And this ground, that none are excepted [from the offer], is as clear and spiritually rational for the gospel to be preached to all, as this ground, that he died for all. Seeing upon both grounds, some only are saved, and not all, and a decree of mere grace and of faith foreseen do equally imply an impossibility of all to be saved; and therefore why is it so contended for that all are redeemed?¹³

Let me translate. According to Saltmarsh, the rationale for the free offer is not that Christ died for all mankind – which he did not – but, even though Christ died only for the elect, nevertheless no one is exempted from the invitation and command to trust Christ.

¹² For my views on the points being dealt with in this section, see my *Offer; Particular; Septimus; Eternal*.

¹³ Saltmarsh pp197-203. It seems to me that, by (rightly) arguing the necessity of faith, Saltmarsh was contradicting his rejection of 'the Reformed position'.

Scripture makes it clear that all without exception are invited to Christ, and are commanded to come to him. It is also true that only the elect will believe, and that all the elect will believe, through the sovereign operation and gift of the Spirit of God. Men may deride and dismiss this as illogical – indeed, they do – but they badly miss the point. Logicality is not the great shibboleth. We must be scriptural. As Saltmarsh recognised, we are dealing with a ‘great mystery’. Let me spell it out: all men are dead in sin by nature; from the mass of fallen humanity, God has elected those upon whom he will have mercy; Christ died particularly to redeem the elect; and the elect, and only the elect, are effectually called by the Spirit. Nevertheless, as the Bible makes equally clear, the offer of the gospel is universal, to each and every sinner as a sinner. In other words, the ground of the free offer does not lie in the extent of the atonement. Indeed, the extent of the atonement has no bearing on the freeness of the offer. Logical this may not be, but scriptural it is.¹⁴

Moving on, Saltmarsh could not have been more explicit:

Christ in the gospel calls out of heaven to sinners by that very name [that is, he calls sinners as sinners], and tells them he has salvation for them if they will believe in him. Nor does he stand upon what sins, less or more, greater or smaller; so as none can say they are not called on, and proffered salvation, be they never so sinful.¹⁵

First class! Let’s have more of this kind of ‘antinomian’ preaching. If we did, we might see more conversions than we do!

Expanding on the heading ‘Jesus Christ offered to sinners as sinners’, Saltmarsh insisted that ‘the apostle has a precious doctrine, and it is this’:

‘This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief’ (1 Tim. 1:15). As if [the apostle] should say: ‘Do any of your hearts tell you [that] you are sinners? Let not that be any ground at all to keep you from Christ. Let not any despair because of that. I myself [Paul] was thus and thus, a blasphemer, a persecutor; indeed, as if that were not enough, I was the chief of sinners, or the sinner in chief, the grand

¹⁴ See my *Offer; Particular; Septimus; Eternal*.

¹⁵ Saltmarsh p141.

and supreme sinner, as if there could not well have been a greater. And I (says he) obtained mercy'. So as here the Spirit has laid out answers to the objecting or doubting soul. If the soul should object: 'If I were not such a sinner as I am, I could believe', the Spirit answers: 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners' – as if he should say, 'to save even just such as you are'. If the soul should object further: 'But there is not such a sinner as I am', [then] the Spirit answers: 'Yes, but here is one greater than you. Here is the chief of all sinners, the prince of sinners obtaining mercy. [After all, Paul himself declared] "of which I am chief"'. So as none can be such a sinner to whom Christ, and the blood of Christ, may not be tendered and offered; and that upon these grounds.

From such an excellent opening, Saltmarsh then went on to set out the grounds of the free offer; that is, on what basis can we freely offer Christ to sinners as sinners? He set out his answers under seven heads:

1. From the order of God's decree, he loved us, and gave Christ for us when we were sinners. 'God commends his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8). 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son' (John 3:16).¹⁶
2. The offering the gospel and Jesus Christ to a sinner as a sinner is but the bringing out of this glorious [eternal] love of God in time and dispensation; it is but the offering that love which God loved them with from everlasting. Neither is it any more to offer Christ to a sinner, than to manifest God in his first love, when he gave Christ for sinners in his own decree.
3. It exalts grace more, and shows [it] as a gift indeed. What can be more of grace than that Jesus Christ should receive a sinner, one who has no money or price, no works or righteousness to bring for him?
4. It is the right lifting up [of] Jesus Christ as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness – not for the healed to look upon, but the stung and wounded.¹⁷

¹⁶ Saltmarsh should have been more careful in quoting passages written to believers, and applying them to unbelievers. While his overall sentiment was right, he should have been more guarded in the way he expressed himself.

¹⁷ We can go further: the free offer fulfils the typical meaning of the lifting up of the brass serpent in the wilderness, and nothing but the free offer does so. Presenting the gospel only to the sensible (hyper-Calvinists avowedly never invite any) certainly does not! The pole was not lifted up

5. It leaves men without all excuse, and brings the greater condemnation, for when Christ is brought home to the very soul, and the blood offered at everyone's door for receiving, then there can be no objecting: 'Lord, had I been thus and thus fit and prepared'¹⁸ then I should have received you, but I was a foul sinner at that very time, so and so guilty'. 'Oh', will the Lord answer, 'I come [came?] therefore to pardon you, and to wash you in my blood, because you were so foul'. And that [your sinful state, your unprepared condition] is no excuse.
6. It is most agreeable to the gospel way of dispensation, and Christ's own preaching: 'The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'.
7. All that ever received Christ in the gospel, received him in a sinful condition. The many believing Jews in the sin of crucifying Christ;¹⁹ all the churches of Corinth, Ephesus and Colosse: 'Such were some of you, but you are washed', *etc.* [1 Cor. 6:11]. 'And now you were sometimes darkness, but are now light in the Lord' (Eph. 5[:8]). 'You who were dead in trespasses and sins; and were enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now has he quickened'.²⁰

Such was Saltmarsh's view of the justification of the free offer. He went on: 'So as to offer Jesus Christ to sinners as sinners is but':

1. To offer him in time, as God gave him before all time. God gave him to us because we were sinners, and now he is but offered as he was given.²¹

only in front of the elect or sensible; many saw the serpent but did not really look, and so perished. Even so, they were invited to look.

¹⁸ We shall come across several hints of Saltmarsh's dislike of preparationism, but I will leave it until I deal with the matter in the next section.

¹⁹ That is, Luke 24:47. See John Bunyan's *Jerusalem Sinner Saved*.

²⁰ Saltmarsh had Col.1, but he appears to be citing a combination of Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 1:21-22; 2:13.

²¹ Saltmarsh must not be misunderstood here. Christ was given to the elect, and given for the elect, in eternity, but he is offered to all men in time. Saltmarsh was saying that in eternity Christ was given to sinners because they were sinners, and in time he is offered to sinners as sinners. Quite rightly, Saltmarsh was not allowing God's decree to hinder the free offer. At the biting-point of the free offer, whether or not the sinners are elect, whether or not Christ has died in particular for them, has no bearing on the offering of Christ to them. While it is absolutely decisive in whether or not they trust Christ, it has nothing to say about offering Christ to them. Here we come across the continual battle between being logical and being

2. There is more of grace in it to offer him to a sinner as a sinner, that 'where sin has abounded, grace may abound much more' [Rom. 5:20].
3. There is a clearer lifting up of Christ as Moses [did the serpent] for the wounded to look on as well as the whole.
4. Men are without excuse because when he is held out to sinners as sinners, all are in a condition for him; sin and a Saviour are most suitable [for each other].
5. It is as Christ himself did, who both calls sinners, and converses with sinners; with Mary Magdalen... and with the publicans, and with the woman of Samaria, who lived in uncleanness when the pure Messiah preached himself to her.
6. It is as all that ever received him, both [*sic*] in Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus, *etc.*, who had they not been foul, had never been washed; had they not been darkness, had never been light in the Lord.

Saltmarsh moved on to a thorny contention between him and the Puritans: 'But you will tell me of conditions in the gospel, of faith and repentance, *etc.*, and certain legal preparations, before Christ should be offered and brought to the soul'. Let me take a moment to underscore the vital nature of this objection. Note the word 'before'. As I have shown, far too many preachers take the Puritan path mapped out here. Saltmarsh is about to show the wrongness of that route. Hyper-Calvinists demand repentance before issuing the gospel invitation – even if they give the invitation then! In my experience, they never designedly do! More widely, too many Reformed preachers argue for preparationism, claiming that it is useless, wrong, to offer Christ to sinners without first preparing them by a thorough law work. Saltmarsh here sets to work to annihilate this unbiblical position: In order 'that you may not be puzzled as many are', you should know that:

In the gospel way or dispensation, faith and repentance are²² to be preached, but Jesus Christ with it. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ'.

scriptural. The Arminian and the Amyraldian say that Christ was given for all and is offered to all. The hyper-Calvinist says that Christ was given for the elect and this is declared or presented to all, but offered to none. The Bible says that Christ was given for the elect and is offered to all. The biblical doctrine leaves itself open to being called illogical – but, even so, it is right. The other three are all logical – but wrong.

²² Saltmarsh had 'is'. I cannot tell whether or not it was the grammar of the day, or the printer's mistake. Or did Saltmarsh deliberately use 'is'

And you are not to consider [divorce] repentance from believing, nor believing from repentance, nor either from Jesus Christ, nor Jesus Christ without them; and yet neither of them bringing in Christ to the soul, but Christ bringing in them, and working them more and more in the soul, and that upon these grounds...

I pause. The above statement is excellent. Saltmarsh got it spot on! In our day, there is much confusion over this issue, and there is too great a risk of turning faith and repentance into a saving work, on account of which God justifies the sinner. As always with Saltmarsh, he is driving the soul to Christ, and I cannot overstate how right he is in his main argument, and how helpful that argument is: Christ and repentance and faith must never be divorced from each other. What is more, in the ultimate, the only bringer of salvation to the soul is Christ himself, by his Spirit, not faith and repentance. Even so, great care is needed at this point. Saltmarsh in his statement, heavily coloured by his view of eternal justification, went too far. While it is certain that faith is not the cause of justification, it most definitely is the means.

Bearing this in mind, let Saltmarsh continue:

1. Christ is not ours by any act of our own but God's, God's imputing and accounting. To make Christ ours is an almighty work, and not the work of anything created [any creature]. So as Christ is ours without faith [in God's decree], by a power more glorious and infinite, but we cannot here [in time] know him to be ours but by believing, nor [actually] partake of him as ours but by believing.²³

Saltmarsh then moved to the consequences of making faith the ground or cause of salvation:

2. If faith should give [be the cause of] our interest in Christ, then as our faith increases, our interest should increase, and we should be more and more justified and forgiven, which none allow, calling these and other acts of faith, faith of assurance, and acts of manifestation;²⁴ and if

because he viewed faith and repentance as one indivisible entity? It looks probable to me. If so, I am of the same mind.

²³ Saltmarsh, I am sure, was thinking in terms of eternal justification, but what he said, as it stands – with my clarifying interpolations – is right.

²⁴ Saltmarsh's eternal justification is clearly evident at this point.

faith is thus in its other degrees of work, why not in its first? It is 'the evidence of things unseen' (Heb. 11:1).²⁵

3. If Christ should be ours by faith, then when faith ceases, shall we cease to be justified? Shall faith begin our interest here, and not be able to continue hereafter?

He immediately made a thrilling point by asking a question in short compass:

4. Can the sinner be too foul for a Saviour, and too wounded for a physician to heal, and too filthy for a fountain opened to wash?

He went on:

5. He [who] offers Christ, offers all the conditions in him, both of faith and repentance, for 'Christ is exalted to give repentance' [Acts 5:31], *etc.*, and faith is called 'the faith of the Son of God' (Gal. 2:20).²⁶

6. It is no more to offer Jesus Christ than any grace of Christ's or gift of Christ's to a sinner. For a sinner is as unprepared and unfit for the one as the other, equally in sin and pollution to both.

7. This spiritual work is a new creation, and so works of preparation are not so proper in that. 'We are (says the apostle) his workmanship created in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:10).

In conclusion: 'And now, why shall any servant of Christ refuse to give out that blood of his master's which runs so freely to sinners? And [why should] any sinner refuse to receive it, because their vessels are not clean enough for it, when it is such a blood as makes the vessels clean for itself?'²⁷ In other words, let the freeness of God's grace in giving his Son to die for sinners, the freeness of Christ's willingness to shed his blood for them, move every preacher to be equally free in offering Christ and his precious blood to sinners. Coming at it from the other direction, let God's freeness in Christ move every sinner to come to Christ, being heartily persuaded that the blood of Christ can cleanse him from all sin. Let

²⁵ See my *Eternal* for an examination of this (mis)use of Heb. 11:1 by those who hold to eternal justification.

²⁶ See my *Eternal* for an examination of Gal. 2:20. The 'of' should, in my opinion, be translated 'in'. The apostle is not speaking of Christ's faith or faithfulness. Rather, he is speaking of the sinner's faith, his faith *in* Christ.

²⁷ Saltmarsh pp184-190.

nothing – nothing at all – hinder any sinner from coming to the Saviour. There is no excuse – either for preacher or sinner.

In this long, and somewhat convoluted, section, Saltmarsh has striven hard for the freeness of grace and the exaltation of Christ in the free offer of the gospel to sinners. Leaving aside his eternal justification – but even here, I am sure, his motive was to exalt free grace – his statement on the free offer is worthy of the highest praise. In the gospel, Christ is to be offered to sinners as sinners; and sinners as sinners must come to Christ in repentance and faith; if they do, they will be saved; if they refuse, they show the greatest contempt possible for the freeness of God's grace in Christ. In all this we see that the gospel offer exalts the free grace of God in Christ. How right this is! And if this is 'antinomianism', let's have more of it! We need it. Sinners need it.

As I noted, we have already met several hints at preparationism – one of the very serious and damaging consequences of the Reformed view of the law. It is now time to examine how Saltmarsh dealt with it. He certainly did not like it! And quite right too!

Saltmarsh and preparationism

Calvin taught preparationism by the law, and sowed the seeds which would produce a fearful harvest in the centuries that followed. In his own words:

First, by exhibiting the righteousness of God – in other words, the righteousness which alone is acceptable to God – [the law] admonishes every one of his own unrighteousness... convicts, and finally condemns him. This is necessary, in order that man... may be brought... to know and confess his weakness and impurity... So soon... as he begins to compare [his own powers] with the requirements of the law, he has something to tame his presumption. How high soever his opinion of his own powers may be, he immediately feels that they pant under the heavy load, then totter and stumble, and finally fall and give way. He, then, who is schooled by the law, lays aside the arrogance which formerly blinded him... After he is forced to weigh his conduct in the balance of the law, renouncing all dependence on [his] fancied righteousness, he sees that he is at an infinite distance from holiness... In the law we behold, first, our impotence; then, in consequence of it,

our iniquity; and, finally, the curse as the consequence of both... To this effect is the apostle's declaration, that 'by the law is the knowledge of sin' (Rom. 3:20). By these words, he only points out the first office of the law as experienced by sinners not yet regenerated.²⁸

That, of course, comes from the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*. By the 1640s (Saltmarsh's time), a massive amount of preparation water had flowed under the bridge, the trickle having become a torrent, with devastating effects. The Puritans, by their divisions and sub-divisions of the stages of preparationism, having been responsible for the swirling flood, had been trying to cope with its grievous consequences for decades, and it still had a long way to go. Jonathan Edwards would suffer from it a century later. Indeed, if nobody else is, Gospel Standard Strict Baptists are still weltering under it to this very day. Despite the warnings of history – let alone the teaching of Scripture – contemporary Reformed teachers still hanker after preparationism by the law. This is no academic issue. It was nothing of the sort for Saltmarsh, nor is it for me with my books on the subject. Nor is it for those doubting souls who are (perhaps) irretrievably damaged by the preaching of the law, and not Christ, and thus being driven to poring over their wretched works instead of looking to Christ, and immediately resting upon him and his promise. If, in a coming day, preparationism gets a hold, souls will have to meet the same grave costs as before.

Now for Saltmarsh. He was clear as to the way God converts a sinner. Steering the biblical course – having no truck with free-will and creature merit, and yet showing that God changes the sinner's will and does not force it with violence – he declared: although it includes 'threatenings', 'the gospel is formed up of exhortations and persuasions'. Listing several, he went on:

Now this gospel, thus fashioned, is on purpose for the better dispensing of it to the souls of his [God's] people [the elect], that his divine and spiritual things might be more naturally conveyed, in a notional and natural way, [just] as the key is made to fit the wards of the lock. And this is the end [purpose] rather of this gospel fashion, than any supposed free will in man – as some imagine. For the gospel is offered,

²⁸ Calvin, John: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A New Translation by Henry Beveridge, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.1 pp304-305.

not upon [the] freedom of [the] will in any, but that those who are made to receive it should be wrought on in a way as near to their own condition and nature and reason as can be, for none are converted against their will, but their will is spiritually changed, and so they are made willing in the day of his power [Ps. 110:3]. God does not break up the hearts of his people, but opens them, and stands and knocks. Lydia's heart was opened [Acts 16:14]; and he stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). This is the gospel way of his entrance. He does not strive nor cry, nor does anyone hear his voice in the streets [Matt. 12:19]. He does not force in himself, nor anything of his into the soul, but brings in spiritual things so naturally as they [the sinners within whom he is working] cannot, indeed, will not, resist.²⁹

Saltmarsh spoke of the greatness of the promises of the gospel in Christ, especially their freeness, and how this serves to break down all resistance in the sinner, remove all excuse, and so bring him to the Saviour: 'The promises that God makes thus in Christ are free, and being made in Christ are more free; for Christ is all that to God that we should be unto him. And we are in Christ so as Christ takes away all discouragements and excuses in any that dare not believe them to be theirs. And, therefore, the Spirit and the bride say: "Come, and whosoever will let him come and take of the waters of life freely" (Rev. 22:17)'.³⁰

Having expatiated on the old covenant, the Mosaic economy, Saltmarsh came to the new covenant. He opened with what I consider to be *the* great biblical phrase in all this debate, 'but now':

But now under the new covenant,³¹ God appears in Christ, and reconciliation is finished, peace is made by the blood of his cross, and now the ministry of the new covenant is not a priesthood of any more offering Christ to God in sacrifice, but of offering and tendering the tidings of a fully reconciled God in Christ to man, and of a sacrifice already accepted for sin. So as now there are no priests, but ministers or stewards or ambassadors for dealing out and dispensing the love of God to man, and for publishing the glad tidings of peace. So as all worship now and spiritual obedience is to run in the way of this

²⁹ Saltmarsh pp163-164.

³⁰ Saltmarsh pp164-165.

³¹ Saltmarsh had 'Testament'. It is better to read this as 'covenant'. The same applies from time to time in what follows, but without this note. I have left 'Testament' where this is obviously right.

dispensation, not for procuring love or peace from God, nor for pacifying [him], but for love procured, and peace purchased, by Jesus Christ.³²

First class!

Again:

I observe that the calling and conversion which souls have in a legally gospel way, not from a pure and clear apprehension of Jesus Christ revealed in the gospel, covenant or promise, though there may be truth in such a calling, and Christ received, yet the manner being not in the way of pure gospel dispensation, the soul may be exceedingly puzzled and perplexed; so though Christ may be truly there, yet being not in a gospel form, but a legal, the soul may mistake and lose the knowledge of Christ... When the Lord sends the light of Jesus Christ into a soul that has formerly been in darkness, and in the shadow of death, then it begins to see its corruption and lusts... then the soul presently is pricked upon the discovery of that, and there is remorse and perplexity in the soul. [Take the Jews in Acts 2]: after Peter had laid open their sin of shedding the blood of Christ, [they] were pricked to the heart for it... And if there be not a clear understanding of Jesus Christ and the gospel, the soul thus wounded will groan under many legal convictions... Many preachers... keep such souls with their wounds open. And if they pour in anything, it is rather... something of the law than [than?]³³ the gospel. So as they [the sinners] are not only long in healing and getting peace through Jesus Christ, but they carry a fear with them still, and are, as it were, lame in their consciences a long time after... The passions which [the] gospel way works in the soul are such as bring enlargements, and [f?]lowings and pourings out of the Spirit, but the passions which the law works bring in straitening, a contraction, or gathering up, or narrowness into the spirit;³⁴ and therefore it is called bondage and fear.³⁵

Saltmarsh has made some huge statements here, statements which he proceeded to work out in detail. The gospel, Christ, is the great

³² Saltmarsh pp166-168.

³³ If it should be 'then', Saltmarsh was here disagreeing with the idea of preparationism by the law; namely, that the law must be preached before the gospel.

³⁴ Saltmarsh had 'Spirit'. He might have meant the law restricts the Spirit's working, or the sinner's apprehension of it. I prefer 'spirit' – the man's own spirit.

³⁵ Saltmarsh pp33-39.

convictor of sinners – not the law; legal preachers keep sinners in bondage with wounds; Christ by his Spirit, however, gives liberty; and so on. And this brings us to preparationism.

Saltmarsh came to grips with the issue. Beginning with the Reformed call for preparationism by the law, he made it clear that he had no time for it: ‘The opening of Jesus Christ in the gospel is the best and surest way to deal with sinners’. He had observed, he said, that when sinners are coming to Christ, some of them ‘are [more] ready to put away gospel promises than [to] receive them, and imagine themselves rather in fitness for judgement than mercy or grace’. In other words, some souls are already (on their own) going down the preparation route – and this effectively keeps them from Christ! And many of the doubts which afflict believers, Saltmarsh traced back to preparationism.

Such anxious souls are, of course, listening to their preachers. What a responsibility such preachers carry! Saltmarsh spoke of the Puritan (Reformed) way of dealing with these afflicted souls – namely, by the law – and showed the dreadful consequences they were storing up for such believers. So closely did Saltmarsh link the hurt preparationism causes both unbelievers and believers, he moved from preparationism by the law in the legal preaching of the gospel to sinners, to the effect of that style of preaching on anxious believers. In so doing, he failed adequately enough to distinguish the two – the reason being, as I have said, that he thought the two are intimately connected. Be that as it may, let Saltmarsh continue:

And then if preachers run to the law in dealing with such souls for their thorough humiliation as they say or pretend, and not to the gospel and faith in Jesus Christ, they bring fire, and not water, to quench them, and so kindle them the more, and setting the everlasting burnings of the law before their souls, put them in a spiritual flame and vexation.

In other words, contrary to the Reformed, the law inflames sinners! Not only so! Saltmarsh showed that this legal preaching went directly against biblical examples. He cited Nathan dealing with David, ‘though under the old covenant’. When David confessed his sin, Nathan told him: ‘The Lord has put away your sin’ (2 Sam.

12:13).³⁶ Saltmarsh cited John's way of dealing with such a case; namely: 'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous' (1 John 2:1). This is the biblical way to deal with anxious souls.³⁷

Saltmarsh then tackled Reformed preaching, analysing what lies behind it:

I know the divinity of some former ages [the Roman Church] to these present times [the Reformed], made up all their recipes for distempered [unsettled] souls of so much law and so much gospel, and usually put a grain or dram of gospel to a pound of law; not being then clear enough in judgement to unminge things which Antichrist had confounded and put together – as to the two Testaments, and two covenants, and not rightly discerning Christ's manner or way of preaching, and the apostles' [preaching], both in their holding forth law and gospel. Now we know that the apostle said: 'Did you receive the Spirit by the preaching of the law, or the preaching of faith?' (Gal. 3:2). And therefore, they that would make the law the ministry of life, and of the Spirit, are not of such a spiritual discerning as the Lord has now revealed, and such put a soul on a legal method of conversion, or coming to Christ.

What is the 'legal method of conversion'? Saltmarsh spelled it out:

First, they [sinners] must be kept so long under the law for humiliation, and contrition, and confession, and then brought to the gospel – as many [Puritan, Reformed] books and teachers do – when... [in fact] the law is not of any power to infuse such gracious passions [feelings] into the soul as the gospel calls for. [True, Christ told us:] 'Blessed are they that mourn, and they that are poor' [Matt. 5:3-4], but this is not the mourning spirit under the law, nor the poor spirit under the curse of the law of sin, but... gospel mournings, and gospel poverty... If they [the passions produced] are only such as the law brings forth, and presses the soul into, they are no better than the contritions of Esau and Judas.

³⁶ How did Nathan preach David into a state of conviction for his sin? Did he hammer the 6th and 7th commandments? He did not! He told him a parable which could have come straight from the Gospels – the sheer unfairness of snatching a poor man's cherished lamb, his only lamb, his little ewe lamb, when he himself had an abundance. It was the rich man's lack of pity that Nathan drove into David's heart (2 Sam. 12:1-10). And this, by a prophet to a king under the old covenant! How much less, then, should new-covenant preachers take Gentiles to the law for conviction!

³⁷ For Crisp's important sermon on this text, see above, p62.

In contrast, if the gospel method were to be adopted, the results would be altogether different:

But if they [the passions produced] are such as the law or Spirit of Jesus Christ, or the law of life, works in the soul, then they are of a more spiritual and precious nature; but this is from the gospel and the preaching of faith.

Saltmarsh then turned to scriptural examples: ‘What law did Peter preach to Cornelius, or Philip to the eunuch, or Ananias to Paul, or Paul to the jailor and his household, but only Jesus Christ?’ He generalised the point:

Nor can you find the law – I mean the law in its form or covenant – preached, but to those who were under the law, and pretended to stand by the law, and to set up a righteousness by the law, as the Pharisees and Jews, *etc.*

How right this is! As I have shown, there is no biblical example of anyone preaching the law to unbelieving Gentiles. Not one! To Jews, yes, but not to Gentiles. And, even then, the law was never preached to Jews to make them fit for Christ. Saltmarsh was careful to add:

Though in all this, I esteem no less of the law than any other, as it was a law for the people of God under Moses, and had³⁸ something of the image of God in it, but now we are under a better law, a more excellent law, and a more spiritual commandment... the more pure, transcending and excellent law of the commandments of the gospel, or the more perfect rule of righteousness of God in the righteousness of Christ, so as the New Testament is both law and gospel... ‘Do we therefore make void the law by the preaching of faith? Indeed, we establish the law, Christ being the end of the law for righteousness’ [Rom. 3:31; 10:4].³⁹

Saltmarsh went on to speak of the long-term damage caused to ‘a soul that is not informed by a pure gospel light, nor apprehends clearly the way of faith, of Christ, and the promises, and the glory of the new covenant’. He is, said Saltmarsh, for ‘ever unsettled, unstable, full of fears, doubtings, distractions, questionings. And the more such a soul is reasoned with concerning their [*sic*]

³⁸ Saltmarsh had ‘hath’, but he was talking in the past tense.

³⁹ Saltmarsh pp39-43.

condition, the more they question the truth of every spiritual working in them’.

Where does this come from?

And this comes from the power of the law still upon the consciences, which is more powerful to convince and accuse them, than the gospel is to excuse or acquit them, having more of the ministry of condemnation before them, or in their eye, than of the ministry of life and Jesus Christ. And Satan takes advantage of their legal condition... and so much as there is of legal apprehensions, so much there is to hinder the bringing in of the kingdom of God into the soul... There is nothing but the taking in of the law, and accusings or condemnations of it, which can trouble the peace and quiet of any soul... all trouble arising from the obligation of [to, required by] the law, which demands a satisfaction of the soul for the breach of it, and such a satisfaction as the soul knows it cannot give, and thereby remains unquiet like a debtor that has nothing to pay [with]... It is no marvel that such souls should be troubled for sin, and unpacified... [since] the law in tables or letters of stone must needs work strongly upon the spirits of such as are but weakly and faintly enlightened, and are not furnished with gospel enough to answer the indictments, the convictions, the terrors, the curses which the law brings. Therefore all the power of Christ and the gospel is to be applied to raise up such souls from under the power of those stones and burdens which the law could roll upon them. Such [souls] are to have more gospel than ordinary applied,⁴⁰ because they have so much law naturally within them. Such are to know, they are not now under the law, but under grace, and the law has no more dominion over them, and they are dead unto that husband [Rom. 7:4-6], and they are now upon a new foundation, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone [Eph. 2:20]. And we should say to such: ‘Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Jesus Christ’ [John 14:1].⁴¹

Saltmarsh conceded ‘that in a soul, though legally enlightened, or receiving Christ, yet there are certain gospel workings, whereby it

⁴⁰ I do not understand Saltmarsh here. I could understand the comment if made by a Reformed preacher: a little more law here; a little more gospel there. Nonsense! All gospel! Full weight gospel, all the time, every time!

⁴¹ Saltmarsh pp43-46. As before, Saltmarsh moves from the unbeliever to the believer without adequately distinguishing between them. As I have noted, Saltmarsh was too sparing with words. A few more would not have come amiss here!

will appear that Jesus Christ is there'. Having spelled out four such signs, Saltmarsh nevertheless felt bound to record that 'the souls of such know not the word or Spirit in their souls many times'. Why not? 'The voice of Christ is not heard for the voice of Moses, nor the voice of grace for the voice of the law'. How right he was! Even so, he concluded: 'I will not quench the smoking flax' [Matt. 12:20].⁴²

Indeed, he was very concerned to make sure his readers really understood and appreciated the simplicity and immediacy of the gospel. He had no time for the wire-drawn experience demanded by legal preparationists. Granting that he got some things askew, nevertheless, he certainly drove home his main concern:

The simplicity of the gospel salvation, easy and plain: Jesus Christ, and forgiveness of sins in his name, and redemption through his blood, is the first and only thing held forth in the gospel to sinners... Jesus Christ crucified is the best story for sinners, and Jesus Christ exalted for saints... Salvation is not made any puzzling work in the gospel; it is plainly, easily and simply revealed. Jesus Christ was crucified for sinners. This is salvation, and we need go no further. The work of salvation is past and finished. Sins are blotted out. Sinners are justified by him that rose for justification. And now if you ask me what must you do to be saved, I answer: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved' [Acts 16:31]. All that is to be done in the work of salvation is to believe there is such work, and that Christ died for you among all those other sinners he died for.

I must break in at this point. Saltmarsh went badly astray here, and in two respects. *First*, there is far more to saving faith than believing Christ died for sinners. That is Sandemanianism. Saving faith goes far deeper than head knowledge. It reaches the heart. And, *secondly*, saving faith does not involve believing that Christ died for me personally. If that were true, a sinner would have to be convinced he was elect before he came to faith – an impossibility, in that God never tells a sinner he is elect before he trusts Christ. The fact is, saving faith is trusting Christ, and nothing to do with believing that I am elect or that Christ died for me.

To let Saltmarsh go on:

⁴² Saltmarsh pp46-49.

To believe now is the only work of the gospel. ‘This is the work that [God requires namely, that] you believe on him whom he sent’ (John 6:29). ‘This is his commandment, that you believe on his Son Jesus Christ’ (1 John 3:23); that is, that you be persuaded of such a thing, that Christ was crucified for you and for your sins;⁴³ and we are called on to believe because they only that can believe are justified. ‘By him all that believe are justified’ (Acts 13:39).

So as salvation is not a business of our working and doing. It was done by Christ, with the Father. Sin, Satan and hell were all triumphed over by Christ himself openly for us, and all our work is no work *for* salvation,⁴⁴ but *in* salvation [that is, because we are saved]. In all the salvation we have by Christ, we receive all, not doing anything that we might receive more, but doing because we receive so much, and because we are saved. Therefore we work, not that we may be saved, and yet we are to work as much as if we were to be saved by what we do, because we should do as much for what is done already for us, and to our hands, as if we were to receive it for what we did ourselves.

This is short work: Believe and be saved. And yet this is the only gospel work and way... [John 3:14-15; 6:40,54; Acts 16:31] (Rom. 10:6-9). So as here is but looking upon Jesus Christ, and salvation is in your soul, and believing with your heart, and you are saved. You were saved by Christ before [in God’s decree and in Christ’s work], but now in yourself.⁴⁵

Saltmarsh concluded: ‘There are yet these grounds why salvation is so soon done’; that is, why sinners are so quickly saved:

1. Because it was done before by Christ, but not believed on before by you till now.
2. Because it is the gospel way or dispensation to assure and pass over salvation in Christ to any that will believe it.
3. There needs no more on our sides to work or warrant salvation to us, but to be persuaded that ‘Jesus Christ died for us’.⁴⁶ Because Christ has suffered, and God is satisfied. Now, suffering and satisfaction is that great work of salvation.
4. Because they, and they only, are justified who can believe. ‘Righteousness is revealed from faith to faith’; and ‘all that believe are justified’ (Rom. 1:17; Acts 13:39).

⁴³ See my comment immediately above.

⁴⁴ Saltmarsh had ‘of salvation’.

⁴⁵ In this last, Saltmarsh actually (but rightly) contradicted his stance on eternal justification.

⁴⁶ See previous notes. As it stands, this is Sandemanianism.

5. That it may be by grace, and not of works. ‘Being justified freely by his grace’ (Rom. 3:24).⁴⁷

As can be clearly seen, we could have done with a few more words to make Saltmarsh’s meaning clearer. But their import is plain enough: we must preach Christ to sinners; they need no legal preparation to fit them either for the invitation or for actually coming to Christ; sinners must be made to look to Christ, and not to themselves; none of this needs to be drawn out.

Saltmarsh’s remarks are leading us to the crux; namely, his view of sanctification, and the part the law plays in that sanctification. It is time we looked at that in some detail.

Saltmarsh on the believer and the law

Saltmarsh was convinced that a right understanding and proper appreciation of the freeness of grace in Christ is essential, not only for the unbeliever coming to Christ, but for the saint:

They that are under grace revealed are no more under the law. While we are out of covenant with God [before we come to faith], we are... under the curse for any breach of law or disobedience. But when we are once under grace revealed, we are ever under grace, and no more under the law.

What does this entail? Once he is in Christ:

The law can only tell a believer he sins, but not tax him for any. We are not under the law, but under grace [Rom. 6:14-15]. ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge God’s elect? Who shall condemn? It is Christ that died’ (Rom. 8:33)... Christ came into the world that he might do what we could not do [as] to the fulfilling of the law, and suffer what we could not suffer for the breach of the law... Christ now standing as a person between God and the children of men [better, the elect] takes in the fullness of righteousness and sin from both natures – righteousness from God, and sin from men – whereby all the sins of his people are fully done away with by the infinite glory of that righteousness, both from himself and from us.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Saltmarsh pp190-194, emphasis mine.

⁴⁸ Saltmarsh pp128,132.

In other words, the law's condemning power has gone for the believer. Christ has taken it for him. What are the consequences?

A person justified... is as pure in the sight of God as the righteousness of Christ can make him (though not so in his own eyes, that there may be work for faith),⁴⁹ because God sees his [people] only in Christ, not in themselves; and if they were not in such perfect righteousness, they could not be loved by him, because his eyes are purer than to behold iniquity, or to love a sinner as a sinner.⁵⁰

So much for justification. But what about sanctification? What about the law, the believer and his sanctification? Does the believer never sin? Sadly, of course, he does. So what about sin in a believer? What are the consequences when a believer sins – and who does not?

Sin separates [a believer], not from his God, but from communion with his God. No sins can make God, who loves for ever and unchangeably, love us less; and yet a believer will grieve for his sin, because it grieves the Spirit of his God. And though he knows [that] sin cannot now separate [him] from God, yet because it once separated [him and God], he hates it, and because it separates still, though not from God, yet from communion with God, grieving the Holy Spirit of God.⁵¹

In other words, when a believer sins, although he loses his communion with God, he never sins himself out of the love of God. Does this mean that a believer's sin does not matter? The suggestion is both ridiculous and offensive. As Saltmarsh stated, the believer grieves for and hates his sin because it grieves God.

Yes, but what about the law's part in the believer's sanctification? What place for the law in this regard now, under the new covenant? Calvin, as we know, followed by and extended by the Puritans, and still maintained by the Reformed today, all argue and continue to argue for sanctification by the law. What about Saltmarsh? Saltmarsh turned to 'a believer's glorious freedom', declaring:

⁴⁹ That is, the believer cannot see in his actual life that he is perfect. It is only by faith that he can realise that he is so in the sight of God.

⁵⁰ God, of course, loves the world (John 3:16). The word 'love' needs nuancing.

⁵¹ Saltmarsh pp129-130.

The Spirit of Christ sets a believer as free from hell, the law and bondage here on earth, as if he were in heaven; nor wants [needs] he anything to make him so, but to make him believe that he is so.⁵² For Satan, sin, sinful flesh and the law, are all so near and about him in this life, that he cannot so walk by sight or in the clear apprehension of it. But ‘the just do live by faith’ [Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17], and ‘faith is the evidence of things not seen’ [Heb. 11:1]. All the sins of believers [are] done away [with] on the cross. There is no sin to be committed [for] which Christ did not pay down the price of his blood upon the cross, ‘making peace through the blood of his cross’, and yet a believer will sin as tenderly as if all his sins were to pay for yet, knowing that he is not redeemed *to* sin, but *from* sin; not that he may sin, but that sinning he may not suffer for sin; Christ is risen for our justification [Rom. 4:25].⁵³

I pause. Clearly, this is potent medicine, and capable of dangerous misuse in the wrong hands. But the question is: *Is it biblical?* I have no hesitation in saying that Saltmarsh was right. What is more, the man who could say such things ought never to have been called an antinomian. Listen to him again: ‘A believer will grieve for his sin, because it grieves the Spirit of his God... A believer will sin as tenderly as if all his sins were to pay for yet, knowing that he is not redeemed *to* sin, but *from* sin; not that he may sin, but that sinning he may not suffer for sin’.⁵⁴ Is that antinomianism? I think Saltmarsh’s meaning is perfectly clear to any fair-minded reader. Above all, of course, was he not declaring what we need to hear far more of today: namely, the glorious freedom and assurance Christ has wrought and accomplished for his people? Do we hear enough these days of the liberty belonging to the saints in Christ? Did not Saltmarsh reach the heart, warm it, and lift it up? More, as he himself declared, is this not the way to produce holiness? For this, he should never be censured. Rather, he should be imitated!

As he stated:

If these things thus stated were more fully and spiritually opened, there would be more gospel teaching and obeying. For man’s obedience

⁵² As before, he needs faith to appreciate what he is in God’s sight.

⁵³ Saltmarsh pp140-141, emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ 70 years later, Matthew Henry, commenting on Matt. 1:21: ‘Christ came to save his people, not in their sins, but from their sins; to purchase for them, not a liberty to sin, but a liberty from sins’.

towards God is not so notionally, or orderly carried, or so purely as the gospel calls for, but they [the preachers and, therefore, the hearers] run in a legal strain, and would work God down into his old and former way of revealing himself as under the law... and... they deal with God as they did under the old covenant, not considering the glorious love revealed in Christ crucified, and how all gospel ordinances are only ways and means for God to reveal this love and grace by the Spirit of adoption, not in any ways and means of ours for getting some love from God, which Christ himself has not gotten for us.⁵⁵

This is the New Testament – the new covenant – way of sanctification. While it does appeal to the law by way of paradigm (never as binding commandment),⁵⁶ the New Testament overwhelmingly appeals to the grace of God in Christ as the motive, the means, the spur to our sanctification. In short, the gospel not only leads sinners to Christ for conversion, it leads saints to Christ for sanctification by his Spirit.

But the question remains: What place for the law now in the sanctification of the believer? In approaching his answer, Saltmarsh turned to another topic – the union of a believer with Christ – the importance of which cannot be overstated. Sadly, how little is this doctrine preached and understood today.

Saltmarsh on the union of a believer with Christ

On this vital – but grossly neglected – topic, Saltmarsh was magnificent:

A believer has a twofold condition (yet as a believer but one); in Christ, [and] in himself. Yet he ought ever to consider himself in Christ by faith, not in himself. In Christ, he has perfectly obeyed the whole law, perfectly suffered and satisfied for all his sins to [that is, he has satisfied] the justice of God, and in Christ is perfectly just and righteous. And therefore it is said that ‘our life is hid with Christ in God’ [Col.3:3], and ‘we are raised up with Christ, and made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ [Eph. 2:6], even already. But in [the believer] himself, there is but a body of lust, corruption and sin, and there is a law revealing sin, accusing and condemning. So if a believer lives only by sense, reason and

⁵⁵ Saltmarsh pp168-169.

⁵⁶ See my *Christ, Sanctification in Galatians*.

experience of himself, and as he lives to men, he lives both under the power and feeling of sin and the law. But if he lives by faith in Christ, believing in the life, righteousness, obedience, satisfaction and glory of him, he lives out of [beyond, free of] the power of all condemnation and unrighteousness. And thus a believer is blessed only in a righteousness without, not within [in himself], and all his assurance, confidence [and] comforts are to flow into him through a channel of faith, not of works, believing himself happy for what another, even Christ, has done for him, not what he has done or can do for himself.

Saltmarsh explained:

All the ground of a believer's righteousness and salvation, and exemption from the law, sin and curse, is from the nature, office and transaction or work of Christ, and God's accounting or imputing [of it to the believer]. Christ stood clothed in our nature, between God and man, and in that with all the sins of believers [better, the elect] upon him, 'God having laid on him the iniquities [*sic*] of us all' [Isa. 53:6]. In his office, he obeyed, suffered, satisfied and offered up himself, and now sits as a mediator to perpetuate or make his sacrifice, obedience, suffering and righteousness everlasting, and thus bringing in everlasting righteousness. And God... accounts, reckons or imputes all that is done in our nature [by Christ], as done by us, 'calling things that are not, as if they were' [Rom. 4:17], and in his [Christ's] person as in our person. And thus he is 'made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him [2 Cor. 5:21]'.⁵⁷

What are the practical, day-to-day consequences of this union between Christ and believers? How does it affect them? A believer must keep his union with Christ in mind at all times; he must learn to talk to himself, constantly reminding himself: 'I am in Christ. God sees me only in Christ; he sees me perfectly righteous in Christ'.

Saltmarsh had not finished with this important point, not by a long way. Indeed, he now moved on to make a series of powerful statements – statements running in direct contradiction of the attitude engendered by Reformed teaching, both in his time and ours. What am I talking about? The Reformed think that the believer is in his most spiritual state when he talks in the vein of Romans 7:14-24. I have already referred to this, when looking at

⁵⁷ Saltmarsh pp141-143.

John Eaton. Saltmarsh would have none of it. True, even as believers we *are* sinners in ourselves. Nevertheless, the great truth is not what we are in ourselves but what we are in Christ, and *that* is what we should be concentrating on. Indeed, it is how God views us – in Christ. All this has far-reaching consequences for our peace, assurance and sanctification.

Saltmarsh:

We must come before God, as having put on Christ first, not as sinners and unrighteous. A believer, in all his dealings with God, either by prayer, or other way of drawing near, is to state, and consider himself, thus in Christ in the first place, and to put on the relation of sonship and righteousness, and to look at or consider sins no otherwise [in no other way] than as debts paid and cancelled by the blood of Christ.

And what follows from this?

And by this, all bondages, fears and doubtings are removed, and his spirit is free. And now he comes in the spirit of adoption, and calls God ‘Father’. And here begins all faith, hope, confidence, love [and] liberty when as others⁵⁸ dare not believe themselves in such a condition till upon terms of humiliation, sorrow for sin, works of righteousness, they have, as they think, a reasonable measure, price or satisfaction to come with, and then begin to believe, hope and be confident, and thus in [a] way of compounding and bargaining with God, deal with him [on] all occasions. But such submit not to the righteousness of God, and the free gift of justification by grace, and give not glory to God. For they that believe upon something first in themselves, shall, as they have kindled a fire of their own kindling, and having nothing in Christ [that is, they look too little to Christ, too much to their own sanctification], lie down in the sparks of their own kindling, and have nothing in Christ, because they will not have all in him. For we must either have all in him, or nothing. And though some will have all in Christ for salvation, yet they will have something in themselves to believe their interest in this salvation, and though this is not to reject Christ for righteousness, yet it is to reject his free promise or word of assurance for this righteousness, and rather be persuaded upon sight [rather] than faith, and sense [rather] than promise, and something in ourselves [rather] than in himself.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Saltmarsh clearly had the Puritans, the Reformed, in his sights.

⁵⁹ Saltmarsh pp144-145.

Although I have annotated that extract, let me return to it and further translate it – it merits it! Please bear in mind that Saltmarsh was speaking about believers and their assurance and sanctification – he was not talking about sinners and their justification. Saltmarsh was arguing that if a believer looks for assurance by his sanctification – which is, according to the Reformed, by the law – it will inevitably mean that the believer is greatly impoverished, is encouraged to doubt, and never able to shake himself free of a measure of fear and torment. Why? Since he is looking within, he can only see his sin and failure, and hence arises his doubt and fear. What he should do is look to Christ for all. He looked to Christ for his justification, didn't he? Well, then, he must look to Christ for his assurance and for his sanctification. He is 'in Christ'! This is no figment! It is a glorious reality! Let him think like it, live like it and talk like it. He must! It is the truth!

How practical is all this! And how refreshingly different to the usual Reformed way of speaking about our poor wretched state! How liberating! The question is, as always: Which way is the New Testament way? I have no doubt. What about you, reader?

But, the question still stands, what about the law for sanctification?

Saltmarsh on the believer and the law for sanctification

Saltmarsh was explicit. The believer is *not* under the law of Moses for sanctification. He is under the law of Christ. Let me stress this with as much vigour as I can. The believer is not lawless. He is not even law-less. While he is not under the law of Moses, he is under the law of Christ. Saltmarsh, quite rightly, made no apology for stating this loud and clear. It is the teaching of the new covenant! What is more, he argued (again, rightly) that it is the Reformed who need to explain their position. They are the ones out of step with biblical teaching on the new covenant:

The law is now in the Spirit and in the gospel for a believer to walk by. The gospel is a perfect law of both life and righteousness, of grace and truth, and therefore I wonder at any [the Puritans, the Reformed] that should contend for the ministry of the law or ten commandments under Moses, which is of less glory than that which is now revealed and exceeds in glory, and should strive for a law without the gospel, which

is in the gospel [the law of Christ]. Nor is the holiness and sanctification now such as is fashioned by the law or outward commandment, but by the preaching of faith, by which the Spirit is given, which renews and sanctifies a believer, and makes him the very law of commandments in himself, and his heart the very two tables of Moses. And though the law [of Moses] is a beam of Christ in substance and matter, yet we are not to live by the light of one beam now when the Sun of righteousness is risen in himself, that was a fitter light for those who lived in the region and shadow of death. And it is with the law [of Christ] now, or light of righteousness, as it was with the light in creation, when that which was scattered was gathered into one body of light. So Christ now being revealed, holiness and righteousness, as well as grace and love, are revealed in him, and gathered up in him. And what need we light up a candle for the children of the day to see by? What, is there any striving for a stream in the channel, when the fountain is open? Nor does it become the glory of Christ revealed to be beholding to any of the light upon Moses' face. 'The word is now made flesh, and dwells among us, and we behold his glory as the glory of the only begotten Son, full of truth as well as grace [John 1:14]'.⁶⁰

As Saltmarsh was saying, the age of the law of Moses has passed; it is now the age of the law of Christ, the age of the Spirit. It is, as I stressed in my *Christ is All*, the time of the 'but now'.

In a passage of the utmost importance, Saltmarsh dealt with an issue which is often greatly misunderstood. He compared, he contrasted, the two laws – the law of Moses and the law of Christ – 'legal [duties] and gospel duties':

Gospel commandments and legal commandments do not command in the same power, in the same manner, or to the same end.

Admirable! I love Saltmarsh's pithy way of encapsulating profundity. The difference between the law of Moses and the law of Christ is that 'gospel commandments and legal commandments do not command in the same power, in the same manner, or to the same end'. He went on:

⁶⁰ Saltmarsh pp146-147.

The law commands us to obey, to love, to fear, to be holy, that God may be our God, and we his people; the gospel commands us to obey and love because we are the people of such a God.⁶¹

The law commands in the power of God as a law-giver and tutor⁶² or minister; the gospel in the power of a Father.

The law commands by promises and threatenings, blessings and cursings; the gospel persuades rather than commands, and rather by promises, and exhorts rather than bids, and reasons us to duty rather than enforces, and rather draws us than drives us, and by setting forth promises and privileges and prerogatives and works done on God's part, and Christ's part, for us, and in love, rather argues us into doing and working, and loving reflections again; and Christ is chiefly propounded, both for holiness and obedience, for mortification and newness of life. So as the gospel commands us rather by pattern than precept, and by imitation than command (Heb. 12:1-3).

Important remarks are coming thick and fast. Do not miss them, reader. Let them sink in. The gospel, not the law, is the believer's rule, spur and motive for godliness. What is more, the entire ambience, range, spirit, place of the old law has gone – the new law, the law of Christ, being of a different character altogether.

Saltmarsh:

Nor [do the law and the gospel work] to the same end. The end of the law was to bondage, fear, tutorship,⁶³ revealing sin, outward obedience and conformity.⁶⁴ The end of gospel laws is to [produce in us] love, newness of spirit, praise and thanksgiving for righteousness and life received, and testimony to our righteousness received in Christ. 'Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit' [2 Cor. 7:1]... And thus, Christ's 'yoke is easy, and his burden light' [Matt. 11:30], and 'his commandments are not grievous' [1 John 5:3], for they are commandments that carry life and power, and quicken to that duty [which] they command, like the sun which warms us in the very shining upon us. And we work and walk and live under the gospel, as being saved already, and redeemed, and

⁶¹ What a massive point! See my *Christ*. See also Jer. 7:23; 24:7; 31:33; Ezek. 11:20; 2 Cor. 6:14 –7:1, for instance.

⁶² Better: 'child-custodian', prison keeper. See my earlier notes on this.

⁶³ See above.

⁶⁴ This is a huge point, and needs stressing today. 'Conformity' is not wanted; conversion and heart-consecration is. Too often, we rest satisfied with conformity.

bringing forth the power of this redemption and salvation, through the Spirit of adoption, freely working to the praise of that free grace, and freely obeying for such free redemption, and doing everything in love, because of the love shed abroad in our hearts; and neither taking in judgements, nor hell, or damnation; no!, nor heaven, nor glory, to force on the work or quicken the duty, but doing all from the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, except when corruption or temptation hinders the freeness and spirituality in the duty.⁶⁵

Note Saltmarsh's heavy and sustained – but proper – emphasis on 'free'. How great is the gulf between Saltmarsh and Calvin with his whip! Which man has caught the spirit of the new covenant? Do not miss Saltmarsh's emphasis on love, placing spiritual love above all other motives for sanctification. Has he not caught the spirit of the apostle? Listen to him:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection* (Col. 3:12-14).

Even so, and it is vital to note it, Saltmarsh was clear. Although the believer, through his union with Christ, has the inward grace and power of the Spirit, and is – or ought to be – motivated by love, nevertheless, he needs an outward law, as well as an inward law, to live by. Have no fear! God has given him one! But this law is not confined to the ten commandments! It is the entire word of God, principally the gospel, that is the outward rule for the believer. Not only that! It is not 'merely' the entire word of God, especially the gospel, that is the rule for the believer; it is the entire word of God, especially the gospel, *in the hands of Christ, administered by his Spirit*, that forms the believer's outward governance – hence, 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus', 'the law of Christ' (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2). Saltmarsh spoke of 'the gospel in the holiness and grace of it':

There is doctrine of holiness in the gospel, as well as grace and love; and there are commands for obedience, as well as tidings of forgiveness: 'The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to

⁶⁵ Saltmarsh pp147-149.

all, teaching us that, denying ungodliness', *etc.* 'We should live soberly, righteously and godly' (Tit. 2:[11-]12). And this kind of gospel is such in the revelation of it as fits both God and man. God the Father may be seen in commanding holiness, and the Spirit in forming the holiness commanded, and the Son in redeeming us to holiness, even to the will both of the Father and the Spirit. And this gospel fits [suits] man, who is made up both of flesh and spirit, and so has need of a law without, and in the letter, as well as in the heart and spirit [that is, the law is necessary both outwardly and inwardly]. 'The law is spiritual, but we are carnal' (Rom. 7[:14]). Nor can such a state of flesh and spirit be ordered by a law only within, for the word and law of the Spirit merely [on its own] is for [those in] a [completely] spiritual condition or state of glory, as angels who only live by a law spiritual, or word of revelation. But our estate here being partly carnal, must needs be ordered yet in part by the law of a carnal commandment.

Let me pause. Was Saltmarsh going back on himself and setting out Reformed doctrine here, speaking as he did of the law? Far from it! The truth is, Saltmarsh was using 'law' in more than one way in this paragraph. If only he had taken time and used more words to explain his terms! Nevertheless, as he went on to declare:

And yet this law is not such as it was before, a mere law in the letter, but it is now under the gospel a law of life, spirit and glory. It is a law in the hand of Christ, and with the promises of Christ about it to make it spiritual indeed. And this is according to the just, wise and righteous distribution which God has made to our mixed estate of flesh and spirit, by dealing out to us both the word and spirit, the letter and life. Therefore the word is called 'Scriptures given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine', *etc.* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). And the Spirit is called 'the anointing, and teaches all things' (1 John 2:27). 'And I will put my law in their minds' (Heb. 8:10-11). 'And the Comforter whom I will send, he shall teach you' (John 14:26; 1 Thess. 4:9; Acts 2:17).

I pause again. This statement is one of massive import. While he ought to have taken care to sort out his use of 'law', Saltmarsh was constantly hitting the nail right on the head. The believer is under both an inward law and an outward law; the inward law is the Spirit of Christ; the outward law is, not as the Reformed argue, the ten commandments, but the entire word of God, all Scripture, principally the gospel. And not only that. In the new covenant, God in Christ by his Spirit gives life and power, the will and heart to obey his law. The two laws, the law of Moses and the law of Christ,

are totally different in character, form, nature. The law of Christ is his own law in his hand. And so on.

Saltmarsh went on:

Thus, whatever doctrine of holiness is in the New Testament, we are to receive it, because it is now the doctrine of him who is the Lord, Jesus Christ, the Lord as well as Jesus Christ,⁶⁶ and one who commands as well as saves. Nor is there any covenant of works in such kind of obedience. Life is given us to make us obey, but not for obeying [that is, God gives grace to help us to obey, not because we do obey].⁶⁷

Reader, how this man could be, and can be, pilloried as an antinomian, I simply cannot fathom. Those who hurl that sort of offensive epithet at such a man must either be blind or utterly prejudiced. I know I keep saying it, but it needs to be repeated: Would to God we had more such ‘antinomians’ in our pulpits these days! Would to God that we all – as believers – were such ‘antinomians’ in life, word and thought.

Saltmarsh moved on to ‘the new covenant further set forth to be merely a promise. The covenant that is called the new covenant that God makes with his [people] now under the gospel, is all on his own part, without anything on man’s’. Having said a few words on the old covenant, Saltmarsh expatiated on ‘the new covenant’:

This is called a *new* covenant, for it is clear against the strain of the *old*, wherein man was to have his life upon condition. Yet it were good that [if] we did not rest too much in the notion of a covenant.⁶⁸ Nor is it the way of a covenant that the gospel uses, but rather the promise or grace or salvation. For the Spirit uses the word ‘covenant’ only by way of allusion, and because the soul, being under the power of the Spirit, does itself contract a covenant with God to obey, though God gives no life in such a way of a covenant or obedience [on our part – it was all

⁶⁶ What a contemporary note! ‘Take Christ as Saviour today. Tomorrow, you can go on to a second blessing or stage and take Christ as Lord’. Rubbish, abhorrent rubbish! The Redeemer is the Lord – Jesus – Christ, and what God has joined together no man should try to separate. Dead right, Mr Saltmarsh, dead right!

⁶⁷ Saltmarsh pp150-152.

⁶⁸ In my *Christ* I drew attention to the fact that although the phrase ‘new covenant’ is not very frequent in the New Testament, the idea appears throughout.

on Christ's part]. And I observe that the usage of this word has a little corrupted some in their notion of free grace, and makes them conceive a little too legally of it.⁶⁹ And I conceive that the doctrine of it in Hebrews 8:10 *etc*; 'I will write my law' *etc*; and 'I will take away your stony heart' *etc*; and 'I will put my Spirit within you' (Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 36:26) clears it to be only [that is, nothing but] promise and grace and free love to a sinner. For if anything were to be done [by us] for life and salvation, we should darken the glory of free grace, and make it a promise neither wholly of grace, nor wholly of works. 'And if it is grace, it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace' (Rom. 11:6). Nor is this promise of salvation given to sinners as sinners, barely, simply and singly; nor as qualified or conditioned; not to sinners as sinners, for God can only love in Christ;⁷⁰ nor as qualified and conditioned; for [if it were] so life [then] should be purchased *by* us rather than *for* us.⁷¹ So as we are only sinners in our own and others' judgements, but truly loved in Christ when the promise comes. And thus the Scripture calls us ungodly and sinners and children of wrath [by nature]...⁷² So here is ground enough for any to offer salvation to the veriest sinners, and for the veriest sinners to receive. 'For God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:19).⁷³

As good as this is in the main – in particular, the new covenant not being a legal covenant, and the free offer yet again clearly stated – there are two points I need to make. *First*, Saltmarsh seemed to

⁶⁹ I drew attention to this important point, also, in my *Christ*. The law of Christ is not strictly a law in the sense of the old-covenant use of the word. Did Saltmarsh also have Reformed 'covenant theology' in mind? I think it very likely.

⁷⁰ As before, the gospel offer is to sinners as sinners, and God loves the world (John 3:16). Nevertheless, Saltmarsh was making the point that God bestows all the benefits of Christ's work upon sinners as they believe, and, therefore, as they are, and as he sees them, in Christ.

⁷¹ Saltmarsh is emphasising that everything we have in the gospel is in Christ, not in ourselves.

⁷² Saltmarsh then betrayed his hyper-Calvinism; in particular, his view of eternal justification: 'And thus the Scripture calls us ungodly and sinners and children of wrath. Not that we are so, but seem so; or not so in God's account, but the world's'. He was quite wrong. Before we are converted, we are as much objects of God's wrath as the reprobate.

⁷³ Saltmarsh pp152-154, emphasis his.

confine his remarks to salvation or justification. I am convinced he was including more – and that is why the Reformed so disliked him and his work – but he did not state it here. The fact remains, what he said about the new covenant and salvation or justification applies equally to the believer and sanctification. That is the first point. *Secondly*, as I have already noted, Saltmarsh held to eternal justification. In this, though he wanted yet again to exalt Christ and free grace, he went beyond Scripture. Before they are united to Christ by faith in conversion, the elect really are the children of wrath even as much as the rest (Eph. 2:1-3). It is not merely that they seem so!⁷⁴

But to come back to the main point: Beyond all question, the great issue in this debate is whether or not the law is the spur, the motive and the measure of the believer's sanctification. Calvin had no doubt. Nor have his followers today. The law of Moses is king in this regard. They could not be more wrong! The law of Moses? No! Christ! Christ *is* all! Christ is his law! And Christ is the believer's law!

Saltmarsh, in yet another purple passage:

Christ and every part of Christ [is] to be studied, and believed in. There is not anything of Jesus Christ, but that it should be a matter for a believer's faith to be exercised in, from his divine nature to his incarnation, and so to his exaltation; that they 'may be able to comprehend with all saints the height, and depth, and breadth of the love of God' [Eph. 3:18]. For God was infinitely influencing⁷⁵ into every passage of [Christ's] birth, his growing up, his infancy, his circumcision, his baptism, his preaching, his praying, his temptations, his fasting, his obedience to the whole law, his sufferings, his reproaches, his poverty, his humiliation, his bloody sweating, his judgement and judges, his condemnation, his crucifying, his piercing, his nailing, his drinking vinegar and gall, his strong crying and tears, his crown of thorns, his blood flowing out from his feet, hands and side, his giving up the ghost, his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, exaltation and sitting on the right hand of God, his priesthood, mediation, intercession, dominion. There is infinite virtue in all these,

⁷⁴ See my *Eternal*.

⁷⁵ I am not quite sure what Saltmarsh meant. Was it: God was working in every part of Christ's life, working in love, empowering Christ, inserting virtue into every aspect of Christ's life and work?

and the gospel is made up of these. In these are those unsearchable riches of grace, love and redemption. These are to be the subjects of every believer's meditation, and he is to seek into the spiritual extent of these, and deepness of these. Out of these he is to draw strength, power, love, holiness, spirituality, regeneration, mortification, new obedience, faith, repentance, humiliation, meekness, temperance, *etc.* Christ, and everything of [about and in] Christ, is to be matter for him, and meditation for him. These are those ministerial and instrumental means of grace and life to sinners; not an historical or tragical use of these, but a believing use, a relying, resting, comforting, spiritualising use. These were all but parcels of the work of redemption, but parts of the whole; and to all these, there is an infinite depth of sin and temptations opposed. And therefore the more we are improving ourselves in [that is, the more we draw on] these things of Christ, the more spiritual and infinitely provided shall we be against the other. It is not enough to look on Jesus Christ in his single person glorified and exalted, but to study every part and parcel and passage of Jesus Christ, and thus 'to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified' [1 Cor. 2:2].⁷⁶

Amen to that! I wish I had written it! I hope to preach it! Above all, I want to live it out! Christ, Christ alone, is both the believer's driver and standard for godliness. The more the believer sets his mind and heart on Christ (Col. 3:1-2), the more like him he will become. Who dares to say that Saltmarsh was not here setting out the gospel of Christ, and doing so in a biblical way? And doing it in such a way as we preachers need to imitate today? How we should pray: 'Oh God, give us such antinomians as this, and make us such antinomians as this; give us such a spirit!'

The sad fact is, however, in some believers, 'the Spirit of adoption works not freely'. Saltmarsh, showing his credentials as a master-physician of souls, analysing this, and setting out several reasons for it, certainly caught the Reformed in his net. Believers get into all sorts of spiritual trouble when they attempt sanctification by wrong methods. And what are those wrong methods?

When they [the believers in question] do things merely as commanded from the power of an outward commandment or precept in the word,

⁷⁶ Saltmarsh pp194-196.

[then] that brings forth but a legal, or at best but a mixed, obedience, and service something of finer hypocrisy.

When they do [things]... more properly the service of the old covenant, and part of their bondage; for wanting the power and fullness of the Spirit of adoption to work them to obedience freely and from within, they [are] under the power of outward principles to put them on from without...

When they take any outward thing to move them, rather than apply to Christ for strength, life and spirit; for the more any motion or obedience is caused from things without [external things], the more forced and unnatural is all such obedience, and the less from a spiritual power within.

When they measure their forgiveness by their sin and sanctification, and can believe no more than they have peace for, and that peace upon [that is, arising from, out of] something of their own performed, and not from believing on him who has performed all.

Saltmarsh had the antidote:

‘God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind’ (2 Tim.1:8), or of a mind not corrupted with any of these.⁷⁷

I intend to return to this important set of statements very shortly, and develop them further. For now, I simply note that Saltmarsh was spelling out ‘opinions which make men legal’, and I draw but one statement from it: ‘The legal, formal, poor ignorant Protestant runs in a course of obedience and serving God, yet it is not in God’s way of righteousness’.⁷⁸ In saying this, Saltmarsh showed that he had observed the Reformed way of sanctification, and was able to distil it. I fear that Reformed and evangelical preachers, who are of Calvin’s persuasion on the law, bear a heavy responsibility for driving – whipping – believers into this bondage, and for keeping them there. We need men of Saltmarsh’s stamp to preach the gospel freely so that such souls may be released from their bondage, and begin to enjoy the liberty they have in Christ, and thus produce good works from a heart full of the sense of the love of God in Christ. In saying this, I am clearly implying a sad deficiency in much professing Christianity, brought about by legal preaching of

⁷⁷ Saltmarsh pp179-181.

⁷⁸ Saltmarsh pp181-183.

the gospel, which leaves believers impoverished. In this regard, I speak for myself.

Nevertheless, at this point, how eagerly Saltmarsh's critics would pounce! Would? They did! They do! They will! Here he is, dismissing the law, speaking ill of God's law! Not at all, Saltmarsh replied. Getting his defence in first, he declared:

Though in all this, I esteem no less of the law than any other, as it was a law for the people of God [Israel] under Moses, and has something of the image of God in it. But now we are under a better law, a more excellent law, and a more spiritual commandment even [than?] that law which was but a few single beams of righteousness, even ten, but [it was] a decalogue of righteousness.⁷⁹ Yet now in the gospel, the righteousness of God is brought forth in more glorious and spiritual commandments; and for ten, there are scores.

The result?

And with this righteousness of God, the righteousness of Christ is brought forth, which makes the condition of God's people a blessed condition, so as they stand righteous now in all their obedience to the righteousness of God, which is the more pure, transcending and excellent law of the commandments of the gospel, or the more perfect rule of the righteousness of God in the righteousness of Christ.

The conclusion?

So as the New Testament is both the law and gospel, or the righteousness of God and Christ more excellently manifested. 'Do we therefore make void the law by the preaching of faith?' [We do not!] Indeed, 'we establish the law', 'Christ being the end of the law for righteousness' [Rom. 3:31; 10:4].⁸⁰

Reader, I do not think I could choose a passage from Saltmarsh to better illustrate my reasons for re-publishing him and his fellow-antinomians. We have suffered – yes, suffered, and suffered grievously, and for far too long – from a sustained diet of legal preaching, and we desperately need a dose of the sort of teaching these men delivered from the pulpit and with their pen. We need to

⁷⁹ Saltmarsh seems to have adopted the Reformed way of restricting the law to the ten commandments, following Aquinas. The Jews, of course, were under the law – the entirety of the law!

⁸⁰ Saltmarsh pp39-43.

hear of the fullness and freeness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to hear of our glorious liberty in Christ. We need to hear of sanctification from a heart full of gratitude – not fear. And so on, and on. I say this for the good of both sinners and saints; above all, for the glory of God.

But let me return to that ‘sad fact’ I spoke of a few moments ago; namely, as Saltmarsh recognised, in some believers, ‘the Spirit of adoption works not freely’; in other words, there are believers who lack assurance. Saltmarsh was eager to help such afflicted saints – remember the title of his book – and he did so in a masterly fashion. It is time to look at what Saltmarsh had to say about the believer and assurance.

Saltmarsh and assurance

As he had made clear in the title of his book, Saltmarsh was greatly concerned to help true believers who, nevertheless, had doubts about their state. Having considered this spiritual problem, he listed three main causes of it. Not only that, having specified the causes, he did what he could to deal with each case, and so resolve the doubts under which true believers might struggle. In all this, he showed not only his compassion, but his skill, in handling diseases of the soul.

Doubt 1. That you are not therefore beloved of God or in Christ because you fell back again into your sin

Saltmarsh knew that doubting souls could think that when they sin they would remove themselves from the love of God. Saltmarsh did not hold back. He explained at once that this doubt stems from a tremendous misunderstanding; namely, that it is possible for a believer to sin himself out of God’s love. Immediately he set out to ‘prove that no sin can make one less beloved of God or less in Christ’.⁸¹

This, it goes without saying, is spiritual dynamite, dangerous stuff to handle. But that’s not the point. Was Saltmarsh right – from

⁸¹ Saltmarsh p79.

Scripture, I mean? *That* is the issue! I have no hesitation in saying that he was. He made three points to substantiate his claim.

First, he rightly argued that God's mercies are sure, his love everlasting, his covenant an everlasting covenant. Quoting, nothing 'shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:39), he went on: 'So then, to whom he is once merciful, [God] is ever merciful; whom he once loves, he ever loves; whom he once takes into covenant, he is ever theirs. "I am the Lord; I change not"'

Secondly, God loves his people, yes, and – more important – he loves them, not in themselves, but in his Son in whom he is well pleased, with whom he is always well pleased, who is always beloved of him, who is ever 'the same yesterday and today, and for ever' (Heb. 13:8). *This union and identification with Christ must not be watered down.* Saltmarsh continued:

Whom he loves in his Son, he accounts as his Son; 'he is made unto us righteousness, sanctification and redemption' [1 Cor. 1:30]. So as we being not beloved for our own sakes, but for his Son's, nothing in us can make God love us less because he loves us not for ourselves, but in and through his Son in whom he is well pleased.

In short, since God without ceasing loves his elect as he sees them in his Son, united to his Son, and not in themselves, and since Christ and his work are perfect and unchangeable and unchanging, the believer has no cause to fear that he shall sin himself out of God's love.

Thirdly:

If God should love us less or more, as we are less or more sinful, then he should be as man... And if believers stood upon these terms with God, then how are the Scriptures true: 'He rose again for our justification. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who shall condemn? There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. The foundation of God stands sure. He ever lives to make intercession for them' [Rom. 4:25; 8:33-34; Rom. 8:1; 2 Tim 2:19; Heb. 7:25]. So as God is ever the same that loves, and his love is as himself, ever the same; and Christ in whom we are beloved, ever the same.⁸²

⁸² Saltmarsh pp78-80.

In other words, since God and his love are unchangeable and unchanging, the believer need have no fear that he can ever sin himself out of God's love. Dangerous it may sound, but it is nothing less than gospel truth. Do not forget Saltmarsh's emphasis on the necessity of sanctification: his instrument had more than one string! But this note – the glory of our free justification in Christ – is a note which needs to be sounded far more than it is.

If I may add my own comment, let me repeat what I said, when looking at Crisp:

'The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out' (John 6:37). This truth is commonly applied to unbelievers, assuring them that if they come to Christ, he will never drive them away (NIV). Glorious truth indeed! But we can go further, much further; indeed, we should go much further: 'The one who comes to me' – the believer – 'I will by no means cast out'. The Greek has the double negative – *ou-mē* – and is thereby much strengthened – 'not at all, never, never under any circumstances' – cast out, reject or drive away. Moreover, the context puts it beyond doubt: 'All that the Father gives me [the elect] will come to me, and the one who comes to me [the believer] I will by no means [under any circumstances] cast out'. Thus declared the Lord Jesus.

In other words, Saltmarsh was right.

Doubt 2. Because you feel not yourself sanctified, you think you are not justified

This, of course, was getting to the heart of the doctrine for which he and his friends were being accused of antinomianism. He did not duck the issue. While he thought that arguing assurance on the basis of sanctification could tend to legalism, Saltmarsh also knew that sanctification is essential. So he had a tightrope to walk. But walk it he did. And he kept his balance.

'I shall allow you', he said, 'your sanctification so far as the Scriptures do, as a lower motive, and more carnally mixed and uncertain way of persuasion and assurance of justification'. That is to say, he was sticking to his guns about the basis of assurance. He did not agree with those who look for assurance mainly on the basis of sanctification (the typical Reformed view today). He himself was sure that the main way of assurance is by the witness of the Spirit,

and the believer looking out of himself to Christ – who gives him the witness of the Spirit.

And he had more to say. Saltmarsh depicted the ‘two sides’ or parties in the debate, each ‘sadly mistaking one another’; that is, the Reformed and the real antinomians. One side would allege that the other was making justification to depend, in part at least, on sanctification. They, in their turn, would allege that the other ‘would cast out all sanctification’; in other words, rank antinomianism. ‘Now such opinions are in neither of them; justly in them, I mean’. ‘But’, he went on, ‘there are some expressions on both parts, which make one side pass for legal teachers, and the other for antinomians – the one giving too much in their sermons and books to faith and works, in an unwarrantable jealousy [concern] lest holiness should be slighted’. Some on the other side, however, give ‘less [weight in their sermons and books to faith and works] than is fit, lest free grace should lose her due’. He gave his own opinion: ‘And both [sides, therefore, do it] in an unwarrantable jealousy [concern]’. That is to say, for the best of motives – but misguided motives – each side tries to protect scriptural principles – one the necessity of good works, the other the freeness of grace. As a consequence, both parties tamper with the biblical doctrine of assurance.

If he had to come down on one side or the other, Saltmarsh had no doubt which it would be. He would prefer not to have to do it, but, if forced, he would come down on the latter and not the former. ‘I had rather cry down men to exalt Christ, than Christ to exalt men, though I would [prefer to] do neither, but let both have their place and order’. He had raised this, he explained, ‘to keep from dashing against the Scriptures either way’.⁸³

⁸³ Saltmarsh pp81-82. Writing in 1692, just after the republication of Crisp’s *Works*, Benjamin Keach: ‘Brethren, ’tis a hard case that any who maintain the old doctrine of justification, should be branded with the name of antinomians. As for my part, if Dr Crisp is not misrepresented by his opponents, I am not of his opinion in several respects’ – Keach did not believe in eternal justification – ‘but I had rather err on their side, who strive to exalt wholly the free grace of God, than on theirs, who seek to darken and magnify the power of the creature’ (Keach, Benjamin: *The Marrow of True Justification*, quoted by Walker, Austin: ‘Much for the

This is a vital passage in Saltmarsh's book. Though he did not agree with the Reformed view that sanctification is the best way of assurance, he did not dismiss it. He was, in my view, scripturally balanced at this point. And whatever other label might be justly fastened to him, 'antinomian' should not. Clearly he was no enemy of sanctification.

Now for the doubt itself – 'because I feel not sanctified, I fear I am not justified'. Saltmarsh drove straight for the jugular: 'If you suppose that God takes in any part of your faith, repentance, or new obedience, or sanctification as a ground upon which he justifies or forgives you, you are clear against the word [of God]: "For if it is of works, it is no more of grace, otherwise work is no more work"'. Superb! The basis or ground of justification is grace, not our works. Nevertheless, too often, doubting souls can begin to think that sanctification is not only the evidence of justification, but its ground or cause. And such a thought is patently unscriptural.

But if the doubting soul had not made that mistake, confusing the *basis* of justification with its *evidence*, 'it must then be only the evidence of your being justified that you seek for in your sanctification'. Very well! Saltmarsh agreed that, according to Scripture, sanctification does contribute to the assurance of justification. But he urged care: 'It must be done in the Scripture's own cautions and way'. He spelled out what he had in mind: 'Christ is revealed to be our sanctification'. He listed a string of scriptures:

'You are Christ's. You are sanctified... you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus... We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works... Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. That new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness... Be found in him, not having my own righteousness... That we present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. But Christ is all and in all. Your life is hid with Christ in God'. See Hebrews 13:20-21. [1 Cor. 3:23; 6:11; Eph. 2:10; 3:17; 4:24; Phil. 3:9; Col. 1:28; 3:11; Col. 3:3].⁸⁴

'All these scriptures', said Saltmarsh:

Work of Religion', being a paper given at the Westminster Conference 2004: *The Faith that Saves* p104.

⁸⁴ Some of these refer to positional sanctification, of course.

Set forth Christ, the sanctification and the fullness of him, the all in all. Christ has believed perfectly, he has repented perfectly, he has sorrowed for sin perfectly, he has obeyed perfectly, he has mortified sin perfectly, and all is ours, and we are Christ's and Christ is God's.⁸⁵

In other words, not only for justification (over which, with the Reformed, there is no quarrel), but even when looking for and at our sanctification, we must keep our eye on Christ, and Christ alone. Our own godliness, in this life, will always be defective, but since we are in Christ, in the eyes of God, as believers we are for ever beyond condemnation.

Furthermore, Saltmarsh argued, 'we must believe more truth of our own graces than we can see or feel... We should walk by faith and not by sight'. We are believers, we walk by faith, and when the crunch comes, we must trust God in his word above and against our feelings. Saltmarsh went on: 'We are to believe our repentance true in him who has repented for us; our mortifying sin true in him, through whom we are more than conquerors, our new obedience true in him, who has obeyed for us, and is the end of the law to everyone that believes, our change of the whole man true in him who is righteousness and true holiness'.⁸⁶

Now there is much that is excellent in this – and that which must not be forgotten but rather stressed! – but... and there is a but! Saltmarsh was in danger of leaving his readers with the wrong impression. We do have to repent for ourselves. God does not do our repenting for us.⁸⁷ I am not aware that Scripture teaches that

⁸⁵ Saltmarsh pp82-84.

⁸⁶ Saltmarsh pp84-85.

⁸⁷ Although God gives faith to the elect sinner, working in him, it is the sinner who believes (Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 2:12-13). The Holy Spirit does not believe for the sinner; God does not do the believing. Gill had it right when he said: 'It is the convinced sinner, and not God or Christ, or the Spirit, who repents and believes'. 'Faith... as a principle, is purely God's work; [but] as it is an act, or as it is exercised under the influence of divine grace, it is man's act'. 'Faith, as it is our act, is our own; hence we read of *his* faith, and *my* faith, and *your* faith, in Scripture' (Gill, John: *The Cause of God and Truth*, W.H.Collingridge, London, 1855, p112; *Gill's Commentary*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1980, Vol.5 p654; *Sermons and Tracts*, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, 1997, Vol.4 p185, emphasis his).

Christ repented for us. And while Christ is our holiness, even so we do have to live a life of godliness. And so on. Saltmarsh was right in saying that we as believers can depend too much on our feelings, but he was playing with fire when he left his readers to deduce that everything is outside of us, and none of our responsibility. It seems as though the desire to exalt Christ, and to help doubting saints, got the better of him here.

And when he declared: ‘This is the scriptural assurance for a child of God, or believer, to see everything in himself as nothing, and in himself everything in Christ. “Faith is the ground of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen” (Heb. 11:1)’, although he was essentially right, once again he needed to show more care. Faith is not the ‘basis’ or ‘ground’ as he baldly stated. The word ‘evidence’, *hupostasis*, is more nuanced than that. It can speak of putting a ground or foundation under something, but faith itself is not the actual ground or basis of assurance. Rather, faith is the confidence, the assurance that the hoped-for things afford.⁸⁸

And Saltmarsh was surely too sweeping – but I sympathise with him a great deal – when he said:

All other assurances are rotten conclusions from the word, and such things as true legal preachers have invented, not understanding the mystery of the kingdom of Christ. The Scriptures bid you see nothing in yourself, or all as nothing. These teachers bid you see something in yourself. So as to leave Christ out of sanctification is the foundation of all doubts, fears and distractions. And he that looks on his repentance, on his love, on his humility, on his obedience, and not in the tincture of the blood of Christ, must needs believe weakly and uncomfortably.⁸⁹

In saying this, Saltmarsh, of course, was not dismissing practical godliness. He did not balk the question: ‘Why do the apostles press sanctification... in all their letters?’ As they do, let it be said loud and clear. What was his reply? This:

Sanctification is the beginning of the forming of Christ here in this life in one part of him; which is holiness, which shall be perfected in the life to come: we shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body.

⁸⁸ See Thayer. As above, see my *Eternal* for my comments on the (mis)use of Heb. 11:1 by the advocates of eternal justification.

⁸⁹ Saltmarsh pp85-86.

Sanctification is the witness to the righteousness of Christ, which, being a glory out of sight to the soul and to the world, is made clearer by faith and holiness to both.⁹⁰ So as in sanctification, both soul and body, flesh and spirit join to glorify the riches of Christ. ‘You are bought with a price; glorify God in your bodies, and in your spirits’ [1 Cor. 6:20]. And: ‘Walk as children of light and of the day’ [Eph. 5:8]. So as the wisdom of the Spirit is seen much in the word, in pressing sanctification, and praising sanctification, both to set forth the nature of the Spirit in believers, and to quicken flesh and blood against an empty formal profession.⁹¹

Nevertheless, while Saltmarsh did not dismiss practical godliness as some sort of evidence, he still came down firmly on the believer taking his eye off himself, and focussing firmly on Christ *in* all things and *for* all things. Otherwise, as Saltmarsh so rightly discerned, the believer will always be prone to doubts about his assurance – this being inevitable, since his sanctification can never be complete in this life.

Doubt 3. Whether you do believe or not

This doubt, Saltmarsh called the Great Doubt: doubting souls can question whether or not their faith is true faith, a real saving faith. In answering this doubt, Saltmarsh rightly went back to preparationism. This, he saw, carries a heavy responsibility for much of the distress caused to such souls.

He opened: ‘It is one thing to believe, and another to know we believe’. He plunged at once into duty faith, speaking of ‘Christ’s command to believe... Now, Christ’s commands are to be obeyed, not disputed. Good servants do not reason their duty out first with themselves, but fall to doing as they are commanded’.

Having cleared that fundamental, but vital, point, he came to grips with preparationism. Remember, preparationism means the

⁹⁰ If Saltmarsh was saying that progressive sanctification, along with faith, is a witness to the soul of its possession of Christ’s righteousness – in other words, progressive sanctification is a part of the believer’s assurance – then he was contradicting his own assertion that all assurances other than reliance upon Christ were rotten. From what follows, however, he may well have been saying that our sanctification testifies to the world of Christ’s righteousness. If so, he was spot on.

⁹¹ Saltmarsh pp90-91.

preaching of the law to sinners to make them ‘fit’ to trust Christ. Saltmarsh:

I find not any in the whole course of Christ’s preaching or the disciples’ [preaching], when they preached to them to believe [that is, when they commanded sinners to believe, that any of those who were so commanded] asking the qualification, whether they believed or not, or whether their faith were true faith or not. I find one saying: ‘Lord, I believe, help my unbelief’; but not: ‘Lord, whether do I believe or not?’ And: ‘The Lord increase my faith’; but not: ‘Lord, whether this is true faith I have or not?’ It would be a strange question in any that were bidden to a feast to ask the master of the feast whether his dainties were real or a delusion.⁹² Would not such a question disparage him for a sorcerer? So in things of the Spirit, to be over-jealous of the truth of them, as many poor tempted souls are, does not become the faithfulness of Jesus Christ [that is, to doubt is to impugn Christ’s faithfulness]. The way to be sure of the truth of the good things is to taste and see how good the Lord is. Spiritual things are best felt and tasted with [by] feeding upon them. Eat, O friends, drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved.

I pause to underscore the excellent point Saltmarsh is making. As I have shown, preparationists make sinners wait at the gate, wait for certain qualifications to be met, wait until they are ‘fit’, properly prepared and qualified to believe. Not so, retorted Saltmarsh. As the Scriptures show, this was never the way with the biblical preachers. No! Come to Christ at once. The only way, the ‘best’ way (to use Saltmarsh’s term) is to taste and see. As the hymn writers, Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady, said: ‘O make but trial of his love/ Experience will decide’. God’s command to sinners is to believe. That is their duty. Therefore, sinner, believe!

Moving on, Saltmarsh confessed that he had no competence to really satisfy souls who doubted the trueness of their faith. There was only one who can do that: ‘For any to doubt whether they do believe or not, I find to be a question only fit and proportional [proper] for Christ himself to satisfy’.

Even so, Saltmarsh then set out the biblical doctrine of faith, showing what true saving faith is. He rightly talked of ‘being

⁹² Remember, Saltmarsh was fully convinced that, according to Scripture, God in Christ gives both repentance and faith (Acts 5:29; Eph. 2:8).

persuaded more or less of Christ's love' in 'the heart'. He also explained that, even though he could and would set out the biblical 'effects and properties of this faith and belief', nevertheless 'none can simply persuade a soul that it does believe, but he on whom it does believe'; that is, Jesus Christ himself. He gave the illustration of a husband bestowing rings and bracelets upon his wife: his gifts 'may concur and help in the manifestation' of his love, but it is the husband's 'voice' that 'can more principally, and with clearer satisfaction, persuade the spouse of [his] goodwill'.

Saltmarsh rolled his sleeves up: 'We ought to believe till we are persuaded that we believe, because the more we do believe, the more we shall be persuaded to believe'. Quoting Ephesians 1:13, though admitting 'there is more to be said' upon it, he gave an illustration: 'The way to be warm is not only to ask for a fire, or whether there is a fire or not, or to hold out the hands towards it... but to stand close to that [what?] fire there is, and to gather heat'. In other words, unbeliever, stop debating about faith, and get on and believe! To change the figure: don't sit looking at a plate, endlessly questioning the nutritional value of the food upon it. Eat and see!

Driving deeper, and, as always driving his readers to Christ: 'We ought, I suppose, no more to question our faith... than we ought to question Christ the foundation of our faith'. Referring to scriptural warnings against unbelief (Heb. 3:12,19; 4:2) – in particular, through preparationism – Saltmarsh came to the biting point:

It is Satan's greatest policy to put a soul upon such qualifications. For by this he sets on the soul for evidence [that is, he starts the soul seeking for evidence] from things which he knows can afford but a questionable assurance; [namely, seeking]... persuasion [of our justification] most [principally] upon marks and signs out of our own sanctification, or works, which cannot hold good without faith itself, to bring down Christ upon them. For he puts us clean back if we observe.

What did Saltmarsh mean? He explained. It was a catch-22 situation. To try to authenticate our faith by our works is a circular argument: 'We are proving our faith by our works, when as [whereas] no works can be proved godly but by our faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God'. A vicious circle, indeed!

Saltmarsh illustrated his argument by observing that a coin may be made of silver, but, unless it has the right ‘image and superscription’, it is no coin, and of no use as coin. The same with works. To take evidence from our works, to use our works as evidence that we truly believe, means that we have to see Christ in those works – and we can only do that by believing! In short: ‘While Satan puzzles us in questioning our faith or believing, he keeps us off from believing, knowing that this is the condemnation: “He that believes not is condemned already” [John 3:18]’.⁹³

As always, Saltmarsh traced this particular doubt back to preparationism:

I cannot but wonder at any [preachers] that keep souls, in acts of preparation and qualification, from the act of believing, as if we could believe too suddenly; and many a one loses some degrees of faith while they are seeking it thus in the evidence of their works. For while faith is kept off from Christ, and the soul suspended, faith decays, and becomes weaker and weaker; when as if it were still exercised upon Christ in the promises, it would sooner bring a clearer and more undeceivable evidence with it, than can any other way be ministered unto it.

In other words, sinners, relying on the promises, should go straight to Christ for everything needed for salvation. And believers, too, should go straight to Christ. Keep going to Christ! Keep him in view! Trusting Christ and his promise is the only way of salvation, and it is the best way of assurance. As we trust Christ, the Holy Spirit increasingly bears witness with our spirit that all is well. ‘Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise’ (Eph. 1:13). Of course that verse applies to conversion, but the principle stands. As we trust Christ and his promises, so the Spirit confirms us more and more. The more we look at ourselves, the weaker our assurance becomes.

To let Saltmarsh continue: ‘In the gospel, all are immediately called to believe’. He cited Hebrews 3:7,15; 4:7; Acts 16:30-31; John 6:22; Acts 8:37. ‘So as I shall draw this conclusion for many that are in the dark in this point, both preachers and people: that none can believe too hastily in Jesus Christ our righteousness... We

⁹³ Saltmarsh pp92-97.

must believe that we may know that we do believe; for the witness comes by believing, the Spirit bearing witness’.

By plying the doubter with a series of questions,⁹⁴ he made clear that faith is not always accompanied by ‘full assurance’, and that, because he does not have full assurance, no believer can conclude he has no faith at all, or that his faith is not a true, saving faith:

There are degrees of believing. One degree is to believe, another is to be assured that you believe. There are in the word, believers of several ages. Some are called little ones, weak ones, babes, children, strong men. Some are such as have been sound believers, and are made weak through sin, and temptation and ignorance of the covenant of free grace and their righteousness in Christ, and the glorious estate of a believer under grace, as a man that is not perfectly healed of some infirmity... The nature and properties of true saving faith [comprise] almost the [entire] business of the whole of the New Testament... Now the great mistake which I find in this [age], and ages before, is the singling out the properties of a true faith, and sending a believer for his assurance most thither – in himself. Which caused the believers of former ages [the time of the medieval Church] to walk in bondage, though with the spirit of adoption, and to make up their assurance much like believers under the law – from their obedience and repentance, and humiliation in themselves, Christ being much in the dark to them, and little seen then. And much the same darkness covers this age [of the Reformed Church] in which we live...⁹⁵

In other words, as before, Saltmarsh drove souls back upon Christ – not to look to themselves, their works, the law. Christ is all! At bottom, Rome and the Reformed send men to themselves for assurance. According to the new covenant, believers – yes, believers – must go to Christ.

Saltmarsh hit the nail smack on the head. Preparationism mars one of the main glories of the gospel, he declared. To what was he referring? He made his point by continuing to bombard the doubter with questions: ‘Did not the promises belong to sinners as sinners?’

⁹⁴ And thereby showing his skill as a spiritual physician. The arm around the shoulder is good, but the real cure is wrought by a firmer approach, and one that makes the doubter see the truth for himself. The word ‘comfort’ in Scripture has a far stronger meaning that it has today. We won’t go far wrong to read it as ‘backbone’.

⁹⁵ Saltmarsh pp97–101.

The doubter, in reply, admitted it was true, but immediately added a devastating rider: ‘Yes, but to repentant sinners’.

I pause. The doubter was making a fundamental error, one which is far too common.⁹⁶ How many times I have tried to expose it in previous works! Saltmarsh gave it short shrift. He referred to the churches of the New Testament and Paul: ‘What was Paul before Christ came to him? Were they sinners or qualified? And what were all that believed, before they believed?’ The doubter replied: ‘They were sinners’. ‘Came not the promise to Adam, even then when he was dead in sin [Gen. 3:15]?’ ‘Yes,’ came the answer. And so on and on. Well, then:

Were you not in their condition... that is, a sinner, according to your own apprehension?... Are you not then as free for Christ to come to as they were?... Are not the promises as free and open to you as to them?

⁹⁶ It always grates when I hear, say, a Grace or Reformed Baptist minister (no doubt the same is true in other circles), talk in terms: ‘Christ died for those who would repent or believe’, or some such. While it is not exactly false, and while it is certainly an improvement on ‘Christ died for believers’, neither are found in Scripture, and are euphemisms for the biblical doctrine that Christ died for his elect. What is more, it gives totally the wrong impression – placing the emphasis on the sinner, not Christ. Faith and repentance are gifts of God secured by the death of Christ. When addressing the ungodly, let us keep to such scriptures as these: ‘Christ died for the ungodly... Christ died for sinners’ (Rom. 5:6,8). We must read Caiaphas’ statement that Christ would die for ‘the children of God’ (John 11:50-52) in terms of Christ dying for the elect, not actual children of God. Gill was unclear on the text: ‘By which may be meant, not only the elect of God among the Jews, who were scattered amidst the nations of the world, for whom Christ died... but rather the elect of God among the Gentiles... because they were the children of God by special adoption, in divine predestination, and in the covenant of grace; and were so considered, when given to Christ, who looked upon them as in this relation, when he assumed their nature, and died in their room and stead; and not merely because they would hereafter appear to be the children of God in regeneration, and by faith in Christ Jesus, and have the witnessings of the Spirit that they were so’. This could be interpreted as *actual* (which is wrong) or *decreed* (which is right) children of God in eternity. Calvin was much better: ‘It is therefore by election that he *reckons* as the children of God, even before they are called, those who at length begin to be manifested by faith both to themselves and to others’ (emphasis mine).

You being all alike sinners, and God's will being revealed no more for one's election than another's, no more for their election than yours?⁹⁷

I must break in at this point. As I have shown in previous works, some argue that the gospel invitation is only to those who are elect. This, of course, is utterly false. One of the direst consequences of such a notion is that it effectually prevents preachers offering any invitation lest they should include one of the reprobate. Moreover, it sets sinners on a fruitless course of seeking to discover whether or not they are elect. And all the time the preachers should be offering Christ freely, and sinners should be trusting Christ, neither of them bothering their head about the election or otherwise of the hearers. Both parties should be applying the principles of Deuteronomy 29:29, leaving the secret things to God – in this case whether or not an unbeliever is elect – and concentrating on the revealed things – in this case, that the preacher should offer Christ freely and invite and command all sinners as sinners to repent and believe, and the sinner should obey that command, and trust Christ at once. The fact is, no unbeliever can know he is elect until he believes. Nor can any preacher. I have fully explored this elsewhere.

To let Saltmarsh continue:

Are any promises made to any in Christ, or out of Christ, [as God sees them, the sinners,] only in themselves? Is not Christ the only qualified person for all promises? And so through Christ derived upon all this, we being said to be complete in him? Does not all fullness dwell in him, and all receive of his fullness? Are not all the promises in him Yea and Amen?

As always, the dictum with Saltmarsh is: go to Christ; all the promises are in him; do not look to anything in yourself; go to Christ for all.

Saltmarsh concluded his remarks to those who suffer from this 'Great Doubt':

1. Election and condemnation being secret things, [they] belong to the Lord, and were not revealed in the word to the end to hinder any from believing, for that were against God's goodness and mercy revealed. And they that make much of them, serve not the Lord's ends, but

⁹⁷ Saltmarsh pp102-103.

Satan's, for such an end is against the sweet simplicity of the gospel of Christ.

2. The only ground for any to believe is the word of promise, not anything more or less in themselves. 'This is his commandment, that you believe on the Son of God' [1 John 3:23].

3. The promises of Christ are held forth to sinners as sinners, not as repenting sinners, or humble sinners, as any condition in us upon which we should challenge Christ.⁹⁸ For then it is [that is, it would be] no more grace, but of works. Now [the Scripture declares that] we are freely justified by his grace.

4. Whatever promise there is, which has any condition in it, it is ours in him; that is, in Christ, who was the only conditioned and qualified person for all the promises, all being in him Yea and Amen; and all being complete in him who is the fullness.⁹⁹

Excellent! The offer of the gospel is to sinners as sinners; election is no basis for the offer nor for duty faith; while God's electing decree is, of course, at the root of the cause of the salvation of a sinner, whether or not any particular sinner is elect, or whether or not Christ has died for him, has no bearing on the free offer and duty faith; the gospel offer is to be issued promiscuously – that is, indiscriminately to all. Moreover, as for the condition in the offer – namely that the sinner must repent and believe – even here the sinner must go to Christ; he gives faith and repentance (Acts 5:29; Eph. 2:8). In short: Christ is all!

If this is antinomianism, reader, let's have more of it! And quick!

Saltmarsh had more to say on the biblical nature of assurance, 'the way of assurance for believers', declaring:

The surest knowledge that anyone has that they have received the promise is the closing of the heart with Christ, the real receiving and believing, the relying and going out of the heart upon Christ. 'The just shall live by faith' (Rom. 1:17). 'We walk by faith, and not by sight' [2 Cor. 5:7]. This was the assurance that the father of the faithful [Abraham] had, who staggered not at the promise, but gave glory to God.

⁹⁸ I am somewhat at a loss to interpret 'challenge' (Saltmarsh had the Middle English spelling). My best guess is 'rival', or, perhaps, 'impugn'.

⁹⁹ Saltmarsh pp103-105.

But Saltmarsh realised that we need more:

Yet this assurance is such, as the soul cannot be content with only; there is something in man beside faith to be satisfied. Reason will have [that is, we demand] more light to see by. And therefore the working of the spirit¹⁰⁰ in new obedience, and love, and repentance and self-denial, are such glimmerings as the soul may be refreshed by, though not strengthened by; and comforted by, though not supported by; works, though they cannot assure by themselves, yet raised up in faith, may with it cheer up the soul. If we believe more of these works than we see or feel, and so strengthen them by faith, they may be like [the] tokens and change of raiment by which Jacob was persuaded that Joseph was [yet] alive; by these we may be better persuaded that we live, and live in Christ. Therefore the soul, being a reasonable and discursive [that is, a reasoning] spirit, is much satisfied in such a way, when the Spirit of God helps it to reason, and draw conclusions, as thus:

The word says 'whoever believes, shall not perish' [John 3:16]. 'But I believe', says the soul, 'and therefore, according to that word, shall not perish'.

The word says 'to believe is to receive or put confidence in or trust', as John 1:12. 'But I receive Jesus Christ for mine. I trust in him for salvation. Therefore I believe'.

The word says 'repentance, love, self denial, obedience to the will of God, are all the fruits of the Spirit' [Gal. 5:22-23]. 'But they are in me. I can [and do] repent and love, and deny myself, and obey'.

The word says that 'we are complete in Christ' [Col. 2:10]. 'But when I repent or love or obey, I believe I am in Christ, and therefore my love, and repentance, and obedience is such as I may believe, though, not in themselves, yet in him, to be good and spiritual'.

And thus a believer may believe for assurance, and yet reason for assurance. And some other questions a believer may put to his own spirit, and draw it out into more conclusions for believing: 'Am I Christ's or my own? If I am Christ's, do I walk in Christ? And obey Christ? Do I delight in Christ, and those [who] are Christ's? Or do I live to myself, to my lust? To my profit or credit? To others, or the world?'¹⁰¹

In all this, Saltmarsh reveals his balance. For assurance, the believer trusts Christ, and thus he is assured; this assurance is

¹⁰⁰ I cannot tell whether Saltmarsh used 'spirit' or 'Spirit'. I think 'spirit' is right.

¹⁰¹ Saltmarsh pp155-157.

strengthened, however, by seeing marks of sanctification. How this man could be dismissed as an antinomian, as an enemy of godliness, beats me. Eternity will tell us how many have been – and yet might be – helped by such a teacher and his teaching. Let those who will have nothing to do with him, and his ilk, wonder how many will be helped by their own teaching!

Saltmarsh exposed ‘the fears of weak believers’, applying to distressed souls the gospel remedy for each particular fear he listed.¹⁰² Of these remedies, this is but a selection:

We are commanded to believe forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ thoroughly, and not in part. Through his name, ‘whoever believes in him, shall receive remission of sins’ (Acts 10:43)... We are to consider that one sin cannot be forgiven but [as a consequence] all is forgiven. Jesus Christ has done away with all sins. ‘For this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God’ (Heb. 10:12)... We are to believe God in the plainness and simplicity he speaks in, in gospel promises, and words of grace even to our souls, as if he spoke out to us by name from heaven. ‘He that believes not God has made him a liar, because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son’ (1 John 5:10)... We must know God is not as man that he should be angry and pleased as we carry ourselves.¹⁰³ ‘I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more’ (Heb. 8:12). ‘I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people’ (Heb. 8:10)... We must remember that our sins are no more ours, but Christ’s, and his righteousness is ours. God reckons and accounts us [that is, Christ and us] as one now. So though we sin, yet every sin was accounted for in him, and ‘now there is no condemnation to them that are in Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 8:1).

Ah, but what about trials, afflictions and sufferings? Do they not arise as a result of sin? When God afflicts a believer, is he not showing his displeasure against the believer’s sin, afflicting him for his sin as a punishment? Saltmarsh had his answer ready:

And [as] for afflictions, though they came in with sin, and for sin, and are the wages of sin, yet to the righteous, and believers, they are no judgements for sin. For everything of justice against sin was spent

¹⁰² Saltmarsh pp171-174.

¹⁰³ That is, God does not have moods, and give up on us because we are such poor believers.

upon Christ, so as to us they are only trials. ‘Count it all joy when you fall into various temptations [trials]’ (Jas. 1:2). They are chastenings of love to prevent sin. ‘As many as I love I rebuke and chasten’ (Rev. 3:19). They are, in a word, a [particular] way or dispensation of love and grace.

In short:

We are to consider that though the Scriptures do often set forth the righteousness of God against sin, and his justice against sin, yet that unrighteousness, being satisfied by Jesus Christ, it has no power against those that are in Christ, no more than the pursuer had to do with the murderer in the city of refuge. ‘For sin shall not have dominion over you’ (Rom. 6:14). ‘You are not under the law, but under grace’ [Rom. 6:14-15].¹⁰⁴

This, of course, is spiritual dynamite. But is it the truth of God declared in Scripture? I, myself, have no doubt whatsoever.

Last words on Saltmarsh

I am not conceited enough to think that this small study of Saltmarsh’s book will bring him in from the cold. But I hope, reader, you have enjoyed this taster, and found it heart-warming enough to make you want to explore the major subject of the believer and the law in greater depth than perhaps you have until now. More than that, I hope it will lead us all (I certainly include myself) into a greater sense of the liberty we have in Christ, into a greater assurance of his love and grace towards us, and into a fuller experience – in this life, here and now – of that inexpressible joy which should follow as a result of trust in Christ and his finished work. Let us hear more of Saltmarsh’s favourite word – ‘free’, free in Christ. We are saved because of God’s free grace, and in that salvation we have been redeemed from bondage to sin, death and the law – and thus set free! Let us live upon this gospel. Let us live upon Christ. And let us hear more of the apostolic proclamation: ‘For freedom Christ has made us free; stand fast therefore, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage’ (Gal. 5:1, footnote).

¹⁰⁴ Saltmarsh pp175-177.

Conclusion

Those of us who disagree with Calvin and his third use of the law are not necessarily lawless and antinomian. We are not necessarily heretics because we don't always agree with the Genevan Reformer, great though he was. He is not our pope! Nor must he be turned into one! Nor have we committed the unforgivable sin if we do not always go along with the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration, or the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession, or whatever. The fact is, some of us cannot allow any man-made standard to set the agenda and rule the roost; that role is reserved for Scripture alone. Saying such things does not automatically turn us into heretics, you know! To judge by some comments, however, you could be forgiven for thinking it!

I say it again: a man can honestly disagree with the Reformed way of sanctification – by the whip of the law applied to lazy asses – and still be a godly man in Christ, a man ruled by Scripture alone, and who, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, is seeking to live his life to the glory of God in obedience to his written word.

Let me allow William Gadsby to spell it out.¹ He was thought by some to be an antinomian – and still is. As for that, peruse his works, reader, and see for yourself. The fact is, I could well have included Gadsby in this book, but he belongs to a later century. In any case, I quoted him extensively in my *Christ is All*. But I am glad to give him the last word here:

They are quite mistaken... who suppose we are enemies to Christian obedience. We consider it incumbent upon us to recommend it, and

¹ On the numbering of the pages in Gadsby's *Works*, note that after the Preface, there is *A Memoir* with page numbers 7-144. Then follows a Preface followed by the *Works* with page numbers 5-315. I have quoted this volume as Gadsby: *Works* with page numbers, but not indicated the section. The works in question are: *The Gospel the Believer's Rule of Conduct, being A Few Remarks upon a Letter Written by Gaius...*; *The Present State of Religion; or, What are the People Miscalled Antinomians?*; *The Perfect Law of Liberty; or, The Glory of God Revealed in the Gospel* – all in *The Works of the Late Mr William Gadsby, Manchester, in Two Volumes*, Vol.1, London, 1851, the 1870 edition.

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enforce the necessity of it as a proof of union to Christ... The advocates for the believer's complete deliverance from the law of works are not enemies to Christian obedience, as is generally insinuated by their opponents.²

Gadsby, justly resenting being falsely accused of antinomianism, responded by spelling out what these so-called antinomians believe. They:

Believe that when the poor sinner has become dead to the law by the body of Christ, he is married to Jesus, and Jesus and he are evidently become one; so that Christ is the bridegroom, and the sinner is his bride; and, as the spouse of Christ, she is to receive all she needs at the hands of Christ, and live wholly dependent upon him: 'For it has pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell' (Col. 1:19); 'And out of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace' (John 1:16); 'Who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30). So that the church rejoices because they are [*sic*] complete in him, (Col. 2:10), and that with him they have all things; for 'all things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's' (1 Cor. 3:22-23)... They also believe that the soul that is married to Christ is dead to the law (Rom. 7:4), and that Jesus, as King in Zion, rules them by his own law, not with the rod of his wrath (Lam. 3:1), nor a rod of iron; but with the rod of his strength sent out of Zion (Ps. 20:2), called the law of faith, love, kindness, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2)...³

It is allowed on all hands than an antinomian is one who is against the law; but to me it appears impossible that a man can be against the law [when he] allows it all the power and authority that it ever possessed... The apostle, when writing to the Romans (Rom. 3:19), observes: 'Whatsoever the law says, it says to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God'; 'The law entered that the offence might abound' (Rom. 5:10); and 'that sin by the commandment might appear exceeding sinful' (Rom. 7:13). Now from this account it appears that the design of the law is to bring the sinner in guilty before God, and to justify Jehovah in his righteous sentence of condemnation; while it stops the sinner's mouth and makes him speechless...⁴

² Gadsby: *Works* pp31-32.

³ Gadsby: *Works* pp61-62.

⁴ Gadsby: *Works* p68. Gadsby was getting close to the Reformed view of preparationism. As I have made clear, this is not my stance.

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They believe that the law of works can never be altered, but must for ever stand a just and holy law, with all its authority, in the very sense that God gave it; and that all who are under it, are under its curse. They also believe that Jesus, the great head of the church, was made under the law, and that cursed him as the representative of his people. But he has fulfilled it, and made it honourable, and given it all that it could require, in every sense, and made them for ever free who believe in him; for if the Son makes them free, they are free indeed; and ‘the law of the Spirit of life has made them free from the law of sin and death’ (Rom. 8:2). Now they do not wish to alter the law, nor strip it of its authority; but to give it its just due, and by faith in Jesus establish it, thus using the law lawfully, and not making it into a nose of wax, to turn it just which way they please to suit their own purpose. No, they dare not trifle with God’s holy law.⁵

And the man who can write like this, so say the Reformed, is the sort of person who is an antinomian! Hmm!

The believer must be sanctified. He will be sanctified – it is an inevitable corollary of justification. He must obey the rule he is under. The question is, of course, what is this rule? The Reformed say it is the law of Moses; or, more precisely, the so-called moral law; more precisely still, the ten commandments. Is it?

Gadsby:

The point then is, what is the rule of this obedience?... The whole will of God in Christ Jesus, as King in Zion and head of the church, is the rule, the whole rule, and the only rule of this obedience. On this ground I profess to stand; on this ground I rejoice to stand; and on this ground I must from conscience stand, until [someone is] able to prove that this ground is not good; or unless God in some other way convince me that I am in error.⁶

Gadsby, it goes without saying, included in this rule the teaching of the apostles:

Whatever Christ and his apostles enjoin upon the church is a branch of this rule, and is the law of Christ. The rule I contend for is all comprised in one blessed code of laws, peculiar to the church of the living God, under the gospel dispensation. Nor does this rule ever leave me at a perplexing uncertainty how to judge of my own conduct, or the conduct of other professors with whom I am connected... The

⁵ Gadsby: *Works* pp69-70.

⁶ Gadsby: *Works* p31. See also p37ff.

Conclusion

matter is soon decided. [If] it is a part of conduct contrary to the law of Christ, [then] as such I treat it.⁷

Gadsby was asked ‘what law it is that’ he claimed ‘the believer is in no sense under’? His reply was unequivocal:

The law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, commonly called the moral law, or the ten commandments, recorded in Exodus 20, and hinted at, with its curses annexed to it in Deuteronomy 27. This is the law I intend, and do venture to say that the believer in Christ is in no sense whatever under it;⁸ so that it is not a rule of life to that man who is led by the Spirit.⁹

So said William Gadsby.¹⁰

‘This is all very well! But if I go down your route (*my* route?), they will call me an antinomian’. So they will, so they will. But remember that the Jews called Jesus a Samaritan (John 8:48), stigmatising him as much as they could. And to get the full sting in the word, bear in mind that the ‘expert in the law’ could not bring himself even to pronounce it (Luke 10:25-37, especially verse 37, NIV). Clearly, the thought that both a priest and a Levite had failed – where a Samaritan had succeeded – was too much for him to stomach. Jesus, of course, deliberately chose ‘Samaritan’ (see also Luke 17:16; John 4:9,39-40), to make his point. Indeed, not content with calling Christ a Samaritan, the Jews wrote him off as ‘raving mad’ (John 8:48; 10:20, NIV), and ‘demon-possessed’ (John 7:20; 8:52; 10:21, NIV) – as they did John the Baptist (Matt. 11:18). The fact is, they heaped a catalogue of invective on Christ (Matt. 11:19). So, you see, to be given a pejorative nickname puts you in the same class as your Saviour!

⁷ Gadsby: *Works* p35.

⁸ As I explained in my *Christ*, while the believer is not under the law, he uses it – as part of John 17:17 and 2 Tim. 3:15-16 – in a biblical way.

⁹ Gadsby: *Works* p72.

¹⁰ All that I have quoted proves beyond a glimmer of a doubt that Gadsby did not ignore holiness of life, did not preach against it, or was an antinomian. Far from it. He constantly and repeatedly demanded godliness, as defined by the law of Christ, as evidence and fruit of grace. See Gadsby: *Works* pp77-80,156-159,224,252-254. See p294 where he quoted Gill.

Conclusion

Paul was similarly accused of madness (Acts 26:24). And they also called him the equivalent of an antinomian (Rom. 3:8; 6:1,15)! In fact, as I explained in my Introduction, a good case can be made for saying that the real fault is *not* to be called by some such negative nickname.

And so we come to the end of my book. But, reader, I hope it is not the end of the matter. You have a choice. You can reject the teaching you have found here. Or you can take what you have learned, seek to apply it, and live the rest of your life rejoicing in the sense of your glorious freedom in Christ, and using that freedom to magnify God in your works day by day. All I ask is that you prove these things, one way or the other, by looking to God to guide you by his Spirit. Yes, of course, consult able teachers and their writings. But above all, make sure that it is Scripture that you follow. Make your decision in accordance with what God shows you out of his word.

And finally, Gadsby, in this hymn, expresses my heart in this matter. Remember: *Christ is All*. Reader, I hope these words express your heart also:

*Immortal honours rest on Jesus' head;
My God, my portion, and my living bread;
In him I live, upon him cast my care;
He saves from death, destruction, and despair.*

*He is my refuge in each deep distress;
The Lord my strength and glorious righteousness;
Through floods and flames he leads me safely on,
And daily makes his sovereign goodness known.*

*My every need he richly will supply;
Nor will his mercy ever let me die;
In him there dwells a treasure all divine,
And matchless grace has made that treasure mine.*

*O that my soul could love and praise him more,
His beauties trace, his majesty adore;
Live near his heart, upon his bosom lean;
Obey his voice, and all his will esteem.¹¹*

¹¹ Gadsby's Hymns number 667; Gospel Hymns number 460.

Appendix

My Reservations about Tobias Crisp

I began the chapter on Tobias Crisp by pointing out that I did not agree with all he said. In this Appendix, I set out my reasons.

I do not agree, for instance, with Crisp's views on eternal justification, eternal union, and the nature of saving faith, and his lack of distinction between God's desire and decree.¹ For example, I disagree absolutely with Crisp when he said: 'There is no person under heaven, reconciled to God, justified by him through the righteousness of Christ, but he is justified and reconciled before he believes. And therefore faith is not the instrument radically to unite Christ and the soul together, but rather is the fruit that follows and flows from Christ.'² This is wrong.³ Saving faith, according to Crisp, is the evidence of justification, not the way to receive it.⁴ In saying such things, Crisp was mistaken. But this did not make him an antinomian! Rather, he was a hyper-Calvinist at these points.⁵

Not only was Crisp wrong at certain points; he was also unwise. Although he has been unjustly accused of being ambiguous on sanctification, inconsistent and contradictory, I do not altogether agree. Rather, Crisp gave his critics plenty of ammunition, and primed their guns, by saying harsh and unguarded things, dangerous things, things open to misrepresentation and misunderstanding. Indeed, I think he rather liked sailing close to the wind. Crisp himself virtually admitted as much; he knew he used some 'harsh' words or phrases which might be 'mistaken'.⁶

¹ See Crisp Vol.1 pp92-93; Vol.2 pp127,157-165,185; Vol.3 pp42-60, especially p59, for instance.

² Crisp Vol.3 p240.

³ See my *Eternal*.

⁴ See his sermon: 'Faith, the Fruit of Union' (Crisp Vol.4 pp4-20).

⁵ On the free offer, Crisp was not a hyper-Calvinist; see the main body of this present work, and my *Particular; Septimus Sears*. On other points, he was.

⁶ Crisp Vol.2 pp37-38,73, for instance.

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Unfortunately, this helped neither his cause nor his friends. Crisp was too fond of trying to alarm his hearers – and, subsequently, his readers. He was hooked on the use of astonishing paradoxes, he had a partiality for the unwise or dramatic statement, and all this tended to spoil his work, leaving him open to attack, but an attack which is not always justified. Sometimes, yes; but not always. There are things to be said on the other side.

Crisp has not always been handled fairly, and the context of his words has not always been given due weight. As with any man – including me!⁷ – if his words are taken out of context they can be made to ‘prove’ almost anything – including that he was an antinomian. What is more, it is possible that his use of crude expressions can be explained, to a certain extent, by the fact that his works were published after his death, and from shorthand records compared with his notes. In addition, it is too easy to forget that Crisp was a child of his age – as we all are! What do I mean? Scores of preachers in Crisp’s day were using words and phrases which sound alarming to us – and some *were* alarming! Had Calvin not said things which could be misunderstood?⁸ And Luther had used exciting, risky expressions, had he not? Crisp was preaching in a fevered age, and this undoubtedly coloured his – and his hearers’ – approach to sermons. While such things do not exonerate his excessive love of the dramatic, they should at least soften criticism of it. The fact is, however, by his love of the vivid turn of phrase, he left himself wide open to his critics.

Let me illustrate Crisp’s excesses in this way by reference to his preaching in three areas – assurance, the part played by unbelief in the non-bestowal of Christ, and the imputation of sin to Christ.

⁷ Indeed, it is true of Scripture!

⁸ For instance: Paul ‘makes all external things subject to our liberty, provided the nature of that liberty approves itself to our minds as before God’; ‘the consciences of believers may rise above the law, and may forget the whole righteousness of the law’ (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp135,683). Calvin, of course, did not mean what antinomians might deduce from his bald words. All I say is, Crisp in this respect should be given the same treatment as Calvin. Let’s be even-handed!

1. Crisp was not always wise in the way he dealt with assurance

When setting out his view of assurance, Crisp left himself open to the charge of antinomianism, or at least of travelling some distance along the road to it. And well he knew it.⁹

Let me glance, first of all, at the doctrine of assurance. This, in itself, is not without controversy! Biblically, there are three strands to assurance. Thus far all is plain sailing. Let me list the three strands – without in any way, at this stage, placing them in any order of time or priority.

First, there is the deduction a believer may make on the basis of the bare word of God. ‘What must I do to be saved?... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:30-31). I believe; the Bible tells me whoever believes is saved; therefore I am saved. ‘He who believes in [Christ] is not condemned’ (John 3:18). I believe; therefore I am not condemned. And so on. But this begs the question. True, a believer is saved – but am I truly a believer? *That* is the question.

Secondly, there is the inner witness of the Spirit of God: ‘The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (Rom. 8:16). The believer is assured by the sense of the love of God shed abroad in his heart. See also Romans 8:9-16; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 5:10.

Thirdly, we are given the tests, marks or evidences of sanctification spelled out in Scripture by which a believer may – must (2 Cor. 13:5) – measure himself. The first letter of John is the prime example. ‘By this we know that we know him’ (1 John 2:3;5; 3:14,24; 4:13; 5:2; *etc.*) ‘These things have I written... that you may know that you have eternal life’ (1 John 5:13).

The doctrine of assurance was vigorously debated in the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly the third aspect of assurance – namely, that outward evidences demonstrate inward grace – and its connection or otherwise with the second aspect – namely, the inner

⁹ Note the chorus in his sermons: ‘Let me not be mistaken’ or similar (Crisp Vol.1 pp10,34,150; Vol.2 p38; Vol.3 pp7,59,74,80,111,123,244). Crisp often showed he felt under attack. Did he welcome it?

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witness of the Spirit. The debate may have died down, but it has not gone away.

In the New England antinomian controversy of the 1630s, Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright had gone as far as to say that even though a man lived a ‘sanctified’ life it was no evidence that he was truly saved.¹⁰ In saying this, they were contradicting the orthodox Puritan doctrine, the biblical doctrine, that sanctification *is* an evidence of justification; in other words, they were weakening, if not rejecting, the third strand of assurance. It is easy to see how this could lead to the charge – and practice – of antinomianism. If sanctification does not count for assurance, does it count at all? In the corresponding debate in England, Crisp, while he played down the first and third aspects of the way of assurance, did not actually go as far as to say that outward marks are no evidence of saving grace. Nevertheless, he got too close for comfort, and left himself open to the accusation of antinomianism.¹¹

Crisp, it is important to note, entered the field with pastoral concern. And when he was addressing the subject, he was not, at that point, primarily trying to establish the necessity of progressive sanctification. What did concern him was that the emphasis upon sanctification as an evidence for assurance could lead to a glorying in good works and not Christ. Just as an emphasis upon free grace can lead to antinomianism, so an emphasis upon sanctification for assurance can lead to legalism. The gospel is always open to

¹⁰ But sanctification and civil obedience were confused in New England in the 1630s. This must not be forgotten. Anne Hutchinson was adamant: emphasising such obedience – sanctification – as an evidence of justification could actually delude men and entice them down the path of salvation by works. History proved them too right for comfort! See, for instance, Miller, Perry: *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961; Morgan, Edmund S.: *The Puritan Dilemma. The Story of John Winthrop*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1958; *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1963; Pettit, Norman: *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966; Stout, Harry S.: *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England*, Oxford University Press, 1986.

¹¹ For his sermons on assurance, see Crisp Vol.3 pp42-60,61-79,79-100.

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extremes! Crisp began by raising the question: ‘I know that among tender consciences, there is nothing pursued with so much vehemence of spirit, earnestness and zeal of affection, as to attain to know certainly they have a part and portion in this grace’; that is, ‘whether they are discharged of their sins or not’.¹² How can this be resolved? Will believers get assurance by looking at their evidences of sanctification?¹³ Although Crisp did not think much of this method,¹⁴ he did not reject it altogether: ‘I will not say but that there may be comfort in some sort, even from the fruits of the Spirit¹⁵ in men; yet that which must resolve the case... and satisfy the spirit of a person, that he has [an] interest in Christ... must be something else besides his own righteousness’.¹⁶ So what will resolve the case? According to Crisp, the second strand of biblical assurance is the answer; namely, the inner witness of the Spirit: ‘There are evidences to resolve men, if the Lord do but give them unto them, and power to receive them... Which are they?... They are two. The one is a revealing evidence, and the other is a receiving evidence. The revealing evidence is the voice of the Spirit of God to a man’s own spirit’.¹⁷

This, of course, was dangerous talk; Crisp was leaving himself open to the accusation of being on the high road to antinomianism. The inner witness, it seems, is more or less all that counts; evidences of sanctification, apparently, are not the main way of assurance. It is, of course, but a short step from saying evidences are not the be-all and end-all of assurance to saying they do not count at all. And to say that sanctification does not demonstrate grace, and therefore does not count for assurance, is wrong. It *is* one of the biblical ways of gaining assurance.¹⁸

¹² Crisp Vol.3 pp43-44,61-62.

¹³ Crisp Vol.3 pp43,55-59.

¹⁴ Crisp Vol.3 pp43-59,62,64,80,84.

¹⁵ Crisp had ‘spirit’.

¹⁶ Crisp Vol.3 p64.

¹⁷ Crisp Vol.3 pp65,73-74.

¹⁸ In addition – and more important – sanctification is essential for salvation (Heb. 12:14). Crisp could avoid the obvious thrust of 1 John 3:14 only by a tortured exposition. Even such a supporter as Gill was embarrassed and had to point it out: ‘I cannot agree with him’ – who

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But despite appearances, Crisp was not, in fact, an antinomian on the issue! He was simply saying that full assurance is not possible *merely* by testing oneself against signs and evidences of sanctification. He was not saying that evidences of sanctification are not required for any purpose. Indeed, he was not saying that they are utterly useless as far as assurance goes; it is simply that they are not *sufficient by themselves* to bring about the desired assurance.¹⁹ The witness of the Spirit is the only sure way. *But even this needs to be verified by Scripture*, as Crisp acknowledged; a mere impression is not enough.²⁰ But for Crisp, as well as Scripture, the inner witness is supreme.²¹

The trouble is, Crisp was too grudging in all this. If he had said evidences of sanctification are not sufficient to give *full* assurance, but they are *necessary* for it, not merely useful; if he had said in a more positive way – not that ‘I do not deny’ – that the fruits of the Spirit accompany the inner witness – not that they ‘may come in as handmaids’; if he had robustly pointed out that the Spirit who witnesses within will surely and inevitably work grace within the same person; if he had said *such* things, and said them as strongly as he made his other points, he would not have left himself open to the charge of antinomianism. While, in my opinion, he said just enough to rebut the charge, he was not sufficiently clear or positive.

But let him try to explain himself:

I do not determine peremptorily that a man cannot, by way of evidence, receive any comfort from his sanctification; I will give you somewhat for the clearing of my judgement... The Spirit must first reveal the gracious mind of the Lord to our spirits, and give us faith to

could? – to have the grace of 1 John 3:14, as Gill said, ‘must be an evidence of passing from death to life’ (Crisp Vol.3 p59).

¹⁹ Crisp Vol.3 pp59-60,80,84.

²⁰ Crisp Vol.3 pp74-75,76,79,95,97.

²¹ Crisp explained what he meant by the written word: ‘You may understand the word in a double sense, either the word of the law, or of grace in the gospel. Now mark, when we say it is the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirits, according to the word, that we are the sons of God, it is not the word of the law that agrees in this with the voice of the Spirit; that speaks nothing but curses... The word, according to which the Spirit of the Lord speaks, when he speaks to his people, is the word of grace’ (Crisp Vol.3 p76).

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receive that testimony, and to sit down satisfied with it, before ever any work of sanctification can possibly give any evidence; but when the testimony of the Spirit is received by faith, and the soul sits down satisfied with it, then all the gifts of the Spirit bear witness together with it, and with faith. In brief, beloved, all the righteousness that ever mere man reached unto since the fall, of itself, was never able to say, upon good grounds, such a person is a child of God.²²

Do not miss the ‘of itself’. *That* was Crisp’s point. But even here, unfortunately, he was putting too low a value on the evidences of sanctification. He was not denying sanctification as evidence of justification, of a man’s interest in Christ and hope of heaven – but putting it forward as a verification only of a lesser kind, a secondary evidence.²³ As I say, it was enough to release him from the charge of antinomianism, but even so he fell short of the scriptural emphasis.

As I explained when beginning this section, for all his dangerous talk in these sermons on assurance, Crisp’s aim was admirable:

All I aim at is that our God, in our Saviour Jesus Christ, might have the pre-eminence in all things; that not only our salvation and justification might have their rise from Christ alone, but that our peace of conscience might be fetched from thence; and that he that gives to us the great things of the gospel, might speak the same things by himself, or by his Spirit, unto us, according to his word, and so we rest satisfied on that; if anything swerve from this principle... I... abhor it.

Unfortunately, Crisp, taking the argument to his opponents, immediately plunged on, once again getting himself into hot water:

To make the evidence of the Spirit, according to the word of grace, and the faith of a believer, no infallible testimonies of our interest in Christ, must of necessity produce this effect; [namely,] to rest and build on our own works, and to give the glory of our peace of conscience and comfort thereunto; but to preach that it is only these [that is, the inner witness, and so on] that evidence to us our interest in Christ, is to give unto the Lord Jesus the honour and glory of all, and to assume nothing to our own works.²⁴

²² Crisp Vol.3 p84.

²³ Crisp Vol.3 p84.

²⁴ Crisp Vol.3 pp98-99.

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While he is commendably arguing that, in the ultimate, the inner witness is supreme, Crisp should have been more guarded, and expressed himself scripturally – the inner witness must be, and will be, supported by good works. Crisp seems to have been saying the inner witness *on its own* is infallible evidence and assurance. In this he was mistaken.

Having said that, we today have erred far, far too much on the other side. I will not press this further here – I intend to publish on Sandemanianism – but the truth is, we today, when thinking about assurance, are far too much inclined to concentrate on ourselves and our works in sanctification, to the detriment of the inner witness of the Spirit. If Crisp can help us anywhere, it is at this point. And we need help!

2. Crisp was not always wise in the way he dealt with unbelief

When speaking about unbelief, Crisp was also unguarded. ‘Unbelief’, he declared, ‘is not a bar to hinder one from having a part in Christ’.²⁵ What! How could he say such a thing? What else *but* unbelief keeps a sinner from Christ? But Crisp said it because he was trying to explain that God does not have regard for anything in the sinner when he comes to bestow Christ to him;²⁶ there is no cause whatever in the sinner; God’s motive is nothing but free grace. Does God demand anything of the sinner to make that sinner worthy to receive Christ? No, said Crisp, nothing at all:

The Father expects nothing in the world of men... God looks for nothing in the world of men; be they what they will, be they in the worst condition, no matter what it is, they are the men to whom Christ offers himself²⁷... [The] giving and communicating Christ, and all that

²⁵ Crisp Vol.1 p107.

²⁶ This is where Crisp sailed too close to the wind. God gave Christ to die – that is, he ‘bestowed’ Christ – *for* sinners, when they were sinners, unbelievers; their unbelief does not interfere with *this*. But he bestows Christ *to* sinners only as and when they believe. But in saying this, God does not bestow Christ to the sinner *because* he believes. This is the point Crisp was trying to make.

²⁷ This must not be missed. Crisp was talking about Christ offering himself *to* sinners *in the gospel* – not offering himself *for* them *on the cross*.

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is Christ's, unto men, [is] merely of grace, merely of gift, without consideration of anything in the world... [God] bestows Christ by grace... God looks for, asks, requires nothing of men to their partaking of him... No matter for bringing of anything with you; have you a mind to him?²⁸ [then] take him freely; God scorns to make a sale of his Son. If men take him as a deed of gift, well and good; if they will have him upon other terms, God never means to part with him. I tell you, could you bring angelical perfection and obedience, and present that to the Father as a motive to him to bestow his Christ upon you; if you dare offer the most perfect righteousness in the world for Christ; I say, you shall be accursed for it.²⁹

Note Crisp's admirable point; he was talking about the Father's *motive* in bestowing Christ, not the way sinners receive him. God offers and bestows Christ to sinners only on the basis of his free and sovereign grace – not because of faith (actual or foreseen). Having established this from Scripture, Crisp moved on: 'As the Father looks for nothing in men to partake of Christ, so also it does imply, there is nothing in men, though never so vile, that can debar a person from a part in this Christ'.³⁰ Is there any sinner who is so bad that God will not offer Christ to him, will not give Christ to him, but will turn away from him, saying he is not worthy to receive Christ? No! Just as there is no merit in any sinner to deserve the gift of Christ, so there is no sin which is too much for God to deal with. And this includes unbelief: 'Unbelief is not simply a bar to the bestowing of Christ... [God] bestows him without any regard to belief or unbelief; if unbelief should be a bar to hinder Christ from being bestowed upon men, where is the man to whom Christ should be bestowed? There is no [unconverted] person under heaven... but he is considered an unbeliever'.³¹

Allowing for the colouring of Crisp's words by his belief in eternal justification, he was right. He was preaching pure gospel! He was speaking, as he said, of God's *motive* in offering and bestowing Christ to sinners, and the *sort* of people to whom he offers and bestows him. God saves *sinners*; Christ came for the sick, the *unrighteous* (Mark. 2:17); Christ died for *sinners* (Rom.

²⁸ That is: Do you want him?

²⁹ Crisp Vol.1 pp100-102.

³⁰ Crisp Vol.1 pp102-103.

³¹ Crisp Vol.1 pp107-108.

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5:8); God invites *sinners* to Christ. Christ died for the *ungodly* (Rom. 5:6); God justifies the *ungodly* (Rom. 4:5). God did not give his Son for believers,³² it was for sinners. Christ does not offer himself to believers; it is to sinners. This is the point Crisp was making. He was addressing *God's offering and bestowal* of Christ to sinners, **not** the *sinner's receiving* of him. There is nothing which makes the sinner fit for God to offer and give him Christ. Nothing!

But only believers will receive Christ, and sinners must believe before they receive Christ! Crisp knew this full well, and argued it stoutly: 'I need not tell you', he said, 'what I have so often mentioned, that there must be a believing in him that justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4)'.³³ Crisp spoke of two 'receivings of Christ', one passive, the other active; the latter being 'when we take him'.³⁴ In other words, unbelief does not hinder God offering and bestowing Christ, just as no good in the sinner merits his bestowal of Christ,³⁵ but until a sinner believes he will never receive Christ:

[Unbelief] is a bar to hinder the manifestation of Christ in the spirit, but it is not a bar to hinder anyone having a part in Christ, on whom God bestows him. It is true, that you, nor I, can say by experience that Christ is ours, until we believe.³⁶

Crisp was teaching gospel truth here but, snatched out of context, his words sound dreadful. And, of course, his approach was coloured by his view of eternal justification; that is to say, belief for Crisp meant coming to realise one's justified state from eternity past. In this, he was mistaken. Let me briefly restate the biblical position: In eternity past, God determined to justify his elect. At the appointed time, Christ died and rose again to justify the elect. In God's sovereign appointment, the Holy Spirit brings the elect to trust the Redeemer to receive their actual justification. And in

³² How common a mistake is this among evangelicals, not excluding Calvinists. I mentioned this point when looking at John Saltmarsh.

³³ Crisp Vol.1 pp104-105.

³⁴ Crisp Vol.1 p107.

³⁵ Compare circumcision and uncircumcision; neither is the basis for justification (Rom. 3:30), 'the bestowal of Christ'.

³⁶ Crisp Vol.1 p107.

eternity to come, God will vindicate his elect as perfect before him for ever.

As for preaching the gospel to sinners, we must concentrate on the third aspect: sinners must trust Christ to be justified. Because of his free and sovereign grace, on the basis of that free and sovereign grace, God offers Christ to sinners as sinners, as unbelievers, ungodly. More: because of his free and sovereign grace, on the basis of his free and sovereign grace, God gives Christ to sinners. But he only gives Christ to sinners who, by his Spirit's gracious, sovereign and effectual action, believe. However, he does not give Christ to them because they believe, but even so believing is the means whereby sinners receive Christ. Without saving faith, sinners will not be saved. Unbelief does not hinder God offering Christ to sinners, but unless a sinner believes, he will be damned.

3. Crisp was not always wise in the way he dealt with the imputation of sin to Christ

Now for the third example of Crisp's tendency to say unwise things – this time, concerning the imputation of sin to Christ. On the one hand he could make this categorical statement: 'I have searched the Scripture as narrowly as possibly I may', he said, 'yet, this I find, that throughout the whole there is not one passage of it that speaks of imputing our sins to Christ'.³⁷ Naturally such a statement sets alarm bells ringing up and down the street. Whatever did he mean? Did he not believe in imputation? It certainly seems to be the case. But the truth is, Crisp *did* believe in it, and at the very time he made this amazing statement, he was in fact enforcing the *scriptural* doctrine against false and fanciful notions of the subject. The scriptural doctrine of imputation was the very thing he was trying to prove, and make men see.³⁸

So why did he put it like this? Whatever did Crisp mean by his staggering statement that he had never found the Scripture speaking of imputing the sins of the elect to Christ? What was he thinking of? Just this: Crisp had two fish to fry. In the first place, he was dealing with a misunderstanding of the word 'imputation'. He

³⁷ Crisp Vol.2 p91.

³⁸ Crisp Vol.2 p91.

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noted how the word itself ‘stumbles many a person’; that is, he explained, they think it implies a figment, an imagined transfer of sin, or some such ‘supposition or connivance’.³⁹ Not so, he replied. ‘I have searched the Scripture’ and never once come across this imaginary idea, this figment. Crisp asserted that the scriptural meaning of the word is ‘accounting’ or ‘reckoning’, and in this sense, he argued, Christ *did* take the sins of his people. He cited Romans 4:3-4. ‘There are two words that illustrate the nature of imputation, and they are these, accounting and reckoning... Imputing is nothing but God’s determination and conclusion that he passes upon things, as really and truly they are, without imagining things to be so and so, when indeed, and in truth, they are not so’.⁴⁰ Not only that; Crisp was trying to protect the sinlessness of Christ. Sins were imputed to the Redeemer, yes, but that did not mean he was actually guilty of sin in himself.

This is what Crisp was reaching for. In two sermons entitled: ‘Sin Transacted *Really* Upon Christ’,⁴¹ he proclaimed a *real* transfer of sins, a *real* transfer of accountability to Christ, not some abstract theoretical device, as though God pretended to transfer sin’s debt to his Son. As Crisp had explained a few paragraphs earlier, when dealing with 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 5:19: ‘God *really* passes over sin upon [Christ], still keeping this fact, that Christ sinned not; so that in respect of this act, not one sin of the believer is Christ’s, but in respect of transgression, the conveyance of it, or passing accounts from one head to another, there is a *reality* of making Christ to be sin’.⁴² As he had said just before ‘Christ never sinned in all his life’.⁴³ Earlier still, in the previous sermon:

Christ himself becomes the transgressor in the room and stead of the person that had transgressed; so that, in respect of the reality of being a transgressor, Christ really is the transgressor... Beloved, mistake me not. I say not that Christ ever was, or ever could be, the actor or

³⁹ See p106 for Eaton on the same theme; namely, that imputation is real not imaginary.

⁴⁰ Crisp Vol.2 pp91-93.

⁴¹ Crisp Vol.2 pp84-113, emphasis mine.

⁴² Crisp Vol.2 p88, emphasis mine.

⁴³ Crisp Vol.2 p87.

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committer of transgression, for he never committed any, but the Lord laid iniquity upon him, and this act of God's laying it upon him makes him as really a transgressor as if he himself had actually committed it.⁴⁴

And this means that:

God lays iniquities upon [Christ], namely, by transferring them upon him, that he takes them away, and carries them into a land of forgetfulness... and, therefore, they are not left behind upon the person whose they were till Christ took them away.⁴⁵

The context clears it all up: 'I will not contend about words; we will take it for granted, that it is consonant to Scripture, that our sins are imputed unto Christ; all the difficulty lies in a true understanding of the word *imputation*'.⁴⁶ In short, Crisp *did* believe in imputation, and tenaciously defended it. Yet, when he was most strongly arguing the biblical case, by a very unwise statement he seemed to be denying it!

And this makes my point perfectly. Although it is possible – for some of his critics, I might say *tempting* – to snatch a sentence from Crisp to 'prove' he did not believe in imputation, the context shows he was proving the very opposite. And so I could go on. Crisp was not careful enough over such statements as 'God... makes Christ as very [really, truly] a sinner as the creature himself was'.⁴⁷ Of course, as Gill said – indeed, as Crisp himself said⁴⁸ – 'that is, by imputation... by which all the sins of the sinner are put upon Christ, so that he, standing in his stead, is reckoned in the eye of justice as what the sinner is in himself'.⁴⁹ The point is, sins were not imputed to Christ so as to make him a sinner, but they were imputed to him in the sense that he assumed the debt, he took up and bore the punishment due to them, he settled the account.⁵⁰ But Crisp should

⁴⁴ Crisp Vol.2 p73.

⁴⁵ Crisp Vol.2 p90. See Gill's note in Crisp Vol.2 p91.

⁴⁶ Crisp Vol.2 p92.

⁴⁷ Crisp Vol.2 p129.

⁴⁸ See above.

⁴⁹ Crisp Vol.2 p129.

⁵⁰ See Gill's note in Crisp Vol.2 p88.

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have been more careful; he obscured his doctrine by the sensational way he expressed himself in his love of verbal fireworks.

All this illustrates the care which must be exercised when quoting him (and other so-called antinomians). Some of their statements offer rich pickings for those who are looking for a juicy tit-bit. He is not alone in this, of course, but it is especially true of Crisp. Even so, he usually clarified his meaning in the context. This cautionary note must not be forgotten.⁵¹

Finally, in arguing so strongly for the real imputation of sin to Christ, Crisp was in effect establishing another, inevitably connected, biblical doctrine: Christ's righteousness really is imputed to us when we believe. And this takes us back to the point I made right at the start: the Reformed and evangelical view of justification is too dry, concentrated too much on its legal aspect to the detriment of the fullness of free justification in Christ. As I said, while this legal aspect is an undoubted truth, the fact is, as these 'antinomians' have argued, when we trust Christ, we are made – yes, *made* (Rom. 5:19) – as righteous as Christ in God's sight. As Romans 5:19 makes clear beyond any vestige of doubt, just as sins were really transferred to Christ so that God regarded him as a sinner, so Christ's righteousness is transferred to the believer to make him perfect in God's sight.

Moreover, nothing – nothing whatsoever – can ever, will ever, cause God in Christ to reject the one who trusts Christ. Hence my choice of John 6:37 as part of the epigraph on the title page: 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out'; that is, under no circumstances whatsoever will God drive away the one who trusts his Son. As John Kent said: 'Once in him, in him for ever'.⁵² Free and full redemption, indeed!

⁵¹ Getting closer to the subject in hand, in his sermon on Phil. 3:8-9, for instance, Crisp seemed to speak vehemently against a believer's holiness, but in truth he was not promoting sin. Rather, he was trying to point out the inevitable corruption found in every true believer this side of glory. See Crisp Vol.2 pp34-48.

⁵² In his hymn: 'Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding'.