

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES
VOLUME FIVE

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

Assurance in the New Covenant.

Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists.

Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law.

Conversion Ruined: The New Perspective and the Conversion of Sinners.

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

Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated: Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton and John Saltmarsh.

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The Pastor: Does He Exist?

The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?

New-Covenant Articles

Volume Five

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

Hebrews 8:6,13

David H.J.Gay

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Scripture quotations come from a variety of versions

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Note to the Reader

This is the fifth volume in my collected articles on the new covenant. Although such pieces will continue to be posted under the eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry (sermonaudio.com), and on christmycovenant.com, once again I not only want to set my work in a more permanent form for those who have already discovered it, but I hope to reach a new audience. The fact is, there is a growing body of believers who, having had more than enough of the bondage and fear produced by the law teachers and their clever tricks with Scripture, are displaying a voracious appetite for the liberating gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am thinking of them. If they find any value in these articles, they might like to explore my full-length books, which are available on Amazon and Kindle. I have also opened a You Tube site with the same heading as the one on [sermonaudio](http://sermonaudio.com).

I express my continued gratitude to Ace and Peggy Staggs for all the internet work they do behind the scenes, and to Moe Bergeron for the way he presents my material on christmycovenant.com. My thanks also to David Burkhardt for his highly-supportive Foreword. I also record my debt to those believers who support me in prayer. Mere words inadequately express what I feel about my brothers and sisters who encourage me in all these ways and more. God will remember them and their labour (Heb. 6:10).

Foreword

In this Volume 5 compendium of *New-Covenant Articles*, David H.J. Gay examines with precision and solid exegesis several very important biblical issues and relevant Christian topics. These are not peripheral or esoteric things, but most often are at the main coronary artery of the Christian faith, and its overflow into life. To quote page 130: ‘Yet the fact is “all things have become new through Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:6); the oldness of the letter and of the flesh has passed away, and the upright new being to the Spirit has been ushered in by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)”’.

The theology of the new covenant is totally embodied in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and is not a new development time-wise. Though its coalescence in this modern era started in the 1970s and 80s, its streams run long and deep, as Gay demonstrates from works of the early Church Fathers, and up to some solid Anabaptist leaders, even before Calvin’s Geneva. Biblically, it really can be traced back to Genesis, and the future promise, now gloriously fulfilled, of our perfect Deliverer!

Actually, many of the tenets within covenant theology are carried over from the legalism and amalgamation of Church and State found in the numerous errors of Rome. Why would that be? Of course there are numerous answers to that broad question. One answer would be that the semi-Pelagian soteriological model of Rome lends itself to a legalistic control-stance, since the majority of the populace, having been inducted into Christendom by infant baptism or territorial borders, are unsaved, and have to be micro-managed. Another answer would be sacramentalism, starting with the world acceptance of Christianity (that strategy of Satan – that if you cannot destroy them outright, join them to pollute and dilute them!) in the 3rd century AD, which distorted baptism and communion, from biblical, outward-pronouncing signs of an inner Spirit-baptised and Spirit-filled life, into mystical man-made induction-rites!

Foreword

Brother Gay in several of these articles asks what is the nature of baptism in the New Testament Scriptures? And he masterfully, from many angles, points out soundly that the real and true baptism is the life-giving, heart-transforming, ministry power of God the Holy Spirit, forming ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27).

Then he correctly critiques various degrees of sacramentalism of both the past and, more importantly, the present – whether it be in the work of N.T.Wright, and other evangelicals, or most within the ‘Reformed’ camp of both conservative Presbyterians and Baptists alike. Grace is not conferred by any human act or thinking. Infant baptism is not replacing circumcision from the old covenant into the new covenant. Even circumcision did not regenerate; it served only as an induction into national Israel. And immersion in Baptist churches, though a correct outward symbol of the believer’s experience, does not ever impart life or favour from God. New life is gained only by the Holy Spirit and his use of the preached and taught holy infallible Word of Christ, which we possess from Genesis to Revelation (Jas. 1:18). As to many evangelicals using the old-covenant law incorrectly, Gay rightly states: ‘The law is not the believer’s perfect rule, nor is it the whip to drive him to progressive sanctification. Clearly, the new-covenant way of bringing about the believer’s holiness of life is by the Spirit, on the basis of the love, grace and mercy of God in the free justification and positional sanctification of the believer in Christ. And Christ himself is the perfect rule for the believer – Christ as revealed in Scripture. Christ-likeness is the aim, and Christ-likeness is the end (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3). It is Christ, therefore, not law, that we must preach if we are to see saints grow in grace. All the believer’s obedience must flow from him, flow from his union and connection with Christ’.¹

Finally, Gay tackles the unbiblical construct of the ‘Covenant of Works’, and also Calvin’s erroneous tripartite use of the old-covenant Mosaic law – as if one could separate the civil, religious

¹ *Christ Is All* (Col 3:11) p168.

Foreword

and moral parts as they were all tied together for national Israel at that era!

The last segment of this present volume is also liberating: 'Unlawful Use of the Law in the Righteous Believer's Life'! To quote again:

In a word, believers ought not to be brought under the law of Moses. It is not designed for them. Paul said so in 1 Timothy 1:8-11. They live in a totally different realm. And, therefore, we should not be surprised to discover that, having opened his first letter to Timothy with 'Jesus Christ... the Lord Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ our Lord...', as with the Corinthians, the apostle went on to speak of Christ: 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord... the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus... Christ Jesus... Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ... Christ Jesus... God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit... the Spirit... Jesus Christ... Christ... the Lord Jesus Christ... our Lord Jesus Christ...', continuing the theme in his second letter: 'Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ Jesus our Lord... Christ Jesus... our Saviour Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus... the Holy Spirit... Christ Jesus... Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ Jesus... the Lord Jesus Christ... the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you'. And, of course, 'the Lord... the Lord... the Lord...'. We should, therefore, be preachers of Christ, not Moses; preachers of the new covenant, not the old; preachers of the Spirit, not the flesh!

I hope, dear reader, that you profit mightily from this Volume 5 of brother Gay, and give heed, as the Bereans, to the Scriptures – as a sincere believer growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, or, if you are a non-believer or nominal professor, that the Holy Spirit will bring you to him: Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour!

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New-Covenant Theology: A Summary

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

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

God has one eternal plan centred in Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

Believers use the law of Moses as a paradigm, as part of ‘all Scripture’, but not as a list of detailed rules.

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

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

Exodus in Romans

My chosen title for this article, I confess, might well give the impression that I am writing on an abstruse topic, abstruse in the sense of being obscure, technical, of interest only to those with a mind bent on theological niceties, and of little or no practical interest or concern to the ‘ordinary’ – how I hate that word in this context – believer. This, to say the least, would be unfortunate, for nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the consequences of going wrong on this subject are horrendous – and horrendous for all men, not just believers.¹

I make my case by reference to the work of N.T.Wright, the arch-advocate of the New Perspective.²

Introduction

According to Wright,³ Paul, when he was writing Romans 3 – 8, used the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt under Moses to serve as a framework for his argument. In particular, Romans 3 – 4 speaks of the new-covenant deliverance from Egypt, and Romans 6 – 8 speaks of the new-covenant giving of the torah, the law. If we include the first two chapters of Romans, we could summarise the position thus:

Romans 1:18 – 3:20

Egyptian slavery: the believer’s ruin in sin
(Eph. 2:1-3)

¹ I suggest you read this article before the following article: ‘Baptism in Romans’.

² For this article, I have drawn on my *Hinge* pp7-23. See also my *Conversion*.

³ N.T.Wright: ‘New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3 – 8’ in Sven K.Soderlund & N.T.Wright (editors): *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honour of Gordon D.Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1999.

Romans 3:21 – 5:21

The passover: the believer's redemption, his justification
(1 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:15-16)

Romans 6:14 – 8:17

The giving of the torah: the believer under the law of Christ
(John 1:17; Gal. 6:2)

Romans 8:18-27

The wilderness: the believer's sufferings
(1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Romans 8:28-39

Canaan: the believer's glory
(2 Cor. 3:18)⁴

You will notice that in the above I have omitted the early part of Romans 6. In Wright's exodus scheme,⁵ the early part of Romans 6 forms the hinge in the apostle's argument, its pivot, its fulcrum, its biting point, its crux.⁶ In other words, Romans 6 is 'the central or pivotal point or principle on which everything in Paul's argument depends'.⁷ To what is Wright referring? I quote the relevant passage from the apostle:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away

⁴ Wright thinks far more in terms of the corporate than this, and far less in terms of the individual.

⁵ It is not only Wright's scheme, of course. He owed his debt to Frank Thielman, Sylvia C.Keesmaat and, above all, to Richard B.Hays (Wright pp27-28).

⁶ I am not saying that Wright used the word 'hinge', but he certainly regarded baptism as the crux.

⁷ See *The Oxford Dictionary*.

with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:1-11).

This, according to Wright, is the crux or turning point in the apostle's argument. As such, of course, it is not only the hinge upon which Paul's argument turns – it is the crucial step in the sinner's experience of redemption. But what, precisely, is that hinge upon which everything turns? Baptism.

Wright:

My initial specific proposal is to explore the possibility that when Paul speaks of baptism in Romans 6 he has in mind the crossing of the Red Sea at the exodus. He makes exactly this connection, of course, in 1 Corinthians 10:2, where it forms an important part of his exhortation to the Corinthian church that they should see themselves as the heirs of the scriptural narrative, as God's true-exodus people now engaged in the homeward-bound wilderness journey. 'Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea... Now these things were examples to us, that we might not desire evil as they did' (1 Cor. 10:1-2,6).

And then the hinge itself:

The primary strength of this proposal lies in the sense it makes of Romans 6 as a whole. Baptism, and that which it embodies and symbolises⁸ (the death of the 'old man' and new life in Christ), is here expounded specifically in terms of the slave: 'Thanks be to God that you who once were slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to

⁸ Do not miss Wright's 'embodies and symbolises' when talking about baptism, especially the 'embodies': 'baptism, and that which it embodies and symbolises...'. I will have more to say on this. Indeed, it encapsulates my reason for writing on this subject.

which you were committed, and, being set free from sin, have become enslaved to righteousness' (Rom. 6:17-18).⁹

Here we have it: baptism is the pivot – the pivot in Paul's argument, and, it therefore follows, the pivot in the believer's experience of redemption. Indeed, as Wright explained:

My starting point for this train of thought – the actual point that set me thinking... is the question of the place of baptism, and hence of Romans 6 as a whole, within the argument of the letter.¹⁰

Baptism is the fulcrum, the hinge or pivot in Paul's argument in this part of his letter to the Romans. In so many words, so said Wright.

And, to a large measure, I agree with him. I think he makes a valid point, and a vital one at that. But! And there is a serious 'but'. It has already surfaced in Wright's use of 'embodies and symbolises'. And that, as I say, is why I have written.¹¹

Before I get to that, however, we need to retrace our steps and think a little more about Wright's claim for the exodus motif in Romans. Is he right? Did Paul use the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt as a framework within which to build his argument when setting out the gospel?

How valid is the 'exodus theme' in Romans?

While it is true that the exodus can be used to illustrate the gospel – and we know that in Romans Paul certainly sets out the gospel (Rom. 1:1-6, 15-17; 16:25-27) – Wright has claimed too much in asserting Paul's dependence on the exodus when writing that

⁹ Wright pp28-29.

¹⁰ Wright p27.

¹¹ In fact, I part company with Wright over two main issues. In addition to the question of baptism in this context (Rom. 6:3-4), I disagree with his view of 'justification by faith' (Rom. 3:21 – 5:21). These two quarrels are far from trivial. On the second, see my *Conversion*.

letter.¹² The parallel fails badly at certain points. For a start, the wilderness for Israel was a judgement for the Hebrews for their refusal to obey God (Num. 14:29-35; Ezek. 20:13-26; Heb. 3:15-19; 4:6,11); God tested them, humbling them, disciplining them (Deut. 8:2-5), keeping them in the wilderness until all the unbelieving generation (apart from the two spies who did believe – Joshua and Caleb) had died (Num. 26:63-65; 32:11-13). The passage of the Hebrews through the wilderness, therefore, does not represent the believer's pilgrimage through this life. Nor does Canaan represent heaven; it speaks of the believer's present rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 3:7 – 4:11). Furthermore, I fail to see how Romans 4 – 5 fits the exodus motif; at least, Wright's use of those chapters does not match the majestic doctrine which the apostle himself laid out. Moreover, if the chronological and historical parallel with the exodus is to be maintained, how can the *hinge* in the apostle's argument – and, more particularly, the hinge or turning point in the believer's experience of redemption – come after 'justification by faith' (Rom. 3:21 – 5:21)? In short, while there is value in drawing a parallel between the exodus and the believer's experience of redemption, it is not to be maintained slavishly.

And there is a more general point, but one which is far from trivial. The New Testament makes it clear that there is a marked contrast between the old and new covenants: 'The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). Just to select two passages out of the many which give us the details of that contrast:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory,

¹² What is more, we must not forget such passages as Jer. 16:14-15; 23:7-8 in which God promised that he would do something which would make the exodus pale by comparison.

how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

And:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned'. The sight was so terrifying that Moses said: 'I am trembling with fear'. But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:18-24).

This is but a sample of the abundance of New Testament material that establishes the contrast between the two covenants. See my *Christ is All* for my full argument.¹³ All I want to do here is draw attention to the dominant note of contrast: 'You have not... but you have...'. It is not only a question of contrast, of course: the new covenant is superior to the old.

We may summarise the apostle's words in 2 Corinthians 3 in this way:

The old covenant was to do with the flesh; the new covenant is the covenant of the Holy Spirit (verses 3,6,8).

The old covenant was an outward covenant, written on stone; the new covenant is an inward covenant, written on the heart (verses 2-3,7).

The old covenant killed; it spelled death; the new covenant is life (verses 3,6-7).

The old covenant was deliberately temporary, designed by God to be so; the new covenant is permanent; it remains, it lasts (verses 11,13).

¹³ See also several of my articles on connected topics which may be found under David H J Gay Ministry (on both the Edocs link on sermonaudio.com, and on christmycovenant.com).

Exodus in Romans

The old covenant had glory, but its glory was lesser and fading; the new covenant has a glory which exceeds, excels, being so much greater than the glory of the old covenant (verses 7-11).¹⁴

The old covenant condemned; the new covenant is saving (verse 9).

The old covenant spelled bondage; the new covenant brings liberty (verses 12,17).

What a phenomenal series of statements. Breathtaking! And all of a piece with this:

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law... The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God...

The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: ‘The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying: “Know the Lord”, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’. By calling this covenant ‘new’, he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear...

He sets aside the first to establish the second... The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: ‘This is the covenant

¹⁴ Note the apostle’s ‘deliberate tautology’ – without redundancy, of course.

I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds'. Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more' (Heb. 7:11-19; 8:6-13; 10:9-17).

Thus, while the exodus motif is valuable when thinking about personal redemption under the gospel, the comparison must not be stressed to such an extent that it in any way blurs the contrast between the old and new covenants. This is where a great many go wrong.

Paul answers an objection

The parallel between the exodus and Paul's argument in Romans breaks down in yet another way. In the opening verses of Romans 6, Paul is not moving his argument on sequentially; he is not setting out the next step in his discourse or in the believer's experience. Rather, in the first place, he is facing up to and dealing with a serious objection to what he has already said.

What is this objection? Grace is dynamite, especially in its freeness! It is the very freeness of God's grace in redemption that makes it so potent. Potent for what? Surely, says, the objector, if a believer really grasps the freeness of God's grace – as you, Paul, have set it out – nothing will prevent him from sinning with impunity. Indeed, because God is so gracious, the believer might even argue that the more he sins, the more he can experience God's grace, and the more he can glorify God in the exercise of his grace towards him: 'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?' In other words, the gospel, the free grace of God, preached in the way Paul did, can only encourage antinomianism.¹⁵ That is the objection.¹⁶

¹⁵ 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. Antinomianism, proper, is an abomination, utterly contrary to the gospel. Sadly, however, 'antinomianism' has become a theological swear-word, remarkably elastic – a proper Humpty-Dumpty word – so that it has come to mean whatever its user wants it to mean. As such, it has proved a handy weapon for those who want to dismiss an opponent without weighing his

Let us remind ourselves of the freeness of the grace of God in the gospel, as the apostle sets it out:

A righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known... This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus... God demonstrate[s] his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law... There is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith... If... Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’. Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness... Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!... It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all... The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore,

arguments. See the aforesaid links for related articles of mine on this topic. See also David H J Gay Ministry on youtube.com.

¹⁶ From this we learn that the possibility of such a charge is a litmus test for preachers. Unless such a charge can be made against our preaching, we are not preaching the gospel as the apostle did. We are more than likely to be preaching law in some form or another. No law preacher could ever be accused of encouraging antinomianism or lawlessness.

since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand... You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!... Just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Christ] the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 3:21 – 5:21).

It is this freeness – the freeness which is so heavily stressed by the apostle – that provokes the objection.¹⁷

This freeness of the grace of God in the gospel is so far-reaching, I cannot help exploring it a little more. I do so by taking just one aspect of Paul's teaching in the above:

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! (Rom. 5:9).

Look at what the apostle teaches us here. We have been justified by Christ's blood. In saying this, of course, Paul was building on what he has already set out, starting from Romans 1:18. As sinners, we are under the wrath of God. There is nothing that we can do, no rite that we can observe, no duty that we can fulfil, that will deliver us from that wrath. But Christ has come and shed his blood to appease the wrath of God, appease it by bearing it in himself. And by faith in Christ, trust in Christ, we are released from condemnation, and clothed with Christ's righteousness. In a word, we are justified and have peace with God. Hence, the

¹⁷ See my *Four*.

apostle says: 'We have now been justified by [Christ's] blood' (Rom. 5:9).

Now that, in itself, speaks of freeness. We are justified, not by our works, but by Christ's sacrifice. But Paul has not finished. In fact, he does not say: 'We have now been justified by [Christ's] blood'. This is what he actually says: '*Since* we have now been justified by [Christ's] blood'. Indeed, he declares: '*Since* we have now been justified by [Christ's] blood, *how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*'

What point am I making? Just this: justification is utterly free to the sinner; it cost the Saviour his all, but it is utterly free to the sinner. The truth is, justification by sovereign grace is far more free, and far more extensive, than we could possibly imagine. 'How much more' – to use the apostle's words – how much richer, how much freer, it is than we dare to think! If we are in Christ, if we are trusting Christ, we are not only justified, but *whatever happens, we shall be delivered from God's wrath though Christ!*

Reader, try to let that sink in! No matter what happens – by way of trial, sin or failure (Rom. 5:3-8) – we who are in Christ by faith, cannot, will not, ever come under the wrath of God. Once we are in Christ, there is no possibility whatsoever that we shall ever be condemned:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirement¹⁸ of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit...¹⁹ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be

¹⁸ The singular is the proper rendering.

¹⁹ Do not misread the apostle: those 'who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' are those who are not in the flesh, not in Adam, but in the Spirit, in Christ; in other words, they are believers, saints, the children of God.

conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Rom. 8:1-4,28-34).

This is the measure of the freeness and fullness of the grace of God in Christ in the gospel: we cannot sin ourselves out of Christ and into condemnation; no accusation can ever be laid against us.²⁰

To say such things is to set alarm bells ringing. So much so, many will be only too quick to retort: ‘Antinomianism!’

Precisely! That is just what happened here. This is the self-same objection which the apostle himself takes up. The very freeness of grace *must* lead to the objection that it will produce antinomianism.²¹

So, how does Paul counter the objection? Does he back off? Not at all! Rather, he recapitulates his doctrine. Actually, he does more: he drives it home even harder. As I have just shown from Romans 8, the apostle can hardly find words sufficient to set out

²⁰ Not long after I was converted, a preacher, addressing us – a group of young people – asked us (rhetorically) what would happen if we were knocked down by a bus and died before we had time to confess the sins we had committed since last we confessed them. No doubt he was trying to lead us into some sort of popery. At the time, I was very young in the faith, having had little or no experience of public speaking. If it happened today, I would immediately get to my feet and say something like: ‘My sins are not forgiven on the basis of my confessions and prayers! Jesus died, Jesus lives, and Jesus ever lives to make intercession for me (Rom. 8:33-39; Heb. 7:25; 10:14-18). Horatio G. Spafford got it right: “My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought! / My sins, not in part but the whole [all my sins – past, present and future], / Are nailed to his cross, and I bear them no more, / Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”’. And so on!

²¹ See, once again, my *Four*.

the wonder of God's free grace to sinners in Christ by his Spirit. And it is in the opening of his battery that he makes the glorious declaration which underlies our discussion here:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:1-11).

Having made that statement, the apostle then moves immediately into making application of his doctrine by way of command to the believer:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (Rom. 6:12-15).

And so Paul continues, arguing that the believer is free from sin, free from law and free from death, and illustrating it by the underlying principles of slavery and marriage (Rom. 6:16 – 7:6).

This is the first point about Romans 6. The opening of this chapter is not, primarily, a development of the apostle's argument. Rather, it marks a recapitulation and reinforcement of his doctrine in order to answer an objection. And linked with this,

having recapped his doctrine, and re-stated it even more powerfully, Paul then makes application of the truth to the believer's progressive sanctification.²²

The exodus motif, however, does illustrate the glories of the new covenant

Having said all that I have by way of caution, the exodus outline does, however, highlight some important aspects of the gospel. So much so (but bearing in mind the objection I have already flagged regarding his 'embodies and symbolises'), I fully accept Wright's summary of this portion of Romans – even to the extent of wishing I had penned it myself:

We could summarise the narrative sequence as follows: those who were enslaved in the 'Egypt' of sin... have been set free by the 'Red Sea' event of baptism, since in baptism they are joined to the Messiah, whose death and resurrection are accounted as theirs. They are now given as their guide... the Spirit, so that the Mosaic covenant has been replaced, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel said it would be, with the covenant written on the hearts of God's people by God's own Spirit.²³

Excellent – as long as, I say again, we do not forget my objection over 'embodies and symbolises'.

Indeed, I would strengthen the parallel between the exodus and the gospel by drawing on two other episodes recorded in the

²² By 'progressive sanctification', I mean the believer's imperfect (in this life) outworking of the perfect positional-sanctification he has in Christ by virtue of his union with Christ at his conversion. The sinner, on coming to faith, is united to Christ and is justified and positionally sanctified. Thus, in God's sight, in Christ he is accounted or made righteous, free of sin and condemnation, and perfectly separated unto God. (See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12). In his Christian life, he has to work out his perfection in Christ, and he will be moved to do so by the Spirit under the direction of Scripture; this is his progressive sanctification or holiness of life. But this, alas, is imperfect. The believer will only be absolutely sanctified in the eternal state. I will set out my arguments on all this in my forthcoming book on sanctification.

²³ Wright p29.

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biblical account of the exodus, two incidents which form links between the passover in Egypt and the crossing of the Jordan.

Take the passover:

When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony [of the passover]. And when your children ask you: 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them: 'It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians' (Ex. 12:25-27) see also Ex. 10:2; 13:8,14-15; Deut. 32:7; Ps. 78:6).

Now the crossing of the Jordan:

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua: 'Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight'. So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them: 'Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you: "What do these stones mean?" tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel for ever'. So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day... And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites: 'In the future when your descendants ask their fathers: "What do these stones mean?" tell them: "Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground". For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over.

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He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God' (Josh. 4:1-9,20-24).

What am I talking about? Notice the two questions, questions which would be asked in years to come by the children (and later descendants) of those who actually experienced the first passover and those who crossed the Jordan: 'What do you mean by this service?' and 'What do you mean by these stones?' That's the first link. Now look at the dates. The passover lamb had to be selected for the passover sacrifice, at the start of the process of deliverance, on the tenth day of the first month: 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household' (Ex. 12:2-3). And what about the crossing of the Jordan – that is, the completion of the deliverance? 'On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho' (Josh. 4:19). The tenth day of the first month in both cases. Remarkable! None of this was an accident. By the memorials, by the questions and by the dates, God was teaching the Israelites that their leaving Egypt and their entering Canaan were one and the same event in his eyes.

Now think about the new-covenant equivalent of all this. The sinner has to be brought out of Adam and brought into Christ; out of the flesh, into the Spirit; out of Satan's domain, into Christ's kingdom (Col. 1:13); out of bondage, into liberty; out of slavery, into rest. Notice how, in Romans 6:3-4, Paul telescopes the two events – the 'out of' and the 'into' – into one, speaking of believers in their dying with Christ and their rising with Christ. Actually, the apostle is clearly reminding them of what they already know, taking it for granted, arguing on that basis. I repeat the following extract:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of

the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:1-11).

The point is, the two aspects or parts to the sinner's experience of redemption – being taken out of Adam, and being brought into Christ; out of the flesh, into Christ; his death with Christ, and his resurrection with Christ – are one event. There is no 'intermediate' or 'limbo' state. It is either/or, mutually exclusive: all men are either in Adam or in Christ. And if we are in Christ, we are in him, in his death and resurrection, and, although the apostle does not state it here, we are with Christ in his ascension into heaven, seated with him in glory even now (Eph. 1:3; 2:6).

The physical leaving of the Hebrews from Egypt and their physical entering into Canaan could not have been one event, literally speaking, of course, but if they had not failed at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran (Num. 13 – 14), then, within the shortest possible time of their exodus from Egypt, the Hebrews would have entered the promised land. This was always God's purpose. As God had promised Abram, centuries before, when making his covenant with him:

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions... In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure... To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites (Gen. 15:13-21; see also Gen. 17:5-8; Acts 7:6).

As God promised: they will come out, and they will go in. And God kept his word – to the very day (Ex. 12:40-41; Gal. 3:17). If Israel had trusted God, obeyed his word, they would have come out of slavery and into rest in virtually one step.

In short, the exodus does illustrate the gospel, and, in particular, the believer's experience of redemption in Christ. And baptism is the pivot or hinge in that new-covenant experience of the believer.

Conclusion

Why have I been making such a song and dance about this? In part, because of N.T.Wright and his use – or, rather, mis-use or abuse – of the exodus motif in Romans. Baptism, as I have said – and here I agree with Wright – baptism is the hinge in Paul's argument in Romans 6, and baptism is the hinge, the pivot, the turning point, in the believer's individual experience. But the question above all which we must ask, and which we must answer – and answer biblically – is this: Which baptism are we speaking about? Going astray here leads to diabolical – even horrendously eternal – consequences. Wright is sure that water baptism is the hinge. And I am equally sure that Scripture shows that Wright is wrong.

Wright, in fact, is just the latest in a long line of teachers – stretching back over 1800 years – who have preached and taught that water baptism regenerates. The middle and later Fathers, the Papists, Luther and Calvin, the Tractarians, the advocates of the Federal Vision, Baptist Sacramentalists, and now N.T.Wright and others with him in the New Perspective, have all taught – and still teach – baptismal regeneration. Millions have been deceived, are being deceived, by this dreadful doctrine. So grim do I regard its harvest, I have done – and will continue to do – what I can to counter it. Having already, in my *The Hinge in Romans 1 – 8: A critique of N.T.Wright's view of Baptism and Conversion*, my *Infant Baptism Tested*, my *Baptism Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists*, and my *Conversion Ruined: The New Perspective and the Conversion of Sinners*, written a great many words on this vital matter, nevertheless I have published this article only to serve, as it were, to lay the cloth on the table in preparation for

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the meat; namely, a further work to expose the wrongness of baptismal regeneration in the light of Scripture.

Baptism in Romans

As I have shown elsewhere,¹ baptism is the hinge in Paul's argument in Romans.² Not only that; baptism is the crucial turning point in the believer's experience of redemption. It must be. After all, this is precisely the point Paul himself made. He clearly directed his readers to the importance of baptism:

Don't you know that all of us who were *baptised* into Christ Jesus were *baptised* into his death? We were therefore buried with him through *baptism* into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Baptism is the key, baptism is the vital step in the way a sinner is delivered from his ruin in Adam, and comes into all the good of the redemption accomplished by Christ in the new covenant. By our baptism we are united to Christ: in our baptism we die with Christ to sin, and in our baptism we are raised with Christ to everlasting life. Baptism is the crux, baptism is the hinge, baptism is the pivot, baptism is the biting point in spiritual experience. Without baptism we are still in Adam, still in the flesh, still in our sins, still under the wrath of God. With baptism, as a result of baptism, by baptism, we are in Christ, we are liberated from sin, death and law, and we are put beyond condemnation, possessed by the Spirit, having his witness with our spirit, freed from fear, made to be sons of God and made to feel it, and be certain of everlasting glory without any fear of separation from Christ. In saying this, all I have done is to paraphrase Romans 6 – 8. With baptism we are in Romans 6 – 8; without baptism we are still in Romans 1:18 – 3:20, we are still in our sins, under the wrath of God. Baptism, clearly, is the hinge upon which all turns. So said the apostle.

But what – or which – baptism are we talking about?

¹ See my 'Exodus in Romans'.

² For this article, I have drawn on my *Hinge* pp25-62.

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This is the great question! What baptism are we talking about? Do not, I plead with you, take this for granted. Do not say: ‘Baptism means baptism!’ – that is, it must be water baptism (even, for millions, it must be baby sprinkling). To go down that road is to read the Bible wearing the glasses of Christendom. The Bible shows us plainly that ‘baptism’ can mean something other than plunging in water (it never – never – means sprinkling with water). I remind you of some of the various ways in which Scripture speaks of baptism:

Jesus answered and said: ‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be *baptised* with the *baptism* that I am *baptised* with?’ They said to him: ‘We are able’. So he said to them: ‘You will indeed drink my cup, and be *baptised* with the *baptism* that I am *baptised* with; but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by my Father’ (Matt. 20:22-23; Mark 10:38-39, NKJV).

I have a *baptism* to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! (Luke 12:50).

They were all *baptised* into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10:2).

None of these speak of water baptism, and yet ‘baptism’ is the word used.

Getting back to Romans 6: with this baptism – the baptism Paul spoke of – having had this baptism, all is well; without this baptism, all could not be more unwell. If I may take the words of Christ in John 3:3-8 and accommodate them (but it’s not really an accommodation, as I will show):

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is baptised... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is baptised. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying: ‘You must be baptised’. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone baptised.

The question is: Which baptism are we talking about? I say ‘which’, because there are two candidates – two baptisms which are suggested as the key step in the believer’s experience of

redemption. These two baptisms are water baptism and spiritual baptism. Both are spoken of in Scripture.

Because I want to keep this article in bounds, and since I have explored these two baptisms elsewhere,³ I will take the point for granted and move on: there is a water baptism and there is a spiritual baptism. We must not confuse or collate the two. Many do, with calamitous effect.⁴

The question is: Which baptism is spoken of in Romans 6:3-4? Is it water baptism or spiritual baptism? Whichever it is, it is effectual. What is more, it must be spiritual baptism (even if – if, I stress – water is involved) for it brings the sinner into Christ. The question then comes down to this: Is it water baptism which produces spiritual baptism, or is it spiritual baptism with no thought of water? Enormous consequences hang on the answer.

In this article, I want to explore N.T.Wright's position on this since he is the foremost advocate of the New Perspective and, as such, is having enormous influence.

Wright was unequivocal: Paul is speaking of water baptism. And we know what Wright understood by 'baptism' in this context – that is, water baptism – and by its significance, what it 'embodies and symbolises': water baptism unites the one baptised to Christ. In what follows, while there is much chaff, there is some wheat:

Membership of the church⁵ begins with a single action which speaks dramatically of what believing and belonging is all about: baptism... We ought to know the story by now. Jews, ancient and modern, have told it every year and in graphic detail: the story of how God rescued them from Egypt. He brought them through the Red Sea and led them through the wilderness into the promised land: through the water to freedom.

³ See, for instance, my *Hinge* pp27-30; *Infant, Baptist*.

⁴ Many Reformed teachers, past and present, not excluding John Calvin, the Westminster Confession, the advocates of the Federal Vision, as well as Baptist Sacramentalists, hold to baptismal regeneration by water (see my *Hinge* pp29-30; *Infant* pp8,38-39,48-65,150-154; *Baptist*).

⁵ Church? Membership of *Christ*! This is what Paul asserts in Rom. 6:3-4.

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The story itself began, interestingly, with the leader, Moses, being rescued as a little boy from the reedy edge of the Nile River, after his parents had placed him there in a waterproof basket rather than kill him as they had been ordered to do. Moses had to go through (on a small scale) the rescue-through-water which God would accomplish through him later on. After Moses' death, it happened again: Joshua led the people through the Jordan River and into the promised land at last.

These stories look back even further. Creation itself took place, according to Genesis 1, when God's great wind or breath or Spirit brooded like a dove over the waters, and when God separated the waters into different places and called dry land to appear. Creation itself, you might say, began with an exodus, a baptism: through the water to new life.

So we shouldn't be surprised when we find that one of the best-known Jewish renewal movements took shape as a new-exodus movement, and a crossing-the-Jordan movement. Jesus' cousin John believed it was his calling to get people ready for the long-awaited moment when Israel's God would fulfil his ancient promises. He called people out into the Judean wilderness to be baptised (the word means literally 'plunged')⁶ into the Jordan River, confessing their sins: through the water into God's new covenant. They were to be the purified people, the new-covenant people, the people ready for their God to come and deliver them. Jesus himself submitted to John's baptism. He was identifying with those he had come to rescue, fulfilling the covenant plan of his Father. And as he came up from the water, God's Spirit descended on him like a dove, with a voice from heaven declaring that he was God's true Son, Israel's Messiah, the king. Jesus saw his kingdom-movement as starting with that symbolic new-exodus⁷ action.

But he also saw it pointing to the action with which his ministry would reach its climax. He spoke on one occasion about having 'a baptism to be baptised with' – and it became clear that he was referring to his own death. As we saw earlier, he chose passover, the great Jewish exodus festival, as the moment to act symbolically to challenge the authorities, knowing what was bound to happen next.

⁶ An excellent admission by an infant baptiser, a bishop in the Church of England which sprinkles babies.

⁷ I fail to see the allusion here.

Jesus' own baptism and his carefully planned last supper both point back to the original exodus (the coming-through-the-water moment), point behind that to the original creation itself, and finally point on to Jesus' death and resurrection as the new defining reality, the moment of new covenant, new creation. And to achieve that renewal it was necessary to go, not just through the water and out the other side, but through a deeper flood altogether. All the multiple layers of meaning that were already present in baptism were now to be re-centred on the event of Jesus' death and resurrection: through the water into God's new world.

That is why, from the earliest Christian sources we possess, Christian baptism is linked not just to Jesus' own baptism, not just to the exodus and the first creation, but to Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul, in one of his earliest letters, speaks of being 'crucified with the Messiah' and coming through into a new life; and in his greatest work (the letter to Rome) he explains that in baptism itself we die 'with the Messiah' and come through to share his risen life. The spectacular, unique events at the heart of the Christian story happen to us, not just at the end of our own lives and beyond (when we die physically and, eventually, when we rise again), but while we are continuing to live in the present time: through the water into the new life of belonging to Jesus.

I break in to say that I agree with Wright here. The resurrection in Romans 6:3-4 is the believer's experience now. The apostle is not referring to the final resurrection.

To let Wright continue:

That is why, from very early on,⁸ Christian baptism was seen as the mode of entry into the Christian family, and why it was associated with the idea of being 'born again'. Of course, not everyone who has been through water-baptism has actually known and experienced for themselves the saving love of God in Christ sweeping through and transforming their lives.⁹ At

⁸ Wright was referring to the Fathers here – or he ought to have been, if he wasn't!

⁹ This is the place where all sacramentalists – apart from those who are prepared to say that using water absolutely does produce the regeneration – draw back. Yet the texts they are referring to all state unequivocally that the baptism in question infallibly joins to Christ. Without exception, all who are baptised in the sense meant by the

various points Paul has to remind his readers that they have a responsibility to make real in their own lives the truth of what happened to them in baptism.¹⁰ But he doesn't say that baptism doesn't matter, or that it isn't real. People who have been baptised can choose to reject the faith,¹¹ just as the children of Israel could rebel against YHWH after having come through the Red Sea. Paul makes that point in 1 Corinthians 10 and elsewhere. But they can't get unbaptised: God will regard them as disobedient family members rather than outsiders.¹²

In particular, we can now see why Christian baptism involves being plunged into water (or having it poured over you)¹³ in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The point is that the story which baptism tells is God's own story, from creation and covenant to new covenant and new creation, with Jesus in the middle of it and the Spirit brooding over it. In baptism,¹⁴ you are brought into that story, to be an actor in the play which God is writing and producing. And once you're on [the] stage, you're part of the action. You can get the lines wrong. You can do your best to spoil the play. But the story is moving forward, and it would be far better to understand where it's going and how to

apostles are joined to Christ. Why do these sacramentalists dilute the texts? Is it because experience shows the shakiness of their claims?

¹⁰ Where?

¹¹ Not those baptised in the sense meant by the apostles.

¹² This is where the rubber hits the road; this is where we meet the disastrous consequences of sacramentalism. According to Wright, those who are water baptised – or sprinkled – may show that they are unregenerate, but they are still in 'the family'. As I wrote in my *Infant* (p98): 'No wonder the term "lapsed Christians" has to be invented to cope with this body of so-called "unregenerate Christians". What is an unregenerate Christian? Lapsed? They never were Christians in the first place! But they have been repeatedly assured throughout their childhood that they are. They have been received and regarded as such. And all the time they were anything but. This dreadful – literally, full of dread – possibility is reason enough to abandon the practice of infant baptism'. The equivalent could be said *of* those baptised by Baptist sacramentalists; and it should be said *to* them!

¹³ Oh?

¹⁴ Wright, I remind you, meant water baptism.

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learn your lines¹⁵ and join in the drama through the water to become part of God's purpose for the world.¹⁶

That's plain enough! But is it right? Is the apostle speaking of water baptism in Romans 6? Wright had more to say on the matter, broadening it. Speaking of water baptism, he asked:

What has baptism to do with justification by faith, the promises to Abraham, and the revelation of God's righteousness, as set out in Romans 3:21 – 4:24?¹⁷

And he answered his question thus:

It was always dubious, in view of the combination of the same themes in Galatians 3 – 4, especially Galatians 3:23 – 4:7, to set apart faith and justification on the one hand, and baptism and the Spirit on the other... Baptism and Spirit speak of a new covenant, new exodus... constituting the liberated ones as God's true people, sets before them the inheritance to which they must now make their way, and promises them the presence of God, in the person of the Spirit, to guide and strengthen them on the journey.¹⁸

Again:

Romans 6 is quite remarkable, when you think about it. Within twenty-five years of the crucifixion, Paul had already worked

¹⁵ A highly significant statement. 'Conversion', in Wright's scheme, has been replaced by becoming 'an actor in the play' and 'learning your lines'. Coming (much) closer to home, there is a great deal of 'coaching' sinners into 'faith' these days. Those who run introductory courses (and I am thinking of other courses, far better courses, than Alpha – but not excluding it) and Bible studies for unbelievers ought, at the very least, to be aware of the exceedingly serious consequences of spoon-feeding them so that they can 'learn their lines', and so be counted converts.

¹⁶ N.T.Wright: 'Believing and Belonging' (ntwrightpage.com).

¹⁷ N.T.Wright: 'New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3 – 8' in Sven K.Soderlund & N.T.Wright (editors): *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honour of Gordon D.Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1999, p27.

¹⁸ Wright: 'New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3 – 8' p35.

out[!]¹⁹ this astonishingly deep and detailed theology of what it means to go through the waters of baptism, linking it to the exodus, to creation, to new creation, and in particular to Jesus' own death and resurrection. Therefore, says Paul... Jesus' dying and rising... happened to us in baptism. Paul doesn't hold back here: he doesn't hedge and say 'as if'.²⁰ He simply says: 'You died with Christ in baptism and you were raised with him through the waters into the new life of belonging to Jesus'... If you've been baptised, you have in fact died with Christ and risen with him... Baptism is the ground on which we stand linked to Jesus.²¹

Here we have it. This is Wright's case. Baptism, water baptism, is the hinge of Romans 6. The sinner is brought into Christ, into redemption, into liberty through dying with Christ and rising with him – and all this is accomplished by water baptism. But while I agree that in such passages as Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:23 – 4:7 (and 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Peter 3:21) it is wrong to divorce baptism and the spiritual benefits of the new covenant, we must be crystal clear as to which baptism we are speaking of. Going astray here constitutes a disaster of enormous magnitude.

Here we reach the critical divide. Many, while striving with might and main to avoid the sacramental,²² nevertheless think that Paul was speaking of water baptism – but as a symbol of what has happened spiritually in the believer's experience. Others, and this includes Wright, are sure that the apostle was referring to water baptism as a sacrament; in other words, regeneration by water baptism, baptismal regeneration. My position is that, while I fully accept that water baptism is a symbol of the believer's inward spiritual experience, the baptism Paul was speaking of is

¹⁹ Paul did not 'work out his theology! He was given God's theology by revelation! See 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3; 2 Cor. 12:1-6; Gal. 1:1,11-20; 2:2; Eph. 3:3,5.

²⁰ I agree totally; there is no 'as if' here, none at all, not a suggestion of it.

²¹ 'N.T.Wright on Word and Sacraments: Baptism' (downloaded from reformedworship.org).

²² That is, the erroneous notion that spiritual grace is conveyed (or made effective) by an outward act.

spiritual baptism – with no thought whatsoever of water. He was not speaking of a symbol in Romans 6:3-4, nor was he speaking of a sacramental water baptism, but he was speaking of spiritual baptism by the secret operation of the Holy Spirit.

I will, however, look at all three. First, water baptism as a symbol.

Water baptism in Romans 6 as a symbol?

This is the view adopted by many Baptists.²³ While they reject the second approach – sacramentalism²⁴ – they say that in Romans 6:3-4 Paul was speaking of water baptism as a representation of conversion.

Of the three possibilities, this has the least merit. The apostle was *not* speaking of a representation. There's not the slightest suggestion of it in the text. The apostle was stating a fact, a reality. He was speaking of the substance, not the shadow or sign. Paul does not here call baptism *a picture of* or *a symbol of* union with Christ, or say that it *represents* that union. He says that baptism *unites* to Christ. He states it categorically: baptism unites to Christ and brings all the benefits of Christ's redemption to the one baptised.

The context is all important. It determines the meaning. I am referring to the apostle's lead-up to Romans 6. His argument in the previous chapters – in itself – rules out the possibility of his speaking of water baptism as a representation.

Consider the immediate context of Romans 6:3-4

The notion that Romans 6 is to do with baptism as a symbol fails to come to grips with the dynamic of Paul's argument. It is incredible to think that the apostle, having, in Romans 5, set out the spiritual *reality* of the headship of Christ, would take his teaching further by talking about a *symbol* of it. Believers are in

²³ I include all those who baptise only believers, not only those who are known as 'Baptists'.

²⁴ Sacramentalists believe that grace is conveyed (or made effective) by an outward act. In terms of baptism, they believe that when water is applied to someone, something spiritual and inward happens to that person: he receives grace, is regenerated, or whatever.

Christ (Rom. 5:12-21); they are in him by baptism – they died, were buried, rose, ascended and were seated in glory (Eph. 1:3; 2:6) with and in him (Rom. 6:3-4). Throughout this section of Romans (Rom. 3:21 – 8:39), Paul is speaking of something which was determined in eternity in God's decree, was accomplished in time with Christ in his death, resurrection and ascension, is made actual in the believer's experience when he comes to faith and repentance, and will be fully realised in the last day when Christ returns.²⁵ Paul is not talking about a symbol. A symbol (in Romans 6) – after talking about the reality (Romans 5)? The suggestion, in light of the context, is incredible. The reality of the believer's experience is a cardinal point in the apostle's argument.

Indeed, it is stronger than that. As we have seen, Paul wrote Romans 6 because of an objection made to his teaching in Romans 3, 4 and 5. He opened Romans 6 in this way: 'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?' 'By no means!' he thundered. 'We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection' (Rom. 6:1-5). And so on. Now... if we are to believe that the baptism in Romans 6 is water baptism as a symbol or representation of the spiritual reality, we have to believe that Paul defended and enforced his argument concerning the believer's union with Christ by reference to... to what? To a symbol! Really? The notion is risible. To try to defend such majestic doctrine by a symbol is not to defend it, but to degrade it. And as such it is too much to swallow.

Douglas J.Moo set out the representational theme with unimpeachable clarity: 'It is clear that Paul... refers to water baptism... Baptism... functions as shorthand for the conversion

²⁵ See my *Eternal*.

experience as a whole'.²⁶ In other words, according to Moo, Paul is supposed to have said something like:

Don't you know that all of us who were *regenerated, convicted, brought to repentance and faith and thus* into Christ Jesus, *and were afterwards water-baptised as a symbol of it*, were *regenerated, convicted, brought to repentance and faith* into his death, *having been afterwards water-baptised as a symbol of it?* We were therefore buried with him through *regeneration, conviction, repentance and faith* into death, *having afterwards being water-baptised as a symbol of it*, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

This introduction – this insertion, intrusion – of the notion of a symbol, a rite, into the flow of Paul's discourse at this point simply fails to match the context.

Moreover, in light of what he said in Romans 4, Paul could not possibly speak, in Romans 6, of a rite or ceremony. To do so, makes the rite, the symbol, if not the climax, then at least the hinge, of the apostle's argument, whereas Paul was clearly making union with Christ that climax or hinge. For him to *rise* to a symbol would be ridiculous!

Let me explore this a little. In Romans 4, Paul shows that Abraham was justified before he underwent circumcision, and four centuries before the giving of the law. This can only mean – as Paul made clear – that neither circumcision or the law can make any contribution to the sinner coming to faith and hence to justification. Not only that. Under no circumstances should anyone try to insert any rite or ceremony into this vital step. We may broaden the point: under no circumstances should anyone try to insert any rite or any ceremony whatsoever into the bringing of a sinner out of Adam into Christ, neither should he make any suggestion which might be construed as giving credence to such a notion. Talking about water baptism, even as a symbol, runs that serious risk. It should not be done. Listen to Paul, speaking of justification by faith:

²⁶ Douglas J.Moo: *The Epistle to the Romans*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1996, p355.

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.²⁷ So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all (Rom. 4:9-16).

Consequently, if the baptism in Romans 6 is water baptism as a symbol, then we have to believe that Paul, writing so strongly against circumcision or the law preceding Abraham's justification (in chapter 4), then proceeds to speak of the union of a believer with Christ in the new covenant in terms of the symbolism of the ceremony of water baptism. Incredible! Even to introduce the note of a symbol, even with Moo's qualifications, diminishes the apostle's argument to such an extent that it beggars belief.

In short, the representational scheme is out of the question – almost an irrelevance in the context – adding nothing to the apostle's argument, only weakening one of the most majestic of all the apostle's statements on conversion, and, furthermore, exposing his readers to think of the fatal and erroneous doctrine of baptismal regeneration, regeneration by water baptism. What a toxic combination!

²⁷ For the seal, see my *Infant* pp137-154. Abraham is the only man ever to be circumcised as a seal. Baptism is not a seal. Certainly, infant baptism is not!

And this leads me on to the next suggestion; namely, that Paul, in Romans 6:3-4, was speaking of baptismal regeneration, regeneration by the administration of water.²⁸

Water baptism in Romans 6 as a sacrament?

This has the merit, at least, of realising that the context absolutely rules out, as being woefully inadequate, the notion of a symbol in Romans 6. We are, most decidedly, thinking of a baptism that is effectual. But, granting that, in light of Romans 4 how can anybody think that a rite – water baptism – can regenerate and therefore lead to justification? Circumcision couldn't. The law couldn't. And yet, we are told, water can! Are we to believe that Paul was teaching that water baptism actually regenerates a sinner, and unites him to Christ: that by water baptism a sinner dies with Christ, is buried with Christ, is raised, ascended and seated with Christ?

Surely not! For this, too, is utterly ruled out by the context. It suffers from the same flaw as the previous suggestion; namely, that if Paul in Romans 6 was talking about water baptism, instead of ascending in his doctrine in this chapter, he was actually descending from the previous lofty heights to... to a rite – a sacramental rite, let it be said, in the eyes of sacramentalists – but a rite, all the same. And a rite administered by a fellow-sinner! To speak of salvation by grace through faith, of union with Christ from eternity to eternity (with not the slightest whiff of a suggestion of water baptism), as he did in chapters 3, 4 and 5, and then to descend to a rite – without the slightest intimation that he was thinking in such terms – is stretching credibility far beyond all reasonable limits, however elastic those limits. It is ludicrous to think that Paul would leave his ever-rising track of Romans 3, 4 and 5, and degrade the force of his argument in order to descend to a discussion of water baptism – when, as I have shown, he was tackling a direct challenge to his argument in

²⁸ Sacramental baptism inevitably leads to sacerdotalism – the notion that a priest has the power to administer water and so regenerate. And this inevitably leads to the idea of baptising babies at the earliest possible moment. See my *Infant* p238.

those chapters. The suggestion is as risible as the first. Whatever else Paul was doing in Romans 6, he was further ascending in his argument – not descending. The punch-line can hardly be a rite, can it?

But, if the sacramentalist continues to insist that Paul was speaking of water baptism in Romans 6, then the inevitable has to be faced. The context, the apostle's argument – its very dynamic – means that water baptism plays a vital part in uniting a sinner to Christ. No! That's too weak! It means far more than that! If the sacramentalist is right, water baptism plays the clinching part in uniting a sinner to Christ. Water baptism is the *sine qua non*. Preaching the gospel, faith, repentance... yes... have their part (Romans 3 – 5), of course they do, but these only lead to water baptism (Romans 6). The truth is, it is water baptism which actually unites the sinner to Christ. Water baptism is the climax of the gospel in its application to the sinner. Water baptism is the hinge, the vital node, in this 'critical path'; water baptism, not repentant faith in Christ.

Romans 6:3-4 is not unique, of course. There are several other passages which speak of baptism in similar terms: 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Peter 3:21. These passages, like Romans 6:3-4, all make huge claims for the power and efficacy of the baptism in question. We dare not minimise or water down (no pun intended!) those claims. That must be the golden rule here. Let the apostles state their case and make their claims. And let us accept them! Whatever the baptism in question is, it does not *represent* the grace spoken of; it *conveys* it, it *produces* the grace spoken of. And all who have received the baptism in question, without exception receive the grace spoken of. There must be no talk such as: 'All who are baptised are not necessarily joined to Christ', even though this is precisely how most sacramentalists do talk! Take the Westminster Confession Chapter 28, for instance, which, when talking of water baptism, declares:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of

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regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving [being given?] up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life... Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptised. Yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it... that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.

As you can see, reader, what the Confession gives with one hand, it (ineffectively, vainly) tries to take away with the other. For, although 'grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto [baptism]... that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated', 'yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto'! And, don't forget, it's what the people take away from the font that counts. If their metaphysical teachers are not certain about all the ins and outs, they themselves *are* sure that 'something good has been done to the baby'. The message is plain: grace is conferred in baptism.

Now the various biblical passages sacramentalists are so fond of quoting – and repeating at the ceremony – all say, categorically, that grace does come through the baptism, always comes through the baptism, so that all who are baptised are in Christ. And there is never an exception in the pages of the New Testament. Some sacramentalists have the courage of their convictions, and assert all that are baptised are regenerate. Most parents who go through the system are pretty sure of it. Why can't all sacramentalists say the same?

Let us call a spade a spade: we are speaking of *baptismal regeneration*. Whether it's Rome, Anglicans or Presbyterians or whatever, we are talking about baptismal regeneration. And Romans 6:1-11 is the principal passage for the doctrine. That is what Paul teaches here – baptismal regeneration, baptismal union

to Christ in his death and resurrection. Sinners by baptism are united to Christ in his death and resurrection. Sinners by baptism are taken out of the flesh and brought into the Spirit, taken out of Adam and brought into Christ, out of the realm of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. This is a fact. There is no doubt about it.

As a consequence, no words can be too strong to describe the place and importance of the baptism in question. And if this is water baptism, then water baptism it is! Water baptism ought to be our theme; water baptism ought to be the high point of our gospel exhortations, when we address sinners with the gospel. Water baptism! Water baptism! We should hear it everywhere. Do we? In Scripture, I mean.

We do not! I will not set out my arguments here (not that they are unimportant), having already done so elsewhere,²⁹ but the idea that the New Testament is constantly and repeatedly calling sinners to water baptism as the great essential, or is reminding believers of their water baptism when teaching for their assurance³⁰ or progressive sanctification,³¹ or helping them to face temptation, trials or death, is without foundation. There is no evidence of it whatsoever.³² Taking that wider context for granted here, I move on to the point at issue.

²⁹ See, for instance, my *Hinge* pp44-56.

³⁰ What need would there be for the witness of the Spirit? All any doubting believer would have to do would be to dig out his baptismal certificate. As for assurance, see my *Assurance*; my 'New-Covenant Assurance', 'The Spirit's Continual Witness to the Believer', 'The Spirit Witnesses to... What?' (all under the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

³¹ The sinner, on coming to faith, is united to Christ and is justified and positionally sanctified. Thus, in God's sight, in Christ he is accounted or made righteous, free of sin and condemnation, and perfectly separated unto God. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12. In his Christian life, he has to work out his perfection in Christ, and he will be moved to do so by the Spirit under the direction of Scripture; this is his progressive sanctification or holiness of life. But this, alas, is imperfect. The believer will only be absolutely sanctified in the eternal state. I will set out my arguments on all this in my forthcoming book on sanctification.

³² There is plenty of evidence of such things in sacramental literature, however.

The baptism in Romans 6:3-4

Romans 6:3-4 speaks of baptism, of a baptism which accomplishes much. As I have shown, this cannot be water baptism as a symbol or representation of the believer's spiritual experience. While water baptism is a symbol of that experience, in Romans 6 Paul is not talking about a symbol. Neither is he talking about water baptism as a sacrament. The New Testament does not warrant the notion of a sacrament, and there isn't a drop of water in Romans 6. In short, the baptism of Romans 6:3-4 is spiritual baptism. That is all it can be.

By way of providing further support for this, let me return to that broader point I made in my 'Exodus in Romans'; namely, that we must not let any comparison between the Hebrews' exodus and the gospel experience of redemption blur, in the slightest, the contrast between the two covenants; in particular, over this matter of baptism. Many, however, do confuse the old and new covenants at this point, with disastrous consequences.³³

The old covenant dealt in physical and external matters: in the exodus, under the old covenant, the Hebrews sheltered under physical blood on a physical lintel, they physically ate the lamb, they physically crossed the sea, they came to the physical Mount Sinai, they were given an external law written on stone tablets, they entered a physical land, and so on.

The new covenant, in contrast (2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 12:18-24, for instance), is a spiritual, internal covenant. While Christ died physically, and shed his blood physically, even so, we appropriate Christ and all his benefits by faith, we come spiritually to Mount Zion, Christ's law is written upon our hearts by the Spirit, we enter by faith into spiritual rest in Christ, and so on. Thus, while the exodus (that is, the physical) does, to a certain extent, illustrate the gospel experience of redemption (that is, the spiritual), the two must not be collated or confused. Alas, the distinction in the covenants, the distinction between the physical and the spiritual, is not always maintained.

³³ See my *Infant*.

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The Jews got it wrong. In response to Christ, they made the crass mistake (or was it deliberate?) of conflating the physical and the spiritual over a parallel issue:

Jesus declared: 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe... My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day'. At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said: 'I am the bread that came down from heaven'... [Jesus said:] 'I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world'. Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Jesus said to them: 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live for ever' (John 6:35-58).

The physical/spiritual principle, which was in play here, could not be clearer. And it applies to the exodus/redemption parallel. At the very least, this makes it extremely likely that the Hebrews' water 'baptism' with Moses in the sea (1 Cor. 10:2) is replaced by spiritual baptism in the individual's experience of redemption (Rom. 3:3-4).

I go further: it makes it certain. Let me quote the apostle's words to the Corinthians in full: 'They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Cor. 10:2). In other words, the Israelites were joined to Moses in the cloud and the sea, the cloud and the water. Believers are united to Christ (Rom. 6:3-4) in the spiritual equivalent of the cloud and the water. The

question is: Is it fair, it is right, to ‘spiritualise’ the cloud, and leave the ‘water’ unchanged as water? Even in the exodus, the important factor was not the physical but the spiritual. As the apostle goes on to say: ‘They all ate the same *spiritual* food and drank the same *spiritual* drink; for they drank from the *spiritual* rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ’ (1 Cor. 10:3-4). The reality, the equivalent in the new covenant of the manna, the water from the rock, and the water of the sea, is spiritual throughout. Hence, the baptism in Romans 6:3-4 is not water baptism, but spiritual.

And if this is not convincing enough, consider John the Baptist’s testimony:

I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:11-12).

I draw attention to these words: ‘He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’.

What am I saying? The cloud, the water, the fire are either physical or spiritual. I defy anybody to maintain the physical when speaking of fire. The same goes, therefore, for the water. We are talking about spiritual baptism – not water baptism.

And as such there’s no quibble about it, no qualification: all the elect, at God’s decreed time, are baptised into Christ by the Spirit, all of them are regenerated, all of them are brought to faith, and all of them are thus converted; all of them – without exception.

And this is true for all the following Pauline passages:

All of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Rom. 6:3-4).

We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (1 Cor. 12:13).

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You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the flesh, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ (Col. 2:1-13).³⁴

All this can only be said of spiritual baptism. Water has nothing to do with it.

Thus, while the idea that the baptism of Romans 6 is symbolic constitutes a diversion from the glory of the passage, the sacramental idea ruins it – and those who adopt it. Spiritual baptism, regeneration, is the great need for us all.

As Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.³⁵ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying: 'You must be born again'. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8).

Conclusion

Romans 6 teaches that all who are baptised are united to Christ, and receive all the benefits of being in union with him. All who are baptised by the Spirit are united to Christ in his death and resurrection, and are everlastingly saved. Will sacramentalists say the same for water? Will they live with (and let people die with) the consequences? Are they prepared to face (on the judgment day) those whom they sacramentally baptised with their

³⁴ Peter said the same in 1 Pet. 3:18-22.

³⁵ The 'water' in John 3:3-8 has no more to do with literal water (hence, baptism) than the 'fire' of Matt. 3:11-12 has to do with literal roasting (see my Baptist pp189-195).

sacramental interpretation of Romans 6 ringing in their ears – and yet who were never converted?³⁶ The scriptural position is this: all who are baptised by the Spirit are everlastingly saved, and all who are not baptised by the Spirit are everlastingly damned.

May I return for a moment to the apostle's death-burial-resurrection theme of baptism in Romans 6? Note the question he asked his readers: 'Don't you know?' (Rom. 6:3). Clearly, the idea was self-evident to them. This question, by itself, shows that I have not been wasting my time – or yours, reader – tilting at windmills.³⁷ Every believer must be able to respond to the apostle: 'Yes, I do know. It is a treasure and a joy to me. I will never forget it'. Never forget what? 'That by God's grace, by the power of the Spirit, I have been regenerated, brought to trust Christ, united to him, so that all my sin is his, and all his righteousness is mine'.³⁸ And how is that accomplished? By baptism? No! By faith: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith' (Eph. 2:8). As Paul and Silas replied to the jailer when he asked how he could be saved: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31). For, as the apostle assured the Romans: 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Rom. 10:13). And so on. It is always the same: believe and be saved. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God' (John 3:16-18, NKJV). Unbelief is damning; faith is saving. Not

³⁶ Speaking for myself, I am prepared to face any person I had responsibility for baptising (in a non-sacramental way). I hesitate – I realise it is a very serious claim. But whether or not I am prepared to face the consequences of my action, face them I will have to. What made me hesitate was my experience as a young believer (and a young man), when, as the one appointed to carry out the baptising, I was placed in an invidious position by those who should have known better.

³⁷ That is, fighting with imaginary error.

³⁸ See the earlier note on assurance.

Baptism in Romans

a mention of baptism! No wonder Paul did not put water baptism at the top of his agenda. Indeed (1 Cor. 1:13-17), it was not even on his agenda:

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

What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5).

And that surely must be the pattern for all believers today in their addresses to sinners. In saying this, of course, I am not for a moment decrying water baptism, or saying that it is unimportant. Not at all! But I am, at this time, determined to put water baptism into its scriptural context, and rescue it from its ruination by Christendom. I do so because I want to help put a stop to the massive hurt that baptismal regeneration has done to millions, and is still doing to this very day. Christendom advocates sacramental water baptism; Scripture does not.

Reader, have you been regenerated, come through repentance and saving faith to trust the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation? Do you submit to Christ as Lord? If so, following your faith, have you been water baptised – plunged in water – in obedience to your Lord and Master? If not, you must! Jesus commands you – as a believer – to be baptised:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Of course, if you do not trust the Saviour, God commands you to repent (Acts 17:30), and he invites you – pleads with you, beseeches you – to trust his Son, now (2 Cor. 5:18 – 6:20), promising you that if you do call upon Christ, he will save you (Luke 18:13-14; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-13). But, as Christ said – and said twice in virtually one breath: ‘Unless you repent, you...

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will... perish... Unless you repent, you... will... perish' (Luke 13:3-5). What about baptism? We will talk about that only if – when – you come to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, turning from your sin, and trusting him for your salvation.

So come to Christ, now.

Conversion: The Great Necessity

It was said of Robert Murray M'Cheyne that when he preached you felt 'as if he was dyin' a'most to have ye converted'; that is, he wanted your conversion, there and then. That is what you felt. And you were right. M'Cheyne wasn't play-acting, putting on a show: your conversion *was* his consuming passion. He wanted you to be convicted of your sin, repent, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting him to wash you in his blood and clothe you in his righteousness, and so have peace with God. To crown it all, M'Cheyne wanted this so badly you felt he would almost have died to get it.¹

'A bit OTT, isn't it?'

Not at all! Listen to Paul, in words which surely defy our ability to understand or explain:

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:1-3).

Don't you think that it was Paul's example that gave M'Cheyne the stimulus for his eloquence?

We can take it further. What did the apostle so earnestly desire? What was it that drove him to such lengths? 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved' (Rom. 10:1). Saved! Converted! That's what he wanted: Jews to be saved. And not just his fellow-Jews. As he told the Colossians: 'Christ... we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to his working which works in me mightily' (Col. 1:27-28). This is what Paul

¹ For this article, I have lightly edited my *Conversion* pp9-17, retaining references to 'this book' or 'volume', *etc.* For this present piece, of course, read 'article'.

was after. Sinners to be saved! Sinners to be converted! This is what he sought so earnestly.

Now, wherever did Paul, in his turn, learn this vehemence and desire? Where did he get it? From whom did he learn it? He got it from God himself!

He met it, first of all, when Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus, and converted him, the Lord immediately spelling out his life's work from that time on, both as a believer and an apostle (Acts 26:15-18). I shall return to this. For now, I simply ask: at which school did Paul enrol in order to learn how to carry out this great commission from the Lord Christ?

Well, we know that he did not go to any man's seminary (Gal. 1:16-24). No! He went to the school of Scripture; that is where he learned to preach. It was there, when he was alone in Arabia, that God, by his Spirit, showed him how to preach. Not only that, the Lord gave him the grace to do it. And God used Scripture (the Old Testament) to teach the apostle.

Paul, of course, by his deep and long-standing acquaintance with the Old Testament, had known the book of Isaiah like the back of his hand. But now that he was regenerate, for the first time he was able to read the prophet's words with a true understanding. The veil had been lifted (2 Cor. 3:15-16); God had shined into his heart (2 Cor. 4:6). With open eyes, and an enlightened mind, Paul could now grasp what the prophet was talking about. He saw how God, picturing himself as a man, went about addressing sinners. And meditating upon that revelation, Paul was taught by the Spirit to go and do likewise.

What exactly did Paul discover, and where did he discover it in Isaiah? Listen to God himself speaking, first through the prophet, and then as quoted by Paul. Let the Almighty's words sink in. This is God speaking to men; God, I say, speaking to men, pleading with men as sinners: 'I have stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people' (Isa. 65:2), he declared. Staggering, isn't it? But so said God. Here we have the Almighty pleading with men, pleading with rebellious sinners! Paul, moved by this tremendous thought, quoted the words in question when writing to the Romans: 'All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people' (Rom. 10:21). Note

the sort of sinners God pleads with: the rebellious, the disobedient, the contrary. Incredible!

Clearly, this amazing revelation, newly-understood by the apostle, was etched deep in his mind and heart. So much so, he could never forget it. He was never the same again. From that moment on, he was a driven man, obsessed with this principle: 'Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!' (1 Cor. 9:16). It was this that compelled him throughout the rest of his life, as he never tired of letting people know:

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Rom. 1:14-16).

Christ... [sent] me to preach the gospel... not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified... 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 Cor. 1:17 – 2:2).

For 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 towards God, but under law towards 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).

If ever a man lived out his dictum, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ', Paul was that man.

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It was no flash in the pan. As he was bidding his final farewell at Miletus, and knowing that imprisonment and worse awaited him, even then the apostle was still determined to go on pleading with sinners for their conversion. In his time, ‘Jesus [had] resolutely set out [set his face, NKJV] for Jerusalem’ (Luke 9:51, NIV). Paul now did the same, as he made clear to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:22-24).

Not only that. Throughout his ministry, Paul preached the gospel in the same way as God himself did; he was a ‘man of God’ indeed. Addressing Agrippa, for instance, the apostle’s words were all the more poignant by reason of the chains hanging from his wrists as he stretched out his arms to the man, looking for his conversion (Acts 26:1,29). Like his God, he stretched out his hands to the unconverted. And, like his God, he was moved in his heart towards sinners.

And that’s not all. Paul could call upon his own experience of Christ, could he not? Had not the Lord Jesus met him on the Damascus road? Had not the risen and exalted Lord shown him his power, along with his mercy, grace and love? Paul certainly saw it that way (Gal. 1:11-16; 1 Tim. 1:11-16). He never forgot how the Son of God had dealt with him in that encounter. So much so, when he in his turn confronted sinners with the gospel, he did it with all his being, preaching Christ to them – stressing Christ’s power to save, and offering sinners the same mercy, grace and love of Christ that he himself had found.

Moreover, he had the moving example of the Lord Jesus who, when he was on earth, had been a preacher. In writing his Gospel, Mark, introducing Christ to us, recorded that ‘Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”’ (Mark 1:14-15).

And how did the Son of God preach? Paul discovered it in the book of Proverbs – wisdom personified standing in the public square, calling out to men (Prov. 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6). Now regenerate, the apostle could see that this portrays none other than Christ in the new covenant (1 Cor. 1:24,30). Wisdom (Christ), calling to men, freely offers them all his benefits, pleading with them to receive them. They refuse! Wisdom responds, spelling

out the dreadful consequences of their refusal: ‘But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand...’ (Prov. 1:24, NIV). Do not miss the vital point. Note how Christ pleads with men, stretching out his hand, and this, of course, not to smite, but to save – as he showed beyond any vestige of doubt when he was here among men.²

Coming to his preaching at that time, listen to the Lord Jesus in full flow; feel the passion in his words:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matt. 23:37).

And we know why the Saviour pleaded with sinners in this way:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:14-18).

Note it well: ‘God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved’. The final judgement is certain, yes, but mercy was God’s great purpose in sending his Son into the world. And when Christ preached, he made this crystal clear. We know what Christ wanted his hearers to do. We know what he offered them. We

² Proverbs sets out the principles of gospel preaching very clearly. The preacher is Christ himself (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6), using his ministers (all his people) (9:1-6); the offer is to all (1:20-22; 8:1-5; 9:3-6); the benefits offered in the gospel are spelled out (1:24,33; 8:5-35; 9:2,5); but the warnings against refusal are made equally clear (1:22-32; 8:36); and all is with passion, uplifted voice, and stretched out hand (*passim*). In addition to the references in the main text above, see Isa. 55:1-13; Matt. 22:1-14; 23:38-39; Luke 13:34-35; 14:15-24; 2 Cor. 5:11 – 6:2.

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know what he commanded, invited and exhorted them to do, what he pleaded with them to do:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

This is the school where Paul learned what he had to preach, what he had to preach for, and how to do it. These were his teachers. This is the kind of curriculum he mastered – or, rather, which mastered him. This is what made him the man that he was. This is what made him the compulsive preacher he was. This is what made him burn with love for lost sinners, and stimulated him into making him passionate in his appeals to them.³

Shouldn't every believer want to attend the same school and be taught the same lesson by the same master? Shouldn't we all want to be fired by the same love, the same passion?

In light of the many testimonies in the Scriptures – Psalm 2:10-12; Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-11; Isaiah 45:22; 55:1-3,6-9; 65:2; Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 22:1-10; Luke 14:16-24; John 6:29; Acts 17:30; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 6:2; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9; and so on – we can be left with no doubt whatsoever: God himself desires the conversion of sinners, and works in his ministers to call them to Christ to be saved. As Paul could so movingly assert: 'Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God' (2 Cor. 5:20).

All this applies to all believers today. All believers are ministers of the new covenant. There are no exceptions! I will not stop to establish the point here – see my *The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?* for that – but, I say it again, all believers are new-covenant ministers, and all preach. But, of course, I am now using 'preach' in its fullest and widest New Testament sense. Not all believers can engage in what we might call 'pulpit

³ I do not, of course, use 'appeal' in the revivalist sense.

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work'. Obviously not. Nevertheless, each and every believer *is* a minister of the new covenant, and every believer *is* a preacher of 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God' (1 Tim. 1:11), one who has the privilege and the duty 'to testify to the gospel of the grace of God' (Acts 20:24).

Well then, how should we believers go about it? Whenever we get the opportunity to speak to sinners – whether in public or in private, in a pulpit or not – all of us who are believers ought to be moved by the same desire as the apostle, the same desire as the incarnate Christ when he was preaching, the same desire as God himself displays today. Do you ask what that desire is? Nothing less than the salvation of sinners, the salvation of all who hear us!

Every believer, therefore, should be 'a driven man'. Knowing the terror of the Lord, and being compelled by the love of Christ, we, too, should long for sinners to come to Christ. We, too, should seek to persuade them to repent and believe (Luke 14:23; Acts 18:4; 20:21; 26:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:11,14). In short, we, too, should want them to be converted. And we should make no bones about it. *All who know us should realise that this is what we want for them.*

In short, may all who know us be able to point the finger at us and say, as they said of Robert Murray M'Cheyne: 'This man, this woman, "preached [to me] as if he [or she] was dyin' a'most to have me converted"'. I rebuke myself in saying it, of course, but I let it stand. It is nothing less than the truth.⁴

At any rate, reader, this is what lies behind all that I set out in this volume. This is what I intend to develop in the pages which follow. I am concerned here with the conversion of sinners. Nothing could be more important. I am convinced that each one of us is born a sinner, each one of us is by nature under the wrath of God, and, each one of us, unless we are converted, will perish eternally (John 3:18,36; 5:24-29; Acts 17:30-31; Eph. 2:1-3; Heb. 9:27; 12:25; and so on). We must be converted!

But the doctrine of conversion is being threatened in these dark days. I realise, of course, that Satan is always attacking on this

⁴ See both my *Offer* and my *Septimus* for much more on this.

front. He knows that if he can stop men preaching for the conversion of sinners, he will be taking a big step towards keeping them on the high road to perdition. Yes, that is true. Satan is always trying to undermine conversion; he is never off duty! Nevertheless, he is certainly very active at the moment, and the biblical doctrine of conversion is under heavy and sustained attack in our day. And I am deeply concerned about it.

So serious are the consequences of these attacks – consequences which are eternally dire for sinners – I must do what I can about it. With that conviction pressing on my heart and mind, I have taken up my pen to produce this book. This is what motivates me. My book represents the latest effort to do what I can to maintain, promote and encourage the biblical doctrine of conversion. More, I want to encourage all believers who read my words – I include myself – to be more earnest than we often are in our addresses to sinners.

Indeed, let me take a dose of my own medicine, and take it here and now. If any unconverted person is scanning these pages, my desire is that you, through reading what I say here, might be brought to Christ. Reader, I have to tell you, unless you repent and trust Christ, you will eternally perish (Luke 13:3-5). But, I am delighted to assure you, Christ stands both willing and able to save you – even at this very moment. Call upon the name of the Lord, therefore, and you will be saved (Rom. 10:13). I urge you to do it. I urge you to do it now!

Ultimately, of course, as in all else, it is the glory of God that is at stake; that is what is under attack in the threat to conversion. And it is the glory of God which counts (Matt. 5:16; 6:13; 9:8; John 5:23; 9:3; 11:4; 13:31-32; 14:13; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:11,16; and so on). ‘The glory of God’ is one of the great phrases in all Scripture – try putting it into a concordance search-engine, and see! Why, God has been pleased to describe himself as the Glory of Israel (Hos. 4:7, NIV)!

The glory of God! Above all, it was for his glory that God sent his Son into the world. It was for the glory of God his Father that Jesus came and died. And it is for the glory of God that the Holy Spirit convicts and converts sinners today. It is in this way,

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supremely, that the triune God is glorified. The Lord Christ, in his high-priestly prayer, expressed it thus:

Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you, as you have given him authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do. And now, O Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was (John 17:1-5).

And hear the apostle:

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

Reader, in light of this biblical emphasis on the glory of God, there is only one ultimate motive that I can have in casting this volume out into the world. The everlasting good of sinners is, of course, a powerful motive in its own right. And righteous indignation at the assault upon any doctrine of God is surely a worthy emotion. But it is, above all, the glory of God which matters. And the glory of God is what I most desire in producing the book now in your hand.

Slim the volume is, I grant you, but, even so, may it prove to be a blessing far beyond its size. May it indeed 'punch above its weight'! May many have cause to thank God that it was ever published!

Conversion Threatened

The biblical doctrine of conversion is being threatened. It has been under attack since the days of the New Testament. It is always thus. Satan knows that this doctrine has to fall if he is to maintain his hold upon men and women. He must not allow them to be converted! That is why he makes sure that the conversion of sinners is always under attack.¹

Sometimes the threat is frontal and sharp, open. At other times, it is more a question of subtle drift, insidious. Nevertheless, conversion is always being attacked or undermined. We see it on all sides.

I can see the damage caused to conversion by covenant theologians, for example, in the doctrine and practice of infant baptism – especially, *but not exclusively*, when it is associated with baptismal regeneration. When people think that because they were born to a believing parent who had them sprinkled as a baby, it means that they are in covenant with God, the biblical doctrine of conversion becomes an inevitable casualty. Millions have been deceived by the idea. Many go the whole hog and think that when they were sprinkled they were regenerated and made a child of God in that act. An ordained minister pronounced it so, and since age-old tradition and complicated (not to say mystifying) logic buttress it, then it must be right! At least, millions believe it is. It is a Satanic master-stroke. What of conversion in such a system?²

I can see the threat to the conversion of sinners in the rise of sacramentalism among the Baptists. When people imagine that by immersing a person in water they convey grace to that person, then the biblical doctrine of conversion is seriously at risk. Baptism and conversion coalesce in such a system, and baptism must, in time, come out as top dog.³

¹ For this article, I have lightly edited my *Conversion* pp19-21. I have let the obvious references to that volume stand.

² See my *Infant*.

³ See my *Baptist*.

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I can see the attack on conversion in the increasing emphasis among evangelicals upon inclusivism, whether by design (saddlebackism, to coin a word) or by default. What am I talking about? I am thinking of the growing number of churches which use carnal methods to attract and hold unbelievers; then, having got them, they treat all and sundry as believers. In such a system, the unconverted are encouraged by every aspect and ambience of the service to feel that they are included, no questions asked – especially when the preaching seems to be designed to do everything to avoid making them feel the slightest twinge of discomfort over their sin. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that the biblical doctrine of conversion is masked, and worse; we should not be surprised when – not if – conversion dwindles to become virtually meaningless, just a social rite of passage.⁴

I can see the danger to conversion when evangelical and Reformed preachers do not preach the gospel. What? Evangelical and Reformed men not preach the gospel? Unthinkable! Well, yes, it ought to be. But, for instance, I recently heard a sermon by a Reformed Baptist minister in which he did not mention Christ once. Not once! The gospel was not remotely preached on that occasion. It was not even broached. In fact, the sermon amounted to salvation by works.⁵ If it had not been for some excellent hymns, we were close to experiencing the complaint before the Great Awakening: in those days it was often impossible to tell whether an Anglican preacher was ‘Confucian, or Moslem, or Christian’. And it was said there were three degrees of preaching – ‘dull, duller, dullest’. Sadly, I am not talking about a State Church man preaching in the 1730s. My complaint concerns a Reformed man, an evangelical man, now! What is more, I know, as he knew, that there were some unconverted sitting in the congregation. Reader, the doctrine of conversion is not so much under attack when this happens; it is simply being allowed to wither and die!

⁴ Material on this, and the following point, is scattered throughout my works.

⁵ Funeral sermons, and the eulogy-atmosphere surrounding them, often give this impression.

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I can certainly see the dreadful threat to conversion in preaching which tends to Sandemanianism. What is that? Sandemanianism is the teaching that saving faith is entirely a matter of the head; all one has to do is accept the facts of the gospel; if you accept the facts of the gospel, you will be saved. Now, incipient or unwitting Sandemanianism is far more common than many realise. What am I talking about? When men lecture, and not preach; when men describe the gospel, and do not actually drive it home; when men, in effect, encourage their hearers to accept the facts of Scripture, and that is all – then, to put it mildly, conversion is seriously threatened. And this kind of ‘preaching’, I say, is far more widespread today than many will allow.

Wherever we find such things as these, I say, we soon discover that the biblical doctrine of conversion has been mortally wounded.

But none of these threats to conversion are what I had in mind when I wrote my *Conversion Threatened: The New Perspective and the Conversion of Sinners* and *The Hinge in Romans 1-8: A critique of N.T.Wright's view of Baptism and Conversion*.⁶ Those threats are real. They are not figments of my imagination. But they were not my main concern in those slim volumes. Rather, I was thinking of another attack on biblical conversion. I had in mind that threat to conversion which arises when the doctrines of justification by faith and believer's baptism are tampered with. And both are being tampered with today, make no mistake about it. The subtitles of my two books make it perfectly clear what I have in mind.

Sticking with the doctrine of justification by faith: that certainly is being undermined today. The particular attack upon justification, and, consequently, upon conversion, I was thinking of in my *Conversion Threatened* was that which comes about through the teaching of what is known as ‘The New Perspective on Paul’. This, through its eloquent and popular advocacy by N.T.Wright, is doing much to bring about the withering of the

⁶ As I say, apart from Sandemanianism, I have written on these other matters in previous works, which see. As for Sandemanianism, so seriously do I regard the matter, I intend to publish on it.

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preaching for, and experience of, conversion. The consequences are already bad. But the longer it goes on, the more widespread will such eternal penalties be. As Jesus made clear:

Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3).

And:

I tell you... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish... I tell you... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3,5).

Therefore, as he said:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15).

And what does that mean? Repent and believe, trust Christ! And you will be saved:

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

If you refuse? Then this:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:14-18).

Therefore, be converted! Now!

Conversion Ruined by the New Perspective

In this article, I want to explore the devastating effect the New Perspective has on conversion.¹ I do so by reference to Tom Wright's book: *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1997, N.T.Wright being one of the leading advocates of the New Perspective.

Let Wright set out his stall:

Justification... is not a matter of how someone enters the community of the true people of God, but of how you tell who belongs to that community... not so much about 'getting in'... as about 'how you [can] tell who [is] in'. In standard Christian theological language, it [isn't] so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation, as about the church... Justification... is not 'how you become a Christian', so much as 'how you can tell who is a member of the covenant family'... Justification is not how someone *becomes* a Christian. It is the declaration that they *have become* a Christian... The doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by 'the gospel'. It is *implied* by the gospel; when the gospel is proclaimed, people come to faith and so are regarded by God as members of his people. But 'the gospel' is not an account of how people get saved.²

This extract shows how a wrong view of justification leads to disastrous changes to the biblical doctrine of conversion. And with the New Perspective we are talking about an unbiblical view of justification by faith, make no mistake.³

¹ For this article, I have lightly edited my *Conversion* pp33-55.

² Wright pp119,122,125,132-133, emphasis his. Do not be misled by Wright's talk of 'the covenant family'. What Wright has in mind is very different to the biblical doctrine of the new covenant. It is more akin to Reformed covenant-theology with its talk of 'a visible church' embracing all the infant-baptised – whether or not they are true believers. See my *Infant*.

³ I will not further substantiate this here. It has been done times without number. See, for instance, the following articles in *The Banner of Truth*:

Wright goes on to speak of those who, as he puts it, are ‘justified without knowing it’.⁴ This takes us to the heart of what I am talking about. Justified without knowing it? Read aloud such passages as, say, Romans 3:21 – 5:11; Galatians 2:15 – 3:14; 3:26 – 4:7; 5:2-6. Do they not teach us that a sinner is only justified when he repents of his sin, turns to Christ in faith, and is thus converted? None of this can possibly take place without the sinner ‘knowing it’! I agree, of course, that justification through faith is an act and declaration by the triune God, but the notion that the sinner can be converted, and thus be actually justified in experience, while the sinner is in some sort of semi-comatose state, is utterly foreign to the New Testament.

True, God decreed the justification of the elect in eternity. True, Christ accomplished the justification of the elect in his death and resurrection. But equally true it is that the elect are only actually justified as they come to faith in Christ and are united to him.⁵ No passage, perhaps, captures all this better than the first chapter of Ephesians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world... He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through

Kenneth D.Macleod: ‘Justification’ (07/01/2011); Maurice Roberts: ‘A Brief Interview...’ (02/03/2007); ‘The New Perspective...’ (21/03/2006); Ligon Duncan: ‘Do we need a new perspective on justification?’ (11/08/2005); James W.Galyon: ‘Retreating to Rome’ (05/12/2003). And there is no end of other works on the subject.

⁴ Here is a clear link with infant baptism. The sprinkled infant – who can have no possible understanding of what is supposed to be happening – is allegedly regenerated – or at least brought into the covenant (whatever that may mean) – by the act of sprinkling (if not by his birth). As I showed in my *Baptist*, advocates of the New Perspective see baptism – especially of the infant variety – as a key player in their scheme, especially in their drive for the ecumenical. See also my *Hinge*. As for being ‘brought into the covenant’, no amount of water will bring anybody into the new covenant. Regeneration leading to repentance and faith (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8,14-21,36) is essential.

⁵ See my ‘Fourfold Justification’ (under the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

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Jesus Christ... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:3-14, NIV).

Now it is this actual justification by faith that we are talking about. *That* is the issue here. And no sinner is justified by faith 'without knowing it'!

Wright continues: 'One is not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith', he says. I pause. Of course not! This is not the teaching of the Bible.⁶ One is justified by trusting Christ! But, having got off on that irrelevant foot, it is not at all surprising that Wright ends up at the wrong terminus:

One is not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith. One is justified by believing in Jesus.⁷ It follows quite clearly that a great many people are justified by faith who don't know they are justified by faith... Many Christians today may not be

⁶ But it is not a million miles from Sandemanianism! 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 Scotsmen, John Glas (1695-1773) and his son-in-law, Robert Sandeman (1718-1771), more especially the latter. It is not a mere historical aberration. Rather, it is, forgiving the oxymoron, very much alive, and wreaking massive damage.

⁷ This needs spelling out. As it stands, the statement is inadequate. It could be nothing other than Sandemanianism.

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very clear about the niceties of doctrine; but, however inarticulately, they hold on to Jesus; and, according to Paul's teaching, they are therefore justified by faith. They are constituted as members of the family. They must be treated as such. This is not to say, of course, that justification is an unimportant or inessential doctrine. Far from it. A church that does not grasp it and teach it is heading for trouble.⁸

I agree with that last understatement! But if we do not appreciate and preach the biblical doctrine of justification by faith, if we do not preach it in a biblical way, and, above all, if we – personally and individually – have not been justified by faith, we are more than 'heading' for trouble; we are in it!

Continuing with Wright, where, in his view, does this leave faith? After all, 'faith' is a huge word in the New Testament. So, under the New Perspective, what place is there for faith? What is going on when a sinner believes? When God speaks of faith being essential (Heb. 11:6), what is he calling for? Wright:

Faith... is never and in no way a qualification, provided from the human side... for getting into God's family... It is the God-given badge of membership, neither more nor less.⁹

I could not more decidedly disagree. While I do agree, of course, that faith does not earn our place among God's children, it is far, far more than a mere membership 'badge'. It is the way in! Let me stress this. God justifies the sinner when he believes, and through his believing, but he never justifies a sinner because he believes, on account of his faith. The basis, the ground, of the sinner's justification is the finished work of Christ, and that alone; it is not faith! Again, the moving cause of justification is the free grace and sovereign love of God; it is not faith! Nevertheless, until a sinner believes, he is not justified. He is only justified as he trusts Christ and his redeeming work. While faith is not the cause or basis of justification, it most definitely is the means of justification.

Consider just two passages, two out of scores. See if they teach that faith is a 'badge':

⁸ Wright p159. A case of glasshouses and stones?

⁹ Wright p160.

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By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness... that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:20-28). 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 (Gal. 2:16).

Faith a ‘badge’? Rubbish! Faith is more the door – not the sticker they affix to your lapel at the door, confirming that you are a genuine guest! The wedding garment in the parable (Matt. 22:2-14) represents, not faith, but the perfect justifying-righteousness of Christ, received by faith at conversion, and the subsequent living of it out in a godly life. Unless a sinner trusts Christ for salvation, he is under the wrath of God, under condemnation, outside the people of God, cut off from God and without hope (John 3:18-19,36; Eph. 2:1-3,11-12). He must be converted. And he is converted when the Spirit regenerates him and leads him to repentance and faith.

And what about imputed righteousness (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21)?¹⁰ According to Wright, the traditional view of imputed righteousness is a nonsense, verging on – if not actually getting to be – ‘a legal fiction’: ‘If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes... his righteousness to... the defendant’.¹¹ Strong and definite may be

¹⁰ See ‘imputed’, ‘credited’, ‘taken into account’, and the like, in such passages as Rom. 4:1-25; 5:13; Jas. 2:23.

¹¹ Wright pp98,102.

his words, but Wright's sentiment is itself patent nonsense.¹² As the New Testament declares:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate... at the present time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21-26).

[Christ] was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. 4:25).

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

God... [sent] 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 (Rom. 8:3-4).

Christ Jesus... became for us wisdom from God... righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

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

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

These passages surely speak for themselves. As really as those in Adam are made sinners in and through Adam, so those in Christ really are made righteous in Christ. This is no 'fiction'. Fiction, indeed! I stress the 'really' or 'actually'. Men are really made sinners in Adam; sinners are really made righteous in Christ. And sinners are made righteous in Christ because Christ really did take their sin and guilt and punishment, and God really does give them (that is, he imputes to them) Christ's righteousness. This, I say again, is no fiction. Rather, to borrow Philip Eveson's use of

¹² I will not substantiate my claim here. The arguments have been well-rehearsed and firmly established times without number.

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the phrase, it is ‘the great exchange’.¹³ More! It is the *glorious* exchange!

Now for Wright’s view of conversion. Under the New Perspective, what place for individual conversion? Wright certainly holds to individual conversion: ‘*Of course*’, he says, ‘every single human being is summoned... to respond personally to the gospel. Nobody in their right mind would deny that’.¹⁴ But – and there is a huge ‘but’ – what really matters here is what we understand by ‘response’. We must allow no muddle here. We must be clear about it! The New Testament is categorical: the only saving response to the gospel is conviction of sin leading to repentance and faith. *That* is the response God calls for: trust in Christ. For it is as he trusts Christ, that the sinner is justified. And in no other way. Is this what Wright means by ‘response’? No, it is not!

I will make the point by moving on to yet another massive ‘but’ in Wright’s statement. What really counts for Wright is the ‘community’. The traditional, Reformed, evangelical view – with its emphasis upon individual, personal conversion – is, according to Wright, quite wrong. It is all a question of the ‘community’:

If you take the old route of putting justification, in its traditional [Reformed] meaning, at the centre of your theology, you will always be in danger of sustaining some sort of individualism.¹⁵

Do not miss the ‘individualism’. Let me assert at once that I am not saying that there is no corporate emphasis in the New Testament – of course not! – nevertheless, until we have had a personal experience of conversion and justification by faith, talk of the corporate is entirely misplaced. If I may illustrate: if the horse is the personal, the cart is the corporate; to put the corporate before the personal is not only daft – it’s dangerous.

¹³ Philip H. Eveson: *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone*, Day One Publications, Leominster, 2005.

¹⁴ Wright p158, emphasis his. Wright went on: ‘Nobody in their right mind would deny that. But...’.

¹⁵ Wright pp157-158.

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There is a corporate aspect to the gospel, yes, a glorious one at that. God in Christ has established a new Israel, formed out of Jew and Gentile, yes. As Paul, writing to the Ephesians, declared:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that he might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:11-22).

Clearly, then, there is a corporate aspect to the gospel. I go further. I admit that we evangelicals and Reformed have not made enough of it. We have been guilty of so stressing the individual that we have lost sight too often of the corporate. Yes! To this extent, Wright has a valuable point to make. He has certainly nailed me! And I am grateful for the rebuke, and the reminder that I need to think more of the corporate.

Nevertheless, the corporate is not the be-all and end-all of the gospel. What is more, as I have explained, until we have been personally and individually converted, all talk of the corporate is entirely misplaced. And this is the point! In fact, it takes us to the very heart of the problem or attack we are looking at. Indeed, this is the crunch point for all the threats to conversion that I mentioned earlier. This is the issue infant baptisers have to face.

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It is the issue Baptist sacramentalists have to face. It is the issue inclusivists have to face. It is the issue to be faced by those who preach salvation by works – whether overtly or by default.¹⁶

Sinners are not joined to Christ in a kind of osmosis. Nor is it a kind of mass movement. Every converted sinner becomes a member of the body of Christ in an individual and personal way by conversion. We are not born Christians. We do not drift into Christ. We do not catch justification like the measles! We do not get it by association with believers! We must, as individuals, come to a ‘crisis’ and be converted.

In saying this, I would not be misunderstood. By ‘crisis’ I do not mean something necessarily dramatic. Nevertheless, conversion is not a process. It is a crisis.¹⁷ There is a before and an after. The New Testament emphasis can only be missed by those who are determined not to see it. While there is a corporate dimension to the gospel, it is personal conversion which comes first, and it is personal conversion which is paramount. Until we have had that experience, all talk of ‘belonging’ is wishful thinking.

Let me prove it. Let me prove that the New Testament emphasises the individual. Take the apostle writing to the Ephesians; I have just quoted him, at length, speaking of the corporate. What did he say to them when setting out the corporate? How did the Ephesians become members of this new community? It was as Paul reminded them:

You... were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit... God, who is rich

¹⁶ As for Sandemanians, they do hold to conversion – but they reduce it to a mere change of mind about the facts of the gospel. Before ‘conversion’, you don’t accept the facts of the gospel; after ‘conversion’ you do. This ruins conversion, but not in the same way as the other attacks. Even so, the end result for sinners is the same. Whereas there is only one way to heaven, there are many roads to hell.

¹⁷ By ‘crisis’ I mean ‘a time when something very important for the future happens or is decided’ (*Encarta*). And by ‘time’ I do not mean ‘process’. I am speaking of an occasion, an event, a juncture, a point in time.

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in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 1:13; 2:4-9, NIV).

Peter made the same point when he, mixing his metaphors, likened the corporate body of Christ to a temple and to a nation.¹⁸ Notice how the apostle set out the way in which this temple or nation is built – namely by the conversion of individual sinners, they being added as individual ‘stones’ to the temple, or individual ‘citizens’ to the nation:

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:2-10).

Wright, however, virtually dismisses the individual experience:

Tragically, some would-be presentations of ‘the gospel’ have actually bought into this, by implying that one is justified or saved first and foremost as an individual.¹⁹

Note well Wright’s words – emphasising justification by faith as an individual through conversion is ‘tragic’! This is the wrong terminus I spoke of. Tragic? Without individual and personal

¹⁸ Don’t worry about the mixed metaphors! The Spirit, inspiring Scripture, did not mind breaking our rules of grammar and linguistic style!

¹⁹ Wright pp157-158.

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justification by faith in the Redeemer, the sinner will be damned for ever!²⁰

So what does Wright think of Paul's conversion? Paul was converted, wasn't he? Well, what really happened to that rabid Jew on the Damascus road? We know that Saul, as he then was, started the day, as he had for some considerable time past, obsessed with the destruction of Christ and all he stood for, determined to set about it by annihilating Christ's followers. As Saul came within sight of his destination, the next on his list for carrying out his soul-consuming passion, something happened to him, something which changed his entire life. What? Wright:

Paul's awareness of Jesus as having been bodily raised from the dead is of paramount importance in understanding the significance of what happened to him on the road to Damascus. It will not do, historically speaking, to spiritualise or psychologise the event, as though (for instance) Saul had been labouring with a troubled conscience for years and suddenly had a great religious experience which enabled him to throw off the burden and enjoy a new level or dimension of spiritual existence. Nor will it do simply to say, as so many have done, (a) that Saul of Tarsus had formerly regarded the crucified Jesus as cursed by the Jewish law; (b) that he then realised that God had reversed the law's curse; so (c) he realised that the law was now shown up as bankrupt and out of date, and (d) he could begin to announce to the world that there was a way of being the people of God in which the law played no role. Even if any of this carries a grain of truth, it is not central to what was going on.²¹

'If any of this carries a grain of truth'? Oh? So, I ask again: What, according to Wright, *did* happen to Paul outside Damascus? Just this:

The significance of Jesus' resurrection, for Saul of Tarsus as he lay blinded and perhaps bruised on the road to Damascus, was this: The one true God had done for Jesus of Nazareth, in the middle of time, what Saul had thought he was going to do for Israel at the end of time.²²

²⁰ See above.

²¹ Wright p36.

²² Wright p36.

Let me reply. Wright's estimate of Paul's conversion is woefully at odds with the weight of scriptural evidence. Let me summarise Wright's view: Saul, before the Damascus road experience, was personally right with God because he was in covenant with God by being a member of the nation of Israel. It is just that he did not understand God's purpose in sending Jesus as the Messiah. He did not realise that when Jesus died and rose again, he ushered in a glorious future for Israel, a future that had been so often promised in the Old Testament, and for which Saul himself was longing. While he himself was right with God – certainly, he was not labouring under any sense of sin, or doing all he could to get right with God – he *was* labouring under a gross misunderstanding about Christ. It was all a question of misunderstanding, you see. When Christ confronted him on the way to Damascus, this was changed, changed dramatically, and changed irreversibly. Saul came to realise that the one he was persecuting was in fact the very one who had brought about the thing he most desired – the glorious age for Israel. Saul saw the light! He came to see how utterly stupid he had been. Here he was, reading the Old Testament, poring over it, longing for the fulfilment of the promises of a glorious future for Israel – so often spoken of by the prophets – and now, right under his nose, the Messiah had come, accomplished God's purpose, and was fulfilling those promises, and yet he, Saul, had failed to spot it! The one he was trying to destroy was the very one who was fulfilling his every hope! How wrong could one be! What a fool he had been! *That* is what Saul came to see when Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus.

Saul's conversion was *not* a change of status before God! Not at all! It was a change of viewpoint. Christ cleared out the clutter in Saul's mental baggage. So much so, Saul could now see Christ for who and what he really was – the one who had accomplished God's purpose for Israel. Indeed, he now realised that it was even greater than he had ever imagined. He could now see that God's purpose was not confined to Israel. It dawned on him that the Gentiles, too, were included. And these two – Jews and Gentiles – under Christ were to form the new man, the new Israel, the new community of God. But this new Israel would be very different to

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the old Israel. In the new Israel, there would be no place for those old separating laws which were so important in Judaism – laws concerning circumcision, diet and days. All that was gone, gone for ever, swept away by the Messiah. And his (Saul's) job from now on was not to persecute Christ, but to bring Gentiles to see what the Messiah had accomplished in setting up the new Israel. Not only that: his job was to urge them not to stand aloof, but to come and join the new community. *That*, from now on, was to be Saul's consuming passion – the encouraging of Jew and Gentile to enter the one new community under Christ. It was nothing to do with personal conviction of sin and trusting Christ and all that. Not at all! It was a question of getting people to recognise this new Israel, and to want to come and join it – a new Israel with none of the old restrictions of the law, all of which had been fulfilled and abolished in Christ. And if only the people would come to recognise this, if only they would come and join this new community and 'hold on to Jesus',²³ then they would be justified!

So much for Saul (Paul) – whose name (as so much else) was changed by his encounter with the risen Christ that day. But what about us? What bearing, according to Wright, does this have on us?

It has a tremendous bearing on us. You see, according to the New Perspective, for centuries we evangelicals and Reformed have been labouring under a dreadful misapprehension – rather like Saul, himself, come to think of it. We have been obsessed by the notion – the false notion – that justification by faith means a conversion, a conversion that involves personal and individual conviction of sin, repentant trust in Christ, and the beginning of a new life of progressive holiness. This, however, misses the mark by a mile! It is all a dreadful misunderstanding – nothing but a throwback to the bad old days of Martin Luther. We need our Damascus road experience. What we must do is this: we must rid ourselves of Luther's rigmarole about personal justification and imputed righteousness. We have to realise that it is all a question of belonging to the community of God's people. Justification is to

²³ Wright p159. I have changed Wright's words from the past tense.

do with God being faithful to his covenant people, the new Israel. It is the community that counts. It is all a question of recognising this new community and our part in it. We must divest ourselves of all this Reformed emphasis on the personal and individual, get rid of this regrettable left-over from poor old Luther, crippled as he was with his psychological neurosis. We must get it into our heads that it is all about the community, belonging to the community, recognising that we belong to the community. Moreover, we have to see this New Perspective for what it is: the great hope, especially in the ecumenical world. After all, this new view of justification, according to Wright:

Is not merely a doctrine which Catholic and Protestant might just be able to agree on, as a result of hard ecumenical endeavour. It is itself the ecumenical doctrine... [This new] doctrine of justification is in fact the great ecumenical doctrine.²⁴

Well, this has let the cat out of the bag, good and proper! Now we know.

Let me say at once how much I admire Wright's clarity; he is perceptive, acute; indeed, he is spot on! And I am glad he states the position so clearly. As he observes, this is where the New Perspective is making such a valuable contribution in the quest for the great ecumenical Church. This newly-defined justification – both in its doctrine and practice, especially its practice – 'is itself the ecumenical doctrine... the great ecumenical doctrine'. Of course it is! For those who want it, that is!

This is the crux. This is where the New Perspective, infant baptism, Baptist sacramentalism, inclusivism and the preaching of salvation by works come together. It's all leading to one end. I have no doubt about it myself. I can see it in my mind's eye. Once the master-cooks have gathered all their ingredients, thoroughly mixed and baked the dough, then, with a suitable flourish, they will be able to present us with the great ecumenical cake. Conversion? No need of conversion, then! All talk of conversion will be a thing of the past. In this coming utopia, if you are curious about that old-fashioned thing called 'conversion'

²⁴ Wright p158.

– that which those suppressed fuddy-duddies used to talk so much about in the bad old days – well, you’ll just have to trot along to the museum and stare at it. There it will be, pinned to its card, grinning helplessly at you through the plate glass. Have no fear: you will be quite safe; it will be securely locked in its cage. And for those who are really determined to learn about ‘conversion’, no doubt there will be the virtual-reality experience to enjoy – much as we today can go to the medieval castle to wander through the dungeons and gawk at all the grisly apparatus of torture: nice for a diversion on a wet afternoon, of course, but how glad we are when we get out of the gloomy cavern, and escape once more into the fresh air! We can sigh with relief, and congratulate ourselves that we today have grown up – and grown out of it all!

Nonsense! Diabolical nonsense!

The point is, of course, the ‘grain of truth’ which Wright dismissed is, in fact, the biblical reality. Saul *had* been labouring under a guilty conscience, zealously doing what he thought was God’s will, and doing it to try to stifle his nagging doubts – ever since, if not before, he witnessed Stephen’s death by stoning (Acts 7:58; 8:1). In truth, the more he did, the busier he was, the less time he had to think.²⁵ But all that was changed in that dramatic encounter with the risen Christ. When Christ confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, and later in the city itself, he brought home to him his sin, reminding him of his pricking conscience (Acts 26:14), thereby convicting him of his personal guilt in his sin. More than that, the Lord dealt with Saul’s sin in an individual way. Saul was brought, as an individual, to submit to Christ as Lord. And as Saul experienced the forgiveness of his sins, he was filled with the Spirit. Furthermore, Christ as Lord told him that his future work was to preach the gospel – the message of the forgiveness of sins, and all the rest, through repentance and faith in Christ. See, for instance, Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-29. From that time on, Paul was a man under

²⁵ It seems to me that Saul’s enforced three-day (lonely and frightening) blindness (Acts 9:9) played its part in making him stop and think.

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authority, the authority of the Lord Christ. As Paul himself testified:

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles... (Gal. 1:13-16).

We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 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 (Phil. 3:3-12).

The glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust... I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on him for everlasting life (1 Tim. 1:11-16).

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For a commentary on all this, I can only suggest a thorough reading of the letters of Paul. In light of which I further suggest a candid assessment of Wright's position must lead to only one conclusion. Wright gets it wrong, woefully so!

How does Wright view the rest of Paul's life, after his conversion?

Saul's vision on the road to Damascus thus equipped him with an entirely new perspective, though one that kept its roots firm and deep within his previous covenantal theology.²⁶ Israel's destiny had been summed up and achieved in Jesus the Messiah. The Age to Come had been inaugurated. Saul himself was summoned to be its agent. He was to declare to the pagan world that YHWH, the God of Israel, was the one true God of the whole world, and that Jesus of Nazareth had overcome evil and was creating a new world in which justice and peace would reign supreme.²⁷

I can only say that my reading of the New Testament shows Paul engaged in a very different ministry to that envisaged by Wright. It can be summed up – it ought to be summed up – in the commission that Christ gave him on the road outside Damascus:

Rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:16-18).

Paul never forgot those words! They were burned into his very heart and mind! They were burned into his very soul! And he acted upon them – at once! What is more, he never stopped! We know this because, when addressing Agrippa, immediately after quoting Christ's commission, the apostle went straight on to assert:

²⁶ That is, Jewish – not Reformed – covenant theology!

²⁷ Wright p37.

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Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance (Acts 26:19-20).

Indeed, that was precisely the reason why the Jews hated him so deeply: ‘For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me’ (Acts 26:21). Undaunted, the apostle was determined to carry out Christ’s commission to the letter, and to his last breath (2 Tim. 4:6-7):

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come – that the Christ would suffer, that he would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23).

And, lest there should be any doubt – but read the New Testament and see – Paul spent his life fulfilling Christ’s final command to all his people, and doing so with all the ramifications and nuances intended by the Lord:

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

Let me quote one passage to prove it. Paul, in a hurry to get back to Jerusalem, desperately longed to address the Ephesian elders just once more. He knew that serious danger was threatening the Ephesian church, and he wanted to do all he could to prevent it. Torn between his desire to get to Jerusalem and the urgent need at Ephesus, he sent for the elders, and they came to meet him at Miletus. It was the apostle’s last anxious throw.

Let us hear part of what the apostle left ringing in the ears of the elders that day. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit recorded these words through Luke, and they have not been lost in the wind. In our degenerate day, we, weltering under attack after attack on the conversion of sinners, must heed the apostle’s appeal to the men

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of Ephesus. This is what he said then, and this is what he says today:

You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God (Acts 20:17-27, NIV).

Paul uttered those words long ago to the leaders at Ephesus. And he says it today to us.

I cannot resist quoting just a little more from the apostle. In light of what I have been saying, it seems to me most apposite:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32, NIV).

I appeal to you, reader, compare the apostle’s words with the claims of the New Perspective. I appeal to every elder or preacher who reads this article to heed Paul’s plea to the Ephesian elders in the face of error. May all of us who profess the name of Christ not only defend the biblical doctrine of conversion, but do all we

can to call as many sinners as possible to obey the command of Christ. This is how he preached; this is what he declared: ‘Repent and believe the good news!’ (Mark 1:14, NIV).

This, then, should be our settled aim and determination. Mark recorded Christ’s words, not as a one-off, surely, but as a succinct summary of the substance of the Saviour’s constant preaching. May it be ours! As Agrippa felt the force of Paul’s words – ‘I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am’ (Acts 26:29) – may those who hear us know that we, in our turn, have longed for *their* conversion.

Conclusion

I hope, reader, that this glance at Wright’s teaching has demonstrated that when the doctrine of justification by faith is changed, the Church becomes more important than salvation; ‘belonging’ becomes more important than ‘believing’; and, above all, the biblical doctrine of conversion is degraded. Wright, arguing for the New Perspective view of justification, has played havoc with conversion. In time, his doctrine will play havoc with souls. He is not alone, of course. Whoever, for whatever reason, and on whatever basis, tinkers with justification by faith, that man and his doctrine are a threat to the biblical doctrine of conversion. And when conversion is degraded, the consequences to countless men and women will be horrendous. They are horrendous.

I come closer to home. I contend that many of us believers today are suffering from a woefully inadequate view of the fullness of God’s grace in free justification by faith in Christ.²⁸ And this diminished sense of justification seriously weakens our view of conversion, and our preaching for it.

This has to be put right. We must get to grips with this glorious biblical doctrine, and let it get a grip of us – our heart, mind and will. And then, having a renewed sense of the wonder of our own justification in Christ, we must state the glorious truth to others, clearly and unequivocally, preaching it with heartfelt

²⁸ See my ‘Justification: Fact or Feeling?’ (under the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

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passion, contending for it with unwavering tenacity, offering Christ and all his benefits as warmly, as freely, and as widely as we can.

And, in light of all this, we have to insist on personal conversion. Eternal consequences hang upon it – especially for those who hear us. But not only for them. If we fail to carry out Christ's commission, *we* too shall have to answer to our master (Ezek. 3:18-21; 33:7-9).

For the truth is stark: unless a sinner trusts Christ, he will perish eternally in his sin. But the gospel is amazing: the moment a sinner turns from his sin, forsaking all his own efforts to make himself right with God, and casts himself in faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ, pleading his blood and righteousness, he is at once and for ever washed from his sin and accounted righteous in God's sight. He is from that moment in Christ, and is, therefore, beyond all condemnation. Outside of Christ, however, there remains nothing but condemnation.

Two short passages of Scripture must suffice. Reader, if you have not yet trusted Christ, in light of these words, I urge you to do so at once. Feel the warmth of God's invitation to you – yes, to you. Yield to God's invitation and command, even now. Do so at once:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's only begotten Son... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him (John 3:14-18,36, NIV).

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. We then, as workers together with

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him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you'. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 5:19 – 6:2).

It is all here. God sees the sinner lost, ruined and helpless in his sin. Staggeringly, even though sin has violated his holiness, out of his great love for sinners, and in his infinite grace, God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn sinners, but to die for them, in their place. And now God, through his servants, pleads with sinners – pleads with you this very moment, even as you read these words – to come to him and receive this full and free justification wrought by Christ. And he assures you that all who trust in Christ and his atoning sacrifice are for ever right with God. More, he assures *you* that if *you* trust the Saviour, he will receive *you*, and save *you*. If you will not trust Christ, however, you will perish. And, I must tell you, reader, to refuse God's offer of mercy in Christ is the highest sin of all.

I have not been tackling the New Perspective and the conversion of sinners for the fun of it. I could not have been handling a more serious subject. As I close let me ask you: Are you converted? Have you seen yourself as a ruined, hopeless sinner, and have you fled to Jesus for refuge (Heb. 6:18)? If you have, you are justified, utterly for ever free from condemnation, and as such you have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). If not, however... if not, you are yet in your sins.

I cannot leave it there. I must take it further. I plead with you, do not leave it there! Come to Christ! Come now! Your need is immense, but Christ's love, grace and power are infinite. He is willing to save you. Are you willing to come to him and receive his salvation? Come, I urge you, come to Christ. Come without delay!

Justification: Fact or Feeling?

Explanation of my title

I am, it surely goes without saying, talking about justification by faith. And when I ask is justification a fact or a feeling, the answer, of course, is that it is both. That is to say, God declares that the sinner who trusts Christ is, from that moment, perfectly righteous in his sight, and free of all condemnation. This is a glorious fact, a staggering statement which is true of every believer. But it is equally true that the believer, now that he is justified, ought to enjoy the felt-sense of his justification. After all, the Holy Spirit witnesses to the believer, reminding him of his free justification in Christ, and thus assuring him of his standing before God. This magnificent truth cannot be dismissed as a legal nicety, relegated to the role of a legal fact – true, but abstract and distant. Justification by faith is far too wonderful for that. What is more, the sense of his free justification in Christ is one of the main drivers in the believer’s progressive sanctification. Having dealt with these vital issues in several of my works,¹ in this short article I want to stress the ‘feeling-ness’ of free justification. I do so because I fear that for many believers justification has become rather a dry, theoretical term, one which gives them little real enjoyment. And this is a sad loss indeed.

Justification: fact or feeling?

May I have a friendly word or two with my fellow evangelical and Reformed believers on the subject of justification by faith? Too often we – and I am sorry to have to admit that I have to speak for myself as well as others, perhaps more than many others – we, I say, have suffered from too low a view of justification by faith: we have allowed it to morph into little more than a legal nicety. We have been too cramped, too dry, too

¹ See, for instance, my *Assurance; Christ; Four; Eternal*. See also various articles which may be found under the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com, and christmycovenant.com.

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academic in our thinking about this great and glorious biblical doctrine. We have adopted a view of justification which does less than justice to the weight of scriptural teaching on the subject. And this has had very serious consequences. For one thing, our experience as believers has been sadly diminished. And, not least, the doctrine of conversion has suffered.

Of course, justification, according to the Bible, *is* God's legal pronouncement about his believing people. In Christ he does declare them righteous, he does account them beyond condemnation, and he does it by imputing to them the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. The scene really is the law courts. This is how the Bible pictures it for us. God the judge pronounces the guilty justified on the basis of the finished work of Christ. So says Scripture. Of that, there is no doubt whatsoever.²

Moreover, because we have been rightly determined to preserve this biblical truth, we have especially wanted to distance ourselves from the Roman Catholic notion of justification. And to say so! Quite right too! Romanists claim that justification involves much more than a legal declaration by God that the believer is righteous in Christ. Those who are justified, they claim, are actually and inherently in themselves made righteous. In other words, it is not only a question of imputed righteousness, but it is a matter of imparted, inherent righteousness. So says Rome. In saying this, Rome is grievously mistaken. Scripture is decidedly against her. The Roman notion is not only false, however. Although I will not expand on it here, the Roman doctrine brings many fearful consequences in its wake.

The point I am driving at is this: in light of all the importance of justification by faith, we have been right to confront Rome over the issue. Even so, in properly reacting against Rome,³ we

² The believer's justification by faith in Christ is intimately linked with his positional sanctification by faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; Heb. 10:10-14), but distinguished from it. Whereas justification speaks in forensic terms, sanctification speaks in terms of separation from the world.

³ Over-reaction is a common fault, a temptation to us all. But over-reaction leads to trouble. Witness John Calvin's change on baptism

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have tended to lay so much weight on God's legal verdict in justification, that we have forgotten – or at least played down – the glorious truth that as justified believers we really are righteous, really are sinlessly perfect before God in Christ, utterly and irrevocably beyond condemnation. Not, I hasten to add, that we as believers are sinless in ourselves. But, in truth, we as believers *are* completely washed free of all sin in the Redeemer's blood, and *are* fully clothed in the perfection of Christ's righteousness. This is what justification by faith means. It is a legal truth, a forensic declaration by God about us as believers, yes, but we, through faith, truly are 'made righteous' in Christ (Rom. 5:19). This is a reality. It is not a figment. It is the biblical truth about us as believers. We, as believers, can say with confidence that God made Christ 'who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him' (2 Cor. 5:21). We can say with assurance that God in Christ did this so that we, 'not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing... should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:27). And all of it hinges on the fact that 'by one offering he [God in Christ] has perfected [us] for ever' (Heb. 10:14). Oh yes, these things are true, these things are real, these things are actual, for all of us who are in Christ by faith. The blood and righteousness of Christ accomplishes all this for us. In ourselves, we are sinners; in Christ, we are for ever beyond condemnation.

This is not the place for me to develop the doctrine of justification; a few scriptures (including repeats of the brief citations just given) must suffice:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God... For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still

which was coloured by his over-reaction to the Anabaptists. The Westminster Assembly was convened to stop antinomianism – and look at the result. I have documented the sources for these allegations. See, for instance, my *Infant* pp44-46; 'The Law and the Confessions' (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com, and christmycovenant.com).

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sinner, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation... For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:1-19).

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

Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,⁴ that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

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

That, I say, is just a sample. And the bulk is every bit as good as the sample.

Now, what are the consequences of this free justification in Christ? What can we say about *that*? The consequences are immense. Justification by faith makes the believer rich beyond words to describe. The benefits of the believer's free justification include his glorious liberty in Christ, his inexpressible joy, and his irrepressible zeal for progressive sanctification out of gratitude for the love and grace God has shown him in his Son. And more; much more. Yet again, the merest sample of scriptures must suffice:

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36). What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?⁵ Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we

⁴ This has nothing to do with water baptism; see my *Baptist*.

⁵ This has nothing to do with water baptism. See my *Hinge*.

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have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him... Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:1-14).

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

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law 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. 8:1-4).

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free (Gal. 5:1, NIV).

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... When the kindness and the love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done,

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but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,⁶ whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by his grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works (Tit. 2:11 – 3:8).

Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

Once again, the bulk is as good as the sample.

In light of these and many other passages of the New Testament, I have no hesitation in saying that we evangelicals and Reformed need to take a higher view of justification than we commonly do. Justification, I say again, *is* a forensic declaration about believers by God, yes, but justification is more than a legal nicety; much more. God really does see his people as in Christ – and, therefore, he sees us as sinless, as perfect, as Christ. And this, it surely goes without saying, ought to give us an exuberance, an exhilarating sense of joy, a transforming sense of liberty in the presence and service of God. Sadly, our view of justification is often stunted – with a corresponding diminishing of our sense of confidence and our joy and liberty in Christ. Too often we live as spiritual paupers when in truth we possess wealth beyond measure. Alas, we have become far too dry, too shrunken, in our view of our free and full justification by God's grace in Christ.

Let Augustus Toplady remind us of our wealth:

*How vast the benefits divine
Which we in Christ possess!
We're saved from guilt and every sin
And called to holiness.*

*'Tis not for works which we have done,
Or shall hereafter do,
But he of his abounding love
Salvation does bestow.*

⁶ This has nothing to do with water baptism. See the previous note.

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‘How vast the benefits divine/ Which we in Christ possess!’
Quite! Isaac Watts had already used the word ‘vast’ when thinking about the same theme:

*How vast the treasure we possess!
How rich thy bounty, King of grace!
This world is ours, and worlds to come;
Earth is our lodge, and heav’n our home.*

*All things are ours: the gifts of God;
The purchase of a Saviour’s blood;
While the good Spirit shows us how
To use, and to improve them too.*

Vast, vast benefits, vast treasure, and all in Christ – for all who believe! No wonder Watts went on to sing:

*I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great;
And while my faith can keep her hold,
I envy not the sinner’s gold.*

Watts got it, of course, from Paul:

All things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

We believers need to reclaim this sense of our treasure in Christ, and do so as a matter of urgency.

Misreading Paul

When Paul challenged the Corinthians to examine themselves – ‘Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves’ – was he implying that the believer gets his assurance by probing himself as to his progressive sanctification,¹ looking to see if he has enough evidence to conclude that he truly is a child of God? Not at all! Although, since the time of the later Puritans, most believers have been taught that this is the way to try to reach assurance,² it is quite wrong; it runs counter to the new covenant. I have coined a phrase for it: ‘legal assurance’. And this legal assurance is in stark contrast to the new-covenant way. As the New Testament makes as clear as noonday, the believer receives his assurance by the witness (the sealing, the anointing) of the Spirit, and he gets this witness at the point of conversion.³

This, of course, is why we must be clear about what Paul wanted when he told the Corinthians to examine themselves. Although, at a superficial glance, it may appear that Paul was calling the believer to pore over his good works in hope of finding enough evidence to have assurance, most definitely he

¹ By ‘progressive sanctification’, I mean the believer’s imperfect (in this life) outworking of the perfect positional-sanctification he has in Christ by virtue of his union with Christ at his conversion. The sinner, on coming to faith, is united to Christ and is justified and positionally sanctified. Thus, in God’s sight, in Christ he is accounted or made righteous, free of sin and condemnation, and perfectly separated unto God. (See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12). In his Christian life, he has to work out his perfection in Christ, and he will be moved to do so by the Spirit under the direction of Scripture; this is his progressive sanctification or holiness of life. But this, alas, is imperfect. The believer will only be absolutely sanctified in the eternal state. I will set out my arguments on all this in my forthcoming book on sanctification.

² The majority of those engaged in this quest for assurance – which, so they are assured (pun intended), is way beyond most of them – are probably ignorant of the Puritan connection.

³ See my *Assurance*.

was not! To read him in that way is to misunderstand him altogether. In fact, it is as he reaches the climax of his second letter to the Corinthians, a letter in which he deals so powerfully and devastatingly with the law teachers who had infected many churches at the time, that the apostle drives home the new-covenant ministry by making this demand on his readers. The truth is, Paul's challenge to the Corinthians – yes, challenge – is nothing less than a mighty enforcement of the new covenant, a direct contradiction of the doctrine of the law men.

Let me make my case.⁴ I start with the apostle's words:

On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed (2 Cor. 13:2-7).

The relevant portion is, of course: 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves'. But, as always, the context is vital, and that is why I have supplied it.

When Paul told the Corinthians: 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves', he was not calling them to harrowing self-doubt about the reality of their faith. This, as I say, is usually assumed, but it's quite foreign to the passage.

For a start, Paul was not addressing the believers at Corinth as individuals. The context tells us that the apostle was under attack over his apostleship and his ministry; and by the context I mean not only the immediate verses, but the entire letter. As in so many churches at the time, the Judaisers were infiltrating and subverting the church at Corinth. And they were putting Paul and his ministry under the microscope, using the Corinthians as a

⁴ For this article, I have lightly edited my *Assurance* pp155-162.

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cat's-paw. Paul responded. Having fought it out with the Judaisers in the earlier part of his letter (from 2 Cor. 2:14 and on) – just as he did with the Judaisers at, for instance, Galatia and Philippi (Phil. 3:2-11, and on) – as he comes to the end of his letter, the apostle swings the spotlight onto the Corinthians. Not that he was paying them back in kind, giving them as good as he got! Paul was no small-minded bigot! No! He was fighting (spiritually) tooth and nail for the gospel against the law mongers: 'You took the side of the Judaisers, and tested me', he thundered, throwing down the gauntlet. 'Right! Now take your own medicine. Take your diaries out and jog your memory as to how you got where you are!' Just as he addressed his readers in 2 Corinthians 3, so he does here. Let me remind you of what he said in the earlier passage:

Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 2:14 – 3:6).

And now the present passage:

On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by

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God's power we will live with him to serve you. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test (2 Cor. 13:2-6).

The apostle's meaning is patent. Addressing the believers at Corinth as a whole – not the individual believer – addressing the Corinthian church as a church, and calling on the church to speak up, in effect he was saying: 'Take a good look at your experience! I am talking to you Corinthians as a body! Did you at Corinth receive Christ through the Judaisers and their law preaching? Of course you didn't! It was through my ministry that you heard of Christ, it was through my new-covenant ministry that you came to Christ, and thus received all the benefits stored up in Christ! Speak up! Own it for the truth that it is! Unless, of course, you are reprobates!' As he reminded them, clearly with the Judaisers in mind, and with irony: 'Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel' (1 Cor. 4:15). They were the *ekklēsia* at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), the called-out ones in Corinth, weren't they? Hadn't they been called out of Judaism or paganism into Christ? Well, who had been instrumental in calling them out? And what ministry had he engaged in to call them out? Was it law?

I think we ought to refresh our memory of all that had gone on at Corinth. Here's Luke's record of those events:

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them: 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles'. Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. Crispus, the

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synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city'. So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God (Acts 18:1-11).

And we know what Paul preached – and it wasn't law. As he told the Corinthians:

We preach Christ crucified... I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!... Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures... This is what we preach, and this is what you believed (1 Cor. 2:2; 1:23; 9:16; 15:1-11).

And, although I have already quoted the passage, I cannot refrain from repeating it:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold... Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God... We do

not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God... made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 3:7 – 4:6).

This is the context! In short, Paul is not calling the Corinthians to rake over their souls to see if they were genuine believers. Rather, because they were genuine believers, he is calling on them to ask themselves how they became such. Was it by the law preachers, or by his ministry of the gospel in the power and demonstration of the Spirit? Did he not preach Christ – not law – and was it not Christ who brought them to where they are now? Not only must the Corinthians not forget their history, they must speak up, throw over the Judaisers and their law teaching, and stand with the apostle for Christ and under Christ!⁵

Do not miss the apostle's use of irony – not to say sarcasm – in all this: 'I trust you will find that you are real Christians! I trust you will find I am!' And this takes me to what might be considered the clinching point in this exegesis. If the 'usual' view is right, and Paul *is* commanding believers – in the first instance, the Corinthians – to probe themselves to try to get assurance, then we end up with the distinct possibility that his first readers might do as he commands, and not only test themselves, but put the apostle himself and Timothy through it! And they should do this to see whether or not the pair were true believers! What is more, he hopes that they will find that he and Timothy do indeed have enough evidence to pass muster! Worse – even if the Corinthians discover that he and Timothy are *not* true believers, he hopes that the Corinthians themselves will still go on to the end! An exegesis conceived in cloud cuckoo land, surely!

The notion that Paul here drives every individual believer into self-doubt is far removed from this passage. The context is entirely corporate – not the individual believer, but the whole church at Corinth, the entire *ekklēsia*. And that church must own up and confess that it was Paul's ministry of Christ and his gospel, and not the Judaisers with their law mongering, that had brought them into blessing. 'Examine yourselves', Paul

⁵ See my *Glorious*.

demanded. ‘You received Christ through my ministry, didn’t you!’

Of course, I am not saying that the passage has nothing to say to us today, and say to us individually – both believer and unbeliever – but we must not miss the main thrust of the apostle’s words. Not miss it? We must *stress* it! The fact is, 2 Corinthians could hardly be more relevant for us today, faced as we are with so many law preachers. Contemporary law preachers have a great deal more in common with the Judaisers than they like to recognise. And we need to get them to take 2 Corinthians seriously, read it as it stands and not filter it by their covenant-theology template. They must be made to face 2 Corinthians 3:1 – 4:6. And, of course, 2 Corinthians 13:2-7.

This is not the only place where we find the apostle taking such a tack. Listen to the parallel in the opening of Galatians 3:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Gal. 3:1-5).

The Galatians – as so many churches in the New Testament – were also being attacked by the Judaisers with their law mongering, and Paul stood up to them through the Galatians. Note the same irony here, as in the Corinthian letter, the same demand for a 100% endorsement of the apostle’s work in the ministry of the new covenant by the Spirit, and not by the law. As he went on to say to the Galatians:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. I plead with you, brothers,

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become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you! (Gal. 4:8-20).

In short, 2 Corinthians 13:5 is not a call for every individual believer to put himself on the rack to try to find if he is a true believer. Rather, it is a demand for endorsement – by the Corinthians – of the apostle’s ministry of the Spirit as opposed to the ministry of law. And we need to issue such a challenge today, in order to help believers come to see, and to enjoy, the glories of the new covenant for themselves.

J.N.Darby:

[The apostle]... puts an end to the question about his ministry by presenting an idea which ought to confound them utterly. If Christ had not spoken by him, Christ did not dwell in them. If Christ was in them, he must have spoken by the apostle, for he had been the means of their conversion. ‘Since’, he says, ‘you seek a proof that Christ speaks in me, examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith. Do you not know yourselves, that Christ dwells in you, unless you are reprobates?’ And that they did not at all think. This was quite upsetting to them, and turning their foolish and stupid opposition, their unbecoming contempt for the apostle, to their own confusion. What folly to allow themselves to be led away by a thought which, no doubt, exalted them in their own eyes, but which, by calling in question the

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apostleship of Paul, necessarily overturned, at the same time, their own experience [Darby had ‘Christianity’]!⁶

As John Calvin observed,⁷ Paul was appealing to the church – challenging the church – to admit that everything they had received by way of spiritual benefit in Christ, they had received through his ministry. That was the thrust of his demand to examine themselves. The apostle was not telling them to probe themselves as to the reality of their faith. Calvin:

[Paul] confirms, what he had stated previously – that Christ’s power showed itself openly in his ministry. For he makes them [the Corinthians] the judges of this matter, provided they descend, as it were, into themselves, and acknowledge what they had received from him. In the first place, as there is but one Christ, it must be of necessity, that the same Christ must dwell alike in minister and people. Now, dwelling in the people, how will he deny himself in the minister? Further, he had shown his power in Paul’s preaching, in such a manner that it could be no longer doubtful or obscure to the Corinthians, if they were not altogether stupid. For, whence had they faith? Whence had they Christ? Whence, *in fine*, had they everything? It is with good reason, therefore, that they are called to look into themselves, that they may discover there, what they despise as a thing unknown. *Then* only has a minister a true and well grounded assurance for the approbation of his doctrine, when he can appeal to the consciences of those whom he has taught, that, if they have anything of Christ, and of sincere piety, they may be constrained to acknowledge his fidelity. We are now in possession of Paul’s object.

Calvin went on to argue against ‘the Sorbonnic sophists’ (Roman schoolmen at Paris University) – who denied the possibility of assurance, leaving us believers – ‘our consciences’ – ‘constantly in suspense, and in a state of perplexity’. Calvin immediately went on:

But what does Paul say here? He declares that all are *reprobates*, who doubt whether they profess Christ and are a part of his

⁶ J.N.Darby: *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, Vol.4, third edition (revised), G.Morrish, London, pp387-388.

⁷ In his *Commentaries*.

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body. Let us, therefore, reckon *that* alone to be right [true, saving] faith, which leads us to repose in safety in the favour of God, with no wavering opinion, but with a firm and steadfast assurance.

Calvin saw that Paul, in 2 Corinthians 13, was not setting out to make believers anxious, but, taking their conversion as a reality, he was using that fact to vindicate his ministry of Christ by the Spirit in the face of the Judaisers and their emphasis upon law.

When Calvin said: ‘Paul... declares that all are reprobates, who doubt whether they profess Christ and are a part of his body’, he went too far. It is possible for believers to have doubt, and yet still be true believers – as I have shown from 1 John.⁸ Nevertheless, every believer ought to enjoy the fullest possible sense of assurance. It is his privilege, his right, in the new covenant.

Assurance! The believer has it by listening to the witness of the Spirit, the Spirit taking him to Christ, taking him to his present position in Christ – that is, justified, positionally sanctified, perfect, faultless before God (see, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12). Paul was able to appeal to all this in his battle with the Judaisers. And assurance should be the norm today. It was in the New Testament. And it should be for us. That is why I wrote my *Assurance*.⁹ Law teachers bring believers into serious bondage. They preach and teach in such a way as to produce anxiety in believers. Yes, I mean it. Listen to John Macarthur; let him serve as a warning to us all. Macarthur was not sufficiently nuanced here, and I can only guess as to the hurt his words may have caused:

I think it’s fair to say the pulpit is *rightly* the creator of anxious hearts. That’s part of the duty of the preacher – to make the heart anxious... The pulpit is to be a purveyor of a message that creates anxious hearts... Where there is that strong preaching, there will be a battle with assurance. And I’ll tell you something,

⁸ See my *Assurance* pp137-154; ‘John Turned Upside Down’ (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

⁹ Please see that volume for my arguments.

it's not bad to have that; it's good because how else are we drawn to the important issue of self-examination?¹⁰

Amazing! When these men preach like this, are they gospel preachers or law preachers?¹¹

2 Corinthians 13:5 stands as a mighty challenge to all believers: Do you want law or grace? In theological terms: Do you want covenant or new-covenant theology? As for me, I can state my response very simply. In the words of John, I am relieved – delighted – to be able to say that God has taught me not to water down the apostle's glorious assertion: 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). May the Spirit go on unfolding to me all the wealth there is bound up in those few words, the wealth that belongs to every believer.

¹⁰ Taken from John Macarthur: 'Why Christians Lack Assurance' (gty.org), emphasis mine.

¹¹ Bear in mind that Macarthur was saying this to believers – not to the ungodly – and doing so in a sermon to give them assurance! Preachers, I agree, must preach so as to awaken and disturb *unbelievers* – but, as I say, Macarthur was here trying to help believers who are afraid and lacking assurance. Fantastic! I would not be misunderstood. I am not saying that preachers should never disturb believers. Of course not! 2 Timothy 3:16, on its own, is more than sufficient to put a stop to that kind of talk. No! What is more, I define preaching as 'a confrontation' (Ezek. 16:2; 20:4; 22:2; 23:36), and I deplore the fact that many preachers steer as far away as possible from challenging believers, let alone upsetting or offending them. But, surely, when a man is deliberately setting out to remove a believer's fears over assurance, the last thing he should be doing is making believers harrow themselves, asserting that his job is to make them anxious. See my *Assurance* pp93-94.

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When Paul challenged the Corinthian believer to examine himself – ‘A man ought to examine himself’; that is, a believer ‘ought to examine himself’ – was he implying that the believer gets his assurance by probing himself as to his progressive sanctification,¹ looking to see if he has enough evidence to conclude that he truly is a child of God? Not at all! Although, since the time of the later Puritans, most believers have been taught that this the way to try to reach assurance,² it is quite wrong; it runs counter to the new covenant. I have coined a phrase for it: ‘legal assurance’. And this legal assurance is in stark contrast to the new-covenant way. As the New Testament makes as clear as noonday, the believer receives his assurance by the witness (the sealing, the anointing) of the Spirit, and he gets this witness at the point of conversion.³

This, of course, is why we must be clear about what Paul wanted when he told the Corinthian believer to examine himself. Although, at a superficial glance, it may appear that Paul was calling the believer to pore over his good works in hope of finding enough evidence to have assurance, most definitely he

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³ See my *Assurance*.

was not! To read him in that way is to misunderstand him altogether.

Let me make my case.⁴ I start with the apostle's words:

Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement (1 Cor. 11:27-31).

The relevant extract is, I say again: 'A man ought to examine himself'; that is, a believer ought to examine himself. But, since it is vital, I have quoted the context. The context, as always, is king!

And what does that context tell us? The passage is entirely concerned, solely concerned, with a believer preparing himself for the Lord's supper. It has nothing to do with making a Christian doubt his salvation, urging a believer to test himself as to the reality of his faith; *that* is utterly foreign to the context. In other words, the passage does not in any way support the view that believers must look to their progressive sanctification for assurance. The apostle's words are, from first to last, to do with the believer in his approach to the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ, his Lord and Saviour.

By plucking the command out of context, by ignoring the context, of course, a legal preacher can have a field-day. He can misuse the passage to make a believer doubt whether or not he is in the faith. He can point to the gloomy portals of introspection, and bid the believer enter. Moreover, the individual believer can take the text, and do all this for himself. Thus by grabbing this command out of context, the believer can be driven – or drive himself – into a whirlpool of sadness and doubt. And I am sure the devil will not be slow in making him do it! And all the time, as I say, the apostle's command is to do with preparation for the Lord's supper.

⁴ For this article, I have lightly edited my *Assurance* pp163-169.

Nor should we miss, even in the call for self-examination before taking the supper, the apostle's positive and encouraging tone, as it is brought out in the NKJV: 'But let a man examine himself, *and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup*'. Yet again, we see that the notion that Paul was driving believers into introspection, making them anxious, is a million miles away from the context.

John Calvin, commenting on the passage, rightly dismissed the papist nonsense of 'auricular confession', calling it 'torture': 'Those persons, after having tortured themselves with reflection for a few hours, and making the priest – such as he is – privy to their vileness, imagine that they have done their duty. It is an examination of another sort that Paul here requires'. And, of course, something similar (leaving aside the aspect of confession to a priest) could be said about any form of legal teaching which encourages doubt and introspection.

Paul's purpose – 'an examination of another sort that Paul here requires' – is all to do with the Lord's supper. Calvin again:

If you would wish to use aright the benefit afforded by Christ, bring faith and repentance. As to these two things, therefore, the trial must be made, if you would come duly prepared. Under repentance I include love; for the man who has learned to renounce himself, that he may give himself up wholly to Christ and his service, will also, without doubt, carefully maintain that unity which Christ has enjoined.

And even in saying this, being sensitive to the fears of believers, Calvin went on: 'It is not a perfect faith or repentance that is required, as some, by urging beyond due bounds, a perfection that can nowhere be found, would shut out for ever from the supper every individual of mankind'. The upshot? 'If, however, you aspire after the righteousness of God with the earnest desire of your mind, and, trembling under a view of your misery, do wholly lean upon Christ's grace', come to the table. In other words, the believer must examine himself, but even in this he must not expect perfection before he can go to the supper. 'Do you want to wholly lean on Christ and his grace?' Then come! I say again, the apostle does not command the believer to search himself as to whether or not he is a believer.

Good as his comments are, nevertheless Calvin did not get to the heart of what Paul was saying, but he did come close with his: ‘Carefully maintain that unity which Christ has enjoined’. Let me explain. Let us think a little more about ‘recognising the body’ of Christ. This is generally assumed, I think, to be ‘recognising the body of Christ, Christ’s own body, pictured in the elements’. This may be right. Even so, almost certainly, the apostle includes – if he does not concentrate on – the body of Christ in the sense of ‘the church’, the *ekklēsia*, the called-out ones.⁵

Gordon D.Fee:

The bread does refer to Christ’s physical body that was given in death on the cross. But the meaning of that ‘body’ at this table is that those who eat the one loaf are themselves that one body... The Lord’s supper is not just any meal; it is *the* meal, in which at a common table, with one loaf and a common cup they proclaimed that through the death of Christ they were one body, the body of Christ; and therefore they are not just any group of sociologically diverse people who could keep those differences intact at this table. Here they must ‘discern/recognise as distinct’ the one body of Christ, of which they are all parts and in which they are all gifts to one another. To fail to discern the body in this way, by abusing those of lesser sociological status, is to incur God’s judgement.⁶

This is right. Take Paul’s earlier words:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one

⁵ I would like to drop ‘church’ and use *ekklēsia*, but I feel I ought to continue to use the language familiar to the overwhelming majority. I say this because ‘church’, today, is largely part and parcel of institutional Christianity – Christendom. And Christendom has done much harm, over many centuries, to the cause of Christ in general, and to the individual believer in particular – to say nothing of the appalling effect it has had on unbelievers.

⁶ Gordon D.Fee: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1991, p564, emphasis his. Fee cited Isa. 1:14-17.

loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (1 Cor. 10:16-17; see also 1 Cor. 12:12-27).⁷

As a result, I do not discount ‘regard for the body of Christ pictured in the elements’, but I am sure that ‘regard for, love for, the members of Christ with whom I am about to break bread’ also figures prominently in ‘recognising the Lord’s body’, especially bearing in mind how necessary this rebuke was at Corinth. At the supper itself, the believers were appallingly carnal in their division and disregard for each other (1 Cor. 11:17-21), and God had judged them with sickness and death because of it (1 Cor. 11:29-30). And it was not just at the supper. The church was riddled with division, party spirit, cliques, carnality, toleration of dreadful offences, going to law with each other, proud excesses in their assemblies, and so on. I can quite see why Paul tackled this by urging his readers to ‘discern the Lord’s body’.

In any case, whichever of the two meanings we attach to ‘the body’ – or both – *the apostle is not calling the Corinthians to harrowing self-doubt as to the reality of their faith*. Rather, he demands that the believer searches himself as to his love for Christ expressed in his love for fellow-believers – the very ones with whom he is about to break bread. This is all of a piece with Christ’s words (rightly understanding his allusion to ‘altar’, of course):

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift (Matt. 5:23-24).

None of this is designed to make a believer doubt the reality of his experience.

C.H.Spurgeon spoke of the process known as ‘fencing the table’. He explained this ‘fencing’. It is, he said, ‘defending the table of the Lord against the approach of improper characters’.

⁷ Calvin commented: ‘The Corinthians [must] understand that we must, even by external profession, maintain that unity which subsists between us and Christ, inasmuch as we all assemble together to receive the symbol of that sacred unity’.

Acknowledging the rightness of the practice, even so he was clear that some had gone too far with it, and caused much hurt thereby:

This [fencing] is a very right and necessary thing to do, but some ministers have so guarded the table that very few have dared to come to it – and those who have come have often been persons who had more conceit than grace, while the better part – the truly humble and broken-hearted ones – have been frightened away! It would appear, from the exhortations of these ministers, as if Paul must have said: ‘Let a man examine himself, but never let him eat of this bread, nor drink of this cup. Let him so examine himself that he shall come to the conclusion that he has no right to sit at the table of the Lord and, therefore, shall go his way feeling that he is utterly unworthy of that high privilege’. Beloved friends, this is not my objective in preaching from this text, nor should it be yours in obeying it. Examine yourselves with the hope and the strong desire that you may be permitted to come to the Lord’s table. Do not let the examination take so morbid and melancholy a form that you almost look out for causes of self-suspicion, but the rather, especially as many of you have known the Lord for years, let your examination be made in order that you may come aright to the table, that you may come there in a right spirit, and not that you may be compelled to stay away. ‘Let a man examine himself’, and then, in the spirit of self-examination, let him eat of this bread, and drink of this cup.

Spurgeon went on to reassure believers:

Distinctly remember that the qualification for a place at the Lord’s table is *not* perfect [progressive] sanctification. If it were, I am afraid that there would not be a soul here so qualified. And if there should be one who declared that he had attained to such a state, I should expect that he would prove to be the biggest hypocrite in the place! Recollect, also, that the qualification for coming to the Lord’s table is not the full assurance of faith. There might be some genuine believers in Christ who would not be able to commune if that were the qualification, but, happily, it is not. The least grain of true faith in Christ qualifies you! You are not to examine to see whether it is full noontide with your soul – have you even a little twilight? Have you been quickened into new life so much as to have a holy hunger and thirst for more of the Christ who is already yours? If so, you may come to his table. Do not arrange the examination in such a way as to

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exclude yourselves unnecessarily. I will not, if I can help it, put it in such a style as to exclude one of you who ought to be admitted. On the contrary, my soul longs that the whole of you might truly feel and say: 'Yes, we do love the Lord, and we are anxious to come and obey his command, and thus show his death in remembrance of him'. Well, that is the first great objective of this examination – not that you may be made to stay away, but that you may come, if you are really entitled to sit at the table of your Lord!

Let me continue with Spurgeon – even though he has said enough on this head to make the point. Note his warm and encouraging words from this passage, words to encourage doubting believers to come to assurance:

And, surely, it also means that every communicant must come most humbly, for the result of any true examination of ourselves must be deep humiliation of spirit. As for myself, I must confess that I am not what I want to be, and I am not what I ought to be. I can only come to the table declaring myself to be an unworthy one in whom the grace of God is indeed magnified. That he should ever have put me among his children and permitted me to call him, my Father, will be a wonder to me throughout eternity! See, then, the blessed result of this self-examination when it lays you low at the foot of the cross, and makes you come to the Lord's table, not boasting: 'I have a right to be here', but humbly and gratefully saying: 'I do indeed adore the grace of God which has made it possible that such an one as I am should be allowed to sit down with the family of God at his banqueting table of love'.

And yet more:

And, just once more, this examination is intended that we may come to the table with an appreciative joy. Let me explain that rather long word. You know if you come to the communion table saying: 'I do not know whether I have a right to be here', you cannot enjoy yourself. If I were sitting at a man's table, and I said to myself: 'I am afraid I have made a mistake. I do not believe he ever invited me', I should feel very uncomfortable while I was there, and I should be wonderfully glad when the dinner was over. But if, as I sat at the table, I said: 'I know the gentleman invited me. I have his invitation with me and he is smiling upon me, for he is glad that I am here'. That is how I

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like to feel at the Lord's table – to know, after examination, that I am in my right place. Then I soon forget all about my right to be there and all I think of is that which is on the table, and about my Lord who has invited me, and how I can enjoy the sweetest communion with him, and partake of the dainties which he has put before me.

In short:

I want you, brothers and sisters, to examine yourselves till you come to this conclusion: 'We are not perfect, but we believe in Jesus. We are not yet fully assured, but we have a humble hope in him. We are not the strongest of his warriors, but we have his life in us – we do know him, and trust him'. Then you will feel: 'The good Shepherd feeds the lambs as well as the full-grown sheep of his flock, so we may come to him for all we need'. Then you will have nothing to think about as to yourself, but all you will have to do will be to say: 'My Lord here gives me his flesh to eat, and his blood to drink, after a spiritual fashion. In these outward types, I will now feed upon him. The fact that God took our nature upon himself shall be as food to my soul. The equally blessed fact that being found in fashion as a man, he took my sins upon himself and suffered in my place shall be like generous wine to me. I will drink it down! I will feed upon it! I will live by it!' Then you will have joy and gladness in your soul and this supper will be what it really is – no funeral feast, but a banquet of delight for all the friends of Christ! 'Let a man examine himself' with the view that he may so eat and so drink when he comes to the table of the Lord.⁸

I feel sure that Spurgeon has caught the apostle's meaning here. In other words, 1 Corinthians 11:28 makes no contribution whatsoever to making any believer worry about whether or not he is a true believer, no contribution to making him go into introspection, and leading him to depression and lack of assurance.

⁸ Sermon 2699: 'Examination Before Communion' (spurgeongems.org).

New-Covenant Theology: New Kid on the Block?

You must have heard something like this:

New-covenant theology? Must be wrong! It was only dreamed up in the 1970s, wasn't it? Doesn't that make it the latest in the line of Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and all the other hare-brained schemes? Steer well clear of it!

This is the kind of cheap jibe that new-covenant men and women have come to expect from the Reformed. And, speaking for myself, I have no difficulty living with it. I say this because I want to make it clear that I am not writing out of anguish, desperately trying to defend myself. Nor am I, strictly speaking, trying to persuade dyed-in-the-wool covenant theologians. The truth is, I fear they are so locked in their system that it will take something far more potent than this little article to shake them out of their complacency. No! I don't have the 'professional' covenant theologians in mind at this time.

Rather, I am concerned with – and concerned for! – the growing number of believers who know that something is wrong in their spiritual experience, something is wrong in today's churches, and have come to understand that covenant theology bears some responsibility for it. I want to help those believers who are suffering under a sense of bondage because they are being taught by men who insist on the law as the perfect rule of life for progressive sanctification. Some – perhaps many – of these believers would like to break free. And they are seriously attracted by what they know of new-covenant theology. They like its scriptural ring. But they are fearful. When they hear Reformed taunts and sneers – such as those above – they are afraid to commit themselves to a course which is so obviously wrong because it's so novel. After all, if nobody thought of new-covenant theology for two thousand years...

These are the very people I wish to help. To that end, I am going to respond to the jibe under three headings:

New-Covenant Theology: New Kid on the Block?

1. New-covenant theology is all so new! So what?
2. New-covenant theology is all so new! At best those who say this are showing a crass ignorance of history. If not, they are deliberately perpetrating a lie.¹
3. New-covenant theology is all so new! Such an accusation, even if it were true – which it is not! – misses the point. What is the real issue?

1. So what?

I wonder how many times the jibe has been used in the past? Did the Papists taunt Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin with it? What was the answer then? And what's the answer now? 'Where was your face before you washed it?'

Incidentally, when was covenant theology invented?² And how did its inventors cope with the jibe?

2. It's a lie

New-covenant theology did not begin last week! Have the Reformed never heard of the early Plymouth Brethren and the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists of the mid 19th century? Never heard of the so-called antinomians in both New and Old England in the 17th century? Never heard of the 16th century Anabaptists – some of whom pre-dated Calvin? Never heard of the early

¹ Do not miss the fact that just in case this jibe fails to stick, covenant theologians also accuse new-covenant people of repeating the antinomianism of past centuries – thereby showing that they know that new-covenant theology is not the Johnny-come-lately they make it out to be!

² Although Johann Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) was probably the first to publish a work containing the concept of federal salvation, Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587) was its inventor, in Germany, when he and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) drafted the final version of the Heidelberg Catechism (1562). William Ames (1576-1633) was the leading British exponent of covenant theology, which dominated the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians (1643-1646) and the Savoy Declaration of the Independents (1661).

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Fathers, particularly of the 2nd century? I refer, of course, to the writings of such men on the place of the law in the life of the individual believer, and the proper use of the old covenant in the life of the *ekklēsia*.³ As I say, if the Reformed haven't heard of such men and their works, then they are simply displaying their ignorance. And if they have heard of them, then, by making the jibe, they are showing their malice and worse. Indeed, they are breaking the 9th commandment.

Let me remind you of the sort of thing the early Brethren, the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists, the Antinomians, the Anabaptists and the early Fathers wrote about the law, and show you that new-covenant theology is anything but the new kid on the block. Indeed, new-covenant theology is far older than covenant theology! Let me prove it.

Just to say that in these extracts, I am not dotting every 'i' or crossing every 't'. Nor am I saying that this is all such men wrote about the old covenant and the law. No! But they did write this! And I am merely demonstrating that these men could well be described as 'new-covenant theologians', long before the term had been invented. In other words, new-covenant theology, as such, was not invented in the 1970s. What matters is not the terminology, but the principle.

The early Brethren

Let J.L.Harris speak for them:

The believer is not... without law to God, but that rule [the law] that subsisted between the Lord and the servant [does] not apply to this new relationship... Many a Christian... [however] does not stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ has made him free: 'For you are all children of God by faith of Jesus Christ'. And, not rejoicing in the liberty of sonship, they [do not] see... their calling to be to walk as 'obedient children, not fashioning themselves according to their former lusts in their ignorance, but as he who has called them is holy, so are they to be holy in all manner of conversation'. They still look to the law [of Moses] as their rule, and 'receive the spirit of bondage again to fear',

³ Alas, later Fathers went back to the old covenant and imposed it on both individual believers and the *ekklēsia*, with disastrous consequences. See my *Pastor*.

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questioning... the extent of the obedience required, instead of returning the answer of a willing heart unto a loving Father. The law deals in formal enactments, but the Spirit, who is liberty, [deals] more in the application of some great and acknowledged principles. What law could accurately define the measure and quality of the obedience of a child to a parent?

Again:

[The believer's] liberty makes him not lawless to God... It is indeed blessed liberty into which we are called as children of God, but it is a high and holy responsibility. 'Be therefore followers (imitators) of God *as* [emphasis mine] *dear children* [emphasis his], and walk in love'. The perfectness of the Father's love is the only standard proposed to the children: 'Be... perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'. Just in proportion as the relationship is raised in dignity from that of a servant to that of a son, so is the standard of obedience raised also. The law might tend to tutor the flesh, but the Spirit alone [can] serve God. 'If you are led of the Spirit you are not under the law', and this applies to the law as a rule of life; for... this passage is not concerning justification, but Christian conduct: 'This I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh'... Jesus... [was] made under the law, meeting every one of God's requirements, even fulfilling all righteousness... He had the right and title to have entered into life, because he had kept the commandments... Freedom from the yoke of bondage is not that we may be without law to God, but that we may be obedient children... The consideration of the remainder of the apostle's statement, as to a Christian being 'under law to Christ', will most plainly prove that he is in no sense whatever under *the* [emphasis his] law. 'The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for unholy and profane'.⁴

Commenting on 1 Timothy 1:8, Harris observed:

[The law] may be used lawfully as the expression of God's mind with respect to a variety of actions. It may be used lawfully too as exhibiting any great principle of divine conduct; as such the apostle uses it, when insisting on children obeying their parents in the Lord, where he shows that there was in the law an express promise to obedient children. So again he uses it lawfully when

⁴ J.L.Harris: *Christian Witness*, Plymouth, January 1835, pp39-41.

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he presents it as the general expression of the Divine mind, that labour is entitled to support [1 Cor. 9:8-9]... If we [do not use it in this way] we deprive ourselves of the benefit of God's own expressed mind on a great variety of subjects, and therefore of that wisdom which comes from above. But fully allowing all this, I would assert that the believer who proposed to himself the law for his rule would constantly be walking disorderly as a disciple of Christ. It was given by Moses for a specific purpose... 'It made nothing perfect'... We are under law to Christ, not to Moses.⁵

Harris again:

Let it ever be borne in mind, that because we are called to liberty, even the liberty of sons, because we are already made the household of God, and have our mansions prepared in it, that the Lord Jesus as head over that house, claims our allegiance to him. It is because we belong to heaven that he exercises this authority over us, in order that we may walk worthy of our high and holy calling. It is because we are sons, and if sons then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, that the Son who has made us free, shows us how to use that freedom in service to the Father.⁶

Thus it is clear that in the second quarter of the 19th century, the early Brethren were speaking in terms consistent with what we now know as 'new-covenant theology'.

The Gospel Standard Strict Baptists

William Gadsby (1773-1844) responded to Andrew Fuller (who had used the name 'Gaius' in a work advocating the law as the believer's rule of sanctification. Gadsby knew he had to answer the charge that he (Gadsby) was decrying the ten commandments. This he did. More, he took that charge back to where it really belonged; namely, to Fuller (Gaius) himself, and all like him:

Who objects to the perfection of the ten commandments? I know no one who does except Gaius, and men like him. I believe the law to be holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good, a perfect transcript of the perfections of God; and it stands as a perfect rule of life *to all that are under it* [emphasis mine], and that too in its primitive purity, *without any alteration whatever*

⁵ Harris pp41-42.

⁶ Harris p46.

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[emphasis mine]. Surely Gaius has forgotten himself. It is *he* [Gadsby's emphasis] that objects to its perfection, for he tells us, 'that as a covenant, it is dead to the believer'.

I pause. Gaius [Fuller] was badly adrift here in more than one way. The Bible never says the law has died; it is the believer who has died to the law (Rom. 7:4-6; Gal. 2:19). To let Gadsby go on:

Now, if the law was originally a perfect rule, how comes it to pass that it must undergo so painful an operation as death to constitute it a rule? If this is not treating the law with contempt, it will be difficult to know what is... To say that the condemning power of the law is taken away, so that, though the believer cannot keep it, it does not condemn him, positively robs the law of its authority and perfection... For what is a law without power to inflict punishment on transgressors? If this is not making void the law, what is? for I read of no penalty annexed to the law of works, but that of a curse.⁷

Listen to Gadsby again, this time exposing the futility of trying to distinguish between the law as a covenant and the law as a rule: In the Sermon on the Mount, he said:

[It] is beyond a doubt... the Lord points out the authority of the law. [First] to convince his disciples of their impossibility of keeping it; but in all that he says upon the subject, he never once mentions any difference between the law as a covenant of works and a rule of conduct, but speaks of it in its fullest sense... therefore evident it is, that such men, who preach the law as a rule of conduct to believers, are the men who break the commandments, and teach men so, by saying it is dead as a covenant, and that its condemning power is taken away; which is as much as to say, the law is your perfect rule of conduct, but if you fall short of obedience, it has no power to hurt you. If this be not sporting with the law, I am at a loss to know what is... Who is it that deprecates the law – the man that, by a precious faith in Jesus Christ, gives it its full demand, and so establishes it; or the

⁷ Gadsby pp7-8,12. I am referring to *The Works of the Late Mr William Gadsby, Manchester, in Two Volumes*, Vol.1, London, 1851, the 1870 edition. On the numbering of the pages in Gadsby, 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 cited this volume as Gadsby with page numbers, but not indicated the section.

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man that first kills it, and then takes it for a perfect rule of conduct, and gives it but a partial obedience at best? The latter must be the man that deprecates the law.⁸

Gaius (Fuller) had asked: ‘Are believers at liberty to profane the sabbath?’ By raising the issue of the sabbath, Fuller, no doubt, had thought he had floored his opponents. The Reformed constantly refer to the sabbath today. It seems to be the touchstone of orthodoxy – and more! But, in fact, Fuller had bitten off more than he could chew! Gadsby was rightly scornful in reply. He pointed out that in the fourth command, God demands the keeping of the *seventh* day. He asked:

Now, are we at liberty to work on the *seventh* day, and set apart the *first* day for worship, and yet the law remain a perfect rule of conduct? Does the law allow us to reverse its commands, so that when it says *the seventh* is the sabbath, and *in it* you shall *not* work, are we to understand by such terms, that the seventh is *not* the sabbath, and in it we *are* to work? If the law, as a perfect rule of conduct, allows us liberty to reverse its commands, it follows that when it says [we are not to kill, steal and bear false witness]... that we *are* at liberty to kill, steal and bear false witness... Does it not appear that those men who enforce the law of works as a perfect rule of conduct to believers, while they can reverse the fourth command, open a wide door for all ungodliness? I wonder how Gaius could ask the above question, and not blush at the same time, seeing he is the man that thinks we *are* at liberty to profane the sabbath!⁹

Gadsby again:

The apostle says, as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, and this is the ceremonial law, think you? Surely not; for that preached Jesus [in shadows]. The curse, or the sentence of death, is in the law of works. A man must do violence to his own understanding before he can think this is the ceremonial law.¹⁰

Once again, as we can see, 19th century men spoke in clear new-covenant terms.

⁸ Gadsby p16.

⁹ Gadsby pp12-13, emphasis his.

¹⁰ Gadsby p69.

Let us go back another 200 years.

The Antinomians

I take Tobias Crisp (1600-1643) as typical. Crisp drew attention to the outcome of the teaching of law men:

You will observe, where such legal observances are required to application of justification,¹¹ 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.¹²

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, not to the law, but to look to Christ – and to do so at once and for everything.

Crisp:

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

¹¹ 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.

¹² For the sad experience of both Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards, see my article 'Legal Assurance' (the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

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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.

Again:

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.¹³

Again:

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 purchased by Christ for them have also the power of God in them, which keeps them [so] that they break not out licentiously.¹⁴

Again:

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

¹³ Tobias Crisp: *Christ Alone Exalted*, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, Vol.4 pp226-228,230-232, emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Crisp Vol.1 pp122-123.

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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.¹⁵

Again:

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.¹⁶

Thus we discover that new-covenant theology was alive and well in the mid 17th century.¹⁷ New kid on the block?

We can go back even further – to the 16th century.

The Anabaptists

Take Balthasar Hubmaier (1480?-1520):

Believed forgiveness of sins is the true gospel which cannot be without the Spirit of God, for the Spirit of God makes the word [of God] alive. Faith is a work of God (John 6:29). For by faith the law of sin and of death becomes a law of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2). For what was impossible to the law, God has fulfilled through Jesus Christ so that the righteousness demanded by the

¹⁵ Crisp Vol.4 pp124-127.

¹⁶ Crisp Vol.3 pp186-187.

¹⁷ For more from Crisp, and other men, see my *Four*; ‘Preparationism in New England’ (the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com; christmycovenant.com).

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law might be fulfilled in us who now walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.¹⁸

Hans Denck (c1495-1527):

Whoever has received the new covenant of God, that is, in whose heart the law was written through the Holy Spirit, is truly righteous. Whoever supposes he will accomplish keeping the law through the book, ascribes to the dead letter what belongs to the living Spirit.¹⁹

Sebastian Franck (1499-c1543) complained of:

Wolves, the doctors of un wisdom, apes of the apostles, and antichrists [who] mix the New Testament [covenant] with the Old [covenant]... and from it prove [the legitimacy of]... [the] power of magistracy... [the] priesthood; and praise everything and ascribe this all forcibly to Christ... And just as the popes have derived all this from it, so also many of those who would have themselves called evangelicals hold that they have nobly escaped the snare of the pope and the devil, and have nevertheless achieved... nothing more than that they have exchanged and confounded the priesthood of the pope with the Mosaic kingdom... If [that is, since] the priesthood cannot be re-established out of the old law, neither can [Christian] government... be established according to the law of Moses.

In all this, Franck listed the sabbath along with circumcision, kingship, temple and sacrifices, as old-covenant externals and shadows fulfilled and rendered obsolete by Christ.²⁰

¹⁸ Balthasar Hubmaier: 'On the Christian Baptism of Believers', in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, translated and edited by H.Wayne Pipkin and John H.Yoder, Herald Press, Scottdale, 1989, p106. Taken from W.R.Estep: 'Law and Gospel in the Anabaptist/Baptist Tradition', in *Grace Theological Journal*, 1991, pp189-214 (taken from biblicalstudies.org.uk).

¹⁹ Hans Denck: 'Concerning the Law of God', in *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck*, translated by Clarence Bauman, p145. Taken from W.R.Estep: 'Law and Gospel in the Anabaptist/Baptist Tradition', in *Grace Theological Journal*, 1991, pp189-214 (which may be found on biblicalstudies.org.uk).

²⁰ Sebastian Franck: *A Letter to John Campanus (1531)*, in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*,

Dietrich Philips (c1560): ‘True ministers... rightly divide the word of God between the Old and New Testaments [covenants], between the letter and the Spirit’. Philips was scathing about the use of Mosaic laws to ‘exercise dominion over the consciences of men’. Taking up Deuteronomy 13:5, ‘that God through Moses commanded that the false prophets be put to death’, he pointed out the obvious:

If, according to the Old Testament [covenant] command, false prophets were to be put to death [today – as of course they were in Philips’ days, by Romanists and Reformers, who both were masters at applying the old covenant to the church!], then... likewise the higher powers would be obliged to put to death not only the false prophets but also all image worshippers, and those who serve idols, and who counsel other people to commit sacrilege (Ex. 22:18), and all adulterers, and all who blaspheme the name of the Lord, and who swear falsely by that name, all who curse father and mother, and profane the sabbath (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 27:16); for they are all alike condemned to death by the law as well as the false prophets are... God through Moses had commanded to kill the false prophets; that is a command of the Old and not the New Testament [covenant]... In all false and anti-Christian congregations these [following] things are not found: namely, no real new birth; no real distinction between law and gospel, that brings forth fruit, and by which people truly repent and are converted from unrighteousness unto the living God (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8); no true knowledge of the eternal and only God, who is life eternal, the fullness of wisdom and of righteousness, that is manifested by the keeping of the commandments of God (John 17:3...); no true confession of the pure, holy and spotless humility; no scriptural baptism or Lord’s supper; no Christian washing of the feet of saints (John 13:5-17) in the quietness of true humility; no key to the kingdom of heaven; no evangelical ban or separation [that is, church discipline]; no shunning of the temples of idolatry nor false worship; no unfeigned brotherly love; no God-fearing life nor keeping of the commands of Christ; no persecution for righteousness’ sake. All these ordinances and evidences of true Christianity are found in no anti-Christian congregations in correct form, but everywhere the reverse and opposite.

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Yet the fact is, ‘all things have become new through Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:6); the oldness of the letter and of the flesh has passed away, and the upright new being of the Spirit has been ushered in by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)’.²¹

The Anabaptist Waterland Confession of 1580, the second Mennonite (Anabaptist) Confession:

The intolerable burden of the Mosaic law with all its shadows and types was brought to an end in Christ and removed from the midst of his people... A man... regenerated and justified by God through Christ, lives through love (which is poured out into his heart through the Holy Spirit) with joy and gladness, in all good works, according to the law and precepts and customs enjoined on him by God through Christ.²²

So much for the 16th century. New-covenant theology the new kid on the block?

And now let us go to the start of the 2nd century.

The early Fathers

Take Justin Martyr (AD110-165), who wrote to the Jew, Trypho. From Justin’s *Dialogue*, chapter 11, I quote the passage dealing with ‘The Law Abrogated; the New Testament [Covenant] Promised and Given by God’:

We do not trust through Moses or through the law; for then we would do the same as yourselves [that is, the Jews]. But now – for I have read that there shall be a final law, and a covenant, the chiefest of all, which it is now incumbent on all men to observe, as many as are seeking after the inheritance of God. For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves [the Jews] alone; but this [final law, the new covenant] is for all universally [that is, Jews and Gentiles]. Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one;

²¹ Dietrich Philips: *The Church of God* (c.1560), in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*, edited by George Huntston Williams, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1957, pp235-237,240-243,253-256.

²² William L.Lumpkin: *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, revised edition 1969, pp41-43,49,57.

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and an eternal and final law – namely, Christ – has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance. Have you not read this which Isaiah says: ‘Hearken unto me, hearken unto me, my people; and, you kings, give ear unto me: for a law shall go forth from me, and my judgment shall be for a light to the nations. My righteousness approaches swiftly, and my salvation shall go forth, and nations shall trust in mine arm’ (Isa. 51:4-5)? And by Jeremiah, concerning this same new covenant, he thus speaks: ‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt’ (Jer. 31:31-32). If, therefore, God proclaimed a new covenant which was to be instituted, and this for a light of the nations, we see and are persuaded that men approach God, leaving their idols and other unrighteousness, through the name of him who was crucified, Jesus Christ, and abide by their confession even unto death, and maintain piety. Moreover, by the works and by the attendant miracles, it is possible for all to understand that he [Christ himself] is the new law, and the new covenant, and the expectation of those who out of every people wait for the good things of God. For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ, as shall be demonstrated while we proceed.

And then chapter 34:

For where it is said: ‘The law of the Lord is perfect’, you do not understand it of the law which was to be after Moses [that is, Christ’s law], but of the law which was given by Moses, although God declared that he would establish a new law and a new covenant.

Irenaeus (AD120-202), *Against Heresies*, Book 4, chapter 4:

Since, then, the law originated with Moses, it terminated with John as a necessary consequence. Christ had come to fulfil it: wherefore ‘the law and the prophets were’ with them ‘until John’. And therefore Jerusalem, taking its commencement from David, and fulfilling its own times, must have an end of legislation when the new covenant was revealed.

Again, Book 4, chapter 12:

But that this is the first and greatest commandment, and that the next [has respect to love] towards our neighbour, the Lord has taught, when he says that the entire law and the prophets hang upon these two commandments. Moreover, he did not himself bring down [from heaven] any other commandment greater than this one, but renewed this very same one to his disciples, when he enjoined them to love God with all their heart, and others as themselves. But if he had descended from another Father, he never would have made use of the first and greatest commandment of the law; but he would undoubtedly have endeavoured by all means to bring down a greater one than this from the perfect Father, so as not to make use of that which had been given by the God of the law. And Paul in like manner declares: 'Love is the fulfilling of the law' (Rom. 13:10) and [he declares] that when all other things have been destroyed, there shall remain 'faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of all is love' (1 Cor. 13:13) and that apart from the love of God, neither knowledge avails anything (1 Cor. 13:2) nor the understanding of mysteries, nor faith, nor prophecy, but that without love all are hollow and vain; moreover, that love makes man perfect; and that he who loves God is perfect, both in this world and in that which is to come. For we do never cease from loving God; but in proportion as we continue to contemplate him, so much the more do we love him.

As in the law, therefore, and in the gospel [likewise], the first and greatest commandment is, to love the Lord God with the whole heart, and then there follows a commandment like to it, to love one's neighbour as one's self; the author of the law and the gospel is shown to be one and the same. For the precepts of an absolutely perfect life, since they are the same in each testament [covenant], have pointed out [to us] the same God, who certainly has promulgated particular laws adapted for each; but the more prominent and the greatest [commandments], without which salvation cannot [be attained], he has exhorted [us to observe] the same in both.

Again, Book 4, chapter 13:

[Christ] did not teach us these things as being opposed to the law, but as fulfilling the law, and implanting in us the varied righteousness of the law. That would have been contrary to the law, if he had commanded his disciples to do anything which the law had prohibited. But this which he did command – namely,

not only to abstain from things forbidden by the law, but even from longing after them – is not contrary to [the law], as I have remarked, neither is it the utterance of one destroying the law, but of one fulfilling, extending, and affording greater scope to it... Now all these [precepts], as I have already observed, were not [the injunctions] of one doing away with the law, but of one fulfilling, extending, and widening it among us; just as if one should say, that the more extensive operation of liberty implies that a more complete subjection and affection towards our liberator had been implanted within us. For he did not set us free for this purpose, that we should depart from him (no one, indeed, while placed out of reach of the Lord's benefits, has power to procure for himself the means of salvation), but that the more we receive his grace, the more we should love him. Now the more we have loved him, the more glory shall we receive from him, when we are continually in the presence of the Father.

Again, Book 4, chapter 16:

Moreover, we learn from the Scripture itself, that God gave circumcision, not as the completer of righteousness, but as a sign, that the race of Abraham might continue recognisable. For it declares: 'God said unto Abraham, Every male among you shall be circumcised; and you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, as a token of the covenant between me and you' (Gen. 17:9-11). This same does Ezekiel the prophet say with regard to the sabbaths: 'Also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord, that sanctify them' (Ezek. 22:12). And in Exodus, God says to Moses: 'And ye shall observe my sabbaths; for it shall be a sign between me and you for your generations' (Ex. 21:13). These things, then, were given for a sign; but the signs were not un-symbolical, that is, neither un-meaning nor to no purpose, inasmuch as they were given by a wise artist; but the circumcision after the flesh typified that after the Spirit. For 'we', says the apostle, 'have been circumcised with the circumcision made without hands' (Col. 2:11). And the prophet declares: 'Circumcise the hardness of your heart' (Deut. 10:16). But the sabbaths taught that we should continue day by day in God's service. 'For we have been counted', says the apostle Paul, 'all the day long as sheep for the slaughter' (Rom. 8:36); that is, consecrated [to God], and ministering continually to our faith, and persevering in it, and abstaining from all avarice, and not acquiring or possessing treasures upon earth (Matt. 6:19).

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Moreover, the sabbath of God..., that is, the kingdom, was, as it were, indicated by created things; in which [kingdom], the man who shall have persevered in serving God... shall, in a state of rest, partake of God's table...

The laws of bondage, however, were one by one promulgated to the people by Moses, suited for their instruction or for their punishment, as Moses himself declared: 'And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments' (Deut 4:14). These things, therefore, which were given for bondage, and for a sign to them, he cancelled by the new covenant of liberty [that is, the new covenant]. But he has increased and widened those laws which are natural, and noble, and common to all, granting to men largely and without grudging, by means of adoption, to know God the Father, and to love him with the whole heart, and to follow his word unswervingly, while they abstain not only from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. But he has also increased the feeling of reverence; for sons should have more veneration than slaves, and greater love for their father. And therefore the Lord says: 'As to every idle word that men have spoken, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment' (Matt. 12:36). And: 'He who has looked upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matt. 5:28); and: 'He that is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment' (Matt. 5:22). [All this is declared,] that we may know that we shall give account to God not of deeds only, as slaves, but even of words and thoughts, as those who have truly received the power of liberty, in which [condition] a man is more severely tested, whether he will reverence, and fear, and love the Lord. And for this reason Peter says 'that we have not liberty as a cloak of maliciousness' (1 Pet. 2:16), but as the means of testing and evidencing faith.²³

We have now reached back to the close of the 1st century and the time just after the apostles. Men, in those days, were clearly speaking in terms of what may be fairly described as new-covenant theology. New-covenant theology the new kid on the block?

But, in the end, all that's irrelevant.

²³ These extracts may be found on ccel.org

3. What is the real issue?

It does not matter a scrap whether or not ‘new-covenant theology’ as a term, as a phrase, first saw the light of day yesterday, a thousand years ago, or two thousand. What matters, the only thing that matters is this: What does Scripture say? John Robinson hit the nail on the head. He had spotted the root problem in this wrangle about ‘newness’. Listen to him addressing the Leiden church on Friday, the 21st of July, 1620, when they were meeting for their last day together upon earth. They were about to set sail from Holland, *via* England to New England. Robinson lifted up his voice and addressed the whole church for the last time. His words did not die four centuries ago; they sound and resound to this very day. They should be heeded – especially by Reformed men. Drawing his sermon to its close, Robinson declared:

We are now ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knows whether ever we shall live to see one another’s faces. But whether the Lord has appointed it or not, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, follow me no further than I follow Christ; and if God shall reveal anything to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry. For I am confident the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word. I bewail the state and condition of the Reformed churches, who have come to a full-stop in religion, and will go no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn beyond what Luther saw; the Calvinists, they stick where Calvin left them. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were shining lights in their times, yet God did not reveal his whole will unto them, and if they were alive today they would be as ready to and willing to embrace further light, as that they had received. Keep in mind our church covenant, our promise and covenant with God and one another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written word. But take heed what you receive for truth – examine it well and compare it and weigh it with other scriptures of truth before you receive it. It is not possible that the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-Christian

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darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.²⁴

This farewell sermon of John Robinson has resonated down the centuries. Its stirring appeal has affected many for good. *He called upon the people to search the Scriptures, to follow all the light which God grants in his word, and not to follow men, or allow their view of Scripture to be restricted by men, even great men, even men which have been much used of God, naming, in particular Luther and Calvin.* It is most remarkable that Robinson emphasised this particular point, and these particular men, in his final sermon to the departing saints.

How is it that many who think highly of the 1620 settlers pay so little attention to Robinson's excellent doctrine? For instance, why do they give the impression (to put it no stronger) that they cannot accept that Calvin, great man though he was, did not see all the truth? Why can they not bring themselves to admit that Calvin was not infallible, that he got some things wrong? Why do they so often try to make out that he was entirely consistent with himself at all times? Let me extend the point. Why do so many think that the men of Westminster, in the 1640s, with their Confession and other documents, set out the final word for all believers until the end of the age? Why is it that not a few of those who take such a view actually preach the Confession – and not Scripture, as they ought (2 Tim. 4:2)? And when confronted with new-covenant teaching on, say, the law or the discontinuity of the covenants, why are they singularly unwilling to face Scripture, and read it shorn of their confessional-spectacles? I do not say that they should throw the spectacles away, but I am asserting that they should read, interpret and apply their Confession by Scripture, and not the other way round. The same goes for all who treat the Heidelberg Confession, the Savoy Declaration, the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession, the writings of J.C.Philpot or John Nelson Darby... in like manner.

²⁴ I have drawn this from my *Battle for the Church: 1517-1644*. See also my *New-Covenant Articles: Volume Three; Voyage to Freedom*; 'A Thanksgiving Day Thought' (under the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com; christmycovenant.com).

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And it's not only John Robinson who laid down this vital marker, is it? We have the inspired record, a record that was surely given to set an example for us:

These Jews [of Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11).

Clearly, the Spirit demands that believers in all ages – not least, that we today – search the Scriptures, and be ready and willing to submit our minds, hearts and lives to what God has revealed in his word. Christ rebuked the Jews, not for searching the Scriptures, but for not applying them: ‘You search the Scriptures... yet...’ (John 5:39-40), he complained. As he prayed for his people: ‘[Father] sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth’ (John 17:17). And, as the prophet thundered: ‘Should not a people seek their God?... To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them’ (Isa. 8:19-20; see also Luke 16:29; 2 Tim. 3:14-17). What Scripture does *not* say is: ‘To the Reformers, to the Puritans! Never move beyond them and their great Confessions! Never get beyond covenant theology’.

So, I address any believer who wants to come into the liberty in Jesus (John 8:32,36; Gal. 5:1), but is being hindered, put off, by the taunt that since new-covenant theology is all so new, it must, of necessity, therefore, be suspect and wrong. To them, I say this: New-covenant theology was *not* dreamed up last week! All down the centuries, men have advocated its leading principles. And they have done so because Scripture teaches it. Search your Bible and see for yourself. And settle it in your mind that God must be true even if this puts some of the greatest teachers the church has ever known in the wrong. Bring every thought into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5),²⁵ not to covenant theology. Have the courage of your convictions. In the words of the apostle: ‘Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong’ (1 Cor.

²⁵ The context of 2 Corinthians could not be more apposite: Paul was dealing with the law men at Corinth. See 2 Cor. 3:1 – 4:6.

16:13). Do not allow yourself to read Scripture by the light of the systems of men – even the greatest of men. If you do, you will fall foul of Christ’s warning against ‘teaching as doctrines the commandments [or precepts, NASB] of men’ (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7). In this instance, for ‘commandments’ read ‘systems’. And I, for one, can see the relevance to all this of Paul’s command to Titus: ‘Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to... the commands of people who turn away from the truth’ (Tit. 1:13-14). And, writing to the Colossians, the apostle was adamant that they should not allow themselves to be brought into bondage ‘according to human precepts and teachings’ (Col. 2:16-22). The same needs to be said today.

Sacramental Baptism Exploded

By ‘sacramental’ I mean the idea that grace is actually conveyed by ministerial use of means – water and the like. Many Reformed teachers, past and present, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, the men of the Westminster Confession, David J. Engelsma, the advocates of the Federal Vision, N.T. Wright of the New Perspective, Daniel R. Hyde, and Baptist Sacramentalists, all hold to, or have held to, baptismal regeneration.¹

Letting the sacramentalists have their say

Martin Luther, for example, commenting on: ‘For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ’ (Gal. 3:27):

Putting on of Christ... consists... in a new birth and a new creation... which is done in baptism... They which are baptised, are regenerated and renewed by the Holy Ghost... There rises in them... new and holy affections, [such] as the fear of God, true faith and assured hope... There begins in them also a new will.

He attacked the Anabaptists, saying they were:

Fond and fantastical spirits, which go about to deface the majesty of baptism, and speak wickedly of it. Paul contrariwise commends and sets it forth with honourable titles, calling it ‘the washing of the new birth, the renewing of the Holy Ghost’ (Tit. 3:5). And here also he says, that all they which are baptised, have put on Christ. As if he said: You have not received through baptism a mere token whereby you are enrolled in the number of the Christians, as in our time many fantastical heads have supposed, which have made of baptism a token only, that is to say, a bare and empty sign. But as many (says he) as have been baptised, have put on Christ: that is, you have been carried out of the law into a new birth, which is wrought in baptism... Paul therefore teaches that baptism is not a sign, but the garment of Christ... Wherefore baptism is a thing of great force and efficacy.

¹ For this article, see my *Hinge; Infant; Baptist*. For this section, see my *Hinge* pp29-30; *Infant* pp8,38-39,42-43,48-65,150-154.

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He did not mince his words:

If any man... denies (as the fantastical spirits [Anabaptists] do) that righteousness and salvation is given unto an infant when first it is baptised... such a one utterly takes away salvation from baptism.²

John Calvin. He, like Luther, also said things which tended (to say the least) towards baptismal regeneration, confusing spiritual and water baptism:

Our children, before they are born, God declares that he adopts for his own when he promises that he will be a God to us, and to our seed after us... As soon as infants are born among them, the Lord signs them with the sacred symbol of baptism; they are therefore, in some sense, the people of God... The offspring of believers are born holy... included in the covenant of eternal life... admitted into the church by baptism... they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born... The children of the godly are born the children of the church and... they are accounted members of Christ from the womb... Children derive some benefit from their baptism... being ingrafted into the body of the church.³

When he was commenting on Paul's letter to the Colossians, Calvin said:

In [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the flesh, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11-12).

He went on:

[Paul] explains still more clearly the manner of spiritual circumcision – because, being buried with Christ, we are partakers of his death. He expressly declares that we obtain this by means of baptism.

² Well, I for one, 'fantastical spirit' or not, deny it! I certainly take away salvation from baptism (or, rather, refuse to give it to baptism).

³ John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, James Clarke and Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.2 pp525,535.

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Calvin, of course, meant water baptism, water baptism as a sacrament, and he was clearly speaking of baptismal regeneration by water. As he went on to say:

When he says that we are ‘buried with Christ’, this means more than that we are crucified with him; for burial expresses a continued process of mortification. When he says that this is done through means of baptism, as he says also in Romans 6:4, he speaks in his usual manner, ascribing efficacy to the sacrament, that it may not fruitlessly signify what does not exist. By [water] baptism, therefore, we are buried with Christ, because Christ does at the same time accomplish efficaciously that mortification, which he there represents, that the reality may be conjoined with the sign.

Take the Westminster Confession Chapter 28, for instance, which, when talking of water baptism, declares:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving [being given?] up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life... Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptised. Yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it... that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in his appointed time.

As you can see, what the Confession gives with one hand, it (ineffectively, vainly) tries to take away with the other. For, although ‘grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto [baptism]... that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated’, ‘yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of

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age or infants) as that grace belongs unto’! And, don’t forget, it’s what the people take away from the font that counts. If their metaphysical teachers are not certain about all the ins and outs, they themselves *are* sure that ‘something good has been done to the baby’. The message is plain: grace is conferred in baptism.

As a further example of statements made by infant baptisers which are perilous, not to say downright wrong, consider the words of David J.Engelsma:

The children of believers are included in the covenant *as children*, that is, already at conception and birth. They receive forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit of sanctification, and church membership – as children. For they have God as their God, and are his people – as children. Therefore, they have full right to baptism... God does not merely put the children of believers in a more advantageous position [than the children of unbelievers], so as to make it likelier that they will be saved; but he establishes his covenant with them, so as to be their God. God gives to the children the promise of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. Accordingly... the Reformed Church regards them, and must regard them, as those ‘sanctified in Christ’... God... gathers his church from age to age from the children of believers... Covenant children are... Jehovah’s children (Ezek. 16:20,21). They are not sinful flesh, spiritually like the devil; but they are holy (1 Cor. 7:14). Quite unlike the children of disobedience, who are ruled by the prince of the power of the air so that they have their conversation in the lusts of their flesh (Eph. 2:1-3), the baptised children of believers are in the Lord Jesus.

Engelsma said that he witnessed boldly to God’s covenant because, among other things, God, ‘looked upon me in my infancy in grace, incorporated me as a baby by his Spirit into his Son, Jesus’.⁴ He meant, of course, by infant baptism.

I must be brief in my comments, but these words cannot go unchallenged. First, observe Engelsma’s emphasis; God blesses the children of believers *as children*, even from ‘conception and

⁴ David J.Engelsma: *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, Protestant Reformed Church, South Holland, Illinois, third printing, 1993, pp9,12-13,17-18,23.

birth', he said. He claimed that they receive the forgiveness of their sins as children. But the Scriptures say that we receive the forgiveness of sins through and by faith (Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; Rom. 4:1-13). We are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8). Sinners have to be converted to receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:16-18). Sinners have to confess their sins before they are forgiven (1 John 1:9). Do the children of believers stand outside all this? Do the children of believers receive forgiveness of their sins as children, because they are the children of believers? Most definitely not! Does this need to be said? Apparently it does. A man, a woman, a child, can only receive the benefits of salvation through faith – their own personal, saving faith (Rom. 3:21-31; Gal. 3:14,22; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9). They are not saved by proxy. Infant baptisers agree that no infant can exercise saving faith – how then can he receive the benefits of Christ's redemption? To be saved, a sinner has to believe. No infant can savingly believe.

Daniel R.Hyde:

The Holy Spirit operates upon men's hearts through the voice of the minister and through the sacramental elements of water, bread and wine... Baptism is no mere symbol... but is a means of the work of the Spirit in our lives... I am washed with [Christ's] blood and Spirit from the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as certainly as I am washed outwardly with water... The water of baptism is more than mere water... for the water is so bound to the promise of God that the physical cleansing becomes, if not the instrument, at least the occasion for the spiritual cleansing... As the outer self is washed with water by the minister, the inner self is washed with the blood of the Christ by the Holy Spirit... The two events do coincide and are bound together in the relationship between promise and sign... We are as really washed from our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water... The Holy Spirit... washes us from our sins, he interchanges the sign and the thing signified.⁵

Contemporary writers have been unequivocal in their assertion that the Reformers held to baptismal regeneration. Take David J.Wright:

⁵ An article in the *Banner of Truth*, May 2008, pp1-8. Sadly, I received no reply to my e-mail raising the issue with the magazine.

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The divines who laboured so long and hard on the Westminster Assembly benches clearly held to regeneration as God's normal baptismal gift. The erosion of such full-bodied teaching about infant baptism among Protestant evangelicals in modern times distances them from the Reformers more markedly than on almost any other topic... The Westminster Confession teaches baptismal regeneration of infants and older persons. Just as [the usual] qualifications are commonplace among the Reformers, so also the generality of their baptismal theology conveys a decisively realist message: baptism is God's normal channel for imparting his gifts... to his children.⁶

Or Rich Lusk: 'The Reformed Confessions clearly teach that a sacrament includes *both* the sign *and* the thing signified. Sacraments are not merely signs; they are signs *conjoined* with the gracious work of Christ and the Spirit'. In this, the Reformed Confessions were following 'Calvin [who] repeatedly claimed the sacraments perform what they picture; that in them, God accomplishes what he signifies'.⁷

Just to confirm what these two modern Reformed writers claim, let me quote some more from Calvin:

By regeneration, the children of God are delivered from the bondage of sin, but not as if they had already obtained full possession of freedom, and no longer felt any annoyance from the flesh... When it is said that God purifies his church so as to be 'holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:26-27), that he promises this cleansing... and performs it in his elect, I understand that reference is made to the guilt rather than to the matter of sin. In regenerating his people, God indeed accomplishes this much for them; he destroys the dominion of sin, by supplying the agency of the Spirit, which enables them to come off victorious from the contest. Sin, however, though it ceases to reign, does not cease to dwell in them... The remains of sin survive, not to have

⁶ David F.Wright: *What has Infant Baptism done to Baptism? An enquiry at the end of Christendom*, Paternoster Press, Milton Keynes, 2005, pp24,99.

⁷ Rich Lusk: 'Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies', in Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (eds.): *The Federal Vision*, Athanasius Press, Monroe, 2004, pp96-102, emphasis his.

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dominion, but to humble them under a consciousness of their infirmity.

So far, so good. But what of Calvin's words in between these last two sections (from 'by regeneration' to 'in regenerating')? How does God regenerate his elect? Like this:

When it is said that God purifies his church so as to be 'holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:26-27)... he promises this cleansing *by means of baptism*.⁸

And now for N.T.Wright:

In baptism, you are brought into that story, to be an actor in the play which God is writing and producing. And once you're on [the] stage, you're part of the action. You can get the lines wrong. You can do your best to spoil the play. But the story is moving forward, and it would be far better to understand where it's going and how to learn your lines⁹ and join in the drama

⁸ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp516-517, emphasis mine. Calvin, in his *Commentaries*, I admit, rowed back, employing his usual double-speak, but we must not forget his own stated position; namely, that his *Institutes* represent his definitive position: 'I have endeavoured [here in the *Institutes*] to give such a summary of religion in all its parts... Having thus... paved the way, I shall not feel it necessary, in any *Commentaries* on Scripture which I may afterwards publish, to enter into long discussions of doctrine... In this way, the pious reader will be saved much trouble and weariness, provided he comes furnished with a knowledge of the [*Institutes*] as an essential prerequisite... seeing that I have in a manner deduced at length all the articles which pertain to Christianity' (*Institutes* Vol.1 pp21,23, in his prefixed explanations for the work dated 1539 and 1545).

⁹ A highly significant statement. 'Conversion', in Wright's scheme, has been replaced by becoming 'an actor in the play' and 'learning your lines'. Coming (much) closer to home, there is a great deal of 'coaching' sinners into 'faith' these days. Those who run introductory courses (and I am thinking of other courses, far better courses, than Alpha – but not excluding it) and Bible studies for unbelievers ought, at the very least, to be aware of the exceedingly serious consequences of spoon-feeding them so that they can 'learn their lines', and so be counted converts.

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through the water to become part of God's purpose for the world.¹⁰

And, finally, the Baptist sacramentalist, Stanley K. Fowler:

In the 20th century... some British Baptist scholars... shifted towards a sacramental understanding of baptism as an integral part of conversion and an instrument by which grace becomes operative in individual experience... A significant stream of recent [early 21st century] Baptist thought moves along the lines of... sacramentalism.¹¹

And by 'sacramentalism', Fowler meant:

To say that baptism is 'sacramental' is to say that it mediates the experience of salvific union with Christ; that is, that one submits to baptism as a penitent sinner in order to experience the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, rather than as a confirmed¹² disciple in order to bear witness to a past experience of union with Christ.¹³

Now... if that doesn't set alarm bells ringing for Baptists, nothing will.

Letting Scripture reply

I refer to 1 Corinthians 1:13-17. The apostle wrote:

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not

¹⁰ N.T. Wright: 'Believing and Belonging' (ntwrightpage.com). For more on Wright, see my Hinge; Conversion Ruined: The New Perspective and the Conversion of Sinners.

¹¹ Stanley K. Fowler: *More than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, 2006, pp3-4. Note the 'shifted'. It was more than a 'shift'; it was a radical departure.

¹² I am sure that Fowler did not use 'confirmed' here in the technical Roman, Reformed or Anglican sense. I take it he meant 'established', 'definite' or 'credible'.

¹³ Fowler p6. Of course, there is immense blessing in the baptism of a believer as he witnesses to his union with Christ, and obeys his command (similarly for the Lord's supper) – but it is a leap of astronomical proportions to try to turn this into sacramentalism.

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baptise any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptised into my name. (Yes, I also baptised the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptised anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Preaching, not baptism, is the priority in the New Testament – and not just in the matter of time sequence, the order of events. Paul says so here. According to the apostle, preaching has priority over baptism in a far deeper way than mere time. In the context of this particular passage, Paul is comparing – contrasting – preaching and baptism as to their power, their place, their weight, their relative importance... Reader, I am hunting for the right word. Paul is not talking about preaching preceding baptism in time only. He is saying that preaching and baptism are chalk and cheese when it comes to the business of fetching sinners out of Adam and bringing them into Christ. Until you have converts, you can't baptise! And you get converts by preaching the gospel.¹⁴

In the New Testament, preaching – not baptising – is the means God uses to call sinners to Christ, and apply the benefits of his redemption to them. Yes, indeed! That is what Paul said, and that is what Paul meant.

'I have begotten you through the gospel', Paul declared (1 Cor. 4:15, NKJV). How does God bring this about? As he had already reminded the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:13-17), it was *not* by baptism! So how was it? James supplies the answer: '[God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth' (Jas. 1:18). 'The word of truth' certainly means the Scriptures, the gospel (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; see also 1 Pet. 1:23 with Heb. 4:12). 'Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ' (Rom. 10:17). Preaching the gospel, the sinner hearing the message and exercising saving faith, with not a mention of baptism!

But I think there is something more. '[God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth' also includes God's decree, his

¹⁴ Preaching is far wider than pulpit work, of course. See both my *The Priesthood of All Believers* and my *Glorious*.

authoritative command – as his effective word at creation: ‘For God, who said: “Let light shine out of darkness”, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:6). In short, God uses the preaching of the gospel to regenerate and convert his elect – and he does it in some mysterious, but effective, sovereign, way like in his fiat at creation: ‘And God said: “Let there be light”, and there was light’ (Gen. 1:3). ‘The law of the LORD [which, in new-covenant terms, is the entire Scripture]¹⁵ is perfect, converting the soul’ (Ps. 19:7, NKJV). As Thomas Manton put it: ‘Without grace I cannot be saved; without the word I cannot have grace... The divine grace does all; he begets us; but remember, it is by the word of truth’.¹⁶

And this is why Paul majored on preaching. Preaching is the means God uses to bring sinners to salvation. Not baptism!

Let me offer some further evidence that this is, indeed, what Paul is saying. First of all, glance at the context of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 1:13-17; that is, 1 Corinthians 1:1 – 4:21. What do we find? Baptism? Really? Leaving aside 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 for the moment, the suggestion is ludicrous. Paul is writing to the saints – sinners who have been called into union with Christ by regeneration leading to repentance and faith. (To cite individual verses would be superfluous; the entire passage is replete with the point). But how were the Corinthians regenerated? By baptism? As I say, the suggestion is ludicrous. The opening chapters of 1 Corinthians constitute the greatest declaration in Scripture of the priority of gospel preaching in the calling of sinners. Baptism? No! Not a whiff of a suggestion of it. Preaching? Yes! I agree with the sacramentalists that Paul was not minimising baptism. Of course not. *But he was maximising preaching!* As he was in this:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I *preached* to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I *preached* to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

¹⁵ See my *Psalm 119 and the New Covenant*.

¹⁶ Thomas Manton: *An Exposition on the Epistle of James*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1962, p119.

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For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we *preach*, and this is what you believed. But if it is *preached* that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our *preaching* is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have *testified* about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised (1 Cor. 15:1-15).

Then again, as he explained, although he had baptised so few of the Corinthians, he had been used to bring many of them to faith (1 Cor. 4:15). They had been baptised, yes, of course. But they were baptised only after they had heard him preach, and believed: ‘Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard [Paul] believed and were baptised’ (Acts 18:8). Believed and were baptised – not were baptised and so came to faith.

In light of all this, we need be in no doubt; we should be in no doubt. For Paul, preaching and not baptism is the means God uses to bring sinners to a saving experience. Preaching, not baptism!

But it was true not only for Paul. It is true for all of us for all time. It was, after all, the way Christ went about his work. The ultimate end and purpose of his coming into the world was, of course, to offer the one effectual propitiating sacrifice of himself upon the cross. But what was the main thrust and driving force of his life leading up to Calvary? He worked miracles, yes, but above all Jesus was a preacher of the gospel. It is no accident that

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Mark opened his account of Christ thus: ‘Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel’ (Mark 1:14, NKJV). How did Luke record Christ’s first works after his baptism and temptation? ‘Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and... he taught in their synagogues... He went to Nazareth... and on the sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read... He rolled up the scroll... and he said to them...’ (Luke 4:14-30). And Matthew’s testimony could be taken as a summary of Christ’s public ministry throughout Israel: ‘Jesus went about... teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel’ (Matt. 4:23, NKJV). Of course, Christ healed the sick, restored the paralysed, made the blind to see, and raised the dead. But *preaching* was his work, preaching the gospel – not preaching baptism, and certainly not baptising. Until the cross, and the fulfilment of the great purpose for which he came into the world – his death (Matt. 1:21; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Pet. 3:18) – Christ was first and foremost a preacher. And as for baptism, as far as I can tell, he never baptised anyone; ‘Jesus himself did not baptise’ (John 4:2, NKJV), is all we are told about it. And yet, so the sacramentalists want us to believe, water baptism is the hinge upon which the personal experience of redemption turns!

The cumulative evidence is overwhelming: preaching, not baptism, is the means God uses to regenerate sinners, bring them to repentance and faith and so to salvation. Baptism has no part in this. Baptism, therefore, cannot be sacramental.

Please do not misunderstand me, however. Baptism is important – after faith. Every believer ought to be baptised – immersed – in obedience to the Lord Jesus. But baptism is only to be thought of after faith. And we know that faith comes after preaching:

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says: ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame’... ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Rom. 10:10-14).

Of course, preaching in itself is not saving. Sinners are not saved merely by attendance at gospel preaching, or merely listening to a friend testifying about Christ, or by simply reading the Bible. I am not saying that these are not the way to hear the gospel and be saved. But something deeper and inward is required. Nothing less than the ‘ordinary’ equivalent of Mark 16:20 will do: ‘The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it’. Sinners need to be regenerated; they have to hear the gospel, repent and *believe* (Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:8-15). Looking back upon their conversion, believers can say: ‘Our salvation is nearer now than when we... *believed*’ (Rom. 13:11),¹⁷ not – as a sacramentalist must say, or would like to say: ‘Our salvation is nearer now than when we... were baptised’.¹⁸

Let me develop this a little. Preaching and believing preceded baptism in the New Testament. And it was the believing that was all-important. Never do we read that believers were to look back upon their baptism as a source of comfort or challenge. Yet sacramentalists, having an inordinate view of baptism, regarding it as ‘the one thing needful’, are prone to press upon their hearers the memory of their baptism. I fully understand this: if water baptism is sacramental, then those who are baptised should be constantly driven back to the fact and memory of their baptism. Baptism is the all-important issue. Baptism accomplishes so much. Baptism should be the theme when addressing both sinners and saints. ‘Be baptised’ should be said to sinners, and ‘remember your baptism’ should be said to saints. So why does the New Testament never do this? This is so important a matter, let me digress to expand upon, and justify, my words.

¹⁷ I have left out ‘*first* believed’ since ‘*first*’ is not in the Greek.

¹⁸ In the Bible, the means of salvation is in the active – sinners repent and believe; but for the sacramentalist it is in the passive – ‘were baptised’. If anyone is tempted to dismiss this vital distinction as a man of straw, he should read my *Infant* and see how Reformed sacramentalists define conversion, draw assurance and seek to promote progressive sanctification based on infant baptism – the infant, of course, of necessity being *passive*.

Excursus to draw attention to the excessive importance sacramentalists give to water baptism

Although, in this excursus, I quote a Puritan – one who baptised infants – as typical of the excessive importance sacramentalists attach to baptism, it is only a question of time before the advocates of the recent rise of Baptist sacramentalism catch up. What follows illustrates the way in which sacramentalists encourage those who are tempted, fearful, lacking assurance, carnal or whatever to think about their baptism: ‘Remember your baptism’ seems to be their mantra.

Take Richard Sibbes: ‘There are many that are not book-learned, that cannot read; at least they have no leisure to read. I would they would read their book in their baptism; and if they would consider what it ministers to them upon all occasions, they would be better Christians than they are. Think of your baptism when you go to God, especially when he seems angry... It is the seal of your covenant; you have gone before me by your grace; you brought me into the covenant before I knew my right hand from my left. So when we go to church to offer our service to God, think, by baptism we were consecrated and dedicated to God. We not only receive grace from God, but we give ourselves to God. Therefore it is sacrilege for persons baptised to yield to temptations to sin. We are dedicated to God in baptism. When we are tempted to despair, let us think of our baptism. We are in the covenant of grace, and have received the seal of the covenant, baptism. The devil is an uncircumcised, damned, cursed spirit. He is out of the covenant. But I am in the covenant. Christ is mine; the Holy Ghost is mine; and God is mine. Therefore let us stand against all the temptations of that uncircumcised, unbaptised, damned spirit. The thinking of our baptism thus will help us to “resist the devil” (Jas. 4:7). He is a coward; if he is resisted, he will flee; and what will better resist him than the covenant of grace and the seal of it? When we are tempted to sin, let us think: What have I to do with sin? By baptism I have union with the death of Christ; he died to take away sin, and my end must be his. I must abolish sin in my flesh. Shall I yield to that which in baptism I have sworn against? And then if we be tempted to despair for sin, let us call to mind the promises of grace and forgiveness of sins, and the seal of forgiveness of sins, which is baptism. For as water in baptism washes the body, so the blood of Christ washes the soul. Let us make that use of our baptism, in temptations, not to despair for sin. And in conversing among men, let us labour to maintain the

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unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3,5)... one baptism... They forget their baptism that are... in quarrels... And then for our children... let us make use of baptism. Do they die in their infancy? Make this use of it: I have assured hope that my child is gone to God. He was born in the covenant, and had the seal of the covenant, baptism; why should I doubt of the salvation of my child? If they live to years of discretion, then be of good comfort; he is God's child more than mine; I have dedicated him to God and to Christ, he was baptised in the name of Christ, Christ will care for him as well as for me. If I leave my children behind me, they are God's and Christ's children. They have received the seal of the covenant, baptism. Christ will provide for them. And he that provides heaven for them will provide all things in the way to heaven necessary. God has said: "I will be the God of you and of your children" (Ps. 132:12). They are in the covenant. Yours they were, Lord. A man may commit his children to God on his death bed... as before... by baptism. All this we have by thinking of our baptism'.¹⁹

Where is the Scripture for all this? This is my point. There is no Scripture for it.

Getting back to 1 Corinthians 1:13-17, as Gordon D.Fee, with consummate understatement, said: 'It seems clear from this passage that Paul does not understand baptism to effect salvation'.²⁰ Indeed, it does seem clear. But what an understatement.

Writing elsewhere, Fee got to grips with the passage:

Paul deliberately subordinates baptism to the proclamation of the gospel. This does not mean that he minimises baptism; what he will not allow is that it holds the same level of significance as the preaching of Christ... He specifically associates the reception of the Spirit with his proclamation of the gospel, not with baptism. In Paul's mind, baptism stands on a different level... as [a] response to [the] grace received through the Spirit's coming in connection with the hearing of faith at the time of

¹⁹ Richard Sibbes: *Lydia's Conversion*, in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, Vol.6, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1983, pp530-531. See my *Infant* pp48-51,150-154 for this and more such evidence.

²⁰ Gordon D.Fee: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1991, p63.

proclamation. It is nearly unthinkable that Paul could speak so casually of baptism and of his having baptised only two of them (plus one household that he had to be reminded of!), if in fact he understood the Spirit to come at their baptism. [What is more,] in [1 Cor.] 2:1-5, he insists that the Spirit came on them precisely at the point of his ministry, through proclamation, which would hardly be true if it [the gift of the Spirit] came during baptism, since he baptised so few of them, one of whom he had actually forgotten about... One can scarcely imagine Paul to have argued the way he does in 1 Corinthians 1:13 – 2:5, if in fact the Spirit came on believers at baptism... [Take] Galatians 3:2-5... nothing in this text even remotely suggests that Paul presupposes this reception to have taken place at baptism; indeed, his argument loses its point if the reception of the Spirit were simply being transferred from one rite (circumcision) to another (baptism). This could perhaps look like an inconclusive argument from silence were it not for the several texts in which Paul ties his converts' reception of the Spirit directly to his own proclamation of the gospel. For Paul, the Spirit came in the context of his preaching and of their hearing the gospel (1 Thess. 1:5; Rom. 15:16,18-19). By his own admission, he rarely engaged in the actual baptising of converts. Thus, it seems scarcely possible that Paul himself understood the reception of the Spirit to be in response to their baptism in water. For him it would have been exactly the opposite... What... this evidence... suggest[s] is that the close tie of water baptism to the Spirit does not come from a close reading of Paul, but stems from reading back into Paul the later experience of the church.²¹

Fee was not quite strong enough here. 'It seems scarcely possible that Paul himself understood the reception of the Spirit to be in response to their baptism in water... What... this evidence... suggest[s]...'. Surely we can put it more dogmatically than that – and should put it more dogmatically. The passage utterly rules out the notion that water baptism conveys the Spirit. The evidence is incontrovertible.

Preaching, then, not baptism, was Paul's emphasis when, in the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 1:13-17, he said: 'God

²¹ Gordon D.Fee: *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, 1994, pp862-863. 'The later experience of the church' – that is, the corruptions foisted on the church by Christendom.

was pleased through the foolishness of what was *preached* to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom' – and, I cannot help observing, sacramentalists demand baptism – 'but we *preach* Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1:21-23).

And this is not the only place. Paul forced the issue on the Galatians when he challenged them: 'Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law' – and I cannot help accommodating the text: 'Did you receive the Spirit by baptism?' – 'or by believing what you heard?' (Gal. 3:2). In all his instructions to Timothy and Titus – books so relevant for church practice – not once did the apostle mention baptism, but repeatedly referred to preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 1:3; 2:7; 3:2; 4:6,11,13,16; 5:1,17; 6:2-5,17; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2:2,14-15,25; 3:10,16; 4:2,17; Tit. 1:3,9,13; 2:1-10,12,15; 3:1,8-9; see also 1 Thess. 2, for instance).

When Christ said that 'only one thing is needed' (Luke 10:42), did he mean baptism? And when the Jews asked him: 'What must we do to do the works God requires?', why did he reply: 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent' (John 6:28-29)? Why didn't he say: 'The work of God is this: to be baptised'?

I repeat the sentiment already expressed: I am not for a minute suggesting that the apostle minimised baptism, but I am saying that sacramentalists give a place to water baptism, give an efficacy to water baptism, which is totally unwarranted by Scripture, an emphasis which flies in the face of 1 Corinthians 1:13-17. Whereas Paul maximises preaching, sacramentalists maximise baptism. But do not miss the difference. Paul is writing Scripture. If he maximises preaching, and sacramentalists do not, they must be distorting the apostolic model – and that must destroy their case.

Let me summarise: 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 is the only major passage in Paul's letters which deals with water baptism as far as it concerns the subject in hand. As such, it must play a very important role – indeed, the all-important role – in determining how we view the ordinance. From this passage, it is quite clear that preaching – not baptism – is that which God has established as the means of calling sinners to Christ. A huge, unbridgeable

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chasm yawns between Paul and the sacramentalists here. Sacramentalism is bound to reverse the roles of preaching and baptism. It is logically bound to reverse their order. But the reversal of the priority – let alone the order – of preaching and baptism is fatal to sacramentalism in that it so plainly contradicts the apostle in this passage. Baptism, therefore, whatever else it is, cannot be sacramental. The sacramentalists must be wrong. 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 is conclusive. It is, indeed, the clinching passage.²²

Conclusion

If, despite the biblical case, sacramentalists have their way and sacramentalism gets a hold, then baptism must be in the driving seat. That being so, as I have argued elsewhere,²³ promiscuous baptism – even going the whole hog and practising promiscuous infant-baptism, and at the earliest possible opportunity for the baby – must inevitably follow. And this will produce a huge number of unregenerate men and women who think that because they were sprinkled as a baby they have their sins washed away and are the children of God. The disaster will be eternal.

²² For more, with regard to Baptist sacramentalists, see my *Baptist* pp205-215.

²³ See my *Baptist; Infant*.

Scripture vs. Calvin's Threefold Use

John Calvin set out a threefold use of the law, and by 'the law' he meant 'the moral law', the ten commandments; or, in his case, nine and a half commandments.¹ Millions have adopted his scheme, while those who dare to oppose it are dismissed as antinomians. In this very short article, I will cite various scriptures, adding only the briefest of comment, to show the wrongness of Calvin's three 'uses'.

Let me first establish that Calvin did indeed teach this threefold use of 'the moral law'.² I set the scene by quoting from 'One Hundred Aphorisms':

The law is threefold: ceremonial, judicial, moral. The use of the ceremonial law is repealed, its effect is perpetual. The judicial or political law was peculiar to the Jews, and has been set aside, while that universal justice which is described in the moral law remains. The latter, or moral law, the object of which is to cherish and maintain godliness and righteousness, is perpetual, and is incumbent on all. The use of the moral law is threefold. The first use shows our weakness, unrighteousness, and condemnation; not that we may despair, but that we may flee to Christ. The second is, that those who are not moved by promises, may be urged by the terror of threatenings. The third

¹ I refer, of course, to Calvin's tinkering with the sabbath. See my *Sabbath* pp65-67.

² I use *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A New Translation by Henry Beveridge, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957, and *Calvin's Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979, bearing in mind that Calvin's *Institutes* represent his definitive position: 'I have endeavoured [here in the *Institutes*] to give such a summary of religion in all its parts... Having thus... paved the way, I shall not feel it necessary, in any Commentaries on Scripture which I may afterwards publish, to enter into long discussions of doctrine... In this way, the pious reader will be saved much trouble and weariness, provided he comes furnished with a knowledge of the [*Institutes*] as an essential prerequisite... seeing that I have in a manner deduced at length all the articles which pertain to Christianity' (*Institutes* Vol.1 pp21,23, in his prefixed explanations for the work dated 1539 and 1545).

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is, that we may know what is the will of God; that we may consider it in order to obedience; that our minds may be strengthened for that purpose; and that we may be kept from falling. The sum of the law is contained in the preface, and in the two tables.³

Calvin's first use of the law

Calvin taught preparationism by the law. In his own words:

First, by exhibiting the righteousness of God – in other words, the righteousness which alone is acceptable to God – it 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.

But, according to Calvin, the law has contrasting effects on the reprobate and the elect. The former might well 'give up all hope and rush headlong on despair... owing to their obstinacy'. The law's effect on the elect, however, is altogether different. God uses it to bring them to Christ. His purpose is:

That divesting themselves of an absurd opinion of their own virtue, they may perceive how they are wholly dependent on the hand of God; that feeling how naked and destitute they are, they

³ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp679-680. 'The One Hundred Aphorisms', while they were not from the pen of Calvin himself, but were supplied by William Pringle of Auchterarder, succinctly capture the essence of Calvin's definitive work.

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may take refuge in his mercy, rely upon it, and cover themselves up entirely with it; renouncing all righteousness and merit, and clinging to mercy alone, as offered in Christ to all who long for it and look for it in true faith... Augustine... writes... 'The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace... The utility of the law is, that it convinces man of his weakness, and compels him to apply for the medicine of grace, which is in Christ... God enjoins what we cannot do, in order that we may know what we have to ask of him... The law was given, that it might make you guilty – being made guilty, might fear; fearing, might ask indulgence... The law was given, in order to convert a great into a little man – to show that you have no power of your own for righteousness; and might thus, poor, needy, and destitute, flee to grace'.⁴

Calvin's second use of the law

Calvin, in his own words:

The second office of the law is, by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice... It is true, they are not on this account either better or more righteous in the sight of God. For although restrained by terror or shame... their heart is by no means trained to fear and obedience. [Indeed], the more they restrain themselves, the more they are inflamed, the more they rage and boil, prepared for any act or outbreak whatsoever, were it not for the terror of the law... The feeling of all who are not yet regenerate... is, that in regard to the observance of the law, they are not led by voluntary submission, but dragged by the fear of force... [Indeed], this tuition is not without its use, even to the children of God... When, by fear of divine vengeance, they are deterred from open out-breakings, though, from not being subdued in mind, they profit little at present, still they are in some measure trained to bear the yoke of righteousness.⁵

An astonishing statement, this, for the gospel age!

⁴ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp304-307.

⁵ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp307-308.

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Calvin, concluding his first two uses of the law, having shown that he did not understand Galatians 3:24,⁶ went on, trying to justify his lack of scriptural support for his view, and in doing so was both patronising and sweeping:

Some... are unfit to receive the grace of Christ, until they are completely humbled. This the law does by making them sensible of their misery, and so disposing them to long for what they previously imagined they did not want. Others have need of a bridle to restrain them from giving full scope to their passions, and thereby utterly losing all desire after righteousness... Those, therefore, whom [God] has destined to the inheritance of his kingdom, if he does not immediately regenerate, he, through the works of the law, preserves in fear, against the time of his visitation, not, indeed, [with] that pure and chaste fear which his children ought to have, but a fear useful to the extent of instructing them in true piety according to their capacity. Of this... we have so many proofs, that there is not the least need of an example... For all who have remained for some time in ignorance of God will confess, as the result of their own experience, that the law had the effect of keeping them in some degree in the fear and reverence of God, till, being regenerated by his Spirit, they began to love him from the heart.⁷

Calvin's third use of the law

He wrote:

The third use of the law (being also the principal use, and more closely connected with its proper end) has respect to believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already flourishes and reigns. For although the law [begging the question as to which law is written on the heart in the new covenant] is written and engraved on their hearts by the finger of God, that is, although they are so influenced and actuated by the Spirit, that they desire to obey God, there are two ways in which they still profit from the law. For it is the *best* instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge... Then, because we need not doctrine merely, but exhortation also, the servant of God will derive this further advantage from the law: by frequently meditating upon it, he will be excited to

⁶ See below.

⁷ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp308-309.

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obedience, and confirmed in it, and so drawn away from the slippery paths of sin... The law acts like a whip to the flesh, urging it on as men do to a lazy sluggish ass. Even in the case of a spiritual man, inasmuch as he is still burdened with the weight of the flesh, the law is a constant stimulus, pricking him forward when he would indulge in sloth... It cannot be denied that it [the law] contains a perfect pattern of righteousness... one perpetual and inflexible rule... The doctrine of the law... remains... that... it may fit and prepare us for every good work... The general end contemplated by the whole law [is] that man may form his life on the model of the divine purity... The law... connects man, by holiness of life, with his God... [It is] one perpetual and inflexible rule... The law... is given for the regulation of the life of men, so that it may be justly called the rule of living well and righteously... By the word 'law'... we understand what peculiarly belonged to Moses; for the law contains the rule of life... and in it we find everywhere many remarkable sentences by which we are instructed as to faith, and as to the fear of God. None of these were abolished by Christ... The law is the everlasting rule of a good and holy life... The law... not only contains a rule of life as to outward duties, but... it also rules their hearts before God and angels... The law acts like a whip to the flesh, urging it on as men do to a lazy sluggish ass... a constant stimulus, pricking him forward.⁸

Having shown that Calvin did indeed teach the threefold use of the law, I now turn to Scripture to show that Calvin was wrong.

1. Calvin said that the law prepares sinners for Christ. We must preach the law to sinners in order to convict them of their sin

Scripture refutes this claim. Consider these statements about and by the Lord Jesus:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was

⁸ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp309-311,356; *Commentaries* Vol.3 Part 1 p196; Vol.22 Part 1 p167; Vol.21 Part 1 p119; Vol.15 Part 2 p220, emphasis mine.

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the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him (John 1:1-10).

Jesus spoke to them, saying: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'... 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world'... 'Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me' (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:44-50).

As these extracts prove, Christ is the light of the world, and he came into the world as the light to lighten every man. Now consider this:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be

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clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:15-21,36).

Clearly, as every man's light, Christ is the great convictor of sin. The highest sin is not to trust in the light; that is, not to trust Christ. This is what we must tell sinners. Notice the complete absence of any mention of 'the law'.

Again:

You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins (John 8:23-24).

Again:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are

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full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them... Gentiles, who do not have the law... are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts,⁹ while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Rom. 1:18-32; 2:14-15).

These are the things we must preach to sinners. We must tell them that they are guilty, condemned under the wrath of God, because they deliberately suppress the evidence of nature, the light in their conscience, and, above all, because they do not trust Christ. Indeed, their refusal to trust Christ is their cardinal sin. It follows, therefore, that we must preach Christ to sinners, preach their responsibility and duty to trust him. And this will convict them of their sin, and this is what the Spirit will use to arouse them to call upon the Saviour.

I ask again: What will convict men of sin and bring them to repentance? It is not so much 'what', as 'who' and 'why':

When [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:8-10).¹⁰

In other words, the Spirit brings conviction to sinners on account of their refusal to trust Christ, the one who wrought perfect righteousness and who, in his death and resurrection, defeated Satan. This is the 'who' and the 'why'. Once again, we see that

⁹ That is, they have a rudimentary knowledge of right and wrong. See my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law* pp38-48,342-347; 'New-Covenant Theology Made Simple Romans 2:12-15' under David H J Gay Ministry (youtube.com and sermonaudio.com).

¹⁰ Note the intimate connection of all this with Christ, with his death and triumph. The 'judgment', of course, is not the final judgment.

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we must preach Christ to sinners, with no mention of 'the law'. This is the way of conviction.

Of course, there is a 'what':

Do you suppose, O man... that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (Rom. 2:3-5).

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in [languages], and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

God... through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: 'In a favourable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 5:18 – 6:2).

Clearly, the apostolic method of awakening sinners is to preach Christ, preach God's mercy, his free and sovereign grace, and his love for sinners, telling them of the necessity of faith and repentance, of their duty and responsibility to believe. Not only do we tell sinners these things. We plead with them, in God's name, to repent and believe, knowing that God himself speaks in this way: 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people' (Rom. 10:21; see also Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; Matt. 23:37; Luke 14:16-24; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9). And we do

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all this looking to the Spirit to convince, regenerate and convert the sinners we preach to.

There is no mention of 'the law' in any of it. Please read Acts 8,10,14,16,17 and see how many Gentiles (non Jews) were brought to Christ without any preaching of the law. The preaching of the law, therefore, cannot be the way to prepare men for Christ. The great convictor of sin is Christ himself, by his Spirit, in and through the preaching of the gospel. Hence the apostle declared:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God... Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 9:16).

We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said: 'Let light shine out of darkness', has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:2-6).

Of course, there is nothing 'wrong' in using the law – indeed, all the old covenant – when addressing sinners – *if they know it*. Jesus did (Matt. 19:16-19). The apostles did – when addressing Jews (Acts 2:14-41; 3:12-26; 4:1-20; 7:1-54; 13:13-48; 17:1-4; and so on). Paul himself, as a Jew, felt the power of the law over his covetousness (Rom. 7:7). But, as I have said, the apostles never used the law when addressing unconverted Gentiles. How

could a man like Paul use the law when addressing unconverted Gentiles, after making this declaration:

What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:18-23).

Hence Calvin's claim that we must use the law to convict men of sin, and so prepare them for Christ, is false.¹¹

2. Calvin said that the law restrains sin in the ungodly

There is no scripture to confirm it. And we have the following passage which clearly refutes the notion:

While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death... Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me (Rom. 7:5-11).

¹¹ If Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13,20 does support the practice, why is there no New Testament example of law-preaching to Gentile unbelievers? Do not forget the context of such verses. The passages are not speaking of the individual being brought to Christ by the law, rather the inadequacy of the law to save! Do not forget the eschatological. God brought in the law to expose sin, and turn it into transgression (Rom. 4:15), and set up punishments for it. As for Gal. 3:23-24, see my 'Three Verses Misunderstood' (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com). See also the video clip on Gal. 3:19-25 in my series on youtube.com

Far from restraining sin, Paul found the law incited and aroused sin in him. Calvin was wrong in his second use of the law.

3. Calvin said that the law is the believer's perfect rule of life, and the whip to drive him to progressive sanctification

If I were to give all the passages which refute this notion, I should have to quote nearly all the apostolic letters! The merest sample must suffice. In all those letters, never once does any apostle use the law as the believer's perfect rule, never once does he use the law as a whip to drive the believer to sanctification. Such notions are utterly foreign to both the plain teaching of Scripture (Rom. 7:4-6; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; and so on), and the spirit of the apostle when dealing with believers on the question of their godliness (see, for instance, 2 Corinthians – the entire letter, but especially chapters 10-12). Indeed, it runs directly contrary to such passages as: 'Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1:27).

On three occasions, and only three (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; Eph. 6:1-3),¹² Paul does quote or refer to the ten commandments, but he does so – as always when citing any part of the old covenant (1 Cor. 5:7-8; 9:1-18; 10:1-11,18; 14:21,34; and so on) – as a paradigm, a support for, an illustration of, his doctrine,¹³ but never once as the believer's perfect rule or whip.

In the following, notice that it is the grace of God, the Spirit of God using the law of Christ in the believer's heart, the Spirit bringing home to the believer the love of God towards him, and reminding him of what he has and what he is in Christ, and so on, which constitutes the motive, the standard and the spring of the believer's godliness, that standard being calibrated, of course, by the written Scriptures:

My brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

¹² Or four, if 1 Tim. 1:7-11 is included.

¹³ See my 'The Law the Believer's Rule?' (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

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For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:4-6).

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4).

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love... For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'... But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught

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in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 5:6,13-26; 6:1-2)

Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:1-2).

In everything [we have to] adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Tit. 2:10-14).

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people (Tit. 3:1-8).

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of

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debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:1-5).

As I say, this is the merest sample of a host of passages which could be adduced to make the point. The law is not the believer's perfect rule, nor is it the whip to drive him to progressive sanctification. Clearly, the new-covenant way of bringing about the believer's holiness of life is by the Spirit, on the basis of the love, grace and mercy of God in the free justification and positional sanctification of the believer in Christ. And Christ himself is the perfect rule for the believer – Christ as revealed in Scripture. Christ-likeness is the aim, and Christ-likeness is the end (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3).¹⁴ It is Christ, therefore, not law, that we must preach if we are to see saints grow in grace. All the believer's obedience must flow from him, flow from his union and connection with Christ. 'Christ is all' (Col. 3:11).

¹⁴ For more on all this, and for all my supporting arguments, see my *Christ* pp51-74,211-278,348-368,481-527.

The Covenant that Never Was

I am talking about the Reformed invention known as ‘the covenant of works’.¹ And that is what it is – a pure invention, a theoretical, philosophical construct imposed on Scripture. Hence the covenant that never was.

Let us start at the beginning. What is the Reformed idea of a covenant? They say it is an agreement between two or more parties, whether or not the parties are equal.

Covenant theologians say God made a covenant with Adam. But where are we told this in Scripture? They go on to say God made a covenant with all men in Adam. Where are we told this in Scripture? Further, they give this so-called covenant a name, a name which looms large in their writings; namely, ‘the covenant of works’. But you will not find this in Scripture.² I am not being silly or pedantic. I am well aware that the word ‘trinity’ does not appear in the Bible. For the moment, I am simply stating a fact. ‘The covenant of works’ does not appear in Scripture as a term. My contention is, of course, neither does it appear as a concept.³

Though its advocates have to admit its development is ‘something of a mystery’, those of us who reject the concept are dismissed as thinking unbiblically. This, of course, needs proof, not mere assertion. Advocates of the covenant of works, aware of the need to be clear about its biblical basis, have to admit its

¹ In addition to some new material, I have drawn this article from my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law* pp87-98,369-391, and my ‘Covenant Theology Tested’ (under the eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry sermonaudio.com; christmycovenant.com). In addition to what you find here, see Walter Senenko: ‘A Covenant of Works or a Work of Fiction?’ (youtube.com).

² Nor will you find it in John Calvin, most Reformed creeds, the 39 Articles or the Heidelberg Catechism. This may surprise some Reformed readers.

³ To try to justify this by reference to ‘trinity’ is fruitless. The difference is patent. The Bible does not use the word ‘trinity’, so we have to invent it. But the Bible does use the word ‘covenant’, and we should not stray from the way it uses it.

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name cannot be found in the first three chapters of Genesis. But why worry about the non-mention of its name? There are bigger problems with it than that! Neither the name – *nor the concept itself* – is found in the entire Bible! Even so, the lack of the term – while this, I freely concede, is not conclusive – should give pause for thought. Yes, if the principle can be found in Scripture, the absence of its name is not important. But is the principle in Scripture? This *is* the question!

Romans 5:12-21, so it seems, is the only passage which, at first glance, can be used to establish the covenant of works, the covenant said to be made with all the human race in Adam. If this is right, and Romans 5:12-21 does speak of the covenant of works, it can only mean that the law is not this covenant of works – since John 1:17, Romans 5:13-14 and Galatians 3:10-29 teach that the law was not given to men until Sinai, 430 years after Abraham, let alone Adam! It could not, therefore, have been given to Adam and the patriarchs. This, in turn, can only mean that the law is a grace covenant – which, as the Bible makes as clear as noonday, is nonsense. The Mosaic covenant was a works covenant: that must be the most self-evident truth in Scripture! As we know:

[God told Israel:] You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them (Lev. 18:4-5).

Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them (Rom. 10:5).

The law is not of faith, rather: ‘The one who does them shall live by them’ (Gal. 3:12).

So what about Romans 5:12-21? I fully accept – I am convinced, biblically – that in eternity past the triune Godhead agreed to save the elect in Christ. I am also convinced that in Adam all the human race fell into sin. Both Adam and Christ acted as representative heads, acting for all their descendants – that is, in Adam, all the human race; in Christ, all the elect. Adam fell; all the human race fell in and with him. Christ was born under the

law, kept the law, died under the law, and was raised from the dead; all the elect are constituted and accounted righteous by God in him, they receiving all the benefits he earned for them by his life, sufferings and resurrection. I find these truths unmistakably taught in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-23,45-49.

But this is a far cry from the covenant theology invented by Reformed scholars. If truth be told, not all of them accept the usual deductions made by covenant theologians from the passages.

But what of: 'But like Adam they transgressed the covenant' (Hos. 6:7)? Surely this establishes the covenant of works with Adam. No it does not! Far from it. The rendering is a mistranslation. There is no reference to the man Adam here. Nor is there any reference to any covenant with Adam. God is complaining that his people have violated his covenant with them; that is, the Mosaic covenant. After all, he talks of their sacrifices and burnt offerings, a clear reference to the Mosaic covenant. Israel has acted as pagans, and done despite to God's law for Israel, dishonoured his covenant with them (not with Adam): 'But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me'.⁴

John Calvin:

'But they like men have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me'. Here God shows that the Israelites boasted in vain of their sacrifices and of all the pomp of their external worship, for God did not regard these external things, but only wished to exercise the faithful in spiritual worship. Then the import of the whole is this: 'My design was, when I appointed the sacrifices and the whole legal worship, to lead you so to myself, that there might be nothing carnal or earthly in your sacrificing; but you have corrupted the whole law; you have been perverse interpreters; for sacrifices have been nothing else among you but mockery as if it were a satisfaction to me to have an ox or a ram killed. You have then transgressed my covenant; and it is nothing that the people say to me, that they have diligently performed the outward ceremonies, for such a worship is not in the least valued by me'.

⁴ *The Geneva Study Bible.*

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Some thus render [it]: ‘As the covenant of man have they transgressed it’, transferring it to the genitive case: ‘And they have transgressed the covenant as if it was that of man’; that is, as if they had to do with a mortal man, so have they despised and violated my holy covenant. And this exposition is not very unsuitable, except that it somewhat changes the construction; for in this case the prophet ought to have said: ‘They have transgressed the covenant as that of a man’; but he says: ‘They as a man...’. But this rendering is far from being that of the words as they are: ‘They as men have transgressed the covenant’. I therefore interpret the words more simply, as meaning, that they showed themselves to be men in violating the covenant.⁵

In short, Hosea 6:7 does not justify ‘the covenant of works’.

Romans 7:10 is another passage which is sometimes called on to justify ‘the covenant of works’. But this verse, according to the immediate context, clearly speaks of the ten commandments (in truth, the law) which, on Sinai, had been addressed to Jews, all of whom, naturally, were sinners. Even so, some Reformed writers claim that, in Romans 7:10, Paul was speaking of the covenant of works given to Adam before he fell. In other words, the law was given to a man who had not sinned. Allowing it to be so for the moment, what Adam made of prohibitions against murder and adultery, and so on, *before he had sinned*, I simply cannot comprehend. And what of 1 Timothy 1:9? ‘The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers...’. In which of these categories did Adam find himself *before he fell*?⁶

The main confusion concerning the Reformed covenant of works, as can be seen, arises over the Mosaic covenant. Was the Mosaic covenant the covenant of works or was it the covenant of

⁵ In the extracts below, see John Murray denying the usual Reformed view of Hos. 6:7.

⁶ See my ‘Unlawful Use of the Law’ (eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry sermonaudio.com).

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grace? I mean, of course, in Reformed terms. The Bible knows nothing of either. But this is a fundamental question for covenant theology. Was Sinai a works covenant or a grace covenant? Was it the Reformed ‘covenant of works’ or ‘covenant of grace’? Since covenant theologians have had over 400 years to sort out the question, and since they have devoted much study to their covenant theology, surely by now they ought to be able to give us a clear, unequivocal answer to the question: Was Sinai a works covenant or a grace covenant? Was it their ‘covenant of works’ or ‘covenant of grace’? Can they answer? Will they? The truth is, they are in utter disarray over the issue.⁷

But what about Hebrews 8:13 and 9:15? Do these passages have any bearing on the so-called covenant of works said to be given to Adam? Certainly not! When God says he has made ‘a new covenant’, and thus, as the writer immediately adds by way of deduction and explanation, ‘he has made the first obsolete’ (Heb. 8:13), it does not mean that after Adam fell, God instituted a ‘new covenant of grace’ with him. The writer to the Hebrews was not talking about Adam at all! There is not the remotest possibility of it! Why, he does not even mention Adam in his entire letter! And in Hebrews 8:13, he was not saying that an old covenant with Adam was replaced by a new covenant with Adam. Nor was he declaring that an old covenant with Adam was replaced by a new covenant with Moses. Nor was he saying that an old covenant of grace was replaced by a new covenant of grace. When the writer to the Hebrews spoke of the old covenant, the first covenant which was made old and replaced, he was referring not to Adam and Eden, but to Moses and Sinai. And when speaking of the new covenant, that altogether different covenant, he was not referring to Moses and Sinai, but to Christ and Calvary. He was asserting that the old covenant of Moses – the law – given at Sinai, has been replaced by the new covenant – a grace covenant – made by Christ on Calvary. This is the simple, undeniable and stubborn (and glorious) fact about Hebrews 8:13. The entire context of Hebrews is incontestable proof of it.

⁷ To see this disarray that covenant theologians find themselves in when asked this basic question, please see my *Christ* pp369-391.

The upshot? ‘The covenant of works’ is a pure invention, imposed on Scripture without scriptural warrant. Alas, it is not an innocent diversion! Covenant theology, in general, (‘the covenant of works’, in particular), carries heavy and dire consequences in its wake. The abandonment of such an unbiblical construct is long overdue.

Some extracts on ‘the covenant of works’ from the writings of covenant theologians – with comments

John Murray was refreshingly honest:

It would not be... in the interests of theological conservation or theological progress to think that the covenant theology is in all respects definitive and that there is no further need for correction, modification, and explanation... It appears to me that the covenant theology, notwithstanding the finesse of analysis with which it was worked out and the grandeur of its articulated systematisation, needs recasting.⁸

He was, as I say, honest; he could have gone further; he should have gone further. Recasting? Rejecting, more like.

The major stumbling block (but not the only stumbling block) for covenant theologians is, of course, the place of the law, and, intimately connected with it, the so-called covenant of works. The covenant of works, Robert Letham explained, though it was hinted at by Augustine, and again in 1562 by Ursinus, owes its inception to Dudley Fenner in 1585. Following Fenner, ‘a spate of theologians’ produced works on the newly-defined covenant, but ‘it was by no means universally taught at this time’, and was not adopted by any Confession until Westminster, sixty years later. And ‘even in the 1640s, unanimity was lacking in the existence of this covenant’. Indeed, some were opposed to the notion. Ever since – to this very day (even down to my effort) – ‘the covenant of works has come under severe criticism’, and many, including covenant theologians themselves, have raised

⁸ Quoted in part by Jon Zens: *Studies in Theology and Ethics*, BREM, INC., 1981, p46 and in part by Daniel P. Fuller: *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?...*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1980, p79.

insurmountable problems with it. James B. Torrance, for instance, argued that it has produced a legal approach to the gospel, ‘with disastrous consequences for both theology and piety’.⁹

Even so, would-be covenant-theologian Baptists are quite determined to hold onto covenant theology, in general, and the covenant of works, in particular. Even though they have to confess that there are some insoluble conundrums at the heart of the system, they are not averse to dismissive name-calling, and the raising of bogey-men. Listen to them.

Erroll Hulse: ‘Some panic-stricken Baptists have been so foolish as to abandon covenant theology by adopting a false kind of dispensationalism – setting up the old covenant against the new’.¹⁰

According to Geoffrey Thomas, the covenant of works is ‘something of a mystery’, but if we reject the concept, ‘we do not have the biblical way of thinking – we are simply sinners thinking’.¹¹ Thus, in a stroke, Geoffrey Thomas writes off countless worthy men and women!

Yet even covenant theologians – in this case, Louis Berkhof – have to admit: ‘The widespread denial of the covenant of works... makes it imperative to examine its scriptural foundation with care’. ‘It must be admitted that the term... is not found in the first three chapters of Genesis’.¹² It is not found in the Bible – neither in name or concept!

According to Berkhof, covenant theologians claim that ‘the parallel which Paul draws between Adam and Christ... can only

⁹ Robert Letham: ‘The Concept of Covenant in the History of Theology’, Affinity Theological Study Conference: *The End of the Law?*, February, 2009, pp1-39.

¹⁰ Erroll Hulse: ‘What is Covenant Theology?’, *Reformation Today*, Leeds, 1980, p20.

¹¹ Geoffrey Thomas: ‘Becoming a Christian – Covenant Theology: A Historical Survey’, The Westminster Conference, 1972: *Becoming a Christian*, The Westminster Conference, pp14-15.

¹² Louis Berkhof: *Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1959, p213; Walter J. Chantry: *God’s Righteous Kingdom: Focussing on the Law’s Connection with the Gospel*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, p45; *The Covenants – Of Works and Of Grace* p2.

be explained on the assumption that Adam, like Christ, was the head of a covenant... The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us [the elect], without any personal work on our part to merit it. And... this... [is] a perfect parallel to the manner in which the guilt of Adam is imputed to us. This naturally leads to the conclusion that Adam stood in covenant relationship to his descendants'.¹³

But this, in turn is answered by another covenant theologian, John Murray:

This administration has often been denoted: 'The Covenant of Works' [but] the term is not felicitous... [and] it is not designated a covenant in Scripture. Hosea 6:7 may be interpreted otherwise [than the usual Reformed view] and does not provide the basis for such a construction of the Adamic economy... It should never be confused with what Scripture calls the old covenant or the first covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; 2 Cor. 3:14; Heb. 8:7,13). The first or old covenant is Sinaitic. And not only must this confusion in denotation be avoided, but also [so must] any attempt to interpret the Mosaic covenant in terms of the Adamic institution. The latter could apply only to the state of innocence, and to Adam alone as representative head. The view that in the Mosaic covenant there was a repetition of the so-called covenant of works, current among covenant theologians, is a grave misconception and involves an erroneous construction of the Mosaic covenant, as well as a failure to assess the uniqueness of the Adamic administration... The obedience Christ rendered fulfilled the obedience in which Adam failed... but it would not be correct to say, however, that Christ's obedience was the same in content or demand. Christ was called on to obey in radically different conditions, and required to fulfil radically different demands. Christ was a sin-bearer and the climactic demand was [for him] to die. This was not true of Adam. Christ came to redeem; not so Adam. So Christ rendered the whole-souled totality [of?] obedience in which Adam failed, but under totally different conditions and with incomparably greater demands.

¹³ Berkhof pp213-214.

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Unfortunately, Murray thought ‘the Mosaic covenant was distinctly redemptive in character and was continuous with and extensive of [as?] the Abrahamic covenants’.¹⁴

What about this for arguing black is white? Witsius thought Adam was under the covenant of works which ‘in substance [corresponded] with what is expressed in the ten commandments’. After Adam fell, God instituted a ‘new covenant of grace’ with him. Witsius based this on the fact that when God says ‘new, he makes the first old’ (Heb. 8:13). ‘It is indeed true, that the [writer], in that place, does not speak precisely of the covenant of works, but of the old economy of the covenant of grace... Yet we properly build on his [that is, the writer to the Hebrews as interpreted by Witsius] reasoning’.¹⁵ I do not apologise for the word – Hermann Witsius was a great man, I have no doubt – but this is rubbish!

¹⁴ John Murray: *The Adamic Administration*, in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1977, pp49-50,58.

¹⁵ Zens pp24-25,92-93, quoting Witsius.

Unlawful Use of the Law

Law men today – that is, covenant theologians, the Reformed and evangelicals who want to impose the law on believers as their perfect rule of life and sanctification – are in direct line of descent from the law men in New Testament times (Acts 15:1-2,5,24; Gal. 2:4-5). No scriptural passage more categorically shows the fundamental error of this endeavour than 1 Timothy 1:6-11.

The law men had reached Ephesus, and were doing as they had done elsewhere; that is, they were trying to bring believers under the law. As always, Paul would have none of it. Writing to Timothy, he opened his letter by putting backbone into the younger man. From the start, he showed that Timothy had to take on all those who were trying to introduce false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3-11), particularly the men who wanted to impose the law on believers.¹ Timothy, in face of such assaults upon the gospel of Christ, had to maintain that gospel, and do so with resolution.

Do not miss the categorical tone of 1 Timothy 1:5. Love is the purpose of the commandment, said the apostle – whether we understand it to refer to the precise command Paul gave Timothy, or to the whole of Scripture, including the law. The law is ‘all summed up’ in love (Rom. 13:9). The believer is not under the law of Moses, the law for Israel, the old-covenant people of God; on the contrary, he is under a new law, ‘the law of Christ’ (1 Cor. 9:19-21; Gal. 6:2). And at the heart of Christ’s new law lies that commandment of Moses – namely, the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Gal. 6:2 with 5:13-14).

So why does Paul say this here? The reason is obvious. In the context, by issuing this classic new-covenant statement, and doing it so early in the letter, Paul is making it as clear as noonday that the law men are utterly out of order. It is not ‘law’ as a list of commands – ticking the boxes – that counts; it is ‘love’. Law men dismiss this as ‘fuzzy’, ‘vague’, ‘foggy

¹ Compare 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:2; Tit. 1:9-16; 2:15.

sentiment', and the like.² They want conformity to rules, whereas God, by his Spirit, in the new covenant, produces love in his people, love being the fulfilment of the law. That is the great end of the law, including, and especially, the law of Christ: 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:34-35; see also Gal. 5:6,13-14; 1 John 3:14-15; 4:20-21).

Having made this vital point, the apostle then bluntly dismissed the law men. Without mincing his words, he declared: There are 'certain persons... [who]... desiring to be teachers of the law [are] without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions' (1 Tim. 1:6-7). The truth is, he went on, they are using the law 'improperly' or 'unlawfully' (1 Tim. 1:8). And they have to be stopped. The believer is not under the law of Moses. Above all, law men do not seem to know – or else forget or ignore – that the great end of the law (including Christ's law) is love.

This categorical apostolic dismissal of the law men is vital for understanding the argument; Paul's plain speaking sets the entire section in its proper perspective. But before I move on, let me pause to make a contemporary application of what we have seen thus far.

I have the temerity to repeat the apostle's charge, and use it to address today's law-men. I say that they fall foul of Paul's assessment, and for exactly the same reason. They are using the law 'improperly' or 'unlawfully'. How? They take the law of Moses (now, since Thomas Aquinas, unlawfully whittled down to the ten commandments),³ that law of the old covenant which was

² For my sources, please search the free Mobi and Epub copies of my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law* (Links on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

³ In taking such a line, law men do not get themselves off the hook. By saying they want believers under the ten commandments, the moral law – as they like to call it – and not the ceremonial or judicial law, they compound their error by trying to divide the law in such a way. See my 'The Law: Reformed Escape Routes' (in my *New-Covenant Articles*:

Unlawful Use of the Law

given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai for Israel, and for Israel alone (Deut. 4:7-8,32-34; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:14; 3:1-2; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21), that condemning covenant in stone (2 Cor. 3:6-9), that covenant of the flesh and not of the spirit or the Spirit, that covenant which Christ fulfilled and rendered obsolete (Heb. 8:13), and they utterly misuse it; they apply it unlawfully. How? They want to impose that law upon believers in the days of the new covenant! Incredible! They take the law, given to Israel, which Israel found to be an intolerable yoke (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1), and fasten that yoke around the necks of believers – men and women who have died to the law in order to be progressively sanctified (Rom. 7:4-6), men and women who have been set free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1-4)! As Peter protested at the Jerusalem meeting called to deal with this issue when it first reared its head among the churches: ‘Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?’ (Acts 15:10). If ever there was an unlawful use of the law, this must be it!

To such men, I repeat Paul’s charge. In the days of the new covenant, you foolishly desire to be teachers of the law, and, by engaging in this (at best) misguided enterprise, you show that you are without understanding either of what you are saying or the things about which you make confident assertions. Your Confessions and Catechisms, of which you are so fond, and which you so repeatedly quote alongside (if not before and above) Scripture, undoubtedly support your action, but 1 Timothy 1:6-11 utterly refutes it. You stand condemned by Scripture. You are failing to address believers in the way you should because you are unlawfully imposing the obsolete law of the old covenant on men and women in the new covenant.

Strong words. Let me make good my case. I start by quoting the relevant apostolic paragraph:

Volume Two; the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com); ‘Reading The Bible’ (in the series ‘New-Covenant Theology Made Simple’ on youtube.com and sermonaudio.com).

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We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.⁴

Paul is speaking of the law of Moses, as the context – both before and after – makes clear. Although verse 9 refers to ‘law’ (no article in the Greek, NIV – but see footnote) and not ‘the law’, this poses no problem. The fact is, the lack of the article strengthens the concept of ‘the law’ as the law of Moses.⁵ In any case, in verse 8 it is ‘the law’. Furthermore, in verse 7, Paul speaks of Judaisers, teachers of the Mosaic law, and in verses 9 and 10, clearly he is referring to the ten commandments. So whatever the passage teaches, it teaches concerning the Mosaic law, including the ten commandments.

But, in the first instance, take Paul’s words as applicable to ‘law’ in general: ‘Law is not made for a righteous person’. This is self-evident. A law is enacted to deal with an offence. Litter is commonly thrown in the streets; the authorities respond by passing a law against litter-louts. Certain dogs bite; a law is passed against dangerous dogs. And so on, *ad infinitum*. Law has to do with sin, not righteousness. Sin leads to the introduction of law. This is true in general, but it is also true in particular – as here – of the law of Moses. Some men murder, so God forbids it, and brings in a law against it. By this law, he exposes the sin, turns it into transgression (Rom. 4:15), and sets up punishments for it. ‘By the law is the knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3:20). ‘Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound’ (Rom. 5:20). The law ‘was added because of transgressions’ (Gal. 3:19).⁶ And the law always curses all offenders for each and every offence: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all

⁴ For the rest of this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ* pp191-195; see also pp474-475.

⁵ See my *Christ* pp26,336.

⁶ The law turned ‘sin’ into ‘transgression’.

things which are written in the book of the law, to do them' (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26).

Though it deals with sin and sinners, the law itself is 'good' (*kalos*): 'We know that the law is good' (1 Tim. 1:8), 'good, excellent in its nature and characteristics, and therefore well-adapted to its ends... good in its substance and nature'.⁷ The same word is used in Romans 7:16 in reference to at least the ten commandments, which, in passing, is a further confirmation of the first point I made; it *is* the law of Moses we are thinking about. This law is 'well-adapted to its ends'. It is these 'ends' or purposes, or God's design in giving the law, which must be thought about.⁸ And that design Paul immediately spells out; that is, 'the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate' (1 Tim. 1:9).

Now this 'good' law can be misused, even abused: 'We know that the law is good' – but only 'if one uses it lawfully' (1 Tim. 1:8). 'Lawfully'? Yes, indeed. It must be used as it was intended by the lawgiver; that is, for the purpose he designed, and for the goal he intended. It must not be used for a purpose for which it was not intended, nor applied to a person outside its remit. Let me illustrate. To try to prevent murder, a law is passed against the use of knives. It would be manifestly absurd to apply this law to chefs, butchers, fish-filleters and surgeons engaged in their normal duties. It would bring the law into disrepute – make 'an ass' of it.

To whom does the law *not* apply? We know 'that the law is not made for a righteous person' (1 Tim. 1:9).⁹ To whom *does* it

⁷ Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991.

⁸ See my *Christ* pp131-132,422-423 for my comments on Gal. 3 dealing with the purpose of the law.

⁹ Incidentally, when they claim that the ten commandments were given to Adam, covenant theologians are going directly contrary to the apostolic teaching in 1 Tim. 1:9. Whatever Adam would have made of commands against sins of which he could have no possible understanding *before he fell*, I simply cannot comprehend. Whatever he would have made of a command against adultery when there was no other woman in existence, and whatever he would have made of a

apply, therefore? For whom *is* it made? It is made for the lawless, the unrighteous, the ungodly, the profane, and so on (1 Tim. 1:9-10). Who is this lawless person? He is *anomos*, one ‘departing from the law, a violator of the law, lawless, wicked, godless’.¹⁰ The same word is used for ‘the lawless one’ (2 Thess. 2:8), ‘he in whom all iniquity has as it were fixed its abode’.¹¹

Let us look at this a little more closely. Who is this righteous person, the one to whom the law does *not* apply? This person must be either a believer or an unbeliever. And the ‘righteousness’ must be ‘true’ righteousness (in the sense, say, of Romans 8:4) or ‘false’ righteousness – that is, external righteousness or self-righteousness.

Let me consider the possibilities.

Is the ‘righteous person’ an unbeliever who is truly righteous? No! Self-evidently, such a person does not exist.

Is the ‘righteous person’ an unbeliever who is righteous in an external way? Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-6) and Paul (Phil. 3:6) are cited as examples by those who argue in this way. If so, then we have to believe the law was not made for such people – it had nothing to do with Jews such as these. Obviously, once again, quite wrong. If not, we end up with the absurdity that the law was not made for Jews such as Zacharias and Elizabeth, and Paul before his conversion, when we know it *was* made for such (Rom. 7:7-12). They were Jews, weren’t they?

Is the ‘righteous person’ an unbeliever who is self-righteous? Take Paul. We know he did not keep the law (Rom. 7:7-12). In fact, it was he himself who argued that ‘there is none righteous, no, not one’ (Rom. 3:10). In Philippians 3:6, he was saying no

command about his father and mother, utterly defeats me – as much as it would have defeated him!

¹⁰ M.R.Vincent: *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Macdonald Publishing Company, Florida, Vol.2 p1016; Thayer; William Arndt and F.Wilbur Gingrich: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, London, 1957.

¹¹ Thayer.

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more than he did in Acts 26:5: in his own opinion – and that of others – before conversion, he was a righteous man, when all the time, as he later found out, he was self-righteous! So, if the ‘righteous person’ of 1 Timothy 1:9 refers to a self-righteous man, then Paul was really saying the law is not made for such. If so, I would like to know for whom it *is* made! Jesus regarded self-righteousness as a sin, and a common sin at that (Luke 16:15; 18:9), and whatever else the law is to do with, it is to do with sin (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:19, for instance). So the law is made for sinners – including the self-righteous.

Coming closer to the matter about which the apostle was writing to Timothy: are we really to believe that Paul was concerned that Judaisers were trying to get self-righteous people, non-believers, to submit to the law? And that, because of his concern, he wrote to Timothy and told him point-blank that the law was not made for self-righteous or externally-righteous unbelievers? Is this what we have to understand? Nonsense!

Surely the false teachers were trying to get *believers* to submit to the law. *That* was the threat. Paul was concerned with the danger to believers, wasn’t he? At this point, he was not in the least worried about what the Judaisers might be trying to do to unbelievers, and whether or not those unbelievers were externally conforming to law or self-righteous hypocrites. It was *believers* he was concerned with. He was anxious because Judaisers were trying to get *believers* under the law. *That* is what Timothy had to sort out and put a stop to. The law was not made for *believers*, said the apostle.

Let me move on to the positive. In general, the righteous person means one who is good, ‘a good person’, but the context takes it further. It here means ‘a justified person’. The ESV got it right: ‘The law is not laid down for the just’. The ‘righteous person’ of verse 9, in the context, is a believer, a child of God. After all, Paul was dealing with false teachers at Ephesus – those who were deceiving and misleading *believers*, trying to bring *them* under the law. The false teachers were not trying to bring merely respectable, decent, ‘good’ people under the law. They were teaching *in the church*. They were trying to get *believers* under the law. Paul was dealing with the issue of the believer and the

law. 'The law is not made for a righteous person'. Here, therefore, the righteous person is a godly person, a believer, one who is justified. The law is not designed for the believer, since the believer is 'not under law' (Rom. 6:14), as 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God' (1 Tim. 1:11) repeatedly affirms (Rom. 6:14-15; 7:4-6; 8:2; Gal. 5:18; Eph. 2:13-15; Col. 2:13-17).

All this is highly significant for the question in hand. It was wrong of these Judaisers to try to impose the law upon believers, to try to bring them under the law. Thus it is, to try to make the law the rule and spur for the believer, in order to stir him to sanctification, must be a gross misuse of the law. God did not design his law or introduce it for that purpose. The law has to do with the sinner and his sin, not the saint and his holiness. This is a basic tenet of the gospel. Note the 'according to' (verse 11). The fact that the law is not made for a righteous man is according to the gospel. This is what Paul taught (1 Tim. 1:10-11). And since, in my book, we are dealing with the believer, one who is a 'righteous' man, a justified (the same word in Greek) man (Rom. 5:19; 8:33), we may say that the apostle's declaration means, therefore, that it is simply not fitting to bring such a man under the rule of the law. In fact, it is quite out of place. It is wrong! The believer has died to the law through Christ who is 'the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Rom. 10:4). If Timothy allowed the Judaisers to get their way, and the law was brought into the church at Ephesus to be taught as the perfect rule for believers, he would be guilty of tolerating a serious misappropriation of the law. The law was not designed for that purpose. It was not designed for believers, full stop, but for the lawless and disobedient.

This, of course, smites a heavy blow at the heart of the Reformed view of the law, as expressed in Calvin's third use. It will not do to say that Paul was speaking about the Mosaic law marred or distorted by human tradition; that he was talking about the condemning power of the law; that he was telling Timothy to watch out for those who misuse the law to introduce 'spells' concerning ancestors; that he was talking about the *self*-righteous man. All of which have been suggested. Paul was speaking of the

justified man, not merely the morally upright, and saying the law is not made for *him*.

The fact is, if any of these alternatives are right, and Paul was saying that these particular uses or abuses of the law are not made for a righteous man, then it can only mean that the law itself – the law – *is* made for a righteous man after all! And Paul was making a dreadful mistake. In fact, from the Reformed point of view, far from attacking these teachers at Ephesus, Paul should have commended them. He should have told Timothy to encourage them! They were doing precisely the right thing; they were getting believers to submit to the law. And if these teachers (and Timothy) were not quite clear about it, and one or other of those suggested alternatives *had* messed things up a bit, and that *that* was the problem he was dealing with, Paul should have instructed them and fine-tuned their thinking on the law – like Aquila and Priscilla did for Apollos on another matter (Acts 18:26). In short, he should have praised these teachers, at least for aiming in the right direction and trying to impose the law on believers, since the law in its third use *is* made for a righteous man! This, apparently, is the very person for whom it is made! Why, according to Calvin, it is its principal use!

Paul, however, declared the exact opposite. These teachers were *false* teachers. They had to be stopped. The law must not be imposed on believers. ‘The law is not made for a righteous person’. The law must be used for the purpose God gave it, and no other. It must be used ‘lawfully’. It must not be misused by trying to make it do something for which it was never intended. The one thing which Paul says here about the believer and the law is that the law is not made for him!

Of course I am not saying that because the law is not made for a righteous man, it has no relevance in his life. But I am certainly saying it is not his pattern, standard or perfect rule. These Judaisers wanted believers under the law, and Paul wouldn’t have it at any price.¹²

¹² I say little about the reconstructionist’s view that the law is the law for the Christian man and for a Christian society. What is a ‘Christian society’? It does not exist. And if it did, it would not need the law. Why not? Because we know ‘the law is not made for a righteous person, but

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As 1 John 3:7 declares: 'He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he [Christ] is righteous'. The justified person will show it by godly works (Jas. 2:14-26). The law is not made for such a person. It is made for the opposite, for the sinner, the ungodly, the non-justified person, the person who is yet in his sin, the person whose ungodly works demonstrate that he is still an unbeliever (Rom. 6:19-23; Gal. 5:16-24; 1 Pet. 4:1-3, for instance). That is to say, God gave the law to the Jews when they were in that condition and for that purpose.

Paul is not here setting out the proper way for the believer to use the law. Not at all! That is not his purpose. He is dealing with false teachers. That's who he has in his sights. As he taught the Romans and the Galatians, believers are in Christ, have the Spirit, and so the law is fulfilled in them. They belong to a new age; thus, they are not under law (Rom. 6:14 – 7:6; Gal. 4:28 – 5:1). The atmosphere of this passage in Timothy – with its talk of the law, lawless, insubordinate and ungodly men, and fornication, sodomy, murder, lying, kidnappers and the like – is surely at variance with the sanctification of believers. I do not pretend that saints are immune to sin. David is too glaring an example for me to suggest such a thing. And, sadly, there is no shortage of contemporary examples. Who is without sin? I certainly do not claim it for myself! But are we really to understand that believers are to be taught, nourished, trained and disciplined in an atmosphere of *law* against sodomy, murder, adultery and the like? Is this really the height of Christianity? Is this the spirit of the New Testament? How does this fit with 1 Corinthians 6:9-11? Paul was clear: fornicators, sodomites, homosexuals and the like 'will not inherit the kingdom of God'. 'And such were some of you', he exclaimed. '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. 6:9-11). If ever there was a place for the apostle to set out Calvin's third use of the law, 1

for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners' (1 Tim. 1:9-10). Would a 'Christian society' need a law against blasphemy or murder for instance? If the answer is yes, then what distinguishes a 'Christian society' from a 'non-Christian society'? This passage on its own destroys the reconstructionist's claim; it says the opposite.

Corinthians 6 is it. But what mention did Paul make of the law to sanctify these ex-homosexuals, ex-drunkards, and so on?

None! Paul did not take the Corinthians to Moses to keep them clean, and growing in godliness. He took them to Christ and the Spirit: ‘The body is not for sexual immorality but for the *Lord*, and the *Lord* for the body. And God both raised up the *Lord* and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of *Christ*?’ he thundered. ‘Shall I then take the members of *Christ* and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!... Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the *Holy Spirit* who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s’ (1 Cor. 6:13-20). ‘Those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again’ (2 Cor. 5:15). *This* is the ‘law’ for believers – the law of Christ; not the law of Moses. The law of Christ is the means and motive of sanctification. Believers are not sanctified by the law of Moses; it is by Christ, by considering him, his blood, his present work as intercessor and advocate, his coming again, their union with him, and so on.¹³

In a word, believers ought not to be brought under the law of Moses. It is not designed for them. Paul said so in 1 Timothy 1:8-11. They live in a totally different realm. And, therefore, we should not be surprised to discover that, having opened his first letter to Timothy with ‘Jesus Christ... the Lord Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ our Lord...’, as with the Corinthians, the apostle went on to speak of Christ: ‘I thank Christ Jesus our Lord... the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus... Christ Jesus... Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ... Christ Jesus... God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit... the Spirit... Jesus Christ... Christ... the Lord Jesus Christ... our Lord Jesus Christ...’, continuing the theme in his second letter: ‘Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ Jesus our Lord... Christ Jesus... our Saviour Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus...

¹³ The concept of ‘law’ in the law of Christ is very different to its concept in the law of Moses. See my “‘The Law’ in ‘The Law of Christ’” (under the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

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the Holy Spirit... Christ Jesus... Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ... Christ Jesus... Christ Jesus... the Lord Jesus Christ... the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you'. And, of course, 'the Lord... the Lord... the Lord...' ¹⁴

We should, therefore, be preachers of Christ, not Moses; preachers of the new covenant, not the old; preachers of the Spirit, not the flesh.

¹⁴ And I may have lost count!

Reviews

Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law

Dr John S. Waldrip

*******Life changing!** July 20, 2013

David H.J. Gay writes in a way most can easily follow to show that an error concerning the Mosaic Law has found its way through Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin into mainstream Protestant thought. Gay shows the error of this and points the reader ever and always to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Object the divine Means by which the believer's sanctification is accomplished. I would give this book six stars if the author had left out the final chapter of the book.

Terence Clarke

*******Deals thoroughly with Christian sanctification in Christ rather than Moses (Law)** 16 August 2013

David Gay thoroughly deals with the biblical concept and application of sanctification (imparted righteousness) which he reveals is in Christ alone. He demolishes the teaching of the reformers and those that follow on this issue that sanctification is by the 10 Commandments. He shows that just as in justification Christ is all and as far as the sanctification of believers is concerned 'Christ is in all'. This is anything but an antinomian approach but emphasises the power of Christ in the Christian's life. David's style is unusual in that it displays a preacher's approach to delivery but is fresh and direct. He does repeat his arguments throughout the book so that the reader should be in no doubt of them or misunderstand them. He introduces briefly his amillennialist view on Israel which, I find, is not argued with the same biblical thoroughness as the main subject. Recommended for all those who have a true interest in biblical sanctification and the whole work of Christ.

Moe Bergeron

******At last a view of 'New Covenant' Sanctification** August 30, 2013

'Antinomian!' is a hideous charge that is levelled at those who do not believe in any use of Sinai's Law for the saint's sanctification. The fact of the matter is that anyone who subscribes to such a use, including a third use, of Sinai's Law denies the clear biblical teaching of Romans 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3. The written code and the way of the Spirit are opposed to one another. In the apostle Peter's 2nd letter and in the 1st chapter he explains New Covenant sanctification. Learn

of Christ! David Gay's work is a must read for all who understand that the Lutheran/Reformed debate is not Law vs. Gospel. It truly is Letter vs. Spirit.

Mr Rod Angus

*******Insightful, courageous and clear** 27 August 2013

The Reformed teaching that the OT law, especially the 10 Commandments, is the Christian's standard and perfect rule for obedience, when not overtly taught, is nevertheless the incipient ingredient lurking in the minds of many believers. The belief that the Law is an aid to sanctification is a lie. The law disempowers and condemns, but never sanctifies. David Gay has written a unique book exposing this Reformed spell that has been cast over the Church. As he writes 'The same grace that saves... also sanctifies'. Grace wins the love of the heart in a way that the law never could. 'The Law of Christ' is 'a real law. Love is its goal, love is its motive'. My only real problem with David's wonderful book is his continued allegiance to the Augustine-Calvin Christologically deficient teaching on election. I have already contacted him over this, to which he graciously replied. I hope he sniffs this one out in the same way as he has exposed the lie concerning the believer and the law. Nevertheless, this is an outstanding piece of writing. Thank you David.

Amazon customer

*******Demolishes Reformed view of sanctification by law**

November 12, 2013

Best and most thorough book on New Covenant Theology I have ever seen. Completely demolishes the erroneous Reformed doctrine of sanctification by law.

Tom Knotts

*******The best book I have ever read next to Bible on the law and grace** April 30, 2014

This book was recommended to me by my former pastor and I have to say it is the best book I have read on the law and grace. Gay takes the time to break each and every passage down dealing with the subject but the beauty is that he goes beyond that and ties in things I had never considered. A great book.

James M.Kray 'Lewis Fan' reviewed *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*

*******So good, I read it 2 times in a row** June 27, 2014

A real challenge to the typical 'use the Law for your sanctification' view held in most Reformed circles. Very readable style too. I wonder how many are trapped in their doctrinal statements and/or confessions. Have you ever noticed that Paul never says 'Walk in the Law'? and this by an ex-Pharisee! I bought the Kindle AND the paperback.

James M.Kray 'Lewis Fan'

*******A Very Good Presentation on Law/Gospel** August 13, 2014

This book will get you thinking hard about the Law/Gospel relationship. If you are Reformed or think that the Law of Moses can be broken down into civil, ceremonial and moral, think again. Even non-Reformed have adopted this 3 way division. So good, I had to read it two times in a row.

Audio book (may be downloaded from sermonaudio.com)

JamesC. (Fallbrook, CA)

Great Audio Book! August 29, 2014

Thank you for providing this free audio book. I am benefiting greatly from the material in it. It is eye-opening – as radical as the biblical doctrine of election. I am seeing things that I once glossed over. Coming out of Way of the Master evangelism and Reformed thinking, the information in this book is causing a welcomed paradigm shift for me.

J. Duncan

*******Great!** October 7, 2014

I am becoming very impressed with Gay's writing. He uses and quotes a wide array of sources (demonstrating he is well versed with differing viewpoints), and most importantly, allows the Bible to guide his thinking. This book is largely a refutation of Covenant Theology, though Gay is not a dispensationalist (see last chapter). He mentions that, while he doesn't prefer to be labelled, many have said he would fit under 'New-Covenant Theology' in his biblical theology. I would agree. I was especially impressed by his demonstration of the new covenant along with its 'law' being the 'Law of Christ.' Many strong points are made demonstrating this is not simply the 'moral law' such as many covenant theologians (including 1689 Baptist federalists) hold. However, the bulk of the book was geared towards proving the subtitle of the book, that sanctification does

not come through the law, as taught by Calvin and many of the reformers. But, in case that last sentence was misleading, Gay believes (though I can't remember if it was explicitly stated) in the doctrines of grace (5 points of 'Calvinism'), although this doesn't have a major purpose in the book. A tremendous read for just \$1. I am looking forward to checking out more of his books, as most centre around this topic.

James

*******Paradigm-Shifting book!** October 14, 2014

I listened to the audio book on sermonaudio. This book really threw me for a loop since I was heavy into the Way of the Master 'Have you kept the 10 commandments?' Evangelism. It was so revolutionary to my thinking that I was left questioning what I really believed. The information helped tear my focus from the Law onto where it should be – Christ. The author does an excellent job of backing up his claims from Scripture. Through the author, the Spirit revealed to me things that were plain as day. I highly recommend this book.

