

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES  
VOLUME FOUR

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.*

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

*Infant Baptism Tested.*

*New-Covenant Articles: Volume One.*

*New-Covenant Articles: Volume Two.*

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

*Priesthood: Our Need, God's Provision.*

*Psalms 119 and The New Covenant.*

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

*Sanctification in Galatians.*

*The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry.*

*The Pastor: Does He Exist?*

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

# New-Covenant Articles

## *Volume Four*

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

Hebrews 8:6,13

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**BRACHUS**

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## *Note to the Reader*

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

David Gay has done the church of Christ a great service with his latest volume. Two key areas highlighted in this work, are of great significance to every disciple of Christ; the priesthood of all believers, and the role of the law in the life of the Christian. The Christian's priesthood is a vital truth not least because it liberates the believer from the tyranny of a hierarchal clerical system, a system whose crimes and accesses are a cancerous tumour on the history of the church. On the other side of this coin is that followers of Christ are responsible for their own spiritual walk and cannot live out their faith via proxy. Added to these two issues is of course the issue of free access to God through Christ which is the privilege of every single Christian, this answers David's question to himself: 'Have I been making a mountain out of a molehill?' By no means is this doctrine a molehill, it is vital and has been neglected for far too long. The next issue of great importance dealt with in this book is that of 'The Law' how is it defined? How does it apply? This issue is a longstanding one in Christian theology, and at this point in time in the development of New-Covenant Theology there are differences of opinion. David does a good job in outlining what the bible means by 'the law' and 'law' and the role (or not) of that law in the life of the Christian. One very important aspect of this debate that is often absent for the discussion is that of regeneration, and the work of the Spirit which causes the disciple to become more like his Master. In his treatment of this subject David is clear, concise and thoroughly Christ centred.

In this book David shines much light on various subjects and events. I heartily recommend this work which alongside the three previous volumes contributes greatly to the ongoing 'Reform' of the Church, *Tolle Lege*.

Robert Millar  
County Fermanagh  
Northern Ireland  
*Semper Reformanda!*



## *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.



## Calvin on Assurance

John Calvin took the doctrine of the law, as formulated by the medieval Church, and forged it into a system which has dominated the Reformed and evangelical world this past 450 years.<sup>1</sup> Millions have adopted his scheme. But on assurance,<sup>2</sup> he makes very uncomfortable reading for many of those who follow him.<sup>3</sup> It is not the only issue on which they fall out with him, of course – the sabbath is another<sup>4</sup> – but assurance is what concerns us here. Later Puritans started the ball rolling, but many others since their time have moved far *beyond* Calvin on assurance – and far *away* from him on it, too! And it is *their* system which has brought fear and doubt to so many, down to the present day. Far more people are influenced by the Puritans on assurance than they realise. Indeed, some who would be horrified to be thought Puritan, nevertheless, are such on the law and assurance – without knowing it. So while they are Calvinists on the law, they differ from the Reformer on assurance. Let me explain.

In his *Institutes*, which he said we should take as definitive,<sup>5</sup> Calvin made it clear that he regarded assurance as the essence of faith, and essential for salvation. He had no time for those who

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<sup>1</sup> See several of my works, especially *Christ*.

<sup>2</sup> For my full argument on assurance, see my *Assurance*.

<sup>3</sup> How is it that Calvin, so strong on the law, was also positive on assurance, when I argue that preaching law leads to loss of assurance? As I do; see my *Assurance* pp61-95. Because he was inconsistent in this matter, as on other issues.

<sup>4</sup> See my *Sabbath*, especially pp65-67.

<sup>5</sup> ‘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’ (Calvin in his prefixed explanations for the work dated 1539 and 1545).

put anything between the believer and immediate assurance,<sup>6</sup> as they do when they replace the witness of the Spirit by tests of evidences of grace; that is, by making the believer pore over his progressive sanctification.<sup>7</sup>

Contrasting the two covenants,<sup>8</sup> Calvin was definite:

In Scripture, the term ‘bondage’ is applied to the old covenant because it begets fear, and the term ‘freedom’ to the new, because [it is] productive of confidence and security. Thus Paul

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<sup>6</sup> He was, of course, heavily engaged with Rome – Rome denying even the possibility of assurance: ‘No one can know with a certainty of faith... that he has obtained the grace of God’ (‘The Council of Trent’ (documentacatholicaomnia.eu). ‘If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he firmly believes that he is absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified except him who believes himself justified... let him be anathema’. ‘If anyone says that a man who is born again and justified is bound *ex fide* to believe that he is certainly in the number of the predestined, let him be anathema’. ‘If anyone says that he will for certain, with an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance even to the end, unless he shall have learned this by a special revelation, let him be anathema’ (canons 14-16) (ewtn.com). In reacting against Rome, however, Calvin went too far in making assurance the essence of faith. Assurance is the concomitant of faith, not its essence. Calvin’s over-reaction parallels the way his detestation of the Anabaptists drove him even further into infant baptism. On assurance, Rome was not Calvin’s only target, as we shall see.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> In what follows, Calvin had ‘Old Testament’. He never understood the biblical doctrine of the two covenants. Such misunderstanding contributed to his emphasis on the law, and hence led to the setting up of the system which led to much of the present trouble over assurance for many believers.

says to the Romans: ‘You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry: “Abba, Father”’ (Rom. 8:15). To the same effect is... (Heb. 12:18–22; Gal. 4:25–26)... The sum of the matter comes to this: the old covenant... led the conscience with fear and trembling – the new inspires it with gladness. By the former the conscience is held in bondage; by the latter it is manumitted [released from slavery] and made free.<sup>9</sup>

As Calvin declared, until believers grasp what they have by the Spirit, they will always be in bondage:

Until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed, because we view him coldly without us, and so at a distance from us... Paul says to the Ephesians: ‘You were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise’ (Eph. 1:13); thus showing that he is the internal teacher, by whose agency the promise of salvation, which would otherwise only strike the air or our ears, penetrates into our minds.<sup>10</sup>

Taking the gloves off, Calvin left no one in any doubt as to where he stood: assurance is the essence of faith. Hear him:

The knowledge of faith consists more of certainty than discernment... We add that it is sure and firm, the better to express strength and constancy of persuasion. For as faith is not contented with a dubious and fickle opinion, so neither is it contented with an obscure and ill-defined conception. The certainty which it requires must be full and decisive... There are very many... who form such an idea of the divine mercy as yields them very little comfort. For they are harassed by miserable anxiety while they doubt whether God will be merciful to them. They think, indeed, that they are most fully persuaded of the divine mercy, but they confine it within too narrow limits. The idea they entertain is that this mercy is great and abundant, is shed upon many, is offered and ready to be bestowed upon all; but that it is uncertain whether it will reach to them individually, or rather whether they can reach to it. Thus their knowledge stopping short leaves them only mid-way; not so much confirming and tranquilising the mind as harassing it with doubt and disquietude.

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<sup>9</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 2.11.9.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.1.3,4.

Calvin turned from this arid faith, this miserable doubt, to what he saw as the scriptural position:

Very different is that feeling of full assurance which the Scriptures uniformly attribute to faith – an assurance which leaves no doubt that the goodness of God is clearly offered to us. This assurance we cannot have without truly perceiving its sweetness, and experiencing it in ourselves. Hence from faith the apostle deduces confidence, and from confidence boldness. His words are: ‘In whom [Christ] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him’ (Eph. 3:12) thus undoubtedly showing that our faith is not true unless it enables us to appear calmly in the presence of God. Such boldness springs only from confidence in the divine favour and salvation. So true is this, that the term ‘faith’ is often used as equivalent to ‘confidence’.<sup>11</sup>

The principal hinge on which faith turns is this: we must not suppose that any promises of mercy which the Lord offers are only true out of us, and not at all in us; we should rather make them ours by inwardly embracing them. In this way only is engendered that confidence which he elsewhere terms ‘peace’ (Rom. 5:1)... This is the security which quiets and calms the conscience in the view of the judgment of God, and without which it is necessarily vexed and almost torn with tumultuous dread... In one word, he only is a true believer who, firmly persuaded that God is reconciled, and is a kind Father to him, hopes everything from his kindness, who, trusting to the promises of the divine favour, with undoubting confidence anticipates salvation; as the [writer] shows in these words: ‘We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end’ (Heb. 3:14). He thus holds, that none hope well in the Lord save those who confidently glory in being the heirs of the heavenly kingdom.

Calvin was definite: saving faith is always accompanied by assurance. Indeed, he said, unless we have assurance, we do not have faith:

No man, I say, is a believer but he who, trusting to the security of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death, as we are taught by the noble exclamation of Paul: ‘I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.2.14,15.



nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38). In like manner, the same apostle does not consider that the eyes of our understanding are enlightened unless we know what is the hope of the eternal inheritance to which we are called (Eph. 1:18). Thus he uniformly intimates throughout his writings, that the goodness of God is not properly comprehended when security does not follow as its fruit.<sup>12</sup>

How does the Spirit give the believer this assurance?

The next thing necessary is that what the mind has imbibed be transferred into the heart. The word is not received in faith when it merely flutters in the brain, but when it has taken deep root in the heart, and become an invincible bulwark to withstand and repel all the assaults of temptation. But if the illumination of the Spirit is the true source of understanding in the intellect, much more manifest is his agency in the confirmation of the heart; inasmuch as there is more distrust in the heart than blindness in the mind; and it is more difficult to inspire the soul with security than to imbue it with knowledge. Hence the Spirit performs the part of a seal, sealing upon our hearts the very promises, the certainty of which was previously impressed upon our minds. [He] also serves as an earnest in establishing and confirming these promises. Thus the apostle says: 'In whom also, after that you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance' (Eph. 1:13-14). You see how he teaches that the hearts of believers are stamped with the Spirit as with a seal, and calls [him] the Spirit of promise, because [he] ratifies the gospel to us.<sup>13</sup>

Calvin derided those who would make assurance depend on something other than the immediate witness of the Spirit:

But, they say, it is rash and presumptuous to pretend to an undoubted knowledge of the divine will. I would grant this, did we hold that we were able to subject the incomprehensible counsel of God to our feeble intellect. But when we simply say with Paul: 'We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God' (1 Cor. 2:12), what can they oppose to

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.2.16.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.2.36.

this, without offering insult to the Spirit of God?... But they still exclaim, that there is great temerity in our presuming to glory in possessing the Spirit of God. Who could believe that these men... could be so stupid as to err thus grossly in the very first principles of religion?... Paul declares that those only are the sons of God who are led by his Spirit (Rom. 8:14)... He tells us that we call God our Father in terms dictated by the Spirit, who alone bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God (Rom. 8:16)... He declares that those only are the servants of Christ who are led by the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9)... He holds out the hope of a blessed resurrection to those only who feel his Spirit dwelling in them (Rom. 8:11).

Calvin went straight on, turning to those who would play down this assurance by the witness of the Spirit:

But perhaps they will say that they deny not the necessity of being endued with the Spirit, but only hold it to be the part of modesty and humility not to recognise it.

Calvin was ready with his reply:

What, then, does Paul mean, when he says to the Corinthians: 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' (2 Cor. 13:5).<sup>14</sup> John, moreover, says: 'Hereby we know that he abides in us by the Spirit which he has given us' (1 John 3:24).<sup>15</sup> And what else is it than to bring the promises of Christ into doubt, when we would be deemed servants of Christ without having his Spirit, whom he declared that he would pour out on all his people? (Isa. 44:3). What! do we not insult the Holy Spirit, when we separate faith, which is his peculiar work, from himself? These being the first rudiments of religion, it is the most wretched blindness to charge Christians with arrogance for presuming to glory in the presence of the Holy Spirit; a glorying without which Christianity itself does not exist!<sup>16</sup>

And, of course, it is not only the presence of the Spirit that Calvin was striving to maintain; it is the Spirit's work, the Spirit's

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<sup>14</sup> For my views on this verse, see my *Assurance* pp155-162.

<sup>15</sup> Notice that Calvin does not turn these words into harrowing introspection (as is so commonly done!). See my *Assurance* pp137-154.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.2.39.

witness in the believer. Calvin was resisting any attack on the believer's confidence in Christ. He had not finished with those who deny the possibility of it, or who, in any way, rob the believer of his assurance:

That they may not attempt to undermine the certainty of faith in one direction only, they attack it in another – *viz.* that though it be lawful for the believer, from his actual state of righteousness, to form a judgment as to the favour of God, the knowledge of final perseverance still remains in suspense.

He gave this short shrift. Do not miss his irony:

An admirable security, indeed, is left us, if, for the present moment only, we can judge from moral conjecture that we are in grace, but know not how we are to be tomorrow!

And now the positive:

Very different is the language of the apostle: 'I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38).

But those who would leave believers in doubt still had not come to the end of their arguments:

They endeavour to evade the force of this by frivolously pretending that the apostle had this assurance by special revelation.

This, Calvin rightly dismissed:

They are too well caught thus to escape; for in that passage he is treating not of his individual experience, but of the blessings which all believers in common derive from faith.<sup>17</sup>

Even though Calvin tended to mix up confidence, assurance and the final perseverance of the saints, nevertheless, there is no mistaking the thrust of what he was saying: the believer can have assurance, the believer should have assurance, and this by the

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<sup>17</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.2.40.

witness of the Spirit. It is not presumption! It is the truth of the new covenant!

Tackling Andreas Osiander's doctrine<sup>18</sup> which 'undermines our assurance of salvation' and 'tries to prevent us from embracing the gift of expiation in faith, and invoking God with quiet minds', Calvin declared:

The doctrine of justification is perverted and completely overthrown whenever doubt is instilled into the mind, confidence in salvation is shaken, and free and intrepid prayer is retarded... whenever rest and tranquillity with spiritual joy are not established.<sup>19</sup>

Calvin has put his finger on the spot. The way so many today are taught to look for assurance – by poring over one's progressive sanctification (I've called this 'legal assurance') – is hopeless: the believer's progressive sanctification is never good enough. Indeed, Calvin went on, linking all this with a right understanding of justification (and, I would add, positional sanctification):

In this way [by looking to works for assurance], faith would be made vain; for if respect be had to works it fails, the holiest of men in that case finding nothing in which they can confide... 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies'. 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' (Rom. 8:33,35). [Paul] clearly declares that the only righteousness for him is that which alone suffices for complete salvation in the presence of God... his confidence... with victorious assurance rise above all fears... [By looking to his progressive sanctification, his works, the believer] will remain in doubt, vibrating to this side and to that, because he will be unable to assume to himself as much righteousness as will be necessary to give confidence.<sup>20</sup>

Leaving the *Institutes* and turning to what Calvin set out in his *Commentaries* on 'the witness' or 'the sealing of the Spirit' (Eph. 1:13-14):

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<sup>18</sup> Osiander was a Christian mystic, and had an idiosyncratic view of justification (see Wikipedia).

<sup>19</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.11.11.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.11.11.

Having maintained that the gospel is certain, [Paul] now comes to the proof. And what higher surety can be found than the Holy Spirit? 'Having denominated the gospel the word of truth, I will not prove it by the authority of men; for you have the testimony of the Spirit of God himself, who seals the truth of it in your hearts'. This elegant comparison is taken from seals, which among men have the effect of removing doubt. Seals give validity both to charters and to testaments; anciently, they were the principal means by which the writer of a letter could be known; and, in short, a seal distinguishes what is true and certain, from what is false and spurious. This office the apostle ascribes to the Holy Spirit, not only here, but in another part of this letter (Eph. 4:30; and in 2 Cor. 1:22). Our minds never become so firmly established in the truth of God as to resist all the temptations of Satan, until we have been confirmed in it by the Holy Spirit. The true conviction which believers have of the word of God, of their own salvation, and of religion in general, does not spring from the judgment of the flesh, or from human and philosophical arguments, but from the sealing of the Spirit, who imparts to their consciences such certainty as to remove all doubt.

Now this raises a question – which Calvin answered:

But is it not the faith itself which is here said to be sealed by the Holy Spirit? If so, faith goes before the sealing. I answer: there are two operations of the Spirit in faith, corresponding to the two parts of which faith consists, as it enlightens, and as it establishes the mind. The commencement of faith is knowledge; the completion of it is a firm and steady conviction, which admits of no opposing doubt. Both, I have said, are the work of the Spirit. No wonder, then, if Paul should declare that the Ephesians, who received by faith the truth of the gospel, were confirmed in that faith by the seal of the Holy Spirit... As God promises in his word... (2 Cor. 6:18) so he gives to us the evidence of having adopted us by the Holy Spirit.

What about 'the earnest' in: 'Which is the earnest of our inheritance'? Calvin:

The metaphor is taken from bargains, in which, when a pledge has been given and accepted, the whole is confirmed, and no room is left for a change of mind. Thus, when we have received the Spirit of God, his promises are confirmed to us, and no dread is felt that they will be revoked. In

themselves, indeed, the promises of God are not weak; but, until we are supported by the testimony of the Spirit, we never rest upon them with unshaken confidence. The Spirit, then, is ‘the earnest of our inheritance’ of eternal life, ‘until the redemption’, that is, until the day of complete redemption is arrived. So long as we are in this world, our warfare is sustained by hope, and therefore this earnest is necessary; but when the possession itself shall have been obtained, the necessity and use of the earnest will then cease.<sup>21</sup>

Commenting on Romans 8:15-16, Calvin declared:

[Paul] now confirms the certainty of that confidence, in which he has already bidden the faithful to rest secure. And he does this by mentioning the special effect produced by the Spirit. For he has not been given for the purpose of harassing us with trembling or of tormenting us with anxiety, but on the contrary, for this end – that having calmed every perturbation, and restoring our minds to a tranquil state, he may stir us up to call on God with confidence and freedom... He teaches us that our confidence in this respect is made certain by the Spirit of adoption, who could not inspire us with confidence in prayer without sealing to us a gratuitous pardon. And that he might make this more evident, he mentions a twofold spirit. He calls one the spirit of bondage, which we receive from the law; and the other, the spirit of adoption, which proceeds from the gospel. The first, he says, was given formerly to produce fear; the other is given now to afford assurance...

He does not simply say that God’s Spirit is a witness to our spirit, but he adopts a compound verb... Paul means that the Spirit of God gives us such a testimony, that when he is our guide and teacher, our spirit is made assured of the adoption of God. For our mind of its own self, without the preceding testimony of the Spirit, could not convey to us this assurance. There is also here an explanation of the former verse. For when

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<sup>21</sup> Now is the time for believing. In glory, there will be no call for faith: all will be experience. ‘Farewell, holy Scriptures... reading... praying... Farewell, sweet believing. Welcome, immediate presence of God and his Son Jesus Christ, who... has redeemed me with his blood’ (Jock Purves: *Fair Sunshine*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1985). The original source, as far as I have discovered, is Robert Garnock in John Howie and William M’Gavin: *The Scots Worthies* Vol.2 p374 (Google Books).

the Spirit testifies to us, that we are the children of God, he at the same time pours into our hearts such confidence, that we venture to call God our Father. And doubtless, since the confidence of the heart alone opens our mouth, except the Spirit testifies to our heart respecting the paternal love of God, our tongues would be dumb, so that they could utter no prayers. For we must ever hold fast this principle – that we do not rightly pray to God, unless we are surely persuaded in our hearts, that he is our Father, when we so call him with our lips. To this there is a corresponding part – that our faith has no true evidence, except we call upon God... Here a striking refutation of the vain notions of the Sophists<sup>22</sup>... which is nothing else but uncertainty and anxiety of mind; nay, rather vacillation and delusion.

And on Romans 8:34, Calvin had this to say:

Our faith is nothing, except we feel assured that Christ is ours, and that the Father is in him propitious to us. Nothing then can be devised more pestilent and ruinous, than the scholastic dogma respecting the uncertainty of salvation.

And finally to another of his writings:

Lastly, there was another most pestilential error... that is, that believers ought to be perpetually in suspense and uncertainty as to their interest in the divine favour. By this suggestion of the devil, the power of faith was completely extinguished, the benefits of Christ's purchase destroyed, and the salvation of men overthrown. For, as Paul declares, that faith only is Christian faith which inspires our hearts with confidence, and emboldens us to appear in the presence of God (Rom. 5:2). On no other view could his doctrine in another passage be maintained; that is, that 'we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry: "Abba, Father"' (Rom. 8:15).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Calvin was clear. Assurance does not arise from progressive sanctification, and it should not be sought there.

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<sup>22</sup> The scholastic theologians of the Sorbonne, Papist theologians.

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin: "The Necessity of Reforming the Church...", in *Calvin's Tracts Relating to the Reformation*, Calvin Translation Society, Edinburgh, 1844, Vol.1 p36 (swrb.com). See also, for instance, *Genevan Catechism* (ondoctrine.com/2cal0504.htm); and, although, it has to be admitted, it is not directly Calvin's own work, *Heidelberg Catechism* (reformed.org/documents/heidelberg.html).

Assurance comes by the witness of the Spirit. Assurance is not some special experience reserved for the elite among the elect; every believer has the Spirit, every believer has the witness of the Spirit, and every believer is assured. Reacting against Rome with its teaching that assurance is not possible, Calvin was dogmatic: assurance is the essence of faith, and those who lack it are reprobates.

Nevertheless, Calvin did not object to progressive sanctification being used by the believer as a confirming evidence of the witness of the Spirit:

Conscience being thus founded, built up, and established, is further established by the consideration of works, inasmuch as they are proofs of God dwelling and reigning in us.

But for those who take such a course, he had a warning: remember that the witness of the Spirit, the Spirit's testimony to the believer of his justification (and positional sanctification) in Christ, is paramount. The believer must not take his eye off that:

Since, then, this confidence in works has no place unless you have previously fixed your whole confidence on the mercy of God, it should not seem contrary to that on which it depends. Wherefore, when we exclude confidence in works, we merely mean, that the Christian mind must not turn back to the merit of works as an aid to salvation, but must dwell entirely on the free promise of justification. But we forbid no believer to confirm and support this faith by the signs of the divine favour towards him. For if when we call to mind the gifts which God has bestowed upon us, they are like rays of the divine countenance, by which we are enabled to behold the highest light of his goodness; much more is this the case with the gift of good works, which shows that we have received the Spirit of adoption. When believers therefore feel their faith strengthened by a consciousness of integrity, and entertain sentiments of exultation, it is just because the fruits of their calling convince them that the Lord has admitted them to a place among his children... But as the fruits of regeneration furnish [believers] with a proof of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, experiencing God to be a Father in a matter of so much moment [importance], they are strengthened in no slight degree to wait for his assistance in all their necessities.



Yes! Progressive sanctification can be a further confirmation to the child of God in the matter of assurance, but listen to the way Calvin went on. His words are of key importance:

Even this they could not do [that is, trust in God at all times and for all things], had they not previously perceived that the goodness of God is sealed to them by nothing but the certainty of the promise. Should they begin to estimate it by their good works, nothing will be weaker or more uncertain; works, when estimated by themselves, no less proving the divine displeasure by their imperfection, than his good-will by their incipient purity. In short, while proclaiming the mercies of the Lord, they never lose sight of his free favour, with all its 'breadth and length, and depth and height', testified by Paul (Eph. 3:18); as if he had said: 'Whithersoever the believer turns, however loftily he climbs, however far and wide his thoughts extend, he must not go farther than the love of Christ, but must be wholly occupied in meditating upon it, as including in itself all dimensions'... We now see that believers have no such confidence in works as to attribute any merit to them (since they regard them only as divine gifts, in which they recognise his goodness, and signs of calling, in which they discern their election); nor such confidence as to derogate in any respect from the free righteousness of Christ; since on this it depends, and without this cannot subsist.<sup>24</sup>

Calvin had not finished with the subject: 'What proof have you of your election?' This, of course, can be a harrowing question:

When once this thought has taken possession of any individual, it keeps him perpetually miserable, subjects him to dire torment, or throws him into a state of complete stupor. I cannot wish a stronger proof of the depraved ideas, which men of this description form of predestination, than experience itself furnishes, since the mind cannot be infected by a more pestilential error than that which disturbs the conscience, and deprives it of peace and tranquillity in regard to God... Let our method of inquiry then be, to begin with the calling of God and to end with it. Although there is nothing in this to prevent believers from feeling that the blessings which they daily receive from the hand of God originate in that secret adoption... with this

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<sup>24</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.14.18 -20.

as a pledge, God is pleased to assure us of as much of his counsel as can be lawfully known.<sup>25</sup>

Calvin commenting on 1 John 4:17:

[John] meant that it is required of us... to resemble the image of God. What God then in heaven is, such he bids us to be in this world, in order that we may be deemed his children; for the image of God, when it appears in us, is as it were the seal of his adoption. But he seems thus to place a part of our confidence on works... But... the apostle here does not refer to the cause of salvation, but to what is added to it. And we readily allow that no one is reconciled to God through Christ, except he is also renewed after God's image, and that the one cannot be disjoined from the other. Right then is what is done by the apostle, who excludes from the confidence of grace all those in whom no image of God is seen; for it is certain that such are wholly aliens to the Spirit of God and to Christ. Nor do we deny that newness of life, as it is the effect of divine adoption, serves to confirm confidence, as a prop, so to speak, of the second order; but in the meantime we ought to have our foundation on grace alone. Nor indeed does the doctrine of John appear otherwise consistent with itself; for experience proves... that as to works, they always give an occasion for trembling. Therefore no one can come with a tranquil mind to God's tribunal, except he believes that he is freely loved.

In other words, progressive sanctification is an *essential* evidence to others of our conversion, and a *supporting* evidence to ourselves of our conversion, but we must not *rely* upon our works for our assurance, nor let it take priority over the Spirit's witness. If we do, it will lead only to fear and anxiety. Our confidence must stem from Christ, and our position in him – and we get this by the witness of the Spirit.

### ***Summary of Calvin's position on assurance***

There is no doubt that Calvin regarded assurance as the essence of faith, and that assurance stems primarily from the work of Christ and the witness of the Spirit. As a secondary support, but only secondary, and only after the witness of the Spirit, the

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* 3.24.4.

believer's progressive sanctification can be used to confirm that assurance. Even so, Calvin warned, the secondary must not usurp the primary.<sup>26</sup>

Having said all that, at other times, Calvin was, at best, ambiguous about the relationship between faith and assurance, and he had his 'qualifiers'!<sup>27</sup> As for Joel R.Beeke's attempted reconciliation of Calvin's contradictions,<sup>28</sup> for all I know or can understand, he may well be right. But if Mr and Mrs, Master and Miss Average-Believer have to come to terms with Beeke's 36 pages before they can use Calvin to help them have assurance, I despair that many believers will ever complete the course. I know I couldn't! And we must bear in mind what we are talking about. We are not trying to sort out some abstruse point. The question of personal assurance of salvation is a vital issue for every believer – not merely the professional theologian or metaphysicist. Am I a true believer? How do I know? How can I know? What if I have doubts? Can I be sure?

The fact is, Calvin regarded assurance as belonging to faith, and that the believer has assurance right from the moment he believes and is united to Christ, and has it by the witness of the Spirit.

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<sup>26</sup> Ian McNaughton was too sweeping when he said: 'Calvin taught that assurance came by the witness of the Holy Spirit and by evidence of sanctification in a person's life' (Ian McNaughton: 'Antinomianism in Historical Perspective', *Reformation Today*, Leeds, Sept./Oct. 2003, p12). McNaughton gave no reference. Replacing 'an' by 'backed up' we get closer to what Calvin actually thought and wrote.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Calvin: *Institutes* 3.2.4,15,17,18,20; 4.14.7. For more on this schizophrenic technique, see my *Infant, Baptist, Christ*. Just as Calvin confused regeneration, repentance, faith and sanctification (Calvin: *Institutes* 3.3.1,9,10,11; Graham Harrison: 'Becoming A Christian – in the Teaching of John Calvin', being a paper given at The Westminster Conference 1972: *Becoming A Christian* p34), so he confused assurance and perseverance.

<sup>28</sup> Joel R.Beeke: *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1999, pp37-72.

## ***The early Puritans***

The early Puritans did not stray far from Calvin. Beeke:

The early Puritans in particular reacted to dead orthodoxy, which minimised the seriousness of sin, and regarded mere assent to the truths of Scripture as sufficient for salvation. It thus became essential [for them] to distinguish between assurance of personal grace and certainty based on mere assent to Bible truth.

The Puritans, as Beeke observed, were trying to deal with a problem which bedevils us all; namely, the tendency for institutional Christianity to produce a dead faith in its adherents, a mere conforming orthodoxy by reason of mental assent to truth.<sup>29</sup> All of us have to face this. But the problem is especially prevalent among infant baptisers, by reason of infant baptism itself. The fact is, the rite stems from the misapplication of the old-covenant aspect of the Abrahamic covenant to the church, and this is why its advocates tend to produce an old Israel, not a new Israel, an external fleshly Israel, not a spiritual Israel. The Puritans saw this only too well. Hence the pressing need for them to try to deal with it. Sadly they failed to grasp, or come to terms with, the fact that their system produced the problem, or, at the very least, heavily contributed to it. They should have gone back to Scripture, seen the unbiblical nature of infant baptism, and abolished the practice. The same goes for today.

I am not saying, I hasten to add, that nobody is converted in such circles. Of course not! But I am saying that the system in which ministers give babies and their parents massive promises, the system thereafter treating the infant-baptised as believers, must inevitably produce conformists who are not converted. Witness the repeated efforts that infant baptisers have used to try to deal with the problem of (to use their own terminology) ‘lapsed Christians’, ‘half-way covenant believers’ who attend ‘visible churches’, and so on.<sup>30</sup>

However, instead of going down the road of biblical reformation according to the new covenant, the Puritans,

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<sup>29</sup> I hope soon to publish my work on Sandemanianism.

<sup>30</sup> I have fully argued and documented all this in my *Infant*.

especially the later Puritans, tried to further their desired aim – of distinguishing dead faith from spiritual faith in the hope of bringing dead professors to a living experience of Christ – by preaching assurance by means of the evidence of progressive sanctification.<sup>31</sup>

As I say, the early Puritans had not adopted that course. '[William] Perkins proposes three grounds of assurance: the promise of the gospel...; the testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God; and the fruits of sanctification'. Perkins attached a work by Jerom Zanchius in which 'Zanchius emphasised three testimonies to the believer's salvation: the Spirit of God, who points the believer to Christ and his benefits; the preaching of the gospel, which commands our consciences to believe; and the effects of grace, such as a holy life and a clear conscience which "seal" assurance. By attaching material from Zanchius', said Beeke, 'Perkins shows that he will not stray beyond the boundaries already established by Continental Reformed theology'.<sup>32</sup> As can be seen, the early Puritans stuck close to Calvin, stressing the witness of the Spirit.

### ***The later Puritans***

I must be brief, so I will offer only the merest sample of the kind of assurance that was produced by the legal teaching of the late Puritans.

Take the Westminster Confession on assurance:

This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the

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<sup>31</sup> See my *Assurance* pp71-95.

<sup>32</sup> Joel R.Beeke: 'William Perkins and his Greatest Case of Conscience', being a paper given at The Westminster Conference 2004: *The Faith that Saves* pp12,17,20,30.

earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

And then, for my purpose, the punch line:

This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it.

While I agree that assurance is not the essence, but a concomitant, of faith, it is how the Westminster statement goes on that makes for trouble. Proof texts offered to establish this struggle for assurance are 1 John 5:13; Isaiah 1:10; Mark 9:24; and Psalms 77 and 88. Whether or not those texts really do establish the Assembly's assertions, reader, I leave for you to decide. I know what I think!

Here is a clear parting of the ways with Calvin; in fact, Westminster flatly contradicts the Reformer.<sup>33</sup> What is more, the believer who takes Westminster as definitive *can* be assured, but he may have to wait long for it, and the path to it may be fraught with difficulties. Indeed, he must be prepared never to get it! And remember, reader, that millions of believers have taken, and many still do take, the Westminster as authoritative. Millions, therefore, are on the high road to lack of assurance before they start. Since 'they drank in Puritan divinity with their mothers' milk',<sup>34</sup> no wonder they grew up with the consequences. Feed a child on the wrong diet, and the effects may well be permanent. As for Timothy, we know that, under the tutelage of his mother and grandmother, he had been reared on a diet of Scripture, and this led him to salvation (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-17). Is it beyond the realms of possibility to think that somebody reared, from pre-conversion days, on a diet of law, assurance by progressive sanctification and assurance an experience only for the elite, might present symptoms of fear and doubt? The same may be

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<sup>33</sup> Despite the reconciliation attempted by some – see Gerald L. Chrisco: 'Theology of Assurance within the Marrow Controversy' (rts.edu).

<sup>34</sup> Calvin on 2 Tim. 1:5, speaking of Timothy: 'He had been educated from his infancy in such a manner that he might have sucked godliness along with his milk'.

said, of course, of those who are under the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession, one which is almost identical to the Westminster.

John Owen (a man of the Savoy Declaration which depended heavily on the Westminster Confession) went even further than Westminster. Believer, if you want to be kept awake at nights, read Owen on assurance just before you switch out the light! Hear him:

*Very few* on gospel grounds do attain to [assurance]... It is a great and rare thing to have forgiveness in God discovered [made known] unto a sinful soul.

Owen spoke of someone who testified to twenty years' struggle with 'trials, difficulties, temptations, [he had] wrestled with... before [he eventually] obtained it'. Owen: 'It is the duty of every believer to labour after an assurance of a personal interest in forgiveness'. Clearly, however, he must not expect it to come easily, if at all, since it is rarely attained. Owen himself struggled with it for five years.<sup>35</sup> He offered three main reasons for this difficulty: 'The constant voice of conscience lies against it'; 'the law lies against this discovery'; 'inbred notions that are in the heart of man about God's holiness and vindictive justice' lie against it.<sup>36</sup> Don't miss number two!

Thomas Brooks was another Puritan to put a grim prospect before his readers:

Now though this full assurance is earnestly desired, and highly prized, and the want of it much lamented, and the enjoyment of it much endeavoured after by all saints, *yet it is only obtained by a few*. Assurance is a mercy too good for most men's hearts, it is a crown too weighty for most men's heads. Assurance is

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<sup>35</sup> John Owen: *A Practical Exposition upon Psalm 130...*, in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol.6, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1966, pp386,413-414,431,508-509, emphasis mine. In his earlier works – two catechisms – Owen had thought of assurance as an integral part of faith. Beeke surmised as to the reason for his change of view. Was it the Westminster documents or his own experience coupled with that of the people to whom he preached? (Beeke: *Quest* p166). Either, it seems to me, gives the game away! We must be men of Scripture before men of Confession or experience.

<sup>36</sup> Owen pp387,389,431, emphasis mine.

*optimum maximum*, the best and greatest mercy; and therefore God will only give it to his best and dearest friends... Assurance is that ‘tried gold’ (Rev. 3:18)... God only gives to tried friends. Among those few that have a share or portion in the special love and favour of God, there are but a very few that have an assurance of his love. It is one mercy for God to love the soul, and another mercy for God to assure the soul of his love.<sup>37</sup>

Not much hope here, then! Hardly any at all! Heaven on earth? Maybe – but only for the few. I wonder where Brooks found the scriptural warrant for telling believers that ‘assurance... [is] only obtained by a few... [it being] too good for most’ believers. Indeed, I ask myself why Brooks wrote his book – a book describing a wonderful experience for believers, but one which the majority of them will never get, even after a life-time of desperate searching for it, since they are not good enough for it! It would seem tantamount to cruelty on Brooks’ part, taunting the overwhelming majority of believers with the golden apple always just out of reach! I wonder why such a book is thought to be worthy of publication today – unless, of course, it is to bolster the Reformed emphasis on law. Do the publishers *want* believers to be miserable? Hardly a recommendation for their law system, is it?

## ***Conclusion***

Calvin (with a measure of inconsistency) taught that assurance is the essence of faith, and that believers get their assurance by the witness of the Spirit, this assurance being supported – but only in a secondary way, and then with limitations – by their progressive sanctification. And the early Puritans followed him closely on this. The later Puritans, however, arguing that assurance is not the essence of faith, departed radically from the Reformers (and, more importantly, from Scripture) by making assurance a matter primarily of progressive sanctification. The witness of the Spirit

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Brooks: *Heaven on Earth: A Serious Discourse, Touching a Well-Grounded Assurance* in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, Vol.2, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, Vol.2 p335, emphasis mine. Also in paperback, 1961, 320 pages.



they placed firmly far beyond the reach of most believers. And this system has dominated the Reformed and evangelical world ever since. It has come with a heavy cost attached. Many today are afflicted with the devastating consequences of their doctrine.

### ***My own assessment of Calvin on assurance***

While Calvin rightly taught that assurance comes by the witness of the Spirit, and saw that progressive sanctification – evidences – are only a secondary confirmation of that assurance, he went too far in making assurance the essence of faith. ***But only just.*** The fact is, those who have been robbed of the new-covenant joy that ought to be theirs in Christ would benefit enormously from a good dose of Calvin on this particular point. Better still, those deprived believers should turn away from their Confessions, stop listening to their law-teachers, and take on board apostolic teaching on the Spirit – his witness to, sealing of, and anointing of every believer. Yes, every believer! I refer to such passages as these from Paul:

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ... Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry: ‘Abba, Father’. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory... We... have the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9,14-17,23).

Now it is God who... anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come ((Rom. 8:9,14-17,23; 2 Cor. 1:21-22).

God... has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (Rom. 8:9,14-17,23; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:5).

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our [your] hearts, the Spirit who calls out: ‘Abba, Father’. So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal. 4:6-7).

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... Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30).

And then John:

You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him (1 John 2:20-27).

This is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:24).

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit (1 John 4:13).

It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth... We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son (1 John 5:6,9-11).<sup>38</sup>

Sadly, as I argued in my *Assurance in the New Covenant*,<sup>39</sup> believers, through bad teaching and error can come into bondage. Witness John's first letter, for instance. He wrote his letter to such doubting believers (1 John 1:4; 5:13-14). But, even so, many misread the apostle, turning his words into harrowing tests of sanctification which believers must pass if they want to be assured. The is quite wrong. Let me quote the way I opened the appropriate section in my *Assurance*:

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<sup>38</sup> In addition, we have the repeated experience of 'being filled with the Spirit' (Luke 1:15,41,67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 9:17; 11:24; 13:52; Eph. 5:18).

<sup>39</sup> See my *Assurance* pp61-70.

Many think that John, in his first letter, is giving believers a series of tests by which they can examine themselves, and so come to assurance. Indeed, some go so far as to think John is actually insisting on such tests for assurance. Listen to Robert A. Morey:

John constantly challenges our assurance by saying: ‘Hereby we know him if...’. He *demands* that we ‘prove’ or ‘test’ our assurance of salvation. This proof is obtained by self-examination. John *calls upon us* to examine our lives to see if God has truly given us a new heart.<sup>40</sup>

This is a serious misreading of the apostle.

John had several purposes in writing his letter. First, like other New Testament writers, he was tackling false teachers; in his case, the Gnostics. Linked with his first aim, he was confronting mere professors, telling them in no uncertain terms that a true conversion reveals itself in observable change, in a Christ-like life. And, thirdly, he wanted to comfort and reassure doubting believers, believers who had lost their assurance and subsequent joy. It is John’s third purpose which concerns us here.

John was writing to doubting believers. That much is clear. But why were they doubting? Throughout the New Testament, we see how false teachers (Judaisers, Gnostics, whatever) and their teaching brought the early believers into bondage and sadness – not least in taking them to the law, with the consequent loss of their assurance. John wrote his letter to help believers regain their sense of assurance after they had lost it through being brought into bondage through the Gnostics. And he did it by taking them back to where they had left the road.

He was doing something similar to Paul, writing to the Galatians: ‘What has happened to all your joy?’ he asked them (Gal. 4:15). In their case, they had lost it through listening to the Judaisers, the law teachers. And the apostle set about restoring their joy and sense of liberty by instructing the Galatians, challenging them, and taking them back to the beginning, to where they had left the track (Gal. 2:16 – 3:5). Had they not been justified in Christ? Had they not received the gift of the Spirit? Of

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<sup>40</sup> Taken from Robert A. Morey: ‘Knowing You Are Saved: Part 4’ (davidsonpress.com), emphasis mine.

course they had! But how had they been justified [and positionally sanctified] and received the Spirit? By the law? They had not! Very well then. As they had begun, so they should continue. Assurance, adoption, [progressive] sanctification, liberty, glory... all of it comes through Christ and not by the law.<sup>41</sup>

The principle is plain: if believers try to find assurance by their sanctification under the law, they will come into bondage and sadness through their inevitable failure to reach the standard. And the remedy is always the same: they must go back to the root of their joy in salvation; namely, Christ.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For the full argument, see my *Christ; Sanctification*.

<sup>42</sup> For the way I go on, see my *Assurance* pp137-154. Since writing this article, I have met Anthony N.S.Lane's 'John Calvin: The Witness of the Holy Spirit' in *Faith and Ferment*, papers being read in The Westminster Conference, 1982, pp1-17.

## *John Eaton: Antinomian?*

John Eaton? Never heard of him! Just in case that might be your reaction, a little potted history might not come amiss:

John Eaton (1574/5–1630/31) was born in Kent, England. In 1604, he became the vicar of Wickham Market, Suffolk, where he preached the fullness of God's free grace and the uselessness of the law in man's salvation; that is, by Christ's redemption, God can see no sin in those who have been justified; true believers are clothed with 'the wedding garment of Christ's perfect righteousness', and God no longer sees their iniquities. And it is this, not the law, that stirs the believer's progressive sanctification,<sup>1</sup> which sanctification is essential in those who are justified. Being dismissed as an antinomian, Eaton quickly found himself in conflict with fellow ministers and the ecclesiastical authorities, and he was deprived and imprisoned for his views. Undeterred, by 1621 Eaton was in London, where he disseminated his ideas from the pulpit, in conference, and through a series of unpublished manuscripts, which circulated widely during the 1620s and 1630s. Through these efforts, he won a considerable following, and became the leader of an increasingly vocal 'antinomianism' in the capital, soon attracting other dissident ministers who shared his dissatisfaction with the 'legalistic' doctrine and preaching of the Puritans. Heated conflicts rapidly ensued, these controversies quickly spilling over into the Church courts, resulting in the prosecution of several well-known antinomians before the High Commission. Eaton was spared this fate only by his death, some time between August 1630 and July 1631. Eaton's death did not, however, signal the end of his influence. His admirers in London wanted to publish his manuscripts, though they had been adjudged heretical by the Church authorities. In 1632, Eaton's widow was called before the High Commission for trying to publish his *magnum opus*; nevertheless, she refused to hand over her manuscript copies, and for this she was gaoled for several months. Meanwhile, Eaton's Puritan enemies published several books in the attempt to counteract his influence and doctrine. With the collapse of censorship in the early 1640s, in 1642,

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<sup>1</sup> See my note just below for what I mean by progressive sanctification.

## *John Eaton: Antinomian?*

Eaton's followers swiftly moved to publish his *The Honeycombe of Free Justification* and his *Discovery of the Most Dangerous Dead Faith*. Although he was accused of being 'an incorrigible divulger of errors and false opinions', the 'father of English antinomianism', even his opponents had to admit that Eaton's life was beyond reproach.

So, John Eaton was an antinomian. Or was he? As you can see, in his own day he was certainly accused of being one. He still is. But was he? By taking a glance at Eaton's aforesaid *Honeycombe*,<sup>2</sup> I want to enable you, reader, to make your own mind up about his 'antinomianism'. While I do not say that he got everything right – which of us does? – I, myself, have no doubt, no doubt at all, that Eaton sweetly and powerfully set out the true doctrine of the new covenant. *And this is why it is important that we look at his work.* It is not merely the man, John Eaton, that we need to be clear about: the gospel is at stake! Many believers today are toiling under legal bondage and gospel ignorance. So much so, a good dose of John Eaton's doctrine would help them enormously. It would take them back to the gospel, back to Christ, and bring them new-covenant liberty, assurance and joy. By weighing what he said on the familiar – but often weakly understood; not to say, misunderstood – Ephesians 5:25-27, you may judge for yourself:

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

Before I begin, I need to make an important point. When Eaton spoke of 'sanctification', he nearly always meant 'progressive sanctification'; that is, 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

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<sup>2</sup> See my *Four* pp96-156. All references and attributions of emphasis are fully documented there. I assure you, Eaton is well worth consulting, as are the other three.

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.

Now for Eaton's work. In what follows, reader, you should be prepared to do a bit of work in unravelling his prose, but the effort is well worth it, I assure you. So let's begin.

### ***Introduction***

In the 'Preface' to his book, Eaton wrote:

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

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

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

I can only say that in reading Eaton's work, and then preparing it for publication, I discovered that for over fifty years I have had too low a view of justification by faith, altogether too dry a view of it. Of course, I knew the doctrine. Yes, I could argue the texts. But the depth, the fullness, the sheer wonder of free justification simply had not penetrated my heart as it ought to have done. I had not realised how God sees me in Christ. Oh! I had sung about it, I had preached it, and I had written about it. But until I read John Eaton's work – a true honeycomb indeed – I had far too academic a view of this most wonderful truth of free justification; namely, that the weakest believer, trusting Christ, is absolutely sinless in the sight of God, and sinless for ever. Far too often, I had taken marvellous New Testament statements about justification and positional sanctification, and the effects and benefits of it, and shuffled them off to eternity to come. But those statements are true of me, NOW! *That* is what I have come to feel, and to feel in a way I have never felt before.

Now to let Eaton set out his stall, defining what he understood by 'free justification':

Justification is when... clothed with the wedding garment of Christ's own and pure righteousness that of unjust we are made just before God:<sup>3</sup> that is, all our sins are utterly abolished out of God's sight, and we are made from all spot of sin perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely [Eph. 5:25-27]. And this is God's pardon or forgiveness (which few understand) great above man's, and glorious and wonderful, like God himself (Acts 13:38-40), the joyful faith whereof [progressively]

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<sup>3</sup> This terminology comes up time and again. Read it as: 'We who were unjust (ungodly) are made just (righteous) before God'.



sanctifies us, and makes us to do the duties of our vocations faithfully, and to walk to the glory of God in the spiritual meaning of all God's ten commandments zealously (Tit. 2:14).

It is all here, in embryo. As I will show, Eaton worked it out in detail: the glorious nature of justification; the two parts to justification – before God and before men; justification is received by faith, contrary to reason, sense and feeling; justification and progressive sanctification are inseparably linked; justification always leads to progressive sanctification, being its spur and motive; the law is not the motive of progressive sanctification – in fact, preaching the law actually hinders progressive sanctification; the nature of saving faith; the joy of the justified; and the way of assurance. In short, a right understanding of our justification and positional sanctification brings us assurance, and stirs us to progressive sanctification. This is pure new-covenant theology, in contrast to the legal system advocated by covenant theologians. What is most certainly is not is antinomianism!

For ease of understanding, I will distil the mass of material under various headings, but it surely goes without saying that it is impossible to take Eaton's large work and tie it into neat little, self-contained packages. Nevertheless, I will try.

### ***The glory of justification by faith through Christ***

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

Much hinges on the word ‘made’ in Romans 5:19, and such like places. This definitely means ‘constituted’. Having said that, however, the believer really is perfectly and absolutely constituted righteous in the sight of God, utterly sinless, washed in the Redeemer’s blood and clothed with his righteousness. Eaton certainly – rightly – stressed this, arguing cogently for it from Scripture, as I will now show.

***The believer is truly made righteous in Christ***

Eaton:

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

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

And *secondly*, he renews us by his Spirit unto inherent and active holiness and righteousness; which... is imperfect in this life, and serves to approve us righteous to the eyes of men, and is called [progressive] sanctification.

Thus when God has both these ways... truly and in very deed made us righteous, then he reposes, accounts, and pronounces, and calls us righteous, absolving us thereby from all guilt and punishment... Therefore, God justifies no wicked man, but first makes him just and righteous in and by Christ, and then accounts him so.

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

By another man’s [Adam’s] sin we are made sinners, lost and damned, so by another man’s [Christ’s] righteousness we are made righteous and saved, and therefore I call this righteousness an essential righteousness and eternal... Only Christ is

everlasting, and therefore his righteousness is everlasting, and yet [it is] ours, and [it] makes us everlasting [in righteousness]. This is the mercy of God the Father; this is the grace of the new covenant,<sup>4</sup> wherein the Lord is sweet to them that taste him. In this we must be saved, and in no other.

So much for justification. Eaton went on to deal with progressive sanctification:

But... there is a righteousness called actual righteousness, flowing from faith and from the aforesaid essential righteousness. And this is our righteousness, and our own proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work together with the aforesaid first righteousness...<sup>5</sup>

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

Let me pause. It is all here. Eaton has rightly set out the glory of free justification and positional sanctification, showing clearly, and beyond contradiction, that God views his believing people as absolutely sinless in Christ. But this perfection of glorious justification and positional sanctification never – never – comes

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<sup>4</sup> Eaton had 'Testament'. It is better to read this as 'covenant'. The same applies from time to time in what follows, but without this note. I have left 'Testament' where this is obviously right.

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

alone. It is always – always – accompanied by the believer's actual progressive-sanctification. God the Father, through Christ's redeeming work, applied by the Spirit's power, ensures that it is so.

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

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

That is to say, in Romans 5, the apostle is dealing with justification. It is only as he moves into Romans 6 that he begins to expand upon progressive sanctification. But, just as the two chapters (indeed, Romans 5 – 8) are joined as one continuous passage in one book, so in personal experience. Every justified sinner must go on to be, and will go on to be, a progressively-sanctified sinner. This is what God accomplishes in and through the new covenant.

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

Mark how [the apostle] says not that he might *count* it a glorious church, but '*make* it to himself a glorious church'. And where as some have objected that the word ('might') imports that this place is to be understood of our making righteous by our [absolute] sanctification, by which we shall be made so righteous, that we shall have no spot or wrinkle in the life to come,<sup>6</sup> I answer that although our [progressive] sanctification is now inseparable from our justification, and yet will not be perfect until the life to come, and then it shall be so perfect that we shall not have one spot or wrinkle of sin to ourselves, and [to our] own sight, sense and feeling, yet, notwithstanding, all interpreters that I have read do understand the place to be meant

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<sup>6</sup> Until I had read Eaton, my position to a 'T'.

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[speaking] of justification also, by which it is verified upon us, that we have, not even in this life, one spot or wrinkle of sin in the sight of God freely. And I think that this place is properly and chiefly to be understood of free justification.

This is a statement of immense importance. Immense, I say! Eaton was arguing that Ephesians 5:26-27 must not be confined to eternity. It is the truth about every believer *now*. Every believer is – now – perfect in his justification and positional sanctification in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; Heb. 10:10,14). Eaton gave his reasons, including:

Our [progressive] sanctification is wrought by us and by the Spirit of God enabling us thereunto. But this example [Eph. 5:25-27] is appropriated to Christ alone, in giving himself to shed his blood to effect it [that?], which properly belongs to the work of our free justification... [Further,] the apostle speaks in the aorist,<sup>7</sup> betokening... that [Christ] *has* made us clean; importing a thing already perfectly done... [Further,] because the apostle says that [Christ] might make us to *himself* a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, he says not to *ourselves*, which will be verified indeed by [our absolute] sanctification in the life to come, for *then*, even to ourselves, and to our sense and feeling, we shall not have one spot or wrinkle of sin or any such thing. But he says to ‘make us to himself’ – that is, above our own reason... and contrary to ourselves, and to our own sense and feeling, has Christ *already* made us fit brides for so glorious a bridegroom, which is only in this life by free justification... [Lastly,]... the participle of the present time immediately following... the church is now in such a case as that it shall not have one spot or wrinkle of sin hereafter... not having *now* at this present time one spot or wrinkle of sin or any such thing, which is only true truly in this life, not man-ward by [progressive] sanctification, but... God-ward by free justification.

Let me unpack this. From the point of view of progressive sanctification, the believer will be perfect only in eternity. But from the point of view of justification and positional sanctification, the believer is perfect the moment he trusts Christ,

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<sup>7</sup> A Greek tense which indicates an action, completed with permanent effect. It can be more complicated, but that is how Eaton is rightly using the word here.

without spot, without wrinkle, without anything of the sort, in the sight of God.

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

But if any object... saying that in some translations the original word is not translated 'that he might *make* us to himself', but [rather] that he might *present* us to himself'; to which I answer that it is all one, or rather confirms more fully what I say, because God does not present to himself a false thing like a thing represented on a stage, but in deed and truth does the thing, and then presents it to himself... that is promise of free justification and [positional] sanctification in Christ... showing that the church is without spot or wrinkle, but inchoatively [beginning of an action; that is, imperfectly] to men-ward by [progressive] sanctification, but made so perfectly to God-ward by justification... We see that beside other equivalent phrases... Christ does not barely *count* her, but has *made* her, clean and righteous.<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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

Christ so truly took our sins upon him, and was so really in the sight of God clothed in the same, that although not inherently and actively... but yet really, he was made a true sinner, and so God, having made him, by his imputation, really a sinner in his

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<sup>8</sup> Eaton cited Col. 1:22, later arguing it out in full. He also wrote on Col. 1:28.

sight, did count him a sinner...<sup>9</sup> Thus mighty is God's imputation of our sin upon his Son, Christ. And as Christ, by the power of God's imputation, though not inherently and actively, yet objectively and passively, was made in the sight of God, really a sinner and cursed, so on the other side, are we, by the power of God's imputation of his Son's righteousness, made, though not inherently and actively, yet objectively and passively, really righteous and blessed... that is, perfectly righteous in the sight of God freely.

Staggering, is it not? But is it scriptural? Of course it is! The truth is, unless our understanding of the believer's justification and positional sanctification leaves us amazed, we have failed to grasp the fullness of the new covenant. When John Newton wrote of 'amazing grace', he was not exaggerating. Those who accuse Eaton of antinomianism at this point should never sing Newton's hymn!

***Justification is contrary to our reason, sense and feeling***

Eaton:

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

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<sup>9</sup> Eaton quoted the well-known passage from Luther on 2 Cor. 5:21 and Isa. 53: 'We must not make these words less than they are... We must know [Christ] to be wrapped in our sins, in our malediction [curse], in our death, and in all our evils, as he is wrapped in our flesh and in our blood. For unless he had taken upon himself my sins... the law had no right over him, which condemns none but sinners, and holds them under the curse'.

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that there is a twofold making of us clean and abolishing of our sins made mention of in God's word.

Eaton spelled out this twofold aspect:

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

And:

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

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

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

In other words, while the believer, looking at himself, sees an imperfect progressive-sanctification, in looking to Christ, he sees the perfection of his justification. Where should the stress fall?



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

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

### ***The God-ward aspect of justification***

Eaton:

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

The fact is:

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

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<sup>10</sup> This, as it stands, is Sandemanianism. I am sure Eaton did not mean to convey that doctrine. True faith is trust in Christ, not the mere acceptance of facts.

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clean, that he might make us to himself a glorious church... The church<sup>11</sup> has not one spot or wrinkle of sin, but is perfectly righteous by free justification and faith only in Christ.

But:

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

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

As Eaton declared:

This then is the glory of God in me, that I being a sinner in myself (for what should he remit and abolish, if I were not a sinner?) do yet notwithstanding believe that heaven and earth shall sooner fall, than that I am not by the blood of Christ, from all my sins in the sight of God, more pure and white than snow. If you believe not this, you make God, with your highest and most horrible reproach and blasphemy, a liar... Truly all our sins are utterly abolished out of God's sight... Perfectly clean the blood of Christ makes us from all sin... God himself... sees no sin in his justified children... The blood of Christ has made us so perfectly clean that we are in the sight of God from all sin whiter than snow. And all this, because we are by the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness made from all spot of sin perfectly holy

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<sup>11</sup> That is the elect in God's decree and Christ's work, but every believer in actual experience. I will not repeat this note every time.

and righteous in the sight of God freely... For God sees no spot in her [the church], because he sees nothing in her but his Son's righteousness, wherewith his church is clothed, and whereby she has salvation, life and glory; for seeing she has put on Christ himself, to God-ward by justification, and to man-ward by [progressive] sanctification, although she has some sin in the imperfections of her [progressive] sanctification, that the devil sees, and every one of us in our consciences feels it. But God sees none, for by reason of Christ, with whom she is clothed, she is all fair, without spot or wrinkle.

High doctrine this, but not too high. In my view, Eaton is hitting the biblical note; namely – whatever cavillers may say – that ‘God himself... sees no sin in his justified children’ because ‘Christ’s righteousness [has] made [them] from all spot of sin perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely’.<sup>12</sup> See Romans 8:33-34.

Eaton pressed on:

We being hereby of unjust made just – that is, perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely in his righteousness only, now as God looks upon us in this justified estate, he remembers no sin in us... (Jer. 50:20; Heb. 9:26) And therefore that there is no more sin, *etc.*, in the church, since Christ now reigns... for they which do believe in Christ are no sinners (Rom. 5:8-9), but are holy and righteous, lords over sin and death, and living for ever... If I look upon my own person, or the person of my brother, it shall never be in God’s sight so absolutely holy. But if I behold Christ, who has sanctified and made clean his church, then it is altogether holy.

Eaton stressed the importance of what he was saying: ‘Nothing therefore concerns us more than that we do securely and joyfully

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<sup>12</sup> But as he went on, Eaton was too strong, saying that those who doubt their perfection in Christ ‘are damned’. The truth is, weak believers do exist, weak because they, looking too much within themselves and, seeing the poverty of their progressive sanctification, cannot see their glorious perfection in Christ. I would encourage any such who might be reading this: look to Christ. Do not look within, look to your Redeemer. Imperfection you will find in yourself; nothing but perfection – and all is laid to your account – is in the Lord Jesus. See my *Assurance*.

assure ourselves that our sins come no more into remembrance before God’.

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

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

Even so:

God has made his children so perfectly holy and righteous in his sight that he sees no sin in them, in and by their justification... Even so, the children of God, terrified more with the horribleness of sin, in the sight of God, than with punishment, although they flying to Christ, he... does not only cover [their sins]... but also, in respect of God, has utterly abolished [their sins] out of his Father’s sight, by making them of unjust just.<sup>13</sup>

Eaton kept pressing home the truth of the new covenant: if we look at our progressive sanctification, we are wretched sinners in ourselves, yes, but, as believers, we must keep our eyes upon Christ and our justification (and our positional sanctification) in him. This, I would add, is the new-covenant way of assurance – the Spirit witnessing to us about what we have, and what we are,

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<sup>13</sup> At this point, Eaton went too far, by saying that God regards the believer’s every word and action as righteous. I know what he was driving at, but the plain fact is when the believer sins, he really does sin. David’s sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, and Peter’s denial of Christ, were far from being ‘perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God’. David and Peter were justified men, but they also sinned in these respects, and both lost their joy as a result. If Eaton had warned that sin is sin, and sin is abhorrent to God, and then gone on to say that, even so, nothing can hinder the believer’s justification and positional sanctification, he would have been on new-covenant ground. Sin does rob the believer, however – not of his justification, but of his sense of joy at the loss of God’s approval. Eaton here was giving his opponents ammunition to use when accusing him of antinomianism.

in Christ.<sup>14</sup> Looking to Christ by faith, we must believe what God has said about us in his word:

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

Eaton went on as if God were addressing believers directly:

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

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

Eaton drew the conclusion:

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

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

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

Humbled ones, terrified with the horribleness of the least sin, and now by justification made glad, joyful and zealous, that they are not made perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely, but that God sees sins in them, and is ready to correct and punish them for the same.

This is not so, said Eaton, for:

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

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

Justification... not only delivers us from the... punishment belonging to the least sin... but also it is the only cause that brings upon us, and puts us in possession of, all the contrary, great and glorious benefits of the gospel. [One of these] excellent [benefits] is our wonderful union into Christ, whereby we are by the power of the Holy Ghost, though mystically and spiritually, yet truly, really and substantially, so engrafted and united into Christ, that we are made one with him, and he one with us. [Further, another] excellent benefit of free justification is our most glorious adoption, whereby we are made true sons and daughters of the living God. [Again,] this free justification is the only immediate cause and means of our final glorification,

and of setting us in the right and assurance of eternal life. [Yet again, just as] the want or ignorance of it is the loss of all true peace and joy in God, so the right knowledge and apprehension thereof is the lively spring of joy, and of a good conscience, and glorifying of God, both in heart and tongue. [It also] works a good judgment, and right discerning of all religion, works and worship to the overthrowing of all superstitions, sects and schisms, and reduces people from their contentious and dangerous by-paths, and rectifies their blind legal zeals... (Rom.10:3).<sup>15</sup>

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

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what

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<sup>15</sup> I have condensed nearly 60 pages into a few lines. To get the weight of what Eaton was saying, he should be consulted in full, in the original.

the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Rom. 7:24 – 8:11).

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

### ***The inseparable connection between justification and progressive sanctification***

Here we reach a crucial point. In light of what follows, how this man could ever have been written off as an antinomian beggars belief. Those who do it, especially if they have not actually read – let alone studied – his work, need to examine their heart. The man who could baldly state in print: The 'grace of justification,



bringing forth also [progressive] sanctification, truly converts... to God', as he did – that man, I say, is no antinomian!

Now for a more detailed explanation. Eaton was nothing if not clear when showing how justification leads inevitably to progressive sanctification. Moreover, he was rightly dogmatic in asserting that the motive and spur for progressive sanctification is a proper sense of justification. This, do not forget, is a direct contradiction of the Reformed way of progressive sanctification by the whip<sup>16</sup> of the law:

[God] has... given his own Son for us unto death that he might, both from [Adam's] sin, and from all sins flowing from this original sin, free us by his blood, and so make us clean. *Then hereupon do arise in us good and holy desires and affections*, contrary to former depravity and corruption – as namely, humility, purity, gentleness, and all other virtues; and then all good works are practiced, and that also with a willing heart. The author and cause of all which is this grace of justification, by which alone this original sin is done away, and we are made clean and acceptable before God... This first part of justification... calls us out of the dead faith, and *makes us give ourselves wholly to God by faith, and to our neighbour by love, to walk in all God's commandments zealously*; this excellency (I say) of this first part of free justification – namely, how truly and utterly our sins are abolished out of God's sight, and how perfectly clean the blood of Christ makes us from all sin – the Holy Ghost expresses it unto us by six principal and most emphatic phrases and similitudes...<sup>17</sup> [so that] we may ascend... by certain steps or stairs to the full height of comfort and joy... For thus teach we: that the church has not one spot or wrinkle of sin, but is perfectly righteous by free justification and faith in Christ only, which serves to approve her to the eyes of God. Again, she is holy in life and conversation, but this latter way [progressive sanctification] is imperfect, and [yet] [this (imperfect) holiness of life and conversation] serves to approve her to the eyes of men.

No unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of Christ... for except a man be born again – that is, made a perfect new creature to the eyes of God by justification, and to declare the

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<sup>16</sup> See my *Christ*.

<sup>17</sup> Over several pages, Eaton worked out these 'principal and most emphatic phrases and similitudes'.

*John Eaton: Antinomian?*

same by being made a new creature to the eyes of men by [progressive] sanctification – he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

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

Again:

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

Furthermore:

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

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

Again:

Although, being by their faith once justified, they [believers] are ever justified, having all the imperfections of their [progressive] sanctification that they daily feel in themselves, ever abolished out of God's sight... (1 John 1:7), and they, ever perfectly holy and righteous from all sin and rebuke before God, and in his

sight (Col. 1:22), yet the trials and exercising of that faith, that has made them such before God, makes them full partakers of God's holiness and righteousness, both of justification and sanctification, more and more experimentally in themselves, by the increase of their faith... (Rom. 1:17).

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

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

Again:

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

When we are justified we are both righteous and sinners also in the sight of God... (Eph. 5:8). ‘You were once in times past darkness’ – there is the time of our being sinners... past and gone. ‘But now are light in the Lord’ – there is the time of our justification, and being righteous in the sight of God now present... ‘Walk as children of light’ – there is [progressive] sanctification showing and declaring to men our new condition and state that we are now only in before God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Eaton moved on immediately to 1 Cor. 6:11: ‘What can be more plain, that the time, state and condition wherein they were foul and sinful was past and gone, but the time, state and condition, wherein they were washed and made righteous to God-ward by justification, and also to

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

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

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

Still moving to his conclusion, Eaton:

Thus a Christian first fulfils and accomplishes the law inwardly by faith (for Christ is the perfection and fulfilling of the law unto righteousness to all that believe – Romans 10:4), and then outwardly by works. Thus is he justified in heaven and earth. The gospel justifies him in heaven, and the law<sup>19</sup> on earth, and thus is this new creature created unto the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, which inwardly is perfectly righteous in the sight of God with a heavenly righteousness by justification, and outwardly is holy and clean in the flesh by [progressive] sanctification. 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be upon them, and mercy as upon the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16).

Again:

This true faith of free justification (contrary to the judgment of popish and carnal reason) inseparably brings the Holy Ghost to dwell in [his] people (Gal. 3:2; Acts 10:44; 13:38-39,52), which

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men-ward by [progressive] sanctification was... present, and abiding for ever'. He then moved on to Rom. 5:8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Take this to mean 'the law of Moses' or even, with the Reformed, 'the ten commandments'. How can the Reformed call him an antinomian? I disagree with Eaton's statement as it stands; it needs nuancing. See my *Christ*.

Holy Ghost infallibly enflames our hearts with true love (Gal. 5:6), and makes true believers in right zeal of God's glory, and in true thankfulness, to break off from sin, and to mortify, by true repentance, their former profane life and ungodly conversation, and brings forth a declarative obedience, righteousness and readiness to every good work, now made good works indeed freely by free justification, and so brings forth a sincere, and, though an imperfect, yet a free and cheerful, walking in, and keeping of, all God's will and commandments, declaratively to man-ward, which is true [progressive] sanctification. And thus the law is not destroyed by free justification, but established (Rom. 3:21,31), and written in the hearts of true believers, and they are fulfillers and keepers of the law [in] two manner of ways. *First*, perfectly making their hearts perfectly righteous, freely, to the full content and satisfying of God by faith... of free justification... (Rom. 10:4-6,10; Acts 15:8-9; Heb. 8:10). *Secondly*, it is written in their hearts,<sup>20</sup> and they are fulfillers and keepers of the law inchoatively [beginning of an action; that is, imperfectly], actively and declaratively to man-ward, by love and true [progressive] sanctification... (Gal. 5:13-14; Rom. 13:8-10). Indeed, this true faith in free justification, deeply, truly and soundly learned, is a thing of perfect virtue and wonderful operation, strength and power to bring forth all good motions [impulses] inwardly, and all good works outwardly, or else it is not the true lively justifying faith, but the blind dead faith, that leaves men in sin, death and double damnation... (Rom. 5 – 6; Tit. 2;11-15; 1 John 3:3-10; Eph. 2:10; 4 – 6; Matt. 5:16; 2 Pet 1:9).

Eaton had a warning for preachers and their hearers:

But if the Sun of Righteousness is so clouded from us that the beams of justification, which exceed in glory, are by want of preaching or receiving it, stopped, that it shines not into our dark hearts, then our souls can return back again no beam of [progressive] sanctification. Thus we see how this joyful knowledge of justification, the worth and glory of the same being discerned, seen and enjoyed with a true and right faith,

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<sup>20</sup> I disagree with Eaton here. The law which is written on believers' hearts is the law of Christ, not the law of Moses, not even restricted to the ten commandments. See my *Christ*.

makes both elders<sup>21</sup> and people to shine forth with the bright shining beams of great glorifying of God.

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

In light of such unequivocal testimony, how Eaton ever found himself so badly treated as an antinomian defies belief. Justification always leads to progressive sanctification; if it does not, the professor was never justified; believers are moved to progressive sanctification by their sense of the freeness of God's grace in their justification; if they lose sight of their justification, their progressive sanctification consequently suffers. So Eaton maintained, over and over again. And *this* is antinomianism? If it is, God make me an antinomian – both as a believer and as a preacher!

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

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

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

The... main point showing the majesty and utility of this benefit of justification is that the true joyful knowledge of the same is

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<sup>21</sup> Eaton had 'pastors'.

the only powerful means to regenerate,<sup>22</sup> quicken and sanctify us, and to make us truly to love, fear and trust in God, working in us the true evangelical repentance, in sincerity hating sin because it is sin, and truly loving all holiness and righteousness. And thus it is God's holy fire that enflames his people with right thankful zeal for God's glory, in careful and diligent walking in all God's commandments, by willing, cheerful and ready practicing of all duties of love, both towards God and your neighbours, and so making it manifest that justification and [progressive] sanctification are inseparable companions that go infallibly together, making every true believer a double saint, or rather a true saint two manner of ways.

Further, in a complicated passage:

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

Let me translate. Eaton was arguing that willing progressive-sanctification demonstrates our justification – both to ourselves and others. But, and this is Eaton's point, only the Holy Spirit can enable us to be progressively sanctified. Our willingness – desire – to be progressively sanctified, and any attainment in it, is entirely due to the Spirit's work in us. Left to ourselves, we would not seek to be progressively sanctified, let alone grow in Christ-likeness. So Eaton stoutly maintained. Perhaps he was a

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<sup>22</sup> That is, preaching free justification is the way to bring sinners to regeneration. See below, where Eaton shows that this is precisely what Christ did in John 3:1-17.

little too categorical in this – after all, from a plethora of scriptures we know that we are responsible for our obedience: ‘As you have always obeyed... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling’, for instance. Even so, as the apostle immediately adds in that place: ‘For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose’ (Phil. 2:12-13; see also 1 Cor. 12:6; 15:10; Heb. 13:20-21). Why was Eaton so adamant? He would allow nothing – nothing – to detract from the glory of Christ. What a motive! And undeniably scriptural. Let me prove it by quoting that last reference:

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

Now for a statement of huge import from Eaton: ‘A faithful minister... [must] not mix and mingle the law and the gospel, as one would mingle black and white together, and mar both’. This, it goes without saying, is precisely what happens when men adopt Calvin’s third use of the law. Without mentioning the name of the Reformer, Eaton warned against those preachers who do it. He wasn’t mealy-mouthed about it, either. While I do not endorse every last expression that he used, Eaton, I am glad to say, certainly did not fail to make his point, one which I wholeheartedly approve of:

Not feeling how powerful the treasures of the gospel alone are, both to abolish all sin from before God, and by joy and zeal thereof to mortify all sin in ourselves, they go to borrow help by fear from the whippings of the law, as if the gospel... were not able to increase that life begun... except it borrow help of the whippings of the law, and so make a miscellany and mixture of the law and gospel, and thus preach (as Luther truly says) neither true law nor true gospel, but a miscellany and marring of both, and thereby make miscellany Christians; that is, mere hypocrites (Gal. 4:25)... By this mixture and mingling of whipping to the righteousness joined with free justification in the faithful, as Luther truly says... (Gal. 1:7): ‘The preachers of the gospel’ (says he) ‘become the apostles of the devil, because this



mingling not only blemishes and darkens the knowledge of grace, but also it takes away Christ, with all his benefits, and it secretly undermines, and utterly overthrows, the gospel. And yet... they glory above others in the name of Christ, and boast themselves to be the most sincere preachers of the gospel. But because they mingle the law with the gospel... they must needs be perverters of the gospel, because... they deny Christ to have by himself alone made us whole; that is, perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This doctrine, that God sees sin in his justified children, to whip, correct and punish them for the same, is the very instrument and engine that confounds the new covenant... with the old that is finished (Heb. 8:9,13)... it brings back the full-grown heir to be whipped under the schoolmaster...<sup>23</sup> (Gal. 3:25)... to beat them with the whippings and corrections of the law... But they are not taught... as people that are made perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely, so that all that they do must be done for joy and thankfulness that they are made so perfectly holy and righteous from all spot in the sight of God freely...

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<sup>23</sup> Greek *paidagōgos*, ‘tutor’ (NKJV), ‘schoolmaster’ (AV), ‘in charge’ (NIV), ‘tutor’, literally ‘child-conductor’ (NASB). Sadly, some of these translations (‘schoolmaster’ and ‘tutor’), even the transliteration ‘pedagogue’, give the misleading impression that the law was an ‘educator’, much like *didaskalos* (Rom. 2:20; Heb. 5:2, for example). This is not the meaning of *paidagōgos*. The word comes from *paidos*, genitive of *pais* (child), and *agōgos* (leader), derived from *agō*, ‘to drive, to lead by laying hold of, to conduct’ with the idea of discipline. As Thayer explained: ‘The name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys... The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them, before reaching the age of manhood... The name carries with it an idea of severity (as of a stern censor and enforcer of morals)’ (Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991).

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

Furthermore:

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

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

The upshot of all this: that when we preachers of the gospel, not feeling in our hearts the vigour and power of the free-given treasures of Christ, do not trust to, nor rely upon, the pressing of them as sufficient (where they are felt and enjoyed) operative causes of all holy walking and godly conversation, then we degenerate and decline thereby to the legal teaching of the old covenant... and constraining men to holiness and righteousness with legal arguments of large blessings if they do well, but with terrors of corrections and punishments for all their evil doings, which either does little good at all, or at best makes but self-

deceiving legal zealous hypocrites, and so goes not with a right foot to the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14), and [the] purity of the first apostolic preaching of constraining men to holiness and righteousness by joy and love, by preaching with joyful enflamed hearts and fiery tongues (Acts 2:4)... (Acts 8:8,38-39,42,44,52; 1 Pet. 1:8; Eph. 3:8)... Not only... the Papists... but also some of us Protestants, by lisping the language of Ashdod do go about... to undermine the very root of the Lord's vine – that is free justification – by going about to prove... that we are not, by the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness, made perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of sin in the sight of God freely, full-sufficient of itself (the more it is rightly known) to constrain us with all joy to holiness and righteousness, not by fear, but by love, and evangelical zeal... (Song 8:6-7; Tit. 2:14).

Eaton has set out a vital truth here. Law-preaching will produce slave-works and outward conformity, yes, but it is only the new covenant that can produce real progressive-sanctification – progressive-sanctification from the heart. It is not only Papists who get this wrong; so do the Reformed. Those who 'lisp the language of Ashdod' badly miss the mark.<sup>24</sup>

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

Other ministers, being both zealous preachers, and such teachers as are of great knowledge and excellent learning, hold the contrary; namely, that the children of God are not freely, without works, made so perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God that God sees no sin in them.

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<sup>24</sup> As I explained and showed in my *Christ*, the Reformed, though they stoutly argue for the law as the motive and spur for progressive sanctification, when they actually come to preach for it, they go – as the New Testament always does – to the gospel. All believers, whatever they may say and write, know in their hearts, and acknowledge in their prayers, that God sovereignly chose and effectively brought them to Christ. The same may be said about the truth that it is grace, and only grace, that can sanctify (in every respect).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eaton lifted his eyes to take in the big picture.

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

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

Whereupon... I think and teach that is a pernicious kind of teaching by which men are taught to repent by beholding the punishments of sin and the rewards...<sup>25</sup> Paul [in Gal. 3:17]... foresaw in spirit that this mischief should creep into the church, that the word of God should be confounded; that is to say, that the promise should be mingled with the law, and so the promise should be utterly lost. For when the promise is mingled with the law, it is made nothing else but the very law, for whosoever does not perfectly understand... justification, must needs confound and mingle the law and grace together.

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

Works of love and thankfulness, in a manner of their own accord (with a little help of direction and exhortation),<sup>26</sup> flowing from a

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<sup>25</sup> Eaton was here paraphrasing Luther on Ps. 130. I realise that Eaton was here speaking of believers, but, incidentally, the same applies to unbelievers – the law does not lead to repentance. The grace of God does that (Rom. 2:4).

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan F. Bayes quoted this from Eaton, making this comment: 'The phrase in parenthesis is noteworthy; it is unclear how direction and exhortation differs from the preaching of the law' (Jonathan F. Bayes: *The Weakness of the Law: God's Law and the Christian in New*

true, right and thankful zeal of God's glory, making them [believers] willing and ready to grow, and cheerfully to walk, in all the holy duties of all his commandments. Thus is justification, making us perfectly holy and righteous freely, in the sight of God, and works, safely taught and not confounded the one with the other,<sup>27</sup> but both in their due bounds powerfully established, works thereby joyfully flowing forth... (Tit. 2:14). You cannot in this case be idle, for surely that love of God and pleasure, which you enjoy in him, will not allow you to be idle. You shall be enflamed with a marvellous study and desire to do what things soever you can know will be an honour unto your God, so loving and bountiful unto you, and will turn to praise, glory and thanksgiving unto him. You will \*\*\* [pause?]<sup>28</sup> for no precept, you shall feel no compulsion of the law, having a most ready will and pleasure to do whatsoever things you shall know to be acceptable unto God.

In what way will the desire to please God show itself? First of all, said Eaton, we shall want to see other sinners converted. In other

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*Testament Perspective*, Paternoster Press, Cumbria, 2000, pp11-12). Well, if Bayes couldn't see the difference between, on the one hand, gospel directions and exhortations for progressive sanctification – which are ubiquitous in the New Testament – and, on the other, the commands of the law to believers for progressive sanctification – which are completely absent from the New Testament – what hope was there that he could come to a right view of 'the weakness of the law' in his book? For myself, I am sorry that Eaton used the word 'little'; I would replace it with 'scriptural'. The believer, as I showed in my *Christ*, needs instruction and calibration by the entire word of God, not simply the ten commandments!

<sup>27</sup> Another vital point. Legal preachers are at risk, to put it no stronger, of driving men to the law – not only for sanctification (both positional and progressive) but for justification. What is more, new-covenant liberty, rejoicing in free justification, is severely endangered by making men cringe under the whip of the law for progressive sanctification. Exulting in liberty and cringing in fear make uneasy bed-fellows, to say the least of it. Incidentally, my spell-checker has just thrown up an interesting alternative to the misspelling of 'sanctification': 'scarification'! Almost a Freudian slip when thinking about the Reformed way of progressive sanctification?

<sup>28</sup> Eaton had 'passe'. Was he saying you will not stumble over any precept?

words he was answering the question: What is the best motive for evangelism? He got it in one: Our sense of the fullness of grace in our own justification by Christ:

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

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

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

Whereupon your love will show itself, and will try all means to make this truth of salvation manifest unto all, rejecting and condemning whatsoever others either teach or say that agrees not with this truth. Whereby it comes to pass that Satan and the world, which hear nothing so unwillingly as this truth, will rise against you with all might, will by and by trouble you. The great, learned, rich, and mighty of the world will condemn you of heresy and madness. Howbeit, if you are endued with this joyful faith, it cannot be, but that your heart being thereby cheered, should even, as it were, laugh and leap for holy joy in God, being void of all care and trouble, and be made above measure confident.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> On re-reading this in preparation for publication, I was encouraged to see how Eaton has admirably encapsulated what I said in my *The Glorious*, being an exposition and application of 2 Cor. 3:1 – 4:6.



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

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

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

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

And thus in these two, faith and love, all, both doctrine and life worthy of Christ, consist... We are children of the Most High by being righteous by faith, whereby, of nothing, we are made the heirs of God, and we are God’s by love, which makes us beneficial to others. Thus never any taught more sound and godly doctrine, as touching good works, than we do today.<sup>30</sup> For if a man feels in his heart a sweetness in this promise of God, ‘that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, makes him clean from all sin’, and so is undoubtedly persuaded that he is of the company of them whom Christ has made to himself a glorious church, ‘not having spot, or wrinkle of sin, or any such thing’, he is assuredly such a one, and Christ’s spouse indeed. For as we believe, so comes it unto us.

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<sup>30</sup> That is, by his teaching that progressive sanctification flows from the sense of justification.

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

Then will such a man by and by have regard for his neighbour, and help him as his brother, care for him, give unto him, lend unto him, comfort him; briefly, do no otherwise unto him than he desires to be done unto himself. And all this proceeds from hence – for that the bountifulness and goodness of Christ has replenished his [the believer’s in question] heart with sweetness and love, that it is a pleasure and joy unto him to do good unto his neighbour.

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

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

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

And all this... is effected because it is the joyful knowledge of justification that... [progressively] sanctifies us. Justification is like the fire, so that he that is not zealous in holiness and righteousness by [progressive] sanctification, it is to be feared that he never had the fire in his breast of justification, or lets the fire go out forgetting... ‘that he was purged from his old sins’ (2 Pet. 1:9). And that knowledge of free justification... which regenerates<sup>31</sup> and [progressively] sanctifies us is not only manifest by the doctrine taught in the first six chapters of Romans, but also by the example of Nicodemus who, at first, was neither regenerate, nor knew, nor could learn, what it meant... but after that Christ had taught him free justification...<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> As Eaton now showed, Christ in the same breath as he speaks of regeneration addresses Nicodemus with free justification (John 3:1-17).

<sup>32</sup> John 3:1-17.

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then he was a new man, enflamed with zeal to defend Christ before the faces of the rulers, even at mid-day (John 7:50-52). For Christ first makes us righteous by the knowledge of himself in the holy gospel, and... he creates a new heart in us, bringing forth new motions [inward impulses], and gives to us that assurance whereby we are persuaded that we have peace with the Father for his sake. Also, he gives unto us a true judgment whereby we prove and try those things which before we knew not, or else altogether disliked.

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

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

Once more, back to the main point:

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

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

For by the law is the knowledge of sin; by faith is the obtaining of the grace (of justification) against sin. By the grace (of justification) is the healing of the fault of sin. By the healing of the soul is the freedom of the will. By the freedom of the will is love of righteousness. By the love of righteousness is the doing

of the law.<sup>33</sup> All these things which I have knit thus together, have their testimonies in Scripture... How then can a man, being justified (that is, made just and righteous) by faith, choose but [to] work justly and righteously?

This is the liberty wherein Paul also testifies... ‘Stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free’ (Gal. 5:1). He speaks... of a spiritual and divine liberty reigning in the conscience... It is a spiritual and divine liberty reigning in the conscience... It is a freedom from the law, sin, the displeasure of God, death, hell and damnation. Indeed, this Christian liberty swallows up at once, and takes quite away, the whole heap of evils, the law, sin, death, God’s displeasure, and [to put it] briefly, the serpent himself with his head and whole power. And in the stead thereof, it places righteousness, peace, everlasting life, and all goodness. Now since those enemies are overcome, and we are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, it is certain that we are righteous before God, and whatsoever we do pleases him. By which means, the schoolmaster [pedagogue]-like<sup>34</sup> bondage and terrors of the law are changed into the liberty of the conscience, and consolation, or joyful news of the gospel, revealing the righteousness of Christ, wherewith we are... justified.

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

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

Note that Eaton’s doctrine – the doctrine of the New Testament – also rightly answers the ‘new atheists’ when they

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<sup>33</sup> Eaton, in common with the Reformed, was too restrictive here. In the new covenant, the believer is enabled to obey *all* God’s word from the heart, not only the law, certainly not only the ten commandments.

<sup>34</sup> Here Eaton’s understanding was distorted by the mistranslation ‘schoolmaster’, *paidagōgos*. See my earlier note and my *Christ; Sanctification*.

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

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

Now the first sermon, and doctrine, is the law of God. The second is the gospel. These two sermons are not the same. Therefore we must have a good grasp of the matter in order to know how to differentiate between them. We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things. The law is thus directed solely to our behaviour and consists in making requirements. For God speaks through the law, saying: ‘Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you’. The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says: ‘This is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake’. So, then, there are two kinds of doctrine and two kinds of works, those of God and those of men. Just as we and God are separated from one another, so also these two doctrines are widely separated from one another. For the gospel teaches exclusively what has been given us by God, and not—as in the case of the law—what we are to do and give to God.<sup>35</sup>

So then, my title once again: ‘John Eaton: Antinomian?’

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<sup>35</sup> See the article: ‘A Brief Introduction to Law & Gospel’ (taken from [lutherantheology.wordpress.com/.../a-brief-introduction-to-law-gospel](http://lutherantheology.wordpress.com/.../a-brief-introduction-to-law-gospel)).



# *Lloyd-Jones for Law Men*

## ***Introduction***

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones is rightly held in high esteem by many believers, believers of all persuasions – including both covenant *and* new-covenant theologians. In this short article, offering only a few comments of my own, I want to let Lloyd-Jones speak largely for himself, and let him comment on various verses found in that momentous passage, Romans 5:20 – 8:15.<sup>1</sup> All I ask is that those who speak and write so highly of Lloyd-Jones read what he said on those verses, and tell the world what they think of his assertions.

Why do I make this request? I think it is only right to ask this because the law, and all that goes with it, is a topic of such momentous importance among believers today. The times demand that we should all be clear and unequivocal on this vital matter. I think Lloyd-Jones, himself, is pretty clear in what follows. It should be obvious what I think about these words of Lloyd-Jones. What do the law men think?

Let me explain my terms. By ‘law men’, I mean those who hold to, and advocate, John Calvin’s threefold use of the law.<sup>2</sup> That is, they agree with Calvin in the following three particulars:

1. The law prepares sinners for Christ.
2. The law restrains sin in the unregenerate.

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<sup>1</sup> I have drawn these extracts from my *Christ*.

<sup>2</sup> And by ‘the law’, such men, as Calvin himself, are really talking about what they call ‘the moral law’ or the ten commandments. This, as I have shown elsewhere, is an unscriptural construct or template imposed on Scripture, that template stemming from the medieval Roman Church – Thomas Aquinas, in particular. See my *Christ*. See also my articles such as: ‘Covenant Theology Tested’; ‘The Law: Reformed Escape Routes’; ‘Preparationism in New England’. These articles may be found in the series: *New-Covenant Articles* (Volumes One & Two); under the Edocs link on: David H J Gay Ministry [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com); and on the [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com) website.

3. The law, acting like a whip for lazy asses, drives believers to progressive sanctification.<sup>3</sup>

In brief, that is what I mean by ‘law men’. I ask all such ‘law men’, most of whom think highly of Lloyd-Jones: What do you think of what he said on the law in the following passages?

Of course, I do not pretend that these extracts comprise all that Lloyd-Jones said on the law. Indeed, I could provide extracts to show a measure of inconsistency in this area – for he was, like us all, only a man, and he published a huge amount of material, stretching over many years. No wonder then, that he sometimes contradicted himself.<sup>4</sup> Nor do I want to give the impression that, if he were alive today, Lloyd-Jones would be want to be labelled as a ‘new-covenant theologian’.

Nevertheless, this I do say: Lloyd-Jones issued what now follows. He declared these things in public. He had them recorded in print. He was willing for the Banner of Truth Trust to publish the relevant titles. Those books are still in the public domain. And many covenant theologians have them on their shelves. What do such men think of the following from D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the man they admire so highly? Was Lloyd-Jones wrong in what he said here? Or was he right? And if he was right, what difference will it make to you and your covenant theology?

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> As I have shown time and again, covenant theologians seem very reluctant to admit that their heroes ever contradicted themselves. Nowhere is this comment more applicable than in the case of John Calvin.



***The extracts***

Commenting on ‘the law entered’ in: ‘Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound’ (Rom. 5:20), Lloyd-Jones declared:

There was a state of affairs already existing; but now into that situation something else comes. It is not so much that it creates a new situation; it comes in alongside of the other situation. If we understand this principle we are at once more than halfway to an understanding of the function of the law. The very word ‘added alongside’, that Paul uses here, tells us that the law, in and of itself, is not something that is of fundamental importance to us. It is something additional, it is something that has come in for the time being, for a particular function. It is not fundamental... it is something that enters, an addition, something that ‘comes in alongside of’.<sup>5</sup>

Again, Lloyd-Jones on the same verse, Romans 5:20:

The law – let us be quite clear about this – in verse 20 means the law that was given through Moses on Mount Sinai, not the [so-called] moral law only but the ceremonial law also, in fact the whole of the law.<sup>6</sup>

Lloyd-Jones went on: ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!’ (Rom. 6:14-15):

To be ‘under sin’, and to be ‘under the law’ are the same thing, and we need to be delivered from sin as we need to be delivered from the law.<sup>7</sup>

There are only two positions; we are either ‘under law’, or else we are ‘under grace’... The term ‘law’... obviously means, not

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<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Assurance* pp284-285.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Assurance* p284. As I have explained, I do not accept the unscriptural division of the law into ‘moral, ceremonial and judicial’, but I let it stand.

<sup>7</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Law* p311.

the ceremonial law, but the demands of the [so-called] moral law.<sup>8</sup>

Lloyd-Jones on: ‘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. 7:6):

‘We have been delivered from the law’. This is a very strong word... Some translate it as ‘discharged’, ‘set at liberty’, ‘set free’. We are no longer under the law; we have had a complete discharge from it.

Speaking of every believer, Lloyd-Jones continued, the law ‘has no authority over him any longer; he has finished with’ it. The question is, of course, ‘in what sense has the Christian been delivered from the law?’ First of all, ‘the law which held us could not justify us, as we were told back in [Rom. 3:20]. We are freed from that’. So far, so good; all are agreed. Then, and of the utmost significance, Lloyd-Jones took up the issue over which the Reformed (covenant theologians) clash with Scripture:

But the point about which the apostle is most concerned here is that we are delivered from the inability of the law to sanctify us.<sup>9</sup> While we were under the law we could never be sanctified. The law can no more sanctify us than it can justify us. While we were held there we could not be joined to the one who can sanctify us as well as justify us. We had no freedom; but now we have been delivered. Now there is the possibility of sanctification. If I can get out of the clutches, as it were, of that first husband, and be joined to another, there is hope for me. There was no hope while I was under the law; but now I am set free. I am delivered from my inability to experience sanctification. This what the apostle is particularly concerned to emphasise.

I break off. Lloyd Jones then had a most intriguing passage:

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *New* pp182,196; see whole section beginning on his p179.

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd-Jones was talking about progressive sanctification. See earlier note. This applies throughout this article.

But [Paul was] concerned also to emphasise something further... namely, the work of the law in aggravating and inflaming our sins.

The law of God always leads to death... the law of God leads to sin; it aggravates it, it inflames [it]... it always produces death.

But, as he said earlier:

We have been set free from this tendency of the law to aggravate our problem... we have now been delivered from the law.<sup>10</sup>

In the above, note Lloyd-Jones' use of 'our' – 'the work of the law in aggravating and inflaming *our* sins'. Was he being a little lax here – or was he being precise? Romans 7:5,7-11 does not refer to the regenerate. Paul, there, was speaking of his pre-regenerate days. The law did not produce sin in him; no, it is good and spiritual (Rom. 7:13-16). But sin used the law to arouse sinful desire in him. It was sin – not the law – which was the cause of the trouble. But did Lloyd-Jones deliberately use 'our' – speaking of believers? If so, then in one stroke he has obliterated Calvin's third use of the law. The law produces holiness in the believer (Calvin). The law arouses sin in the believer (Lloyd-Jones)! In any case, let us not forget what Lloyd-Jones said in the previous paragraph: 'We are delivered from the inability of the law to sanctify us. While we were under the law we could never be sanctified'. If that does not sound the death knell for the Reformer's third use of the law, what does?

Sadly, those who advocate the biblical position on Romans 5 – 8 are often dismissed as antinomians. When preaching on: 'You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out: "Abba, Father"' (Rom. 8:15), Lloyd-Jones met the accusation head-on: 'You are surely inciting people to sin by speaking in this way' – that is, the way in which he himself had been speaking. He had his reply ready:

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<sup>10</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Law* pp85-87,287-294.

I am quite happy about such a charge, for it is the charge that was brought against Paul...True preaching of the gospel in its fullness always exposes itself to the charge of antinomianism.<sup>11</sup>

Lloyd-Jones preaching on: ‘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). He declared:

Let me put it plainly and clearly. The apostle teaches here that it was essential we should be married to [Christ]; because until we are married to him we shall never bear this fruit. We were married to the law, but the law was impotent; it could not bring forth children (fruit) out of us. But we are now married to one who has the strength and the virility and the potency to produce children even out of us. It is his strength that matters... Here is the real purpose of the marriage; we need one whose seed is so powerful, who can so impregnate us with his own holy nature that he will produce holiness even in us. That is why we are married to him, in order that ‘we should bring forth fruit unto God’. His strength is so great, his might is so potent, that even out of us he can bear this progeny of holiness... This therefore is the apostle’s argument. He says in effect: You had to be delivered from your marriage to the law before you could produce this fruit. You had to die to that law, that old marriage had to be dissolved, in order that you might be married to this mighty one who can produce the fruit in you. And he says it has happened. The central object of salvation is holiness. I would not hesitate to assert that it is sinful to say that you can stop at justification even temporarily, or say that a man can be justified and not sanctified. It is impossible... You cannot stop at justification... The whole object, the whole movement of salvation is to make us holy. So from the moment we are joined to him the process begins. From the moment of the marriage and the union... his power begins to work... and... we are already

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<sup>11</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Sons* p228.

bringing forth something of this fruit, which is ‘holiness unto God’.<sup>12</sup>

Lloyd-Jones preaching on ‘the law of sin and death’ (Rom. 8:2), asserted:

It is ‘the law’ about which he [the apostle] has been writing from the beginning of this letter... The law condemns [Rom. 3:19]... the law is always the great cause of condemnation [Rom. 4:15; 5:20-21; 7:13; 1 Cor. 15:56; 2 Cor. 3:7,9]... The law of God leads to sin [Rom. 7:7-12]... The law... always produces death [Rom. 7:13-25]... What is it that has set me free from the law? The answer is: ‘The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’... [which is] obviously the opposite of the law of God... We as Christians are no longer in the position in which we were before we became Christians; since we are ‘in Christ Jesus’ our whole position has been changed... We were ‘under law’, we were under the rules and the reign and the power of the law. But now we are in an entirely different position... the opposite of being ‘under the law’... What has set me free from the law of sin and death? It is the grace of God in Christ Jesus... the gospel... the opposite to the ‘law’ is ‘grace’, and ‘the reign of grace’ is contrasted with ‘the reign of sin’... The principle, or the ministration, or the covenant, of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and death. In other words, the apostle is saying that we are under a new covenant now, under a new testament; there is a new principle or power reigning over us and in us. The gospel has set us free, we are under ‘the law of liberty’... by the Holy Spirit... The gospel has freed us, and the gospel frees us through the Spirit... Before it was the ‘power of the law’ that was the chief power in us, and led us to sin and to captivity, to defeat and death. Now, we have been set free and delivered from all that; we are in a new realm... We are not ‘under law’, we are ‘under grace’... We have nothing to do with the law from the standpoint of salvation now; we have finished with it; we are dead to it.<sup>13</sup>

Let me comment on this. Lloyd-Jones was confining his remarks here to ‘the moral law’. As I have made clear, I disagree with this. But, allowing the caveat – even with the caveat; indeed, *especially* with it – he was shattering Calvin’s third use of the

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<sup>12</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Law* pp66-67.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Law* pp285-293.

law. I do hope all ‘devotees’ of Lloyd-Jones (not excluding his publishers) remember what he said here. His books are bought by the thousand. Are they read by the thousand? As for those who do read him, do his words affect their view of the law, the believer and sanctification?

Lloyd-Jones preached on the passage: ‘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). He was dogmatic:

The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us in two ways. The righteousness of Christ is ‘imputed’ to us; but, thank God, the righteousness of Christ is also ‘imparted’ to us... The second is the process of sanctification... Paul’s argument everywhere... is not merely that we are no longer guilty... [but] the apostle rejoices that we are now able to bring forth fruit unto God – that is, positive righteousness... The apostle is saying here that the law could not deliver me from the guilt and condemnation it pronounced upon me; *but still more important*, that it could not give me positive righteousness... But, thank God, ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ has given it me. I am ‘in Christ’ and because of that I walk ‘not after the flesh’, but ‘after the Spirit’. I am no longer walking under the law; I am no longer ‘under the law’; I am ‘under grace’... First and foremost this means our justification, and that we are ‘clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ’. *But again I insist*... that we must not stop at that point, as some of the great commentators do... Christ has fully satisfied the demands of the law... and because all this has happened in and through Christ there is no more that the law can do to us who are ‘in Christ’. Christ has exhausted all the possibilities of the law with respect to us, he is ‘the end of the law’. So the law can say nothing to me, and, as far as the believer is concerned, is powerless... the law is eliminated... the law is taken away... The law having been removed, Christ having fulfilled it in every way, I am free to be married to

[Christ]; I am married to him. His power is now in me delivering me... Thus is the righteousness of the law fulfilled in me. We do not stop at justification, we go further. The moment the Christian is 'in Christ' sanctification has begun... The learned commentators with whom I am disagreeing are at great pains elsewhere to say that you must never separate justification and sanctification, yet they themselves separate them here... The law could never save us... We are in a state [by nature] in which we have to be set free from 'the law of sin and death'... That having been done, we can be united to [Christ] and the power of his life. And the Spirit that was in him is in us, and thus the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us.<sup>14</sup>

In the above, note the words I have stressed: 'But still more important... but again I insist', *and what follows!* And let me get rid of his euphemisms. Let me not mince words. Lloyd-Jones was exploding the Reformed view of sanctification by the law. 'The great commentators... the learned commentators', of course, are the leading Reformed men, covenant theologians. I say it again. I hope that all who 'follow' Lloyd-Jones will either answer him – refute and disown him here – or else submit their thinking to Scripture, abandon 'the great and learned commentators' on this issue, come out into the open, and start arguing for the biblical view of the law, the believer and sanctification.

#### Lloyd-Jones on Romans 7:

What law is this?... [Some] say that this is a reference only to the law as given through Moses... Some even go further and say that it refers to the ceremonial part of [the Mosaic] law alone, and to nothing else... It would be quite unprofitable to spend time in refuting these false expositions. [What Paul said] is true of the Mosaic law, certainly, but not only of the Mosaic law... [Paul] is referring, of course [please note], to the written [so-called] moral law that was given through Moses to the children of Israel. They referred to it as the 'writing' because God wrote it on the tables of stone which he gave to Moses.<sup>15</sup>

I must say I like Lloyd-Jones' 'of course', although I wish he had not introduced the unnecessary (above all, unscriptural) 'moral

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<sup>14</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Law* pp304-306,337,339-342, emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Law* pp15,92.

law'. Nevertheless, bearing in mind what the Reformed mean by it, I am rather glad he did, and I find I now like Lloyd-Jones' 'of course' very much indeed! Do the Reformed?

And, finally, Lloyd-Jones:

The opposite of 'law' is 'grace', and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus means 'the rule of grace', the 'reign of grace'. It is the way of faith in Christ Jesus... We are no longer under that old law called 'the letter'; we are under the law of the Spirit now... 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'... the 'perfect law of liberty'. What a paradox! 'Law of liberty'! [James] means 'a way', 'a reign'; it is 'the reign of grace' and that is a reign or law 'of liberty'.<sup>16</sup>

On the above, I have made my position clear. Reader, what do *you* think about Lloyd-Jones' comments?

### ***Source list***

- Lloyd-Jones, D.Martyn: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5. Assurance*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1971.
- Lloyd-Jones, D.Martyn: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6. The New Man*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1972.
- Lloyd-Jones, D.Martyn: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 7:1 – 8:4. The Law: Its Function and Limits*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1973.
- Lloyd-Jones, D.Martyn: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17. The Sons of God*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974.

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<sup>16</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Law* pp290-291.



## *John Turned Upside Down*

Many think that John, in his first letter, is giving believers a series of tests by which they can examine themselves, and so come to assurance.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, some go so far as to think John is actually insisting on such tests for assurance. Listen to Robert A. Morey:

John constantly challenges our assurance by saying: ‘Hereby we know him if...’. He *demand*s that we ‘prove’ or ‘test’ our assurance of salvation. This proof is obtained by self-examination. John *calls upon us* to examine our lives to see if God has truly given us a new heart.<sup>2</sup>

This is a serious misreading of the apostle.

John had several purposes in writing his letter. First, like other New Testament writers, he was tackling false teachers; in his case, the Gnostics. Linked with his first aim, he was confronting mere professors, telling them in no uncertain terms that a true conversion reveals itself in observable change, in a Christ-like life. And, thirdly, he wanted to comfort and reassure doubting believers, believers who had lost their assurance and subsequent joy. It is John’s third purpose which concerns us here.

John was writing to doubting believers. That much is clear. But why were they doubting? Throughout the New Testament, we see how false teachers (Judaizers, Gnostics, whatever) and their teaching brought the early believers into bondage and sadness – not least in taking them to the law, with the consequent loss of their assurance. John wrote his letter to help believers regain their sense of assurance after they had lost it through being brought into bondage through the Gnostics. And he did it by taking them back to where they had left the road.

He was doing something similar to Paul, writing to the Galatians: ‘What has happened to all your joy?’ he asked them (Gal. 4:15). In their case, they had lost it through listening to the

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Assurance* pp137-154.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Robert A. Morey: ‘Knowing You Are Saved: Part 4’ (davidsonpress.com), emphasis mine.

Judaisers, the law teachers. And the apostle set about restoring their joy and sense of liberty by instructing the Galatians, challenging them, and taking them back to the beginning, to where they had left the track (Gal. 2:16 – 3:5). Had they not been justified in Christ? Had they not received the gift of the Spirit? Of course they had! But how had they been justified and received the Spirit? By the law? They had not! Very well then. As they had begun their Christian experience, so they should continue (Col. 2:6 – 3:17). Assurance, adoption, sanctification (positional and progressive),<sup>3</sup> liberty, glory... all of it comes through Christ and not by the law.<sup>4</sup>

The principle is plain: if believers try to find assurance by their progressive sanctification, they will come into bondage and sadness through their inevitable failure to reach the standard. Moreover, they will only compound the problem if they seek it (the assurance through their progressive sanctification) under the law. And the remedy is always the same: they must go back to the root of their joy in salvation; namely, Christ.

All this applies to John's letter. False teaching brings believers into doubt. As John's closing remarks make clear:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> For the full argument, see my *Christ, Sanctification*.

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him... The one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols (1 John 5:13-15,18-21).

Here we have both the cure for doubt, and its preventative: ‘Dear children, keep yourselves from idols’. Keep to Christ!

And do not miss John’s confidence: ‘We know’! No lack of assurance on John’s part here! ‘We know also...’. No lack of assurance on John’s part here! ‘We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him...’. No lack of assurance on John’s part here!

Nor here:

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth... We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is... You know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins... We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers... We know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us... Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us... We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit... We know and rely on the love God has for us... This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands... (1 John 2:20-21; 3:2,5,14,16,24; 4:13,16; 5:2).

Yes, I realise that one or two of these statements are generally taken to be tests, tests which believers should apply to themselves to give them assurance. While there is an element of truth in this, it must be carefully nuanced. To make progressive sanctification the way of assurance is to misread the apostle, with serious consequences.

John, we must not forget, has his own idiosyncratic way of writing; he puts things ‘back to front’!<sup>5</sup> Every writer has his own peculiar way of expressing things, of course. As a man can be recognised by his handwriting, so he can by the way he strings his words together: every writer has his own voice.<sup>6</sup> 1 John 5:1 is typical of the striking way the apostle likes to put things: ‘Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God’. John was not saying that regeneration follows faith; rather, faith is the evidence of prior regeneration. But, as I say, the apostle likes putting things back to front.

Take, for instance: ‘You know that everyone who does what is right has been born of [God]’ (1 John 2:29). This does not mean that the practice of righteousness leads to, produces regeneration; rather, the practice of righteousness is the proof, the evidence, the demonstration, of the fact that a sinner has been regenerated.

‘He who does what is right is righteous’ (1 John 3:7); that is, progressive sanctification is a sure sign of justification, not the cause of it.

‘This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother’ (1 John 3:10). John is not saying that progressive sanctification produces justification. He is not saying that by his godliness a man becomes a child of God. No! But because a man is a child of God, he will live a godly life. It is just the apostle’s own way of expressing himself.

‘Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God’ (1 John 4:2); that is, spiritual, believing,

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<sup>5</sup> Compare ‘the man said’ with ‘said the man’.

<sup>6</sup> Paul had. John had. I have. I have been told that people can hear me speaking as they read my books. Quite! See Stanley Baldwin’s letter to Winston Churchill on reading the latter’s first volume on the life of Marlborough (Martin Gilbert: *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years*, Book Club Associates, London, 1981, pp80,104). See D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 1. The Gospel of God*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1985, pp13-14. ‘[Thomas] Carlyle... contrived to get the sound of his own spoken voice into his writings’ (M.H.Abrams (General Editor): *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol.2, W.W.Norton & Company, New York, 1979, p948).

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confession of the incarnation of Christ is evidence – not the cause – of regeneration, the evidence of a man being ‘of God’.

‘Everyone who loves is born of God’ (1 John 4:7, NKJV); spiritual love is an evidence of regeneration – not that regeneration is produced by it: ‘Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God’ (1 John 4:7, NIV).

Yet in all these passages, at first glance John seems to be saying the opposite. It’s simply the striking way he puts things; regeneration comes first!

Take another of John’s statements – this time where he expresses himself the ‘right way round’:

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God... Everyone born of God overcomes the world... We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin (1 John 3:9; 5:4,18).

What I am saying is this: we can read John’s words as tests by which we have to probe ourselves to gain assurance. The right way to read him, however, is to realise he was giving *encouragements* to his readers who had lost their assurance, writing in order to reassure them. John was sure about his readers; he wants them to be sure! Applying it to ourselves: John’s ‘tests’, far from being hoops through which believers have to jump in order to be assured, *are encouragements to reassure believers who have lost their joy*. A.M.Stibbs and J.I.Packer, having pointed out that the early believers generally did not lack assurance, and, therefore, the New Testament never discusses it, then went on to say:

The nearest thing to such a discussion is the first letter of John, which was written partly to *reassure* Christians whose prior assurance had been shaken by false teachers telling them that they were really still in darkness; but this is a different issue from that of leading into assurance Christians who have never had it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A.M.Stibbs and J.I.Packer: *The Spirit Within You: The Church’s Neglected Possession*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1967, p87, emphasis theirs.

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We must take a firm grip on this: John is *not* giving a series of tests by which believers can and should test themselves to come to assurance.

That being said, John's assurances, of course, are only assurances to those who are living in the way he delineates. In other words, although I do not think John's words should be used to harrow believers – rather, they should be used as reassurances for true believers – they are to be so used only by those who are demonstrating the marks of progressive sanctification he sets out. John was not encouraging so-called 'carnal Christians' to live as they want. Not at all! But he was reassuring true believers who were living for Christ (or, at the very least, were honestly seeking to glorify Christ by obeying his commands), and so he must be read. But whatever we take from John, it is quite wrong to think that he was telling the saints that their progressive sanctification was the source of their assurance.

Not at all! John was clear on the witness of the Spirit as the primary source of assurance: 'anointing' seems to be his favourite word to describe it. Indeed, no New Testament writer is clearer and stronger and more emphatic (repeatedly so) upon the Spirit's anointing, the gift of the Spirit, the witness of the Spirit for every believer:

You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him (1 John 2:20-27).

This is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:24).

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit (1 John 4:13).

It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth... We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given

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about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son (1 John 5:6,9-11).

It is this that puts John's 'tests' in their proper light:

We know that we have come to know [Christ] if we obey his commands. The man who says: 'I know him', but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him... Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world... Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (1 John 2:3-6,9-11,15-19).

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in

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him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother (1 John 3:1-10).

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another... We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:11-24).

John was saying all this to believers, believers who, of course, had been assured by the witness (anointing) of the Spirit, but believers, who, sadly, had lost their assurance as a result of false teaching. The false teachers had taken the believers' eyes off Christ, and that had led them into all sorts of difficulty (and, I am sure, sadness for John). As he made clear right from the start: 'We write this to make our [or your] joy complete' (1 John 1:4). And, coming to the end of his letter, he could say: 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life' (1 John 5:13). 'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols' (1 John 5:21). Keep hold of Christ!

Nor must we forget what he had already said:

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts



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condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 John 3:19-20).

John's use of 'to know', *ginōskō* and *eidō* (*oida*), merits careful and detailed study. The words are richly nuanced.<sup>8</sup> D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones got it wrong when he claimed that John was speaking about 'what we deduce about ourselves when we apply to our lives, and to our experiences, the various tests which are given us in the Scriptures... 1 John 3:14'.<sup>9</sup> The idea of 'deduce' is quite wrong here. The thrust of 'know' is 'experience, know directly' or 'know by reflection and meditation' – not 'discover by deduction'. Michael Eaton:

The 'tests of conversion' approach to 1 John is refuted entirely by these verses [1 John 2:12-14]. John is far from wanting his 'little children' to look to their personal character or their estimate of their spiritual strength in order to discover whether they are converted. Any sensitive soul who truly tries this will end up in endless introspection. It is only the Pharisee who can examine himself and then say with assurance: 'I thank you I am not as other men', and come away with assurance.<sup>10</sup>

John assures his readers: 'Your sins are forgiven', and forgiven for Christ's sake, his 'name' (his person and work). They have 'known' God, he tells them, they have 'overcome the evil one', they 'are strong', and God's word 'lives' in them (1 John 2:12-14). He has no doubt about it. And he wants them to feel it, to enjoy it, to delight in it, for themselves. He writes to reassure them, to show them that the false teaching they have imbibed is bankrupt, and so nerve them to resist the Gnostics. There's not the slightest suggestion that he wants to make his readers introspective. He doesn't doubt the reality of their conversion: to make them doubt it is the last thing in his mind! Rather, he wants to put backbone and joy into them by reassuring them. The

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<sup>8</sup> See Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991.

<sup>9</sup> D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17. The Sons of God*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974, p303; Michael Eaton: *1,2,3 John*, Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 1996, pp20-25.

<sup>10</sup> Eaton pp62-63.

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heretics and their false teaching had unsettled his readers, had robbed them of their assurance and happiness. John wants to bring the believers back to the basics so that they might recover their assurance – and in this way stand up to the heretics, and get rid of them and their false teaching with its inevitable misery and bondage. He not only points the believers to the evidence of their godliness to assure them, but he calls for their continuance in the faith in order to assure other believers that they are truly converted (1 John 1:6; 2:4-6; 4:20). As he asserts, true believers have the Spirit (1 John 4:13), and it shows (1 John 3:24; 4:12):

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:14-24).

As a result, John's 'tests' need careful handling. Just as with medicine for the body, so with medicine for the soul. A physician prescribes medicine A for condition X, and medicine B for condition Y. If I have condition X, and I take medicine B, it will do me no good; it might make the disease worse and do me serious harm; it might even prove fatal. So with medicine for the soul. If you are a Gnostic in any shape or form, reader, pay serious attention to John's words. You are in error; give up your error and come to Christ as he is revealed in the New Testament. If you are one of those so-called 'carnal Christians', read John's

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warnings, and take them home to yourself: be converted! If you are a doubting believer, doubting because you have listened to legal preachers, Gnostics or whatever, then take a good dose of John's comforting cordial. Retrace your steps to where you left the road, get your mind and heart fixed on Christ, listen to the witness of the Spirit, and be reassured by the evidences of godliness in your life.

Alas, doubting believers can get John's teaching wrong, even turning it upside down, and so make their condition far worse. Although John's tests can be read as though he wanted believers to get anxious about themselves, and probe themselves as to the reality of their conversion, that is to *misread* him! The apostle's actual purpose, I say again, was very different. He was doing all he could to encourage and reassure such believers, and so bring them into liberty! He was doing all he could to restore them to where they were when they came into the faith.

In other words, while John's 'tests' certainly ought to strike fear into the false professor and the so-called 'carnal Christian', they ought to be a means of succour and encouragement to the sincere and true believer.

Let me put it another way. We should not view John's tests as a stiff barrier for the doubting believer to climb over, but rather as an open-armed welcome of assurance and comfort.

If I may illustrate. When hill-walking, I have from time to time missed my path and come up against a stone wall topped by barbed wire. Yet, if I had taken the right path, I would have met another wall straddled by a ladder stile. John did not write his book to confront his readers with a stone wall topped by barbed wire! He wrote to enable his readers to get over their fears: 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that you may know* that you have eternal life' (1 John 5:13). The same may be said about his remarks as he drew near the close of his Gospel, when John explained why he had written that volume: 'That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31). Remember that in both works he was writing to believers. He wanted unbelievers to hear the truth, believe and be converted, yes, but he also wanted (perhaps, primarily he wanted)

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believers to read and go on believing – being confirmed in their faith.

If I may be permitted a further illustration. The bread knife! An excellent tool, one well designed for the job – cutting bread. It has a comfortable handle and a sharp blade. Catch hold of the knife by the handle, and it can be used to slice crusty bread with ease. Catch hold of it by the blade, however, and while the handle will make little impression on the bread, the blade will make a nasty impression on the palm of your hand.

I am reminded of the way hyper-Calvinists read the invitations of the gospel. Take Matthew 11:28, for instance: ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’. So said Christ. Now, how should we take hold of this invitation? Should we pore over our hearts to see if we are weary, if we are weary enough, before we feel that we are invited to come to Christ? Or should we take the invitation – as Jesus clearly intended we should – and treat his words as the warmest, widest and freest of invitations? Surely, Jesus was not making sinners think about themselves, but encouraging them to think of him, and, above all urging them to come to himself for salvation and rest!

Thus it is with John’s tests. While they *can* be misread as introspective hindrances to the doubting soul, they are clearly meant as the warmest of encouragements, designed by the apostle to put doubting souls at rest.

I go further. There is no man alive – John, himself, certainly was no exception – there is no man alive who can honestly say he fulfils any of these tests as well as he should. Not one! But John was not demanding perfection! If perfection is required before we can be assured, then there’s not a true believer that’s assured on the face of the globe! Having said that, yet again I have to sound the note on the other string: not demanding perfection is not the same as *laissez-faire*. The truth is, the question is: Do I have a desire to meet John’s tests? Do I, for example, desire to love and obey Christ? Do I want to love my brothers? Do I have any measure of love towards Christ? Can I detect any mark of obedience to Christ? Do I want to obey Christ?

As William Cowper has it:

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*Lord, it is my chief complaint  
That my love is weak and faint;  
Yet I love thee, and adore:  
O for grace to love thee more!*

In other words, we must not raise the barrier so high that nobody can get over. Rather, we must follow the apostle, and bring it as low as John himself did, in order that all believers might receive all the assurance he desired for them. As John Calvin commented on 1 John 2:3: ‘We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands’:

We are not hence to conclude that faith recumbs [leans, rests, reposes] on works: for though every one receives a testimony to his faith from his works, yet it does not follow that it is founded on them, since they are added as an evidence... The certainty of faith depends on the grace of Christ alone, but piety and holiness of life distinguish true faith from the knowledge of God which is fictitious and dead (Col. 3:9).

Again, Calvin on 1 John 3:14: ‘We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers’:

Were it said that love makes us more certain of life, then confidence as to salvation would recumb [lean, rest, repose] on works. But the answer to this is obvious: for though faith is confirmed by all the graces of God as aids, yet it ceases not to have its foundation in the mercy of God only.

Again, Calvin on 1 John 3:18-20: ‘Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us’:

If we, in truth, love our neighbours, we have an evidence that we are born of God, who is truth, or that the truth of God dwells in us. But we must ever remember that we have not from love the knowledge which the apostle mentions, as though we were to seek from it the certainty of salvation. And doubtless we know not otherwise that we are the children of God, than as he seals his free adoption on our hearts by his own Spirit, and as we receive by faith the sure pledge of it offered in Christ. Then love is accessory or an inferior aid, a prop to our faith, not a foundation on which it rests. Why then does the apostle say: ‘We

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shall assure our hearts before God'? He reminds us by these words that faith does not exist without a good conscience; not that assurance arises from it or depends on it, but that then only we are really and not falsely assured of our union with God, when by the efficacy of his Holy Spirit he manifests himself in our love. For it is ever meet and proper to consider what the apostle handles. For as he condemns feigned and false profession of faith, he says that a genuine assurance before God we cannot have, except his Spirit produces in us the fruit of love. Nevertheless, though a good conscience cannot be separated from faith, yet no one should hence conclude that we must look to our works in order that our assurance may be certain.

Finally, Calvin on 1 John 5:13-14: 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us':

As there ought to be a daily progress in faith, so [John] says that he wrote to those who had already believed, so that they might believe more firmly and with greater certainty, and thus enjoy a fuller confidence as to eternal life. Then the use of doctrine is not only to initiate the ignorant in the knowledge of Christ, but also to confirm those more and more who have been already taught. It therefore becomes us assiduously to attend to the duty of learning, that our faith may increase through the whole course of our life. For there are still in us many remnants of unbelief, and so weak is our faith that what we believe is not yet really believed except there be a fuller confirmation.

And now a most important statement:

But we ought to observe the way in which faith is confirmed, even by having the office and power of Christ explained to us. For the apostle says that he wrote these things, that is, that eternal life is to be sought nowhere else but in Christ, in order that they who were believers already might believe, that is, make progress in believing. It is therefore the duty of a godly teacher, in order to confirm disciples in the faith, to extol as much as possible the grace of Christ, so that being satisfied with that, we may seek nothing else.

Those words must sink in! Calvin went on:

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The apostle teaches further still... that Christ is the peculiar object of faith, and that to the faith which we have in his name is annexed the hope of salvation. For in this case the end of believing is that we become the children and the heirs of God.

As for : ‘And this is the confidence’, Calvin declared:

[John] commends the faith which he mentioned by its fruit, or he shows that in which our confidence especially is, that is, that the godly dare confidently to call on God; as also Paul speaks in Ephesians 3:12, that we have by faith access to God with confidence; and also in Romans 8:15, that the Spirit gives us a mouth to cry: ‘Abba, Father’. And doubtless, were we driven away from an access to God, nothing could make us more miserable; but, on the other hand, provided this asylum [refuge] be opened to us, we should be happy even in extreme evils; indeed, this one thing renders our troubles blessed, because we surely know that God will be our deliverer, and relying on his paternal love towards us, we flee to him. Let us, then, bear in mind this declaration of the apostle, that calling on God is the chief trial of our faith, and that God is not rightly nor in faith called upon except we be fully persuaded that our prayers will not be in vain. For the apostle denies that those who, being doubtful, hesitate, are endued with faith.<sup>11</sup>

And now C.H.Spurgeon – on 1 John 5:13:

John then proceeds to mention three witnesses. Now, dear hearers, do you know anything about these three witnesses?... Do you know ‘the Spirit’? Has the Spirit of God quickened you, changed you, illuminated you, sanctified you? Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Do you feel his sacred impulses? Is he the essence of the new life within you? Do you know him as clothing you with his light and power? If so, you are alive unto God... One thing more I would notice. Read the ninth verse: the apostle puts our faith and assurance on the ground that we receive ‘the witness of God’. If I believe that I am saved because of this, that, and the other, I may be mistaken: the only sure ground is ‘the witness of God’. The inmost heart of Christian faith is that we take God at his word; and we must accept that word, not because of the probabilities of its statements, nor because of the confirmatory evidence of science and philosophy,

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<sup>11</sup> Here, once again, is Calvin’s view that assurance is the essence of faith.

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but simply and alone because the Lord has spoken it. Many professing Christians fall sadly short of this point. They dare to judge the word instead of bowing before it. They do not sit at the Master's feet, but become doctors themselves. I thank God that I believe everything that God has spoken, whether I am able to see its reason or not. To me the fact that the mouth of God hath spoken it stands in the place of all argument, either for or against. If Jehovah says so, so it is. Do you accept the witness of God? If not, you have made him a liar, and the truth is not in you; but if you have received 'the witness of God', then this is his witness, that 'he has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son'. I say again, if your faith stands in the wisdom of men, and is based upon the cleverness of a preacher, it will fail you; but if it stands on the sure word of the Lord it will stand for ever, and this may be to you a special token that you have eternal life. I have said enough upon this subject; oh that God may bless it to you! May we be enabled, from what John has written, to gather beyond doubt that we have the life of God within our souls... John desired the increase and confirmation of their faith. He says: 'That you might believe on the name of the Son of God'. John wrote to those who believed, that they might believe in a more emphatic sense. As our Saviour has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly, so does John write, that having faith we may have more of it. Come, beloved, listen for a moment to this! You have the milk of faith, but God wills that you should have this cream of assurance! He would increase your faith...

Will you live in perpetual questioning and doubt?... The Bible is sent that you may have full assurance of your possession of eternal life; do not, therefore, dream that it will be presumptuous on your part to aspire to it. Our conscience tells us that we ought to seek full assurance of salvation. It cannot be right for us to be children of God, and not to know our own Father. How can we kneel down and say: 'Our Father which art in heaven', when we do not know whether he is our Father or not? Will not a life of doubt tend to be a life of falsehood? May we not be using language which is not true to our consciousness? Can you sing joyful hymns which you fear are not true to you? Will you join in worship when your heart does not know that God is your God? Until the spirit of adoption enables you to cry, 'Abba, Father', where is your love to God? Can you rest? Dare you rest, while it is a question whether you are saved or not? Can you go home to your dinner today and enjoy your meal, while there is a question about your soul's eternal life? Oh, be not so foolhardy



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as to run risks on that matter! I pray you, make sure work for eternity. If you leave anything in uncertainty, let it concern your body or your estate, but not your soul. Conscience bids you seek to know that you have eternal life, for without this knowledge many duties will be impossible of performance. Many scriptures which I cannot quote this morning stir you up to this duty. Are you not bidden to make your calling and election sure? Are you not a thousand times over exhorted to rejoice in the Lord, and to give thanks continually? But how can you rejoice, if the dark suspicion haunts you, that perhaps, after all, you have not the life of God? You must get this question settled, or you cannot rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Come, brothers and sisters, I beseech you, as you would follow Scripture, and obey the Lord's precepts, get the assurance without which you cannot obey them.

Listen, as I close, to this mass of reasons why each believer should seek to know that he has eternal life. Here they are. Assurance of your salvation will bring you 'the peace of God, which passes all understanding'... Assurance is a mountain of spices, a land that flows with milk and honey. To be the assured possessor of eternal life is to find a paradise beneath the stars, where the mountains and the hills break forth before you into singing.

Full assurance will sometimes overflow in cataracts of delight. Peace flows like a river, and here and there it leaps in cascades of ecstatic joy. There are seasons when the plant of peace is in flower, and then it sheds a perfume as of myrrh and cassia. Oh, the blessedness of the man who knows that he has eternal life! Sometimes in our room alone, when we have been enjoying this assurance, we have laughed outright, for we could not help it. If anybody had wondered why a man was laughing by himself alone, we could have explained that it was nothing ridiculous which had touched us, but our mouth was filled with laughter because the Lord had done great things for us, whereof we were glad. That religion which sets no sweetmeats on the table is a niggardly housekeeper. I do not wonder that some people give up their starveling religion: it is hardly worth the keeping. The child of God who knows that he has eternal life goes to school, but he has many a holiday; and he anticipates that day of home-going when he shall see the face of his beloved for ever.

Brethren, full assurance will give us the full result of the gospel. The gospel ought to make us holy; and so it will when we are in full possession of it. The gospel ought to make us separate from the world, the gospel ought to make us lead a heavenly life here

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below; and so it will if we drink deep draughts of it; but if we take only a sip of it now and again, we give it no chance of working out its design in us. Do not paddle about the margin of the water of life, but first wade in up to your knees, and then hasten to plunge into the waters to swim in. Beware of contentment with shallow grace. Prove what the grace of God can do for you by giving yourself up to its power.

Full assurance gives a man a grateful zeal for the God he loves.<sup>12</sup>

These are the people that will go to the Congo for Jesus, for they know they are his. These are the people that will lay down their all for Christ, for Christ is theirs. These are the people that will bear scorn and shame and misrepresentation for the truth's sake, for they know that they have eternal life. These are they that will keep on preaching and teaching, spending and working, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and they know it. Men will do little for what they doubt, and much for what they believe. If you have lost your title deeds, and you do not know whether your house is your own or not, you are not going to spend much in repairs and enlargements. When you know that heaven is yours, you are anxious to get ready for it. Full assurance finds fuel for zeal to feed upon.

This also creates and sustains patience. When we know that we have eternal life, we do not fret about the trials of this passing life... Assurance makes us strong to suffer.

This, dear friends, will give you constant firmness in your confession of divine truth. You who do not know whether you are saved or not, I hope the Lord will keep you from denying the faith; but those who have a firm grip of it, these are the men who will never forsake it... When you know that your Lord is able to keep that which you have committed to him until that day, then you are firm as a rock. God make you so.

Dear brethren, this is the kind of thing that will enable you to bear a telling testimony for your Lord. It is of no use to stand up and preach things that may or may not be true. I am charged with being a dreadful dogmatist, and I am not anxious to excuse myself. When a man is not quite sure of a thing, he grows very liberal [unstable, undogmatic, erratic, wavering]...

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<sup>12</sup> 'Assurance of salvation is one of the greatest motivators in the New Testament' (Eaton p63).

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God grant that you may have this assurance, all of you! May sinners begin to believe in Jesus, and saints believe more firmly, for Christ's sake! Amen.<sup>13</sup>

Out of the wealth of gems in the above, because it captures precisely what John's first letter is about, I select this: 'John desired the increase and confirmation of their faith'. He was not setting out a series of hurdles over which his readers had to jump in order to get assurance.

Let me apply this to those of us who preach in a stated way. If ever there was a time when we need to openly and clearly distinguish in our ministry between the unbeliever and the believer, this is it. Indeed, on this issue we need to distinguish between the unbeliever, 'the carnal Christian' (so-called), the false professor, the doubting believer, and the assured believer. What we must not do is grab a text and go at it like a bull in the proverbial china shop! If we do, we risk making true believers wrongly unhappy – that is, quench the smoking flax. Of course, if we at the same time alarm the careless and sanctify the carnal, that may be considered a price worth paying. I don't! There's no need of it! With due care, it is surely possible to meet all those proper ends, and yet *not* break any bruised reeds on the way.

I quote John Macarthur 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, it's not bad to have that; it's good because how else are we drawn to the important issue of self-examination?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sermon number 2023. See also sermon number 1791.

<sup>14</sup> Taken from John Macarthur: 'Why Christians Lack Assurance' (gty.org), emphasis mine. 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

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I am sure that the words of John – John, the apostle – properly interpreted, will reassure the doubting believer, while at the same time they rightly disabuse the unbeliever.

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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.

## Misreading Peter

The words in question are: ‘My brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Pet. 1:10). I am sure that many misread the apostle here. Let me quote him in full:

[God’s] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

As I say, the words in question are: ‘My brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Pet. 1:10).<sup>1</sup>

What does Peter mean by ‘sure’? And ‘sure’ to whom? He uses *bebaios*, ‘stable, fast, firm, sure, trusty’, ‘certain’ (2 Pet. 1:19), ‘firm’ (Heb. 3:14), ‘in force’ (Heb. 9:17), ‘guaranteed’ (Rom. 4:16). The question is, is Peter telling believers that they will know that they are called and elected once they have reached a certain standard of progressive sanctification,<sup>2</sup> and have made

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Assurance* pp171-177.

<sup>2</sup> 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

sufficient progress? I think not! For a start, I know of no other passage which says it. In any case, what standard will ever be sufficient?

So what is Peter saying? It is possible that he is telling believers that the only way to verify, to make sure, confirm and demonstrate *to others* the reality of their calling and election – the profession of their calling and election – is by their progressive sanctification.<sup>3</sup> That is one possibility.

Another possibility – and I think most likely right – the thrust of the apostle's words is to do with the perseverance of the saints. Rather like riding a bicycle; if you stop pedalling, in time you come to a standstill and fall off! Keep growing in grace, therefore, until the day you die! This is the way to persevere.

John Calvin, commenting on the verse, declared:

It is one proof that we have been really elected, and not in vain called by the Lord, if a good conscience and integrity of life correspond with our profession of faith. And [Peter] infers that there ought to be more labour and diligence, because he had said before that faith ought not to be barren... The meaning then is, labour that you may have it really proved that you have not been called nor elected in vain. At the same time he speaks here of calling as the effect and evidence of election.

What about assurance by progressive sanctification? I ask this question because this is the almost universal method most believers adopt in their quest for assurance; indeed, they are told

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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.

<sup>3</sup> 'What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?... Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... Faith without deeds is useless... A person is justified [in the eyes of others] by what he does and not by faith alone... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead' (Jas. 2:14-26).

it is the way. But this, though it has a long pedigree, stemming as it does from the later Puritans, is quite wrong. (Incidentally, Calvin did not teach it).<sup>4</sup>

Calvin again on the verse in question:

Now a question arises: Whether the stability of our calling and election depends on good works, for if it is so, it follows that it depends on us. But the whole Scripture teaches us, first, that God's election is founded on his eternal purpose; and secondly, that calling begins and is completed through his gratuitous goodness... Every [believer] confirms his calling by leading a holy and pious life... The matter stands thus: God effectually calls whom he has pre-ordained to life in his secret counsel before the foundation of the world; and he also carries on the perpetual course of calling through grace alone. But as he has chosen us, and calls us for this end, that we may be pure and spotless in his presence, purity of life is not improperly called the evidence and proof of election, by which the faithful may not only testify to others that they are the children of God, but also confirm themselves in this confidence, in such a manner, however, that they fix their solid foundation on something else.

Calvin was right. Progressive sanctification is both an evidence – a necessary evidence – to others, and a confirmation to the believer, of the reality of his profession. But Peter was not calling the believer to try to reach an elusive<sup>5</sup> assurance by probing his progressive sanctification. He was speaking of a life consistent with his profession, and, above all, of the necessity of growth in grace and perseverance in the faith. Consistency and growth – both are essential. As the apostle said in his final exhortation in this letter: 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. 3:18).

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<sup>4</sup> Far more people are influenced by the Puritans on assurance than they realise. Indeed, some who would be horrified to be thought Puritan, nevertheless, are such on the law and assurance – without knowing it. As I say, Calvin did not teach assurance by progressive sanctification. For both points, see my 'Calvin on Assurance' (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).

<sup>5</sup> The advocates of what I call 'legal assurance' assure (pun intended) their followers that the desired end is way beyond most of them. See my *Assurance*.

Progressive sanctification is also, as I have said, the way of perseverance. Now the old (biblical) way of expressing this – ‘the perseverance of the saints’ – has too often been replaced by the notion of ‘the eternal security of believers’ or ‘once saved, always saved’. These two – perseverance and security – are chalk and cheese. The biblical way of speaking of this matter is in terms of saints (not believers) and their continuance or perseverance in godliness. And this is what Peter is calling for here: ‘My brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Pet. 1:10). And we do this by producing the works of progressive sanctification which he set out in the verses leading up to his command.

As Calvin went on to say in his comments:

At the same time, this certainty, mentioned by Peter, ought, I think, to be referred to the conscience, as though the faithful acknowledged themselves before God to be chosen and called. But I take it simply of the fact itself, that calling appears as confirmed by this very holiness of life. It may, indeed, be rendered: ‘Labour that your calling may become certain...’. The import of what is said is that the children of God are distinguished from the reprobate by this mark, that they live a godly and a holy life, because this is the design and end of election. Hence it is evident how wickedly some vile unprincipled men prattle, when they seek to make gratuitous election an excuse for all licentiousness; as though... we may sin with impunity, because we have been predestinated to righteousness and holiness!...

[Peter’s] purpose was only to show that hypocrites have in them nothing real or solid, and that, on the contrary, they who prove their calling sure by good works are free from the danger of falling, because sure and sufficient is the grace of God by which they are supported. Thus the certainty of our salvation by no means depends on us, as doubtless the cause of it is beyond our limits. But with regard to those who feel in themselves the efficacious working of the Spirit, Peter bids them to take courage as to the future, because the Lord has laid in them the solid foundation of a true and sure calling.

He explains the way or means of persevering, when he says, an entrance shall be ministered to you. The import of the words is this: ‘God, by ever supplying you abundantly with new graces, will lead you to his own kingdom’. And this was added, that we



may know, that though we have already passed from death into life, yet it is a passage of hope. And as to the fruition of life, there remains for us yet a long journey. In the meantime we are not destitute of necessary helps. Hence Peter obviates a doubt by these words: 'The Lord will abundantly supply your need, until you shall enter into his eternal kingdom'.

I think this is very clear. Calvin did not regard 2 Peter 1:10 as a call to introspection. Not at all! Rather, Peter insists on progressive sanctification as a demonstration and confirmation of inward grace – very much along the lines of Paul to the Ephesians: 'As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received... So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking' (Eph. 4:1,17). And, as he told the Philippians: 'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1:27). And, although I have just quoted it, as Peter urged his readers: 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. 3:18).

C.H.Spurgeon, tackling those who consider that expressing doubt about oneself is the highest form of spirituality, and those who encourage believers to think it, went for the jugular:

'Make your calling and election sure'. Not towards God, for they are sure to him: make them sure to yourself. Be quite certain of them; be fully satisfied about them. In many of our dissenting places of worship very great encouragement is held out to doubting. A person comes before the pastor, and says: 'Oh! sir, I am so afraid I am not converted; I tremble lest I should not be a child of God. Oh! I fear I am not one of the Lord's elect'. The pastor will put out his hands to him, and say: 'Dear brother, you are all right so long as you can doubt'. Now, I hold, that is altogether wrong. Scripture never says: 'He that doubts shall be saved', but: 'He that believes'. It may be true that the man is in a good state [that is, he is converted]; it may be true that he wants a little comfort; but his doubts are not good things, nor ought we to encourage him in his doubts. Our business is to encourage him out of his doubts, and by the grace of God to urge him to 'give all diligence to make his calling and election sure'; not to doubt it, but to be sure of it.

Spurgeon then directed his attention to the mere professor. Let me stress this – ‘the mere professor’; or, in Spurgeon’s words, ‘the hypocrite’. Spurgeon was clearly directing his remarks to the carnal man, not the doubting true believer:

Ah! I have heard some hypocritical doubters say: ‘Oh! I have had such doubts whether I am the Lord’s’, and I have thought to myself: ‘And so have I very great doubts about you’. I have heard some say they do tremble so because they are afraid they are not the Lord’s people; and the lazy fellows sit in their pews on the Sunday, and just listen to the sermon; but they never think of giving diligence, they never do good, perhaps are inconsistent in their lives, and then talk about doubting. It is quite right they should doubt, it is well they should; and if they did not doubt we might begin to doubt for them. Idle men have no right to assurance. The Scripture says: ‘Give diligence to make your calling and election sure’.

What about those who say they have heard voices or seen visions?<sup>6</sup>

Full assurance is an excellent attainment. It is profitable for a man to be certain in this life, and absolutely sure of his own calling and election. But how can he be sure? Now, many of our more ignorant hearers imagine that the only way they have of being assured of their election is by some revelation, some dream, and some mystery. I have enjoyed very hearty laughs at the expense of some people who have trusted in their visions. Really, if you had passed among so many shades of ignorant professing Christians as I have, and had to resolve so many doubts and fears, you would be so infinitely sick of dreams and visions that you would say, as soon as a person began to speak about them: ‘Now, do just hold your tongue’. ‘Sir’, said a woman, ‘I saw blue lights in the front parlour when I was in prayer, and I thought I saw the Saviour in the corner, and I said to myself: “I am safe”’... And yet there are tens of thousands of people in every part of the country, and members too of Christian bodies, who have no better ground for their belief that they are called and elected, than some vision equally ridiculous, or the equally absurd hearing of a voice. A young woman came to me some time ago; she wanted to join the church, and when I asked her how she knew herself to be converted, she said she

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<sup>6</sup> This, of course, is a million miles away from the witness of the Spirit.

was down at the bottom of the garden, and she thought she heard a voice, and she thought she saw something up in the clouds that said to her so-and-so. 'Well', I said to her, 'that thing may have been the means of doing good to you, but if you put any trust in it, it is all over with you'. A dream, yes, and a vision, may often bring men to Christ. I have known many who have been brought to him by them, beyond a doubt, though it has been mysterious to me how it was. But when men bring these forward as a proof of their conversion, there is the mistake, because you may see fifty thousand dreams and fifty thousand visions, and you may be a fool for all that, and all the bigger sinner for having seen them.

Spurgeon turned to the scriptural way:

There is better evidence to be had than all this: 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure'. 'How, then', says one, 'am I to make my calling and election sure?'

In an extended passage, Spurgeon then spelled out the marks of grace – the things the apostle listed in verses 5 to 8; in other words, practical godliness, growing in grace, progressive sanctification. This is the only way to prove to others that we are converted. A man may profess what he will, but his life must be consistent with it:

When you have got all these, then you will know your calling and election, and just in proportion as you practice these heavenly rules of life, in this heavenly manner, will you come to know that you are called and that you are elect. But by no other means can you attain to a knowledge of that, except by the witness of the Spirit, bearing witness with your spirit that you are born of God, and then witnessing in your conscience that you are not what you were, but are a new man in Christ Jesus, and are therefore called and therefore elected.

This is muddled. Scripture reverses these two and makes evidences a confirmation of assurance, and not its source. The new-covenant way of assurance is by the witness of the Spirit. But, on the whole, Spurgeon was thinking of evidence to others:

A man over there says he is elect. He gets drunk. Yes, you are elect by the devil, sir; that is about your only election. Another man says: 'Blessed be God, I don't care about evidences a bit; I

am not so legal as you are!’ No, I dare say you are not, but you have no great reason to bless God about it, for, my dear friend, unless you have these evidences of a new birth take heed to yourself. ‘God is not mocked: whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap’. ‘Well’, says another, ‘but I think that doctrine of election is a very licentious doctrine’. Think on as long as you please, but please to bear me witness that as I have preached it today there is nothing licentious about it. Very likely you are licentious, and you would make the doctrine licentious, if you believed it, but ‘to the pure all things are pure’. He who receives God’s truth in his heart does not often pervert it and turn aside from it unto wicked ways. No man, let me repeat, has any right to believe himself called, unless his life be in the main consistent with his vocation, and he walk worthy of that whereunto he is called. Out upon an election that lets you live in sin! Away with it! Away with it! That was never the design of God’s word; and it never was the doctrine of Calvinists either. Though we have been lied against and our teachings perverted, we have always stood by this – that good works, though they do not procure nor in any degree merit salvation, yet are the necessary evidences of salvation, and unless they be in men the soul is still dead, uncalled and unrenewed. The nearer you live to Christ, the more you imitate him, the more your life is conformed to him, and the more simply you hang upon him by faith, the more certain you may be of your election in Christ and of your calling by his Holy Spirit. May the Holy One of Israel give you the sweet assurance of grace, by affording you ‘tokens for good’ in the graces which he enables you to manifest.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Peter is not calling believers to a harrowing self-examination over a considerable period of time (verse 8) to obtain assurance. Rather, he is calling them to be progressively sanctified, in order to demonstrate, to verify and to confirm the reality of their experience of the gospel to others, and to make sure they, themselves, persevere to the end. Paul, at the close of his life, could declare: ‘The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’ (2 Tim. 4:6-7). Remember Christ’s words to the church in Smyrna: ‘Be faithful, even to the point of death’ (Rev. 2:10). ‘The perseverance of the saints’ means what it says on the tin!

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<sup>7</sup> Sermon number 123.

And being assured certainly helps in that essential perseverance! Living a life of fear (what a travesty of the gospel!) – fear under the law for progressive sanctification, fear under progressive sanctification by the law for assurance – has nothing – nothing – to do with the gospel as revealed in the New Testament.

I appeal to all believers, therefore, who are on the treadmill of ‘legal assurance’: Come into the full benefits of Christ in the new covenant. Listen to the witness of the Spirit, the one who takes you to Christ,<sup>8</sup> tells you of your glorious standing in him – that you are, from the moment you trust Christ, positionally sanctified, justified, free from sin in God’s sight, spotless, beyond accusation, let alone condemnation. (See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12). This is the new-covenant way of assurance. And 2 Peter 1:10 does not speak against it. To make it do so is to badly misread the apostle.

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<sup>8</sup> See my *Assurance* pp23-59.



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We could approach this in another way, in a more fundamental way. Indeed, we should approach it in this other way. How does the new covenant compare to the old? For, as it is with the two covenants, so it is with the priests of the two covenants. Like covenant, like priest:

If perfection were through the levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law... And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For [God] testifies: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’. For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God... Now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, he says: ‘Behold, the days are coming’, says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them’, says the Lord. ‘For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days’, says the Lord: ‘I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying: “Know the Lord”, for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless

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deeds I will remember no more'. In that he says: 'A new covenant', he has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 7:11-19; 8: 6-13).<sup>1</sup>

Think for a moment about the old covenant. It was abolished by Christ, yes, but, make no mistake, the ceremony of the old economy, while it lasted, was glorious, jaw-dropping. Using the word in a 'good' sense, without any suggestion of the sexual, the old covenant was highly sensual; it appealed to the senses. As a physical (outward) covenant, it was resplendent to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree, stunning in all its magnificence. Of course it was, for it represented indescribable spiritual glories in physical signs and symbols, so that fallen man could catch at least a glimpse of those eternal verities. 'Resplendent' is the word. So much so, the performance of old-covenant ritual must have presented a breathtaking spectacle to the senses; to the eye, dazzling; a reverberating chorus to the ear; and an evocative stimulus to the nostrils.

Picture the scene. See in your mind's eye the temple buildings in all their glory. Take in the glint and gleam of gold. Stand open-mouthed at the size and magnificence of the courts of the Lord, their majestic splendour. Catch sight of the priests ministering in their multi-coloured robes; the riot of colour; the glittering apparatus of worship – the lampstand, the table with its consecrated bread, the curtains, the golden altar of incense, the gold jar, the carved cherubim, the bowls and basins. Much of it, of course, was hidden from the eyes of the majority, veiled in the Most Holy Place, seen only by the high priest once a year. But the splendour of the tabernacle and, even more, the temple, would have been 'exceeding magnificent' as David stipulated (1 Chron. 22:5, AV). (See, for instance, Ex. 25:1 – 31:11; 1 Kings 7:13 – 8:66). Listen to the wonderful music, both with voice and instrument, echoing round and round, swelling to the roof, wave upon wave. See and smell the billowing clouds of sweet incense ascending slowly but surely to God. Jaw-dropping is right!

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *The Priesthood of All Believers* pp105-123.



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Truly the old economy was glorious, impressive beyond words. The sight and sound and smell of it would have left us speechless if we had been there and seen it in all its glory, especially under Solomon.

In addition, of course, the milling crowd of attendants and priests, the bellowing beasts, the flowing blood, the stench of burning flesh, the incessant smoke – if not charming to western sensibilities – would have been, to say the least, indelibly impressive. I am sure that breathtaking old-covenant ritual and worship, once seen, heard and smelled in all its splendour, would not easily have been forgotten.

But what of the new covenant? How does it compare with the old? Why, there is no comparison between the two. Despite all I have just said, the old covenant had no glory at all when placed side by side with the new covenant with its priesthood of all believers. None at all! For all the outward glory of the old covenant, even under Solomon – especially under Solomon, for ‘a greater than Solomon is here’ (Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31) – the new is even more splendid, and more splendid by far. Outward and symbolic had been the old; inward and real is the new. The new-covenant system, in which all believers are priests, has far more glory than the old ever had or could have, even at its peak.

Let this sink in. The old covenant was glorious, but the new excels in glory. The old was like a worn-out garment or a dried-up wineskin; the new is... well, new! (Luke 5:36-38). The shadow has given way to the reality; the sketch to the finished painting; the photograph to the person; the virtual world of the telephone and internet to the reality and actuality of life.

I say it again: outward and symbolic had been the old; inward and real is the new. Although the actual second Jewish temple (built after return from exile) did not match the glory of Solomon’s original temple which had long since been destroyed, at the foundation of that second temple, God used the prophet to speak of its greater glory, by which, I am convinced, he meant the gospel, the new covenant (Ezra 3:10-13; Hag. 2:1-9). The glory of the second temple itself did not exceed the glory of Solomon’s temple. But the gospel does! “‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former’”, says the LORD of hosts. “And

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in this place I will give peace”, says the LORD of hosts’ (Hag. 2:9).

Rome’s worship is based on the old covenant. But not all the so-called splendour and dazzle of Rome, besides being erroneous and wicked, can compare to new-covenant worship. Such is the crass folly – if nothing worse – of Rome. I am not saying that Rome has actually gone back to the old covenant. I am thinking of its priestcraft, its fascination with the external, its devotion to incense, altars, robes and candles, the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass, its love of hierarchy, and so on. From the time of Cyprian, it has gone back again and again to the old covenant for many of its practices – when not going to the pagans! And Rome is far from alone in this!<sup>2</sup>

The fact is, the more emphasis on the outward and physical, the less on the spiritual. The more candles upon an altar, the less light. The more robes, the less thought for the robe of Christ’s righteousness. The more altars, and the more ornate they are, the less room for the true altar (Heb. 13:10) and Christ’s sacrifice. The more Roman priests elevate ‘the host’, the more they denigrate Christ.

Getting back to Scripture, even though the old covenant was good, God has set up a better (Heb. 8:7). The new covenant exceeds the old in glory. Why? How? The new covenant is more glorious than the old because, principally, of the difference in the nature and the end of the covenant. The old covenant, ‘the law of sin and death’ (Rom. 8:2), was a covenant of condemnation, ‘the ministry of death’ (2 Cor. 3:7); the new is a covenant of life and the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8). The new is founded on better promises (Heb. 8:6) and has a better sacrifice (Heb. 9:23). With the death of Christ, the old became out-of-date and obsolete (Heb. 8:13). The old way was with ‘glory’, it is true, but ‘the ministry of the Spirit’ is even ‘more glorious’:

If the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even

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<sup>2</sup> I have said much more about this in my *Pastor*.

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what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

In short, as covenant, so priesthood. The old – both covenant and priesthood – was good, but with the coming of Christ and his triumph at Calvary, it became out-of-date, was fulfilled and abolished. Like the veil, it has been torn down, finished. Now we have the priesthood of Christ. And in company with that, we have the priesthood of all believers. This new-covenant priesthood is far more glorious.

The question is: How, in detail, is the priesthood of believers more glorious than the levitical priesthood? In what ways is the new covenant so much better than the old? In eight ways. I do not pretend, of course, that these exist in eight watertight compartments. There is considerable overlap. But for ease of understanding, I will try to separate them in this way.

### ***1. The old covenant was a covenant of condemnation; the new is a covenant of life***

I have far more to say on this in my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*, but for now let me just remind you, reader, of some of the salient, but stark, facts about the law; that is, the old covenant. Before I do, let me make a technical point. Though, strictly speaking, covenant and law are not identical, in practice, within the Bible and in theological discussions, the terms ‘covenant’ and ‘law’ are used virtually interchangeably (see the letter to the Hebrews; in particular, say, Heb. 9:15-22), and often references to covenant will include references to ordinances or commandments or regulations (Heb. 9:1, for instance). Strictly, ‘covenant’ refers to relationship, whereas ‘law’ speaks of requirements that influence the relationship. But I will use the terms as interchangeable.

To go on with the listing of the stark features of the law: One offence under the old covenant, under the law, brought guilt and condemnation to the sinner as though he had broken all the commandments (Jas. 2:10). In turn, this had dreadful consequences: ‘For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does

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not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them” (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26). The curses were severe (Deut. 28:15-68; 29:1-29). The law was inexorable. It always condemned every offender; it could do no other, since it was ‘the letter [which] kills... the ministry of death... the ministry of condemnation’ (2 Cor. 3:6-9; see also Gal. 3:13,19-25; 4:1-3,21,24-25; 5:16-21).

Indeed, God’s *purpose* in giving the law was all of a piece with this: ‘By the law is the knowledge of sin... The law entered that the offence might abound’ (Rom. 3:20; 5:20; see John 9:39-41; 15:22-25; Rom. 4:15), and by it God took away all excuse (Rom. 3:19); the law turned sin into transgression (Rom. 4:15; 5:13).

What is more, because of the weakness of the flesh, the law incited rebellion against itself, incited transgression:

When we were in the flesh, the sinful passions... were aroused by the law... Sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law, sin was dead... but when the commandment came, sin revived... Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me... Sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good [that is, the law], so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful (Rom. 7:5-13).

In other words, ‘the law entered that the offence might abound’. Such is the old covenant. And its priesthood reflected it.

But what of the new? What a contrast! ‘The law entered that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more’ (Rom. 5:20). Note the ‘but’. How small a word – just a conjunction – yet what a wealth of meaning it holds within its three letters. ‘But’. God, through Moses, gave the law to make sin’s offence abound, but grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17), so that where sin abounded God might make his grace abound *much more*. I know the ‘but’ has been supplied in John 1:17, but how right the translators were to supply it. Note further how Paul piles on the hyperbole – ‘abound much more’.

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In closing this sub-section, I cannot resist re-quoting the extract above:

If the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

The old covenant was, beyond all question, a covenant, a ministry, of death and condemnation. Every time the priests sacrificed, they repeatedly reminded Israel of it.

The new, however, is a covenant of life and righteousness. It is the covenant of the Spirit.

### ***2. The old covenant was temporary; the new is eternal***

The old covenant, for all its glory, was only temporary; it was abolished with the coming of the Seed, Christ (Gal. 3:15-25; Heb. 7:11-28; 8:6-13). The new is eternal. It is not just for this age. No! It will last for ever (Gen. 17:7,13,19; 2 Sam. 23:5; Isa. 55:3; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26; Heb. 13:20, for instance). Even for ever. As a consequence, just as the old covenant itself was temporary – lasting only until the establishment of the new covenant under Christ – so its priesthood was temporary. But, in the new covenant, there is nothing temporary.

In particular, God's people will always be his priests. The priesthood of all believers will never be abolished. Never! Believers will always serve him as priests. Always, I stress, even throughout eternity. They are priests now, and they will be priests for ever. In glory, they will continue to be priests for ever engaged in the service of God (Rev. 7:13-15; 22:3). Christ is a priest for ever. 'He has a permanent priesthood' (Heb. 7:24, NIV), 'he... holds his priesthood permanently' (NASB). His priesthood is 'unchangeable' (Heb. 7:24). And so, in Christ, and through Christ, his saints are, and always will be, God's own priests, for ever.

### **3. The old covenant was material; the new is spiritual**

The old-covenant priests offered material sacrifices upon a physical altar. And those offerings and that altar were magnificent – in a material way, that is, but only in a material way. The new covenant, however, is a spiritual ministry. As such, its great high priest, Christ, infinitely exceeds Aaron in all his high-priestly splendour. Aaron, for all his glory, had none in comparison to Christ, none at all. Similarly, the offerings of the levitical priests (bulls and lambs, and so on) cannot be compared to Christ's one great and effectual sacrifice of himself (Heb. 9:11-14). Water, and the blood of a bull? The blood of Christ! The writer to the Hebrews:

Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come [footnote], with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands; that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all [time], having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh [under the old covenant], how much more [under the new covenant] shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:11-14).

There is no comparison between the offerings under the two covenants. None whatsoever.

And as Christ, so Christ's people – his priests. They exercise a ministry in the new covenant, a spiritual ministry, which exceeds by far the glory of that of the old, which was an outward ministry. Believers have more glory than the levitical priests, and their offerings have more glory than levitical sacrifices. The glory of the old ministry – and it had glory – was outward, and had no glory in comparison with the inward, spiritual glory of the new-covenant priesthood and ministry (2 Cor. 3:7-11). God demands, he seeks, true spiritual worship from true spiritual worshippers: 'The true worshippers... worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth' (John

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4:23-24). The old covenant, for all its glory, could never meet and satisfy this desire in God.

Just in case anyone doubts this – or, because of covenant theology (which I challenge),<sup>3</sup> disputes it – I am not saying that no one in the Old Testament was saved and worshipped God spiritually. Of course not! The fact is:

Although the likes of David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel... were living under the old covenant, they were, in truth, spiritual men and women of the new covenant by anticipation. Of course they spoke in old-covenant terms – they could do nothing else – but, reading their words in the light of the New Testament, we can see the spiritual meaning of what they were saying. They, too, in a measure, saw that spiritual meaning, and felt it.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the glory of the old covenant was, at best, dim, and – now that Christ has established the new covenant – the old has faded away (see 2 Cor. 3:11, NIV). It is in the new covenant that God through Christ has formed his people into a priesthood for the very purpose of satisfying his demand and desire for true spiritual worship from true spiritual worshippers (John 4:23-24). In Christ, he has established a body of priests who truly worship him in spirit, and offer true spiritual sacrifices. Addressing the Philippian believers, who were being mauled by Judaisers ('those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh', NIV), men who wanted to drag the saints back to the old covenant, and lock them into spiritual bondage, the apostle thundered: 'We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3:2-3). It is *we* – believers under the new covenant – it is *we* who are the true people of God, the true Israel, who truly and spiritually worship God!

In short, the newest believer approaches God with greater glory than Aaron himself ever did, even Aaron dressed in all his robes, bearing all his sacrifices. Indeed, he does. And he comes to

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<sup>3</sup> See 'Covenant Theology Tested' in my *New-Covenant Articles: Volume One*. (It may also be found on my Edocs link on David H J Gay Ministry [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) and on [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com)). See also my *Christ; Infant*.

<sup>4</sup> See my *Psalms 119*.

God adorned with greater glory than Solomon in all his royal vestments. If I may be permitted to accommodate Scripture: Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these (see Matt. 6:29). Believers truly are *royal* priests – a phenomenon which, as we have seen, could never have arisen under the Mosaic covenant (see 2 Chron. 26:16-21, for instance).

And that leads me on to the next point.

#### ***4. Believers are royal priests – an impossibility under the old covenant***

Let me repeat what I have just said: Believers truly are *royal* priests – a phenomenon which could never have arisen under the Mosaic covenant. What does ‘being kings’ mean?

For the believer, being a king is entirely a spiritual matter. Let me stress this by putting it in the negative. New Testament talk of the believer’s kingship has no physical connotation whatsoever. What appalling harm *that* notion has wrought! But in a spiritual sense, believers – being in Christ, in union with Christ – are, with him, *spiritual* priests. Equally, in Christ, they are *spiritual* lords, rulers and kings, and are so now, in this age.

For Christ *is* king – now. Judging by outward circumstances, it does not appear so. But he is. The prophets repeatedly foretold his kingship over an increasing and endless kingdom (Ps. 89:35-37; Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Dan. 2:44; 7:14,18,27; Zech. 9:9-10, and so on). Just before Christ’s birth, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that her ‘son... Jesus... will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end’ (Luke 1:31-33, NIV). Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on the donkey we know ‘took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet [Zech. 9:9]: “Say to the daughter of Zion, see, your king comes to you...”’ (Matt. 21:1-11). ‘The whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices... “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord”’ (Luke 19:37-40). In commissioning his people for their work – spreading the gospel, baptising converts, teaching them, and so on – Christ could claim: ‘All authority (power, AV) has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore... and



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lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:18-20). Power! Authority! Lordship! Christ is king, now, in this age! As Christ claimed (Luke 23:2-3) and the early church preached (Acts 17:7).

Christ is now *seated* in heaven, and this tells us of his *finished* sacrificial work (Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). But there is another aspect to it. Rulers, kings, sit on their thrones. Commoners stand in their presence. To remain seated, to be seated, speaks of power and authority, governance (1 Kings 22:19; Is. 6:1; Jer. 17:25; 22:4,30). Well, Christ is now seated at God's right hand as king, with authority, in power (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-36; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 3:21).

In Christ, believers, too, have power; they, too, are kings. How? God their Father ensures that all things are made to serve them for their good. They triumph over all circumstances, over all things – including trials, sufferings, afflictions, troubles and weakness. In all these things, they are more than conquerors. Even death itself is made to work for the good and glory of God's people. Oh, the grave will swallow them, but it will not be able to hold its prey. Death itself will be swallowed up! When Christ comes, then the triumphant chorus of all the elect shall resound: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 15:52-57).

That, of course, is yet to come. We sing of it now – by faith – but at that great day, faith will give way to experience. But even now, believers are conquerors and kings:

For if [since] by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17).

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified... In all these things [tribulation, distress,

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persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword] we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:28-39).

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).

Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14).

[The Lord] said to [Paul]: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness'. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

[God] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6).

You... have redeemed us to God by your blood... and have made us kings [or a kingdom] and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).

Some would regard those last two extracts from Revelation as prophecy concerning a coming age. While I am not blind to the *eternal* aspect of such passages, I am convinced they also apply to believers now, during this present age. Leaving that to one side, I do not for a moment deny that the complete working-out and fulfilment of the believer's kingship will be in eternity. Of course it will:

If we endure, we shall also reign with him (2 Tim. 2:12).

There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him (Jas. 1:12).

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There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads... And they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 22:3-5; see also, for instance, Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:5; Rev. 2:10).

Yes, the full realisation of the believer's kingship must await the eternal day. Nevertheless, even at this present time, believers are royal priests. They are kings, 'princes of the blood', now! Although Paul's general tone is ironical in the following passage, nevertheless the fundamental truth still stands: 'You have become kings', he told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:8, NIV). Of every believer it may be said, like Jacob who struggled and overcame, that he has 'power with God' (Gen. 32:28; Hos. 12:3-4; both AV). Ah! Power! What a word! Surprising as it may seem to many, the New Testament (covenant) makes 'power', the power of Christ by the Spirit of God, one of the leading characteristics of the experience of believers (see Acts 1:8; 4:7,33; 6:8; Rom. 15:13,19; 1 Cor. 2:4; 4:20; 5:4; 15:43; 2 Cor. 4:7; 12:9; 13:10 (AV); Eph. 1:19; 3:7,20; 6:10; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:11; 2:10; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:5; Rev. 2:26; 20:6). As one example of the believer's 'power with God', take the promise of power in prayer (John 14:13-14; 15:7,16; 16:23-24,26-28; 1 John 3:21-22; 5:14-15).

Nor must the corporate aspect of this be lost. Take Christ's promise of the power of the keys (Matt. 16:19). Rome limits this to Peter and thence to the Popes. Martin Luther and John Calvin, the latter citing Cyprian and Augustine, ascribed this power to the church. And this is certainly borne out by such passages as Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5, especially verses 4 and 5: 'When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over...' (NIV). Note, in the question of spiritual discipline, the power of an apostle, in concert with the assembly, is nothing less than the power of the Lord Christ himself who is gathered with the believers, presiding over them. (See also John 20:21-23; 2 Cor. 2:10; 13:3,10).

The point can be broadened beyond 'power'. Notice how the New Testament links the believer to words like 'boast, glory,

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confidence, triumph, joy inexpressible', and so on. Listen to the promise of Christ to his people, which promise he started to fulfil when, after he had ascended, he poured out his Holy Spirit:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father (John 14:12).

Hence, the believer's regal, noble – *royal* – status. Now! Although I have to confess it does not seem so in day-to-day terms, this *is* how Scripture speaks. *This* is the reality!

Thus we may justly say that, while the old covenant was glorious, it had no glory at all in this respect. No levitical priest could be royal. But now that Christ has established the new covenant, all believers are kings, all of them are all royal priests. Consequently, as Luther put it:

Who then can comprehend the lofty dignity of the Christian? By virtue of his royal power he rules over all things, death, life and sin, and through his priestly glory is omnipotent with God because he does the things God asks and desires; as it is written: 'He will fulfil the desire of those who fear him; he also will hear their cry and save them' [compare Phil. 4:13]. To this glory a man attains, certainly not by any works of his, but by faith alone.<sup>5</sup>

### ***5. The old covenant was outward; the new is inward***

The old covenant was an outward ministry. And it had a glory, a great glory – but only in that outward way. Yes, but, great as it was, it was still only outward. The new-covenant priesthood has a glory greater by far since it is a ministry of the heart, and inward.

Of course, even under the old covenant, God always desired the worship of the heart – 'behold, you desire truth in the inward parts' – and not the mere outward worship of form or ceremony (Deut. 13:3; 30:1-20; 1 Sam. 12:20,24; Ps. 15:2; 24:4; 51:6,10; Isa. 29:13; Jer. 4:4,14; Ezek. 11:19,21; 36:26, for instance). Aaron bore the names of the sons of Israel over his heart as he

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther: *Freedom*, St Matthias Press, London, 1997, p21; R.Paul Stevens: *The Other Six Days...*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2000, p189.

entered the holy place (Ex. 28:29-30). But he could only do it in a physical, outward and symbolic way. And that was when the old covenant was performed at its best. Too often, however, it was not at its best. As God had to complain through Isaiah, the Israelites ‘draw near with their mouths, and honour me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me’ (Isa. 29:13). Christ took up these words, saying they applied to the Jews in his day (Matt. 15:7-9).

What of believers in the new covenant? We have just read John 4:23-24 and Philippians 3:3. In the new covenant, God has entered into a spiritual relationship with spiritual men and women, as a consequence of which they offer, and he is pleased to receive, spiritual worship to him from the heart. Whereas the old was external, the new covenant is inward and spiritual.

I am not saying that Christ’s rebuke, drawn from Isaiah, does not apply to believers, or have relevance to us under the new covenant. Of course it does! Sadly, we, too, can carry out our worship and service of God in a carnal, outward or formal way. And if and when we do, then the cap fits and we must wear it. Do we not have to confess that our best efforts are tainted, and we need to repent? The point I am making, however, is that the old-covenant, *at its best*, was an outward covenant, whereas the new covenant is spiritual and inward. The spiritual worship, therefore, which God took so many pains to set up in the new covenant through Christ, far exceeds the glory of the old covenant with its priesthood and all its sacrifices.

## ***6. The old-covenant priesthood was for the few; the new is for all believers***

The old was a ministry carried out by the few for the many. Out of all Israel, only a relative few were priests. And they were all male, and restricted by age (Num. 8:24-25). But under the new covenant, every believer is a priest, with no starting age, and no retirement. And that includes females. Every believer, man or woman, young or old, is a priest. Every believer! In saying this, of course, I am not denying the biblical restriction of eldership and the public teaching and preaching ministry to brothers set apart by God (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9).

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Even so, women have a speaking and teaching role, within these New Testament confines (Acts 18:26; 1 Cor. 11:3-16, for instance). The point here, however, is that in the new covenant every believer, man or woman, is a priest. What a glorious change. Change? What a tremendous *advance*.

What is more, under the old covenant, the few ministered for the many. Now, under the new covenant, nobody performs religious exercises for the rest. Or should do! That is, they should *not* do! As I have already observed, there is not a trace of sacerdotalism about the priesthood of all believers. All God's people, as priests of the new covenant, all believers make their own sacrifices, and all offer their own worship and prayers. There is no dependence on any other creature; there is no delegation of these tasks to another. No man can do it for me. No man can do it better for me than I can myself. The believer comes directly to God through Christ, and he comes for himself.

I am not saying that believers cannot pray for one another. Of course not. But that is very different to one believer praying as a surrogate for another. I have read D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones to the effect that he never used books of devotion. 'I'd rather do my own devotions'. Quite right, too!

Thus, new-covenant priests exceed the glory of the priests of the old covenant. Alas, by adopting (albeit, in the overwhelming majority of cases, unknowingly) principles brought in by the Fathers, and accepting what has become known as 'the ministry', and resigning most of their spiritual activity to such a designated class of men, many believers are letting slip one of the greatest glories of the new covenant. And when they do, they are on the high road to sacerdotalism. This is of such importance, I will come back to it.

### ***7. The old covenant restricted entrance into the presence of God; the new opened the way to all believers***

As I have said, the old covenant must have presented a breathtaking spectacle. But there was a serious fly in its ointment. In that covenant, men could not come directly into the presence of God. The truth is, it was worse than that. Out of the select

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company of the priests, only one could be high priest at any one time, and he alone could enter the Most Holy Place, and that but once a year. And that, it must not be forgotten, was only a symbolic representation of the presence of God. He could not come to God himself. The way to God himself was not yet open to men; no, not even to the high priest!<sup>6</sup>

The writer to the Hebrews:

Into the second part, the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle [or temple] was still standing (Heb. 9:7-8).

Under the old covenant, the way to God was barred. Not only so. This was a vital part of the instruction that God was giving Israel under that covenant, the covenant of condemnation. Sin keeps men from God. Sin puts a barrier between men and God. And the sacrifices of the old covenant could never remove that barrier. Indeed, their continuous, repetitive nature constantly reinforced the sense of the barrier. An effective sacrifice was needed. Even so, although the old covenant did not provide it, its ceremonies illustrated, and pointed to, the way in which God would, at his appointed time, remove the barrier, break down the veil and throw open the way into his presence through the sacrifice of his Son.

So much for the old covenant. Its ceremonies and sacrifices spoke of the barrier between men and God. It reminded men of the way God addressed Israel at the giving of the law. Keep away! Curse! *That* was the message of Sinai, right from the start, even as the children of Israel were on the plain beneath the mount (Ex. 19:12-24; Heb. 12:18-21).

Now for the contrast! And what a contrast it is. Under Christ in the new covenant, the way is open for all believers to come unto God directly, not in any shadowy or symbolic manner, but

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<sup>6</sup> In saying this, I am not denying that, at times in the Old Testament, God appeared directly to men. Nor am I going back on what I have said about 'new-covenant men' in the old covenant. But the general point still stands.

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really, and to be welcomed into his presence (Heb. 12:22-24). ‘Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law’ (Gal. 3:13). The veil has been torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). What a powerful symbol. Torn! Not only is the way now open for sinners to come to God, the barrier having been removed. No! that barrier to God has been ‘torn’ away, and the gate thrown open, wide open. The curtain was not calmly removed, folded up and stowed away. No, it was ripped apart, and pulled down. And it was torn from top to bottom, from heaven to earth, from God to men. Man couldn’t do it. Man didn’t do it. God himself tore it down. God took the initiative. God displayed the power. The way is open!

And it is all in and through Christ:

Through [Christ] we... have access by one Spirit to the Father...  
In Christ Jesus our Lord... we have boldness and access with  
confidence through faith in him (Eph. 2:18; 3:11-12).

Moreover, because under the new covenant we now have a high priest who can ‘sympathise with our weaknesses’, we may at all times, at any time, pass through the torn veil – actually, pass through the open door – and come ‘boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need’ (Heb. 4:15-16). As the writer to the Hebrews later said:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:19-22).<sup>7</sup>

Isaac Watts certainly understood the contrast between the old and the new covenants in this regard, and rightly rejoiced in his membership of the new covenant:

*Curs’d be the man, for ever curs’d,  
That does one wilful sin commit;  
Death and damnation for the first,  
Without relief, and infinite.*

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<sup>7</sup> For more on Heb. 10:22, see my *Baptist* pp143,163,194,229-237,290.



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*Thus Sinai roars, and round the earth  
Thunder, and fire, and vengeance flings;  
But Jesus, thy dear gasping breath  
And Calvary, say gentler things:*

*'Pardon and grace, and boundless love,  
Streaming along a Saviour's blood;  
And life, and joy, and crowns above,  
Obtained by a dear bleeding God'.*

*Hark! How he prays (the charming sound  
Dwells on his dying lips): 'Forgive!'  
And every groan and gaping wound  
Cries: 'Father, let the rebels live!'*

*Go, ye that rest upon the law,  
And toil and seek salvation there,  
Look to the flame that Moses saw,  
And shrink, and tremble, and despair.*

*But I'll retire beneath the cross;  
Saviour, at thy dear feet I'll lie!  
And the keen sword that justice draws,  
Flaming and red, shall pass me by.*

This, then, is yet another way – and what a way it is! – in which, although the old covenant was glorious, it has no glory now by reason of the glory of the new which exceeds it.

***8. In the old covenant, the priestly work was done at special times and in special places; in the new, believers are (or should be) always exercising their ministry, and in all places***

The old-covenant ministry had to be performed at stated times and in special places. In the new, there are no stated times, there are no special places. Believers can carry out their ministry anywhere and at all times. They do. Or should do! 'In every place', God will receive pure worship that is offered to him; not just at Jerusalem (Mal. 1:11; John 4:21). The priesthood of believers is performed 'continually' (Heb. 13:15); in modern parlance, 24/7.

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I do not for a moment deny that Christ has instituted the Lord's day, and that churches meet at stated times. But the fact remains that under the new covenant, believers may approach God as priests at any and every time, and in any and every place.

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So, to answer the question: 'How do the two systems compare?' They don't. The two covenants, the old and the new, cannot be *compared*. The New Testament *contrasts* them; it does not merely *compare* them. The old is finished and gone, torn away, obsolete. The new has come, and it is superior in every way. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews 'put pen to paper' in order to prove it, and he marshalled overwhelming evidence in making his case. I will expand on this vital point in my forthcoming book on the law.

'Glory' is a word which belongs to, and describes, both covenants. But the glory of the old covenant has faded away to nothing in the light of the glory of the new, and it now has no glory at all in comparison with that which Christ has established. And the same goes for the priests of the two covenants. The glory of the priesthood which belongs to all believers under the Lord Christ exceeds by far the aaronic priesthood, even in all its glory under King Solomon. The new covenant, with its priesthood and its service, is a covenant of life, not condemnation. It is eternal, spiritual, inward, for all believers. It allows them, guarantees them, unrestricted access at all times to Almighty God himself. Indeed, God encourages and commands them to come to him at all times and in all places, assuring them of an unchangeable and undoubted welcome.

Charitie L. Bancroft put it admirably:

*Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea.  
A great high priest whose name is love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.*

*My name is graven on his hands,  
My name is written on his heart.*

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***I know that while in heaven he stands<sup>8</sup>  
No tongue can bid me thence depart.***

*When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see him there  
Who made an end of all my sin.*

*Because the sinless Saviour died  
My sinful soul is counted free.  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on him and pardon me.*

*Behold him there the risen Lamb,  
My perfect spotless righteousness,  
The great unchangeable I AM,  
The King of glory and of grace.*

*One with himself I cannot die.  
My soul is purchased by his blood,  
My life is hid with Christ on high,  
With Christ my Saviour and my God!*

In all these ways, the new covenant exceeds by far the glory of the old. In the same manner, and to the same extent, the glory of the new-covenant priesthood exceeds that of the old. And all believers – all believers – from the moment of their conversion and union with Christ, are fully-fledged priests of the Lord in the new covenant. This is one of the greatest glories of the new covenant that God has established in and through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> Would the hymn writer have preferred ‘appears’, but poetic licence, and all that? The truth is, as I have just explained, Christ now sits. But, let us not forget, Christ stood to receive Stephen (Acts 7:55-56).



## *The Priesthood of All Believers Does It Matter?*

I have published a fair amount of material on the priesthood of all believers, both in print and in preaching.<sup>1</sup> Some may wonder if it is necessary to look so closely into this subject, to make such a song and dance about it. Is it *that* important? What difference does it make? Have I been making a mountain out of a molehill?

A molehill? ‘The priesthood of believers’ a molehill? Whatever next! Is it important, indeed! It *is*! It is at the heart of the Christian life, a vital part of the new covenant. But, alas, ‘the priesthood of all believers’ is a doctrine which has been sadly neglected and forgotten by many Christians. Oh yes, lip service has been paid to it. Many have been ready to repeat ‘the priesthood of all believers’ as some kind of slogan. But how little serious thought has been given to it in detail. It is, I might say, a phrase often repeated, but rarely realised. I am not alone in placing a high value on the doctrine. Cyril Eastwood:

There is both need and room for a thorough examination of the basis, meaning and development of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It is time that the doctrine was taken out of the slogan category and set in its true context as an essential and determinative element in the theology of the church... The history of the Reformation, the history of Puritanism, and the history of the Evangelical Revival, are the story of the extent to which Christians have understood and applied the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>2</sup>

Too often, those who do have some concept of it think of it in terms of an *individual* thing, a personal thing; that is to say, I can go directly to God for myself without an intermediary. Excellent,

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *The Priesthood of All Believers* pp161-181.

<sup>2</sup> Cyril Eastwood: *The Priesthood Of All Believers: An Examination of the Doctrine from the Reformation to the Present Day*, The Epworth Press, London, 1960, ix, p241.

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of course, and entirely proper; a fundamental biblical principle, without question.

But the priesthood of all believers has a large part to play in the *corporate* life of believers, the church. Eastwood again: ‘The truths inherent in the doctrine should be incorporated in the worshipping life of the church’.<sup>3</sup> I would broaden this to ‘the entire life of the church’, unless ‘worship’ is defined as everything a believer engages in. Let me explain. Worship is something that every believer should be engaged in, and engaged in at all times, not just when attending ‘public worship’ in an institutional church – and being mostly passive when there! To put it mildly, this scriptural truth concerning worship, running, as it does, contrary to the ubiquitous, deadening, institutional Christendom which plagues us, is not always appreciated as it should be.

In casting this stone, I know I, too, live in this particular glass-house. To my confusion, alas, I have to confess that until I looked into the subject in the course of writing the original essay which started this particular ball rolling for me,<sup>4</sup> I had an abysmal lack of understanding and appreciation of the priesthood of all believers. I, myself, was guilty of using the phrase as little more than a slogan, a form of words virtually without content, not stopping to think what I meant by it. I simply had not realised how important a matter it is, and how far-reaching it is in practical terms. And the more I have worked on the material, the more I have come to see that it is a vital subject, and ought to have a far greater influence in the life of the Christian, and in his life with and among other believers, than it too often has.

I am saying all this despite the fewness of the number of direct scriptural references to the subject, and the corresponding lack of arguments along the lines of: ‘Because you are priests of the Lord, you should...’. In my *The Priesthood of All Believers* I tried to deal with both points, but I still recognise the objection.

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<sup>3</sup> Eastwood p249.

<sup>4</sup> In 1983, the late Sydney Wolstenholme and I were joint winners of a Reformed Essay Competition organised by the Sovereign Grace Union. That year, the S.G.U. published both essays in their magazine *Peace and Truth*.

Nevertheless, the important word in the objection is ‘direct’; *indirect* references and allusions abound (see, for instance, Rom. 12:1-8; 16:1-27; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; 14:1-39; 16:15-24; Eph. 4:1-16; Phil. 1:27 – 2:18; Col. 3:15-17; 1 Thess. 5:12-28 – and this is only a sample). As in so many doctrines (the person of Christ, for instance),<sup>5</sup> indirect references and allusions carry a great deal of weight; indeed, in some respects, they are more telling than direct references. So much for the objection.

‘The priesthood of all believers’, then, is of huge importance and has far-reaching consequences.

Let me set out these consequences in nine ways.

### ***1. ‘The priesthood of all believers’ is a biblical principle***

In the first place, the doctrine we are talking about is a biblical doctrine. That, on its own, should be more than enough to show its importance to the Christian. God has wasted no words in the Bible. He has not revealed any doctrine or principle that we can dismiss as unimportant. If we cannot see the relevance of any biblical doctrine, the fault is ours and we must put it right. Bible doctrines must be understood by Christians – and applied by them! The priesthood of all believers is no exception.

### ***2. ‘The priesthood of all believers’ reminds us that God is, that he must be worshipped, and that he can only be approached and worshipped by a priest***

The fact that God exists, and that he must be worshipped, is fundamental to our faith. Indeed, as I explained in the opening

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<sup>5</sup> Take the scores of indirect references to Christ’s deity. For example, those passages which link God and Christ in such a way that, if Christ is not God, the writer is playing with fire (John 5:16-47; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; see 3-11; Gal. 1:1,3; 1 Thess. 3:11; 2 Pet. 1:2 and many, many more). What mere man would need to say: ‘My Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28)? And so on. Compare Isa. 41:4; Rev. 1:8,11; 21:6; 22:13.

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chapter of my *The Priesthood*, 'First Principles',<sup>6</sup> this truth is basic to the human condition. God rightly expects and deserves glory from all his creation. Scripture makes clear that God demands recognition and acknowledgement from mankind. Far more, he demands submission, obedience and worship. We can go further. God *desires* such worship, as he has made known to us through his Son (John 4:23). But he will only be worshipped in the way that he has revealed – and that is by the principle of 'priesthood'.

I realise that men such as Noah and Abraham had dealings with God *before* the establishment of the levitical priesthood. May I remind you, reader, that in those same 'First Principles' I stressed this very fact. The point is, however, these men were acting as virtual priests themselves; they certainly offered sacrifice. And, although after the establishment of the Mosaic covenant, men such as David and Daniel prayed and worshipped God without always making formal use of levitical priests, those who had spiritual communion with God before the coming of Christ, had that communion under the new covenant, and, therefore, by virtue of the priesthood of Christ. 'Priesthood', I repeat, is essential.<sup>7</sup>

And this is the crux of the matter. God will not allow or receive any worship, however sincere or well intentioned, if it is not in obedience to his word (John 4:24). There is such a thing as true worship, and there is such a thing as false worship. And God dismisses pagan worship as abominable, the worship of 'demons' (1 Cor. 10:19-22). Sincere it might be, even well-intentioned, but it is, nevertheless, an abomination to God. Sincerity is not enough.

With that ringing in our ears, it is a truism to say that we cannot allow mistakes in this matter. Muddle is a luxury we

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<sup>6</sup> See my *The Priesthood of All Believers* pp9-46; *Priesthood: Our Need, God's Provision*. I apologise for the possible confusion caused by my choice of titles.

<sup>7</sup> This matter is so important, I published my *Priesthood: Our Need, God's Provision* as a free-standing booklet. See also my 'Priesthood: Our Need, God's Provision' (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com).



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cannot afford. The nature of true worship must be well understood and acted upon by all who profess to serve the living God. And this is precisely what the doctrine of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ deals with. If we wish to know how to come to God acceptably, this is the doctrine we have to grasp. Such is the measure of its importance. This is what it is about.

Priestly sacrifice is at the root of all acceptable worship of God; priestly sacrifice is its basis. God has revealed that he will only be worshipped in this way; he will receive the approaches only of those who come as priests bearing acceptable sacrifices. That, surely, as I have just argued, requires no proof as far as the Old Testament is concerned. It is self-evident; it is written plainly across the entire volume from Genesis to Malachi, both before and after the setting up of the old covenant. In both epochs, God could only be approached by means of acceptable sacrifices in the hands of a priest, and both had to be as appointed by him.

But the same is true of the New Testament. God does not suddenly change in between the two Testaments. An important principle is involved here: I am talking about what is known as the continuity/discontinuity debate. Let me pause to say a little more about it.

### ***The continuity/discontinuity debate***

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about this topic, a misunderstanding which leads to a severe distortion of Scripture. Maybe I should put it the other way round. Many impose their theological template on Scripture, and, in so doing, warp biblical doctrine to make it fit their system. It all hinges on the words ‘testament’ and ‘covenant’. A nice point of translation from the Greek arises – should we be talking about *covenant* or *testament*? Almost certainly, the former. The two Testaments should have been called the Old and New *Covenants*. And in the text itself, *covenant* should have almost always have been used instead of *testament*, since it would have more truly conveyed the (almost-universal) meaning of the word to readers of the English Bible.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Heb. 9:16-17 is the *only* place where *testament* is the right translation; both the NIV and ESV happily use *will*. In 2 Cor. 3:14, I disagree with NKJV and AV; see NIV, NASB and ESV. Gal. 3:15 could be either –

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The two Testaments are strictly continuous (apart from the 400 year gap), but the two covenants are radically different, and have to be contrasted by us because they are contrasted in Scripture. The one, the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant, was the covenant of the flesh, outward, a shadow, ineffective, condemning, killing, a covenant of death, a temporary covenant which was fulfilled by Christ and abolished because it was weak and useless. The other covenant, the new covenant, is superior in that it is spiritual, of the Spirit, inward, the reality, effective, saving and permanent. While the Reformed want to talk in terms of the continuity of the two Testaments, this, in fact, is virtually irrelevant in this debate. What really matters is the fundamental disjoint of the two covenants. See John 1:17; Romans 8:3; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 7:12,18,22,28; 8:7-13. This is precisely what the Reformed will not face up to. They will insist on imposing their covenant-theology template on Scripture. It is this that lies at the heart of the disagreement between new-covenant theologians and covenant theologians.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, I say again, God does not suddenly change in between the two Testaments. Nor has he changed in the covenants. Though he has abolished the old covenant, this is because in Christ he fulfilled the old, and therefore abolished it. Christ brought in the reality having fulfilled the shadow (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 8:1-4; 10:4-5; 2 Cor. 3:1 – 4:6; Gal. 3:1 – 4:7; 4:21 – 5:1; Heb. 7:11 – 8:13; 10:1-18). This, God always intended! And priesthood runs throughout both covenants, old and new, and is vital to both (Heb. 7:11-22). God himself has not changed. One of the last things that God said as he drew the Old Testament to a close, re-emphasises this very point: ‘I am the LORD, I do not change’ (Mal. 3:6). In particular, in that closing book of the Old

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but ‘covenant’ is the better. Speaking historically, the original use of ‘new testament’ was for the new covenant. It was only in the 3rd century that ‘New Testament’, as we now use it, became widespread. Indeed, my AV consistently uses small case for both ‘old testament’ and ‘new testament’. See my *Christ* pp79,374-378.

<sup>9</sup> For more on this, see my *Christ*; ‘Covenant Theology Tested’ in my *New-Covenant Articles: Volume One*; and under my eDocs link on David H J Gay [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com); [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com).

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Testament, God, through the prophet, addressed the priests, demanding reformation of their observance of the priesthood, insisting on his people's return to Scripture and obedience to it. And he made sure that they all got the point. He had revealed his word, and he was *not* going to change his mind. *They* had to change *their* ways, and come back to his law. He was not going to tamper with it to come to terms with their sin: 'I am the LORD, I do not change'. Men change; God does not. We are changeable; God is not.

'I am the LORD, I do not change'. Very well. Just as in the Old Testament he demanded sacrificial worship and priestly service in obedience to his revealed will in Scripture, so he does in the New. And still he does today. We have seen that all God's people are priests. God has elected, redeemed, called, justified and sanctified them to make them such, and he has revealed the nature of their sacrificial work in his word. Indeed, it is only those brought to saving faith, and so made priests, who can worship God in a way that is acceptable to him.

That being the case, we must come to terms with this 'priesthood'. We must get a grip on it. It must get a grip on us. It is not something of secondary importance. It is vital. Nothing could be more important. How can we approach God? How can I be saved? Priesthood is at the heart of the answer; the priesthood of Christ, his person and work. Not only that. The nature of true worship and service is involved. And is that secondary? Now 'priesthood' is at the heart of that also. If we do not understand what is involved in 'the priesthood of all believers', we are attempting to worship God in the dark. There is no need of it. It is wrong to do it. God has made himself very clear on this matter, and it is a sin if we do not apply our mind to the Bible to find out what God is teaching us. Furthermore, it is our duty to study God's word, and then put its doctrine into practice.

### ***3. 'The priesthood of all believers' destroys sacerdotalism***

Another very important consequence of the doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers' is that it destroys the error of sacerdotalism. I make no apology for returning to this subject

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once more.<sup>10</sup> Sacerdotalism is endemic. Sacerdotalism is the delegation of our worship into the hands of others, who we feel are better able, more qualified, to carry it out for us. In such a system, worship is a task that is best left to a special class – priests. Called by various names they may be, but that is what they are – professional priests. Hence arose the distinction between the clergy and the laity. The clergy do the spiritual, while the laity are largely passive and have the spiritual done to and for them by the clergy.

This special class, this clergy can be given various names. But call them by what names men will, disguise it as much as they like, such a class has only one real name – ‘priests’. John Milton, 350 years ago, spotted it with his ‘new presbyter – old priest writ large’. Sometimes such clerical men are quite openly called ‘priests’, and then the evil nonsense is easy to spot. But the error is present even when hidden by use of more acceptable names. Those in this clerical class are variously called ‘ministers’, ‘elders’ or ‘pastors’. But are these not biblical words? Yes, they are. But that does not prevent them from being mis-used. As they are, as I will argue more fully in a forthcoming work. The root of the trouble is that when we read these biblical words, time and again we read them through glasses tinted by 1500 years of Christendom. But we must not assume that Christendom’s view of ‘pastor’ and ‘minister’ is the biblical view. Whatever else it is, it most certainly is not that! And Christendom’s view can so easily drift into ‘clericalism’. It has, times without number. And it has not always ‘drifted’ into it; it has been ‘driven’ into it!

‘Clericalism? Too frequently, believers think of their ministers as those more qualified to worship than they are; they are better able to approach God. And too many believers seem to want to leave their worship – and more – in the hands of this special class. Moreover, too many men, who ought to know better, are willing to let themselves be called – even choose to be called, and try to defend being called – ‘reverend’ or some such. I know that howls of protest will arise on reading this. Nevertheless, I stand by my assertion. There is an inflated view of ‘the ministry’ today,

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<sup>10</sup> I have written about it in several of my works. See, for instance, my *Baptist; Infant; No Sacerdotalism*.

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and, chicken and egg, it has assumed a role, a status, a structure, never envisaged in the New Testament. Most believers cannot think of ‘ministry’ in any other way than a designated class of ordained men. In a word, clergy!<sup>11</sup>

Such an attitude is on the high road to sacerdotalism. And sacerdotalism is far more widespread than many think.<sup>12</sup>

This error is nonsense, dangerous and sinful nonsense. All believers are priests. There is no such thing as a special class of acceptable or higher worshippers; nor anything like it. No class distinction exists among believers. No believer is more qualified to worship God than the rest. There is no clergy/laity split. The notion is an invention of the Fathers which was set in concrete by the Church of Rome. It was kept up by the Reformers, and it has not gone away. Still it pervades the thinking of most believers today.

And it stands in direct contradiction of a vital biblical principle; namely, that the spiritual worship and the sacrifice offered to God by every believer, even the weakest and newest believer, is as acceptable to him as the worship of the most advanced and most mature believer. Any notion that, perhaps, some men are better qualified to worship and have more responsibility than others in this area is abominable to the Lord. Abominable, I repeat. Christians are not divided into two groups – professional worshippers or priests, and the rest. All believers are priests.

Allied to this is the objectionable, utterly wrong, practice adopted by some (even Reformed; perhaps, especially, Reformed) ministers using the aaronic priestly blessing as it stands (Num. 6:22-27) – with its repeated use of the priestly ‘you’ – when closing a service. Right it was, of course, under the old covenant, for a priest to bestow a blessing, *but not for us today under the new covenant*. None of us today can ‘bless’ another. Worse still is it, as I have witnessed, for a Reformed Baptist minister – who, incidentally, has the most decided anti-papist views, and certainly has not been guilty of hiding them under any bushel – to raise his arms above the congregation, *the palms of*

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

<sup>12</sup> See my *Pastor*.

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*his hands facing us*, as he pronounces the words. He gave the distinct impression to more than one person that he thought he *was* blessing the congregation, not *asking* for a blessing upon us all – including himself. I know the man has been told of it (not by me!), but it has made no difference. He continues the practice. Nevertheless, it smacks of sacerdotalism; it is sacerdotalism. It is an abominable abuse.<sup>13</sup>

Do such men not fear they might be trespassing on Christ's prerogative (Luke 24:50)? Or, worse, are they aping him? No man today has this right or power. If 2 Corinthians 13:14 is thought to justify it – though it needs proof that Paul was not simply *praying* there – it must not be forgotten that it was an *apostle* pronouncing the blessing. In any case, I do not think Paul was pronouncing a blessing. He was asking, praying for, wishing for, hoping for, the Corinthians to feel the sense of, the enjoyment of, the triune God's blessing: 'May' – note the word – 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all' (NIV). Compare Romans 1:7; 15:13; 16:20,25-27; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 16:23; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3-5; 6:18, for instance. There are many other examples. As above, I do not accept that any man has the right – or power – to bless another today. The proper understanding of the priesthood of all believers would put a stop to the nonsense at once. There is all the difference in asking for a blessing, and pronouncing one.

### ***4. 'The priesthood of all believers' is another way of expressing the biblical principle of an 'all-body ministry' in the church***

Very closely linked to the last point – indeed, in a sense, it is the same point viewed the other way about – is the fact that the emphasis in the Bible is on the total involvement of believers in the worship and service of God. Routinely today, there seems to

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<sup>13</sup> Contrary to Spurgeon (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit... 1871*, Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1872, pp242-244). I think he was much closer to the truth of it a year later (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit... 1872*, Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1873, pp625-626).

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be a notion that church life, if not Christianity itself, is, for the majority, a 'spectator sport'. A few get 'involved' – they are especially 'keen' – while the majority can watch (and criticise) from the safety of the sidelines. But God's word cuts right across all such sinful goings-on. He stipulates that *all* his people must be totally involved in his service and worship. All are priests. 'The priesthood of *all* believers'. *All* sacrifice. They all have a service to perform for him. There are no exceptions, no special cases. God has made all his people priests. Prayer (including public prayer meetings), gospel service, mutual instruction, reproof and edification, practical care of the saints, daily holiness and dedication to God, financial support of the gospel and its ministers, true spiritual humility... these are not just for the few, the fanatical super-saints, to be concerned about. They comprise the duty which God demands of *all* his people; he has made them *all* priests, and expects *all* of them to offer the sacrifices that he has commanded. There is no opting out, no holiday, no retirement. All God's people, all their days, carry the responsibilities and privileges of being priests; they all engage in priestly duty in serving God. Or should do. Even though God raises stated and recognised teachers in his church, all believers are, in the proper sense, teaching ministers; all are gifted and appointed by Christ so that they may mutually edify one another. This is their duty. This is their privilege. I am not suggesting that all are able to address a congregation, but no child of God is without some ability to pass on a word of experience, encouragement, instruction, comfort, reproof... to a fellow-believer. Let me emphasise this. Scripture is rich on the subject:

For as we have many members in one body, but all members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives... I... am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another (Rom. 12:3-8; 15:14).

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I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by him in all utterance and all knowledge... so that you come short in no gift... There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased (1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:1-40, especially 4-7,18).

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

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 cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted 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... To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers... Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:16-17).

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thess. 5:11).

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is



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gracious. Coming to him as 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... As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 2:2-5; 4:10-11).

You, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh (Jude 20-23).

Is that not proof enough?

It is, I say, abundantly clear: All the saints are ministers; all engage in ministry. Note the emphasis, ‘to each one’. To each believer, Christ gives a gift or gifts so that each might serve the church. These passages tell us that *all* the saints are ministers, *all* are engaged in the ministry. We know that apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors-and-teachers are given to the churches, and used by Christ, in order to equip the saints for this work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16). Let me emphasise it: Christ gives teachers to his people *for the very purpose of fitting believers – all of them – to engage in profitable ministry*. Filling believers’ heads (or notebooks) with facts, falls a long way short; a long way. Imagine, in a physical sense, always eating four square meals a day, and never doing any work, never doing anything productive with all the calories, protein, and so on, which has been taken in. The very suggestion is laughable. So it ought to be in a spiritual sense.

All believers need constant, consistent and continual teaching. And that teaching is designed (or ought to be designed) to prepare every believer to engage in ‘the ministry’. This ‘work of the ministry’ is something *all* the saints are to do. It is not something reserved for elders or deacons; certainly it is not confined to an ‘ordained’ minister.

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If I may pick just one verse from the above, may I stress: ‘Therefore comfort *each other* and edify *one another*, just as you also are doing’ (1 Thess. 5:11)? Could Paul say this to the majority of believers in the majority of churches today? I especially note the ‘just as you also are doing’. I am not talking about mere theory; ‘just as you also are doing’. Not ‘just as you used to do’; not ‘just as you once did’; not ‘just as you would like to do’. But ‘just as you also *are* doing’.

### **5. ‘The priesthood of all believers’ emphasises the biblical principle of self-denial**

The concept of priestly sacrifice cuts across another aspect of so much so-called gospel preaching – and, consequently, spiritual life – which is, alas, all too common these days. So much is said, or at least implied, from the pulpit on ‘get, get, get’ from God and the gospel. Sinners are told how much God will give them... they have nothing to lose... everything will be better and better. At least, that’s the impression which too often I am left with. The gospel has become man-centred. But notice Paul’s way of expressing himself. He wanted to preach the gospel to sinners – Gentile sinners, in particular – to see them converted: ‘to make the Gentiles obedient... I have fully preached the gospel of Christ’ (Rom. 15:18-19). To make them obedient, I stress, not merely to make them beneficiaries. Believers gain enormous – infinite – benefits from Christ, of course. But the biblical emphasis on obedience must not be muted. (See also Rom. 1:5; 2:8; 6:17; 10:16,21; 11:30-32; 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 3:18-19 with 4:6,11; 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:2,21-22; 2:7-8; 3:1; 4:17). For more on this, see my other works.

I say again, the Bible sets out the vast benefits of the gospel in all that the Lord has done and will do for his people. Even so, Scripture also tells us of God’s *demands* in the gospel. He requires repentance, turning from sin, total commitment, self-denial, the forsaking of the world and its ways as part of the cost of the gospel. And *these* demands upon sinners – God’s demands – *they* need emphasis, too. Joshua showed the right spirit when confronting the Israelites in his final address to them. Nevertheless, in reply they certainly showed no lack of self-

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confidence. Oh, they could serve the LORD; it was as easy as falling off a log, they thought! Not at all, retorted Joshua. 'You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins'. He warned the people that God would visit any disobedience with judgment. Still the Israelites protested that they would serve God. Very well! 'Is that what you think?' Joshua spelled out to Israel the terms of the covenant, and demanded their practical obedience in the forsaking of their idols (Josh. 24:14-25). Count the cost! Count the cost!

And not only Joshua. Jesus preached it to sinners, and so must we (Luke 14:25-33). And we must live like it (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Thess. 1:4-10). Daily (Luke 9:23, NIV).

And it is the doctrine and consequences of the priesthood of all believers which is a principal weapon in the constant battle against the dreadful effects of defective, if not false, teaching in this area. All believers are priests and have to sacrifice. Sacrifice! *That's* the word. Sacrifice is a part of the gospel. Christianity involves personal sacrifice. Give up nothing to become a Christian? Rubbish! 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new' (2 Cor. 5:17). All things! A gospel which promises everything at no cost to the sinner is not the gospel of Christ.

And there are preachers who do make it sound as if there is no cost involved in being a Christian. When I was a young believer, over fifty years ago, I seem to recall sinners and new converts, me among them, being assured from the pulpit that there was nothing to give up. Give up nothing? We should have been told we have to give up everything! If the assurance I was given in those days was commonplace, perhaps it might in part explain why things have gone so badly wrong this past half-century. A costless Christianity is not the Christianity of the Bible.

Of course, I have met the opposite end of the spectrum to the view I heard in those far-off days. I have altogether too often come across the notion that outward conformity produced by legalistic observance of man-made rules, minutely specified in all sorts of cultural areas, is the acid test of spirituality. I am not appealing for *that*! But I *am* thinking of the texts I quote in this

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section, calling for self-denial. Self-denial is a mark of a true believer.

Wait a minute! Isn't the gospel a gospel of *free* grace? Of course it is. Salvation is free to the sinner who repents and believes. Free! Not cheap! Free! Nevertheless, there is a cost, an enormous cost, and that cost was paid entirely by Christ. It cost him his life-blood, yielded up on the cross as a sacrifice to propitiate the wrath of God. Of course there is a cost. It fell upon the Lord Jesus.

But that's not what we are talking about. Not at all. We are concerned with the *consequences* of justification, not its *cause*. The notion of a costless Christianity, a costless sanctification, is grossly unbiblical. Speaking to believers, Paul could hardly have been more blunt:

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... Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness... Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual [or reasonable] act of worship (Rom. 6:13,19; 12:1, all NIV).

Those verses, especially Romans 12:1, follow on directly from the clearest and fullest setting out of the doctrine of grace. 'In view of God's mercy', said the apostle. Compare the way the doctrine of the first three chapters of the Ephesians leads to practical out-working in the last three chapters. So much for Paul. As Christ put it, a man has to deny himself (Luke 9:23-26). When Peter rightly told Christ: 'We have left all and followed you', Christ immediately responded with a glorious promise (Mark 10:28-30). But the fact remains; Peter and the other disciples *had* forsaken all for Christ. They 'left their nets and followed him' (Matt. 4:20), in more ways than one. Christ demands all. How recurrent and insistent was his command: 'Follow me' (Matt. 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21).

In light of this, we need to hear today, not quite so much on what we will get from the Lord, but a little more on how much he

demands of us. ‘He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me’ (Matt. 10:37-38). The doctrine of every believer being duty-bound to engage in priestly sacrifice, if well taught – and even better, if well digested and acted upon – would do much to restore the biblical emphasis. And it *is* the biblical emphasis. Look at the verses I have just quoted from Matthew; and that’s only Matthew!

The worldling is *self*-centred; the believer is, or should be, *God*-centred! If the believer thought more of himself as a priest of the Lord, it would go a long way towards rectifying this prevalent cult of self-gratification and self-centredness. Naturally, since self is every man’s great pope,<sup>14</sup> selfishness is widespread among unbelievers. Number one comes first! But it should not be so much as named among believers. Sadly, too often it is more than ‘named’!

## ***6. ‘The priesthood of all believers’ puts an end to the nonsense of dividing the believer’s life into the secular and the sacred***

When the believer rightly understands that he is a priest, and comes to grasp the nature of the sacrifices that he is expected to offer in the exercise of his ‘priesthood’, he will soon see what a mistake it is to try to divide his life into the sacred and the secular. It is all one, all of a piece. God takes account of his people’s lives in every aspect of them – home, church, family, job and relaxation. The believer is always a priest. And God calls the believer to look upon every part of his life as an acceptable spiritual sacrifice to him, if offered and lived in the way he has revealed. ‘Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God’ (1 Cor. 10:31). Every believer is a priest, devoted to God and his service.

And God requires his priests to be always about their duty. They are always to be engaged in offering their sacrifices. No part of the life of a believer is exempt from the service of God.

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<sup>14</sup> As Martin Luther put it: ‘I have within me the great pope, Self’ ([famousquotesandauthors.com/authors/martin\\_luther\\_quotes.html](http://famousquotesandauthors.com/authors/martin_luther_quotes.html)).

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There is no such thing as ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’ in the life of a Christian. All is dedicated to God and, therefore, sacred. The believer, himself, is to be dedicated to God. As a priest of God, the believer is never ‘off duty’. Once a priest, always a priest; always a priest, in every place, and at all times.

Now when a believer rightly appreciates that he is continually engaged in the worship of God as a priest, it adds indescribable dignity to his daily life and duty. What meaning it puts into his continued existence on earth! Humdrum at times it may seem to him, but it is never really so. All of it, he realises, is done as unto God, done as a priestly sacrifice to him, and is received by God himself as a sacrificial offering with which he is well pleased. Nothing in the believer’s life is small, trivial or insignificant. Nothing. All is dedicated to God.

As George Herbert put it:

*Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things thee to see,  
And what I do in anything  
To do it as for thee.*

*All may of thee partake:  
Nothing can be so mean,  
Which with this tincture – ‘for thy sake’ –  
Will not grow bright and clean.*

*A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine:  
Who sweeps a room as for thy laws,  
Makes that and th’action fine.*

*This is the famous stone  
That turneth all to gold;  
For that which God doth touch and own  
Cannot for less be told.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> *The Elixir* ([oremus.org/hymnal/t/t021.html](http://oremus.org/hymnal/t/t021.html)).

**7. *‘The priesthood of all believers’ means that Christ, and Christ only, comes between a believer and God, and brings the believer to God***

The doctrine of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ sets out one of the principal glories of the gospel. Which is? There is no one between a believer and his God – other than the Lord Jesus Christ. No man, no angel. In particular, no earthly priest.

This ties in very strongly with what I said a few moments ago about sacerdotalism. These two sections need to be read in tandem. What I said there applies here. In all this, I am not talking merely about Rome. Rome does not have a monopoly on popes and intermediaries; far from it.

The priesthood of all believers destroys the abominable notion that a believer needs an intermediary to bring him to Christ, and to gain access to God. How? Because every believer is a true priest of the Lord in his own right. Consequently, he stands in need of no other priest since he, himself, has been given the right of access to God. He does not have to torment himself, like Esther did when approaching King Ahasuerus (Esth. 4:11,16): Will the king receive me or not? Will I be executed? The believer knows – *knows*, I say – that God will always accept him. *Always*. Wherever a believer is, and whenever he wishes to come to God, he has an immediate entrance into the presence of the Most High, through his great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only does the believer have access to God through Christ – he is *in* Christ! He could not possibly be closer to God! Catesby Paget:

*So nigh, so very nigh to God,  
I cannot nearer be;  
For in the person of his Son,  
I am as near as he.*

Furthermore, not only does he have no need of another priest in addition to Christ – no one can ever block his way to God. ‘I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it’ (Rev. 3:8). God has opened the way of priestly access for all his people. No one can hinder them. Thus, I say again, the priesthood of all believers is one of the principal glories of the new covenant.

### **8. ‘The priesthood of all believers’ is a spur to godliness**

This doctrine of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ is a great spur to practical godliness. Let me explain. Am I a believer? If so, I am a priest of the Lord. A priest? Am I always a priest, engaged in the service of my God and King? Am I always on duty? Then how can I live an ungodly life? When tempted, how can I do this – whatever it is – and sin against my God (Gen. 39:9)? If my body is to be a living sacrifice to God, God who will only accept a clean sacrifice, what kind of life should I live? What kind of things should I avoid? Such questions, faithfully asked and answered, can only serve to promote true godliness of life.

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation (Ps. 24:3-5).

The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him... The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous (Prov. 15:8,29, NIV).

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matt. 5:8).

Holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

And when the believer sins? God has told us and assured us:

Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to him: ‘Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips’ (Hos. 14:2).

According to the man in the street, a priest is ‘a man of God’, and the world knows he should be a holy man. Witness the outrage felt at the scandalous abuse of children by papist priests, brought to public light at the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

Very well. The cap fits the Reformed and the evangelical Christian, as well as any Roman Catholic. Allowing the parlance, every believer is a priest, a man of God. Every believer surely realises that it is essential not to stain his testimony for Christ. If and when the believer falls, Christ’s reputation goes down with him. ‘If *that’s* your gospel, if *that’s* Christianity...’.

I recall Al Martin of New Jersey, who preached many times in the UK in the second half of the 20th century, saying that he



thought God had made him a minister because he knew his (Martin's) need to be kept from sin. The thought of bringing public disgrace to Christ, if he fell as a minister, served as a sharp spur to keeping him godly. All believers – each believer – should argue the same.

***9. 'The priesthood of all believers' is of the greatest encouragement to the believer***

This doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers' is of the greatest encouragement to the child of God. Every believer should remind himself, and remind himself frequently, that he is a priest of the Lord. 'I am a priest – a priest of God himself'. A royal priest. Think! What a privilege is this. What dignity God has placed upon his child and his worship. Poor, weak, helpless and hopeless sinners, elevated to the priesthood! I ask you! The weakest and rawest believer has this dignity, whatever his circumstances of life and experience, whatever his educational or class background, whatever his intellectual attainments – or lack of them! He has the certain knowledge that he and his worship are pleasing to Almighty God, if he presents himself and his worship to God in the way the Lord GOD has ordained.

The believer, quite rightly, may not have a very high regard for himself and his worship; he may not think it amounts to much. God says that it is a delight to him. What an encouragement is this to the child of God. How amazing it is to think – to think that the holy God, offended and angry because of my sin, has, nevertheless, by the work of Christ under the terms of the new covenant, taken me, and distinguished me by elevating me to the honour of the royal priesthood. What an encouragement, I say again. What a distinction the Almighty has placed upon me. To be a Christian is the greatest privilege in the world. A child of God is a royal priest of the Most High God.

Every believer has this distinction, this honour. Reader, if you are resting in Christ as your Lord and Saviour, *you* have this standing before God. Now. And always. And for ever. You are a priest – a priest of God Most High. Tell yourself now: I am, by God's grace, a royal priest.

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But, reader, if you do not know Christ as *your* Redeemer, does ‘the priesthood of all believers’ matter? Is it of any consequence? To you, I mean. Does it matter?

In one sense, no. You are not a believer. But, the truth is, if you are not a priest of God – in other words, if you are not a true believer – you dare not die! Does *that* matter? Not fit to die? You dare not die? Of course not. You are in no fit state to die and stand before God in the judgment – as you most certainly will:

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

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27).

[All] will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:5).

Do not miss the general, universal emphasis: ‘*All men everywhere...* appointed for *men*’, please note. And by ‘men’, of course, Scripture means ‘every human being’. Every human being will have to face God in judgment. Every one of us; including me, including you. We – all of us – shall have to give an account.

Notice the argument in Acts 17: ‘God... commands all men everywhere to repent, *because...*’. Because you will be judged one day soon, God commands you to repent. Now, since he commands you to repent, it must be his desire and pleasure that you do repent. That is why, all day long, he stretches out his hands to a disobedient and contrary people (Rom. 10:21). Oh, do not refuse! If you do, you know the consequences. Listen to Wisdom crying out to men (Prov. 1:20; 8:4) – that is, listen to Christ calling out to *you*:

Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a

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whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD, they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies (Prov. 1:24-31).

Reader, do not let this happen to you, I plead with you. What can you do? What should you do? Listen: ‘As it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many’ (Heb. 9:27-28). Do not miss the ‘as... so’. At the very least, this is telling you of God’s grace and willingness to save sinners. *As* – because – sinners are under appointment to die and face judgment, *so* God sent Christ to die as a sacrifice to save. Oh, I plead with you, do not rest until you know that Christ by his sacrifice has saved *you* from your sins! Listen to the following. No! Act upon it. Do it. Now:

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... We then, as workers together with him, also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain... Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1-2).

I ‘implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God’. Speaking to believers, the apostle explained:

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation... For he made him who knew no sin to be sin [or a sin offering] for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:19,21).

There is only one thing to do. Do it now! Repent and come to Christ at once. Come to him as the only priest whose sacrifice can save from sin. Come to Christ as the only priest and sacrifice who can bring *you* to God and save *you* from *your* sins. Repent of your sins, turn from them and turn to Christ, come to him and rest in his one sacrifice – the sacrifice of himself and his blood. If you do, you will be eternally saved, and saved now. Jesus said: ‘Come to me... and I will give you rest’ (Matt. 11:28). Again, he said:

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‘The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out’ (John 6:37). So... come! He will receive you!

What is more, you will at once become one of the priests of God in the new covenant. In fact, at that very moment, you will become the newest recruit to that glorious host. And if so, I invite you to go back to the beginning of this small book, and read it all over again. Read it, as it were, with a fresh eye – now that you are newly converted and, as such, have just become a member of that most select band of men and women on earth – the priesthood of all believers.

I think that the most appropriate way in which I can bring this article to a close, is to turn to the words of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, words he wrote as he drew near to the end of his letter – in which he so clearly set out the biblical doctrine of priesthood. I hope nobody runs away with the wrong impression when I quote him to say: ‘I appeal to you, brethren; bear with the word of exhortation’ (Heb. 13:22). I certainly do not imply any suggestion of importance about my work commensurate to that which attaches to his letter. No. But, in the spirit I have quoted him, I hope it will be received. ‘I appeal to you, brethren; bear with the word of exhortation’.

Finally, I turn back to the verses immediately before that. Having dealt so thoroughly with the new covenant compared to the old, and in every respect shown the glory of Christ, the superiority of Christ – ‘better’ is the key word (he uses it about a dozen times in his letter) – the writer now lifts his readers’ eyes and, it is to be hoped, their hearts, to Christ, earnestly desiring to move them to serve their glorious high priest, the one who died to save them, and was raised for their justification, and wrought their sanctification. He points them to the need for God, through his Spirit, to give them the grace to do it. He prays for it. In so doing, he addresses his readers, naturally, in the second person. Not writing with his authority, and wanting – needing – to include myself, I have taken the liberty of quoting the text in the first person:

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of

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the everlasting covenant, make [us] complete in every good work to do his will, working in [us] what is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).



## *The Four Laws of Romans 8:1-4*

As Paul declared to the Romans:

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 [has freed you] 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 [for] 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.<sup>1</sup>

Note the emphatic ‘therefore now’. Paul, seizing the reader’s (listener’s) attention, picks up his argument<sup>2</sup> from chapters 6 and 7:1-6, which stemmed from Romans 5:12-21, and stresses once again the ‘now’, the new age in the history of salvation, the new era inaugurated by Christ in his death and resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

Note also, once again, the intimate connection between justification – ‘no condemnation’ – and progressive sanctification<sup>4</sup> – those ‘who do not walk according to the flesh,

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ* pp172-176; see also pp460-464.

<sup>2</sup> And it is an argument! Take, for instance, the word *gar*, ‘therefore’, a word used by a man engaged in reasoning out an argument. In Rom. 8, it appears in verses 2,3,5,6 and 7 (twice). And that in addition to *dio ti*, ‘because’ (verse 7) and *de*, or *ei de*, ‘so’, ‘but’ or ‘and’ in verses 8,9 (twice), 10 (twice) and 11, besides other arguing words (*ara*, *dia*, *alla*, and so on) (‘then’, ‘on account of’, ‘but’, and so on). We are not dealing with isolated ‘proof-texts’!

<sup>3</sup> Not only is Paul’s opening in Rom. 8 emphatic, it is ungrammatical – for the same reason as his opening of Gal. 5 – which see. There is widespread disagreement about the precise import of the ‘therefore’. My view is as above. It does *not* refer to Rom. 7:25.

<sup>4</sup> 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

but according to the Spirit', and 'the righteous requirement of the law... fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'.<sup>5</sup> The 'in' – 'fulfilled *in* us' – shows that Paul has moved on from 'imputed' to 'imparted' righteousness. And the 'walk' shows we are firmly located in the realm of practical godliness, and not (merely) justification. Believers are not only freed from the condemnation of the law, but they have received the Spirit (Rom. 8:9) to live a life to the glory of God. We are dealing, therefore, with the believer's life in the Spirit, the life of one who is no longer condemned. In short, progressive sanctification.

The word 'law' appears four times in this passage; 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus', 'the law of sin and death', 'the law', and 'the righteous requirement of the law'. There is no question about the third and fourth; both refer to the Mosaic law.

But what of the first law, 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'? This law, 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' is said to be a liberating law – it 'has made me free' (Rom. 8:2). Therefore it cannot be the Mosaic law. *That* law was a law of bondage, condemning, killing (2 Cor. 3:6-9). *This* law 'has made me free from the law of sin and death' (Rom. 8:2). It cannot be the very same law!

And that leads to consideration of the second law, 'the law of sin and death' (Rom. 8:2), 'the law of sin' (Rom. 7:25). What law is that? Is it the dominion of sin, sin likened to, or personified as, a slave-master, the enslaving power which leads to death? Or is it 'the law of God' as it stimulates sin and condemns the sinner? I

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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.

<sup>5</sup> It makes no difference if, as is most likely, 'who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit' is not in Rom. 8:1; it is in Rom. 8:4. See NASB, NIV, NKJV footnote.



think the latter. After all, as the apostle said in the context, when the law of God struck home in his own heart, this is how it appeared to him, this is how it was – it aroused sin in him, deceived him, made him captive, and killed him (Rom. 7:5,7-11,13,23); it made him wretched (Rom. 7:24). The law of God is ‘the law of sin and death’, which fails utterly to bring peace (Rom. 8:1-8; see also Rom. 3:19; 4:15; 5:20-21; 7:7-25; 1 Cor. 15:56; 2 Cor. 3:7,9).<sup>6</sup>

Putting this together, ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ – that which liberates from the law of Moses – is clearly the antithesis of the law of God. The believer is now ‘in Christ Jesus’, whereas he was before ‘under the law’, under its rule and power. But no longer. His condition is the very opposite of being under the law; he is under grace. He was in the flesh, under the letter; he is now in the Spirit. He is under the principle of grace, the reign of grace, ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’. Paul is once again contrasting these two realms or reigns – the reign of law, letter, flesh and sin with the reign of grace, Spirit and spirit.

The apostle never tired of the theme! The believer is in the new covenant; a new principle or power reigns within him. The gospel, ‘the law of liberty’ (Jas. 1:25; 2:12), has, by the Holy Spirit, freed him from the old regime of law, sin and death.

By using the phrase, ‘the law of the Spirit’, Paul is engaging in word play – a favoured technique of his.<sup>7</sup> Here, he plays with the word *law*, contrasting the *law* of Moses – ‘the *law* of sin and death’ – with ‘the *law* of the Spirit of life’. Paul does this to highlight yet again that the Spirit, on the basis of Christ’s work,

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<sup>6</sup> Rom. 7:5,7-11 does not refer to the regenerate. Paul was speaking of his pre-regenerate days. The law did not *produce* sin in him, since it is good and spiritual (Rom. 7:7-16), but sin used the law to *arouse* sinful desire in him. It was sin – not the law – which was the cause of the trouble, producing death through the law. Note, as I have shown (see my *Christ* pp61-63,358-359), Reformed teachers wrongly argue that the law *restrains* the unregenerate from sin. Paul said he found it aroused sin in him!

<sup>7</sup> For more on Paul and his play on words, especially over ‘law’, see 1 Cor. 9:19-23. See also Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:3; 2 Thess. 3:11 (NIV); Philem. 10-11.

liberates the believer from the old age or realm of the law – both in its condemnation, and in its grip, its enslaving power.

The believer dare not go back under the law (Rom. 3:19 – 8:17; Gal. 3:10; 4:21-31). Its rule has gone for him (2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:25; 4:28 – 5:1; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14), lock, stock and barrel. The law is not made for a righteous man (1 Tim. 1:9). Just as he dare not go under it for justification, so he must not go under it for progressive sanctification. The law is obsolete (Heb. 8:13). Its time is over. The age of the law has passed. And, as for the age, so for the individual. Though the law is good in itself, of course, being the law of God, nevertheless it cannot handle the flesh, it cannot cope with the flesh, it cannot conquer the flesh. To put it bluntly, the flesh is too strong for it. The truth is, the flesh has so weakened the law, flesh is master, and thus law cannot conquer sin. And this is true not only for justification, but also for progressive sanctification; especially, in this context, progressive sanctification.<sup>8</sup>

The point is made every day. Governments are for ever passing new laws to try to change moral behaviour – but man immediately seeks a way round the law, finding the law stimulates him to break it, and so on. Take a child. Forbid him to look in a certain cupboard. What will he inevitably do? Take the speed limit. That which was intended to be the maximum becomes the minimum. Take tax laws. Some accountants sit up all night after the Budget preparing new strategies for their clients to avoid tax in line with the laws just announced. Examples are legion. As I write, the Prime Minister has just delivered a speech in which he has admitted the obvious; namely, that the Government (by passing laws) cannot stop men and women being

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<sup>8</sup> It has been suggested that Paul was here saying the opposite; namely, that through the Spirit, the law holds a new power which produces the believer's progressive sanctification. The verses cannot bear such an interpretation – except by drastically altering the translation of the text of Rom. 8:3; which is precisely what has been done. See my *Christ* p464.

obese. C.S.Lewis observed the obvious but largely ignored: ‘You cannot make men good by law’.<sup>9</sup>

And what is this ‘righteous requirement of the law’ (Rom. 8:4) which is fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit? It is not ‘the law’ itself, but ‘the righteous requirement of the law’, which Paul speaks of. The law, it seems, is not so important as that which it intends, its purpose, its end, its ‘righteous requirement’, which is ‘love’ (Gal. 5:13-16; 1 Tim. 1:5). Note also the singular, ‘requirement’, not ‘requirements’; ‘the righteous requirement of the law’ is its *one* great end or purpose. And it is, said Paul, this ‘righteous requirement of the law’ which is fulfilled in believers. The end of the law – ‘the commandment which was to bring life’ (Rom. 7:10) – the purpose of the law, its majestic goal, all that the law wants, all this is produced in those who live by the Spirit.

‘What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son... that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us’ (Rom. 8:3-4); that is, believers. Echoes here of Galatians 4:4-5.<sup>10</sup> By Christ’s work, ‘the righteous requirement of the law’ is ‘fulfilled in us’. ‘Fulfilled’, ‘fulfilled in us’! Clearly, this is something which God in Christ has done *for* and *in* believers, not something to be done *by* believers trying to keep the law. Paul here *describes* believers; he does not tell them to fulfil the law. God, by his Son, Christ Jesus, accomplished the fulfilment of the righteous requirement of the law, and it is this perfect obedience of Christ, his righteousness, which is imputed and imparted to believers. Thus Christ fulfilled the law, and believers have fulfilled it in him. Christ’s work imputed to them by the Spirit accomplishes their justification. Christ’s work being imparted to them by the Spirit accomplishes their progressive sanctification. And it is this progressive sanctification which is the evidence (to others) and fruit of the fulfilment of the righteous requirement of the law in believers in and by Christ. Do not miss the trinitarian emphasis in all this. In his doctrine, Paul has taken us up onto high ground.

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<sup>9</sup> C.S.Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, in *Selected Books*, HarperCollins, London, 1999, p367.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Christ* pp93-98.

This is what Paul speaks of here. Christ is the only one who has power to deal with sin. What the law cannot do, he has done. This is the contrast the apostle is making. He spells out what Christ did (and does), and what the law was (and is) too weak to do. The Spirit takes the place of the outward law in the life of the believer,<sup>11</sup> and thus enables the believer to ‘fulfil’ it. Christ did not abolish the law in the sense of ignoring or getting rid of its purpose. Quite the reverse! Christ, by the Spirit, accomplishes that very purpose in his people. Note how Paul does not say the law is now ‘obeyed’ or ‘kept’ or ‘done’ by believers – the usual way of talking about keeping the law – but he says that what the law requires is now ‘fulfilled’ in believers. Note the passive. Note the word itself: ‘fulfilled’! – a word of immense significance in New Testament terms. Christ set the tone right at the start: ‘Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled’ (Matt. 5:17-18). As Paul said in Galatians 5:14, the Spirit is the ‘fulfilment’ of the law, its goal, end or aim – which is, to bring about righteousness. The law, though holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7:12), being weak, could not bring about the righteousness that God required. It is the Spirit who has been given to believers in order to effect, to ‘fulfil’, the law in them, and so establish that righteousness which the law demanded but was unable to produce. Paul was not talking about ‘law-works’, law-observance, but conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29), renewal of mind so that the believer can live to God’s pleasure (Rom. 12:1-2). This is why Paul, when spelling out the details of the believer’s obedience (Rom. 12:1 – 15:13), declares that ‘the righteous requirement’ of the law is love of neighbour – which ‘fulfils’ the law (Rom. 13:8). Even though the occasion was ripe for the apostle to make the point if he wished, Paul does not speak of keeping dietary laws, for example – expressly ruling them out – but of ‘righteousness and peace, and

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<sup>11</sup> The believer is under Scripture, of course, but it is far better than that: he also has God’s law (that is, Christ’s law, the gospel, the entire word of God nuanced by the new covenant) written on his heart (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16).

joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17). Yes, 'fulfilled' is a massive New Testament word.

The believer is no longer guilty for his sins, no longer under condemnation. Yes, but far more is also true of him. The believer is now able to live a life pleasing to God; that is, a righteous life. Long before reaching Romans 8, Paul has taught that the law could never justify, that it could never take away guilt and condemnation, but now he is stressing something more. He is, once again, taking us ever higher – developing and enforcing what he has been setting out from Romans 6. 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' has enabled the believer, the man who is 'in Christ', to live 'not after the flesh', but 'after the Spirit'. He is no longer living 'under the law' but 'under grace', no longer 'in the flesh' but 'in the Spirit'. The purpose of the Father's plan, the design of Christ's redemption, and the culmination of the Spirit's work – which goal is one and the same – is not merely to have a forgiven people, a justified people. No! It is to have a fruitful people, a holy people, a people who glorify the triune God (Rom. 7:4,6; 8:4,8-14; Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Pet. 1:15-16, and many more); in other words, a progressively sanctified people. But just as the law cannot produce this justification, neither can it produce this progressive sanctification.

How sad it is that many Reformed commentators stop short of this in connection with the law. They are rightly adamant that the law cannot justify, but are unable to admit that it cannot sanctify (either positionally or progressively). They stress that justification and progressive sanctification can never be separated, yet too often they themselves separate them at this very point. But if only they would do as Scripture does, and keep the union between justification and progressive sanctification, it would signal the end of the debate concerning the believer and the law. The law is rendered obsolete, removed, eliminated, taken away (Heb. 8:13). The believer is no longer enslaved to it, or married to it, but he is enslaved and married to Christ. Thus the law is fulfilled in the believer. What the law could not do, Christ has done. What the law cannot do, Christ does. And what goes for justification goes equally for progressive sanctification. This is the teaching of Romans 6 – 8. How distressing it is to see this lost in a welter of

*The Four Laws of Romans 8:1-4*

petty-fogging, unscriptural get-out clauses such as ‘ceremonial law’, or ‘law as a covenant and not a rule’, and all the rest of it. Get-out clauses? Who wants to ‘get out’ of Paul’s magnificent, breath-taking argument of Romans 6 – 8? It could be argued that it is the peak of all biblical revelation! Let us rejoice in it!

## *What Is The Law?*

There is an enormous amount of confusion, not to say misinformation, in much that is said and written about ‘the law’.<sup>1</sup> Let me explain.

Most evangelicals think of ‘the law’ as a moral system encapsulated in the ten commandments.<sup>2</sup> This is a bad, bad mistake, and the source of much misunderstanding and trouble. True, ‘the ten commandments’ *is* a biblical phrase, but its use in Scripture is very rare, and the law is never defined in this way, never! The phrase ‘ten commandments’ occurs only three times in the entire Bible (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4), never once in the New Testament. Of course, the ‘tablets of stone’, and ‘the ministry... written and engraved on stones’ are mentioned in the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:3,7), but whether these are references exclusively to the ten commandments or to the entire Sinai covenant is debatable.

So where did the idea – that ‘the law’ means ‘the ten commandments’ – come from? It originated with Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, was developed by the Reformers, and reached its zenith in the following hundred years under the Puritans. It is still with us. And it confuses – and worse than confuses – the debate over the law right at the start.

How does the Bible speak of ‘the law’?

The two main words are *torah* (instruction)<sup>3</sup> in the Old Testament, and *nomos* in the New. Sometimes ‘the law’ refers to

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<sup>1</sup> Reader, you are advised to read this article before the next.

<sup>2</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ* pp25-26; see also pp214-218,336,481-483.

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of *torah* is ‘teaching’, ‘doctrine’, or ‘instruction’; the commonly accepted ‘law’ gives a wrong impression. We should, perhaps, think in terms of ‘custom, theory, guidance or system’ (see Wikipedia).

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the entire Scriptures;<sup>4</sup> sometimes the Old Testament;<sup>5</sup> sometimes the Pentateuch,<sup>6</sup> or Moses' teaching;<sup>7</sup> sometimes the ten commandments (but whether just the ten commandments is open to question);<sup>8</sup> sometimes a system or universal principle;<sup>9</sup> sometimes the Mosaic covenant;<sup>10</sup> sometimes several of these concepts coalesce.<sup>11</sup>

Take Romans 3:19 as a particular example: 'Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God'. The context tells us what 'the law' is here. It must refer to more than the ten commandments, and more than the Pentateuch. After all, in Romans 3:10-18, Paul quotes extensively from the Psalms, and from Ecclesiastes and Isaiah, all the while talking about 'the law'. Some, however, limit 'the law' of Romans 3:19 to what they call 'the moral law', the ten commandments. This is wrong. 'The law' here refers to the entire Old Testament, especially the Mosaic law.

To summarise: In Scripture, the word 'law' is capable of several meanings. It certainly is not always(!) the ten commandments. In fact, it overwhelmingly refers to *all* the Mosaic legislation. Let me give some evidence for what I say.

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<sup>4</sup> Ps. 19:7, for instance.

<sup>5</sup> John 10:34 quoting Ps. 82:6; John 12:34 alluding to Dan. 7:14; John 15:25 quoting Ps. 35:19 and 69:4; 1 Cor. 14:21 quoting Isa. 28:11-12, for instance.

<sup>6</sup> John 1:45; Luke 16:16; 24:44; Gal. 4:21, for instance.

<sup>7</sup> Josh. 1:7-8; 2 Kings 14:6; John 5:46; 1 Cor. 9:9, for instance. 1 Cor. 9:9 is the only place where Paul used the phrase, 'the law of Moses', probably meaning the five books of Moses.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. 7:7,14, for instance.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. 7:21,23; 8:2a, for instance. 'The law of faith' (Rom. 3:27) clearly means the *principle* of faith. See my *Christ* pp214-218,481-483.

<sup>10</sup> Deut. 5:1-3,5-22; 6:1; 9:9,11,15; 10:4-5,8, for instance. (I admit 'the law' does not appear in these verses – as a phrase – but they are clearly talking about it).

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 11:13; 12:5; John 1:17; 12:34, for instance.



## *What Is The Law?*

Moses spoke ‘every *precept* [*commandment*, NASB and NIV]... according to the *law*... saying: “This is the blood of the *covenant* which God has *commanded* you”... According to the *law* almost all things are purified with blood’ (Heb. 9:19-22). ‘Moses came and told the people all the *words* of the LORD and all the *judgments*... And Moses wrote all the *words* of the LORD... He took the book of the *covenant* and read [it]... And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said: “This is the blood of the *covenant* which the LORD has made with you according to all these *words*”’ (Ex. 24:3-8). What were these *words*, these *judgments*, this *covenant*, this *law*? Everything which God made known to the Hebrews leaving Egypt (Ex. 12 – 13), in the wilderness of Sinai (Ex. 15 – 16; 19:1 – 24:8, and far beyond), the *covenant* (Ex. 19:5), the words the LORD commanded (Ex. 19:7), the ten commandments (Ex. 20), the judgments (Ex. 21 – 23). Clearly, law, commandments, precepts, statutes, words of the LORD, judgments and covenant are all encompassed in the one word ‘law’. Indeed, ‘law’ includes virtually everything from Exodus 12 to the end of Deuteronomy (the renewal of the law in Moab), including Leviticus and Numbers.

In particular, when Paul spoke of ‘the law’, he almost always meant the Jewish law, the law of God given to Israel through Moses as recorded in the first five books of the Bible.

There is another point: Paul frequently used the word ‘law’ without the definite article – a fact which many readers of the English New Testament may not be aware of, since the translators have often introduced the definite article to make the text read ‘the law’, instead of what Paul actually wrote; that is, ‘law’. But the lack of the article, contrary to how it might seem, is Paul’s way of stressing his concept of law, not the opposite.

In short, ‘the law’ in Scripture really amounts to the revelation of God to Israel, principally through Moses on Sinai, including (but far from being restricted to) the ten commandments engraved on

### *What Is The Law?*

the two stone tablets. And this is the overriding meaning we should attach to ‘the law’.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In saying this, I except biblical prophecies of the new covenant. The law of the new covenant, the law of Christ, contrary to covenant theologians, most definitely is *not* the law of Moses. Jer. 31:32 (Heb. 8:9) expressly states that the new covenant is not like the old covenant. Consequently, but this is not the only reason, the new law in the new covenant is not like the old law of the old covenant. It is, in fact, very different! As for which ‘law’ it is that fulfils such prophecies, see my *Christ* pp299-321,543-555; ‘The Prophets and the New Covenant’ (under the eDocs link on David H J Gay [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com); [christmycovenant.com](http://christmycovenant.com)).

## ‘The Law’ in ‘The Law of Christ’

We know what ‘law’ is in ‘the law of Moses’,<sup>1</sup> but what about ‘law’ in ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2)?<sup>2</sup>

‘The law of Moses’ and ‘the law of Christ’ are (in the common parlance) very different beasts; that is, they are very different ‘entities’, ‘systems’, ‘regimes’. And they are poles apart, not only in content, but in their whole basis, approach, ethos, outlook, attitude and mindset. It is all to do with ‘Moses’ and ‘Christ’ (John 1:17). The two laws belong to two distinct, contrasting ages, and are very different ‘laws’. The law of Moses is a list of specific rules – the decalogue is *ten* commandments, after all. The law of Christ, however, is far wider, far bigger. And I am not thinking of a hundred commandments instead of ten! (Or, rather, a thousand commandments instead of the more-than six hundred in the Mosaic law!) The law of Christ is not a list at all. This is the point I am striving for. The law of Christ is a principle, an all-embracing principle. Anything more different to a list of rules, especially a list of ‘do not’s’, would be hard to imagine. Christ’s law is inflexible, but there is certain flexibility within it. Within limits, differences of judgment are allowed under Christ (see Rom. 14:1 – 15:7; Phil. 3:15-16, for instance). This is a remarkable aspect of the law of Christ. In general, law allows no room for conscience. In particular, the Mosaic law allows none. Summarising the essential difference between the two ‘laws’, the law of Moses and the law of Christ, we are talking about the difference between precept and principle.

The word ‘law’ takes different meanings in Scripture, according to the context.<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, ‘law’ often carries all the overtones of Jewish law, the *torah*, but not always. Sometimes it means ‘principle’ or something similar. Take ‘the law of faith’

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<sup>1</sup> See the previous article.

<sup>2</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ* pp214-218; see also pp336,481-483, adding a little more from other pages in that volume.

<sup>3</sup> See note 1.

(Rom. 3:27). I have already noted that Paul was not speaking about the 'law' of faith, in the sense of substituting faith in Christ for obedience to Mosaic commandments – in effect, one set of rules replaced by another. Rather, the idea is 'principle', the principle of faith. 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:2), is another example. Many teachers have rightly called on other words in trying to get to grips with this concept – 'principle', 'ordinance', 'norm', 'system', 'doctrine', 'teaching', 'order', 'method', 'demand', 'arrangement', 'force' or 'reign'.<sup>4</sup> Paul spoke of 'a pattern' (Phil. 3:17). Boasting is excluded, said Paul. 'By what law?' On what basis? By what principle? Not by substituting faith in Christ for works under Moses. No! Boasting is excluded by the fact that the concept of works, obedience to law, has gone, and has been replaced by a totally new principle or system or arrangement (Rom. 3:27-28). Indeed, it is a new age, 'the time of the new order' (Heb. 9:10, NIV). Law has been replaced by gospel.<sup>5</sup>

So why did Paul use 'law' in Romans 3:27, and speak of 'the law of faith'? Why did he not use something like 'principle'? Above all, why did he not coin a word? This is a most interesting question. It seems a contradiction in terms. 'The law of faith', I ask you! Obviously, the apostle had good reason for his choice.<sup>6</sup>

Could it be because of the high regard the Jews had for the law? Or because the apostle wanted to avoid the charge of novelty? Was it a Hebraism? Could it amount to nothing more than 'the doctrine or prescript of faith'? Could Paul have been using 'law' the way Greek-speaking Jews of the first century used

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<sup>4</sup> See my *Christ* pp279-298,481-527.

<sup>5</sup> See my *Christ* pp75-98,158-177,369-391,448-468; my 'Covenant Theology Tested' (eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com; also on christmycovenant.com).

<sup>6</sup> See my *Christ* pp314-320,552-555 for the close parallel with Paul's deliberate use of the term 'Israel' in 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16). This describes the people of the new covenant. The law of Moses was for Israel after the flesh. The law of Christ is for spiritual Israel, the Israel of God. Paul showed that both 'law' and 'Israel' have been taken over and *transformed* in the new covenant. And do not forget Paul's love of word play. I will say more on this.

it – in a general sense – just as we do today, when speaking of ‘the [so-called] law of averages’, ‘the laws of music’, ‘the law of unintended consequences’, ‘the law of diminishing returns’, and the like. As I say, it is a fascinating question: Why did Paul use the word ‘law’ in ‘the law of Christ’?

Almost certainly Paul was drawing upon the Septuagint, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek for Jews with no Hebrew, completed just over a hundred years before Christ, the version most often quoted in the New Testament. After all, this was the way the Greek-speaking Jews – who could not understand Hebrew – read or heard the Greek word for ‘law’. Did this matter? A great deal! They read it and *understood* it as a Greek word (*nomos*), not reading into it all the ideas and associations of the Hebrew word (*torah*) which it translated. Most of the scattered Jews of the time would have never read the law of Moses – they didn’t have a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures, and, at best, would have only heard it read. In any case, as I have explained, most of them couldn’t understand Hebrew. All this is highly relevant to Paul’s use of the word – and even more relevant to the way his non-Hebrew readers would have understood him.

And, of course, the same goes for us today. When Paul uses *nomos* in connection with the law of Moses, we should think in Jewish terms, but when used in connection with the law of Christ, we should think in this Greek way. In addition, the *torah* was more than rules and regulations.<sup>7</sup> And in the new covenant, Christ is the *torah* in that his teaching is his *nomos*, and he himself *in toto* reveals God and what he requires of his people.

Then again, we must remember, Paul loved word play. He used it with ‘law’ in Romans 3:27: ‘Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what *law*? [The *law*] of works? No, but by the *law* of faith’. He used it in Romans 8:2-4: ‘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

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<sup>7</sup> The meaning of *torah* is ‘teaching’, ‘doctrine’, or ‘instruction’; the commonly accepted ‘law’ gives a wrong impression. We should, perhaps, think in terms of ‘custom, theory, guidance or system’ (see Wikipedia).

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'. He used it in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, when he explained the way in which he approached sinners with the gospel, how he accommodated himself to his hearers, so that 'I might win the more'. In particular, he said: 'To those who are without *law*, [I became] as without *law* (not being without *law* towards God, but under *law* towards Christ), that I might win those who are without *law*'.<sup>8</sup> It is very likely, therefore, that when he spoke of being 'under law towards Christ', 'under Christ's law', Paul deliberately chose to use 'law', precisely because of the association his word play entails. In particular, the apostle engaged in word play in 'the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2). For 'law', we could also speak of the standard, the norm, the principle of Christ. (See earlier on 'the law of faith').

The law of Christ! What a staggering choice of phrase! As I have said, 'the law of Christ' is a seeming contradiction in terms. And look where the apostle coined it – at the end of Galatians! Galatians, of all places! After all he has said in the letter, it seems as though Paul must have blundered, forgotten himself and written an absurdity. It has been rightly called 'a breathtaking paradox'; 'the law of Christ', indeed! But of course the apostle hadn't blundered! He knew what he was doing! By using such provocative language, latching on to the word 'law' and attaching it to 'Christ', Paul was deliberately drawing attention to what he was saying. He was a teacher! He wanted the Galatians to understand and remember! And what was he saying? Bearing in mind Paul's entire argument throughout the first five chapters of the letter, 'the law of Christ' must be, at the very least, different to the law of Moses. I go further. It must be in stark contrast to the law of Moses.

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<sup>8</sup> Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:3; 2 Thess. 3:11 (NIV); Philem. 10-11 are further examples of word play. God himself does it; see Mic. 1:8-16. Christ did it – see below. See my *Christ* pp172-176,460-464 for comments on Rom. 8:1-4.

Word play. Christ himself engaged in it: 'Take my yoke upon you... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light', he said (Matt. 11:29-30).<sup>9</sup> The concept of a 'yoke' was current in such phrases as 'yoke of the *torah*' and 'yoke of the commandments'. Clearly, however, Christ was speaking of a new yoke, an altogether different kind of yoke – 'my yoke' – not the old yoke of Moses, nor the Mosaic law as expounded by Christ. Christ, I repeat, was speaking of his *own* law, not the Mosaic law reinterpreted. There is a clear contrast between Christ's yoke and the yoke of the law. The Jews would have recognised at once Christ's word play, and would have readily grasped the substitution he was claiming, the substitution of himself and his law in the place of Moses and his law. The contrast is clear. The *Didache*, probably dating from about 80-140, called Christ's commandments 'the Lord's yoke'. What a contrast there is between the two yokes. Christ's is easy (Matt. 11:30),<sup>10</sup> the opposite of Moses' (Acts 15:10,28; Gal. 5:1). An easy *yoke*? What is this? Yet another contradiction in terms.

And this raises the very point – the vital point – I am trying to make. Christ has his law, his yoke for his people, but this is not a new list of laws replacing the old list (although, of course, there are specific commands for believers to obey in the gospel; witness the abundance of such in the letters of the New Testament). In speaking of the law of Christ, Paul was not referring to a new set of ten commandments, using 'law' in the old sense. We are talking about the *new* covenant. The old law has been replaced by the new. And the phrase makes its appearance, remember, at the end of Galatians. The apostle, having resolutely stood up to the Judaisers, having endured personal stress in publicly rebuking Peter, and having taught the Galatians so thoroughly – all of which he had done in order to rescue believers from the bondage of the Mosaic law – would not, as he closed his letter, bind believers with an even tighter and heavier yoke. It would have been unthinkable! He was not setting out a new legalism with the commands of Moses replaced by the

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<sup>9</sup> See Christ's play on 'rock' in Matt. 16:18.

<sup>10</sup> Is there another word play here (in the Greek) between *chrētos* (easy) and *christos* (anointed, Christ)?

commands of Christ. For progressive sanctification,<sup>11</sup> what is wanted is not mere conformity to a set of rules, especially negative, but consecration, dedication and likeness to Christ.

In short, while the law of Christ is a real law, it is a *new* law, a law very unlike the law of Moses. Consequently, when we speak of Christ's *yoke*, 'the believers' *rule*', 'the *law* of Christ', we should not think in Jewish terms, of the *torah*. Rather, we should think in terms of the broader, fuller, first-century meaning of the Greek word *nomos*. This is the way to understand 'the law of Christ', since this was the way the non-Hebrew-speaking believers of the first century (the overwhelming majority) would have understood Paul's words, written in Greek. We must put the same overtones on 'the *law* of Christ' as they did, and not impose Jewish nuances on the phrase.

Paul saw Christ as the new Moses in a new covenant, teaching his own law, a new *torah*, with the idea of *torah* qualified as above. So it would be better to think of the law of Christ, not as a set of rules, commandments and prohibitions, but rather as a life-principle within the believer empowered by the Spirit of Christ. It is Christ's teaching, life, death, and resurrection, and the coming of his Spirit upon and in his people, and the deposit of all truth from Christ into which he led the apostles (John 14:26; 16:12-15), which is the believer's new *torah*, the law of Christ. The law of Christ is not a list. It is power! 'The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power' (1 Cor. 4:20, NIV).

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<sup>11</sup> 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.



### ***A vital principle***

In saying this, I would not be misunderstood. There are commands in the new covenant: a host of them! And we must maintain the union between the Spirit and the word. It is not a question of the Spirit or the Scriptures; it is not the Spirit above the Scriptures; it is the Spirit and the Scriptures! Indeed, in Christ there is more: in the new covenant, God not only gives his people the Scriptures, and also gives them his Spirit, but he writes his law – the gospel, Christ – on their hearts. The believer, therefore, is under all three, moved by all three, guided by all three: the Scriptures, the Spirit, and the law written in his heart, all three mutually calibrating each other,<sup>12</sup> and all three stirring the believer to assurance and progressive sanctification.

Douglas J. Moo:

Indeed, while not being ‘under the law’, [Paul] recognises a continuing obligation to ‘God’s law’, in the form of ‘Christ’s law’ (the Greek is *ennomos Christou*). The conceptualisation of this text provides as neat a summary of my view [Moo’s, and mine – DG] of the law as the New Testament affords. It suggests that ‘God’s law’ comes to his people in two forms: to Israel in the form of ‘law’, *torah*, and to Christians in the form of ‘Christ’s law’. Here we find the ‘new-covenant theology’ emphasis on two contrasting covenants worked out in terms of two different ‘laws’. But the key question remains: How different are they?

‘To answer this question’, Moo said, ‘we return to Galatians’; in particular, to Galatians 5:13 – 6:2. Moo went on:

To recapitulate: ...The teaching of the New Testament on the matter of the law of God is neatly summarised in the distinctions that Paul draws in 1 Cor. 9:20-21: the law of Moses, the *torah* (‘law’ simply), was given to the people of Israel to govern them until the coming of the Messiah; since his coming, the people of God are governed by the ‘law of Christ’. Biblical law, in other

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<sup>12</sup> As just one example, link Rom. 8:1-4,9 with Gal. 6:2 and 2 Tim. 3:15-16. See my *Christ* pp154,231-232,256-257, for instance.

words, is firmly attached to the temporal two-covenant structure that is the hallmark of 'new-covenant theology'.<sup>13</sup>

Moo again, now answering the question: 'What will guide and empower' believers – seeing they are not under the law? The answer, as he said, contains two components – the Spirit and, 'surprisingly, perhaps', the law.<sup>14</sup> Ah! But which law? Moo:

The other reference to 'law' in this concluding section of Galatians comes in Gal. 6:2... The interpretation of the phrase 'law of Christ' is central to my [Moo's and mine – DG] argument. Unfortunately, Paul provides little contextual information.<sup>15</sup> We have, however, already noticed that Paul uses similar language in 1 Cor. 9:21, where, the context suggests [it makes it plain!] 'the law of Christ' is distinguished from the Mosaic law. Coupled with the claim that Christians are no longer 'under the (Mosaic) law', this makes it unlikely [it rules out the possibility!] that the 'law of Christ' is the Mosaic law interpreted and fulfilled by Christ. Rather, the phrase is more likely [it makes it certain!] [to be] Paul's answer to those who might conclude that his law-free gospel provides no standards of guidance for believers.<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, Paul says, though no longer directly responsible to Moses' law, Christians are bound to Christ's law. In what does this 'law' consist? Since... Gal. 5:14..., the demand for love [must be] a central component of the 'law of Christ'. But it is unlikely that Paul confines the law to this demand alone, for, as we have seen, Paul also stresses in this context the fruit-bearing ministry of the Spirit. Coupled with the centrality of the Spirit in Paul's teaching about what it means to live as a Christian, this strongly suggests that the directing influence of the Spirit is an important part of this law of Christ... Jer. 31:31-34... Ezek. 36:26-27. It is more difficult to determine whether the law of Christ includes specific teachings and principles... I think it highly probable [it is certain!] that Paul

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<sup>13</sup> Douglas J. Moo: 'The Covenants and the Mosaic Law: The View from Galatians', Affinity Theological Study Conference: *The End of the Law?*, February, 2009, pp20,27.

<sup>14</sup> See above for the staggering nature of this phrase: 'the law of Christ'.

<sup>15</sup> Is it because the early believers knew full-well what the apostle was talking about?

<sup>16</sup> A routine – but false – accusation levelled against all who advocate new-covenant theology.

### *'The Law' in 'The Law of Christ'*

thought of the law of Christ as including within it teachings of Jesus and the apostolic witness, based on his life and teaching.

Moo, in part, quoting Richard N. Longenecker:

The law of Christ 'stands in Paul's thought for those prescriptive principles stemming from the heart of the gospel (usually embodied in the example and teachings of Jesus), which are meant to be applied to specific situations by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit, being always motivated and conditioned by love'. Does the 'law of Christ' include Mosaic commandants? Of course.<sup>17</sup>

On the whole, a fine statement, but, as so often, Moo could have been stronger at certain points. The biblical evidence is overwhelming – 'the law of Christ' cannot be confined to the ten commandments. It certainly cannot be encapsulated in any list. And while the believer is under the entirety of God's word – all of it, including the Mosaic law (all of it, not just the ten commandments!) as nuanced by the new covenant – he has God's Spirit moving him and enabling him to fulfil that word. Alas, this fulfilment will never be perfect in this life. Nevertheless, 'the righteous requirement'<sup>18</sup> of the law' *is* fulfilled in believers by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). The child of God is fully, perfectly, justified and positionally sanctified, he is assured by the witness of the Spirit, and he is being progressively sanctified by God's grace in the power of that self-same Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness. Furthermore, he is being transformed into Christ's likeness with ever-increasing glory now (2 Cor. 3:18, NIV), and will, at Christ's return, be absolutely glorified by being made into his Saviour's likeness (John 17:24; Rom. 8:29-30; 1 John 3:2-3).

This is what we must understand by 'the law' in 'the law of Christ'. To distort the law of Christ by mixing it with the law of Moses, thereby forging a hybrid, a mongrel sort of 'Mosaic law of Christ', is tragic. Sadly, it is commonly done, leading multitudes of believers into a gloomy valley, where a weary, relentless struggle leads to a sense of increasing failure. How very different is this to the spirit of the new covenant, with its

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<sup>17</sup> Moo pp21-22.

<sup>18</sup> The singular 'requirement' is what Paul wrote.

*'The Law' in 'The Law of Christ'*

sense of ever-increasing glory and inexpressible joy in a life of growing Christ-likeness (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:8-9).

## 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](http://sermonaudio.com))

JamesC. (Fallbrook, CA)

**Great Audio Book!** August 29, 2014

Thank you for providing this free audio book. I am benefiting greatly from the material in it. It is eye-opening – as radical as the biblical doctrine of election. I am seeing things that I once glossed over. Coming out of Way of the Master evangelism and Reformed thinking, the information in this book is causing a welcomed paradigm shift for me.

J. Duncan

\*\*\*\*\***Great!** October 7, 2014

I am becoming very impressed with Gay's writing. He uses and quotes a wide array of sources (demonstrating he is well versed with differing viewpoints), and most importantly, allows the Bible to guide his thinking. This book is largely a refutation of Covenant Theology, though Gay is not a dispensationalist (see last chapter). He mentions that, while he doesn't prefer to be labelled, many have said he would fit under 'New-Covenant Theology' in his biblical theology. I would agree. I was especially impressed by his demonstration of the new covenant along with its 'law' being the 'Law of Christ.' Many strong points are made demonstrating this is not simply the 'moral law' such as many covenant theologians (including 1689 Baptist federalists) hold. However, the bulk of the book was geared towards proving the subtitle of the book, that sanctification does

not come through the law, as taught by Calvin and many of the reformers. But, in case that last sentence was misleading, Gay believes (though I can't remember if it was explicitly stated) in the doctrines of grace (5 points of 'Calvinism'), although this doesn't have a major purpose in the book. A tremendous read for just \$1. I am looking forward to checking out more of his books, as most centre around this topic.

James

\*\*\*\*\***Paradigm-Shifting book!** October 14, 2014

I listened to the audio book on sermonaudio. This book really threw me for a loop since I was heavy into the Way of the Master 'Have you kept the 10 commandments?' Evangelism. It was so revolutionary to my thinking that I was left questioning what I really believed. The information helped tear my focus from the Law onto where it should be – Christ. The author does an excellent job of backing up his claims from Scripture. Through the author, the Spirit revealed to me things that were plain as day. I highly recommend this book.

