A PURITAN THEOLOGY

DOCTRINE FOR LIFE

JOEL R. BEEKE
& MARK JONES

“For more than half a century primary research on Puritan theologians and their teaching has been in full swing. Here now is a massive compendium of the findings, digested into sixty lively chapters. The authors’ expository skill will keep readers on their toes, and the Puritans’ own concern for godly living, which runs through everything, will send readers to their knees. This is a landmark book in every way.”

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“The Puritans are undoubtedly one of the most significant sources for theology that is both doctrinal and practical in equal measure. This massive volume by Joel Beeke and Mark Jones provides the reader with a comprehensive introduction to Puritan thought. It is a notable work of historical-theological synthesis and a book to which I will be returning again and again, both for scholarly reference and personal devotion. Simply an amazing achievement.”

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“Experiential theology begins with this—Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. It is personalized thus—He loved me and gave Himself for me. It can’t be studied in cold blood because of the grace that has delivered us from ignorance, shame, and hell. Who is the God who has done this? What am I that He should have done this for me? Theology answers these questions. Wrong answers will lead to wrong living. No body of men is more helpful in teaching the profoundest and yet the most accessible theology than the Puritans. They were lucid and passionate in explaining and applying what was true. This book will lead to deeper knowledge; it will also lead to greater love for Him who is the object of all true theology, the living God.”

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“Joel Beeke and Mark Jones are to be congratulated on the publication of this volume. They have collaborated to produce a book missing from Puritan studies: a systematization of *loci* and topics in Puritan theology. This collection of studies represents both a labor of spiritual love and a love of spiritual labor. It shows an extensive grasp of the relevant literature and will soon become the first stop for any serious inquiry into Puritan views on theological subjects. More than that, it will become a devotional tool in its own right, since Puritan theology was as much about enflaming the soul as about informing the mind. May it be used of God to enable us to love Him with heart, mind, soul, and strength, even as we love our Puritan forebears as ourselves!”

—IAIN D. CAMPBELL, *MINISTER OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, POINT, ISLE OF LEWIS, SCOTLAND*

“This is a remarkable book, invaluable for our study of the Puritans, but more than that, invaluable in making us Puritans ourselves, using the Bible and its theology the way our Father designed it for the transformation of our hearts and lives. Very clearly and very succinctly it arranges the great Puritan themes in contexts and sequences we can recognize. It brings us up to date on the relevant scholarship on the most

controversial of the themes and guides us carefully in evaluating that scholarship. I found this book especially helpful in showing us how to think in a Christ-centered way—something we talk much about but don't usually know what we are saying."

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"All serious-minded Christians will be thankful for the labor of love performed by Drs. Beeke and Jones in compiling *A Puritan Theology*. The book will be an excellent reference resource for all who study or teach theology or want to grasp what the Puritans thought or what contribution they made to a particular *loci* of theology. But since it is so well written, it also will be edifying for anyone who simply reads through it *seriatim*."

—JOSEPH A. PIPA JR., *PRESIDENT AND PROFESSOR OF HISTORICAL AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, GREENVILLE PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY*

"In *A Puritan Theology* Joel Beeke and Mark Jones help us to taste in one serving some of the best from the Puritan theological buffet on the Christian life. Many of us who have feasted sumptuously from these choice servants of God have stood helplessly as we have seen their prodigious production, wondering how we can have a feel of the entire culinary. Here is an answer to our prayers! The size of this book should not make you hesitate to join the feast. Rather, may it only whet your appetite to delve deeper into the kind of meal that has turned many spiritual infants into mature manhood in Christ."

—CONRAD MBEWE, *PASTOR OF KABWATA BAPTIST CHURCH, LUSAKA, ZAMBIA*

"At last! A book that addresses not simply a single Puritan writer or a single doctrine but that presents the breadth of Puritan theology, and does so not for professional theologians alone but for every believer who wants to know the blessing of this 'doctrine for life' in his own life. The authors do this not by giving their own summary of Puritan thought, but by presenting a great variety of Puritan thinkers and letting them speak for themselves, going to the primary sources and quoting them at length. This large volume represents a lifetime of research and reflection by authors who share the Puritan faith. It is a truly *magnum opus* that will soon become a standard textbook for its subject."

—ROBERT B. STRIMPLE, *PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, WESTMINSTER SEMINARY CALIFORNIA*

"A systematic theology, covering the main *loci* of doctrine, from a Puritan perspective, with insightful comment and analysis from two respected Puritan scholars of our time. What more needs to be said by way of commendation? A necessary text for seminarians and all serious students of theology."

—DEREK W. H. THOMAS, *PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY, REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY*

"In this volume the tremendous renaissance in Puritan studies that has been going since the 1960s finds its *magnum opus*, a truly fabulous resource for all who are interested in and love the Puritans. While nearly as exhaustive as one could wish for, it is also replete with chapters that detail the thought of individual Puritans. Without a doubt, this will be an indispensable guidebook to Puritan thought and practice for years to come."

—MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN, *PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY, THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY*

"No expression of the Christian faith has excelled that of the great Puritans and those who followed in their steps. This excellent volume by Dr. Beeke and Dr. Jones presents to the reader a rich feast both in academic theology and practical divinity. It deserves to be read, studied, and re-read by all who are hungry to know God better and to know how to glorify Him more."

—MAURICE ROBERTS, *EMERITUS MINISTER IN INVERNESS, FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (CONTINUING)*

"For their exegetical insight, theological precision, and heartwarming devotion, the Puritans remain a gold mine. There are great modern editions of many Puritan classics, anthologies collecting their quotes on various subjects, and myriad studies of the movement. So it's a little surprising that a Puritan systematic theology like this one has never been written. I'm just glad that it has been, and by two scholar-pastors whose familiarity with the primary and secondary sources is unsurpassed. I couldn't put it down and will return to it again and again. It is an ambitious undertaking, but the authors' pain is our gain. This will be an enduring reference work as well as devotional resource."

—MICHAEL HORTON, *J. GRESHAM MACHEN PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND APOLOGETICS, WESTMINSTER SEMINARY CALIFORNIA*

"Leading Puritan studies scholars, Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, join forces to offer a comprehensive and impressive treatment of Puritan teaching on most major *loci*, or topics of theology, ranging from prolegomena to eschatology. This book is a unique achievement, for it supersedes all previous books on Puritan theology through its breadth of scope and its richness of both historical detail and theological insight. This book will interest a wide audience ranging from theologians to historians, from pastors to educated laymen, who seek to learn about how the Puritans sought to renew theology in conjunction with the practice of piety. At the same time it shows the modern reader that in Puritan theology rational activity is embedded in a scripturally deep spiritual receptivity that we rarely find in modern theology. Indeed, Puritan theology is doctrine for Life!"

—WILLEM J. VAN ASSELT, *PROFESSOR OF HISTORICAL THEOLOGY, THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL FACULTY IN LEUVEN, BELGIUM*

"This is, undoubtedly, the *magnum opus* of Joel Beeke and Mark Jones—their greatest contribution to the study of our Calvinist forefathers, the Puritans. With this massive corpus, the authors make an enormous contribution to our understanding of Puritan theology by compiling this war chest of their teaching. This work is scholarly, well researched, precise, and comprehensive in scope, yet accessible in style. This one-volume theology allows us to sit at the feet of these luminous figures and be taught by their Scripture-steeped, God-saturated writings."

—STEVEN J. LAWSON, *CHRIST FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH, SENIOR PASTOR, MOBILE, ALABAMA*

"An obvious labor of love, *A Puritan Theology* is at the same time an impressively competent and balanced study in historical theology. It should go a long way toward dispelling misconceptions present among those who, whether approvingly or dismissively, think they know what the Puritans said. In reading I have been impressed anew with the deep and cordial lines of continuity there are between Calvin, the mainstream of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy of which this study shows the Puritans were an integral part, and the best of the redemptive-historical insights of more recent Reformed biblical theology. A broad audience from scholars to interested laypersons will read this lucid and winsomely written 'doctrine for life' (its subtitle) with great profit. I commend it most highly."

—RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR., *PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, EMERITUS, WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY*

A PURITAN THEOLOGY

Doctrine for Life

JOEL R. BEEKE
AND
MARK JONES

REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS
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A Puritan Theology

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To

David P. Murray

spiritual brother, caring friend, loyal colleague, Christ-exalting preacher, and gifted teacher; and

the **theological students** to whom I have been privileged to teach Puritan theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary Reformed Theological Seminary
Westminster Seminary California
Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

and

seminaries in a few dozen foreign countries around the globe.

> *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen* (Ephesians 3:20–21).

—JRB

To

Barb

wife, friend, soccer star, and mother of our beloved children; and

**Robert J. McKelvey, James F. Wright, Mark A. Herzer,
John L. Ronning, and Patrick Stevenson,**

who have taught me “doctrine for life.”

Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever (Revelation 5:13).

—MJ

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Foreword

The one thousand pages and more than half a million words you now hold in your hand constitute the largest and most comprehensive exposition to date on the theology of the English Puritans. It is a remarkable achievement, the fruit of many combined decades of reading, research, and reflection on the part of its authors.

Dr. Joel R. Beeke and Dr. Mark Jones are both published experts in Puritan theology. Here they have combined their resources to produce a work of such wide-ranging exposition and analysis that it will, surely, be many years before the like is attempted again.

There is something for everyone here. *A Puritan Theology* is a veritable Who's Who of the Puritan era. Here the twenty-first century reader can imagine him or herself transported back to London, Cambridge, and Oxford in the seventeenth century to rub shoulders with one of the most amazing spiritual brotherhoods in the history of English-speaking Christianity. Here we meet William Perkins, whose preaching left such an impact on the city and University of Cambridge that when Thomas Goodwin matriculated as a youngster ten years after his death, "the town was still full of his [Perkins's] preaching." And that is only the beginning. For soon we encounter the twin giants of Congregationalism, Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, as well as the master exposition of the law of God, Anthony Burgess; the systematic textual expositor and royal chaplain, Thomas Manton; the "sweet dropper," Richard Sibbes; the God-saturated Stephen Charnock; the commentator Matthew Henry; and many others. As one returns to the world of twenty-first century church, one cannot help feeling that there were giants in the land in those days.

There are too many outstanding features of this volume to list them adequately. The sheer range of theology covered—each locus in the theological encyclopedia is touched on—is breathtaking; the focus of attention on some of the most significant thinkers, preachers, and writers (who were men who, to a remarkable degree, combined all three) is profoundly impressive. Within this broad context, however, certain emphases are bound to impress even the cursory reader of these sixty chapters.

The first is just how deeply these men—who spent most of their lives in

pastoral ministry—had studied and knew Scripture. Often one is struck with a sense of passages and texts being held up to the light like a freshly cut diamond and then being slowly turned so that each facet might reflect the light. These were biblical theologians—in both senses of the term: biblical in the sense that they quarried their theology from the Bible, but also biblical in the more modern sense of understanding and being concerned to expound the unified flow of the story of salvation and to see each element of it in its proper place in the story. To many who have never read the Puritans in detail, the claim of a recent scholar that John Owen matches (if not surpasses!) Geerhardus Vos as a biblical theologian may seem incomprehensible;[1] but no one who has read the works of these men in detail would ever think they were simply "proof-texters," interested in a statement here and a phrase there. Their sense of the deep-down interconnectedness of Scripture is impressive indeed. Hence, in this volume the discussion of covenant theology takes some one hundred pages.

But secondly, while in the best sense they were biblicists (after all, they believed the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are God's Word), they were also profoundly conscious that they were called to comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of God's love together "with all saints" (Eph. 3:18). Thus, while often thought of narrowly as "Calvinists," they themselves were deeply conscious that they stood in an older and larger tradition than merely that of Geneva. Indeed one is far more likely to find them quoting Augustine than Calvin, for example. They were conscious, with Bernard of Chartres, that they were "dwarfs seated on the shoulders of giants so that we can see more than they."[2]

But in addition to this it is clear that the "Puritan Brotherhood" were men who thought theologically, profoundly, and prayerfully. To read their work, be it on the Trinity or the person of Christ or the holiness of the Christian, is to enter a different and more rarified atmosphere than that to which most of us have become accustomed. When, for example, we discover that one of John Owen's most celebrated treatises, *On the Mortification of Sin*,[3] owes its origins to sermons preached to a congregation made up largely of teenage students at the University of Oxford, we are likely to feel a little dizzy. But then, on reflection, we begin to understand that Owen and his comrades in arms had it right: teaching Christian believers how to deal with sin should be done *before* we are overtaken in sin because of our naivety about our own spiritual strength and our ignorance of biblical instruction.

These pages are not replete with complexities and obscurities. Nor are they light reading. One is again reminded of some words of the young John Owen (at the time a somewhat edgy thirty-year-old!) as he introduces his work *The Death*

of Death in the Death of Christ with some comments to the reader:

> If thou intendest to go any farther, I would entreat thee to stay here a little. If thou art, as many in this pretending age, *a sign or title gazer*, and comest into books as Cato into the theatre, to go out again—thou hast had thy entertainment; farewell![4]

But if you share the concern of the Puritans to think biblically in order to live to the glory of God, these pages will prove to be a goldmine and an example of what Paul termed "the acknowledging of the truth which is after [i.e., accords with] godliness" (Titus 1:1).

Here, then, is a rare find: a thesaurus of theological, intellectual, spiritual, and practical treasure. Dr. Beeke and Dr. Jones have put us in their debt, and we are grateful for that. So, since the Puritans regarded themselves as at root followers of Augustine, all that remains to be said can be expressed in the words that led to his great change: *Tolle lege*—pick up the book and read it!

—Sinclair B. Ferguson First Presbyterian Church Columbia, South Carolina

1. See Richard Barcellos, *The Family Tree of Reformed Theology* (Palmdale, Calif.: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2010).

2. John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury*: *A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. with intro. and notes by Daniel E. McGarry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 167.

3. This treatise can be found in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Johnstone, 1850–53), 6:1–86.

4. In *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Johnstone, 1850–53), 10:149.

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No book of this size leaves its authors without substantial thanks to a goodly number of people. I, Joel Beeke, would like to thank Mark Jones, my coauthor, for his remarkable cooperation in writing this book. There are few Reformed scholars in the world as easy to work with as Mark Jones! He originally sent me several chapters on the Puritan view of the covenants of works and grace to consider for publication. When I shared with him my vision to write a "Puritan systematic theology of sorts," which I hoped to do after retiring from teaching, he showed keen interest in coauthoring the work with me. I drafted a plan for seventy-some chapters, which overwhelmed him (and me!). We cut it back to thirty chapters, but then it grew to sixty. Throughout, Mark was diligent and helpful. Without you, Mark, this book would have not seen the light of day for another decade or two, and it would not be as good as it is.

I am also deeply grateful to my teaching assistant, Paul Smalley, for his assistance in writing several chapters, in addition to coauthoring four chapters (6, 11, 12, and 28) with me. I am particularly grateful for our daily prayer times together, which included many petitions for divine benediction upon this volume. Paul, your servant heart, your love for Puritan theology, and your growing knowledge of the Puritans have been a source of great joy and strength to me.

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I also thank all our PRTS students and alumni, together with students at other seminaries around the world, as well as conference attendees, to whom I have taught Puritan theology. Several of these chapters have grown out of seminary lectures in my Puritan Theology class or out of conference addresses in various countries on aspects of Puritan thought.

My dear, faithful wife, Mary, is a constant source of inspiration. I thank her for amazing devotion to me and my work. Without her, I would not accomplish half of what I am privileged to accomplish. I am grateful for my loving children, Calvin, Esther, and Lydia, whose kindness to me is humbling.

Most of all, I am grateful to my triune God and Savior, who makes Himself increasingly lovable to me the older I grow. I certainly can concur with Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) that I do not know which Divine Person I love the most, Father, Son, or Holy Ghost—but know that I love each of them and need them all. One thing that has allured me to the Puritans, whom I started reading fifty years ago at the age of nine, is their obsession with God Triune. Increasingly I covet their trinitarian centeredness, both as theologians and as believers in Christ.

In terms of past influences that stirred within me a love for reading the Puritans, I owe the most to my father, John Beeke, and his experiential conversations with me as a teenager. They reinforced the Puritan paperbacks in his bookcase, which I devoured. I am also grateful to Iain Murray and the Banner of Truth Trust’s books and conferences; Sinclair B. Ferguson and his passion for John Owen; and D. Clair Davis and his encouragement while studying the Puritan view of assurance of faith for my doctoral dissertation at Westminster Seminary.

I, Mark Jones, wish to thank a number of people who have directly or indirectly made this work possible. Scholars who have been especially influential on me include Professors Ernestine van der Wall, Michael A. G. Haykin, Richard A. Muller, Willem J. van Asselt, and Crawford Gribben. I wish to acknowledge my intellectual debt to them all.

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Some of the chapters I wrote in this book are coauthored. I am privileged to have cowritten chapters with two of my mentors, Mark Herzer (chapter 29) and Bob McKelvey (chapter 51). They taught me at seminary and will, in this life, always be my superiors in doctrine and in life. Michael Haykin (chapter 27), Danny Hyde (chapter 41), Ryan Kelly (chapter 39), Gert van den Brink (chapter 8), and Ted van Raalte (chapter 45) also cowrote chapters with me. I am understating the case when I say that our cowritten chapters are far better than they would have been if I had done them alone. Readers will surely profit from their scholarship, as I have. Thanks, too, to Hunter Powell for all his assistance.

I owe much to Joel Beeke, my coauthor. Several years ago I would never have dreamt of writing such a substantial work on Puritan theology with him. But through various providences I have been given this wonderful privilege, and I only hope that my work will not look out of place alongside his. He is a living Puritan both in learning and in piety.

Writing this book has taken no small amount of time. I am deeply grateful for my congregation at Faith Vancouver Presbyterian Church. Some of the time I have spent on this book could perhaps have been spent on them instead. I willingly acknowledge their sacrifices in making this project a reality.

With the birth of my twin boys, Thomas and Matthew, in July 2010, I wondered if this book would ever see publication. Coupled with the already significant responsibilities of raising my other two covenant children, Katie and Josh, I gladly acknowledge the help of my wife, Barbara, whose love, patience, and encouragement are the chief reasons, humanly speaking, for why this book is now complete.

To the triune God who has loved me with an everlasting love, and who will continue to love me forever because of Jesus Christ, I join with the apostle Paul in doxology: “for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom

be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

—Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones

Introduction

The word “Puritan” originated in the 1560s as a bit of pejorative hurled at people who wanted further reformation in the Church of England. While some social historians think the term should be abandoned due to the various ways it was used during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, others who identify themselves as Reformed or Calvinistic defend the continuing use of the terms “Puritan” and “Puritanism.”

This book is about Puritan theology. Its chapters will address various areas of the systematic theology of Puritanism. Fine studies on Puritan theology already exist. Some address the Puritans in general,[1] and some focus on the work of a particular Puritan theologian.[2] To date, however, there has been no single work that provides an overview of Puritan thought concerning Scripture’s major doctrines, historically and systematically considered. We hope this book will fill that gap. We will begin by stating what we will and will not cover—and why.

Puritans and Puritanism One of the most difficult tasks for the church historian is to define Puritanism.[3] It would be no overstatement to suggest that a thorough definition would double the length of this introduction. Nonetheless, a few thoughts are in order.

According to John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, “Puritanism was a variety of Reformed Protestantism, aligned with the continental Calvinistic churches rather than with the Lutherans.”[4] They say Puritanism was a “distinctive and particularly intense variety of early modern Reformed Protestantism which originated within the Church of England, and was a product of that unique environment and its tensions. Under Elizabeth I, the Church of England was widely regarded as a Reformed Church.”[5] No doubt Puritan theologians were for the most part Reformed, or Calvinistic. Even so, we do not insist that the Puritans were exclusively Reformed. Defining Reformed orthodoxy is complex, but confessional documents such as the Three Forms of Unity[6] and, more relevant to this book, the Westminster Standards[7] provide us with an accurate summation of Reformed theology.

Richard Baxter (1615–1691) was certainly a Puritan, but he was not Reformed in the way of William Perkins (1558–1602), Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), and John Owen (1616–1683). Intense theological debates between Baxter and Owen reveal that their differences went far beyond semantics. Baxter thought he could affirm the Canons of Dort, but he did not have the same sympathy for the Westminster documents, which excluded several of his views, most notably on the atonement and justification. And while he contributed with other ministers to the writing of *A New Confession of Faith, or the first Principles of the Christian Religion necessary to bee laid as a Foundation by all such as desire to build on unto Perfection* (1654), Baxter did not approve of its final form. What is more, he accused Owen, Goodwin, and Thomas Manton (1620–1677) of lacking the judgment required for such a work.

Puritanism was more diverse than it may seem from our vantage point today. The use of the word as a theological term in this book must be carefully understood. Not only does Baxter defy classification, but so do John Goodwin (1594–1665), an Arminian; John Milton (1608–1674), possibly an Arian; John Bunyan (1628–1688), a Baptist; and John Eaton (c. 1575–c. 1631), an Antinomian—all of whom are often considered Puritans. Coffey and Lim suggest that "Calvinistic Baptists, for example, were widely recognized as orthodox and pious, and the Puritan national church of the Cromwellian era incorporated some Baptists alongside Presbyterians and Congregationalists."[8]

Nonetheless, the vast majority of Puritans were part of the larger theological movement called Reformed orthodoxy.[9] The English Parliament certainly wanted the nation's faith to be understood as Reformed and Protestant. The great design of the calling of the Westminster Assembly was to secure "uniformity of religion" in the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland. But that did not mean the Puritans always agreed on matters of theology. They held spirited debates on several doctrines (not to mention matters of liturgy and church polity), as will be shown in forthcoming chapters.[10] But they were united in seeking to demolish the errors of the semi-Pelagian Roman Catholics, anti-trinitarian Socinians, and freewill Arminians. They opposed Roman Catholics such as the Jesuit preacher Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). They rejected Socinianism, particularly the views of Laelius (1525–1562) and Faustus (1539–1604), and the Polish Racovian Catechism (1605). And they fought against the Arminians, especially their erroneous views on predestination, the doctrine of God, the atonement, the Trinity, and the doctrine of justification.[11]

Besides their strong polemics with the aforementioned groups (and others), the Puritans provide evidence of an ever-widening divide between Reformed and Lutheran theologians. Lutheranism had been very influential in the earliest

beginnings of the English Reformation, but as Coffey and Lim note, the Lutherans were not part of the Puritan movement. There are some references to Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) in Puritan writings, but generally references to Lutheran theology are negative, especially in the areas of Christology and the Lord's Supper. John Owen's massive corpus is strikingly absent of quotes from Lutheran writers, though he seems to quote from almost everyone else![12] The Puritans believed that Lutheran worship retained too many unbiblical pre-Reformation practices.[13] That is perhaps the principal reason the Lutherans were regarded as theologically suspect, notwithstanding their contribution to and general agreement on the understanding of justification by faith alone.

Puritanism must be understood as a movement that sought further reformation of the Church of England in conformity with the Word of God. The Puritans were successful for a time in achieving this goal, as is evident in the work done by the Westminster Assembly, the introduction of Presbyterian ordination and church government in divers places, and the accession of Puritans to positions of influence in church and state and in the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge. But Puritanism was dealt a severe blow as a reform movement inside the Church of England, as Carl Trueman notes: "In 1662, with the passing of the Act of Uniformity, those within the Church of England who wished for a more thorough reformation of its practices, and who found themselves unable to accept what they regarded as the popish aspects of the Book of Common Prayer, were forced to make a difficult choice: either they should conform and give up their deeply-held beliefs about the church; or they should leave the church in protest. Nearly two-thousand chose the latter option and thus Puritanism made the transition to nonconformity."[14]

What became of Puritanism? Norman Sykes once gave this concise summation:

> The eighteenth century witnessed a marked decline of the religious fervor of its predecessor among all churches. With the accession of the house of Hanover,[15] an age of moderation, sobriety and convention began. The established Church was safeguarded by the Test and Corporation acts;[16] and the Protestant Dissenters,[17] secure in their toleration[18] and much divided by theological controversies, settled down to a position of passive acquiescence. Politically their organization into the Dissenting Deputies[19] enabled them to preserve the *status quo* as regards legal toleration, but not extend it; and their acceptance of the royal bounty, the *regium donum*,[20] as an annual contribution to their charities, signified their settling down to be

at ease in Sion.[21]

Some, like Trueman, suggest that 1662 was the end of the Puritan era, since attempts to reform the Church of England ended with the threefold restoration of the monarchy, the historic episcopate, and the Book of Common Prayer. Others, as Sykes, argue that the transition from Puritanism to Protestant Dissent came after 1689 with the Act of Toleration. And some would say that Puritanism ended with the death of John Howe (1630–1705), minister of the Silver Street Presbyterian Church in London. Whatever the year, Puritanism has special reference to issues of church and state, theology and worship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After 1689, all parties to the great conflicts of earlier decades laid down their weapons and began peacefully to coexist, more or less.

This is important because although Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was a Puritan in theology and piety and is sometimes regarded as the last of the Puritans, he was not a Puritan in the strict historical sense. This book therefore does not include chapters on Edwards's theology, however fascinating they would have been. The Marrow men and Seceders of Scotland, the "Old Princeton" worthies, Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), John Charles Ryle (1816–1900), Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), James I. Packer (b. 1926), and other luminaries, though deeply sympathetic to the Puritans, cannot be regarded as Puritans in the sense that the Westminster divines were. If they were, Puritanism would lose any specific historical meaning.

In understanding the Puritans, we should note what Tom Webster says about the three distinctives of a Puritan. He says, first, Puritans had a dynamic fellowship with God that shaped their minds, affected their emotions, and penetrated their souls. They were grounded in something and someone outside of themselves: the triune God of the Scriptures. Second, Puritans embraced a shared system of beliefs grounded in the Scriptures. Today we refer to this system as Reformed orthodoxy. Third, on the basis of their common spiritual experience and unity in the faith, the Puritans established a network of relationships among believers and ministers.[22] This fellowship of cooperative brotherhood was born in sixteenth-century Elizabethan England, and developed in seventeenth-century England and New England. The distinctive character of Puritanism was its quest for a life reformed by the Word of God. The Puritans were committed to search the Scriptures, organize and analyze their findings, and then apply them to all areas of life. They had a confessional, theological, and trinitarian approach that urged conversion and communion with God in personal, family, church, and national life.

So, in calling Thomas Goodwin a Puritan, for example, we mean that he was part of a spiritual network of leaders grounded in Reformed beliefs and experiential fellowship with God. Puritans like Goodwin worked for Bible-based reformation and Spirit-empowered revival on personal, familial, ecclesiastical, and national levels in England from the 1560s to the 1660s and beyond. His writings, and the writings of his contemporaries, were about "doctrine for life," holding the belief, as American Presbyterians later declared, "that truth is in order to goodness: and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness."[23]

In summary, the late sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century movement of Puritanism was a kind of vigorous Calvinism. Experientially, it was warm and contagious; evangelistically, it was aggressive, yet tender; ecclesiastically, it sought to practice the headship of Christ over the faith, worship, and order of His body, the church; politically, it was active, balanced, and bound by conscience before God, in the relations of king, Parliament, and subjects.[24] J. I. Packer says it well: "Puritanism was an evangelical holiness movement seeking to implement its vision of spiritual renewal, national and personal, in the church, the state, and the home; in education, evangelism, and economics; in individual discipleship and devotion, and in pastoral care and competence."[25]

Book and Chapter Aims

Some chapters in this book refer to many Puritans, some to a few, and some to only one. This is deliberate on our part, for a variety of reasons. Chapters that discuss many Puritans offer a picture of what might be called the "Puritan Position" or "Puritan Consensus."[26] When only a few Puritans are discussed, we can discuss each author's thought in more detail but also note differences, nuances, and emphases in each author. Finally, chapters that focus mainly on one Puritan, though in interaction with his contemporaries, enable us to provide a fairly comprehensive view of how a particular theologian thought through a particular doctrine. The authors treated as the chief subject of a chapter are typically reflective of basic Puritan theology, or, in the case of the chapter on Thomas Goodwin's christological supralapsarianism, a position that was acceptable within the Reformed tradition. In some cases, a chapter devoted to a single Puritan author provides us with a closer look at Puritans whom others have ignored, such as Thomas Manton, Christopher Love (1618–1651), and Stephen Charnock (1628–1680).

Some chapters also interact with theologians from the Continent. This too is deliberate on our part. Anyone familiar with the writings of the Puritans will discover that they quoted hundreds of authors from many different traditions and all periods in ecclesiastical history. We have chosen to interact mainly with Continental Reformed theologians since the Puritans we discuss considered themselves part of the wider international movement of Reformed orthodoxy. John Calvin (1509–1564), Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644), Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), Francis Turretin (1623–1687), Herman Witsius (1636–1708), and others are frequently brought into discussions to show the similarities or occasional differences between the Puritans and Reformed theologians on the Continent.

In many chapters, we feel we have just scratched the surface. For example, trying to give an overview of Stephen Charnock's mammoth tome, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, in one chapter is almost impossible. Our hope is that these chapters will offer a general yet accurate picture of various doctrines, while whetting the appetite of students of Puritanism to engage in further study of these doctrines in greater detail.

We have tried to be fairly comprehensive, but we must acknowledge that we have not covered all areas of Puritan theology.[27] Large, single-volume works typically suffer from a lack of the breadth and depth possible in a multivolume

work. Nonetheless, nearly all of the major Puritan doctrines are discussed, and some chapters cover topics that could easily be expanded into an essay or dissertation (e.g., the beatific vision, or Puritan preaching).

In this book we have also attempted to do responsible, historical theology. The chapters are designed to give an accurate picture of what the Puritans said, not what we would have liked them to say. We recognize that there were strengths and weaknesses in Puritan theology. There is no question that Thomas Goodwin's eschatology, fascinating as it is, had many problems. In the latter part of his life, Goodwin regretted setting a date for the beginning of the millennium (supposedly 1666). The Puritans did not excel in eschatology. Reformed theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have provided the church with a more exegetically sustainable account of how to understand, for example, the book of Revelation. That said, we believe that the Puritans were not only correct but that they excelled in most areas of theology. Few theologians prior to the Puritans could write with such theological precision while also applying theology to the hearts and minds of those who listened to their sermons and read their books. "Doctrine for life" was a constant emphasis in the writings of Puritans, who were almost all highly trained theologians as well as pastors of churches. Many forget that most of the greatest theologians God has given to the church were also pastors and teachers in the local church.

We are hopeful as well that this book will lay to rest many misconceptions about the Puritans. This explains our emphasis on the primary sources in each chapter. We are grateful for sound secondary literature on the Puritans, but we have (by far) relied on primary documents from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in writing this book. For example, the criticism that the Puritans were legalistic never seems to go away.[28] If people paid attention to the whole of Puritan theology, however, they would likely find themselves rethinking that criticism. We are also hopeful that we may discredit so-called "Calvin versus the Calvinists" historiography with this book, if indeed it was not already discredited long since. And we hope that a careful reading of the chapters in this book will present you with what the Puritans actually said on a given doctrine, which might then be compared to what others may think or claim that the Puritans said.

This book concludes with eight chapters showing a variety of ways in which the Puritans put their theology into practice. Though "doctrine for life" runs throughout this book (the Puritans could not escape their "uses" of each doctrine, and neither could we as we expounded their beliefs), we consider it fitting and true to Puritan theology to have such a concluding section. J. I. Packer, in the introduction to his excellent work, *A Quest for Godliness*, commented that the essays in his book "are not just history and historical theology; they are

themselves, in aim at least, spirituality, as much as anything else I have written."29 We echo that sentiment and pray that this work will not only affect the minds but also the hearts of its readers. The Puritans would find this a most desirable outcome.

We trust that this book on Puritan theology will appeal to many types of people. Scholars will find this book useful, given our attention to primary sources and efforts to accurately reflect what the Puritans believed about various doctrines. But the target audience for this book is not primarily academic. Rather, we hope this book will also appeal to Christian laypersons, students of theology, seminarians, and ordained church leaders, such as pastors, ruling elders, and deacons. Reaching these varied groups is not easy, but we have done our best to put together a book that allows—to quote one well-known phrase—"elephants to swim and children to play in the water." Nearly all Latin, Greek, and Hebrew words, phrases, and sentences have been translated for the reader. In the end, we are reminded of Archbishop James Ussher's (1581–1656) comment that it takes all of our learning to make these things plain. We have done our best to do that.

Most of the chapters we have written are original to this book. Some have been reprinted from other places, and we are grateful for permission from various publishers to include them here; however, in nearly all such cases we have rewritten and edited those formerly published chapters—in most cases, substantially so. It should also be noted that we have taken the liberty to modernize spellings in quotations from antiquarian books.

1. See, e.g., Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Ernest Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (1964; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

2. See, e.g., J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College, 2000).

3. On this question, see Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 82n1; Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), xiii–xix; Ralph Bronkema, *The Essence of Puritanism* (Goes: Oosterbaan and LeCointre, 1929); Jerald C. Brauer, "Reflections on the Nature of English Puritanism," *Church History* 23 (1954): 98–109; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1991), 313–21; Basil Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition," in *Studies in Church History*, ed. G. J. Cumming (London: Nelson, 1965), 2:283–96; Charles H. George, "Puritanism as History and Historiography," *Past and Present* 41 (1968): 77–104; Richard Mitchell Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 247; William Lamont, "Puritanism as History and Historiography: Some Further Thoughts," *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 133–46; Richard Greaves, "The Nature of the Puritan Tradition," in *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall*, ed. R. Buick Knox (London: Epworth Press, 1977), 255–73; John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1986), 9–22; D. M. Lloyd-Jones, "Puritanism and Its Origins," in *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 237–59; J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Godly Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 21–36; Tae-Hyeun Park, *The Sacred Rhetoric of the Holy Spirit: A Study of Puritan Preaching in Pneumatological Perspective* (Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2005), 73–75; Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History* 20 (1951): 37–57.

4. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

5. Coffey and Lim, introduction to *Cambridge Companion*, 3.

6. Doctrinal standards of the Dutch Reformed churches and their kindred denominations outside the Netherlands: the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

7. Major (Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms) and minor (Directory for the Public Worship of God, Form of Presbyterial Church Government, and *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*).

8. Coffey and Lim, introduction to *Cambridge Companion*, 5.

9. Carl Trueman, speaking of the 1662 Act of Uniformity, whereby the Puritans were ejected from the Church of England, notes that this "guaranteed that the Reformed theology for which most of them stood would no longer be a significant force in these three [political, educational, and ecclesiastical] realms." "Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context," in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 253. For a brief discussion of Reformed orthodoxy, see Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33ff.

10. On this matter, see also Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

11. See Aza Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt*, ed. Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot and Willemien Otten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 155–78.

12. Incidentally, he does, however, take a "Lutheran" view of the old covenant's relation to the new covenant.

13. "With the Reformed, Puritans believed that the Lutheran church remained too 'popish' in its liturgy, its sacramental theology and its church government." Coffey and Lim, introduction to *Cambridge Companion*, 2.

14. Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event," 253.

15. In 1714 George Louis, Elector of Hanover, took the British throne as King George I.

16. Laws that, until 1828, imposed a religious test for holding public office, requiring, *inter alia*, public officials and employees to receive Holy Communion in the Church of England once a year.

17. Soon to be known merely as "Nonconformists," and "Nonconformity."

18. In 1689, the Act of Toleration granted freedom of worship to trinitarian Protestant dissenters, provided that they met in houses of worship registered with the authorities.

19. Beginning about 1732, each Baptist, Congregational, and Presbyterian congregation within ten miles of London appointed deputies to act in concert as a political action committee or lobby to protect the rights and interests of Nonconformity. The repeal of the Test and Corporation acts was largely the fruit of their labors.

20. Beginning in 1721, an annual "royal gift" from public funds to assist impoverished Nonconformist ministers and their widows, distributed by representatives of the Baptist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches. That was discontinued in 1857.

21. Norman Sykes, *The English Religious Tradition: Sketches of Its Influence on Church, State, and Society* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 66.

22. Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–*

1643 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 333–35.

23. "Preliminary Principles," *Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839), Bk. 1, Ch. 1, Sec. 4.

24. Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, xviii–xix.

25. J. I. Packer, "An Anglican to Remember—William Perkins: Puritan Popularizer," St. Antholin's Lectureship Charity Lecture, 1996, 1–2.

26. In the chapters on the covenant of works and the old and new covenants, for example, we see unity and diversity.

27. Nor have we introduced much biographical material concerning the Puritan authors being expounded or bibliographical material of their reprinted books, since that has been done by Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*. That volume tells the life story of all the nearly 150 Puritans who have been reprinted since the resurgence of Puritan literature in the 1950s and provides short descriptions of the nearly seven hundred reprinted Puritan titles, serving as a kind of companion volume to this book.

28. Coffey and Lim seem to imply the Puritans were legalists: "And like the Reformed, they typically qualified Luther's antithesis between law and gospel, emphasising the role of God's law within the Christian life and the local community, and trying (sometimes with conspicuous success) to recreate godly Genevas in England and America. This legalism provoked an 'antinomian backlash' from within, but even when radical Puritans rejected orthodox Reformed ideas about the moral law or predestination or infant baptism, they still defined themselves in relation to the Reformed tradition." Introduction to *Cambridge Companion*, 3.

29. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 16.

PROLEGOMENA

Chapter 1

The Puritans on Natural and Supernatural Theology

> *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*
>
> —MATTHEW 11:25–27

The concept of natural and supernatural revelation was not a major theme in the writings of the Puritans, but it was not something that they ignored.[1] Several impressive works were written on the nature of revelation, addressing the concepts of natural theology and supernatural revelation. A basic premise of Reformed thought in general, and of those Puritans who identified themselves as Reformed theologians in particular, was the idea that no knowledge of God is possible unless it comes from Him. He is the source of all knowledge, and particularly knowledge of Himself. Knowledge of God is possible only because of God's self-revelation.

For the Puritans, natural theology was tied closely to the creation of Adam in the image of God, and therefore, he was blessed in a natural theology (*theologia naturalis*), or knowledge of God both innate and acquired from the handiwork of God around him. Puritan theologians debated among themselves whether all knowledge of God before the fall of man was natural or supernatural, but they all agreed that Adam possessed a natural theology. After the fall, natural theology continued, but because of sin, man is incapable of knowing God properly. Orthodox Protestants did indeed affirm a natural theology of the regenerate (*theologia naturalis regenitorum*) that was helpful in the context of a regenerate life, but natural theology played a distinctly subservient role to supernatural theology (*theologia supernaturalis*) in the context of redemption.

For Reformed Puritan theologians, supernatural theology has in view the revelation of God, which is not limited to the Scriptures but certainly includes them as the written Word of God, particularly in the post-apostolic era, when all special revelation has ceased. The Puritans held that only through Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit, can one come to a knowledge of God that is sufficient for salvation—hence the concept of the twofold knowledge of God (*duplex cognitio Dei*). Natural theology is sufficient to leave humans without excuse (Rom. 1:18–21) but cannot save them, for saving knowledge is found only in Christ. Christ's own knowledge of God enables Him to reveal God; thus, supernatural revelation has an explicit christocentric focus. But as John Owen (1616–1683) pointed out, the Holy Spirit provides the witness that enables believers to recognize and receive the Scriptures as the Word of God. Without the Holy Spirit, God's Word, its own self-authenticating nature notwithstanding, cannot bring sinful human beings to faith and salvation. With this emphasis on Christ and the Spirit, Puritan theologians such as Owen committed themselves to a robust trinitarian theology of revelation.

Finally, the revelation of God through Christ took place in the context of God's covenant. God's relationship with His creatures has always been by way of covenant, and so His revelation to them must be understood not only as christological, but also as covenantal. The aforementioned elements do not quite paint the full picture, but they certainly provide the basic components to understanding natural and supernatural theology in the thought of British Reformed divines in the seventeenth century.

Natural Theology Christian theologians certainly have not always agreed on the topic of natural theology. Among the Puritans, however, we find general agreement on the truthfulness, and therefore the usefulness, of natural theology if properly understood. Several works in this period stand out: Edward Leigh's *Systeme, or Body of Divinity* (1654); John Preston's *Life Eternall* (1631); John Howe's *The Living Temple* (1675); Matthew Barker's *Natural Theology* (1674); and several treatises of John Owen, especially those in Owen's collected *Works*, volumes 4, 5, and 17. Moreover, many other Puritan writers addressed the concept of natural theology, especially Samuel Rutherford, William Twisse, Stephen Charnock, and Thomas Goodwin. A number of scholars have looked at the concept of natural theology in the Puritans, with Sebastian Rehnman's work standing out in his acute analysis of Owen's work *Theologoumena Pantadapa*.[2] Moreover, Richard Muller's work on prolegomena, which includes a section on natural theology, provides a thorough look at the Continental Reformed theologians during the post-Reformation period.[3] The Continental Reformed

orthodox theologians gave more attention to the concept of natural theology in their writings, which partly explains why Rehnman frequently compares Owen with Amandus Polanus, Francis Turretin, and Petrus van Mastricht. Similarly, Muller's discussion is almost entirely concerned with the Protestant scholastics on the Continent.

First-generation Reformers did not always agree upon the value and limits of natural theology.[4] Later, the Reformed orthodox would discuss the limits of natural theology with more exactness than, for example, John Calvin did. Among the Puritans, the role of natural theology was often expounded in relation to Arminian, Papist, and Socinian views that were in conflict with Reformed orthodoxy. For example, the Socinians argued that God can require from humans only what He gives; if Christ is not given to them, then pagans can be saved apart from Christ.[5] In response to this, Puritans with Reformed theological convictions strenuously affirmed that natural theology cannot save but may prepare a man or woman for grace. Matthew Barker (1619–1698) notes that the gospel calls men to believe in Christ, and the sense of deity in the heart of men may "Excite and Influence Men" to believe.[6] But when Puritans like Barker developed their own natural theology, they always did so in the broader context of their system of supernatural theology. Thus, knowledge of God, according to John Owen, is partly natural and partly supernatural;[7] it is innate and acquired. As Barker further argued, though the Scripture is self-authenticating (*autopistos*), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit in man's conscience produces trust in God's Word, "yet some additional strength may be borrowed from the Light of Nature."[8] Yet, notwithstanding the fact that natural and supernatural theology are mutually reinforcing—after all, a basic axiom of Reformed thought is the belief that grace is not opposed to nature—the two must be distinguished.

Theology, according to Barker, consists of two parts: natural and supernatural revelation. The former is the knowledge of God that is available through creation. Adam was made in the image of God, and thus his knowledge of God was both by the implanted word (τον εμφυτον λογον, James 1:21) and, notes Barker, "by what the large power of his intellectual faculty might gather from Works of Creation."[9] Together, the implanted Word and God's revelation in creation led Adam to know and love God. With this basic knowledge of God, otherwise known as the "sense of the divine" (*sensus divinitatis*), the Reformed orthodox taught that natural theology is partly innate and partly acquired.[10]

But an important question arises as to whether Adam possessed supernatural revelation before the fall. Rehnman notes that Owen is "vague on limiting supernatural theology till after the fall as he maintains that originally revelation was partly supernatural and that this part was intended to increase daily."[11]

Whether theology before the fall was partly natural and partly supernatural has a lot to do with how various theologians understood the precise nature of the covenant of works, particularly with regard to Adam's "end." But even here we encounter some problems.

Some Reformed theologians (such as Thomas Goodwin [1600–1680]) argued that Adam's end would have been continual life in the garden of Eden; he would not have been rewarded with life in heaven, which only Christ could acquire. Others (for example, Francis Turretin [1623–1687]) believed that Adam's supernatural end would be life in heaven according to the terms of the covenant. And still others (such as Owen) remained agnostic on the question.[12] Interestingly, Goodwin believes that Adam's theology before the fall was purely natural, which fits rather nicely with his view that Adam's end was not supernatural. Turretin, who does in fact argue for a supernatural end for Adam (had he remained obedient), also limits supernatural revelation till after the fall. Returning to Owen's position, Rehnman concludes that, for Owen, theology before the fall "was not entirely natural because it was from the beginning subject to augmentation by further revelation as special revelation was necessary to obedience."[13] Moreover, the fact that Adam was under the covenant of works, which included sacramental precepts, seems to better suit the idea that revelation before the fall was partly supernatural. Owen and Goodwin often disagreed on points of doctrine, and each man took a different approach on this specific point. In my own view, Goodwin's christological supralapsarianism accounts for why he limits supernatural revelation to the post-lapsarian period. For Goodwin, supernatural revelation is explicitly christocentric, and only Christ could merit a supernatural end on account of the dignity of His person, something Adam could never do as a man "from the earth" contrasted with the "man from heaven," Jesus Christ. Goodwin's position on the boundaries of natural theology, which extend quite far for him, warrants further discussion below.

Goodwin explains the distinction ("so much used of all sides, both schoolmen and our own divines") between natural righteousness and supernatural grace as the difference between knowledge of God that is natural to man and knowledge of God in a supernatural way that goes "above nature."[14] Goodwin considers these two ways of knowing God in the state of innocence. He affirms an orthodox view of Adam's natural theology, in much the same way as Owen and Barker. But Goodwin also speaks of that "which was vouchsafed to man over and above this natural due, and *supra exigentiam* [beyond the immediate need of the] creature, more than it was simply meet for God to give him upon and with his creating him reasonable,—that, I say, is supernatural, and is therefore called

grace, as being a free gift over and above that which was necessarily due to such a creature."[15] Therefore, for God to keep Adam from falling into sin would have been above Adam's natural due. With these distinctions in mind, Goodwin argues that Adam's ordinary means of knowing and enjoying God was in the natural way; his happiness was a natural happiness. Goodwin describes this natural knowledge in the following manner:

> In having at first a glimmering light, and common, yet obscure principles and glimpses of the notions of things sown in the mind by nature, which then by observation and laying things together, and so gathering one thing from another, the mind improveth and enlargeth, till it arise to a particular, clear, distinct, and perfect knowledge of those things which it seeks to know…. And unto that end, God, in the instant of his creation, did sow in his mind holy and sanctifying notions and principles, both concerning his own nature, what a God he was, and also concerning his will…which principles were by rectified reason to be improved, enlarged, and confirmed, made clear and illustrious, out of his observations from the creatures and the works of providence, as also from the covenant of works, till it arise to a full, clear, and distinct knowledge of God.[16]

In this estate, Adam had the natural ability to know the nature of God (His attributes, such as wisdom, power, and eternity) and the will of God for man. Goodwin's manner of speaking fits nicely with Muller's description of the basic Reformed orthodox position on Adam's natural theology:

> The seed of religion (*semen religionis*) or sense of the divine (*sensus divinitatis*; *sensus numinis*), is not innate knowledge (*cognitio innata*) in a Platonic sense, nor is it infused knowledge (*cognitio infusa*) so foreign to the mind that without it the mind is blank, a *tabula rasa*, nor is it like the subject matter of the discipline of theology, an acquired knowledge.[17]

Then, quoting Turretin,[18] Muller shows that Reformed theologians taught that natural theology is partly innate and partly acquired from the book of creation, which falls very much in line with the quote from Goodwin above.[19] Goodwin claims that Adam did not have complete, innate knowledge of God's attributes and so needed to enlarge his "inbred, obscure" knowledge of God.[20] Similarly, Adam had the knowledge of God's will sown in his heart, which included the moral law. When confronted with a moral decision, Adam had an innate sense of what to do in any given situation. This moral law remains in humans after the fall, but it is reduced to a mere shadow, "an imperfect counterfeit."[21] Further, in agreement with what has been noted above, Adam's knowledge was improved by observation of creation. With the institution of the Sabbath, Adam was able to

contemplate the works of God, which "was the principal duty of the Sabbath, under the covenant of works" (Ps. 42).[22]

In Goodwin's mind, whether Adam possessed supernatural knowledge or not comes down to the type of faith—natural or supernatural—required of him under the covenant of works. Supernatural faith, according to Goodwin, enables humans to know revelation from God above the requirements of nature. Faith is infused for this reason, and most divines refer to faith as a supernatural gift. Not only did Adam have the "inbred light of nature," he also "had another window and inlet of knowledge, even revelation from, and communication with, God."[23] For this reason, aware that some divines have affirmed that Adam had supernatural revelation from God, Goodwin aims to prove that Adam's faith was natural—as opposed to the supernatural faith believers receive in the covenant of grace—which means that all Adam had under the covenant of works was natural theology.[24]

Goodwin recognizes that his position seems a "hard and bold assertion, to deny that Adam had a supernatural knowledge of God by revelation."[25] After all, Adam spoke with God, and God revealed His will to Adam; add to this the sacraments of the covenant of works and, as Owen seems to suggest, the ingredients are present for a supernatural theology coexisting with a natural theology in the garden of Eden. Nevertheless, Goodwin insists that these elements in the covenant of works belong to natural theology, because what Adam was required to believe was proper to a natural faith. In arguing for his position, Goodwin provides insight into how far he is willing to press the bounds of natural theology from a Reformed perspective.

Man, even in his fallen state, trusts and believes "one that is faithful," which means that "believing" is not necessarily a supernatural act. In Eden, Adam's ability to converse, both with God and with his wife, was a natural capacity. Thus, when God told Adam what He required of him in the garden, "whatever it was that was revealed, was not above the due of nature.… For he knew, out of the same principles and dictates of nature, that God was true, faithful, and just in his word."[26] Concerning the two trees, these objects were not supernatural; rather, they were given to Adam in his own sphere, and he had, by natural light, the natural ability to discern that these trees promised life and warned of his mutability. All these arguments are intended to show that a natural faith was all Adam needed to know and believe God in the context of the covenant of works.

Goodwin understands that his opinion is a rejection of the medieval doctrine of the "superadded gift" *(donum superadditum*).[27] In fact, unlike most of his contemporaries,[28] Goodwin also rejects the idea of grace (properly speaking) in the garden because of his view that Adam's reward does not involve his

translation to heaven. If Adam had been promised eternal life in heaven, he would have needed a supernatural faith, but because he was not, a supernatural faith would have been "superfluous, and to no end."[29] A supernatural faith would have caused Adam to long for heaven, but since heaven was not promised, such a faith would have "made him miserable." Here Goodwin echoes the position of John Cameron (1579?–1625), who argued that the faith under the covenant of nature is to be distinguished from the supernatural faith that is given to the elect in the covenant of grace.[30] For Goodwin, but not necessarily for Turretin, a natural faith was commensurate with a reward that went no further than the promise of life in Eden.

In the end, there is no question that the Puritans believed in natural theology. Whether they were willing to posit that natural theology coexisted with supernatural theology before the fall was not agreed on. Owen seemed to suggest that they coexisted, whereas Goodwin rejected the idea. This disagreement arose, in part, because of different ideas among the Puritans on the nature of Adam's reward.

Natural Theology after the Fall Just as the Reformed from the time of Calvin onward did not always agree on the boundaries of natural theology before the fall, likewise they did not quite agree in all details on the role of natural theology in the state of sin.[31] There was, however, unanimous agreement among the Puritans on natural theology's continued existence after the fall into sin. Stephen Charnock (1628–1680), in his penetrating work on the knowledge of God, notes that men after the fall "conclude something of God, though nothing of Christ."[32] Sinners by nature, "dimmed by the fumes of their corruption," are unable completely to blot out the knowledge that God exists.[33] Not only the implanted notion of God, but also creation (the visible world) acts upon sinners to make them aware of God's attributes, even as they are perceived by man's "purblind and dim sight" (Rom. 1:20).[34] Charnock lists ten attributes of God that may be recognized by the light of nature: (1) the power of God, in creating a world out of nothing; (2) the wisdom of God, in the order, variety, and beauty of creation; (3) the goodness of God, in the provision God makes for His creatures; (4) the immutability of God, for if He were mutable, He would lack the perfection of the sun and heavenly bodies, "wherein no change hath been observed"; (5) His eternity, for He must exist before what was made in time; (6) the omniscience of God, since as the Creator He must necessarily know everything He has made; (7) the sovereignty of God, "in the obedience his creatures pay to him, in observing their several orders, and moving in the spheres wherein he set them"; (8) the spirituality of God, insofar as God is not visible, "and the more spiritual any

creature in the world is, the more pure it is"; (9) the sufficiency of God, for He gave all creatures a beginning, and so their being was not necessary, which means God was in no need of them; and finally, (10) His majesty, seen in the glory of the heavens.[35] Charnock concludes that all of these attributes of God may be known by sinful man by observation of the natural world.

This knowledge that men have of God is, however, according to Goodwin, a false knowledge (1 John 2:3–4). The difference between the knowledge of the regenerate and the unregenerate is vast and categorical, and not, according to Goodwin, simply one of degree, though there is some truth in that.[36] Charnock adds, "Men by reason know that there is a God, but it is so dim in the discovery of his perfections that it sees not light enough to raise it up to any close act of a fiducial dependence on him."[37] The difference between unregenerate man's knowledge of God and regenerate man's knowledge is the difference between natural knowledge and the supernatural knowledge of God as revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ.[38] Believers can truly know God through Jesus Christ as the Mediator, whereas unbelievers can never truly know God apart from Christ's mediation.

In similar vein, Charnock maintains that fallen human beings can only know God from the book of creation, and without a mediator, in a "terrible" [terrifying] manner. As a result of Adam's transgression, he and his posterity are unable to both know and enjoy God. Consequently, God can only be truly known through Jesus Christ. Charnock explains: "God therefore pitches upon Christ in his secret counsel, and stores up in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, to shoot his beams through him upon man."[39] In Christ the Father is made visible, for He is the image of the invisible God. The divine nature cannot be comprehended by the finite, and much less so, by sinful finite creatures. As Owen noted, God in His essence is incomprehensible; direct intuitive notions of God's essence are "too wonderful for us."[40] But, as Charnock argues, the divine nature "shines forth and sparkles in the face of Christ" because human nature, both body and soul, is assumed by the incarnate Son of God.[41] Without, then, denying natural theology, the Puritans generally spoke of its limitations in the context of Christology, particularly when compared to that way the Son makes knowledge of God possible through His incarnation. Natural theology cannot save, but supernatural theology can. As Barker noted, the works of creation cannot make known the way of redemption in Christ: "Adam might see God as Creator, not as a Redeemer in these Works of Nature. He might see an infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness shining forth herein. But that Second and better Edition of these Attributes to be set forth in the work of Redemption, he could not see."[42]

Supernatural Revelation In general, scholastic Reformed theologians on the Continent during the seventeenth century may have surpassed their Reformed contemporaries in Britain in setting forth the nature of supernatural revelation, but the work of John Owen on revelation stands out among the Puritans.[43] J. I. Packer is certainly correct to note that Owen used the term "communication" to "cover every divine bestowal of benefit upon man."[44] But, like Packer's treatment, the following analysis of Owen's thought on supernatural revelation will concern itself with Owen's understanding of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's role in man's appropriation of the knowledge of the triune God. This discussion will be followed by a consideration of a hugely significant element in the concept of revelation: the source of true knowledge of God and its divinely appointed context, namely Christ and the covenant.

The Inspiration of Scripture In view is the Word of God, which for Owen has a threefold meaning: "*hypostatikos*, *endiathetos*, and *prophorikos*."[45] The hypostatic ("personal") Word has reference to the person of Christ. The latter two Greek terms, found commonly in patristic literature and used by Philo of Alexandria, speak of the "internal" or "inherent" (*endiathetos*) Word and the "spoken" (*prophorikos*) Word. The *logos prophorikos* is the Bible, God's supernatural revelation, expressed in words and committed to writing. Supernatural revelation provides an objective ground for supernatural illumination, and Owen constantly ties together the fact of divine revelation and the concept of appropriating it. So the Scripture is the "only external means of divine supernatural illumination, because it is the only repository of all divine supernatural revelation."[46] Faith arises from the authority and truth of God in the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth of God's Word because the Spirit is truth.[47] The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit infallibly assures believers that Scripture is God's Word.[48] The relation of the external Word of God and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit requires further discussion below, but a look at the Puritan doctrine of inspiration, with particular reference to Owen, will provide the necessary introduction to the concept of the Bible's self-authentication, both internal and external, and the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding the mind of God for believers.

As the Westminster Confession of Faith makes clear (see 1.8), "the Old Testament in Hebrew…and the New Testament in Greek…being immediately inspired by God…are therefore authentical."[49] Even when translated into English the Bible remains the Word of God. According to Richard Vines (1600–c. 1655) the translated Word of God is still Scripture, "for the Scripture stands

not in *cortice verborum* [the outer shell of the words] but in *medulla sensus* [the marrow of what they mean], it's the same wine in this vessel which was drawn out of that. Translations are but vessels or taps.… The *Scriptures expressed in English are the word of God*."[50] Similarly, Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) argues that no author of any book in the Bible wrote "Canonical Scripture of their own head"; instead, the Scriptures were written by "immediate inspiration, which essentially did include every syllable and word that the Apostles and Prophets were to write."[51] Owen connects the inspiration of Scripture to the work of the Holy Spirit, who prepared and elevated the various authors' minds of Scripture. The Spirit "acted and guided them as to the very *organs of their bodies* whereby they expressed the revelation which they had received by inspiration from him.… He guided their tongues in the declaration of his revelations, as the mind of a man guideth his hand in writing to express its conceptions.… For whatever they received by revelation, they were but the pipes through which the waters of it were conveyed, without the least mixture with any alloy from their frailties."[52]

There is no question that Owen had a high view of inspiration; the Bible is nothing less than the revelation of the mind of God, which, although committed to writing by sinful men, was kept pure from their own innate shortcomings. Owen elaborates on how this took place. He notes that three things concurred in God revealing His will to men and as they wrote down the words of God. First, the "inspiration of the minds of the prophets with knowledge"; second, the "suggestion of words unto them to express what their minds conceived"; and, third, the Spirit's guiding of their hands "in setting down the words suggested."[53] If any of the three aforementioned elements were missing, Scripture would not be divine and infallible, according to Owen. Some might suggest that Owen presents an overly mechanical view of inspiration, but he also affirms that the work of the Spirit on the minds of men "doth not put a force upon them, nor act them any otherwise than they are in their own natures."[54] In fact, the words the Spirit uses with each respective author are those "they are accustomed unto, and he causeth them to make use of such expressions as were familiar unto themselves."[55] Here, then, Owen highlights the so-called "organic" nature of inspiration, but not to the same degree perhaps as by Calvin.

The means by which God revealed Himself to the authors of Scripture are considered under three heads by Owen: voices, dreams, and visions, with two adjuncts, symbolical actions and local mutations. By voices, Owen shows that God sometimes used an articulate voice, as in the case of Moses. Owen contends that the "whole revelation made unto Moses was by outward, audible, articulate voices, whose sense was impressed upon his mind by the Holy Spirit; for an

external voice without an inward elevation and disposition of mind is not sufficient to give security and assurance of truth unto him that doth receive it."[56] In the next place, besides His audible voice, God sometimes made use of dreams, which came through the immediate operation of the Spirit, confirming infallibly the impressions these dreams made on the minds of men (Acts 2:17), a phenomenon most especially seen in the Old Testament. Third, God revealed Himself by visions that were apprehended by the inward and outward senses of the prophets. So, for example, concerning outward revelation, sometimes prophets saw angels, as Abraham did (Gen. 18:1–2). Regarding inward revelation, Isaiah saw God seated upon His throne (Isa. 6).[57] In all of these various modes of revelation, the Holy Spirit enabled the prophets faithfully to retain "and infallibly to declare, what was so represented unto them."[58]

As noted above, Owen speaks of two "adjuncts" to these various means by which God revealed Himself to the prophets, namely "symbolical actions and local mutations." The former are the various visible actions performed by the prophets that were forms of revelation, such as Isaiah walking naked (Isa. 20:1–3) or Hosea marrying a wife of whoredom (Hos. 1:2). Interestingly, Owen argues that both of these actions are against the law of God and so were not actually done. Instead, they were "represented unto them in visions."[59] However, cases in which the law of God was not transgressed, such as Ezekiel lying on his left side for 390 days, actually happened in view of God's people (Ezek. 4:4–5; see also 12:4–6). By "local mutations" Owen has in mind events in which the prophets were transported from one place to another, as in the instances recorded in Ezekiel 8:3 and 11:24. When this happened, Ezekiel's senses were suspended and he fell into a trance, a sort of "holy rapture" in which Ezekiel was carried from one place to another. Owen refers to these symbolical actions and local mutations as accidents of prophecy, part of the variety of revelations alluded to in Hebrews 1:1. These various modes of revelation, however, have ceased with the completion of the canon of Scripture. For new covenant believers, the Scriptures are the only rule for understanding the mind of God. As Owen notes, it was formerly "the word spoken that was to be believed; and it is now the word written that is to be believed."[60] Nonetheless, one can only truly understand the mind of God if he or she has received the promised Holy Spirit, which brings up the all-important topic of how God's revelation is appropriated by us.

Appropriating the Truth of the Bible Axiomatic for Owen, and indeed for all Reformed theologians, is the idea that there is a correspondence between God and man, insofar as man has the ability to understand the mind of God.

Certainly, according to the maxim *finitum non capax infiniti* (the finite cannot contain the infinite), man can never fully comprehend God, but, as Packer notes, "as far as our thoughts about him correspond to what he says about himself, they are true thoughts about him, and constitute real knowledge about him…and this knowledge he himself gives us by his own verbal self-testimony."[61] Such knowledge of God via the Scriptures is made possible by the supernatural illumination of the Holy Spirit. Before the formation of the canon, however, Owen explains the ways in which God revealed Himself through external revelations. These revelations had a twofold purpose, namely, the edification and instruction of the individual who received the "word from God" and the edification and instruction of the church.[62] Here again, the role of the Holy Spirit in these revelations provides Owen with the basis to distinguish between God's Word and Satan's delusions. Revelations from God, such as that given to Abraham, commanding him to sacrifice his only son, had a "divine power and efficacy" that infallibly assured Abraham that the words came from God.[63] Nevertheless, God required from Abraham the exercise of his "faith, conscience, obedience, and reason" in order to know that God had indeed spoken to him.[64] This means of revelation was, however, imperfect and had certain disadvantages, according to Owen. Revelation communicated to individuals could never provide continuing knowledge of God in the world. Consequently, the Scriptures provided the world with the mind and will of God expressed in a permanent form, so when the law was given, God "obliged the church unto the use of it *alone*."[65] God continued to give additional revelation to the church, at different times, in various modes, to be preserved in written form, until the "full revelation of the whole mind of God…was committed unto and perfected by Jesus Christ" (Heb. 1:1–2). The revelation made by Christ, either immediately, or by His Spirit to the apostles, was committed to writing in the Scriptures of the New Testament. For that reason, and here one notes Owen's polemic against the Quakers of his day who allowed for revelation that went beyond God's written Word,[66] the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, once completed, became for the church the "*only external means of divine supernatural illumination*."[67]

Returning to the discussion about supernatural faith, Owen affirms, as Goodwin did, that a supernatural faith is required to believe supernatural revelation.[68] A natural faith cannot ascend so high as infallibly to believe God's testimony concerning Himself and, particularly, the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, Owen argued, "if we believe it not with faith divine and supernatural, we believe it not at all."[69] Owen concludes that an internal, efficacious work of the Holy Spirit must illuminate the minds of believers so that

they not only recognize the divine authority of Scripture, but also embrace the truths contained therein. Goodwin speaks of the supernatural faith of God's elect as that whereby the Holy Spirit gives light and seals up to believers the truth of the Scriptures. In fact, the "prevailing testimony of the Spirit is the ground of all our faith."[70] That the Holy Spirit is necessary to believe God's Word shows that the "wisest philosophers" need the internal testimony of the Spirit as much as the "meanest and most unlearned."[71] In a similar manner to Calvin, Owen notes the twofold manner by which the Holy Spirit confirms the truth of God's Word to the church, namely by His external and internal witness. The internal witness of the Spirit persuades believers that the Scriptures really are the very words of God. But Owen's stress on the external witness of the Spirit makes "explicit what is implicit in Calvin's statements on the subject."[72]

The authority of the Word of God comes from itself as God's word. Thus Scripture, for Owen, is self-evidencing and has an innate efficacy because of its Author. Light and power constitute the self-evidencing nature of Scripture as the Word of God. Light, like God and Scripture, does not require proof of authenticity. The Scriptures are referred to as "light," indeed, "a glorious, shining light,…an illuminating light, compared to and preferred above the light of the sun."[73] Consequently, the church must hold out the "light" ministerially and not authoritatively: in other words, the church "may *bear up the light* [but] it *is not the light*."[74] Those in the church who have not been blinded by Satan, who have been given a supernatural faith by the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, will readily assent to the Scripture as the Word of God because as light, it authenticates itself. Owen continues: "By this self-evidencing light, I say, doth the Scripture make such a proposition of itself as the word of God, that whoever rejects it, doth it at the peril of his eternal ruin."[75] The other aspect that shows Scripture to be the very Word of God is its innate power. The Scriptures are not read or preached as a naked word, but as a word clad with power; the Word of God effects change because it is powerful (James 1:21; Acts 20:32; Col. 1:6). Scripture cuts into the hearts of men; it judges and sentences them; it convicts, converts, makes wise and consoles; in short, its power to effect change in men evidences it to be revelation from God.[76]

Returning to the role of the Holy Spirit in appropriating the Scriptures as the Word of God, Owen explains that the Spirit does not speak to believers in an outward or inward vocal testimony. In other words, the Spirit does not speak to believers "*of* the Word, but *by* the Word."[77] When the Spirit and the Word accompany each other in the hearts and minds of believers, natural darkness is dispelled and sinful resistance is overcome, so that they are able to see the light and yield to the power of the Word of God. Owen forcefully concludes: "He that

would utterly separate the Spirit from the word had as good burn his Bible."[78]

In summary, when the Holy Spirit externally assures believers that the Scriptures are the Word of God, at the same time the Spirit enables them to understand the mind of God through the illumination provided by His internal testimony.[79] The Scriptures, then, were for the Puritans the *principium cognoscendi theologiae* (cognitive foundation for theology), as evidenced in the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Their principal purpose is to record the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, who proclaims the will of God for our salvation (WSC, Q. 24). Thus, God is known only through Christ, and for that reason the Puritans, like their Reformed orthodox contemporaries on the Continent, always grounded supernatural revelation on an explicitly christological base.

Christ the Source of Knowledge Owen speaks of Christ as the "sacred repository" of all truth.[80] Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) similarly acknowledges that Christ is the "sum and centre of all divinely revealed truth."[81] Because He is God incarnate, Christ makes theology possible.[82] In fact, Owen distinguishes between the theology of the God-man, Jesus Christ, and the theology of everyone else. Christ's theology is innate in Himself (Col. 2:3), and so this theology far exceeds that of anyone else whose knowledge of God must be acquired from without. We cannot comprehend Christ's theology, so Owen forbears to discuss the theology of "Jesus Christ, 'in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden' (Col. 2:3), and about that knowledge, which He through personal union held and holds, and about the revelations given to Him from the Father (Rev. 1:1), and about [the idea] that all the fullness of the Spirit dwells in him without measure (John 3:34)."[83] While Christ's own knowledge of God is something utterly beyond believers, He nevertheless provides the ontological basis, in the glory of His person as the God-man, for revelation to be communicated from God to humanity; He is the Mediator not only in salvation, but also in all communication between God and fallen humanity.[84]

Charnock likewise affirmed that only Christ possessed such knowledge; for He is the beam of light by which the perfections of God are manifested to believers. Indeed, as Charnock shows, "whatsoever tends to the glory of God…is fully revealed by Christ."[85] Before any man could come to know God, Christ had a unique capacity for, and the sole prerogative of knowing God, in order to make God known to us. Christ had an intimacy with the Father that no mere man could claim (John 3:13). Only Christ understood the secret mysteries of God from eternity because, as Charnock notes further, Christ "only was interested in

them."[86] More than that, Christ was the "medium of the first discovery of God in the creation" (John 1:3–4; Heb. 1:2; Prov. 8:22). Christ is the wisdom and power of God, not only in creation, but also in redemption. Charnock writes:

> Now, as in the creation the Son communicated to all creatures some resemblance of God, and the end of the creation being to declare God to the rational creature, it was most proper for the Son of God to make those further declarations of him which were necessary, who at first made the manifestation of God in the frame of the world. As the beautiful image of reason in the mind, breaking out with the discovery of itself in speech and words, is fittest to express the inward sense, thoughts, conceptions, nature, and posture of the mind, so the essential Word of God clothes himself with flesh, comes out from God to manifest to us the nature and thoughts of God. He which is the word of God is fittest to manifest the nature of God.[87]

No one but the God-man has the ability to declare perfectly the revelation of God. So the "great end" of Christ's coming was to reveal God (Matt. 13:35; John 1:18). This christological conception implied for the Puritans, such as Charnock, Owen, and Goodwin, that the Scriptures are dependent upon Christ for their content.

Christ reveals God not only to men, but also to angels. The angels have their knowledge of God through Christ, who was the instrument of their creation. In fact, when the angels saw Christ crucified on the cross, deserted by the Father, buried in the tomb, raised from the dead, and ascending into heaven, "they learned more of God and his nature, more of the depths of his wisdom, treasures of his grace, and power of his wrath, then they had done by all God's actions in the world…in all those four thousand years wherein they had remained in being."[88] In Christ all of God's attributes are manifested and glorified. Natural theology may give a man a dim knowledge of God's attributes, but in Christ the attributes of God "sparkle" because they have in view redemption. "Christ is the stage," says Charnock, "wherein all the attributes of God act their parts." There is a profound sense in which the gospel reveals God in a way the law never could.[89]

In light of this, orthodox Protestants typically refer to the theology of believers on earth as "our theology" (*theologia nostra*), which is given by, or acquired from Christ. This revealed theology is only derivative or ectypal theology (*theologia ectypa*), and is thus finite, as opposed to original or archetypal theology (*theologia archetypa*), which is the infinite knowledge of Himself that only God possesses. The content of God's revelation of Himself is communicated through Jesus Christ, but that communication takes place in the

context of a covenant.

Covenantal Context for the Knowledge of God God revealed Himself to Adam in the context of a covenant (the covenant of works). If this was true for Adam in the garden, how much more for the elect in the covenant of grace? Owen would argue that all true theology is based on a covenant, which means that supernatural theology is best understood covenantally.90 The doctrine of the covenant was important for Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century because it enabled them to articulate the relational nature of theology, which is the purpose of revelation. As Trueman has noted, the doctrine of the covenant "allows for the bridging of the ontological chasm that exists between an infinite, self-existent Creator and a finite, dependent creation."91

In the covenant of grace, revelation grows by degrees, something highlighted by John Ball (1585–1640) in his well-known work, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1645). For the Puritans, Christ was the great subject of the Scriptures, but He was revealed in the context of the various covenants one finds in the Bible, even the covenant of works, in which Adam was a type of Christ. In other words, the hypostatic Word (Christ) provides the foundation for the spoken Word (*logos prophorikos*) in the context of the history of redemption, which is concerned with the revelation of the glory of God through the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In the covenant of grace, God reveals His love and grace toward His people. But those truths are all proposed to God's people in the various post-lapsarian covenants in and by Christ. In fact, there is not "any one text of Scripture which presseth our duty unto God, that we can so understand as to perform that duty in an acceptable manner, without an actual regard unto Christ, from whom alone we receive ability for the performance of it, and in or through whom alone it is accepted with God."92 As Owen would demonstrate in his own writings, revelation was progressive along covenantal lines, but in the new covenant God speaks definitively and most gloriously in the person of Jesus Christ. Trueman has accurately pointed out that there are two lines in Owen's view of Scripture as revelation that relate to the doctrine of the covenant:

> First, there is the vertical line of God's gracious will to save, which, thanks to the Son's consubstantiality with the Father and his participation in the covenant of redemption, is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit whose task is to bear witness to the will of the Father revealed in the Son. Second, there is the horizontal line of the gradual revelation of God's salvific will in history which starts in the Garden of Eden and culminates in the birth, life, and death of Christ.93

What Trueman highlights in these two lines are the various elements in God's revelation of Himself to the church, the christocentric and the covenantal—the former vertical and the latter horizontal, the former providing the foundation for the latter. Moreover, all of the required elements for supernatural revelation are present in the above-mentioned model that contains elements of Christology, pneumatology, a thorough-going Trinitarianism, and the covenant as the context for understanding the mind of God.

Conclusion

The doctrine of the revelation among the Puritans may be understood as twofold, as natural theology and supernatural theology. God reveals Himself in both. Puritan theologians did not always agree on the specifics of revelation, but the disagreement may be more formal or semantic than real. Certainly, natural theology was commonly affirmed by the Puritans, and in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the phrase "light of nature" occurs five times (1.1, 6; 10.4; 20.4; 21.1). But the divines were all aware that natural theology was insufficient for salvation after the fall, even if, as Goodwin maintained, natural theology was sufficient for Adam in the garden. Thus the Puritans all affirmed a twofold knowledge of God after the fall. Saving knowledge is supernatural and comes through the Mediator, Jesus Christ. The Son reveals the Father to believers by the Spirit, so that they come to know God rightly, which is impossible to achieve by natural theology alone. Hence the need for supernatural theology and supernatural faith, produced by the Spirit, to believe and obey the Scriptures. The Scriptures apart from the internal and external testimony of the Spirit are useless to sinful creatures, which explains why, for Owen and the Puritans, Christian theology must be conceived of in supernatural terms; otherwise it is not theology. And supernatural theology must also, of course, have a trinitarian thrust to it, which is precisely what we find in Owen and the other major Puritan theologians. God reveals Himself through Christ in the Scriptures by means of the Holy Spirit—the means including not only the inscripturation of God's Word but also the appropriation of them on the part of believers who are joined to Christ by faith.

1. See the article by J. V. Fesko and Guy M. Richard, "Natural Theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2003), 3:223–66.

2. See Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

3. See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

4. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 1:278.

5. Owen frequently refers to the basic errors of the Socinians in his work, *Theologoumena*. "*Fungum primum hominem et stipitem, vixdum rationis compote fuisse fingunt Sociniani; tanquam Dei, sui, uxoris, aliarumque creaturarum ignarum, deridendum quasi propinant*," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 17:40 (1.4.4).

6. Matthew Barker, *Natural Theology* (London: N. Ranew, 1674), 70.

7. Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:27–31 (1.4.1).

8. Barker, *Natural Theology*, 68.

9. Barker, *Natural Theology*, 4.

10. According to Francis Turretin, "The orthodox…uniformly teach that there is a natural theology,

partly innate…and partly acquired." *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 1992), 1.3.4.

11. Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 79.

12. On Goodwin, see *Of the Creatures, and the Condition of their Estate by Creation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:44–69. On Turretin, see *Institutes*, 8.6.3; cf. 8.3.15. On Owen, see *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:42 (1.4.7): "*Quo verò demum spatio temporis decurso, Adamo sub ratione præmii Deo frui contigisset, cùm id Deus ipse tanquam futurum nunquam præsciverit, subtilis et periculosa est disceptatio.*"

13. Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 84. Cf. Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 67–70.

14. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:44.

15. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:44.

16. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:45–46.

17. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 1:284.

18. "The orthodox indeed consistently teach that natural theology is partly implanted (*insitam*), as derived from the book of conscience by common or basic insights; partly acquired (*acquisitam*), as arises discursively from the book of Creatures." Turretin, *Institutes*, 1.3.4.

19. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 1:285.

20. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:46.

21. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:47.

22. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:48.

23. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:54.

24. Goodwin often posits a strong contrast between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. "That Adam's best knowledge and enjoyment was inferior, and of a lower rank, than is that knowledge and fellowship with God, which we in Christ, through faith, do here enjoy, in that estate of grace which the gospel putteth us into." Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:43. Also, in response to the Papists, who argued that Adam received supernatural gifts as part of being made in the image of God, Goodwin responds in the following manner: "But then, they put this absurdity upon our assertion, that what is natural cannot be lost; and that what was, by a supernatural act of God's, given the angels and us, must be supernatural." Goodwin answers this objection by noting that three things belong to men and angels. First, the actual soul, an essential property that, if taken away, means a man ceases to be a man. Second, men and angels also possess understanding, a will, and affections. These, too, are essential to the being of men and angels. Thirdly, there are also various dispositions in those faculties that perfect the soul, "whereby it might attain and be preserved in happiness and blessedness." Among these are holiness, in which the soul could be perfected, while it was also liable to sin. Thus, Goodwin argues: "For it was and is but a perfection in the soul or angel, which may, *abesse vel adesse sine subjective interitu*, be lost, and cease without the ceasing of the subject they belonged unto." *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:33.

25. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:54.

26. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:55.

27. The *donum superadditum* is contrasted with the *donum concreatum* (concreated gift) or *donum naturale* (natural gift) by the Protestant scholastics. As Richard Muller notes, "The Protestant argument was that the *donum gratuitum*, the utterly free gift, of *iustitia originalis* was part of the original constitution of man and therefore a *donum concreatum*, natural, or *intrinsecum* rather than something superadded to the original constitution of man." *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (1985; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 96.

28. See chapter 14 on the covenant of works in this book. Cf. Richard Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183.

29. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:57.

30. See Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome…. Whereunto Is Annexed a Discourse*

of the Learned John Cameron's, Touching the ThreeFold Covenant of God with Man, Faithfully Translated (London: for P. S., 1656), 361–62 (Thesis 14).

31. See Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 1:300.

32. Stephen Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), 4:16.

33. Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *Works*, 4:114–15.

34. Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *Works*, 4:115.

35. Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *Works*, 4:115–16.

36. Thomas Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness before God, in Respect of Sin and Punishment*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 10:159.

37. Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *Works*, 4:31.

38. See Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:162–63.

39. Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *Works*, 4:110–11.

40. John Owen, *The Person of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:65. See also Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *Works*, 4:39–40.

41. Charnock, *The Knowledge of God*, in *Works*, 4:112.

42. Barker, *Natural Theology*, 111.

43. One of the best treatments on Owen's doctrine of revelation is J. I. Packer's essay, "John Owen on Communication from God," in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 81–96. See also, more recently, Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 47–101; Henry M. Knapp, "Understanding the Mind of God: John Owen and Seventeenth-Century Exegetical Methodology" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2002); and Barry H. Howson, "The Puritan Hermeneutics of John Owen: A Recommendation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63, no. 2 (2001): 351–76.

44. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 82.

45. Owen, *Pro Sacris Scripturis*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 16:427.

46. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4:12.

47. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:72.

48. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:61.

49. For an account of the views of the Westminster divines on the inspiration of Scripture, see Richard Muller's essay "'Inspired by God—Pure in All Ages': The Doctrine of Scripture in the Westminster Confession," in *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship*, ed. Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 2007), 31–58.

50. Richard Vines, *The Authours, Nature, and Danger of Haeresie Laid Open in a Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons*… (London: W. Wilson for Abel Roper, 1647), 68–69.

51. Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London: Printed by John Field for Christopher Meredith, 1646), 66.

52. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 3:134.

53. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:144.

54. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:144. By "overly mechanical" I have in mind Owen's comments in his work "The Divine Original of the Scripture" (16:299), where he argues that the Old Testament prophets "obtained nothing by study or meditation, by inquiry or reading (Amos vii. 15). Whether we consider the *matter* or manner of what they received and delivered, or their receiving and delivering of it, they were but as an instrument of music, giving a sound according to the hand, intention, and skill of him that strikes it." On Calvin's views of inspiration see David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 26–37.

55. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:144–45.
56. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:135.
57. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:137–38.
58. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:138.
59. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:139.
60. Owen, *The Divine Original of Scripture*, in *Works*, 16:319.
61. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 82–83.
62. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:8.
63. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:8.
64. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:9.
65. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:11.
66. For a particularly good short treatment of Owen's polemics with the Quakers, see Michael A. G. Haykin, "John Owen and the Challenge of the Quakers," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 2002), 131–55. Cf. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 56–84.
67. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:12.
68. Goodwin's work *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, vol. 7, principally shows the exaltation of Jesus over Adam and the superiority of the condition of God's people in Christ compared to Adam's condition in Eden.
69. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:49.
70. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:63.
71. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:92.
72. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 90. On Calvin's magisterial work on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 1.7.5.
73. Owen, *The Divine Original of Scripture*, in *Works*, 16:320.
74. Owen, *The Divine Original of Scripture*, in *Works*, 16:320.
75. Owen, *The Divine Original of Scripture*, in *Works*, 16:322.
76. Owen, *The Divine Original of Scripture*, in *Works*, 16:324–25.
77. Owen, *The Divine Original of Scripture*, in *Works*, 16:326.
78. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:192.
79. Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:14. Elsewhere, "The work of the Holy Ghost unto this purpose consists in the saving illumination of the mind; and the effect of it is a supernatural light, whereby the mind is renewed: see Rom. xii. 2; Eph.i. 18, 19, iii. 16–19." Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *Works*, 4:57.
80. Owen, *The Person of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:79.
81. Edward Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm…* (1656; repr., London: Religious Tract Society, 1837), 1.
82. See Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:36 (1.3.2).
83. "'*Quæ de Jesu Christi, in quo absconditi sunt omnes thesauri sapientiæ et scientiæ,' Col. ii.3, theologia, deque scientia illa, quam per unionem personalem habuit, habetque, atque revelationibus ei a Patre datis, Apoc. i. 1., utque in illo habitet omnis plenitude Spiritus, Joh. iii. 34.*…" Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:38 (1.3.6).
84. On the possible role of the Holy Spirit as Mediator in the covenant of works, see Willem J. van Asselt's interesting comments on tendencies in that direction in Johannes Cocceius, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 262.
85. Charnock, *A Discourse of the Knowledge of God in Christ*, in *Works*, 4:131. The second part of Charnock's book looks more specifically at the knowledge of God "in Christ"; hence the slight change of title from previous references.
86. Charnock, *The Knowledge of Christ*, in *Works*, 4:131.
87. Charnock, *The Knowledge of Christ*, in *Works*, 4:132.

88. Charnock, *The Knowledge of Christ*, in *Works*, 4:135.
89. Charnock, *The Knowledge of Christ*, in *Works*, 4:139.
90. See Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:43–44 (1.4.10).
91. Trueman, *John Owen*, 67.
92. Owen, *The Person of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:82.
93. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 74.

Chapter 2

Puritan Hermeneutics and Exegesis

> *We can do nothing well without joy, and a good conscience, which is the ground of joy.*
>
> —WILLIAM WHITAKER[1]

> *The conferring and comparing of Scriptures is an excellent means of coming to an acquaintance with the mind and will of God in them.*
>
> —JOHN OWEN[2]

Reformed theologians in Puritan England had to address a variety of theological heresies and errors. Fundamentally, these problems resulted from a failure to interpret the Scriptures correctly. In the Puritan view, correct interpretation of the Scriptures was not only a matter of employing the right interpretative tools, but also of having and using the right spiritual tools, such as prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit for illumination. Likewise, interpretation without application was an idea utterly foreign to the mind of the Puritans. Though each aspect was important, this chapter will focus primarily on the former; other chapters in this book will deal with the latter.

Recently, some good work has appeared in the secondary literature on Puritan hermeneutics.[3] In his impressive study on the exegetical methodology of John Owen (1616–1683), Henry Knapp has refuted the view that the seventeenth century was a regressive time in biblical studies and hermeneutics. Anyone who has taken the time to read the works of the best Puritan authors knows that they were highly sophisticated in their Bible interpretation. The Puritans were so far from relying on unthinking proof-texting that their use of hermeneutical tools resulted in a number of advances in exegesis from the period of the Reformation. British theologians who had the benefit of standing on the shoulders of their predecessors wrote impressive commentaries on various books of the Bible. One has to think only of the works of Paul Baynes (1573–1617) on Ephesians and Colossians, John Owen on Hebrews, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679) on Ephesians—though one might wish to miss his commentary on Revelation—and Joseph Caryl's (1602–1673) massive commentary on Job. Some Puritans (e.g.,

John Bunyan [1628–1688]) did slip into excessive allegorizing of Scripture, but even then their reasons were chiefly pastoral. This chapter will examine some of the major hermeneutical presuppositions of various Puritan theologians, as well as some of the basic exegetical principles they used in interpreting various texts of Scripture.

Two Covenants

The doctrine of the covenant played a major role in Puritan theology. In the area of biblical hermeneutics, the Puritans affirmed two historical covenants between God and man, namely the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. There are, of course, other covenants in Scripture, but these two covenants provided the basic framework for understanding how God relates to humanity, with the covenant of works having reference to man in the state of original innocency and the covenant of grace having reference to man in the state of sin. These covenants are not absolutely antithetical, as if they had nothing in common, but at the same time, there are important differences. Some of the similarities and differences will be highlighted in order to show how these two covenants function as hermeneutical categories in Puritan thought.

One Puritan theologian who wrote extensively on the doctrine of the covenant was Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675). In *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (1681), he spends a good deal of time highlighting the similarities and differences between the covenants of works and of grace. He first considers a number of similarities between the two before moving to a discussion of their differences. In both, God was the efficient cause; that is, He is the author of both covenants. In both, the moving cause is the grace of God. Some Puritans (e.g., Francis Roberts [1609–1675]) were not altogether keen on the use of "works" and "grace" as the principal designations of these two covenants for the simple reason that "there was very much of Grace and Favour in both."[4] Gillespie, like all of the Reformed orthodox of that era, admits that in the covenant of works the condition was obedience and the reward resulted from works; yet, "even that Covenant was thus far a Covenant of Grace."[5] Not only did God's grace provide the motive for the establishment of the covenant in Eden, but God also "freely endued man with all the habits of Grace in perfection."[6] Moreover, the promised reward was gracious because Adam's obedience could not merit anything from God.

The goal of both covenants is the glory of God. That is to say, Puritan theology always had, in keeping with the Reformed tradition, the glory of God in view as the highest end for all of God's actions. If God's grace was glorified in the first covenant, it was much more glorified in the person of His Son in the second covenant, which, by way of eminency, has the privilege of the title "covenant of grace." In both cases, God enters into covenant with man. However, more particularly, God enters into covenant with a "public person" (Larger Catechism, Q. 22) in each covenant: in the first with Adam as a federal head and in the second with Christ as the federal head of those included in the covenant of grace. Adam is the head of his natural seed; Christ is the head of His

spiritual seed—hence the term “federalism.”[7]

In each covenant, God provided strength or ability for the persons in covenant with Him to fulfill the conditions of the covenants. God endowed Adam with a power or strength natural to Adam by virtue of being made in the image of God. Adam’s strength was natural, but the strength given to Christ’s spiritual posterity is supernatural, namely, the power of God’s grace and Holy Spirit. While there was not complete agreement among the Puritans on the role of natural and supernatural theology both before and after the fall, they were all agreed that to meet the conditions of the covenant of grace, sinners needed supernatural help from God.

The two covenants also agree insofar as they are effectual toward the ends for which God made them. The covenant of works is still effectual after the fall, not because sinners can justify themselves according to the terms given to Adam, but as a way to curse and condemn them. The covenant of grace has an efficacy not present in the covenant of works because the Son of God places Himself under a covenant of works—for some, specifically, the covenant of redemption—on behalf of the elect. For this reason, the promises of the covenant are effectual to Christ’s seed, because Christ’s person and work together provide an unshakable foundation on which the blessings of the covenant of grace rest.[8]

The covenants of works and of grace also demand the same thing, namely, a perfect righteousness that will enable the person to stand before the tribunal of God. For example, in the case of Adam, in the first covenant his righteousness was truly his own, but in the second covenant his righteousness was his only by way of imputation.

The conditions in both covenants are set by God and not man. In fact, generally speaking, in both covenants faith and works are required. Works was the condition of the first covenant, but faith was present in Adam, even if it was a natural faith, as Thomas Goodwin argued. In the covenant of grace, faith in the Mediator is required for justification, but works are not excluded as a condition of this covenant. Works function antecedently to the reward in the first covenant, whereas works follow the reward (justification) in the second covenant.

Both covenants had sacraments as signs and seals.[9] Finally, Gillespie notes that in both covenants the “Confederates needed something more than habitual Grace, for fulfilling the conditions of these Covenants, and persevering in a Covenant-state of life.”[10] To persevere in the garden—for how long and for what reward was open to debate among the Puritans[11]—Adam needed more than habitual grace; he needed “influences of the Spirit for his confirmation, which were not promised to him.”[12] In other words, perseverance in the garden would have been a supernatural grace given to Adam. In the same way, in the

covenant of grace, believers need supernatural grace in order to persevere in the covenant.

Having discussed the similarities between the two covenants, Gillespie turns his attention to the differences between the two covenants, "which are manifold and substantial."[13] While both covenants are designed to advance the glory of God, they nevertheless differ in their special ends. The first covenant was made with man in innocency; he was to persevere in the garden through his obedience. The second covenant was made with sinful man in order to restore him to happiness. The original happiness that Adam possessed is far inferior to the happiness that saints in the covenant of grace will enjoy. The Puritans commonly asserted that saints enjoy far greater privileges in the covenant of grace than Adam did in Eden. Not only Gillespie, but Thomas Goodwin in his exposition of the covenant of works has a decided stress on the superior state of believers in the covenant of grace, who enjoy supernatural graces as opposed to Adam's natural dues in the covenant of nature.[14] In Gillespie's view, those in the second covenant have a certainty of perseverance that Adam never had. A significant support for Gillespie's position is that the mystical and spiritual union with Christ, promising and securing the blessings He procured for His people, given in the covenant of grace, is much superior to the mere moral union (that is, a union of affections) that Adam had with God.[15] Moreover, the believer possesses God and Christ, who dwells in the elect (John 14:20; Gal. 2:20), a privilege Adam did not have.

The end of the covenant of works was God's glory as Creator, but in the covenant of grace, the goal is God's glory as Redeemer. Thus, God's attributes are manifested more abundantly in the covenant of grace because His grace and mercy shine forth in the salvation of men. In Jesus Christ the attributes of God are glorified with a "new and glorious luster…. They are much more glorified then they were or could have been by the Covenant of Works (John 12:28, 17:4)."[16]

Returning to the matter of the "strength of perseverance," Gillespie notes how the covenant of works was more dependent upon Adam and his natural strength, whereas in the covenant of grace believers are far more dependent upon God and His grace. The commandments of the first covenant required nothing but works, and even the faith Adam had in the garden was considered a work; faith in the second covenant is an evangelical grace—that is, "faith considered as 'tis an instrument, not as a gracious act of the soul."[17] That said, and with his ever-conscious eye upon antinomian theology, Gillespie argues that everything the covenant of works commands, the covenant of grace also commands ("though for quite different ends"). In fact, the covenant of grace commands more than the

covenant of works, such as conversion, repentance, faith in Christ, self-denial, mortification, and taking up the cross of Christ.[18] Nonetheless, the covenant of works requires perfect and perpetual obedience, whereas the covenant of grace allows for sincere obedience. For this reason, when speaking of the conditions in each covenant, Gillespie remarks that while both covenants require certain conditions, they are "opposite," that is to say, "the Covenant of Works stood by works as the condition thereof, but the Covenant of Grace standeth by Faith as the condition thereof,"[19] particularly in the realm of justification: "For works are no part of the righteousness of the second Covenant, as faith was of the first, nor is faith our righteousness in the Covenant of Grace, as Works was in the first Covenant, but an instrument only whereby a perfect righteousness is received in Christ."[20] This type of careful language was necessary in order to safeguard the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone from neonomian legalizing tendencies that were creeping into the church through the back door while the Puritans steadfastly fought against antinomian views coming through the front door.

Following from this, Gillespie posits that the conditions of the first covenant were not any one act of obedience but rather multiple acts of obedience (i.e., perfect and perpetual). However, in the second covenant the initial act of a lively faith in Christ fulfills the condition of the covenant. Certainly, believers will continue to exercise their "lively faith," but as soon as they believe in Christ they have a title to heavenly life, which was not the case with Adam. The ability to fulfill the conditions in the covenant of works was innate to Adam, but in the covenant of grace the conditions fulfilled by believers are not properly their own (Eph. 2:8; John 15:5).[21] In arguing this way, Gillespie has in view not only the errors of the Antinomians, who deny conditions, but also those of the Arminian theologians who make faith a work.

In setting out the similarities and differences between the covenants of works and grace, Gillespie provides a basic framework for how Puritan theologians understood the sweep of biblical history. There are two ways by which man finds acceptance with God: by works or by faith. The former was possible in the first covenant, but with the entrance of sin into the world, sinners must go out of themselves and place their faith in the One who placed Himself under the covenant of works or be damned for failing to fulfill the terms of the covenant of works themselves. Gillespie's work stands out as an acute analysis of how the Puritans explained their dichotomous reading of the Bible. They fully appreciated the similarities between the two covenants while forcefully insisting upon an absolute antithesis at the point of how a sinner may be justified before God.

Christological Focus A major principle of interpretation used by the Puritans was the idea, firmly rooted in Scripture, that all of God's Word points to Christ. As John Owen argued, anyone reading Scripture must always keep in mind this fundamental principle, namely:

> that the revelation and doctrine of the person of Christ and his office, is the foundation whereon all other instructions of the prophets and apostles for the edification of the church are built, and whereinto they are resolved.… There are, therefore, such revelations of the person and glory of Christ treasured up in the Scripture, from the beginning unto the end of it, as may exercise the faith and contemplation of believers in this world, and shall never, during this life, be fully discovered or understood.[22]

Since Christ is not merely here or there in the Scriptures, but found on every page, Owen declares that believers will never fully understand in their lives on earth everything in the Bible concerning His person and work. But they must certainly try their best.

Thomas Adams (1583–1652) remarks that Christ is the "sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost in every line…. Christ is the main, the centre whither all these lines are referred."[23] Similarly, commenting on how Christ is the scope of the Scriptures, Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) remarks: "Christ is the pearl of that ring, Christ is the object, the centre wherein all those lines end: take away Christ, what remains?—Therefore, in the whole scriptures let us see that we have an eye to Christ; all is nothing, but Christ."[24] Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) claims that before His incarnation Christ was held forth in "Ceremonies, Rites, Figures, Types, Promises, [and] Covenants."[25] Like most of his Puritan predecessors and contemporaries, Ambrose understands the history of salvation not only covenantally, but also christologically. In each dispensation of God's revelation to His people, more and more of Christ is set forth through the various means listed by Ambrose. So when reading the Old Testament, there is a definite goal in mind: to perceive the ever-increasing revelation of Jesus Christ found on every page of Scripture. This partly explains why the Puritans insisted on reading the Song of Solomon as an allegory highlighting the communion Christ has with His church.[26]

Because Christ, as the God-man, makes revelation possible to sinful, finite creatures, He also becomes the foundation and center of the Bible. Christ is, as it were, the *fundamentum Scripturae* (basic principle of Scripture). However, Reformed theologians have not always entirely agreed on how Christ functions

as the *scopos Scripturae* (target at which Scripture aims). Compare, for example, John Calvin's exegesis of Psalm 8 with Johannes Cocceius's (1603–1669) more rigorously christocentric exegesis of the same psalm.[27] The Puritans inclined more toward the approach of Cocceius than that of Calvin, notwithstanding Calvin's fame in seventeenth-century England.[28] Puritan covenant theology demanded a more explicitly christological reading of Old Testament texts, through typology or even allegory.[29] As Richard Muller notes, "Federal theology, as taught by Cocceius and his followers, was far more open to allegorical and typological exegesis than other varieties of Reformed thought and, therefore, far more liable to have recourse to Christological readings of the Old Testament."[30] The same could be said for the English Puritans. Moving from the general hermeneutical principles of covenant theology and Christ as the *fundamentum Scripturae*, we now turn to more specific exegetical tools used by the Puritans to interpret Scripture.

***Sensus Literalis* (The Literal Sense)** The Westminster Confession of Faith makes some important points about the interpretation of Scripture, including chapter 1.9: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." Behind the words of the Westminster Confession is the Protestant rejection of the medieval exegetical method known as the *quadriga*, or "fourfold sense." Edward Leigh (1603–1671) notes that in this view, the literal sense "is that which is gathered immediately out of the words," which is then coupled with the "spiritual sense," divided into allegorical, tropological, and anagogical.[31] William Perkins (1558–1602) likewise aims several polemical shots at the Church of Rome for using the *quadriga*. He looks at how those using this device interpret Melchizedek offering bread and wine to Abraham (Gen. 14:18): "The literal sense is, that the King of Salem with meat which he brought, refreshed the soldiers of Abraham being tired with travel. The allegorical is, that the Priest doth offer up Christ in ye Mass. The tropological is, therefore something is to be given to the poor. The anagogical is, that Christ in like manner being in heaven, shall be the bread of life to the faithful."[32] However, Perkins strongly asserts that such a method of interpretation "must be exploded and rejected [because] there is one only sense, and the same is the literal."[33] A text may demand an allegorical interpretation because it literally is an allegory, but theologians are not to go to the text with the fourfold method in mind as a basic presupposition for interpreting the Bible. The Scriptures themselves must dictate how they are to be interpreted.

In the same way, Leigh affirms that in Scripture one finds allegories, anagogies, and tropologies. “Yet,” writes Leigh, “these are not many and divers senses of the Scripture; but divers collections from one sense.”[34] Hence, Leigh affirms that Scripture often has two senses, “one of which the latter Divines call literal, grammatical, or historical, another mystical or spiritual.”[35] Thomas Goodwin, who affirms the *sensus literalis*, provides an example in his comments on Matthew 26:29 (“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom”): “It is true, this is likewise interpreted in a mystical sense; but there is no reason, why we may not take it literally.”[36] In other words, the single sense of the passage must always be affirmed, even if a wider range of applications may be gathered or inferred from the literal sense of the text.

The Puritans are well known for their allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon. In the main, however, the Puritans rejected allegorical approaches to interpreting Scripture, even if a number of them may have slipped into excessive allegorizing from time to time.[37] For example, in commenting on Psalms 49 and 149 as evidence for a millennial age, Goodwin contends that “if we put upon allegorical senses, we may put off any Scripture; but if we take them literally, why should we not?”[38] Nonetheless there are places, albeit few, where to interpret the passage or book literally requires the reader to interpret it allegorically. In his commentary on the Song of Solomon, James Durham (c. 1622–1658) affirms its literal meaning (“one sense”), but he also notes

> that literal meaning is not immediate, and that which first looketh out, as in Historical Scriptures, or others which are not figurative, but that which is spiritually and especially meant by these allegorical and figurative speeches, is the literal meaning of this Song. So that its literal sense is mediate, representing the meaning, not immediately from the Words, but mediately from the scope, that is, the intention of the Spirit, which is couched under the figures and allegories, here made use of: For, a literal sense…is that which floweth from such a place of Scripture as intended by the Spirit in the words, whether properly or figuratively used, and is to be gathered from the whole complex expression together, applied thereunto, as in the exposition of parables, allegories and figurative scriptures is clear; and it were as improper and absurd to deny a figurative sense (though literal) to these, as it were to fix figurative expositions upon plain Scriptures, which are properly to be taken.[39]

Not wishing to depart from the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.9), Durham clearly argues that to affirm the literal meaning in the Song of

Solomon necessarily means affirming it as an allegory—the allegory, of course, being a picture of Christ's communion with believers.

Typology

The use of typology figured prominently in Puritan theology, especially in terms of its significance for the two-covenant hermeneutic and the desire to understand the Bible as a book about the person and work of Jesus Christ. In his study on Owen, Henry Knapp defines typology as "a method of interpretation where one explains Old Testament events, persons, and practices, as prefiguring the coming person and ministry of the Messiah and his covenant people."[40] In the minds of the Puritans, this was not a rejection of the literal approach to interpretation. The typological meaning was frequently a necessary component of understanding the literal text so that to interpret such a text literally was to interpret it typologically. Moreover, typology should not be confused with allegory. James Durham lists a number of differences between the two ways of interpreting the Scriptures.

First, types presuppose history. So in the example of Jonah, who was a type of Christ (Matt. 12:40), he really lived in the belly of the fish for three days. However, allegories do not require a firm historical basis as types do.[41] Next, types deal with the comparison of facts (e.g., Jonah with Christ), whereas allegories "take in Words, Sentences, Doctrines both of Faith and manners."[42] Related to this point, types make comparisons between persons and facts in the Old Testament with persons and facts in the New Testament. Allegories have no such limitation. Similarly, types can be applied only to some things, such as persons and events (e.g., Christ and the spread of the gospel); but allegories "take in every thing that belong either to Doctrine, or Instruction in Faith, or to practice for ordering ones life."[43] For these reasons, allegories are more comprehensive in meaning and scope than typologies.

Thomas Goodwin made extensive use of typologies in his theology. He works within a general rule that "what is attributed to the type his shadow, must needs be in a more divine and super-eminent manner ascribed to him the substance. For if so excellent persons in their highest excellency were but his types, then what are those excellencies in him, a person so divine?"[44] Therefore, apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament shows that "whatever eminent and extraordinary excellency was found in any of their ancestors renowned in the Old Testament, or in the ceremonial law, that all such foresignified the Messiah to come, as the perfection and centre of them."[45] Types of Christ in the Old Testament included David, Solomon, Joseph, Noah, Samson, Melchizedek, and especially Adam, who was the "most eminent type of Christ."[46] With regard to Adam, Goodwin argues that because Adam was a type of Christ other particulars also come into the picture:

> Adam's fall, you know, was in a garden; Satan there encountered him, and overcame him, led him and all mankind into captivity to sin and death. God now singleth out the place where the great redeemer of the world, the second Adam, should first encounter with his Father's wrath, to be in a garden, and that there he should be bound and led away captive as Adam was…. Because by a temptation let in at the ear man was condemned, therefore by hearing of the word men shall be saved. 'Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brows,' that was part of Adam's curse; Christ he sweat drops of blood for this, it was the force of that curse that caused it. 'The ground shall bring forth thorns to thee'; Christ he was crucified with a crown of thorns. Adam his disobedience was acted in a garden; and Christ both his active and passive obedience also, much of it was in a garden; and at the last, as the first beginning of his humiliation was in a garden, so the last step was too; he was buried, though not in this, yet in another garden. Thus the type and the thing typified answer one another.[47]

Not only persons, then, but circumstances serve to confirm in Goodwin's mind the typical relation between Adam and Christ. The explicit parallel in 1 Corinthians 15 between the two Adams opens up other parallels. So consumed were the Puritans with Christ—Thomas Goodwin being a fine example of that focus—that typology was not a minor aspect of Puritan hermeneutics but instead a major principle behind their christological reading of the Old Testament.

The Analogy of Faith Returning again to the Westminster Confession of Faith, another important principle of interpretation is provided in 1.9, namely that the Scriptures interpret the Scriptures, so that "when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture,… it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." The analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) resulted from the fact that the Bible is the Word of God and therefore possesses an intrinsic consistency and unity. That is to say, the Scriptures do not contradict themselves. For that reason, the analogy of faith was a crucial aspect of the Puritan hermeneutical and exegetical method. In relation to the concept of the unity of Scripture, Knapp explains that the analogy of faith "did not dictate the interpretation of any particular text; what it did was limit the options which the exegete would consider as appropriate explanations of a passage."[48] According to John Owen, in searching after truth, Christians are to keep uppermost in their minds the analogy of faith, for in the Bible there is a "harmony, an answerableness, and a proportion, in the whole system of faith, or things to be believed. Particular places are so to be interpreted as that they do not break or disturb this order, or fall in upon their due relation to one another."[49] So,

besides limiting the options available to the exegete, the analogy of faith maintains the internal consistency of the Scriptures, which are not contradictory.

The analogy of faith differs from the analogy of Scripture (*analogia Scripturae*) insofar as the analogy of faith is a principle whereby a theologian uses the "general sense of the meaning of Scripture, constructed from the clear or unambiguous *loci* [passages] as the basis for interpreting unclear or ambiguous texts."[50] The analogy of Scripture, however, more specifically has in view the interpretation of unclear passages by comparing with clearer passages that are related to the difficult text in question. In affirming the basic truths of the analogy of faith and the analogy of Scripture, John Flavel (1628–1691) remarks that Christians must not interpret a text that does not square with the "proportion of faith"; that is to say, interpreters cannot "take liberty to rend off a single text from the body of truth to which it belongs, and put a peculiar interpretation upon it, which is absonous and discordant to other Scriptures."[51] For this reason, passages like James 2:24 and John 14:28 ought to be compared with other Scriptures in order to avoid the heresies of the Papists and Socinians. Against the antipaedobaptists, Flavel argues that since "holy" is used over five hundred times to speak of separation to God, "therefore to make it signify, in that place, nothing but legitimacy, is a bold and daring practicing upon Scripture."[52]

In the preface to Goodwin's commentary on Ephesians, Thankful Owen (1620–1681) and James Baron (1649–1683) alert the reader that "if at any time he steps out of the road, he doth it with a due regard to the analogy of faith, and a just veneration for the Reformed Religion."[53] Goodwin was constantly interacting with theologians from various traditions over the centuries, and in his exposition of Ephesians 1:5 he asks whether God the Father predestined the elect for Himself or for Christ. Goodwin admits that initially he argued that God predestined the elect for Christ as part of Christ's mediatorial glory. However, Goodwin shows a change of mind, and in so doing reveals not only his adherence to the analogy of faith, but also his interpretive method of taking passages in their fullest sense, which may be multiple "senses." Speaking of the Greek words *eis auton* he writes:

> But seeing the Greek word may as indifferently, with a variation of the aspirate, be rendered "to himself," and so refer unto God the Father; and finding that the Scriptures do frequently express God's electing of us by choosing us to himself and for himself, as I found when I lately handled the doctrine of election, (upon Rom. ii. 4–6,) and that there was so much and so great a matter comprehended and contained in that expression; I have been

> thereby moved to take that interpretation in also, it being a rule I have always measured the interpretation of Scripture by, as I have oft professed, to take the Scripture phrases and words in the most comprehensive sense; yea, and in two senses, or more, that will stand together with the context and analogy of faith.[54]

Goodwin is taking the text in what he believes is its fullest sense, even if that means "two senses," whereby not only are the elect predestined for Christ, but also for God. Some might argue that in this instance Goodwin jettisons the principle of "one sense," but that "one sense" means in this context, based upon the analogy of faith, that both Christ and the Father are intended by "to himself." What this shows, among other things, is how various elements of interpretation work together as part of an elaborate hermeneutical and exegetical method used by Goodwin.

Good and Necessary Consequence Chapter 1 in the Westminster Confession of Faith continues the theme of biblical interpretation in section 6 by noting that "the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture."[55] The last phrase—"by good and necessary consequence"—has been an important hermeneutical tool for Reformed theologians since the time of the Reformation. Incidentally, the London Baptist Confession of Faith (1677/1689) omits the words "in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" and replaces them with "or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture," which had an obvious connection to their rejection of paedobaptism. For Reformed theologians, including the Westminster divines, the doctrine of the prelapsarian covenant of works was a result of "good and necessary consequence." No single text in the Scriptures was used to prove the covenant of works, but instead, based upon the totality of scriptural evidence, Puritan divines concluded that "the covenant of works" and other such phrases (e.g. covenant of nature) accurately described Adam's context in Genesis 2.

George Gillespie (1613–1648) provides more precise insight into the abovementioned principle of interpretation by polemicizing against various theological traditions, such as the Papists, Arminians, Arians, and Socinians, who all either abuse this principle or fail to even make use of it. For example, according to Gillespie, the Arminians "admit of no proofs from Scripture, but either plain explicit Texts, or such consequences as are *nulli non obvie* [opposed by no one] as neither are nor can be contraverted by any man who is *rationis compos* [able to reason]."[56] A higher degree of theological sophistication was

required to refute various theological errors brought forth by the Papists, and so the Arminian view of "good and necessary consequence" fails to provide an adequate safeguard against error. Thus, necessary consequence, and not an explicit text, will prove that women can take communion and that infants ought to be baptized.

Regarding the practice of paedobaptism, Reformed theologians used the interpretative principle of good and necessary consequence in relation to their other hermeneutical and exegetical methods. As the two-covenant structure makes clear—a structure that even "trichotomists" such as Goodwin and Owen embraced—there is a unity between the Old and New Testaments, with the theological term "the covenant of grace" used by most Puritan theologians to describe God's grand plan of redemption beginning with Genesis 3 and culminating at the final judgment. Hermeneutically, those theologians who argued for paedobaptism placed a great deal of weight on the covenant made with Abraham and its continued significance for the new covenant era. Accordingly, Flavel, whose polemics with antipaedobaptists such as Philip Cary (d. 1710) are well known, argues that the two Testaments should cast light upon one another. Specifically, Christians should not "undervalue or reject an Old-Testament text, as no way useful to clear and establish a New-Testament point of faith or duty."[57] In other words, understanding the whole law (i.e., the Bible) helps one to know the sense of particular laws (e.g., paedobaptism).

The Spirit and Reason John Owen did not mince any words when it came to another fundamental aspect of interpreting the Bible. Those who attempt to interpret the Scriptures "in a solemn manner, without invocation of God to be taught and instructed by his Spirit, is a high provocation to him; nor shall I expect the discovery of truth from any one who so proudly and ignorantly engageth in a work so much above his ability to manage."[58] Owen affirmed that the Holy Spirit works on the minds of the elect so as to enable them to understand the Scriptures since He is the immediate author of all spiritual illumination. Christians cannot assume this will happen, as if to take for granted this spiritual privilege; rather, they must pray that God would enable them to understand His mind and will, which apart from the Spirit is impossible. In part, this was necessary because of the limitations of reason.[59] As Knapp has shown, reason "was consistently denied the status of being the standard; rather, it functioned in a supportive role, subservient to the Scripture, the *principium cognoscendi theologiae*."[60] In Puritan England the role of reason in theology was a major point of contention between Reformed and Socinian theologians. Puritan theologians accused the Socinians of giving reason a place of

preeminence above the Scriptures. Because they did this, the Puritans disagreed with the Socinians on almost every point of doctrine. And the Arminians also gave a place to reason that made it the rule of faith, which explains many of their own theological errors. The Lutherans and the Papists also were criticized by Reformed theologians for leaving reason at the door, so to speak, in their understanding of the Lord's Supper.

For the Puritans, then, reason was helpful, but it had its limits. The mystery of the gospel holds out a number of truths that, on the surface, appear to be contradictions, but the Holy Spirit enables Christians to receive all of these truths without letting reason dominate in a way that leads to various theological errors. Goodwin quotes a number of mysteries contained in the gospel:

> that God had a Son as old as himself…and equal to himself…. That this man Jesus Christ should be in heaven when he was on earth…. That that God that made the law should be subject to the law…. That God, who is nothing but spirit, should have blood to redeem men by…. That he, that is God blessed for ever, should be made a curse…. That God should never be more angry with his Son than when he was most pleased with him.[61]

Goodwin then claims that the cause of all theological errors "hath been for the want of reconciling these things together."[62] He clearly has in mind those who exalt reason over revelation, which meant that so many glorious truths, such as those listed above, were denied in favor of reason. He then refers to a number of opponents to Reformed orthodoxy who cannot accept that apparent contradictions are resolved by the mystery of the gospel:

> The Arians found great things spoken of the manhood of Christ, as of a divine man, and therefore denied that he was God. They could not reconcile these two…therefore, taking part with one, they exclude the other…. As for the Socinians, they say there is no satisfaction for sin; for if God pardon freely, how can he pardon for a satisfaction?… Take Antinomianism, as you call it. All those glorious truths of the gospel, that a man is justified from all eternity…. A man, before he believeth, is unjustified, therefore he is said to be justified by faith; and he is a child of wrath until he believe…. [The Antinomians take] part with one truth to exclude another, whereas both must be taken in…. Take Arminianism. What is the foundation of their error? It is merely a want of reconciling seeming, though not real, contradictions in the gospel. As, for example, they know not how to reconcile man's free will with God's peremptory decree.[63]

Reason cannot work out these mysteries. Adam possessed a natural conscience and reason, but a supernatural faith goes beyond these two principles

that were innate to Adam in the garden of Eden. If reason becomes the primary principle, and not faith, “you will understand nothing, or little, of the mysteries of salvation.”64 In the same way, Flavel suggests that reason is no better than a “usurper when it presumes to arbitrate matters belonging to faith and revelation.”65 Instead, reason sits at the feet of faith. Indeed, God’s works are not unreasonable, “but many of them are above reason.”66

Thus, the Holy Spirit is given by God to the saints in order for them to believe the truths of Scripture that reason, on its own, cannot accept. Francis Turretin (1623–1687) adequately sums up the position of Reformed theologians during the seventeenth century by stating that “although every truth cannot be demonstrated by reason (the boundaries of truth being much more widely extended than those of reason), yet no lie against the truth can be sheltered under the protection of true reason, nor can one truth be destroyed by another.”67 The Holy Spirit, who is the author of Scripture, is also the agent by which the elect come to apprehend spiritual truths. Reason alone cannot ascend to the heights of the mystery of the gospel, and so a supernatural faith is required for understanding and accepting the truths contained in God’s Word.

Conclusion

Many more things could be said about how the Puritans interpreted the Scriptures. But in reading Puritan authors like John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, John Howe (1630–1705), and Stephen Charnock (1628–1680), for example, one cannot help but be impressed by their vast knowledge of the Scriptures. The Puritans were comfortable reading their Bibles in the original languages, and their writings show that they knew other languages such as Aramaic—they frequently cited the Targums—and Coptic. Owen constantly pressed home the importance of reading the Bible in its original languages, especially Hebrew. Puritan theologians were also in constant interaction with theologians on the Continent, both orthodox and heretical. They had a fine knowledge of ecclesiastical history, and their commentaries on various books of the Bible are filled with quotations from pagan and Christian authors.

Thus, their covenantal reading of the Bible, whereby history is divided up into two basic covenants (i.e., works and grace) meant that they were consciously reading the Scriptures with a Christ-centered lens, which was seen in their use of typology and, at times, allegory. They rejected the many "senses" of Scripture (i.e., the so-called *quadriga*), but their writings certainly show that they were often keen to press home the "fuller sense" of certain passages, which may have multiple layers of meanings and was a legitimate application of the literal meaning (*sensus literalis*). Their view that the Scriptures were internally consistent and that most theological truths had to be gathered out of more than one place in the Bible made the basic principles of the analogy of faith and "good and necessary consequence" an indispensable part of their hermeneutic. These principles of interpretation are important, but if reason alone tries to make sense of the mystery of the gospel, a Christian will forever run into error and heresy. Only a Spirit-wrought, supernatural faith will allow a Christian to believe that God had a Son as old as Himself! And yet to come to formulate such a truth a host of interpretative techniques were required.

1. William Whitaker, *Disputations on Holy Scripture*, trans. William Fitzgerald (London, 1588), 402.

2. John Owen, *A Day of Sacred Rest,* in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 19:462.

3. Slightly older works include Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 145–49; Thomas D. Lea, "The Hermeneutics of the Puritans," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 2 (June 1996): 271–84; and J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 97–105. More recently, see Henry Knapp's excellent work on John Owen, "Understanding the Mind of God: John Owen and Seventeenth-Century Exegetical Methodology" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2002); Barry Howson, "The Puritan Hermeneutics of John Owen: A Recommendation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63, no. 2 (Fall, 2001): 351–76; Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed*

Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 86–97; Robert J. McKelvey, *Histories That Mansoul and Her Wars Anatomize: The Drama of Redemption in John Bunyan's Holy War* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Richard A. Muller, "Either Expressly Set Down…or by Good and Necessary Consequence," in *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship*, ed. Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2007), 59–92; Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1998), 84–101.

4. Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (London, 1681), 221.

5. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 221.

6. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 221.

7. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 222–23.

8. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 223–24.

9. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 225–30.

10. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 231.

11. See chapter 14, "The Puritans on the Covenant of Works," in this book.

12. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 231.

13. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 232. The differences are too many to list for this particular chapter, so we will focus on some of the more significant differences between the two covenants.

14. See Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Creatures, and the Condition of Their State by Creation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:1–128.

15. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 233–35.

16. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 237–38.

17. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 248.

18. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 248.

19. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 256.

20. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 257.

21. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 262.

22. John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:314–15.

23. Thomas Adams, *Meditations upon Some Part of the Creed*, in *The Works of Thomas Adams* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 3:224.

24. Richard Sibbes, *God Manifested in the Flesh*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers, 1809). 1:153.

25. Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus; A View of the Everlasting Gospel* (London: Edward Mottershed for Nathanael Webb and William Grantham, 1658), 131.

26. J. I. Packer quotes Ambrose saying elsewhere the following: "Keep still Jesus Christ in your eye, in the perusal of the Scriptures, as the end, scope and substance thereof: what are the whole Scriptures, but as it were the spiritual swaddling clothes of the holy child Jesus? 1. Christ is the truth and substance of all the types and shadows. 2. Christ is the substance and matter of the Covenant of Grace, and all administrations thereof; under the Old Testament Christ is veiled, under the New Covenant revealed. 3. Christ is the centre and meeting place of all the promises for in him the promises of God are yea and Amen. 4. Christ is the thing signified, sealed and exhibited in the Sacraments of the Old and New Testament. 5. Scripture genealogies are to discover to us the times and seasons of Christ. 6. Scripture chronologies are to discover to us the times and seasons of Christ. 7. Scripture-laws are our schoolmasters to bring us to Christ, the moral by correcting, the ceremonial by directing. 8. Scripture-gospel is Christ's light, whereby we are drawn into sweet union and communion with him; yea it is the very power of God unto salvation unto all them that believe in Christ Jesus; and therefore think of Christ as the very substance, marrow, soul and scope of the whole Scriptures." *Quest for Godliness*, 103.

27. See Willem J. van Asselt, "'*Quid est homo quod memor es ipsius?*' Calvin and Cocceius (1603–

1669) on Psalm 8," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1–2 (2011): 135–47.

28. Edward Leigh, who was not strictly a federal theologian, commends Calvin as a Protestant interpreter of Scripture: "I would content my self among the new writers with Mr. Calvin, who performeth best of all other that which he of himself professeth, that a man in reading his expositions reapeth this benefit, that for the shortness he useth, he departeth not far from the Text itself." Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity: Consisting of Three Bookes* (London: E. Griffin for William Lee, 1647), 186.

29. For example, William Perkins connects Christ with the covenant when he writes, "The foundation and ground work of the Covenant is Christ Jesus the Mediator, in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen." *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London, 1626), 1:165.

30. Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725. Volume 2: Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 222.

31. Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 172.

32. William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecying, or, A Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching First Written in Latine*… (London: Felix Kyngston for E. E., 1607), 30–31. Leland Ryken highlights that Catholic theologians understood Rebekah drawing water for Abraham's servant really to mean that believers must come to the Bible to meet Christ. *Worldly Saints*, 145.

33. Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecying*, 31.

34. Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 174. Whitaker likewise argues: "As to those three spiritual senses, it is surely foolish to say that there are as many senses of scripture as the words themselves may be transferred to bear. For although the words may be applied and accommodated tropologically, allegorically, anagogically, or any other way; yet there are not therefore various senses, various interpretations and explications of scripture, but there is but one sense, and that the literal, which may be variously accommodated, and from which various things may be collected." *Disputations*, 405.

35. Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 171.

36. Thomas Goodwin, *A Glimpse of Sions Glory* (London, 1640), 13–14. There is some debate over whether Goodwin authored this work, but the point remains true in terms of how the Puritans argued for a literal and mystical sense.

37. See John Bunyan, *Solomon's Temple Spiritualiz'd* (London: for George Larkin, 1688). See also McKelvey, *Histories That Mansoul and Her Wars Anatomize*, 205–10.

38. Goodwin, *Sions Glory*, 17.

39. James Durham, Clavis Cantici, *or, An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (London: J. W., 1669), 6.

40. Knapp, "Understanding the Mind of God," 264.

41. Durham, *Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 8.

42. Durham, *Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 9.

43. Durham, *Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 9.

44. Thomas Goodwin, *Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:148–49.

45. Thomas Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:150.

46. Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *Works*, 5:198.

47. Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *Works*, 5:198.

48. Knapp, "Understanding the Mind of God," 63.

49. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 20:315.

50. Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (1985; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 33.

51. John Flavel, *The Occasions, Causes, Nature, Rise, Growth, and Remedies of Mental Errors*, in *The*

Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 3:445.

52. Flavel, *Mental Errors*, in *Works*, 3:446.

53. Thankful Owen and James Baron, preface to *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006),1:32.

54. Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:90.

55. For a valuable essay on this aspect of the Westminster Confession see C. J. Williams, "Good and Necessary Consequences in the Westminster Confession," in *The Faith Once Delivered: Celebrating the Legacy of Reformed Systematic Theology, Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne Spear* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2007), 171–90.

56. George Gillespie, *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions: Wherein Many Useful Questions and Cases of Conscience Are Discussed and Resolved…* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1649), 238.

57. Flavel, *Mental Errors*, in *Works*, 3:446.

58. Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, in *Works*, 4:204.

59. Sebastian Rehnman provides a good discussion of the use and role of reason in the thought of John Owen. See *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 109–28.

60. Knapp, "Understanding the Mind of God," 108.

61. Goodwin, *A Discourse of the Glory of the Gospel*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1864; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006) 4:274–75.

62. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:276–77.

63. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:276–77.

64. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:304.

65. Flavel, *Mental Errors*, in *Works*, 3:465.

66. Flavel, *Mental Errors*, in *Works*, 3:465.

67. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 1.13.3.

Chapter 3

The Learned Doctor William Ames and *The Marrow of Theology*

> *Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God…. Men live to God when they live in accord with the will of God, to the glory of God, and with God working in them.*
>
> —WILLIAM AMES[1]

Few men had as much influence over Reformed theology on either side of both the English Channel and Atlantic Ocean as William Ames (1576–1633). Today his name is little known outside academic circles, but in his day, his writings were deemed fundamental for ministerial training in New England, and they were greatly admired in England and the Netherlands for generations after his death.

Ames was one of the first to build an entire system of Reformed covenant theology. Although Calvin and other Reformers incorporated the covenant as an important dimension of theology,[2]Ames went beyond them, making covenant the overarching framework of theology. John Eusden said the covenant of grace "is clearly one of the central concepts in Amesian theology…. No previous thinker in the Calvinist-Puritan tradition analyzed the covenant of grace with an acuteness comparable to that of the Franeker professor," William Ames.[3] Within the framework of covenant theology, Ames wedded doctrine and life to promote practical piety and the purity of the church.

In this chapter we will briefly sketch Ames's life and teaching career, examine Ames's classic work, *The Marrow of Theology*, with some reference to its sequel, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof*, and discuss the influence of these books on Reformed theologians and pastors.

Biographical Sketch

William Ames (Latinized as Amesius) was born in 1576 at Ipswich, chief city of England's Suffolk County, then a center of robust Puritanism.[4] John Winthrop (1588–1649), a zealous Reformed Christian and the first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, also hailed from Suffolk County.

Ames's father, also named William, was a well-to-do merchant with Puritan sympathies; his mother, Joan Snelling, was related to families that helped to found Plymouth Plantation in the New World. Since both parents died when he was young, Ames was reared by his maternal uncle, Robert Snelling, a Puritan from nearby Boxford. From childhood Ames was steeped in a vigorous form of doctrinal and practical Christianity.

Ames's uncle spared no expense for his education, sending him in 1593/94 to Christ's College, Cambridge University, known for its Puritanism and Ramist philosophy. Ames rapidly displayed his proclivity to learn. He graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in 1598. In 1601, he received a master of arts degree, was elected fellow at Christ's College and ordained to the ministry, and underwent a dramatic conversion experience under the "rousing preaching" of William Perkins (1558–1602), father of English Reformed experimental theology.[5]

Following this profound spiritual transformation, Ames declared that "a man may be *bonus ethicus*, and yet not *bonus theologus*, i.e., a well-carriaged man outwardly, expressing both the sense and practice of religion in his outward demeanor: And yet not be a sincere hearted Christian."[6] This personal experience led Ames into his lifelong concern for a practical Christianity that expressed the inner piety of a redeemed and renewed heart.

With an emphasis on personal and corporate piety and in opposition to any church practice not explicitly instituted by Scripture, Ames quickly became the moral compass and conscience of the college. He viewed himself as Ezekiel's watchman (Ezek. 33), with a duty to warn students about sin and to promote a deeper faith and purity among the students, but this role was short-lived. With King James's edict of tolerance at the 1604 Hampton Court Conference, any Puritan activity at the colleges that involved criticism of the Church of England was suppressed. The king thought the church had been reformed enough.

The Puritan party at Cambridge, however, continued its unrelenting opposition to the Elizabethan settlement. This violation of the king's edict had serious consequences. The authorities soon stripped critics of the established church of their degrees and dismissed them. In 1609 they appointed Valentine Cary to the mastership rather than William Ames, though Ames was far more qualified for the position. Cary's approach to Puritanism was decidedly antagonistic. Ames's rebukes of the Church of England and his refusal to wear

priestly vestments such as the surplice were increasingly resented. On December 21, 1609, when Ames preached a sermon on St. Thomas Day—an annual festivity at Cambridge that had become increasingly raucous over the years—and denounced gambling, administering the "salutary vinegar of reproof,"[7] the college authorities had him taken into custody and suspended his degrees.

Although Ames was not formally expelled, he reckoned that leaving was more appealing than facing the grim prospects of an unknown future in Cambridge, and he left his position as a fellow. After a brief stint as city lecturer in Colchester, Ames was forbidden to preach by the bishop of London, George Abbott. In 1610, Ames decided to seek the freer academic and ecclesiastical climate of the Netherlands. There he remained in exile for the rest of his life.

Ames first went to Rotterdam, where he met John Robinson (1575–1625), pastor of the English separatist congregation at Leiden. Some of the congregation's members were soon to establish Plymouth Plantation in the New World and become known as the Pilgrims. Ames could not persuade Robinson to abandon his separatist sentiments, namely, that the Puritan churches should separate "root and branch" from the Church of England, but he did succeed in tempering some of his more radical views.

Following a brief stay in Rotterdam and Leiden, Ames was employed by Sir Horace Vere from 1611 to 1619 as military chaplain to the English forces stationed at The Hague. Here Ames wrote prolifically against the Arminianism that would soon precipitate an ecclesiastical crisis. That crisis among the Dutch was eventually addressed at an international synod in the Dutch city of Dordrecht (1618–1619). Because of his expertise in refuting Arminianism, Ames, an Englishman and nonvoting member of the Synod of Dort, was called to be chief theological advisor and secretary to Johannes Bogerman, the presiding officer. Members of the Synod of Dort ruled in favor of the historic Reformed position on all five points raised by the Arminians, much to Ames's joy. Unwanted in England, he found himself at home here, within the warm embrace of the official Calvinism of the Dutch Republic.

An anti-Arminian purge in ecclesiastical, political, and academic circles followed the Synod of Dort's rulings, which vacated a professorship at Leiden University. Ames was elected to fill the chair, but the long arm of the English state prevailed. Ames, recently dismissed from his post in The Hague under pressure from the English authorities, found the post at Leiden University closed to him as well.

Ames married his second wife, Joan Fletcher, around 1618, who bore him three children, Ruth, William, and John. His first wife, the daughter of John Burgess, Ames's predecessor in The Hague, had died shortly after they married,

leaving no children. To support his family, he turned to private lecturing and tutoring university students for three years after the Synod of Dort. He ran a little private "house college," resembling, on a small scale, the Staten College presided over by Festus Hommius (1576–1642). Theological students lived in Ames's home, and he taught them Puritanism and systematic theology according to the logical method of Petrus Ramus. He later developed some of these lectures into his famous *Marrow of Theology*.8

In 1622, officials at Franeker University, a relatively new institution in the remote northern province of Friesland, ignored the English authorities and appointed Ames as professor of theology. On May 7, 1622, Ames gave his inaugural address on the Urim and Thummim, based on Exodus 28:30. Four days after his inauguration as professor, he received the doctor of theology degree upon successfully defending thirty-eight theses and four corollaries on "the nature, theory, and practical working of Conscience" before Sibrandus Lubbertus, senior professor on the faculty. In 1626, he was appointed Rector Magnificus, the highest honorary academic office in the university.

During his eleven-year tenure at Franeker, Ames became known as the "Learned Doctor" who tried to "puritanize" the entire university. Ames acknowledged the university was orthodox in doctrine but did not feel that a majority of the faculty and student body were sufficiently Reformed in practice. Their faith was not yet translated into proper Christian observance. The faculty, in particular, were, for Ames's thinking, too dependent on Aristotelian logic and inadequately emphasized human responsibility and the exercise of the human will in Christian living. Therefore, Ames once again organized a kind of rooming house, or "college," in his house within the university where tutorial sessions, lectures, and numerous theological discussions took place.9 Ames's goal was "to see whether at least in our University I could in any way call theology away from questions and controversies obscure, confused, and not very essential, and introduce it to life and practice so that students would begin to think seriously of conscience and its concerns."10 To that end, Ames, as rector, promoted piety, enforced Sabbath observance, shortened Christmas and Easter holidays, and tightened student discipline. His austere reforms produced what was called "the Reformation" of the 1620s at the university.

Ames maintained a strong anti-prelatic and anti-Arminian stance in his lectures and prolific writing during his Franeker years, but his greatest contribution was in theology and ethics, which he saw as a unified system that helped the Christian live a life of genuine piety. Here he wrote his two greatest works, *Medulla Theologiae (The Marrow of Theology)* and *De Conscientia* ("Of the Conscience," translated in English as *Conscience with the Power and Cases*

Thereof). In his system of theological and moral divinity, Ames incorporated the Ramist philosophy and method he had learned at Cambridge.

Ramism was a philosophy that sought to correct the artificial sophistry of the Aristotelianism of the day, characterized by a breach between life and thought, between knowing and doing, and, in the case of the religious life, between theology and ethics. Ramism was developed by Petrus Ramus (Pierre de la Ramée, 1515–1572), a sixteenth-century French Reformed philosopher and pedagogue who was martyred in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris.11 Ames incorporated the thought of this Huguenot into his own work, seamlessly weaving theology and ethics together into a program of obedient, covenant living.

Through his teaching, Ames established his own reputation as well as that of the academy where he taught. Students came from all over Europe to study under him. His most famous pupil was Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), who would later carry covenant theology well beyond Ames.

But Ames was not content in Franeker, for all was not well at the university. Some students and faculty members did not appreciate Ames's efforts to achieve deeper or further reformation. A clique of professors, led by Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644), sabotaged Ames's efforts. Moreover, continuing arguments between Ames and his Aristotelian colleague Maccovius spoiled the intellectual climate at Franeker, while the damp sea air of Friesland eroded Ames's health. Those problems, combined with his wife's desire to rejoin her countrymen, convinced Ames to look for a new place in which to serve.

In 1632, Ames accepted an invitation from his friend Hugh Peters (1598–1660) to join him in co-pastoring the English-speaking Congregational Church at Rotterdam. Ames was very attracted to the invitation because of Peters's design for an independent, covenant-centered congregation that strove for a membership of confessing believers who truly practiced their faith. Ames had long argued for such Congregationalist principles within and outside Puritan circles.12 He was also attracted to the idea of helping the church develop a Puritan college in Rotterdam.

In late summer 1633, Ames finally headed south to Rotterdam. His tenure there was brief. In the fall, the Maas River breached its banks, and Ames, who was already unwell, took a turn for the worse after his house was flooded. He died of pneumonia on November 11 at the age of fifty-seven in the arms of his friend, Hugh Peters. To the end, he remained firm in faith and triumphant in hope.13

Shortly before his death, Ames had seriously considered joining his friend John Winthrop in New England, but God had another "New World" in mind for

him. Although Ames had great influence on the theological and intellectual history of New England—particularly through the *Marrow*—he never arrived at its shores. Would he have become the first president of Harvard, as many historians have speculated?14 In his history of New England, the Puritan Cotton Mather (1663–1728) mused that the "angelical doctor" William Ames "was *intentionally* a New England man, though not *eventually*."15 Four years after Ames's death, his wife and children went to live in the Puritan settlement of Salem, Massachusetts. Although it is unlikely that Ames's entire library accompanied his family to the New World, it is probable that at least some of Ames's books crossed the Atlantic to become the nucleus of the original library of Harvard College, although a fire in 1764 destroyed most of the books.16

The Marrow of Theology

Although William Ames's *Marrow of Theology* was first published in Latin as *Medulla theologiae* in 1627, its main ideas were expressed earlier than that. The theological lectures that Ames gave from 1619 to 1622 as tutor to the students at Leiden were reworked while he stood "idle in the marketplace." They were first released in Latin (1623), in fragmentary form, from Franeker. Four years later, after Ames found financial security within the scholarly environment of the university, he finally finished what would become the landmark publication for which he is best remembered today.

The book was intended to serve as a useful compendium of theology for laypersons and theological students. It immediately earned recognition and acclaim in scholarly and ecclesiastical circles and was quickly translated into many languages. The first English translations were published in 1642 and 1643.

Major Theme: The Godward Life The opening statement of the *Marrow* is remarkably simple and terse: "Theology is the doctrine of living to God" (*theologia est doctrina Deo vivendi.*) (1.1.1). This statement, simple as it may appear, is loaded with meaning. It declares the practical orientation of Ames's system of Christianity—a faith of the whole man, not just the intellect, will, or affections. It demonstrates Ames's passion for practical, vital Christianity that integrates thought and action. Ames tried to show that theology does not deal merely with statements about God, but rather with knowledge of how to "live to God." He said, "Men live to God when they live in accord with the will of God, to the glory of God, and with God working in them" (1.1.6; citing 1 Peter 4:2, 6; Gal. 2:19–20; 2 Cor. 4:10; Phil. 1:20). In another setting he wrote, "The revealed will of God ought to be the rule of our life."17

Although Calvin expressed his theology more in terms of *knowledge*—

knowing God and knowing yourself[18]—this apparent difference in Ames's and Calvin's formulations should not lead us to overlook the fundamental unity of their thought. Calvin's *Catechism* (1545) defined "the chief end of human life" as "to know God," and this as our "sovereign good" apart from which we are miserable.[19] The *Catechism* then expounds Calvin's concept of the knowledge of God in terms of glorifying Him through practical trust and submission:

> 6. *M[inister]. What is the true and right knowledge of God?*
> C[hild]. When we know Him in order that we may honour Him.
>
> 7. *M. How do we honour Him aright?*
> C. We put our reliance entirely on Him, by serving Him in obedience to His will, by calling upon Him in all our need, seeking salvation and every good thing in Him, and acknowledging with heart and mouth that all our good proceeds from Him.[20]

Clearly, for Calvin the knowledge of God includes more than the intellect and engages the whole being. He would not call anything the true knowledge of God that existed apart from piety—that is, love and reverence for God.[21] "God is not known," declared Calvin, "where there is no religion or piety."[22] So Calvin's knowledge of God and Ames's living to God actually express the same reality from different angles.

In this regard, Ames was moving in a direction established by his mentor, William Perkins, and reflecting the influence of Petrus Ramus, who said, "Theology is the doctrine of living well." Perkins saw theology as "the science of living blessedly forever."[23] This blessed life, according to Perkins, is obtained via knowledge of God and knowledge of self. In this respect, Perkins's theology was a combination of the theology of Calvin and the methodology of Ramus. Ames in his *Marrow* expressed reservations about this view, acknowledging that eternal life includes "living well" and "living happily," but saying that it is more excellent to live for God's glory than for our happiness (1.1.8). John Dykstra Eusden writes, "For Ames the end of theology was never to produce blessedness, which he felt related chiefly to man's ultimate aspiration and desire. In searching for his own blessedness, man could miss God, the very object of his living rightly."[24] Eusden's absolute statement, however, needs to be balanced by Ames's affirmation of the pursuit of happiness (2.1.27–28; 2.16.13). He wrote in his sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism, "The highest good ought to be considered and sought above all other things in our entire life…. Moreover, 'highest good' is specifically understood as that in which our blessedness consists."[25] These two strands of holiness and happiness in Calvin, Perkins, and Ames were ultimately intertwined in the Westminster Shorter

Catechism's opening statement that man's chief end is to glorify God *and* enjoy Him forever.

Emphasis on the Divinely Enabled Human Will Ames wrote, "The will is the proper and prime subject of this [regenerating] grace; the conversion of the will is the effectual principle in the conversion of the whole man" (1.26.23). Again, he said, "The principal subject of observance [obedience] is the will, as it is in living faith (Phil. 2:13)" (2.1.35).

Ames's emphasis on the will was one of the key points of the controversy between him and Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644), his Franeker colleague. Maccovius emphasized the primacy of the intellect in the regenerate mind; i.e., the will is renewed through the intellect. The intellect is the *terminus a quo,* i.e., the beginning point of a process; the will is the *terminus ad quem,* i.e., the final goal of a process. Ames, however, held to the primacy of volition. Faith involves "an act of the whole man—which is by no means a mere act of the intellect," he wrote, but the act of the will in believing the gospel is that which, by the Spirit's grace, makes knowledge saving. Saving knowledge, therefore, differs from mere knowledge by involving the wholehearted commitment of the will. Ames writes, "Although faith always presupposes a knowledge of the gospel, there is nevertheless no saving knowledge in anyone…except the knowledge which follows this act of the will and depends upon it" (1.3.3–4; cf. 2.5.11–16).

This position differed from much of established orthodoxy in the early seventeenth century, which said that faith proceeded from the understanding and then shapes the will. Consequently, Ames's position on faith and volition came under scrutiny by the orthodox Reformed. Interestingly, Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), a follower of Ames and a leader in developing the Reformed system of theology and piety in the post-Reformation Netherlands, declared that attributing faith to the will was unheard of in Reformed theology, with the exception of Ames, who was the only one he had known to defend that view publicly.[26]

When Abraham Kuyper Jr. examined the controversy between Ames and Maccovius, he concluded that Ames had deviated from the traditional Reformed position that Maccovius defended.[27] Robert T. Kendall goes so far as to say that through Ames's influence, "Calvin's doctrine of faith, for all practical purposes, was now dead and buried. Ames espoused a voluntaristic doctrine of faith within a tradition that had already been shaking off Calvin's influence anyway." Kendall goes on to conclude that "Ames's voluntarism appears to be the key to all he believes."[28] By "voluntarism" he means the view of saving "faith as an act of the will in contrast to a passive persuasion in the mind."[29] Kendall saw

this as a step away from the Calvinistic view of faith by divine illumination toward an Arminian view of faith as the choice of human free will.[30]

Though Ames did make occasional statements that sounded as though he were a voluntarist who had strayed from the path of Reformed orthodoxy, scholars who charge Ames with voluntarism are unfamiliar with the broad scope of his work and the foundational philosophical categories he utilized. Within the parameters of orthodox Reformed theology, Ames stressed that Christianity is a Spirit-worked, vital, heartfelt faith that produces a genuine Christian walk. When God calls a man to Christ, man is "passive," but "a spiritual principle of grace is generated in the will of man (Eph. 2:5)" (1.26.21). Ames emphasized that the enlightenment of the mind was insufficient to produce conversion because the corruption of the will must be overcome (1.26.24). As a result of the conquest of the will, men called by God trust Christ "freely but also surely, unavoidably, and unchangeably. John 6:37, 'Whomever my Father gives me will come to me'" (1.26.28).

Ames employed a different emphasis from Calvin in his definition of faith but stood in clear continuity with the latter's theological perspective. While Calvin defined faith as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ," he emphasized that "it would not help us at all to know that God is true unless he mercifully attracted us to himself."[31] In elaborating on the role of the affections in the divine-human encounter, Calvin asks, "But how can the mind be aroused to taste the divine goodness without at the same time being wholly kindled to love God in return?" He responds: "Once anyone has been moved by it, it utterly ravishes him and draws him to itself."[32] Calvin, with Ames coming after him, equally affirmed the affective and volitional dimensions in both his definition of faith and his teaching on conversion.[33]

By focusing on the will as the center of faith, Ames wanted to demonstrate that true piety takes place in a covenant relationship between the sinful creature and the redeeming Creator. Faith as an act of the will is a true mark of covenant obedience as the creature is asked to respond with faith and obedience to the covenant promises offered freely in Christ. Covenant theology is the heart of Ames's theological system.

Organization and Content of Ames's Doctrine The *Marrow* is organized according to the Ramist system of dichotomies[34] in which the theme is pursued that theology, the doctrine of living to God, consists of, first, "faith" (book 1), or what one believes, and second, "observance" (book 2), or how one practices faith and does good works in obedience to God. Those two major categories—

faith and observance—comprise the fountainhead from which Ames's entire theological system flows. Ames proceeded from this basis to explain his theological system through various dichotomies in which the marks of living to God are set forth.

After defining faith as "the resting of the heart on God" (1.3.1) and setting forth faith as an act of the whole man, especially the will, Ames discussed the object of faith, which is God. He taught on the knowledge of God (1.4.1–7), the content of which he divided into God's "sufficiency" and "efficiency" (1.4.8). The former holds that God is all that He and His creatures need, which is seen clearly in, first, His "essence" as expressed in manifold attributes (1.4.12–67), and, second, His trinitarian "subsistence" as one God in three persons (1.5). In the latter, Ames set forth God's "efficiency," which he defined as the "working power of God by which He works all things in all things (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:36)" (1.6). God's decree, Ames taught, is the first exercise of God's efficiency (1.7). He established that everything happens because of God's eternal good pleasure as realized in His creation and providence (1.8.9). God's preserving grace extends over the created order, while the special government that God exercises toward man as the "intelligent creature" is the covenant of works (1.10). By violating this conditional covenant, humanity tragically fell into sin. That fall had serious and eternal consequences, including spiritual and physical death and the propagation of original sin (1.11–17).

But there is still hope. Condemnation is overturned by restorative grace through redemption. Through the person and work of Christ, fallen humanity can have renewed fellowship with God (1.18–23). All of this happens solely for God's good pleasure and out of His "merciful purpose" (1.18.2). God sent Christ with the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king, in order to be our mediator and redeemer (1.19).[35] He offered "satisfaction" to God for our sins and to obtain "merit" for our righteousness (1.20).

Ames described the death of Christ for sinners with reverent simplicity. He wrote, "The death of Christ is the last act of his humiliation in which he underwent extreme, horrible, and most acute pain for the sins of men" (1.22.1). His death included the loss of conscious "enjoyment of God," "the tasting of the wrath of God," and "sadness, fear, and dread in agony" (1.22.7–11). He experienced being "forsaken, denied, and betrayed by his most intimate disciples"; false accusations and injustice; "mocking, whipping, and crucifixion"; "the forsaking of him by His Father"; and "the full consciousness of God's judgment on man's sins" (1.22.20–24). Christ's humiliation was then completed by "the expiration of his soul in greatest torment and pain of body," burial, and continuation under death for three days (1.22.25, 29, 30).

Then Ames wrote of Christ's exaltation by His resurrection, ascension, and sitting at God's right hand (1.23.9). Christ merited victory by His death; His exaltation is the "crown and manifestation of this victory" (1.23.3). The Mediator entered into "kingly glory," which is "the fullness of power and majesty whereby he governs all things for the good of his own" and will be "judge of men and of angels" (1.23.28–29, 31). Ames said, "This kingly glory of Christ overflows into his other offices so that he exercises a kingly priesthood and kingly prophecy" (1.23.32).

From the beginning Ames's theology is built implicitly along covenantal lines. In book 1, chapter 24, titled "The Application of Christ," Ames's covenant theology becomes more obvious. The means through which the covenant of redemption between God and Christ comes to fruition is the covenant of grace, which the Scriptures call the "new covenant." In other words, the "application of Christ" is administered covenantally. After explaining how the new covenant differs from the old, Ames asserts that the essence of the covenant of grace continues through different historical dispensations until, finally, in the last day, believers will be swept up into glory, and the covenant of grace inaugurated at the fall will finally be consummated.

The covenant of grace is both *conditional*, for faith is required, and *absolute*, for the condition required by the covenant is also promised in the covenant. On the one hand, Ames said one cannot have certainty that he is saved by grace without "the perceiving of faith and repentance" in himself (1.30.16). On the other hand, to Ames, as John von Rohr points out, "the promise of fulfillment of covenant conditions was itself covenant promise."[36] In Ames's words, faith, the condition of the covenant, is promised "to be given by grace as a means to grace" (1.24.19). Thus, in the final analysis, grace does all, and the believer learns to rest on a promising, decreeing God.

It is noteworthy that in Ames's theology the decrees of election and reprobation are not discussed until chapter 25 in the section on the application of redemption. They do not appear in his earlier chapters on the decree of God (1.7) or on his government over intelligent creatures (1.10). Ames closely follows Paul's letter to the Romans when he locates divine election with his examination of the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*), at the head of his consideration of "union by calling," justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification (1.26–30).

Ames then devoted two chapters to the *subject* of the application of redemption, which is the church. After considering the mystical, invisible church (1.31) and the instituted or visible church (1.32), he addressed the *way* or *means* of the application of redemption, devoting chapters to Holy Scripture (1.34), the ministry (1.33, 35), the sacraments (1.36, 41), and ecclesiastical discipline

(1.37).

Finally, Ames explained the *administration* of the application of redemption, i.e., how God administers the covenant of grace (1.38–39, 41). He divided history into periods of covenantal administration, showing how there has been progression from "the imperfect to the more perfect" and "from the general and obscure to the more specific and clear" (1.38.2–3). From Adam to Abraham, the covenant of grace was administered by general promises, such as Genesis 3:15 (1.38.14). From Abraham to Moses, the covenant was administered chiefly along a family line to Abraham and his posterity (1.38.20). From Moses to Christ, the church was in its childhood under the covenant, and the ministry was "almost always an extraordinary one conducted by prophets" (1.38.12). From Christ's coming in the flesh all the way to His return on the clouds, the believer freely receives the application of the covenant as a spiritual heir through the Spirit of adoption, rather than as an earthly child in the spirit of fear and bondage (1.38.8–9; 1.39.9). Upon Christ's return, "the application which has only been begun in this life will be perfected" (1.41.1).

Ames discussed how God displayed His election, redemption, calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification through the institutions and events of each chronological period in the administration of the covenant of grace (1.38.14–35). In other words, the temporal and eternal aspects of salvation history merge together. The logical, existential elements of the *ordo salutis* are integrated with the chronological periods of the *ordo temporum*. The horizontal movement and vertical progression are continually in a state of intersection; the recipients of God's electing power receive covenantal benefits with ever-increasing clarity and assurance as predestination and covenant meet in unity in a harmonious blending of decretal theology and covenant doctrine. For example, in the Mosaic era, redemption was displayed in the exodus from Egypt, justification in the atoning sacrifices, adoption in the dedication of the firstborn, sanctification in the laws of cleanness, and glorification in the inheritance of the land and communion with God in His house. In this way, Ames avoided the apparent incongruity between the eternal decree and the historical administrations of the covenant that has often dogged Reformed theology. He offers an internally consistent system of covenant theology that does justice to both God's decretal activity and His covenantal revelations.

Organization and Content of Ames's Ethics We have seen that Ames's theological teaching begins with faith, which is explained in book 1 of the *Marrow* within a covenantal framework. Book 2 offers the second half of Ames's Ramist system of theology: the observance or obedience that

accompanies faith. He wrote, “Observance is the submissive performance of the will of God for the glory of God” (2.1.1). With respect to “readiness of mind,” Christians obey God as “sons,” but with respect to duty, we obey as “servants” (2.1.7). By “submissive” Ames meant a willing obedience (2.1.4) in “reverent fear as the authority and power of God is acknowledged” (2.1.11). Submissive observance also involves sincerity and zeal (2.1.34).

Ames linked obedience to saving faith, thus linking his ethics to his doctrine. “Faith brings forth obedience,” he wrote, by grasping Christ, “the fountain of life and the spring of all power to do well,” and by receiving the promises and threats of God, which motivate obedience (2.1.15). The obedience of faith is driven by the power of God’s “sanctifying grace,” which works both our willing and doing (2.1.16)—that is, both the inward virtue of a holy habit (*habitus*) and inclination toward good (2.2), and the outward good works produced by this virtue as a tree produces fruit (2.3).

The remainder of Ames’s *Marrow* consists of his treatment of the Ten Commandments. Following Christ (Matt. 22:37–40), Ames analyzed the law into two parts: Godward “religion” and manward “justice” (2.4.1–4). He explained religion or piety via the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love toward God (2.5–7). These religious virtues engage men in communion with God through the hearing of the Word and prayer (2.8–12). The second commandment sets the boundaries of worship by divinely “instituted worship”—that is, “the means ordained by the will of God,” as opposed to any means of worship devised by men (2.13). This point, later called the regulative principle, was the central thrust of the Puritan critique of ceremonies in the Church of England. The third commandment establishes the mode of worship, and the fourth commandment the time of worship (2.14–15).

Ames discussed the second table of the law in terms of “justice,” by which he meant doing our duty to our neighbors out of desire for their good (2.16). The commandments direct that love to promote our neighbors’ honor, life, sexual purity, lawful possessions, and belief in the truth, with joy in our neighbors’ good (2.17–22). This tenth commandment of contented joy in the prosperity of our neighbors summarizes our love for our neighbor, just as the first commandment summarizes our love for God (2.22.19).

At this point, we should note the relationship between the *Marrow* and Ames’s *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (Latin, 1630; English, 1639), which became a landmark work in moral theology, passing through nearly twenty editions in one generation.[37] That these two books are unified is evident by their subject matter as well as by how *Conscience* naturally flows from and serves as a commentary, as it were, on book 2 of the *Marrow*. In fact, it

was Ames's stated intent that "if there are some who desire to have practical matters better explained, especially those of the latter part of this *Marrow*, we shall attempt, God willing, to satisfy them in a special treatise, which I mean to write, dealing with questions usually called 'cases of conscience.'"[38] Therefore, we will also comment on *Conscience* in our explanation of the second part of Ames's *Marrow*. As we shift our focus from his formal theology to the more applied dimension of his thought, we are entering the realm of early Reformed Christian ethics or moral theology.

The subject of Christian ethics was critically important to Ames. That is perfectly understandable, given what we know about Ames's emphasis on practical Christian living. Since living to God is characterized by vital and practical piety, Christians need answers to the more difficult ethical questions concerning the Christian life. This concern is addressed in *Conscience,* a collection of five books that move from a highly theoretical treatment of the nature of conscience to very practical applications. The core content of this book first came to light in Ames's defense of the thirty-eight theses and four corollaries connected with his promotion to the doctor of theology degree at Franeker University in 1622. Eight years after that defense, Ames published this undertaking as a multivolume work on moral theology that filled a gap in the developing system of Reformed thought. Richard Baxter (1615–1691), who built his own *Christian Directory* on Ames's casuistry, said that Perkins did valuable service in promoting Reformed casuistry but that Ames's work, though briefer, was superior. "Ames hath exceeded all," Baxter said.[39]

The first book in *Conscience* defines conscience as "a man's judgment of himself, according to the judgment of God of him."[40] It offers a theoretical treatment of what constitutes conscience before going into detail about the working of conscience. In book 2, Ames describes what a case of conscience is: "a practical question, concerning which, the Conscience may make a doubt." This section explains sin, entry into the state of grace, the ongoing battle between flesh and spirit, and conduct in the Christian life. Book 2 could easily serve as a compendium of Reformed theology. Book 3, titled "Of Man's Duty in General," asks about "the actions, and conversation of [man's] life." Ames says the sign of true obedience is submissively placing God's will ahead of the will of the creature, even when that will does not appear to work toward the creature's advantage. This is accomplished by exercising the disciplines of an obedient life —humility, sincerity, zeal, peace, virtue, prudence, patience, temperance—and by avoiding practices that hinder an obedient walk, such as drunkenness, sins of the heart, and sins of the tongue.

These three books take up about a third of *Conscience*. Following these

preliminary matters of definitional statements and conceptual elaborations on conscience and obedience, Ames now concentrated on his real concern for ethics or moral theology by asking how cases of conscience are to be adjudicated. The simple answer is, by proper understanding and application of the moral law. This is where *Conscience* picks up the theme from book 2 of the *Marrow*.

Books 4 and 5 elucidate the moral law regarding one's duty toward God and one's neighbor. Man's duty to God covers the entire spectrum of the obedient Christian walk, from love toward God in public and private worship to the keeping of the Sabbath. Ames discusses general topics such as the church, but he also covers specific topics such as prayer and singing. He properly prepares the reader for book 5 on interpersonal relations by first settling any uncertainty the believer may have about his relationship to God. In book 5, which has fifty-seven chapters and is twice as long as book 4, Ames discusses cases of conscience that might come up in interpersonal relationships. He grounds all his teaching in the last six of the Ten Commandments.

Ames's writing is permeated with practical Christianity. He offers a detailed blueprint for the warmhearted piety of the redeemed. He makes clear that covenant obedience to God and covenant justice to one's neighbor are crucial for a living faith. This formal work on ethics is a necessary elaboration and appropriate conclusion to Ames's work on moral theology in book 2 of the *Marrow* (observance), which is itself the logical concomitant to his formal theology elucidated in book 1 (faith). The *Marrow* and *Conscience*, along with Ames's commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, show that he left no stone unturned in his quest to explain the walk of faith. These works together demonstrate that the sovereign covenant love of a gracious God must be answered by the submissive covenant obedience of the redeemed child of God.

Ames's Influence

The Marrow of Theology was most influential in New England, where it was generally regarded as the best summary of Calvinistic theology ever written. Both *Marrow* and *Conscience* were required reading at Harvard and Yale well into the eighteenth century, by which time the theological curriculum also required study of the *Compendium of Christian Theology* by Ames's contemporary Johannes Wollebius (1586–1629) and the *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* by Francis Turretin (1623–1687).[41] Thomas Hooker (1586–1647) and Increase Mather (1639–1723) recommended the *Marrow* as the most important book beyond the Bible for making a sound theologian. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) made copious marginal notes on his own copy of the *Marrow*, studied Ames's *Conscience* on the Sabbath, and acknowledged his indebtedness to

Ames.[42]

Ames's influence in New England, however, went beyond his program of theology and ethics. His ecclesiological writings laid the groundwork for nonseparating Congregationalism in New England, a movement that maintained that the Congregational churches of Massachusetts Bay Colony ought to model reforming the Church of England rather than separating from it. The Cambridge Platform of 1648, in particular, reflects Ames's thought. Then, too, his Puritan Ramism was eagerly embraced and became characteristic of New England Puritanism.[43] New England Puritans such as John Cotton (1585–1652), Increase Mather, and Cotton Mather (1663–1728) quoted Ames more frequently than they quoted Calvin. Increase Mather said, "It is rare for a *scholastical wit* to be joined with an *heart warm in religion*, but in Ames it was so." Cotton Mather called Ames "that profound, that sublime; that subtle, that irrefragable—yea, that angelic doctor."[44]

Ames and his *Marrow* had their second greatest impact in the Netherlands. Matthias Nethenus (1618–1686), Voetius's colleague at the University of Utrecht, observed that "in England…the study of practical theology has flourished marvelously; and in the Dutch churches and schools, from the time of Willem Teellinck and Ames it has been ever more widely spread, even though all do not take to it with equal interest."[45] Keith L. Sprunger notes that Ames found the Dutch too intellectual and not sufficiently practical, and therefore promoted Puritan piety with some considerable success in an effort to "make Dutchmen into Puritans."[46] In addition to Voetius, he greatly impacted Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706), a Dutch pietist whose systematic theology, in the judgment of Jonathan Edwards, surpassed even that of Turretin for usefulness in thought and life. Van Mastricht drew heavily on Ames, especially in covenantal thinking and casuistry.[47]

Nearly all of Ames's books were printed in the Netherlands, many in Latin for the international scholarly community. *The Marrow of Theology* and *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* were soon both translated into Dutch and printed at least four times in the seventeenth century.[48] His ecclesiological writings, however, were not printed as often, suggesting that his theology and casuistry made more impact in the Netherlands than his Congregationalist views.

Ironically, Ames was least influential in his homeland of England, although there, too, he was considered Perkins's most influential disciple and true heir. Ames's major works were widely circulated and influenced English Calvinistic theology throughout the seventeenth century. His *Marrow of Theology* was particularly highly esteemed by the Puritans. Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) said that "next to the Bible, he esteemed Dr. Ames's Marrow of Divinity as the

best book in the world."[49]

Conclusion: Sovereign Grace, Faith, and Obedience As we review the life and teaching of Ames, we must ask this question: Did Ames really depart from the mainstream of Reformed theology, as Kuyper and Kendall contend? The answer has to be in the negative. Ames was instrumental in revitalizing Reformed orthodoxy when it was beginning to lose its experiential vibrancy. Covenant-based obedience is activism of a Christian sort. This sort of activism is not mere voluntarism. True, Ames's emphasis was on the will: "The true and proper subject of theology is the will" (1.1.9). But Ames, as a faithful son of the Reformation, continued to emphasize that "the final dependence of faith, as it designates the act of believing, is on the operation and inner persuasion of the Holy Spirit" (1.3.12).

Moreover, Ames's focus on the will should be seen for what it is: a combination of faith and obedience in commitment to God. Ames worked this out in philosophical and theological battles with his Franeker colleagues, as he attempted to reintroduce a vital heartfelt Christianity to a seventeenth-century Dutch church that had lost its pious moorings. Neither faith nor practice is adequate by itself. Faith divorced from practice leads to "cold orthodoxy," while an isolated emphasis on the will and on good works leads to Arminianism. The story of Ames's life, and the theme of his thought as evidenced in *Marrow of Theology, Conscience,* and other writings, is that he strove for proper balance between the two.[50]

The key to properly combining sovereign grace with freely given faith and responsible obedience was to be found in the context of God's covenant. Under the covenant of grace, Ames expounded the harmony of faith and obedience, the gospel of Christ and the Ten Commandments, orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Rather than isolating Ames's statements about the will and crying "voluntarism," we must interpret each of his teachings in light of his whole theology—a Reformed theology of heart religion and humble obedience.

The Marrow of Theology more clearly and systematically sets forth "the gist of Puritan thought about God, the church, and the world" than any other Puritan book.[51] It is essential for understanding the Puritan view of covenant, sanctification, and activism, and is highly recommended for laypeople and theologians alike. The *Marrow* is still worth consulting today and ought to be a part of every pastor's library and available in the educational resources of every church.

1. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology,* trans. and ed. John D. Eusden (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 77. This chapter is an edited version of Joel R. Beeke and Jan van Vliet, "The Marrow of

Theology by William Ames (1576–1633)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 52–65.

2. See Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

3. John D. Eusden, introduction to *The Marrow of Theology*, by William Ames, 51–52.

4. The definitive biographical account of Ames is Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), a revision of Sprunger, "The Learned Doctor Ames" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1963). Also helpful is Benjamin J. Boerkoel Sr., "William Ames (1576–1633): Primogenitor of the *Theologia-Pietatis* in English-Dutch Puritanism" (ThM thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1990). For briefer accounts of Ames's life and work, see Eusden's introduction to *The Marrow of Theology*, by William Ames, 1–66; Lee W. Gibbs, introduction to *Technometry*, by William Ames (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 3–17; Jan van Vliet, "William Ames: Marrow of the Theology and Piety of the Reformed Tradition" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002), 15–40. The best Dutch sources are Hugo Visscher, *Guilielmus Amesius, Zijn Leven en Werken* (Haarlem: J. M. Stap, 1894); Willem van't Spijker, "Guilielmus Amesius," in *De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeerd Piëtisme* ('s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1989), 53–86.

Three biographical works on Ames were translated and edited by Douglas Horton and published in one volume as *William Ames by Matthew Nethenus, Hugo Visscher, and Karl Reuter* (Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School Library, 1965). These include Matthias Nethenus, *Introductory Preface in Which the Story of Master Ames is Briefly Narrated and the Excellence and Usefulness of His Writings Shown* (Amsterdam: John Jansson, 1668); Hugo Visscher, *William Ames: His Life and Works* (Haarlem: J. M. Stap, 1894); and Karl Reuter, *William Ames: The Leading Theologian in the Awakening of Reformed Pietism* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1940). Notes from these biographies reference Horton's volume. See also Horton, "Let Us Not Forget the Mighty William Ames," *Religion in Life* 29 (1960): 434–42; and John Quick's (1636–1706) unpublished manuscript, "*Icones Sacrae Anglicapae*," at Dr. Williams's Library in London, which includes a chapter, "The Life of William Ames, Dr. of Divinity."

5. By "experimental" we mean the testing of human experience by the doctrines of the Bible to determine whether and to what degree God's saving grace has affected that person.

6. William Ames, *A Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies in Gods Worship* (Rotterdam, 1633), 131.

7. Horton, *Ames*, 4.

8. Horton, *Ames*, 13.

9. See Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor Ames*, chap. 4; Sprunger, "William Ames and the Franeker Link to English and American Puritanism," in *Universiteitte Franeker, 1585–1811*, ed. G. Th. Jensma, F. R. H. Smit, and F. Westra (Leeuwarden: Fryske Academy, 1985), 264–85.

10. Ames, "*Paraenesis ad studiosos theologiae, habita Franekerae*" (1623), trans. Douglas Horton as "An Exhortation to the Students of Theology" (1958).

11. Sprunger, *Ames*, 107; Eusden, introduction, 37.

12. Ames, *Marrow*, book 1, chap. 32, paragraphs 6 and 15 (hereafter citations to this source will be given parenthetically in the text as, e.g., 1.32.6, 15); cf. his *A Reply to Dr. Mortons Generall Defence of Three Nocent Ceremonies* (1622), *A Reply to Dr. Mortons Particular Defence of Three Nocent Ceremonies* (1623), and *A Fresh Suit*. Increase Mather said that Ames gave us "perfect Congregationalism." *A Disquisition Concerning Ecclesiastical Councils* (Boston: for N. Boone, 1716), v–vi.

13. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor Ames*, 247.

14. Ames's disciple, Nathaniel Eaton, became Harvard's first president.

15. Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America or* Magnalia Christi Americana, 3rd ed. (1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 1:236.

16. The existence of an auction catalog for Ames's library suggests that efforts were made to sell off the library to raise funds for Ames's family, who were impoverished at the time of his death. See *Cataloguslibrorum D. Guilielmi Amesii* (Amsterdam: Jansson, 1634), reprinted and with an introduction by

Keith L. Sprunger, ed. R. Breugelmans, *The Auction Catalogue of the Library of William Ames*, Catalogi Redivivi, vol. 6 (Utrecht: HES Publishers, 1988).

17. William Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, trans. Todd M. Rester, Classic Reformed Theology, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 214 (Lord's Day 49).

18. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.1.1.

19. James T. Dennison Jr., comp., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 1, 1523–1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 469.

20. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 1:469.

21. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.2.1.

22. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.2.1.

23. William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612), 1:11.

24. Eusden, introduction, 47.

25. Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, 6 (Lord's Day 1).

26. Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum theologicae* (Utrecht: Joannem à Waesberge, 1669), 5:289.

27. Abraham Kuyper Jr., *Johannes Maccovius* (Leiden: D. Donner, 1899), 315–96. Abraham Kuyper Jr. (1872–1941) was the son of the famous Abraham Kuyper Sr. (1837–1920), Dutch Reformed theologian and political leader who served as prime minister in the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905.

28. Robert T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 151, 154.

29. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 3. The term "voluntarist" can also be used with respect to the medieval theological debate between nominalists and realists over the freedom of God's will. We are not alluding to that discussion here.

30. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 151–52.

31. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.7.

32. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.41.

33. The medieval philosophical context of the concepts "intellectualism" and "voluntarism," understood more technically and in their relation to faith, speaks to their relative primacy as the constitutive elements of the two faculties of the soul—the intellect and the will. Primacy of the intellect, a more contemplative or speculative act, underscores the view of God as being and truth while, from a more practical angle, primacy is assigned to the volition when God is seen, ultimately, as the highest object of human love. One can see from this medieval context that neither view has in mind the idea of human thinking, willing, or acting outside of grace. Moreover, where Calvin does address the volition, he does so not in a philosophical sense but from a soteriological perspective wherein he addresses the age-old theological problem of human inability. Based upon this, Richard A. Muller concludes that primacy belongs to the volition, not the intellect, in Calvin's doctrine of faith. See his *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159–73. Because Ames makes use of the same philosophical and soteriological categories as Calvin, the line between Calvin's view of faith and that of Ames is almost direct.

34. For an outline of the entire book in a Ramist fashion, see Ames, "Method and Chart of the *Marrow*," in *Marrow*, 72–73.

35. Ames's broad and authoritative influence is illustrated by the early English Particular Baptists. When they drew up the First London Baptist Confession in 1644, much of their confession on the office of Christ consists of extended quotations from Ames's *Marrow*. Compare the First London Baptist Confession, article 12, to *Marrow* 1.14.3–7; article 14 to *Marrow* 1.14.10–11; article 15 to *Marrow* 1.14.14; article 16 to *Marrow* 1.14.16; and article 18 to *Marrow* 1.14.18–19. See Jay T. Collier, "The Sources behind the First London Confession," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2002): 197–214.

36. John von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *Church History* 34 (1965): 201.

37. For Ames as a Puritan casuist, see George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 68–87.

38. Ames, "Brief Forewarning," in *Marrow*, 70.

39. Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (London: James Duncan, 1838), 1:3–4.

40. Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (1639; repr., Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1975), 1.1 (preamble).

41. S. E. Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), 267, and Richard Warch, *School of the Prophets: Yale College, 1701–1740* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), 191.

42. Eusden, introduction 1–2, and Warch, *School of the Prophets*, 191.

43. Keith L. Sprunger, "Ames, Ramus, and the Method of Puritan Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 59 (1966): 133–51.

44. Mather, *Great Works of Christ in America*, 1:245, 236.

45. Horton, *Ames*, 15.

46. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor Ames*, 260.

47. Van Vliet, "William Ames," 346–75, and Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 7.

48. C. W. Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Dutch Translation with a Checklist* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983).

49. As quoted by Increase Mather, "To the Reader," in *The First Principles of the Doctrine of Christ*, by James Fitch (Boston, 1679).

50. For an example of Ames's doctrinal and practical exposition of Scripture, see his *Analytical Exposition of Both the Epistles of the Apostle Peter* (London: E. G. for John Rothwell, 1641).

51. Douglas Horton, foreword to *Marrow*, by William Ames, vii.

THEOLOGY PROPER

Chapter 4

Stephen Charnock on the Attributes of God

[As] immensity is the diffusion of [God's] essence,
so eternity is the duration of his essence….
His duration is as endless as his essence is boundless.
—STEPHEN CHARNOCK[1]

Very little work on Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) exists in the secondary literature.[2] Those who have heard of him tend to know of his magnum opus, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*. No doubt the sheer size of the volume has caused not a few persons to direct their reading efforts elsewhere. This is regrettable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is Charnock's ability to combine rigorous theological discourse on the doctrine of God with the typical Puritan emphasis on "uses" of the doctrine (relating doctrine and life). His work has much value on a practical level, which should be the goal of all theology.

Charnock studied at Cambridge and was later made senior proctor at Oxford from 1652–1656. At Oxford he belonged to a "gathered church" with fellow Puritan stalwarts, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Thankful Owen (1620–1681), and Theophilus Gale (1628–1678). After Oxford, Charnock went to Ireland where he served various churches, becoming one of the highest-paid clergy in Ireland. In 1660 he returned to England but, in the wake of the Restoration, had no pastoral charge for fifteen years. According to Richard Greaves, Charnock supported himself by practicing medicine.[3] After ministering in private, including secret trips to Holland and France, Charnock became co-pastor in 1675 with the one-time Westminster divine Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686), serving a Nonconformist congregation at Crosby Hall in London. In the latter years of his life he wrote *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, perhaps the most extensive and incisive Puritan treatise on the doctrine of God. Charnock displays remarkable exegetical skill, familiarity with Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians on the Continent, and a beautiful way with words

(particularly his metaphors and analogies). When all these factors are considered together, there is no doubt Charnock belongs to the upper echelon of Puritan theologians. This chapter will focus almost exclusively on Charnock's understanding of the attributes of God.

The doctrine of God was a hugely significant topic (*locus*) among the Reformed orthodox.[4] In seventeenth century England a number of Puritan theologians wrote polemical treatises refuting various errors from other theological traditions, particularly the Socinians. The doctrine of God was the foundational starting point in Reformed dogmatics and was typically arranged under five headings: the names of God, the being of God, the attributes of God, the works of God, and the persons of the Godhead. The first three categories address the doctrine of God in the strict sense. The fourth topic concerns the outworking of the divine decree and has an obvious relation to the previous three headings. The Trinity (i.e., the three persons of the Godhead) has its own category because Reformed theologians often spoke of "God" in a twofold sense: essentially and personally. Essentially, "God" refers to the divine essence or substance; personally, "God" refers to each (or all) of the three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[5] Connected to these categories is the humanist series of questions that were commonplace in sixteenth-and seventeenth-century academic discourse: *An sit?* (Whether it be so?); *Quid sit?* (What is it?); and *Quale sit?* (Of what sort is it?). As te Velde helpfully notes, the Reformed scholastics normally used *qualis* (not *quale*) because God is personal, not neutral.[6] In this essay, the focus will be on the being and attributes of God—that is, what God is and what sort of being God is. Discussion on "whether God exists" (*An Deus sit?*) lies outside the scope of this chapter.

Charnock's doctrine of God begins by answering the question whether God exists or not. He then moves to the question of what sort of being God is, followed by a discussion of the most important attributes of God. Of course, the attributes of God are closely related to the question of God's being, for if the attributes are God's perfections then we are able to deduce from them what sort of being God is.

What Is God? (*Quid Deus Sit?*)[7]

The being of God is necessarily bound up with the concepts of essence and existence. The former comes under consideration in Charnock's exposition of John 4:24, "God is a Spirit." "He hath nothing corporeal, no mixture of matter, not a visible substance, a bodily form."[8] Charnock notes that John 4:24 is the only place in the whole Bible where God is explicitly described as a Spirit, at least in these very words (*totidem verbis*). If God exists, He must necessarily be

immaterial or incorporeal, since material is by nature imperfect. Here Charnock, in a similar vein to many Reformed orthodox theologians, argues by way of negation. Charnock affirms that God can be described in two ways: by affirmation (e.g., God is good) and by negation (e.g., God has no body). "The first ascribes to him whatsoever is excellent; the other separates from him whatsoever is imperfect."[9] In Charnock's view, the way of negation is the best way to understand God; indeed, it is the way we commonly understand God. To describe God, the word "mutable" becomes "immutable"; that is, God cannot change.

By affirming that God is a spirit, one is at the same time affirming what He is not (i.e., He has no body). As opposed to a material existence, God's being is noncomposite. Moreover, because God is a spirit, Charnock is able to show how this necessarily speaks to His other attributes. For example, holding to the Reformed maxim *finitum non capax infiniti* (the finite cannot contain the infinite), Charnock explains that if God were not a spirit, He could not be infinite; or, positively, because He is a spirit, He is also an independent being who is illimitable and immutable, and His immutability depends upon His simplicity. The point that Charnock makes in this section of his exposition is that there must be consistency between God's essence and His attributes; otherwise He cannot be God.[10] By beginning with God's spirituality, Charnock is in line with the Westminster Confession of Faith, which makes spirituality the first of the attributes of God: "There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body" (2.1). For these reasons, Charnock's defense of God as Spirit is a fitting starting point for his discussion of the attributes of God, the major part of his discourse.

God's Simplicity

This might seem a strange heading given that Charnock's discourse on the attributes of God does not have a section devoted explicitly to the simplicity of God (*simplicitas Dei*). Indeed, as Richard Muller notes, while "the concept of divine simplicity was held by virtually all of the orthodox theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was not invariably discussed as a separate attribute in their theological systems."[11] There is no question, however, that Charnock affirms the simplicity of God in many places. The concept of divine simplicity, that God is free from all composition, is affirmed by Reformation and post-Reformation theologians.[12] He is not a being composed as the sum of its parts: "God is the most simple being; for that which is first in nature, having nothing beyond it, cannot by any means be thought to be compounded."[13] Francis Turretin (1623–1687) explains divine simplicity in refuting the

Socinians, who rejected this concept in order to reject the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Remonstrants, who denied that the doctrine must be affirmed as an article of faith since, as they saw it, the Scriptures are silent on the matter.14 The simplicity of God is an elusive concept, but one way of understanding what Reformed theologians mean by it is by negation and affirmation. Negatively, simplicity denies that there is one thing and another in God. Positively, simplicity affirms that whatever is in God is God. Simplicity, then, is God's "incommunicable attribute by which the divine nature is conceived by us not only as free from all composition and division, but also as incapable of composition and divisibility."15

Charnock's understanding of God's simplicity reflects the basic position of the Reformed orthodox. In the first place, simplicity reflects the consistency of God's attributes.16 Mutability is "absolutely inconsistent with simplicity," for if God "could be changed by anything within himself, all in God would not be God."17 God's power is also linked to His simplicity. The more simple a substance is, the more powerful it is. Hence, Charnock adds, "Where there is the greatest simplicity, there is the greatest unity; and where there is the greatest unity, there is the greatest power."18 It is therefore incorrect to argue that God is the sum of all the divine attributes. Rather, the attributes are identical with the essence of God. Charnock affirmed that divine simplicity is absolutely essential for understanding the other divine attributes; indeed, all other divine attributes depend upon this concept. In discussing the divine attributes (e.g., His immutability and eternity), the concept of divine simplicity is axiomatic for Charnock's understanding of the doctrine of God, as it was for Reformed scholastic divines.19

God's Eternity

In his discussion on the eternity of God, Charnock makes a number of important distinctions in order to show that eternity, properly considered, implies that there is no beginning, no end, and no temporal succession in God. He begins by noting that the notion of eternity is difficult.20 Just as Augustine (354–430) had difficulty explaining what time is, so eternity is "hardly understood, and more hardly expressed."21 In attempting to understand eternity Charnock contrasts this attribute of God with the concept of time. Eternity is perpetual duration, without beginning or end, but time has both a beginning and an end. That which begins necessarily has a succession of parts. Eternity, however, is "contrary to time, and is therefore a permanent and immutable state."22 Charnock adds that eternity is

> a perfect possession of life without any variation; it comprehends in itself

> all years, all ages, all periods of ages; it never begins; it endures after every duration of time, and never ceaseth; it doth as much outrun time, as it went before the beginning of it: time supposeth something before it; but there can be nothing before eternity.[23]

He relates the above concept of eternity to God by explaining as God, God must be eternal, and that eternity properly belongs only to God.

In typical fashion, Charnock speaks of eternity as a negative attribute; that is, it is the denial of measures of time in God, much in the same way that the attribute of immensity is the denial of spatial limitations to God. As "immensity is the diffusion of his essence, so eternity is the duration of his essence…. His duration is as endless as his essence is boundless."[24] The Scriptures constantly speak of God as eternal; He is the everlasting God (Gen. 21:33; Rom. 16:26). Nothing can give a being to itself. Acts, whatever they may be, are predicated on existence. In other words, a cause precedes an effect. God's existence proves that He has no being from another—otherwise He would not be God—and so God must be eternal. Charnock explains further: "Therefore, when we say God is of and from himself, we mean not that God gave being to himself; but it is negatively to be understood that he hath no cause of existence without himself."[25] In the first place, then, the eternity of God proves that He is without beginning. Likewise God has no end. Again, the scriptural passages testifying to this truth are abundant (see Ps. 9:7; Rev. 4:9–10; Ps. 102:27). Because God needs nothing, there is no reason He should cease to exist. Charnock adds that God cannot desert Himself "because he cannot but love himself as the best and chiefest good."[26] Returning again to the doctrine of simplicity, Charnock argues that there is no weakness in God's nature that could introduce corruption or mutability "because he is infinitely simple."[27]

Finally, because there is no beginning and no end with God, there is no succession in God. Heaven and hell are everlasting, but they are not properly called eternal since they have a beginning. Only God is eternal because only He is without beginning or end. Reformed theologians were also careful to affirm that God is not subject to temporal succession; that is, there is no before and after with God. Turretin shows that true eternity (i.e., that which belongs only to God) "excludes succession no less than end and ought to be conceived as standing, but not a flowing…. God has every moment at once whatever we have dividedly by succession of time."[28] For God there is no past or future, but only present.[29] The idea of eternity involves not only the lack of beginning and end, but also the lack of succession, because, according to Charnock, "to have no succession, nothing first or last, notes rather the perfection of a being in regard

of its essence."[30] Moreover, God "receives nothing as an addition to what he was before" because of the perfection (simplicity) of His being.[31] Charnock provides a summary of this axiom of the Reformed doctrine of God in a way that the average layman—who would have heard these sermons preached by Charnock—could understand:

> [God] is not in his essence this day what he was not before, or will be the next day and year what he is not now. All his perfections are most perfect in him every moment; before all ages, after all ages. As he hath his whole essence undivided in every place, as well as in an immense space; so he hath all his being in one moment of time, as well as in infinite intervals of time…. He is what he always was, and he is what he always will be.[32]

So while the idea of creatures enjoying heavenly life for eternity to come is firmly rooted in the biblical narrative, it is nevertheless blasphemous to ascribe to creatures the attribute of absolute eternity, which belongs only to God. Only God sees and knows all things at once, for in God there is no past or future but only the present. For that reason, this attribute of God is not "communicable" that is, it cannot be shared with His creatures.

God's Immutability By affirming the eternity of God, Reformed theologians were essentially affirming the immutability of God. Like eternity, the doctrine of immutability is a necessary attribute of God because of His simplicity; that is, since God does not consist of many parts, He cannot change and does not change. He is what He always was, and always will be. Charnock defends God's immutability by appealing to His eternity, "for what endures, is not changed, and what is changed, doth not endure" (Ps. 102:26).[33]

In the Westminster Confession of Faith, the section on God denies that He has "passions"[34] and affirms His immutability. Muller suggests that the Reformed orthodox theologians, including Charnock, did not treat impassibility as an attribute of God. Instead, they spoke of the attribute of immutability. Muller nevertheless notes that there is "no great difference between the terms, and those writers who refrain from using the term *impassibilitas* are also quite adamant in stating God has no passions."[35] By denying that God has passions, the Reformed aimed to show, among other things, that God's happiness or glory, for example, cannot be increased or diminished by finite creatures. God's eternity necessitates His immutability: "He is truly and properly eternal, therefore Immutable."[36] These two attributes are, however, different insofar as eternity speaks about the duration of a state, whereas immutability is the state itself.

The concept of immutability is not necessarily a perfection, however, since

the fallen angels are unchanging in their malice toward God. Edward Leigh (1603–1671) therefore distinguishes between immutability that is "independent and absolute," which belongs to God alone, and immutability that is "dependent and comparative," which can belong to creatures.37 Clearly Charnock, when speaking of fallen angels, has in mind immutability that is dependent and comparative, or relative. Immutability in God, however, is a perfection since He is "infinite in essence, infinitely good, wise, holy; so it is a perfection necessary to his nature, that he should be immutably all this," otherwise He would an imperfect being and therefore no God at all.38 Immutability in God is a "glory belonging to all the attributes of God."39 God has attributes and perfections that are different, "but immutability is the center wherein they all unite."40 What God is, He is eternally and unchangeably.

This raises an important issue concerning a distinction in God's attributes. Reformed writers typically argued that the distinctions we posit among God's attributes have no objective existence in God, but are merely the result of our limited power of comprehension.41 Therefore, all of God's attributes are the "manifestation of the same absolutely simple essentiality of God," and so "it may justifiably be said (Braun I, ii, 2, 19) that 'God's righteousness is His goodness, is His knowledge, is His will…. But it would be wrong for me to say that the concept I have of the righteousness is the same concept which I have of the deity, mercy, or eternity.'"42 Francis Cheynell (1608–1665), in his penetrating work on the Trinity, affirms that though the attributes are "very many," yet they are "nothing else but the single undivided Essence of God"; that is, the attributes of God belong to the essence of God, and so cannot be properly divided without dividing God's essence.43 Leigh also speaks of God's attributes as all essential to God, "for in him is no accident at all; whatsoever is in God the same is God. All these are also one in him; his Mercy is his Justice, and his Justice is his Mercy, and each are his essence, only they differ in our apprehension."44 Charnock, likewise, argues that God's perfections are identical with His essence; "for though we conceive the essence of God as the subject, and the attributes of God as faculties and qualities in that subject, according to our weak model…yet truly and really there is no distinction between his essence and attributes; one is inseparable from the other. His power and wisdom are his essence."45 Thus when Charnock claims that God's immutability is not His power, he is only speaking in such a way for the benefit of his listeners.

Returning to the doctrine of immutability, the Reformed scholastics spoke of God as a necessary being who cannot change, language that Charnock himself uses. That which is immutable by nature is God. Opponents of the Reformed doctrine of God might argue that some creatures (e.g., angels) are also

immutable, but, as Charnock points out, if a creature is immutable it is only by God's grace and power, not by the nature of the creature. So, for example, regarding other perfections, God is "holy, happy, wise, good, by his essence; angels and men are made holy, wise, happy, strong, and good, by qualities and graces."[46] In terms of God's knowledge, His immutability coupled with His eternity necessitates that He knows all things at once. The attribute of eternity, properly speaking, involves no succession in God; thus, there is no succession in God's knowledge. Immutability in God precludes any change in His knowledge. Charnock affirms, then, that God knows all things from eternity because His knowledge is infinite. He knows all things at once because there is no past or future in God, but only the present.

If God is immutable in terms of His being and His knowledge, why is God said to "repent" in Scripture? This was a question that Charnock, Leigh, and other Puritan and Continental theologians sought to address in their works on the doctrine of God. Leigh suggests that God does not repent "properly," but instead "after the manner of men, not *affective* but *effective*."[47] Similarly, Charnock argues that repentance is not "properly in God," who is a "pure Spirit, and not capable of those passions which are signs of weakness and impotence."[48] Repentance implies a mistake made by the person repenting that was not foreseen as well as sorrow for sin. To affirm proper repentance to God would be to deny His foreknowledge and thus affirm evil in Him. The explanation for why Scripture speaks of God "repenting" is based on the principle of accommodation: "God accommodates himself in the Scripture to our weak capacity."[49] In other words, since finite creatures cannot comprehend the infinite God, God will sometimes clothe Himself with our nature in certain expressions "that we may apprehend him as we are able, and by an inspection into ourselves, learn something of the nature of God."[50] So, when it is said that God repents that He had made man (Gen. 6:6), there is something to be learned about God's hatred of sin. In other words, these types of anthropomorphic expressions are used in the Scriptures so that Christians may "ascribe the perfection we conceive in them to God, and lay the imperfection at the door of the creature."[51]

In summary, God's attribute of immutability is too clear and too vital to affirm hesitantly or with reservations. If God's essence is changed then it can only be changed by a being more powerful than God. Such a view was clearly out of the question for Charnock and those who shared his doctrine of God. True, there are passages in Scripture that seem to imply that God can change His mind, but there are a great deal more texts that affirm God's immutability in regard to His being and knowledge. By comparing the apparently contradictory texts with one

another, the Reformed developed an understanding of God's immutability that was consonant with them all. Consequently, Reformed theologians, making use of distinctions, spoke of "proper" and "improper" repentance. In terms of God, the former was certainly denied by Charnock and Reformed theologians, but the latter affirmed because it reflects the language of accommodation for human beings so that they are in fact driven to see in it both their own imperfections and the perfections of God. In the next place, Charnock moves from discussing God's immutability to a vindication of God's omnipresence.

God's Omnipresence God's attribute of omnipresence is, of course, best understood in the context of the aforementioned attributes. God is omnipresent because of the immensity of His essence. Immensity (*immensitas*) and omnipresence (*omnipraesentia*) are not strictly synonymous, but Charnock practically uses them interchangeably.52 Specifically, the immensity of God refers to spatiality, whereas omnipresence speaks of God's relation to concrete/filled space. As te Velde notes, this "can be expressed by the distinction between immensity as an absolute property of God, and omnipresence as God's disposition towards places."53 Drawing on Rijssen, Muller notes that "while *immensitas Dei* refers to God in distinction from the created order, the *omnipraesentia Dei* refers to him in positive relation to the world and indicated his 'dwelling' in all places in the world."54 Leigh speaks of immensity (and infinity) both largely and strictly. Largely considered, God is not bound by space or time or any other thing; strictly speaking, immensity is a property of God "by which he can not be measured nor circumscribed by any place, but fills all places without multiplying or extension of his essence."55 In other words, God is "neither shut up in any place, nor shut out from any place."56

Charnock expounds the classic passage (*locus classicus)* on God's omnipresence, Jeremiah 23:24 ("Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD"), to affirm the typical Reformed position against the assaults of the Socinian theologians who declared that God's omnipresence was an extension of His power, not His essence.57 He also relates this attribute to the other attributes of God already discussed in his discourse: "As eternity is the perfection whereby he hath neither beginning nor end, immutability is the perfection whereby he hath neither increase nor diminution, so immensity or omnipresence is that whereby he hath neither bounds nor limitation."58 In affirming God's omnipresence, Charnock speaks about three ways a thing may be said to be present or in a place: circumspectively (as circumscribed: the hand, belonging to the body, is not in the same particular place as the foot); definitely (angels that are in a point and not another at the same time), and repletively (filling all

places).[59] God is repletively present because He is not limited by space. As He is infinite, God fills all things: "He is from the height of the heavens to the bottom of the deeps, in every point of the world, and in the whole circle of it, yet not limited by it, but beyond it."[60]

When speaking of God's omnipresence, a number of truths need to be affirmed to understand this doctrine correctly, particularly since the Socinians were also comfortable speaking of God's omnipresence. But their idea of God's omnipresence was understood principally as a reference to God's power and energy, whereas the Reformed also included the idea of God's providence. This was certainly the case for Charnock, who lays down several propositions in order to understand what is meant by the omnipresence of God. Charnock speaks of the *influential* omnipresence of God. All things in heaven and on earth are subjected to God by His power, since He sustains all things, and His knowledge, because He knows all things: "His power reacheth all, and his knowledge pierceth all."[61] Creation in the Bible is something richer than simply God making the earth and all living things out of nothing. That is to say, "preservation is not wholly distinct from creation," so God must be omnipresent in order to preserve all things.[62] God's presence is an intimate presence with all His creatures in sustaining their very existence, which is a strong denial that God is only present by His virtue, as if only the effects of His creative power and wisdom were present in the world. There are also types of manifestations of God's presence: "he hath a presence of glory in heaven, whereby he comforts the saints; a presence of wrath in hell, whereby he torments the damned," which shows that providence and presence are necessarily bound up with one another.[63] God is both providentially and essentially omnipresent. He fills all things. In characteristically lucid language, Charnock posits that as "all times are a moment to his eternity, so all places are as a point to his essence. As he is larger than all time, so he is vaster than all places."[64] If God is everywhere—that is, He is as present in hell as He is in heaven—it is important to affirm that He is present without mixture. Returning again to the simplicity of God, Charnock connects that idea to the idea that His essence cannot be mixed with anything and therefore a part of His essence cannot be separated from another part; "if there were such a division of his being, he would not be the most simple and uncompounded being…. He would not be a Spirit."[65] But because He is a spirit and also omnipresent, it is true to say that "nothing is more present than God, yet nothing more hid."[66]

God's Omniscience The doctrine of God's comprehensive knowledge (*omniscientia*) was a major subject of debate between Reformed theologians and

their opponents in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. If God has infallible knowledge of all things past, present, and future, then according to opponents of Reformed theology, humans are not free creatures.[67] Reformed theologians replied to their various critics by showing that they in turn could not adequately affirm God's omniscience.[68] This is a rather simple way to understand the debate. When all of the particulars are considered, there is no question that this divine attribute was the most problematic aspect of the Reformed doctrine of God.[69] Charnock's thoughts on divine omniscience begin, as is typical with the general thrust of his work, by exegeting a well-known Scripture text bearing on the topic. Psalm 147:5, "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite," was frequently cited by Reformed theologians in order to prove God's omniscience.[70] After providing an exegesis of that text, Charnock moves on to the doctrine, and asserts that God has infinite knowledge. Such a statement needs elaboration, so Charnock considers, for example, what kind of knowledge there is in God, what God knows, and how God knows things in order to arrive at a better understanding of God's omniscience.

The kind of knowledge that God possesses is described in the Scriptures in relation to things past, present, and future. Specifically, regarding things future, God's knowledge is foreknowledge or "prescience" (*praescientia Dei*): "in regard of the universality of the objects, it is called omniscience; in regard of the simple understanding of things, it is called knowledge; in regard of acting and modeling the ways of acting, it is called wisdom and prudence."[71] Knowledge in God is not simple knowledge of all things, but also God's wisdom or understanding of all things. In knowing, God is doing; and in doing, the wisdom of God is manifested. God's knowledge may further be considered in terms of visionary and simple understanding (*visionis et simplicis intelligentiæ*).[72] In terms of the former, God not only infallibly knows all things past, present, and future, but He also knows Himself. This knowledge concerns things that actually are in terms of God's decree and in terms of His self-knowledge. But the latter has to do with God's simple understanding, which involves things outside of God's decree, that is, "things as are possible to be wrought by the power of God, though they shall never in the least peep up into being, but lie for ever wrapt up in darkness and nothing."[73] This distinction is similar to that between God's ordained power (*potentia ordinata*) and His absolute power (*potentia absoluta*), between God's power to carry out what He has ordained or decreed and God's absolute power to do all things.[74] Charnock bases much of his understanding of God's knowledge on an analogy in humans who have not only the ability to know and see the world as it is, but also the ability to conceive of other possible worlds. However, finite human beings cannot comprehend God's vision and

knowledge, “to which ours is but as a grain of dust.”[75]

As noted above, God knows Himself, which has reference to His speculative and practical knowledge. Knowledge is speculative, Charnock says,“when the truth of a thing is known without a respect to any working or practical operation.”[76] Therefore God’s self-knowledge is only speculative “because there is nothing for God to work in himself.” Charnock adds:

> and though he knows himself, yet this knowledge of himself doth not terminate there, but flowers into a love of himself, and delight in himself; yet this love of himself, and delight in himself, is not enough to make it a practical knowledge, because it is natural, and naturally and necessarily flows from the knowledge of himself and his own goodness: he cannot but love himself and delight in himself, upon the knowledge of himself.[77]

This speculative or natural knowledge that God has differs from His practical knowledge. Practical knowledge is God’s understanding of the things He has decreed. In other words, this knowledge terminates in the act of creation and so, unlike God’s speculative knowledge, is neither natural nor necessary. God’s self-love, however, is both natural and necessary. God’s practical knowledge extends to the essence, qualities, and properties of all that He has created; indeed, God’s practical knowledge also extends to things He might have made but did not. Charnock also mentions a further type of knowledge: the knowledge of approbation as well as apprehension. So, in the case of His people, His treasured possession, God possesses not only a practical knowledge, but also a knowledge of affection (Amos 3:2), which includes His special care of His people.

With these distinctions in place, Charnock turns to the question of how far God’s knowledge and understanding extend. The basis for God’s absolute omniscience lies in His perfect knowledge of Himself, which is the “first and original knowledge.”[78] Similarly, Leigh notes, “God knows all things, because first he knew himself directly in himself.”[79] The infiniteness of God’s knowledge is grounded in His self-knowledge. In fact, God’s self-knowledge is essential to His being. He is ignorant of nothing, and certainly not Himself. God’s essential blessedness and happiness is rooted in His perfect understanding of His essence and attributes. Charnock adds that if God did not know Himself perfectly He could not create, since He would be “ignorant of his own power, and his own ability,” and He could not govern because He would be “without the knowledge of his own holiness and righteousness.”[80] In short, God knows Himself perfectly, a necessary prerequisite for His comprehensive knowledge of things created and things that might possibly be created. Charnock affirms, then, a high view of God’s omniscience:

> God knows all other things, whether they be possible, past, present, or future; whether they be things that he can do, but will never do, or whether they be things that he hath done, but are not now; things that are now in being, or things that are not now existing, that lie in the womb of their proper and immediate causes. If his understanding be infinite, he then knows all things whatsoever that can be known, else his understanding would have bounds, and what hath limits is not infinite, but finite.[81]

If God has knowledge of all possible worlds, then He has knowledge of this world, which He has created. Nor is His knowledge limited to an infallible understanding of the present, though there is only the present in God, "because God sees all things in one instant."[82] In fact, Leigh adds that foreknowledge and remembrance do not properly belong to God since "all things both past, and to come, [are] present before him."[83] He has perfect foreknowledge of all future events because they have been decreed by Him, which explains why the prophets were able to make predictions of things future.[84]

Charnock's exposition of God's knowledge is one of the most thorough sections in his work on the doctrine of God, and much could be said, not only about his defense of human freedom, but also about his view of God's omniscience in response to the Jesuit, Socinian, and Remonstrant theologians' views on "middle knowledge" (*scientia media*).[85] The doctrine of human freedom was, of course, understood differently by Reformed theologians and the abovementioned groups, and this was in large part because the Reformed rejected Luis de Molina's (1535–1600) views on middle knowledge, which were subsequently adopted by Jacob Arminius (1560–1609).[86] Almost all of Charnock's views on God's knowledge involve the explicit or implicit rejection of middle knowledge, and his section on how God knows all things proves this to be the case.

In brief, the doctrine of middle knowledge derives its name from the fact that it claims to find a middle ground between what has been alluded to above as natural knowledge *(scientia naturalis)* and free knowledge or visionary and definite knowledge *(scientia libera seu visionis et definite)*—hence, "middle knowledge." As Eef Dekker notes, "Molina's point of view implies that it is possible for God to know, prior to his choice, which possibilities will be actual, what human beings (completely free) will do, given certain circumstances."[87] Thus, on this model, in the realm of soteriology, God elects certain individuals not freely but contingently, depending upon whether an individual will choose Christ or not. This is what makes the doctrine of middle knowledge so repulsive to seventeenth-century Reformed theologians. God does not, in their view,

sovereignly decree whatsover comes to pass; rather, in His foreknowledge He has responded to the possible choices of finite, contingent beings. As Muller notes, the idea of divine foreknowledge based on future conditionals "is a rather unstable concept: in order for God to know the conditional conditionally, God would have to be ignorant of its resolution in actuality."88 The "Molinist" view indeed asserts that God knows conditionals conditionally. This view is entirely inconsistent with Charnock's doctrine of God's knowledge. God knows by His own essence, that is, by viewing Himself, "and so he knows all things in their first and original cause; which is no other than his own essence willing, and his own essence executing what he wills."89 In addition, Francis Turretin argues that the Molinists understand God's foreknowledge concerning future conditional events as a truth that "depends not upon the free decree of God (being anterior to this), but upon the liberty of the creature (which God certainly foresees), whether in itself or in the thing (how it will determine itself if placed in certain given circumstances)."90 God's reaction in this way would necessarily imply a limitation in His understanding, according to Charnock and other Reformed theologians.91

There is, then, according to Charnock, God's simple understanding and His definite understanding, the former concerning all possible things and events, and the latter concerning all things and events that are actualized according to the will of God. Thus, in God's knowledge a twofold distinction (*scientia necessaria* and *scientia definita*) is affirmed, but not a threefold distinction (i.e., one including *scientia media*), which would have detrimental implications for other doctrines in Christian dogmatics, as well as the doctrine of God itself.

God's Wisdom

Some might place God's wisdom in the context of His knowledge and understanding. Although no single attribute can be adequately considered apart from an affirmation of all the divine attributes, for Charnock, the wisdom of God deserves its own discussion because wisdom is different from knowledge. This section in Charnock's work is exceedingly thorough, and only a few of Charnock's more salient points will be highlighted.

Wisdom, in the first place, is that quality whereby a person acts for a right end. Moreover, wisdom not only has in view the end, but also the means that bring about the end. When God acts He does so according to the counsel of His own infinite understanding. No one is His counselor. Charnock speaks of the divine will as something that is not rash, but follows the "proposals of the Divine mind; he chooses that which is fittest to be done."92 Knowledge and wisdom differ insofar as knowledge is the "apprehension of a thing, and wisdom is the

appointing and ordering of things."[93] God possesses an essential and comprehensive wisdom (*omnisapientia*). The Son of God, however, is the personal wisdom of God. Wisdom, as a necessary perfection in God, is manifested in the Son of God, who "opens to us the secrets of God."[94] Wisdom is an attribute; it belongs to the essence of God, and because of simplicity, wisdom is not something superadded to God. For this reason, only God is wise (Rom. 16:27), properly speaking, perfectly, universally, perpetually, incomprehensibly, and infallibly. God's wisdom must be consistent with His other attributes, which is another reason He alone is properly wise, though His creatures, made in His image, may be derivatively wise. Charnock notes that since God has infinite wisdom, some (e.g., Suárez) have called God, "not only wise, but above all wisdom."[95] God manifests His wisdom in creation and the government of His creatures, but God's wisdom in redemption "mounts the mind to a greater astonishment."[96] In his typically splendid way of capturing the glories of redemption, Charnock refers to creation as the "footsteps" of God's wisdom but the work of redemption as the "face" of God's wisdom.[97]

In the person and work of Jesus Christ, wisdom shines forth with a luster seen nowhere else in God's dealings with creation (Col. 2:3). In the gospel, the wisdom of God is described in several ways, all of which serve to confirm Charnock's contention that wisdom is an essential attribute of God whereby all of the attributes of God are ordered. The wisdom manifested in the gospel is a hidden wisdom (1 Tim. 1:17), also known as a mystery. In redemption there is, instead of one act, multiple ends and means that display the glory of God in His wisdom. For example, in the gospel one learns of the "conjunction of two natures…the union of eternity and time, of mortality and immortality: death is made the way to life, and shame the path to glory."[98] God's wisdom is displayed by the fact that God's justice and mercy are both satisfied: "justice in punishing, and mercy in pardoning."[99] In a similar vein, Thomas Goodwin speaks of redemption as God's "masterpiece, wherein he means to bring all his attributes upon the stage."[100]

The work of Christ manifests the wisdom of God as both just and the justifier of the ungodly; but the person of Christ also reveals the preeminent wisdom of God, for in the incarnation the finite is united with the infinite, immortality is united to mortality, and a nature who made the law is united to a nature under the law, all in one person.[101] This union "transcends all the unions visible among creatures" and for that reason is incomprehensible.[102] And while the finite can never comprehend the infinite, not even in the union of the two natures, nevertheless the divine nature is united to every part of Christ's human nature. Because of the incarnation the Son of God is able to mediate between

God and sinful humanity. Charnock expresses this well in the following words:

> He is a true Mediator between mortal sinners and the immortal righteous One. He was near to us by the infirmities of our nature, and near to God by the perfections of the Divine; as near to God in his nature, as to us in ours; as near to us in our nature as he is to God in the Divine. Nothing that belongs to the Deity, but he possesses; nothing that belongs to the human nature, but he is clothed with. He had both the nature which had offended, and the nature which was offended: a nature to please God, and a nature to pleasure us: a nature, whereby he experimentally knew the excellency of God, which was injured, and understood the glory due to him, and consequently the greatness of the offence, which was to be measured by the dignity of his person: and a nature whereby he might be sensible of the miseries contracted by, and endure the calamities due to the offender, that he might both have compassion on him, and make due satisfaction for him.[103]

In short, the incarnation reveals the wisdom of God in appointing the Son as Mediator. Only the God-man could effect reconciliation between God and man, and communion with God is only possible for us because God became man. Indeed, the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity gave Him an experimental compassion that the divine nature was not capable of, and so the efficacy of Christ's priestly office, in all of its aspects, depends upon the union of the two natures in one person. The incarnation, then, is one of the many ways God has revealed His wisdom to men. God's wisdom, which brings together both mercy and justice, among other things, would not, however, be effectual if God were not powerful.

God's Almighty Power Not surprisingly, Charnock affirms that the attribute of power (*potentia*) is essential to God's nature. In fact, while mercy and justice are essential to the divine nature, power is more "apparently essential" because mercy and justice, for example, cannot be exercised without power.[104] The simplicity of God, including the harmony of His attributes, necessitates that His power is unlimited, which explains why power is used as a name for God (Mark 14:62).

The concept of power may be understood either as authority or strength. One may have authority without power and power without authority. In terms of understanding this attribute in God, Charnock makes clear that he has in mind God's strength, not His authority.[105] In the next place, Charnock makes the well-known distinction between absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) and

“ordinate” (i.e., applied to a given end) power (*potentia ordinata*). Absolute power is God’s ability “to do that which he will not do, but is possible to be done; ordinate, is that power whereby God doth that which he hath decreed to do, that is, which he hath ordained or appointed to be exercised.”106 These are, of course, not distinct or different powers, but different ways of understanding the application, or nonapplication, of God’s power. Absolute power must, however, be understood as that power which is constrained by God’s nature (i.e., God cannot lie). Or, if God had made the world and then dissolved the world it would be eternally true that God had made the world, “for it is impossible, that that which was once true, should ever be false.”107 Following from this, Leigh notes that divine power must not be conceived as if God could contradict His nature, such as lying, changing, or denying himself, for these things “oppose the Divine, Immutable, Simple, most true and perfect essence.”108 Again, Reformed theologians were constantly speaking of the divine attributes in a way that was consistent with the simplicity of God.

Ordinate power is the outworking of God’s decree; while according to His absolute power He can effect a change, He chooses not to because of the decree He has already made. So, for example, in Matthew 26:53–54 Christ speaks of absolute power (“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”) and ordinate power (“But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”). God’s absolute power is a necessary power because it belongs to His essence, but His ordinate power is free since it is an act of His will. The relation of God’s will to His power is also another way of conceiving the greatness of His power. Creatures possess a will but may not have the ability to do as they would. But God’s power is not less than His will; after all, His power of acting is not distinct from His will to act. While God may not will certain things, according to His ordinate power, “yet supposing he should will it, he is able to perform it: so that you must, in your notion of Divine power, enlarge it further than to think God can only do what he hath resolved to do.”109

Humans conceive of the attributes of God by noting the relation the divine attributes have to each other. God’s knowledge pertains to things possible; God’s wisdom speaks of the fitness of how things are done; God’s will resolves that things should be done; and God’s power enables Him to do them. In other words, God’s power “is his ability to act, and his wisdom is the rector of his action: his will orders, his wisdom guides, and his power effects.”110 For this reason, Charnock subordinates God’s ordained power to His understanding and will: “his will is the supreme cause of every thing that stands up in time, and all things receive a being as he wills them. His power is but his will perpetually

working, and diffusing itself in the season his will hath fixed from eternity."[111] However, God's absolute power is greater than His resolving will. Charnock observes that some argue that God's understanding and will are greater than His absolute power, "for God understands sins, and wills to permit them, but he cannot himself do any evil or unjust action, nor have a power of doing it."[112] If God were able to perform these imperfect acts (e.g., performing evil) it would indicate impotence or weakness in God. Paradoxically, it belongs to God's power that He cannot do evil. Whatever God's will is, it will be consistent with His power, for He cannot will to do things that are contrary to His nature, and so there is a harmony between these two attributes.

The power of God is not something distinct from God's essence, but belongs essentially to His nature. So to be omnipotent is to be God, which makes omnipotence another incommunicable attribute, even to the human nature of Jesus Christ. Charnock reasons, against the Lutheran conception of the "sharing of properties" *(communicatio idiomatum)*, that if Christ's human nature actually possessed omnipotence then the "essence of God were also communicated to his humanity, and then eternity would be communicated. His humanity then was not given him in time; his humanity would be uncompounded, that is, his body would be no body, his soul no soul."[113] This was a natural outworking of the Reformed axiom that the finite was not capable of containing the infinite. Thus, the power of God is infinite since not even Christ's human nature can contain or possess the power of God, properly speaking. Or, to put it another way: "To be infinite, and to be God, is one and the same thing. Nothing can be infinite but God; nothing but God is infinite. But the power of God is infinite, because it can produce infinite effects."[114]

Though God may produce infinite effects and infinite worlds according to His absolute power, the exercise of His power is subordinate to the decree—hence "ordered power." Goodwin draws attention to the fact that some divines affirm that while God is omnipotent, "yet he is not omnivolent [willing to do all things]; though he can do all things infinitely more than he hath done, yet he doth not will to do all things that he is able, for his power is limited by his will."[115] But while the exercise of God's power is subordinated to the decree, Charnock is careful to point out that the essence of His power is not subordinate to the decree since the power of God is eternal (Rom. 1:20). Leigh notes that God's power is properly called omnipotence because it is perpetual, as His essence is.[116] Leigh and Charnock both connect one attribute of God with another and thus show their consistency. God's power must be omnipotent power because God is eternal, infinite God. Regarding the simplicity of God, as noted above, Charnock observes that "every substance, the more spiritual it is,

the more powerful it is. All perfections are more united in a simple than in a compounded being…. Where there is the greatest simplicity, there is the greatest unity; and where there is the greatest unity, there is the greatest power."[117] The power of God may be perceived from the whole of His works *ad extra* (with regard to what is outside of or distinct from Himself), whether creation, government, or redemption. In these works one may, through the lens of faith, come to see the wisdom of God; but one important ingredient missing so far is the purity of God's works. By this, Charnock means that one may ascribe to God the attributes of infinity, eternity, omnipotence, etc., and rightly so; but "if we conceive him destitute of this excellent perfection [i.e., holiness], and imagine him possessed with the least contagion of evil, we make him but an infinite monster."[118] Holiness, in Charnock's mind, is an attribute that "hath an excellency above his other perfections."[119]

God's Holiness

The attribute of God's holiness was a prominent theme in the writings of the post-Reformation Reformed theologians. In similar language to Charnock, Leigh speaks of holiness as the "beauty of all God's attributes, without which his wisdom would be but subtilty, his justice cruelty, his Sovereignty tyranny, his mercy foolish pity."[120] Far from being an infinite monster, God possesses a "perfect and unpolluted freedom from all evil."[121] Positively, Charnock describes God's holiness as the "rectitude or integrity of the Divine nature…in affection and action, to the Divine will…whereby he works with a becomingness to his own excellency."[122] Simply put, God unchangeably loves good and hates evil.

There was no doubt among Reformed theologians that holiness was an essential attribute of God.[123] As Charnock moves from one attribute to another, he is constantly weaving them together to paint a fuller picture of God in His essence. And when it comes to holiness, Charnock argues that it is as necessary an attribute as God's being, omniscience, and immutability, for example. Interestingly, in the context of arguing for God's essential holiness, Charnock also posits (quoting Turretin) that God is also essentially gracious, merciful, and just, "though no creature had been framed by him to exercise his grace, mercy, justice, or holiness upon."[124] In other words, justice is an essential attribute of God's, but it requires a condition for the act of justice to be necessary. Likewise, holiness is not simply an act of God's will. If it were, He could will to love unrighteousness or hate righteousness. Instead, God is, by a free—not compelled—necessity, that is, because of the perfection of His attributes, necessarily holy. Not only necessarily holy, but God is also absolutely and infinitely holy. A

creature cannot be essentially holy because of the innate mutability of all creatures, but God, who is immutable, is absolutely holy in keeping with His other attributes.

In the context of sin, God must necessarily abhor it. Charnock observes that since God loves Himself, "so must he necessarily hate every thing that is against himself."[125] And so His hatred of sin is an intense hatred. The Scriptures paint a striking picture of God's view of sin as something He loathes; "that he is impatient of beholding it; the very sight of it affects him with detestation (Hab. 1:13); he hates the first spark of it in the imagination (Zech. viii. 17)."[126] In fact, "sin is the only primary object of his displeasure."[127] Man derived his nature from God, and so it is not the nature of man that God hates, but rather the corruption of man's nature. For God to approve of sin He must first deny Himself, an utter impossibility. Therefore, God will perpetually hate sin and express His displeasure against sin, which, among Reformed theologians, provides the ground for the doctrine of eternal punishment.

By the merits of Jesus Christ, sinners may escape the punishment due to them, but in reconciling sinners to Himself, in consistency with His essential attributes, God nevertheless displays His hatred for sin by punishing it in the death of His only Son. Charnock uses vivid imagery to capture this all-important point of Christian theology: "Not all the vials of judgments, that have, or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious devils, nor the groans of the damned creatures, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon his Son."[128] As Psalm 22 was fulfilled perfectly in the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross, Charnock points out that verse 3 speaks of God's holiness in the midst of Christ's dying groans. "Justice indeed gave the stroke, but holiness ordered it."[129] Reaffirming God's hatred for sin as an evidence of His essential holiness, Charnock explains that the Father "would have the most excellent person, one next in order to himself, and equal to him in all the glorious perfections of his nature (Phil. ii. 6), die on a disgraceful cross, and be exposed to the flames of Divine wrath, rather than sin should live, and his holiness remain for ever disparaged by the violations of his law…. God seems to lay aside the bowels of a father, and put on the garb of an irreconcilable enemy."[130]

As alluded to above, the essential holiness of God is an important factor for Charnock's view of God's essential justice. Reformed theologians have not always agreed on whether the atonement was necessary.[131] Charnock appears to hold to the position held by John Owen (1616–1683) and Turretin, against the likes of Goodwin and William Twisse (1578–1646), that there is "a necessity of

the satisfaction of the holiness of God by some sufficient mediator."[132] Charnock admits that none (among Reformed divines) deny that God essentially hates all unrighteousness, but the debate concerns whether the only way for sin to be pardoned was by satisfaction or whether an act of God's will would have sufficed. Citing Turretin and in harmony with what Owen says, Charnock writes: "That the justice of God is so essential to him, as that sin could not be pardoned without satisfaction, some do question; though this latter seems rationally to follow upon the former."[133] In the satisfaction of Christ, whereby God is able to pardon sinners, the holiness and mercy of God are together manifested, "that mercy might not always sigh for the destruction of the creature, and that holiness might not mourn for the neglect of its honor."[134]

As the holiness of God is manifested in the death of Christ, so is the holiness of God shown in the person of Christ. Christ is the image of God's holiness. Since God in His glory is "too dazzling to be beheld by us," the incarnation makes it possible for the elect to not only behold the holiness of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but also to become holy like God through Jesus Christ.[135] Indeed, becoming holy like Christ is the prime way of honoring God. "As this is the splendour of all the Divine attributes, so it is the flower of all a Christian's graces, the crown of all religion."[136] Thus, unlike the attribute of eternity, for example, the holiness of God is a communicable attribute. But one must always keep in mind that all communicable attributes are first declared perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ, and then believers, through union with the Savior, are made partakers of these attributes of God. The application, then, of holiness has a christological focus.

God's Goodness

The goodness of God (*bonitas Dei*) is identified as an essential attribute of God; that is, goodness is identical with the divine essence. Thus, God's power and mercy, for example, are aspects of His goodness. God is good, good in His essence, so that "whatsoever is perfect goodness, is God; whatsoever is truly goodness in any creature, is a resemblance of God."[137] This last thought speaks to the two basic aspects to the goodness of God. The first has reference to God's essential goodness; the second relates to the communication of His goodness in His works *ad extra*. In his section on the goodness of God, Charnock does not focus on the goodness of God's essence or the perfection of His nature, nor does he mean by "goodness" the holiness of God. Rather, the goodness of God in His discourse has to do with the "efflux of his will, whereby he is beneficial to his creatures."[138] In this sense, goodness extends to more objects than God's mercy. So creation and providence are effects of God's goodness.

One fascinating discussion held not only among medieval theologians, but also among a number of Protestant scholastics, concerned whether the Son of God would have become incarnate had man not sinned. Charnock uses this example to show that had the Son become flesh it would have been an act of God's goodness, not His mercy, because His creatures were not fallen.[139] Thus Muller seems to paint an accurate picture, stating that while both the essential *ad intra* ("inward") goodness of God and *ad extra* ("outward") manifestation of His goodness toward His creatures are affirmed by Reformed theologians; nevertheless "it is certainly the latter and not the former point that receives emphasis in Reformed systems."[140] Nonetheless, God's goodness toward His creatures is grounded in His essential goodness.

Charnock speaks of the attributes of God being comprehended by His goodness. Therefore God is good by His own essence. Moreover, because of this, everything God created was good. And so any good that is in the creature is received from God. Goodness, however, is not a quality in God, but a nature; "not a habit added to his essence, but his essence itself; he is not first God, and then afterwards good; but he is good as he is God, his essence, being one and the same, is formally and equally God and good."[141] God's goodness, like His other attributes, is infinite, but the exercise of His goodness may be limited according to the exercise of His will. Those who receive benefits because of the goodness of God are also in a position to be good themselves, which shows that this particular attribute, unlike omnipotence or immutability, is communicable. In fact, Charnock posits that goodness "includes diffusiveness [the tendency to expand, or shed itself abroad]; without goodness he would cease to be a Deity, and without diffusiveness he would cease to be good."[142] As God is necessarily immutable, eternal, omnipotent, etc., so He is necessarily good. And because God is good in Himself, He delights in Himself. This personal delight provides the basis for His delight in His creatures; "if he loves himself, he cannot but love the resemblance of himself, and the image of his own goodness."[143] Here Charnock is making use of the distinction between *amor naturalis* or *amor complacentiae* and *amor voluntarius*. The *amor naturalis* (innate love) refers to God's love of Himself apart from His relationship to the created world, and this is a necessary love. But the *amor voluntarius* (willing love) speaks of the exercise of God's love toward His creation. In creating, God will necessarily love His creation because in its essential goodness, creation resembles Himself.

This is not to suggest, however, that God is not free. As Charnock makes clear, "the necessity of the goodness of his nature hinders not the liberty of his actions; the matter of his acting is not at all necessary, but the manner of his acting in a good and bountiful way, is necessary, as well as free."[144] In other

words, the decision to create was free, but in creating He necessarily made His creatures and the world good. In the words of Charnock, “As it is the perfection of his nature, it is necessary; as it is the communication of his bounty, it is voluntary.”145 Even in His own self-love, God necessarily loves Himself, but this is not by constraint but according to the freedom that results from His self-knowledge. In the communication of God’s love to His creatures, Charnock, citing Amyraut, suggests that the goodness of God was the “motive and end of all his works of creation and providence.”146 The motive for creating must come from within God, not from without. Wisdom speaks to the directing of creation; power enables God to create, but goodness provides the motive. In fact, God could have no end but Himself, who is the supreme good (*summum bonum*). Thus God wills the good as an end necessarily, but the means that lead to the end are willed freely.

God’s goodness is revealed in His works of creation and redemption. Implicit in Charnock’s treatise is the threefold distinction, arising out of God’s *amor voluntarius*, of God’s goodwill or benevolent love (*amor benevolentiae*) toward the elect in eternity; God’s well-doing or beneficent love (*amor beneficentiae*) in terms of His will to redeem the elect; and God’s love of delight and friendship (*amor complacentiae vel amicitiae*) that has in view the rewards accruing from redemption.147 These aspects of God’s love have a correlation to His immanent, transient, and applicatory works *ad extra*. Before considering God’s goodness in redemption, Charnock shows God’s goodness in creation. Regarding Adam’s state in the garden of Eden, God displayed His goodness to Adam in terms of the gracious reward given for a due debt. Adam owed to God obedience, but “the article on God’s part, of giving perpetual blessedness to innocent man, was not founded upon rules of strict justice and righteousness, for that would have argued God to be a debtor to man.”148 The reward offered by God—immortality or eternal life—far exceeded what Adam was able to merit, which testifies to God’s goodness in creation. Goodness was also the “spring of redemption”; in fact, it was “pure goodness,” for God was not required to redeem fallen mankind. His goodness provides the reason for God to set upon the work of redeeming men and women through His Son.149 This goodness exceeds that of the goodness revealed in creation, for “there is more of his bounty expressed in that one verse, ‘So God loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son’ (John iii. 16), than there is in the whole volume of the world: it is an incomprehensible *so*; a *so* that all the angels in heaven cannot analyse.”150

The fact of redemption leads Charnock to the provocative conclusion that the goodness shown to the elect was “a greater goodness to us, than was for a time

manifested to Christ himself."[151] God valued the redemption of the elect so much that He sentenced His own Son to humiliation on earth so that all who belong to Christ may be exalted in heaven. Charnock adds:

> He was desirous to hear him groaning, and see him bleeding, that we might not groan under his frowns, and bleed under his wrath; he spared not him, that he might spare us; refused not to strike him, that he might be well pleased with us; drenched his sword in the blood of his Son, that it might not for ever be wet with ours, but that his goodness might for ever triumph in our salvation; he was willing to have his Son made man, and die, rather than man should perish, who had delighted to ruin himself; he seemed to degrade him for a time from what he was.[152]

Believers should place great value on Christ's merits and work on their behalf; but it was the goodness of God that provided a Mediator in the first place.[153] In fact, Charnock claims that in giving His only Son as the Redeemer of God's elect, God gave the "highest gift that it was possible for Divine goodness to bestow."[154] In the exaltation of Christ, the goodness of God continues to His creatures. Christ, as the exalted Savior, procured numerous gifts and graces that He bestowed upon the church when He ascended into heaven. Just as God's holiness has a christological center in terms of its communication to believers, so too does His goodness. Christ becomes the focal point for God's display of His pure goodness to His creatures in redemption. But apart from redemption, the goodness of God manifests itself in all areas of creation because the God who is goodness itself must necessarily, in His works *ad extra*, display His goodness.

God's Dominion

The dominion (*dominium* or *potestas*) or majesty of God (*maiestas Dei*) is given a great deal of attention among the post-Reformation Reformed theologians in contrast to the first-and second-generation Reformers. This attribute, like all the others considered above, is an inward property belonging to God essentially. Nonetheless, their expositions of the *maiestas Dei* frequently draw attention to the outward manifestation of this attribute. Charnock uses the word "dominion" more frequently than "majesty," but he is certainly comfortable using the word "majesty" to describe this aspect of God's being. In his exposition of God's dominion, Charnock begins his discourse by affirming a threefold dominion in God: that which is natural and therefore absolute over all things; that which is spiritual or gracious, which is the dominion God has over the church; and that which is glorious (i.e., eschatological), which refers to the kingdom of God as He reigns over saints in heaven and sinners in hell.[155] "The first dominion is

founded in nature; the second in grace; the third in regard of the blessed in grace; in regard of the damned, in demerit in them, and justice in him.[156]

The dominion of God is to be distinguished from His power. The latter has reference to His ability to effect certain things, whereas the former speaks of His royal prerogative to do what He pleases. God's physical power is best described as omnipotence, but God's moral power must be understood as His dominion, or lordship. In exercising His sovereign power, all creatures are brought into subjection to Him; in exercising His dominion, God possesses a sovereign right to subdue them. Because, properly speaking, there is no distinction of attributes in God, one cannot understand the dominion of God unless the attributes are all referred to the perfection of dominion. So, for example, God's goodness relates to His dominion insofar as "he can never use his authority but for the good of the creatures, and conducting them to their true end."[157] Thus His goodness is expressed in His dominion.

More to the point, to acknowledge God as God is to acknowledge His dominion, for He cannot be God if He does not possess dominion in His essential being. As Charnock notes, "It is as possible for him not to be God as not to be supreme…. To fancy an infinite power without a supreme dominion, is to fancy a mighty senseless statue, fit to be beheld, but not fit to be obeyed."[158] God's dominion is, therefore, an essential, incommunicable attribute because no creature can properly exercise all three of the aforementioned aspects of dominion. The divine nature provides the foundation for dominion, for in that nature God is infinite, unchangeable, powerful, holy, omniscient, eternal, *etc.* These attributes necessitate God's dominion over all things.

Unlike men, who derive their dominion from God (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 13:1), God is entirely independent in His dominion since He Himself is independent. Following from His independence, God's dominion is necessarily absolute, that is, the authority that God possesses as God is unlimited.[159] As God exercises His dominion, His other attributes (e.g., wisdom, righteousness, and goodness) are all present in the exercise of that dominion, which means that His dominion is not tyrannical, oppressive, or unmerciful but perfectly good, just, and wise; as Charnock notes, "In all the exercises of his sovereign right, he is never unattended with those perfections of his nature."[160] Therefore, as God exercises dominion over His creatures, including the wills of men, it is a dominion that must never be understood as naked power, but power clad in the beauty of God's holy being, since there is no division of attributes in God. For that same reason, God's dominion, including His sovereignty over humans in heaven and hell, is eternal. There is an ontological necessity that man remain under the moral law of God.[161]

God's works *ad extra* are a display of His dominion. If some men believe and others do not, it is because in His dominion God decreed this should be so. If some men possess certain gifts that others do not, the reason is God's prerogative as the sovereign Lord who does what He pleases, in whom He pleases. Even the exaltation of Christ displays God's dominion. The gift of comprehensive authority to Christ (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22; Rev. 3:21; John 5:22), according to the pleasure and will of God, was the act of one who is free to do such a thing by virtue of His dominion. The act of giving or rewarding testifies to the dominion of the person who gives and rewards (Heb. 11:6). Thus there is a distinction between God's essential dominion and the economical dominion that belongs to Christ. Moreover, the act of punishing sin is unavoidable because of God's dominion. He has authority to cast unrepentant sinners into hell forever where the terribleness of God's punishment will be consistent with His supreme dominion.162 The reason, however, that God does not immediately cast sinners into hell is because of His slowness to anger; that is, God is patient. This is the final attribute that Charnock discusses in his *magnum opus*.

God's Patience

Patience (*patientia*) is an attribute that differs from goodness and mercy. God's mercy has to do with His attitude toward sinful creatures, but His patience has in view the punishment that sinners deserve, in terms of either delaying the punishment or tempering it. Leigh understands the patience of God as that attribute "whereby he beares the reproach of sinners and defers their punishments; or it is the most bountiful will of God, whereby he doth long bear with sin which he hateth, sparing sinners, not minding their destruction, but that he might bring them to repentance."163 There is, with this view, a twofold understanding of God's patience, the latter of which has redemption in mind.

At the outset, Charnock is careful to note that by "patience" he does not attribute to God the idea of "suffering" or "passibility." The term is not particularly suitable for that reason, but the virtue of patience can still be attributed to God. In brief, Reformed theologians generally understood God's patience as that attribute whereby God delays the execution of His judgment in its fullest extent. Charnock speaks this way: "[Patience] signifies a willingness to defer, and an unwillingness to pour forth wrath upon sinful creatures; [God] moderates his provoked justice, and forbears to revenge the injuries he daily meets with in the world."164

In typical fashion, Charnock deftly brings God's attributes together harmoniously, which is the logical outcome of God's essential simplicity.

“Goodness sets God upon the exercise of patience, and patience sets many a sinner on running into the arms of mercy.”165 With that in mind, Charnock takes the view that God’s patience does not extend to the fallen angels, just because they are spared from total punishment for a time, for there is no chance for them to repent and be restored into favor. Here one notes the close relationship between mercy and patience. Regarding God’s disposition toward sinners, it is merciful to be patient. Even so, God’s patience does not make Him soft or weak. God’s slowness to anger does not mean that He is incapable of anger.166 The delay of the fulfillment of promises to His people does not reflect “slackness” in God; in the same way, “his deferring of punishment is not from a stupidity under the affronts offered him” since God is omniscient and has complete knowledge of the thoughts and actions of sinful human beings.167 In this connection, because patience is understood along with God’s goodness and mercy—indeed, along with all His attributes, but especially these—it is not constrained. There is no lack of power in God to punish sinful creatures. In fact, Charnock argues that it is because of God’s power that He can exercise patience toward sinners—Nahum 1:3: “The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power.” God’s slowness to anger (ability to restrain it) reveals His power more than His creation of the world. In the latter, He has a dominion over creatures, but in the former He has a dominion over Himself. Charnock puts it memorably: “The power of God is more manifest in his patience to a multitude of sinners, than it would be in creating millions of worlds out of nothing.”168 Not only then does God’s patience have obvious reference to His mercy and goodness, but also His power.

Fundamental to the understanding of divine patience is the death of Christ. There is no explanation for God’s patience toward human beings and not toward angels apart from a consideration of Christ’s sacrificial atonement. Christ took the nature of humans (“the seed of Abraham”), and not of angels, so that humans should benefit from God’s patience. Patience toward humankind is a fruit of the gospel and of the covenant of grace. Without Christ’s appointment as Mediator, there is no reason for God to be patient toward sinners.169 God may be good toward His creatures apart from Christ—though some would dispute that—but God cannot be merciful or patient toward sinful humanity apart from the person and work of His Son.

In the destruction of the ungodly, God does so with “some regret” and He metes out His judgments by degrees.170 He “pinches” rather than tearing asunder.171 In all God does there is equity, but in what we deserve there is not equality. Even the wicked prosper for a time; “God not only punisheth, but still continues his benefits; the old drunkard is still alive.”172 The wickedness of

man is an affront to God, but God nevertheless exercises patience in terms of delaying His wrath and tempering it. The question inevitably must be raised as to why God does so. The answer given above has in view the mediatorial work of Christ. This is certainly the main reason, but the patience of God toward sinners on account of Christ also shows God to be appeasable. God desires reconciliation with His creatures and so He does not destroy them at once, but gives them space for repentance.

Practically speaking, the patience of God also allows for the propagation of the human race. Mankind would be unable to increase in number if God killed all humans upon their entry (or even conception) into the world. More specifically, God's patience allows for the continuance and growth of the church. God has in His eye the elect that sometimes spring from the loins of evil men, as in the case of Ahaz and Hezekiah. In this light, Charnock observes, "There could not have been a saint in the earth, nor, consequently, in heaven, had it not been for this perfection" (i.e., patience).[173] This explains, then, why God is patient, even toward wicked men. And for those who are not brought to repentance by God's patience, God will "manifest the equity of his future justice upon them."[174] All of this suggests that God's patience is either directly or indirectly focused on christology. In and through Christ, and for His sake, God is patient toward His creatures.

Conclusion

Many more things could be said about Charnock's discourse upon the attributes of God. This chapter has touched only on his major points of doctrine in regard to each attribute, thus bypassing two other aspects of Charnock's work: exegesis of relevant Scriptures, and application of the doctrine to life. The doctrine of God is in no way subservient to other doctrines like christology and soteriology. Rather, christology and soteriology, for example, have their basis in the doctrine of God. Reformed theologians differed from Lutheran, Socinian, and Arminian theologians precisely because they had a different view of who God is. What this chapter has attempted to show, albeit in a somewhat cursory fashion, is how a Puritan theologian understood the attributes of God. No doubt, there were minor points of difference here and there—note the debate in regard to God's vindicatory justice—but in the main, Reformed Puritan theologians were all of one mind on the doctrine of God (see WCF, 2.1–2).

As this chapter has made clear, for Charnock and other Reformed theologians, the division of God's attributes reflects the weakness of man in understanding God. God's mercy is His goodness; His goodness is His justice; His omniscience is His omnipotence, and so forth. This is because God's attributes never conflict with one another, for He is the simplest being there is. Yet, through creation and revelation, God has shown who He is to His creatures, and the church owes an immeasurable debt to men like Charnock who have used their gifts to enable sinners to understand the glories of the triune God. It is a great pity that so many know about Charnock's work on the existence and attributes of God but so few have actually read it. We might even say it is an even greater pity that many have heard about God, but few in the world today know Him as He truly is, or acknowledge Him as God.

1. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 175–76. This edition is used throughout this chapter.

2. But note Carl Trueman's essay "Reason and Rhetoric: Stephen Charnock on the Existence of God," in *Reason, Faith and History: Philosophical Essays for Paul Helm*, ed. M. W. F. Stone (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 29–46. Trueman places Charnock's work in the context of the seventeenth-century intellectual and political culture. My own attempt to look at Charnock's work will be less historical and more in keeping with dogmatic interests, in similar fashion to the approach of Richard Muller, who, in his work on the doctrine of God, often refers to Charnock. See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Divine Essence and Attributes*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

3. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Charnock, Stephen (1628–1680)."

4. Among the more impressive secondary works on the doctrine of God in Reformed orthodoxy are Muller, *Post-Reformation*; Dolf te Velde, *Paths beyond Tracing Out: The Connection of Method and Content in the Doctrine of God, Examined in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School* (Delft: Eburon, 2010); and Andreas Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676): Sein Theologieverstandnis und seine Gotteslehre* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). As far as the Puritans are concerned, the

work of Edward Leigh also stands out as a valuable systematic contribution to the doctrine of God in the seventeenth century. See *A Treatise of Divinity: Consisting of Three Bookes…* (London: E. Griffin for William Lee…, 1647), especially book 2.

5. See Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 107.

6. Te Velde, *Paths*, 96n4.

7. See Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 4.

8. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 107.

9. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 109.

10. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 111–13.

11. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:275.

12. For a brief account of this concept in the thought of John Owen, see Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 38–39.

13. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 210.

14. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 3.7.1.

15. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.7.3. On communicable and incommunicable attributes, see Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:22–23.

16. Leigh also maintains that because God is a most simple being He must also be incorporeal. *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:24.

17. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 210.

18. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 415.

19. The question regarding whether the concept of divine simplicity is consistent with the Trinity is answered by te Velde: "Is not the existence of three Persons in God a form of composition? The Reformed orthodox writers are unanimous in their denial: the Persons do not compose, but only distinguish (*personae non component, sed distinguunt*). The three Persons do not relate to each other as different beings, but as distinct modes of being (*modi subsistentiae*) or modifications." *Paths*, 126.

20. On the differences of opinion between Reformed theologians on how to relate eternity to the created order (whether positively or negatively), see Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:346.

21. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 174.

22. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 175.

23. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 175.

24. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 175–76.

25. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 176.

26. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 177.

27. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 177.

28. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.10.6.

29. Thus, Johannes Maccovius: "In God there is no succession of past, present and future, but all things are present to Him (*in Deo nulla datur succesio, præsentis, præteriti et future, sed omnia illi præsentia*)." As quoted in Willem J. van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink, Rein Ferwerda, *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules* (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), 115.

30. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 177.

31. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 177.

32. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 178.

33. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 199.

34. That is, there is nothing in God that subjects Him to, or renders Him liable to be acted on, by what is external or foreign to His true nature. See *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, s.v. "passion," definition 4a).

35. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:310.

36. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:45.
37. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:44.
38. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 200.
39. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 200.
40. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 200.
41. See Heinrich Heppe and Ernst Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 58.
42. Heppe and Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 59. Maccovius argues that God's attributes do not differ in Himself, but only in our way of conceiving. Theologians distinguish in God the attributes from the essence because of our inadequate conception. "*Causa, quare distinguimus in Deo attributa ab essentia, est inadæquatus noster conceptus*." Van Asselt, et al., *Scholastic Discourse*, 110–11.
43. Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London: T. R. and E. M. for S. Gellibrand, 1650), 111.
44. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:21.
45. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 242. Muller provides a very helpful discussion of the problems associated with predicating attributes in God. See *Post-Reformation*, 3:195–205.
46. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 201.
47. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:46.
48. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 216.
49. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 216.
50. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 216.
51. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 216.
52. Charnock: "So immensity or omnipresence is a denial of limitation of place." *Existence and Attributes*, 234. In his comments on the infinity of God, Leigh writes, "God is Immense or Omnipresent." *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:36. But he later nuances this, like Charnock does, by suggesting that the reason for God's omnipresence is the infiniteness of His nature. *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:39–40.
53. Te Velde, *Paths*, 137.
54. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:338.
55. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:36.
56. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:36.
57. The Racovian Catechism, a Socinian document from the seventeenth century, refers to the immensity of God as the "supreme perfection of his dominion, power, and wisdom." *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (London: Longman, 1818), 32.
58. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 233.
59. Cf. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:244.
60. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 233.
61. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 234.
62. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 234.
63. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 235. Leigh notes that the Schoolmen speak of five ways God is present in His creatures: "1. In the humanity of Christ; by hypostatical union. 2. In the Saints, by knowledge and love. 3. In the Church, by his essence and direction. 4. In heaven, by his Majesty and glory. 5. In Hell by his vindicative justice." Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:39.
64. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 236.
65. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 238.

66. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 252.

67. An important distinction was made by Reformed theologians in order to escape the charge of determinism, namely the distinction between *necessitas consequentiae* (necessity of the consequences) and *necessitas consequentis* (necessity of the consequent). On this distinction, see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (1985; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 200, 238–39.

68. On the manner in which Reformed theologians affirmed the freedom of the will in the context of divine sovereignty and omniscience, see Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, eds., *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

69. See te Velde, *Paths*, 151–54.

70. See Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:393.

71. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 262–63. Leigh speaks of the distinction among the Schoolmen between "*scientia visionis*, a knowledge of all future things; 2. *simplicis intelligentiæ*, a most perfect knowledge of all, and the several things, which may be done." *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:63.

72. Cf. John Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.*, ed. William H. Goold (1965–1968; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 12:127.

73. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 263.

74. On this distinction, see Muller, *Dictionary*, 231–32.

75. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 263.

76. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 263. Here Charnock is quoting the Catholic theologian Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who was frequently cited by Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century.

77. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 263.

78. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 265.

79. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:60.

80. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 266.

81. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 267.

82. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 281. As Leigh notes, "God knows all things together, and by one most simple, immutable, and eternal act of understanding." *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:63.

83. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:67.

84. Van Asselt, et al, *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, provides an analysis of how certain Protestant scholastics viewed human freedom in relation to a Reformed doctrine of God. This is a worthwhile topic that Charnock takes up in some detail and consciously omits the technical terms found in the schools. See *Existence and Attributes*, 287–90.

85. Cf. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:411–32.

86. For evidence that Arminius was a Molinist see Eef Dekker, "Was Arminius a Molinist?", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 337–52.

87. Dekker, "Was Arminius a Molinist?", 339.

88. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:421.

89. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 291. Charnock's aversion to any form of middle knowledge is discussed further on p. 662. In response to the Arminian view, Charnock affirms that "election is the cause of faith, and not faith the cause of election.… Men are not chosen because they believe, but they believe because they are chosen."

90. See Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.13.2–3. Turretin's argument against middle knowledge is in my view the most forceful seventeenth-century argument that we currently possess in English translation.

91. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.13.12.

92. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 328.
93. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 329.
94. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 329.
95. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 334.
96. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 359.
97. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 359.
98. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 360.
99. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 360.
100. Thomas Goodwin, *Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:16.
101. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 364.
102. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 365. Maccovius similarly affirms: "The union of both natures of Christ is incomprehensible to us (*Unio naturarum Christi nobis est incomprehensibilis*)." Van Asselt, et al., *Scholastic Discourse*, 223.
103. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 366.
104. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 400.
105. Muller observes the following: "The seventeenth-century scholastics distinguish between the power of God as *potentia* or the power inhering in the divine essence to do as it wills and the power of God as *potestas* or the power of God over things, that is the absolute *jus* and *authoritas* of God to control what is his. The latter, considered as the right of the creator over creation, is not a category as much elaborated upon as the *potentia Dei*, the 'potency' or effective power of God." *Post-Reformation*, 3:537. Maccovius also distinguishes in Christ between power and authority: "Authority denotes an office; power a nature (*Potestas officium, potentia naturam notat*.)." Van Asselt, et al., *Scholastic Discourse*, 119.
106. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 401. Cf. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:106.
107. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 401.
108. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:108.
109. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 402.
110. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 402.
111. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 402.
112. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 403.
113. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 405. On the *communicatio idiomatum* (and *communicatio operationum*) see Muller, *Dictionary*, 72–74; Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 160–65.
114. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 406.
115. Thomas Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:216–17. Heppe quotes Heidan and refers to Ames for the same point: "The nature of will is not the same as that of knowledge and power in God. His knowledge knows everything knowable and His power can do everything possible. But by will He does not will all that He can will. The things He decreed needed willing and are future in act. Hence, although He is called omniscient and omnipotent, He is not therefore omnivolent." *Reformed Dogmatics*, 84.
116. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:107.
117. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 415.
118. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 468.
119. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 468.
120. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:104.
121. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 470.
122. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 470.
123. See, for example, Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:102–3.
124. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 471.

125. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 473.
126. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 473.
127. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 473.
128. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 484.
129. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 484.
130. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 484.
131. See Carl Trueman, "The Necessity of the Atonement," in *The Diversity of a Tradition: Intra-Reformed Theological Debates in Puritan England*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming); Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth*, 131–34.
132. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 517. Cf. p. 648 where Charnock writes, "Might not God, by his absolute power, have pardoned men's guilt, and thrown the invading sin out of his creatures?… In regard of his justice, which demanded satisfaction, he would not."
133. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 517.
134. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 518.
135. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 529.
136. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 529.
137. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 538.
138. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 540.
139. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 541.
140. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:506.
141. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 542.
142. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 544.
143. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 546. See also Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:71.
144. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 546.
145. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 546.
146. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 547.
147. See Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 3:567.
148. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 566.
149. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 568.
150. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 569.
151. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 572.
152. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 572.
153. See chapter 15, "The Puritans on the Covenant of Redemption," for an extended treatment of the trinitarian nature of salvation rooted in eternity.
154. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 573.
155. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 639.
156. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 639.
157. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 640.
158. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 640.
159. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 645–46.
160. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 648.
161. See Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 658.
162. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 704–7.
163. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:99.
164. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 717.
165. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 717.
166. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 718.
167. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 719.
168. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 720.
169. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 720.

170. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 728.
171. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 729.
172. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:100.
173. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 735.
174. Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 736.

Chapter 5

The Puritans on the Trinity

> *We do believe that God is one, most singly and singularly one, and an only one: The unity of the Godhead is…a most singular unity…. All three Persons have one and the same single and infinite Godhead, and therefore must needs mutually subsist in one another, because they are all three one and the same infinite God…united in their one nature, not confounded in their distinct subsistences; nay though their subsistence is in one another, yet their subsistences are distinct, but the nature most singularly the same.*
>
> —FRANCIS CHEYNELL[1]

The doctrine of God may be understood in a twofold sense, either essentially or personally. Understood essentially, the doctrine refers to the essence of God and His attributes; a personal understanding refers to the doctrine of the tri-personality of the Godhead, or the doctrine of the Trinity.[2] The Westminster Confession of Faith follows this basic demarcation, with the essence of God receiving more attention than the Trinity, at least in chapter 2 ("Of God, and the Holy Trinity"). The Confession has been criticized for this imbalance by T. F. Torrance and Robert Letham. Letham goes so far as to say that the Confession "lacks the focus to provide the tools to confront Islam effectively."[3] He notes, however, that the Larger Catechism has a strong trinitarian emphasis. Whatever may be said about the Confession's teaching on the doctrine of the Trinity, it is clear that Puritan theologians did not lack a trinitarian emphasis in their writings. This chapter will discuss the writings of the Puritans on the doctrine of the Trinity with particular focus on a number of specific questions involved in trinitarian theology.

Given the many assaults on it by various heretics over the centuries, it is no surprise to find that the doctrine of the Trinity is the most carefully defined of all the theological dogmas that comprise ecumenical or catholic Christian orthodoxy, as defined by the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church, such as the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon. Puritan

theologians, as evidenced by Westminster's Nicene trinitarianism, explained and defended their teaching on the Trinity in conscious dialogue with the ecumenical creeds and councils of the ancient church. Because of the rising anti-trinitarian influence of the Socinians in the seventeenth century, defenses of the doctrine of the Trinity were needed. Thus, a number of works were published to safeguard trinitarian orthodoxy, not only by major figures such as John Owen (1616–1683) and Francis Cheynell (1608–1665), but also by men like Nicholas Estwick, rector of Warkton, who wrote rather lengthy books attacking the the Socinianism of John Biddle (1615–1662).

The official defense of the doctrine of the Trinity in the mid-seventeenth century fell to Francis Cheynell. A member of the Westminster Assembly, Cheynell was particularly gifted (and fierce) in polemical debate, as his opponents found out. His works, *The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianisme* (London, 1643) and *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London, 1650) are his best-known attacks on Socinianism.

Cheynell was joined by fellow Westminster divine Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), who also wrote a great deal on the doctrine of the Trinity.[4] Goodwin's work, *The Knowledge of God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ*, is one of the most detailed seventeenth-century expositions of the doctrine of the Trinity.[5] His writings on the Trinity are both a defense of Christian orthodoxy as formulated in the ecumenical creeds and a refutation of the highly biblicistic anti-trinitarianism of the Socinians. However, Goodwin's writings on the Trinity are not a simple restatement of Patristic trinitarian theology. His defense of the Trinity is exegetically rigorous, and his emphasis on the union and communion of the three persons among themselves, and its practical implications for our own communion with God, figures prominently.[6]

Besides the writings of the two aforementioned Westminster divines, there is also the formidable theological work of John Owen. He, too, wrote a great deal on the doctrine of the Trinity, with an eye to combatting the theological rationalism of the Socinians, and perhaps the Cambridge Platonists as well. For all these Puritan theologians, the doctrine of the Trinity was an essential part of the Christian faith, so much so for Cheynell as to warrant the use of the sword of the magistrate to punish those who wrote against this doctrine.[7]

Somewhat surprisingly, in light of the many debates that went on in seventeenth-century England, there has not been a great deal of scholarly discussion on the trinitarian theology of the Puritans.[8] Richard Muller observes that "the heresies have received significant analysis in monograph and scholarly essays, but the orthodoxy, with few exceptions, has been neglected."[9] Similarly, Philip Dixon notes in his recent work on the Trinity that "the neglect of the

seventeenth century is a serious *lacuna* in contemporary studies of the history of Trinitarian doctrine. Most investigations leap over this period."[10] In part, the dearth of studies can be explained by the fact that the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox did not deviate from historic orthodox trinitarianism, but instead elaborated and exegetically substantiated both the ecumenical creeds and the insights of the Reformers. This chapter will consider how the Puritans understood the doctrine of the Trinity. For that reason, theological and exegetical considerations will be highlighted more than the historical circumstances in which the Puritans wrote.

The TriUnity of God: One God, Three Persons The Puritans were monotheists because scriptural evidence led them in no other direction (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:6; Deut. 6:4; Deut. 32:39; Isa. 44:8). On this point, they agreed with the Socinians that there is only one God.[11] But that agreement was only apparent because it was not the whole truth about the identity of God. With the ancient church, the Puritans affirmed the singularity of "God," and the unity of the "Godhead," while at the same time affirming that there are three persons in the one Godhead. Therefore, in Goodwin's words, "we may safely say of each Person, as of the Father, that *He is God*, and likewise of the Son, that *He is God*, and of the Holy Ghost, that *He is God*."[12] In almost identical language, Owen remarks "that God is one; that this one God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; so that the Father is God, so also is the Son, and the Holy Ghost likewise."[13] This is a point which is not up for debate since, if it is denied, "we have no ground to…discourse about the unity of the divine essence, or the distinction of the persons."[14] Puritan theologians, affirming that there is one God in three persons, explained how each person is identified as God in the Scriptures. For example, Cheynell notes how deity is attributed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Bible: "To the Father, Rom. 7.25. 8.32. To the Son, Act. 20.28. Titus 2.13…. 3. To the Holy Ghost, Act. 5.3, 4. Ps. 95.3, 8, 9 compared with Heb. 3. 1 Cor. 3.16, 17."[15] Cheynell then proceeds to argue for the divinity of the three persons by showing how they each possess the same incommunicable divine attributes, such as eternity, omnipotence, immutability, and immensity.[16]

Because they affirmed this view of the Trinity, the Puritans were often charged with tritheism.[17] They were also criticized for introducing words that were not scriptural, such as "person." Both charges are worth considering in some detail. Cheynell recognized that distinguishing the persons of the Trinity in the Godhead is of the utmost importance, since the errors of tritheism and Sabellianism arise from a failure to make such distinctions.[18] Reformed theologians avoided defining "person" as an individual essence; otherwise the

charge of tritheism would stand. On the Continent, Francis Turretin (1623–1687) affirmed that the three persons are distinct from the essence of God "because essence is one only, while the persons are three. The former is absolute, the latter are relative; the former is communicable (…as to identity), the latter are incommunicable."[19] One will often find writers using words such as "subsistence" or "hypostasis" (Heb. 1:3) instead of "person" in an attempt to safeguard biblical trinitarian monotheism. Cheynell affirms a multiplicity of persons/subsistences in the Godhead in terms of a "relative opposition" (not "contrary").[20] This relative/friendly opposition shows that "the Father did not beget himself, but did beget his Son; But then we consider again, that this Son is an eternal son, and therefore is God, and we are sure God did not beget another God, for the Power of God is not, nay, cannot be exercised about any thing repugnant to the Nature of God, and nothing is more repugnant to the Godhead then a Plurality of Gods."[21]

Another way in which theologians such as Cheynell attacked this problem was to appeal to the essential attributes of God to show that tritheism is contrary to the nature of God. Because of the simplicity of God (i.e., because He is not a composite being), "there is," as Muller notes, "no real distinction between the three persons and the divine essence, as if the essence were one thing and the three persons each another thing, for God is a simple or noncomposite being."[22] That is why Cheynell argues that the three persons all "really, positively, truly subsist in the Divine Essence; and yet these three Subsistences, and the Divine Essence, do not make four, no nor two things really distinct; even as Entity, Truth, Goodness, and Unity, do not make four things really distinct, but are one real thing and no more."[23] In other words, the simplicity of God implies that, properly speaking, in God there is no real distinction between His attributes. God's attributes are distinguished simply to accommodate the weakness of finite human understanding. The simplicity of God means that God's omniscience is His omnipotence is His infinity is His immutability, *etc*.[24] Moreover, there can be no multiplicity of the divine essence. As Turretin notes, "there is no composition in God because composition arises only from diverse things. Here we do not have a thing and a thing, but a thing and the modes of the thing by which it is not compounded but distinguished."[25] For Reformed theologians, the two ways of conceiving God, either essentially or personally, were not to be divorced from each another. The doctrine of God essentially considered prevented the dangerous heresy of tritheism, showing that it cannot be consistent with the simplicity of God.

The other major criticism that orthodox Puritan theologians had to refute concerned the use of extrabiblical language to analyse and discuss concepts

found in the Bible. And here we note the connection between the use of terms like “person” or “hypostasis” in an attempt to deal with the charge of tritheism. Owen recognized that Christians must confess that God is one in “respect of his nature, substance, essence, Godhead, or divine being”; and that this one God, “being Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, [subsists] in these three distinct persons or hypostases.”[26] But in using this language, he was making use of words that could not be found directly in the Bible (though *hypostasis* can be used in more than one sense in the New Testament, being translated in Hebrews 1:3 as “person” in the King James Version and as *substantia* in the Vulgate).

Owen responds that to affirm the truth of the Trinity is to affirm a meaning or sense of what the Scripture is speaking of. We understand the Trinity in our minds by thinking in terms of words such as “person.” To deny Christians this privilege is to make “brutes of ourselves.”[27] Thus, “in the declaration of the doctrine of the Trinity, we may *lawfully*, nay, we must *necessarily*, make use of other words, phrases and expressions, than what are literally and syllabically contained in the Scripture, but teach no other things.”[28] Importantly, if words other than ones used in Scripture accurately and truly convey the sense of Scripture, then “whatsoever is so revealed in the Scripture is no less true and divine as to whatever necessarily followeth thereon, than it is as unto that which is principally revealed and directly expressed.”[29]

Regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, then, Owen concludes that “when the Scripture revealeth the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be one God, seeing it necessarily and unavoidably follows thereon that they are one in essence…and three in their distinct subsistences…—this is no less of divine revelation than the first principle from whence these things follow.”[30] This is a hugely important aspect of understanding Reformed theology. What Owen is arguing for, and he is not saying anything that his Puritan contemporaries would disagree with, is the idea that what the Westminster Confession calls “good and necessary consequences” deduced from Scripture—good and necessary, that is, if they accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture—are part of the whole counsel of God revealed in Scripture. The content of the phrase “God is one essence in three persons” is infallibly true because it is a truth deduced from the written Word of God.[31] The Socinians, of course, reacted fiercely against this type of reasoning because the crass biblicism of Socinian theologians allowed no such place for this type of theological reasoning.

Like Owen, acknowledging that “essence” and “person” are not explicit scriptural terms, Thomas Manton (1620–1677) claims that these terms are the “best that we can use in so deep a matter, and serve to prevent the errors and mistakes of those who would either multiply the essence, or abolish the

persons."[32] The use of certain such extrabiblical terms is an aid to theologians in avoiding and refuting the heresy of tritheism, for example. Moreover, Manton distinguishes between "essence" and "existence": "Whatever is said of the essence is true of every person…. But…whatever is said of the existence… cannot be said of the essence; every one that is God is not Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."[33] Manton is responding to the error noted above of Sabellianism (modalism), which posits that the person of the Son is the same of that of the Father. Early anti-trinitarians argued that if Christ is God, of the same substance with the Father, then the Father was incarnate too. However, Manton argues that though the persons share the same essence (*ousia*), they do not share the same subsistence.[34] Goodwin, like Manton, argues that though the persons have one essence, they have distinct subsistences, and this evidences itself in the works of God outside Himself (*ad extra*).[35] Because the persons have different subsistences, it would be wrong to say, for example, that the Father was incarnate. This is consistent with the early ecumenical witness of, for example, the Definition of Chalcedon and the Athanasian Creed. Thus, besides justifying the use of terms not found in Scripture, these Puritan theologians also refuted the charge of tritheism by distinguishing between essence and subsistence.

Cheynell provides a helpful summary of the doctrine of the Trinity by affirming a number of the points mentioned above:

> We do believe that God is one, most singly and singularly one, and an only one: The unity of the Godhead is…a most singular unity…. All three Persons have one and the same single and infinite Godhead, and therefore must needs mutually subsist in one another, because they are all three one and the same infinite God…united in their one nature, not confounded in their distinct subsistences; nay though their subsistence is in one another, yet their subsistences are distinct, but the nature most singularly the same.[36]

Cheynell, Goodwin, Owen, and Turretin, for example, all distinguished between essence-appropriate and person-appropriate language (essential versus relative predication). That is to say, regarding their persons, the Son and the Spirit both proceed from the Father (*a Patre*), but in relation to their essence they are self-subsistent (*a se*). Thus, the unity of God's essence is maintained ("whatever is in God essential and absolute is God himself") with a relational order in terms of the three persons ("whatever is in God personal, relative and modal may not immediately in every way be identified with the divine essence").[37] Because the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, a number of considerations arise in terms of the relations

between the three persons.

Intratrinitarian Communion (Circumincession) The Puritans were very concerned about the communion with God enjoyed by believers on the basis of their union with Christ. Union and communion with the triune God was a reflection of a much more intimate union and communion, namely, that which exists among the persons of the Trinity ("reciprocal embracing," or *mutua circumplexio,* also called "mutual indwelling," or *circumcessio*). The typical, oversimplistic distinction between a Western focus on one divine essence and the Eastern focus on the relationship between the three persons breaks down when it comes to analyzing the doctrine of the Trinity in Puritan thought.38

With the Trinity defined as one God subsisting in three persons, all sharing in the same divine essence (*tres personae in una essentia divina*), among the three persons there is eternal communion and mutual delight. Edward Leigh (1603–1671) briefly addresses this aspect of trinitarian life, referring to it as a "community of Deity" whereby "all three persons remain together and are coeternal delight to themselves."39 This communion is strictly among the three persons and cannot be communicated to creatures.40 Goodwin refers to the three persons as a "society among themselves" whereby there is complete happiness among, rejoicing in, glorifying of, and speaking to each other.41 This communion—"incommunicable to any mere Creature"42—lies at the very heart of not only Goodwin's doctrine of the Trinity, but also his Creator/creature distinction. The communion among the three persons in eternity, described by Goodwin as "Supreme and Independent," involves mutual, corresponding interests that relate to the divine nature.43 Goodwin's views on the communion among the persons of the Trinity, as well as his formulation of the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), may give readers the impression that Goodwin espoused social trinitarianism, a type of tritheism. Goodwin would, of course, reject such a charge, but language such as that above might explain why Owen exercised so much caution in speaking about "divine circumincession," a term that Owen calls "barbarous."44

The mutual interrelation of the three persons is described by Puritan writers in different ways, but they all agree that because they each possess innate life, and exist in union with one another, the persons share mutual interests. As Cheynell notes, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "subsist in the unity of the Godhead, and dwell in one another, mutually possess, love & glorify one another from everlasting to everlasting."45 One passage that the Puritans frequently turned to was Proverbs 8:30 ("Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him"), which they understood

christologically to describe the intratrinitarian relations from eternity. Goodwin turns to this passage in order to highlight the mutual joy that each person finds in the others.[46] In particular, the Father delighted that He had begotten such a Son as the Son of God, one coeternal with Him.[47] Thomas Manton likewise refers to this passage and speaks of the "mutual familiarity, delight, and complacency which the divine persons have in one another."[48] Not only is there a complete knowledge of and delight in one another, but the persons of the Trinity share alike in the divine sovereignty that is theirs by right (Rev. 3:21). To summarize, this communion between the three persons has reference to the co-indwelling, coinhering, and mutual interpenetration of the three persons; each person shares fully in the life of the other two persons.

The External Works (*ad Extra*) of the Trinity Are Indivisible (*Opera Trinitatis ad Extra Sunt Indivisa*) The doctrine of mutual intratrinitarian communion or circumincession has important implications for understanding the will of God. After speaking briefly about circumincession, Cheynell affirms that in every divine work there is a "joint concurrence of all three [persons]."[49] In other words, the external or outward works of the Trinity are undivided (*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*); that is, all three persons agree and cooperate in the works done by any one of them. In his work *On Communion with God*, Owen addresses this principle: "When I assign any thing as peculiar wherein we distinctly hold communion with any person, I do not exclude the other persons from communion with the soul in the very same thing" because "the works that outwardly are of God (called *'Trinitatis ad extra'*) [are] commonly said to be *common and undivided*."[50] Goodwin also notes this principle of orthodoxy: "It is a certain Rule, that *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, all their works to us-ward of Creation and Redemption, and whatsoever else, they are all works of each Person concurring to them. As they have but one Being, one Essence, so they have but one work."[51] However, because they have distinct subsistences (*modus subsistendi*), the persons have several manners of working. Thus, while the Father is said to raise Christ (Rom. 4:24; Col. 2:12–13), it is also true that Christ raised Himself (John 2:19; 10:17–18), and the Spirit raised Christ (Rom. 8:11). Because "all Three Persons concur in every work," the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are said to have raised Christ from the dead.[52] However, in raising Christ from the dead, His body "concurred nothing to it, for that was dead, but the Son of God, the Second Person, concurred and raised up that Body and Soul."[53] John Arrowsmith (1602–1659) sums up the nature of external works *(ad extra)* in relation to the Trinity by insisting that these works are common to all three persons. The Father, Son, and Spirit all create; the will of God is the

same in all the three persons because they share in the same essence. However, "because, they have different Subsistencies, the Father a distinct Person from the Son, and the Son from the Holy Ghost, therefore, they have a distinct manner of working."[54] The unity of God is maintained as well as the distinction of the three persons, based on the idea of subsistence. Goodwin, likewise, suggests that though the persons share in the same essence, because they have distinct personalities, the operation of each person "follows the distinction of their Existences and bears the resemblance of them."[55] Therefore, the Father, as the fountain of the other two subsistences, begins the work, the Son carries on the motion, and the Spirit, proceeding from both, "perfects, consummates, and executes the work" (1 Cor. 8:6).[56]

Notwithstanding this basic principle of attributing *ad extra* works to all the persons of the Trinity, Goodwin argues that certain outward works—depending on what they are—can be more particularly attributed to one of the persons.[57] This principle enables Owen to say that we have "*principally*, immediately, and by the way of eminency" communion with a particular person, "and therein with the others *secondarily*."[58] That is to suggest that the persons all share a common prerogative, but often a certain work will be attributed to the Father, for example, in order to display His uniqueness. Therefore, believers commune with God in love and with Christ in grace. Both Goodwin and Owen wrestle with how this relates to the incarnation of the Son of God. So, for example, while some divines attribute to the Spirit "the special Honor of tying that Marriage knot, or Union, between the Son of God, and that Man Jesus," Goodwin believes "that Action is more peculiarly to be Attributed to the Son Himself; as Second Person; who took up into one Person with Himself that Human Nature" (Heb. 2:16).[59] Of course, Goodwin agrees that if they argue on the basis that the external works of the Trinity are undivided, there is no conflict. But, in Goodwin's mind, it was "the Son's Special Act…to assume [our human nature]."[60] Owen argues that it was an outward act (*ad extra*) of the triune God, "as unto *original efficiency*." However, "as unto *authoritative designation*, it was the act of the Father…. As unto the *formation of the human nature*, it was the peculiar act of the Spirit…. As unto the *term of the assumption*, or the taking of our nature unto himself, it was the peculiar act of the person of the Son."[61] Essentially, Goodwin and Owen are claiming that the undivided works *ad extra* often manifest one of the persons as their "operative focus," or *terminus operationis*. In the above example, the incarnation terminates on the Son, though the act is willed by the three persons of the Trinity.

Eternal Generation

Leigh contrasts the doctrine that the external works of the Trinity are undivided with the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son: "*Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*…belong to one person as well as the other…but *opera ad intra sunt divisa*, the personal properties of internal works are distinguished, as the Father begets, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son."62 Unlike the double procession of the Spirit, the eternal generation of the Son received wide acceptance among theologians of the ancient church. There were some differences among Reformed theologians on the precise meaning of the Son's generation; nevertheless, the doctrine of the Son's generation was connected to the idea that the Father is the fountain of all deity (*fons totius Deitatis*). Goodwin explicitly uses this term, but he, like his Reformed contemporaries, was always careful to insist that the Son and Spirit were "very God of very God."63 Leigh, therefore, speaks of the order of the persons to explain this doctrine: "the Father is the first person from himself, not from another both in respect of his Essence and person. The Son is the second Person, from his Father in respect of his Person and filiation, existing by eternal generation, after an ineffable manner (and is so called God of God) by reason of his Essence he is God himself. The Holy Ghost is the third Person, proceeding… from the Father and the Son in respect of his Person…."64 Here Leigh refers to the Nicene Creed ("God of God") to speak of the Son's eternal generation. Goodwin likewise argues for the "begottenness" or "eternal generation" of the Son based upon the Father communicating to the Son the whole indivisible substance of the Godhead.65 As the English mathematician and theologian John Wallis (1616–1703) noted, to be the Son by eternal generation implies the communication of the same essence.66

One of the lengthiest defenses of the Son's eternal generation comes from the pen of Cheynell, refuting the Socinian claim that the divine essence is incommunicable, and, therefore, the idea of the Son's generation by the Father shows that the divine essence is not one, which would necessitate a multiplicity of gods. Cheynell responds first by giving scriptural examples in order to prove the Son's generation from the Father. Like the framers of the Belgic Confession, Cheynell adduces Psalm 2 as proof, where the words "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (v. 7) are "indisputable" proof of this fundamental point of Christian doctrine.67 Cheynell adduces another text, John 5:26: "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." He speaks of the "life" communicated by the Father to the Son, by "eternal and ineffable generation."68 The Son, in this context, asserts His power to communicate resurrection life by His word of command (John 5:25). He, like the

Father, has life in Himself and is the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). In other words, unlike humans, who derive their life from God, God the Father has communicated to the Son the attribute of having life in Himself (see also John 1:4), which means that the Son possessed power to give life to others even before His resurrection. The ground for this authority must therefore be something belonging to the Son in eternity (see John 1:1–14; 17:5). Thus, economic language may reflect immanent intratrinitarian relations, which is how the Reformed orthodox were able to defend the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation on biblical grounds. In response to the Socinian claim that generation of the Son implies division of the essence of God, Cheynell writes:

> The Father did beget his Son without change or motion after a most glorious and wonderful manner; there can be no change, motion, or succession in this eternal and most perfect generation. The Essence of God is spiritual, John 4.24. and therefore the Son is not begotten of the Father's seed, or any material substance, because God is a single and pure Act, who doth beget a Son within himself Essentially one with himself and therefore his Son doth not subsist out of himself, John 14.10, John 10.30. for an infinite nature cannot be poured forth beyond it self. There can be no essential change in the Son by this generation, because the generation is eternal, and the nature which is communicated by generation unchangeable; the Father did unchangeably beget his Son, and his Son is unchangeably begotten.[69]

The generation of the Son is both eternal and perpetual (*aeterna et perpetua*). And because the Son's generation is supernatural ("hyperphysical"), the Reformed orthodox could argue, against the Socinians, that eternal generation is not a movement from nonbeing (*non esse*) into existence (*esse*), but rather the consequence of an unchanging activity within the divine essence.[70]

According to Goodwin, the "all things" that the Father has given to the Son "leaves nothing excepted" (John 17:7, 11; 16:15).[71] If the Father possesses omnipotence, immensity, and eternity, the Son and the Spirit possess the same. That is to say, the internal acts of the Godhead (*opera Dei ad intra*) are common to the three persons, with the necessary exception that the distinctive properties of each person are not shared by all. As a person, the Father is not the Son, nor is He the Spirit. Eternal generation therefore affirms that the person of the Son is "from" the person of the Father, and works from the Father (John 5:17–47). Goodwin uses the economic context of John 5:17 to understand the immanent Trinity. In other words, the application of redemption, as one of the *ad extra* works of the divine persons, is a reflection of the *ad intra* "workings" of the

triune God. Moreover, the triune God is this way and did not become this way. Therefore, the Son "depends" on the Father to be Son in the same way the Father "depends" on the Son to be Father. The Father's act of begetting the Son is necessary, not voluntary. Besides the fact that the three persons are all essentially God, the act of the Father's begetting and the begottenness of the Son are necessary relations because of their distinctive personality.

Not surprisingly, the Westminster Confession of Faith retains Nicene language in affirming the eternal generation of the Son: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son" (2.3).

The God Who Is of Himself (*Autotheos*) The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son was agreed upon by all Reformed theologians. What they did not all agree upon, however, was the precise meaning of the Father's generation of the Son. So it was possible to be Nicean and yet have somewhat differing views on what it means for the Son to be "God of God." Consequently, the Reformed orthodox all held to the aseity (self-existence) of God the Son, but with different nuances. Most of the Reformed orthodox argued that the Son, considered as the Second Person in the Trinity, is "God of God," or *Deus a se ipso*, not merely a creature of divine origin (*divinus a se ipso*); that is, he is *autotheos* (God-of-Himself). The Son is self-existent God (*Deus a se ipso*), but He receives His deity from the Father. This was certainly the dominant Puritan position, as the writings of Cheynell, Goodwin, and Leigh demonstrate.

The aseity of the Son had been a topic of debate in the sixteenth century, particularly in Calvin's debate with Peter Caroli. In the seventeenth century, the debate resurfaced at the Westminster Assembly.[72] Calvin argued that "when we speak simply of the Son without regard to the Father, we well and properly declare him to be of himself; and for this reason we call him the sole beginning. But when we mark the relation that he has with the Father, we rightly make the Father the beginning of the Son."[73] Elsewhere, Calvin contends that to say the Son has been "given his essence from the Father denies that he has being from himself."[74] Hence, for Calvin, the generation of the Son from the Father has reference to His sonship and not His deity.[75]

Chad van Dixhoorn, commenting on Calvin's position on the aseity of the Son, argues that Calvin's "opponents believed that Christ's divinity or essence was of the Father by eternal generation."[76] Muller has noted that Calvin's position is "not echoed by all of the early orthodox Reformed theologians."[77]

For example, Muller refers to the sixteenth-century German theologian Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), who argued that while the Son shares in the same essence as the Father, He is not God "of himself, but of the Father."[78] Between Calvin and Ursinus there arose a number of hybrid positions on the aseity of Christ (e.g., Theodore Beza [1519–1605], Turretin). The majority of Reformed orthodox theologians seem more closely aligned with Turretin and Beza than with Calvin. B. B. Warfield sums up the debate by arguing that "despite the influence of Calvin, the great body of the Reformed teachers remained good Nicenists. But they were none the less, as they were fully entitled to be, good 'Autotheanites' also."[79]

Cheynell briefly defends both Calvin and Beza from what some had referred to as the "new Heresy…*Autotheanisme*."[80] Cheynell adds, "Genebrardus, Canisius…Faber Fevardentius, and the rest are extremely mistaken, when they say that Calvin and Beza deny that the Father did beget his Son in the unity of his own divine essence."[81] Thus Cheynell, besides equating Calvin's position with Beza's, argues that the two were representative of the mainstream opinion among the Reformed orthodox on the aseity of the Son. This debate remained unclear at the Westminster Assembly where the religious controversialist Daniel Featley (1582–1645) was at the center of the debate over whether the Nicene Creed was compatible with Calvin's view of the Son's aseity.[82] According to van Dixhoorn, Featley did not always represent his case—he made a number of speeches on the subject—clearly or convincingly. Though affirming Calvin's *autotheos* formulation as consistent with his own, Featley closed his speech with a quote from Augustine—"in reference to Himself, Christ is called God; in reference to the Father, He is called the Son" *(Christus ad se Deus, dicitur ad patrem filius)*—that proved to be a "statement broad enough for almost anyone in the debate to adopt as their own."[83] In the end, the details of the debate at the Westminster Assembly over Christ's aseity, with particular reference to the Son as *autotheos*, remain a mystery because of incomplete records.

The facts indicate that the Puritans did not side with Calvin on the Son's aseity. Their doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son was not only personal but essential. As they expressed it, the Father communicated the divine nature to the Son "ineffably" (i.e., in a manner that cannot be expressed in words), as many would put it. As a result, they affirmed the Father as the fountain of the deity as affirmed by Calvin, but only in a strictly personal fashion. Goodwin, for example, affirms that the Father communicates the whole Godhead to the Son: "for *Essentiae communicatio facit omnia communia* [any communication of the essence is necessarily the communication of all of it]; the Godhead being Communicated by the Father, all things of the Godhead…only the distinction of

the Persons excepted."[84] There is no generation of a new essence. Hence the Son's deity, being communicated from the Father, is not derived from another essence but is identical to the Father's essence, and therefore the Son is God of Himself (*a se*). On this point, while Goodwin's position differs from Calvin's, it has much in common with Turretin's, who argues that although the Son is from the Father, He may still be called "God-of-himself," that is, "not with respect to his person, but essence; not relatively as Son (for thus he is from the Father), but absolutely as God inasmuch as he has the divine essence existing from itself and not divided or produced from another essence (but not as having that essence from himself). So the Son is God from himself although not the Son from himself."[85] Turretin is making the distinction between "aseity of personality" (*aseitas personalis*), a trinitarian heresy, and "aseity of essence" (*aseitas essentialis*). This appears the best way to read Leigh's statement above that the Son is of the Father "in respect of his Person and filiation, existing by eternal generation, after an ineffable manner (and is so called God of God) by reason of his Essence he is God himself."[86] Howe shares this view when he asserts that the Son has the "Divine Nature communicated to him (as he is *Filius* the Son) by eternal generation, and in regard of that Divine Nature he may in some sense be called *autotheos*, *i.e.* God of himself."[87] This is the position of the majority of Puritans on the aseity of Christ, even if it was not precisely Calvin's.

Double Procession of the Spirit The procession of the Spirit is related to the *ad extra* works of the Godhead. In fact, Muller has argued that among the Reformed orthodox the "*ad intra* procession of the Spirit is mirrored and followed by the *ad extra* procession or 'mission' of the Spirit."[88] In much the same way that the Son's eternal generation is deduced from texts that speak primarily—though not necessarily exclusively—of economic trinitarian roles, the procession of the Spirit was based upon texts that often had in view economic roles among the persons of the Trinity. The procession of the Spirit has been variously understood by the Western and Eastern churches. The division of East and West became outright schism when the Latin-speaking Western church added the words "and the Son" (*filioque*) to the article of the Nicene Creed that affirms the procession of the Spirit from the Father, to assert the so-called "double procession" of the Spirit "from the Father and the Son." The Eastern church, however, holds that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only.[89] Again, Muller suggests that the Reformed orthodox "not only argue the Augustinian doctrine of double procession, they insist on it as a biblical point held over against the teachings of the Greek Orthodox."[90] By insisting on the addition of *filioque* to the Creed, the Western church sought to maintain the co-equality of the Father

and the Son by arguing that the Spirit proceeds from both. To the Reformed orthodox in particular, the idea that the Spirit proceeded from the Father only would imply ontological subordination of the Son to the Father.

The *filioque* clause is explicitly affirmed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which describes the Spirit as "eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son" (2.3). Leigh explains the debate from his point of view:

> Hence arose the schism between the Western and the Eastern Churches, they affirming the procession from the Father and the Son, these from the Father alone.
>
> To deny the procession of the holy Ghost from the Son, is a grievous error in Divinity, and would have granted the foundation, if the Greek Church had so denied the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son, as that they had made an inequality between the Persons. But since their form of speech is, that the Holy Ghost proceedeth from the Father by the Son, and is the Spirit of the Son, without making any difference in the consubstantiality of the Persons, it is a true though an erroneous Church in this particular.[91]

Leigh's strong sentiments—even though he still recognizes the Eastern church as truly a part of the visible Catholic Church—unquestionably reflect the views of his Puritan contemporaries and Reformed theologians on the Continent. Thus Turretin affirms that as "generation (*gennēsis*) is ascribed to the Son, so procession (*ekporeusis*) is ascribed to the Holy Spirit."[92] Goodwin, though affirming that the Spirit "is a Person in the Godhead, equal with the Father and the Son,"[93] argues that because the Spirit is last in the order of the divine persons, He necessarily proceeds from the other two persons.[94] As the "bond of the Trinity" (*vinculum Trinitatis*), He proceeds by way of love.[95] The Spirit acts as the bond of love (*vinculum caritatis*) between the Father and the Son. Goodwin is, of course, echoing Augustine, who argued that the Spirit is "that which unites the Father and the Son" (*patris et filii copula*).

Cheynell acknowledges the mystery of this doctrine but attempts to explain it by noting four fundamental points concerning the Spirit's double procession. First, it must be understood that the procession is spiritual, not corporeal. Second, because this process relates to intratrinitarian activity, the procession of the Spirit is eternal. Third, the procession is immutable, "not a change of the Spirit from not being to being, or from an imperfect being to a more perfect being. We know that procession cannot be a motion from one place to another, for the Spirit is omnipresent, fills all places, and therefore cannot change its place."[96] Fourth, as the generation of the Son by the Father is necessary, so too

is the Spirit's double procession. In affirming double procession, Cheynell notes that the Father and Son "did from all eternity breathe forth the Spirit in the unity of the Godhead, not by any alienation of the Godhead from themselves, but by an unspeakable communication of the same divine Nature to a third person of the Godhead; And this communication is natural, and therefore necessary it is, but not Involuntary."97 Of course, even though double procession is necessary, Cheynell denies that the Father and Son breathed forth the Spirit by compulsion; but it was nevertheless not an arbitrary act. It is an inward act of the Godhead that is both necessary and natural, for "such is the perfection of the Godhead that it must needs be communicated to all three persons."98 If the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is denied, then, according to Cheynell, the equality of the three persons cannot be maintained. Because the Father and Son are not in contrary opposition, but are naturally one, the Spirit proceeds from both equally.

Cheynell's defense of double procession of the Spirit is a corollary to his manner of proving the eternal generation of the Son. For example, Cheynell notes that the eternal procession of the Spirit must be distinguished from His mission in time. There is a difference between ontology and economy. Yet, he connects *ad intra* trinitarian acts with *ad extra* trinitarian works by suggesting that the "Natural and Eternal Procession of the Spirit may be evinced by the Temporal Mission of the Spirit."99 Following from that, the fact that the Scriptures plainly declare that the Son sends the Spirit into the world as the realm of time and space is evidence that the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Son as well. This reasoning was common among Reformed theologians. As Muller notes, the "*ad intra* procession of the Spirit is mirrored and followed by the *ad extra* procession…of the Spirit."100

Texts such as John 15:26, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father," were therefore hugely important to Reformed theologians in defending double procession. They did not invariably agree, however, on whether economy always mirrored ontology. Owen's comments on John 15:26 are almost identical to those made by Goodwin, with the exception that Goodwin sees both ontology and economy in verse 26. For Owen, the Father is referred to as the "fountain." There is, however, a twofold procession of the Spirit: first, in respect of substance and personality and, second, dispensatory or economic.101 According to the first, "He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, proceeding from both eternally."102 But the words in John 15:26, according to Owen, have reference to the Spirit's "economical or dispensatory proceeding."103 Similarly, Willem van Asselt has argued that Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) understood John 15:26 to refer to the

economical procession of the Spirit and does not refer to His ontological existence.104 Turretin, while acknowledging that John 15:26 speaks of the Spirit proceeding from the Father, argues that “it is not denied of the Son. Indeed it is implied because the mission of the Spirit is ascribed to him and whatever the Father has, the Son is said to have equally (John 16:15).”105 Ussher likewise notes that while the Spirit is explicitly said to proceed from the Father (John 15:26), the fact that He proceeds from the Son “is by necessary consequence implied because the Son is said to send him, as John 14.26. The Father is said to send him in the Son’s name, by which sending the order of the persons of the Trinity is evidently designed.”106 So while some Reformed theologians did not concur in reading ontology into certain texts that spoke of economic trinitarian actions, the majority felt this was a legitimate way in which to understand eternal relations within the Godhead.

Conclusion

The Puritans saw themselves as part of a continuing Western trinitarian tradition, grounded in Nicene orthodoxy, and sought to refute the claims of the Socinians, who constituted a rising anti-trinitarian influence in Europe. Likewise, the Puritans held that the doctrine of the Trinity was an essential article of faith, over against the Remonstrants. This doctrine in fact presents the necessary ontological framework for a consistent Christian theology. In defending the doctrine of the Trinity, the Puritans were zealous to maintain the co-equality in power and glory, coeternality, and consubstantiality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by virtue of the fact that they share in the same essence, thus resisting any form of ontological subordination among the persons. There is, however, an "order of relationships among the persons" (*ordo personarum sive relationum*). In order of subsistence, the Father is the First Person of the Godhead, the "fountain of deity" (*fons deitatis*), who eternally begets the Son, the Second Person. The Spirit, third in subsistence, proceeds from both the Father and the Son. These three persons, because they are "distinct but not separate" (*distinctio sed non separatio*), abide in and through one another (*circumincessio*). The doctrine of the Trinity provided the Puritans with the requisite ontological framework for understanding the history of salvation, which has an eternal foundation that is thoroughly trinitarian.

The persons of the Trinity are also to be known, loved, and experienced by believers. Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) confessed that he could not say which Divine Person he loved the most, but he knew that he needed each of them and loved them all. In the next chapter, we will focus on how the believer communes with each person of the Godhead through Owen's magisterial work on this experientially rich subject.

1. Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London, 1650), 42.

2. On God "essentially" understood, see chapter 4, "Stephen Charnock on the Attributes of God."

3. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009), 165.

4. I draw attention to Goodwin's "robust trinitarianism" in Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

5. All references from Goodwin's works in this chapter will come from *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford*, 5 vols. (London: J. D. and S. R. for T. G., 1681–1704). On Goodwin's trinitarianism, see *Ephesians*, vol. 1, pt. 1:18–32; *Of the Knowledge of God the Father*, vol. 2; *Of Election*, 2:130–44; *Man's Restauration by Grace*, vol. 3; *Of the Holy Ghost*, vol. 5.

6. See Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *Works*, 2:140–44; *Of the Knowledge of God the Father*, in *Works*, vol. 2.

7. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 463–65. See the Westminster Confession of Faith, 20.4 and 23.3, which takes the same position.

8. See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4:22–25. Robert Letham, in his work, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2004), moves from the sixteenth century straight into the twentieth century, thus completely omitting any developments in the seventeenth century.

9. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:24. For example, see the work of Sarah Mortimer, which looks at the doctrine of the Trinity principally in relation to Socinianism. *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

10. Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 208.

11. Regarding Socinian monotheism, see *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (London, 1818), 26–28.

12. Goodwin, *Of the Knowledge of God the Father*, in *Works*, 2:2. See also John Owen, *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), specifically, *The Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated*, 2:385–86.

13. Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:380. These usages were not unique to Goodwin or Owen. They are derived from the Athanasian Creed (*Quicunque Vult*), which was part of the Order for Morning Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, to be used on all the major feast days and a number of principal saints' days.

14. Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:380.

15. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 20–21.

16. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 28–39.

17. In the latter part of the seventeenth century this criticism was often hurled at the orthodox. John Howe (1630–1705) spends a good deal of time refuting the charge of tritheism in his works: *A Calm and Sober Enquiry Concerning the Possibility of a Trinity in the Godhead in a Letter to a Person of Worth* (London, 1694); and *A View of That Part of the Late Considerations Addrest to H. H. about the Trinity Which Concerns the Sober Enquiry, on That Subject: In a Letter to the Former Friend* (London, 1695), esp. 9.

18. On these two errors in relation to trinitarian orthodoxy, see Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:190; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 3.22.9.

19. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.22.1.

20. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 102.

21. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 102.

22. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:191.

23. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 105.

24. See Heinrich Heppe and Ernst Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 58. Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) argues that God's attributes do not differ in Himself, but only in our way of conceiving. Theologians distinguish in God the attributes from the essence because of our inadequate conception. "*Causa, quare distinguimus in Deo attributa ab essentia, est inadæquatus noster conceptus*." Willem J. van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink, Rein Ferwerda, *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules* (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), 110–11.

25. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.4.

26. Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:378.

27. Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:379.

28. Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:379.

29. Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:379.

30. Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:379.

31. This might be a useful point of departure in the debate between those who hold to exclusive psalmody and those who believe that Christians are able to sing noninspired hymns.

32. Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon John XVII*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: J. Nisbet, 1870), 10:159.

33. Manton, *Sermons upon John XVII*, in *Works*, 10:159. Manton understands "existence" and "subsistence" as synonymous terms.

34. Manton, *Sermons upon John XVII*, in *Works*, 10:159.

35. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, in *Works*, vol. 1, pt. 1:401.

36. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 42.

37. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.27.5.

38. At my doctoral defense at Leiden Universiteit, Professor Dr. Gijsbert van den Brink commented on the feel of Goodwin's "Eastern" trinitarianism.

39. Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity Consisting of Three Bookes*… (London, 1647), 2:136.

40. See Goodwin, *Of the Knowledge*, in *Works*, 2:14.

41. Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *Works*, 2:141. Goodwin notes that "Divines call [this] Circumincession" (Lat. *circumincessio*), which is used as a synonym of the Greek word *perichoresis* and refers to the coinherence of the persons in the Trinity. See also James Ussher, *Body of Divinitie* (London, 1645), 87.

42. Goodwin, *Of the Knowledge*, in *Works*, 2:15.

43. Goodwin, *Of the Knowledge*, in *Works*, 2:15.

44.The Latin term can be misread as "mutual assaulting of one another." John Owen, *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 12:73.

45. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 62.

46. Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *Works*, 2:141.

47. Thomas Goodwin, *A Sermon on Hebrews 10:4–7*, in *Works*, 1:94.

48. Manton, *Sermons upon Romans VIII*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: J. Nisbet, 1870), 12:338.

49. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 60.

50. John Owen, *On Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 3:18.

51. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, in *Works*, vol. 1, pt. 1:401. See also William Bucanus, *Body of Divinity*, trans. Robert Hill (London, 1659), 13.

52. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:401.

53. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:402. See also Owen, *On Communion with God*, in *Works*, 3:18–19.

54. John Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos, or, God-Man Being an Exposition upon the First Eighteen Verses of the First Chapter of the Gospel according to St John* (London, 1660), 61.

55. Goodwin, *Mans Restauration*, in *Works*, 3:9. William Ames, likewise, writes, "As for the boundary of the action, that aspect in which one person's working or manner of working shines forth most clearly is chiefly attributed to that person." *Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 1.6.31.

56. Goodwin, *Mans Restauration*, in *Works*, 3:9. Many theologians, including Goodwin, divide up the work of the three persons on account of the so-called "differentiating prepositions" (i.e., *ek*, *dia*, *en)*, which have an ancient trinitarian pedigree.

57. This is also referred to as the doctrine of appropriations. Goodwin echoes this principle elsewhere: "In this will that common Axiom of Divines helps us, that what works all three Persons do towards us Ad extra, though they have all a joint hand in them, yet they are attributed more especially to one Person than to another; as Sanctification you know is attributed more especially to the Holy Ghost, Redemption to the Son, Creation to God the Father, though all Three Persons have a hand in it." *Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:439.

58. Owen, *On Communion with God*, in *Works*, 3:18.

59. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 5:8. Goodwin may have had in mind James Ussher (1581–1656), who attributes the "tying of the marriage knot" to the Spirit. Ussher writes: "That blessed womb of

hers was the Bride-chamber, wherein the holy Ghost did knit that indissoluble knot betwixt our humane nature and his Deity: the Son of God assuming into the unity of his person that which before he was not." *Immanuel, or, The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God* (London, 1647), 5.

60. Owen, *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:8.

61. Owen, *Of the Person of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:225.

62. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:127.

63. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, in *Works*, 11:285.

64. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:137.

65. Goodwin, *Sermons on Hebrews 1:1, 2*, in *Works*, 1:145; *Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:285; *Of the Knowledge*, in *Works*, 2:110. Turretin provides a thorough discussion of the Reformed orthodox view of the eternal generation of the Son. *Institutes*, 3.29.1–30. See also Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, in *Works*, 12:213–14, 275.

66. John Wallis, *Three Sermons Concerning the Sacred Trinity* (London, 1691), 22.

67. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 192.

68. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 192.

69. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 195.

70. Maccovius argues that the generation in God is hyperphysical, not physical: "*Generatio quæ in Deo est, etsi sit hyperphysical, tamen non est metaphorica, sed propriè dicta*." As quoted in Willem van Asselt, et al, *Scholastic Discourse*, 128. See also James Durham, *A Commentarie upon the Book of the Revelation…* (Edinburgh, 1658), 6–8.

71. Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *Works*, 2:136.

72. I have written on the differences between Calvin and the Westminster Assembly regarding the Son's aseity. See Mark Jones, "John Calvin's Reception at the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649)," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1–2 (2011): 215–27.

73. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2008), 1.13.19.

74. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.23.

75. Calvin writes: "For what is the point in disputing whether the Father always begets? Indeed, it is foolish to imagine a continuous act of begetting, since it is clear that the three persons have subsisted in God from eternity." *Institutes*, 1.13.29. Based on this, some argue, therefore, that Calvin rejects the eternal generation of the Son. However, Calvin affirmed eternal generation. His point in this section is to make sure it was understood as a personal generation and not an essential communication. In the quote above, Calvin sought to dissuade fruitless speculation into the "mode" of it. In fact, Calvin's quote on continual begetting makes little sense apart from the original Latin distinctions of Augustine and the Augustinian tradition (distinctions between, for example, *semper natus*, *natus est*, *natum*), with whom Calvin was debating here. Eternal generation was not a big issue for Calvin; rather, he argued that modesty must be employed when speaking on the subject. I am thankful to Brannan Ellis for his insights on this matter. On Calvin and his view of eternal generation, see Jones, "John Calvin's Reception" or Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 35–57.

76. Chad van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1642–1652" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), 1:242.

77. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:326.

78. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:326.

79. B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 275.

80. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity* (London, 1650), 232. Cheynell's work is perhaps the classic defense of the Trinity among the English Puritans.

81. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 232. Gilbertus Genebrardus (1537–1597) and Peter Canisius (1521–1597) were sixteenth-century Roman Catholic theologians.

82. On Featley's debate, with regard to the Son as *autotheos*, at the Westminster Assembly, see Daniel Featley, *Sacra Nemesis, the Levites Scourge, or, Mercurius Britan.…* (Oxford: Printed by Leonard Lichfield, 1644), 13–19.

83. Chad van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation," 1:248.

84. Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *Works*, 2:136. See also *Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:285. Girolamo Zanchi also defines the Son as equal (i.e. *autotheos*) to the Father on account of the systematic distinction between the Son in His essential Godhead and the Son as the Second Person in relation to the First Person (i.e., the Father). *De tribus Elohim aeterno Patre, Filio, et Spiritu Sancto, uno eode mque Iohoua*, in *Operum Theologicorum D. Hieronymi* (Geneva: Excudebat Stephanus Gamonetus, 1605), 1:col. 540.

85. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.28.40.

86. Leigh, *Treatise of Divinity*, 2:137.

87. John Howe, *Christ, God-Man*, 3.

88. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:378. Elsewhere, Muller, speaking of the congruence between the *ad intra* life of the Godhead and the *ad extra* manifestation and work, writes, "The relation between the Father and the Son is such that, given the character of the Father's primacy, the Son in unity with the Father is, with the Father, the *principium* of the Holy Spirit—and that this single *principium* in the inner life of the Godhead mirrors the way in which the *ad extra* work is also one, the three persons together being the sole *principium* of creation." *Post-Reformation*, 4:58.

89. For recent assessments of the *filioque*, see Bernd Oberdorfer, *Filioque*: *Geschichte und Theologie eines ökumenischen Problems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001); Dennis Ngien, *Apologetic for Filioque in Medieval Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

90. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:374.

91. Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 2:138. Turretin argues, in agreement with Leigh, "Although the Greeks ought not to have been charged with heresy on account of their opinion, nor ought it to have been the occasion of a schism arising or continuing, still the opinion of the Latins may be properly retained as more agreeable to the words of Scripture and the truer." *Institutes*, 3.31.5.

92. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.31.1.

93. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 5:1.

94. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 5:2, 46.

95. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 5:33, 43.

96. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 220.

97. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 220.

98. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 221.

99. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 225.

100. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:378.

101. Owen, *On Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:226.

102. Owen, *On Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:227.

103. Owen, *On Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:227.

104. Willem van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 184.

105. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.31.7.

106. Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, 85. Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) adopts the same position in arguing for the double procession of the Spirit. He writes, "And that this third person proceedeth from the Father and the Son, it is evident enough in the same Gospel of John…. Seeing the Son saith, that he will send the Spirit, and (as we said before) affirmeth him to receive of his; no man doubteth, but that he proceedeth from the Son. And now he expressly addeth; Who proceedeth from the Father" (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). *The Common Places of Peter Martyr*, trans. Anthony Marten (London, 1583), 1:12.7.

Chapter 6

John Owen on Communion with the Triune God

> *The saints have distinct communion with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*
>
> —JOHN OWEN[1]

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was foundational for the theology of John Owen (1616–1683)—as Richard Muller observed to be true among orthodox Reformed theologians generally. Owen asserted that if you take away the doctrine of the Trinity, "the foundation of all fruits of love and goodness is lost to the soul."[2] Sinclair Ferguson calls Owen "a deeply Trinitarian theologian."[3] Carl Trueman writes, "Throughout his works—whether those dealing with God, redemption, or justification—the doctrine of the Trinity is always foundational."[4]

What did John Owen mean by the Trinity? In his lesser catechism, Owen wrote, "Q. *Is there but one God?* A. One only, in respect of his essence and being, but one in three distinct persons, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."[5] In his greater catechism, Owen defined "person" as "a distinct manner of subsistence or being, distinguished from the other persons by its own properties." These distinguishing properties he gave as:

- The Father is the "only fountain of the Godhead (John 5:26, 27; Eph. 1:3)."[6]
- The Son is "begotten of his Father from eternity (Ps. 2:7; John 1:14; 3:16)."
- The Spirit is said "to proceed from the Father and the Son (John 14:17; 16:14; 15:26; 20:22)."[7]

In another place, Owen summarized the doctrine of the Trinity as follows: "that God is one; that this one God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that the Father is the Father of the Son; and the Son, the Son of the Father; and the Holy Ghost,

the Spirit of the Father and the Son; and that, in respect of this their mutual relations, they are distinct from each other."[8]

Regarding the three divine persons, he wrote, "they are distinct, living, divine, intelligent, voluntary principles of operation or working, and that in and by internal acts one towards another, and in acts that outwardly respect the creation and the several parts of it. Now, this distinction originally lieth in this, that the Father begetteth the Son, and the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceedeth from both of them."[9]

Though Owen defended the doctrine of the Trinity at length,[10] he did not regard it as merely a matter of disputation or confessional fidelity. Carl Trueman wrote, "Owen demonstrates that most delightful aspect of precritical theology: its essentially ecclesiastical and practical purpose…. It was theology done within the church for the benefit of the church."[11] Trueman observed that this was especially true of the doctrine of the Trinity: "the Trinity stood at the heart of Christian soteriology and thus must stand at the heart of Christian worship as well."[12]

God had revealed Himself as the Trinity so that men might walk with Him in obedience, love, fear, and happiness as He required of them.[13] Whereas the Remonstrants viewed the Trinity as a doctrine neither fundamental nor profitable,[14] Owen saw it as both fundamental to saving faith and very profitable for the spiritual experience of believers. For Owen viewed Christian experience as communion with the mysterious God, and so his theology was, in Robert Letham's words, "a superb example of a synthesis of metatheoretical constructs, catholic exegesis and dogma, and practical pastoral piety."[15] It is likely that Owen influenced the Savoy Declaration (1658) where it added to the text of the Westminster Confession (2.3) this statement: "Which Doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our Communion with God, and comfortable Dependence upon him."[16]

Ferguson wrote that in Owen's theology, "the Christian life is nothing less than fellowship with God the Trinity, leading to the full assurance of faith."[17] What did Owen mean by communion or fellowship with God? It is the mutual exchange of spiritual benefits between God and His people based on the bond between them in Christ. Owen wrote,

> Now, communion is the mutual communication of such good things as wherein the persons holding that communion are delighted, bottomed upon some union between them…. Our communion, then, with God consisteth in his communication of himself to us, with our returnal unto him of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that union which in Jesus

Christ we have with him.[18]

Ian Hamilton commented, “In communion, God gives Himself to His people, and they give to Him what He requires and accepts—their love, trust, obedience, and faithfulness.”[19] Owen carefully distinguished between union with Christ (the unchangeable relationship of our salvation) and communion with God (the variable experience of that relationship).[20]

Owen picked up on a theme found in Augustine, namely, communion as the “enjoyment,” or possession of and delighting in the *triune* God. In Augustine’s “On Christian Doctrine,” one chapter is titled, “The Trinity the true object of enjoyment.” There, Augustine wrote, “The true objects of enjoyment, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are at the same time the Trinity, one Being, supreme above all, and common to all who enjoy Him.”[21]

Owen embraced this idea of enjoying the Trinity and amplified it through the concept of distinct communion with each divine person.[22] Owen found scriptural support for “distinct communion” in such texts as John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 12:4–6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 1:3; 5:7; and Revelation 3:20. Sinclair Ferguson wrote of Owen’s use of such passages, that “Owen adds the axiom that all the activity of faith has reference to one distinct person of the Trinity, as do all receptions of grace. This is what he means by fellowship or communion. Thus the Father communicates by original authority, the Son from a purchased treasury, and the Spirit in immediate efficacy. This is the classical doctrine of *Appropriations*.”[23] Owen carefully guarded the unity of the Godhead by clarifying that distinct communion is not exclusive communion with any one person, but communion primarily *appropriated* by that person according to his distinct property and role.[24]

J. I. Packer explained, “Communion with God is a relationship in which Christians receive love from, and respond in love to, all three persons of the Trinity.”[25] In this regard, Owen avoided the problematic tendency of Christians especially in the West to stress the “undifferentiated Godhead” over against relating to each of the persons of the Trinity.[26] Rather than trying to relate to an impersonal essence or, worse, an abstract collection of attributes, believers should relate to each person of the Godhead in a distinctly personal way.

Owen developed his view of communion with the Trinity at some length in one particular treatise known as *Communion with God* (1657). In this chapter, we will examine this treatise in its historical and theological setting and then explore Owen’s specific teaching on communion with each divine person of the Trinity.

***Communion with God* in Historical Context** The theme of communion with

God was critically important to Owen's generation of Puritan divines. Their preoccupation with the subject of communion between God and His people was not an attempt to humanize God or to deify man, however.[27] Rather, Owen and his colleagues wanted to explain, within a trinitarian framework, how God deals with needy sinners. The divines were not so much concerned with religious experience as an end in itself as they were with religious experience as a revelation of God and His astonishing grace. Packer rightly states, "In modern spiritual autobiography [for example], the hero and chief actor is usually the writer himself; he is the centre of interest, and God comes in only as a part of his story. His theme is in effect '*I*—and God'. But in Puritan autobiography, God is at the centre throughout. He, not the writer, is the focus of interest; the subject of the book is in effect '*God*—and me.'"[28]

Owen's theme of communion with each of the divine persons was likewise a familiar one in Puritan literature.[29] In *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, for example, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) wrote of an intimate connection between assurance of faith and communion with the Trinity:

> Sometimes a man's communion and converse is with the one, sometimes with the other; sometimes with the Father, then with the Son, and then with the Holy Ghost; sometimes his heart is drawn out to consider the Father's love in choosing, and then the love of Christ in redeeming, and so again the love of the Holy Ghost, that searcheth the deep things of God, and revealeth them to us, and taketh all the pains with us; and so a man goes from one witness to another distinctly…. We should never be satisfied till all three persons lie level in us, and all make their abode with us, and we sit as it were in the midst of them, while they all manifest their love unto us.[30]

However, Owen's *Communion with God* was unique in working the idea of communion with distinct persons of the Trinity into a complete systematic treatise. That is what prompted Daniel Burgess to write, "This treatise…is the only one extant upon its great and necessary subject."[31] Brian Kay says, "Owen breaks new ground…by showing how the Christian's devotional response to God takes on a distinctively trinitarian shape."[32]

Communion with God was favorably received from the time of its 1657 printing, but the 1674 reprinting prompted a rather inept attack from William Sherlock (c. 1641–1707).[33] Owen responded with *A Vindication*[34] but seemed genuinely surprised that this work should be subject to such an attack, since it was "wholly practical, designed for popular edification, without a direct engagement into things controversial." He added, "I do know that multitudes of persons fearing God, and desiring to walk before him in sincerity, are ready, if

occasion require to give testimony unto the benefit which they received thereby."[35]

Communion with God was popular among Dutch Reformed Christians as well. It was translated into Dutch by J. H. Hofman and published in 1717.[36] For many of English and Dutch descent, the work merited Daniel Burgess's commendation: "The very highest of angel's food is here set before thee."[37] No doubt this book was also angelic food for Owen, who was at the time of its writing extremely busy serving as vice chancellor at Oxford University.[38]

Andrew Thomson's criticism that Owen carried the idea of distinct communion between the believer and each of the persons of the Godhead beyond Scripture[39] did not do justice to Owen's careful, biblical scholarship. Reginald Kirby's assessment was more accurate: "Owen is but setting forth what is the experience of those who do enter into communion with God, and shows that the doctrine of the Trinity has its basis in human experience as well as Divine revelation."[40]

Owen's concept of communion with "distinct persons" was innocent of Dale Stover's charge that "when God is known in this philosophical way, then epistemology is inevitably detached from soteriology."[41] As we shall see, Owen's *Communion with God* actually merged the knowledge of God and the history of God's saving acts spiritually and biblically. His treatise was much more a sermon than a philosophy lecture.

For Owen, communion between a believer and any person of the Trinity represented a living relationship of mutual exchange. This mutual communication must be in and through Christ, for without Christ no communion between God and man can exist. Dewey Wallace wrote that, for Owen, all such "communion is entered only through the 'door' of 'grace and pardoning mercy,' purchased for the elect by the merit of Christ."[42] From the outset, Owen established a christological focus for his trinitarian framework. He said fellowship, or communion with God, "consisteth in his *communication of himself unto us*, *with our return unto him* of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that *union* which in Jesus Christ we have with him."[43] Ferguson observed that for Owen "both the union with Christ which gives the Christian his status before God, and the communion with God which is the fruit of that status, are thus subsumed under the notion of communion, and this is the sense in which Owen generally employs the expression."[44]

Owen did not stress Christ at the expense of the Father and the Spirit, however, in a false, imbalanced christomonism. For Owen, theocentricity and christocentricity walked together as friends, not as rivals. F. R. Entwistle noted, "It is sometimes suggested that modern, Christological theology is more

honouring to Christ than the older Trinitarianism, and in such a suggestion lies its appeal to the Christian. But this is not so. Owen's full Trinitarianism is not less honouring to Christ: to give glory to the Father and the Spirit does not detract from the glory of the Son."[45] As Richard Daniels commented, "True Trinitarian thinking, it would seem, must be Christocentric, and Christocentric thinking, Trinitarian."[46]

Within that framework, Owen taught distinct roles or economies for the Father, Son, and Spirit. He said the First Person, the Father, is *initiator*, who chooses whom He will save, and how. The Second Person is the Son and Word of God, who images the Father's nature and does His will as Mediator to *redeem* sinners. The Third Person proceeds from the first two as their *executive*, conveying to God's elect their sure salvation.

Repeatedly Owen taught that there is a divine economy of operation where each person takes a role in the work of God, a role that reflects the personal relations in the Trinity. The Father acts as origin, authority, fountain, initiator, and sender; the Son acts as executor of the Father's will, treasury of His riches, foundation, worker, purchaser, and accomplisher; the Spirit acts as completer, finisher, immediate efficacy, fruit, and applier. This is not to divide God's works and distribute them among the three persons—the external works of the Trinity are undivided—but rather to recognize that in every work of God all three persons cooperate in distinct ways.[47]

Since all three persons are active in salvation, conferring distinct benefits according to their roles, the believer should distinctly acknowledge each person. "There is no grace whereby our souls go forth unto God, no act of divine worship yielded to Him, no duty or obedience performed, but they are distinctly directed unto Father, Son and Spirit."[48]

Having set Owen's treatise in its context, we will next examine Owen's specific teaching regarding communion with the triune God.

Distinct Communion with God in Three Persons In formulating the distinct manner of communion believers enjoy with each person of the Trinity, Owen drew upon 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

Communion with the Father: Love The saints have particular communion with the Father in "his love—free, undeserved, and eternal love" (1 John 4:8–9; 2 Cor. 13:14; John 16:26–27; Rom. 5:5–6).[49] The Father's love is "the fountain from whence all other sweetnesses flow," and the source of all grace.[50] Owen highlighted the sovereign, divine quality of the Father's love as exalted above all

human love, describing it in these ways:

> • "*Eternal*. It was fixed on us before the foundation of the world. Before we were, or had done the least good, then were his thoughts upon us."
>
> • "*Free*. He loves us because he will; there was, there is, nothing in us for which we should be beloved."
>
> • "*Unchangeable*. Though we change every day, yet his love changeth not."
>
> • "*Distinguishing*. He hath not thus loved all the world…. Why should he fix his love on us, and pass by millions from whom we differ not by nature…?"[51]

Thus, Owen said, the Father's love is different from ours, even our spiritual love for Him. Owen wrote, "It is the love of him who is in himself all-sufficient, infinitely satiated with himself and his own glorious excellencies and perfections; who hath no need to go forth with his love unto others, nor to seek an object of it without [outside] himself…. He had his Son, also, his eternal Wisdom, to rejoice and delight himself in from all eternity."[52] The Father does not love the saints out of loneliness or need, but out of his abundant all-sufficiency and joy in His Son.

The Father's love is "a love of bounty," but our love for God is "a love of duty." The love of the Father is "antecedent love," always going before ours; our love for the Father is "consequent love," always our response to Him. Even when God rebukes and disciplines His children, He loves them the same. "What then?" Owen anticipated the objection, "loves he his people in their sinning? Yes; his people, not their sinning."[53]

Careful not to present Christ's love as winning over a reluctant Father's love, Owen insisted that divine love has its deepest roots in the bosom of the Father. The Father delights to bestow divine love on the elect (Phil. 1:28), Owen said. And Scripture's references to the love of God most frequently mean the love of the Father. Christ's words, "The Father himself loveth you" (John 16:27), assure the believer of God the Father's role in his salvation.[54] Kay writes, "The Father does not first love his people because of Christ's mediation, rather, Christ's mediation is the outworking of the Father's prior love. For Owen, the love of the Father is the impetus for the whole plan of salvation, including his sending of the Son."[55]

The Father's love calls for a response in believers "to complete communion with the Father in love" by receiving his love and making "suitable returns unto him." They receive it "by faith." Here Owen carefully qualifies his statement so as not to encourage "an immediate acting of faith upon the Father, but by the Son," citing John 14:6.[56] His trinitarian theology remains Christ-centered by

constantly acknowledging Christ as the only Mediator between God and man.

But looking to the Son we see the Father, as we see the sun by the beams of light which shine from it. Owen wrote, “Jesus Christ in respect of the love of the Father, is but the beam, the stream, wherein though actually all our light, our refreshment lies, yet by him we are led to the fountain, the sun of eternal love itself [i.e., the Father]. The soul being thus by faith through Christ…brought unto the bosom of God, into a comfortable persuasion, and spiritual perception and sense of his love, there reposes and rests itself.” Thus believers are always to trust the Father as “benign, kind, tender, loving, and unchangeable therein…as the Father, as the great fountain and spring of all gracious communications and fruits of love.”[57]

In receiving the Father’s love through Christ, the believer returns the Father’s love in his heart to the heart of the Father, from whom it originated. This returned love consists of rest, delight, reverence, and obedience.[58] When the Christian encounters obstacles in loving God, he must contemplate the nature of the Father’s love, Owen said. First, the believer must remember not to invert God’s order of love, thinking that the believer’s love comes first. Second, he should meditate on the eternal quality and unchangeableness of the Father’s love. Third, he should remember that the cross of Christ is the sign and seal of God’s love, assuring him that the Father’s *antecedent* love wins his *consequent* love through the Mediator.[59] He who returns to the Father with such meditations will find assurance of the Father’s love. As Owen wrote: “Never any one from the foundation of the world, who believed such love in the Father, and made returns of love to him again, was deceived…. If thou believest and receivest the Father as love, he will infallibly be so to thee.”[60] Owen’s warmth in expounding the love of the Father should explode the caricature that Reformed theology is a sterile exercise in Aristotelian logic where God’s love is marginal.[61]

Communion with the Son: Grace How do the saints enjoy communion with Christ? Owen turns again to 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.” Whereas believers commune with the Father in love, they commune with the Son in “grace.” Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant, and the new covenant is the covenant of grace. Grace is in Him and everywhere ascribed to Him (John 1:14). The believer receives grace by receiving Christ. As John 1:16 says, “Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Christ’s mission is the essence of grace.[62]

Christ invites believers to commune with Him. Owen quoted the words of Christ, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and

open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). To sit at the table with Christ, Christ enjoying His graces in the saints, and the saints feasting on Christ's glory—this for Owen was the height of spiritual delight, worthy of the most sensual poetic expressions of the Song of Songs.[63] Fellowship with Christ feeds the soul with sweetness, delight, safety, and comfort.[64] Owen analyzed the grace of Christ more specifically in terms of, first, "personal grace," focusing on the person of Christ and, second, "purchased grace," focusing on the work of Christ.[65]

1. Communion with Christ in His Personal Grace By "personal grace," Owen did not mean Christ's deity considered abstractly or the physical appearance of His human body, but the spiritual beauty of the God-man as our grace-filled Mediator (cf. Ps. 45:2).[66] He then proceeded to illustrate from the Song of Solomon Christ's incarnation and "fulness to save…by the unction of the Spirit" (citing John 1:16; 3:34) and "his excellency to endear, from his complete suitableness to all the wants of the souls of men."[67]

The saints enjoy communion with Christ in His personal grace "by the way of a conjugal relation…attended with suitable conjugal affections"—that is, as spiritual husband and wife.[68] It begins when "Christ gives himself to the soul," and the saints "receive, embrace, and submit unto the Lord Jesus, as their husband, Lord, and Savior."[69] This stirs the affections of mutual delight, mutual "valuation" (esteem). Christ's "pity, or compassion," evokes the church's response of "chastity," Christ's "bounty," the church's response of "duty" or a life of holiness.[70] One remarkable facet of this Puritan's teaching is his emphasis on the Lord's enjoyment of His people: "The thoughts of communion with the saints were the joy of his heart from eternity."[71]

Just as is true with regard to his exposition of the Father's love, Owen's treatment of communion with Christ in His personal grace should destroy any misconception of Reformed orthodoxy as an emotionally desiccated, hyper-intellectual endeavor. Kay says, "Owen wants to somehow emphasize that the forensic and covenantal actions of Christ are, in the end, in service of a personal, face-to-face dealing between two lovers, a groom and his bride."[72] Owen employed doctrine to stir up the affections into flames of love for Christ.

In explaining the conjugal relationship between Christ and His people, Owen drew upon the poetry of the Song of Solomon. Owen wrote of the Song, "The more general persuasion of learned men is, that the whole is one holy declaration of that mystically spiritual communion, that is between the great Bridegroom and his Spouse, the Lord Christ and his church, and every believing soul that belongs thereunto."[73] This is not to say that Owen based his Christology or even

its experimental aspects on the Song of Solomon. Rather, he saw its poetry as illustrating the believer's experience of communion with Christ. This experience is defined by other Scriptures, especially those revealing the objective work of redemption. Ferguson noted, "He does not subjectivize Christ to the point of mysticism, but rather tries to describe the subjective experience of the objective Christ to whom the rest of Scripture bears witness."[74]

Christ woos and wins His bride in an ever-deepening relationship. In this spiritual marriage, believers guard their enjoyment of Christ by guarding their hearts against resting in anything other than "the Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:6). Owen wrote, "This does he who hath communion with Christ: he watcheth daily and diligently over his own heart that nothing creep into its affections to give it any peace or establishment before God, but Christ only."[75]

2. Communion with Christ in His Purchased Grace Purchased grace for Owen is "all that righteousness and grace which Christ hath procured…by any thing that he hath done or suffered, or by any thing he continueth to do as mediator."[76] We have communion with Christ in His work because "there is almost nothing that Christ hath done, which is a spring of that grace whereof we speak, but we are said to do it with him"—whether suffering crucifixion, dying, being made alive, rising, or sitting in the heavenly places.[77]

In particular, "purchased grace" consists of the three graces of (1) "acceptation with God" (justification), (2) "sanctification from God," and (3) "privileges with and before God" (adoption and its benefits).[78] To purchase our acceptance with God, Christ obeyed not for His own sake but for us; He suffered not for His own sins but for ours. Presently Christ offers the "very precious" promises of the gospel in "much kindness," and sends His Holy Spirit so that the dead hear His voice and live.[79] The saints respond by grieving over sin, abandoning hope in their own righteousness, rejoicing in Christ's righteousness, and consciously exchanging the one for the other.[80] In this way, as Hamilton writes, they are "approving and embracing the divine way of salvation" revealed in the gospel of Christ.[81]

For the grace of "sanctification," the Lord Jesus intercedes with the Father to obtain the Holy Spirit for His own on the basis of His purchase, and sends forth that Spirit into the hearts of the saints to produce in them habitual grace and every actual good work.[82] The saints look to Christ as their "great Joseph," who dispenses heaven's food to them.[83] They look to His blood shed at Calvary not only for atonement but also for purification from all uncleanness; they look to His blood sprinkled on their souls through the promises; and they look to His Spirit to dwell in them, continually to quicken or vivify them, and act through

them in every holy motion of the soul.[84] Owen said Christ "is to be himself in them as a well of water springing up to everlasting life…. This is their way, this their communion with Christ; this is the life of faith, as to grace and holiness."[85]

In the purchased grace of "privilege" Christ leads His followers into the enjoyment of the spiritual liberties of the sons of God.[86] Owen wrote, "Adoption is the authoritative translation of a believer, by Jesus Christ, from the family of the world and Satan into the family of God, with his investiture in all the privileges and advantages of that family."[87] Through Christ the Christian experiences liberty from sin's penalty and its enslaving power. He also experiences liberty in his new family privileges such as the lively power to obey with delight, the rights to the ordinances of the household of faith, the hope of a future inheritance, the provision of a loving Father, boldness with God, and correction through fatherly discipline.[88] Though adoption is an act of God the Father (1 John 3:1), Owen included it under communion with Christ because the believer obtains adoption by union with Christ.[89]

In the conclusion of his treatment of communion with the Son, Owen outlined what Kelly Kapic called "the fullness of fellowship with the Son made possible through adoption."[90] Owen wrote that with the Son of God we have the following:

- "fellowship in *name*; we are (as he is) sons of God"
- "fellowship in *title* and right; we are heirs, co-heirs with Christ"
- "fellowship in *likeness* and conformity; we are predestinated to be like the firstborn of the family"
- "fellowship in *honour*; he is not ashamed to call us brethren"
- "fellowship in *sufferings*; he learned obedience by what he suffered, and every son is to be scourged that is received"
- "fellowship in his *kingdom*; we shall reign with him."[91]

Owen elsewhere explained that the Lord's Supper offers a special opportunity for believers to commune with their Lord. He wrote, "There is, in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, an especial and peculiar communion with Christ, in his body and blood, to be obtained."[92] The Supper is designed by God to focus our faith specifically on the human sufferings and death of God's Son, sent by the Father's love, required by God's justice, and planned to make known the glory of God.[93]

Two-thirds of Owen's treatise on communion with God is taken up with the topic of distinct communion with the Son. Though all communion between God and man involves all three divine persons, the Son is especially prominent. This fits with Owen's understanding of the Son as the appointed Mediator in the

covenant. Christ is the God-man, and all communion with God was purchased by Him and is mediated through Him alone.

Communion with the Spirit: Comfort Owen wrote, "The foundation of all our communion with the Holy Ghost [consists] in his mission, or sending to be our comforter, by Jesus Christ."[94] Owen understood the title *parakletos* to mean "comforter," Christ's answer to the disciples' sorrow over His imminent departure (John 16:6–7). Though the elect experience the Spirit's regeneration passively as so many dry bones (Ezek. 37:1–14), believers put their trust in the promises of the comfort of the Spirit and pray for Him and His work in them (Gal. 3:2, 14; John 7:37–39; Luke 11:13).[95] Thus believers have a responsibility to seek the Spirit.

Owen cataloged the effects of the Comforter in believers, showing repeatedly that the Spirit teaches believers about the love and grace of God toward them. Owen identified nine ways in which the Spirit communes with the believer: (1) the Spirit helps the believer remember the words of Christ and teaches what they mean; (2) the Spirit glorifies Christ; (3) He pours out the love of God in the Christian's heart; (4) He witnesses to the believer that he is a child of God; (5) He seals faith in the Christian; (6) as the earnest of our inheritance, He assures the believer of salvation; (7) He anoints the believer; (8) as the indwelling Spirit He sheds the love of God abroad in the believer's heart; and (9) He becomes to him the Spirit of supplication.[96]

These works of the Holy Spirit produce consolation, peace, joy, and hope in believers.[97] The Holy Spirit produces real effects in the experience of believers, experience revolving around Christ as revealed in Scripture. Thus Owen rejected both the rationalists who dismissed the experiential work of the Spirit and the fanatics whose "spirit" disregarded the Word and Christ.[98]

One example of the work of the Spirit is His witness in "the court of conscience," testifying that the believer is a child of God (Rom. 8:16). Owen described this by way of the drama of courtroom prosecution and defense:

> The soul, by the power of its own conscience, is brought before the law of God. There a man puts in his plea, that he is a child of God, that he belongs to God's family; and for this end produceth all his evidences, every thing whereby faith gives him an interest in God. Satan, in the meantime, opposeth with all his might; sin and law assist him; many flaws are found in his evidences; the truth of them all is questioned; and the soul hangs in suspense as to the issue. In the midst of the plea and contest the Comforter comes, and, by a word of promise or otherwise, overpowers the heart with a comfortable persuasion (and bears down all objections) that his plea is

> good, and that he is a child of God…. When our spirits are pleading their right and title, he comes in and bears witness on our side; at the same time enabling us to put forth acts of filial obedience, kind and child-like; which is called "crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6).[99]

Owen explained that the court case may last long before it is settled—even years, as Owen himself experienced[100]—but when "the Holy Ghost by one word stills the tumults and storms that are raised in the soul, giving it an immediate claim and security, it knows his divine power, and rejoices in his presence."[101]

Consider also Owen's description of how the Holy Spirit is an *earnest* to the believer (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13–14). He defined an earnest as "part of the price of any thing, or part of any grant, given beforehand to assure the person to whom it is given that at the appointed season he shall receive the whole that is promised him."[102] God gives believers the Holy Spirit as the earnest of their inheritance of eternal life. Owen explained, "The full inheritance promised, is the fullness of the Spirit in the enjoyment of God." The Spirit is given to us now "for the fitting of us for enjoyment of God in some measure," thus a portion and foretaste of our inheritance.[103] In the Holy Spirit, our present grace is integral with our future glory.

The subjective earnest of the Spirit complements the objective promises of the Scriptures in promoting the assurance of believers.[104] Owen wrote, "So is he in all respects completely an earnest,—given of God, received by us, as the beginning of our inheritance, and the assurance of it. So much as we have of the Spirit, so much we have of heaven."[105]

Given all the manifold work of the Holy Spirit in God's elect, what does it mean to have communion with the Spirit? What is the essence of His consolation and comfort? The Spirit comforts believers by bringing them into fellowship with the Father and the Son. Owen wrote,

> All the consolations of the Holy Ghost consist in his acquainting us with, and communicating unto us, the love of the Father and the grace of the Son; nor is there any thing in the one or the other but he makes it a matter of consolation to us: so that, indeed, we have our communion with the Father in his love, and the Son in his grace, by the operation of the Holy Ghost.[106]

This explains the *binary* description of communion in the Scripture with which Owen opened this treatise on *trinitarian* communion: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3b; see also John 14:23; 17:3). The Holy Spirit is implied, and not excluded; He is the

immediate agent of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Although Owen does not explicitly say so, this seems to take up the third element of the Scripture he has quoted regarding communion with the Father and with the Son, 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all.” Whereas we have communion with the Father in His “love,” and with the Son in His “grace,” communion with the Spirit is simply called “communion,” for in the Spirit believers commune with the Father and the Son. Thus, as Ferguson says, the Spirit enables prayer to the Father through the Son, so that Christian prayer penetrates “into the very nature of the economic Trinity, and the character of the inter-Trinitarian relationship.”107 Ontologically, the Spirit’s operation of bringing believers into fellowship with the Father and the Son derives from His eternal procession or being breathed forth (John 20:22), as it were, from both persons.108 The Holy Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of God the Father and the Spirit of God the Son.

We might picture this principle in terms of descent and ascent, as Owen did in his discourse on the Holy Spirit. Owen said that God’s grace descends to us from the Father, through the Son, and finally in the Holy Spirit’s work within us. Likewise, the work of the Spirit in believers is the beginning of their ascent through the Son to the Father. The believer cannot rest merely in the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit leads him to cry, “Abba! Father!”109 These steps of descent and ascent should not be viewed as levels of being within the Godhead, or stages in time, but as an order in relationships within the Trinity as all three persons cooperate in the divine enterprise of salvation.

In this way, the Holy Spirit communes with believers according to the promise of the Lord Jesus in John 16:14–15: “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” Owen explained this text: “Thus, then, is he a comforter. He reveals to the souls of sinners the good things of the covenant of grace, which the Father hath provided, and the Son purchased.”110

Owen presented three general ways a man should respond to the Spirit. He should not “grieve” the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; Isa. 63:10), but instead “pursue universal holiness” to please Him. Neither should he “quench” the Spirit’s gracious operations in his soul (1 Thess. 5:19), but be “careful and watchful to improve them all to the end aimed at.” Finally, he should not “resist” (Acts 7:51) the Spirit’s “great ordinance of the word,” but instead humbly subject himself to the gospel ministry of the church—that is, “fall low before the word.”111 In this way, the believer offers a depth of submission to the Holy Spirit that can only be

called true worship.

Owen called believers to "ask [for the Spirit] daily of the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. This is the daily work of believers…to ask him of the Father as children do of their parents daily bread [cf. Luke 11:11–13]."[112] Owen continued, "And as, in this asking and receiving of the Holy Ghost, we have communion with the Father in his love, whence he is sent; and with the Son in his grace, whereby he is obtained for us; so with himself, on the account of his voluntary condescension to this dispensation. Every request for the Holy Ghost implies our closing with all these. O the riches of the grace of God!"[113]

Conclusion: The Sweetness of a Personal Relationship with the Trinity The Trinity is therefore a doctrine to be savored in personal Christian experience. Owen wrote, "What am I the better if I can dispute that Christ is God, but have no sense or sweetness in my heart from hence that he is a God in covenant with my soul?"[114]

Packer aptly summarized Owen's teaching by writing, "This, then, according to Owen, should be the pattern of our regular communion with the three persons of the Godhead, in meditation, prayer, and a duly ordered life. We should dwell on the special mercy and ministry of each person towards us, and make our proper response of love and communion distinctly to each. Thus we are to maintain a full-orbed communion with God."[115]

Furthermore, the experience of God as the Trinity confirms and strengthens faith in the doctrine of the Trinity. Owen wrote,

> And this is the nature of all gospel truths, they are fitted and suited to be experienced by a believing soul. There is nothing so sublime and high…but that a gracious soul hath an experience of an excellency, reality, power, and efficacy in it all…. What is so high, glorious, and mysterious as the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity? Some wise men have thought meet to keep it veiled from ordinary Christians, and some have delivered it in such terms as that they can understand nothing by them. But take a believer who hath tasted how gracious the Lord is, in the eternal love of the Father, the great undertaking of the Son in the work of mediation and redemption, with the almighty work of the Spirit creating grace and comfort in the soul; and hath had an experience of the love, holiness, and power of God in them all; and he will with more firm confidence adhere to this mysterious truth, being led into it and confirmed in it by some few plain testimonies of the word, than a thousand disputers shall do who only have a notion of it in their minds.[116]

On the other hand, Owen insisted that the Christian's experience of God be

molded by God's trinitarian self-revelation. Why is the biblical doctrine of the Trinity crucial for Christian experience? First, the doctrine of the Trinity regulates our *worship* of God. If our worship is to please God, then it must be our faithful response to what God has spoken about Himself. This is our spiritual worship of God, communion with the three divine persons. As Owen expanded Ephesians 2:18, "Through him (that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God) we have access by one Spirit (that good and holy Spirit the Holy Ghost) unto God, that is the Father."[117] He warned, "If either we come not unto it by Jesus Christ, or perform it not in the strength of the Holy Ghost, or in it go not unto God as Father, we transgress all the rules of this worship."[118]

Second, trinitarian spirituality is the only truly *evangelical* spirituality. While we might be able to conceive of a Creator without reference to the Trinity, the economy of salvation immediately brings to light the interactions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit because the Son has come uniquely as the incarnate Mediator. God's works in general (such as creation), Owen said, "are all effects of the essential properties of the same divine nature, which is in them all, or rather, which is the one nature of them all."[119] The persons of the Trinity necessarily cooperate in the works of creation and providence but are not outwardly manifested in trinitarian relationships. But this is not the case in the gospel of our salvation. Christ's office as Mediator both reveals the Trinity and regulates our response to the gospel according to the Trinity. We cannot draw near to the Father except through the Son by the enablement of the Spirit.[120] Owen says, "And these things ought to be explicitly attended unto by us, if we intend our faith, and love, and duties of obedience should be evangelical."[121] In other words, spirituality without the Trinity is spirituality without the gospel—mere natural religion.[122]

Third, the doctrine of the Trinity makes spirituality profoundly *relational* and guards it from becoming a mystical experience of an impersonal, even pantheistic deity. This doctrine of one God in three *persons* makes our relationship with God deeply *personal*. This is essential for true communion, for Owen defined communion as the sharing of good and delightful things between persons united with one another.[123] Owen's doctrine of divine communion highlights the mutual interactions between God and His people. In these interactions, the sovereign Lord leads and believers respond, yet both God and men move together in personal embrace.

John Owen's doctrine of trinitarian communion presents us with an excellent model of a Reformed Christianity that is richly and warmly biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical. Kay described it with the perhaps surprising phrase, "devotionally exercised Protestant Scholasticism," writing that Owen's covenant

theology was pregnant with emotional interactions with God.[124] As Owen said,

> There was no more glorious mystery brought to light in and by Jesus Christ than that of the holy Trinity, or the subsistence of the three persons in the unity of the same divine nature…. And this revelation is made unto us, not that our minds might be possessed with the notions of it, but that we may know aright how to place our trust in him, how to obey him and live unto him, how to obtain and exercise communion with him, until we come to the enjoyment of him.[125]

1. John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 2:9. Portions of this chapter have been adapted from Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 173–87; and Paul M. Smalley, "Sweet Mystery: John Owen on the Trinity," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3, no. 1 (2011): 81–112.

2. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 145, 148.

3. Sinclair Ferguson, "John Owen and the Doctrine of the Person of Christ," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2002), 82.

4. Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 124.

5. Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 1:467.

6. Owen often referred to the Father as the "fount" or "fountain" in the Godhead, but not as the "cause" of the other divine persons. In this regard he stood in the same tradition as Thomas Aquinas and the Latin fathers as opposed to Athanasius, Basil, and Theodoret. Aquinas recognized that the language of "cause" could imply that the Son was created, whereas "fount" indicated identical substance. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:46.

7. Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, in *Works*, 1:472.

8. Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity as also of the Person and Satisfaction of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 2:377.

9. Owen, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *Works*, 2:405.

10. Owen, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *Works*, 2:366–419; *Vindiciae Evangelicae; or, The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 12:169–333.

11. Trueman, *John Owen*, 128.

12. Trueman, *John Owen*, 123.

13. Owen, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *Works*, 2:378, 406.

14. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 4:154–55.

15. Robert Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity in Its Catholic Context and Its Significance for Today," in *Where Reason Fails* (London: Westminster Conference, 2006), 14.

16. Savoy Declaration, chap. 2, sec. 3, cited in Kelly M. Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 156.

17. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 74.

18. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:8.

19. Ian Hamilton, "Communion with God," in *Reformed Spirituality*, ed. Joseph A. Pipa Jr. and J.

Andrew Wortman (Taylors, S. C.: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2003), 63.

20. Kelly M. Kapic, "Communion with God by John Owen (1616–1683)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 169.

21. Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine" (1.5), in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, ed. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892), 9:10.

22. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:9.

23. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 75–76.

24. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:18–19.

25. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 204. Cf. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:10–16.

26. Kapic, *Communion with God*, in *The Devoted Life*, 148.

27. Dale Arden Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1967), 304–5.

28. J. I. Packer, "The Puritan Idea of Communion with God," in *Press Toward the Mark: Papers Read at the Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, 19th and 20th December, 1961* (London: n.p., 1962), 7.

29. See any Puritan commentary on the Song of Solomon (Richard Sibbes, John Dove, Nathaniel Homes, James Durham, and John Collinges). The latter wrote 909 pages on chapter 1 and 530 on chapter 2 on the communion of Christ and His church as represented by the communion of the bridegroom and his bride (John Collinges, *The Intercourses of Divine Love betwixt Christ and the Church* [London: A. Maxwell for Tho. Parkhurst, 1676]).

30. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 8:378–79.

31. Daniel Burgess, "To the Reader," in *Of Communion with God*, by John Owen, in *Works*, 2:4.

32. Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 113–14.

33. William Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Knowledge of Jesus Christ and Our Union and Communion with Him* (London: J. M. for Walter Kettilby, 1674). Sherlock later published other works on the Trinity as well as a very popular book, *Practical Discourse Concerning Death* (London: for W. Rogers, 1689).

34. Owen, *A Vindication of Some Passages in a Discourse Concerning Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 2:275–365.

35. Owen, *Vindication…Concerning Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:277.

36. J. van der Haar, *Van Abbadie tot Young, Een Bibliografie van Engelse, veelal Puritaanse, in het Nederlands vertaalde Werken* (Veenendaal: Uitgeverij Kool, 1980), 89.

37. Burgess, "To the Reader," in *Communion with God*, by John Owen, in *Works*, 2:4.

38. See Andrew Thomson, "Life of Dr. Owen," in Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 1:lxxii–lxxiii; Reginald Kirby, *The Threefold Bond* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, n.d.), 25.

39. Thomson, "Life of Dr. Owen," in Owen, *Works*, 1:lxxii.

40. Kirby, *Threefold Bond*, 25.

41. Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 304.

42. Dewey D. Wallace Jr., "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1965), 265.

43. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:8.

44. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 75.

45. F. R. Entwistle, "Some Aspects of John Owen's Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ," in *Faith and a Good Conscience* ([London]: Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, 1962), 51.

46. Richard Daniels, *The Christology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004),

5.

47. Owen, *Works*, 1:219–20; 2:15–19, 198–99, 228; 3:92–94, 393; 10:163–79.
48. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:15.
49. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:19.
50. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:22.
51. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:33–34.
52. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:32.
53. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:28–30.
54. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:20.
55. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 127.
56. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:22.
57. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:23. The sun and the fountain are rare examples of Owen making use of patristic trinitarian metaphors. Cf. Kapic, *Communion with God*, 169–70.
58. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:28.
59. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:29.
60. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:36–37.
61. Kapic, *Communion with God*, 168.
62. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:47; 3:414.
63. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:40.
64. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:44.
65. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:47–48. Later in this treatise Owen referred back to the "two heads" of the grace of Christ, namely, "the grace of his person, and of his office and work." *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:263.
66. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:48.
67. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:51–52.
68. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:54. Owen cited Song of Solomon 2:16; Isaiah 54:5; 61:10; 62:5; Hosea 2:19–20; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25.
69. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:56, 58.
70. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:118. Cf. pp. 118–54 for Owen's full explanation of each element of affection.
71. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:118.
72. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 161.
73. John Owen, "To the Reader," in *The Song of Solomon*, by James Durham (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 21.
74. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 78.
75. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:146.
76. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:154. For Owen's usage of and safeguards on the expression "purchased grace," see Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 86–88.
77. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:155. He cited Romans 6:4; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:5–6; Colossians 2:12–13; 3:1, 3; 2 Timothy 2:11.
78. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:169. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 32) similarly defined the principal benefits in this life of effectual calling to be "justification, adoption, and sanctification."
79. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:173–75.
80. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:187–94. Pages 176–87 consist of Owen's answers to objections against substitutionary atonement and the imputed righteousness of Christ.
81. Hamilton, "Communion with God," in *Reformed Spirituality*, 68.

82. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:197–202.
83. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:203.
84. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:203–7.
85. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:206.
86. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:207–15. Cf. 2:173; Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 89–90, 97.
87. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:207.
88. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:211–22.
89. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Doctrine of the Christian Life in the Teaching of Dr John Owen (1616–83)" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1979), 175–76.
90. Kapic, *Communion with God*, in *The Devoted Life*, 177.
91. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:222, emphasis original.
92. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 9:523.
93. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:525–26.
94. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:222.
95. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:224–25, 231–32.
96. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:236–49.
97. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:250–53. He cited Acts 9:31; Romans 14:17; 15:13; Galatians 5:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:6.
98. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:254–58.
99. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:241.
100. Owen remarked, "I myself preached Christ some years, when I had but very little, if any, experimental acquaintance with access to God through Christ; until the Lord was pleased to visit me with sore affliction, whereby I was brought to the mouth of the grave, and under which my soul was oppressed with horror and darkness; but God graciously relieved my spirit by a powerful application of Psalm 130:4, 'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' from whence I received special instruction, peace, and comfort, in drawing near to God through the Mediator." Quoted in prefatory note to "A Practical Exposition upon Psalm CXXX," by John Owen, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 6:324.
101. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:242. The court of conscience image was also used by Dutch theologians like Alexander Comrie (1706–1774).
102. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:243–44.
103. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:245.
104. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:245.
105. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:246.
106. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:262.
107. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 228.
108. Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 3:55.
109. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:200.
110. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:239.
111. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:264–68.
112. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:272.
113. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:272.
114. Owen, "The Preface to the Reader," in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, in *Works*, 12:52.
115. Packer, "The Puritan Idea of Communion with God," 12.
116. Owen, "A Practical Exposition upon Psalm CXXX," in *Works*, 6:459.
117. Owen, "The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H.

Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 9:57. For the ease of the reader we have removed Owen's quotation marks around the biblical phrases.

118. Owen, "The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship," in *Works*, 9:57.

119. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:198.

120. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:199–200. See the discussion of this text in Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 103–6.

121. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:200.

122. Owen argued that since present human knowledge of God apart from special revelation is "but a tiny particle of the knowledge enjoyed by newly-created man in his first state of innocence," and since Adam before the fall knew only the covenant of works and nothing of the promise of Christ, "then it follows with certainty that salvation cannot come from natural theology." John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, trans. Stephen P. Westcott (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 45 (1.6).

123. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:8.

124. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 124.

125. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:158.

Chapter 7

William Perkins on Predestination

> *His decree determines what shall be done…. For there is nothing higher than his will.*
>
> —WILLIAM PERKINS[1]

William Perkins (1558–1602), often called the "father of Puritanism," laid the foundations of Puritan piety by digging deep into the biblical doctrine of divine predestination. What many have dismissed as an irrelevant or even irreverent doctrine was for him and generations of Puritans after him the bedrock on which they built their faith. This solid foundation was, in Perkins's opinion, none other than Christ Himself.

In this doctrine we draw near to the heart of the Puritan conception of the gospel. Iain Murray says, "The doctrine of election was vital to the Puritans; they believed with Zanchius that it 'is the golden thread that runs through the whole Christian system,' and they asserted that a departure from this truth would bring the visible church under God's judgment and indignation."[2] Predestination was not mere orthodox theology for the Puritans; it was essential to the gospel and to godliness.[3]

Perkins has been evaluated by many scholars.[4] They have offered positive as well as negative commentary about his political, ethical, revivalistic, and ecclesiastical interests. Some have offered contradictory assertions about his theological stand, particularly in the area of predestination.[5] For example, confusion exists on Perkins's christological emphasis in predestination. Marshall M. Knappen faults Perkins for following Calvin too closely in christological predestination, while Ian Breward believes Perkins strayed from Calvin at this point. Breward says that the "work of Christ was discussed within the context of predestination rather than providing the key to the decrees of God."[6]

In reality, Perkins walked the tightrope of Reformed experiential theology, balancing his doctrine so as not to fall into either the abyss of fatalism or the pit of man-centered religion. While Perkins cannot escape all charges of promoting

confusion with his theology, his synthesis of decretal and experimental predestination is christologically stable and a natural outgrowth of early Calvinism. It is particularly faithful to the theology of Theodore Beza, which promotes a healthy combination of Reformed theology and Puritan piety.[7] William H. Chalker is wrong in his assertion that Perkins kills Calvin's theology, as is Robert T. Kendall's thesis that Beza—and thus Perkins—differ substantially from the Genevan Reformer. Rather, Richard Muller says rightly, "Perkins's thought is not a distortion of earlier Reformed Theology, but a positive outgrowth of the systematic beginnings of Protestant thought."[8]

This chapter will focus on three of Perkins's major contributions in the area of predestination: his christological, supralapsarian focus; his view of predestination as a golden chain that runs from eternity past to eternity future; and his emphasis on preaching as bringing in the elect.

Christ-Centered Supralapsarian Predestination Primarily concerned with the conversion of souls and subsequent growth in godliness, Perkins believed that a biblical experience of God's sovereign grace in predestination was vital for spiritual comfort and assurance. He believed that salvation worked out experimentally in the souls of believers was inseparable from sovereign predestination in Christ. Far from being harsh and cold, sovereign predestination was the foundation upon which experimental faith could be built.[9] It offered hope to the true believer.

In the introduction to his *Armilla Aurea* (1590), translated as *A Golden Chaine* (1591),[10] in which he first articulated his doctrine of predestination, Perkins identified four viewpoints on this matter:

- The old and new Pelagians, who place the cause of predestination in man, in that God ordained men to life or death according to His foreknowledge of their free-will rejection or receiving of offered grace.
- The Lutherans, who teach that God chose some to salvation by His mere mercy but rejected the rest because He foresaw they would reject His grace.
- The semi-Pelagian Roman Catholics, who ascribe God's predestination partly to mercy and partly to foreseen human preparations and meritorious works.
- Finally, those who teach that God saves some merely of His mercy and damns others entirely because of man's sin, but that the divine predestination concerning both has no other cause than His will.

Perkins concluded, "Of these four opinions, the three former I labour to oppugn [oppose] as erroneous, and to maintain the last, as being truth which will bear

weight in the balance of the sanctuary."[11] The latter expression refers to a scale, figuratively applied to assigning each truth its proper weight according to Holy Scripture. Perkins thereby declared his intention of presenting a balanced theology of predestination. Decretal theology exalts God and abases man. Experimental theology identifies the saved by the fruition of election in a life of faith and increasing holiness, "a life consonant with God's choice," as Irvonwy Morgan said.[12] In Perkins's theology, the decree in Christ and the experience in Christ are conceptually and realistically linked together.

Predestination for the Glory of God Alone The terms *supralapsarian* and *infralapsarian* concern the logical order of God's decree related to man's eternal state. Sometimes supralapsarianism is called "high Calvinism." Supralapsarian literally means "above the fall," and infralapsarian means "below the fall" (Latin *supra* = above; *infra* = below; *lapsus* = fall). Supralapsarians believe that the decree of divine predestination must logically precede the decree concerning mankind's creation and fall in order to preserve the absolute sovereignty of God. Infralapsarians maintain that the decree of predestination must logically follow the decree of creation and the fall, believing it to be inconsistent with the nature of God for Him to decree to reprobate any man without first contemplating him as created, fallen, and sinful.[13]

Perkins was a supralapsarian more for practical than metaphysical reasons. Adhering to high Calvinism for the framework of his predestination and practical theology, Perkins believed that accenting the sovereignty of God and His decree gave God the most glory and the Christian the most comfort. He felt that this emphasis also served as the best polemic against Lutherans, semi-Pelagian Roman Catholics like Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), and anti-predestinarians in England like Peter Baro (1534–1599) and William Barrett (c. 1561–c. 1630). Though greatly indebted to Calvin, Perkins also relied upon such theologians as Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), and Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587).[14] Freely admitting that he used these writers (he even added a work of Beza to his *Golden Chaine*), Perkins nonetheless used his gifts to add to the treasury of high Calvinism.

It is impossible to understand predestination without realizing that God's decrees flow from the inner life of the triune God. Perkins defined God's glory as "the infinite excellency of his most simple and most holy divine nature."[15] Proceeding from this internal glory, God's decree, as well as its execution, aims at "the manifestation of the glory of God."[16] Perkins wrote, "The decree of God, is that by which God in himself, hath necessarily, and yet freely, from all

eternity determined all things (Eph. 1:11; Matt. 10:29; Rom. 9:21)."[17] Predestination, which is only God's decree insofar as it concerns man, is that "by which he hath ordained all men to a certain and everlasting estate: that is, either to salvation or condemnation, for his own glory."[18]

Predestination is the means by which God manifests His glory to the human race. Election is God's decree "whereby on his own free will, he hath ordained certain men to salvation, to the praise of the glory of his grace."[19] Reprobation is "that part of predestination, whereby God, according to the most free and just purpose of his will, hath determined to reject certain men unto eternal destruction, and misery, and that to the praise of his justice."[20]

Like Beza, Perkins held a supralapsarian position of denying that God, in reprobating, considered man as fallen. He supported this belief with Beza's argument that the end is first in the intention of an agent. Thus God first decided the end—the manifestation of His glory in saving and damning—before He considered the means, such as creation and the fall.Ultimately, predestination must not be understood in terms of what it does for man, but in terms of its highest goal—the glory of God. Absolute sovereignty in double predestination for the pure glory of God: this is the heartbeat of Perkins's theology.

Answering Objections: The Predestining God Is Righteous As a theological tightrope walker, Perkins knew that his view prompted two objections: (1) it makes God the author of sin; (2) it diminishes the role of Christ.[21] In addressing the first objection, Perkins adamantly rejected the idea that God is the author of sin. God decreed the fall of man, but He did not cause man to sin. Perkins insisted that the Scriptures teach that God ordains all that shall come to pass.[22] We must not think that man's fall was by chance, or by God's failure to foreknow it, or by His barely winking at it, or by allowing it against His will. Rather, man fell away from God, "not without the will of God, yet without all approbation of it."[23] In other words, God had a good purpose for the fall, although He did not see the fall as good.

God's decree did not cause Adam's sin. The decree of God "planted nothing in Adam, whereby he should fall into sin, but left him to his own liberty, not hindering his fall when it might."[24] If it is objected that man cannot have liberty not to sin if God decreed the fall, Perkins distinguished the necessity of infallibility and the necessity of compulsion. As a consequence of God's decree, what He decreed will infallibly come to pass. But the voluntary acts of the creature are in no way coerced or compelled by God's secret decree. God works through means as secondary causes. He does not handle men as if they were mindless stones but moves their wills by working through their understanding.[25]

The devil and Adam—not God—are responsible for sin. The proper cause of the fall, according to Perkins, was "the devil attempting our overthrow, and Adam's will, which when it began to be proved by temptations, did not desire God's assistance, but voluntarily bent itself to fall away."[26]

This raises the question of how God executed His decree that man would fall without compelling man to sin. Perkins's answer is that God withheld from Adam the grace of perseverance. God gave Adam a righteous human will, a revelation of God's commandment, and the inward ability to will and do what is good. But God did not give Adam the grace to persevere in willing and doing good under temptation. Nor can He be blamed for withholding this grace because God owes no man any grace, and God had good purposes for withholding it.[27] Perkins used the illustration of an unpropped house in a windstorm. As an unsupported house would fall with the blowing of the wind, so man without the help of God falls. Thus, the cause of the fall is not the owner but the wind.[28]

Here then, said Perkins, is the biblical balance. Though the decree of God "doth altogether order every event, partly by inclining and gently bending the will in all things that are good, and partly by forsaking it in things that are evil: yet the will of the creature left unto itself, is carried headlong of [its] own accord, not of necessity in itself, but contingently that way which the decree of God determined from eternity."[29]

Answering Objections: Christ Is the Heart of Predestination As for the charge that supralapsarianism subordinates Christ, Perkins firmly maintains that not election considered absolutely, but election *in Christ* draws the line of separation between the elect and reprobate. Contrary to accusations, Perkins emphasizes Christ-centered predestination. For Perkins, salvation is never focused on a bare decree, but always upon the decreed and decreeing Christ. The election and work of Christ is not commanded by God's decree; rather, it is voluntarily chosen by the Son. Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) would state at the Synod of Dort, "Christ in accordance with his divine nature also participated in the work of election," but He may not be called "the foundation" of election.[30] Perkins went even further; he showed no qualms stating that Christ is the foundation, means, and end of election:

> Election is God's decree whereby of his own free will he hath ordained certain men to salvation, to the praise of the glory of his grace…. There appertain three things to the execution of this decree: first the foundation, secondly the means, thirdly the degrees. The foundation is Christ Jesus, called of his Father from all eternity to perform the office of the Mediator,

that in him all those which should be saved might be chosen.

Q. How can Christ be subordinate unto God's election seeing he together with the Father decreed all things?

A. Christ as he is Mediator is not subordinate to the very decree itself of election, but to the execution thereof only.[31]

Elsewhere Perkins wrote of "the actual or real foundation of God's election, and that is Christ: and therefore we are said to be chosen 'in Christ.' He must be considered two ways: as he is God, we are predestinated *of him*, even as we are predestinated of the Father and the holy Ghost. As he is our Mediator, we are predestinated *in him*."[32]

Perkins went on to say that this act of predestination has "no inward impulsive cause over and beside the good pleasure of God: and it is with regard to Christ the Mediator, in whom all are elected to grace and salvation; and to dream of any election out of him, is against all sense: because he is the foundation of election to be executed, in regard of the beginning, the means, and the end."[33]

Perkins wrote, "The ordaining of a Mediator is that, whereby the second person being the Son of God, is appointed from all eternity to be a Mediator between God himself and men. And hence it is that Peter saith, that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world. And well saith Augustine, that Christ was predestinated to be our head. For howsoever as he is the substantial word (*logos*) of the Father, or the Son, he doth predestinate with the Father, and the Holy Ghost; yet as he is the Mediator, he is predestinated himself."[34]

With approval, Perkins quoted Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444), who wrote, "Christ knoweth his sheep, electing and foreseeing them unto everlasting life." He also cited Augustine of Hippo, who wrote, "Christ by his secret dispensation hath out of an unfaithful people predestinated some to everlasting liberty, quickening them of his free mercy: and damned others in everlasting death, in leaving them by his hidden judgement in their wickedness."[35]

Perkins was more Christ-centered in his predestinarianism than most scholars realize. Breward is correct in saying that Perkins's "definition of theology was a combination of Peter Ramus and John Calvin, and the arrangement of the whole work [*A Golden Chaine*], prefaced as it was by a formidable looking diagram, owed a good deal to Ramist categories of arrangement and aristotelian logic."[36] But Breward errs in failing to recognize how Perkins centered predestination on Christ. Muller more accurately observes that prior to Perkins's time, no one had so meticulously placed the Mediator in such a central relation to the decree and its execution. The order of salvation *(ordo salutis)* originates and is effected in Christ.[37]

A Golden Chain from Sovereign Pleasure to Sovereign Glory In his most famous work, *Armilla Aurea* (*A Golden Chaine*, 1591), Perkins stressed that the will of God in Christ is immovable, not only in the sovereign decree but also in the execution of the sovereign decree. The title page expresses this conviction by describing *A Golden Chaine* as "The Description of Theology, Containing the order of the causes of Salvation and Damnation, according to God's word."[38] The "Table" shows that Perkins taught that God not only decreed man's destiny but also the means through which the elect might attain eternal life, and without which the reprobate could not be saved. At the top of the chart is the triune God as the source of the decree. At the bottom is God's glory as the goal of the decree. On the left is a line or chain of the steps by which God saves His elect. On the right is a line or chain by which the reprobate descend into damnation for their sins. In the center is a line representing the work of Christ the Mediator in His humiliation and exaltation. Perkins drew lines connecting the work of Christ to every step of the order of salvation to show that all is in Him.[39]

The Foundation of Decretal Execution: Jesus Christ Predestination does not affect anyone apart from the work of Jesus Christ. Without Christ, man is totally hopeless. Christ is the foundation of election, as the center of Perkins's chart shows. He is predestined to be Mediator. He is promised to the elect. He is offered by grace to the elect. And, finally, He is personally applied to their souls in all His benefits, natures, offices, and states.[40]

This Christ-centeredness is what sets Perkins's theological chart apart from Beza's *Tabula*. Perkins's chart is similar to Beza's in showing the following contrasts:

- God's love for His elect versus His hatred for the reprobate
- Effectual calling versus ineffectual calling
- The softening of the heart versus the hardening of the heart
- Faith versus ignorance
- Justification and sanctification versus unrighteousness and pollution
- The glorification of the elect versus the damnation of the reprobate

Kendall errs in stating that "Perkins's contribution to Beza's chart was merely making it more attractive and more understandable."[41] The greatest contrast between Beza's and Perkins's tables is the center of the diagram. The central column of Beza's table is empty between the fall and the final judgment. By contrast, the center of Perkins's table is filled with the work of Christ as "mediator of the elect." Christ is thus central to predestination and its outworking in the calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification of the

elect.[42]

The Means of Decretal Execution: The Covenants After introducing Christ as the foundation of election, Perkins explains how predestination is carried out through the covenants. Although his chart does not show this connection, a major part of his discussion falls under covenantal headings.[43] Perkins taught that God established a covenant of works with Adam in paradise, thus setting a covenantal context for the fall.[44] Similarly, He made the covenant of grace as the context for the salvation of the elect. In a dipleuric (two-sided) view of the covenant of grace, the pact between God and man implies mutual, voluntary interaction between God and man. This view is consistent with Perkins's emphasis on apprehending Christ to open the door for the application of His benefits. To this, Perkins added a monopleuric (one-sided) view of covenant as a testament in which sinners are made heirs through God's gracious and unmerited gift of salvation in Christ.

Perkins offered this view of covenant as a way to relieve the tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Without the covenant of grace, man cannot fulfill God's demands; whereas with it, man finds his will renewed through the Holy Spirit to the point that he is capable of choosing repentance. In Perkins's diagram, man becomes active in "mortification and vivification," which leads to "repentance and new obedience." For Perkins, conversion is the point of reconciliation at which the monopleuric and dipleuric aspects of covenant theology can unite. This allowed the Christian life to be systematized and stated as a vast series of "cases of conscience." It also allowed the covenant to be presented in the form of a voluntary act by the regenerate in their search for personal assurance. The greatest case of conscience would naturally be "whether a man be a child of God or no," that is, whether a man is savingly brought into the covenant of grace and converted.[45]

Consequently, Perkins could say that though faith and repentance are the conditions of the covenant of grace, man is totally incapable of initiating or meriting the covenant relation through any goodness or obedience in himself. Ultimately, the decree of election and the covenant of grace stand upon the good pleasure of God. God chose to be in covenant with man; God initiates the covenant relation; God freely, out of His sovereign will alone, brings man into the covenant of grace by granting him the conditions of faith and repentance. The decreeing, establishing, and maintaining of the covenant are all dependent on the free grace of God. Man does not bind or tame God by the covenant, as Perry Miller implied.[46] Rather, God binds Himself to man in covenant.

For Perkins the covenant of grace from a divine perspective is one-sided and

initiated by grace. God's dealings with Abel and Cain, Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau are examples of His role as the divine Initiator of the covenant. From them we learn that "when God receives any man into covenant of eternal life, it proceeds not of any dignity in the man whom God calleth, but from his mercy and alone good pleasure…. As for the opinion of them that say, that foreseen faith and good works are the cause that moved God to choose men to salvation, it is frivolous. For faith and good works are the fruits and effects of God's election."[47]

Since God's covenant is made with man, apart from any effort put forth by him, "in this covenant we do not so much offer, or promise any great matter to God, as in a manner only receive." In its fullest manifestation, the covenant is the gospel itself as well as "the instrument, and, as it were, the conduit pipe of the holy Ghost, to fashion and derive faith unto the soul: by which faith, they which believe, do, as with an hand, apprehend Christ's righteousness."[48] Far from being capricious, God's covenant assures man that God can be counted on graciously to fulfill the golden chain of salvation in the hearts of the elect (Rom. 8:29–30). Thus the covenant of grace forms the heart of salvation itself. Perkins wrote, "We are to know God, not as he is in himself, but as he hath revealed himself unto us in the covenant of grace; and therefore we must acknowledge the Father to be our Father, the Son to be our Redeemer, the holy Ghost to be our comforter, and seek to grow in the knowledge and experience of this."[49]

Without abandoning the Calvinist view of God's eternal decrees, Perkins's covenant emphasis helps us to focus on God's relationship with man. By focusing on the covenant, Perkins and other Puritans reduced the inscrutable mystery of God's dealings to laws that are somewhat understandable to us. They saw, though through a glass darkly, the movement of God's secret counsels in the revealed covenants, and His concern for man particularly in the covenant of grace. While retaining Calvin's concern for the glory of God, Perkins offered more emphasis on the conversion of man. As F. Ernest Stoeffler says, "Hand in hand with this reorientation goes his…concern for the practical aspects of Christianity which is typical of all Pietistic Puritanism."[50] This is particularly evident in Perkins's *Golden Chaine*, of which the vast majority is devoted to practical concerns rather than theoretical aspects of theology.

The Degrees of Decretal Execution: Calling, Justification, Sanctification, Glorification According to Perkins, God shows "degrees of love" in carrying out election in Jesus Christ by means of covenant, that is, steps by which He puts into action His eternal love. By "degree" Perkins did not mean that God loves one Christian more than another, but that He works their salvation in distinct

steps from sin to glory.

Effectual calling, the first part of the process, represents the saving grace "whereby a sinner being severed from the world, is entertained into God's family."[51] The first part of effectual calling is a right hearing of the Word by those who were dead in sin; their minds are illuminated by the Spirit with irresistible truth. The preaching of the Word accomplishes two things: "the Law shewing a man his sin and the punishment thereof, which is eternal death" and "the Gospel, shewing salvation by Christ Jesus, to such as believe." Both become so real that "the eyes of the mind are enlightened, the heart and ears opened, that he [the elect sinner] may see, hear, and understand the preaching of the word of God."[52]

The second part of this process is the breaking of the sinner's heart. Under the preaching of the Word, it is "bruised in pieces, that it may be fit to receive God's saving grace offered unto it." To accomplish this, God uses four "principal hammers":

- The knowledge of the law of God
- The knowledge of sin, both original and actual, and its due punishment
- Pricking the heart with a sense of the wrath of God against sin
- Despairing of human ability to gain eternal life[53]

The product of effectual calling is saving faith, which Perkins defines as "a miraculous and supernatural faculty of the heart, apprehending Christ Jesus being applied by the operation of the holy Ghost, and receiving him to itself."[54] The act of receiving Christ is not something that man does in his own strength; rather, by Spirit-wrought faith the elect receives the grace that Christ brings, thereby bringing the believer into union with every aspect of Christ's saving work through faith. As Charles Munson says, "Faith then saves the elect, not because it is a perfect virtue, but because it apprehends a perfect object, which is the obedience of Christ. Whether faith is weak or strong does not matter for salvation rests on God's mercy and promises."[55] According to Perkins, God "accepts the very seeds and rudiments of faith and repentance at the first, though they be but in measure, as a grain of mustard seed."[56]

Once a sinner has been effectually called, he is justified. Justification, as the "declaration of God's love," is the act "whereby such as believe, are accounted just before God, through the obedience of Christ Jesus." The foundation of justification is the obedience of Christ, expressed in "his Passion in life and death, and his fulfilling of the Law joined therewith." Christ frees the elect from the twofold debt of fulfilling the law "every moment, from our first beginning, both in regard of purity of nature and purity of action," and of making

"satisfaction for the breach of the law." Christ is our surety for this debt, and God accepts His obedience for us, "it being full satisfaction." Justification thus consists of "remission of sins, and imputation of Christ's righteousness."[57] It takes place when a sinner is brought in his conscience before God's judgment seat, pleads guilty, and flees to Christ as his only refuge for acquittal.[58] Justification is clearly a judicial, sovereign act of God's eternal good pleasure.

Justification includes other benefits as well. Outwardly, it offers reconciliation, afflictions that serve as chastisements rather than punishments, and eternal life. Inwardly, it offers peace, quietness of conscience, entrance into God's favor, boldness at the throne of grace, an abiding sense of spiritual joy, and intimate awareness of the love of God.[59]

Sanctification, the third part of this process, received more attention from Perkins than any other part. He defined sanctification as that work "by which a Christian in his mind, in his will and in his affections is freed from the bondage and tyranny of sin and Satan and is little by little enabled through the Spirit of Christ to desire and approve that which is good and walk in it."[60] Sanctification has two parts. "The first is mortification, when the power of sin is continually weakened, consumed, and diminished. The second is vivification, by which inherent righteousness is really put into them and afterward is continually increased."[61] Sanctification includes a changed life, repentance, and new obedience—in short, the entire field of "Christian warfare."[62] All the benefits of salvation that begin with regeneration are tied to a living relationship with Jesus Christ, to whom the believer is bound by the Holy Spirit.[63]

Perkins taught that just as a fire without fuel will soon go out, so God's children will grow cold and fall away unless God warms them with new and daily supplies of His grace.[64] Victor Priebe says, "Sanctification, then, is dependent upon a moment by moment renewal as the believer looks away from himself and his deeds to the person and work of Christ. Mortification and vivification are evidence of that most vital and definitive reality—union with Christ upon which all reception of grace depends…. It is unquestionably clear that sanctification is the result of the activity of divine grace in man."[65]

After sanctification comes the final step: glorification. This part of God's love is "the perfect transforming of the saints into the image of the Son of God," Perkins said. Glorification awaits the fulfillment of the Last Judgment, when the elect shall enjoy "blessedness…whereby God himself is all in all his elect." By sovereign grace the elect will be ushered into perfect glory, a "wonderful excellency" that includes beholding the glory and majesty of God, fully conforming to Christ, and inheriting "the new heavens and the new earth."[66]

The Descent of the Reprobate toward Hell Perkins's chart reveals that he developed reprobation as carefully as he did election. Indeed, the dark chain of reprobation from man's perspective is really a golden chain from God's perspective, for it, too, issues in the glory of God at the last.

Reprobation involves two acts. The first act is God's decision to glorify His justice by leaving certain men to themselves. This act is absolute, based on nothing in man but only the will of God. The second act is God's decision to damn these men to hell. This second act is not absolute, but based on their sins. It is the act of God's righteous hatred against sinners. Therefore, Perkins did not teach that God damns men arbitrarily; no one will go to hell except those who deserve it for their sins.67

Perkins saw reprobation as a logical concomitant of election. He wrote, "If there be an eternal decree of God, whereby he chooseth some men, then there must needs be another whereby he doth pass by others and refuse them."68

Two differences of emphasis exist between reprobation and election, however. First, God willed the sin and damnation of men but not with the will of approval or action. God's will to elect sinners consisted of His delight in showing grace and His intent to work grace in them. But God's will to reprobate sinners did not include any delight in their sin, nor any intent to work sin in them. Rather, He willed not to prevent their sinning because He delighted in the glorification of His justice.69 Second, in executing reprobation, God primarily passes over the reprobate by withholding from them His special, supernatural grace of election. Perkins even speaks of God permitting the reprobate to fall into sin. By using infralapsarian language such as "passing over" and "permitting," Perkins again shows his tendency to move from a supralapsarian view of God's decree to an infralapsarian conception of its execution.70

According to Perkins, there are two types of reprobates: those who are not called and those who are called, but not effectually. Those with no calling proceed from "ignorance and vanity of mind" to "heart hardening" to "a reprobate sense" to "greediness in sin" to "fullness of sin."71 Those who are called may go as far as "yielding to God's calling"—which may include "a general illumination, penitence, temporary faith, a taste, [and] zeal"—before they "relapse" into sin by means of "the deceit of sin, the hardening of the heart, an evil heart, an unbelieving heart, [and] apostasy." Ultimately, also the ineffectually called are led to "fullness of sin," so that the two streams of reprobates become one prior to death. For the reprobate, all calls remain ineffectual because all fail to bring them to Christ. Taken captive by their own sins, of which the greatest sin is "an unbelieving heart," the reprobate make themselves ripe for divine judgment and damnation.72

However, no one should conclude that his present sins and unbelief prove him to be reprobate of God. Rather, he should seek God's grace and place himself under the means of grace, especially the preaching of the Scriptures.

Understanding the covenantal grace in Christ and inescapable wrath outside of this grace inevitably prompts questions such as, "Am I one of God's favored elect? How can I avail myself of the salvation wrought in Christ? How can I be sure that I have true faith? If reprobates can also behave in ways that seem motivated by grace, how can I know whether I am a child of God?"[73] These questions lead to the crucial task of preaching.

Preaching: Bringing in the Elect No Puritan was more concerned about preaching than William Perkins.[74] Preaching was uniquely honored by God "in that it serveth to collect the church and to accomplish the number of the elect" and also "it driveth away the wolves from the folds of the Lord."[75] In essence, Perkins's goal was to help preachers realize their responsibility as God's instruments to reveal and realize election and the covenant. Biblically balanced preaching was paramount, for the Word preached is the power of God unto salvation, without which there would be no salvation.[76] Perkins taught that preaching is "the mighty arm" by which God "draws his elect into his kingdom and fashions them to all holy obedience."[77] The Word evidences its divine power in that "it converteth men, and, though it be flatly contrary to the reason and affections of men, yet it winneth them unto itself."[78] With such a high view of preaching, Perkins did not hesitate to assert that the sermon was the climax of public worship.

Munson writes, "Perkins' golden chain of the causes of salvation…is linked to the elect through the instrument of preaching."[79] As we observed earlier, the covenant is the means by which God executes His decree.[80] Perkins wrote, "The covenant of grace, is that whereby God freely promising Christ, and his benefits, exacts again of man, that he would by faith receive Christ, and repent of his sins."[81] It promises "that now for all such as repent and believe in Christ Jesus, there is prepared a full remission for all their sins, together with salvation and life everlasting."[82] This gospel must be preached (Rom. 10:14). It is the "allurer of the soul, whereby men's froward minds are mitigated and moved from an ungodly and barbarous life unto Christian faith and repentance."[83] Therefore, Perkins said, "The gospel preached is…that ordinary means to beget faith."[84] So we see that for Perkins the gospel is preached to all men without distinction. It views all men as possibly elect and demands a response. This accounts for the detailed exposition of the way of salvation and for the almost tangential treatment of reprobation in Perkins's work. *A Golden Chaine* asks all men to

inquire within themselves for signs of election as they encounter the means of grace.

Since the elect are known only to God, Perkins assumed that everyone who listened to a sermon could potentially be gathered into gospel grace. He thus pressed every sinner to accept God's offer of salvation in Christ. The gospel promise must be offered freely to every hearer as a "precious jewel," Perkins said.[85]

Plain and powerful preaching of Scripture was not merely the work of a man, but a heavenly intrusion where the Spirit of the electing God speaks.[86] Perkins said, "And every prophet is…the voice of God…in preaching…. Preaching of the word is prophesying in the name and room of Christ, whereby men are called into the state of grace, and conserved in it (2 Cor. 5:19–20)."[87]

Conclusion: Reformed Scholastic Piety Perkins earned the titles of both "scholastic, high Calvinist" and "father of pietism."[88] His theology affirms divine sovereignty in the predestination decree of the Father, the satisfaction made by Christ for the elect, and the saving work of the Spirit. Yet Perkins never allows sovereignty to prevent a practical, evangelical emphasis on the individual believer working out his own salvation as hearer of the Word, follower of Christ, and warrior of the conscience. Divine sovereignty, individual piety, and the gospel offer of salvation are always in view.

Perkins's emphasis on sound doctrine and the reform of souls influenced Puritanism for years to come.[89] J. I. Packer writes, "Puritanism, with its complex of biblical, devotional, ecclesiastical, reformational, polemical and cultural concerns, came of age, we might say, with Perkins, and began to display characteristically a wholeness of spiritual vision and a maturity of Christian patience that had not been seen in it before."[90] Contemporary scholars have called Perkins "the principal architect of Elizabethan Puritanism," "the Puritan theologian of Tudor times," "the most important Puritan writer," "the prince of Puritan theologians," "the ideal Puritan clergyman of the quietist years," "the most famous of all Puritan divines," and have classed him with Calvin and Beza as third in "the trinity of the orthodox."[91] He was the first theologian to be more widely published in England than Calvin and the first English Protestant theologian to have a major impact in the British Isles, on the Continent, and in North America. It is not surprising that Puritan scholars marvel that Perkins's rare works have remained largely unavailable until now.[92]

Though Reformed theologians continued to debate supralapsarianism versus infralapsarianism they remained unified in the basic lines of predestinarian doctrine. Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) wrote that regardless of where they fell on

the lapsarian question, all his fellow Reformed divines agreed,

> first, that there was an eternal separation of men in God's purpose; secondly, that this first decree of severing man to his ends, is an act of sovereignty over his creature, and altogether independent of anything in the creature as a cause of it, especially in comparative reprobation, as why he rejected Judas and not Peter. Sin foreseen cannot be the cause, because that was common to both, and therefore could be no cause of severing. Thirdly, all agree in this, that damnation is an act of divine justice, which supposeth demerit; and therefore the execution of God's decree is founded on sin, either of nature or life, or both.[93]

One might object, as did Erasmus centuries ago, that predestination should not be preached because it will discourage saints from assurance of their salvation and encourage the wicked to sin. Zanchius replied to such objections with the insights of Luther and Bucer:

- God teaches us predestination in His Word, and we must not be ashamed of His doctrine but proclaim it with reverence and trust in His wisdom.
- This doctrine humbles our pride and magnifies God's grace, for it shows us that we can do nothing to save ourselves—God alone saves sinners.
- Faith by nature receives doctrines of God that it cannot see and fully comprehend by human reasoning.
- Election comforts and sustains the saints with God's unchangeable love for them when Satan attacks with doubts and accusations.
- Predestination reveals the infinite glory and sovereignty of the eternal and unchangeable God so that we know Him and worship Him.
- Predestination guards the gospel of salvation *by grace alone*.
- This doctrine brings us a vibrant vision of God's special love for His people in Christ Jesus, which is the joy of His people and fuel of their love to Him.
- Predestination moves God's people to diligent holiness of life.[94]

Perkins's predestinarian theology did not make him cold and heartless when dealing with sinners and saints in need of a Savior. Rather, his warm, biblical theology set the tone for Puritan "practical divinity" literature that would pour forth from the presses in the seventeenth century. It inspired generations of preachers to call men to turn from sin to a loving Savior and to follow Him through trials to glory.

1. William Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612–13), 1:723 (hereafter, *Works*). This chapter is

a revised and abridged version of Joel R. Beeke, "William Perkins on Predestination, Preaching, and Conversion," in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and Reformed Heritage, in Honor of D. Clair Davis*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002), 183–213.

2. Iain Murray, "The Puritans and the Doctrine of Election," in *Puritan Papers, Volume One, 1956–1959*, ed. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 2000), 5. See Girolamo Zanchi, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination* (Perth: R. Morison Jr., 1793), chap. 5.

3. Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 43–44.

4. Dissertations and theses that contribute to an understanding of Perkins's theology include Ian Breward, "The Life and Theology of William Perkins" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963); William H. Chalker, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1961); Lionel Greve, "Freedom and Discipline in the Theology of John Calvin, William Perkins, and John Wesley: An Examination of the Origin and Nature of Pietism" (PhD diss., Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1976); Robert W. A. Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort," 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1979); R. David Lightfoot, "William Perkins' View of Sanctification" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984); Donald Keith McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins's Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987); C. C. Markham, "William Perkins' Understanding of the Function of Conscience" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1967); Richard Alfred Muller, "Predestination and Christology in Sixteenth-Century Reformed Theology" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1976); Charles Robert Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve, 1971); Willem Jan op't Hof, *Engelse piëtistische geschriften in het Nederlands, 1598–1622* (Rotterdam: Lindenberg, 1987); Joseph A. Pipa Jr., "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); Victor L. Priebe, "The Covenant Theology of William Perkins" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1967); Mark R. Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins" (PhD diss., Westminister Theological Seminary, 1981); Paul R. Schaefer Jr., *The Spiritual Brotherhood on the Habits of the Heart: Cambridge Protestants and the Doctrine of Sanctification from William Perkins to Thomas Shepard* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); Rosemary Sisson, "William Perkins" (MA thesis, University of Cambridge, 1952); C. J. Sommerville, "Conversion, Sacrament and Assurance in the Puritan Covenant of Grace to 1650" (MA thesis, University of Kansas, 1963); Young Jae Timothy Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1998); Lynn Baird Tipson Jr., "The Development of a Puritan Understanding of Conversion" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1972); J. R. Tufft, "William Perkins, 1558–1602" (PhD diss., Edinburgh, 1952); Jan Jacobus van Baarsel, *William Perkins: eene bijdrage tot de Kennis der religieuse ontwikkeling in Engeland ten tijde, van Koningin Elisabeth* ('s-Gravenhage: H. P. De Swart & Zoon, 1912); William G. Wilcox, "New England Covenant Theology: Its Precursors and Early American Exponents" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1959); James Eugene Williams Jr., "An Evaluation of William Perkins' Doctrine of Predestination in the Light of John Calvin's Writings" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986); Andrew Alexander Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1988).

5. Perkins's critics—both positive and negative—agree that he provided a major link in Reformed thought between Beza and the Westminster Confession. Those who view that linkage as largely negative include M. M. Knappen (*Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939], 374–76); Perry Miller (*Errand into the Wilderness* [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1978]); Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, III/4 [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961], 8); Chalker, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists"; Basil Hall ("Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield [Appleford, England: Sutton Courtney Press, 1966], 19–37); Robert T. Kendall (*Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979]; "Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers," in *Living the Christian Life* [London: Westminster Conference, 1974]; "John Cotton—First English Calvinist?," in *The Puritan Experiment in the New World*

[London: Westminster Conference, 1976]; "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 199–214). Scholars who have reacted positively to Perkins include F. Ernest Stoeffler (*The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* [Leiden: Brill, 1965]); Ian Breward ("William Perkins and the Origins of Puritan Casuistry," in *Faith and a Good Conscience* [London: Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, 1962]; "The Significance of William Perkins," *Journal of Religious History* 4, no. 2 [1966]: 113–28; "William Perkins and the Origins of Puritan Casuistry," *The Evangelist Quarterly* 40 [1968]: 16–22); Richard Muller ("Perkins' *A Golden Chaine:* Predestinarian System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis?," Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 1 [1978]: 69–81); "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 [1980]: 308–34; *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988]); Mark R. Shaw ("Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 41–72; "William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Cambridge Predestination Controversy of the 1590s," *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 [1996]: 267–302); Joel R. Beeke (*The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999]); Greve, Markham, Munson, op't Hof, Pipa, Priebe, Schaefer, Sommerville, Song, van Baarsel, and Woolsey, as noted in footnote 4. See Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 4–29 for a summary of interpretations of Perkins's thought.

6. M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 374–76; Ian Breward, ed., introduction to *The Work of William Perkins*, vol. 3 of The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics (Abingdon, England: Sutton Courtenay, 1970), 86.

7. Breward, introduction to *Work of Perkins*, xi.

8. Muller, "Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*," 69–71, 79–81.

9. The term *experimental* comes from *experimentum*, meaning "trial," and is derived from the verb *experior*, to know by experience, which in turn leads to "experiential," meaning knowledge gained by experiment. Calvin used experimental and experiential interchangeably, since both words indicate the need for measuring experienced knowledge against the touchstone of Scripture. See chapters 42 and 43 on Puritan experimental preaching, which seeks to explain in terms of biblical truth how matters ought to go, how they do go, and what the goal of the Christian life should be. Cf. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, 8–9; Joel R. Beeke, "The Lasting Power of Reformed Experiential Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 94–128; *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust 2008), 255–74.

10. For a list of Perkins's writings, see Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition," 231–34; McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins*, 335–37.

11. Breward, *Work of Perkins*, 175–76. Cf. Michael T. Malone, "The Doctrine of Predestination in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker," *Anglican Theological Review* 52 (1970): 103–17.

12. Irvonwy Morgan, *Puritan Spirituality: Illustrated from the Life and Times of the Rev. Dr. John Preston* (London: Epworth, 1973), 25.

13. See Joel R. Beeke, "Did Beza's Supralapsarianism Spoil Calvin's Theology?," *Reformed Theological Journal* 13 (Nov. 1997): 58–60; William Hastie, *The Theology of the Reformed Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904); Klaas Dijk, *De Strijd over Infra-en Supralapsarisme in de Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland* (Kampen: Kok, 1912).

14. W. Stanford Reid, ed. *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 206–7; Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 30–31, 76; Otto Grundler, "Thomism and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1960), 123; Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 59; Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 176–81. Cf. C. M. Dent, *Protestant Reformers in Elizabethan Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 98–102.

15. William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or, The Description of Theologie, Containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation*, in *Works*, 1:13.

16. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:15.
17. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:15.
18. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:16.
19. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:24.
20. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:106.
21. Twentieth-century theologians also made the accusation that supralapsarian predestination subordinates Christ to the decree, diminishing Him to a mere "carrier of salvation"—that He plays no active role since the decree of predestination is made prior to grace. J. K. S. Reid, "The Office of Christ in Predestination," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 1 (1948): 5–19, 166–83; James Daane, *The Freedom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), chap. 7.
22. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:15.
23. Breward, *Work of Perkins*, 197–98.
24. William Perkins, *A Treatise of the Manner and Order of Predestination, and of the Largenesse of Gods Grace*, in *Works*, 2:619.
25. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:619.
26. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:607.
27. William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, in *Works*, 1:160; cf. 1:16; 2:611.
28. Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition," 79.
29. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:621.
30. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 143.
31. Breward, *Work of Perkins*, 197–98.
32. Perkins, *Creed of the Apostles*, in *Works*, 1:282.
33. Perkins, *Creed of the Apostles*, in *Works*, 1:283.
34. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:608.
35. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:607.
36. Breward, introduction to *Work of Perkins*, 85–86.
37. Muller, "Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*," 71, 76.
38. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:9.
39. See Perkins's chart in *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:11. For an exposition of Perkins's chart, see Cornelis Graafland, *Van Calvijn tot Barth: Oorsprong en ontwikkeling van de leer der verkiezing in het Gereformeerd Protestantisme* ('s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1987), 72–84. Both Beza's chart and Perkins's chart were recently reproduced in Lillback, ed., *The Practical Calvinist*, 580–83. Perkins's chart may also be found in Breward, *Work of Perkins*, 169.
40. Cf. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:608.
41. Reid, *John Calvin*, 204–5.
42. Muller, "Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*," 76–77.
43. Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 124. Shaw concludes that "the background of Perkins's covenant of grace was election in Christ as its formal cause and the work of Christ as its material cause."
44. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:32.
45. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience," 310–11.
46. Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 48–98.
47. Perkins, *Creed of the Apostles*, in *Works*, 1:279, 281.
48. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:70.
49. William Perkins, *A Commentarie or Exposition upon the Five First Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *Works*, 2:258.
50. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 55.
51. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:77.
52. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:78.
53. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:79.

54. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:79.
55. Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition," 100.
56. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:79–80.
57. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:81–82.
58. Perkins, *Galatians*, in *Works*, 2:204.
59. William Perkins, *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration, Whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace*, in *Works*, 1:368.
60. Perkins, *Whether a Man*, in *Works*, 1:370.
61. Perkins, *Whether a Man*, in *Works*, 1:370.
62. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:85.
63. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:83; *Whether a Man*, 1:370.
64. Thomas F. Merrill, ed., *William Perkins, 1558–1602, English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: "A Discourse of Conscience" and "the Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience"* (Nieuwkoop, the Netherlands: B. DeGraaf, 1966), 103.
65. Priebe, "Covenant Theology of Perkins," 141.
66. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:92, 94.
67. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:105; *Galatians*, 2:612.
68. Perkins, *Creed of the Apostles*, in *Works*, 1:287.
69. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:613–14.
70. Perkins, *Manner and Order of Predestination*, in *Works*, 2:611–18; Graafland, *Van Calvijn tot Barth*, 80.
71. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:107.
72. See chart in Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:11.
73. Chalker, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century Calvinists," 91.
74. See Perkins, *The Arte of Prophesying, or, A Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Only True Manner and Method of Preaching*, in *Works*, 2:645ff.
75. Perkins, *Arte of Prophesying*, in *Works*, 2:645.
76. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:83.
77. Quoted in Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition," 197.
78. Perkins, *Arte of Prophesying*, in *Works*, 2:650.
79. Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition," 183.
80. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:31.
81. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:70.
82. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:70.
83. Perkins, *Arte of Prophesying*, in *Works*, 2:645.
84. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:71.
85. Breward, *Work of Perkins*, 300.
86. Perkins, *Arte of Prophesying*, in *Works*, 2:670; William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 130–31.
87. Perkins, *Arte of Prophesying*, in *Works*, 2:646.
88. Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der reformierten Kirche namentlich in der Niederlande* (Leiden: Brill, 1879), 24–26.
89. Richard Muller, "William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition: Interpretation, Style, and Method," in *William Perkins, A Commentary on Hebrews 11*, ed. John H. Augustine (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 72.
90. J. I. Packer, "An Anglican to Remember—William Perkins: Puritan Popularizer" (London: St. Antholin's Lectureship Charity Lecture, 1996), 4.
91. John Eusden, *Puritans, Lawyers, and Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1958), 11; Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 375; Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 91; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan*

Puritan Movement (London: Jonathan Cape), 125; Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560–1662* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), 114; Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 38; Packer, "An Anglican to Remember," 1.

92. Louis Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 171; George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 48.

93. Richard Sibbes, preface to *An Entire Commentary upon the Whole Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians*, by Paul Baynes (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 2.

94. Girolamo Zanchi, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination* (Perth: R. Morison Jr., 1793), 97–107.

Chapter 8

Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius on Justification from Eternity

> *I neither am nor ever was of that judgment; though, as it may be explained, I know better, wiser, and more learned men than myself, that have been and are.*
>
> —JOHN OWEN[1]

Since the Reformation in the sixteenth century the question has been raised whether certain Reformed orthodox theologians believed that justification, as the act of God, was accomplished in eternity rather than in time. It may be more precise to speak of "justification in (or from) eternity" rather than "eternal justification," since the discussion revolves around the moment or time of justification instead of the duration of it, but the term "eternal justification" will also be used in this chapter. The idea of justification from eternity caused a firestorm of debate among Reformed theologians, particularly because of the perceived antinomian implications of the doctrine.[2] As with many doctrines, a spectrum of positions on justification from eternity can be discerned in the views of various Reformed theologians. Regrettably, however, there has been only passing treatment of this doctrine in the secondary literature, and there is no real consensus on the orthodoxy, or lack thereof, of the various positions.

Carl Trueman has correctly identified the role of eternal justification in English-and Dutch-speaking traditions and notes that eternal justification "was the idea that the elect were not only elected in eternity, but were also justified in eternity."[3] According to this view, "faith became the realization of one's prior justification, the acknowledgment of one's eternal status before God, and not in any way, constitutive or otherwise, a part of that justification."[4] Trueman makes a connection between this doctrine and its role in antinomian theology, such as that of Tobias Crisp (1600–1643).[5] However, Trueman also suggests that this doctrine "found support among the more traditional Orthodox, such as Thomas Goodwin" (1600–1679). Besides Goodwin, the Dutch scholastic theologian, Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644), has also been described in the secondary

literature as one of the most prominent defenders of justification from eternity.[6]

We may ask this, however: Did Tobias Crisp hold to the doctrine of justification of eternity, as Trueman suggests? Second, what is the relation between antinomianism and eternal justification? Third, what precisely was the view of "the more traditional Orthodox" theologians Goodwin and Maccovius? Regarding the first question, it turns out that Crisp did not hold to eternal justification. His actual view was that the elect were justified at the moment Christ died on the cross. God did indeed decree from all eternity to justify the elect, but the actual acquittal took place on Calvary.[7] So, clearly, the best-known antinomian did not hold the view of eternal justification, which leads to the second question.

Holding to justification from eternity has long been closely associated with antinomianism.[8] Chad van Dixhoorn argues that the "idea of an eternal justification is the intellectual starting point for a number of key tenets of antinomianism."[9] Consequently, many have criticized the proponents of eternal justification. Paul Lim notes that Richard Baxter (1615–1691) refers to justification before faith and from eternity as "the very 'pillar of Antinomianism,' and he accused John Owen (1616–1683), Maccovius, and others of propagating this doctrine."[10] John Flavel (1628–1691) notes this doctrine in his rebuttal of antinomianism: "The Antinomian, indeed, makes our actual justification to be nothing else but the manifestation or declaration of our Justification from Eternity."[11] Flavel goes on to say that this error makes justification to be an immanent and eternal act of God: "And [the Antinomians] do affirm, the Elect were justified before themselves, or the World, had a being. Others come lower, and affirm, the Elect were justified at the time of Christ's death. With these Dr. [Tobias] Crisp harmonizes."[12] Flavel acknowledges that Crisp did not hold to eternal justification, and so he correctly distinguishes two questions: First, does justification take place in eternity? Second, what is the logical order between faith and justification; that is, does justification precede faith? Curt Daniel quotes Crisp's provocative language, "he is first justified before he believes, then he believes that he is justified," which causes him to attribute to Crisp the position of justification from eternity.[13] This last contention, however, is false, as Flavel admitted. Trueman has rightly noted that Crisp's understanding of justification is "somewhat more sophisticated than the bald characterization implied by the term 'eternal justification.'"[14] This chapter, however, will not deal with Crisp, but with Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius, two "more traditional Orthodox" theologians to whom the doctrine of justification from eternity is attributed. The example of Crisp makes clear that careful investigation is needed, and as will be shown, neither Goodwin nor

Maccovius held to this doctrine.

Distinguishing these two questions—whether justification takes place in eternity, and what logical order exists between faith and justification—provides a useful clue. If justification is from eternity, then justification precedes faith. But not all who hold that justification precedes faith agree with eternal justification. As will become clear, confusion on these two questions is a common cause for misinterpretation.

Goodwin on Eternal Justification Goodwin's doctrine of salvation has a number of basic distinctions that need to be kept in view. He refers to "three sorts of works whereby our Salvation is completed and accomplished."[15] These works are:

> 1. *Immanent* in God towards us, as his *Eternal love* set and passed upon us, out of which He chose us, and designed this and all blessings to us;
>
> 2. *Transient*, in Christ done for us; in all He did or suffered representing of us, and in our stead; or
>
> 3. *Applicatory*, wrought in and upon us, in the endowing us with all those blessings by the Spirit; as calling, justification, sanctification, glorification.[16]

Goodwin elsewhere makes a distinction between what God is said to do "in Christ" and what He does "by Christ."[17] To be reconciled "in Christ" has reference to God's immanent acts toward His people. They are the soteric blessings the elect received in Christ when they had as yet no subsistence but in Him. However, "by Christ" refers to the "actual performance" of God's immanent acts and the application of Christ's work to His people.[18] The words "by Christ" have reference to works both transient (i.e., His mediatorial sufferings and death) and applicatory (i.e., the Spirit's application of the benefits of Christ's mediation to the believer). These various distinctions are vital to a proper understanding of Goodwin's doctrine of justification. It is important to note that immanent works take place in eternity; transient works have in this context reference to works of impetration,[19] done in time; and God's applicatory acts, which are existentially experienced, complete the process of redemption.

Goodwin takes as axiomatic that there are three stages in justification (*tria momenta*). While justification in its application is an individual act (*actus individuus*), there are nevertheless "three Paces and Progresses of God."[20] However, only stage 3 can properly be called justification; what precedes stage 3 cannot. However, by each of these first two stages or progresses, God entitles His elect to a complete discharge from the penalties of sin. The first stage is the

making of the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) in eternity: "The first Progress or Step was at the first Covenant-making and striking of the Bargain from all Eternity…. Justified then we were when first elected, though not in our own Persons, yet in our Head, as he had our Persons then given him, and we came to have a Being and Interest in him."[21] This stage has reference to acts immanent in God, those inward acts of God where He chose His people in Christ (Eph. 1:3) and predestined them to eternal life. Thus, Goodwin notes that Paul speaks in the past tense in Romans 8:30 about the blessings of calling, justification, and glorification. In this context, these redemptive blessings existed for us only in Christ as the federal head of His people. Accordingly, there was an "actual Donation and receiving of all these for us…by virtue of a Covenant made with Christ."[22] Because of the terms of the covenant of redemption, namely, that Christ has been appointed in eternity as the surety of His people, the elect are "in this respect justified from all Eternity."[23] But this must be understood only in a highly qualified sense. Consequently, Christ's eternal appointment as surety for His people represents a necessary condition for justification, but not a sufficient condition.

The second stage in justification has reference to the transient works of Christ, the "Payment and Performance by Christ at his Resurrection."[24] Because Christ died and rose as a public person, God "performed a farther Act of Justification towards him, and us in him."[25] His resurrection was not only His own justification (1 Tim. 3:16), but the justification of those who were "in him" (Eph. 1:3–11) before the foundation of the world. When Paul describes Christ's justification, he does not speak of Christ abstractly considered in Himself, but as a federal head or representative of His people. Thus, the justification of the elect is attributed more especially to Christ's resurrection.[26] This stage, what was done for the salvation of Christ's people yet unborn, concerns them only as they existed in their head, according to the Father's election. None of these acts properly justify the elect, however: "though they concern us, and are *towards us*, yet are not acts of God *upon us*, they being performed towards us, not as actually existing in ourselves, but only as existing in our Head, who covenanted for us, and represented us: so as though by these acts we are estated into a right title to justification, yet the benefit and the possession of that estate we have not without a farther act to be passed upon us."[27]

Significantly, in Goodwin's exposition of the final stage in justification, he supports the view, against the Antinomians, that the elect possess the right to justification in their own persons only when they are enabled by the Spirit to exercise saving faith. This stage, or act of God, is the completion and accomplishment of the former stages; here justification properly takes place. A

change that the authors of the Savoy Declaration made to the Westminster Confession of Faith reflects the dynamics of Goodwin's position on this point, though one should be careful not to read too much into the change, because Owen clearly sought to distance himself from any form of justification from eternity. Chapter 11.4 of the Westminster Confession reads: "God did, from all eternity, decree to justify the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins and rise again for their justification; nevertheless they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them." The Confession rejects a form of eternal justification that would make existential faith merely the realization or manifestation of what is already true. However, the Savoy Declaration adds a significant adverb to this statement, making it read like this: "God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified *personally*, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them" (11.4, emphasis added). By adding "personally" to 11.4, the Congregationalists, no doubt influenced by Goodwin, still reject justification from eternity, but leave open the possibility for Goodwin to hold that the elect are eternally justified in their Head, though not personally. Whatever the case, to this extent this change further distanced the Congregationalists from antinomianism.

For Goodwin, the elect abide under God's wrath until they believe (Eph. 2:3). Goodwin makes a distinction between justification "in the court of God" (*in foro Dei*) and justification "in the courts of one's own conscience" (*in foro conscientiae*), but this does not have to do with the distinction between stage 1 and stage 3 of justification, but with the fact that what is true in God's judgment will become true in our conscience. If God acquits the sinner, the conscience will acquiesce in His sentence. Goodwin explicitly asserts that faith is not only the instrument of justification in our conscience, but also in God's court or tribunal. He adds, "God doth judge, and pronounceth his Elect ungodly and unjustified, till they believe."[28]

In arguing this way Goodwin distances himself from the antinomian doctrine of eternal justification. He adds, "Take Antinomianism as you call it. All those glorious Truths of the Gospel, that a Man is justified from all Eternity, yea, and glorified from all Eternity too…. Men cleave to all these Truths, whereas other Truths are to be joined with them. *A Man before he believeth is unjustified*, therefore he is said to be justified by Faith; and he is a Child of Wrath until he believe."[29]

So Goodwin affirms against the Antinomians that faith marks the transition from wrath to grace. Elsewhere, he explicitly argues that according to the Word

of God, men remain unjustified until they exercise faith. Yet, "according to those secret Passages of his secret Will transacted with Christ, and to which he [alone] is privy, they are justified Persons before him."30 In the first two stages, the elect are justified in Christ as their federal head, but not personally. They themselves possess justification and all other blessings of redemption only after they exercise faith, in the context of the unfolding history of redemption. Goodwin calls this the "true and real act of justification."31 Insisting on this distinction, Goodwin refers to the "great mistake" of those who hold that faith is "a particular Evidence, and Apprehension of God's having already justified us, both from Eternity, and in Christ's bearing our sins."32 When Scripture speaks of justification by faith, not the first nor the second stage is meant, but the third: "We are in our own persons made true owners and enjoyers of it, which is then done at that instant when we first believe; which act is the completion and accomplishment of the former, and is that great and famous justification by faith which the Scripture so much inculcates, and almost only mentioneth."33

Thus to infer, as Trueman does, that Goodwin held to the form of eternal justification that posits faith as a realization of one's prior justification is misleading.34 Goodwin's self-conscious desire to distance himself from the Antinomians' understanding of eternal justification relates primarily to their view on the logical order between faith and justification, and not whether justification takes place in eternity. Moreover, he adds that while faith does give men knowledge of their eternal justification in Christ as their head, faith alone effects their transfer "from a state of Sin and Wrath, to a state of Righteousness and Favour…and this according to the Rules of God's revealed Will."35 Unquestionably, the evidence shows that Goodwin rejected the antinomian version of eternal justification, even though he held to an understanding of justification with an eternal dimension or aspect to it.36

Goodwin's three stages of justification have an important correlation to his doctrine of union with Christ, a doctrine that played a central role in the soteriology of the Reformed orthodox. The seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox argued that the goal of the covenant of grace is to bring sinners into union with Christ. Union with Christ played an especially significant role in the theology of Owen and Goodwin. For example, Owen argues that union with Christ is the "principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations."37 So, with regard to justification, union with Christ is the "ground of the *actual imputation* of his righteousness to [believers]."38 Goodwin likewise argues that union with Christ is the "fundamental constitution of a Christian."39 Indeed, union with Christ is the means by which Christians receive all spiritual blessings, which include both justification and sanctification.

Thus, Goodwin can suggest “all acts of God’s justifying us depend upon Union with Christ.”[40] Moreover, through union with Christ, the elect receive the “perfect Holiness of his Nature, to whom we are united, that we partake of the privileges of the Covenant of Grace.”[41] The concept of union with Christ, then, seems to occupy a central position in Goodwin’s soteriology, and just as justification has three stages, so too does Goodwin’s concept of union with Christ.

Like justification, union with Christ has reference to God’s immanent, transient, and applicatory acts. In the first place, then, union and justification are tied to the eternal covenant of redemption: “When Christ did but undertake for us, and took by Covenant our Sins off from us, and indented with and entered into Bond to God for our Debts, God then discharged us in his secret Purpose; and knowing Christ able and faithful, expected all from him.”[42] The second stage relates to the time when Christ performed His work of mediation on behalf of His elect. By virtue of union with Christ, according to the principle of representation, the elect both died and rose with Christ.

Finally, union with Christ in the life of believers takes place when “Christ by his Spirit knits us to him, and works Faith in us, to look towards that Satisfaction and Justification wrought for us.”[43] This is what Goodwin calls the “last Act” of God to unite sinners with Christ. Goodwin summarizes the basic relationship between union with Christ and justification thus:

> All these Acts of Justification, as they depend upon Christ, so upon our being one with Christ; and look what kind of Union there is, answerable is the Act of Justification past forthwith. From all Eternity we were one with Christ by Stipulation, he by a secret Covenant undertaking for us, and answerably that Act of God’s justifying us was but as we were considered in his Undertaking. When Christ died and rose again, we were in him by Representation, as performing it for us, and no otherwise; but as so considered we were justified. But now when we come in our Persons through him to be personally and in our selves justified, and receive the Atonement by Faith.[44]

The central question involved here seems to be what kind of union is not only necessary but also sufficient for personal justification. Is it enough to be chosen of God in Him, and given to Him as our federal head? In the Antinomians’ view, yes.[45] However, in Goodwin’s opinion, our union with Christ must be consummated by faith. The sinner’s justification can only take effect when he is united to Christ by faith. Goodwin’s doctrine of justification is highly nuanced. His three stages of justification must be understood in light of his doctrine of

union with Christ, which likewise has three stages. Thus, his doctrine of justification follows from the soteric significance of the union of the elect with Christ in the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis)*. The question remains, however, whether or not Goodwin's theology was influenced by the tenets of the Antinomians.

Barry Howson provides a helpful list of eight tenets of moderate Antinomians in the seventeenth century.46 Howson's third tenet is that faith follows justification.47 Howson quotes the Antinomian Henry Denne (1607–1660), who argued that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us "before the act of our Faith, and therefore necessarily without it."48 The Reformed orthodox typically held that faith was the antecedent condition of justification.49 In connection with this debate, Flavel quotes the basic argument of the Antinomians against the position of the Reformed orthodox: "You say, That to affirm Faith and Repentance to be the Conditions of the New Covenant required of us in point of Duty, antecedent to the benefit of the Promise, doth necessarily suppose that Christ hath not done all for us, nor purchased a right to Life for any; but only made way that they may have it upon certain terms, or merited that we might merit."50 In reply, Flavel says,

> Can you read the words I have recited out of blessed Burroughs, Owen, Pemble, Perkins, Davenant, Downame, yea, the whole Assembly of Reverend and Holy Divines, with multitudes more (who have all with one mouth asserted Faith to be the Condition of the New Covenant required on Man's part, in point of Duty; and that Men must believe before they can be justified; which is the very same thing with what I say, That it is antecedent to the benefit of the Promise) and not tremble to think of the direful charges you here draw against them? The Lord forgive your rash presumption.51

To that list of names, Flavel could have added Goodwin, who calls conditions of the covenant "necessary means of being made partakers of Christ, and Salvation."52 Goodwin aligns himself with Owen, who, with characteristic precision, would allow one to argue that faith is the condition of justification only if "no more be intended thereby, but that it is the duty on our part which God requireth, that we may be justified."53 Like Owen, Goodwin, while insisting on the free grace of the covenant, nevertheless argues that faith is required to receive God's grace (Eph. 2:8), though, of course, the Reformed orthodox argued that faith itself is the free gift of God.54 Therefore, Michael Horton rightly notes that Goodwin holds to the conditionality of the covenant, "placing him beyond any doubt as to his aversion to antinomianism."55

Goodwin's doctrine of justification is the outworking of a number of

interrelated doctrines in his theology. Time and eternity bear an important relationship to each other; what is true in the eternal realm ultimately becomes true in the temporal realm. The elect who are "in Christ" before the foundation of the world are the same elect who are "in Christ" in the context of the covenant of grace. Thus, Christ's undertaking for His people, rooted in the eternal covenant of redemption, finds its fulfillment when those individuals appropriate the benefits of Christ's redemptive work by exercising Spirit-wrought faith in the One who mediated on their behalf. In the same way that Goodwin's Christology is the logical outworking of the *pactum salutis*, so too is his soteriology. While maintaining against the Antinomians that faith precedes justification logically, he also stresses that our personal justification in time has an eternal antecedent in the works of God.

Maccovius on Eternal Justification Another Reformed theologian was held to advocate eternal justification long before Goodwin was accused of it—Johannes Maccovius. Alexander Comrie (1706–1774) and the English Baptist theologian John Gill (1697–1771) both refer to Maccovius's alleged position on justification from eternity as support for their own views.[56] Maccovius was a highly sophisticated theologian, and in his *Collegia* he gives the most detailed explanation of this question in the whole body of his writings.[57] He provides a detailed explanation, in the form of fifteen disputations, of the doctrine of justification.[58] The first disputation starts with a definition: "Justification is the act of God in which he accepts the sinner because of Christ into grace in such a way that he declares him righteous after having forgiven his sins and imputed Christ's righteousness unto him."[59] This definition does not speak about the time or moment of justification, but it does highlight the declarative character of justification. Subsequent to the definition, Maccovius holds that both the Hebrew *hitzdik* and the Greek *dikaioun* (commonly transliterated today as *tsadaq* and *dikaioō*) have a forensic meaning.[60] Moreover, justification may be viewed from either God's side or man's side.[61] The former he calls "active justification" (*justificatio activa*) and the latter, "passive justification" (*justificatio passiva*), respectively. God justifies (active voice); human beings are justified (passive voice).[62] Regarding active justification, Maccovius answers three questions. He discusses, first, the time or moment (*circumstantia temporis*) of justification; second, the two aspects (*partes*) of justification; and third, the propriety of justification.[63] The following will consider only Maccovius's view of the moment of justification, for that decides the question of whether justification is from eternity.

Maccovius argues that the moment of active justification can be seen either as

indefinite (justified in principle) or as definite (justified in personal experience).64 "Indefinite active justification" involves the logical order between faith and justification. Does faith precede justification, or does justification precede faith? Referring to Heidelberg University professor Daniel Toussain (Tossanus) (1541–1602), Maccovius maintains that justification precedes faith.65 Unlike Goodwin, here we have, remarkably, a "more traditional Orthodox theologian" who states explicitly that justification precedes faith.

However, according to both Maccovius and Toussain, justification is not the application of salvation, but is something that *is* applied to that end. Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622) argued that the Reformed doctrine of justification amounts to an internal contradiction. However, Maccovius responds that Vorstius confuses justification with its application and therefore imagines a contradiction where there is none. Maccovius further argues that the "elect are justified in Christ in respect to his impetration [mediation] before they were born; and so they are also justified and redeemed in Christ before they do believe. But later on he gives faith to his elect. And though faith is not without sincere conversion and though this faith puts conversion into clear light, nevertheless faith seeks its righteousness in Christ."66 Therefore, justification precedes faith; the elect are already justified before they believe.67 So when exactly are they justified? Does justification take place in time or in eternity? According to Maccovius, some theologians state that justification took place in eternity; others argue that justification takes place in time, precisely at the time that Christ was first promised to us as a Mediator (Gen. 3:15).68 Considering that defenders of justification from eternity invoke Maccovius in support of their position, one might expect him to hold to the first position. However, he chooses the second one. Active justification took place after the fall, when God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Hence, Maccovius argues in the following manner:

> This is sure: as being the Mediator and the meriting cause of our salvation Christ is the sole author of justification. But he has not been thus from eternity. But in order to be so, He is by God appointed to be the Mediator. In like manner we were not justified from eternity, although it was God's decree from eternity to justify us in time.69

Christ, the author of justification, accomplished salvation not in eternity but in time. Moreover, justification is not an act of Christ in His Godhead, but rather in His office as the incarnate Mediator. Because He received this office only in time (for the incarnation was a necessary prerequisite for this office),

justification cannot be said to be from eternity, even though God decreed Christ's mediatorial work from eternity. God's eternal decree to appoint the Son as the Mediator does not make Christ an eternal mediator, according to Maccovius. The same line of reasoning has to be applied to the doctrine of justification.[70] Subsequently, Maccovius refers to English theologian Anthony Wotton (1561–1626), who distinguished between immanent and transient acts (*acta immanentes & transeuntes*) and considers justification as a transient act of Christ, a middle stage in the movement from eternal election to justification in time. Thus, because every transient act is appointed toward creatures, justification cannot be from eternity.[71] So, Maccovius argues:

> We have to know that of all the deeds of God that aim for our salvation, predestination is the only immanent act in God. All other deeds of God, like justification, sanctification, adoption and redemption (which approximately includes the forgoing deeds) are reckoned to be transient acts. For these acts, together and separate, produce something, whether this be in a physical way or in a moral way, as in those which are justified, adopted and redeemed. It is common in the schools on the other side to state that predestination does not produce anything in him who is predestined.[72]

Note, in the first place, that Maccovius rejects the view of justification from eternity since he does not regard justification as an immanent act of God. Here he differs from Goodwin and William Twisse (1578–1646), whom he cites.[73] Justification can only be a transient act, which therefore can take place only in time.[74] In the second place, the above shows God's transient acts effectuate something in various ways. The causation is either physical or moral.[75] An example of physical causation is regeneration,[76] in which a true change takes place in the object. A moral cause, on the contrary, does not change the object itself, but rather the way in which the object stands related to others. For Maccovius and Wotton, justification is a moral cause.

Despite arguing that justification is not an immanent act, Maccovius maintains that justification took place at the giving of the Genesis 3:15 promise, rightly called "the mother promise" because it is the mother of all future promises. He asserts, "Active justification has happened when God promised us Christ as the Mediator."[77] This may, at first, appear odd. However, for Maccovius, justification is a juridical declaration, and this declaration of acquittal and forgiveness of sins is made known for the first time in the mother promise. The victory of the promised Mediator over the serpent implies the justification of those who believe in Him. In this promise, all believers are declared righteous, according to Maccovius.[78] The Reformed stress on the declarative character of

justification compels Maccovius to state that God's act of justification takes place in this common and public promise. Unlike, for example, the promise that the people of Israel would be freed from Egypt, the promise of justification is attended with the announcement of the forgiveness of sins and imputation of Christ's righteousness.[79]

Maccovius closes the first disputation (about the moment of justification) by mentioning some possible objections to his position. These objections do not so much concern justification from eternity but rather the argument that justification does not take place before the moment of actually believing.[80] The first objection is philosophical in nature: "But this seems to be absurd. Are men by this covenant indeed justified before they exist, when as yet they are without being, identifying traits, or affections?"[81] Maccovius responds that indeed a non-being cannot have or acquire any properties. Referring to a distinction conventional "in the schools" (i.e., in scholastic theology), he refutes the objection by observing that something can lack actual existence (*actu esse*) while nevertheless being the object of a cognitive act (*esse cognitum*).[82] In this last sense, every human being has an existence before birth, namely, as an *esse cognitum*, for he is known to God from eternity, Maccovius stresses, referring to Acts 15:18.[83] Therefore a person can be the object of God's act of justification even before birth, as an *esse cognitum*, that is, as existing in the mind of God.[84]

The scholastics defend this view in two ways, according to Maccovius: first, by referring to the character of a meritorious cause (*causa meritoria*). Examples of such a cause can be found in daily life: in contractual negotiations things can be promised even when they are not yet realized.[85] They have an *ens cognitum*, though not yet an *ens actu*, which is enough for trade. Commerce and society could not exist if one could not promise, for example, to deliver a product not as yet manufactured. So, just as a promise in society has binding force even for things that do not as yet have an actual existence, so also the mother promise can secure justification for human beings yet to be born. Second, Maccovius defends his position by appealing to the character of moral acts. Unlike physical acts, moral acts can be performed even though their object does not exist because it will exist in the future.[86] Moral acts do not produce their effects by a direct influence, like physical acts.[87] An example of such a moral act is imputation, which takes place in the mother promise:

> God imputed to Christ the sins of all the elect, which were, are, and will be, as soon as He promised Him to us as a Mediator. Nevertheless, Christ was at that moment not yet incarnated, although He was God. In like manner, God imputed the satisfaction and merit of Christ to all those whose sins He

> had transferred on Christ, whether they were actually in existence or still future. For at the same moment in which God transferred the sins of all the elect on Christ, he freed all the elect from them and imputed Christ's righteousness unto them.88

Therefore, Maccovius conceives of justification as a divine act that takes place in time, namely, in the giving of the mother promise immediately after the fall. In this promise, God declared all the elect justified for Christ's sake, though His work as mediator still had to be accomplished, and the elect had to be brought into existence.89

The second objection Maccovius addresses is theological in nature: "When the elect are justified even before their birth, how can it be true what is read in John 3:36, namely, that God's wrath is on everybody who does not believe? Some of the elect are not converted before their adulthood, like the apostle Paul. So, before his regeneration, was he then justified or under the wrath of God?"90 Maccovius responds with a quote from Augustine:

> That we are reconciled by the death [of the Son of God, Romans 5:9] should not be conceived or interpreted as if the Son has reconciled us with the Father in such a way that God then began to love those he hated before; but we are reconciled with a loving God, with whom we lived in enmity because of our sins.91

This formulation rests on the implicit distinction between God's unconditional "benevolent love" (*amor benevolentiae*) for His creatures, and His "love of approbation" (*amor complacentiae*), which He withholds from men while they are yet in their sins There is no change in God's *amor benevolentiae*, but His *amor complacentiae* is not experienced before the moment of regeneration and the first act of faith. Despite quoting Augustine to prove his point, Maccovius is not very clear here, for the question is not about the influence of Christ's death on our relationship with God, but the impact of our regeneration on this relationship. Maccovius agrees with the plain sense of John 3:36 but denies any temporal change in God. So Paul was indeed under the wrath of God before he believed, although God was (in His *amor benevolentiae*) not at enmity with him even before his regeneration.

So what is justification? For the most part, Reformed theologians have understood justification as the particular, individual acquittal of the believer, consequent to his act of faith in Jesus Christ. This view can be found, for example, in Herman Witsius (1636–1708).92 However, a number of British theologians, while not rejecting this definition, also view justification as an immanent act of God. William Twisse and William Eyre (1642–1660) took this

latter position. They defined justification as the non-imputation of sins and thus consider justification as from eternity.[93] Maccovius repudiates this view for two reasons. He not only limits justification to a transient act (*actus transiens*), but also argues that justification is not simply co-extensive with the forgiveness of sins. Besides the non-imputation of sins, the imputation of Christ's righteousness also belongs to justification, and these two parts form the essence of justification.[94] With this opinion, Maccovius represents the typical Reformed position on the parts of justification (i.e., double imputation). Therefore, most Reformed theologians rejected the view that justification is an immanent act of God.[95]

Besides the two views mentioned, there is a third, which Maccovius advances. As noted, Toussain answered Vorstius's criticism by arguing that he confused justification with its application. Maccovius does not consider justification in the context of the application to the believing sinner of the benefits Christ secured through His mediation.[96] Instead, justification is primarily a judgment pronounced on Christ and only subsequently on those who by faith are "in Christ." By distinguishing justification from the application of salvation, Maccovius can place it in the context of the proclamation of the *protoevangelium* and all subsequent promises.[97] Because the first promise was given immediately after the fall, the justification of the elect took place at that time, and therefore before their birth. Later promises of justification (e.g., Rom. 8:1) are only a reiteration or explication of the mother promise of Genesis 3:15.

Because Maccovius argued that justification precedes faith, many later theologians concluded that he held to justification from eternity. When Gill and Comrie, who defend justification as an immanent act of God, appeal to Maccovius, they misrepresent his view. It is clear that Gill failed to understand Maccovius. Gill refers to the distinction Maccovius makes concerning *ens actu* and *ens congnitum* and his distinction between moral and physical acts; however, he wrongly deduces that Maccovius considers justification as an *actus immanens*.[98] Theologians in the seventeenth century appear to understand the position of Maccovius better than did Gill in the eighteenth century. For example, antinomian theologian William Eyre advances the view of justification from eternity, but at the same time he admits that he cannot appeal to Maccovius for support.[99] Interestingly, Maccovius's position was not viewed in the seventeenth century as an innovation. Of the fifty accusations brought against him at the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619, none concerned the doctrine of justification.[100] Comrie, who was not aware of the content of the accusations, assumed that at least one of them had to do with justification from eternity and concluded that the Synod had accepted the doctrine because Maccovius was

cleared of all charges.[101] The Reformed stress on the declarative character of justification is connected by Maccovius with a stress on the importance of God's first promise in an unusual way, underlining that God's grace precedes any human activity and therefore, as an act of God, justification must be prior to faith.[102] Aware of the charge of antinomianism, Maccovius warns his readers not to confuse justification with its application. Justification itself does not happen by faith, but its application does.[103] Therefore, Maccovius fully endorses the necessity of faith as a human act.[104]

Setting Maccovius's view in the context of Goodwin's three stages, it appears that Goodwin used the word justification for something that belongs to stage 3 (application), whereas Maccovius uses the word for something that belongs to stage 2 (Christ's impetration or mediation). However, neither man located justification in stage 1, that is, in eternity. They agreed that justification proper is not an immanent act, and in that sense both denied justification from eternity.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that understanding the question of justification from eternity is more complicated than is often assumed, if for no other reason than there is no necessary connection between antinomianism and eternal justification. On the other hand, almost all Reformed orthodox theologians defend the view that in regard to justification there is a connection between God's acts in eternity and in time. In the case of Goodwin, this connection is expressed in terms of the covenant of redemption between God and Christ as the representative or federal head of all the elect. Nevertheless, both Goodwin and Maccovius argue that justification, properly speaking, is not an eternal, immanent act of God but a transient act in time and history. They do, however, differ in whether justification is the act of God toward the individual (Goodwin) or collectively, toward all the elect (Maccovius). For Maccovius, active justification is always a collective concept, and, thus, Goodwin and Maccovius disagree on the logical order of faith and justification.

Here, as in many doctrines, there is room for diversity among Reformed theologians. The idea of a pan-Protestant doctrine of justification can be pressed only so far, particularly when all of the details are considered. Regarding antinomianism, we should be careful not to make its teaching synonymous with justification from eternity, or even the view that justification precedes faith. Rather, on various grounds, Antinomians argued that God's act of individual or personal justification precedes faith, a view firmly rejected by both Goodwin and Maccovius, despite their own disagreements on the topic.

1. John Owen's response to Richard Baxter's charge that he held to justification from eternity. *Of the Death of Christ, and of Justification*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 12:596.

2. See G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 143–68.

3. Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1998), 28.

4. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 28.

5. The evidence that Crisp held to the doctrine of eternal justification is not so straightforward. For a detailed evaluation of Crisp's position on this question, see Gert van den Brink, *Herman Witsius en het Antinomianisme* (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2008), 66–86. See also Curt Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (PhD diss., Edinburgh University, 1983), 305–30; and "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael Haykin (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 185ff.

6. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 28; J. De Ruiter, "Naschrift," in *De Rechtvaardiging door het Geloof*, ed. Th. Van der Groe (Urk: de Vuurtoren 1978), 141; Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Non-Conformity 1689–1765* (London: Olive Tree, 1967), 60, 116, 133.

7. Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted* (London: Richard Bishop, 1643), 298: "I say, all the weight, and all the burden, and all that very sin it self, is long ago laid upon Christ; and that laying of it upon him, is a

full discharge, and a general release and acquittance unto thee; that there is not any one sin now to be charged upon thee. How can these two Propositions stand together, Thy sin is laid upon Christ, and yet thy sins lie upon thee?"

8. Besides that, Trueman states that the doctrine of justification from eternity minimalizes the person of Christ and the necessity of the salvation history. "John Owen's Dissertation on Divine Justice: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 105.

9. Chad van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1642–1652" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), 1:277.

10. Paul Chang-Ha Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty: Richard Baxter's Puritan Ecclesiology in Its Seventeenth-Century Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 159–60.

11. John Flavel, *Planelogia, a Succinct and Seasonable Discourse of the Occasions, Causes, Nature, Rise, Growth, and Remedies of Mental Errors* (London, 1691), 260. Cf. John Flavel, *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 3:413–92, 551–91.

12. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 318–19.

13. Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," 185.

14. Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 114.

15. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 5:374.

16. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 5:374.

17. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 3:9.

18. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 3:9.

19. *Impetration* is that part of salvation that is done by Christ in His mediatorial work. With respect to salvation, John Owen distinguishes between impetration and application: "By impetration we mean the meritorious purchase of all good things made by Christ for us with and of his Father; and by application, the actual enjoyment of those good things upon our believing;—as, if a man pay a price for the redeeming of captives, the paying of the price supplieth the room of the impetration of which we speak; and the freeing of the captives is as the application of it. Yet, then, we must observe, That all the things which Christ obtained for us are not bestowed upon condition, but some of them absolutely. And as for those that are bestowed upon condition, the condition on which they are bestowed is actually purchased and procured for us, upon no condition but only by virtue of the purchase. For instance: Christ hath purchased remission of sins and eternal life for us, to be enjoyed on our believing, upon the condition of faith. But faith itself, which is the condition of them, on whose performance they are bestowed, that he hath procured for us absolutely, on no condition at all." *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 10:223–24.

20. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), vol. 4, pt. 1:104.

21. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:104.

22. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:105. Cf. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 16.9.4.

23. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:105.

24. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:105.

25. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:106.

26. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:106.

27. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:106.

28. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:106–7.

29. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 5:17.

30. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:107. See also *Election*, in *The*

Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford (London, 1681–1704), 2:86.

31. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 2:129.

32. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 2:129.

33. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:107.

34. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 28.

35. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 2:130.

36. Peter Bulkeley holds to a similar position as Goodwin in *The Gospel-Covenant or the Covenant of Grace Opened* (London, 1646): "And thus we have shewed; first, That faith is the condition of the Covenant; secondly, Why faith is appointed to be the condition rather then Works; thirdly, It is the act, not the habit which is the condition on our parts; fourthly, What those acts of faith be, by which it brings us into Covenant, and enables us to walk in it" (321). See also 322: "I lay down this conclusion, according to the Scripture, That we are not actually justified, nor in a state of grace and salvation, before faith, before we believe; This I hope to prove by evidence of the word; only before I come to proof of it, to prevent mistake, observe how I speak of actual justification, whereas our justification may be considered either, First, as purposed and determined in the mind and will of God; Or secondly, as impetrated and obtained for us by the obedience of Christ; Or thirdly, as actually applied unto us, so as we may be truly said to be actually just in the sight of God; in the two former respects it is not denied; God purposed to justify us before the world was, and therefore much more before our faith; And the atonement and obedience which Christ hath performed for us, is also before our faith, and before we were born. But the question is whether this Righteousness wrought for us by Christ, be actually applied to a sinner before he believe; whether one, as yet not believing, be actually acquitting of his sin and accounted just and righteous before God."

37. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–53), 20:146.

38. Owen, *Works*, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:150.

39. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 3:347.

40. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 2:130.

41. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 3:347.

42. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:107.

43. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:107.

44. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:108.

45. Cf. Van den Brink, *Herman Witsius en het Antinomianisme*, 143–44; Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 117.

46. Barry Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions: The Question of Orthodoxy Regarding the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (c. 1599–1691)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 105–14.

47. Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions*, 107.

48. Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions*, 107. See also Henry Denne, *The Doctrine and Conversation of John Baptist* (London, 1642), 25; John Saltmarsh, *Sparkles of Glory, or, Some Beams of the Morning Star* (London, 1647), 190–91.

49. For example, Flavel argues: "An Antecedent Condition signifying no more than an Act of ours, which though it be neither perfect in every degree, nor in the least meritorious of the benefit conferred; nor performed in our own natural strength; yet according to the constitution of the Covenant, is required of us in order to the blessings consequent thereupon by virtue of the Promise: and consequently the benefits and mercies granted in the promise in this order are, and must be suspended by the Donor or Disposer of them, until it be performed. Such a Condition we affirm faith to be. But here again, Faith, in this sense is considered, 1. Essentially. Or, Organically and Instrumentally." *Planelogia*, 248–49. Responding to antinomian theology, he further maintains that "[w]e affirm faith to be an Antecedent Condition, or, *Causa sine qua non*, to the saving benefits of the new Covenant; and that it must go before them, at least in order of nature, which is that we mean, when we say Faith is the antecedent Condition of the New Covenant. And those that deny it to be so, as the Antinomians do, who talk of actually and personal Justification from

Eternity, or at least from the death of Christ." *Planelogia*, 250. See also Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.3.3.

50. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 260–61.

51. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 261.

52. Goodwin, *Election*, in *Works*, 2:65.

53. Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:113. He adds: "If it be intended that they are such a condition of the covenant as to be by us performed *antecedently* unto the participation of any grace, mercy, or privilege of it, so as that they should be the consideration and procuring cause of them,—that they should be all of them, as some speak, the *reward of our faith and obedience*,—it is most false, and not only contrary to express testimonies of Scripture, but destructive of the nature of the covenant itself." *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:113–14.

54. Goodwin, *Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, vol. 4, pt. 1:107, and pt. 3:154.

55. Michael S. Horton, "Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Reformed Tradition, 1600–1680" (PhD diss., Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Coventry University, 1995), 134.

56. See John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (London: Higham, 1839), pt. 2:205, 207, 239; and "The Doctrine of Justification Stated and Maintained," in *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts* (London: G. Keith, 1778), 3:163, 174–75; Alexander Comrie, *Brief over de Regtvaardigmaking des Zondaars* (Utrecht: Fisscher, 1889), 71–73. In this work, Comrie responds to an accusation by the Leiden professor Joan van den Honert (1693–1758), of teaching justification from eternity and hence antinomianism. Comrie argued that such a charge was oversimplistic, and his own stress on justification from eternity was not the entire doctrine of justification. See *Brief*, 110.

57. See Johannes Maccovius, *Collegia Theologica quae extant Omnia, tertio ab auctore recognita, emendata & plurimis locis aucta, in partes duas distributa* (Franeker: U. Balck, 1641). Recently, Maccovius's work *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules* (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), has been translated into English by Willem van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink, and Rein Ferwerda. On Maccovius's distinctions, see also Willem J. van Asselt, "The Theologian's Tool Kit: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) and the Development of Theological Distinctions in Reformed Theology," *The Westminster Theological Journal 68* (2006): 23–40.

58. The *Collegia* contains six parts: 1. *de praedestinatione*; 2. *de statu primi hominis ante lapsum*; 3. *de providentiae Dei*; 4. *de Justificatione*; 5. *de Mediatore en* 6. *tractat miscellaneas quaestiones*. The discussion of justification takes place on pp. 127–79.

59. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 128: "*Iustificatio est actus Dei, qua hominem peccatorem, gratis, propter Christum in gratiam suscipit, ita, ut peccatis remissis, ac Christi justitia imputata, eum justum pronunciet*." See also Maccovius, *Thesium Theologicarum per Locos Communes* (Franeker: U. Balck, 1641), 309–10.

60. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 128–29.

61. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 129: "*Haec actio Dei, nempe justificatio, consideratur, vel ex parte Dei, vel ex parte nostri*."

62. Note the titles of disputation 1 and 8: "*De circumstantia temporis Justificationis activae, sive ex parte Dei"* (128) and "*De eo, in quonam consistat justificatio passiva*" (153). The *iustificatio passiva* Maccovius describes as follows (153): "*Justificatio passiva est per fidem acceptio remissionis peccatorum propter satisfactionem Christi imputatam factae, & sortis inter sanctos propter justitiam Christi imputatam indultae*, Act. 26.vers.18." See also Maccovius, *Distinctiones et Regulae Theologicae ac Philosophicae* (Oxford: H. Hall, 1656), 124: "*Justificatio est alia activa, alia passiva. Verbalia in io, plerumque ita accipiuntur, iustificat enim Deus, & nos iustificamur*." The distinction between active and passive justification Maccovius finds in Trelcatius, Keckermann, and Twisse, among others. See *Collegia*, 423–25.

63. In the opinion of Maccovius, justification comprehends two parts: in the first place the forgiveness of sins and in the second place the imputation of Christ's righteousness. *Collegia*, 131.

64. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 129: "*Circumstantia Temporis ponitur a Theologis, vel indefinite vel definite*."

65. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 129: "*Indefinite, ut cum dicimur justificati, antequam fide donaremur, itemque antequam nati essemus*." For Tossanus see F. W. Cuno, *Daniel Tossanus der Ältere Professor der Theologie und Pastor (1541–1602)* (Amsterdam: Scheffer, 1898).

66. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 129: "*Sic hac de re Tossanus in Epist. ad Vorstium: Confundis, inquit, justificationem cum ejus applicatione, idcirco fingis tibi contradictionem, ubi nulla est contradictio: omnes enim electi in Christo sunt justificati, si meritum ipsius spectes, antequam sint nati, & sic antequam credamus, sumus justificati, & in Christo redempti. Sed postea suis electis dat fidem, quae licet non sit sine seria conversione, & ei praeluceat, justititam suam tamen quaerit fides in Christo*."

67. See also Maccovius, *Metaphysica Theoretico-Practica, editie in Opuscula Philosophica Omnia* (Amsterdam: L. & D. Elzevir 1660), 118: "*Nam quaeritur: utrumne justificatio nostri activa praecedat regenerationem: Resp. Ita est. Quemadmodum enim imputatum peccatum inhaerens est, ita & inhaerens justitia praesupponit justitiam imputatam. Accedit & hoc, quod vita spiritualis, quae est ipsa regeneratio, hauriatur ex Christo Ioh. 15. Oportet ergo prius nobis Christum imputari cum suis beneficiis, & nobiscum conjungi, antequam vita ista oriatur*."

68. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 129: "*Circumstantia Temporis ponitur a Theologis, vel indefinite vel definite. Indefinite, ut cum dicimur justificati, antquam fide donaremur, itemque antequam nati essemus…. Circa definitam circumstantiam Temporis discrepant Theologi; aliqui dicunt, nos justificatos esse ab aeterno; alii hoc ipso demum tempore, quo nobis Christus promissus est in Mediatorem, Genes.3.15*."

69. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 129: "*Certe, si Christus, quatenus ille Mediator est, & quatenus causa meritoria, justificationis solus author est, ab aeterno non fuit, sed ut esset, propositum Dei fuit ab aeterno: pari ratione, non eramus justificati ab aeterno, etamsi decretum fuisset apud Deum ab aeterno, de nobis justificandis in tempore*."

70. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 424: "*Ergo cum beneficium etiam justificationis nobis obtingat propter Christum Mediatorem, Christus Mediator fuerit prius necesse est. Atqui Christus Mediator ab aeterno non fuit, sed ut fieret in tempore, decretum apud Dei ab aeterno erat. Ergo etiam ab aeterno non sumus justificati active, licet ab aeterno Deus nos propter Christum justificare decrevit. Quando ergo factus est mediator? Resp. tum cum generi humano promissus est. Tum etenim peccata ipsi imputata sunt omnium, et per hoc omnes electi a peccato absoluti*."

71. Anthony Wotton, *De reconcilatione peccatoris* (Basel, 1624). Baxter regarded this work as one of the most thorough publications on this subject. See J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 246.

72. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 129–30: "*Praeclare hoc probat Wottonus Anglus, de Reconcil. part.1. l.1. c.3. num.12. Sciendum est, inquit, praedestinationem ex iis omnibus Dei actionibus, quae ad nostrum salutem pertinent, actionem in Deo esse immanentem. Reliquas autem omnes Dei actiones, cujusmodi sunt, Justificatio, Sanctificatio, Adoptio, &, quae has fere universas complectitur, Redemptio, in transeuntibus actionibus numerari. Nam hae quidem omnes & singulae ponunt aliquid, vel physice, vel moraliter saltem in Justificatis, Adoptatis, Redemptis. De praedestinatione autem tritum est in Scholis, eam nihil ponere in praedestinato*."

73. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 424: "*In eo autem variant Theologi, quando ista justificatio facta: Aliqui dicunt ab aeterno, quo Tuissus, Piscator inclinant*."

74. For the same conclusion about Maccovius's view see Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1998), 3:430; 4:49 (53–54); A. Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1872), 272.

75. Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 125: "*Iustificatio est actus Dei moralis, non realis. Duplex est actio Dei in peccatore. Una moralis, quae est iustificatio, Altera realis quae est regeneratio. Moralis, ut diximus, consistit in eo, ut nobis non imputet peccata, sed imputet iustitiam Christi. Realis in sublatione reali peccati*."

76. Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 133–34: "*Regeneratio est actus Dei realis. Dicitur realis, ut sit*

contradistinctia iustificationi, qui est actus moralis."

77. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 423: "*Activa justificatio facta est, quando nobis Deus promisit Christum in Mediatorem*."

78. The same interpretation of Genesis 3:15 is to be found in G. Voetius, *Catechisatie over den Heidelbergschen Catechismus* (Rotterdam: H. Huge, 1891), 585; L. Rijssen, *Summa Theologiae Elenctiae completa* (Edinburgh: G. Mosman, 1692), 224; Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum* (Utrecht: G. Vande Water, 1694), 3:8.57 (390).

79. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 423–24: "*Eo scilicet modo, quo activa liberatio Israelitarum ex Aegypto & Babylone, facta est active, quando fuit promissa, id est, antequam regiones illas unquam viderunt…. Resp. Respondeo ista plane non eodem modo habere. Nam cum Christus promissus fuit, tum statim factus est vas pro nobis, & nostra,inquam, omnium & singulorum*."

80. Maccovius, *Loci Communes Theologici, ex Thesibus…* (Franeker, 1650), 310: "*Objicitur: Justificatio sequitur fidem: nam fide justificamur: Ergo nemo justificatur, antequam credat*."

81. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 130: "*At videtur hoc absurdum; Nam hoc pacto homines justificarentur antequam essent, cum tamen ejus, quod non est, nulla sind accidentia, nullae affectiones*."

82. Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 174: "*Esse reale & esse Cognitionis, sive esse Cognitum, idem est quod esse rei & Obiectum. Ut omnes res fuerunt in Deo quantum ad esse cognitum, sed esse reale acceperunt in tempore*."

83. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 130–31: "*Resp. Ejus sc. quod nec actu esse habet, nec esse cognitum, ut in scholis loquuntur, nulla suns accidentia, nullae affectiones: At ita cadit Minor; Nam hominess antequam nascantur, habent esse cognitum ratione Dei, omnia enim opera novi ab omni aevo. Act. 15*."

84. Maccovius, *Loci Communes*, 311.

85. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 131: "*Et theologi hanc responsionem duplici probant ratione, prima petita a causa meritoria; Cujus causae haec est ratione, ut vim habeat, etiam cum non est actu, modo habeat esse cognitum, ut diximus. Cujus rei exempla sunt quam plurima in vita; nulla enim esset societas, nullum commercium inter homines, si promissa nihil efficerent, nisi postquam impleta sunt*."

86. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 131: "*Alteram rationem petunt ab actu Dei morali, cujus ratio aliquando ea est, ut sit ratione objecti, quod nondum est, sed quod futurum est*."

87. Maccovius, *Logica Liber 1*, in *Opuscula Omnia*, ed. Nicolaum Arnoldum (Amsterdam: L. & D. Elzevir, 1660), 9: "*Est causa alia Moralis, alia Realis. Moralis quae agit, suadendo, praecipiendo, consulendo, minitando, rogando, monendo, de aliquo bene vel male merendo. Realis, quae producit effectum vi sua*."

88. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 131: "*Imputavit Deus Christo omnium eletorum peccata, qui erant, sunt, & futuri, simul ac eum nobis in Mediatorem promisit; At Christo nondum homo erat, ut ut esset Deus: pari ergo ratione imputavit Deus Christi satisfactionem & meritum omnibus, quorum peccata in Christum transferebat, sive praesentibus, sive futuris. Nam quo tempore omnium electorum peccata in Christum transferebat, eodem omnes electos ab iisdem liberabat, & justitiam ejus ipis imputabat*." See also Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 127–28: "*Iustitia nobis imputata est moraliter, non physice. Quaeritur an iustitia sit in nobis? Resp. Non Physice, hoc est inhaerenter; sed moraliter, hoc est per imputationem*."

89. Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 90: "*Imputatio non est actus Physicus sed moralis. Proinde non requiritur ut obiectum sit praesens, sed tantum ut sit certo futurum*."

90. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 131: "*Objicitur 2. Si justificantur omnes electi antequam nascantur, Ergo etiam antequam regenerantur; contingit etiam aliquos electos, ut Paulum, in adultiori demum aetate regenerari; at hoc videtur inconveniens: Nam si tales justificati, quomodo hoc universaliter erit verum, quod Joh. 3.36. dicitur. Qui non credit, ira Dei manet super ipsum*."

91. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 131: "*Respondet ad hoc Augustinus in Joh. Tract.10 Quod conciliati sumus per mortem, non sic audiatur, non sic intelligatur, quasi ideo nos reconciliaverit ei Filius, ut jam amare inceperit quos oderat, sed nos jam Deo diligenti, reconciliati sumus, cum quo propter peccatum inimicitias habebamus*." For the same objection from John 3:36 see Maccovius, *Loci Communes*, 312; however, there Maccovius responds with a reference to Calvin, not Augustine. See also Maccovius, *Collegia*, 425.

92. Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum*, 3.8.51 (387)—reprinted in English as *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), which includes introductions on the life and covenant theology of Witsius by Joel R. Beeke and J. I. Packer ([3]–[43]); *Animadversiones Irenicae* (Utrecht: G. vande Water, 1696), 131—available in English as *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, Under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians*, trans. Thomas Bell (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807).

93. William Eyre, *Vindiciae Justificationis Gratuitae* (London: E. Forrest, 1654), 63; William Twisse, *Vindiciae Gratiae Potestatis ac Providentiae Dei* (Amsterdam, 1632), 1:2.25 (194): "*Remissio peccatorum si quidditatem inspicias nihil aliud est, quam punitionis negatio, aut volitionis puniendo negatio. Sit ergo peccata remittere nihil aliud, quam nolle punire, ut actus immanens in Deo, fuit ab aeterno*."

94. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 128, 131, 444–54. F. Turretini, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae Pars Secunda* (Edinburgh: Lowe, 1847), 16.4 (577–79).

95. See, for example, Rijssen, in Heppe, *Reformierte Dogmatik*, 443; Turretini, *Institutio*, 16.9.3.

96. Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 126: "*In oratione dominica, dum petimus remissionem peccatorum, non petimus actum eius, sed applicationem & sensum. Disceptant Theologi, si, inquiunt, remittuntur nobis peccata unico actu, cur ergo petimus remissionem fieri in oratione dominica. Resp. Petimus quoad applicationem & sensum, non quoad actum*." See also Maccovius, *Loci Communes*, 310.

97. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 155.

98. Gill, *Body*, 205–7, 239.

99. Eyre, *Vindiciae Justificationis Gratuitae*, 63; Twisse, *Vindiciae Gratiae*, 1:2.25 (194): "*Remissio peccatorum si quidditatem inspicias nihil aliud est, quam punitionis negatio, aut volitionis puniendo negatio. Sit ergo peccata remittere nihil aliud, quam nolle punire, ut actus immanens in Deo, fuit ab aeterno*."

100. For these accusations see Willem van Asselt, "On the Maccovius Affair," in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

101. Comrie, *Brief*, 37–38.

102. Maccovius, *Collegia*, 153: "*Deus enim Spiritu suo Sancto & fide neminem donat, nisi justificatum*."

103. Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 126.

104. Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 127: "*Fides actualis iustificat, non habitualis*."

Chapter 9

Thomas Goodwin's Christological Supralapsarianism

> *And he was first ordained for these higher ends than our salvation is.*
>
> —THOMAS GOODWIN[1]

> *For the reparation of man is everywhere in the Scripture declared to be the end of Christ's taking flesh.*
>
> —JOHN OWEN[2]

Like all theologians, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) addressed certain doctrines in more detail than others, and one topic examined prominently in his writings is the much-discussed doctrine of election. Goodwin is commonly believed to have been a supralapsarian. However, Michael Horton claims that Goodwin was "an infralapsarian Calvinist,"[3] but supports this claim by referring to a section in Goodwin's writings where, in fact, Goodwin is arguing quite the opposite, namely, for a supralapsarian position. Carl Trueman is closer to the truth when he contrasts the infralapsarianism of John Owen (1616–1683) with the "more vigorously supralapsarian theology of…Goodwin."[4]

This chapter will examine Goodwin's doctrine of election in a way that tries to avoid overly technical language. It may surprise the reader to suggest that the infralapsarian/supralapsarian question could be discussed simply—especially since Goodwin did not always speak as clearly as others, such as Calvin—but enough secondary literature exists on this subject for the interested student to seek out a more technical discussion.[5] Of course, not all scholars have fully understood the debate in question, and in our judgment, at least, the Westminster Standards, particularly the Confession of Faith, do not decide the issue in favor of either view.[6]

Goodwin may best be described as advancing a christological supralapsarian position that has in view the glory of the God-man, Jesus Christ, who unites His church to Himself.[7] Along with showing that Goodwin was a supralapsarian, this chapter will also examine *why* he was a supralapsarian, which will go to the

very heart of his Christology—hence the term "christological supralapsarianism." Goodwin's comments on Ephesians 1:4–5 will be noted, and then his view on the order of the decrees found in his lengthy work on election will be discussed. A section will follow on the goal or end of election, namely, union with the triune God through Jesus Christ.

Election (Ephesians 1:4) The words of Ephesians 1:4, according to Goodwin, "have bred more controversy than any so few words almost in the whole Bible."[8] For that reason, he provides a fairly detailed defense of the Reformed doctrine of election, keeping in mind that even among Reformed theologians areas of disagreement exist on the precise details of how to best understand the doctrine.[9]

With the Remonstrants or Arminians[10] in mind, though he does not name them explicitly, Goodwin notes that some have understood God's choosing of individuals to be based upon foreseen faith, because individuals are "in Christ" only by faith.[11] Goodwin contends that had this been Paul's intended meaning, then God would have chosen not individual persons but graces. Besides that, as the text shows, God has chosen individuals in order that they may be holy and blameless, not because they are holy and blameless. Moreover, for Goodwin, faith "may be considered as part of sanctification" (1 John 5:1; 2 Thess. 2:13).[12]

Showing that Reformed theologians approached this text differently, Goodwin describes one view put forward by "our divines" whereby persons are said to be elected "in Christ" but "to be in Christ," that is, as an eternal precondition not to their salvation, but only to their sanctification.[13] These expositors join "in Christ" with the words that follow: "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." In his commentary on Ephesians, Paul Baynes (1573–1617), whom Goodwin highly esteemed, also notes this viewpoint among expositors: "Some make this [in Christ] not to be referred to that action of election, but to the end, in this sense; He hath chosen us in Christ, that we should be holy, that is, he hath chosen us that we should be holy in Christ."[14] Like Goodwin, Baynes rejects this opinion. In Goodwin's view, although there is much to commend this interpretation, it does not capture the whole of the apostle's thought. First, the text simply does not say "to be in him," but only "in him," and there is no compelling reason why the words "to be" should be inserted. Second, the words "in him" are joined most naturally with "before the foundation of the world," which shows that election "in Christ" took place in eternity. Goodwin then makes reference to one of his favorite Protestant, scholastic theologians, Girolamo Zanchi, who distinguishes between what God does "in Christ" and what God does "through Christ." God's acts "in Christ" have reference to

immanent acts of God concerning the elect transacted between the Father and the Son before the world was created. The words “through Christ” denote God’s transient acts that are performed by Christ on behalf of His people. “So,” argues Goodwin, “God redeemeth through Christ, justifieth through Christ, and saveth through Christ; but he chooseth in Christ.”15

The concept of being “in Christ” in eternity past, when the Son was not yet incarnate as the God-man, raises a number of christological questions that Goodwin is careful to answer. In the first place, Christ was not the cause of election.16 That prerogative belonged to the Father. Christ could not predestinate since He Himself was predestined (1 Peter 1:20). Goodwin notes that as the mediator, Christ “did not choose so much as one man.”17

To explain this concept, Goodwin insists upon the distinction between being elected “with Christ” and “in Christ.” The elect were chosen “with Christ” at the same time that Christ was chosen; the elect were also chosen “in Christ” as their representative head. Thus, Christ was a common or “publick” person18 not only in dying for His people, but also in being elected for His people.

This raises an important question: How can Christ act as a common person or representative head before His incarnation? Goodwin admits that “some divines” agree that Christ acted as a common person in His death and resurrection. “But, say they, in the act of choosing, how should he be considered as a Common Person, in that he did not then exist as God-man?”19 Goodwin answers this by affirming, first, that the Son was with the Father in eternity and had knowledge of His election as the God-man. Next, the Son, as the object of election, which included knowledge of His incarnation, undertook in eternity to be a common person as head of the elect. This must necessarily have taken place when believers were elected in eternity. Hence, referring to Proverbs 8:23 (“I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was”), Goodwin argues that according to these words, the Father appointed the Son, or “set him up from the beginning, as bearing and sustaining the person of God-man… before God, who reputed him such.”20 The Son promised to perform His work of mediation as the head of the elect and is, then, the head of election; “in the order of nature elected first, though in order of time we were elected with him. In the womb of election he, the Head, came out first, and then we, the members.”21 For that reason, Paul describes Christ as the “firstborn” (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15), a title given peculiarly to Christ as the God-man who acts as head of His people in election. Believers are never considered as “elect” apart from Christ. In the same way, the Son, as the Second Person, was not chosen by one act to become man, and then by another act to be a common person, but rather as He was chosen to be the God-man he was necessarily chosen to be the

God-man who is head of elect humanity.[22]

The election of Christ as head of His people occurs in the context of a covenant, which, in Goodwin's view, is an agreement on terms between two parties.[23] The Son agreed to undertake, as the covenant head, to work in His people all of the terms God required of them, namely, to be holy and blameless. The Son represents His people in eternity, and so all spiritual blessings are "virtually given" to the elect (2 Tim. 1:9); that is, they actually received these blessings before the foundation of the world. For that reason, the salvation of the elect rests on a "sure foundation given…in election," not simply because of God's love, but also because He loved us in Christ, "so that now we are to run the same fortune, if I may so speak, with Christ himself forever, our persons being made mystically one with his. [Indeed], we are chosen in Christ, and therefore are in as sure a condition…as Christ himself."[24]

Predestination (Ephesians 1:5) Ephesians 1:5 continues the theme of election, but under a different word: predestination. In Goodwin's mind these two terms are not strictly synonymous. The differences between them provide the requisite context for discussing the order of the decrees. Goodwin claims that "to choose" means to single and cull out from a common lump, whereas "to predestine" has in view to foreordain to some end.[25] Paul Baynes likewise posits a distinction between the two terms. "Predestination," according to Bayne, involves a decree to an end through means. "Election" involves the end, but predestination has in view the means. Baynes also remarks that election refers to God's will, but predestination points to God's understanding (i.e., of how to accomplish His will).[26] Goodwin certainly seems to have Bayne's work in mind—he often speaks of "holy Baines"[27]—and agrees with his basic line of argument, with some minor differences. Election is a decree concerning the end, but in Goodwin's view, "it does eminently note forth a singling…out some persons with a special and peculiar love from others of the same rank and condition."[28] In election, then, God prefers some instead of others; election refers to the mass of persons from which (*terminus a quo*) the elect are chosen, but predestination refers to the state to which (*terminus ad quem*) the elect are ordained.[29] In election, believers are never considered separate beings in themselves; instead, the elect are considered collectively "in Christ" at God's first act of choosing. Predestination "imports a second act or ordaining [believers] to a glorious well-being in him, as the end God means to bring [the elect] to."[30] One of those ends, as Ephesians 1:5 says, includes adoption. To be "in Christ" (election) necessarily provides the context for receiving those benefits that are "through Christ" (predestination).[31] What will become clear is the importance of this distinction

in understanding the various lapsarian positions espoused by Goodwin and his Reformed orthodox predecessors and contemporaries.

Another christological issue presents itself that provides a further context for Goodwin's supralapsarianism. Goodwin refers to "Christ" in the eternal context, i.e., before the Son had assumed a human nature. He does this because the Son, according to the terms of the eternal covenant of redemption according to which He acts as head for His people, undertakes to assume flesh for the purpose of reconciliation. But reconciliation is not the primary purpose for the Son's incarnation, and in fact, the Son's incarnation was not decreed on the supposition of the fall.[32] Invoking the difference between election and predestination, Goodwin insists that to say that the Son of God assumed flesh only because of man's sin is to make Christ subject to His people.[33] Rather, Christ is the end of election and all other things. At this point, Goodwin makes an important christological assertion, namely, that in relation to the decree that He should become incarnate, Christ's person takes precedence over His work. The Second Person was not principally ordained so that sinners might be saved by the benefits of His meritorious work. These benefits "are all far inferior to the gift of his person unto us, and much more the glory of his person itself. His person is of infinite more worth than they all can be of."[34] Hence, the term "christological supralapsarianism" calls attention to what may be the focal point of Goodwin's theology and certainly represents a different way of thinking than that of Calvin, Owen, and others like them.[35]

However, Goodwin refrains from discussing the question about what might have happened had Adam not fallen.[36] Goodwin simply wants to affirm that in decreeing that His Son should assume our flesh-and-blood human nature, the Father not only had regard to our need of a redeemer, but also

> looked upon that infinite glory of the second Person to be manifested in that nature through this assumption. Both these ends moved him; and of the two, the glory of Christ's person, in and through that union, had the greatest sway, and that so as even redemption itself was subordinated to, and ordained for the glory of his person, as the end of all first and chiefly intended.[37]

God, because of His omniscience, had in view at once the election of Christ and the elect, Christ's work of redemption, and everything else that would come to pass according to God's decree. Of all the projects that God "had most in his eye," i.e., what had the place of preeminence in God's decree, was Christ and the glory of His person. In other words, God's "chief end was not to bring Christ into the world for us, but us for Christ…. And God contrived all things that do

fall out, and even redemption itself, for the setting forth of Christ's glory, more than our salvation."[38] The natural relation between the Father and the Son strengthen Goodwin's contention; the Son of God dwelling among us as man possesses a degree of loveliness that exceeds His work of redemption, for His work of mediation is accidental (i.e., not necessary or essential), whereas His person is both essential and absolute. "And therefore," says Goodwin, "to have ordained [the incarnation] for this work only, had been to have lowered and debased [his person]."[39] Moreover, Christ is God's natural Son, and the elect are sons only by adoption. Goodwin connects the privilege of adoption that believers receive to Christ's person and not His work. However, one should always be careful, especially in Goodwin's case, not to separate these two aspects of Christology. There is a priority of Christ's glory over our salvation. Indeed, the whole of God's decrees were set up with this purpose, that Christ should be the end of them all. With these considerations from Ephesians 1:4–5 in mind, the question of the order of decrees comes into focus.

The Order of Decrees

Contrary to Horton's contention that the infra/supralapsarian debate was about the means to the end, the actual debate was over the logical order of the decrees.[40] Goodwin takes as "generally acknowledged" the distinction between the end and the means. He argues for the position that in regard to the end, God viewed mankind as unfallen in His election of human beings, but as fallen in His decrees as to the means to that end.[41] However, Goodwin recognizes that what is meant by the end and the means needs explication. The end is either God's glory, which Goodwin calls the "supreme" or "ultimate end," namely, the glorious perfection God intended for the elect.[42] The perfection of Christ's elect is what Goodwin has in mind when he argues that the decree regarding the end was not upon consideration of the fall.[43] However, the decree of the means to the "ultimate end," that is, the means by which the elect are brought to perfection in glory, considered man as fallen.

Goodwin identifies the position of the pure supralapsarians: "The pure superlapsarian [*sic*] he takes into the means to this end, the creation, and the permission of the fall, and calls them means to bring about that intention or decree to that ultimate end or glory specified."[44] However, Goodwin argues that means refers to what Christ, as redeemer of God's elect, performed for His people, otherwise known as transient works as opposed to immanent works. The soteric benefits of Christ's work are "preparations unto glory" (Rom. 9:23; Eph. 2:10).[45] These means that prepare God's elect for glory "presuppose a fall."[46]

Adam, in his pre-fall estate, possessed a natural, inherent holiness. This holiness was not a means that prepared him for election glory, however, because it lacked a christological base. Nor was Adam's sin a means to the possession of such glory, but rather "a mere…passage through which election wrought itself into a new enlargement…and magnifying of the grace…towards the elect…considered as sinners."[47] Thus, fallen sinners receive redemptive grace in order to bring about the ultimate end, namely, their glorification. However, there is a prior grace (i.e., election itself) wherein the elect are considered as unfallen. Goodwin is advancing the argument that creation and permission of the fall are acts of God's providence and not direct means to the "ultimate end." Means, therefore, have reference to Christ's redemptive work; they have an immediate influence in bringing the elect to glory. Accordingly, Goodwin argues that in the decree as to the end, God considered man as unfallen. He cites the German Reformed orthodox theologian Amandus Polanus (1561–1610):

> God in his Decree of Election, did behold (or look upon) his Elect, as the End he predestinated them unto, so as men absolutely in common, without

> all consideration of Qualities in them. But if we consider the Means leading to the End, so he looked upon men, not as in their upright Condition (afore the Fall) but as they would be corrupt, of and in themselves, by the Fall, and falling headlong by their own default into Eternal Death.[48]

The issue, notes Goodwin, is not whether election has reference to the means. Rather, the controversy is whether God's decree regarding both the end and the means was pitched "either wholly upon man considered in the mass of *creability* [i.e., potential human beings, yet to be created as such] afore the fall, or wholly upon the mass of mankind considered and viewed first as *fallen* into sin."[49] Upon Goodwin's reading of various authors, he recognizes that many "do judge it incompatible that both should stand."[50] Regarding the compatibility of both views, Goodwin argues that both "conditions were at once viewed by God, so that one was neither first nor second to the other in time."[51] In an attempt to make "both stand," Goodwin comments:

> God having all afore him in his immense Understanding, had in his purpose of Election to the End, a respect unto Man considered as *unfallen*, but in that to these *Means* unto Man considered as *fallen*, and decreed both, and all in one and the same determination of his Divine Will.
>
> That there have been some eminent Divines that have gone about to reconcile those different Opinions, Whether Men fallen or unfallen were the Object of Predestination, may be well known among them that are versed in this Controversy.[52]

Both the end and the means were in God's mind at once; "neither had a priority or a posteriority."[53] In the divine mind and will, Goodwin argues nonetheless that the decree to the end, in which man is considered as unfallen, is the initial starting point (*terminus a quo*). Goodwin refers to the German Reformed scholastic Bartholomäus Keckermann (c. 1572–1609), who argues similarly that the decree to elect falls under a twofold consideration. First, regarding the end (i.e., eternal life), "the fall was not necessary, because the fall was not a means thereof, but rather an impediment."[54] Second, the decree to elect may also be understood with respect to man fallen, which God foresaw, as the means. Election, with a view to redemption, "necessarily includes a respect and consideration of the fall."[55] Goodwin makes a crucial distinction between election and predestination, as noted above. Election has reference to the end; thus, in election God decrees to give men eternal life without consideration of the fall. However, predestination falls under God's decree of man considered as in sin, or fallen. Predestination, then, involves the means to the end. Therefore, the infra/supralapsarian debate cannot have in view only predestination, and

whether man is considered as fallen or unfallen. To do that is to misread Goodwin's position, because election and predestination are not synonymous in his schema.

Goodwin's supralapsarianism is further revealed in his distinction between love and mercy. When God shows love to a creature He does so "not under the consideration of fallen, but *in that pure mass as yet not fallen.*"[56] Love necessarily precedes mercy. Thus, God shows mercy to fallen creatures in order to show how He loved them when they were yet unfallen, "and therefore he lets them fall into sin, that so he might be merciful."[57] Based on his distinction between election and predestination, Goodwin makes clear that election was not an act of mercy, but of love.[58] God certainly also decreed to show mercy, but election is strictly an act of love. In fact, Goodwin remarks that all of God's attributes are subjected to His love.[59] God has mercy on some and not others because He loved some and not others. God shows His love in the mediator, Jesus Christ, who in His human nature personified the love the Father has for the church. It was love that "drew him from heaven to the womb, and from the womb to the cross; and it kept him upon the cross…. It was his love that held him there."[60] The love that was in Christ's heart—speaking of His human nature—is certainly less than God's love since the finite cannot comprehend the infinite; nevertheless, "if there were infinite worlds made of creatures loving, they would not have so much love in them as was in the heart of that man Christ Jesus."[61] The love that God and Christ have for the church manifests itself in the salvation of the elect. In his work on election, Goodwin shows that election involves the union of the elect with God and Christ; union is the preeminent spiritual blessing that flows out of election.[62]

Union with God and Christ A major theme in Goodwin's theology concerns the glory of Jesus Christ. God elected the Son to be the God-man for higher ends than the salvation of mankind. The elect were chosen to be Christ's delight, but Christ was elected to be the God-man for the delight of God. In this way, God beholds the image of Himself in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15–18). In the person of Jesus Christ, God communicates Himself in a "high, superior way, as could no way have been otherwise communicated to mere creatures."[63] This end, as noted above, far transcends the end of Christ being mediator for His people. As the chosen God-man, Christ is endowed with royalty to be the sovereign end of all. In other words, Christ was "predestined, for the dignity of himself; but we, for God's glory and Christ's."[64] Christ's glory does not depend, in the first instance, on the glory He receives from His redeemed people, but on the dignity of His person.

Christ sustains a twofold relation to the elect, that of head and of Savior. Christ is a head to His people as they are considered apart from the fall (*in massa pura*). Christ is considered as Savior to His people as they are viewed as fallen. Goodwin sums up his position on this matter in relation to the decrees thus:

> And these two relations of Christ, of head and Saviour, are simultaneous with God's election of us…and neither afore nor after, neither in time (for so no decree in God is afore or after another), but not in order, as to our understanding. For he could not be our head but there must be his correlate, his body; and so of the other, of being a redeemer. Neither had Christ been ordained to either, had it not been for us and our salvation. But still the election of Christ's person remains in the primary and first intention of it absolute, and for itself, and for higher ends than these which are specified; and that did not depend at all on us or our election.[65]

Goodwin makes clear, again, that the glory of Christ's person retains the preeminent place in terms of the end of creation. But, as far as the elect are concerned, the supreme end of election is God's choosing believers to a "supernatural union with himself, and communication of himself."[66] The end goal for believers is union with the triune God. Goodwin makes reference to the maxim that "what is last in execution is first in intention…. And…you see, it is last in execution, he chose us for himself; that was his primitive intention; and he presents us to himself, as last in execution."[67] God's union with believers has, as expected, a distinctive christological focus. Before God could communicate Himself to mere men, the hypostatic union must take place whereby the man Christ Jesus, who is the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29), enjoys the highest union possible with God because He is both God and man. The incarnation makes possible a "super-creation union" between the elect and God. The height of salvation is not justification or sanctification but union with God.[68] Goodwin uses John 17:20–26 as his exegetical basis for understanding the nature of the union between God and men.

In His high priestly prayer in John 17, Christ asks His Father that He may enjoy a mystical union with those whom the Father has given to him.[69] Other requests are made, but the mystical union between Christ and the church is the "grand subject" of His requests, "the ocean all the other run into."[70] But what does Goodwin mean by "mystical union"? The main burden of Christ's prayer is not that the saints should enjoy union with one another, though that is implied in the text, but rather that believers may enjoy a union with the Father and with the Son, because the Father and Son are in them (John 14:20; 1 John 4:15). The union that the elect share with Christ and God is the highest union a creature is

capable of, apart from the union of Christ's two natures. This union was chief in the apostle Paul's mind: "that I may win Christ, and be found in him" (Phil. 3:8–9). Goodwin shows the priority of union with Christ and God by contrasting that union with other soteric benefits:

> You pray for redemption and forgiveness of sins, &c., and you do well, for ye have need on it; and to sinners, when they are heavy laden and burdened with their sins, it is that which is first objected and laid before them by the Spirit in the word; but yet let me tell you, there is a thing behind that is more remote and further off, and hidden to our thoughts at first, and that is, union with Christ and God, which in the utmost enjoyment of it will take place in the other world, when sin shall be forgotten.[71]

There is a definite eschatological priority of union with Christ and God in Goodwin's theology. He does not minimize justification or sanctification, as his *Works* make clear, but there is no doubt Goodwin thought that God's supernatural communication of Himself through Christ was the highest and most glorious spiritual blessing that believers received, all of which is the fruit of election in Christ.

Conclusion

Thomas Goodwin's views on the order of God's decrees are best understood as a christological form of supralapsarianism. He, more than perhaps any of his British contemporaries, had an intense focus on the glory of the God-man, Jesus Christ. All things are subordinate to Him, including the salvation of the elect. The incarnation is the great act of God who delights in the man Christ Jesus, who is the visible image of the invisible God. Goodwin might even say that Christ's incarnation brought more glory to Himself than His death and resurrection.72 In terms of election and predestination, Goodwin makes an important distinction between the two terms. God's election of individuals in Christ, their head, is based on a supralapsarian order of the decrees; that is, they are elected as unfallen. But predestination has in view the means to the end—the so-called transient acts of Christ's mediation—and so individuals are represented in Christ, their Savior, as fallen. Anthropocentrically speaking, the *telos*, or end, of God's decrees is the union of the elect with God and Christ, which finds its consummation in heaven. That which is last in execution is first in intention, and so union with God and Christ may be called the eminent blessing bestowed upon the elect. In summary, these words from Goodwin appropriately distill the basic argument of this chapter:

> Much less were Christ's merits considered as any motive unto God. They are but actions which are means of Christ's glory, and so far less than the glory of his person, and so are to him but as God's works are to himself. It was therefore the glory of his person alone that can, in the business we now speak of, be any way called a motive.73

Scottish theologian Robert Leighton (1611–1684) may have decried the fact that some "learned men" talked "presumptuously about the order of the Divine decrees," but surely in the case of Thomas Goodwin something more noble was at work. The glory of Christ was the great motive behind his argument for his particular construction of supralapsarianism. Whether one agrees with him or not, it seems hard to fault Goodwin for his desire to highlight the glory of the person of Christ and the sovereign act of God whereby the elect are brought into union with their Maker and Redeemer.74

1. Thomas Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1864; repr. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 9:94.

2. John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–53), 19:37.

3. Michael Horton, "Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Reformed Tradition, 1600–1680" (PhD diss., Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Coventry University, 1995), 66.

4. Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 138.

5. For those unacquainted with the terms "infralapsarianism" and "supralapsarianism," the question in its most basic form focuses on whether God decreed to elect man above the fall (*supra lapsum*) or below the fall (*infra lapsum*). See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 292.

6. As John Murray writes: "The Confession is non-committal on the debate between the Supralapsarians and the Infralapsarians and intentionally so, as both the terms of the section and the debate in the Assembly clearly show. Surely this is the proper reserve in a credal document." *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 4:209. This chapter should confirm that a "vigorous" supralapsarian like Goodwin could affirm the basic content of chapter 3—"Of God's Eternal Decree"—in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Confession is simply not exact enough on this question to decide it in favor of any of the parties, including the hypothetical universalists. Thus, we are not quite persuaded by John Fesko's position that the infralapsarians prevailed at the Westminster Assembly. See Fesko, "The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism: Calvin and the Divines," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century, Volume 2: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (2004; repr., Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2005), 2:497–501. Instead, on the outcome at the Assembly, we prefer the position advanced by Derek Thomas; see "The Westminster Consensus on the Decree: The Infra/Supra Lapsarian Debate," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2009), 3:267–90.

Richard Muller is currently writing an in-depth treatment of predestination and election among the post-Reformation Reformed orthodox, and the reader is urged to be patient and wait for his treatment of these issues, which will no doubt bring more clarity to a topic that has not always been dealt with in a manner that does justice to its complexity. For a preview of Muller's research, see "Revising the Predestination Paradigm: An Alternative to Supralapsarianism, Infralapsarianism, and Hypothetical Universalism (lectures, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dyer, Indiana, November 5–7, 2008).

7. For a modern defense of christological supralapsarianism, see Edwin Christian van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). On p. 5 he notes that while christological supralapsarianism is "the minority position in Western theology, [it] experienced something of a resurgence in nineteenth-and twentieth-century theology, when major theological figures like Friedrich Schleiermacher, M. J. Scheeben, Karl Barth, and Karl Rahner embraced this view." We do not wish to suggest, however, that Goodwin's position can be simply equated with the aforementioned theologians. There are similarities but also important differences, which we cannot address in this short chapter.

8. Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1864; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 1:65.

9. As Francis Turretin notes, "The opinions even of orthodox themselves vary." *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 4.9.1. Some, however, posit divides that are exaggerated. For example, see Oliver Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 34–55. Crisp considers only a few confessional statements, which do not do justice to the various technical points in the debate. This is especially true of his reading of the mid-sixteenth-century documents. His reading of Turretin could be questioned on the grounds that Turretin was not writing a positive exposition of his view on a number of issues but rather an elenctical system that is by nature defensive. Furthermore, using Heinrich Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* raises further questions since Heppe was sometimes quite selective. There is also no interaction with Salmurian primary sources. His dichotomy of a "conservative Reformed position" and a "moderate Reformed position" on the election of Christ lacks sufficient evidence to warrant such terminological constructions.

10. On the position of Jacob Arminius, for example, see "Certain Articles to Be Diligently Examined

and Weighed," in *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:718–19. In his schema, Arminius assumes that God first decrees to save sinful men by appointing Jesus Christ as mediator. In the "second decree" God "resolves to receive into [*gratiam*] favour those who repent and believe" (719). The "third decree" involves the means God resolves to administer for salvation, such as faith and repentance. The "fourth decree" shows just how radically Arminius's position on the decrees differs from Reformed orthodoxy. This decree concerns "the salvation of these particular persons, and the damnation of those: This rests or depends on the prescience and foresight of God, by which He foreknew from all eternity [*quinam*] what men would, through such administration, believe by the aid of subsequent or following grace; and who would not believe and persevere" (719).

11. Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), though obviously not having the Remonstrants in mind, perhaps was thinking of certain early church fathers when he argues: "Those who are ordained unto eternal life were not so ordained on account of any worthiness foreseen in them, or of any good works to be wrought by them; not yet for their future faith: but purely and solely, of free, sovereign grace." *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted* (New York: George Lindsay, 1811), 129.

12. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:66. See also Zanchi, *Absolute Predestination*, 130.

13. For example, the supralapsarian Johannes Maccovius argued for this position, namely that the elect were chosen to be in Christ, not because they were in Christ: "*Electi sumus, ut simus in Christo, non quod eramus*." *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*, trans. Willem J. van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink, and Rein Ferwerda (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), 158.

14. Paul Baynes, *A Commentarie upon the First Chapter of the Epistle of Saint Paul, Written to the Ephesians* (London, 1643), 35.

15. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:69.

16. On this question see Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.10.1–19.

17. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:70. But note how Baynes remarks that though the Father is said to choose, that does not mean that the Son and the Spirit did not choose also, "for if three of us had but one will common to us all, one could not will if the other two should not also will." Yet, because the Son acts as mediator and the Spirit as schoolmaster "therefore the Father only is expressed." *A Commentarie upon Ephesians*, 37. Goodwin, too, holds to the maxim that the works of the persons in the Trinity are undivided, but certain works manifest themselves on one person as the *terminus operationis*.

18. Larger Catechism, Q. 22; a "publick person" is one who, like Adam, acts "not for himself only, but for his posterity"; in Scripture, believers are reckoned as the posterity or "seed" of Christ (Ps. 22:30; Isa. 53:10).

19. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:72.

20. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:72.

21. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:74.

22. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:74.

23. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:75.

24. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:76.

25. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:83.

26. Baynes, *A Commentarie upon Ephesians*, 61.

27. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:90.

28. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:84.

29. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:84.

30. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:85.

31. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:85.

32. Owen attempts to answer this argument. See *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19.37. See also John Calvin's comments, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.12.4–5. Even if it is right to call Calvin a supralapsarian, we can see

that there are nevertheless different ways in which Reformed theologians expressed themselves on the *ordo decretum*.

33. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:99.

34. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:99. The glory of Christ plays a significant role in Goodwin's theology. See Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

35. Incidentally, this is something I wish I had pressed more in *Why Heaven Kissed Earth*. I address the issue of Christ's glory in my book, but on further reflection I would have made more of Goodwin's christological supralapsarianism. This chapter attempts to rectify the lack of a more explicit reference to Goodwin's supralapsarianism.

36. "Neither yet, on the other side, do I, or dare I, affirm that Christ should have been incarnate, and assumed our nature, though man had never fallen; because all things are ordained to fall out no otherwise than they do." Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:99. Some would argue that "christological surpalapsarians" are those who affirm that Christ would have been incarnate had man not fallen, but I think we can still apply this title to Goodwin, despite his refusal to affirm that Christ would have been incarnate had man not sinned.

37. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:99–100.

38. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:100.

39. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:100.

40. See Horton, "Assurance," 65.

41. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:84.

42. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:84.

43. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:84–85.

44. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:84.

45. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:84.

46. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:84.

47. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:85.

48. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:85.

49. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:86.

50. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:86.

51. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:86.

52. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:86.

53. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:87.

54. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:86.

55. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:86.

56. Goodwin, *An Exposition of the Second Chapter to the Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1864; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 2:148.

57. Goodwin, *Second Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:148.

58. Goodwin, *Second Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:149.

59. Goodwin, *Second Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:152.

60. Goodwin, *Second Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:162.

61. Goodwin, *Second Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:162.

62. John Owen's comments on Hebrews 3:12–14 are clearly in line with what Goodwin is speaking of here: "Union with Christ is the principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations." *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 4:146. Owen adds: "[Union with Christ] is the first in dignity; it is the greatest, most honourable, and glorious of all graces that we are made partakers of" (4:148).

63. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:94.

64. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:95.

65. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:98.

66. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:99.

67. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:104. Turretin, who argued for an infralapsarian position, notes this contention made by the supralapsarians and attempts to answer their argument, which he thinks leads to an absurdity if taken too far. See Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.9.23. See also Owen's criticism of this maxim: *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19.31.

68. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:106.

69. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:107.

70. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:107.

71. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:114.

72. See Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1864; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:418: "What was the greatest work of wonder that ever God did in the world? It was the incarnation of the Son of God."

73. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:102.

74. On Leighton, see *The Whole Works of Robert Leighton, D.D.* (New York: Riker, 1844), 669. See also Owen's criticism, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:30.

Chapter 10

The Puritans on Providence

> *God covers under the wings of His care each single one of His creatures.*
>
> —JOHN CALVIN[1]

The church has long taught God's personal, detailed, wise, and good providence over creation. In contrast to Greek philosophies that so spiritualize God that they separate Him from involvement in the physical world, early Christians taught that God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things. Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202) said, "The Maker of this universe…exercises a providence over all things, and arranges the affairs of our world."[2]

Augustine wrote *The City of God* in part to teach the providence of God over nations and civilizations, especially in light of the crisis caused by the fall of Rome to the barbarians.[3] He said that events did not happen by luck or by fate but by the will of God.[4] John Chrysostom (c. 349–407), Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390–c. 463), Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 457), Salvian of Marseilles (c. 400–c. 480), and Boethius (c. 480–c. 525) all wrote treatises on God's providential government of the world.[5] Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) devoted several questions in his *Summa Theologica* to divine providence and government.[6] He wrote, "All things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual selves…. All things that exist in whatsoever manner are necessarily directed by God towards some end."[7]

The Reformers continued to explore this biblical theme of God's sovereignty. Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), who wrote a treatise on God's sovereign providence, said, "Providence is the enduring and unchangeable rule over and direction of all things in the universe…. [God] freely supplies all with all things…. For since He is in need of nothing, [He] is rich in all things…it follows that He cannot be wearied or exhausted in giving, [and] that He rejoiced in giving."[8]

John Calvin wrote three chapters on providence in his *Institutes*, saying it would be "cold and barren" to think of God as a Creator who leaves creation to

itself. Calvin asserted, “He is also everlasting Governor and Preserver…. He sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow.”9 He added, “God so attends to the regulation of individual events, and they all so proceed from his set plan, that nothing takes place by chance.”10 Calvin also published a separate treatise on providence.11

Henry Bullinger (1504–1575), in his famous series of sermons titled *Decades*, also offered a rich biblical treatment of providence.12 He quoted Theodoret of Cyrrhus in saying it is ridiculous to think that the Creator of all things would leave His creation like a boat with no one to steer it, so that it is blown about by the wind and broken up on the rocks.13 And Theodore Beza wrote, “Nothing happens by chance, and without a very righteous decree of God.”14

The Puritans expounded on the theme of God’s preservation of creation for His glory and the peace of His people. In this chapter, we will explore the Puritans’ teaching, polemics, questions, submission, hope, and meditation with respect to providence.

Puritan Teaching on Providence Divine providence is a fundamental article of the Christian faith. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) included the doctrine of providence in its treatment of the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” (cf. Q. 26–28). Likewise Puritan Arthur Dent (1553–1607) wrote, “For every one of us, when we do confess God to be almighty, do acknowledge that he by his providence rules everything.”15 The Heidelberg Catechism offers proof that as the beginning of the Puritan era dawned, Reformed Christians professed the experiential comfort of the doctrine of providence. The catechism (Q. 27 and 28) offers these classic words of encouragement to Christians:

> *What dost thou mean by the providence of God?*
>
> The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things, come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.
>
> *What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?*
>
> That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as

move.[16]

William Ames (1576–1633), in his sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism, deduced the following lessons from Romans 11:36, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." He wrote,

- "God has a fixed providence by which He cares for all things and directs them to His own glory." God's wisdom, not chance, moves all that is unto its proper end.
- "The providence of God includes in itself not only the intention but also the comprehension of the goal." God always achieves His goals; His blessedness proves it, and His power and wisdom guarantee it.
- "The providence of God extends to all things." God is a good head of household (Eph. 2:19) who takes care of all His children and all His property. God does not force His creatures to act, but rules them "sweetly" according to their nature.[17]

In his *Marrow of Theology*, Ames writes of God's "efficiency, or working power…by which he works all things in all things (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:36)." Everything depends on God as the primary cause both of its substance and circumstances (Isa. 45:7; Lam. 3:37–38). God often works through means, though He does not need those means. His providence both preserves all things (Ps. 104:19–20; Acts 17:28; Heb. 1:3) and governs all things (Ps. 29:10; Gen. 50:20).[18]

Providence is not the same as God's predestination or eternal decree, but rather is the execution of that decree within the time and space of His creation. William Pemble (c. 1591–1623) wrote, "Providence is an external and temporal action of God, whereby he preserveth, governeth, and disposeth all and singular things, which are, and are done, both the creatures, and the faculties and actions of the creatures, and directeth them both to the mediate ends, and to the last end of all, after a set and determinate manner, according to the most free decree, and counsel of his own will; that himself in all things may be glorified."[19] Two decades later, Edward Leigh (1603–1671), who, like Pemble, served in Magdalen Hall at Oxford as divinity reader and tutor, offered the same definition (word-for-word) of providence in his *Body of Divinity*, thus showing a unified tradition.[20]

John Owen (1616–1683) echoed those thoughts when he wrote that providence is "an ineffable act or work of Almighty God, whereby he cherisheth, sustaineth, and governeth the world, or all things by him created, moving them, agreeably to those natures which he endowed them withal in the beginning, unto those ends which he hath proposed."[21] The Creator continued to work after

completing creation (John 5:17), governing all things, even human suffering or "evil" (Isa. 45:6–7), as is evident as well from the Genesis account of the flood, Owen said. "There is nothing which he hath made, that with the good hand of providence he doth not govern and sustain."[22]

What is more, God sustains His creation through His preserving providence. "Every creature depends on God," wrote Edward Corbet (d. 1658).[23] The universe is not like a house that continues to stand after the carpenter finishes his work and leaves. It is rather like daylight that ceases after the sun goes down. Both our being and our actions depend on God for their existence (Acts 17:24, 28). As Corbet wrote, "We cannot utter one word, think one thought, turn our eye, or move a finger, without the concurrence of his power who gives life and breath, and all things."[24]

God accomplishes His purposes through His governing providence. Ephesians 1:11–12 affirms that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory." In his commentary on Ephesians 1, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) wrote, "He plotteth every thing beforehand…. Nothing falleth out but what he had laid the plot before."[25] He continued, God's "will shall stand, it shall not be resisted" (Ps. 135:6; Isa. 46:10). God's providence includes very small matters (Matt. 10:30), chance events (Exod. 21:13; Prov. 16:33; 1 Kings 22:28, 34), and the choices of men (James 4:15; Exod. 34:24; 11:3).[26] The counsel of God is His "mature pitching upon what is best" or "a certain judgment of what is best to do," which God is uniquely qualified to do (Isa. 28:29). Ultimately this is God's will, for God did not make choices by selecting the best available option, as if He depended on anything. Rather, "all is attributed to his will," and God's counsel formulated how "to do it the best way."[27] God's highest goal is not just that we speak or sing His praise but that we exist for the praise of His glory, Goodwin said, for "your being, all you are and have, should be to his glory."[28]

Obadiah Sedgwick (c. 1600–1658) added, "God has a providence that extends to all creatures and the details concerning them."[29] He gleaned this from Christ's words in Matthew 10:29–30: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Sedgwick offered this definition of providence: "Divine providence is an external action of God whereby He conserves and governs all things wisely, holily, justly, and powerfully, to the admiration of His own glory."[30]

Christ's promise regarding God's numbering the hairs of our heads moved Ezekiel Hopkins (1634–1690) to write, "Hence we learn that God governs the meanest, the most inconsiderable, and contemptible occurrences in the world by

an exact and particular providence. Do you see [a] thousand little motes and atoms wandering up and down in a sun-beam? It is God that so peoples it; and he guides their innumerable and irregular strayings."[31]

Owen said that God upholds all things in "their being, natural strength, and faculties." God works in and through secondary causes. He rules all things to make them accomplish His purposes for His glory, even accidents such as an axhead flying off its handle and killing a man (cf. Exod. 21:13; Deut. 19:5). Understanding how God works through secondary causes is "beyond the reach of mortals," Owen said. But the truth of His providence is clearly revealed in Scripture.[32]

The Puritan doctrine of providence found its most beautiful expression in *The Mystery of Providence* by John Flavel (1628–1691). First published in 1678, the book is an exposition of Psalm 57:2, "I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me." Its primary emphasis is that God fulfills His purposes for His people, even though our understanding of divine providence is imperfect and partial. Like Peter, we do not always understand what our Lord is doing, but someday we will (John 13:7). We see providence now like the "disjointed wheels and scattered pins of a watch," but in glory we will we see the timepiece as a completed whole. By contrast, God views providence as a unified working reality, for, "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). He is like an "accurate anatomist discerning the course of all the veins and arteries of the body," Flavel said.[33] Within this mystery, we must cling to what God has revealed in the Scriptures.

God's providence can also be seen in His ordinary blessings, for example, in our daily employment. Flavel said in this God's intent is not our immediate self-satisfaction but our eternal blessing. He explained, "If you had more of the world than you have, your heads and hearts might not be able to manage it to your advantage."[34] God places obligations squarely on our shoulders so that we should not be lazy, nor should we give our calling in this world precedence over our calling to trust and serve the Lord, never forgetting that God is our ultimate benefactor.

One of the greatest blessings of God's providence is marriage and family life. Proverbs 19:14 says, "A prudent wife is from the LORD." God works in wonderful and unexpected ways, which teach us that,

> not what [men] fancy, but what his infinite wisdom judges best and most beneficial for them takes place…. Well then, if God have set *the solitary in families*, as it is, Psa. Lxviii.6, built an house for the desolate, given you comfortable relations, which are springs of daily comfort and refreshment

> to you, you are, upon many accounts, engaged to walk answerably to these gracious providences…. [Then] improve relations [i.e., make good use of these relationships], to the end Providence designed them: walk together as co-heirs of the grace of life: study to be mutual blessings to each other; so walk in your relations, that the parting day may be sweet. Death will shortly break up the family; and then nothing but the sense of duty discharged, or the neglects pardoned, will give comfort.35

Flavel wrote this based on personal experience. When *The Mystery of Providence* was first published (1678), Flavel had already lost his first wife and their infant during childbirth. He had remarried, but his second wife would also die before he did.

One of Flavel's aims was to press home the evidences of God's providence, or the "performances" of providence, to be observed in the life and experience of Christians, with special reference to what he and his fellow believers had experienced in those days. Flavel listed ten such "performances" of providence, tracing God's activity from our formation and protection in the womb, through birth, to our present lives; the family in which we are raised; the dangers from which we have been preserved; the temptations from which we are guarded; and the ways providence enables us to overcome sin and live for God's glory.36 Flavel's aim here was, "Do you not realize how blessed you are as the child of such a God?"

The providence of God takes on special significance in our conversion to Christ. Owen said, "The sending of the gospel to any nation, place, or persons, rather than others, as the means of life and salvation, is of the mere free grace and good pleasure of God" (Acts 16:6–9).37 Goodwin wrote, "The principle by which he works all things is the same principle by which he wrought grace in [the Ephesian believers'] hearts…omnipotent power, an efficacious hand… according to the counsel of his will."38 Flavel observed that apparently random events have led individuals to faith. For example, a man from Ethiopia meets an evangelist in the desert (Acts 8:26–39); a Syrian general is advised by a slave girl how he may be healed of disease (2 Kings 5:1–4); a woman makes a lonely noonday journey to the city well and finds a thirsty stranger (John 4:1–42). The same patterns can be seen in the contemporary world, Flavel said, for the providence of God was not limited to Bible times. For example, Spanish soldiers enter German cities to conquer them and are brought to faith in Christ; a random piece of paper explains the way of salvation; a romantic attraction brings someone into the embrace of a truly Christian family; a minister wanders from the main point of his sermon, and through "chance" remarks someone is

converted; a Christian is imprisoned, and a fellow prisoner is converted through his testimony; persecuted Christians are scattered, but by this means the gospel spreads. In everything God is absolutely and gloriously sovereign.[39]

Even evil deeds can be used by God for His work. Flavel offered a particularly gripping example of this. In 1673, a ship returning from Virginia anchored at Dartmouth. A young surgeon on board, who was deeply depressed, attempted suicide. As the surgeon lay dying, he was visited by Flavel, who spoke to him about the gospel. Flavel continued to visit the doctor, who, in time, was converted and recovered from his injuries. Thus God providentially used an attempt at suicide to bring a man to conversion. He turned evil to good. Other experiences may not be so spectacular, but they are no less supernatural.[40]

Puritan Polemics for Providence The most outspoken theological opponents of the English Reformed orthodox were Roman Catholics, Arminians, and Socinians. Papists and Puritans did not disagree much about the doctrine of providence; both acknowledged "an omnipotent providence which preordained and governed all events," Alexandra Walsham said.[41] Reformed leaders did criticize the Roman idea that God delegated a secondary providence to His special "saints," however; it was part of their rejection of "all intermediaries between God and the individual soul."[42]

The Socinians challenged the doctrine of providence in their radical denial of the doctrine of God, specifically, God's omniscient foreknowledge of future free actions. Socinians embraced the Bible but subjected its interpretation to human standards of reason. The result was that they rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, His substitutionary atonement as a satisfaction of God's justice, and divine predestination.[43] When John Biddle (1615–1662) published Socinian catechisms, Owen opposed them with his weighty tome *Vindicae Evangelicae*.[44] Regarding divine foreknowledge, Owen argued that (1) the Bible's ascriptions of human emotions and repentance to God are figurative, as other Scriptures indicate; (2) Biddle's hyper-literal hermeneutic would also strip God of His knowledge of many *present* things (Gen. 22:12); (3) the Bible contains many predictions of future choices of free agents; and (4) it is no contradiction to believe that God decrees, knows, and works out all things which come to pass, and that some events are contingent or freely chosen of their own nature.[45]

The Arminians affirmed sovereign providence over the realm of physical objects and outward actions. But they opposed Reformed theology by separating God's providential activity from the motions of man's will and spoke of divine providence toward men's souls merely in terms of the revelation of God's law

with its threats and promises.[46] The Puritans answered the Arminians in this by saying they did not treat men like stocks of wood and blocks of stone. Owen described God's sovereign providence as

> that effectual working of his will, according to his eternal purpose, whereby, though some agents, as the wills of men, are causes most free and indefinite, or unlimited lords of their own actions, in respect of their internal principle of operation (that is, their own nature), [they] are yet all, in respect of his decree, and by his powerful working, determined to this or that effect in particular; not that they are compelled to do this, or hindered from doing that, but are inclined and disposed to do this or that, according to their proper manner of working, that is, most freely: for truly such testimonies are everywhere obvious in Scripture, of the stirring up of men's wills and minds, of bending and inclining them to divers things, of the governing of the secret thoughts and motions of the heart, as cannot by any means be referred to a naked permission, with a government of external actions, or to a general influence, whereby they should have power to do this or that, or any thing else; wherein, as some suppose, his whole providence consisteth.[47]

Thus Owen affirmed both the free agency of man and the providential sovereignty of God.

Owen strongly objected to the Arminian doctrine of providence, however; specifically as it was presented by writers such as Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622)[48] and John Corvinus (1582–1650). Owen accused them of teaching that (1) God's preservation of all things consisted of a mere negative act of His will not to destroy them; (2) God's concurrence with secondary causes was a mere general influence equally upon all men which they made use of as they pleased; and (3) God never determines the will of man to a particular choice because the will of man is "absolutely free, independent, and uncontrollable."[49] In opposition to these doctrines, Owen argued that the Bible teaches:

- God's providence rules the plans and most secret resolutions of men (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 16:9; Ps. 33:10–11; 2 Sam. 15:31 [cf. 17:14]).
- God's providence turns men's hearts whichever way He pleases (Prov. 16:1; Gen. 43:14; Prov. 21:1; Dan. 5:23).
- God's saints pray for Him to move their hearts and bend their wills (Ps. 119:36; 1 Kings 8:57–58; Pss. 51:10; 86:11), as He promised (Jer. 32:40).
- The certainty of God's promises depends on His determining and turning the wills of men as He pleases (Prov. 3:4; Ps. 106:46; Job 12:17; Matt. 16:18).[50]

Questions the Puritans Asked about Providence The mystery of divine providence prompts many challenging questions. The Puritans personally and theologically wrestled with such questions, seeking neither to ignore the realities of life nor to cast doubt on the certainties of Scripture. Here are some of those questions, and the Puritan responses to them.

How does God's providence relate to the laws of nature? According to Ames, the order we observe in the world, "the law of nature," is evidence of the continuing power of God's Word over creation (Jer. 31:35–36; 33:20).51 God's active presence is also required to sustain the world and its inhabitants. Sedgwick noted that the Bible specifically speaks of Christ "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). God works through ordinary means such as the provision of food, rain, and clothing (Pss. 136:25; 147:8–9; Matt. 6:30, 32).52 But He is the one whose work it is, however it is accomplished.

How does God's providence relate to the sins of men? Thomas Boston (1676–1732) pointed out that God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13), but He does permit them to sin (Acts 14:16). He withholds the grace that would prevent sin (Ps. 81:11–12), powerfully "bounds" or limits sin (Job 1:12; 2:6), and overrules sin to fulfill His holy purposes (Gen. 50:20; Isa. 46:10).53 Similarly, Sedgwick said God's providence is over sin, "not causing, not approving, but permitting, by leaving the sinner to himself or to Satan" while placing limitations on how far sin can go (Gen. 20:6).54 Owen wrote that even where the fear of God does not shine in men's hearts, nonetheless His providence rules over men's hearts, bringing forth the gold of His purposes though they do not think of Him at all.55

How can God's providence permit the prosperity of the wicked? Sedgwick said God is gracious, patient, and generous, even with the wicked (Matt. 5:45). His justice sometimes brings punishments in this life, but will always do so in eternity (Eccl. 8:12–13; 1 Tim. 5:24). The outward prosperity of the wicked teaches us that outward goods are not the highest blessing that God bestows on humans.56

Why do the righteous suffer and die alongside the wicked? William Gouge (1575–1653), when asked to comment about the "black death," or bubonic plague, that stalked the cities of Europe in those times, rejected the idea that true believers would be spared by the plague. He said the Bible teaches that the same event overtakes both the righteous and the wicked (Eccl. 9:2).57 Nor could Gouge accept the idea that believers would escape the plague if they had enough faith. Faith is presumption, if it be without a promise on which to stand, Gouge said. What God promised in such texts as Psalm 91 was that He would deliver

His saints from trouble "so far forth as God in his wisdom seeth it good for them to be delivered." Gouge asked, "Yea, what believer would not die of the plague, if his wise Father seeth it to be the best for him to die of that disease?" When the wicked die, they go to hell, he said, but the righteous are released from this earthly prison to go to heaven.[58]

How does God's providence help us know God's will? Can we learn God's will by watching His works around us? While God revealed His will in various ways in the past, He does so now through His Word, said Flavel, adding, "All are tied up to the ordinary standing rule of the written word, and must not expect any such extraordinary revelations from God."[59] If Scripture does not speak directly to our situation, our task is prayerfully to apply its general principles. Flavel did admit that "God doth give men secret hints and intimations of his will by his providence," but he cautioned, "yet providences in themselves are no stable rule of duty nor sufficient discovery of the will of God."[60]

In brief, Flavel offered this counsel: If you want to discover God's will, govern your search by these rules:

- Get the true fear of God upon your hearts; be truly afraid of offending Him.
- Study the *Word* more, and the concerns and interests of the world less.
- Reduce what you know to practice, and you shall know what is your duty to practice.
- Pray for illumination and direction about the way you should go; beg the Lord to guide you in straits, and not to suffer you to fall into sin.
- This being done, follow providence as far as it agrees with the Word, and no further.[61]

How does God's providence relate to our efforts? Since God works through means, we must not stand idle, waiting for God to act, but "apply ourselves to the ways of God's providence" (cf. Gen. 42:1–2), Sedgwick said.[62] He went on, "If we desire to enjoy the good of providence, we must use the means provided." God has joined together the means and the end; we must not try to separate them. If a man wants to reap a harvest, he must sow seed. If he wants to find mercy, he must repent and believe in Christ.[63]

Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) warned that pride uses means without seeking God, and presumption depends on God while neglecting the means God provides. He said, "Diligence on our part, and the blessing on God's, Solomon joined together, 'The hand of the diligent makes rich' (Prov. 10:4), but, 'The blessing of the LORD maketh rich' (v. 22)."[64]

Sedgwick wrote, "If we desire to experience the good of providence, then we

must be diligent in our callings."[65] God blesses diligence and curses laziness. Furthermore, since the righteous Lord makes the use of means effective, "we must use only lawful and warrantable means," not schemes "devised by the temptations of Satan, the haste of unbelief, or the strength of sinful greediness."[66] A lawful use of means springs from hearts that are upright and exercise faith in the promises of the covenant of grace.[67] Charnock warned against justifying sin by its supposed potential to do good, using the example of Daniel's decision to avoid defilement by eating the food of the court of Babylon (Dan. 1:8–10). He wrote,

> Daniel might have argued, I may wind myself into the king's favour, do the church of God a great service by my interest in him, which may be dashed in pieces by my refusal of this kindness; but none of these things wrought upon him. No providences wherein we have seeming circumstances of glorifying God, must lead us out of the way of duty; this is to rob God one way to pay him another.[68]

In the end, God blessed Daniel's costly obedience, and in His providence He accomplished His good will thereby.

Puritan Submission to Providence The Puritan doctrine of providence calls men to surrender to God's will. Goodwin said, "If God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, you should not lean to your own will, nor to your own wisdom; give yourself up fully unto God (Prov. 23:4)."[69]

Suffering complicates and tests our surrender to God. As Psalm 34:19 says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," so Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) observed, "God, who is infinite in wisdom and matchless in goodness, hath ordered troubles, yea, many troubles to come trooping in upon us on every side."[70] Sorrows create a grave dilemma for the Christian, for he does not want to deny either the sovereignty or the goodness of God. If we desire to walk humbly with our God (Mic. 6:8), then, as Owen said, we must fall down before God and acknowledge that He has the sovereign right to do as He pleases. We must believe that He acts with wisdom, righteousness, goodness, love, and mercy in all that He does, even though it may be difficult to see that in the confusing vicissitudes, dizzying changes, and deep distresses of life.[71]

God often exercises His providence through methods that are beyond our understanding. Hopkins warned that if human reason attempts to track the logic of divine providence, it will find itself in "entangled mazes and labyrinths," just as if we try to search out God's eternal decree of election. He wrote, "We may sooner tire reason in such a pursuit than satisfy it." It is far better to bow in

worship and exclaim with Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).[72]

In reflecting upon his troubles, David wrote in Psalm 39:9, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.” From this Brooks deduced, “It is the great duty and concernment of gracious souls to be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences, and sharpest trials that they meet with in this world.”[73] He did not propose a stoic silence, a sullen silence, or a despairing silence. Rather, he called for a believing silence—an inner quietness born of seeing through secondary causes the majestic and righteous God who holds all things in His hand.[74] We may groan to God, but we must not grumble against God.[75]

One of the greatest trials of our faith is waiting in the midst of adversity for God to act. But God is never late! Flavel wrote, “The Lord doth not compute and reckon his seasons of working by our *arithmetic*.”[76] Satan will seek to make capital out of our uncertainty, so we must be sure that we are relying on the promises of God, not on wishful thinking. We must also be certain that our motives are truly spiritual and our wills truly submissive to God. Flavel said, “Enjoyment of your desires is the thing that will please you, but resignation of your wills is that which is pleasing to God.”[77] Brooks wrote, “The Lord doth not always time his answers to the swiftness of his people’s expectations. He that is the God of our mercies is the Lord of our times.”[78]

Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) reasoned, “Suppose you were in a smith’s shop, and there you should see several sorts of tools, some crooked, some bowed, others hooked, would you condemn all these things for nought because they do not look handsome? The smith makes use of them all for the doing of his work. Thus it is with the providences of God, they seem to us to be very crooked and strange, yet they all carry on God’s work.”[79] As the saying is, God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

Boston said that whatever is crooked in life was made so by God and therefore must be received in submission to God.[80] “There is not any thing whatsoever befalls us without his overruling hand,” he said.[81] God makes the blind (John 9:1–3), the poor (1 Sam. 2:7), the barren (1 Sam. 1:5), and the deaf (Exod. 4:11). We cannot straighten what He has made crooked (Eccl. 7:13). Submitting the results to the Lord’s hands moderates our attempt to better our lives, knowing that, as Sedgwick said, second causes cannot succeed “without the blessing of the Lord’s providence (Ps. 127:2).”[82] This also enables Christians to thank God for the purifying effects of their God-ordained trials. While only the blood of Christ can purge us from sin, the application of its power may be effected within

the context of providential affliction. In referring to a painful providence as a "cross," Flavel said, "Though a *cross* without a Christ never did any man good, yet thousands have been beholden to the *cross*, as it hath wrought in the virtue of his death for their good."[83]

Like Job, we should respond to painful providences by worshiping God (Job 1:20). Joseph Caryl (1602–1673) put these words into Job's mouth as a model for all believers who suffer with proper love, fear, dependence, and trust toward an afflicting God:

> Lord, though all this be come upon me, yet I will not depart from thee, or deal falsely in thy covenant. I know thou art still the same Jehovah, true, holy, gracious, faithful, all-sufficient; and therefore behold me prostrate before thee, and resolving still to love thee, still to fear thee, still to trust thee; thou art my God still and my portion forever. Though I had nothing left in the world that I could call mine, yet thou Lord alone art enough, yet thou alone art all.[84]

When Job suffered terrible losses of family and property, he said, "the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). So Caryl said that in afflictions we should worship God as the sovereign Lord over both the prosperous results of our labors and the painful troubles brought by men, devils, and inanimate forces. All things are in God's hand, whose hand is in all our sorrows.[85] Hence, "God is worthy of all praise and honor, not only when he doth enrich and strengthen us, when he fills and protects us; but also when he doth impoverish and weaken us, when he empties and smites us."[86]

Puritan Hope in Providence The Puritans lived in a time when childbirth, sickness, plague, fire, and war killed many people before they reached adulthood, even as they still do in many parts of the world today. With eyes of faith, they envisioned evil spirits going about like roaring lions seeking someone to devour. Yet they also had great hope in the providence of a covenant God. Sedgwick wrote, "No one is so fit to govern the world as He who made it."[87] For God exercises perfect wisdom, holiness, justice, and power in His government so that He fits the times and the means to accomplish His goals.[88]

The Puritans, like Christians of all eras, clung to the promise of Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Watson wrote, "All the various dealings of God with his children do by a special providence turn to their good. 'All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his

covenant' (Ps. 25:10)."[89] He said, "The grand reason why all things work for good, is the near and dear interest which God has in His people. The Lord has made a covenant with them. 'They shall be my people, and I will be their God' (Jer. 32:38)."[90]

God's providence offers great comfort to His covenant people. Sedgwick said, "No good man ever lacked anything that was good for him. I may lack a thing which is good, but not which is good for me: 'For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.'"[91] God has a special providential care for His church because we are the apple of His eye, His children, His lambs, and His jewels (Zech. 2:8; Isa. 49:15; 40:11; Mal. 3:17).[92] God's care for His people is gracious, tender, mysterious, glorious, exact, and often extraordinary.[93]

Flavel's town of Dartmouth was a busy port, so Flavel wrote several works applying God's providence to seafarers.[94] He appealed to them, saying, "Many of you have seen wonders of salvation upon the deeps where the hand of God has been signally stretched forth for your rescue and deliverance."[95] He then asked, "Consider what is the aim of providence in all the tender care it hath manifested for you? Is it not that you should employ your bodies for God, and cheerfully apply yourselves to that service he hath called you to?"[96]

God's providence restrains evil and protects His people, Caryl said. Using the example of the divine hedge that God placed around Job, Caryl said, "God himself doth undertake the guarding and protecting of his people…. God hath an especial care, and doth exceedingly prize even the meanest [least] thing that belongs to one of his servants."[97] Satan cannot so much as untie our shoes without God's commission. Caryl added, "If the devils could not go into the swine, much less can they meddle with a man, made after God's image, till God gives them leave."[98]

The Christian's hope is further bolstered by knowing that our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Owen wrote, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, hath the weight of the whole creation upon his hand, and disposeth of it by his power and wisdom. Such is the nature and condition of the universe, that it could not subsist a moment, nor could anything in it act regularly unto its appointed end, without the continual support, guidance, influence, and disposal of the Son of God."[99]

Therefore, Sedgwick said, we are not to vex our minds with anxiety about our condition in this world (Matt. 6:28; 1 Peter 5:7; Phil. 4:5–6).[100] Perhaps the means by which we hoped to attain our goals seem impotent. But we must remember that the means are but pipes, whereas God is the fountain; they are mere instruments in His hands. It is not the doctor who heals you, but God who

heals you through the doctor.[101] God often works through unlikely means to draw our trust away from what we tend to depend upon and to show us that our blessings truly are gifts from the sovereign God.[102] Corbet asked, "What confusion cannot he order? What wisdom cannot he frustrate? What weakness cannot he enable? Nothing [is] so high that [it] is above his command, nothing so low that [it] is beneath his providence."[103]

God has straight purposes for crooked providences. Boston listed seven:

1. To prove your spiritual state as a hypocrite or genuine believer
2. To stir you to obedience, wean you from this world, and set your eyes on heaven
3. To convict you of sin
4. To correct or punish you for sin
5. To prevent you from committing sin
6. To reveal latent sin deep within your heart
7. To awaken you from laziness so that you exercise yourself in grace.[104]

Christians may become dismayed at the trials of the church. The Puritans lived through days of corruption, doctrinal error, persecution, and the multiplication of sects, but they rested their hope upon providence. Sedgwick wrote, "The church is like a ship at sea, endangered by waves and winds; but divine providence sits at the helm, powerfully guiding and preserving it."[105] God is working out His eternal plan, and all things will ultimately serve His glory in showing His grace to His people, in His Son. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) traced God's work of redemption throughout human history with exquisite biblical detail in *A History of the Work of Redemption*.[106] He observed that all the lines of providence meet in one center, all the rivers and crooked streams of providence pour into one ocean, and that is Christ.[107] Therefore, those who share in Christ's kingdom and partake of His redemption may rejoice that all things are theirs—past, present, and future (1 Cor. 3:21).[108]

Puritan Meditation on the Providence of God Flavel often meditated on the Word of God and the providence of God. His facility with Scripture is outstanding. In many ways *The Mystery of Providence* is a tapestry woven from biblical principles and history, with additional illustrations and practical applications. It reveals Flavel's vast knowledge of every page of Scripture.

Failure to meditate on God's providence is sinful for it diminishes our praise of God. Moreover, we rob ourselves of the nourishment our faith receives from such meditation. We slight the God who acts in providence. Meditation on God's providence is essential if we are to come to God in prayer and know how to

address Him. But *how* can we learn to meditate on God's providence? Flavel offered the following four directions:

1. Work hard at remembering and exploring the providence of God toward you. We should do this by extensively tracing God's ways through our life and counting the blessings He has poured on us. We should do this intensively also; Flavel advised, "Let not your thoughts swim like *feathers* upon the surface of the water, but sink like *lead* to the bottom."[109]

Each Christian's life is a marvelous story written by God for our reading and edification. John Norton (1606–1663) said that if the least of God's saints, who had walked with God for only a few years, could write down all of God's dealings with him, it "would make a volume full of temptations, signs, and wonders: a wonderful history, because a history of such experiences, each one whereof is more than a wonder."[110]

Flavel also counseled readers to explore the timing of God's actions and the care that timing expresses. Think about the means He has employed with you—a stranger or even an enemy rather than a friend, an evil act rather than a beneficent one. Consider the way "all things" work together for believers (Rom. 8:28); that "a thousand friendly hands are at work for them to promote and bring about their happiness." In particular we should trace the relationship between prayer and providence, to see how "providences have borne the very signatures of your prayers upon them."[111]

2. Trace the connection between the providences of God in your life and the promises of God in His Word. Doing this will confirm the reliability of Scripture and teach us what course of action we should take in a given set of circumstances. The Christian's rule of life is God's revealed will (in Scripture), not His secret will (which comes to expression in providence). As the latter unfolds, we discover that God is always faithful to His promises.

3. Look beyond the events and circumstances of providence to God as author and provider. Think of the attributes and ways of God (His love, wisdom, grace, condescension, purposes, methods, and goodness). Recognize how He reveals these attributes and things in His dealings with you. Remember too that God often works out His purposes through painful trials. He is sovereign in all things, gracious, wise, faithful, all-sufficient, and unchanging, which is precisely what we need to remember in the darkness of affliction: "God is what he was, and where he was."[112]

4. Respond to each providence in an appropriate way. Even in sorrow, biblically

instructed believers will always experience an element of comfort and joy. For no element of God's providence should be viewed as a mark of His enmity against us. Consider that "all your losses are but as the loss of a *farthing*[113] to a prince." God's "heart is full of love, whilst the face of providence is full of frowns."[114] The Christian who realizes the Lord is near (Phil. 4:5) will see all these things in proper perspective.

But what are we to do when the providences of God seem to conflict with His promises? First, we must learn how to resist discouragement. God is teaching us patience. It may not yet be God's time to act, or He may be delaying to increase our appetite for the blessing for which we long. What are we to do? We must remember that He is bringing about a greater blessing: our willingness to depend entirely on God and His good pleasure. Our loving Father delights to come to us when we are at the end of our own resources. Perhaps we are not yet ready to receive the blessing. If all His mercies are of grace and we do not deserve them, we must learn to wait for them.

Second, we must learn not to assume that we fully understand God's ways and purposes. "There are hard texts in the works, as well as in the word of God," Flavel said. "It becomes us modestly and humbly to reverence, but not to dogmatize about them; a man may easily get a strain by over-reaching."[115] In Psalm 73, Asaph deepened his depression by trying to understand all the intricacies of God's ways; the same can be true for us. Trying to solve mysteries that are too great for us will only breed suspicion of God, darkness of spirit, and tempt us to take matters into our own hands. That leads us to distrust providence and to reject the wisdom and love of God.

Meditating the right way on God's providence leads to ongoing communion with God, since He "manifests himself among his people by *providences* as well as ordinances."[116] A chief pleasure of the Christian life is to trace the harmony of God's attributes as He expresses them in His providences.

Such meditation also serves to "*over-power and suppress the natural atheism that is in your hearts.*"[117] As a wise and compassionate pastor, Flavel knew that some true believers were afflicted with doubts about God's goodness and even His very existence. Meditations on the providence of God can prop up our faith as we trace the clear lines of God's loving care and mighty power in our lives.

In this way, faith is supported by what we have seen of God in the past. The young David drew strength for his conflict with Goliath from his memories of the providence of God in his past (1 Sam. 17:37). A spirit of praise then breathes sweet melody into our lives, and Christ becomes more important to us, since all of God's mercies come to us only in and through Him. With melted hearts, inward poise, and an increased devotion to holiness, we are thus equipped to

face death, which Flavel knew is often a time of considerable inner turmoil and special temptation from Satan. Dying is one of the two most difficult acts of faith (the other is coming to Christ for the first time). But the dying believer who is able to rehearse the blessings of God's providence in his or her life will surely know God's peace.

Flavel closes with this basic and practical advice: learn to record in writing the providences of God in your life,[118] for by so doing you will preserve the memory of them for future meditation and encouragement. Flavel said, "Providence carries our lives, liberties, and concernments in its hand every moment. Your bread is in its cupboard, your money in its purse, your safety in its enfolding arms: and sure it is the least part of what you owe, to record the favors you receive at its hands."[119]

Conclusion

The Puritan writings on providence are easy to read, yet they are deeply thought provoking. They are biblically focused, yet they throb with a sense of God's ongoing activity. They are rigorously Reformed, yet they are wonderfully sensitive to human pain. They were written for people living in a time of social, political, and religious upheaval in the seventeenth century. They were written for people who knew a great deal of the angst that we moderns often mistakenly view as peculiarly modern or even postmodern. The Puritan writings also apply to people in the twenty-first century who suffer massive change. More than that, they spell out clearly some biblical principles that Christians today desperately need to hear:

- God is in control of His universe.
- God is working out His perfect purposes, also in my life.
- God is not my servant.
- God's ways are far more mysterious and wonderful than I can understand.
- God is always good; I can always trust Him.
- God's timetable is not the same as mine.
- God is far more interested in what I become than in what I do.
- Freedom from suffering is not promised in the Christian gospel.
- Suffering is an integral part of the Christian life.
- God works through suffering to fulfill His purposes in me.
- God's purposes, not mine, are what bring Him glory.
- God enables me to read His providences through the lens of His Word.
- I have few greater pleasures than tracing the wonders of God's ways.

No wonder, then, that Sedgwick admonishes us with the words of Psalm 37:5: "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."120 The God of the Bible, the God of sovereign providence, He alone is worthy of such trust.

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2. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 25.1, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 1:459.

3. Benjamin W. Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 103–4.

4. Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.1, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1887), 2:84.

5. Christopher A. Hall, "John Chrysostom's *On Providence*: A Translation and Theological Interpretation" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1991); Prosper, *De Providentia Dei*, trans. Miroslav Marcovich (Leiden: Brill, 1989); Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, trans. Thomas P. Halton (New York:

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7. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, pt. 1, q. 22, art. 2.

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9. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.16.1.

10. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.4. See also Joseph A. Pipa Jr., "Creation and Providence," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2008), 137–49.

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13. Bullinger, *Decades*, 178.

14. Shawn D. Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 2004), 139.

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24. Corbet, *Gods Providence*, 4.

25. Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 1:211.

26. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:212–13.

27. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:217–18.

28. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:220.

29. Obadiah Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Kelly Van Wyck (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 8. This book was originally published as *The Doctrine of Providence Practically Handled* (London, 1658).

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35. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:392, 394, 395.

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44. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 205. “Biddle” is also spelled “Bidle.”

45. Owen, *Vindicae Evangelicae*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1855; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 12:115–40.

46. Mark Ellis, ed. and trans., *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 58–63. The Dutch Arminian Confession (1621), composed in Latin primarily by Arminius’s student Simon Episcopius (1583–1643), offers an exposition of divine providence in eight paragraphs. It speaks of the two sides of providence in “the preservation and sustenance” and “the governing and directing” of all things (6.1). However, it defined God’s providence over men as His giving of laws with threats and promises of rewards (6.2). God does not directly rule over the will, but permits the will to act freely in obedience or disobedience (6.3). He does control “the actions that flow from disobedience” in their results and timing (6.3). Thus “God manages all outward actions and events of all things according to his will alone” but never disturbs “the natural contingency of things and the innate liberty of the human will” (6.6). In another chapter, the Arminian Confession indicates that apart from God’s grace even regenerate men cannot think, will, or do any good thing (17.6). God gives to each hearer of the gospel “necessary” and “sufficient” grace for him to repent and believe (17.2), yet the hearer retains the power to resist and so nullify that grace’s effect (17.3). In His providence God does not equally attend to every creature, but to men more than animals, godly men more than ungodly, and excellent godly men more than any others (6.4). God’s providence is sometimes omnipotent and irresistible, yet in other cases with mere “concourse and assistance”; sometimes immediate but in other cases through means; sometimes “by an almost physical action” and other times by a moral influence (6.5). Nothing happens by chance, but God never carries out His decree by “violently compelling” men’s wills with “irresistible power” (6.7). Thus Episcopius avoided what he perceived to be the “two rocks” of “blind fortune” (luck) and “fatal necessity” (determinism) (6.8).

47. Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *Works*, 10:36.

48. Vorstius later fell under accusations of Socinianism. John Collinges (1623–1690) wrote that, according to Vorstius, God is omniscient only insofar as things can be known, which excludes from His certain knowledge “anything that depended upon the will of man.” Collinges exclaimed, “And I beseech you, consider how great a part of the divine knowledge this takes away.” John Collinges, *Several Discourses Concerning the Actual Providence of God* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1678), 9.

49. Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *Works*, 10:38–39.

50. Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *Works*, 10:40–42.

51. Ames, *Marrow*, 1.9.10.
52. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 11.
53. Thomas Boston, *The Crook in the Lot*, in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (1853; repr., Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 3:509–11.
54. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 13–14.
55. Owen, "A Memorial of the Deliverance of Essex County and Committee," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1855; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 8:116.
56. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 18.
57. William Gouge, *Gods Three Arrows: Plague, Famine, and Sword* (London: George Miller for Edwards Brewster, 1631), 21.
58. Gouge, *Gods Three Arrows*, 22.
59. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:468.
60. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:469.
61. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:470–71.
62. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 78.
63. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 78–79.
64. Stephen Charnock, *A Discourse of Divine Providence*, in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 1:57.
65. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 87.
66. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 80.
67. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 83–85.
68. Charnock, *A Discourse of Divine Providence*, in *Works*, 1:57.
69. Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:219.
70. Thomas Brooks, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 1:287.
71. Owen, "Of Walking Humbly with God," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1855; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 9:112–19.
72. Hopkins, *An Exposition on the Lord's Prayer…[and] Sermons on Providence*, 265.
73. Brooks, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, in *Works*, 1:295.
74. Brooks, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, in *Works*, 1:295–301.
75. Brooks, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, in *Works*, 1:306, 310.
76. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:472.
77. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:476.
78. Brooks, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, in *Works*, 1:385.
79. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: A. Fullarton, 1845), 85.
80. Boston, *The Crook in the Lot*, in *Works*, 3:498.
81. Boston, *The Crook in the Lot*, in *Works*, 3:507.
82. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 15.
83. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:408 (emphasis his).
84. Joseph Caryl, *An Exposition with Practical Applications upon…Job* (1644–1646; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books and Dust & Ashes, 2001), 1:190.
85. Caryl, *Job*, 1:204, 209.
86. Caryl, *Job*, 1:213.
87. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 10.
88. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 14–15.
89. Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good* (1663; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 11.
90. Watson, *All Things for Good*, 52.
91. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 18.
92. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 21–22.
93. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 29–30.

94. These included Flavel's earlier work *The Seaman's Companion wherein the Mysteries of Providence, Relating to Seamen, Are Opened, Their Sins and Dangers Discovered; Their Duties Pressed, and Their Several Troubles and Burdens Relieved. In Six Practicable and Suitable Sermons* (London, 1676).

95. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:403.

96. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:405.

97. Caryl, *Job*, 1:116.

98. Caryl, *Job*, 1:138.

99. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 2:462.

100. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 39.

101. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 41–43.

102. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 43–45.

103. Corbet, *Gods Providence*, 3.

104. Boston, *The Crook in the Lot*, in *Works*, 3:511–16.

105. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 7.

106. A search for the word "providence" in an online version of Edwards's book shows 115 occurrences, not counting the introductory material by the editor. See The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, *http://edwards.yale.edu/* (accessed May 20, 2011).

107. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 9, *The History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 518–20.

108. Edwards, *Works*, 9:526.

109. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:417 (emphasis his).

110. John Norton, *Abel Being Dead Yet Speaketh* (London, 1658), 5; quoted in Michael P. Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 16–17.

111. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:418–19.

112. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:428.

113. The farthing was the coin of least value in England until it was withdrawn from currency in the twentieth century.

114. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:429.

115. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:435.

116. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:436.

117. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:442.

118. One example of the Puritan delight in recording the providences of God is found in Increase Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences, Wherein an Account Is Given of Many Remarkable and Very Memorable Events, Which Have Happened in the Last Age; Especially in New England* (Boston: Samuel Green for Joseph Browning, 1684).

119. Flavel, *Mystery*, in *Works*, 4:496.

120. Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 34.

Chapter 11

The Puritans on Angels

> *The great God hath an army of holy angels at his disposal…. They who truly fear the Lord, receive much benefit, by the ministry of holy angels.*
>
> —INCREASE MATHER[1]

In considering how the Puritans viewed angels, we should remember that people in seventeenth-century Britain and its American colonies viewed the world very differently from Westerners today. David Hall writes, "The people of seventeenth-century New England lived in an enchanted universe. Theirs was a world of wonders."[2] Both popular and scholarly writers in the seventeenth century reported ghosts, ominous comets, visions of armies and ships floating in the air, demons appearing as black dogs or black bears, voices and music from invisible sources, and devils carrying men into hell.[3] To some extent, this world of wonders was an inheritance from ancient and medieval times, which had elements of pagan pantheism, spiritism, astrology, ancient cosmology, and ignorance of true science. Into this hodgepodge, teachings of the Scriptures on angels and demons were blended.

English poets wrote extensive works on the angelic world.[4] Even famous English scientists of the day saw the world as a supernatural place. For example, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), father of the scientific method, cured warts by rubbing them with bacon, then hanging the bacon in a window facing south. Robert Boyle (1627–1691), a brilliant chemist, yearned to interview miners about subterranean demons. Isaac Newton (1642–1727), mathematician and physicist, dabbled in alchemy and the occult.[5]

We have difficulty understanding this semi-magical worldview because we are heirs of the Enlightenment and atheistic evolutionary theory, which stress a mechanical worldview. We view the universe as a vast machine with parts that blindly act upon each other through the forces of nature like so many interlocking gears. Supernatural forces such as angels and demons do not fit our

world of science and technology, though the allure of magic and paganism is rebounding in our postmodern age.

Despite the popular beliefs of their age, the Puritans seldom focused on angels compared to other theological topics. That is not to say they seldom mentioned angels, but ordinarily they did so in connection to another topic or in the course of expositing a Scripture involving angels. Rarely did they engage in what we might call "angelology" today.[6] They wrote much more about the devil, but less in regard to the occult and supernatural phenomena as compared to the daily battle of people against Satan and his devils. The Puritans carefully followed the Scriptures, which did not lead them either to a magical or mechanical worldview, but rather a God-centered worldview. They offered some teachings on angels and demons, but only as part of the whole counsel of God. They focused upon God, His law, and His gospel, not upon spirits. That is especially evident in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which makes only one passing reference to angels (Q. 103), and one to Satan (Q. 102).

Richard Godbeer distinguishes between the Puritan religious ideal and popular magical beliefs by contrasting *supplicative* versus *manipulative* spirituality. The magical worldview was fundamentally *manipulative*, he said, as men and women used rituals to control spiritual powers. By contrast, the Puritan worldview was fundamentally *supplicative*, as people submitted themselves and their desires to the sovereign Lord through faith and prayer. Yet on the popular level, these distinct approaches to spirituality often blended together.[7]

The more God and Christ were emphasized, however, the more the world of spirits diminished. David Keck observes that the medieval landscape was littered with angels:

> From the great shrines dedicated to Michael the Archangel at Mont-Saint-Michel and Monte Gargano to the elaborate metaphysical speculations of the great thirteenth-century scholastics, angels permeated the physical, temporal, and intellectual landscape of the medieval West. Sculptures, stained glass, coins, clerical vestments, and pilgrim's badges all bore images of the celestial spirits. Each September 29 on the Feast of Saint Michael, clerics all across Christendom delivered sermons on and offered prayers to Michael and his cohorts…. So pervasive were angelic matters that a manuscript for a medieval miracle play provides stage directions for portraying an angel "teleporting" a man from one place to another. In the Middle Ages, angels were ubiquitous.[8]

However, as Joad Raymond writes, "Around 1500 most beliefs about angels, most representations of them…were not founded on Scripture."[9] Thus the

Reformation, with its insistence on *sola Scriptura* and *soli Deo gloria*, sought to peel away many layers of popular tradition. Elizabeth Reis writes, "Though saints and angels were celebrated and revered in medieval Europe, in John Calvin's revolutionary religious teaching their significance was de-emphasized in favour of God's centrality and supremacy." The result, she says, is that "reports of angel sightings were infrequently described in the written records of both [Puritan] clergy and lay people in the seventeenth century."[10] Let us explore what the Puritans taught about the angels. In the next chapter, we will explore their doctrine of the devil and his demons.

The Nature of Angels The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 16) says, "God created all the angels spirits, immortal, holy, excelling in knowledge, mighty in power, to execute his commandments, and to praise his name, yet subject to change."[11] The Puritans, who composed the catechism, had a high view of the angels, yet subordinated them to God.[12]

Thomas Ridgley (1667–1734) wrote a massive work on the Westminster Larger Catechism. He said that the Scriptures call the angels (1) "the morning stars" (Job 38:7) for their glory above all other creatures, (2) "the sons of God" for being created by God in His image, (3) "spirits" for being immaterial (Ps. 104:4), (4) "a flame of fire" for their agility and fervency in obeying God (Heb. 1:7), and (5) "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers" (Col. 1:16) for their high dignity and noble work.[13] Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) described angels as "the nobles and barons of the court of heaven, as dignified servants in the palace of the King of kings" (Matt. 18:10; Col. 1:16).[14]

Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664), in meditating on Hebrews 1:14, asked of angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" He acknowledged that in its context this verse establishes the absolute superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ over the angels. He quipped, "You see I had need to be careful what I say of the angels," lest the glory of God and Christ be ascribed wrongly to them (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:9).[15] From Hebrews 1:14, Ambrose deduced five doctrines about angels: (1) they are spirits, (2) their office is to minister and serve, (3) the highest angel shares in this office, (4) angels are commissioned for this work by God and Christ, and (5) the office of angels is to minister to the heirs of heaven, not all people.[16]

As to the spiritual nature of angels, Ambrose noted the difference between the view of medieval scholastics, who said angels are altogether incorporeal, and the view of Platonists and some church fathers, such as Augustine, and the Italian Reformed teacher Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), who believed that angels had bodies made of a heavenly substance more pure and subtle than earth, air, or

fire.17 Ridgley regarded the latter view as an attempt "to be wise above what is written" and an exercise in imagination "without any solid argument."18 Ridgley said it is better to regard angels as beings who, like human spirits, have understanding, will, responsibility to the law of God, and the power of influencing material objects. As beings with an incorporeal nature, angels are not subject to death because death is the dissolution of parts of the body, whereas spirits are not composed of parts. God, who created spirits, could annihilate them, but He has willed that they remain forever.19

Samuel Willard (1640–1707) wrote a large exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Although the Shorter Catechism says very little about angels, Willard addressed the subject in his expositions of God's nature as "spirit" (Q. 4) and the work of creation (Q. 9). Willard said, "Angels…are a great company of spiritual natures, or substances, created on purpose to be ministering spirits unto God."20 Scripture says angels were created by God (Ps. 148:2, 5; Col. 1:16). There are so many angels that we cannot count them (Luke 2:13; Matt. 26:53; Heb. 12:22). And angels have a specific nature (Heb. 2:16) as spiritual substances.21

Both God and angels are called "spirits" in an analogous but different manner. Willard made the following observations about how angels reflect God. Like God,

1. "Spirits are invisible substances."
2. "Spirits are impalpable…. They cannot be felt" (Luke 24:39).
3. "Spirits are the most agile, active, or nimble beings among creatures." Angels are "God's swift messengers to do his will." They travel faster than lightning. They are never tired. They are like the wind (Ps. 18:10).
4. "Spirits are the strongest among created beings." They excel in strength (Ps. 103:20) and are called powers (Eph. 6:12). One angel can fight off an army of men. Consider what angels did at the empty tomb (Matt. 28:2–7).
5. "Spirits are the most incorruptible of created beings." This refers to their power, not their purity. Lesser creatures cannot harm angels or annihilate them.
6. "Spirits are rational substances, endowed with the noblest faculties of understanding and will." They understand by reason and revelation (Eph. 3:10). Their wills love God and His people (Ps. 103:20; Luke 15:10).22

The Puritans viewed the angels as highly exalted creatures yet far below God. Ambrose said that in some respects, "they come nearest to God of all the creatures in the world, and they have kept their cloth of gold unstained six thousand years: O the purity, agility, beauty, glory, sanctity, and excellency of

the angels!”[23] Ridgley offered these comparisons between God and angels. God created the angels holy (cf. Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; Rev. 14:10), but their holiness is infinitely less than that of God, of whom Scripture says, “Thou only art holy” (Rev. 15:4). They excel in knowledge (2 Sam. 14:20), but only God knows men’s hearts (Jer. 17:10) and the future (Isa. 41:23). Angels are mighty in power (Ps. 103:20; 2 Thess. 1:7), but only God can create the world (Isa. 40:28) and sustain its existence and motions (Heb. 1:3). Only God can regenerate the soul as a new creation (Eph. 2:10). God created angels in a high estate of glory, but they were not immutable. Many angels fell from being God’s sons to become God’s enemies (Jude 6).[24]

The attributes of angels are mere echoes of God, who is infinitely more glorious than angels (Ps. 148:13). Angels fall short of God in a number of ways, Willard said:

1. Spirits are creatures, but God is not. He is and was and is to be.
2. God is “a pure act” but angels have “potentiality” to be, or not to be, and so to change.
3. Angels are limited by their own essence to one place at a time.
4. Angels are under the dominion of their Creator.
5. As spirits, the essence and acts of angels are different. They do not share in God’s simplicity whereby we can say that God loves and God is love.[25]

Willard wrote, “The nature of God and the nature of angels are infinitely different one from the other.”[26] Thomas Manton (1620–1677) described angels as beings who are ravished by the glory of God and therefore earnestly and affectionately desire to see yet more of the divine beauty shining in the work of Christ, the Redeemer of sinful men (1 Peter 1:12).[27]

The History of Angels The Puritan view of the history of angels begins with God’s eternal decree for them. It continues with their creation, the fall of some angels and the continued righteousness of others, and the role of angels in redemptive history. The history concludes with the role of angels at the end of this age and throughout the day of glory. Let us briefly review this history, using the Westminster Larger Catechism as our guide.

(1) *God’s eternal decree concerning angels.* The Larger Catechism (Q. 13), citing 1 Timothy 5:21 (“the elect angels”), says “God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of his mere love, for the praise of his glorious grace… hath elected some angels to glory.” God “passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonor and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise of the glory of his justice.” Thus the election and reprobation of men has a parallel in the election

and reprobation of angels.

The predestination of angels lies within the secret counsels of God and therefore is largely hidden from us. Ridgley gave this subject only one paragraph within the context of election, observing that whereas men are "chosen unto salvation" from sin and "chosen in Christ," neither is said of elect angels.[28] Christ is the head of elect men as their mediator, but He did not redeem angels.[29] Jonathan Edwards, on the other hand, viewed Christ's headship as extending to "all the rational creation." He said "saints and angels are united in Christ and have communion in him" (cf. Eph. 1:10). Christ's incarnate mission actually brought the angels closer to God because in Christ God drew closer to His creatures.[30]

(2) *God's creation of angels.* The Larger Catechism (Q. 16) says, "God created all the angels" (Col. 1:16). Increase Mather (1639–1723) said, "The angels are as much beholden to God for their beings as the poorest worm on the earth."[31] Willard said the creation of the "heavens" in Genesis 1:1 refers to "the third heaven," which includes the angels, as distinguished from the heavens of the sky and the region of the stars. The angels were "singing and shouting" in the "morning or beginning of the creation," according to Job 38:7, so it follows that they were created "in the first moment of time."[32]

(3) *God's establishment of elect angels in righteousness.* The Larger Catechism (Q. 19) says God permitted the fall of some angels and "established the rest in holiness and happiness." The fall of Satan and his demons will be more fully discussed later, but here we will deal with "the rest." If some angels are "elect" (1 Tim. 5:21), then, as Ridgley said, it follows that God's ultimate purpose was to give them "the grace of confirmation" so that they would never fall into sin but persevere in "holiness and happiness."[33] Debating about the time and manner of this confirmation is "to enter too far into things out of our reach," Ridgley said.[34]

Jonathan Edwards devoted a dozen of his "Miscellanies" to the confirmation of elect angels. He saw confirmation as a progressive work that began with "the terrible destruction that God brought upon the angels that fell," and continued with "the experience of the elect angels in their own happiness in standing," particularly in Christ's work of redemption (Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 1:12).[35] That ended the time of probation for the angels, who received the full and certain confirmation of eternal life when Christ ascended into heaven.[36]

(4) *God's employment of angels as the servants of present providence.* The

Larger Catechism (Q. 19) says God is employing the angels today "at his pleasure, in the administrations of his power, mercy, and justice." How this works is a huge topic. We will deal with the office and work of angels in the next section of this chapter.

(5) *God's consummation of history through angels.* Angels are prominent figures in the eschatology of the Larger Catechism, which says Christ will come to judge the world "with all his holy angels" (Q. 56; cf. Matt. 25:31). The Lord will judge "angels and men" (Q. 88). The wicked will be cast out of the presence of God, His saints, and "all his holy angels" (Q. 89). The saints will then join Christ in judging "reprobate angels and men" (Q. 90).

Ambrose said that when the day of resurrection comes, Christ will send forth angels to gather His elect in glorified bodies (Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16), and affirmed with medieval scholastics that the angels will gather the dust of men's corpses and assemble them into whole bodies, although only God can restore the soul, life, and animation to these bodies. The angels will bring men to Christ's judgment seat where He will separate the righteous from the wicked (Matt. 13:36–43). The angels will then serve as witnesses to Christ's judgment of men (Luke 12:8).37

In eternal glory, saints and angels will join together in sweet harmony in glorifying God. Edwards said angels will surpass the saints "in greatness, in strength and wisdom," but the saints will surpass angels "in beauty and amiableness [loveliness] and in being most beloved of God and most nearly united to him." Angels will be like the nobles and barons and great ministers of a king's court, while believers will be like the king's children.38

The Office and Present Work of Angels William Ames (1576–1633) said the work of angels is "to celebrate the glory of God and execute his commandments (Ps. 103:20), especially for the heirs of eternal life" (Heb. 1:14; Pss. 91:11; 34:7).39 As worshipers of God, angels were created and perfectly fitted for "the noble and delightful work of praise," Ridgley said. They praised God from the dawn of creation (Job 38:7), sang His glories at the incarnation of Christ (Luke 2:13–14; Heb. 1:6), rejoice now in the triumph of every converted sinner (Luke 15:7, 10), and in the future will join the spirits of righteous men made perfect in heaven to sing of the worthiness of the Lamb (Heb. 12:22–23; Rev. 5:11–12).40

Angels especially delight in the gospel (1 Peter 1:12). Manton wrote, "As we behold the sun that shineth to us from their part of the world, so do [the angels] behold the sun of righteousness from our part of the world, even Jesus Christ the Lord, in all the acts of his mediation…with wonder and reverence."41

Ambrose noted that angels are the messengers and soldiers of God in "ever running errands betwixt heaven and earth."[42] The Puritans believed that angels were greatly involved in God's providence throughout the world. James Ussher (1581–1656) wrote that angels have general duties "in respect of all creatures," namely, "that they are the instruments and ministers of God for the administration and government of the whole world."[43] The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 19) says God uses His angels, "employing them all, at his pleasure, in the administrations of his power, mercy, and justice."

Increase Mather said God is to His angels as a general is to his soldiers.[44] Ambrose wrote, "Upon this ground is the Lord very often called the Lord of hosts, *i.e.* the Lord of angels, for so Jacob called the two armies of angels, God's 'host'; and the multitude of angels that praised God at Christ's nativity 'a multitude of the heavenly hosts.' Look, as commanders say to their soldiers, go, and they go; so saith God to his angels, go, and they go."[45] The number of angels is vast. William Ames said, "They are many in number, up to ten thousand times ten thousand (Dan. 7:10; Heb. 12:22; Matt. 26:53)…and they are subject only to the rule of God and Christ."[46]

Despite men's speculations about angels, Ambrose taught that all angels are called to minister to men (Heb. 1:14), even Michael (Jude 9) and Gabriel (Luke 1:19, 26).[47] In all their work, the angels obey the commands of their Lord (Zech. 1:10; 1 Kings 22:19–23).[48]

From the Middle Ages, the church had generally followed the doctrines of Dionysius the Areopagite's *Celestial Hierarchy*, which influenced both Dante and Aquinas's views of heaven with its nine levels of angelic orders. But Renaissance humanism had proven that the document was a forgery written four or five centuries after the apostle Paul—of whom "Dionysius" claimed to be a contemporary.[49] Though its ideas remained influential among theologians and laypeople, the Puritans discouraged speculations about the hierarchy of angels. William Perkins (1558–1602) wrote, "That there are degrees of angels, is most plain [citing Col. 1:16; Rom. 8:38; 1 Thess. 4:16]…. But it is not for us to search, who, or how many be of each order, neither ought we curiously to inquire how they are distinguished, whether in essence, or qualities."[50]

Ridgley said tersely about angelic hierarchies, "Scripture is silent on the subject."[51] Ambrose commended the wisdom of those who avoided such useless controversies, choosing rather to propound "only those things which tended to the kindling of true faith in Christ, and to the exercise of true godliness, according to the word of God, and to the procuring of true consolation both in life and death."[52]

God commands His angels to care for His saints, not to rule over them or

receive worship from them. The angels obey God's will by using their strength to shield and support us in our weakness. As Ambrose wrote, "They shall accompany thee, go before thee, wait upon thee, follow thee, as the shadow follows the body" (Ps. 91:11–12).[53] As a result, no harm can fall upon us except for evils ordained by God for His glory.[54] Willard said angels may even interfere with the plans of earthly kings to defeat evil purposes against God's people (Dan. 10:13, 20).[55]

Ambrose described angels as God's "watchful sentinels" and "safe convoys" who protect those who fear Him until they reach heaven (Ps. 34:7; 2 Kings 6:17). Though we deserve tigers and dragons, our God sends angels to care for us. Angels are the bodyguards of the children of the King. Indeed, the delight of the angels is to "attend their partners in heavenly joy." They are ravished with the wonder of our redemption through Christ (1 Peter 1:12).[56]

What amazing comfort it is that "the noblest spirits, who behold the face of God himself… should be destined by Christ, the King of saints, to minister to his saints,"[57] Ambrose wrote. Whether a believer is on a journey (Gen. 24:7), or in battle (Exod. 23:23), or suffering persecution (1 Kings 19:5, 7), or is even sentenced to death (Dan. 6:22; Acts 12:1–11), he may be encouraged by angels who minister to his needs.[58] Wicked men may take away our pastors, our Bibles, and our freedom, but they cannot take away God's angels.[59]

According to Ambrose, angels give help and strength to the elect even in their death pains. Sometimes they grant the dying with supernatural comfort or prophetic foreknowledge. After death, angels carry elect souls through Satan's domain into heaven (cf. Luke 16:22; 2 Kings 2:11). Angels also stand at heaven's gates to welcome the saints into the glorious city of God with embraces and kisses and burning love (cf. Rev. 21:12). They present these souls to Christ, who is seated upon His throne, to receive His benediction. The angels then join with the souls of the elect to worship God their Creator and the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 4–5).[60]

Communion with Angels Can we converse with angels? Henry Ainsworth (1571–1622) said, "These heavenly spirits have communion, not only with God, in whose presence they stand, but also with us, the children of God, through faith, by which we are come unto the great assembly of the many thousands of them (Heb. 12:22), have them for our guardians (Pss. 34:7; 91:11–12), and acknowledge them to be our fellow-servants (Rev. 22:9)."[61]

Yet Ainsworth reflected the caution of other Puritans in writing, "God hath in ages past, before the incarnation of Christ, more frequently employed them outwardly in revealing his will unto men, than in these last days he doth, since

he hath opened unto us the whole mystery of his counsel by his Son (Heb. 1)."[62]

Ambrose, on the other hand, ascribed nearly everything in God's providence in the world to the work of angels, even in the provision of our daily food and health.[63] In this he failed to walk carefully within the limits of scriptural revelation and gave way to speculations and anecdotal evidence. Ambrose went so far as to say that angels secretly teach the minds of the elect through dreams and the injection of holy motions into the heart, acting as "cisterns and channels" by which the Holy Spirit works to regenerate and guide His own.[64] Christopher Love (1618–1651) also wrote that angels "suggest holy thoughts into the hearts of the people of God," being "instruments in the Spirit's hand."[65] James Ussher wrote similarly that the good things of the soul which God gives His saints by the ministry of angels include "to inform them in things which he would have done" and "to stir up good motions in their heart."[66] Cotton Mather (1663–1728) recorded more than one angelic appearance in his diary. He also suggested that medical cures might be offered to men's minds by helpful angels.[67]

The stories that Ambrose and Mather related about angelic experiences demonstrate how some Puritans lived in a world of wonder, populated by invisible spirits. Sometimes this view of life bubbled over into speculations and folklore. More often, the Puritans rejoiced in the ministry of angels but drew the curtain where Scripture ceased to speak, leaving what lay beyond Scripture shrouded in mystery. Ridgley, for example, asserted that most accounts of angels in the Bible were extraordinary and miraculous, not the ordinary providences of God toward His children in the world. The latter he confined to more general promises of protection through angels (Pss. 91:11–12; 34:7).[68]

Some seventeenth-century Englishmen continued to be influenced by the medieval Catholic view that every person has two angels, one good and one bad, both seeking to influence him throughout life. This view appeared in the second-century book *The Shepherd*, by Hermas. English Protestants generally dismissed the idea that the elect have an evil angel, but sometimes embraced the concept of a guardian angel assigned to each of the elect.[69] Thomas Aquinas had written, "Each man has an angel guardian appointed to him."[70] But Calvin had taught, "We ought to hold as a fact that the care of each one of us is not the task of one angel only, but all with one consent watch over our salvation."[71] So Love argued that the guardian angel motif sprang from paganism, encourages astrology and devotion to the saints, and diminishes the display of God's love for His people for the Bible repeatedly speaks of a saint being attended by not one but *many* angels (Gen. 32:1–2; 2 Kings 6:17; Luke 15:10; 16:22).[72]

Conclusion

The Puritan approach to angels was guarded by their passion for the mediation of Christ alone and the glory of God alone. Ambrose wrote, "We have far less written in God's word of the nature of angels, than of God himself; because the knowledge of God is far more practical, and less controversial, and more necessary to salvation."73 He thus advised, "O then let us eye God, and eye Jesus Christ, in all, above all, and beyond all angel-ministration."74

Increase Mather challenged his readers, "Behold the majesty of the great God, who hath such glorious creatures as the angels are, to wait upon him, and to do his pleasure…. A king hath lords and nobles, the greatest of the kingdom about him, as his servants. But the great God, the King of heaven, hath those that are higher than they, and more" (Ps. 68:17; Dan. 7:10).75

1. Increase Mather, *Angelographia, or A Discourse Concerning the Nature and Power of the Holy Angels, and the Great Benefit Which the True Fearers of God Receive by Their Ministry* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen for Samuel Phillips, 1696), 4.

2. David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 71.

3. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 71–80.

4. See Thomas Heywood, *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels, Their Names, Order, and Offices, the Fall of Lucifer and His Angels* (London: Adam Islip, 1635); Lucy Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder, or, The World Made and Undone* (1679); John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Peter Barker, 1667); Samuel Pordage, *Mundorum Explicatio…The Mysteries of the External, Internal, and Eternal Worlds* (London: T. R. for Lodowick Lloyd, 1661).

5. Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 7.

6. Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20, 38–39.

7. Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9–10.

8. David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

9. Raymond, *Milton's Angels*, 4.

10. Elizabeth Reis, "Otherworldly Visions: Angels, Devils and Gender in Puritan New England," in *Angels in the Early Modern World,* ed. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 282. Reis notes that reports of angelic appearances substantially increased in the 1730s and 1740s and into the nineteenth century (292–94).

11. Citing Col. 1:16; Ps. 104:4; Matt. 22:30; 25:31; 2 Sam. 14:17; Matt. 24:36; 2 Thess. 1:7; Ps. 103:20; 2 Peter 2:4.

12. For seventeenth-century English treatises on angels, see Isaac Ambrose, *The Ministration of and Communion with Angels*, in *Works of Isaac Ambrose* (London: Printed for Thomas Tegg and Son, 1829), 473–560; Benjamin Camfield, *A Theological Discourse of Angels, and Their Ministries* (London: R[obert] E[everingham] for Hen. Brome, 1678); Robert Dingley, *The Deputation of Angels, or The Angel Guardian* (London: T. R. for E. Dod, 1654); Henry Lawrence, *An History of Angels; Being a Theological Treatise of Our Communion and War with Them* (London: Nealand, 1649); Christopher Love, *A Treatise of Angels*, in *The Works of…Christopher Love* (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1806), 1:182–218; Increase Mather, *Coelestinus: a Conversation in Heaven…Introduced by Agathangelus, or, An Essay on the Ministry of the Holy Angels* (Boston: S. Kneeland, for Nath. Belknap, 1723); and *Angelographia*; John Salkeld, *A Treatise of Angels* (London: T. S. for Nathaniel Butter, 1623); Thomas Shepard, *Several Sermons on Angels, With a Sermon on the Power of Devils in Bodily Distempers* (London: Sam Drury, 1702). See also Peter Martyr Vermigli,

The Common Places of Peter Martyr, trans. Anthonie Marten (n.p.: [1583]), 1:72–92, 111–21; Henry Bullinger, "Of Good and Evil Spirits," in *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding (1849–1852; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 2:327–65. Bullinger was a major Continental influence on English theology.

13. Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity…Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 1:341–42.

14. Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 1247, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 23, The "Miscellanies" 1153–1360*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 182.

15. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 474.

16. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 474.

17. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 475.

18. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:342.

19. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:342.

20. Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1969), 112. It is sometimes said the Puritans did not produce systematic theologies. But the expositions of the Westminster catechisms produced by Willard and Ridgley, not to mention Thomas Vincent, Thomas Watson, and Thomas Boston, demonstrate that the Puritans published systematic theology.

21. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 112.

22. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 52–53, 112–13.

23. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 484.

24. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:343–44, 346.

25. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 53–54. Cf. 60, 69, 72, 111–12.

26. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 52.

27. Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1874), 18:205–8.

28. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:263.

29. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:283.

30. Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 120, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," a–500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 284–85.

31. Increase Mather, *Angelographia*, 6.

32. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 111–12.

33. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:367–68.

34. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:367.

35. Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 442, in *Works*, 13:490–91.

36. Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 515, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies" 501–832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 58–62. See also "Miscellanies," no. 570, 591, 664b sec. 8, 702 cor. 4, 744, 935, 937, 939 cor., 942, 947, 994, and 1329.

37. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 553–57.

38. Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 824, in *Works*, 18:535–36.

39. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John D. Eusden (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 103 (1.8.39). See Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:344; Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 112–13; Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 16.

40. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:344.

41. Manton, *Works*, 18:203.

42. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 476.

43. James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity* (1648; repr., Birmingham, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 105 (seventh head).

44. Increase Mather, *Angelographia*, 19.

45. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 482.

46. Ames, *Marrow*, 103 (1.8.41).
47. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 477–78.
48. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 479.
49. Raymond, *Milton's Angels*, 23–26.
50. William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine: or, The Description of Theologie* ([London]: John Legat, 1600), 12.
51. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:345. He rejected the authority and authenticity of the book on which Roman Catholics based much of their angelology, the *Celestial Hierarchy*, ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite.
52. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 479.
53. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 481.
54. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 510–11.
55. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 113.
56. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 481–83, 487.
57. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 484.
58. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 486.
59. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 492.
60. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 538–42.
61. Henry Ainsworth, *The Communion of Saints*, in *Two Treatises* (Edinburgh: D. Paterson, 1789), 34–35.
62. Ainsworth, *The Communion of Saints*, in *Two Treatises*, 156.
63. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 495–512.
64. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 513–21.
65. Love, *A Treatise of Angels*, in *Works*, 202.
66. Ussher, *Body of Divinity*, 105 (seventh head).
67. Cotton Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather* (repr., New York: Frederick Ungar, n.d.), 2:190, 200; Reis, "Otherworldly Visions," in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, 285–87, 291.
68. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 1:368–69.
69. Raymond, *Milton's Angels*, 57–60. Raymond notes that this doctrine is taken up in the Quran with the image of the good angel sitting on one's right shoulder and the bad angel on the left shoulder.
70. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1922), part 1, q. 113, art. 2.
71. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.14.7.
72. Love, *A Treatise of Angels*, in *Works*, 196–97.
73. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 480.
74. Ambrose, *Angels*, in *Works*, 537.
75. Increase Mather, *Angelographia*, 21.

Chapter 12

The Puritans on Demons

> *Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched.*
>
> —THOMAS BROOKS[1]

In the previous chapter, we examined the teachings of the Puritans on angels, including their nature, history, and involvement in human life. In this chapter, we consider more specifically the fallen angels and the believer's warfare against them. The Puritans regarded the subject of demonology as significant but not central to the faith. As noted in the last chapter, the Westminster Shorter Catechism makes only a single reference to Satan (Q. 102) but says nothing about the devil or demons. The Larger Catechism speaks of Satan and the devil in eleven places (Q. 19, 21, 27, 48, 89, 90, 105, 121, 191, 192, 195). The Puritans spoke guardedly of experiences with angels but constantly wrote about our conflict with Satan.[2]

The History of Satan and the Demons The Puritans regarded the devil and his minions as angels who were created good by God but fell into sin and misery (2 Peter 2:4).[3] William Gouge (1575–1653) wrote, "The devils by creation were good angels, as powerful, wise, quick, speedy, invisible, and immortal as any other angels."[4] Demons share the same nature as angels, but through rebellion against God became corrupt and subject to divine judgment. When these angels fell, said Gouge, "They lost not their natural substance, and essential properties thereof, no more than what man lost when he fell…. Only the quality of his nature and properties is altered from good to evil." The angelic attributes of the fallen spirits now work for evil rather than good.[5]

The Larger Catechism (Q. 19) says, "God by his providence permitted some of the angels, willfully and irrecoverably, to fall into sin and damnation, limiting and ordering that, and all their sins, to his own glory." Since Christ, the only Mediator, did not take the nature of angels (Heb. 2:16), Thomas Ridgley (1667–

1734) said, “Their condition was irretrievable, and their misery eternal.”6

The fall of Satan and his angels is shrouded in mystery. Biblical texts traditionally used to describe the fall of Satan (Isa. 14; Ezek. 28; Luke 10:18; Rev. 12) were otherwise understood by most Puritan Bible commentators.7 They revealed little to even nothing of the fall of the angels.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), on the other hand, considered the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:12 to be a type of Satan. He said the phrase “son of the morning” referred to Lucifer as the most glorious of all angels and “the very highest of all God’s creatures.” This stressed Satan’s superiority above other demons so much that they are called “his angels” (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7).8 Edwards argued that in Ezekiel 28:12–19, the king of Tyre is “a type of the devil” who fell from grace.9

Edwards speculated that God tested the angels by revealing that His Son would become a man, and all angels would be subservient to Him. He wrote, “Satan, or Lucifer, or Beelzebub, being the archangel, one of the highest of the angels, could not bear it [and] thought it below him” to serve the lowly man, Jesus. His rebellion resulted in events that brought to pass the very thing he sought to avoid: the incarnation of Christ and His exaltation over all angelic powers.10 In this, Edwards agreed with some other Reformed and Puritan theologians such as Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590) and Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680).11 There are ancient roots to the view that Satan’s rebellion began with an objection against serving the incarnate Christ. A fourth-century text, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, said that the devil first rebelled when he refused to bow before Adam.12 Edwards’s view of the fall of the reprobate angels parallels his view of the confirmation of the elect angels in that both events center upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

The history of the demons will reach its ultimate end when they are cast into the lake of fire. According to the Larger Catechism (Q. 89), on the day of judgment the wicked will “be punished with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, with the devil and his angels forever.” The righteous will join Christ “in the judging of reprobate angels” (Q. 90).

The damnation of all the fallen angels dramatically illustrates that the salvation of elect men is of sheer grace. Samuel Willard (1640–1707) wrote that we should be amazed that God chose to leave “all the vast number of apostate spirits…in chains of darkness, and not one of them is brought back to salvation,” but He chose to save some men: “What is there in man more than in an angel to prefer him in the choice?” he asked.13 Similarly, Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) marveled that when the angels sinned, “divine thunder dashed them into hell,” whereas when man sinned, “divine blood wafts the fallen creature from his

misery."[14]

The Power of Satan and the Demons The Puritans viewed human history as one in continual conflict with evil spiritual powers. The Larger Catechism says that man fell "through the temptation of Satan" (Q. 21). The fall brought man into the misery of being "bond slaves to Satan" (Q. 27). Christ's humiliation was a state of conflict with the temptations of Satan (Q. 48).

The power of these invisible spiritual enemies was limited, according to Edward Reynolds (1599–1676), who wrote, "Satan hath three titles given him in the Scripture, setting forth his malignity against the church of God: a dragon, to denote his malice (Rev. 12:3); a serpent, to denote his subtlety (Gen. 3:1); and a lion, to denote his strength (1 Peter 5:8). But none of all these can stand before prayer."[15] Edwards said the devil's remarkable knowledge of God, creation, and providence was due to his having been "educated in the best divinity school in the universe, *viz.* the heaven of heavens."[16]

Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) expounded on the demonic angels as principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:12), with the following points:

1. "Principalities." Satan rules over the entire world and is called "the prince of this world" (John 14:30) and "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). "God in justice gave Satan leave to prevail and rule in the sons of disobedience."[17]

2. "Powers." Demons are "filled with a mighty power." They can control natural forces such as lightning and wind (Job 1:16, 19), the bodies of animals (Matt. 8:32), even men (Matt. 17:15). They can afflict believers with disease (Job 2:7; Luke 13:16). They can act upon the "fancies" or imaginations of men, injecting thoughts or bringing up sensual memories in the human mind, thereby stirring the affections toward "wrath, pride, covetousness, lusts."[18]

3. "Rulers of the darkness of this world." Ambrose designated Satan's dominion in term of its (a) time: the age from Adam's fall until Christ's coming; (b) place: the earth as opposed to the heavens; and (c) subjects: those persons in darkness, the spiritual night of sin and ignorance.[19]

4. "Spiritual wickednesses." As spirits, demons can attack us invisibly in any place and at any time, and physical objects cannot protect us. As wicked spirits they are "evil and malicious." The devil's "main work is to damn souls." And these wicked spirits not only tempt us to fleshly sins but to spiritual sins "such as unbelief, pride, hypocrisy, idolatry, blasphemy."[20]

William Ames (1576–1633) said the fall of man brought humanity into a state of "spiritual death" which consists in part of man's "bondage to the devil" (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31; 16:11; 2 Tim. 2:26; Eph. 2:2). Man is in subjection to Satan's servants, meaning he is in "subjection to the evil incitements found in the world" (1 John 4:5; 2:15–16) and is "so captivated by sin that he has no power to rise out of it."[21]

The Larger Catechism says people by nature are "wholly inclined to do the will of the flesh and of the devil" (Q. 192). Thus, people are encouraged to pray for God's mercy (Q. 191), "acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed…that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him for ever." We must pray for total victory over this enemy (Q. 195).

God calls people out of this darkness into His glorious light through His Son.[22] Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) said Christ came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). He wrote, "The truth is, Satan's works of sin and hell… was a prison house, and a castle of strength, and many strong chains of sin and misery. Christ was manifested to break down and dissolve the house, to break his war-ship, and to set the captives at liberty (Isa. 61:1–2; John 14:30)."[23] Though the devil was like a strong man, well-armed and secure in his palace (Matt. 12:29), Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) rejoiced that "Almighty Jesus hath conquered and slain him; the strong man armed is subdued, your adversary the devil is brought down."[24] On the basis of Christ's victory, the gospel calls men to turn from the power of darkness to Christ. Keach made the following poetic appeal to the unsaved:

> A slave to Satan hadst thou rather be
> Than take Christ's easy yoke, and be made free?
> Which will afford most comfort in the end,
> The Lord to please, and Satan to offend;
> Or Satan to obey, and so thereby
> Declare thyself JEHOVAH's enemy?
> For whoso lives in sin, it is most clear,
> That open enemies to God they are.[25]

The person who repents and trusts in Christ has overwhelming resources in Christ to fight the devil. John Calvin said, "We are conquerors before we engage with the enemy, for our head Christ has once for all conquered for us the whole world."[26] Believers need to apply Christ's victory to their battles by faith. Rutherford wrote, "Certain it is, we improve not [do not make good use of]

Christ's power of dominion over Satan to the utmost." If the disciple Peter had not been "self-strong" but instead had "watched, and trusted in the strength of an Intercessor, he should not have been deserted so as to deny his Lord," Rutherford said. He thus concluded, "Certain it is, that as we come short of these comforts of a communion with God, which we might enjoy, by our loose walking; so, upon the same reason, we fall short of many victories over Satan, which we might have, if we should improve the dominion and kingly power of Christ over that restless spirit."[27]

Satan's powers are great, but they are limited by God for His divine purposes to do good to those whom He has chosen. The Puritans saw Job as an example of this limitation. It led Ridgley to exclaim, "What would not fallen angels attempt against mankind, were not their sin limited by the providence of God!"[28] God rules over Satan's instruments to serve His own purposes, such as using Satan's thorn in Paul's flesh to display the sufficiency of God's grace in polishing Paul (2 Cor. 12:7–9).[29] Stephen Charnock wrote, "The goodness of God makes the devil a polisher, while he intends to be a destroyer."[30] This polishing makes our metal shine. Indeed, God's wisdom rules over Satan's schemes so that the devil accomplishes God's plans. William Gurnall (1616–1679) said, "God sets the devil to catch the devil, and lays, as it were, his own counsels under Satan's wings, and makes him hatch them."[31]

Rutherford said that since Christ relates to all creatures as the Lord God, devils can go no place without being held by Christ on the "chain of omnipotency." He added, "Christ numbers all the footsteps of devils. Satan hath not a general warrant to tempt the saints; but to every new act against Job (1:12; 2:6), against Peter, ere he can put him upon one single blast, to cast him but once through his sieve (Luke 22:31), yea against one sow, or a bristle of a sow (Matt. 8:31–32), he must have a new signed commission."[32] Keach put this boast in the mouth of the believer:

> Father of lies, dost think I dread thy frown?
> 'Tis past thy pow'r or skill to cast me down.
> Thy head is bruis'd: thou art a conquer'd foe;
> And chained up fast; no further can'st thou go
> Than thou art suffered by my God and King;
> Therefore I fear not; thou hast lost thy sting.[33]

The Believer's Battle against Satan's Devices Calvin warned believers about the wiles of Satan, saying, "All that Scripture teaches concerning devils aims at arousing us to take precaution against their stratagems and contrivances, and also to make us equip ourselves with those weapons which are strong and powerful

enough to vanquish these most powerful foes."[34] The Puritans took this advice seriously. William Spurstowe (c. 1605–1666) warned, "Satan is full of devices, and studies arts of circumvention by which he unweariedly seeks the irrecoverable ruin of the souls of men."[35] Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) said, "Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched."[36]

Spiritual warfare calls us to be watchful because Satan's chief means of destroying people is through deception (Gen. 3:1–5, 13; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14; Rev. 12:9). Spurstowe wrote, "We ought rather to be all the more watchful since we have such a serpent to deal with that can hide his deadly poison with a beautiful and shining skin."[37] Satan is also dangerous to the elect. Spurstowe wrote, "If not to extinguish their light, yet [Satan tempts] to eclipse their luster; if not to cause a shipwreck, yet to raise a storm; if not to hinder their happy end, yet to molest them in their way."[38]

Satan crafts his temptations to suit the individual. William Jenkyn (1613–1685) said, "He has an apple for Eve, a grape for Noah, a change of raiment for Gehazi, and a bag for Judas."[39] Spurstowe said Satan tempts a young man with sexual lust, a middle-aged man with "an itch for honor and to be great," and an old man with "covetousness and peevishness."[40] Gurnall said no actress has "so many dresses to come in upon the stage with as the devil hath forms of temptation."[41]

Spurstowe cataloged many of Satan's devices. Here are some of those devices as well as remedies for them from Spurstowe and other Puritan writers.

Device 1: Satan leads men from lesser sins to greater. People usually think of lesser sins as nothing more serious than a cold. But Spurstowe warned, "Small sins are as the priming of a post or pillar, that prepare it to better receive those other colors that are to be laid upon it." Small sins leach away our fear of God and hatred of sin. They lead us to greater sins as we try to cover up our slips.[42]

Remedy: Spurstowe warned, "Take heed of giving place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). If you let the serpent's head into your house, his whole body will quickly follow.[43] If the devil minimizes sin, look at what every sin deserves and see it as the hateful thing that God despises. Gurnall said, "There is a spark of hell in every temptation."[44] Brooks wrote, "The least sin is contrary to the law of God, the nature of God, the being of God, and the glory of God."[45] He also said, "There is more evil in the least sin than in the greatest affliction."[46]

Device 2: The devil persistently urges men to a particular sin. He inserts evil thoughts in the mind (John 13:2). He sways the understanding with arguments and promises (1 Kings 22:21; Matt. 4:9). He persistently presses until men

succumb, as Delilah did with Samson (Judg. 16:16).47 Yet he can so subtly insinuate such suggestions that they appear to be our own thoughts. With such thinking, Peter acted on his own impulses and became Satan's emissary to Christ (Matt. 16:22–23).48

Remedy: Reject the promises of sin. Brooks said, "Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst: he promises honor and pays with disgrace, he promises pleasure and pays with pain, he promises profit and pays with loss, he promises life and pays with death; but God pays as he promises, for all his payments are made in pure gold."49

For those who prefer peace with sin rather than war against the devil, Rutherford wrote, "The devil's war is better than the devil's peace…. When the dog is kept out of doors he howls to be in again."50 Spurstowe wrote, "We need resolution, for he who will be a Christian must expect opposition; we must not think to pass out of Egypt without Pharaoh's pursuing us."51 For those wearied by temptations, Brooks said, "Remember this, that your life is short, your duties many, your assistance great, and your reward sure; therefore faint not, hold on and hold up, in ways of well-doing, and heaven shall make amends for all."52 For those losing hope under the pressure of demonic doubts, the Puritans often quoted Romans 16:20, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Stand firm and Satan will flee.53

Device 3: Satan makes a strategic retreat for a time to draw us out of our position of strength (cf. Josh. 8:15). He permits us a momentary victory to "swell the heart with pride." He lulls us into "a spirit of security" and "vain presumption."54

Remedy: Spurstowe said we can overcome the devil by "Christian sobriety and watchfulness" (1 Peter 5:8). Christians in this world should not live like rich men in a king's court but like soldiers in the camps of war—"it is a war without a truce."55

Device 4: Satan clothes evil with false appearances (Isa. 5:20). He dyes sin with the colors of virtue so that greed becomes frugality, and lukewarmness appears to be moderation. He smears goodness with contempt, like a lovely face viewed in a broken mirror.56 Satan especially strives to misrepresent God. Charnock wrote, "Satan paints God with his own colours, represents him as envious and malicious as himself."57 Spurstowe warned that Satan seduces men into doctrinal error through false teachers (2 Thess. 2:1–2; 2 Peter 2:1). False doctrine is from the devil (Gal. 3:1; John 8:44).58

Remedy: We must love the truth of the Bible. "Truth is the food of the soul,"

Spurstowe said.[59] Brooks said, “A man may lawfully sell his house, land, and jewels, but truth is a jewel that exceeds all price, and must not be sold.”[60] Spurstowe wrote, “In resisting temptations, make use of Christ as a pattern…. Observe the weapon Christ chose to foil him by, and to resist all the temptations of Satan with. He could as easily, by His power, have rebuked and silenced him as he did the wind and waves, but He did it by the Word.”[61] So study the Scriptures and “get a skill in the Word” to apply it well.[62] If the powers of Satan are as formidable as the walls of Jericho, realize that preachers of the Holy Scriptures are God’s trumpets to cast the devil’s kingdom to the ground.[63]

Device 5: Satan ensnares men with lawful things. With this ploy, a quiet stream will carry more boats over the waterfall than noisy rapids. Spurstowe named such lawful things as hunting, drinking, falconry, recreations, eating, even hard work. These become sinful “when they are unbounded and not according to the rule and warrant of the Word.”[64] Richard Gilpin (1625–1700) said that “worldly delights” are “Satan’s great engine” of temptation.[65]

Remedy: Gilpin exhorted those with little to be content with such and not long for riches, for “the world is not so desirable a thing as many dream.” Those with plenty should also be careful “because they walk in the midst of snares.”[66] Spurstowe urged caution in the use of things that might prove to be temptations. He said, “Take heed of venturing upon the occasions of sin and coming near the borders of temptations…. Our hearts are [gun] powder, and therefore we must take heed of sparks.”[67]

Device 6: Fallen angels exalt new revelations and miracles, while putting down the Scriptures and ordinary ministers of the church. Satan can appear as an “angel of light” claiming to reveal new truths (2 Cor. 11:14). New revelations appeal to people’s pride by making them think they are closer to God than others.[68]

Remedy: Edwards warned that not all experiences are from Christ, even if they cannot be explained by mere human influences. He said,

> There are other spirits who have influence on the minds of men, besides the Holy Ghost. We are directed not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they be of God [1 John 4:1]. There are many false spirits, exceedingly busy with men, who often transform themselves into angels of light, and do in many wonderful ways, with great subtlety and power, mimic the operations of the Spirit of God.[69]

Edwards included in the category of such experiences false comforts and joys, terrors, and raptures.[70]

Spurstowe said the devil uses “lying signs, wonders, and miracles” to support his servants in the world (Matt. 24:24; Rev. 13:13).[71] Other Puritans warned that the Antichrist or “man of lawlessness” will come “after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9). Thomas Manton (1620–1677) said the greatest number of those are “mere fables, notorious impostures, and forgeries.” He said others may be “done by diabolical illusions, as there may be apparitions, visions, specters, for Satan will bestir himself to keep up the credit of his ministers.” But the Bible says that even truly supernatural events must be rejected if they draw us away from the true God.[72]

Device 7: The demons surprise or shock people with temptations. They make them think no one else has experienced such temptations before. Or they lure us toward sins we never thought would appeal to us. Or they foster shame so that we tell no one of our struggles.[73]

Remedy: Spurstowe wrote, “Suspect yourself prone to every sin; do not repose anything on constitution or temperament.” He quoted 1 Corinthians 10:13, which says, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” None of us is exempt from temptation, nor do we face unique temptations. Therefore, believers who are tempted to sin are urged to talk with wise and experienced Christians “who will pray for us and not deride us.”[74]

Device 8: The devil encourages us to fight him with charms and sacred objects. But Scriptures written on jewelry or clothing are nothing compared to Scripture that is written on our hearts. Satan is not disturbed by holy water and incantations, though he may at times give them false success to spur on superstition.[75]

Remedy: Spurstowe wrote, “Do not think that these things will frighten the devil; rather look up to God.”[76] He urged, “Be abundant in the use of prayer,” and quoted Bernard of Clairvaux, who said, “Satan’s temptations are grievous to us, but our prayers are more grievous to him.”[77]

Device 9: Satan attacks the conscience and assurance of believers with false reasoning. He might use a false syllogism such as, “This sin cannot remain in a true child of God. But it remains in you. Therefore you are not a true child of God.” He urges believers to judge themselves by false standards.[78]

Remedy: Spurstowe said true conversion is not determined by whether sin remains in us, but whether sin *reigns* in us. He said, “We are not to place the strength of our confidence in our own righteousness, as if it would abide the severity of God’s trial.” So our conversion does not depend on the perfection of

our work, but the sincerity of our endeavors to pursue perfection.[79] Only Christ obeys perfectly.

Device 10: The tempter entices people with the promise that they can repent easily after sinning.[80]

Remedy: Brooks wrote, "Repentance is a mighty work, a difficult work, a work that is above our power…. Repentance is a flower that grows not in nature's garden."[81] Repentance is a great grace from God. We must cherish it and develop it, not take it for granted.

Device 11: The devil seeks to make our calling as Christians clash with our calling to a particular field of work. He urges us to do devotions when we should be doing our jobs, or go to work when we should be worshiping God.[82]

Remedy: Spurstowe called believers to "diligence and industry in your calling," as a bird is much safer from attack when it is flying than when it is sitting in a tree.[83] Benjamin Wadsworth (1670–1737) said, "If thou are not doing some work for God, well employed in some good thing, the devil will be ready to employ thee."[84]

The Puritans also commended observance of the Lord's Day to balance work and worship. The Larger Catechism (Q. 121) says one reason the Decalogue says, "*Remember* the Sabbath," is that "Satan with his instruments labors much to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety."

Device 12: Satan drives men from one extreme to the other. He pushes believers' pendulum from presumptuous sin to despair over sin, and from neglect of religious duties to "such a rigorous tyranny that makes many to groan under them." He provokes men to react against one heresy by embracing the opposite error.[85] The evil one aggravates the wounds made by the Holy Spirit. He takes legitimate convictions of sins and adds "horror and terror" to them to urge believers to resist the medicine of the gospel rather than to receive right comfort.[86]

Remedy: Spurstowe said, "Faith leaves both extremes and closes with [embraces] God according to the rule of the Word."[87] Brooks said we must solemnly consider "that God is as just as he is merciful"; therefore, we must not abuse His mercy lest we bring His judgments upon ourselves.[88] On the other hand, we must believe in the sincerity and faithfulness of God in His gospel promises of mercy to the repentant believer lest we dishonor His goodness. Charnock said, "What is the reason we come not to him when he calls us, but

some secret imagination that he is of an ill nature, means not as he speaks, but intends to mock us, instead of welcoming us?”[89]

Conclusion: Victory Assured!

Most importantly, in a world of angels and demons, the Puritans directed the believer to Christ, who is the victorious Captain against all the forces of evil and Lord of the hosts of heaven. John Downame (d. 1652) wrote,

> If we did indeed regard our enemies’ strength and our own weakness only, we might well be discouraged from undertaking this combat, but if we look upon our grand Captain Christ, whose love towards us is no less than his power, and both infinite, there is no cause of doubting…. He hath already overcome our enemies…. Our Saviour hath spoiled principalities and powers, and hath made a show of them openly, and hath triumphed over them upon the cross (Col. 2:15).[90]

The Puritans said Christ was the Seed of the woman who “bruised” Satan’s head (Gen. 3:15) in His atoning death (Heb. 2:14), His victorious resurrection (Ps. 68:18), and His final judgment (cf. Rev. 20–21). On judgment day, Satan and his seed will be cast out forever. Never again will Satan trouble the seed of the woman. The Victor, Christ Jesus, will seize the old serpent and cast him eternally into the bottomless pit. The crushing of Satan’s head will then be complete. The accuser of the brethren will accuse no more. The militant church will become the church triumphant. All evil will forever be walled out of heaven, and all good walled in. *Soli Deo gloria!*

1. Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies for Satan’s Devices*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 1:3.

2. For some Puritan treatises on a Christian’s war with Satan, see Isaac Ambrose, *War with Devils; Ministration of, and Communion with Angels* (Glasgow: Joseph Galbraith and Co., 1769); Brooks, *Precious Remedies for Satan’s Devices*, in *Works*, 1:1–166; Benjamin Colman, *The Case of Satan’s Fiery Dart* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, for J. Edwards, 1744); John Downame, *The Christian Warfare against the Devil, World, and Flesh* (1604; facsimile repr., Vestavia Hills, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009); Richard Gilpin, *Daemonologia Sacra, or, A Treatise on Satan’s Temptations* (1677; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000); William Gouge, *The Whole-Armour of God* (London: John Beale, 1616); William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour: A Treatise of the Saints’ War against the Devil* (1662–1665; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002); Benjamin Keach, *War with the Devil* (Coventry: T. Luckman, [1760]); William Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan* (1666; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004); Samuel Willard, *The Christian’s Exercise by Satan’s Temptations* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen for Benjamin Eliot, 1701). For a bibliography of books published from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries on demons, see Henry Kernot, *Bibliotheca Diabolica* (New York: Scribner, Wellford, and Armstrong, 1874).

3. Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity…Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly’s Larger Catechism* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 1:365.

4. Gouge, *The Whole-Armour of God*, 40.

5. Gouge, *The Whole-Armour of God*, 40.

6. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 365.

7. James Durham, *Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (1658; repr., Willow Street, Pa.: Old Paths Publications, 2000), 660–62; Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 3:65; William Greenhill, *Ezekiel* (1645–1647; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 612; Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 4:68, 721; 5:551; 6:934; Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, n.d.), 2:358, 749; 3:227, 980; [Westminster Divines], *Annotations upon All the Books of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Evan Tyler, 1657), on Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:1; Luke 10:18; Rev. 12:3.

8. Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 936, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *The "Miscellanies" 833–1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 190–91.

9. Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 980, in *Works*, 20:296–99.

10. Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 320, in *Works*, 13:401. See also "Miscellanies," nos. 344, 438, 702 cor. 3, 833, 936, 939, 1057, 1261, and 1266b.

11. Edwards, "Miscellanies," nos. 1261 and 1266b, in *Works*, 23:200, 213.

12. Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75–76.

13. Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1969), 89.

14. Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 2:321.

15. Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Hall, Edward Reynolds, *An Exposition of the Prophecy of Hosea* (1643; repr., Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 618. Reynolds wrote the portion on Hosea 14.

16. Jonathan Edwards, "True Grace, Distinguished from the Experience of Devils," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 25, *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 614.

17. Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 15.

18. Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 15–19. Ambrose in this section quoted William Gurnall, showing the influence of the latter's *The Christian in Complete Armour* upon him.

19. Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 19–20.

20. Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 20–21.

21. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 119 (1.12.37–44).

22. On the Puritan view of Christ's saving work, see chapter 23, "The Blood of Christ in Puritan Piety."

23. Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (1645; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 388.

24. Benjamin Keach, *Exposition of the Parables* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991), 2:317.

25. Keach, *War with the Devil*, 20.

26. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), 184 (on 1 John 2:13).

27. Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*, 391–93.

28. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 366.

29. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 366.

30. Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, in *Works*, 2:364.

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36. Brooks, *Precious Remedies*, in *Works*, 1:3.
37. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 14.
38. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 21.
39. Cited in I. D. E. Thomas, comp., *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 76.
40. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 61.
41. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1:382.
42. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 36–42.
43. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 92.
44. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 2:76.
45. Brooks, *Precious Remedies*, in *Works*, 1:19.
46. Brooks, *Precious Remedies*, in *Works*, 1:23. On the Puritan view of the evil of sin see chapter 13 of this book as well as William Bridge, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, in *The Works of the Rev. William Bridge* (1845; repr., Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 5:3–20; Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Evil of Evils* (1654; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992); Edward Reynolds, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, in *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds* (1826; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 1:102–353; Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993).
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48. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 62.
49. Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 2:322.
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51. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 83.
52. Brooks, *Precious Remedies*, in *Works*, 1:7.
53. Edward K. Trefz, "Satan in Puritan Preaching," *The Boston Public Library Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1956): 152.
54. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 47–49.
55. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 80–81.
56. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 56–60.
57. Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, in *Works*, 2:365.
58. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 63, 66.
59. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 67.
60. Brooks, *Precious Remedies*, in *Works*, 1:9.
61. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 84.
62. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 87.
63. Christopher R. Reaske, "The Devil and Jonathan Edwards," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33, no. 1 (1972): 129.
64. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 60–61.
65. Gilpin, *Satan's Temptations*, 438.
66. Gilpin, *Satan's Temptations*, 443–44.
67. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 92–93.
68. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 67–68.
69. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 141.
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72. Thomas Manton, *Eighteen Sermons on the Second Chapter of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton* (repr., Vestavia Hills, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009), 3:67.
73. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 69–70, 75.
74. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 70, 75.
75. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 72.
76. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 72.
77. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 90–91. His quotation of Bernard illustrates the Puritans' frequent use of the patristic and medieval Christian authors.
78. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 73.
79. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 73.
80. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 76.
81. Brooks, *Precious Remedies*, in *Works*, 2:31.
82. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 76–77.
83. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 94.
84. Quoted in Trefz, "Satan in Puritan Preaching," 153.
85. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 78–79.
86. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 76.
87. Spurstowe, *The Wiles of Satan*, 79.
88. Brooks, *Precious Remedies*, in *Works*, 1:28.
89. Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, in *Works*, 2:369.
90. Downame, *The Christian Warfare*, 14.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND COVENANT THEOLOGY

Chapter 13

The Puritans on the Sinfulness of Sin

> *Sin is worse than Hell…. There is more evil in it, than good in all the Creation.*
>
> —RALPH VENNING [1]

The Puritans were not perfect. They knew that about themselves and others not only from experience but also from what the Scriptures say about man. Puritan writers often quoted the words of Ecclesiastes 7:29—"God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions"—as they expressed their insights into how man had fallen from the mountain peak of innocence into the abyss of sin, only to be raised to even greater heights by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Of all the major Puritan works on sin, John Owen's (1616–1683) treatise, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, has received the most attention in recent years.[2] Other Puritan writers devoted copious attention to the doctrine of sin, including Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), who, in some respects, addressed different issues and concerns than did Owen, his Congregationalist contemporary. They both wrote works on the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology, and justification by faith alone, for example. But their works emphasize different aspects of these theological topics, and their respective works on sin are no exception to this rule. This chapter will focus not only on Owen and Goodwin, but also on other Puritan writers in an attempt to understand the doctrine of sin in Puritan thought, which will provide a suitable backdrop to other chapters in this book on how God saves His people from the guilt and pollution of sin.[3]

As the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF, 6) makes clear, the guilt of sin and its corruption are the two hinges upon which the Puritan view of sin turns. This chapter will follow that basic division, with more attention focused on the various ways humans, both unregenerate and regenerate, are corrupted by sin. This approach reflects the emphases of the Puritans, who had a deep, pastoral concern with the many-sidedness of the effects of sin upon human nature after the fall and in the context of redemption. First, however, a brief discussion of the

Puritan understanding of the creation of man in the state of original righteousness, living in the garden under the covenant of works, will provide the requisite context for understanding the twofold problem of the guilt and corruption of sin.

"God Made Man Upright"

In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were made in the image of God, "having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it" (WCF, 4.2). They reflected God in moral likeness and were free from sin. The idea of having "power" or ability to fulfill the law was a major source of contention between Puritan theologians and their opponents from the Socinian and Papist theological traditions, among others. Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) spoke for his Puritan contemporaries on the graces God gave to Adam in the garden by referring, as he treads cautiously yet confidently between two errors, to the Socinians, who speak of a natural innocence in Adam, "without any infused or concreated habits of holiness, or any thing supernatural in him," and the Papists, who argued that all of Adam's holiness was supernatural, a "superadded gift" above nature.[4] Burgess notes that though the image of God was natural to Adam, "yet we must not say, that he had nothing supernatural, that there was nothing by way of superadded grace to him."[5] Although Adam had a natural holiness, according to the dues of creation law, "yet there were other things that might be of mere grace, and superadded favour to him; And under this we may comprehend the grace of God, which Adam needed."[6] Burgess thought the reward God promised to Adam for his perfect obedience (there are differences of opinion concerning such a reward) "would not have been of merit, though of works, but of grace, for works and that grace in that state were consistent…. Adam then was not without some supernatural favors."[7]

Adam and Eve were not immutably holy, however, and so were liable to both temptation and sin. As the Westminster Confession of Faith makes clear, they were both "under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change" (4.2). That is to say, God created Adam in moral purity with the necessary innate ability to fulfill the terms of the covenant of works. Adam and Eve were image-bearers of God, but they were unlike God in several significant ways, one of which was their mutability. By their Creator who preserves all things, including Adam and Eve, they were able to maintain their place through obedience to His commands, but that did not mean they were in the privileged position of being immune to temptation (*non posse peccare*, "not able to sin") as the saints in heaven are and will be.

Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil, on pain of death, implying a promise of life, on condition of perfect obedience. For this reason, the Puritans and the majority of seventeenth-century Reformed theologians spoke of Adam being placed in a covenant of works (*foedus operum*), also referred to as the covenant of nature (*foedus naturae*). In this covenant, Adam and Eve were given dominion over creation, and Adam acted as federal head of all humanity. His actions, positive or negative, would have ramifications for his descendants. As Scripture makes clear, Adam and Eve failed to maintain their status in the garden by eating of the forbidden tree and "fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body" (WCF, 6.2). As sin, their disobedience was a both a want of conformity unto, and a transgression of, the law of God (Shorter Catechism, Q. 14).

In consequence, the Puritans argued that because Adam and Eve were the "root of all mankind," the guilt of their sin was imputed and their death and corrupted nature were conveyed to all their natural descendants.8 Interestingly, the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith (6.2) differs from the Larger Catechism (Q. 22), which asks, "Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?" Instead of listing both Adam and Eve as responsible for the entrance of sin, the Catechism speaks of Adam only: "The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression." John Murray reasonably theorizes that the divines decided to speak more carefully in the Larger Catechism after the view of Josué de la Place (Placaeus, 1596–1655) on mediate imputation was condemned in 1644–1645.9 We will now consider how this controversy relates to the question of imputed guilt.

Immediate Imputation of Adam's Guilt As noted, the covenant of works helps us to understand why most of the Puritans viewed all mankind as guilty in Adam. Anthony Burgess connected the guilt and contagion of Adam's sin to the covenant of works, and in one place he remarks that "by God's Covenant we were looked upon, as in him."10 Those last words were crucial to the Puritans, who defended the view commonly described as the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity.11 Romans 5:12–21 proved to be the exegetical battleground for the defense of immediate imputation. The doctrine of the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt was typically understood to provide the ground for the transmission of indwelling or inherent sin. Burgess argues that Paul distinguishes between imputed sin and inherent sin in his letter to the

Romans; thus, imputed sin and inherent sin are two distinct sins, "though one doth necessarily imply an order to another, and the later is always to be looked upon, as a relative to the former."[12] This was an extremely important point for many Puritans, as shown by Goodwin's comment that those who speak of original sin only in terms of corruption and not also of guilt "usually…deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness also."[13] For that reason, Owen's argument for the imputation of Adam's guilt is made in the context of his defense of the imputation of Christ's righteousness in his work on justification.[14] And Burgess presses the importance of the twofold problem of sin (i.e., guilt and corruption) by linking these two aspects to the twofold righteousness of Christ: justification (taking away guilt) and sanctification (overcoming corruption).[15]

One important argument for the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt was his status as a "public person." By the appointment of God, Adam and Christ were made public persons according to the covenants in which they represented their people, namely the covenant of works (Adam) and the covenant of redemption (Christ).[16] Adam's role as the representative head of mankind was based upon a number of statements in Scripture, some more explicit than others. As noted previously, nowhere is Adam's role in the propagation of sin made clearer than in Romans 5. Owen's compelling argument from Romans 5 for the immediate imputation of Adam's sin to his descendants had many similarities not only with the views of his Puritan colleagues but also with those of Reformed scholastic theologians on the Continent, such as Francis Turretin (1623–1687).

In Romans 5, two men are contrasted, one by whom sin entered the world, and one by whom it was taken away. Moreover, the comparison, Owen notes, concerns things contrary. The entrance of sin leads to its punishment, as verse 12 makes clear. Because of the federal solidarity between Adam and the human race, all human beings—with the sole exception of Jesus Christ—have a relation to Adam beyond that of their humanity. Rather, Adam is related to the entire human race as its covenant head, and therefore his sin meant that his descendants by ordinary generation were subject to death as the punishment due to his sin. As Owen notes, they "were so by virtue of divine constitution, upon *their federal existence* in the one man that sinned."[17] Owen makes clear that while the Bible clearly supports the idea that through Adam's sin all men became corrupt and depraved in their natures by natural generation, nonetheless Paul's argument in Romans 5 shows that it is "the guilt of Adam's actual sin alone that rendered them all 'obnoxious' (liable) to death upon the first entrance of sin into the world."[18] The guilt of Adam's sin is immediately imputed to the human race, and this—not natural propagation—is the principal reason that humans die.[19]

The words of the final clause of Romans 5:12 (*eph' hō pantes hēmarton*) can be translated as a causal clause, "for that all have sinned" (KJV text), or as a simple relative clause, "in whom all have sinned" (KJV margin, n. 4). The latter rendering is based on the Vulgate (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*) and is preferred by Owen.[20] Goodwin claims that if the marginal rendering is true, "then the matter is plain that the guilt of that his first act is the sin conveyed by imputation, and that we sinned in him."[21] Those denying the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt prefer the causal rendering, "in that all have sinned." Even if one takes *eph' hō* as "in that," i.e., as introducing a causal clause, "yet still it implies that all have sinned, and were guilty of an act of sinning."[22] Likewise, Turretin argues that "whatever way *eph' hō* is translated, whether relatively, 'in whom'…or causally, it amounts to the same thing."[23] Moving from verse 12, Owen stresses that death came upon all men; in verse 14, that death came upon those who did not actually sin, or sin as Adam sinned. So the act of Adam's sin does not belong to all humans subjectively, but his actual sin does have consequences for his posterity because the guilt of his sin is imputed immediately to his descendants. In other words, when Adam sinned, at the same time all humans sinned in Adam by representation. Hence, the imputation of Adam's guilt to his offspring was effected immediately, contemporaneous with the sin, and not mediately, that is, passed down to us when and because we sin as Adam did. There were, however, other arguments from Scripture that buttress the case made from Romans 5.

Thomas Manton (1620–1677) also affirms the doctrine of the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt. He refers to the example of Reuben defiling his father's bed, an act that stained his posterity and entailed the loss of privileges. Thus Manton reasons that all mankind, "being in Adam, as they descended from him, and were in him as in a common person, they sinned in him, so that what Adam did we did."[24] Manton adds the example of Levi, who paid tithes in Abraham (Heb. 7:9), as a further example of the principle of how the actions of one person have consequences for others. He writes: "There is ground you see in nature for the imputation of the father's deed to those that descend of him: and God may as justly impute to us Adam's sin as to Levi Abraham's paying of tithes. When Abraham did it, it was as if Levi did it; and when Adam sinned, it was as if you sinned."[25] Manton's examples highlight an important aspect of how the Puritan theological method worked. The doctrine of immediate imputation was not simply a result of deducing consequences from the covenant of works. Rather, exegetical reflection upon numerous texts led Puritan writers to the conclusion that the best way to understand Adam's relationship to his own posterity was covenantal as well as natural, and that immediate imputation was a

legitimate principle found elsewhere in Scripture in other instances involving other persons, albeit with different terms and consequences. Accordingly, exegesis of various texts and the systematization of doctrines were mutually reinforcing friends in the case of the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity.

Moving on from the imputation of Adam's guilt, the Puritans wrote copiously on the various ways in which humans are "wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body" (WCF, 6.2) as a result of their descent from Adam. Theologians such as Burgess, Goodwin, Owen, and Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) wrote thousands of pages on the effects of sin in human beings, and so what follows can focus only on a few aspects of human depravity, not only in the state of nature, but also in the state of grace.

"Many Inventions"

Preliminary Considerations The Puritans had a high view of the grace of God in the salvation of sinners because, in the first place, they had a high view of sin. Goodwin speaks of the "abounding sinfulness of man by nature." Man is not only guilty of representatively participating in Adam's transgression in the garden but also "guilty of an universal, total, sinful defilement, spread over all faculties of soul and body, containing in it a privation or want of all good, and an inclination to all evil."[26] J. I. Packer captures the essence of how the Puritans viewed sin: "They saw sin as a perverted energy within people that enslaves them to God-defying, self-gratifying behavior, and by distraction, deceit, and direct opposition weakens and overthrows their purposes of righteousness."[27]

One might even say the real issue that separates Reformed theology from other theological traditions is how sin is viewed. Monergism in salvation speaks not only to the nature and grace of God, but also to the depraved and enslaved condition of man. In Romans 5, Paul deals with, among other things, imputed sin; in Romans 7, Paul describes inherent or indwelling sin. Burgess says that Romans 7, a place the Puritans frequently turned to in their expositions on sin, contains "the heart and life of the Doctrine of Original Sin, so that it may be called the Divine Map thereof, describing all the parts and extents of it."[28] According to Burgess, there are three types of sins: original, habitual, and actual. Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) divided sin into original and actual. Like the Puritans, he then speaks of original sin as imputed and inherent.[29] Original sin, therefore, is the cause of all actual (and, for Burgess, habitual) sins.

Actual sins are personal transgressions of the law of God, "whether by thought, word or deed."[30] The Puritans were fully Augustinian in viewing sin as including every work, word, or wish contrary to God's law. Actual sins are committed because of original sin. Some actual sins do not dwell in people;

rather, they are transient and pass away after they have been committed. In contrast, however, habitual sins are those frequent sins committed by men and women; "and these," writes Burgess, "indeed must be confessed to be indwelling and fixed sins in us; and these habits of sin do much intend, and strengthen our original corruption."[31]

It is important to note that the Puritans considered the doctrine of sin in relation to both unbelievers and believers, and there were significant differences between the two states of human beings while on earth. If Owen was the Puritan theologian who wrote best on the relation of the believer to sin, then Goodwin was definitely the Puritan theologian who wrote most incisively on the way in which sin affects the unregenerate—hence the title of his work: *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness before God*.

Sin in the Unregenerate: "All Concupiscence"

The example in Romans 7:8 of Paul, who by his own account, was one of the most morally degenerate men who ever lived (Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13, 15), provides a gateway for Goodwin to understand how no man or woman in a carnal state is free from inclination to all sin. The struggling man in Romans 7 was viewed by the Puritans as a Christian,[32] but verse 8 has reference to Paul in his unconverted state. The sin in Paul in this verse is original sin, and original sin produced in him "all manner of concupiscence," that is, all kinds of covetous lust or desire for things forbidden.[33] As Edward Reynolds put it, "It is as natural to the heart to lust, as it is to the eye to see."[34] Self-love, instead of love to God, results from original sin. Therefore, the sinner declares all-out war on God; whatever God commands man's nature will resist, because the carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). The value of Goodwin's exposition on how sin inclines the whole man to break all of God's laws becomes apparent when he responds to objections to the idea that unregenerate persons are prone not to some but to all sins. For example, some object that there are non-Christians who have an antipathy toward drunkenness. Or, how can someone be prodigal and covetous at the same time? Others object that people generally have one sin they are inclined to more than others. And, of course, who would deny that some men are more evil than other men? Finally, why then do not all men commit the sin against the Holy Spirit?[35]

Goodwin points out that human beings are constituted differently in body and soul. Their natural constitutions fuel particular sins: "as choler for anger, melancholy for settled wrath and repinings, sanguine for uncleanness."[36] The soul and body bear an organic relation to each another, and so the things that are done in the body are never to be considered apart from the uncleanness of the

soul; yet the soul acts in different ways because of the different types of bodies men and women are endowed with. Thus, Goodwin claims that every person is "radically still inclined to all these [i.e., all kinds of sin], be the constitution of his body what it will, suppose never so indisposed to any of these sins; so as put that soul into another body, it would be as notoriously inclined to them as any other man is."[37] In other words, Goodwin contends that the constitution of a person's body has a decisive impact on the sins he commits. Moreover, the social standing of a person also has implications for the types of sins he commits: "Men of lower understandings are given to lusts of body, but men of higher understandings to…a desire of honour and applause."[38] Perhaps a change in one's understanding or level of mental development—if Goodwin allows for that—through education would bring about a change in that person's choice of sins to commit.

Goodwin goes on to show that certain sins are more prevalent at different stages of life. A child possesses a heart that will be prone to certain sins only later in life, for example. Moreover, the lusts of individuals are drawn out according to their various callings. Judas stole because he was a sinner, but also because as treasurer he was presented with the opportunity to steal. Goodwin also calls attention to the role of God in restraining sin. "God oftentimes stops and plugs up the holes as he pleaseth, that they may not run out at every hole" (Est. 5:10).[39] To answer the objection that certain sins are contrary to each other and so men are not given to all types of covetousness, Goodwin explains that people are inclined to different sins at different times in their lives. So the prodigal youth may become covetous in his old age. It is also true that some people have an antipathy to certain sins, but this antipathy is not moral but physical, "either because their bodies will not bear it, or for some other incommodity they find in it."[40] Finally, not all people commit the sin against the Holy Spirit because this sin has a further qualification attached to it, namely the sinner must have "first had supernatural light, against which he sinned" (Heb. 10:26; John 9:41).[41] The unregenerate man, then, is capable of every kind of sin. Context, time, circumstance, and other factors may account for why he or she may or may not commit certain sins. But, make no mistake, for Goodwin and his Puritan contemporaries, there is no question but that they would have agreed with Robert Murray M'Cheyne's (1813–1843) famous declaration that "the seeds of all sins are in my heart."[42]

Sin in the Unregenerate: The Noetic Effects of Sin In Reformed theology, the topic of noetic (from the Greek *nous* ["mind"] and its related verb *noeō*, "to perceive, understand, think, consider") effects of sin has been addressed in the

secondary literature with a particular focus on the thought of John Calvin.[43] Calvin had many important things to say about the effects of sin on the mind of both unregenerate and regenerate, but he was just one of many Reformed theologians who wrote on this issue. The Reformed were of one mind in claiming that sin dwells not only in the will but also in the intellect.[44] Fallen humans, without exception, suffered two principal problems with regard to their intellect. First, there are "natural miseries" whereby sin impairs the intellect (e.g., loss of memory) in a way that is not sinful per se, but rather is a result of sin. And second, there is a moral rupture between God and men so that the unregenerate misinterpret evidence due to love of self and hatred of God. Moreover, they are blind spiritually and can never come to a true and proper understanding of God in this state. The noetic effects of sin is a topic to which Goodwin, Owen, Burgess, and several other Puritans devoted a great deal of attention in their writings.

Owen's words on this subject are striking: "The knowledge of a proud man is the throne of Satan in his mind."[45] Goodwin recognized that the most spiritual faculty in the minds of men is their understanding. But this understanding has been corrupted by sin and so needs to be renewed. The view of some that reason in humans was left pure and unimpaired, notwithstanding the fall of mankind into sin, shows just how vain they have become in their thinking. The minds of the unregenerate are not merely ignorant but also darkened and disordered. In fact, according to Goodwin, the darkness of the mind "is not only thus negatively…the root of all sin, but it is positively the immediate cause of most corruptions in men's lives."[46] He adds:

> So idolatry, heresy, blasphemy, hypocrisy, infidelity, evil surmising, seeking after credit, and praise, and glory, which is an aerial thing, a sublimated object of the understanding…; and all the evil thoughts, wicked devising, sinister and hypocritical ends, which set unregenerate men on work in all their ways, these are all seated in the understanding.[47]

Here Goodwin focuses on how the understanding acts sinfully. But he has more in mind than just the sinful dispositions of the mind. Because of the fall, man has both natural and spiritual defects in his mind, which differ from each other. The difference, in brief, between natural and spiritual defects is the difference between misery and sin, for instance, between loss of memory and the wilful suppression of the truth. Burgess speaks of a twofold weakness of the memory: that which is due to old age or certain maladies and that which is the willful forgetting of holy duties. The latter sort of memory loss is sin, whereas the former is only an effect of sin.[48] This leads to another distinction between gifts

and graces, of which the former may belong to the unregenerate. Interestingly, Goodwin posits that the unregenerate may have the "imperfections of their understandings more healed by gifts than a godly man."[49] So in universities, one will find unregenerate men with outstanding ability (gifts) in the natural sciences, for example, that surpass the ability of many Christian men and women. Nonetheless, one should not lose sight of the fact that the natural faculties of Christians and non-Christians alike have been seriously impaired by the fall and even gifts do not compensate for the damage done by sin. The more serious concern, however, relates to the spiritual knowledge, or lack thereof, of the unregenerate, who are blind to the spiritual things of God.

Due to the spiritual blindness of the unregenerate, they are inclined to pervert the truth.[50] Heresy, then, is not in the first instance a problem arising out of natural defects in understanding, though it includes them, but rather a spiritual defect in the person who, for example, denies that Christ is fully man and fully God (2 Peter 3:16; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8). Sometimes a man will assent to the truth of orthodox doctrines, but these doctrines will "have no influence on his heart."[51] Reynolds speaks of how the ability to reason or "dianoeticall faculty" of the unregenerate is unable to deduce from "spiritual principles…such sound and divine conclusions as they are apt to beget."[52] Whatever they know of God will inevitably be perverted in some measure and will most certainly be reflected in their practice and so-called worship.

Like Goodwin, Reynolds argues that the unregenerate mind is beset by the twofold problem of natural miseries and spiritual defects. Natural miseries, common to all, even Christians, are rectified in part by gifts from God. Spiritual defects, also common to all, are only rectified by grace, which means that the unregenerate persist in being spiritually blind, reasoning defectively and being unable to understand spiritual truths in a manner that is of any use to them. The unregenerate are therefore spiritually bankrupt in both thought and action. In the words of Reynolds, whatever the unregenerate do is "altogether sinful." Their thoughts, deeds, imaginations, and whatever else proceeds from their minds are all "Carnal."[53] But what of the believer who has been regenerated by the Spirit of God and seeks to live his or her life in conformity to the law of God? The Puritans were far from silent on the topic of sin in the life of the believer.

Sin in the Regenerate: The Remnants of Indwelling Sin While the Puritans did not ignore the effects of sin on the unregenerate, they gave far more attention to understanding sin in the lives of the regenerate. To do so, the Puritans frequently turned to Romans 7, particularly verse 21, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." Despite the many blessings of salvation that

Christians possessed, such as regeneration, union with Christ, justification, adoption, and sanctification, a formidable struggle remained for the Christian in terms of indwelling sin. This struggle is nowhere better described or explained than in Romans 7:14–25. According to Burgess, the evil or sin that is present with Paul is not actual or habitual, but original sin.[54] Saints in this world are never entirely free from original sin; it will plague them to the day they die. Contrasting it with the law of God, Paul calls it the law of sin, "another law warring in my members" (Rom. 7:23). This "law of sin" is powerful, even in the best of saints, and "though its rule be broken, its strength weakened and impaired, its root mortified, yet it is a law still of great force and efficacy."[55] Original sin in believers, to use a phrase from Burgess, is like a furnace always sending forth sparks.[56]

Believers soon discover how powerful this law of sin is, as they fight against it. Owen warns that "they that find not its power are under its dominion."[57] The Puritans were all agreed that this "law" is always present in the believer in this life. This "dangerous companion" is always resident in the soul; it is a "living coal" that must not be disregarded or it may consume a person.[58] The Puritans were adamant that original sin is never quiescent but perpetually active in the form of indwelling sin. In everything the Christian does, including righteous deeds such as prayer and worship, indwelling sin is right there. As the Heidelberg Catechism says, "Our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin" (Q. 62). In this connection, Owen speaks of sin's "easiness in the application of itself unto its work."[59] Here, picking up on the language of Hebrews 12:1 ("and the sin which doth so easily beset us"), Owen argues that sin will readily exercise itself upon all the faculties of the inner man:

> Is the understanding or the mind to be applied unto any thing?—there it is, in ignorance, darkness, vanity, folly, madness. Is the will to be engaged?—there it is also, in spiritual deadness, stubbornness, and the roots of obstinacy. Is the heart and affections to be set on work?—there it is, in inclinations to the world and present things, and sensuality, with proneness to all manner of defilements. Hence it is easy for it to insinuate itself into all that we do, and to hinder all that is good, and to further all sin and wickedness.[60]

All of this is to suggest that the easiness with which sin acts may be compared to the easiness by which men breathe.

Sin's presence and force arise from its being seated or rooted in the human heart. Christianity is a heart religion because it aims to repair what sin has corrupted and damaged. Frequently in Scripture, the heart is spoken of as the

place from which sin proceeds and as the fundamental problem of mankind (Gen. 6:5; Eccl. 9:3; Matt. 15:19; Luke 6:45). The "heart," of course, speaks not of the physical organ, but of the mind, understanding, will, conscience, that is, all the parts or faculties of the inner man. "Generally, it denotes the whole soul of man."[61] Sin is such a powerful enemy because it resides in the whole soul of man. Owen speaks of sin in the heart as an "enemy whose secret strength we cannot discover." "It can lie so close in the mind's darkness, in the will's indisposition, in the disorder and carnality of the affections, that no eye can discover it."[62] For this reason, Scripture speaks of the heart as being "deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9). The heart inclines a person to call good evil and evil good; the heart so deceives that a person may perform a work that appears to be good and righteous, but in fact self-love and desire for self-aggrandizement give rise to the external work. All of these corruptions and deceits have a place in the lives of Christians because of the remnants of indwelling sin that will never be thoroughly purged until believers are taken to glory. Nonetheless, while discoursing so extensively on the power of indwelling sin in God's people, the Puritans were also of one mind in affirming that for Christians there is true freedom from its dominion.

Sin in the Regenerate: Freedom from Sin's Dominion The book of Romans continues to provide the road map in understanding the Puritan view of sin. If Romans 5 speaks about the imputation of guilt from Adam to his descendants, and Romans 7 speaks of the presence of indwelling sin in the life of believers, Romans 6 proclaims the freedom from the dominion of sin that characterizes the lives of the godly. At the moment of regeneration a Christian experiences emancipation (redemption) from the power or dominion of sin, although not from presence of sin in his heart and life. So Manton, affirming what has been said above about indwelling sin, expostulates: "We cannot hope for a total exemption from sin, but, O Lord, let it not reign over us."[63] Because of their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, Christians must reckon themselves "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God" though Christ (Rom. 6:11).

Burgess argues that in regeneration "original sin is more then suppressed, there is a qualitative change, and so a diminishing of darkness in the mind, by light; of evil in the will by holiness."[64] The qualitative change must be placed firmly in the context of Christ's death upon the cross, for in acting as a common person on behalf of His people there is a sense in which the elect died to sin when Christ was crucified (Rom. 6:6). Following from that, Reynolds affirms that fellowship in the death of Christ brings deliverance from the reigning power

of sin in the believer.65 If this is not true, then Christ died in vain. The Spirit applies what Christ purchased. In other words, the Holy Spirit necessarily applies to the elect the benefits of Christ's works of redemption. The evidence that sin no longer reigns in the regenerate is shown by the several transitions that take place in the lives of Christians.

Owen gives a detailed account of the Christian's freedom from the dominion of sin. According to Romans 8:1, Christians are assured that they are no longer under condemnation since their sins have been expiated. Freedom from condemnation is also freedom from bondage; sin is no longer their master. However, to be freed from the reign of sin does not imply, as has been noted above, that believers are free from all sin. Such an assertion flatly contradicts the Scriptures (1 John 1:8). Even so, the gospel communicates life and power to the elect "with such continual supplies of grace as are able to dethrone sin, and for ever to prohibit its return."66 If sin is powerful, the gospel is more powerful (Rom. 1:16). According to the promise of the gospel, the Spirit supplies Christians with the power to deal with sin. The law can do no such thing. In the course of sanctification, sin is gradually weakened through mortification and hence destroyed. Of course, this mortification or putting to death of sin only happens where the Spirit is at work as the "principal efficient cause."67

John Flavel (1628–1691) contrasts the state of a man before regeneration with his state as regenerate. The dominion of sin darkens the understanding (1 Cor. 2:14), but in a state of grace the veil has been removed and believers are children of the light (Eph. 5:8). In a state of wrath, the dominion of sin defiles the conscience, whereas a Christian's conscience has been cleansed. Besides that, those who were enemies of Christ, refusing to do His will, are made His friends, and are enabled to subject themselves to His reign (Acts 9:6). In terms of regeneration, the Spirit takes what was a heart of stone and "thaws and breaks it, as hard as it was, and makes it to dissolve in the breast of a sinner in godly sorrow" (Ezek. 36:26).68 Finally, the dominion of sin misplaces the affections, but sanctification sets them right (Ps. 4:6–7). Flavel concludes by noting that while Christians are not entirely cured of sin in this life, nevertheless the "cure is begun, and daily advances towards perfection." Christians are on the way that leads to heavenly life where the presence of sin in any form will be extinguished forever.69

Sin in the Regenerate: Mortifying Sin Romans 1–7 provides an almost comprehensive view of sin in the lives of both the unregenerate and regenerate. Scholars today argue about whether Romans 7 portrays the struggle of a Christian, but there was no debate among the Puritans on this issue. They all

agreed that Paul's struggle is the struggle of Paul the Christian, not Saul the Pharisee. Likewise, none would deny that in Romans 8:13 Paul is speaking about the mortification of sin only in the life of believers. Given the popularity of John Owen's work on Romans 8:13, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, we would be negligent not to consider his exposition of that verse. If readers do not have time to reread Owen's eighty-six-page exposition, they may wish to consult Burgess, who devotes only four pages on Romans 8:13, as a shorter alternative.[70]

Reformed theologians affirmed the necessity of doing good works.[71] Faith is the only antecedent condition of the covenant of grace. Putting to death ("mortifying") sin is nevertheless a consequent condition of the covenant of grace. Any attempt at mortification as an antecedent condition, that is, in order to be justified or made right with God, was looked upon by Owen as "the soul and substance of all false religion in the world."[72] Because indwelling sin remains in all believers while they are in this world, they are to make it their business all their days to be mortifying their sins by the power of the Holy Spirit.[73] If people claim to be Christians but do not mortify their sins, they are lost. Believers are able to mortify sin because they receive from Christ the gift of the Spirit. Owen speaks of the Spirit working upon "our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us and with us, not against us or without us."[74] Whereas the unregenerate love their sin and rush headlong into it, believers possessed by the Spirit of Christ hate sin, and hatred of sin lies "at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification."[75]

The duty of mortification is not, then, something optional for believers, as those few words in Romans 8:13 make clear. The problem of sin is answered by the gospel. God justifies believers from their sins, but the same God who justifies sinners will "not justify the least sin in us."[76] Far from advocating a stringent moralism, the doctrine of mortification brings glory to the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit "brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power."[77] And in the life of believers the Spirit is the author and finisher of their sanctification. Thus the cure of guilt among those who love Christ is their justification; in this life, the cure of sin's dominion is sanctification, which involves mortifying sin by the power of the Spirit; and, after this life, the blessing that will bring the full cure from sin to God's people is glorification.[78] Until then believers are ever to be killing sin, or sin will be killing them.[79]

Conclusion

Finding secondary literature on the Puritan doctrine of sin is not easy. Here and there the occasional author will shed light on various aspects of how the Puritans understood and addressed the problem of sin in the life of fallen human beings in general, and of Christians in particular, but by far most of the secondary literature, in terms of theology, focuses on matters related to soteriology. This is unfortunate, particularly since soteriological truths are best understood as God's response to the problem of sin. It is interesting that the Reformed differed from other theological traditions such as Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Arminianism, and Socinianism, not only on matters relating to the plan or way of salvation, but also on how to understand sin, its origin, its consequences, and its power over humanity. For example, Burgess constantly interacts polemically with all of these theological traditions. A need, then, exists for further study on the Puritan doctrine of sin. This chapter has charted some of the basic components and emphases of that doctrine as expounded in Puritan writings, but much more study can and should be undertaken. In the modern church, books on grace and love are churned from the presses, but few books deal with sin at length or in any detail, certainly nothing like the ample scope and meticulous detail found in the works that have been mentioned in this chapter.

In sum, the Puritans were deeply aware of the guilt and pollution of Adam's sin. Adam's transgression was something that affected not only the unregenerate portion of the human race but also the regenerate, albeit in different ways or to differing degrees. Most of the works cited in this chapter focus principally on how sin affects those who belong to Jesus Christ, with Goodwin's work being a notable exception. John Bunyan (1628–1688) did not have the theological incisiveness of Owen or Burgess, but he surpassed these men in terms of vivid illustration. For this reason, Bunyan's words are an appropriate way to close a chapter discussing the sinfulness of sin from the perspective of the seventeenth-century English Puritans:

> Sin is the living worm, the lasting fire;
> Hell seen would lose its heat, could sin expire.
> Better sinless in hell, than to be where
> Heaven is, and to be found a sinner there.
> One sinless with infernals might do well,
> But sin would make of heaven a very hell.
>
> Look to thyself then, keep it out of door,
> Lest it get in and never leave thee more.
>
> Fools make a mock at sin, will not believe

It carries such a dagger in its sleeve;
How can it be, say they, that such a thing,
So full of sweetness, e'er should wear a sting?
They know not that it is the very spell
Of sin, to make them laugh themselves to hell.

Look to thyself, then, deal with sin no more,
Lest He who saves, against thee shuts the door.80

1. Ralph Venning, *Sin, the Plague of Plagues, or, Sinful Sin the Worst of Evils.*… (London, 1669), 225–26.

2. The reprint of Owen's work on sin and temptation explains in part why many in the church today are familiar with only this Puritan work on sin. See John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006).

3. The following are a few examples of Puritan works on sin: Thomas Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness before God in Respect of Sin and Punishment*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006); Samuel Bolton, *Hamartolos hamartia: or, The Sinfulnes of Sin: Held Forth*… (London, 1646); William Bridge, *The Sinfulnesse of Sinne; and, The Fulnesse of Christ Delivered in Two Sermons* (London, 1667); Anthony Burgess, *The Doctrine of Original Sin Asserted & Vindicated against the Old and New Adversaries Thereof*… (London, 1658); Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Eighth Book of Mr Jeremiah Burroughs. Being a Treatise of the Evil of Evils, or the Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*… (London, 1654); Henry Ainsworth, *A Censure upon a Dialogue of the Anabaptists.*… (London, 1643); Edward Reynolds, *The Sinfulnesse of Sinne Considered in the State, Guilt, Power, and Pollution Thereof*… (London, 1639); Ralph Venning, *Sin, the Plague of Plagues*. The works of Goodwin, Burgess, Venning, and Reynolds stand out as particularly incisive.

4. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 126.

5. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 126.

6. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 127.

7. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 127.

8. The only exception being the Lord Jesus, who descended from Adam but not "by ordinary generation" (WCF, 6.3), because of the extraordinary circumstances of His being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.

9. See the discussion of this by Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 2009), 200. Also, see Francis Turretin's discussion of this controversy and his argument for immediate imputation in *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 1992), 9.9.4–45.

10. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 46.

11. The classic defense of immediate imputation of Adam's guilt is John Murray's work, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007), 207–94. This work represents a fine combination of historical and exegetical theology, which is consistent with how the very best Reformed theologians have typically expressed their theology.

12. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 43.

13. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:12.

14. John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:321–35.

15. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 66–67. In the same way, Goodwin argues that the "remedy must be proportioned to the disease; and if only Adam's sin were conveyed to us, then our justification only were

sufficient; but there must be sanctification also, and therefore there is a defilement of nature also." *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:47.

16. See Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:17–19. As Goodwin, Owen, and Patrick Gillespie, among others, note, Christ was appointed as Head of His people according to the terms of the eternal covenant of redemption (also known as the *pactum salutis*), which provided the eternal foundation for the temporal covenant of grace whereby Christ mediated on behalf of His people.

17. Owen, *Doctrine of Justification*, in *Works*, 5:324.

18. Owen, *Doctrine of Justification*, in *Works*, 5:324.

19. John Murray provides a helpful commentary on the differences between immediate imputation, which was the standard Puritan position, and mediate imputation, which was espoused by Placaeus: "Immediate and antecedent imputation…must be distinguished from mediate and consequent. The former takes place immediately and is not mediated by hereditary corruption; the latter takes place mediately and is mediated by this corruption. In the former case the imputation of Adam's first sin precedes corruption in the order of nature and is reckoned to be the cause of corruption; in the latter case the imputation of the first sin follows hereditary corruption and is reckoned to be the effect." *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 244.

20. Owen, *Doctrine of Justification*, in *Works*, 5:324.

21. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:15.

22. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:15.

23. Turretin, *Institutes*, 9.9.17. Johannes Maccovius makes the point that "in whom we have sinned" should "not be understood in a subjective but in a causative sense, namely in the same manner as we are said to have died in Adam. For it would be foolish to explain this subjectively, because then we would have been dead before we were born." *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*, trans. Willem J. van Asselt, *et al.* (Apeldoorn: Institute for Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), 181.

24. Thomas Manton, *A Practical Exposition upon the Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: James Nisbet, 1870–1875), 3:297.

25. Manton, *Fifty-Third of Isaiah*, in *Works*, 3:297.

26. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:40–41.

27. J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 2009), 99.

28. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 87.

29. Maccovius, *Scholastic Discourse*, 181.

30. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 89.

31. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 89.

32. Owen writes, "The seventh chapter of the Romans contains the description of a regenerate man." *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 6:49.

33. See G. Abbot-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (1937; repr., Edinburgh: Clark, 1977), s.v. *epithumia*.

34. Reynolds, *Sinfulnesse of Sin*, 187.

35. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:64.

36. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:65.

37. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:65.

38. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:66.

39. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:66.

40. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:68.

41. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:67.

42. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Dundee: William Middleton, 1846), 154.

43. For example, see Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary*

Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking (Lanham: Lexington, 2000); Michael Sudduth, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 116–18; Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 209–45; and "John Calvin, the 'Sensus Divinitatis,' and the Noetic Effects of Sin," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43, no. 2 (April 1998): 87–107.

44. See Maccovius, *Scholastic Discourse*, 189.

45. Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4:180.

46. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:138.

47. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:139.

48. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 250–51.

49. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:142.

50. Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, in *Works*, 4:178–79.

51. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:180.

52. Reynolds, *Sinfulnesse of Sin*, 182. By "dianoeticall," Reformed theologians had in mind argumentative reasoning.

53. Reynolds, *Sinfulnesse of Sin*, 249.

54. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 93.

55. Owen, *The Nature and Power of Indwelling Sin*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 6:159.

56. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 93.

57. Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, in *Works*, 6:159.

58. Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, in *Works*, 6:166.

59. Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, in *Works*, 6:167.

60. Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, in *Works*, 6:167. See also, Burgess, *Original Sin*, 96–98.

61. Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, in *Works*, 6:170.

62. Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, in *Works*, 6:172.

63. Manton, *An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1870–1875), 1:239.

64. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 125.

65. Reynolds, *Sinfulnesse of Sin*, 273, 275.

66. Owen, *Of the Dominion of Sin and Grace*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 7:546.

67. Owen, *Of the Dominion of Sin and Grace*, in *Works*, 7:551.

68. John Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 2:192–93.

69. Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:193.

70. Burgess, *Original Sin*, 106–9.

71. See Turretin, *Institutes*, 17.3.1–16.

72. Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:7.

73. Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:9–10.

74. Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:20.

75. Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:41.

76. Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:77.

77. Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:86.

78. Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:198.

79. Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:9.

80. John Bunyan, *The Complete Works of John Bunyan* (Philadelphia: William Garretson & Co., 1871), 1000.

Chapter 14

The Puritans on the Covenant of Works

> *The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him, as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.*
>
> —WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, 7.1

> *The first covenant made with man, was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.*
>
> —WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, 7.2

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Reformed theologians described the prelapsarian state of Adam in various ways.[1] Among the several terms in use during the mid-1640s, "the covenant of works" (*foedus operum*) was most frequently used to describe the relationship between God and man in Eden, though the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 20) speaks of a "covenant of life," describing the covenant in terms of its promise (life), rather than its condition (works). As a commonplace in Reformed orthodoxy the covenant of works raises a number of important exegetical and theological questions that were answered similarly, though not without certain disagreements, by theologians in that interpretative tradition.[2] The basic question of precisely when the concept originated has perplexed scholars.[3] Tracing the origin of the term "covenant of works" proves particularly hard given that Reformed theologians each had their preferences for describing the nature of the Creator-creature relationship in the garden. Moreover, the theology behind the covenant of works can be found in John Calvin, even though he does not use the exact terminology of his successors.[4]

English Puritan theologian Dudley Fenner (1558–1587) may have been the

first to use the term “covenant of works,” at least in its Latin form *foedus operum*. He likely picked up the substance of the doctrine from his teacher, Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603), who in turn may have learned it during his twenty years of exile on the Continent.5 Whatever the case, the term “covenant of works” was firmly entrenched in the writings of most Reformed theologians during the seventeenth century and thus found its way into the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), 7.2.6

“Good and Necessary Consequence”7

The idea of a covenant of works raises a number of important theological questions, particularly since the Bible does not actually use the word “covenant” to characterize Adam’s prelapsarian relationship to his Maker. Justifying the terminology cannot be separated from defining what constitutes a covenant, and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians were not unaware of this problem.8

At the beginning of his acclaimed work on covenant theology, John Ball (1585–1640) acknowledges, “We read not the word Covenant betwixt God and man, ever since the Creation…but we have in Scripture what may amount to as much.”9 He bases this on the nature of the Creator-creature relationship in the garden, which then gives rise to his general definition of a covenant, namely, “a mutual compact or agreement betwixt God and man, whereby God promiseth… eternal happiness unto man, upon just, equal and favourable conditions.”10 Commenting on Genesis 2:17, “For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die,” Westminster divine Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) candidly admits that the covenant of works made with Adam is more “obscurely laid down” than the covenant of grace.11 The covenant made with Adam “must only be gathered by deductions and consequence.” Thus to insist that the term must be explicitly used in Scripture would be too rigid, “for that which is necessarily and immediately drawn from Scripture, is as truly Scripture, as that which is expressly contained in it.”12 Burgess evidently placed a great deal of interpretative value on “good and necessary consequence” or inference. Similarly, the so-called “Prince of the Puritans,” John Owen (1616–1683), maintains that though the terms between God and Adam were “not expressly called a covenant…it contained the express nature of a covenant; for it was the agreement of God and man concerning obedience and disobedience, rewards and punishments.”13 Francis Roberts (1609–1675), author of the single largest volume in English—more than 1,700 folio pages—on covenant theology in the seventeenth century, likewise admits that the covenant of works is “not positively and plainly said in Scripture.”14 Nevertheless, he gives several reasons why the term remains appropriate.

The Westminster divines, along with some of their predecessors and successors, maintained the principle that the whole counsel of God "is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" (WCF, 1.6).15 As one considers the exegetical, linguistic, theological, and hermeneutical sophistication that lies behind how the divines formulated their doctrine of the covenant of works, there was no question in their minds that the covenant of works is both good and necessary as a consequence deduced from Scripture.

Defining "Covenant"

Reformed divines could also speak of Adam being in a covenant of works based on a general definition of a covenant. For example, Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656) defines a covenant as "an agreement which it pleaseth the Almighty God to enter into with man concerning his everlasting condition."16 Thomas Blake (c. 1597–1657) calls a covenant a "mutual consent of parties with stipulations on both sides."17 Westminster divine George Walker (c. 1581–1651) states that covenant refers to a "mutual promise, bargain and Obligation between two parties."18 His colleague in the assembly, Obadiah Sedgwick (c. 1600–1658), likewise insists that two parties must be involved so that a mutual promise, agreement, and engagement can take place.19

Describing a covenant in this way helps to explain the emergence of the concept of the covenant of works. However, Reformed theologians understood that it would be theologically naïve to give the word "covenant" such a general definition without considering how the Scriptures themselves describe various covenants. Certain nuances must be acknowledged if the richness of the covenant motif is to be appreciated fully. William Bridge (1600–1671) observed that God always deals with man by way of a covenant. However, Bridge's definition of a covenant changes based upon the particular covenant in question. Thus the new covenant, as opposed to the covenant of works, contains a christological focus, entailing questions about the relationship between covenant and testament.20 Indeed, understanding the precise relationship between covenant and testament clarifies several points of contention among interpreters of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy, especially in the case of John Owen, who rejects the idea that a static meaning can be applied to all covenants reported in Scripture, "for the word is used in great variety, and what is intended by it must be learned from the subject matter treated of."21 In brief, for Owen and his Reformed orthodox contemporaries, "covenant" carries more meaning in the new covenant context than in Eden, yet covenantal language can still be applied to describe Adam's context.

Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675) took pains to detail what constitutes a covenant in his work, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*. Without wishing to deny that various covenants have unique elements, Gillespie argues that six elements belong to all biblical covenants. First, that there are two parties; second, that there are agreements; third, that they have mutual conditions; fourth, the conditions are mutually binding; fifth, the terms are mutually satisfying to both parties; and sixth, they must be inviolable, that is, the covenant cannot be revoked and violated, which would mean the "highest breach and violation of the Law of God."22 Defined this way, one can understand how Adam's state came to be understood covenantally. Owen echoes Gillespie's basic framework for understanding a covenant. In his commentary on Hebrews, Owen defines a covenant as a "voluntary convention, pact, or agreement, between distinct persons, about the ordering and disposal of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage."23 He also defines the nature and ends of a covenant in his work *An Exposition of Psalm CXXX*: "In its own nature it is a convention, compact, and agreement for some certain ends and purposes between the holy Creator and his poor creatures…. Now, [the ends] are no other than that man might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought unto the everlasting enjoyment of him;—all unto his glory."24 In a similar vein Edward Leigh (1602–1671) maintains that a covenant "is a solemn Contract, passing between some parties, each to other in certain articles to both their contents, for their mutual peace and comfort."25

Another Westminster divine, William Gouge (1575–1653), wrote a magnificent commentary on Hebrews, which has not received the attention it deserves, partly due to the fame of John Owen's exposition of that book. In his commentary, Gouge defines "covenant" as a mutual agreement between God and man. A covenant necessarily involves a promise from God and a "retribution on man's part, which is to perform his duty in way of gratitude."26 Besides that, he further defines a divine covenant into four causes, using Aristotelian logic to elucidate his theological points. A covenant may be understood in terms of the efficient, material, formal, and final causes.27 God is the efficient cause. The material or procuring cause is God's pleasure and will (Eph. 1:11). The formal cause consists in the binding of the two parties, God and man. The final cause, or the end, of the covenant is God's glory.28 Thus Gouge, like his contemporaries, can use covenantal language to describe Adam's state in the garden. Moreover, the consistent themes of mutuality, contract, and blessing certainly predominate in discussions about the nature of covenants in general, which fits well with the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.2).

The Moral Law and *Imago Dei*

The moral law possessed primary significance in the covenant of works. Robert Rollock (1555–1599) maintains that the covenant of works, which may also be called a legal or natural covenant, "is founded in nature," and thus the law of God "was ingraven in man's heart."29 Since Adam was created in God's image, the law of God was written on his heart. The justice of God demanded that He should create Adam "pure and holy," and therefore inclined to delight in and obey the moral law. Rollock adds that the ground of the covenant of works was "the nature of man in the first creation holy and perfect, endued also with the knowledge of the law."30 John Ball echoes Rollock's teaching by arguing that Adam's obedience was "partly natural, to be regulated according to the Law engraven in his heart by the finger of God himself."31 Francis Roberts justifies covenantal language in the garden because God wrote the moral law on Adam's heart "and in so doing Entered into Covenant with him."32 In more colorful language, John Lightfoot (1602–1675), a highly influential member of the Westminster Assembly, connects the law written on Adam's heart to Sinai: "Adam heard as much in the garden, as Israel did at Sinai, but only in fewer words and without thunder."33 The place of the moral law in the covenant of works cannot be overstated for these Reformed theologians.

Thomas Goodwin's (1600–1680) exposition of the covenant of works reflects this emphasis on the significance of the law. Aware that Reformed divines generally refer to the covenant of works as the covenant of nature (*foedus naturae*), Goodwin prefers instead to call it the law of creation (*jus creationis*).34 His exposition of this law is so elaborate as to warrant careful consideration, so it will be discussed below. However, in connection with what has been said concerning the law, Goodwin argues that Adam's enjoyment of God in the garden was contingent upon the law being written on his heart. For him to enjoy God, he must be inwardly holy; all of his faculties must be inclined toward knowing, serving, and loving God by keeping every law that God as Creator had commanded. The law of God written on Adam's heart, "in the full perfection of it," was Adam's due creation right.35 Goodwin argues further that what remains of the law written on man's heart in his fallen condition "is but a shadow of that full and perfect, exact copy of the whole and holy law, which was then man's nature much more" in the covenant of works.36 The Savoy representatives made an interesting addition to Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1 that more clearly emphasizes the law being written on Adam's heart.

> God gave to Adam a law *of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good*

> *and evil*, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it (Savoy Declaration 19.1).[37]

The law written on Adam's heart in his state of innocence reflects a more fundamental truth, namely, that Adam was made in the image of God. John Ball says that being made in God's image gave Adam "divine qualities breathed from the whole Trinity…enabling and fitting him to obey the will of God entirely, willingly, [and] exactly."[38] The Westminster Confession of Faith ties these concerns together by saying that Adam and Eve were made "after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts" (4.2).[39] One of the lesser known divines at the Assembly, John Maynard (1600–1665), devotes considerable space to man being made in the image of God in his work *The Beauty and Order of Creation*. Maynard reasons that since God "made our bodies, we must yield up our bodies to his service."[40] The greatest gift that God could give to His creatures was the gift of His own image, which only humans possessed. Aware of the maxim *finitum non capax infiniti* (the finite cannot comprehend the infinite), Maynard speaks of man's faculties, including knowledge and moral likeness, as sufficient to make Adam naturally admire and love God, "and so much as was sufficient clearly to direct him in any duty, which by the first Covenant and Law of his Creation he owed unto him."[41]

Thomas Goodwin affirms that the law of nature impressed upon Adam and Eve "required that God himself should become [their] object,…and so to give man a power to know and delight in him."[42] Goodwin argues that Reformed divines insist upon this principle of "natural dues" against Roman Catholic theologians. Adam's knowledge and holiness enabled him to know God as his supreme good. Because God made man in His image, Adam immediately possessed "holy and sanctifying principles" concerning himself and his relation to God.[43] In terms of his relationship to God, Adam possessed knowledge of who God is and what duty God required of him, which is reflected in the basic outline of the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.[44] On this model, the image of God in Adam, which necessitates that the law is written on his heart, means that, for Goodwin, Adam knew the promises and threats in the garden naturally. The two sacraments (i.e., the trees) only confirmed the nature of his covenantal state. Thus he argues: "the knowledge of this covenant, and of the promise and threatening annexed to it, was natural, though it were strengthened and enlarged by those two sacraments."[45] This raises an interesting question, namely, whether Adam was created *in* a covenant or *for* a covenant? Goodwin's

own answer seems to imply the former because of how he understands the relationship between the image of God and the nature of the covenant. But not all divines would agree.

Made *In* or *For* a Covenant?

Was the covenant of works already in place when Adam was created? Willem van Asselt has shown that for Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), Adam was created for a covenant relationship, not immediately in that relationship. "In other words," writes van Asselt, "the covenant of works is synthetically, rather than analytically related to creation. It is a real addition to creation that was not originally there."[46] Francis Roberts, while not denying positive law, seems to make the covenant of works co-extensive with the law written on Adam's heart, which necessarily means that Adam was created in a covenant. Indeed, Roberts explicitly argues that the "Moral Law is the Covenant of Works."[47] Giving the moral law to Adam was at least an implicit covenanting, and perhaps even explicit. Rowland Ward has argued that Edward Fisher (fl. 1627–1655) distinguished between the law written on Adam's heart, which was the "matter of the covenant of works," and the specific agreement of Genesis 2:16–17, which was the "form of a covenant."[48] William Bridge echoed Fisher's point by contending that a covenant differs from a law. In fact, "no sooner was man made, but he was under a Law, to be obedience unto God his Maker…. But then when God said unto him, *In the day that though eatest thereof*…then God entered into Covenant."[49]

John Owen presents the same line of reasoning. Owen remarks that the covenant made with Adam can be considered in two ways: as a law only, and as a covenant. By "law only" Owen makes reference to the Creator-creature relationship: "God being considered as the creator, governor, and benefactor of man; and man as an intellectual creature, capable of moral obedience; this law was necessary, and is eternally indispensable."[50] The presence of the law was an ontological necessity bound up in the Creator-creature relationship, whereas the covenantal aspect depended upon the will and good pleasure of God, who instituted promises and threats, rewards and punishments; the promise speaks of grace, the punishment speaks of justice. These promises and threatenings were expressed through external signs: "the first in the tree of life, the latter in that of the knowledge of good and evil."[51] Furthermore, by these signs God established the original law of creation as a covenant and gave it the nature of a covenant. These trees, being sacramental, acted as the signs and pledges of the covenant of works.[52] Thus, for Owen, the covenantal nature of Adam's situation in Eden finds its confirmation not simply in the fact that Adam had the law written on his

heart, but also in the two trees, which set forth life and death.

Like Owen, many Reformed theologians held to the view that the Tree of Life was a sacrament. James Ussher (1581–1656) posited the view that by eating from the Tree of Life ("which, no doubt, according to the manner of Sacramental signes"), Adam was assured he should live in Paradise forever.[53] Edward Leigh speaks of two sacraments in the covenant: "the Tree of knowledge respecting the Law, *do this*, and the tree of life respecting the promise, *Live*."[54] William Strong (d. 1654) likewise sees in the two trees seals of the covenant: "In the Covenant God made with Adam there was a Life promise, of which the Tree of Life was a Seal; and there was a Death threatened, which was seal'd by the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil…. One is called the *Sacrament of Life*, and the other the *Sacrament of Death*."[55]

The Tree of Life did not possess an innate power to give life. Rowland Ward notes that the Reformed orthodox "everywhere reject the idea that the tree of life had the inherent ability through God's provision to preserve man's life if he ate of it from time to time."[56] However, not all Reformed theologians agreed that the Tree of Life was a type of Christ. Francis Turretin (1623–1687) certainly believed the tree typified Christ.[57] He even connects the Tree of Life to the gospel, arguing that "the gospel…is the saving and quickening tree of life because it is 'the word of life' (John 6:68)."[58] Anthony Burgess acknowledged the opinion of Turretin but argues that the Tree of Life did not represent Christ.[59] Francis Roberts simply argues that the Tree of Life was not "typical" (i.e., a type of Christ), but "sacramental," a sign that assured Adam of life upon perpetual obedience.[60] This point of contention was never settled among the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox.[61] Yet, whether one believed that Adam was created in a covenant, by virtue of the law being written on his heart, or created for a covenant, once the terms had been set forth by positive institution, all were agreed that the presence of these two trees, which represented life and death, promises and threats, confirmed Adam in a covenant of works.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Anthony Burgess considers the question of why God would give Adam a positive law, in the form of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, to try his obedience. Burgess first asks what is meant by the Tree's name. Received opinion, from Augustine onward, held that the name derives "not from any effect, but from the event, because it did indeed experimentally make [Adam] to know good and evil."[62] Yet, Burgess adds that the mere event does not alone justify its name. He observes that "the divine decree and appointment of God" limited Adam from knowing more than what

God had appointed.[63] God's appointment speaks of His dominion and power over Adam, the first reason Burgess lists for the presence of the Tree. In the second place, God provided the Tree so that Adam's obedience "might be more tried, and be manifested to be obedience."[64] William Strong makes the same point: "God loves to try the obedience of the best of his Creatures."[65] Focusing on the nature of Adam's obedience, Burgess argues that though Adam's obedience to the positive law was "far inferior" compared to that rendered to the moral law, his disobedience to the positive law "is no less heinous than that to the moral law."[66] The disobedience of Adam that Paul speaks of in Romans 5 has special reference to the positive law: "and though pride and unbelief were in this sin, yet this was properly his sin," that is, to eat from the Tree of which he was commanded not to eat.[67] To deter Adam from sinning in this particular manner, which according to the Westminster divines included transgressing the whole law, God threatened Adam with death (cf. James 1:10).

Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), a Scottish Presbyterian and commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, provides a detailed—and somewhat perplexing at times—explanation of the threatening language of Genesis 2:17. According to Rutherford, to understand the death threat made to Adam "we must distinguish between the intent of the threatener, and the intent and sense of the threatening."[68] God's threat in the garden was actually partly legal and partly evangelical insofar as the threatening of death was "executed upon Christ," which spared His elect from the second death, but not the first death. The reprobate suffers the first and the second death. In a sense, then, the threat involved both law and gospel; the Lord was free to "inflict the punishment, or to provide an Evangelic remedy."[69] God's threat to Adam describes what He may do if Adam breaks covenant, but what God actually will do if Adam sins remains His prerogative as king of creation: "the threatening of the Law doth not deny the Evangelic remedy."[70] For Rutherford, even in the covenant of works, the "Gospel may be proven out of the Law" since the first commandment, which was written on Adam's heart, speaks of God's mercy, wisdom, and ability to save.[71] Thus, between Adam's sin and the promise of Genesis 3:15, he had hope of the gospel based on God's character revealed in the law. This understanding of the law would, of course, raise eyebrows among classical Lutherans. Indeed, even God's threats to believers, "though materially legal," are "formally and in the Lord's intention directed to them upon an Evangelic intention."[72]

Rutherford's interpretation of God's threat to Adam provides an explanation for why Adam did not die immediately. However, Reformed divines acknowledged that Adam died spiritually immediately upon sinning, and his body fell under the curse of death. William Strong explains that God's threat

manifested itself in the form of curses both temporal and spiritual.73 In the end, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil afforded Adam a visible warning not to eat from it because of what God had said would happen if he did.

Creation Dues

One of the most penetrating seventeenth-century treatments of the covenant of works came from Thomas Goodwin. His approach to the covenant of works provides valuable insight into his doctrines of God, Christ, man, creation, sin, and redemption. Regarding the Creator-creature relationship, Goodwin posits that by creating man to be in a covenant of works God's will "regulated itself by what was meet for their natures, as such, to receive from him, and for him as a Creator to give."[74] That is, He gave all that was due on His part for Adam to attain happiness and communion with Him. As noted above, God endued Adam with innate holiness by writing the law on his heart. And as long as Adam and Eve kept the moral law, God was obliged to allow them to continue in the "happy estate he had set them in."[75] Nonetheless, God was not obliged to keep Adam from falling. William Bridge also argues that God gave Adam "ability to stand, but he did not give a promise of perseverance in standing."[76]

Both Burgess and Goodwin highlight the pneumatic element in Adam's obedience. Burgess attributes Adam's holiness to the Holy Spirit, "though not as the holy Spirit of Christ."[77] Goodwin remarks that Adam possessed the Holy Spirit. The Spirit "was in Adam's heart to assist his graces, and cause them to flow and bring forth, and to move him to live according to those principles of life given him."[78] There are, however, differences between Adam possessing the Spirit pre-fall and Christians receiving the Spirit post-fall. The emphasis on the Spirit in the history of redemption is christological; Goodwin argues that Christians possess the Spirit "upon Christ's account, in his name, purchased by him, as whom he had first received, also purchased as the head of the church."[79] Adam retained the Spirit according to the tenor of the covenant of works ("do this and live"). By his disobedience Adam forfeited life, "and so in like manner the Spirit was forfeitable by him upon the same terms."[80] However, in the case of a Christian, the Spirit is given by promise; He is an absolute gift, "and not upon conditions on our parts, but to work and maintain in us what God requires of us."[81] In Goodwin's mind, then, Adam's obedience was not merely obedience performed according to the power of his human faculties but rather performed according to the operations of the Spirit. Full perseverance in obedience was not his creation due (i.e., something God was obliged to provide), though it would end up becoming his "redemption due" on account of the application of Christ's mediation. The emphasis on Adam's obedience should not give the impression that he did not have faith. Certainly he had faith, and several Reformed divines carefully discussed the nature of that faith.

Adam's Faith

Reformed divines spoke of Adam's faith in the garden, but at the same time they were always careful to distinguish between Adam's faith in the covenant of works and his faith in the covenant of grace.82 To be sure, there were similarities, but there were also important differences. According to John Ball, Adam's faith in both covenants was theocentric. In both contexts his faith is evident from the love he had for God, "because if faith abounds, love abounds."83 However, the foundation for faith in each respective context differs. The righteousness of nature presupposes a certain type of faith based on mutual love between the Creator and the creature. After the fall, however, faith leans upon the promise made in Christ because man, in himself, falls under the judgment of God. In the next place, faith in the covenant of works is natural, whereas in the covenant of grace it is supernatural.84 Finally, Ball notes that faith in the covenant of works was mutable, and thus, so was Adam's holiness, but faith in the covenant of grace "is eternal and unchangeable, because it comes from an eternal and unchangeable beginning, the Spirit of Grace."85 Burgess considers not only whether Adam had faith, but also whether repentance belongs to his being made in the image of God. Adam had a power to believe, "so far as it did not imply an imperfection in the subject."86 After the fall, Adam needed a greater power to believe in Christ, which some divines called "supernatural" faith as opposed to "natural" faith.87 Concerning repentance, Burgess reasons that it cannot belong to the image of God because "it denoteth an imperfection in the subject…yet as it floweth from a regenerated nature, so far it is reductively the image of God."88

In addition, Thomas Goodwin notes that some divines regard Adam's faith in the garden as supernatural, yet he opts for the position that Adam's faith was only natural. That Adam could converse with God by faith was his natural due. Thus, because he was holy and pure, Adam believed God's word; he naturally assented to its veracity, and his sanctified reason enabled him to apprehend the words of God, which (again) was his natural due.89

Goodwin then distinguishes between Adam's natural faith and the supernatural faith required of those in the covenant of grace. In the first place, since Adam's covenant was natural (*foedus naturae*), because his justification, reward, and the image of God in him were all natural, according to the terms of the covenant, "it were strange if the principle of faith in him…should be supernatural."90 Goodwin's understanding of Adam's reward influences his next point, that a supernatural faith would have been superfluous for Adam. Adam was not given the promise of heaven or the vision of God there, and so a supernatural faith was unnecessary. Supernatural faith prepares God's elect for heaven, but Adam had no such "preparation" since the promised reward was

only continued life in the garden.[91] Consequently, a supernatural faith would have made Adam miserable, for he would have desired to be in heaven with God without possessing the promise of heaven.[92] Goodwin's distinction between natural faith and supernatural faith and his premise that heaven belongs only to those with supernatural faith raise the question of what Adam's reward would have been based upon his continued obedience in the garden. On this particular question Reformed divines held varying views.

Adam's Reward: Heaven or Earth?

One of the most intriguing intra-Reformed debates during the seventeenth century had reference to the nature of Adam's reward: Was it to be heaven or continued life in the garden? William Bridge speaks briefly to the question by arguing that when God entered into covenant with Adam, and therefore his posterity, he "promised eternal life in Heaven; not eternal life in this World only, as some would."[93] Francis Turretin poses the question "whether Adam had the promise of eternal and heavenly life so that (his course of obedience being finished) he would have been carried to heaven."[94] Turretin answers in the affirmative. Reformed systematician William Bucanus (d. 1603), likewise argues that had Adam not sinned he would have been "removed into Heaven, indeed without death…but yet not without some change."[95]

On the Continent, Reformed theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries generally favored the view that Adam's reward for obedience would have been heaven.[96] However, those in Britain lacked such unanimity, and a good number of them preferred to remain agnostic on the question. Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) noted that "life" is promised in both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He cautions, however, "Now whether the same life be promised in both, or whether…life here on earth, be promised in the one, and an heavenly life in the other, as some think, or whether a heavenly life and glory in both, as some others think, I will not determine, it not being much material."[97] John Ball advocates a similar sentiment: "To say that God would have translated [Adam] to the state of glory in Heaven, is more than any just ground will warrant."[98]

Besides the extreme position of the Socinians, who held that the relationship between God and Adam was not spiritual, some of the Salmurian theologians held the view that Turretin opposes, namely, that Adam would have continued in the garden without the promise of heaven if he had not sinned. Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664), for example, held to this position.[99] Joining Amyraut were Thomas Goodwin, William Gouge, and Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646).[100] Burroughs mentions that only continued life in Eden was promised to Adam;

“we do not read of God’s promising Adam to life in Heaven if he had obeyed.”[101]

Goodwin in particular provides a rigorous defense of his position on christological grounds. All that was promised to Adam was life in the garden “and not the translating him, in the end, unto that Spiritual life in heaven.”[102] Goodwin gives several reasons why Adam’s reward would have been only continued life on earth. First, Christ is the “heavenly man” (1 Cor. 15:47), whereas Adam is the “earthly man.” Christ is the first and only author of heavenly life. Adam, as an earthly man, had a happiness that should reach no higher. Paul, according to Goodwin, grounds our heavenly inheritance not on the merits of Christ’s death but on Christ being the Lord of heaven. Because Adam was a man of the earth, he could never have come to heaven (John 3:13).[103] A Christian’s right to heaven is based upon Christ, who is the only one to have come down from heaven. In this way, Christ secures for His people far greater eschatological blessings than Adam ever could have possessed (that is, according to the covenant of works). Second, Eden was a type of the paradise above (heaven); Adam’s Sabbath was a type of heaven, just as Adam was a type of Christ. Therefore, “he was not to have entered into the heavenly paradise, except by this Second Adam, Christ, whose paradise alone it was.”[104] Third, the moral law, the law of nature, makes no mention of “going to heaven.” Rather, the law only speaks of living: “do this and you will live.”[105] According to Goodwin, that is why heaven is mentioned so sparsely in the Old Testament. At this point Goodwin makes an important distinction between “treasure in Heaven” and “eternal life.” “And that right to treasure in heaven comes by following Christ; but a life eternal, that is, a living forever in God’s favour, is promised to keeping the commandments. And this life is here spoken of as a thing differing from heaven.”[106] In the fourth place, the law of nature toward all creatures who continually obey the law perfectly amounts to them not obtaining “a higher station than they were created in” but instead a continuance in that state of creation and enjoyment of communion and pleasure with God.[107] Hence, finally, Goodwin posits that the covenant of works could only confirm him in the condition in which he was created, rather than reward him with heavenly life for these reasons:

> 1. I know no promise for it, that after such a time, and so long obedience performed, he should stand perpetually. And without such a promise, we have no warrant so to think, or judge of it.
>
> 2. Because a creature is defectible, the obedience of that creature could never have procured indefectibility; for that must be of Grace. Only the

God-man could procure such an estate.[108]

Adam's reward then, if he had stood, was a blessed life in Eden where he could enjoy communion with God according to the perpetual terms of the covenant of works. But certainly not heaven, "which is not *ex debito*, is not due to nature under the covenant of works."[109] Rather, the reward of heaven comes through Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23) and is the "sole fruit of election."[110] Whether or not one finds Goodwin's arguments persuasive, the obvious burden of his exposition focuses on the superiority of the second Adam over the first Adam. Christ could merit heavenly life on account of the dignity and worth of His person, whereas Adam, as a mere creature, could only continue in the state in which God had placed him, which nevertheless was a reward above and beyond what he deserved.

The Savoy Declaration differs from the Westminster Confession on the language used to describe Adam's reward in the context of God's infinite condescension. The Savoy Declaration speaks of Adam attaining "the reward of life" (7.2; cf. WCF, 7.2). The significance of the change ought not to be exaggerated, but there is no question that both Thomas Goodwin and William Bridge would interpret the "reward of life" differently. In this case, "life" may either be interpreted as continued life in Eden or life in heaven.

Grace and Merit

Given the constituent elements in the covenant of works and the way God dealt with Adam, the question naturally arises whether the covenant of works was a gracious covenant. Related to that question is the concept of merit. Rowland Ward is surely correct to note that most seventeenth-century Reformed theologians understood grace in a more general sense than simply equating it with redemptive favor.111 Anthony Burgess argues that Adam needed help from God to obey the law and then notes, "Some learned Divines, as [David] Pareus…deny the holiness Adam had, or the help God gave Adam, to be truly and properly called grace."112 Pareus believed that grace only comes from Christ to sinners. Burgess shies away from the dispute, but he does insist that Adam could not persevere "without help from God."113 Francis Roberts contends that grace in Scripture "hath manifold acceptations."114 Primarily, grace refers to God's free favor to His creatures and the blessings He gives to them. In the covenant of works, Adam received the grace of benevolence; in the covenant of grace, he received the grace of mercy. The covenant of works was gracious; the covenant of grace is doubly gracious.115 For the most part, then, grace was operative in both covenants, but the terms of its operation were different in each.

Anthony Burgess acknowledges that although Adam was in a covenant of works he "could not merit that happiness which God would bestow upon him."116 God's grace to man is "an infinite good, and all that is done by us is finite."117 Moreover, Adam's obedience was not without God's help. William Ames (1576–1633) notes that Adam persisted in the garden by grace and that "grace was not taken from him before he had sinned."118 As alluded to above, Francis Roberts argues that God's entering into the covenant of works with Adam was an "act of divine grace and favour, not of debt."119 God could have dealt only in terms of "command," requiring duty from Adam without a reward. However, His condescending to Adam and entering into a covenant with him was "mere grace," according to Roberts. In connection with this, he insists that Adam could not merit any reward. Even if Adam had rendered perfect obedience, he would still have "been an unprofitable servant, having done nothing but what was duty."120 In fact, Roberts suggests that if God's dealings with Adam in the covenant of works were an "Act of Divine Grace," then God's covenant of grace was an act of "superabounding and transcendent grace."121 John Ball also defends the view that God's grace was operative in the covenant of works: "it was of grace that he was pleased to make that promise."122 Thus Adam could not merit the reward God promised to him for faithful obedience.123 Speaking of the covenant of life, Scottish theologian Hugh

Binning (1627–1653) highlights the principle of "do this and live." However, immediately after stating the works principle, he affirms that there were "some out-breakings of the glorious grace, and free condescendency of God; for it was no less free grace, and undeserved favour, to promise life to his obedience, than now to promise life to our Faith."[124] Binning adds that if Adam had not sinned and God had continued that covenant with mankind, it would have still been of grace, and the faithful would have been "saved by grace" and had reason to boast, but not before God.[125]

William Gouge also connects God's promise and reward to His gracious disposition toward Adam. Indeed, "the performing of the condition could not merit such a reward as was promised."[126] In both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, according to Patrick Gillespie, the moving cause was "mere Grace"; in fact, Gillespie contends that though the covenant of grace derives its name by way of eminency, the covenant of works was "a Covenant of Grace."[127] First, God's grace, and nothing in man, initiated the covenant; second, God's grace endued Adam "with all the habits of Grace in perfection"; and, third, promising to reward his obedience was gracious, "for there was no merit in Adams obedience."[128] George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673) also makes the contention that the covenant of works "was in some respects a covenant of grace" because the reward promised to Adam for perfect obedience was not something God owed to him.[129] Like Gouge, Gillespie, and Swinnock, Samuel Rutherford argues that God "never loved to make any Covenant, yea even that of Works, without some acts and out-goings of grace."[130] John Owen makes similar statements. Referring to covenants in general, he insists that there is "infinite grace in every divine covenant, inasmuch as it is established on promises."[131] Elsewhere, speaking explicitly of the covenant of works, he notes that the reward for obedience, which was eternal life with God, "did in strict justice exceed the worth of the obedience required, and so was a superadded effect of goodness and grace."[132] Thomas Manton (1620–1677) sums up these concerns by noting in the first place that the grace of God moved Him to establish the covenant of works. But, more than that, the grace of God accepted Adam's obedience; indeed, though the "last covenant hath the honour by way of eminency to be styled the covenant of grace, yet the first was so…. It was grace that endowed with original righteousness, and fitted him, and enabled him to keep that covenant…. Grace engaged the reward, there was no more merit in Adam's obedience than in ours."[133]

The Westminster Confession, however, speaks of "voluntary condescension" and not "grace" to characterize the covenants God makes with man. Two things should be noted. First, for most of the divines a covenant is by definition

gracious. Second, the phrase “voluntary condescension” clearly has in view God’s grace. William Bridge brings the two concepts together. In comparing the new covenant with the covenant made with Adam, Bridge remarks that “out of free love and grace [God] was pleased to condescend to enter into Covenant with man.”134 Similarly, in describing the covenant of works, Thomas Blake speaks of God’s “gracious condescension.”135 Francis Roberts posits that all of God’s covenants with His creatures “are his gratuitous condescensions to his Creatures. The Covenant of Works even in innocency was merely Gratuitous.”136 By condescending to make a covenant with Adam, God dealt graciously with him, so much so that Patrick Gillespie could say, as noted, that the covenant of works was also a covenant of grace.137 Richard Muller has suggested that not only does the language of “voluntary condescension” rule out human merit, but that the “presence of divine grace prior to the fall was a fundamental assumption of most of the Reformed thinkers of that era.”138 The evidence cited above sustains Muller’s contention.

The Fall

Whatever graces Adam received from God, he did not receive the grace of perseverance in the covenant of works. Samuel Rutherford recognizes that Adam was in fact predestined to eternal life, but he was not "predestinate to a law glory [viz., a glory attained to by law-keeping], and to influences of God to carry him to persevere [in his state of original righteousness]."[139] Instead, Adam was predestined not as a public person, but as a individual, elect in Jesus Christ. His fall, however, was as a public person, and so involved his descendants in his sin and its consequences (WCF, 6.2–3).[140] The Westminster divines all agreed that Adam was able to not sin (*posse non peccare*), but not infallibly or immutably so (*non posse peccare*); in the garden he was not "confirmed in a state of goodness, as the Elect Angels and Men are," though he was nevertheless elect in the covenant of grace.[141] While recognizing that the covenant of works was gracious, the divines argued that it did not contain the grace of perseverance that belongs to the covenant of grace. A question that occupied the minds of Reformed theologians was God's role in Adam's fall. In the chapter on God's eternal decree, the Westminster Confession affirms that God ordains all that comes to pass, yet He is not the author of sin, "nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established" (WCF, 3.1). Further clarification comes in chapter 5 on God's providence. While acknowledging that God's providence extends to the fall, including the sins of angels and men, "and that not by a bare permission," the Confession nevertheless affirms that sin proceeds only from the creature and not from God, "who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin" (WCF, 5.4).

Reformed theologians provided different ways of trying to understand why a sovereign God cannot be blamed for the fall of man. Robert Harris (1581–1658) put the blame squarely on Adam: "And here he must blame none but himself, for the evil that is befallen him: For the devil could not compel him to sin, much less did God any way necessitate him: it was man's own doing alone."[142] Patrick Gillespie, however, found it necessary to attempt to reconcile God's sovereignty and Adam's sin. He recognizes that Adam's sin came to pass in God's providence; to deny that would be "injurious to [God's] Infinite Wisdom."[143] Though there was no necessity upon Adam to sin, there was "some kind of holy, spotless necessity, that this should come to pass" connected to the decree of God.[144] Adam's will was still free since necessity is not opposed to freedom. He adds that God's spotless necessity was not (1) brutish, devoid of man's natural faculties; (2) natural, as the sun gives light; or (3) compelling, "such as a man bound hand and foot."[145] Rather, God's necessity was one of

determination, “as insinuateth itself sweetly and continually in the bosom of the elective power, without any the least straightening and forcing the light of the mind and its indifferency.”146 Moreover, this necessity did not compel Adam’s will to involuntary acts or motions that are “not spontaneous, or to be carried in its choice after any other of the opposites then itself doth connaturally embrace. Nor doth this necessity of divine determination make God the moral cause of Adam’s none obedience, but the physical cause only.”147

Before Gillespie, William Ames distinguished between principal and adjuvant (i.e. assisting) causes. Man was the principal cause, for, in the exercise of his free will, he ate from the forbidden tree. The adjuvant causes were the devil and Adam’s wife, Eve. The devil was not, however, the compelling cause or the direct cause in procuring Adam’s sin. He counseled and persuaded, but did not force Adam and Eve to sin. In connection with the devil’s temptation, “there was joined the tempting of God, whereby he did so order that business…but this tempting of God was neither Evil, nor tending to Evil.”148 These various comments help to explain the wording of Westminster Confession of Faith 5.2, which speaks of God as the first cause of all things, “yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.”

What were the consequences of Adam’s sin? William Ames speaks of the twofold consequences of sin, namely, guiltiness and filthiness. Punishment has a direct connection to guilt, which is culpability or blameworthiness for having sinned. Filthiness has reference to spiritual pollution or defilement, “whereby a sinner is made destitute of all comeliness.”149 Robert Harris makes similar observations about Adam’s state after he sinned, claiming that Adam did not change in his essentials. By that he means that Adam was substantially the same man before and after his change. What changed was his relation to God. As one who had been made in the image of God, he was “much varied and changed.”150 William Bridge’s work, *The Sinfulnesse of Sinne*, provides a brief and accurate commentary on chapter 6 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which highlights the change that took place in man after the fall.151 But among the Westminster divines, William Strong’s work on the covenants may be the most precise statement on the consequences of Adam’s sin.

Strong, following William Ames’s distinction between filthiness and guilt, analyzes the effects of sin on the soul and highlights the serious estate into which Adam fell. Just as the soul receives the greatest blessing, so it receives the greatest curse. If the soul is cursed, all blessings are turned into curses.152 Whereas Adam’s soul in innocence gave him thoughts directed to God, who was his chief good, his sinful soul has no room for God in his thoughts; his soul lost

interest in God. Sin breaks all relations between man and God, so much so that sinful man is no longer the son of God as Adam was, but a child of the devil.153 The image of God is "utterly defaced," and a new image is stamped upon man (see WCF, 6.2, 4). In fact, Strong goes so far as to suggest that though divines speak of fragments of the image of God remaining in sinful man, these fragments are derived from the covenant of grace. Thus Strong speaks not only of a supernatural light from Christ to the elect, but a light that "even all mankind has from Christ by virtue of the second Covenant."154 Apart from the grace of the second covenant, the soul is "wholly servile…, has lost all fellowship and communion with God…, is at enmity with God…, and is an enemy to all those ways that might bring him back unto God again."155 The curse also renders the soul guilty, and by imputation the whole world becomes guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).156

Adam's Federal Headship The doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin helps to explain the presentation of the two covenants in the Westminster Standards. Indeed, the doctrine of the covenant of works was defended by appealing to the parallels between the two Adams in Romans 5.157 In brief, federalism (from Latin, *foedus,* "covenant") is the idea that by virtue of the covenant of works, sin and death entered the world through Adam and passed on to all men. In the words of John Owen, "All men became liable and obnoxious unto it, as the punishment due to sin."158 He adds that all men, without exception, "were not then existent in their own persons; but yet were they all of them then, upon the first entrance of sin, made subject to death, or liable unto punishment."159 By divine constitution and their "federal existence" in Adam, they "became obnoxious in their own persons unto the sentence of it upon their first natural existence, being born children of wrath."160 What is imputed to all humanity is specifically the guilt of Adam's sin. Thus Westminster Confession of Faith 6.3: "They [Adam and Eve] being the root of mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by original generation." Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) joins with Owen in connecting the terms of Romans 5 with the covenant of works. Calamy maintains that Adam received a "Covenant both for himself and all his posterity…. He breaking that Covenant brought not only guilt upon himself but upon all his posterity with him" (Rom. 5:12).161 Because of Adam's sin, all men are polluted and guilty before God, "and liable to all the curses and penalties due unto them for breach of that Covenant."162 Anthony Burgess also makes the case for the covenant of works based upon the guilt of Adam's sin being imputed to his posterity. This could only happen by way of

covenant and not natural propagation, otherwise Adam would be “no more to us than our parents…which is contrary to the Apostle, Rom. 5, who chargeth it still upon one man.”[163] At bottom, Adam’s position as the federal head or covenant representative of humanity in the covenant of works finds its most compelling exegetical argument in Romans 5.[164]

Conclusion

In describing the place of the covenant of works in the theology of the seventeenth century, Carl Trueman has maintained that "to assume that its use in Reformed Orthodoxy is…the result either of Procrustean dogmatic eisegesis or of bald proof-texting or of a brutal imposition of a legalistic or commercial doctrine of God on creation would be wrong."165 If this chapter has succeeded in accurately summarizing how the Westminster divines and some of their immediate predecessors and successors thought about the covenant of works, then Trueman's contention is certainly right.

However one accounts for the emergence of this term, the doctrine of the covenant of works became a commonplace in Reformed orthodoxy during the mid-seventeenth century, achieving confessional status in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The doctrine highlights a number of important aspects of Reformed theology: the relational aspect of theology and the use of the covenant concept to articulate God's relations with His creatures; the idea that biblically authoritative doctrines can be deduced by good and necessary consequence from Scripture; the implications of man's creation in the image of God; the grace and goodness of God in covenanting with Adam and offering him "life," whatever "life" may mean; the federal relationship between Adam and his offspring; and the need for another Adam to "make right" what the first Adam "made wrong." The second Adam, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the answer to the failure of the first Adam in the covenant of works and the mediator of the covenant of grace.

1. See Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1699)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 254–57. He lists the following terms: *foedus naturae* (covenant of nature); *foedus naturale* (natural covenant); *foedus creationis* (covenant of creation); *foedus legale* (covenant of law); *amicitia cum Deo* (friendship with God); *foedus operum* (covenant of works). Note later in this chapter that Thomas Goodwin favors the term *jus creationis* (the creation law).

2. A particularly good, short essay that looks at various issues connected with the covenant of works in the seventeenth century can be found in Richard Muller's work, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel," in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 175–89.

3. See, for example, Robert Letham, "The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting for Its Development," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 457–68; David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

4. See Peter Lillback's argument in *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 276–304.

5. For Fenner's explicit use of *foedus operum*, see *Sacra theologia, sive, Veritas quae est secundum pietatem* (1585), 88. Michael McGiffert recognizes Fenner's importance in the development of this doctrine in "From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 131–55.

6. The doctrine of the covenant of works has received criticism from a number of well-known theologians. In response to these criticisms, see Cornelis P. Venema, "Recent Criticisms of the Covenant of Works in the Westminster Confession of Faith," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9 (Fall 1993): 165–98.

7. On this topic, see C. J. William's essay, "Good and Necessary Consequences in the Westminster Confession," in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne Spear*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2007), 171–90; Ryan M. McGraw, *By Good and Necessary Consequence* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).

8. Richard Muller's essay, "'Either Expressely Set Down…or by Good and Necessary Consequenece': Exegesis and Formulation in the Annotations and the Confession," addresses the exegetical sophistication behind the covenant of works in the writings of the seventeenth-century British divines. Richard Muller and Rowland S. Ward, eds., *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Public Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2007), 59–82.

9. John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* (London, 1645), 6.

10. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 7. On p. 9, Ball notes that "we read not in Scripture, the Covenant of works…. The nearest we come to it is Rom. 3.27. the law of works opposed to the law of faith; which holds out as much as the Covenant of works, and the Covenant of Grace."

11. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis: or, A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, From the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially Antinomians* (London, 1646), 119.

12. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 120.

13. John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 23:60.

14. Francis Roberts, *The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man…* (London, 1657), 19.

15. The London Baptist Confession (1689) reads instead: "is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture." This change surely reflects hermeneutical differences between the Presbyterian and Baptist theologians and partly explains why they did not agree on whether paedobaptism was warranted in the new covenant.

16. James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie* (London, 1645), 123.

17. Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of God Entered with Man-Kinde…* (London, 1658), 11.

18. George Walker, *The Manifold Wisedome of God* (London, 1640), 39.

19. Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Bowels of Tender Mercy Sealed in the Everlasting Covenant…* (London, 1661), 2.

20. William Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant* (London, 1667), 57–58.

21. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:81.

22. Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (London, 1661), 49–51.

23. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:82. See also Owen, *Works*, 6:470; 10:210; 19:77–82; 23:55.

24. Owen, *Exposition of Psalm CXXX*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 6:470–71.

25. Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises* (London, 1633), 63.

26. William Gouge, *A Learned and Very Useful Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews Wherein Every Word and Particle in the Original Is Explained* (London, 1655), 251.

27. Robert Harris (1581–1658), a member of the Westminster Assembly, uses the same sorts of distinctions to describe the covenant of works. *A Brief Discourse of Mans Estate in the First and Second Adam* (London, 1653), 2–3.

28. Gouge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 251.

29. Robert Rollock, *A Treatise of Gods Effectual Calling* (London, 1603), 6–7.

30. Rollock, *A Treatise of Gods Effectual Calling*, 6–7.

31. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 10.

32. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 20. Note also John Plaifere's remark that the "Law Natural or Moral, written in the heart of Man, comprehended all Works to be done by [Adam]." Appello Evangelium *for the True Doctrine of the Divine Predestination, Concorded with the Orthodox Doctrine of Gods Free-Grace, and Mans Free-Will* (London, 1638), 80.

33. John Lightfoot, *Miscellanies Christian and Judiciall* (London, 1629), 182–83.

34. Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Creatures, and the Condition of their State by Creation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:23.

35. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:25.

36. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:25.

37. The italicized words are not found in Westminster Confession of Faith, 19.1. The London Baptist Confession removes the words "as a covenant of works."

38. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 11.

39. See also Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 17.

40. John Maynard, *The Beauty and Order of the Creation* (London, 1668), 132.

41. Maynard, *The Beauty and Order of the Creation*, 190.

42. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:44.

43. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:46.

44. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:46–47.

45. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:47.

46. Van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius*, 259–60.

47. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 20.

48. Rowland Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and The Creation Covenant* (Wantirna, Australia: New Melbourne Press, 2003), 102. I am especially thankful for some of the references that Dr. Ward alerted me to in his book.

49. Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant*, 58.

50. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:60.

51. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:60.

52. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:61.

53. Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, 125.

54. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 64.

55. William Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants: wherein the Nature, Differences, and Effects of the Covenant of Works and of Grace Are Distinctly, Rationally, Spiritually, and Practically Discussed: Together with a Considerable Quantity of Practical Cases Dependent Thereon* (London: J. M. for Francis Tyton and Thomas Parkhurst, 1678), 1.

56. Ward, *God and Adam*, 114.

57. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 8.5.3–14.

58. Turretin, *Institutes*, 8.5.4.

59. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 136.

60. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 34–35.

61. Other theologians, such as John Calvin and Herman Witsius (1636–1708), argued that the Tree of Life signified the Son of God but not Christ as the God-man. See J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 124–28.

62. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 102. Cf. Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament*, 190–92.

63. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 103.

64. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 103.
65. Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants*, 4.
66. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 104.
67. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 104.
68. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh, 1655), 3. As a Scottish commissioner invited by Parliament, Rutherford did not have voting rights at the Westminster Assembly. Of all the Scottish divines present at the assembly, Rutherford had the highest attendance record, and he also spoke frequently on the floor.
69. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 4.
70. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 4–5.
71. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 7.
72. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 7–8.
73. For his detailed explanation of the temporal curses and spiritual curses, see Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants*, 4–21.
74. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:24.
75. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:25.
76. Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant*, 62.
77. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 130.
78. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:54.
79. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:55.
80. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:55.
81. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:55.
82. See Sedgwick, *The Bowels of Tender Mercy*, 10–11.
83. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 12.
84. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 12–13.
85. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 12–13.
86. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 118.
87. See Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:54–60.
88. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 118.
89. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:54–55.
90. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:56.
91. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:56.
92. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:57–58.
93. Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant*, 61.
94. Turretin, *Institutes*, 8.6.1.
95. William Bucanus, *Body of Divinity*, trans. Robert Hill (London, 1659), 127.
96. See Heinrich Heppe and Ernst Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 293–96.
97. Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant or the Covenant of Grace Opened* (London, 1646), 55. See also Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 126.
98. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 10.
99. Moïse Amyraut, Louis Cappel, and Josué de La Place, *Syntagma Thesium Theologicarum in Academia Salmuriensi variis temporibus disputatarum* (Saumur: Apud Olivarium de Varennes, in Porticu Captivorum Palatij, sub Vase Aureo, 1664), 214.
100. On Gouge, see *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 253.
101. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Conversation* (London, 1650), 43.
102. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:49.
103. Burroughs makes the same argument, see *Gospel Conversation*, 43.
104. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:50.
105. Incidentally, Turretin uses the argument of the promise of the law, “do this and live,” to prove his

own position. *Institutes*, 8.6.4.

106. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:51.

107. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:51.

108. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:51–52.

109. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:52.

110. Goodwin, *Of the Creatures*, in *Works*, 7:52.

111. Ward, *God and Adam*, 116. Note the conclusion reached by Robert Letham: "On the absence of grace, Kline is simply wrong. The Westminster documents clearly affirm that grace was present before the fall." *The Westminster Assembly*, 232.

112. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 113. Besides Pareus, Thomas Goodwin comes close to denying grace in the covenant of works. For Goodwin, grace implies more than to give; it implies to give freely. It arises from the sovereignty of God's will. Thus, "it is most certain that all that Adam had might be called grace in that respect." *Exposition of Ephesians 2*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 2:223. All of the goodness that God showed to Adam, including his innate holiness, was a free gift. Nevertheless, properly speaking, in the Scriptures this is not called "grace." Rather, in Scripture, grace is "opposed to all that dueness which in a way of justice becomes God to reward the creature with under the covenant of works," as in Romans 4:4 and subsequent verses. For this reason, Goodwin distinguishes between God's grace that was freely given to Adam and "gospel grace." After having forefeited his right to a loving bond between himself and God, Adam was now a traitor, and so God's grace to him went beyond the law of nature. God's grace in the covenant of grace is so rich that faith and holiness are, in Goodwin's mind, not conditions—contra the vast majority of his contemporaries—but effects of grace. Goodwin accents the unconditional nature of the covenant of grace so that the so-called conditions are not actually conditions but "essentials to salvation itself," which appears to be mere semantics, but nevertheless is a way that Goodwin can highlight the difference between grace in the prelapsarian and postlapsarian contexts and the nature of gospel grace. See *Exposition of Ephesians 2*, in *Works*, 2:222–24.

113. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 113.

114. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 105.

115. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 106.

116. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 125. Patrick Gillespie acknowledges that "justice had some place in this Covenant, yet merit had none at all." *The Ark of the Testament*, 198.

117. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 126. He adds that all the orthodox acknowledge that God enabled Adam in his obedience; thus, if Adam was strengthened by God to do good "he was so far from meriting thereby, that indeed he was the more obliged to God." *Vindiciae Legis*, 126.

118. William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London, 1642), 50.

119. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 26.

120. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 26.

121. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 26.

122. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 7.

123. Ball, *The Covenant of Grace*, 10.

124. Hugh Binning, *The Common Principles of Christian Religion* (Edinburgh, 1660), 42.

125. Binning, *Common Principles*, 42.

126. Gouge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 253.

127. Gillespie, *Ark of the Testament Opened*, 221.

128. Gillespie, *Ark of the Testament Opened*, 221.

129. George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 4:61.

130. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 22.

131. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:68.

132. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:337. In Owen's work on justification by faith he argues in the following manner: "Grace is the original fountain and cause of all our acceptation before God in the

new covenant. Ans. It was so also in the old. The creation of man in original righteousness was an effect of divine grace, benignity, and goodness; and the reward of eternal life in the enjoyment of God was of mere sovereign grace: yet what was then of works was not of grace;—no more is it at present." *Justification by Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:277. And: "*Atque hoc sapientem eum reddere in obedientia secundum foedus operum Deo rite praestanda, ad felicitatem propriam, et potentiae, sapientiae, bonitatis, gratiae, ac justititae divinae gloriam, pote erat; haec primi hominis theologia*." *Theologoumena*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 17:39 (1.4.2).

133. Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon Psalm CXLVI*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: J. Nisbet, 1872), 8:372.

134. Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant*, 61. Robert Letham writes, "In Protestant scholasticism, long entrenched by the time of Westminster, *condescensio* was used for God's accommodation of himself to human ways of knowing in order to reveal himself. This was closely related to *gratia Dei* (the grace of God), the goodness and undeserved favor of God toward man, and to *gratia communis* (common grace), his nonsaving, universal grace, by which, in his goodness, he lavishes favor on all creation in the blessings of physical sustenance and moral influence for the good. These are the clearest senses of the terms for the Assembly, for they saw grace as fully compatible with law not offsetting or limiting it, as in the late medieval notions of congruent and condign grace" (*The Westminster Assembly*, 225–26).

135. Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis*, 8. Blake recognizes that divines distinguish between the covenants of works and grace, but he notes that the "fountain and first rise of either, was the free grace, and favour of God. For howsoever the first covenant was on condition of obedience, and engaged to the reward of Works, yet it was of Grace, that God made any such promise, of reward to any work of man…. If merit be taken in a proper sense, Adam in innocency was too low for it…. But a more superabundant measure of Grace is seen in God's entrance into covenant with man, in his fallen condition…. Therefore this by way of eminency hath the honour to be styled the covenant of Grace." *Vindiciae Foederis*, 9.

136. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1099.

137. Richard Muller notes the following: "As Kevan has shown, there was not only considerable agreement among Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century concerning the identity of the prelapsarian relationship between God and Adam as a covenant, virtually all of the Reformed theologians of the era recognized, albeit in varying degrees, that there could be no relationship between God and the finite, mutable creature apart from grace." *After Calvin*, 183.

138. Muller and Ward, *Scripture and Worship*, 72n47. See also Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study of Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 112–13.

139. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life Opened*, 2.

140. Chapter 6 of the Savoy reads much differently from the Westminster Confession. The language of Savoy is much more precise.

141. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 206.

142. Robert Harris, *The Way to True Happinesse Delivered in XXIV Sermons upon the Beatitudes* (London, 1632), 1:9.

143. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 207.

144. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 207.

145. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 208.

146. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 208.

147. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 208.

148. Ames, *The Marrow of Divinity*, 51–52.

149. Ames, *The Marrow of Divinity*, 53.

150. Harris, *A Brief Discourse of Mans Estate*, 8. See also Heppe and Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 339.

151. William Bridge, *The Sinfulnesse of Sinne* (London, 1667), 11.

152. Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants*, 14.

153. Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants*, 14.

154. Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants*, 16.
155. Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants*, 16–17.
156. Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants*, 18.
157. See Muller and Ward, *Scripture and Worship*, 71.
158. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:323.
159. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:323.
160. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:323.
161. Edmund Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants Made between God and Man: viz. The Covenant of Workes, and the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1647), 2.
162. Edmund Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants*, 2.
163. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 120.
164. Interestingly, Robert Letham makes the argument that the imputation of Adam's sin is not in the Westminster Confession but is in the Larger Catechism. See *The Westminster Assembly*, 198–206.
165. Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 71.

Chapter 15

The Puritans on the Covenant of Redemption

> *It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and men, the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of his Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world; unto whom he did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.*
>
> —WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, 8.1

> *It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to a covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of his Church, the Heir of all things and Judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.*
>
> —SAVOY DECLARATION, 8.1

The idea of an eternal covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) between the Father and Son can be located in the work of many sixteenth-and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians.[1] Simply put, the covenant of redemption between the Father and Son provides the eternal, inviolable foundation of the temporal covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*).[2] The Reformed orthodox in particular used the covenant of redemption as an argument for the *ad intra* trinitarian grounding for the *ad extra* work of salvation. Therefore, this doctrine provides the starting point of any discussion of God's soteric purposes in the history of redemption. In the words of Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1636–1708), the covenant between the Father and the Son "is the foundation of the whole of our salvation."[3] David Dickson (c. 1583–1662) has similarly remarked, "Since the whole Bible takes the denomination from [the covenant of

redemption], it is recommended to us to study it better."[4] The covenant of redemption was an exceedingly important doctrine for many Reformed theologians.

A chapter on the covenant of redemption in relation to the theology of the Westminster Assembly may seem out of place, since the term is not used in the Confession or Catechisms.[5] However, a number of reasons justify including this chapter. In the first place, the Savoy Confession adds eight words—"according to a covenant made between them both"—to Westminster Confession 8.1 in an attempt to clarify and highlight the nature of salvation in explicitly covenantal terms. Additionally, the basic teaching of the covenant of redemption can be located in several places in the Westminster Confession though not in explicit terms. Indeed, the Scottish divine David Dickson, in his commentary on the Westminster Confession, "had no difficulty finding the doctrine there."[6] Dickson speaks of the covenant of redemption as the basis for the temporal covenant of grace: "for the accomplishment of this Covenant of Redemption, and making the Elect partakers of the benefits thereof in the Covenant of Grace, Christ Jesus was clad with the threefold Office of Prophet, Priest, and King."[7] John Brown of Haddington (1722–1787) takes a different approach, however, in his exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 20). He asks, "Is the covenant of grace, and that of redemption, one and the same covenant?" He answers in the affirmative, though recognizing that some divines distinguish between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace.[8] Brown seems to be arguing in a similar manner to Edmund Calamy (1600–1666), who suggested that the Father made the covenant of grace with Christ "from all eternity."[9] Calamy's position, which is consistent with the teaching of the Westminster documents, maintains that the covenant of grace was not an afterthought of God in response to the fall but rather "was made with Jesus Christ from all eternity, being a contract or plot of God the Father with God the Son from all eternity as mediator for the salvation of the Elect."[10] Many Reformed theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries agreed with Calamy's position. However, toward the middle of the seventeenth century, a number of divines, including some of the more prominent Westminster theologians, did distinguish between the eternal covenant of redemption and the temporal covenant of grace.[11]

In the preface to Patrick Gillespie's (1617–1675) work on the covenant of redemption, John Owen (1616–1683) gives Gillespie the highest commendation for his exposition: "That for Order, Method, Perspicuity in treating, and Solidity of Argument, the ensuing Discourse exceedeth whatsoever single Treatise I have seen written with the same design."[12] In his work, Gillespie points out that the

covenant of grace is “founded and bottomed…upon God’s covenant with Christ.”13 Obadiah Sedgwick (c. 1600–1658) also distinguishes between the covenant made between the Father and the Son and a covenant between God and His people.14 The covenant between the Father and Son also plays a significant role in the theology of Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680).15 In the light of John Owen’s own contributions toward understanding this eternal covenant, the clarification made in the Savoy Confession (8.1) seems only natural. More than that, the covenants of works and of grace are best understood in the larger context of the eternal agreement between the Father and Son. The eternal covenant of redemption, which manifests itself in time, represents the structural parallel of the covenant of works; the second Adam succeeds where the first Adam failed.16

Origins of the Concept As noted above, some Reformed theologians distinguished between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace, whereas others preferred to speak of the covenant of grace as having an eternal and temporal aspect. Regardless, the eternal nature of God’s redemptive purposes plays a significant role in Reformed soteriology. Accordingly, Richard Muller has noted that the relationship between the covenants of works and grace is established by “virtually all of the major Reformed covenant theologians of the seventeenth century in their discussion of the ‘covenant of redemption’ or *pactum salutis* between God the Father and God the Son.”17 Muller adds that this eternal covenant may have originated in the writings of Cocceius, “but its roots are most probably to be found in the earlier Reformed meditation on the trinitarian nature of the divine decrees.”18 In fact, according to Muller, “hints of the concept may be discerned in Luther.”19 The early Reformer Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), in his lectures on Isaiah (c. 1523), actually speaks of a covenant between the Father and the Son (“*Pactum cum filio suo domino nostro Ihesu Christo*”).20 The concept can also be located in Calvin and his successors, but David Dickson most likely introduced the actual terminology of the covenant of redemption in 1638 as he addressed the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on the dangers of Arminian theology.21

In terms of Reformed confessional grounding, the covenant of redemption can be found either implicitly or explicitly. Hints of an eternal foundation of the covenant of grace can be located in both the Belgic Confession (1561) and Heidelberg Catechism (1563). For example, in article 26 of the Belgic Confession, the Father appointed Christ to be the Mediator of the elect. Likewise, the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 31) states that Christ derives His title, meaning “anointed,” from the Father, who ordained Him to be a prophet, priest,

and king. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) in chapter 11 speaks of Christ as "predestinated or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Savior of the world." The Canons of Dort (1619), Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF, 1646), and Savoy Declaration (1658) present the doctrine in much more explicit terms. In head I, article 7, on election, the Canons of Dort argue that "before the foundation of the world, [God] hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his will, chosen…a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation. This elect number…God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit." This statement includes many of the key elements of the covenant of redemption. However, the most explicit examples come from the Westminster and Savoy Confessions in chapter 8, "Of Christ the Mediator."

As noted above, the Savoy Declaration added the words, "according to a covenant made between them," which no doubt reflects the influence of Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, who both made extensive use of the covenant of redemption in their writings. Goodwin referred to the revisions in the Savoy Declaration as the "latest and best."[22] Nevertheless, the Westminster Confession, without using the explicit terminology found in the Savoy Declaration, contains all of the necessary elements of the covenant of redemption, particularly when taken together with certain statements in chapter 3 on God's eternal decree.

Agreement between the Father and the Son Agreement between the Father and Son provides the basis for the covenant of redemption. Those who explained this doctrine went to great lengths to give exegetical reasons for a *pactum* (Latin, *paciscor*, "to make a contract, to agree, to covenant") between the Father and Son. An issue foremost in the minds of those who argued for the covenant of redemption was whether God's saving purposes toward His people emanate from a covenant made between the Father and the Son. Peter Bulkeley affirms that the "whole business of our salvation was first transacted between the Father and Christ."[23] In anthropomorphic terms, Edward Fisher (fl. 1627–1678) likewise posits that from everlasting Christ "stroke [struck] hands with God" concerning the redemption of the elect.[24] Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) understands the covenant of grace to be an agreement that God makes with sinners in the temporal realm. Therefore, a distinct covenant must have been concluded in eternity between the Father and the Son. This eternal covenant provides the foundation for the temporal covenant of grace, but it is not strictly

part of the covenant of grace.25 Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) contrasts the love between the Father and the Son in the covenant of redemption with the love between God and sinners in the "covenant of reconciliation," i.e., the covenant of grace. The covenant of redemption represents the "eternal design of love in the heart of God toward his Son, his everlasting delight…. Here was mutual love-delight acted by the Father and Son."26 For Rutherford, God's love for sinners finds its basis in the love between the Father and the Son. Edmund Calamy strikes a similar note, even though he speaks of the covenant between the Father and Son as the covenant of grace: "The covenant of grace was made with Jesus Christ from all eternity, being a contract or plot of God the Father with God the Son from all eternity as mediator for the salvation of the Elect."27 Thomas Goodwin refers to this agreement between the Father and the Son to save sinners as "the greatest affair, between persons of the highest sovereignty and majesty, that ever was transacted either in heaven or earth, or ever will be."28 These examples prove that some of the more noteworthy Westminster divines understood the words, "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus" (WCF, 8.1), as a covenant transaction. John Owen's contention that all transactions between the Father and the Son were "by way of covenant" may explain why the Savoy "elders and messengers" added the words, "according to a covenant made between them both," to Westminster Confession 8.1. Next, we will show how this doctrine resulted from extensive exegetical and theological reflection among the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox.

Divine Justice

Expositions of the covenant of redemption typically highlight the various attributes of God. A number of treatments move in an Anselmic direction, that is, they consider in the first place the consequences of God's justice toward mankind considered as fallen. In the words of Edmund Calamy, had not the covenant between the Father and Son "been prepared ready against the fall of Adam to take place at the very moment of his fall, the Justice of God had immediately seized upon the whole Creation under Heaven, and consumed them."29

There is no question that Thomas Goodwin was a christological supralapsarian, but in his exposition of it, the covenant of redemption viewed man as fallen. Goodwin distinguishes between the means and the end; the means are Christ's mediatorial ("transient") works, which necessarily view man as fallen, even if in the order of decrees God's election viewed mankind as unfallen.30 Thus the language of satisfaction plays a significant role in Goodwin's treatment of this eternal covenant. In the eternal counsel between the Father and the Son, the Son promised to act as a surety for the elect and so "satisfy his Father for all the wrong…done to him."31

Samuel Rutherford argued that God's offended justice due to the breach of the covenant of works was mitigated by the covenant of redemption, which provided a "Physician before we be sick."32 John Flavel (1628–1691) distinguishes between the Father, who "stands upon satisfaction," and the Son, who "engages to give it."33 Equally, Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) speaks of Christ who "[satisfies] offended justice"; the Son repairs and vindicates his Father's honor.34

Patrick Gillespie also treated the necessity of the covenant of redemption in the context of God's justice.35 In doing this, Gillespie raises a point of debate among Reformed theologians. He recognizes that divine justice will be satisfied because of the covenant between the Father and the Son, but that consideration does not keep him from asking whether God could have forgiven Adam's sin apart from Christ's satisfaction.36 The divine "necessity" for the covenant of redemption follows from the fact that God, in His infinite wisdom, would only have ordained the covenant of redemption if it was necessary, and, furthermore, Christ's work as Mediator by its very nature demands a covenantal agreement. But the question still looms in Gillespie's mind as to whether the covenant of redemption was a hypothetical necessity or a necessity of consequence.37

Reformed theologians on both sides of the debate agreed that the supreme end of God's decree involves glorifying His attributes, in particular, His justice, mercy, and love. For Gillespie, the covenant of redemption was most suitable in

achieving this end. There remained, however, no consensus concerning whether "God's Justice in punishing…sin to be so natural, that he cannot but punish it, or require satisfaction; otherwise he should deny himself, and his own nature."[38] Gillespie distances himself from this "extreme" position.[39]

This debate was exacerbated by the fact that Socinians held that God could have pardoned sin apart from the satisfaction of Christ. Hence, guilt by association was a powerful tool in the arsenal of those who insisted on the necessity of the atonement.[40] Besides Patrick Gillespie, Westminster divines such as William Twisse (1578–1646), Samuel Rutherford, and Thomas Goodwin argued that God could have pardoned sin by a free act of His will.[41] John Owen's work, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647), promotes the views of Twisse, Rutherford, and Goodwin. However, Owen's later work, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (1652), represents a change in his own thinking, and he advances the position, in common with Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), Sibrandus Lubbertus (1566–1625), Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644), John Cameron (c. 1579–1623), and Francis Turretin (1623–1687), that God's vindicatory justice is essential to His nature.[42] Hence, according to Owen's revised understanding, God's justice has priority over His will; to pardon sin, God must act in a manner consistent with His nature.

Thomas Goodwin argues that God's decree to forgive sin in the covenant of redemption is the free act of His will. In effecting His will, God manifests both His love and His wisdom and satisfies His justice. However, although God's justice was satisfied through the death of Christ on behalf of the elect, "there was one way indeed which was more obvious, and that was to pardon the rebels, and make no more ado of it; for he might if he had pleased have ran a way and course of mere mercy, not tempered with justice at all."[43] Goodwin argues for this position on the grounds that to punish sin is an act of God's will in the same way that other works *ad extra* are, and not, as Owen argues, of His nature. For if to punish sin is an act of God's nature, then the sinner would die immediately. Thus it must be an act of God's will in order for Him to suspend the sentence of death. Goodwin insists that God's hatred of sin is "an act of his nature, but to express his hatred by punishing, is an act of his will; and therefore might be wholly suspended."[44] Moreover, when Christ prayed that the "cup" might be taken from Him (Mark 14:36), the preceding words, "all things are possible unto thee," suggest the possibility for God to forgive apart from the death of Christ. Indeed, the "impossibility lay only in God's will to have it done by Christ's satisfaction, and no way else."[45] This debate arose therefore out of important exegetical as well as logical concerns.[46]

Despite rejecting Owen's position on the absolute necessity of the atonement,

both Patrick Gillespie and Thomas Goodwin highlight the covenant of redemption as God's chosen means of manifesting His attributes to the fullest possible extent; "[in Christ] his glorious attributes and nature was made conspicuous, and the declarative glory thereof had a more glorious luster, than by all the works of Creation and Providence beside."[47] According to Goodwin, this "plot" is God's "masterpiece, wherein he means to bring all his attributes upon the Stage."[48] In offering up His Son, the Father satisfies not only His justice, but also extends His mercy and love toward fallen creatures. However, in desiring to manifest both His justice and mercy, God requires a full and adequate ransom for sin (1 Tim. 2:6; Rom. 5:6–8). Because man, the recipient of mercy, cannot pay the price demanded by God and so satisfy God's justice, Goodwin asks, "Who is there in heaven and earth [that] should be a fit mediator, both able and willing to undertake it, and faithful to perform it?"[49] His answer, in the tradition of Anselm, is the God-man, Jesus Christ.

In the covenant of redemption the satisfaction of God's justice is a means to reconciliation between God and man. Man has offended God; God requires satisfaction; satisfaction opens the way for reconciliation. In most treatments on the covenant of redemption, the authors show that Christ as Mediator effects reconciliation between the Father and the elect.[50] William Ames (1576–1633) highlights how the Son reconciles His people to the Father.[51] Thomas Goodwin elaborates this aspect of the covenant with an important clarification. Taking 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 as his point of departure, Goodwin argues that God and Christ are meant as distinct persons, and so the Father is the person to whom sinners are reconciled. Of course, reconciliation to the Father also involves reconciliation to the Son and the Spirit by virtue of the unity of the Godhead. Notwithstanding this fact, however, because the Father is the First Person in order of subsistence, "the suit against us runs in his name especially, though it be the quarrel of all the rest of the persons."[52] Because the work of each person of the Trinity follows the distinction of His subsistence and bears the resemblance of His name, Goodwin can argue that reconciliation is attributed to the Father because the covenant of works is generally attributed to the Father, just as creation is. The "law" (covenant structure) under which Adam was created is made especially with the Father on behalf of the other persons. Thus, in the covenant of works Adam sins against the Father since "in the dispensation of that covenant [the Father] ruled immediately."[53] In other words, just as the sins against the covenant of grace are said to be "in a more especial manner against Christ and the Holy Ghost, so those against the First [covenant] which occasioned the performance of Reconciliation, are said to be against the Father."[54] As Mediator, then, Christ's duty was to reconcile alienated sinners to

the Father. This mediation stands at the heart of the covenant of redemption.

Christ's Appointment In the covenant of redemption, the Reformed unanimously agreed that the Father appointed the Son as Mediator. William Ames attributes Christ's call to the Father: "Whereby, a special covenant being made, he ordained his Son to this office" of prophet, priest, and king.[55] Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) likewise shows that the Father appointed the Son to His office of Mediator. Based on a number of texts (e.g., John 6:27; 1 Peter 1:20; Isa. 42:1), Bulkeley shows that the Father took the active role in assigning to Christ His work.[56] Thomas Brooks makes clear that Christ "would not take one step in the work of our Redemption, till he was called and commissioned by his father."[57]

Thomas Goodwin also argues that the Father appointed Christ to His threefold office as prophet (Deut. 18:15), priest (Heb. 3:1–2), and king (Ps. 2:6).[58] Patrick Gillespie elaborates on this point, adducing a series of texts to prove that Christ's appointment by the Father represents an important aspect of what constitutes a covenant. A text often used to support this idea is 1 Peter 1:20, which speaks of Christ as "foreordained before the foundation of the world."[59] Other texts (Ps. 89:19; Isa. 42:6; Heb. 5:5) confirm that Christ "was by an eternal act of God's will called to this work, and that long before he came into the world."[60] The Father invested Christ with His threefold office to do the will of His Father "by an eternal act or commission given out to him concerning all this work, long before he was actually made under the Law" (Heb. 10:7; John 6:39; 10:18).[61] In light of such evidence, there is little doubt that many of the divines would have understood the following words in Westminster Confession 8.1 to have reference to the eternal covenant of redemption: "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and men, the prophet, priest, and king." The ordination of the Son to His offices was given a covenantal explanation by many of the Westminster divines. A covenant requires agreement between the parties, so naturally the next aspect of the covenant of redemption focuses on Christ's acceptance of His mediatorial role.

Christ's Acceptance of the Terms According to John Owen, in the covenant of redemption the Father was the "prescriber, the promiser and lawgiver; the Son was the undertaker upon his prescription, law, and promises."[62] Thomas Brooks provides a number of definitions of the covenant of redemption in his *Paradice Opened*, one of which relates to Christ's acceptance of the terms: "The Father Covenants to do thus and thus for fallen man; but first…the Son must covenant

to take man's nature…. He submits, assents to these demands…and covenants to make all good; and this was the substance of the Covenant of Redemption."[63] Because the covenant of redemption involves distinct persons, it must be voluntary.[64] Hence, Thomas Goodwin argues that if the Son did not undertake the work of redemption freely, then satisfaction was not made. Patrick Gillespie reasons that words Christ spoke in time—e.g., "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me" (John 6:39)—have reference to His covenant with the Father in eternity: "For Christ God, equal with the Father, does not begin to consent and agree unto anything in time; nor can the eternal Son of God will any thing in time, which he did not will and consent unto from eternity."[65] Gillespie seems to have copied this exact language from Samuel Rutherford, who writes, "And because Christ-God equal with the Father, does not begin to consent and agree to the designation in time, nor can Christ-God will any thing in time, which he did not will, and consent unto, from eternity."[66]

There is substantial agreement among Reformed theologians that in the covenant of redemption Christ acts as a surety for His people, mediating only on behalf of those who the Father gives to Him. The idea of the Father's appointment and the Son's acceptance finds its clearest expression in Isaiah 49, a text frequently adduced in support of the covenant of redemption. Thomas Goodwin says Isaiah 49 portrays "a most elegant Dialogue" between the Father and the Son.[67] In alluding to this text, Goodwin makes a rather interesting point about the identity of the elect. In the opening verses (Isa. 49:1–2) of the chapter, Christ speaks about His calling, His fitness for the work of redemption, and what reward He would receive for His work. In verse 3, God responds by offering to Christ the elect of Israel. However, according to Goodwin, Christ was not satisfied with the reward of the Jews. His work demanded a greater payment (Isa. 49:4). Therefore the Father "comes off more freely." He opens his heart more largely to Christ because Christ would undergo such humiliation, which culminated in His death.[68] Goodwin adds, "It is a light thing (says God to him) that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, that is not worth dying for, I value thy sufferings more then so, I will give thee for a salvation unto the ends of the earth."[69] John Flavel, like Goodwin, sees Isaiah 49 as a covenantal dialogue between the Father and Son. Having been declared "fit" to save, Christ, after being offered only the elect of Israel, "resolves his blood shall not be sold at low and cheap rates."[70] So, by virtue of the worth of His blood, Christ also asks for the Gentiles, whom the Father is happy to grant to Him.[71] All of this confirms not only that the work of Christ is contingent upon the Father's will, but also that those for whom Christ works, so to speak, are those who have been given to Him by the Father, both Jews and Gentiles.

The well-known Puritan theologian Thomas Hooker (1586–1647) also held that on the basis of the Father-Son agreement, Christ undertook to act for the souls the Father had given to Him. In other words, the Son, as the Good Shepherd, knows His sheep and will surely save them according to the compact agreed upon in eternity.[72] Patrick Gillespie argues that Christ "was not Surety… for all Mankind…but for a chosen people" (John 17:9).[73] Christ received a definite number of people for whom He would act as Mediator, "who are ordinarily called 'those whom the Father gave unto Christ'" (John 17:3, 6, 9, 11; 6:37, 39; Eph. 1:4).[74] John Arrowsmith (1602–1659), a distinguished member of the Westminster Assembly, speaks of "certain persons" given to Christ in eternity by the Father: "That in this transaction there passed promises from the Father to the Son in the behalf of himself and all his members."[75] Not surprisingly, John Owen defended the doctrine of particular redemption by appealing to the implications of the covenant of redemption. According to Owen's logic, because there is a unity and purpose in the will of the Father and the Son to "bring many sons to glory," it would have been nonsensical for the Father to give a people to His Son only for the Son to die for those the Father had not given to Him. Owen buttresses his exegetical case for the particularity of the atonement by referencing Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17. In verse 4, Christ speaks of the work that the Father had given Him to do, a work that finds its basis in the covenant of redemption. Because Christ fulfilled the terms of the covenant to the satisfaction of the Father, He speaks in verse 5 of the promised glory that would be His. The glory given to Christ involves the Father bestowing upon the elect faith, sanctification, and glory. The salvation of the elect rests upon the promises that the Father made to Christ; "and in this, not one word concerning all and every one, but expressly the contrary, verse 9."[76] Accordingly, based on the unity of the Godhead, the Son mediates only for those whom the Father has given to the Son, those who have been "chosen in Christ" (Eph. 1:4).[77] The above is perfectly consistent with the language of Westminster Confession 8.1, which reads, "Unto whom he did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed."

Having accepted that He will mediate on behalf of the elect, the Son receives the precise nature of His work from the Father. By virtue of the order of subsistence, Christ's work begins and comes from the Father, who is the First Person in the Godhead (John 5:19–20; 8:42). For the Son to act as Mediator on behalf of the elect, He must assume a human nature.[78] He receives a commandment to submit to and obey the Father, thereby accomplishing the redemption of those whom the Father had given to Him. For example, as a prophet, He was instructed by the Father what to teach: "He had a

commandment to enlighten the Elect with the knowledge of the truth" (Isa. 42:6–7).[79] In the words of Samuel Rutherford, "The Son is decreed…to be in time clothed with our nature, and to put on the state and legal condition of a Covenant-Obeyer of God to the death" (Isa. 53:6; Gal. 4:4).[80] Like Rutherford, Patrick Gillespie refers to Galatians 4:4 to show that Christ takes upon Himself "our Law-place and room, and in order to that his taking our nature upon him, that Justice might reach him in our stead and place."[81] As noted above, structurally the covenant of redemption is parallel to the covenant of works. "And thus," writes Edward Fisher, "did our Lord Jesus Christ enter into the same covenant of works that Adam did" so that by his work he would deliver the elect from "all that commanding, revenging authority which that Covenant had over them."[82] This line of reasoning makes sense in light of the fact that Christ is implicitly referred to in Romans 5 as the second Adam. Because Adam's transgression brought guilt and corruption upon all His posterity, the Father required satisfaction in order to forgive. Therefore Christ not only had to keep the law, but also had to offer Himself up as an atoning sacrifice. As Patrick Gillespie notes, "Christ as our Surety should die, and lay down his life for us, that he should pay for us the whole sum that was owing; even all that the Law and Justice could exact of the broken man" (John 10:18; Gal. 3:13; Isa. 53:5–12).[83]

John Owen followed this same outline when discussing the conditions required of the Mediator. They fall under three heads. First, Christ must "assume…the nature of those whom, according unto the terms of this covenant, he was to bring unto God" (Heb. 2:9, 14; 10:5; Phil. 2:6–8).[84] His assumption of a human nature—an act of infinite condescension—was the foundation of His obedience and "gave the nature of merit…unto what he did."[85] The Father prescribed that He should come in this manner (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3; Heb. 10:7). The Son's assumption of a human nature was essential for His work as Mediator, for "he could not otherwise have exalted the glory of God in the salvation of sinners, nor been himself in our nature exalted unto his mediatory kingdom, which are the principal ends of this covenant."[86] Second, because Christ assumed a human nature, it was requisite that He should be the Father's servant and yield obedience to Him in a threefold manner: "according to the *general law* of God obliging all mankind, and according unto the *especial law* of the church under which he was born and made, and according unto the *singular law* of that compact or agreement which we have described" (Isa. 42:1; 49:5).[87] Third, because Christ acted as surety for a sinful people, He was required to make atonement for sin "in and by our nature assumed, and answer the justice of God by suffering and undergoing what was due unto them; without which it was not

possible they should be delivered or saved, unto the glory of God" (Isa. 53:11–12).[88]

Owen's definition of a covenant sets up the next stage in this eternal agreement between the Father and the Son. For Owen, a covenant involves distinct persons; is voluntary; must be stated in terms the parties are able to fulfill; and its parties must be mutually satisfied. Consequently, the Father appoints Christ as Mediator and promises to "protect and assist him" in the accomplishment of His work.[89] Owen's friend, Patrick Gillespie, provided eight "promises" made to Christ, which related to the "offices, authorities, trusts and powers that were covenanted to him, for the doing of this work."[90]

God's Promises to Christ In the covenant of redemption, the Father promised to assist the Son in the performance of His work as Mediator. Francis Roberts refers to Isaiah 42:1 and the subsequent verses as evidence that the Father would "strengthen, preserve and stand by him in all his Mediatory administrations."[91] As Owen argued, a covenant demands that the parties have the power or ability to fulfill their obligations, and this demand had implications for the Reformed orthodox conception of the covenant of redemption.[92] Patrick Gillespie's account of the eight ways in which the Father assisted the Son is worth considering in some detail.[93]

In the first place, the Father equipped Christ for the work of mediation by appointing Him to be prophet, priest, and king. For example, Christ had a power unique to Himself as a priest-king "to bow the hearts of his Subjects, and to crush the greatest Heads and Rulers in the world that oppose him" (Pss. 2:9; 110:3–6).[94] Second, Christ received gifts and endowments to aid Him in His work, namely, the infusion of habitual graces into His human nature (Isa. 11:2–4).[95] This point was carefully highlighted by several Puritan writers. John Owen makes perhaps the most explicit comment: "The only singular immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with himself."[96] Moreover, Owen insists that the Spirit is the "immediate operator of all divine acts of the Son himself, even on his own human nature. Whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon the human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit."[97] The graces wrought upon the human nature were, therefore, a result of the Spirit's work in Christ. This concept plays an important role in Thomas Goodwin's Christology. Like Owen, Goodwin maintained that the Spirit sanctified the human nature and constituted the incarnate Son as the Christ. The Spirit anointed Christ with graces (Isa. 11:2).

Thus the graces manifested in Christ's human nature are to be attributed to the

Spirit as the "immediate Author of them."[98] Goodwin adds that "although the Son of God dwelt personally, in the human nature, and so advanced that nature above the ordinary rank of creatures, and raised it up to that dignity and worth; yet all his habitual graces, which even his soul was full of, were from the Holy Ghost…and this inhabitation of the Holy Ghost did in some sense and degree concur to constitute him Christ."[99] So, for Goodwin, in the hypostatic union, the divine nature acts not immediately, but mediately through the work of the Spirit. And, in connection with Gillespie's point above, the Spirit equips Christ for the work of mediation.

Gillespie next shows that not only did Christ receive the Spirit to assist Him, but He also received promises from the Father to encourage Him (Isa. 42:4; 49:1–3). Fourth, Christ also received promises of victory and triumph over His enemies (Pss. 89:23; 110:1–6; Isa. 53:12; Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15).[100] Fifth, Christ was aided by the hope of pleasing and being graciously accepted by His Father. Christ's justification (Isa. 50:8; 1 Tim. 3:16) makes clear that the Father was pleased with His Son.[101] The sixth promise has reference to Christ's reward, which included the following: (1) His exaltation (Ps. 89:27; Phil. 2:9); (2) His satisfaction in the results of His completed work (Isa. 53:11); (3) the salvation of those He mediated for (Isa. 53:10–11); (4) the promise of a large kingdom (Ps. 2:8; Zech. 9:10); and (5) the promise of glory (John 17:4–5).[102] Seventh, according to the covenantal agreement, Christ received "a new Sonship and Covenant-title to God as his Covenanted Father" (Ps. 89:26; Heb. 1:5).[103] The Father is the Head of Christ, not naturally (ontologically) speaking, but federally (covenantally) speaking; thus Christ enjoyed communion with His Father on earth, which was indeed the fulfillment of great promise and an aid to His soul. "Out of these Covenant-interests engaged unto him, did our Covenant-relations spring."[104] Finally, Christ received the promise that His work would usher in a new creation and free the present world from its bondage (Rom. 8:20–22). Because of Christ, the world will be restored to its "primitive perfection…. Christ mends and makes all things new again by his Surety-covenant, that were broken by the rupture of the Covenant of works."[105] With these eight promises, Christ was equipped and aided to complete the work of redemption on behalf of His people.

The Role of the Spirit While the roles of the Father and Son are clearly defined in sixteenth-and seventeenth-century treatments on the covenant of redemption, Carl Trueman has suggested that Edward Fisher and Peter Bulkeley, by focusing exclusively on the Father-Son relationship, are "arguably vulnerable to the accusation of developing a sub-Trinitarian foundation for the economy of

salvation."[106] Trueman has a point. Whether the Spirit was party to the "covenant-transactions" is not all that clear in seventeenth-century formulations of the covenant of redemption. For example, Rutherford clearly affirms a trinitarian economy of redemption wherein all three persons are involved in the salvation of sinners. However, he considers whether this necessarily means all three persons are actual covenanting partners in the covenant of redemption. He asks, "Did not the Holy Ghost also from eternity, say Amen, and agree to be sent by the Father and the Son, to lead the Saints in all truth, to sanctify, to comfort them? And did not the Father and the Son from eternity decree to send the Spirit? And did not the Spirit also consent to the decree before the world was? And so shall there be also a Covenant between the Father and the Son sending the Spirit."[107] Rutherford provides an interesting answer, which highlights a point of difference among Reformed theologians. He argues that not all mutual intratrinitarian agreements must be called covenants and so suggests that only the Son is ordained (1 Peter 1:20), with His own consent, to be the Mediator and thus be the "Covenant-Obeyer." Consequently, the Holy Spirit was not a formal party to the making of the eternal covenant.[108] Thomas Brooks defines the covenant of redemption as a "compact, bargain and agreement between God the father, and God the son, designed Mediator; concerning the conversion, sanctification and salvation of the Elect."[109] Finally, as noted above, both the Westminster Confession (implicitly) and the Savoy Declaration (explicitly) seem to speak primarily of the Father and the Son in the covenant of redemption (8.1). Thus the role of the Spirit in the covenant of redemption was by no means obvious or taken for granted. Nevertheless, there are four references to the Spirit in Westminster Confession, chapter 8, connecting Him with Christ's conception, anointing, atoning sacrifice, and the effectual calling of the elect, so evidently the divines were agreed upon at least some kind of implicit role for the Third Person of the Godhead in relation to the covenant of redemption and its outworkings.

However, Reformed orthodox trinitarianism necessitates the Spirit's presence in the Father-Son agreement. In his exposition of the covenant of redemption, Scottish theologian James Durham (c. 1622–1658) notes the ontological necessity of the three persons being present even though he argues that there are only two parties involved; on the one side, God essentially considered as all three persons, and on the other side, Christ. Durham notes, "All the three persons…give the command…and concur as the infinitely wise orderers of the decree."[110] Durham argues, then, for the Spirit's role as a contracting partner. Thomas Goodwin's work on the covenant of redemption focuses primarily on the Father-Son agreement. However, there are some statements that show he

may have been one of the few seventeenth-century theologians to speak explicitly of the Holy Spirit's role in the covenant of redemption. Goodwin states that the Father "draws the platform of all the works that the other two persons do put their hand to effect."[111] This statement makes clear that Goodwin understood the eternal transactions as a trinitarian activity. Moreover, in his work *Of the Holy Ghost*, he makes a number of comments on the role of the Spirit in these eternal, intratrinitarian transactions.[112] He identifies the Spirit as the "recorder" of the transactions that took place in the eternal counsels (Heb. 10:7–15), for the Spirit "hears all that passeth" between the Father and the Son (John 16:13). Furthermore, the Spirit did not only stand by "as a bare Witness"; rather, "he was sent down by both as a principal Actor."[113] Goodwin is particularly explicit concerning the Spirit's role in the covenant of redemption when he suggests a type of intratrinitarian dialogue concerning man's fall and restoration to convey this point.

> I will choose him to Life, saith the Father, but he will fall, and so fall short of what my love designed to him: but I will redeem him, says the Son, out of that lost estate: but yet being fallen he will refuse that grace, and the offers of it, and despise it, therefore I will sanctify him, said the Holy Ghost, and overcome his unrighteousness, and cause him to accept it.[114]

For Goodwin, then, the Spirit has an important role in the eternal, intratrinitarian transactions. Neither the Westminster Confession nor the Savoy Declaration make explict reference to the Spirit in discussions about the establishing of the eternal covenant, which may indicate either a lack of consensus or development among Reformed theologians at that time. After all, two eminent members of the Assembly, Thomas Goodwin and Samuel Rutherford, seem to disagree on whether the Spirit was involved directly in the covenant of redemption as a negotiating partner. Also, the lack of explicit scriptural evidence surely accounts for the omission in confessional documents concerning the Spirit's role in the eternal covenant of redemption.

Christ's Reward

The basic elements in the covenant of redemption have been addressed, with one notable exception. In any covenant a reward is promised by the author or first party of the covenant to the second party if the terms of the covenant are met. Therefore, upon Christ's acceptance of His role as Mediator, the Father promised to reward Him for faithfully fulfilling the terms of the covenant. Some of these rewards were noted above where Patrick Gillespie speaks of the promises the Father made to the Son. The texts alleged by the Reformed

orthodox in support of Christ's reward include Isaiah 49 and 53:11–14, and Psalm 2:8–9, among others. Commenting on Isaiah 49:3, Thomas Brooks notes that the Father promises to Christ "a glorious reward" for His work of redemption.115 He also makes reference to Isaiah 53 and the reward offered to the Suffering Servant. The salvation of the elect provides the ground for Christ's exaltation in His threefold office. By redeeming the elect out of their poor miserable condition and making them beautiful again, Christ's name is glorified (John 17:10). He receives glory from His people as Israel's true king.116 Peter Bulkeley had earlier pursued this vein of thought, writing of Christ's rule and dominion as a king in the context of His glory (John 5:22; Isa. 55:5).117 In connection with this idea, Edward Reynolds (1599–1676), a prominent member at the Westminster Assembly, makes an important distinction between Christ's natural kingdom, which belongs to Him as the eternal Son of God, and His dispensatory kingdom, which belongs to Him as His reward from His Father. As head of the church, Christ is promised a number of blessings, which included the "Souls and Consciences of men, even to the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession" (Ps. 2:8).118 Westminster Confession 8 highlights this principle, namely, that the Father appointed Christ to be the "head and Savior of the Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world." This part reflects, like the other parts of Westminster Confession 8.1, the terms of the eternal covenant of redemption.

Concluding the Covenant With the terms of the covenant set in order to secure the full redemption of fallen sinners, Thomas Goodwin speaks about the conclusion of the covenant in a most illuminating manner. He suggests that there "was never such joy in heaven, as upon this happy conclusion and agreement. The whole Trinity rejoiced in it."119 In fact, the persons of the Godhead delighted more in this agreement than in all their temporal works. Based on Proverbs 8, besides the internal, essential, and personal delights each person shared with the others, the Father and the Son are said to delight in the "sons of men" (v. 31).120 Only because of the certainty of redemption—such is the saving efficacy of the covenant of redemption—could the Father and the Son have such thoughts toward the elect. Goodwin adds that the salvation of mankind was, therefore, in "sure hands, even afore the world was" because the Father and Christ "had engaged themselves by Covenant…the one to die, the other to accept it for us."121 Furthermore, "what Christ hath done to the accomplishment of all this, and what fullness was in him for it…makes up the Second Part of this Glorious Story."122 In a similar way to Goodwin, Thomas Brooks mentions that "Christ takes a singular pleasure in the work of our

Redemption," and both Christ and the Father, upon concluding the covenant, "forget the hard labour [and]…are so greatly refreshed, delighted…and satisfied, that they forget their former pains and sorrow."123 For Goodwin and Brooks, the delight of the Father, Son, and Spirit rests upon the certainty and efficacy of the covenant of redemption in redeeming sinners, despite the fact that the administration of the covenant of grace had yet to take place in time. With that in mind, the relationship of the eternal covenant of redemption to the temporal covenant of grace needs clarification.

Relationship between the Covenants The idea of the covenant of redemption raises important questions about its relation to the covenant of grace. As noted above, some Reformed divines did not distinguish between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace and simply spoke of the covenant of grace as founded in eternity and realized in time. Whatever view one takes on the matter, the question of the relation between the eternal and the temporal requires elaboration. This issue will be addressed in more detail in a subsequent chapter on the conditions of the covenant, but for now, a number of observations on the relationship between the covenants of redemption and grace will provide a useful link between this chapter and the next.

The Reformed orthodox typically held to the threefold distinction of God's immanent, transient, and applicatory acts.124 Thomas Goodwin describes these acts in the following manner:

> 1. *Immanent* in God towards us, as his *Eternal Love* set and past upon us; out of which he chose us, and designed this and all Blessings to us.
> 2. *Transient*, in Christ done *for us*; in all he did or suffered representing of us, and in our stead.
> 3. *Applicatory*, wrought in us, and upon us, in the endowing us with all those Blessings by the Spirit: As Calling, Justification, Sanctification, Glorification.125

Similarly, using this threefold distinction, Peter Bulkeley considers justification first "as purposed and determined in the mind and will of God…. Secondly, as impetrated [requested] and obtained for us by the obedience of Christ…. Thirdly, as actually applied unto us."126 Another way of understanding this is to distinguish between what God is said to do "in Christ" (*en Christo*) and what He does "through Christ" (*dia Christo*). God's reconciliation "in Christ" has reference to immanent acts of God, those acts where saving benefits are laid up for believers in Christ, "as in our Head, in whom God looked upon us, when we had no subsistence but in him; when God

and he were alone plotting of all…that was after to be done by Christ for us, and applied to us."[127] However, the instrumental preposition, *dia* ("by/through"), "imports the actual performance of all this by Christ, and application of it to us."[128] Therefore, the phrase "in Christ" has reference to Him as our common head; the phrase "for Christ" speaks of Him as the meritorious cause, since He purchases the blessings, and "through Christ" speaks of Christ as the efficient cause, the one who dispenses grace to His people.[129] Therefore, whatever is said to have been ordained "in Christ" has particular reference to the covenant of redemption. However, that which is wrought "through Christ" has reference to the temporal covenant of grace as the context in which Christ performs His work. These distinctions prove helpful when discussing the similarities and differences between the covenants of redemption and grace.[130]

Patrick Gillespie recognizes that a good deal of affinity exists between "the Covenant of Redemption made with Christ, and the Covenant of Reconciliation made with Sinners."[131] However, in his opinion, they are not the same covenant. Moreover, two extremes must be avoided: "That we neither confound, nor divide these two Covenants."[132] Samuel Rutherford likewise makes the contention that "it is not the same Covenant that is made with Christ and that which is made with sinners" since they differ in the parties that covenant together.[133] In the covenant of redemption, God, "as common to all three on the one part," and the Son of God, on the other part, covenant together; in the covenant of grace—or, reconciliation, as Rutherford and Gillespie both like to call it—the parties are the triune God and fallen sinners.[134] This distinction represents the major difference between the two covenants. But although differences exist, Gillespie makes reference to eight similarities. The covenants of redemption and grace agree in the following ways: (1) pure grace gave rise to both covenants (Eph. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:9); (2) both covenants aim to redeem sinners (Titus 1:2; 2 Cor. 5:19); (3) Christ is the main instrument of action (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20); (4) God elects in both covenants; in the first He elects Christ (Ps. 89:3), and in the second He elects sinners for salvation in Christ; (5) both covenants manifest the same attributes (mercy, justice, love, etc.) of God; (6) both covenants profit the elect; and both covenants honor God; (7) in both covenants, Christ exchanges places with His people (2 Cor. 5:21); and (8) both covenants are free, gracious, and everlasting.[135]

Given the similarities enumerated by Gillespie, one can well understand why many Reformed theologians simply spoke of the covenant of grace having both eternal and temporal administrations. However, Gillespie manages to find nine differences between the two covenants in order to prove his point that they are distinct but not separate.[136] They differ in the following ways: (1) though both

covenants had their rise in the grace of God, the covenant of redemption sprang from grace in both parties, God and Christ, whereas in the covenant of grace only one side (God's) acted out of grace (1 John 4:10, 19); (2) although both are everlasting covenants, only the covenant of redemption is eternal; the covenant of grace is concluded in time (Titus 1:2–3); (3) the parties differ in both covenants; the covenant of redemption concerns God and Christ, and the covenant of grace concerns the triune God and lost sinners; (4) the covenant of redemption is an equal covenant, whereas the covenant of grace is an unequal covenant; moreover, that which was required of Christ far exceeds that which is required of God's elect; (5) there is no mediator in the covenant of redemption (Prov. 8:22–23), but in the covenant of grace, Christ acts as Mediator on behalf of the elect (1 Tim. 2:5); (6) the promises of the covenant of grace, for example, a new heart, cannot be promised to Christ; in the same way, Christ was promised a name above every name (Phil. 2:9), which was not promised to His people; (7) Christ was not threatened in the covenant of redemption since, as the God-man, He could not sin, but believers are threatened in the covenant of grace (Heb. 2:3; 1 Cor. 16:22); (8) the conditions in each covenant differ; Christ was required to become flesh and lay down His life (Heb. 10:5–7); His people are required to believe in Christ, repent of their sins, and work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Acts 16:31; Phil. 2:12);[137] and (9) the covenant of redemption did not require man's consent to be elected in Christ; however, the covenant of grace requires consent from those elected in eternity for the blessings of the covenant to be applied to them (John 6:37; Rev. 22:17, 20).[138] As a result, for Gillespie, notwithstanding the similarities between the two covenants, the differences need to be taken into account. Having said that, they are "conjoined together by a five-fold connection."[139]

First, these covenants bear such a "near and strict conjunction" that they cannot be separated; indeed, the covenant of grace fails to exist apart from the covenant of redemption, which amounts to "an inseparable connection."[140] Second, "an infallible connection" exists between the two covenants, "whereby one thing doth necessarily and certainly follow upon another."[141] In other words, "nothing is…transacted in time, which was not from eternity concluded in the counsel of God's Will."[142] Third, the two covenants are joined by "an Insuperable connection," that is to say, the covenant of redemption has such power and efficacy that nothing can thwart the outcome of the covenant of grace (John 17:2; Matt. 16:18).[143] Samuel Rutherford makes a similar point by noting that the covenant of redemption is the "cause of the stability and firmness of the Covenant of Grace."[144] Fourth, Gillespie argues that the covenants of redemption and grace are joined together by a "secret and hidden

connection."[145] Gillespie means to suggest that the covenant of redemption was "hid in God's breast…kept close betwixt God and Christ" and then revealed to believers who, unlike carnal minds, can understand the great mysteries of God's salvation in Christ.[146] Finally, the two covenants are joined together by a "beautiful connection."[147] All that was plotted in the counsels between the Father and the Son are in the history of redemption beautifully executed. There is an organic cause and effect between the two covenants; that which was deliberated in eternity is performed by Christ in temporal history.[148] This section on the relationship between the two covenants helps to explain the final clause in Westminster Confession 8.1, which reads, "[God] did from all eternity, give a people to be [Christ's] seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified."

Excursus: A Christological Point The view of the covenant of redemption as realized in time in the covenant of grace accounts for the particularity of Christ's mediatorial work, but it also explains several statements of Christ that show His subordination to the Father. For example, in relatively recent times, B. B. Warfield noted that in Christ's "modes of operation" He assumes a subordinate role to the Father. The Father sends the Son into the world, and the Son does the will of His Father; Christ even declared that "my Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). However, Warfield makes an important point: "It is not clear that the principle of subordination rules also in 'modes of subsistence.'… We are bound to bear in mind that these relations of subordination in modes of operation may just as well be due to a convention, an agreement, between the Persons of the Trinity—a 'Covenant' as it is technically called, by virtue of which a distinct function in the work of redemption is voluntarily assumed by [the Son]."[149] Warfield was not the first, however, to explain Christ's subordination to the Father in terms of a covenant between them. The English Reformed theologian John Yates (d. 1657) made this connection in his work *Ibis ad Caesarem* ("Unto Caesar Shalt Thou Go"). Discussing election and the eternal counsel between the Father and the Son, Yates refers to Christ as the "first of the Elect"; as our surety, He "humbles himself" for his people.[150] He refers to this as Christ's "subordination"; but subsequently "he that humbled himself is exalted above all, laying aside all infirmities, assuming and taking up all perfections: and so is returned again into his own rank, next to his Father to be glorified…with him."[151] Later, John Owen would be even more explicit. Aware that there are passages in Scripture that refer to the subordination of the Son to the Father, in which the Son calls the Father "God" or "Lord" (Pss. 16:2; 22:1; Mic. 5:4; John 14:28; 20:17; Rev. 3:12), Owen argues that these "expressions argued both a

covenant and a subordination therein."[152] He adds:

> And on this account it is that our Saviour says his Father is greater than he, John xiv. 28. This place, I confess, the ancients expound unanimously of the human nature only, to obviate the Arians, who ascribed unto him a divine nature, but made, and absolutely in itself inferior to the nature of God. But the inferiority of the human nature unto God or the Father is a thing so unquestionable as needed no declaration or solemn attestation, and the mention of it is no way suited unto the design of the place. But our Saviour speaks with respect unto the covenant engagement that was between the Father and himself as to the work which he had to do.[153]

The covenant of redemption not only provides the ground for the covenant of grace, but it also explains perhaps one of the thorniest issues in the history of Christology, namely, the distinction between ontological equality and economic subordination.

Conclusion

Chapter 7 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, "Of God's Covenant with Man," will yield very little information on the eternal covenant of redemption. This should not be surprising, given the information provided in this chapter, which proves that the covenant of redemption is an intratrinitarian covenant primarily between the Father and the Son and not between God and man. The actual place to "find" the covenant of redemption in the Westminster documents is in the next chapter, "Of Christ the Mediator" (8.1).154 The exact language of "the covenant of redemption" does not appear in the Westminster documents; in fact, such language does not even appear in the Savoy Declaration (1658), though the addition of the words, "according to a covenant made between them both" (8.1), provides a helpful clarification to Westminster Confession 8.1. Without doubt, there were members at the Westminster Assembly who held to the doctrine that would later be called the covenant of redemption. Some of them (e.g., Edmund Calamy) clearly spoke of the covenant of grace as having not only a temporal aspect, but also an eternal foundation. Others, building on the work of men like Peter Bulkeley, would eventually distinguish between the covenant of grace (God's covenant with man) and the covenant of redemption (God's covenant with Christ) for a number of reasons. These reasons no doubt included the exegetical evidence, which Patrick Gillespie and John Owen would elaborate on in some detail. Moreover, the rising antinomian influences in the seventeenth century may have been a factor, too. The distinction between the two covenants reduces the tendency toward justification from eternity, which was a hallmark of antinomianism. Finally, as with the covenant of works, various terms were employed by Reformed theologians to discuss the eternal agreement between the Father and the Son.155 The covenant of redemption would eventually become the most used English phrase among later seventeenth-century theologians to describe the covenant between the Father and the Son, but during the time of the Assembly, a host of phrases were being used, which explains why David Dickson's terminology needed time to become a so-called "common-place" in Reformed theology.

The Westminster documents would provide a platform for further clarification on this matter, which did indeed take place among the Congregationalists at the Savoy Palace in London (1658). Due to the religio-political climate of the seventeenth century, especially after 1660, Reformed divines did not have a chance to formally meet together to write up another confession of faith. Given the development of the covenant of redemption during the mid-seventeenth century, one wonders how subsequent confessions might have looked. Whatever the case, one cannot fault David Dickson for finding in the Westminster

Confession of Faith the substance of the covenant of redemption. And a poem by William Geddes (1600–1694) certainly shows that the covenant of grace finds its root in an agreement between the Father and the Son:

> This is the Covenant of Grace,
> Which brings my Soul so sweet solace.
> There is a gracious paction
> Betwixt the Father and the Son
>
> And by the Son, with Adam's race,
> Who should repent, and seek his grace.
> The Son unto the Father spake,
> I will Man's nature on me take.
>
> I will my self a ransom give,
> For the Elect that they may live:
> Come, Son, (quothe He) if thou do so,
> They shall be saved from Hell and woe.
>
> The Father to poor man he saith,
> If thou believe with saving Faith,
> In this my Son; I'll give thee peace:
> Eternal Love shall thee embrace.[156]

1. I have refrained from referring to the covenant of redemption as "pretemporal." Gert van den Brink has convinced me that in Reformed orthodoxy eternity is not pretemporal, but only, so to speak, prae-temporal. It is a logical prae, not a temporal pre. In other words, God's eternity does not have a beginning, ending, or succession; only our eternity has a succession. To use "pretemporal" synonymously with "eternal" suggests that eternity temporally precedes created time, which leads to deterministic thinking. I understand, however, that we may use "pretemporal" and "temporal" to understand the differences between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace from our finite perspective, but not God's eternal perspective. In this chapter, therefore, I refer to the "eternal covenant of redemption" (*pactum salutis*).

2. The role, or lack thereof, of the Spirit in the covenant of redemption will be discussed below.

3. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 2.3.1.

4. David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra…* (Edinburgh, 1664), 22.

5. It should be noted that the covenant of redemption is already mentioned in David Dickson and James Durham's *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (1650; repr., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), sometimes nicknamed "the unofficial fourth Westminster Standard," since it was often printed with the Westminster Standards for many decades in Scotland and America.

6. Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 82n59.

7. Dickson and Durham, *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, head 2.

8. John Brown, *An Help for the Ignorant: Being an Essay towards an Easy Explication of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, Composed for the Young Ones of His Own Congregation* (Edinburgh: Gray, 1758), Q. 20. Brown may have in mind John Owen, who posits that the covenant of grace is "the covenant that God made *with men concerning Christ*" whereas the covenant of redemption is "the covenant that he made *with his Son concerning men*." John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 19:78.

9. Edmund Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants Made between God and Man: viz. The Covenant of Workes, and the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1647), 2.

10. Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants*, 2.

11. The Antinomian theologians typically did not distinguish between the covenants of redemption and grace, and so the distinction between the two covenants may reflect not only exegetical advances by Reformed theologians, but also a desire to distance themselves from the rising Antinomian influence in the seventeenth century. John von Rohr notes that "collapsing…the covenant of grace into the covenant of redemption tended, however, to be more characteristic of the Antinomian wing of Puritanism where there was inclination to see as much as possible in the divine act and to keep the covenant as far away as possible from human contracting." *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 44.

12. John Owen, "To the Reader," in *The Ark of the Covenant Opened: Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption between God and Christ as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace,* by Patrick Gillespie (London, 1677), 4.

13. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 1.

14. Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Bowels of Tender Mercy Sealed in the Everlasting Covenant…* (London, 1661), 4.

15. See Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

16. See E[dward] F[isher], *The Marrow of Modern Divinity, with notes by Thomas Boston* (London: T. Tegg, 1837), 27; Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant; or the Covenant of Grace Opened* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1651), 356.

17. Richard Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 187.

18. Muller, *After Calvin*, 187.

19. Richard Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11.

20. Johannes Oecolampadius, *In Iesaiam Prophetam Hypomnematon* (Basle, 1525), 268b. Andrew Woolsey appears to be the first scholar to identify this concept in Oecolampadius. See "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1988), 1:262.

21. Carol Williams, "The Decree of Redemption is in Effect a Covenant: David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2005). In connection with this, Patrick Gillespie explicitly uses the term "covenant of redemption," but he notes that the term is "not found in the Scripture, in so many words (which may be among the reasons why most Writers have been silent about the thing); yet the thing it self being so evidently held" among Reformed theologians. *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 1.

22. This information comes from a speech that Goodwin delivered to the newly appointed Lord Protector, Richard Cromwell (1626–1712), in the weekly newspaper *Mercurius Politicus* 438 (1658), 924. I thank Ryan Kelly for alerting me to this information.

23. Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 31.

24. Fisher, *Marrow of Divinity*, 26.

25. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted & Vindicated…* (London, 1654), 375–76.

26. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh: Andro Anderson for Robert Brown, 1655), 326.

27. Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants*, 2.

28. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:7. See also John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life Opened…* (London, 1673), 26–27.

29. Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants*, 2.

30. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:1–6. Cf. *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 1:99–100.

31. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 4.

32. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 303. This statement is consistent, of course, with Rutherford's supralapsarianism, but even an infralapsarian could make this statement because, as Rutherford would elsewhere argue, "the Lord does not begin in time to design Covenant-ways the Son to be the Consenter to be our Surety: nor doth the Son in time begin to consent." *Covenant of Life*, 309. In other words, the eternal nature of the covenant of redemption means that God had already provided the solution to Adam's fall even before he fell.

33. Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, 27.

34. Thomas Brooks, *Paradice Opened…* (London, 1675), 98–99.

35. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 51.

36. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 32–33.

37. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 34–35.

38. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 36.

39. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 37.

40. On the Socinian position regarding the necessity of the atonement, see Socinus, *De Iesu Christo Servatore* (1594), 1:1; Alan Gomes, "*De Jesu Christo Servatore*: Faustos Socinus on the Satisfaction of Christ," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 209–31; Carl Trueman, "John Owen's *Dissertation on Divine Justice*: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 87–103.

41. Rutherford's massive work (over 600 pages) in Latin on this issue represents the complexity of the debate, which was not confined to Reformed orthodoxy, but also occurred among Roman Catholic theologians, for example. On Rutherford's position, see *Disputatio Scholastica de Divina Providentia* (Edinburgh, 1649). On William Twisse, see *Vindiciae Gratiae Potestatis ac Providentiae Dei* (Amsterdam, 1632), 198–207. Goodwin's position will be discussed below. Patrick Gillespie describes the position of Twisse, Rutherford, and Goodwin in the following way: "Others hold, if God be considered absolutely in regard of his power, and not upon a supposition of this decree, which is de facto, to let no sin go unpunished; but to punish it either in the Person, or in his Surety: In this absolute sense they say God might freely had remitted sin without any satisfaction." Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 36.

42. For example, in 1647, Owen writes: "The foundation of this whole assertion seems to me to be false and erroneous,—namely, that God could not have mercy on mankind unless satisfaction were made by his Son." *The Death of Death*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 10:205. But, several years later, Owen departs from the position that he held in common with Twisse; see *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, in T*he Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 10:495–624.

43. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:15.

44. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:72.

45. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:72.

46. Gillespie's argument follows a slightly different trajectory from Goodwin's. See *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 37–38.

47. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 40.

48. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:16.

49. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:18.

50. See, for example, Fisher, *Marrow of Divinity*, 26–27; Burgess, *True Doctrine of Justification*, 375–76; Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 80, 98–99.

51. William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London: Edward Griffen for Henry Overton, 1642), 100.

52. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:5.

53. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:8.

54. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:8.

55. Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 74.

56. Bulkeley, *Gospel-Covenant*, 31.

57. Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 71.

58. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:10. See also Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 303; Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, 29; Francis Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum: The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible, viz. God's Covenants with Man in the First Adam before the Fall, and in the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, after the Fall…* (London: R. W. for George Calvert, 1657), 80–82; Dickson and Durham, *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, 15v–16r.

59. For example, see Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:22; Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 303; Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 2.3.2.

60. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 52.

61. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 52.

62. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:85.

63. Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 67.

64. See Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:24; Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 12:497; Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 67–68.

65. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 52–53.

66. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 303.

67. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:28. See also Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 81.

68. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:28.

69. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:28.

70. Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, 26–27.

71. Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, 27. Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) makes similar comments in his work *Looking unto Jesus; A View of the Everlasting Gospel* (London, 1658), 80–81.

72. Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Exaltation* (London, 1638), 170.

73. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 80–81.

74. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 81.

75. John Arrowsmith, Armilla Catechetica. *A Chain of Principles; or, An Orderly Concatenation of Theological Aphorismes and Exercitations* (Cambridge, 1659), 283–84. In the margin, Arrowsmith refers to his agreement on this point with David Dickson.

76. Owen, *The Death of Death*, in *Works*, 10:171.

77. See Paul Baynes's exposition of Ephesians 1:4 in *A Commentarie upon the First Chapter of the Epistle of Saint Paul, Written to the Ephesians* (London, 1618), 55ff.

78. As William Ames would argue, "It was [necessary] that Christ the Mediator should be God, and man: for unless he had been God, he could not be the spiritual King of our souls, dispensing life and death eternal: and unless he had been man he could not have been an head of the same kind with his body." *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 77.

79. Bulkeley, *Gospel-Covenant*, 31–32.

80. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 305.

81. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 82.

82. Fisher, *Marrow of Divinity*, 27.

83. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 82.

84. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:94.

85. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:94–95.

86. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:95.

87. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:95.

88. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:95.

89. Owen, *The Death of Death*, in *Works*, 10:168–71.

90. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 94.

91. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 82–83.

92. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:83–85.

93. Obadiah Sedgwick provides six promises made by the Father to Christ. *The Bowels of Tender Mercy*, 3–4.

94. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 94–95.

95. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 97.

96. Owen, *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:160.

97. Owen, *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:162.

98. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:50.

99. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:50.

100. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 100–1.

101. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 101–3.

102. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 104–6.

103. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 107.

104. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 108.

105. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 109.

106. Trueman, *John Owen*, 86.

107. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 304–5.

108. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 304–5.

109. Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 68. While the bulk of his exposition is principally taken up with the transactions between the Father and the Son, Brooks does mention the role of the Spirit in two places (see pp. 88 and 169).

110. James Durham, *Christ Crucified: or, The Marrow of the Gospel Evidently Holden Forth in LXXII Sermons, on the Whole 53 Chapter of Isaiah* (Edinburgh, 1683), 157.

111. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:9.

112. Richard Muller argues that early Reformed orthodox theologians—Perkins, Polanus, and Ussher, for example—"paid remarkably close attention to the dictum of Christian doctrine that all activity of God *ad extra* is the common work of the entire Trinity and, in order to sustain this dictum, they paid strict attention to the necessarily trinitarian structures at the ground of all doctrine…. This was particularly true of the trinitarian motif, which ceased to function as prominently in the treatment of the eternal counsel. I know of only two thinkers prior to Gill who noted this problem and attempted a partial solution, Franz Burmann and Petrus van Mastricht." "The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill's Critique of the *Pactum Salutis*," *Foundations* 24 (1981): 5–6.

113. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:419.

114. Goodwin, *Man's Restoration by Grace*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:540. Goodwin is also rather explicit about a triune conversation in eternity concerning redemption: "There was the highest and freest mutual Converse held between the Three Persons amongst themselves from Everlasting…. They spoke one to the other, and one of another." *Of the Knowledge of God the Father*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4:492.

115. Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 72.

116. Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 74–79.

117. Bulkeley, *Gospel-Covenant*, 32.

118. Edward Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundreth and Tenth Psalme Wherein the Severall Heads of Christian Religion Therein Contained* (London, 1632), 7–8. Page 5 of his exposition of Psalm 110 provides a summary that reflects the basic teaching of the covenant of redemption.

119. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:31.

120. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:32.

121. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:32.

122. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:32.

123. Brooks, *Paradice Opened*, 83.

124. There are variations of this principle. See Lucas Trelcatius, *A Brief Institution of the Common Places of Sacred Divinitie* (London: Imprinted by T. P. for Francis Burton, 1610), 2:1: "The works of God, of which we must treat in the first part of Divinity; are of two sorts, Inward and Immanent, Outward or Going out; those are in the very Essence of God by an Internal and Eternal Act: these pass from (or go out of) God into the Creatures: by an external or temporal act."

125. Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:405.

126. Bulkeley, *Gospel-Covenant*, 358.

127. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:11.

128. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:12.

129. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:12.

130. Calamy, who did not distinguish formally between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace, lacks the precision of the theologians who did distinguish between the two covenants. See Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants*, 3.

131. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 113.

132. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 113.

133. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 308.

134. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 309. Similarly, Bulkeley writes: "Thus far then I grant a Covenant betwixt God the Father and Christ…. But if any shall hereupon conclude, that there is no Covenant passing betwixt God and us, then I say, they deny that which is as clear in Scripture, as the Sun-shining at noon day…. There is therefore a Covenant passing betwixt God and man." Bulkeley, *Gospel-Covenant*, 33–34.

135. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 113–17.

136. Rutherford also provides a section on the differences between the two covenants. See *Covenant of Life*, 308–15. Patrick Gillespie appears to have not only read but also relied heavily on this particular work of Rutherford's.

137. Brooks highlights several of the same differences between the two covenants as Gillespie, particularly this point. See *Paradice Opened*, 98.

138. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 117–23.

139. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 123.

140. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 123.

141. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 124.

142. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 124.

143. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 125.

144. Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 309.

145. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 125.

146. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 125.

147. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 125.

148. Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 126–27.

149. B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1952), 53–55.

150. John Yates, *Ibis ad Caesarem*… (London, 1626), pt. 2:75.

151. Yates, *Ibis ad Caesarem*, pt. 2:75–76.

152. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:84.

153. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:84–85.

154. Robert Letham clearly has problems with the covenant of redemption because, he feels, it leads to tritheism. See *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009), 235. Theologians like Owen, Goodwin, Cocceius, and Witsius, to name a few, certainly did not see things that way, and their expositions of the *pactum salutis* were reflective of their deep trinitarian concerns.

155. For example, Owen speaks of "the covenant of the Mediator or Redeemer," and more frequently of an "agreement or a "compact," "covenant," and "convention." Sometimes he will use "eternal transactions" or "eternal compact" to describe the covenant of redemption. Both Rutherford and Gillespie use the term "covenant of suretyship," as well as other terms (e.g., "counsel of peace") to describe the covenant of redemption.

156. William Geddes, *The Saints Recreation* (Edinburgh, 1683), 19. In the margin, Geddes writes, "Some distinguish the Covenant of Redemption, which is betwixt God the Father, and the Son, from the Covenant of grace, which is betwixt God and Man by the Mediator Jesus."

Chapter 16

The Puritans on the Covenant of Grace

> *The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works…. Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace; whereby he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved….*
>
> —WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, 7.2, 3

> *This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.*
>
> —WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, 7.51

Beginning with the Swiss Reformers in Zurich and Geneva, Reformed theologians since the sixteenth century have employed the concept of the covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*) to establish the unity of redemptive history that began with the first promise (*protoevangelium*), made to Adam, recorded in Genesis 3:15, and culminated in the work of Jesus Christ as the Mediator of the covenant. Though the covenant of grace is one in substance, the Reformed divided the covenant of grace into several administrations to reflect the pattern of the biblical narrative, which shows the gradual unfolding of God's redemptive purposes. Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675) stated that the covenant of grace "is the very hinge upon which the whole business of Salvation from beginning to end is turned about."2 The covenant of grace received a fixed place in the Westminster

Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Savoy Declaration. In both confessions, history is divided into two distinct dispensations, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, each of which have different grounds for salvation (works versus faith). The covenant of grace represents God's gracious response to Adam's sinful failure to fulfill the condition of the covenant of works: "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe" (WCF, 7.3). The covenant of grace forms the heart and soul of Reformed soteriology and declares that salvation, whether in the Old or New Testament, is by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ.

In his study on the covenant of grace in Puritan thought, John von Rohr correctly notes that for the Puritans, the progress of revelation was "from cloudiness to light…[but this] progression was in the administration of the one covenant, and thus the whole of the biblical story was [the] stage for this drama of the history of salvation."[3] In the context of the covenant of grace, faith is wrought by the Spirit in the hearts of those who have been ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48) so that they can appropriate the benefits of Christ's redemptive work. Thus the covenant of grace was made unilaterally by God; it is called a "one-sided covenant" (*foedus monopleuron*), given to fallen sinners apart from any consideration of their natural ability to respond or to fulfill the terms of the covenant.[4] However, the covenant of grace is conditional in that it requires faith in Christ on man's part, and so may be also called a "two-sided covenant" (*foedus dipleuron*).[5] Reformed theologians in Britain during the seventeenth century were able to keep these two aspects of the covenant in balance as they wrote prodigiously on the covenant of grace. In this chapter, we will examine the most significant British Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century, particularly the hugely influential John Ball (1585–1640), and his successors Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), Francis Roberts (1609–1675), John Owen (1616–1683), and Patrick Gillespie. A comprehensive analysis of the covenant of grace would be impossible, even for a book-length project, given the copious literature on the subject, so this chapter will be confined to a discussion of the unfolding nature of revelation in the covenant of grace and the duties required in each successive dispensation.

The Divine Response Samuel Rutherford sums up well the gracious character and saving efficacy of God's covenantal dealings with sinners after the fall by

stating that “the first Adam mars all, the second ADAM who makes all things new, mends all.”[6] Rutherford’s comment is thus a summary of redemptive history from Genesis 3:15 onward. Reformed theologians all held that in the wake of the failure of the first covenant natural revelation was inadequate for man’s salvation, making supernatural revelation of the way of life in Christ necessary. The light that was natural to Adam before the fall was largely extinguished as a result of sin. As John Owen put it, in this way human nature suffered great injury or loss because of the entrance of sin.[7] Therefore, man needs God not only as Creator, but also as Redeemer, which inevitably necessitates the revelation of God in the Mediator, Jesus Christ. Reformed theologians such as John Ball, Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), and John Owen, understand the history of redemption, which develops progressively, or by degrees (*gradus*), with a distinctively christological focus. Because the first covenant made no provision for the remission of sin, the covenant of grace became the necessary context for understanding the way of salvation for man after the fall.[8]

Owen provides two principal reasons why the covenant of grace is different in essence, substance, and nature from the covenant of works. In the first place, justification in the covenant of grace is entirely of grace, “which wholly excludes works; that is, so of grace, as that our own works are not the means of justification before God.”[9] Second, the covenant of grace has a “*mediator and surety;* which is built alone on this supposition, that what we cannot do in ourselves which was originally required of us, and what the law of the first covenant cannot enable us to perform, that should be performed for us by our mediator and surety.”[10] In the covenant of grace, Jesus Christ fulfills that role of mediator and surety inasmuch as He is the principal subject of this covenant. As the surety (i.e., guarantor) of the covenant, Christ undertook, in obedience to God, to perform the terms of the covenant on man’s behalf, and Christ accomplished it in His own person. In the words of Owen, Christ undertook to do “whatever was to be done *in* and *by* man, to effect it by his own Spirit and grace; that so the covenant on every side might be firm and stable, and the ends of it fulfilled.”[11] The graciousness of the covenant of grace is rooted in God’s willingness to accept the work of Christ on our behalf. Because Christ is the surety, the covenant of grace has an enduring stability and certainty of fulfillment never possible in the covenant of works.[12] If God was gracious toward Adam in the garden—a point argued by almost all Reformed divines—then the covenant of grace is, in the words of Francis Roberts, “double gratuitous.”[13] Put another way, the second Adam, by virtue of the dignity and worth of His person as the God-man, would certainly succeed where the first

Adam failed, and in a more excellent and glorious way, by "bringing many sons unto glory" (Heb. 2:10). The history of the covenant of grace begins in Genesis 3:15, immediately after the fall, in the record of the giving of the first gospel promise (*protoevangelium*), setting redemptive history in motion with the goal of ultimate victory for the people of God, when Christ as the seed of the woman crushes the head of "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan" (Rev. 12:9).

Theology from Adam to Noah Genesis 3:15 was a significant verse for the sixteenth-and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox.[14] According to John Owen, all true postlapsarian theology is rooted in the *protoevangelium*, which is a complete summary of the gospel. However, this completeness is strengthened and illuminated by successive stages of divine revelation and illumination.[15] Owen argues that the substance of the *protoevangelium*, "wherein the whole covenant of grace was virtually comprised," explicitly refers to Christ as the one who will recover mankind from sin and misery by His death.[16] Like Owen, Thomas Goodwin refers to Genesis 3:15 as the first promise of the Messiah.[17] Francis Roberts likewise adds that Genesis 3:15 is "the first and most ancient gospel recorded in the Bible."[18] Ball claims that Genesis 3:15 sets forth both the "irrevocable judgment and final overthrow and destruction of Satan…and man's Salvation."[19] While all Reformed theologians agreed that Genesis 3:15 represented the first promise of grace by pointing to the victory of Messiah over the serpent, the exegetical details of the words "seed of the woman" were understood in different ways.

Thomas Goodwin notes that the Papists understand the "woman" to be Mary and the "seed" to be Christ only.[20] In response to the Roman Catholic position, Ball argues, "If the Virgin Mary may be said to bruise the Serpent's head, because Christ was borne of her, by the same reason we may say, she was crucified and died for us."[21] In his detailed exegetical analysis of Genesis 3:15, Francis Roberts recognizes the diversity of opinion concerning how to understand the seed of the woman. In response to the Roman Catholic contention that the seed refers to Mary, he notes their deliberate textual emendation in attempt to buttress their position. In both the Vulgate and the Queen Mary Psalter (1553), they render the Hebrew *hu* ("he") as if it were *hee* ("she"), resulting in the reading *ipsa conteret caput tuum* ("she shall bruise thy head"); and, moreover, "for the better Countenancing of this corrupt translation, they have by the perfidiousness of Guy Fabricius corrupted the Hebrew text in the Interlinear Bible printed at Antwerp…. But our learned Divines [Rivetus, Calvin, and Gomarus] justly condemn this notorious Corrupting of the Text."[22]

But Roberts also rightly notes that Protestants have not always agreed on how

to understand what is meant by the seed of the woman. John Calvin acknowledged that some interpreters understood the "seed" to refer to Christ, commenting, "Gladly would I give my suffrage in support of their opinion, but that I regard the word *seed* as too violently distorted by them; for who will concede that a *collective* noun is to be understood of one man *only*?"[23] Calvin identifies the first use of "seed" in Genesis 3:15 to refer to "the posterity of the woman generally" (i.e., the whole human race). However, the second "seed" in Genesis 3:15d refers to Christ and the believing church, so that "the whole Church of God, under its Head, will gloriously exult over [Satan]."[24] According to Goodwin, David Pareus (1548–1622) "halves it; understanding by 'the seed' in the former part of the Promise, *all Believers of Mankind*: But the [*It*] or [*He*] in the latter part prophetically to point out, and terminate on Christ alone."[25] After considering the details of both the Septuagint and the Aramaic Targums, Goodwin argues that Christ in His person and believers considered as "in Christ" are intended in both uses of the noun "seed" and the pronoun rendered variously as "it" or "he."[26] After evaluating the various positions among the orthodox, including the position of David Pareus, which Andreas Rivetus (1572–1651) countenances, Roberts argues for the position put forth by Goodwin, namely, that "seed" should be understood collectively, "as Comprehending Christ and all his Seed, Christ and all his elect members."[27] Roberts adds that Christ "originally and primitively" victoriously crushes/bruises the devil through His own power; and the elect who are Christ's "derivatively" receive power and victory communicated to them from Christ in this spiritual war.[28] Because the *protoevangelium* speaks of Christ's victory over the devil, Owen had no problem arguing that all the benefits of salvation, including justification, repentance, and eternal blessings, such as the resurrection of the body, find their basis in Genesis 3:15.[29] Though obscure, the promise in Genesis 3:15 was sufficient for the faithful during that particular dispensation of the covenant. Further revelation would come in the covenant made with Noah.

Theology from Noah to Abraham Not all Reformed theologians gave attention to the Noahic covenant in their exposition of the covenant of grace. In fact, a good number of theologians divided the covenant of grace into three periods: (1) from Adam to Abraham; (2) Abraham to Moses; and (3) Moses to Christ. For example, John Ball passes right over the Noahic administration, which is surprising given his characteristic thoroughness. William Ames (1576–1633) and Johannes Wollebius (1586–1629) also held to the threefold structuring of the history of redemption.[30] Many prominent Reformed theologians did, however, insist, sometimes emphatically, that the covenant made with Noah was a distinct

dispensation or administration in the *foedus gratiae*. Goodwin defends this view by appealing to Isaiah 54:7–11 and says that the Noahic covenant was a "pure covenant of grace."[31] Typical of Goodwin's christological reading of the Old Testament, he claims that the ark Noah built signifies salvation but not simply a temporal salvation from the flood. The ark signified Christ, the promised seed, which Noah understood by faith (Heb. 11:7), and, as John Owen would argue, all saving faith looks to the promised seed, which faith Noah possessed, as evident from his righteous life.[32] Goodwin adds that Noah was also a prophet, a preacher of the righteousness of Christ; as such, he had the honor of being the first prophet to whom God ever explicitly spoke of a covenant: "there was Promise indeed of Christ, the woman's seed, uttered before, which all the patriarchs before the flood lived upon; but under the title of a covenant, never no mention, no, nor of the word Grace, till now."[33]

The most detailed defense of the position that the Noahic covenant belongs to the covenant of grace comes from Francis Roberts, who affirms that all God's "Covenants and Promises since Man's fall were founded, established and principally accomplished in Jesus Christ the Sinners Saviour."[34] As is true with Goodwin, the role of typology helps explain Roberts's position. The moving cause of the Noahic covenant was twofold: (1) less principal and typical, that is, Noah's burnt offerings which were a pleasing aroma to God (Gen. 8:20–21); and (2) more principal and antitypical, namely, Christ offering himself as a sacrifice for sin to God (Eph. 5:2).[35] Even though Christ was revealed to Noah "dimly, obscurely, and…implicitly," Noah nevertheless lived by faith in Christ and became heir of the righteousness that is by faith.[36] As a result, Noah's faith in Christ was saving faith, and thus the Noahic covenant was an administration of the covenant of grace.[37] Roberts highlights an important aspect about covenant theology that Reformed theologians were all careful to insist upon. The Noahic covenant was made not only with Noah but also with his offspring—Shem, Japheth, and Ham, the wicked son. Roberts reasons that if the Lord admits "Root and Branches, Parents and their seed into his Covenant jointly: how unwarrantable and dangerous are the Acts of the Anabaptists who forbid Infants of such Parents to partake of the initiating sign and Token of the Covenant?"[38] Some Reformed theologians defending this view by positing a distinction between the outward administration of the common benefits of the covenant of grace, "which comes short of Salvation: and the Inward Efficacy and special benefits thereof which reach unto Salvation."[39] Because God's dealings with Noah further illuminated His redemptive purposes, the Noahic covenant was the first advance in the progress of revelation after the fall. God communicated His word to sinners through a mediator, and thus a covenant, explicitly so called,

was established with mankind.[40]

Theology from Abraham to Moses If Reformed theologians were not entirely agreed that the Noahic covenant belonged properly to the covenant of grace, they certainly presented a united front on the relationship of the Abrahamic covenant to redemptive history. The covenant of grace would receive such clarification in the time of Abraham that Owen could claim that "such an exposition of God's will and of the mysteries of grace, and so illustrious, is given in this explanation of postlapsarian theology [i.e., revelation], that there has hardly been a more abundant attestation of the economy of the one revelation, until He came in whom everything was laid down."[41] Owen highlights several advances in the progress of revelation. Building on the more ancient promises, God gave Abraham clearer and fuller explanations of His saving purposes, particularly as He reiterates His promise of a seed, namely Christ, who is the foundation of all grace. Thus, "the promise of the Seed being given in advance, who is the foundation of all grace, God gracefully promises that He will graciously and immutably be unto him an indulging, sanctifying, justifying and saving God, who, in turn, demands from him faith and a new obedience."[42] The content of the Abrahamic covenant, particularly concerning the relation of justifying faith and obedience as the fruit thereof, is identical in all essential respects with the content of the new covenant. In Owen's *Greater Catechism* he asks in question 13: "What is this new covenant?" He answers, "The gracious, free, immutable promise of God, made unto all his elect fallen in Adam, to give them Jesus Christ, and in him mercy, pardon, grace, and glory, with a re-stipulation of faith from them unto this promise, and new obedience."[43] Owen and his Reformed contemporaries did not simply equate the covenant of grace with justification by faith alone. Soteric benefits—whether justification, adoption, or sanctification—are appropriated in the context of the covenant of grace, and all are necessary for salvation. Yet because these benefits are rooted first in the person and work of Christ, the covenant of grace retains its gracious character.

The theologian who most influenced the covenant theology of the Westminster divines was John Ball. The section on the Abrahamic covenant in his work on the covenant of grace highlights the central importance of this covenant to the theological framework of Reformed orthodoxy. Though Ball omitted the Noahic covenant in his treatise, he certainly makes up for this omission with a penetrating analysis of God's gracious dealings with Abraham in the form of promises. What was obscure to God's people before now is made clear to Abraham (Gen. 17:7), who receives several significant promises made to

his seed, that is, first of all to Christ (Gal. 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:20), who is the "Head upon whom this Covenant is settled."[44] The quality of the promises made to Abraham necessitates that a person of Christ's dignity and worth fulfill them. The blessings of the covenant belong to Abraham's offspring, those who receive the covenant promises from him either externally or inwardly, which includes believing Gentiles. Ball makes a distinction between those who are the spiritual seed of Abraham and those who are the carnal seed. Thus Ishmael and Esau belonged to the covenant made with Abraham until they apostatized and "discovenanted themselves."[45] In other words, even those who enjoyed only the outward or temporal blessings promised to Abraham are included in the covenant of grace. Concerning children born to parents in covenant with God, the Abrahamic covenant makes clear that infants must receive the sign of the covenant (1 Cor. 7:14), and although they cannot enjoy all of the benefits of the covenant and are not capable of "actual Faith," nonetheless "through the free grace and acceptation of God, the Promise of forgiveness and the Kingdom of Heaven belongeth unto them."[46] Though the Abrahamic covenant is a spiritual covenant, Ball and the Reformed orthodox see no contradiction in admitting children to the covenant because of the distinction between internal efficacy and outward administration.[47]

Annexed to the various spiritual blessings are a number of temporal promises such as protection ("I am thy shield"), riches and honor ("I will make thee great"), numerous offspring ("I will multiply thee exceedingly"), and possession of land ("all the land of Canaan"). Ball notes that during Abraham's time temporal blessings were more prominent, but as time moves on spiritual blessings, such as the inclusion of Gentiles into the church, take precedence.[48] However, that change does not diminish the importance of the spiritual blessings promised to Abraham in God's covenantal dealings with him. Even though the promises were freely made according to the unmerited grace of God, there are conditions required of Abraham.[49] The Bible makes clear that Abraham was freely justified by grace through redemption in Christ Jesus (Rom. 4:3), "and in this is included all eternal and spiritual blessings."[50] The condition required of Abraham in the first instance was faith, which was imputed (credited) to Abraham for righteousness. Ball makes clear that faith is the "sole working instrument and relative action required on our part in the Covenant of grace, unto free justification."[51] He adds that although Abraham was justified by faith alone, with no other grace co-working with it, his faith did not "lie dead in him as a dormant and idle quality."[52] Rather, true faith is "lively and operative, attended with every other grace of the Spirit."[53] Earlier in his work, Ball makes a similar comment about the relation of faith to good works:

> The faith that is lively to embrace mercy is ever conjoined with an unfeigned purpose to walk in all well pleasing, and the sincere performance of all holy obedience, as opportunity is offered, doth ever attend that faith, whereby we continually lay hold upon the promises once embraced. Actual good works of all sorts (though not perfect in degree) are necessary to the continuance of actual justification, because faith can no longer lay faithful claim to the promises of life, then it doth virtually or actually lead us forward in the way of heaven.[54]

Ball believed that true saving faith necessarily yields willing and continual obedience. Good works may be necessary for the continuance of actual justification, but they do not constitute the ground of justification, nor are they instruments by which sinners are justified. Regarding Abraham, the same faith that embraced the promise (Gen. 15:6) was the same faith that enabled him to offer up his son in obedience to God (Gen. 22). Because Abraham had true faith, he was commanded to walk before God and be perfect, and all true believers from Abraham onward would reflect "their father Abraham," both in their faith and in the obedience of faith. For these reasons, all Reformed theologians recognized the unique honor afforded to Abraham as the father of all the faithful.

Thomas Goodwin argues that God's declaration to Abraham that He Himself is Abraham's "exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1) is "the deepest and most comprehensive expression of love, that God ever made unto any man; and Abraham takes the advantage of this, and improves it."[55] Taken together, the first promise to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15) and God's promises to Abraham highlight the unity and gradual expression of the covenant of grace. Abraham is given the honor of being the father of all who believe, just as Eve had the honor of being the mother of all the living, an honor addressed to her by her husband, Adam, after they received the *protoevangelium*. Eve became the "mother of all living, that is, that live spiritually, and by faith, as Abraham was father of all the faithful."[56] As Francis Roberts would note, no one sinner in the Bible is more highly commended for faith than Abraham.[57]

Roberts proceeds to highlight several ways by which God revealed more of Christ. The faith that Abraham possessed had reference to the promised Seed (Christ); Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day (John 8:56), but he could see it only by faith. His commission to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, prefigured Christ in His death and resurrection. Roberts remarks that by faith Abraham witnesses Christ's birth in Isaac's birth, and by his faithful obedience he saw Christ sacrificed when he offered up Isaac upon the altar in obedience to God's command. God blessed Abraham by justifying him, not according to his works,

but according to his faith. “By believing according to the Covenant of Faith,” his believing was “pure Gospel.”[58] Because Abraham had faith in the God of the covenant, he received the sign of circumcision, which typified Christ’s work of shedding His blood for the remission of sins. As Romans 4:11 makes clear, circumcision was a seal of the righteousness Abraham had by faith while yet uncircumcised, and anticipated baptism as the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2:11). The promises of God and Abraham’s response of faith and obedience, sealed with the sacramental sign of circumcision, all reflect the unfolding of God’s redemptive purposes in the covenant of grace. In regard to the Abrahamic covenant, Reformed theologians have shown unanimous agreement. However, there has been far less agreement as to whether the next covenant, the Sinaitic or Mosaic “old covenant” (Heb. 8:6–13), can properly be called an administration of the covenant of grace.

The Theology of Moses Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) highlights a point of contention between Reformed and Lutheran theologians that helps explain the difficultly of understanding the role of Sinai in the history of redemption:

> It is true, the Lutheran Divines, they do expressly oppose the Calvinists herein, maintaining the Covenant given by *Moses*, to be a Covenant of works, and so directly contrary to the Covenant of grace. Indeed, they acknowledge that the Fathers were justified by Christ, and had the same way of salvation with us; only they make that Covenant of *Moses* to be a superadded thing to the Promise, holding forth a condition of perfect righteousness unto the Jews, that they might be convinced of their own folly in their self-righteousness. But, I think, it is already cleared, that *Moses* his Covenant, was a Covenant of grace.[59]

Burgess affirms the position that the Mosaic covenant belongs to the covenant of grace, which is the plain sense of the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.5).[60] However, not all Reformed theologians were willing to make the Mosaic, or “old covenant,” as spoken of in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8, an administration of the covenant of grace. Like the Lutherans, they did not deny that salvation has always been through grace, by faith in Christ, but they regarded the Mosaic covenant as superadded or subservient to the covenant of grace.[61] Sebastian Rehnman has suggested that the differences between what he calls the “dichotomous” (Ball and Roberts) and the “trichotomous” (Goodwin and Owen) schools are more formal than real.[62] There is some truth in this contention, even if Rehnman does not quite capture all the nuances of Owen’s thought on this extremely complex issue, but the differences between the two positions are

worth exploring.

With Abraham's seed growing, if not always spiritually, certainly numerically (i.e., externally), Ball claims that God knitted together "the circumcision" by means of a state or national covenant. Immediately, Ball recognizes that the nature of the Mosaic covenant was of such a nature that "we meet with a great difficulty" as to whether the administration with Moses was indeed gracious.[63] In a similar vein, Roberts, who provides a thoroughgoing defense of the so-called dichotomous position, admits that the Mosaic covenant is, "without exception, the hardest Gordian-Knot to untie" among all the covenant administrations.[64] Both Roberts and Ball explain the various ways Reformed theologians have described the old covenant.[65] All who wrote on this issue agreed that there are explicit differences between the old and new covenants, "but," as Ball wrote, "how all these differences should stand, if they be not Covenants opposite in kind, it is not easy to understand."[66]

For Ball and those who agreed with him, the Mosaic covenant was delivered at Sinai in a manner suited to the church at that time in order to drive the Israelites to seek mercy from God through His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. More than that, the old covenant was given to Israel to direct them how to walk blamelessly before the Lord, as Abraham did, in holiness and righteousness. Reformed theologians of this persuasion reasoned that when God enters into a covenant with sinful creatures, the covenant must necessarily be gracious, and the relationship established between God and His people in the covenant agreement must be in and through a mediator. In the old covenant, the Israelites were declared to be a spiritual seed, a kingdom of priests, God's "peculiar treasure" (Ex. 19:5). As the Decalogue makes clear, they had been redeemed out of Egypt; thus the "ten words" were based upon God's redemptive activity. As Ball noted, in the preface to the moral law, does God not "propound himself as their King, Judge, Saviour and Redeemer"?[67] The first commandment likewise proves the gracious intent of Sinai. The Israelites are commanded to take Jehovah as their God, to choose Him as their portion and only Savior, and only a gracious covenant could command sinners to take God as their Father, King, and Savior. In addition, unlike the covenant of works, the old covenant was renewed after it was broken (Deut. 4:30–31), "and if the Covenant after transgression may be renewed, it is of grace."[68]

According to Ball, the Sinaitic covenant also shares a number of similarities with the Abrahamic covenant. Both the promise and the conditions are the same in each covenant administration. Abraham and the Israelites receive a promise from God that He will bless them in this life (i.e., temporal blessings) and in the life to come (i.e., eternal blessings). Furthermore, God commands Abraham to

walk before Him in obedience (Gen. 17:1) and later commands the Israelites to do the same (Deut. 26:16–19). Though God required obedience from Abraham, He required only the obedience that springs from faith (Rom. 14:23); in fact, love and obedience both build upon the foundation of Spirit-wrought faith (Acts 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:5).[69] Thus even the ceremonies on the law, which prefigure Christ, require faith in Him for them to be of any value to the Israelites. God continued the rite of circumcision among the Israelites so that they would seek justification by faith, not by the works of the law.[70] Those holding to the view that the Mosaic covenant was only subservient to the covenant of grace appealed to the typological character of the ceremonial laws to prove their position. Ball argues, however, that as types such as the animal sacrifices must "of necessity… bring forth a second, in which is fulfilled that which in the first is prefigured to."[71] Goodwin, for example, reasoned that Sinai was a subservient covenant on the same grounds that Ball used to claim unity of substance in all the covenants.[72] Importantly, Ball argued that taken as a whole the law was given to Israel and required faith in Christ:

> If without faith it be impossible to please God, or to obtain Salvation, the Law which promiseth eternal life to them that keep it, doth require faith as well as love or obedience. For if faith be necessary to Salvation, it cannot be that man a sinner should be justified, if he could keep the law: because he cannot by future works purchase Redemption from former transgressions. And from this it followeth, that the Law as it was given to the Jews, is for substance the Covenant of grace, or a rule according to which the people in Covenant ought to walk.[73]

Ball's comments reflect a general tendency among the dichotomists, namely, the emphasis on the the "third use of the law"(*tertius usus legis*), or the law as a teacher of righteousness. They certainly did not deny the "convicting or tutorial use" (*usus elenchticus sive paedagogicus*) of the law as a teacher of sin, to expose sinners and lead them to Christ for salvation, but they gave prominence to the "instructive or preceptive use" (*usus didacticus sive normativus*) of the law, given to instruct Israelites in how to walk before God in holiness and righteousness.

In discussing this much-mooted question, Reformed theologians tended to distinguish between understanding the law in a broad or narrow sense. For example, Peter Bulkeley (1583–1689) and Francis Turretin (1623–1687) both make this distinction to prove their position that Sinai belongs to the covenant of grace.[74] Anthony Burgess likewise comments that the law may be understood largely, "as that whole doctrine delivered on Mount Sinai," or strictly, "as it is an

abstracted rule of righteousness, holding forth life upon no terms, but perfect obedience."[75] In the former sense, the law belongs to the covenant of grace; in the latter sense, the law was not of grace, but of works, which helps explains Paul's polemic against the law in his New Testament writings (e.g., Galatians). These distinctions also help to explain the idea found in many Puritan authors who speak of the Mosaic covenant as republishing the moral law first given to Adam, written on his heart, engraved on tablets of stone as the Decalogue. For the most part, theologians who spoke in this way, whether dichotomists or trichotomists, made a number of careful qualifications in order to show that the moral law was republished not as a covenant but as a rule of righteousness for those in covenant with God. In other words, the moral law was not republished at Sinai to serve as a means of justification before God. For example, John Owen made clear in his work on justification by faith that the old covenant was not a revival of the covenant of works strictly (i.e., "formally"). Rather, the moral law was renewed declaratively (i.e., "materially") and not covenantally: "God did never formally and absolutely renew or give again this law as a covenant a second time. Nor was there any need that so he should do, unless it were declaratively only, for so it was renewed at Sinai."[76] The concept of republication of the moral law does not make Sinai coextensive with Eden in terms of strict covenantal principles. If the moral law is abstracted "most strictly," to use Roberts's language, then Sinai certainly was a formal republication of the covenant of works. But, as Ball tried to argue, that certainly was not the intention of the old covenant. In the end, Ball's position, which had been argued during the Reformation by Heinrich Bullinger, Peter Martyr, and John Calvin, clearly influenced the Westminster divines.

Accordingly, chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession, "Of the Law of God," begins by asserting that the moral law was first given to Adam, and goes on to say, "This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables" (19.2). The Confession further asserts, "The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof" (19.5), and is of great use to believers "as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty…discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature…together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience" (19.6). Chapter 19 concludes that for a believer to do good because the law commands it or to refrain from evil because the law forbids it, "is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace. Nor are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it" (19.6–7).

Likewise, the Confession declares that the covenant of grace was administered "in the time of the law…by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances…all fore-signifying Christ to come." Such outward forms were "for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation" (7.5). Hence it follows that "the justification of believers under the Old Testament was…one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament" (11.6).

The Davidic Covenant Reformed theologians typically included the covenant made with David in their works on the history of redemption because of the abundant revelations made to David. These revelations include Christ's eternal sonship; His threefold office of prophet, priest, and king; His incarnation, His mediatorial sufferings, and death; His resurrection, ascension into heaven, and enthronement at God's right hand; the rise, progress, and success of His church and kingdom in the earth; His appointment to judge the world at the last day; and His eternal glory, in which all who belong to Him are destined to share.

Both Ball and Roberts identify God's covenant with David as a constitutive part of the history of redemption. Ball claims that Christ is manifested to David more clearly than in any covenant administration before.[77] The revelation of one who would come from David's lineage and yet be David's Lord shows Christ to be the God-man (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 22:42–45; Acts 2:34). David also came to understand that Christ's person would experience both humiliation in His sufferings and exaltation in His resurrection and ascension (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:26–27), and His "threefold office" (*munus triplex*) as prophet, priest, and king also received greater clarification. For example, the Psalms of David reveal Christ as king who rules and governs His elect and also subdues His enemies (Pss. 2, 110; Heb. 1:5).[78] Psalm 110 also shows that Christ is no ordinary priest, but rather a priest in the order of Melchizedek, which means He can hold the office of both priest and king (v. 4). As a priest, Christ offers up His own body in obedience to His Father (Ps. 40:7–8), and all of the promises made to David, who was a type of Christ, are fulfilled in Christ. William Gouge, in his impressive commentary on Hebrews, argues that if anything good is spoken of David it necessarily has reference to David as a type of Christ.[79] Commenting on Hebrews 1:5 and its use of Psalm 2:7, Gouge remarks that "there is never a clause therein but may most fitly be applied to Christ."[80] Roberts identifies David as an eminent type of Christ; David was the shadow and Christ the substance. In particular, Roberts highlights David's title as God's firstborn, the

king who is “higher than the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:27), as evidence of David’s typological relationship to Christ. Roberts shows that in the Old Testament the firstborn had a fourfold prerogative: (1) as prophet for instructing the family; (2) as priest for sacrificing; (3) as king for governing; and (4) as an heir, receiving a double prerogative for carrying the dignity of these offices (2 Chron. 21:3). In these four prerogatives, Christ “is primarily intended and shadowed out” in His threefold office.[81]

Psalm 89 highlights the explicit covenantal promises made to David and fulfilled in Christ: “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David” (vv. 34–35). Ball notes that God’s oath cannot be revoked, and His promises will not be broken. These promises made to David, and fulfilled in Christ, include (1) that God would be with David by prospering him and defeating his enemies, as well as giving him a great name (Ps. 4); (2) that God would provide a final dwelling place for Israel (2 Sam. 7:10); (3) that after David’s death God would enthrone his son in his stead, who would build the house of the Lord (1 Kings 5:5); (4) that God would be a Father to David’s seed (2 Sam. 7:14); (5) that his throne would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16); (6) that God would be merciful and gracious by chastening David’s posterity so that they would advance in holiness, and even when they did not act righteously God would still remain faithful to His promises (1 Sam. 7:14–15); and (7) that God, by giving Israel priests, would dwell among His people, hear their prayers, and accept their worship (Ps. 132:16).[82] As in all covenant administrations, the Davidic covenant requires that the Israelites should “walk in the ways of the Lord…keep his statutes and his Commandments…walk in holiness, sing the praises of God, and give up themselves unto God as an holy people, zealous of good works.”[83] In the main, the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants all require obedience to the commandments of God. All who are in covenant with God, whether in the covenants of works, grace, or redemption, are required to obey God’s commandments.[84] In keeping with the general tenor of the covenant of grace, Roberts claims that as God “performs covenant-mercy; So [the Israelites] must perform Covenant-Duty.”[85] In fact, the conditions required in the Davidic covenant “are the same with those imposed upon Israel and their Posterity in the Sinai Covenant,” and these duties continue in force till the death of Christ, which ushers in the new covenant or testament.[86] However, only faith in Christ enables sinners, both in the Old and New Testaments, to obey God’s commands, according to Roberts. What they must do must be done by faith.

Ball, who distinguishes between the covenant’s internal efficacy and its outward administration, makes another distinction between the promises of the

Davidic covenant. Some promises are absolute; others are conditional. Thus God's promise of a son to David, who would sit upon his throne, was an absolute promise, subsequently fulfilled in Christ (Ps. 89:4). Though David's descendants failed to keep their part of the covenant, the eternity of the kingdom promised to David found its fulfillment in Christ, who established a spiritual kingdom that will never cease. However, God promised many things to David that were never realized. Certainly the spiritual house of David did not lack saving blessings such as pardon of sin and adoption, but "the temporal glory of David's house, and the peace of Israel was changed, because they…brake the Commandments of God" (Ps. 89:31–32; 2 Chron. 7:19–22).87 David's transgressions (e.g., against Uriah) and the transgressions of his son Solomon, who went after foreign wives, were punished severely by God in diverse ways. Nonetheless, God's absolute promises stood firm, because not even the infidelity of His chosen people can void God's saving purposes. Certain promises are, therefore, made conditionally; if the Israelites "do well they shall be accepted; if they consent and obey, they shall inherit the good things of the Land."88 On the other hand, the promises made to those effectually called will be realized because "God will give them to do what he requireth."89 For that reason, though Israel often sinned heinously against the Lord during the time of the kings, God preserved His church according to the stability of His divine (absolute) promises. The promise first made in Genesis 3 and then subsequently clarified and enlarged to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, awaited its fulfillment in the person and work of the Mediator, Jesus Christ. For that reason, the corporate sin of the nation of Israel could not make void the absolute promises of God, not even during the years of exile when God disclosed an even greater measure of His redemptive purposes.

The Babylonian Captivity The final dispensation or administration of the covenant prior to its fulfillment in Christ took place during and after the time of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. The prophecies about Christ in Isaiah feature prominently in Ball's section on the covenant God made with the Jews during their exile. He opens with a flood of quotations from Isaiah before marshaling several arguments to explain why God would not abandon His promises made to His people. Roberts notes that God's renewed covenant with Israel was revealed especially to three prophets: (1) Isaiah, before the carrying away captive of the Jews into Babylon; (2) Ezekiel, in the twelfth year of their captivity; and (3) Jeremiah in the eighteenth year (or thereabouts) of that captivity. This "captivity covenant" remained in force until the death of Jesus Christ. It did not annul the Sinai covenant; rather, the promises made before and

during the captivity enlarged the promises that had been made earlier. Therefore, this covenant administration ran concurrently with the old Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant. The Davidic covenant had particular reference to David and his family, but this covenant had application to all Jews living before, during, and after captivity. Nevertheless, they both in substance agree with the Sinaitic covenant.90 Both Ball and Roberts agree that the promises and revelations made to the prophets during this dispensation of the covenant of grace exceeded anything that had come before. Ball held that Christ was "more plainly revealed, both in respect of his person, humiliation, resurrection, place of his birth, time of his coming, [and] kingly office…than in the former expressions" (Jer. 23:5–6; Isa. 40; 53; Zech. 3:8).91 Roberts says that previous covenants were "promising him at a great distance," but this covenant was "bringing Christ into the world as it were in its arms."92

The servant songs in Isaiah constitute the clearest picture of the Lord's ministry found anywhere in the Old Testament, with the possible exception of the book of Psalms. His person and work come into clear focus, as well as His states of humiliation and exaltation. Reformed theologians who wrote on the eternal covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) almost always referenced the promises made to Christ in Isaiah 49, namely, that He would be a covenant for the people, both Jews and Gentiles. The fourth servant song, found in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, provides indisputable evidence that Israel's redemption would come through the sufferings of a servant of Jehovah who would be rewarded by His God (53:10–12). James Durham (c. 1622–1658) began his work on Isaiah 53 declaring that "Jesus Christ and the Substance of the Gospel is compended and summed up here…[and] that there is no Scripture in the Old Testament so often and so convincingly applied to Christ as this is."93 According to Durham, Isaiah 53 opens up Christ, as the God-man, in His two natures. Christ's threefold office as prophet, priest, and king is also displayed and His states of humiliation and exaltation set forth.94 Besides the clear revelations of Christ in Isaiah, Ezekiel also revealed many promises to the captives in Babylon to give them hope. Ezekiel speaks of God's faithful servant David (34:23–25) being set up as their shepherd in contradistinction to the unfaithful shepherds who did such harm to the sheep of God before the exile. As Roberts observes, the explicit covenantal language of Ezekiel has several promises in view, namely, that God would effect a reconciliation between Himself and His people; that there would be an everlasting covenant of peace; and that "David" (Christ) would be Israel's Shepherd, Prince, and King forever.95 Jeremiah describes this same covenant, though with slightly different emphases, in his well-known description of the promise of a new covenant (31:31–34). For the promises in Ezekiel and

Jeremiah to be realized, God would also have to bring back His people from captivity, returning the exiles to their land. Even their return to the land, according to Roberts, prefigured the redemption of the elect out of the bondage of sin, Satan, death, and hell.96

Substantially, then, all these covenants are one and the same covenant of grace, revealed progressively and with ever greater clarity and fullness through all the successive administrations or dispensations of this one covenant. The theological concept of one covenant of grace highlights the "free grace and mercy of God looking at poor sinners in Jesus Christ."97 In all these dispensations, God required faith in His Son. The first declaration (Gen. 3:15) of the promised seed was sufficient for sinners to be saved, but God, in His mercy and kindness, enlarged His promises and thus His revelations of the salvation decreed for His people. The Old Testament contained, certainly by the time of Isaiah, many glorious truths about Christ's person and work; yet, notwithstanding these truths, "the New covenant doth in many things out-strip the old, which do nothing to derogate from their substantial and real unity and agreement."98

The New Covenant

As the final dispensation of the covenant of grace, the new covenant in Christ's blood signifies completion of the fullness of special revelation. As Sebastian Rehnman has noted, this dispensation of God's grace "is the crown and glory of the divine disclosure of grace in history and the treasure of Owen's heart."[99] Rehnman further notes that Owen "stresses how the progressive movement of revelation culminated in Jesus Christ because the whole mind and will of God was revealed in him."[100] Owen addresses the glories of new covenant revelation in his exposition of Hebrews 8:6 and subsequent verses: "That which before lay hid in promises, in many things obscure, the principal mysteries of it being a secret hid in God himself, was now brought to light; and that covenant which had invisibly, in the way of a promise, put forth its efficacy under types and shadows, was now solemnly sealed, ratified, and confirmed, in the death and resurrection of Christ."[101] Similarly, Ball shows that with Christ's death and resurrection the promise of forgiveness is "clearly, plainly and openly propounded."[102]

An important question arises as to whether the covenant of grace is coextensive with the new covenant. Owen argues that the covenant of grace is coextensive with the new covenant in substance. When considered absolutely, both contained the promise of grace through Jesus Christ, and so both are the means whereby salvation is communicated to the church after the inroad of sin. They are, then, one and the same thing.[103] The covenant of grace is not, however, a biblical term, whereas "new covenant" is. The new covenant was confirmed and established only in the death of Christ and so did not have "the formal nature of a covenant or a testament, as our apostle proves, Heb. ix 15–23."[104] The law at Sinai could be described as the old covenant only because the blood of sacrifices had confirmed it. Thus Owen notes that although the covenant of grace typically refers to salvation in Christ, "yet by 'the new covenant,' we intend its actual establishment in the death of Christ."[105] Ball makes the same point. The covenant of grace in the form of the new covenant cannot be annulled because "it was established after a new manner, by the blood of the Mediator."[106] This dispensation of God's grace may be understood both as a covenant and a testament: "A Covenant in respect of the manner of agreement; a Testament in respect of the manner of confirming. A Covenant in respect of God; a Testament in respect of Christ."[107] Like Ball, Roberts argues that the new covenant "hath in it the Nature of a Testament, as well as of a Covenant: and is A Testamental-Covenant."[108] And, like Owen, Roberts shows that the new covenant or testament is contrasted with the old testament; that is, the old covenant, which was dedicated with blood (Heb. 9:18), has been replaced

by the new covenant, which was dedicated with the blood of Christ.109 The covenant-testamental character of the new covenant shows, according to Peter Bulkeley, its "firmness, and inviolable and unchangeable nature of it, being confirmed by the death of Christ the Testator…is therefore now unchangeable, being ratified by his death…and this is the true reason why the Apostle calls it a Testament."110 Because of its immutability, under the new covenant, believers have a more sure ground of confidence in God's promises, in light of the irrevocable nature of Christ's death and resurrection coupled with its intent as a testament.

The blessings emanating from the formal establishment of the new covenant through the death of Christ are numerous. All saving blessings, including the knowledge of God, are enlarged in scope and heightened in clarity. The Puritans all recognized this truth, but some more strongly emphasized the greater clarity of the new covenant over the old covenant. The evidence seems to suggest that those who distinguished the Mosaic covenant from the covenant of grace, like Owen and Goodwin, had a stronger law-gospel (i.e., Old Testament versus New Testament) contrast than those, like Ball and Roberts, who viewed Sinai as an administration of the covenant of grace. Goodwin's work, *The Glory of the Gospel*, based upon his exposition of Colossians 1, highlights the many ways in which the new covenant excels the old. Such are the revelations of the gospel in the new covenant that God "put the angels to school again."111 In the New Testament the divine works of redemption are more clearly and largely displayed, such as a "greater and clearer" manifestation of God's justice in giving up His Son to death on behalf of sinners.112 His greatest glories, that is, His infinite mercy and free grace, were more profoundly displayed with the dawn of the gospel. In the person of Christ a "greater and far more transcendent righteousness" appeared than either in the law of God or in the angels themselves.113 Besides God's attributes, the mystery of the Trinity comes into full view: "there being scarce footsteps of [the three persons] distinctly to be seen in the works of creation or in the law. But now, when the gospel comes to be revealed, and the work of salvation in it, then they were discovered to be… witnesses to our salvation."114 Consequently, Bulkeley notes the trinitarian nature of salvation in the New Testament: election belongs to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Holy Spirit. "All the whole Trinity working together in the work of our salvation; yet every one in his own order."115 Of the three persons revealed in the gospel age, God has chosen to make Himself known principally in the person of Jesus Christ, for, in Him are "all the riches of God and the knowledge of him are laid up, as the treasury and subject of them; and so discovered and communicated to us objectively in the

knowledge of him."[116] Furthermore, since in the person of Christ the glory of God shines, Christ is the "great and eminent subject of the gospel."[117] God, who is invisible, becomes visible in the person of the God-man (Col. 1:15), a blessing that saints in the Old Testament did not enjoy. The knowledge of God increases because His attributes (e.g., power, wisdom, truth, and justice) are more abundantly held forth "by what we know of Christ as a redeemer in the gospel." Christ possesses a threefold glory: (1) as He is God, without respect to His human nature; (2) the glory of His person as the God-man; and (3) the image of God's attributes that shine forth not only in His person, but also in His works of redemption.

In the application of the saving benefits of the new covenant, which include justification, sanctification, and adoption, the Puritans affirmed that the covenant of grace always carries the same condition, namely, faith and the obedience of faith. In the first place, however, the promises of the new covenant are absolute and free. In connection with Goodwin's emphases on how God glorifies His attributes in the new covenant, Patrick Gillespie argues that the freeness of the covenant of grace has in view God's highest end: "to glorify his Grace and free Mercy."[118] The freeness of the covenant of grace is revealed not only the end, but also in its ground, namely God's mercy and goodness "without any moving cause in the creature to extract it" (Rom. 9:16).[119] Gillespie does not deny conditions on the part of the "federates," or parties to the covenant, but he refers to faith and holiness as "consequent conditions, which denote no causality, nor proper efficiency in the condition."[120] Bulkeley recognizes the gracious nature of the covenant of grace, which has in view not man's merit but the free grace of God. Nevertheless, he affirms that the covenant of grace was first made with Christ on behalf of sinners, and for that reason is conditional. "Christ receives the promises of grace for us, but he receives not the least of them but upon condition that he must lay down his life for them."[121] Following from the condition placed upon Christ, the covenant of grace has conditions for those who receive the benefits of Christ's mediatorial work. The promises of salvation are made only "upon condition of faith and obedience…and thus whether we look to the first Grace as the beginning of the Covenant, or to the last Grace as the end of it, the one is conditional in respect of Christ, the other in respect of ourselves; there is a condition in both."[122] As noted above, in his *Greater Catechism* John Owen makes essentially the same point about the conditions of the new covenant in the answer to question 13, "What is the New covenant?" Owen explicitly affirms that God requires faith from His people in the promises and new obedience.[123]

Francis Roberts provides a useful description that reflects the position of

Bulkeley, Owen, and their contemporaries. Roberts enumerates several requirements in the new covenant: (1) knowledge, (2) faith, (3) repentance, (4) conformity to God's law, and (5) self-denial toward God.[124] In the new covenant, God has given His people a greater measure of the Holy Spirit in order to allow them to know God more fully than His people could under the old covenant. In terms of the requirement of faith, Roberts refers to God's promises and the faith of His people as "relatives" and says God's promises have in mind the faith of His elect. "Otherwise," asks Roberts, "how shall his Promises, or promised Mercies be appropriated to us as our own, without Faith?"[125] One of the promises of the new covenant is remission of sins. Therefore, repentance necessarily becomes a constitutive part of Christian living. Christ's message to His disciples after His resurrection included the command to preach repentance and remission of sins (Luke 24:47), as Peter attests in his preaching in Acts 2:38. Following from faith and repentance, Roberts notes a further blessing of the new covenant: heart-conformity to God's moral law (Heb. 8:10). In fact, just as Bulkeley and Owen speak of new obedience as a condition of the new covenant, Roberts notes that the power by which this obedience is performed comes from the Spirit who enables God's people to receive and respond to the promise that God will write His law afresh upon their hearts. Finally, God's people are characterized by a life of self-denial; indeed, they must "yield up themselves…in an entire Self-denying, Self-Resignation unto God."[126] Self-denial, according to Roberts, is "one of the First and fundamental lessons in Christ's School" (Luke 9:23).[127] In conclusion, Roberts highlights how the grace of God and the conditions of the new covenant are not opposed, but complementary:

> For he first expressly promiseth Ability; and then implicitly requires answerable Duty. First he enables us to do, what he will require: Then requires us to do, what we are able. We must know him, but first he will teach us: we must believe and Repent, and be conformed to his Laws in heart and life, but first he will make us his people. Well said Augustine, "Lord give me to do what thou commandest, and then command what thou pleasest."[128]

Bulkeley uses similar language when he contends that the "promise is the ground of the duty, and the duty is the way to the promise."[129] These views reflect the manner in which various Reformed theologians maintained the delicate balance between God's grace and human responsibility. The covenant viewed from one side was unconditional, requiring nothing from sinful man who is unable to perform his duties before God. However, from another side, based upon the work of Christ on behalf of sinners, the blessings of the covenant are received

through faith, and once in covenant with God His people are required to obey His law and advance in holiness and conformity to the image of Christ.[130]

Conclusion

A basic grasp of the covenant of grace helps students of Reformed theologians in the Puritan tradition to understand their basic approach to interpreting the Bible. From the very entrance of sin into the world, God revealed His plan for redemption (Gen. 3:15). As that revelation is unfolded and enlarged through successive covenants, the plan of God for the salvation of His people becomes ever more clear. In other words, from Genesis to Revelation salvation remains firmly centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit applying the benefits of Christ's redemptive work to those whom the Father has chosen for everlasting life and given to His Son. The covenant of grace is two-sided (dipleuric) in its administration. Salvation is trinitarian, involving the three persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit brings sinners into union with Jesus Christ by producing faith in the elect.

Upon believing and receiving forgiveness of sins, believers are instated into covenant with God and required to live a life of holiness in obedience to His commandments. This was as true for Abraham, Moses, or David as for Peter and the apostles, and the same is true for God's people today. For that reason, the covenant of grace unites the people of God into one family, both Jews and Gentiles, all who are partakers of a gracious salvation that was planned in eternity and realized in time. Saints in the Old Testament looked forward to Christ's coming to accomplish His redemptive work, whereas saints in the New Testament and beyond remember and rejoice in that work as wholly accomplished in His death and resurrection. For that reason, Christ assumes the central place in redemptive history, which is nothing but the unfolding of the mystery of the covenant of grace.

1. The Savoy Declaration (1658) reads differently at this point: "Although this covenant hath been differently and variously administered in respect of ordinances and institutions in the time of the law, and since the coming of Christ in the flesh; yet for the substance and efficacy of it, to all its spiritual and saving ends, it is one and the same; upon the account of which various dispensations, it is called the Old and New Testament" (7.5).

2. Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (London, 1681), 1:29.

3. John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 49. Cf. Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* (London, 1674), 57ff.

4. Therefore, Owen argues: "*Ita est, non suspenditur Dei foedus a voluntate nostra, ullisve conditionibus a nobis praestandis; ab auctoritate, gratia, et fidelitate ipsius Dei virtutem omnem habet et effectum. Absoluta enim est promissio gratiae, neque ulla est foederis conditio, quae in ipsa promissione non continetur.*" John Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 17:158 (3.1.6).

5. Thus, John Ball argues: "The Covenant of Grace is that free and gracious Covenant which God of his mere mercy in Jesus Christ made with man a miserable and wretched sinner, promising unto him pardon of sin and eternal happiness, if he will return from his iniquity, embrace mercy reached forth, by faith unfeigned, and walk before God in sincere, faithful and willing obedience, as becomes such a creature lifted

up into such enjoyment, and partaker of such precious promises." *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* (London, 1645), 14–15.

6. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* (Edinburgh, 1655), 225.

7. "*Naturam ideo humanam tantâ quamvis per peccatum clade confectam, et pene suae solùm residuam, theologiae hujus reliquiis adhuc instructam esse dicimus*." Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:45 (1.5.4).

8. See John Owen, *An Exposition upon Psalm CXXX*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 6:474–75.

9. John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:276. See also Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 15.

10. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:276.

11. John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 19:78.

12. Gillespie provides a lengthy discussion of the similarities and differences between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace in *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 1:220–90. On the greater stability of the covenant of grace over the covenant of works, see pp. 233–44.

13. Francis Roberts, *The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man* (London, 1657), 106. Because Roberts insists so strongly on the gracious nature of the covenant of works, he prefers instead to divide up redemptive history into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith.

14. For a historical and systematic study on Genesis 3:15, see John Ronning, "The Curse on the Serpent (Genesis 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997).

15. "*Omnis autem veri nominis theologia postlapsaria ejusdem generis est. Variis revelationum gradibus objectivè tantùm aliquoties innovata*." Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:134 (2.1.2).

16. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:192. Elsewhere, Owen similarly remarks: "*Foedus ideo hoc novum, gratiae erat, quia in alio fundatum, qui conditiones ejus omnes praestare tenebatur. Istius autem foederis promissis et praeceptis constitit nova haec theologia*." Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:135.

17. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:309–15.

18. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 192.

19. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 37.

20. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:310.

21. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 38.

22. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 194.

23. John Calvin, *Commentaries* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1:170.

24. Calvin, *Commentaries*, 1:171. Goodwin references Calvin's interpretation: "Calvin understands by the *seed of the woman*, the whole spiritual Race of Believers *collectively* in all ages, as more directly intended, and Christ only as the eminentest of that Seed, and by whom all the rest obtain the victory, and so principally intended." *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:310.

25. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 310.

26. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:310.

27. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 196.

28. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 197. Ball argues the same position: "Christ peculiarly was the seed of the woman, but the faithful are comprehended under that title also; the seed of the woman is to be taken collectively, but so as it doth comprehend them only, who are not the Serpent's seed, but opposite to them. Christ properly is the seed by which the Promise is to be fulfilled: the faithful are the seed to whom the promise is made." *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 39.

29. "*Hisce autem capitibus omnem de mediatoris persona et officio, de justificatione gratuita, de resipiscientia, de morte aeterna, vita, et praemio, de resurrectione carnis, doctrinam (utut obscurius) contineri, facile esset probare.*" Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:136 (2.1.4).

30. William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London, 1642), 170–74 (1:38); Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae* (London, 1760), 100 (1.31.10–11). Ames does add a fourth period from Christ to the end of the world (*Marrow*, 175–76).

31. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 9:42.

32. "*Fides omnis salutaris respicit promissum Semen. Hanc vero fidem habuit antediluvianus; tunc enim testimonio justititae per Deum ornatus est…At vero in gratiam ipsius Noachi, et ecclesiae in familia ejus instaurandae, variis luminis gradibus statim a diluvio aucta est ea theologia, quos strictim percurram*." Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:157 (3.1.4).

33. *Goodwin, Of Election*, in *Works*, 9:45.

34. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 263.

35. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 257.

36. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 263–64. Roberts adds that the righteousness by faith "is that Perfect Righteousness of Jesus Christ, which God of his mere Grace imputeth to them that by Faith accept and receive the same, having renounced all self-righteousness, and all other ways of sinners justification whatsoever." *God's Covenants*, 264.

37. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 265.

38. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 259.

39. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 259.

40. See Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:160 (3.1.9).

41. "*Tanta autem voluntatis divinae et mysteriorum gratiae expositio, tamque illustris, ea explanatione theologiae postlapsariae edita est, ut proventum uberiorem unius revelationis* οκονομία, *donec ille veniret, cui omnia errant reposita, vix obtinuerit*." Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:265 (4.1.12).

42. "*Praemissa Seminis promissione, omnis gratiae fundamento, Deus gratiose promittit se ei in semine illo, Deum parcentem, sanctificantem, justificantem, servantem gratuitò et immutabiliter fore, fidem atque novam obedientiam abs eo vicissim postulans.*" *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:266 (4.1.13).

43. John Owen, *Greater Catechism*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:482.

44. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 48.

45. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 51.

46. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 52.

47. Owen similarly argues that the Abrahamic covenant bestows privileges upon the children of believers so that in the covenant of grace children would always belong to the visible church. "*Et quintò, communicatio privilegiorum foederis et ecclesiae, cum semine infantili (quod postquam modo peculiari Deo curae esse coeperat, ecclesia nunquam absolute defecit) conceditur, Gen. xvii.7.*" *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17:266 (4.1.13). And Goodwin argued that Abraham's Gentile servants and their children would have been circumcised "as fore-running pledges and types that both we and our children, who are Gentiles and strangers, [would be] engrafted into this covenant." *Of Election*, in *Works*, 9:483.

48. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 54–55.

49. Francis Roberts speaks of a number of conditions, but two principally stand out: "Faith and Worthy walking. Both which are the Conditions of the Covenant of Faith." *God's Covenants*, 297.

50. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 59.

51. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 63.

52. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 73.

53. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 73. Samuel Rutherford argues that either weak or strong faith justifies, but, whether weak or strong, the faith that justifies is a "lively faith." *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 155.

54. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 21. Similarly, on p. 73 he argues that works justify "as the

passive qualification of the subject capable of Justification, or as the qualification of that faith that justifieth; or as they testify or give proof that faith is lively: but faith alone justifieth, as it embraceth the promise of free forgiveness in Jesus Christ."

55. Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *Works*, 9:428.

56. Goodwin, *Of Election*, in *Works*, 9:429.

57. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 297.

58. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 298.

59. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis: or, A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians* (London, 1646), 251.

60. See also the conclusions of Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 113–17.

61. Concerning the position that separates the old covenant from the covenant of grace, see chapters 17 and 18 of this book.

62. See Sebastian Rehnman, "Is the Narrative of Redemptive History Trichotomous or Dichotomous? A Problem for Federal Theology," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 80 (2000): 302.

63. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 93.

64. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 779.

65. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 93–96; Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 734–89.

66. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 96.

67. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 104–5.

68. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 104–5.

69. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 108–9.

70. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 135.

71. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 119.

72. See Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:355–56.

73. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 111.

74. Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant…* (London, 1651), 196; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 12.8.1–25.

75. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 223.

76. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:244.

77. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 144.

78. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 144. Note the similarity of language that the Shorter Catechism (Q. 26) uses to describe Christ's execution of His kingly office.

79. William Gouge, *A Learned and Very Useful Commentary upon the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews…* (London, 1655), 36.

80. Gouge, *A Commentary upon Hebrews*, 36.

81. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1007.

82. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 146–49. Francis Roberts makes similar points. *God's Covenants*, 1015–31.

83. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 149–50.

84. Adam and Eve were obligated to obey God's commands; God's redeemed people are under obligation to obey God's commandments; and Christ, in the eternal covenant of redemption, agreed to fully obey the law in order to save those who had broken God's law (Gal. 4:4). For the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox, the structural parallel to the covenant of works is the covenant of redemption. In both of these covenants, perfect obedience was required. In the covenant of grace, however, evangelical obedience is required of those who have been justified.

85. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1052.

86. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1054.

87. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 153.
88. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 154.
89. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 154.
90. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1086–88.
91. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 161.
92. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1088.
93. James Durham, *Christ Crucified: or, the Marrow of the Gospel…on the Whole 53 Chapters of Isaiah…* (Edinburgh, 1683), 1.
94. Durham, *Christ Crucified*, 1.
95. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1110.
96. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1121.
97. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 164.
98. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 164.
99. Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 174.
100. Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 174.
101. John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:64.
102. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 197.
103. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:74.
104. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:74.
105. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:75.
106. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 196.
107. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 196.
108. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1260.
109. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1262.
110. Bulkeley, *The Gospel Covenant*, 317. Patrick Gillespie provides a rather lengthy discussion of the nature of Christ's testament; see *Ark of the Testament*, 1:315–63.
111. Thomas Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4:262.
112. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:262.
113. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:262.
114. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:262–63.
115. Bulkeley, *Gospel Covenant*, 255. See also Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:263.
116. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:263.
117. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:263.
118. Gillespie, *Ark of the Testament*, 2:3.
119. Gillespie, *Ark of the Testament*, 2:3.
120. Gillespie, *Ark of the Testament*, 1:261.
121. Bulkeley, *Gospel Covenant*, 318.
122. Bulkeley, *Gospel Covenant*, 319. John von Rohr provides a fuller discussion of the conditions of faith and obedience in his work on Puritan covenant theology, *Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 63–80. See also chapter 19, "The Puritans on Covenant Conditions," on the conditionality of the covenant.
123. Owen, *Greater Catechism*, in *Works*, 1:482.
124. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1555.
125. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1557.
126. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1561.
127. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1561.
128. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1562.
129. Bulkeley, *Gospel Covenant*, 157.
130. See Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 19–21.

Chapter 17

The Puritans on the Old and New Covenants: A Gracious Moses?

> *This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel…. There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.*
>
> —WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, 7.5, 6

By the seventeenth century, the concept of the covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*) had become a theological commonplace in Reformed orthodoxy.[1] Beginning with the *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:15, the history of redemption from Genesis to Revelation was understood and interpreted covenantally. The covenant of grace expresses the idea that in both the Old and New Testaments God provides salvation for His people apart from any human initiative, in and through the person and work of the Mediator of the covenant, Jesus Christ. For this reason, the covenant of grace may be described as unilateral or "one-sided" (*foedus monopleuron*); humanity's fallen, disabled condition means the sinner can receive the benefits of the covenant only by God's grace.

That reality did not, however, rule out conditions in the covenant, that is, requirements to be met by the beneficiaries of the covenant. John Owen (1616–1683) argued that "if by conditions we intend the duties of obedience which God requireth of us in and by virtue of that covenant; but this I say, the principal promises thereof are not in the first place remunerative of our obedience in the covenant, but efficaciously assumptive of us in the covenant, and establishing or confirming the covenant."[2] In other words, salvation is by grace through faith, no matter what may subsequently be required of believers as their part in the covenant.

Thus the covenant of grace may be understood as both monopleuric or unilateral (*foedus monoplueron*) and dipleuric or bilateral (*foedus dipleuron*). John Calvin captures this idea well by noting that God requires "uprightness and sanctity of life" from those in the covenant; "nonetheless the covenant is at the

outset drawn up as a free agreement, and perpetually remains such."[3] Leonard Trinterud contends that a tension existed between the covenant theology of the Rhineland theologians (e.g., Heinrich Bullinger [1504–1575]) and the covenant theology of Calvin, with the latter emphasizing the unilateral nature of the covenant and the former emphasizing its bilateral nature. He argues further that the Puritans were opposed to Calvin; however, that contention cannot be sustained.[4] As Richard Muller has argued, "The language of *monopleuron* and *dipleuron* describes the same covenant from different points of view."[5] By the seventeenth century, the covenant of grace provided a tool for understanding not only what God had done for His people, but also what God required of His people who were in covenant with Him. Hence, treatises on the covenant of grace were essentially systematic theologies, or "bodies of divinity."[6]

Together with the covenant of grace, Reformed orthodox theologians had also developed the concept of the covenant of works (*foedus operum*), held to be the first covenant God made with Adam in the garden of Eden. Adam sinned and thereby failed to perform his part of the covenant; worse, by his fall, he robbed himself and his posterity of the ability needed to fulfill the condition of perfect and personal obedience. Consequently, the Westminster Confession contrasts the covenant of works with the covenant of grace: "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe" (7.3). In so contrasting these covenants, the Confession upholds what may be termed a dichotomous understanding of redemptive history. Moreover, notwithstanding the distinction they made between "the time of the law" (the Old Testament [7.5]) and "the time of the gospel" (the New Testament [7.6]), the Westminster divines insisted that "there are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations" (7.6). So far, the "dichotomist" understanding of redemptive history appears to be a straightforward matter. However, the words in Westminster Confession of Faith 7.5, "this covenant was differently administered in the time of the law," provide a gateway into a debate among Reformed theologians that caused Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) to remark that he did "not find in any point of Divinity, learned men so confused and perplexed" as on the relationship between the Sinaitic or Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace.[7]

Burgess was not alone in his assessment of how much confusion about this relationship existed among the Reformed orthodox. What did the author of

Hebrews intend by the old and new covenants in Hebrews 8:6? Highly regarded covenant theologian John Ball (1585–1640) noted that most divines understood the old and new covenants (Heb. 8; 2 Cor. 3) to be "one in substance and kind, to differ only in degrees: but in setting down the differences they speak so obscurely, that it is hard to find how they consent with themselves."[8]

John Owen agreed with Ball that most Reformed divines understood the differences between the old and new covenants to be varying administrations of the one covenant of grace, contrasting this "Reformed" position with the "Lutheran" view that argues "not a twofold administration of the same covenant, but that two covenants substantially distinct"[9] are intended in this discourse of the apostle. Though still insisting on the unity of the covenant of grace, Owen agrees with the Lutherans that the old and new covenants are two distinct covenants, "rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant."[10] In other words, the old covenant was "not a mere administration of the covenant of grace."[11] The complexity of the debate is compounded by the fact that Owen's position seems to be one of many among the British Reformed orthodox during the seventeenth century. These positions will be discussed below, but there is no question that Reformed theologians did not all agree on the function of the old covenant in the history of redemption, even though there was basic agreement among them about the unity of the covenant of grace and the distinction between the covenants of works and grace.

Taxonomies

Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) provides a brief, if somewhat unreliable, taxonomy of the views among the Westminster divines on the number of covenants made between God and man. He speaks of "several opinions":

> Some hold that there be four Covenants, two of Works, and two of Grace; the two first, one with Adam before the fall, and the other with Israel at their return out of Egypt, and the Covenants of Grace the first to Abraham, and the other at the Incarnation of Jesus Christ; this M. Sympson affirmed before a Committee of the Assembly of Divines in my hearing. 2. Others hold that there is but three Covenants; the first with Adam, the second with Israel at their going out of Egypt, and a third with Jesus Christ, the two first of Workes, and the last of Grace, and this M. Burroughes delivered in his Exposition Sermon in Cornhill in my hearing. 3. Others hold that there is but two Covenants, the one of Works, and the other of Grace; yet the first they hold was made with Israel at Mount Sinai, and no Covenant of works before that, and now it is vanished away, and the other a Covenant of grace yet not made till the death of Christ the testator, and this is affirmed by James Pope, in a Book entitled, *The Unveiling of Antichrist*. 4. Others hold that the Law at Mount Sinai was a Covenant of grace, implying that there is more than one Covenant of grace, and this is affirmed by Mr. Anthony Burgesse in his *Vindication of the Morall Law* the 24. Lecture, text the 4. of Deuteronomy. 5. Others with myself hold that there is but two Covenants, the one a Covenant of Workes…then there was a Covenant of grace which God the Father made with Jesus Christ from all eternity to save some of the posterity of Adam.[12]

Regarding his own position on Sinai, Calamy maintains that the law given at Sinai was neither a covenant of works nor a covenant of grace; instead, the law was given to those already in covenant with God as a rule of obedience.[13] However, in his brief taxonomy Calamy makes generalizations that need clarification. Regarding Sydrach Simpson (c. 1600–1655) and Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646), Calamy relies on what he personally heard; regarding others, such as James Pope and Anthony Burgess, he relies on their written works. There is some truth in Calamy's description of Burroughs's position, but in the latter's work, *Gospel Conversation* (1653), the relation of Sinai to Eden does not constitute a strict parallel. His aim is to make a redemptive-historical contrast that shows the superiority of living in the time of the gospel instead of the time of the law. He does not deny that the Israelites in the time of Moses had the gospel, but says "the chief Ministration of God towards them was then in a

legal way."[14] Burroughs adopts a position similar to that of John Cameron (c. 1579–1625), who viewed Sinai as a subservient covenant (*foedus subserviens*) that did not properly belong to either the covenant of works or the covenant of grace.[15] Also potentially misleading is Calamy's description of Anthony Burgess's position, which Calamy says identifies the covenant of grace as an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son concerning the elect only. Many Reformed theologians identified this covenant as the eternal covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), in distinction from the covenant of grace made in time. For Burgess, this eternal covenant provides the foundation for the covenant of grace in time, but it is not strictly part of the covenant of grace.[16] Thus, Burgess sees no inconsistency in speaking of one covenant of grace, which included the Mosaic covenant.[17] The above shows that even a member of the Westminster Assembly could hear and read his contemporaries on the topic of the covenants, with particular reference to Sinai, and not necessarily provide an altogether accurate or clear taxonomy of their respective positions.

Recent scholarship has fallen into the same errors.[18] Sebastian Rehnman asks an important question about Reformed covenant theology with particular reference to John Owen: Is redemptive history trichotomous or dichotomous?[19] Rehnman makes the argument that "although criticized by the core group of Reformed orthodoxy and always a minority view, Owen follows the trichotomist federal theology, possibly in particular the Cameronian version, in his otherwise standard Reformed theology."[20] Rehnman does, however, qualify his statement by suggesting that the difference between Owen and the majority of his Reformed contemporaries "is more formal than real."[21] We will challenge this reading of Owen in the next chapter.[22] The trichotomist label is generally helpful, but it fails to do justice to the nuances peculiar to Owen's covenant theology. While others, such as John Cameron, might accurately be described as reading the history of redemption in a trichotomous way, that label places Owen in a category he would likely have repudiated. The following discussion will set forth a variety of positions in order to show the diversity that existed within the Reformed theological tradition on how best to interpret the function of the Mosaic covenant in the history of redemption.

The Majority Position: Dichotomy The vast majority of Reformed theologians from the Reformation onward understood the Mosaic covenant to be an administration of the covenant of grace. As noted above, the pre-fall covenant of works, not the Sinaitic or old covenant, provides the basis for the dichotomist position set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.6). Those who held to the dichotomous view of redemptive history viewed the law given at Mount

Sinai to be in substance (i.e., broadly considered) part of—not distinct from—the covenant of grace in a form that was appropriate for the church at that time. With its heightened legal demands, the old covenant functioned in such a way as to drive the Israelites to seek the mercy of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This function of the law is usually described as the convicting or tutorial use (*usus elenchticus sive paedagogicus*). However, as John Ball argued, the law also proved to be a direction of "how to walk before God in holiness and righteousness."[23] This use of the law is the instructive or preceptive use (*usus didacticus sive normativus*), or third use of the law (*tertius usus legis*), and, as we have seen in the last chapter, most of the Reformed laid great stress on this positive use. This view helps in part to explain the divide between the Reformed and the Lutherans on the role of the old covenant in redemptive history.[24] As Richard Muller notes, "This difference between the Lutherans and the Reformed arises out of the dialectical relationship of law and gospel in Lutheranism as opposed to the simple distinction of law and gospel within the one *foedus gratiae* [covenant of grace] held among the Reformed."[25] In this connection, Ball notes that the "law was never given or made positive without the Gospel, neither was the Gospel [given] without the Law."[26] The positive function of the law as part of the old covenant finds its basis in God's promises and acts of grace, which were not limited to the new covenant era.

Anthony Burgess, another proponent of the dichotomist position, recognizes that among the "Learned and Orthodox" there are roughly four positions concerning the old covenant: "Some…make it a Covenant of works, others a mixed Covenant, some a subservient Covenant; but I am persuaded to go with those who hold it to be a Covenant of Grace."[27] He maintains that the arguments for his position outweigh the objections brought against it. By proving that the old covenant belongs to the covenant of grace, Burgess argues that the "dignity and excellency of the Law will appear the more."[28] His view of the dignity and excellence of the moral law fits well within the dichotomous structure of redemptive history and best reflects the consensus position of the Westminster Standards. However, Burgess refers to several different explanations of how Sinai may be said to be an administration of the covenant of grace.[29] The view he adopts is found in the writings of John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) and Francis Turretin (1623–1687), who distinguish between the law "taken largely" and the law "taken strictly."[30]

Burgess accordingly notes that, taken largely, the law may be understood "as that whole doctrine delivered on Mount Sinai, with the preface and promises adjoined, and all things that may be reduced to it" or taken more strictly "as an

abstracted rule of righteousness, holding forth life upon no terms, but perfect obedience."[31] Francis Roberts (1609–1675) adds another term to this distinction to clarify his own contention that Sinai was an administration of the "covenant of faith" (i.e., the covenant of grace). He affirms that the law given by Moses may be understood (1) more largely, (2) more strictly, and (3) most strictly. "More largely" includes all of the commandments, moral, ceremonial, and judicial. "More strictly" refers to the Ten Commandments, including the preface "and the promises interwoven therein."[32] Taken "most strictly," Roberts agrees with Ball that the law is a rule of righteousness abstracted from Moses, which holds "forth life merely upon terms of perfect and perpetual personal Obedience…. And in this sense, the Apostle takes the word [law] in his dispute about Justification by Faith."[33]

These distinctions allowed Reformed theologians both to maintain the unity of the covenant of grace and explain certain statements in Paul's writings that, on the surface, seem to deny the unity of the covenant of grace (e.g., 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 4). Besides the aforementioned, a number of arguments were put forward to prove the old covenant was not distinct from the covenant of grace. A few of them are worth considering in some detail.[34] Although not everyone shared the same view of Sinai's relation to the covenant of grace, the Reformed orthodox reached general agreement on certain points. John Owen highlights some of these points of agreement. First, "that from the giving of the first promise none was ever justified or saved but by the new covenant, and Jesus Christ." Second, that the Old Testament contains the doctrine of salvation in and through the person and work of Christ. Third, that the old covenant, "separated from its figurative relation unto the covenant of grace," could not save. And, fourth, that all of the institutions in the old covenant typified Christ.[35] Thus, more specific points of contention must now be addressed since the arguments made by Owen were not in dispute, though the "dichotomists" no doubt felt that Owen's arguments favored their own position.

In giving the old covenant to the nation of Israel, God declares Himself to be their God and Father. The law's imperatives are based upon the indicative in the preface, namely, that God has redeemed Israel out of bondage in the land of Egypt (Ex. 20:2; Rom. 9:4). Ball argues that God's redemption of Israel means that God is their "King, Judge, Saviour, and Redeemer: Spiritual Redeemer from the bondage of sin and Satan, whereof that temporal deliverance was a type."[36] Burgess asks how God can be the God of sinners unless the old covenant were a covenant of grace. He adds that the language of Exodus 19:5–6, which describes Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, is applied by Peter to the new covenant church. He asks, "If therefore the Law had been a Covenant of works,

how could such an agreement come between them?”[37] Roberts asks a similar question: “How can the Lord be A Covenant-God to Sinners, or Sinners be a Covenant-people to God, but only in Christ by faith?”[38] Moreover, he also focuses on the preface to the Decalogue where the name Jehovah is understood not only doctrinally—signifying His covenant faithfulness—but also experimentally, as the faithful God who has fulfilled His covenant promise to Abraham’s seed. The first commandment likewise proves that Sinai must belong to the covenant of grace. Roberts insists that true worship since the fall can be offered to God only through faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 11:6).[39] Burgess likewise strengthens his argument by focusing on the second commandment, which speaks of God showing mercy, a term that denotes God’s grace in the context of redemption. Peter Bulkeley, another proponent of the dichotomous position, highlights the central place of mercy in the old covenant (Deut. 7:9–12; 2 Chron. 6:14; 2 Kings 13:23; Neh. 1:5), which shows “that both beginning and accomplishment of that covenant was out of mercy and free goodness.”[40]

Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) provides a slightly more provocative argument about the positive aspects of God’s moral law, arguing that even in the covenant of works the “Gospel may be proven out of the Law” since the first commandment, which had earlier been written on Adam’s heart, speaks of God’s mercy, wisdom, and ability to save.[41] Thus, between Adam’s sin and the promise of Genesis 3:15, he had hope of the gospel based on God’s character as revealed in the moral law. Even God’s threats to believers, “though materially legal,” are “formally and in the Lord’s intention directed to them upon an Evangelic intention.”[42] In other words, God’s threats are intended to move sinners to turn back to Him and sue for mercy. Not surprisingly, then, Rutherford held to the view that Sinai belonged to the covenant of grace.[43]

The ceremonial law also provides evidence that the old covenant was part of the covenant of grace. Burgess makes the point that all divines reduced the ceremonial law to the moral law, “so that Sacrifices were commanded by virtue of the second Commandment.”[44] The sacrifices, according to Burgess, did not oppose Christ or the grace of God but included them. Moreover, the ceremonial law foreshadowed Christ’s person and work; “it typically pointed further…to Christ.”[45] The various typologies of the old covenant cause Ball to suggest that the first covenant, which is gracious, “must bring forth a second, in which is fulfilled that which in the first is prefigured.”[46]

Appealing to both the moral and the ceremonial law to prove that Sinai was part of the covenant of grace was a powerful argument.[47] Inevitably, however, questions concerning the relationship of law and gospel arose. Immediately after his discussion of the old covenant, Anthony Burgess turns his attention to the

law-gospel distinction, which in many ways lies at the heart of the debate over Sinai's role in the history of redemption. Burgess notes how the Arminians, Socinians, Roman Catholics, Antinomians, Lutherans, and Reformed all understood this distinction differently. The Reformed typically understood the distinction both broadly and strictly. In the broader sense, the distinction between the law (i.e., old covenant) and the gospel (i.e., new covenant) "is not essential, or substantial, but accidental…. [It] is not a division of the Genus into its opposite Species; but of the subject, according to its several accidental administrations."[48] On this point, notes Burgess, the "Lutheran Divines…do expressly oppose the Calvinists herein, maintaining the Covenant given by Moses, to be a Covenant of works, and so directly contrary to the Covenant of grace."[49] Burgess defends his position that the old covenant was a covenant of grace by understanding the law-gospel distinction as largely considered, which "doth easily take away that difference which seemeth to be among the Learned in this point."[50]

The old covenant, with its emphasis on the law, was not devoid of grace. The new covenant, with its emphasis on grace, is not devoid of the law. Bulkeley highlights how this relation between law and grace functions in the lives of God's people, noting that the law and the gospel are opposed concerning the doctrine of justification, but agree regarding the doctrine of sanctification; the law "continues as a guide and rule, even unto those that do believe."[51] On this view, regarding justification, the law is an enemy, but for those who are justified (through faith in Christ) the law becomes a friend. Consequently, based on the fact that the Israelites were already God's people when the old covenant was formally initiated at Sinai, the law did not oppose grace in terms of its normative function in the believer's life. In fact, as the above has shown, God's mercy, love, and forgiveness were displayed in both the moral and the ceremonial law. For these reasons, and many more, Ernest Kevan noted that "the Puritans clearly saw how inconceivable it was to suppose that the Mosaic Covenant could be a cancellation of grace or a reversion to a basis of salvation by works. They contended, therefore, that the Mosaic Covenant could not possibly be inconsistent with grace."[52] This was indeed the case. However, not all of the Puritans understood the old covenant and its place in the history of redemption in quite the same way as those cited above.

A Subservient Covenant: Trichotomy As has been noted, Sebastian Rehnman suggests that the debate over whether there are two covenants (the majority view) or three (Owen's supposed position) "is more formal than real."[53] Even if Owen does not belong in the trichotomist camp, the question of what the actual

differences between the positions were, besides semantics, need to be answered. To that end, Alister McGrath posits that the idea of a subservient covenant (*foedus subserviens*)—that is, that the old covenant serves the covenant of grace—employed by John Cameron "appears to have represented an attempt to incorporate the Lutheran distinction between law and gospel within the context of a federal scheme."[54] McGrath adds that Cameron "seems to have regarded the harmonization of law and gospel implicit in the Orthodox Reformed twofold covenant scheme as compromising the doctrine of justification *sola fide*."[55] McGrath does not provide any primary evidence, but his conclusions warrant further exploration. Any evaluation of McGrath's contention depends first upon understanding the position of Cameron and those who agreed with him. Cameron explains his threefold structuring of the divine covenants:

> We say therefore that there is one covenant of nature, one of grace, and one subservient to the covenant of grace (which in Scripture is called the 'old covenant') and therefore we will deal with that in the last instance, giving the first instance to the covenant of nature and of grace, since they are the chief and since they do not refer to any other covenant.[56]

Cameron's trichotomist structure was innovative, but his covenant theology was in essential agreement with Reformed orthodoxy. Richard Muller has argued that Cameron's federal theology, and that of his Salmurian successors, was not in fact heresy and was "consciously framed to stand within the confessionalism of the Canons of Dort. In the specific case of Cameron's covenantal thought, it ought to be viewed not as a protest against various developments in Reformed theology but rather an integral part of the rather fluid and variegated history of early Reformed covenantal thought."[57] To support Muller's view, it can be pointed out that a number of Reformed divines embraced Cameron's trichotomist reading of redemptive history. For example, Owen's close friend, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), registers agreement with Cameron when he refers to the old covenant as "*foedus subserviens* to the gospel (as learned Cameron calls it)."[58] Besides Goodwin, Samuel Bolton (1606–1654) also holds the view that the old covenant was a subservient covenant to the covenant of grace.[59] That two prominent Puritan Reformed theologians, Goodwin and Bolton, agreed with Cameron on the nature of the old covenant shows Muller is correct to argue that Cameron's covenant theology, far from being heretical or erroneous, fits within the broad contours of orthodox Reformed covenant theology.

In Cameron's work on God's threefold covenant with man, he highlights the manner in which the old covenant as *foedus subserviens* displays certain

similarities with the covenants both of works and of grace and yet involves enough substantial differences to make the old covenant distinct from them both. Whereas the theologians who follow the dichotomist structure of redemptive history emphasize the positive use of the law, Cameron views the old covenant as preparation for faith rather than conveying the life of faith. Dichotomists also speak of Sinai's pedagogical or tutorial function (Gal. 3:24), and Cameron does highlight, albeit briefly, the manner in which Sinai agrees with the covenant of grace, but the difference between the two schools of thought appears to be one of emphasis.60 Thus Cameron argues that the old covenant causes men to "fly into the arms of Christ."61 He also highlights the discontinuities between the Old and New Testaments, for during the old covenant the Israelites did not possess the Spirit of adoption as believers do in the new covenant.62 Moreover, in the Old Testament the measure in which the Spirit was given was "far different then from what it is now under the New Testament."63 Samuel Bolton in particular and Thomas Goodwin would follow this basic line of argument.

Bolton uses almost the exact language of Cameron in arguing that as a subservient covenant the law was given to Israel to "prepare them to faith, and to inflame them with the desire of the Promise."64 In highlighting the similarities and differences this subservient covenant displays when compared with the covenants of works and of grace, a methodological point found in Cameron's work, Bolton insists that the *foedus subserviens* "doth not stand in opposition to Grace, neither is inconsistent with the covenant of Grace…yet it hath its subservient ends to the Covenant of Grace."65 In particular, the old covenant had in view the land of Canaan and "God's blessing there, in obedience to it, and not to heaven."66 Bolton also addresses the relationship between law and gospel. He discusses the principle of "do this and live" (Lev. 18:5), and notes the varying interpretations given to this much-mooted passage of Scripture. For his own part, he notes that "in the external view of them…the Law and Gospel do seem to stand upon opposite terms," but only if "we look upon the Law separately [i.e., strictly]."67 When the law and the gospel are separated by distinguishing the *foedus subserviens* from the covenant of grace, the Israelites "should have been driven to Christ by it, but they expected life in obedience to it. And this was their great error… seeking life by their own righteousness."68 Instead, they should have recognized their inability to attain justification by the works of the law and so put their faith in Christ for their justification. Only then could the law, in its substance, function as a "rule of obedience to the people of God, and that to which they are to conform their walking under the Gospel."69

Thomas Goodwin makes this same point in his brief argument for a subservient covenant. He notes that when the covenant was renewed, Joshua told

the Israelites of their inability to keep the covenant (Josh. 24:19). Nevertheless, the Israelites, "in confidence of their strength, would take it as a covenant they were to perform."[70] Goodwin adds that in order for God to convince the Israelites of their inability to save themselves He gave the law "covenant-wise" that they, "now fallen, might…acknowledge themselves debtors to this moral law."[71] Goodwin places significant stress on a redemptive historical law-gospel contrast to prove his point. Both dichotomists and trichotomists agree that the components of the old covenant are typological of new covenant realities, but for Goodwin this amounts to both a distinction and a separation of the two covenants.[72] On the other hand, the maxim "distinguish but do not separate" (*distinctio sed non separatio*) best illustrates the dichotomist reading of redemptive history.

In his refutation of the trichotomist position, Francis Roberts proves his position both negatively—answering the main arguments of the trichotomists—and positively, setting forth reasons why the old covenant belongs to the covenant of grace.[73] A chief argument of those who call the old covenant *foedus subserviens* is the idea that the old covenant terrifies the conscience, whereas the new covenant comforts the conscience. Roberts recognizes that the old has "much more servitude and terror in it, than the New."[74] However, he points out that the old covenant holds forth comfort to God's people, as evidenced by the preface to and promises in the moral law. Moreover, the ceremonial law afforded glimpses of Christ, and God's promises included in the old covenant furnished believers "with sweet streams of Soul-reviving Consolations."[75] Roberts adds that the new covenant carries its own "severe threats against impenitent unbelievers."[76] Again, the issue of continuity between the two covenants plays a decisive role in understanding their relation to each other. Cameron, Bolton, Goodwin, and Owen all emphasized the differences between the two covenants, while at the same time insisting on the unity of the covenant of grace, but the majority of Reformed divines did not think the trichotomist position could be held with consistency.[77]

As noted above, McGrath contends that Cameron was able to incorporate the Lutheran law-gospel distinction into his covenant theology by separating the old covenant from the covenant of grace. On this model, the *foedus subserviens* functioned as a law covenant running concurrently with the covenant of grace. In describing the covenant theology of the Salmurian theologian Moses Amyraut (1596–1664), Brian Armstrong argues that Amyraut's "insistence upon a threefold covenant marks a major point of divergence on the part of Salmurian theology from the covenant theology within orthodoxy."[78] He also adds that Amyraut's terminology of "a covenant in a law" (*foedus legale*) "emphasized the

radical opposition of the two covenants in a way which recalls Luther's law-gospel distinction."[79]

McGrath and Armstrong touch on an important aspect of this debate, but their conclusions need to be drawn more cautiously. The "Lutheran" law-gospel distinction did not manifest itself only among the trichotomists; dichotomists also employed this distinction in their writings on the covenant. For example, Anthony Burgess devotes a whole section of his work on the law to explaining the opposition between the law and the gospel.[80] He acknowledges that the law and the gospel may be understood either largely or strictly. Thus, concerning the gospel, if taken largely, "there is no question, but [the apostles] pressed the duty of mortification and sanctification… but if you take the Gospel strictly, then it holdeth forth nothing but remission of sins through Christ."[81] Burgess argues, therefore, that the law understood largely, as in the time of Moses, was a gracious covenant. Indeed, it is "folly" to make the law and the gospel, largely considered, "to hinder one another."[82] The debate, then, has to do with the application of the law-gospel distinction as a hermeneutic. What Mark Beach says about Turretin's rejection of the threefold *schema* could well describe the views of those in Britain who held to a twofold covenant *schema:* "Turretin rejects the Amyraldian scheme, for it blurs, if not obliterates, the gospel and grace present in the law."[83] Dichotomists had a strict law-gospel distinction regarding justification, but they applied this distinction less strictly when not only justification, but also sanctification was in view. In the time of the law, there was gospel; in the time of the gospel, there is law. In justification, the law and the gospel are opposed, but in sanctification, they are friends. Those who argued for a subservient or superadded covenant to the covenant of grace not only emphasized the distinction between the law and the gospel in justification, but also placed great stress on the superiority of the time of the gospel (i.e., new covenant) over the time of the law (i.e., old covenant).

Conclusion

The evidence clearly shows that Reformed theologians in Britain during the seventeenth century did not agree on how to relate the Sinaitic covenant to the covenant of grace. Was this debate more formal than real, especially when certain distinctions are properly understood? However tempting it may be to deny any substantial differences between the two sides, the debate centers on a major point in hermeneutics. In his impressive study on the seventeenth-century antinomian controversy, David Como makes an interesting point about the debates on ecclesiology, namely, that they "masked a more fundamental intellectual and emotional bifurcation within Puritanism, a split over that most basic of Christian antinomies, the relationship between Law and Gospel."84 This chapter has shown there may be some truth to that contention. Whereas the Presbyterians generally emphasized the similarities between the old and new covenants, the Congregationalists were quick to point out their differences. In the end, this meant that some viewed the Sinai covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace, different only in the outward form of administration; and some viewed it not only as different in form, but also different in intention and different in kind from the covenant of grace.

1. Most of this chapter comes from an essay by Mark Jones in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 180–200.

2. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 23:68–69.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 3.7.5.

4. For example, Trinterud argues the following: "For Calvin, and so in the Geneva Bible, the covenant of God is God's promise to man, which obligates God to fulfill. Moreover, in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ God did actually fulfill that promise to which his covenant bound him. Therefore, the sacraments are witnesses, attestations, or seals to the effect that God has long since fulfilled his covenant, his promise. Therefore, covenant and testament are identical. In the covenant theory of the Rhineland and of the English reformers the covenant is a conditional promise on God's part, which has the effect of drawing out of man a responding promise of obedience, thus creating a mutual pact or treaty. The burden of fulfillment rests upon man, for he must first obey in order to bring God's reciprocal obligation into force. Theologically, of course, the difference between these two views is of the greatest moment." Leonard Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History* 20 (1951): 45. Two responses to Trinterud are particularly noteworthy. See J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 22–64; and John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 17–33. Von Rohr's statement on p. 33 sums up the issue with regard to Puritan covenant theology rather well: "For the mainstream of Puritanism, therefore, it would appear that basically the bilateral and the unilateral were conjoined, human responsibility and divine sovereignty were unitedly maintained, and the covenant of grace was seen as both conditional and absolute."

5. Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 120.

6. See John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* (London, 1645).

7. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis: or, A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians* (London, 1646), 219.

8. Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* 95.

9. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:73. Anthony Burgess makes the same point: "It is true, the Lutheran Divines, they do expressly oppose the Calvinists herein, maintaining the Covenant given by *Moses*, to be a Covenant of works, and so directly contrary to the Covenant of grace. Indeed, they acknowledge that the Fathers were justified by Christ, and had the same way of salvation with us; only they make that Covenant of *Moses* to be a superadded thing to the Promise, holding forth a condition of perfect righteousness unto the Jews, that they might be convinced of their own folly in their self-righteousness. But, I think, it is already cleared, that *Moses* his Covenant, was a Covenant of grace." *Vindiciae Legis*, 251.

10. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:76.

11. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:77.

12. Edmund Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants Made Between God and Man: viz. the Covenant of Workes, and the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1647), 1–2.

13. Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants*, 8.

14. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Conversation* (London: Peter Cole, 1653), 47.

15. John Cameron, *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* (Heidelberg, 1608), 7.

16. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted & Vindicated…* (London, 1654), 375–76.

17. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 251. The Westminster Confession makes clear that there "are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations" (7.6).

18. See Brenton C. Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy," in *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009), 76–105. Ferry makes a number of criticisms of past taxonomies in the secondary literature. Although Ferry commits a few errors himself, his taxonomy remains generally helpful in understanding the diversity of opinions on the matter.

19. See Sebastian Rehnman, "Is the Narrative of Redemptive History Trichotomous or Dichotomous? A Problem for Federal Theology," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 80 (2000): 296–308.

20. Rehnman, "The Narrative of Redemptive History," 302.

21. Rehnman, "The Narrative of Redemptive History," 302.

22. See chapter 18, "The Minority Report: John Owen on Sinai."

23. Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 102.

24. Mark Beach provides a good discussion of the "controversy with the Lutherans" on this point. See *Christ and the Covenant*, 265–69.

25. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 321.

26. Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 102. See also Francis Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum the Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible…* (London, 1657), 778.

27. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 222. Francis Roberts (1609–1675) provides an identical taxonomy in his massive work on the covenants. See *Mysterium & Medulla*, 738–39.

28. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 222.

29. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 222–23.

30. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.1–9; 2.9.1–5; Heinrich Bullinger, *Common Places of Christian Religion*, trans. John Stockwood (London, 1572), 96–102; Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, Ohio: Scott, 1852), 23–29; Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant* (London, 1674), 196; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 12.8.1–25.

31. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 223.

32. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 659.

33. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 660.

34. Peter Bulkeley advances seven arguments to prove his argument that the old and new covenants are one in substance. His arguments fall under the following headings: (1) both covenants spring from God's grace; (2) both covenants carry the same blessings and privileges; (3) both lead to Christ by and through whom the blessings of the covenant are received; (4) both covenants have the same condition, namely, faith; (5) both covenants communicate the grace of God; (6) both covenants require obedience to God's law; and (7) the end of each covenant is salvation. *Gospel-Covenant*, 114–41.

35. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:71.

36. Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 104–5.

37. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 224.

38. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 759.

39. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 759. Burgess and Ball make the same argument. See Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 225; Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 106.

40. Bulkeley, *Gospel-Covenant*, 116.

41. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened…* (Edinburgh, 1655), 7.

42. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 8.

43. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 59–60.

44. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 225.

45. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 761.

46. Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 119.

47. Ernest F. Kevan provides a fairly detailed analysis of this argument in his work *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 119–34.

48. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 241. Richard Byfield (c. 1598–1664) similarly notes: "Heb. 8.8.10. taken out of Jer. 31.31,32,33. which speaketh of a new & old Covenant, is thus to be understood; not of two Covenants differing in substance…but of one and the same Covenant of Grace distinguished in their different manner of Administration…. Here also we see that a proof out of the old Testament is as much Gospel if rightly applied, as any in the New-Testament." *Temple-Defilers Defiled, Wherein a True Visible Church of Christ Is Described* (London, 1645), 38–39.

49. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 241.

50. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 241.

51. Bulkeley, *Gospel-Covenant*, 129.

52. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 122.

53. Rehnman, "The Narrative of Redemptive History," 302.

54. Alister McGrath, Justitia Dei: *A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 268–69.

55. McGrath, Justitia Dei, 269.

56. Cameron, *De triplici Dei*, 7. Cf. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 356.

57. Richard Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional: John Cameron and the Early Orthodox Development of Reformed Covenant Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 37.

58. Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:354. Francis Roberts also refers to Cameron as "learned Cameron" as he counters the idea of a subservient covenant. *Mysterium & Medulla*, 748.

59. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 137ff.

60. Cameron, *De triplici Dei*, 67; (Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 392).

61. Cameron, *De triplici Dei*, 46; (Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 383).

62. Cameron, *De triplici Dei*, 52; (Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 387).

63. Cameron, *De triplici Dei*, 53; (Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 387).

64. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 138. Cf. Cameron, *De triplici Dei*, 56.

65. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 145.

66. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 145.

67. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 156–57.

68. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 160–61.

69. Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*, 162.

70. Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:354.

71. Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost, in Works*, 6:354.

72. Thus, Goodwin argues that God "had not made such an outward covenant with that nation as a church in such promises, such as justification, adoption, sanctification, outward and carnal, haeternalion, true and real, whereof he made this the shadow; and this he did for Christ's sake also, whom and whose covenant these things typified out." *The Work of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:355–56.

73. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 748–53.

74. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 753.

75. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 753.

76. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 753.

77. See Heinrich Heppe and Ernest Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 395–404; Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 301–16.

78. Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 144.

79. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 144.

80. See Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 228–53.

81. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 250. Herman Witsius likewise comments: "It is known to all who are acquainted with theology, that the law is sometimes used in such an extensive signification, that it contains the whole system of the doctrine of salvation, the better part of which is the gospel: Isa. ii 3. xlii. 4. and that also the gospel sometimes signifies all that doctrine which Christ and the Apostles delivered, in which are comprehended both commandments, and prohibitions, and upbraidings, and threatenings, Mark xvi. 15. compared with Matth. xxviii. 20. Rom. ii.16." *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain…* (Glasgow, 1807), 180–81.

82. Burgess, *Vindicae Legis*, 252. Samuel Rutherford holds to a view of the law and the gospel that helps explain why he saw Sinai as an administration of the covenant of grace. Positively, the law and the gospel are not contrary to one another: "Perfect obedience, which the Law requireth, and imperfect obedience which the Gospel accepteth are but gradual differences." Furthermore, "the Gospel abateth nothing of the height of perfection, in commanding what ever the law commandeth in the same perfection…. In acceptation of grace, the Gospel accepteth less than the law, but commandeth no less." *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist…* (London, 1648), 2:7–8.

83. Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 316.

84. David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 451.

Chapter 18

The Minority Report: John Owen on Sinai

> *It is true, the Lutheran Divines, they do expressly oppose the Calvinists herein, maintaining the Covenant given by Moses, to be a Covenant of works, and so directly contrary to the Covenant of grace. Indeed, they acknowledge that the Fathers were justified by Christ, and had the same way of salvation with us; only they make that Covenant of Moses to be a superadded thing to the Promise, holding forth a condition of perfect righteousness unto the Jews, that they might be convinced of their own folly in their self-righteousness. But, I think, it is already cleared, that Moses his Covenant, was a Covenant of grace.*
>
> —ANTHONY BURGESS[1]

Among the Reformed orthodox, the role of Sinai in the history of redemption has been variously understood.[2] While almost all federal theologians agreed on the distinction between the covenant of works (*foedus operum*) and covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*), the relationship between the old and new covenants, described in Hebrews 8 and elsewhere (e.g., 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 3, 4), proved to be a source of contention among Reformed theologians, especially when the Salmurian theologians are included.[3] Part of the problem was the sheer complexity of the issue. John Ball (1585–1640) comments, "Most Divines hold the old and new Covenant to be one in substance and kind, to differ only in degrees: but in setting down the differences they speak so obscurely, that it is hard to find how they consent with themselves."[4] John Owen (1616–1683) similarly concedes that "this is a subject wrapped up in much obscurity, and attended with many difficulties."[5] Samuel Petto (1624–1711) refers to the issues surrounding this subject as a "knotty puzzling Question in Divinity."[6] Those who attempted to tackle Sinai's place in the history of redemption were keenly

aware of the difficulty of the subject, and hence the various interpretations, even among those who belonged to the broader Reformed interpretive tradition.

This chapter will look specifically at John Owen's covenant schema, with particular attention to the role of the Sinaitic or Mosaic covenant and its relation to the covenants of works and grace. By focusing specifically on Owen and the details of his thought, the hope is that he can be placed more accurately within the larger taxonomy of Reformed thinking on this issue. The evidence suggests that Owen's covenant theology cannot be labeled by terms such as "dichotomous" and "trichotomous." While these terms may prove helpful in other cases, Owen's theology of the covenants is so complex that any attempt to label him in this way inevitably misses some of the nuances of his thought.

The Majority Position: Dichotomous As Ball suggests, most Reformed divines argued that the old and new covenants are one in substance and kind; that is, they are different administrations of the covenant of grace.[7] Francis Turretin (1623–1687) likewise notes that the Reformed orthodox "maintain the difference between the Old and New Testaments (broadly considered) is only accidental, not essential."[8] However, because "it was so different from that which is established in the gospel after the coming of Christ…it hath the appearance and name of another covenant."[9] In other words, while Turretin can acknowledge the redemptive-historical function of Sinai—i.e., strictly considered it "denotes the covenant of works"[10]—he nevertheless insists that the "Sinaitic covenant is no other than the covenant of grace."[11] Here he affirms his agreement with theologians such as John Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500–1562), Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), and Herman Witsius (1636–1708). Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) also upholds the dichotomous position and states, "The law as pressed upon Israel was not a covenant of works."[12] Owen, despite dissenting from both Ball and Turretin, candidly admits that the "judgment of most reformed divines is, that the church under the old testament had the same promise of Christ, the same interest in him by faith, remission of sins…. And whereas the essence and the substance of the covenant consists in these things, they are not to be said to be under *another covenant*, but only a *different administration* of it."[13]

Therefore, the Reformed orthodox typically held to what Sebastian Rehnman calls a "dichotomous" understanding of redemptive history.[14] For these theologians, the Mosaic covenant is actually part of the covenant of grace that contains, because of the nature of Sinai, elements of law and gospel (i.e., commands and promises).[15] However, the law, while present in the covenant of grace, cannot have any saving efficacy, but only functions as "our schoolmaster

to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:23). The so-called *usus pedagogicus* ("tutorial use") of the law is emphasized, lest the covenant of grace be compromised and the distinction between the covenants of works and grace be altogether lost.

The Salmurian Position: Trichotomous Not all Reformed theologians were content to divide redemptive history into two covenants, namely, the covenant of works and covenant of grace. As Mark Beach notes, part of Turretin's polemic on this issue is aimed at those "within Reformed churches who sought wholly to divide the Law and Gospel from one another by positing a third covenant… namely a covenant of the Law. The advocates of this view, Moïse Amyraut and those identified with the Academy in Saumur, believed that a distinct 'legal covenant,' juxtaposed to the covenant of grace and distinct from the covenant of works, better captured the biblical materials on the nature of the covenants and the relationship between the two testaments."16 John Cameron (c. 1579–1625) has been identified as one who held to a trichotomous understanding of redemptive history.17 However, as Muller has noted, Cameron, in *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* ("Theses on the Threefold Covenant of God with Man"), does not only argue for three covenants, but focuses "his theses on the threefold conditional or hypothetical covenant of God, as distinct from other covenants."18 The threefold conditional covenant schema—understood in the broader context alongside the twofold *unconditional* covenant schema—provides the basis for the "trichotomist" title of Cameron's work. In describing his position, Cameron writes:

> We say therefore that there is one covenant of nature, one of grace, and one subservient to the covenant of grace (which in Scripture is called the "old covenant") and therefore we will deal with that in the last instance, giving the first instance to the covenant of nature and of grace, since they are the chief and since they do not refer to any other covenant.19

Far from making a distinct innovation in covenant theology,20 Muller has argued that Cameron's model has corollaries with Robert Rollock (1555–1599), William Perkins (1558–1602), and Amandus Polanus (1561–1610).21 Besides these Reformed divines, Turretin notes that Johannes Piscator (1546–1625) and Lucas Trelcatius (1542–1602) also "take the old covenant strictly, not only separating the promise of grace from it, but opposing the one to the other."22 Beach notes that for these men the old covenant did not set forth any gospel content, which means "that the two covenants—old and new—constitute distinct species of covenant; the former is the covenant of works; the latter is 'the

covenant of the gospel.’”[23] Despite being “criticized by the core group of Reformed orthodoxy and always a minority view,” Rehnman has argued that Owen belongs to the group of Reformed theologians who espouse a “trichotomist federal theology, possibly in particular the Cameronian version.”[24] Does Owen’s federal theology, in fact, reflect the trichotomist tradition? Or is his covenant schema misrepresented if we give it the title “trichotomist”?

Owen’s Covenant Schema *The Covenant of Works* Hebrews 8 contrasts two covenants, the old and the new. Owen’s first concern is to show that the covenant made with Adam (i.e., the covenant of works), though not “expressly called a covenant,” but still containing the nature of a covenant (e.g., promises and threatening, rewards and punishments), “is not the covenant here intended [in Hebrews 8:6ff.].”[25] The reason the covenant of works cannot be intended is because Hebrews 8 speaks of a “testament” (*diatheke*). The old in Hebrews 8 is both a covenant and a testament, and “there can be no testament, but there must be death for the confirmation of it, Heb. ix.16.”[26] The covenant made with Adam did not involve the death of any living thing, and so it was not a testament. However, during the Mosaic covenant, “there was the death of beasts in sacrifice in the confirmation of the covenant at Sinai”; therefore, the covenant at Sinai is also a testament.[27]

Besides this important distinction, Owen argues that after the entrance of sin, all that remains from the covenant of works is the law, which must remain because of an ontological necessity in the Creator-creature relationship. In other words, the “fall made no changes in God’s absolute dominion over man, or in man’s obligations to God, but henceforth this was a dominion of power and righteous law, and no longer a relationship of unbroken and covenanted friendship.”[28] Therefore, the covenant of works does not remain as a potentially salvific covenant, but the moral law, which was fundamental to the covenant of works, remains and holds both unbelievers and believers accountable before God. The threatening innate to the covenant of works remains, but the promises do not. This necessary qualification has important implications for how Owen understands the Mosaic covenant in relation to the covenant of grace. In short, the Mosaic covenant is not a revival of the covenant of works strictly, but rather, the moral law is renewed *declaratively* and not *covenantally*. Owen writes, “God did never formally and absolutely renew or give again this law as a covenant a second time. Nor was there any need that so he should do, unless it were declaratively only, for so it was renewed at Sinai; for the whole of it being *an emanation of eternal right and truth*, it abides, and must abide, in full force forever.”[29] The old covenant, then, spoken of in Hebrews 8, is not the

prelapsarian covenant of works, “but that which God made with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.”30

The Covenant of Grace Owen insists that Israel was never absolutely under the covenant of works in terms of its saving efficacy because from the time of Genesis 3:15 (the *protoevangelium*), the promise was immediately given to Adam and Eve. This promise “had in it the nature of a covenant, grounded on the promise of grace.”31 If the covenant of works were revived in its entirety—that is, if the *covenantal* aspect is renewed—the promise of grace would have been annulled because that promise is diametrically opposed to the covenant of works. In the first promise, “the whole covenant of grace was virtually comprised, directly respected and expressed the giving of [Christ] for the recovery of mankind from sin and misery by his death, Gen iii. 15.”32 As redemptive history unfolds, the covenant of grace, being grounded in the first promise, received such clarification in the time of Abraham that, according to Owen, only the dawn of the new covenant would surpass the Abrahamic covenant in terms of the manifestation and confirmation of God’s redemptive purposes.33 The Abrahamic covenant (i.e., the covenant of grace), and the promises contained in it, were not interrupted nor were they abrogated by the giving of the law at Sinai (Gal. 3:17). In other words, the covenant of grace was always present during the Old Testament dispensation, despite the introduction of the old covenant.34 But how does the covenant of grace relate to the new covenant, the covenant “wherewith the old covenant made at Sinai was absolutely inconsistent”?35 Are they co-extensive with each other?

As noted, Rehnman has argued that Owen’s position is “trichotomous.” However, missing from Rehnman’s analysis is Owen’s notion of how the new covenant, confirmed and established through the death of Christ, relates to the covenant of grace. The evidence suggests that Owen does not simply equate the covenant of grace with the new covenant. For example, Owen writes, “When we speak of the ‘new covenant,’ we do not intend the covenant of grace absolutely.”36 Though Owen maintains that the substance of the covenant of grace was “the only way and means of salvation unto the church, from the first entrance of sin,” he nevertheless argues that “it is not expressly called a covenant.”37 Even the Abrahamic covenant was based only on the promise; indeed, the “full legal establishment of it, whence it became formally a covenant unto the whole church, was future only,”38 notwithstanding sacrifices and the sacramental sign of covenant inclusion. In the same way that the “old covenant” cannot be the covenant of works because the covenant of works was not a testament, so too the covenant of grace lacked “its solemn confirmation and

establishment, by the blood of the only sacrifice which belonged unto it."[39] For Owen, the covenant of grace only formally becomes a covenant through the death of Christ (Heb. 9:15–23), although this sacrifice had been decreed from before the foundation of the world. As a result, the new covenant, promised in the Old Testament, is not the promise of grace, but the actual "formal nature of a covenant" through its establishment by the death of Christ.[40] The new covenant, then, is the fulfillment of the covenant of grace, but also distinguishable from it by virtue of being a testament. Hebrews 8 has, therefore, special reference not to the covenant of grace, but to the new covenant specifically.[41]

The Theology of Moses and the Sinaitic Covenant *Two Distinct Covenants* So far, Owen has established that the covenants in view, also called testaments, are the old and new, which are to be distinguished from both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Petto also adopts this position: "And the opposition is not laid between the Covenant of Works, as with the first Adam, and the New Covenant, but between that at Sinai and the New."[42] Even more contentious is Owen's argument, which is the minority position among the Reformed orthodox,[43] that the old and new covenants are not different administrations of the covenant of grace, but two distinct covenants.[44] Similarly, Petto asks whether the old and new covenants are two covenants or one, and answers, "That New or better Covenant is distinct from that at Mount Sinai: it is usually said, that they are two administrations of the same Covenant: I think, they are not merely one and the same Covenant diversely administered, but they are two Covenants."[45]

At the heart of Owen's dichotomous view of the old and new covenants are exegetical considerations. The old covenant is described in Exodus 24:3–8 and Deuteronomy 5:2–5, and the new covenant is described in Jeremiah 31:31–34, Matthew 26:28, and Mark 14:24. "And these two covenants, or testaments, are compared with the other, and opposed one unto another, 2 Cor. iii.6–9; Gal. iv.24–26; Heb. vii.22, ix.15–20."[46] Like Owen, Turretin notes the strong letter/Spirit contrast in 2 Corinthians 3:6–7. But in order to maintain that the old covenant at Sinai was an administration in the covenant of grace, he suggests that the Mosaic covenant be understood in two aspects: "either according to the intention and design of God and in order to Christ; or separately and abstracted from him."[47] If considered apart from Christ, Sinai is, in fact, "distinct from the covenant of grace because it coincides with the covenant of works and in this sense is called the letter that killeth and the ministration of condemnation" (2 Cor. 3:6, 7).[48] And this appears to be the sense in which Owen understands the old covenant. However, Turretin argues that this abstraction is unwarranted

because, for example, the law causes sinners to flee to Christ (*usus pedagogicus*). Moreover, the opposition spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31–34 is not with reference to essence, but to the diversity (or accidents) of economy or administration. If, however, one wishes like Owen to oppose the two covenants, he must do so "not in its whole latitude, but only as to the legal relation (*schesin*) and in contradistinction to the gospel."[49] On the one hand, then, Owen and Turretin share the same concern to distinguish between law and gospel. However, they differ insofar as Owen separates Sinai altogether from the covenant of grace because he understands the old covenant only in its legal aspect, whereas Turretin understands Sinai, in its whole latitude, to comprise elements that are consistent with the covenant of grace.

Despite positing two distinct covenants, Owen insists that he does so "provided always that the way of reconciliation and salvation was the same under both."[50] That is to say, if sinners could be saved by virtue of the old covenant, "then it must be the same for substance with the new. But this is not so; for no reconciliation with God nor salvation could be obtained by virtue of the old covenant…though all believers were reconciled, justified, and saved, by virtue of the promise."[51] Consequently, the covenant of grace is not present in the old covenant (i.e., Sinai), but present during the Mosaic economy. Salvation during the old covenant is available by virtue of the promise of the new covenant, but this salvation has no reference to the Mosaic covenant, which could never save. In fact, for Owen, the old covenant "was never intended to be of itself the absolute rule and law of life and salvation unto the church…. It was never intended to come in the place or room thereof, as a covenant, containing the entire rule of all the faith and obedience of the whole church."[52] If this is the case, what, according to Owen was the purpose or place of the old covenant in redemptive history?

Sinai's Function Although Sinai does not act as another covenant of works, nevertheless, in a number of ways, Owen says it "re-enforced, established, and confirmed that covenant."[53] Owen's close friend, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), referred to the old covenant as a "renewing" of the covenant of works and, like Cameron, calls it a subservient covenant *(foedus subserviens)*.[54] Incidentally, nowhere does Owen refer to Sinai as a "subservient covenant." Rather, he calls it a "superadded covenant."[55] But, still, Sinai is a real covenant —a testament that sets forth, on tables of stone, the law of God, including its demands. "And because none could answer its demands…it was called 'the ministration of death,' causing fear and bondage, 2 Cor. iii.7."[56] Not only were the commands revived, but the sanctions of the covenant of works were issued,

namely, the sentence of death on those who failed to observe all the commands contained in the law (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10). In addition, the promise of life was revived—"that of eternal life upon perfect obedience" (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5).[57] However, while the promise of life is revived, the "old" covenant "could give neither righteousness nor life unto any in the state of sin."[58] In short, the covenant of works was revived but, unlike the prelapsarian covenant of works, without the power to save. In fact, the "revival" of the law only served to confirm the "impossibility of obtaining reconciliation and peace with God any other way but by the promise."[59]

If the old covenant possessed no saving efficacy and did not annul the promise made to Abraham, then, Owen asks, what benefit did the church receive from its promulgation? Galatians 3:19–24 makes clear, for Owen, that the law was added because of transgressions. At this point in redemptive history, the new covenant existed only as a promise; it awaited its confirmation in the death of Christ. Therefore, the *usus pedagogicus* of the law occupies a central place in Owen's thought at this point. The "old" covenant both convinced men of their sins and condemned them for their sins. The condemning power of the law serves to drive sinners to Christ, for the old covenant was never intended to justify, unlike the promise of the covenant of grace.[60] Because the old covenant was never intended to justify, it therefore never condemned anyone eternally. Those who lived during the old covenant dispensation either attained eternal life or perished eternally, "but not by virtue of this covenant as formally such."[61] Believers were saved under it, but not by virtue of it, which reinforces the point that the covenant of grace operates during (or, alongside) the old covenant but not in (i.e., not mixed with) the old covenant. And those who were condemned were condemned by "the curse of the original law of works."[62] All of this is to suggest that for Owen, the old covenant was a particular, temporary covenant, "and was not a mere dispensation of the covenant of grace."[63]

Positively, however, the old covenant preserved the lineage of Christ because the land of Canaan afforded the Israelites, even in the face of the threatenings of the law, the promise that they would never be cast out from the land until God had accomplished His purpose. Next, the law, which Israel alone possessed, thus marking them out as a chosen people, was "hard to be understood, and difficult to be observed."[64] As a result, this particular state subdued their pride and caused them to desire the promised Messiah. Petto also spends a good deal of time looking at the good that was in the Sinai covenant. Like Owen, he argues that the old covenant was a "provocation unto Israel to look unto a Mediator…to fulfill and accomplish it for them."[65] Like Owen, Petto insists that the old covenant was added because of transgressions; that is, the nature of the covenant

restrained the Israelites from sinning. Moreover, the old covenant established worship for Israel as one ecclesiastical body. And because Israel had "swelled into a great number," the old covenant acted as a platform not only for ecclesiastical government but also for civil government. Finally, the old covenant also held forth many typologies respecting the covenant of grace, and particularly, the land of Canaan prefigured heaven.66 Despite these blessings innate to the old covenant dispensation, Petto and Owen viewed the old covenant on the whole in a decidedly negative light, especially in relation to the new covenant.

As noted above, according to Owen, the promises of the covenant of grace, beginning with the *protoevangelium* (Gen. 3:15) and elaborated during the time of Abraham (Gen. 12–22), only formally become a covenant through the death of Christ. Thus Owen prefers the word "testament" to describe the finality of the new covenant. He writes, regarding this distinction, "The name of 'a covenant' is indeed sometimes applied unto the promises of grace before or under the old testament; but *berith*, the word used in all those places, denoteth only 'a free, gratuitous promise'…. But…none of them…[were] reduced into the form of a testament; which they could not be but by the death of the testator."67 The differences, then, between the old and new covenants must be understood strictly, that is, in terms of their nature as testaments. In distinguishing between the two testaments, Owen identified no fewer than seventeen ways in which they differed from each other.68 These differences led Owen to conclude,

> For some, when they hear that the covenant of grace was always one and the same, of the same nature and efficacy under both testaments,—that the way of salvation by Christ was always one and the same,—are ready to think that there was no such great difference between their state and ours as is pretended. But we see that on this supposition, that covenant which God brought the people into at Sinai, and under the yoke whereof they were to abide until the new covenant was established, had all the disadvantages attending it which we have insisted on. And those who understand not how excellent and glorious those privileges are which are added unto the covenant of grace, as to the administration of it, by the introduction and establishment of the new covenant, are utterly unacquainted with the nature of spiritual and heavenly things.69

In light of Owen's conclusions here, Rehnman has accurately noted that "to Owen's mind the majority view's way of expressing continuity and discontinuity within redemptive history is insufficient."70 However, even a cursory glance at Turretin's view on this subject shows that he also took seriously the unique

redemptive-historical role of Sinai, despite viewing the old covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace. Owen's exposition—a "minority report" of sorts—of Sinai reflects his self-conscious desire to remain faithful to the teaching of Scripture, despite disagreeing with the majority of the Reformed orthodox on this particular point of doctrine.

A Potential Problem[71]

Owen's most detailed exposition of the old and new covenants flows out of his comments on Hebrews 8:6. However, in his exposition of Hebrews 7:9–10, Owen's language may cause a great deal of confusion, especially given what has been said above. Quoting his words will make this potential problem apparent:

> There were never absolutely any more than two covenants wherein all persons indefinitely are concerned. The first was the covenant of works, made with Adam, and with all in him. And what he did as the head of that covenant, as our representative therein, is imputed unto us, as if we had done it, Rom. v. 12. The other is that of grace, made originally with Christ, and through him with all the elect. And here lie the life and hope of our souls,—that what Christ did as the head of that covenant, as our representative, is all imputed unto us for righteousness and salvation.[72]

How should this statement be interpreted? One possibility is that Owen changed his definition of covenant as he moved from Hebrews 7:9–10 to Hebrews 8:6. Do his comments on Hebrews 8:6 reflect his more mature covenant theology? It is hard to see how a writer as theologically and intellectually sophisticated as Owen would so quickly change his opinion and understanding of what constitutes a biblical covenant. More likely, however, Owen's observations on Hebrews 7:9–10 refer to general soteric principles rather than specific exegetical details. In other words, Owen uses "covenant" in two ways: one in a more general sense; another that is more specific and takes into account the exegetical requirements for what constitutes a biblical covenant (i.e., it must also be a testament). Speaking generally, then, Owen can say, without contradicting himself in his later comments on Hebrews 8:6, that the principle of representation (Rom. 5:12) manifest itself in the two Adams so that the only hope of salvation (for the elect) rests in the second Adam, Jesus Christ. In this sense—and against Rehnman's contention—Owen is better understood as a dichotomist rather than a trichotomist.

Given the complexity of Owen's position, one may sympathize with Anthony Burgess's statement that on this point of divinity he found "learned men… confused and perplexed."[73] Owen's covenant schema may have made sense to

him, but given Rehnman's identification of Owen as a trichotomist, with which Brenton C. Ferry seems to agree, though he adds the eternal covenant of redemption to Owen's schema, it seems his interpreters have not fared so well.74 Perhaps one cannot blame them, even if use of the term "trichotomist" is misguided.

Conclusion Is Owen's federal theology dichotomous or trichotomous? On one level, Owen posits a distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. However, he also distinguishes between the old and new covenants. These latter two covenants, unlike the former two, are also testaments. If we accept that for Owen, the covenants of works and of grace, though not testaments, nevertheless are still covenants, then Owen's covenant schema is actually fourfold or fivefold, if the eternal covenant of redemption is included. Of course the covenant of grace, understood as only promissory, finds its fulfillment and establishment in the new covenant, whereas the covenant of works was not fulfilled in the old, but revived only declaratively, and not covenantally. As a result, Owen may possibly be described as a trichotomist. Yet that runs the risk of misunderstanding due to Owen's various nuances, which differentiate his position from the Salmurian theologians who self-consciously adopt a threefold covenant schema (e.g., Cameron).

Owen's covenant theology must be appreciated both against the backdrop of the broader Reformed theological tradition and on its own terms if his covenant theology is to be accurately understood and assessed. In Owen's case, the customary labels may not be helpful in describing the thought of one who produced his own "minority report" among the various interpretations of the seventeenth-century orthodox Reformed.

1. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis.*… (London, 1647), 251.

2. See Sebastian Rehnman, "Is the Narrative of Redemptive History Trichotomous or Dichotomous? A Problem for Federal Theology," *Nederlands archief voor kergeschiedenis* 80 (2000): 296–308; J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 264–65, 301–16.

3. That the Salmurian theologians (e.g., John Cameron) were in essential continuity with the Reformed orthodox, see Richard Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional: John Cameron and the Early Orthodox Development of Reformed Covenant Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 11–56. On pp. 36–37 Muller writes, "[Cameron's covenantal] pattern has major implications for understanding the Salmurian soteriology. It indicates a covenantal or federal continuity with Reformed predestinarianism that has been left unexamined in discussions of hypothetical universalism. Against Moltmann's assessment, it offers an element of the Salmurian theology that presses it away from rather than toward Arminianism; and against Brian Armstrong's thesis, it demonstrates the point, recognized even by seventeenth-century opponents of Amyraldianism like Francis Turretin, namely, that views of Cameron and his Salmurian successors were not heresy and, like it or not, were consciously framed to stand within the confessionalism of the Canons of Dort. In the specific case of Cameron's covenantal thought, it ought to be

understood not as a protest against various developments in Reformed theology but rather an integral part of the rather fluid and variegated history of early Reformed covenantal thought."

4. John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* (London: Simeon Ash, 1645), 95.

5. John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 23:60.

6. Samuel Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained…* (London: for Eliz. Calvert, 1674), 102.

7. Ball also writes, "Some Divines hold the old Testament, even the Law, as it was given upon Mount Sinai, to be the Covenant of Grace for substance, though propounded in a manner fitting to the state of that people, time and condition of the Church. It was so delivered as it might serve to discover sin, drive the Jews to deny themselves and fly to the mercy of God revealed in Jesus: but it was given to be a rule of life to a people in Covenant, directing them how to walk before God in holiness and righteousness, that they might inherit the promises of grace and mercy. This I take to be the truth, and it may be confirmed by many and strong reasons out of the word of God." *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 102.

8. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 12.8.17.

9. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:71.

10. Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.8.4.

11. Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.12.9.

12. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened…* (Edinburgh, 1655), 60.

13. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:71.

14. Rehnman, "Trichotomous or Dichotomous." See also Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.12.5.

15. Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706), speaking of the presence of both law and gospel in the covenant of grace, writes, "We refuse the question from the opponent and teach that both law and gospel were given by God under the patriarchal epoch and under the Mosaic epoch in the same manner, although in different mode and degree." *Theoretica-practica Theologia* (Utrecht: Thomas Appels, 1699), 8.1.39.

16. Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 301.

17. Rehnman, "Trichotomous or Dichotomous," 298–99.

18. Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional," 28.

19. John Cameron, *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* (Heidelberg, 1608), 7. Samuel Bolton (1606–1654) provides an English translation of Cameron's work in *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome….* (London: for P. S., 1656), 351–401. Petto also adopts a trichotomist structure. He writes, "It is in no way incongruous to speak of three Covenants, seeing that with Adam is generally acknowledged to be One, and here [i.e., Gal. 4:24] the Scripture expressly speaketh of two Covenants and that with Adam is none of them." *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 94.

20. As suggested by Brian G. Armstrong, see *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 56.

21. Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional," 33.

22. Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.8.6.

23. Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 264.

24. Rehnman, "Trichotomous or Dichotomous," 302.

25. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:60–61.

26. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:61.

27. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:61. Heinrich Heppe notes that Franciscus Burmannus (1628–1679) also makes the same distinction as Owen between a covenant and testament. Hence, Burmannus, like Owen, does not view the covenant of works as a testament. But, unlike Owen, Burmannus views the covenant of grace—and not just the new covenant—as a testament. Heinrich Heppe and Ernst Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 375.

28. John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:243.

29. Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:244. Amandus Polanus, however, argues that God repeated the same covenant of works—the covenant of law, which is also called the "old covenant"—through Moses. He writes: "*Idem foedus repetivit Deus populo Israelitico per Mosen… appellatur foedus Mosis, foedus legis, et communiter foedus vetus*." *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanau, 1615), lib. 6, cap. 33, col. 321.

30. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:63.

31. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:63.

32. Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:192. See also Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:112.

33. John Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 17.4.12–14.

34. See Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:70, 74.

35. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:64.

36. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:74.

37. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:74.

38. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:74.

39. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:74.

40. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:74.

41. It is unclear whether, for Owen, the covenant of grace (as promise) becomes obsolete with the establishment of the new covenant or if the covenant of grace is confirmed by becoming the new covenant. The evidence seems to suggest the latter, namely, that the covenant of grace was "confirmed in the blood and sacrifice of Christ, and so legalized or established." Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:82. Petto writes, "Jesus Christ by fulfilling the condition of the Covenant of grace…turned it into a Testament." *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 69.

42. Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 69.

43. See Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:71.

44. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:71–74.

45. Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 84–85.

46. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:76.

47. Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.12.18.

48. Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.12.18.

49. Turretin, *Institutes*, 12.12.19.

50. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:76. Petto also maintains, "Also I am far from thinking, that there are two Covenants of Grace, if thereby be meant, two ways of Life and Salvation specifically and essentially different from each other. I conclude that the Elect were saved in one and the same way, for substance and essence in all Ages, *viz.* by Grace, through a Mediator, by Faith in him." *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 85.

51. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:77.

52. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:77.

53. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:77.

54. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D., Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 5:330.

55. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:113.

56. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:77.

57. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:78.

58. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:81.

59. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:79.

60. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:82.
61. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:85.
62. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:86.
63. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:86.
64. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:84.
65. Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 190–91.
66. Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 192–94.
67. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:113.
68. These differences are as follows: "These two covenants differ in the *circumstance of time* as to their promulgation, declaration, and establishment…. They differ in the *circumstance of place* as to their promulgation…. They differ in the *manner of their promulgation* and establishment…. They differ in their *mediators*…. They differ in their *subject-matter*, both as unto precepts and promises…. They differ, and that principally, in the *manner of their dedication and sanction*…. They differ in the *priests* that were to officiate before God in the behalf of the people…. They differ in the *sacrifices* whereon the peace and reconciliation with God which is tendered in them doth depend…. They differ in the *way and manner of their solemn writing or enrollment*…. They differ in their *ends*…. They differed in their *effects*…. They differ greatly with respect unto *the dispensation and grant of the Holy Ghost*…. They differ in the *declaration made in them of the kingdom of God*…. They differ in their *substance*…. They differ in *the extent of their administration, according unto the will of God*…. They differ in their *efficacy*…. They differ in their *duration.*" Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:87–97.
69. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:97–98.
70. Rehnman, "Trichotomous or Dichotomous," 305.
71. I am especially thankful to Ryan Kelly for suggesting to me that Owen may have changed his position on this issue. The conclusions are my own, however, and below I argue that Owen did not necessarily change his position on the covenants.
72. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 22:391.
73. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis, or A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants* (London, 1647), 229.
74. Brenton C. Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy," in *The Law is Not of Faith*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009), 104.

Chapter 19

The Puritans on Covenant Conditions

> *Many and great Absurdities, inconveniences, paradoxes and incongruities must needs inevitably follow, upon denial of Conditionality of the Covenant of Faith.*
>
> —FRANCIS ROBERTS[1]

John von Rohr has persuasively argued that to "speak of the nature of the covenant of grace in Puritan thought is to speak actually of its two natures…. In the terminology of the Puritans the covenant of grace is both conditional and absolute."[2] Reformed theologians typically insisted on the covenant as both "one-sided" (*monopleuron*) and "two-sided" (*dipleuron*).[3] In this way Puritan writings on the covenant presented a powerful polemic against other theological traditions, particularly that of Roman Catholicism and the seventeenth-century Antinomians. John Flavel (1628–1691) explains the issues involved by noting, first, that the question of "whether the covenant of grace be conditional or absolute, was moved (as a learned Man observes) in the former Age, by occasion of the Controversy about Justification, betwixt the Protestants and Papists."[4] Flavel also addresses the reasons why Protestants did not always agree on whether conditions were required for salvation. Some Protestants denied conditionality "for fear of mingling Law and Gospel, Christ's righteousness and Man's, as the Papists had wickedly done before."[5] However, those who affirmed conditionality "did so out of fear also; lest the necessity of Faith and Holiness being relaxed, Libertinism should be that way introduced."[6] In Flavel's mind, if certain necessary distinctions are agreed upon, there is no reason to deny that the covenant of grace is conditional.

This chapter will focus less on the covenant considered as absolute or unconditional, and more on the conditions of the covenant as understood by Reformed theologians in Britain during the seventeenth century. These conditions, or requirements, fall under three principal headings: (1) the necessity of faith, (2) the necessity of evangelical obedience, and (3) the necessity of good

works for salvation. With these three conditions in mind, the idea arises concerning a judgment according to works. Far from being Roman Catholic errors, these conditions of the covenant of grace were frequently discussed in the writings of Reformed theologians from the Reformation onward. This chapter aims to provide insight into the "two-sided" nature of the covenant of grace.

The Nature of a Covenant Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) begins his defense of the conditionality of the covenant of grace with a simple argument: the promises of God's covenant do not belong to unbelieving and unrepentant sinners. Rather, those who repent, believe, and walk in obedience are heirs of the promises. Some distinction needs to be made between Christians and non-Christians, and denying conditions necessarily removes the distinction between those who believe and those who do not. Some promises exist that seem to be absolute (unconditional) and do not mention faith as a condition (e.g., Isa. 43:25; Ezek. 36:22), but their existence does not mean the promises do not require faith. God forgives based upon the merits of Christ only (Heb. 9:22), even though Christ is not always explicitly mentioned in every promise of forgiveness. Likewise, God forgives based upon faith only, even though the condition of faith is not always mentioned explicitly.7 The promises offered by God occur in the context of the covenant, and the nature of the covenant is necessarily two-sided, according to Bulkeley.

A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties, requiring mutual conditions from each. A promise may be unilateral ("one-sided"), but a covenant binds parties together. Francis Roberts (1609–1675) argued that it is "absurd, and contrary to the Nature of a Covenant" to make it one-sided: "Covenants imply reciprocal obligations between Federates."8 Bulkeley recognizes that "covenant" may be used on a special occasion to denote a promise without conditions (Gen. 9:9), but says he knows of only one such instance: the Noahic covenant. Otherwise, a covenant, by its very nature, requires "mutual stipulation or condition on both parties…. Take away the condition, you must also take away the Covenant commanded; and if there be a Covenant commanded, there must of necessity be a condition" (Josh. 7:11).9 The relationship of covenant and testament also received much attention because the new covenant described in Hebrews 7–9 is not only a covenant but also a testament. This additional concept did not exclude conditions but did establish the absolute or inviolable nature of the new covenant.

Instead of the classical Greek word *suntheke* ("mutual agreement"), both the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament and the Greek New Testament prefer to use *diatheke* ("arrangement" or "testament" in the sense of last will and

testament, i.e., a document "arranging" the disposing of one's estate after death) as the equivalent of the Hebrew word *berith* ("covenant"). *Berith* therefore seems to denote something more than a mere mutual agreement (*suntheke*). For this reason, some Reformed theologians stressed the unconditional nature of the new covenant. For example, John Owen (1616–1683) argued that *berith* could refer to a single promise without a condition, as in the Noahic covenant (Gen. 6:18; 9:9). According to Owen, this idea is no doubt present in the New Testament when the writer to the Hebrews calls the covenant a "testament," and in a "*testamentary dispensation* there is not in the nature of it any mutual stipulation required, but only a mere single favor and grant or concession."[10] Thus, where God's covenant is mentioned in Scripture, a uniform meaning should not be imposed upon the word. Owen adds, "And they do not but deceive themselves who, from the name of a covenant between God and man, do conclude always unto the nature and conditions of it; for the word is used in great variety, and what is intended by it must be learned from the subject matter treated of, seeing there is no precept or promise of God but may be so called."[11] Owen certainly did not deny conditions in the new covenant, but, like Bulkeley, he emphasizes its absolute nature as a testament to show its unchangeableness. Nevertheless, Bulkeley shows that the language of Hebrews 9:15 ("they which are called") indicates that conditions are still involved:

> These words…do plainly and fully imply the condition required in the Covenant of life, our calling being finished in the working of faith, which is the condition of the Covenant; no man is effectually called so as to have part in that eternal inheritance until he believe, so that the Legacies of the Testament being to those that are called, that is, to those that do believe, it is most manifest that the intent of the Apostle in calling the Covenant by name of a Testament, was not to exclude the condition, but only (as was said) to show the stability and immutability of the Covenant.[12]

This shows that to speak of the covenant as one-sided or two-sided, conditional or absolute, depends on the context of each covenant. The new covenant, like most covenants, is two-sided. Certainly, Richard Muller is correct to argue, "The language of monopleuron and dipleuron describes the same covenant from different points of view."[13]

The Condition of Faith Reformed theologians did not deny the conditionality or two-sidedness of the covenant of grace. They all agreed that faith in Christ was the condition required for a sinner to be translated from a state of wrath to a state of grace. As Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) notes, "Faith is the condition

God requires to justification; but not a dead, but an active faith."[14] They were also careful to distinguish between certain types of conditions, namely, antecedent and consequent conditions. This important distinction sheds light on the various theological debates that took place in seventeenth-century England, particularly with reference to the Antinomians, who taught that faith followed justification.[15] According to views expressed in the sermons of Tobias Crisp (1600–1643) on John 2:1–2, the elect are justified and reconciled to God before they believe, so that faith is not the instrumental cause of justification.[16]

In his response to Crisp and the Antinomians, John Flavel claims that the controversy is not about consequent conditions (things required after the believer is instated into covenant with God), but rather about whether we may speak of antecedent conditions (things required beforehand, in order to being instated into covenant with God) in the covenant of grace. He considers this discussion from two distinct vantage points: (1) the covenant made with Christ and (2) the application of the benefits of the covenant to sinners.[17] With regard to the former, Flavel acknowledges that no condition is required on man's part, "but depends purely and only upon the Grace of God, and Merit of Christ."[18] Francis Roberts likewise affirms that there are no antecedent conditions on man's part, because there is nothing that sinners can do to merit anything from God or move God to action, such as bringing man into covenant with God: "All such Antecedent Conditions we utterly disclaim, as wholly inconsistent with this gratuitous Gospel-Covenant of Faith. Antecedent Impulsives or Motives in man, we leave to the Remonstrants and Papists."[19] But Flavel considers whether the condition of faith may be understood as antecedent in the application of salvation. Thus he distinguishes between meritorious acts and nonmeritorious acts:

> 1. Such Antecedent Conditions which have the force of a meritorious and impulsive Cause, which being performed by the proper strength of Nature, or at most by the help of common assisting Grace, do give a Man a right to the reward or blessings of the Covenant. And in this sense we utterly disclaim antecedent Conditions….
>
> 2. An Antecedent Condition signifying no more than an Act of ours, which though it be neither perfect in every degree, nor in the least meritorious of the benefit conferred; nor performed in our own natural strength; yet according to the constitution of the Covenant, is required of us in order to the blessings consequent thereupon by virtue of the Promise: and consequently the benefits and mercies granted in the Promise in this order are, and must be suspended by the Donor or Disposer of them, until it be

performed. Such a Condition we affirm Faith to be.[20]

Based upon this distinction, Flavel affirms faith to be an antecedent condition in terms of a nonmeritorious act required of us in order to receive the application of the benefits of the covenant of grace. But given the controversy that surrounds this subject, he makes a further (important) distinction between faith "essentially" considered and faith considered "organically and instrumentally." Faith essentially (i.e., in terms of the essence of faith) considered refers to obedience, "and in that respect we exclude it from justifying our persons, or entitling us to the saving-mercies of the New Covenant."[21] However, faith "organically" considered refers to its instrumentality, "as it receives Christ…and so gives us power to become the Sons of God; it being impossible for any Man to partake of the saving benefits of the Covenant, but as he is united to Christ."[22] Faith is the necessary antecedent condition—the *causa sine qua non*—of the covenant. Many Antinomians denied that faith was an antecedent condition of the covenant, and thus they held to a personal justification either from eternity or from the time of the death of Christ.

Peter Bulkeley addresses this problem in some detail, noting that most agree that faith is a condition of the covenant, while some argue it is only a consequent condition. In addressing this "new light," Bulkeley affirms that believers are not actually justified until they believe; however, he considers justification in terms of a commonplace distinction between God's immanent, transient, and applicatory works. The distinction between impetration and application was also important for Bulkeley in addressing this controversy. For him, like Flavel, sinners are not actually justified before faith, and therefore faith is not a consequent condition but an antecedent condition necessary for actual justification to take place.[23]

On the surface, there appears to be disagreement among the Reformed orthodox theologians on whether faith may be understood as an antecedent condition of salvation. For example, Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675) argues that the conditions of the covenant of grace are consequent conditions, but notes that these conditions, including faith, "denote no causality, nor proper efficiency in the condition, with respect to the thing promised, but an instrumentality and connexion, and thus faith hath no proper efficiency in our Justification, but only an instrumentality."[24] When Gillespie and Roberts affirm that there are no antecedent conditions in our salvation, they have in mind the same concept that Flavel speaks of when he refers to conditions that are either meritorious or "impulsive" (motivating) causes of God's covenant blessings. Flavel, too, rejects antecedent conditions understood in those terms. In other words, the distinction

between Christ's work of mediation (i.e., His transient works) and the Spirit's work of application allows for Reformed theologians such as Bulkeley and Flavel to speak of antecedent conditions in reference to the application of Christ's merits. Balancing these tensions, John Owen provides a concise summary of how to understand conditions in the covenant of grace so that both the grace of God and the conditionality of the covenant are maintained: "I do not say the covenant of grace is absolutely without conditions, if by conditions we intend the duties of obedience which God requireth of us in and by virtue of that covenant; but this I say, the principal promises thereof are not in the first place remunerative of our obedience in the covenant, but efficaciously assumptive of us into covenant; and establishing and confirming in the covenant."25 In other words, we do not earn our place in the covenant, we simply obtain it by faith. Once in covenant, our obedience to God's commandments only serves to confirm our new status. This position seems to do justice to the concerns of the aforementioned Reformed theologians who rejected meritorious conditions in terms of earning or meriting salvation while still affirming covenant conditions, such as faith, that enabled sinners to receive the benefits of the covenant.26

The claim that receiving the benefits of the covenant of grace depends on meeting the condition of faith in the Mediator, Jesus Christ, is expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which describes the covenant of grace as God's offer to sinners of life and salvation, but "requiring of them faith in [Christ], that they may be saved" (7.3). More explicitly, the Larger Catechism, Question 32, asks, "How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant?" The answer likewise describes the covenant as God's offer to sinners of life and salvation in His Son, "and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him" (see also Q. 153). Whatever reservations they may have had about referring to conditions in the covenant, the aforementioned Reformed theologians clearly saw the need to speak of the condition or requirement of faith for a sinner to receive the benefits of Christ's mediatorial work. They did so on exegetical grounds and in response to the rising influence of antinomianism during the mid-seventeenth century. But they affirmed more than the necessity of faith; closely tied to the antecedent condition of faith was the consequent condition of evangelical obedience to God's law.

The Necessity of Evangelical Obedience Few students of Puritan theology are familiar with *A New Confession of Faith, or The First Principles of the Christian Religion Necessary to Bee Laid as a Foundation by All Such as Desire to Build on unto Perfection* (1654), which was composed in the mid-seventeenth century by Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), John

Owen, Philip Nye (c. 1595–1672), Sydrach Simpson (c. 1600–1655), Richard Vines (1600–c. 1655), Francis Cheynell (1608–1665), Thomas Manton (1620–1677), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), and others drafted this confession in Westminster Abbey's Jerusalem Chamber, where some of them had sat years before as members of the Westminster Assembly. It was written with the intention of uniting Presbyterians and Congregationalists around one confession of faith. All of these men, with the exception of Baxter, were participants in Oliver Cromwell's triers and ejectors scheme, which had been designed by Goodwin, Owen, and Nye. Moderate Presbyterians and Congregationalists had experienced working together, in vetting ministerial candidates for the national church under the protectorate. The 1654 confession sheds further light on the Reformed doctrine of salvation, and its relative brevity compared with other confessions of faith allows for statements that speak rather pointedly to several important doctrines.

It seems that leading Congregationalists, such as Goodwin, Owen, and Nye, were trying to create a broad Reformed (Calvinistic) consensus but still exclude Socinians, Quakers, Arminians, and Antinomians. Baxter also desired such Reformed unity, but he felt the Apostles' Creed was a sufficient safeguard. Cromwell was similarly inclined toward such a broad-based unity (hence his calling for this confession), but he also feared disruptive sectarianism. So, while the document does shed light on the theological debates of the times, it is also specifically a product of that very complex year, 1654. It reveals an internal theological debate, to be sure, but also an attempt to accommodate Cromwell and to rouse an increasingly inert Parliament to action. The contents of *A New Confession* (1654) are reproduced below to show how the authors envisaged uniting the nation and church around this particular document.

> 1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, and the only Rule of knowing him savingly, and living unto him in all holiness and righteousness, in which we must rest; which Scriptures, who so doth not believe but rejecting them, doth instead thereof betake himself to any other way of discovering the mind of God, cannot be saved.
> 2. There is one only God, who is a Spirit Allsufficient, Eternal, Infinite, Unchangeable, Almighty, Omniscient, Just, Merciful, most Holy, Good, True, Faithful, and only Wise, working all things according to the Counsel of His Own Will, the Creator, Governor, and Judge of the World, the knowledge of God by faith is necessary to salvation, and every other way of knowledge of him is insufficient to salvation.
> 3. That this God is infinitely distinct from all Creatures in his Being and

Blessedness.
4. That this God is one in three persons or Subsistences, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
5. God made Man upright in his own Image to yield obedience to him, so that the chief end of man is to live to God and enjoy him for ever.
6. Man who was thus created is fallen into a State of sin and misery, so that our nature is wholly corrupted, disabled to all that is spiritually good, in bondage to sin, at enmity with God, prone to all that is evil, and whilst we continue in that estate, the wrath of God abides upon us.
7. That every transgression of the Law of God is sin, the wages whereof is eternal death.
8. That God out of his Love sent Jesus Christ to be the only Mediator between God and man, without the knowledge of whom, by the Revelation of the Gospel, there is no salvation.
9. That this Jesus Christ is God by Nature, the only and eternally begotten Son of the Father, and also true man in one person.
10. That this Jesus Christ is our Redeemer and Surety, who dying in our stead, laying down his life a ransom for us, and bearing our sins, hath made full satisfaction for them.
11. That this Lord Jesus Christ is he that was crucified at Jerusalem, was buried, rose again, and ascended into Heaven, and there sits at the right Hand of God, making intercession for us, who remains for ever a distinct person from all Saints, and Angels, notwithstanding their union and communion with him.
12. All true believers are partakers of Jesus Christ and all his benefits freely by grace, and are justified by faith in him, and not by works, he being made of God righteousness unto us.
13. That no man can be saved unless he be born again of the holy Spirit, Repent, Believe, and walk in holy conversation and godliness.
14. That whosoever do not prize and love Jesus Christ above himself, and all other things, cannot be saved.
15. Whosoever allows himself to live in any known sin, upon any pretense or principle whatsoever, is in a state of damnation.
16. That God is to be worshipped according to his own will, and that only in and through Jesus Christ.
17. That all the dead shall rise again.
18. That in the last day God will judge the World in Righteousness by Jesus Christ, and reward every one according to his Works.
19. That all Believers shall be translated into an everlasting state of

blessedness, and an inheritance of glory in the Kingdom of Heaven.

20. That all the wicked and unbelievers shall be cast into everlasting Torments, with the Devil and his angels in Hell.

Michael Lawrence has noted that this confession highlighted most of the fundamentals of Christian religion; it protected "liberty of conscience for the orthodox while at the same time delimiting heresy, the first and crucial step in restraining it by the civil magistrate."[27] Articles 13–15 have particular reference to the scope of this chapter as they show evangelical obedience forms a necessary aspect of salvation for God's people who are in covenant with Him.

Baxter was clearly not happy with the confession, most likely because of article 12 on justification. Apparently he left the group at that point, but surely articles 13–15 would have satisfied him that the document was sufficiently anti-antinomian. Lawrence is correct to argue that this document showed that the "boundaries of orthodoxy had become noticeably less ambiguous and definitely, if slightly, narrower."[28] Yet this is precisely what caused Baxter so much consternation. He insisted that this confession was written by men who lacked the requisite judgment and abilities, which is an astounding claim given the impressive list of theologians who were present. As Lawrence notes, Baxter felt this confession was "full of 'crude and unsound Passages' inserted by 'over-Orthodox' men, and was comparable to that later factional document, 'the Savoy Articles.'"[29]

Whatever one thinks of the document, it clearly aimed to secure unity in the national church. For the ministers involved in drafting this confession, the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone (article 12) was nonnegotiable, but so too was the view that Christians must "walk in holy conversation and godliness" (article 13), and, perhaps more strikingly, that Christians must not allow themselves to live in any known sin, "upon any pretense or principle whatsoever" (article 15). In other words, evangelical obedience was, for these ministers, not optional, but a necessary condition or requirement for salvation.[30] As Thomas Manton, an author of this confession, would argue, God bestows two benefits upon His people in the covenant of grace: remission of sins and sanctification by the Spirit. From this, two necessary duties fall to men in covenant with God, namely, "thankful acceptance of his grace by faith, and also new obedience, as the fruit of love."[31] In connection with this view of salvation, Reformed theologians typically insisted upon the necessity of good works for salvation though not specifically for justification. Salvation included justification, but was not merely co-extensive or synonymous with it.

The Necessity of Good Works Protestants did not all agree on whether good works were necessary for salvation. In Article 4 of the Epitome, the Lutheran Book of Concord addresses this issue at the beginning of the Negative Theses: "1. Accordingly, we reject and condemn the following manner of speaking: when it is taught and written that good works are necessary for salvation; or that no one has ever been saved without good works; or that it is impossible to be saved without good works." The writings of Reformed theologians paint a very different picture, however. In fact, they affirmed the very opposite, namely, that good works are necessary for salvation. But they would defend this truth with a great deal of care to include the requisite distinctions that kept them from denying justification by faith alone, by situating this doctrine in the context of their doctrine of the covenant.

On the Continent during the seventeenth century, Francis Turretin (1623–1687) addressed this question with his characteristic precision, affirming that good works are indeed necessary for salvation, but not for justification. They do not contribute to the meriting of salvation, but they are necessary for possessing salvation. Moreover, Turretin's understanding of the covenant as two-sided, which accords perfectly with the British understanding of the covenant of grace, necessitates that the promises of God are met with obedience from those in covenant with him. Believers are "bound to new obedience by an indissoluble and indispensable bond…not only by the necessity of precept, but also by the necessity of the means."[32] Turretin adds that the gospel demands not only profession of the truth, but also (principally) the practice of piety and defends this view by noting that works can be explained in three ways, with reference to justification, sanctification, and glorification:

> They are related to justification not antecedently, efficiently, and meritoriously, but consequently and declaratively. They are related to sanctification constitutively because they constitute and promote it. They are related to glorification antecedently and ordinatively because they are related to it as the means to the end.[33]

With these distinctions made, Turretin is able to safeguard the doctrine of justification by faith alone and yet do justice to the many passages that speak about the necessity of evangelical obedience to God's commands. Thus, good works do not merit life but flow out of life. Turretin certainly was not alone in his affirmation of this point.

The highly regarded English theologian and delegate to the Synod of Dort, John Davenant (1572–1641), speaks to this issue by noting that good works are

required of those who are already justified; the condition of justification is faith alone, but good works manifest obedience to God's commands. In fact, good works are required of both those under legal contract (i.e., the covenant of works) and those living in covenant with God (i.e., the covenant of grace): "The Law, because it regards man as created by God in uprightness of nature, requires good works to be done in the strength of nature; but the Gospel, because it regards man as fallen, requires good works from the justified; but to be done, not by the strength of free-will, but from infused grace."[34] The gospel, not the law, requires good works from those who have been justified apart from the works of the law. Davenant argues for his position by noting that the gospel demands faith alone as the condition for justification; "yet in the subject and doctrine of sanctification, [the gospel] demands the fruits of faith."[35] That is to say, as with Turretin, the gospel commands not only faith, but also obedience.

Davenant makes his arguments in the context of his polemic against the Roman Catholic theologian, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), and in so doing, understands his position as fully Protestant. Interestingly, he admits that good works may even be necessary for justification if explained properly,[36] but because the Papists understand this to mean that works are meritorious for justification, "we ought not to afford this occasion for error to the Papists, who are accustomed to distort these expressions to an heretical sense."[37] So, certain expressions and turns of phrases such as *Christotokos* ("Bearer [Mother] of Christ," a variant on *Theotokos*, "Mother of God," a title given to the Virgin Mary in Orthodox and Roman Catholic tradition) may be sound, but they are not necessarily expedient because of the tradition associated with them. Nevertheless, Davenant makes a number of important distinctions in order to affirm his main point that good works are necessary for salvation. The necessary good works need not be perfectly good and are not meritorious; rather, they are necessary for "retaining and preserving a state of justification, not as causes which by themselves effect or merit this preservation, but as means or conditions, without which God will not preserve in men the grace of justification."[38] Aiming at more clarity, Davenant notes that good works are necessary to salvation for the justified by "a necessity of order, not of causality; or more plainly, as the way appointed to life, not as the meritorious cause of eternal life."[39] Far from abandoning the idea of the necessity of good works due to various Roman Catholic errors or abuses, Davenant makes sufficient qualifications in his treatise on justification to show how Protestants can affirm that good works are necessary for salvation. By positing that good works are the way to salvation, Davenant speaks in a way adopted by many Reformed writers. For example, John Ball (1585–1640) maintains that keeping God's

commandments is not the ground for obtaining salvation, but rather "the way to walk in unto eternal life."[40] Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) shows also that to deny works as the way to heaven was in fact an antinomian error.[41]

Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) argues that good works are necessary according to the commands and promises of God. But he plainly states that the works of believers are not the formal cause of their justification, which would amount to a denial of Christ's meritorious work on behalf of His people. The works of believers are washed in Christ's blood, "and justified that they may justify us."[42] The command of God coupled with the law of gratitude given to justified sinners means that performing good works in the context of the covenant is simply not an option for believers.

Many more examples could be adduced to show that Reformed theologians affirmed that good works are necessary for salvation.[43] However, all these theologians rejected the idea that good works had any merit or instrumentality in either justification or salvation, but that rejection did not mean that good works could not properly be spoken of as the way to salvation.

Bellarmine and the Council of Trent did not properly understand the Protestant position on good works. Good works are not simply evidence of sanctity. In fact, Davenant makes a rather strong statement in response to this idea, claiming that Bellarmine charges Protestants with the view that good works are only a sign to show the presence of faith. "But," says Davenant, "we abhor such doatings [imbecile notions] as these with our whole soul, and openly affirm that good works have, in reference to salvation, a necessity of their own, not significative only, but active; because…by means of the practice of good works are we advancing and make progress towards the kingdom of heaven."[44] This basic line of reasoning was subsequently affirmed in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Like the 1654 New Confession of Faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith affirms "the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (13.1). The Larger Catechism provides the best summary of what has been argued so far in answering the previously mentioned question 32, "How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant [the covenant of grace]? Answer: The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he has appointed them to salvation." Faith is a requirement or condition for salvation, but so is

obedience to God, which is “the way to salvation” for all His elect.

The question that inevitably arises from a discussion of these issues is what role good works will play at the final judgment. Given the prominent place of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Reformed writings, is it even proper to talk about a judgment according to works? Major representative theologians from the Reformed tradition show that the Scriptures make it impossible to deny a future judgment according to works. Nevertheless, just as proper distinctions are needed when speaking about the necessity of good works for salvation, so too are they needed when describing the final judgment.

Judgment according to Works In his work on the Apostles’ Creed, Dutch covenant theologian Herman Witsius (1636–1708) makes an explicit connection between the good works of believers and the final judgment, affirming that the title to eternal life for believers is “not founded on any merit” of their good works, but instead on Christ’s mediatorial work.[45] However, he also contends that no believer will obtain salvation without good works, and this means that “God ‘will render to every man according to his deeds’; and he will adjudge eternal life to none but ‘them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honor and immortality (Rom. 2:6–7).’”[46] Witsius’s contemporary, Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) identifies the important texts concerning this question (e.g., Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23; 20:12) and notes that these texts speak of the “qualities of, and the distinction between, the persons who will be rewarded with either evil or good.”[47] He adds, “Those who have done well and who have lived godly will be saved, but whoever has lived in an ungodly manner will be condemned. Therefore it does not say that every man will be rewarded *because* of his works, but *according* to his works, albeit that the works of the ungodly are the cause of their destruction.”[48] Likewise, in England during the seventeenth century, the very best Reformed theologians, such as Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, gave attention to the doctrine of a final judgment according to works.

In the case of Goodwin, it is important to note that he did in fact affirm a double justification: the first authoritative, the second declarative or demonstrative. Goodwin suggests that “the one is the justification of men’s persons *coram Deo,* before God, as they appear before him nakedly, and have to do with him alone for the right to salvation; and so they are justified by faith without works, either as looked at by God or by themselves.”[49] Believers in this state are accounted righteous through faith in Christ. Goodwin then adduces Romans 4:2–5, the example of Abraham, in support of this justification, a justification that is a “private transaction” between God and Abraham. However,

God will, at the day of judgment, as King of all the world, judge men and "put a difference between man and man, and that upon this account, that the one were true believers when he justified them; the other were unsound, even in their very acts of faith."[50] God will therefore make evident, for all to see, the difference between those whom He has truly justified and those who have been left under wrath, even though they may have professed faith in Christ. One group, the justified, will hear "Come, ye blessed," while the other will hear "Go, ye cursed."

On this matter, Goodwin wants to do justice to both James and Paul. Thus for Goodwin, God will not "put the possession of salvation upon that private act of his own, without having anything else to show for it."[51] The key in all of this is to understand that Goodwin is making an argument for God's own justification or vindication of Himself at the final judgment. God justifies apart from works, but He also will "go demonstratively to work" and clearly distinguish between believing Abraham and unbelieving Ishmael; God will "justify his own acts of justification."[52] The apparent contrast between Paul and James is then brought into clearer view: "In a word, Abraham's person, considered singly and alone, yea, as ungodly, is the object of Paul's justification without works, Rom. 4:3–5. But Abraham, as professing himself to have such a true justifying faith, and to have been justified thereupon, and claiming right to salvation by it, Abraham, as such, is to be justified by works."[53] Furthermore, in the case of Abraham in Genesis 22:12 ("now I know that you fear God"), God has a visible demonstration of Abraham's justification: "so that whereas before I, upon a private act of my own, justified thee upon believing, I can now own thee to all the world, and have an evidence to give upon certain knowledge."[54]

Goodwin then brings these ideas into the context of the final judgment and asks in what sense "a man may be said to be judged by his works at the latter day."[55] All those judged will either be justified or condemned: "So there is no more danger to say, a man at the latter day shall be justified by his works, as evidences of his state and faith, than to say he shall be judged according thereto" (they are to be taken in the same sense, according to Goodwin).[56] To be "judged according to works" is meant demonstratively. Christ will show forth and declare Abraham's justification by looking to his offering up of his son. Therefore, the judgment at the latter day whereby believers are saved is termed a public justification (Matt. 12:36–37). Goodwin remarks that "[n]either is it anywhere said, that God will judge men according to their faith only"; rather, "God will say, I am to judge thee so as every one shall be able to judge my sentence righteous together with me: 1 Cor. 4:5…the whole world may know that he justified one that had true faith indeed."[57] Again, the force of Goodwin's

argument rests primarily on God's own justification of Himself as the one who justifies the ungodly. The result of this, for Goodwin, is that "Paul's judging according to works, and James his justification by works are all one, and are alike consistent with Paul's justification by faith only. For, in the same epistle where he argues so strongly for justification by faith without works, as Rom. 3, 4, he in chapter 2, also declares, that 'he will judge every man according to his works.'"[58] Besides aiming to do justice to the exegetical data, Goodwin wants to show how God will vindicate Himself, His Son, and true believers at the final judgment, and this constitutes a crucial aspect of Goodwin's soteriology.

John Owen takes a similar approach to Goodwin's. Carl Trueman admits that Owen's comments on the final judgment and the role of works may seem "odd."[59] After arguing that believers are justified freely, apart from works, whereupon they will be declared righteous at the final judgment, Owen nevertheless contends that "how a man that professeth evangelical faith…shall be tried, judged, and whereon, as such, he shall be justified, we grant that it is, and must be, by his own personal, sincere obedience."[60] This fits very well with Goodwin's emphasis on discriminating between the truly godly and the ungodly, which also includes those in the church who were only externally members of the covenant. Owen actually labels the final judgment according to works a "sentential justification," which involves, as it did for Goodwin, the public vindication of God, Christ, and the church. In order to buttress his point and avoid falling into the danger of implicitly denying justification *sola fide*, Owen shows that Scripture nowhere says

> we shall be judged at the last day "*ex operibus*" [of works]; but only that God will render unto men "*secundum opera*" [according to works]; being justified freely by his grace, and not according to the works of righteousness which we have done. And we are everywhere said to be justified in this life "*ex fide*" [of faith], "*per fidem*" [through faith], but nowhere "*propter fidem*" [for faith]; or that God justifieth us "*secundum fidem*" [according to faith], by faith, but not for our faith, nor according unto faith.[61]

Therefore, he argues that it would be strange for God to justify at the last day by works when Scripture constantly ascribes our justification before God by faith apart from works. Similarly to Goodwin, however, Owen argues that while we are not justified according to our works, that God will judge all men, "and rendereth unto all men, at the last judgment, according to their works, is true, and affirmed in the Scripture."[62] Furthermore, the "end of God in the last judgment is *the glory of his remunerative righteousness* (2 Tim. 4:8)."[63]

Matthew 7 and 25 also have in view a final judgment according to works, and Owen claims that these passages concern the visible church. Like Goodwin, he argues that all in the visible church will plead their faith and that this faith will be "put unto the trial whether it were sincere, true faith or no, or only that which was dead and barren. And this trial is made solely by the fruits and effects of it; and otherwise, in the public declaration of things unto all, it cannot be made. Otherwise, the faith whereby we are justified comes not into judgment at the last day" (John 5:24).[64]

None of this makes Goodwin or Owen Roman Catholic sympathizers. For example, Owen's chief polemic against Rome consists primarily in proving the Roman Catholic distinction of a double justification to be false. The first justification, according to Rome, is the infusion of grace, through baptism, which effects grace automatically *ex opere operato*, whereby original sin is extinguished and the habits of sin are expelled. The second justification is the formal cause of their good works: "Paul, they say, treats of the *first justification* only, whence he excludes all works…but James treats of the *second justification*; which is by good works…. Sanctification is turned into a justification…. The whole nature of *evangelical justification*, consisting in the gratuitous pardon of sin and the imputation of righteousness…is utterly defeated by it."[65] Elsewhere, Owen argues that the distinction of two justifications, as defended and articulated by the Catholic Church, leaves us with no justification at all. If justification is not at once complete, we stand in need of a second justification, and therefore "no man can be justified in this world."[66]

The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms do not speak of a second justification but of an open acknowledgement and acquittal on the day of judgment. "What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment? A. At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted" (Larger Catechism, Q. 90). All of this implies that true believers will be openly distinguished from false professors. Both groups professed faith in Christ, but only those who possessed true, saving faith will be acquitted, and their good works will serve as a public demonstration that they trusted God (see Larger Catechism, Q. 32). God and Christ will be glorified, and believers will receive rewards for their works, which, to use Rutherford's words, have been washed in the blood of Christ; hence, as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, "This reward is not of merit, but of grace" (Q. 63). The final judgment, then, for believers is not something to fear but a motive to rejoice that their faith in Christ provides the eschatological certainty for them to know that vindication, not condemnation, awaits them at the return of Christ.

Conclusion Reformed theologians in Britain during the seventeenth century affirmed that the covenant of grace is two-sided (dipleuric). Because of this, they affirmed that it is proper to speak of the covenant of grace as conditional. The conditions of the covenant were principally faith in Christ and its fruit of new obedience. The former condition was understood, against the Antinomians, as an antecedent condition, so that no blessing procured by Christ could be applied to the believer until he or she exercised faith in Christ. Only then did actual justification take place.

Being in covenant with God, the believer is required to believe and keep God's commandments. Therefore the pursuit of holiness and the practice of righteousness are also conditions, but they are consequent to the initial exercise of faith. These conditions of course were not optional, and this chapter has shown that the necessity of evangelical obedience and good works functioned as the proper and obligatory response to the grace of God held forth in the covenant. A true and lively faith will inevitably bring forth good works, which will be confirmed publicly (openly) at the final judgment when an objective difference will be made not only between Christians and non-Christians, but also between those in the church who were godly and those who were not. To maintain that the covenant of grace is not conditional, that good works are not necessary for salvation, and to deny a future judgment according to works has no biblical warrant, and for that reason, the Reformed orthodox spoke of requirements or conditions demanded of those who would inherit the promise of salvation.

1. Francis Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum the Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible…* (London, 1657), 123.

2. John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 53.

3. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 120–22.

4. John Flavel, *Planelogia…* (London, 1691), 242.

5. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 242.

6. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 242.

7. Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel Covenant Opened*, 2nd ed. (London, 1674), 313.

8. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 124.

9. Bulkeley, *Gospel Covenant Opened*, 314–15.

10. John Owen, *The Saints' Perseverance*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1851–1855), 21:218.

11. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1851–1855), 19:81.

12. Bulkeley, *Gospel Covenant Opened*, 317.

13. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 120.

14. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Thomas Tegg,

1840), 486.

15. See Barry H. Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatic Opinions: The Question of Orthodoxy Regarding the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (c. 1599–1691)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 107, 114.

16. Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted in the Perfection and Encouragements of the Saints…* (London: M. S. for Henry Overton, 1646), 3:225–26.

17. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 247.

18. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 247.

19. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla*, 119.

20. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 248–49.

21. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 249.

22. Flavel, *Planelogia*, 249–50.

23. Bulkeley lists a number of reasons and answers several objections to his opinion. See *Gospel Covenant Opened*, 358–71.

24. Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (London, 1681), 261.

25. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, *in Works*, 23:68–69. See also Carl Trueman's analysis of Owen's position on conditions in *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 79.

26. See also John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* (London, 1645), 133–34. Flavel often cites Turretin on this issue, who is of the same mind: "We say first, if the condition is taken antecedently and a priori for the meritorious and impulsive cause and for a natural condition, the covenant of grace is rightly denied to be conditioned…. But if it is taken consequently and a posteriori for the instrumental cause, receptive of the promises of the covenant…it cannot be denied that the covenant is conditional." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 12.3.3. Turretin adds that application of the covenant depends on the faith, which makes the covenant of grace conditional. In line with Flavel, Turretin acknowledges how the condition of faith may be an antecedent condition: "The condition is either antecedent to the acceptance of the covenant or subsequent…. In the former sense, faith is the sole condition of the covenant because it alone embraces Christ with his benefits. But in the latter sense, holiness and obedience can have the relation of a condition because they are the mean and the way by which we arrive at the full possession of the blessings of the covenant." *Institutes*, 12.3.16. J. Mark Beach also provides a helpful discussion of Turretin's position on conditions in *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 179–202.

27. Michael Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation: Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Project 1600–1704" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2002), 169.

28. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 170.

29. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 170.

30. On the Continent, Zacharias Ursinus likewise affirms that the gospel promises life "on the condition of faith in Christ and the commencement of new obedience." *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, Ohio: Scott, 1852), 3.

31. Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians 5*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1870–1875), 13:77.

32. Turretin, *Institutes*, 17.3.5.

33. Turretin, *Institutes*, 17.3.14.

34. John Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification…*, trans. Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1844), 1:288.

35. Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification*, 1:288.

36. Consider John Ball's statement that the "faith that is lively to embrace mercy is ever conjoined with an unfeigned purpose to walk in all well pleasing, and the sincere performance of all holy obedience, as opportunity is offered, doth ever attend that faith, whereby we continually lay hold upon the promises once embraced. Actual good works of all sorts (though not perfect in degree) are necessary to the continuance of actual justification, because faith can no longer lay faithfull claim to the promises of life, then it doth

virtually or actually lead us forward in the way of heaven." *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 21.

37. Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification*, 1:295.

38. Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification*, 1:300–1.

39. Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification*, 1:302.

40. John Ball, *A Treatise of Faith* (London, 1657), 112.

41. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis.*… (London, 1646), 31–32.

42. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened.*… (Edinburgh, 1655), 178.

43. As John Owen argues, "Though there are no conditions properly so called of the whole grace of the covenant, yet there are conditions in the covenant, taking that term, in a large sense, for that which by the order of divine constitution precedeth some other things, and hath an influence into their existence; for God requireth many things of them whom he actually takes into covenant, and makes partakers of the promises and benefits of it. Of this nature is that whole obedience which is prescribed unto us in the gospel, in our walking before God in uprightness; and there being an order in the things that belong hereunto, some acts, duties, and parts of our gracious obedience, being appointed to be means of the further additional supplies of the grace and mercies of the covenant, they may be called conditions required of us in the covenant, as well as duties prescribed unto us." Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 23:137.

44. Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification*, 1:314.

45. Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations: On What Is Commonly Called the Apostles' Creed* (Escondido, Calif.: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1993), 2:479.

46. Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations*, 2:479–80.

47. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 2:367.

48. À Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:367.

49. Thomas Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:181.

50. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:181.

51. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:181.

52. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:181.

53. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:181.

54. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:182.

55. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:182.

56. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:182.

57. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:182.

58. Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness*, in *Works*, 7:182.

59. Trueman, *John Owen*, 120.

60. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:159–60.

61. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:161.

62. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:161.

63. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:161.

64. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:161–62.

65. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:138.

66. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, in *Works*, 5:145. See also Trueman's conclusions, *John Owen*, 120.

CHRISTOLOGY

Chapter 20

The Puritans on Law and Gospel

> *Further research may well demonstrate, then, that the battles over church government masked a more fundamental intellectual and emotional bifurcation within Puritanism, a split over that most basic of Christian antinomies, the relationship between Law and Gospel.*
>
> —DAVID COMO[1]

> *But (I pray) why doth not Saltmarsh speak accurately, in setting down the differences between the Law, and Gospel (For they are the very hinges of the controversy between Antinomians and us).*
>
> —SAMUEL RUTHERFORD[2]

A theological commonplace in Reformation and post-Reformation Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics concerns the distinction between law and gospel. Martin Luther famously noted that "whoever knows well this art of distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel, him place at the head and call him a doctor of Holy Scripture."[3] Theodore Beza (1519–1605) affirmed that ignorance of the law-gospel distinction "is one of the principal sources of the abuses which corrupted and still corrupt Christianity."[4] Thus, representative theologians from the Lutheran and Reformed tradition have stressed the importance of the law-gospel distinction. However, while there were obvious points of agreement, especially in regard to justification by faith alone, Reformed theologians usually employed this distinction differently from Lutheran theologians, particularly as Reformed theologians elaborated this distinction in the context of covenant theology.[5] One should be careful not to generalize from isolated statements made by Reformed theologians without appreciating the different ways in which they understood and used the terms "law" and "gospel."[6] Whether repentance belongs to the law or to the gospel provides one example of the Reformed-Lutheran divide on the use of this distinction in regard to the doctrine of salvation.

The chief question in the dispute, according to the Epitome of the Lutheran Formula of Concord (LFC), is whether the preaching of the gospel is properly

not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and reproof. The Affirmative Theses argue that "everything that reproves sin [and by implication, demands repentance], is and belongs to the preaching of the law." On the other hand, the gospel proclaims Christ's atonement and satisfaction for all sins and the benefits He has purchased for us, namely, pardon, righteousness, and eternal life. The Formula does recognize that Scripture uses the word "gospel" in different ways, and so "gospel" also has reference to everything taught by Christ and His apostles, which would include God's wrath against sin, the threat of judgment and eternal punishment, and the call to repentance (5.5). However, the Formula then claims that "if the Law and the Gospel, likewise also Moses himself [as] a teacher of the Law and Christ as a preacher of the Gospel are contrasted with one another, we believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of repentance or reproof, but properly is nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but comforts consciences against the terrors of the Law, points alone to the merit of Christ, and raises them up again by the lovely preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit" (5.6). This statement of the matter seems to invite confusion. What is deemed "correct" in 5.5 contradicts what is immediately affirmed thereafter in 5.6. In fact, the Formula explicitly states that it is "incorrect and injurious" to hold that "the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace" (5.11). Simply put, though recognizing the multiple senses in which the Scriptures speak of "law" and "gospel," the Lutherans preferred to understand the law only as a message of condemnation for sin, and the gospel only as a message of consolation in Christ.

In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583) shows his awareness of this position when he addresses the differences between the law and the gospel. He notes the Lutheran objection, "There is no precept, or commandment belonging to the gospel, but to the law. The preaching of repentance is a precept. Therefore the preaching of repentance does not belong to the gospel, but to the law."[7] In reply, he denies the major premise of this syllogism, insisting that there is indeed a precept that belongs to the gospel, namely, the command "to believe, to embrace the benefits of Christ, and to commence new obedience, or that righteousness which the law requires."[8] He adds that "if it be objected that the law also commands us to believe in God, we reply that it does this only in general, by requiring us to give credit to all the divine promises, precepts and denunciations, and that with a threatening of punishment, unless we do it. But the gospel commands us expressly and particularly to embrace, by faith, the promise of grace; and also exhorts us by the

Holy Spirit, and by the Word, to walk worthy of our heavenly calling."[9] Implicit in the command to believe is the command to repent, since the gospel is preached to an unbelieving and unrepentant world. The Canons of Dort highlights the imperative force of the gospel: "And as it hath pleased God by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments" (5.14). Like Ursinus, the Canons of Dort speak of the gospel in the "correct" sense, that is, understood in all its fullness of promise and power to command.

In seventeenth-century Britain, the Reformed orthodox were engaged in heated debates with the Antinomians over a number of important doctrines.[10] One area of contention concerned whether the gospel commands; to put it another way, we might ask this question: Do imperatives belong to the gospel? The Antinomians did not go so far to argue that the gospel contained only indicatives and no imperatives, as the Formula of Concord (5.6) did, but their "imperatives" lacked a certain robustness because of their aversion to the moral law.[11] Interestingly, the Antinomians quoted from Luther's writings far more than from any other major Reformation theologian. David Como notes that the Antinomian John Eaton (c. 1575–c. 1631) viewed himself as "nothing more than a faithful disciple of Martin Luther."[12] The British Reformed orthodox, particularly those who took part in the Westminster Assembly, such as Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) and Anthony Burgess (d. 1664), addressed the points of contention in some detail,[13] providing insight into how these theologians understood the gospel in relation to antinomianism. Como's impressive historical-theological analysis of the antinomian debates of the Puritan era has certainly gone far toward filling the large gap in the secondary literature on this topic, but even his work does not tell the whole story. This chapter seeks to provide a perspective on the theological distinction between the law and the gospel from the writings of Samuel Rutherford, Anthony Burgess, and their seventeenth-century Reformed contemporaries in relation to antinomian views on the law and the gospel.

The Problem of Antinomianism Defining "antinomianism" in general is fraught with difficulty. Defining "antinomianism" in the context of seventeenth-century Britain is even harder, in part because as the century wore on the term became a hostile epithet, and theological polemic does not always lend itself to fair assessments of one's opponents. Opponents of antinomianism sometimes used the term carelessly, and those who were charged with being Antinomians

usually denied it, with the exception of Richard Coore, who owned the name. A number of peculiarities separated the English Antinomians from Reformed orthodoxy, but the obvious dividing line centered on whether an individual rejected the moral law as a rule of life for believers. Even then, the position of some individuals defied such a neat classification. Related to this concern was the manner in which a so-called Antinomian might speak about freedom from sin; Antinomians were often prepared to affirm that believers were free from indwelling sin. Antinomian theologians also denied the conditionality of the covenant of grace, and specifically, the new covenant. A number of other theological distinctives characterized the movement, but the various idiosyncratic positions within the movement do not allow for much generalization.14

Having said that, the second half of the seventeenth century lends itself more easily to a theological analysis of antinomianism because the texts change. The earlier writings are either ultra-polemical or else ephemeral and partial; they are sometimes no more than incomplete sermon notes or religious verse, not works of systematic theology.15

The sources grow richer as the seventeenth century moves to a close, which allows scholars to assess the various schools of thought in the antinomian movement. However, a good deal of fragmentation appears in the many works committed to the press; thus antinomianism, like Reformed orthodoxy, records a number of internal debates that suggest it was by no means a monolithic movement. Even the lines of separation between Reformed orthodoxy and antinomianism were not always clear-cut. Very little work has been done on Edward Fisher (fl. 1627–1655) and his well-known work *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645). He was not an antinomian, even though his book was condemned as antinomian by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1720. Tobias Crisp (1600–1643) was commended by some orthodox Reformed theologians, and condemned by others.16 Crisp had the ability to write perfectly orthodox sermons—by Reformed standards, at least—but also made comments that suggested a departure from Reformed orthodoxy. Scholars have typically claimed that a key starting point for Crisp's unorthodox views was his commitment to justification from eternity, but Crisp in fact did not hold this doctrine. His writings evince a concern to maintain at all costs the exclusive primacy of the grace of God in the salvation of sinners.17 He argued in a way not unlike the Lutheran position, dividing law and gospel into imperatives and indicatives. His determination to exclude faith and repentance from having any part in the gospel was one reason he aroused so much opposition from certain Reformed theologians.

Several times in his sermons on 1 John 2:1–2, Crisp acknowledged the various controversies surrounding his opinions. At one point, he notes an objection to his position that faith must be understood as the instrumental cause enabling a sinner to be transferred from a state of wrath to a state of grace and so be justified.[18] His answer to that objection helps explain why his theology was deemed so controversial: "I say, that faith, as it lays hold upon the righteousness of Christ, it doth not bring this righteousness of Christ to the soul, but only doth declare the presence of this righteousness in the soul that was there, even before faith was."[19] He adds that the elect who are justified by God are justified and reconciled to God before they believe: "And therefore faith is not the instrument to unite Christ and the soul together."[20] Crisp's views received a rather sharp response from John Flavel (1628–1691) in his work *Planelogia* (1691). Flavel argued that he—along with Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646), John Owen (1616–1683), William Pemble (c. 1591–1623), William Perkins (1558–1602), John Davenant (1572–1641), and "multitudes more"—have all "asserted Faith to be the Condition of the New Covenant required on Man's part, in point of Duty; and that Men must believe before they can be justified."[21] As shown in the last chapter, the claim that the new covenant is conditional, requiring both faith and obedience, had important ramifications for the way the British Reformed orthodox understood the distinction between the law and the gospel.

"The Spirituall Antichrist"

A number of seventeenth-century polemical works attacked antinomian theology from a broadly Reformed perspective.[22] Samuel Rutherford's work, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, stands out among them because of his prestige as perhaps the finest theological mind in Scotland at the time. Moreover, his scathing denunciations of the various errors associated with antinomian theology leave no doubt as to how seriously he viewed the doctrines emanating from the pens of his adversaries.[23] There may be reason to question whether Rutherford always correctly understood his opponents, but his arguments (ninety-three chapters) definitely provide insight into his own views on the relationship between the law and the gospel. Rutherford lays a number of charges against many well-known Antinomians such as John Eaton, John Saltmarsh (d. 1647), Robert Towne (c. 1592–1664), and Tobias Crisp. In some cases he was responding to criticisms made by Antinomian theologians regarding the theology of Rutherford and the so-called "precisionist" strain of Puritanism.[24] David Como has shown that from the perspective of the Antinomians, the "mainstream puritans were, in short, the product of miscegenation between Law and Gospel."[25] Rutherford addresses an objection raised by the Antinomians, that Rutherford and his

brethren “confound Law and Gospel, and run on that common error, that the Gospel is conditional; remission of sins dependeth not on works.”[26] Rutherford refers to comments made by Crisp in a sermon on Christ’s advocacy in which Crisp makes the striking claim that he did not see any “considerable difference between the plea of Christ for the converted persons, and the Elect unconverted.”[27] There remains only a circumstantial difference: that Christ in His priestly work pleads for the manifestation of salvation to His people at different times, but whether they believe or not, so long as they are elect, does not matter in terms of their standing before God.[28] For Crisp, the gospel cannot have any conditions, and to speak of conditions, as Rutherford and his Reformed contemporaries did, was to confound the law and the gospel. In response to this, Rutherford speaks of the “new heresy of the Antinomians” who “deny a conditional Gospel.”[29] Thus for Rutherford, the gospel is conditional, and in his judgment, to deny that conditionality is heresy. The stakes, then, in this debate were high.

As noted above, a principal bone of contention between the Reformed and Antinomian theologians was the question of the moment of actual justification.[30] Even Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), who held that the elect were justified in eternity but still must experience an existential transfer from wrath to grace for actual justification, criticizes the Antinomians on this point. Goodwin clearly states that before he believes the sinner is “unjustified…and he is a child of wrath until he believe.”[31] Rutherford enters a stronger protest against the idea of eternal justification, declaring that God’s decree to justify in eternity “is not more justification than Creation, sanctification, glorification, the crucifying of Christ, and all things that fall out in time.”[32] From Rutherford’s perspective, Crisp cannot hold to his view and make sense of Paul’s statement that believers were at one time children of wrath and dead in their sins (Eph. 2).[33] This contention helps explain why Rutherford viewed the whole theological system of the Antinomians as basically wrong. So, too, Rutherford’s position on gospel obedience has little in common with that of his adversaries. Rutherford claims that “strict and precise walking” is a gospel duty.[34] He admits that strict walking cannot merit Christ, and if that were all Crisp and Towne meant to say there would be no disagreement here.

Rutherford had in view the Christian life, and he provides a litany of texts that press upon the Christian the duty of strict and precise obedience to God.[35] Not surprisingly, then, Rutherford claims, in agreement with most Reformed theologians, that good works are necessary for salvation.[36] He affirms that these good works are not “extorted by the terrors of the Law” but performed according to evangelical principles. God, as lawgiver, requires good works on evangelical

principles, namely, from faith that purifies the heart and from the supernatural habits of grace that are bestowed upon believers. For Rutherford, "holy walking is a way to heaven…and Christ maketh a promise of life eternal to him that doth his Commandments."[37] As Rutherford clarifies his position, he sheds important light upon his understanding of the gospel.

For Rutherford, the gospel contains the whole doctrine of grace and, as preached by the prophets and apostles, requires believers to do good works for these reasons: (1) God commanded good works throughout the entire New Testament; (2) good works are necessary, for without them faith is dead and therefore cannot justify; (3) good works are the end for which Christ died; (4) without good works no one can be saved; (5) good works are commanded of those who are new creatures and are therefore expressions of thankfulness for Christ's redemptive work.[38] Nonetheless, while making such strong statements about the necessity of good works, Rutherford again makes clear that these works cannot merit salvation, nor can they purchase eternal life; only Christ's blood has such value and power. Moreover, they are not causes or conditions of justification.[39]

In a similar manner, John Davenant, a British delegate to the Synod of Dort, affirms that "the law, because it regards man as created by God in uprightness of nature, requires good works to be done in the strength of nature; *but the Gospel, because it regards man as fallen, requires good works from the justified*; but to be done, not by the strength of nature of free will, but from infused grace."[40] Reformed orthodox theologians were clear about the law-gospel distinction in the matter of justification: justification by faith alone (gospel) is set in contrast to justification by works (law), but the gospel was more than the doctrine of justification by faith. Therefore, Rutherford and Davenant, among others, could speak about the gospel requiring good works. Furthermore, just as Rutherford viewed the law positively in its relation to the gospel, he also claimed that the "gospel may be proven out of the Law" because the first commandment speaks of God's character, which includes His mercy.[41] That does not mean that the law is the gospel, but that the law, in a unique sense, points to the gospel.

Returning to his criticism of the Antinomian theologians, Rutherford takes issue with their view that the gospel is unconditional. Rutherford has in mind John Saltmarsh, who argued that the gospel "offers and gives life freely, without the condition of any work, and requires nothing but the receiving of that which is offered…. The Gospel hath in it no moral condition of any thing to be done of us."[42] The conditions Rutherford speaks of are evangelical, that is, they are wrought in believers by the grace of Christ, and without them persons cannot be saved. Therefore, "to deny the Gospel to be a conditional covenant, is to bely the

Gospel…that repentance and doing of God's will, and new obedience, are conditions, is evident by Scripture."[43] Referring to Romans 2:7, Rutherford claims that works are not conditions of justification, as faith is, but they are nevertheless required of those that are saved.[44] At the heart of the debate between the Reformed orthodox and the Antinomians was the difference between the law and the gospel. Saltmarsh shows a lack of clarity on the imperatives of the gospel and instead prefers to argue that it "persuades rather then commands…. The Gospel commands us rather by pattern than precept, and by imitation than command."[45] In Rutherford's mind, the way Saltmarsh speaks of them, they are reduced to friendly advice and not actual commands from the lawgiver. Moreover, in direct response to the idea that the gospel only persuades, Rutherford makes a rather forceful point about the commanding force of the gospel: "But say we, it both commands, (as the Law doth) and with a more strong obligation of the constraining love of Christ…and also persuadeth."[46] What Rutherford argues for accords well with the teaching from the Westminster Confession of Faith on the moral law: "The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation" (19.5).[47]

Rutherford elsewhere affirms that the law and the gospel require the same obedience. Indeed, "positively," they are not contrary to one another: "Perfect obedience, which the Law requireth, and imperfect obedience which the Gospel accepteth are but gradual differences," that is, a difference in degree, not kind.[48] Furthermore, "the Gospel abateth nothing of the height of perfection, in commanding what ever the law commandeth in the same perfection…. In acceptation of grace, the Gospel accepteth less than the law, but commandeth no less."[49] John Owen, following Ursinus, speaks of God's commands in the new covenant as the "preceptive part of the gospel" (Eph. 4:22–24; Titus 2:11–12).[50] In discussing the similarities and differences between the law and the gospel, Owen notes that gospel commands, which require obedience in God's people, do not have reference to justification.[51] Owen and Rutherford can maintain this position because they, like their Reformed orthodox contemporaries, understood the law-gospel contrast not simply as command versus promise but rather as a redemptive-historical distinction. In chapter 7, "Of God's Covenant with Man," the Westminster Confession of Faith divides the covenant of grace into "the time of the law" (Old Testament) and "the time of the gospel" (New Testament). Understood this way, Rutherford's insistence on the commanding force of the gospel in the context of the covenant of grace shows that he has not retreated to

Roman Catholicism, as some of his Antinomian opponents claimed. Rather, he believed that the gospel presented both indicatives and imperatives, and in that order. Rutherford was not, of course, the lone voice crying in the wilderness of a "precisionist" crusade. John Coffey has noted that Rutherford himself was accused of both antinomianism and enthusiasm.[52] This was of course absurd, and Coffey rightly notes that Rutherford "refused to create a dichotomy between the external and the internal, the spirit and the law."[53] In so doing, Rutherford devoted his theological career to "combating the twin threats of Arminianism and Antinomianism."[54] But he was not alone. The work of his contemporary, Anthony Burgess, shows that the threat of antinomianism was real and demanded a response from the pens of orthodox Reformed theologians.

Vindication of the Moral Law In his penetrating work *Vindiciae Legis* ("Claims of the Law," 1646), Anthony Burgess responds to the rising antinomian influences in mid-seventeenth century Britain. His emphases are slightly different from Rutherford's and will be highlighted in this section, although the two writers have much in common. Burgess's perspective may add clarity to Rutherford's arguments.

The Mosaic covenant represents an important starting point regarding the relation between the law and the gospel. Like many Reformed theologians, and consistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith, Burgess speaks of "the time of the law" (old covenant) and "the time of the gospel" (new covenant). Within the context of the time of the law, Burgess distinguishes between the law considered largely, "as that whole doctrine delivered on Mount Sinai, with the preface and promises adjoined," or strictly, "as it is an abstracted rule of righteousness, holding forth life upon no terms, but perfect obedience."[55] In the former sense, the law functions as an administration in the covenant of grace; in the latter sense, it functions similarly to the prelapsarian covenant of works. Burgess suggests that much in Paul's writings on the law can be explained by applying this distinction. The general doctrine of Moses is more than the law considered in abstraction from God's covenantal promises. Thus Burgess affirms that the "law" covenant was a covenant of grace, "yet the righteousness of works and faith differ as much as heaven and earth."[56]

This is a point about which Burgess cannot afford to be tentative, especially in the context of Roman Catholic polemics and the doctrine of justification by faith. He makes plain therefore that in the matter of justification all works are excluded. So although the law (old covenant) was a covenant of grace, Burgess nevertheless insists on contrasting the law and the gospel, for "in some sense the Law and Gospel do oppose and thwart one another."[57] "In some sense" suggests

ambiguity, but Burgess explains that the phrase means the law and the gospel differ in terms of a redemptive-historical contrast between the Old and New Testaments. When contrasted this way, the law (old covenant) and the gospel (new covenant) differ "only gradually."[58] Burgess provides more fine-tuning of the contrast between the law and the gospel by noting the prescriptive elements in each. Like the law, the gospel and its precepts—apart from the grace of God—kill. When the law and the gospel are therefore taken largely, the difference is only of degree, not of absolute antithesis.

However, as noted above, Burgess says the law and the gospel may also be understood strictly. When one takes the law strictly and identifies it with the covenant of grace, he or she confounds "the righteousness of works, and of faith together, as the Papists do: but if largely, then there may be an happy reconciliation."[59] The word "gospel" may also be viewed largely or strictly. Understood largely, the gospel first signifies the whole doctrine taught by Christ's apostles (Mark 16:15). Next, the gospel is sometimes taken strictly as the announcement of a Savior, as in Luke 2:10 ("I bring you good tidings of great joy"). Accordingly, for Reformed theologians like Burgess, both the law and the gospel may be viewed largely and strictly.

As noted above in connection with the Lutheran Formula of Concord and Ursinus, these distinctions raise the question of whether the command of repentance belongs to the gospel or the law. Burgess notes that the "Lutherans, Antinomians, and Calvinists…speak differently" in answering this question.[60] This point should not go unnoticed. Simply asserting a distinction between the law and the gospel means very little unless the terms are defined and the differences are spelled out. Burgess notes the difference of opinion among several theological traditions on the matter of the law and the gospel. For instance, Anabaptists and Socinians saw no gospel in the time of the law (Old Testament), and the Antinomians typically argued that the gospel began only when Christ appeared. In Burgess's mind, the Papists "make the Law and the Gospel capable of no opposite consideration, no not in any strict sense," which means saints in the Old and New Testaments were "both justified by fulfilling the Law of God."[61]

Returning to the debate over whether repentance belongs to the law or the gospel, Burgess claims that repentance may also be understood both strictly and largely. Taken largely, repentance includes faith. Understood strictly, repentance simply means sorrow for sin and can be distinguished from faith. Without providing names, Burgess refers to "learned men" who make two commandments of the gospel: faith and repentance. Others, according to Burgess, make these commands "appendices to the Gospel." He rejects these

positions in favor of "seeing Faith and Repentance have something initial in them, and something confirmative in them, therefore they are both wrought by Law and Gospel also."62 But, when strictly understood, the gospel is not a doctrine of repentance or obedience, but only a gracious promise of Christ. Yet Burgess admits that "learned men do sometimes speak otherwise, calling Faith and Repentance the two Evangelical commands, but then they use the word more largely, the doctrine of Christ and the Apostles."63 Obviously, even a cursory glance at Burgess's work on the law and the gospel will show that "learned men" differ on the precise details of the law and the gospel. The Lutherans are not Reformed, and the Reformed are not the Antinomians—but they all talk about the law and the gospel. Burgess certainly holds to a law-gospel distinction, but what that distinction means depends entirely on the context in which it is posited. In the matter of justification, the law and the gospel are antithetical. Understood in the context of redemptive history, the differences between the law and the gospel are only relative and not absolute. For the Reformed, repentance belongs to the gospel; the Antinomians also affirmed this, but on different grounds, namely, their rejection of the commanding force of the moral law. The Lutherans preferred to interpret the law and the gospel strictly—to use Burgess's distinction—which meant the command to repent belonged to the law and not the gospel.

One final consideration concerns what the gospel promises are.64 Was the gospel simply the promise of forgiveness of sins (i.e., justification)? Or something more?

The Glory of the Gospel The Puritans wrote prolifically on the gospel. One of the more incisive treatments of the gospel comes from Thomas Goodwin, *A Discourse of the Glory of the Gospel*. For him, the gospel is really about Christology first and foremost. Reformed Christology has, since Calvin, placed great stress on the organic relationship between Christ's person and His mediatorial work. He is prophet, priest, and king, and all of these offices relate to the gospel of Jesus Christ, in both His humiliation and His exaltation. That is to say, the gospel is the whole Christ, His person and His work, and our receiving the whole Christ by faith. More than that, Reformed Christology has historically placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the Spirit in relation to Christ. Hence, Christology informs pneumatology and vice versa. Paul's Christology is essential to Paul's pneumatology, and both are integral to the gospel (see 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 3:17–18). The Spirit's work in us is actually Christ's work in us and for us (Rom. 8:9). Goodwin elaborates on this idea, and the concept of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) occupies a central place in his understanding

of the gospel.

Basing his exposition of the gospel on Colossians 1:3–23, Goodwin shows that "the gospel does not only thus convey the Holy Spirit to you, to dwell in you forever, clotheth you with this righteousness, enableth you with open face to behold God…. I say the gospel doth not only do all this, but it changeth you into the same image, from glory to glory."[65] In other words, the gospel is not simply Christ for His people—though understood strictly the gospel has in view Christ's redemptive work and not the application of it—but also Christ in His people. As Goodwin would argue, "Whatsoever glory, and whatsoever riches of Jesus Christ the gospel lays open, it is all yours, it is all in you, and for you."[66] Therefore, the gospel is not limited to justification but also includes sanctification: "If I act anything, it is not I, but the grace of Jesus Christ in me…. If I be sanctified it is not grace, so much as Christ, is made sanctification. The truth is, that as a man still grows up more and more gospelised in his spirit, so Jesus Christ is in him, and works out all things else, till there be nothing but Christ in him."[67] Goodwin clearly understands the gospel largely when he writes in this vein, but there are some important distinctions that may help clarify why he does so. He identifies several works of God that have reference to the salvation of His people. They are the following:

> 1. *Immanent* in God towards us, as his *Eternal love* set and passed upon us, out of which he chose us, and designed this and all blessings to us.
> 2. *Transient*, in Christ done for us; in all he did or suffered representing of us, and in our stead.
> 3. *Applicatory*, wrought in and upon us, in the endowing us with all those blessings by the Spirit; as calling, justification, sanctification, glorification.[68]

These works of God are all "gospel" works, which means that calling, justification, sanctification, and adoption can be included in the gospel (largely considered). Therefore, Goodwin shows in his treatise on the gospel that what Christ did for His people must necessarily be applied to His people. Redemption without application is no redemption at all. In other words, "the bulk and sum of our practical religion…is resolved into God's revealing Christ, and Christ's revealing himself within us, from first to last, throughout our whole lives."[69] And, to make abundantly clear the comprehensive nature of the gospel in terms of its application, Goodwin contends that

> the main sum and substance of Christianity then is, that Christ be revealed in us, and not only to us; that you come to have Christ by application in and to your souls; Christ brought down into your heart.[70]

And,

> All then, that God works upon you savingly, from first to last, is a discovery of Christ, some way or other, in you. It is either the knowledge of

> his person, or it is a conformity to him, or it is dispositions suited to what you know of him; working upon us, and operations of God upon us suitable to what is in him; and this I call the sum or substance of our religion.[71]

Goodwin's understanding of the gospel, which includes Christ for His people and Christ in His people, defies neat categorizations. The gospel certainly includes Christ for His people, but it is much more than that. It is also Christ in His people and the conformity of sinners to the image of Christ, who dwells in their hearts by faith (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 3:17).

Conclusion

Theologians from various traditions have not understood the law-gospel distinction—so important to Protestant dogmatics—in the same way. In fact, not even Reformed theologians agreed on all the details. In the matter of justification there was unanimous agreement, even between the Reformed and the Lutherans, for they both understood that the law must be taken strictly in this matter. Justification before God is either by works or by faith alone in Christ. To be sure, not all particulars of the doctrine of justification were expressed the same way among Reformed theologians, but they did agree with Lutheran theologians on the basic antithesis between the law and the gospel in this connection. However, as this chapter has shown, the law-gospel distinction cannot simply be reduced to its application to the doctrine of justification by faith. For many Puritans the law and the gospel were redemptive periods correlating to the Old and New Testaments. Therefore the law contained the gospel, and the gospel contained the law. Moreover, as Thomas Goodwin argued, the gospel was not simply Christ's work for His people. Rather, the gospel was the whole of salvation, which includes adoption, sanctification, and glorification in addition to justification. J. I. Packer is certainly correct, then, to note the comprehensiveness of the gospel in Puritan literature: "It denoted to them the whole doctrine of the covenant of grace. Sometimes they included as part of it the preparatory message of sin and judgment as well. Thus to preach the gospel meant to them nothing less than declaring the entire economy of redemption, the saving work of all three Persons of the Trinity."72

In the end, it is indeed proper to speak of the Lutheran versus the Reformed versus the Antinomian understanding of the law and the gospel, if the terms of the debate have been defined carefully. Certainly, to insist that the law-gospel distinction is idiosyncratic to Lutheranism is inaccurate to a fault, but that does not mean the Lutherans and the Reformed always employed this distinction in the same way. Covenant theology has a lot to say about this distinction, and so too do the various doctrinal controversies that helped shape Reformed theology from the time of the Reformation on.

1. David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 451.

2. Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist…* (London, 1648), 120.

3. Martin Luther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine Evening Lectures*, ed. F. W. Walther, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1986).

4. Theodore Beza, "The Christian Faith (1558)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 2: 1552–1556*, comp. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 273–74. Beza also notes their point of agreement: "They have this in common: both are of one and the true God, who continually remains like unto himself (Heb. 1:1–2), so that

we may not think that the one abolishes the other with regard to the substance; but on the contrary the one establishes the substance of the other as we will see (Rom. 10:2–4)."

5. Thus, Richard Muller argues that the Lutherans and the Reformed applied the use of the law (*usus legis*) differently: "The Reformed lay heavy stress on the *tertius usus legis* on the assumption that faith must spring forth and bear the fruit of good works, as defined by the law in its normative function. The Lutherans, however, see here the danger of works-righteousness and insist that the *usus normativus* ultimately returns the believer, who remains *simul iustus et peccator*, to the *usus paedagogicus* and from there again to Christ and his grace as the sole source of salvation. The law, for Lutheranism, can never become the ultimate norm for Christian living but, instead, must always lead to Christ who alone is righteous. This difference between the Lutherans and the Reformed arises out of the dialectical relationship of law and gospel in Lutheranism as opposed to the simple distinction of law and gospel within the one *foedus gratiae* held among the Reformed." *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 321.

6. For example, were they speaking in a redemptive-historical sense so that the law was synonymous with the Old Testament and the gospel is synonymous with the New Testament? Were they distinguishing between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace? Were they addressing the question of justification? Or did they use also this distinction in the context of sanctification? These are important questions that help get to the heart of the issue, and they show how the Reformed sometimes differed from the Lutherans (and each other) in the application of this principle.

7. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Cincinnati, Ohio: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 105.

8. Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 105.

9. Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 105. Thomas Manton likewise speaks of repentance as a gospel precept: "And then having God for our father, we may have Christ for our advocate, and the Spirit for our comforter and sanctifier, to enable us to observe the gospel precepts of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." *Sermons upon Romans 8*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: James Nisbet, 1870–1875), 12:104.

10. See Gert van den Brink, "Calvin, Witsius and the English Antinomians," in *The Reception of Calvin in Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Andreas Beck and William den Boer (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

11. J. Wayne Baker attempts to draw a number of parallels between the seventeenth-century English Antinomians and Martin Luther. He remarks, for example, "At times the Antinomians went beyond Luther, *viz.* the doctrine of eternal justification, and at times their language was somewhat less precise than Luther's, but to a large degree they were faithful to Luther's theology of grace." "*Sola Fide, Sola Gratia:* The Battle for Luther in Seventeenth-Century England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1985): 133. Baker's article has several problematic elements, but his basic thesis warrants further investigation concerning the role of Luther's theology, and Lutheranism in general, in the debates between the Antinomians and the Reformed orthodox, such as Rutherford and Burgess, in the seventeenth century.

12. Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 185. Como adds, "In time, this claim to Luther's legacy seems to have become almost axiomatic within antinomian circles. Towne, for instance, placed Luther in a rather exalted category of evangelists that included saints Paul and Stephen. Their use of his works was surely selective, however. Eaton, for instance, showed a strong bias for the most anti-legal of all Luther's writings…. [Eaton] managed quietly to ignore Luther's vocal denunciations of Agricola and his 'antinomian' followers." *Blown by the Spirit*, 185–86.

13. For instance, a major part of Rutherford's work, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist*, focuses on the antinomian misreading of Martin Luther's theology.

14. On some of the chief tenets of English Antinomianism in the seventeenth century, see Barry H. Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions: The Questions of Orthodoxy Regarding the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (c. 1599–1691)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 96–114.

15. I am grateful for a private conversation with David Como, who shared his thoughts on this issue.

16. See Curt Daniel, "John Gill and Calvinistic Antinomianism," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill*

(1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 174–75.

17. For an evaluation of Crisp's position on this question see Gert van den Brink, *Herman Witsius en het Antinomianisme* (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2008), 66–86.

18. Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted in the Perfection and Encouragements of the Saints, Notwithstanding Sins and Trialls.*… (London: M. S. for Henry Overton, 1646), 3:225.

19. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 3:225.

20. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 3:225–26.

21. John Flavel, *Planelogia.*… (London: R. Roberts, 1691), 261.

22. See, for example, Thomas Bakewell, *The Antinomians' Christ Confounded, and the Lord's Christ Exalted* (London: for Thomas Bankes, 1644); Thomas Bedford, *An Examination of the Chief Points of Antinomianism* (London: John Field for Philemon Stephens, 1647); Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena.*… 3rd ed. (London: T. R. and E. M. for Ralph Smith, 1646).

23. Commenting on Rutherford's polemical style against antinomianism, William Lorimer notes, "There are many precious Truths ill expressed by some very Orthodox Divines; and in such a case, we may well say that we dislike the way of expression; tho' we dearly love the Truth so expressed. We find that the Reverend and pious Mr. Rutherford in a Fast Sermon, preached before the House of Commons in the Year 1643. on Dan. 6.26. saith, That the Antinomian is the Golden white Devil, a Spirit of Hell cloathed with all Heaven, and the Notions of Free Grace." *An Apology for the Ministers Who Subscribed Only unto the Stating of the Truths and Errours in Mr. William's book*… (London: for John Lawrence, 1694), 12–13.

24. On the "precisionist" strain among the early Puritans, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

25. Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 195.

26. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:63.

27. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 3:176.

28. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 3:176.

29. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:63.

30. See chapter 8, "Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius on Justification from Eternity," for a more extended treatment of the moment of actual justification.

31. Thomas Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4:277.

32. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:19.

33. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:19. On Crisp's view, see *Christ Alone Exalted*, 2:155–60.

34. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:30.

35. For example, 1 Peter 1:15–16; 2:11; Luke 13:24; 14:26; 18:25; Matthew 13:46; 1 Corinthians 9:24–25; Hebrews 12:4.

36. Thomas Blake, in addressing the necessity of conditions in the covenant of grace, argues the following: "God hath ordained good works as a Christians way and walk. They are charged upon man as is plain in the context, in order to salvation which God of grace vouchsafes; and we are Gods workmanship created in Christ Jesus for these ends…faith and repentance are our conditions, and not God's." *Vindiciae Foederis; Or A Treatise of the Covenant of God Entered with Man-Kinde*… (London: Able Roper, 1658), 145. Francis Turretin addresses this controversy in some detail and affirms the necessity of good works, but he is careful to distinguish how they relate to justification, sanctification, and glorification: "*Ratione prioris non se habent antecedentur, efficienter, et meritorie, sed consequenter, et declarative. Ratione Sanctificationis, se habent constitutive, quia eam constituunt et promovent. Ratione Glorificationis vero antecedenter et ordinative, quia ad eam referuntur ut medium ad finem, Imo ut initium ad complementum, quia gratia est gloriae inchoatio, ut Gloria est gratiaw consummatio*." *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae* (Edinburgh: Lowe, 1847), 17.3.14. See also John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*… (London, 1645), 136–37; Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 484–85.

37. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:37–38.

38. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:38.
39. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:39.
40. John Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification, or the* Disputatio De Justitia Habituali Et Actuali, trans. Josiah Allport (London, 1844), 1:288.
41. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened…* (Edinburgh, 1655), 7.
42. John Saltmarsh, *Free Grace, or, The Flowings of Christs Blood Free to Sinners…* (London, 1646), 206–7.
43. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:40.
44. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:40.
45. Saltmarsh, *Free Grace*, 148.
46. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:122. Thomas Manton suggests that the covenant of grace is a law: "A law it is, for it hath all the requisites of a law, a precept, and a sanction. They err certainly, that tell us the gospel is no law; for if there were no law, there would be no governor, and no government, no duty, no sin, no judgment, no punishment, nor reward." *Sermons upon the Sixth and Eighth Chapters of Romans*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: James Nisbet, 1870–1875), 11:395.
47. See also Westminster Confession of Faith, 3.8 and 33.2, which speak of "obeying the gospel."
48. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:8.
49. Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:8.
50. Owen, *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 3:605.
51. Owen, *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:609.
52. John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 135.
53. Coffey, *The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, 135.
54. Coffey, *The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, 138.
55. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis: or, A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants…* (London, 1647), 223.
56. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 223.
57. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 229.
58. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 230.
59. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 230.
60. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 231.
61. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 233.
62. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 251.
63. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 252.
64. There are a whole host of issues related to the law-gospel distinction that require further discussion, such as the manner in which they agree and disagree. Related to their agreement, Francis Roberts argued, "How sweetly the Law and Gospel do agree in one. They are both digested and incorporated together in this one Sinai-Covenant. They jointly conduct the Sinner out of himself unto Jesus Christ that he may be justified by Faith, not by works. They jointly require faith in Jesus Christ unto Justification. They jointly tender eternal life and happiness, upon Believing. They jointly direct Believers, how to walk towards God and man after justification, in order to the promised happiness. How admirable is this Consent and Harmony! In this Sinai-Covenant, the Law was not administered without the Gospel, nor the Gospel without the Law: they were indivisibly conjoined, and inseparably married together: becoming a Legal Gospel, and an Evangelical Law; A Gospel, full of Doing, and a Law full of Believing." *The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man…* (London, 1657), 778.
65. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:329.
66. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:337.
67. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:339.
68. Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*,

D.D. (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:405.

69. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:343.

70. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:345.

71. Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, in *Works*, 4:346. See also Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon Acts 2:37, 38*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1870–1875), 21:284.

72. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 167.

Chapter 21

Puritan Christology

> *If there were infinite worlds made of creatures loving, they would not have so much love in them as was in the heart of that man Christ Jesus.*
>
> —THOMAS GOODWIN[1]

Puritan theologians produced outstanding studies in the area of Christology, namely, the person and work of Christ. These men combined their learning with soul-stirring applications to bring Christ home to the mind and soul. John Arrowsmith (1602–1659), in his formidable exposition *Theanthropos* ("The God-Man"), shows beyond doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was both God and man in one person.[2] On a more pastoral level, *Looking unto Jesus,* the more than six-hundred-page work of Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664), presents Christ to the believer in both His person and work in a way that highlights the distinctive nature of Reformed Christology.[3] Many more works could be listed, and it is a great mystery why so little secondary literature has been written on Puritan Christology. This chapter will, however, consider the unique contributions of two eminent Puritan theologians, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) and John Owen (1616–1683).

Puritan Christology unquestionably distinguished itself from other theological traditions regarding Christ's work.[4] Yet most scholars assume that the aforementioned theologians simply affirmed Nicene and Chalcedonian orthodoxy regarding His person and nothing more distinctive. However, a closer examination shows that while Puritan theology affirmed the basic teaching of Chalcedon, a distinct Puritan Christology with regard to Christ's person emerged in the seventeenth century, especially in the writings of Goodwin and Owen.[5] The fixed Reformed-Lutheran divide on Christology played a significant role in their thought, as did the rising influence of Socinianism, but neither author was merely polemical; both, in fact, sought to make positive contributions to Reformed orthodoxy. One such contribution was the appreciation of the true humanity of Jesus Christ and the development of a better model for

understanding the relation of the two natures in His person in both His earthly and heavenly ministries. In this chapter, the theological contributions of both Owen and Goodwin will be examined in light of a distinctively Reformed Christology that considers the person of Christ in His two states of humiliation and exaltation, and how the Holy Spirit relates to Him in each state. A brief account of the polemical situation will lay a foundation for better appreciation of the genius of Reformed Christology.

The Historical Context The christological conflicts between the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools that led to the Council of Chalcedon (451) were not fully resolved by the promulgation of the Chalcedonian Definition. Even in the secondary literature, no agreement exists as to which party emerged victorious.[6] That said, many scholars acknowledge the Alexandrian emphasis on the unity of Christ's person and His deity (*logos-sarx*, "the divine Word in human flesh") and the Antiochene emphasis on the distinction between the two natures (*logos-anthropos*, "the divine Word and a human being").[7] Regardless of which side would be happier with the result of the council, Richard Muller has argued that these two positions are not without dangers: "the Antiochene position, taken to an extreme by Nestorius, threatens the unity of Christ's person; the Alexandrian doctrine, taken to an extreme by Eutyches, threatens the integrity of the natures."[8] Certain problems remain, especially with regard to the writings of Cyril, the father of Alexandrian Christology. Oliver Crisp has argued that there are certain statements in Cyril that seem "much more in keeping with the Antiochene tradition…than with the Alexandrian."[9] In fact, Cyril often makes statements that appear to be better suited to the Antiochene model.[10] Crisp's analysis, even if does not satisfy all interpreters, serves to highlight the complexity of the issues.[11] At the very least, there are ambiguities in the Chalcedonian Definition that have caused no shortage of disagreements among scholars and allowed theologians from various traditions to affirm their own readings of what the Creed teaches. All are agreed, however, that the Creed affirms that the two natures exist in one person. However, the debate's major point of contention was the identity of the one person. In other words, do we simply identify the person with the divine Logos (Cyril's position) or with the whole Christ (Calvin's position)? That question, to be answered below, has particular significance for the development of a distinct Reformed Christology.

The Western church has always distinguished between the two natures of Christ, who is both consubstantial (*homoousios*, "the same in substance") with humanity and consubstantial with God. However, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed theologians all understood this twofold consubstantiality

differently. Roman Catholic theology formulates the hypostatic union in a way that means the divine attributes completely permeated the human nature and thus enabled Christ, in His human nature, to possess from birth the beatific vision of God. As Herman Bavinck has noted, in this model, "even on earth Christ was already both a pilgrim and one who fully understood (*comprehensor ac viator*), walking not by faith but by sight…all the gifts of which the human nature of Christ was capable were given to him, not gradually but all at once, at his incarnation."12 Lutheran theologians affirmed this idea, but they went further by teaching not only a "communication of graces" (*communicatio gratiarum*), but also a "communication of properties" (*communication idiomatum*) to the human nature.13 A version of the Lutheran model argues that the communication of properties is "unidirectional, from the divine to the human nature, and not vice versa."14 However we understand the Lutheran version of the "communication of properties"—admittedly, a complex issue—the fact remains that Bavinck speaks not a little truth by contending that the tendency of both the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran positions is to "elevate the human nature above the boundaries set for it and dissolve into mere appearance both the human development of Jesus and the state of his humiliation."15

In response, Reformed theologians have insisted upon an important maxim, namely, that "the finite cannot contain the infinite" (*finitum non capax infiniti*). Human nature has certain limitations; there was room for development in Christ's human nature (cf. Luke 2:52). He also moved from a state of humiliation to a state of exaltation.16 But even in His state of exaltation, Christ's glorified human nature remained distinct from His divine nature. Maintaining the integrity of the human nature both during Christ's ministry on earth and afterwards in heaven was essential to Reformed orthodoxy.17 The primary focus of this chapter will evaluate just how Reformed Christology in the Puritan tradition, with particular reference to John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, understood the humanity of Christ in a way that represents a significant and distinctive contribution to the topic of Christology.

Reformed Christology John Arrowsmith's views on the incarnation reflect those of his Puritan contemporaries. He affirms that the Logos assumed the nature of a man, both body and soul. If Christ had not assumed a human nature, body and soul, He could not have saved body and soul.18 But, and this point was made rather forcefully by all the Reformed orthodox, the Son did not assume a person, for if He did He would have saved only that person, assuming that such a personal incarnation was possible. As Arrowsmith notes, "With us, the soul, and body, being united, make a person. But in Christ, the soul and body were so

united, as to have their subsistence not of themselves (as in us) but in the Godhead."[19] The Logos's assumption of a human nature has been termed a hypostatic union, with the result that the human nature subsists in and depends upon the divine nature of the Logos. The humanity of Christ is therefore said to be "enhypostic," that is, subsisting in (*en*) His deity.

Another issue is whether Christ assumed a human nature in its perfection, as before the fall, or whether He assumed a human nature clothed with infirmities, as after the fall. Arrowsmith concludes that Christ took a human nature "clothed with infirmities, as after the fall; which is implied in the word *Flesh*."[20] Aware of the potential danger of affirming that Christ assumed "weakened flesh," Arrowsmith qualifies his position by noting that Christ did not take all of the infirmities of man, distinguishing between "painful infirmities" and "sinful and culpable infirmities," the latter of which Christ did not take and the former of which He took only a part.[21] The "painful infirmities" fall under a twofold consideration: those that are personal and proper to some men and women, such as various diseases (e.g., gout, leprosy), and those that are "natural," such as pain, grief, sorrow, hunger, and thirst. The former Christ did not take, but He certainly experienced the latter.[22] Like his contemporaries, Arrowsmith aims to do justice to the two natures of Christ but in a manner that escapes the charge of christological heresy.

As noted above, the Reformed vigorously maintained a distinction between the two natures of Christ. Goodwin remarks that the two natures "could not be changed into the other, for God was immutable; and it was impossible that the Nature of Man should become the Nature of God, since the Essence of the Godhead is incommunicable."[23] Thus the perfections of Christ's human nature come infinitely "short of the Attributes that are essential to the Godhead."[24]

Returning to the question over the identity of the person, a number of considerations are worth noting. Cyril's position, despite the ambiguities Crisp mentioned, maintains that the person is the divine Word, or Logos. Thus, for Cyril, the Logos acts as the agent of all that is done in the human nature, a position that raises a host of problems, including how the integrity of the human nature could be preserved. In other words, how can we speak of truly human experiences?[25] Moreover, ascribing suffering to the Logos while affirming divine impassibility proves to be, at best, incoherent. Consequently, following Leo the Great (c. 391–461), Reformed theologians have used the idea of "person" to refer to Christ in both His two natures and not the Logos only (*simpliciter*).[26] The incarnation resulted in a "complex person," one that reflects the two natures of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Following from this view of Christ's person, Reformed theologians have

spoken of the “communication of properties” (*communicatio idiomatum*), which also includes the “communication of operations” (*communicatio operationum*), since the terms taken together reflect the person doing the work.[27] The Westminster Confession of Faith describes these concepts in the following manner: “Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature” (8.7).[28] In other words, the divine Logos does not act through the human nature as His instrument; rather, the God-man acts according to both natures. Seventeenth-century covenant theologian Francis Roberts (1609–1675) explains this point by noting that “Christ did his *opera authoritatis* or *magisterii*, his works of authority from his Godhead: but his *opera ministerii*, his works of ministry, from his man-hood: but as his natures are united in one person: so his acts and operations from his two principles are conjoined in one mediation.”[29] This point of doctrine was a source of contention between the Reformed orthodox and various Roman Catholic writers, who held that Christ performed all His acts of mediation only as man. By limiting Christ’s mediation to His humanity, the Roman Catholics found support for the idea of a sacerdotal priesthood. The implication was that since Christ mediated only as a human being, then another human could mediate as well, both before and after the incarnation.[30] Roberts sums up the issues at stake between the Reformed and the Roman Catholic theologians, particularly the Italian Jesuit, Cardinal Bellarmine (1542–1621): “Bellarmine speaks plainly, thus distinguishing; the *principium quod*, the principle or beginning which did the works of mediatorship, was not God alone, nor man alone, but both together, *viz.* God-man; but the *principium quo*, the principle or beginning whereby these works were done of the mediator, was his humane nature, not his divine.”[31] By anchoring the natures of Christ in the unity of the person, Reformed theologians refused to speak of Christ’s mediatorial work as simply the work of a human.

Therefore, based on the unity of the person and the communication of properties and operations, the church can be said to be purchased by the blood of God (Acts 20:28), or, as Goodwin notes, “We say that God and Man died, though the Manhood only did die, yet it is attributed to the whole, it is called the *blood of God*, and we say God-Man rose, though his Body only rose, yet it is attributed to the whole, *Totus Christus* [Christ as a whole person], though not *Totum Christ* [the whole being of Christ].”[32] Turretin elaborates on Goodwin’s contention that the whole Christ is God and man, but not the whole of Christ: “Whole in the masculine (*totus*) denotes a person in the concrete, but whole in the neuter (*totum*) a nature in the abstract. Therefore it is rightly said that the

whole Christ is God or man because this marks the person, but not the whole of Christ because this marks each nature which is in Him."[33] This teaching reflects the Reformed understanding of the communication of operations and follows naturally from their insistence on a complex person.

So it is the case that Reformed Christology has its own distinctive emphases when compared to Catholic and Lutheran accounts of the person of Christ. But in terms of the broader Reformed interpretative tradition, nothing described above seems to warrant the claim that a distinct Christology emerged in the Reformed Puritan tradition. All that has been suggested so far is the principle of the distinction between the two natures, which is based upon the maxim that the finite cannot contain the infinite, and the unity of the (complex) person based upon the "anhypostatic" model (i.e., the Logos assumed an impersonal human nature).[34]

What might raise some eyebrows about Owen's Christology, which distinguishes him from many Reformed theologians in the sixteenth century, is his position on the relation of the two natures in the one person of Christ.

Owen's Contribution to Christology If we argue that Christ's divine nature acts through the human nature, thus enabling Him to perform miracles, for example, a serious problem emerges concerning the plethora of texts that speak of the Holy Spirit's role in the life of Christ. This was the problem that Cyril's position was unable to overcome. By affirming that the Logos was the sole effective agent working on the human nature, Cyril's asymmetrical relation between the two natures renders the Holy Spirit's work in the life of Jesus superfluous. In fact, the Socinian, John Biddle, picks up on this tension by asking a series of questions:

> What need was there that the holy Spirit should be given unto Christ, to enable him to do miracles; and an Angel appear from heaven unto him to strengthen him; or why should he so earnestly expostulate with God for forsaking him, if Christ were he, by whom the First Creation was performed, had a Divine Nature and was God himself?… Would it be said of him that had the Divine Nature, that he did miracles because God was with him, and not rather, because he was God?… Would not the Divine nature in Christ, at this rate, be in the mean time idle and useless?[35]

These questions are not without merit and deserve answers.[36] Neither Roman Catholic nor Lutheran theologians can adequately account for any meaningful role of the Spirit in the life of Christ; indeed, their respective Christologies may find Biddle's questions rather difficult to answer. Bavinck makes the strong

assertion that “while Lutheran Christology still speaks of gifts, it actually does not know what to do with them and no longer has room even for Christ’s anointing with the Holy Spirit.”37 And this is precisely where Owen makes his valuable contribution to understanding the person and work of Christ. Indeed, Owen’s understanding of the Spirit’s work in Christ is the consistent outworking of the Reformed insistence on both the integrity or perfection of the two natures and the unity of the person. He argues that “the only singular immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with himself.”38 Thus, the Holy Spirit is the “immediate operator of all divine acts of the Son himself, even on his own human nature. Whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon the human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit.”39 Oliver Crisp admits that “it could be argued that it is the Holy Spirit that enables the human nature of Christ to perform miracles, rather than Christ’s divine nature.”40 However, he is careful to note that “this is not a conventional view of the means by which Christ was able to perform miracles. A conventional view would claim that Christ was able to perform miracles in virtue of the action of his divine nature in and through his human nature in the hypostatic union.”41 The implication of Crisp’s observation is, of course, that Owen’s Christology is not conventional.

Unconventional Puritan Views of Christology But Owen was not alone. Other Puritans argued in a similar manner. For example, Goodwin posits that the Spirit sanctified the human nature and constituted Him as the Christ. The Spirit was the “immediate Author” of Christ’s graces, to be sure; “for although the Son of God dwelt personally, in the humane Nature, and so advanced that Nature above the ordinary rank of Creatures…yet all his habitual Graces, which even his Soul was full of, were from the Holy Ghost.”42 This way of understanding the relation of the Spirit to the human nature preserves the humanity of Jesus Christ and answers a host of exegetical questions.43 In this connection, Stephen Holmes has noted that, for Owen, Christ’s human nature was sanctified by the Spirit; “the command to ‘be holy as I am holy’…can have new force: the Jewish man Jesus Christ can be imitated because he was ‘like us in every way, sin apart’, and so this Christology leads directly to a robust account of sanctification, a topic of particular interest to the Reformed, and another facet of their dispute with the Lutherans.”44

Owen recognized that earlier Christian theologians had imagined that Christ’s divine nature took the place of His soul or was responsible for immediately operating upon the human nature. Yet Owen insists that “being a perfect man, his rational soul was in him the immediate principle of all his moral operations,

even as ours are in us."[45] Owen's point that Christ's human nature was "self actuated" (*autokineton*) cannot be overemphasized since some might understand the Reformed view of Christ's anhypostatic (impersonal) human nature as meaning He had no human self-consciousness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Turretin remarks, "Personality is not an act, but the mode of a thing."[46] The human nature was, because of the incarnation, personalized in the person of the Logos. But to make the consciousness or personality of the human nature co-extensive with the God-man is to fail to understand how Reformed theologians have typically understood the word "person." Unlike Lutheran Christology, then, Owen's version of the *communicatio idiomatum* means that Christ's humanity does not get lost in His divinity.

One cannot help but think that Owen's emphases are greatly needed in the church today where so many seem to view Christ as a sort of "superman," in the manner of Arianism, that is, as someone neither truly divine nor truly human. Such a view of Christ can lead to disastrous consequences for the church. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to demonstrate why Reformed Christology is the best Christology, particularly because it remains faithful to the exegetical data and provides the sort of pastoral comfort that good theology ought to produce. There is much value in understanding the full deity of Christ, but there is also value in understanding the true and complete humanity of Christ. Bavinck has argued, "His true and complete humanity is as important as his deity."[47] And in the same way, Berkouwer remarks, "Indeed, this *Ecce homo,* in the language of the church, is inseparable from the confession of Christ's true deity. In the unity of the two lies the secret of the church's joyful praises."[48]

Christ's Inseparable Companion Though they expressed it in different ways, the Puritans were keenly aware of the importance of the Holy Spirit's relation to Christ in connection with both His earthly and His heavenly ministries. As Isaac Ambrose states, in Christ there is a "compound of all the graces of the Spirit…. He received the Spirit out of measure; there was in him as much as possibly could be in a creature, and more than in all other creatures whatsoever."[49] These comments provide an ideal starting point for discussing the way in which the Holy Spirit relates to Christ.

In all of the major events in the life of Christ, the Holy Spirit took a prominent role. The Father decreed that the Son should assume flesh. The Son voluntarily assumed flesh in obedience to the will of the Father, but it is the Holy Spirit who was the "immediate divine efficiency" of the incarnation (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20).[50] This was a fitting "beginning" for Christ since Isaiah spoke of the Messiah as one endowed with the Spirit (Isa. 42:1; 61:1). The New Testament

confirmed Isaiah's testimony in several places, noting, for example, that He received the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). At Christ's baptism, the Spirit descended upon Him (Matt. 3:16), and in Luke 4 the Spirit played a significant role in Christ's temptation (v. 1). In that same chapter, Christ read from Isaiah 61:1–2 ("the Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me") and announced that He is the fulfillment of that prophecy (Luke 4:18). Moreover, Christ's performance of miracles is attributed to the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:38), for, "on the ascription of his mighty works unto Beelzebub…he lets the Jews know that therein they blasphemed the Holy Spirit, whose works indeed they were" (Matt. 12:31–32).[51] Hebrews 9:14 says that Christ offered Himself up "through the eternal Spirit." As Sinclair Ferguson notes, "A strong case can be made for understanding the *pneuma* in which Jesus offered himself as referring to the divine Spirit."[52] Christ's resurrection is attributed to the Spirit (Rom. 8:11), and by His resurrection Christ was declared "to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1:4; see also 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18). Because the Spirit was Christ's inseparable companion during His earthly ministry, there is little doubt that Christ called out (i.e., prayed) to His Father by the enabling or help of the Spirit, which would impart an implicit christological emphasis to the words of Romans 8:26–27.

To put this point more provocatively, Christ's obedience in our place had to be real obedience. He did not cheat by relying on His own divine nature while He acted as the second Adam. Rather, by receiving and depending upon the Spirit, Christ was fully dependent upon His Father (John 6:38). The translation of *ouch harpagmon hegesato to einai isa Theo* (Phil. 2:6)[53] as "he did not regard his equality with God as something to exploit" or "something to take advantage of" fits perfectly with this model. As a result, Christ truly grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52).[54] If Christ appeared ignorant (e.g., Matt. 24:36; Luke 8:45), it was because He was; if He appeared to have supernatural knowledge (Luke 9:47), it was because the Father revealed such knowledge to Him by the Spirit.[55] But in a real sense, Christ learned about His messianic calling through reading the Scriptures "morning by morning" (Isa. 50:4–5). Ferguson well remarks that "Jesus' intimate acquaintance with Scripture did not come *de caelo* ('from heaven') during the period of his public ministry; it was grounded no doubt on his early education, but nourished by long years of personal meditation."[56] Such an understanding of Christ's life serves to heighten our appreciation for what He did as the second Adam.

Bavinck summarizes the basic theological concerns set forth so far regarding the intimate relation between the Spirit and Christ:

> At this point it is important to note that this activity of the Holy Spirit with respect to Christ's human nature absolutely does not stand by itself. Though it began with the conception, it did not stop there. It continued throughout his entire life, even right into the state of exaltation. Generally speaking, the necessity of this activity can be inferred already from the fact that the Holy Spirit is the author of all creaturely life and specifically of the religious-ethical life in humans. The true human who bears God's image is inconceivable even for a moment without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit…. If humans in general cannot have communion with God except by the Holy Spirit, then this applies even more powerfully to Christ's human nature.[57]

That Christ received the Spirit is an ontological necessity of His true humanity; indeed, Christ would not have been Christ, apart from the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Far from being superfluous to Christ, who according to His divine nature is "God in Himself" (*autotheos*), the Holy Spirit must occupy a central place in any discussion of Christology because of His relation to the human nature of Christ.[58]

The exegetical evidence, however one interprets it, speaks of the importance of the organic relation between the Holy Spirit and the God-man during His ministry on earth, beginning at His conception, and continuing through not only to His resurrection, but also to His heavenly ministry. Reformed Christology emerges precisely at this point as the most satisfying account of Christ's person and work. If John Owen was the Puritan who most carefully explained the Spirit's relation to Christ, there is no question that Thomas Goodwin was the Puritan who best explained the ministry of Christ in heaven toward sinners on earth. As J. I. Packer has argued, "John Owen saw into the mind of Paul as clearly as Goodwin—sometimes, on points of detail, more clearly—but not even Owen saw so deep into Paul's heart."[59] Packer speaks not a little truth here, but, to be more specific, the brilliance of Goodwin's Christology is not just that he saw into Paul's heart, but that he was able to see so penetratingly into the attitude of the heart of Christ in heaven toward sinners on earth.[60] Goodwin's work on this subject may be the finest practical work on Christology in the Puritan tradition, and therefore it warrants attention if we are to understand why the best theology is the most helpful theology. We will explore this subject fully in chapter 25.

Conclusion

The preceding argument regarding Christ and the Spirit inevitably raises questions about the oft-made distinction between Christ's person and work. Over the centuries, many theologians have argued that what is important about Christ is not so much who He is but what He did.[61] G. C. Berkouwer has noted, however, that in the Scriptures "we continually encounter the irrefragable unity of Christ's person and work…. Not to know who he is means: not to understand what his work is; and not to see his work in the right perspective is not to understand his person."[62] The organic unity of Christ's person and work is undeniable, particularly in light of the argument that relates Christ's earthly and heavenly ministry to the work of the Spirit. We have seen that Christ's obedience (i.e., His work) was the obedience of a true human being, but, more than that, it was the obedience of a human being who resisted the devil, performed miracles, and offered Himself up as a sacrifice, all in the power of the Holy Spirit, who, as Owen argued, was the immediate operator of all acts of the God-man. In addition, the organic unity of Christ's person and work becomes apparent when we consider that the person gives value to the work. To put it differently, what makes Christ's life, death, and resurrection meritorious on behalf of sinners is the fact that the God-man performs the work.

In his fascinating study on Cyril, John A. McGuckin notes this church father's premise that "in christology the implications are crucial to the argument."[63] Indeed. The argument of this chapter points to an important principle characteristic of the very best Reformed orthodox theologians, namely, that Christian doctrine must relate to the Christian life. Doctrines are not abstract philosophical ideas to be debated among the clergy to pass the time; instead, doctrines, if understood correctly, provide an avenue for the Christian piety that results from a right understanding of God's revelation. The Christology developed by Owen, Goodwin, and their contemporaries, and appropriated in the following centuries by other Reformed theologians, remains the best Christology because Reformed Christology not only provides the most coherent exegesis of Scripture, but also affords the best pastoral comfort for God's people. Reformed Christology allows for real growth and advancement in Christ's human nature and, moreover, provides an important christological context for discussing the work of the Holy Spirit. This chapter shows that our Christology should inform our pneumatology, and vice versa. To deny this concept is really to deny a crucial aspect of the person and work of Jesus Christ. To that end, the theological insights of John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, among others, are to be welcomed as profound insights into our understanding of the One who is "the chiefest among ten thousand" (Song 5:10).

1. Thomas Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 2:162.

2. John Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos, or, God-Man Being an Exposition upon the First Eighteen Verses of the First Chapter of the Gospel according to St John* (London, 1660).

3. Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus; A View of the Everlasting Gospel* (London, 1674). Another gold mine of rich Christology can be found in William Gouge's work, *A Learned and Very Useful Commentary upon the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews…* (London, 1655).

4. For example, Arminian and Reformed theologians have historically disagreed on the doctrine of justification by faith. The Arminian Bible commentator, Adam Clarke, remarks, "To say that Christ's personal righteousness is imputed to every true believer, is not scriptural: To say that he has fulfilled all righteousness for us, in our stead, if by this is meant his fulfillment of all moral duties, is neither scriptural nor true. In no part of the Book of God is Christ's righteousness ever said to be imputed to us for our justification." *Christian Theology* (London: Thomas & Son, 1835), 156. See also the excellent work by Aza Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt*, ed. Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 155–78.

5. We are grateful for the work of Alan Spence, who has discussed this issue in some detail in his work *Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007). Stephen Holmes also made a similar contention regarding the uniqueness of Owen's Christology. See "Reformed Varieties of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*," in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen Holmes and Murray Rae (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 70–86.

6. Among the studies that argue for a Cyrilline victory, see H. Diepen, *Les trois chapitres au Concile de Chalcédoine* (Oosterhout: Éditions de Saint-Michel, 1953); and John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969). Conversely, Robert Jenson has argued that Chalcedon leans in an Antiochene direction in *Systematic Theology: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), vol. 1, chap. 8. Before Jenson, Jaroslav Pelikan also argued for an Antiochene victory: "Even though it may be statistically accurate to say that 'the majority of the quotations come from the letters of St. Cyril,' the contributions of Leo's *Tome* were the decisive ones." *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 264. For my own part, I think Chalcedon slightly favors Cyril's position.

7. David Wells suggests that instead of pitting Alexandria against Antioch, "It is better…to speak of these schools in terms of their typical Christology—'Word-flesh' and 'Word-man'—rather than cities in which they first came to prominence." *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1984), 100.

8. Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (1985; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 72–73. John A. McGuckin provides a more sympathetic account of Nestorius in his fascinating work *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004). McGuckin clearly favors Cyril in the debate between the two early church fathers, but he does clear up a lot of misconceptions about Nestorius's position. Also, see McGuckin's brief treatment in *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 237–38.

9. Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39–40.

10. See Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 39.

11. John A. McGuckin may be an example of one scholar who would dissent from Crisp's analysis. McGuckin provides a corrective to a number of what he believes are misunderstandings of Cyril's Christology. Part of his section on the topic is worth quoting: "The human nature is, therefore, not conceived as an independently acting dynamic…but as the manner of action of an independent and omnipotent power—that of the Logos; and to the Logos alone can be attributed the authorship of, and responsibility for, all its actions. This last principle is the flagship of Cyril's whole argument…. Cyril

constantly reminds his readers that in christology one must not speak of the Logos as ‘Gymnos’ (ie. Naked, in his divine characteristics) but as ‘Sesarkomene’ (enfleshed). The subject is unchanged, the divine Logos, but that subject now expresses the characteristics of his divinely powerful condition in and through the medium of a passible and fragile condition.” *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 186.

12. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:256.

13. Louis Berkhof notes that Luther and other Lutheran theologians also spoke of a communication of attributes from the human to the divine; however, this view was short-lived, and the emphasis was very much on the communication of the divine to the human. *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 324.

14. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 14. For a critique of the Lutheran varieties of the communication of attributes, see Crisp’s discussion on pp. 13–15. See also Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 162–65.

15. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:257.

16. The argument in this chapter proceeds on the assumption that Christ’s human nature is a concrete particular—or what might be termed a “hylomorphic” view of the body-soul relation. This is how the Reformed orthodox have viewed Christ’s human nature.

17. See Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 47–48, with its clear reference to the *extra Calvinisticum*, the Reformed assertion that Christ’s “Godhead” or deity is “beyond (*extra*) the limits of the human nature He assumed.”

18. Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 207.

19. Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 207.

20. Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 208.

21. Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 209.

22. Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 209. Arrowsmith further qualifies his position later by stating that Christ did in fact take the sinful infirmities of man by way of imputation, for because of His divine nature He was protected from any inherent sin. *Theanthropos*, 217.

23. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 3:51. See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 13.8.9.

24. Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Knowledge of God the Father*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 2:104.

25. McGuckin recognizes Cyril has attracted a number of critics on just this point, but writing as an Eastern Orthodox theologian, he insists that such a criticism “presumes…that ‘humanity’ is to be defined on the basis of our common experience of humankind—a static and reductionist model of analysis arrived at by leveling down. Cyril’s point was that Christ was fully human because he offered the possibility of human transcendence.” *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 225.

26. See G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 286; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, Ky.: Wesminster John Knox Press, 2006), 2.14.1, 5.

27. Many Reformed theologians have spoken of the concept of the “communication of operations” under the heading of the *communicatio idiomatum* without actually distinguishing the two. Berkouwer remarks that the “communion of actions is not something additional to the communion of natures, but part of it: this communion, far from being static, is a permanently dynamic reality in the life and works of Christ.” *The Person of Christ*, 293.

28. Calvin describes the *communicatio idiomatum* thus: “[The Scriptures] sometimes attribute to [Christ] what must be referred solely to his humanity, sometimes what belongs uniquely to his divinity; and sometimes what embraces both natures but fits neither alone. And they so earnestly express the union of the

two natures that is in Christ as sometimes to interchange them. This figure of speech is called by the ancient writers 'the communication of properties.'" *Institutes*, 2.14.1. See also Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 221.

29. Francis Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum: The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible…* (London, 1657), 1594.

30. Referring to Owen's position, Carl Trueman remarks, "The union of natures in the Incarnation is what qualifies Christ as capable of acting as mediator." *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 110.

31. Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum*, 1594.

32. Thomas Goodwin, *Ephesians*, part 1, in *Works*, 1:415.

33. Turretin, *Institutes*, 13.7.17. The *totus*/*totum* distinction in theology has to do with the distinction between the whole person and the whole thing. As Richard Muller notes, "The *totus Christus*, i.e., the whole person of Christ, is omnipresent, inasmuch as the divine person is, by virtue of his divinity, omnipresent; but the *totum Christi*, all of Christ, i.e., both natures, cannot be omnipresent, since the human nature must be in one place." *Dictionary of Terms*, 305.

34. Berkhof cautions against speaking of the human nature of Christ as impersonal: "This is true only in the sense that this nature has no independent subsistence of its own. Strictly speaking, however, the human nature of Christ was not for a moment impersonal. The Logos assumed that nature into personal subsistence with Himself. The human nature has its personal existence in the person of the Logos. It is in-personal rather than impersonal." *Systematic Theology*, 322.

35. Quoted in Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration*, 16. Incidentally, McGuckin shows that Cyril explained Christ's prayer life "as an economic exercise done largely for our instruction and edification." *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 133. Contrary to this position, Reformed theologians believed that Christ, as a true man, needed to pray, which is to say, of course, that He did not pray merely for our instruction.

36. Owen appears to be fully aware of this criticism, but he argues that "with the clear and evident analogy of faith" he can easily overcome the difficulty pressed by the Socinians. *Pneumatologia*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 3:160.

37. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:309.

38. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:160.

39. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:162. See also Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), 195.

40. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 25.

41. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 25. Calvin, for example, reflects "conventional" Christology: "How plainly and clearly is his deity shown in miracles! Even though I confess that both the prophets and the apostles performed miracles equal to and similar to his, yet in this respect there is the greatest of differences: they distributed the gifts of God by their ministry, but he showed forth his own power." *Institutes*, 1.13.13.

42. Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), 5:43.

43. Michael Horton also makes the connection between Christ's humanity and the Holy Spirit: "This emphasis on the salvific humanity of Christ also opens up a wider space for pneumatology, pointing to the Spirit rather than merely the divine nature as the focus of Jesus' dependence." *Lord and Servant*, 176.

44. Holmes, "Reformed Varieties of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*," 81–82.

45. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:169.

46. Turretin, *Institutes*, 13.8.9.

47. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:298.

48. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, 234.

49. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 201. See also Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 83.

50. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:163.

51. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:174.

52. Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 53. Chapter 2 in

Ferguson's work represents a modern treatment of Owen's basic position. See also George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 139.

53. KJV: "thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

54. Susan Wessel comments that Luke 2:52 "presented Cyril with something of a challenge, for it clearly stated that Jesus advanced in stature, wisdom, and grace…. Cyril could say only that Christ's advance and increase were merely apparent." *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 133. McGuckin takes a very different approach to understanding Cyril on this point. See *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 216–18.

55. See Turretin, *Institutes*, 13.13.2–5.

56. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 44.

57. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:292.

58. I would term this particular aspect of Christology as "christo-pneumatology," which is a term I first heard from my friend James F. Wright.

59. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 179.

60. See Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London, 1681–1704), vol. 4.

61. See Berkouwer's excellent discussion of this in *The Person of Christ*, 101–10.

62. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, 105.

63. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 129.

Chapter 22

The Puritans on Christ's Offices and States

> *Q. In what condition doth Jesus Christ exercise these offices [i.e. prophet, priest, and king]? A: He did in a low estate of humiliation on earth, but now in a glorious estate of exaltation in heaven.*
>
> —JOHN OWEN[1]

A concise summary of the teaching of the Puritans on the offices and states of Christ can be found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Question 23 asks, "What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?" The answer: "Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation." This particular answer seems relatively simple, but the theology involved is profound. The Shorter Catechism goes on to describe Christ's work as prophet, priest, and king (Q. 24–26) before defining the states ("estates") of Christ's life and work as the incarnate Mediator (Q. 27–28), namely, His humiliation from the womb of His mother to His burial in the tomb and His exaltation, beginning with His resurrection, ascension, enthronement at God's right hand and continuing until He comes again to judge the world.

This chapter will attempt to provide a brief look at the offices and states of Christ in Puritan thought. As will become apparent, the person and work of Christ are wed together as essential components of Puritan Christology. Indeed, this way of looking at Puritan Christology shows that there is an organic connection between Christ's person and work; you cannot have one without the other. What follows will be a brief treatment of the person of Christ from a Reformed perspective, which was by and large embraced, confessionally formulated, and elaborated by the Puritans, as well as an introductory look at Christ's offices and His states of humiliation and exaltation.

The Person of Christ The Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381) affirmed that Christ is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made." This same Lord Jesus Christ "for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man."[2] The Council of Chalcedon (451) further affirmed that Christ is one person with two natures: "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics [*idiomata*] of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ." The Definition of Chalcedon provides a basic understanding of what Christians are to affirm concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

Scholars continue to debate whether the Definition is more "Antiochene" or more "Alexandrian." Theologians and church historians have typically argued that the so-called Antiochene school emphasized the distinction of the two natures, whereas the Alexandrians placed great weight on the unity of the person (i.e., the divine Word, or Logos). Typically, scholars argue that the Antiochene emphasis can lead to the error of Nestorianism (maintaining that Christ having two distinct natures, existed as two distinct persons), while the Alexandrian emphasis can lead to the error of Eutychianism (denying the consubstantiality of Christ with us as a man, in order to affirm His consubstantiality with God).

This analysis may be a little overly simplistic, particularly since very few people have taken the time to understand the various nuances of Nestorius.[3] In fact, as he lived out his remaining years in exile, Nestorius believed that the Council of Chalcedon had vindicated him. As John Anthony McGuckin has ably demonstrated, many understood Nestorius to be arguing for "two personal subjects in Christ, a man and a god, and so they denounced him as if he had revived the ancient heresy of Paul of Samosata (a man Jesus who had been 'possessed' by the divinity)."[4] But, as McGuckin points out—and McGuckin is clearly favorable to Cyril's Christology—Nestorius did not mean that, "but it was how a large section heard him, and has become, ever after, the popular (if inaccurate) meaning of the heresy of Nestorianism: the doctrine that a man, Jesus, dwelt simultaneously alongside the divine Word in the person of Christ."[5]

The charge of "Nestorianism," whatever that may be, is aimed at those who insist on a radical distinction between the two natures. Thus, the Reformed have

had to deal with frequent assaults launched against their "Nestorian" Christology, and the Lutherans have had to deal with charges of Eutychianism. When we turn to the Puritans, especially the writings of John Owen (1616–1683), there is a "Nestorian" feel to his views on the person of Christ. Now Owen clearly did not hold to the error commonly associated with Nestorius. But Owen and his Puritan contemporaries were keen to emphasize the distinction of the two natures in Christ, which meant that Christ had two wills, not one. Likewise, in connection with the two wills, Owen posited two kinds of knowledge. The eternal Son is omniscient, but the incarnate Christ, at least in His human nature, is not. The well-known maxim "the finite cannot contain the infinite" **(***finitum non capax infiniti***)** was a fundamental principle in Reformed orthodoxy and was designed, among other things, to protect the integrity of the two natures of Christ. Thus the eternal Son, who is *autotheos* ("God of Himself"), is omniscient, but in His human nature, He was ignorant of certain facts. The hypostatic union does not mean that the Son has a single psychological center. For those who make the personal and the psychological synonymous, Owen's Christology will not be well understood and may not be well received. What the hypostatic union does mean, however, is that while there are two natures there is only one person **(***hypostasis***)**.

This concept has profound implications for how we understand Puritan Christology, particularly the dogmatic insistence that Christ's transition from the state of humiliation to the state of exaltation was not apparent, but real. Not only Christ's body, but also His knowledge and power, for example, were quantitatively and qualitatively different after the resurrection than before—speaking only in terms of His human nature, that is. This is what marks out Reformed and Puritan Christology from other traditions, such as Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism.

Puritan writings on Christology contain constant references, almost always negative, to the Lutheran concept of the *communicatio idiomatum* (the communication of properties).6 In short, the typical Lutheran understanding of the relation of the two natures in Christ was a unidirectional (divine to human) communication of divine attributes to the human nature. This had obvious implications for their doctrine of the Lord's Supper, which argued that Christ's body was present "in, with, and under the bread" because of the "ubiquity" of the human nature, i.e., the view that Christ's human nature, being joined to His divine nature, was now omnipresent or ubiquitous. Puritan theologians pointed out, first, that according to the Lutheran view there is no proper distinction in God's attributes. If one attribute is communicated to the human nature, then all of them are. God is a simple being, not compound or complex (made up of

parts). The distinction in attributes that Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) presents in *The Existence and Attributes of God*, is an accommodation to human weakness and not a reflection of real distinctions in God. God's wisdom is His power is His knowledge is His infinity, etc.—or better, God is all these things at once. To communicate ubiquity to Christ's human nature would necessarily involve the communication of infinity and eternity, which would have deleterious consequences for the true humanity of Christ and the reality of His incarnation. Second, the Lutheran version of the *communicatio* means that Christ's transition from suffering to glory is only apparent or perceived, not real. Christ did not existentially grow in wisdom and in knowledge, as Luke 2:52 suggests; that was only how it appeared to those who watched Him.7

Roman Catholic theologians did not hold the same position as the Lutherans, but their outworking of Christology practically amounted to the same thing. Instead of a communication of attributes, Roman Catholic theologians such as Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) affirmed a "communication of gifts" to the human nature in such a way that Christ received at the moment of His incarnation the sum of all spiritual knowledge known as "the beatific vision," which meant that His life was lived not by faith (or in hope) but by sight. He was regarded as both a pilgrim on the way, and a blessed one who already possessed the object of His quest. All the gifts the human nature is capable of were immediately given to Him at the time of incarnation. Thus there was no real development from infancy to adulthood or from His earthly life to His heavenly life. Christ's movement from the state of humiliation to the state of exaltation did not have quite the same significance for Roman Catholic theologians as it did for the Reformed in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras.

The Reformed view of Christ's person is essential to understanding His threefold office exercised in His states of humiliation and exaltation. Because the Reformed insisted on the absolute integrity of each of the two natures in the one person of the God-man, who mediates according to both natures, "each nature doing that which is proper to itself" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 8.7), there is room for real development in Christ's human nature. As the prophet, priest, and king of the church, the gifts given to Christ's human nature increase at different points in His life (e.g., baptism, resurrection, enthronement).

Christ as Prophet The Shorter Catechism explains that Christ executes the office of a prophet "in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation" (Q. 24). Keeping in mind the Reformed view of Christ's person, Christ's office of prophet does not cease at His death, but in fact continues "forever." The catechism seems to limit Christ's prophetic office to matters

regarding the salvation of the elect, but many Puritans argued that the immediate means by which God communicates revelation to His saints in heaven is through the glorified God-man, Jesus Christ. We may think of Christ's prophetic office principally in terms of His ministry on earth for roughly three years, but this represents only a small fraction of the content of Christ's role of prophet, considering that He will continue to disclose to His bride revelation from God for all eternity. So while His mediatorial office of prophet ends at the consummation in one sense, there is another sense in which His function as revealer of God's will and mind will continue on in heaven.

Christ, in His office of prophet, imparts and enables all true knowledge of God. That is to say, as John Flavel (1628–1691) noted, Christ is the "original and fountain of all that light which guides us to salvation (2 Cor. 4:6)."[8] Working with the distinction between natural revelation and supernatural revelation, Flavel adds that "common knowledge may be obtained in a natural way," but not saving knowledge. With such a statement, a number of important christological questions come to the fore. These are nowhere better answered than by John Owen in his commentary on the book that gives us the richest Christology found anywhere in the Bible, the epistle to the Hebrews.

Owen makes an important distinction concerning the revelation Christ delivered to the church. In the Old Testament, the Son revealed God's will to the prophets in His divine person, sometimes mediated through angels, "but now, in the revelation of the gospel, taking his own humanity…he taught it immediately himself."[9] Owen notes that some have argued that Christ's ability to reveal the will of God as a prophet comes from His unique privilege of being one person with two natures, and so being the eternal Logos enables Christ to reveal God's will to the church. Owen rejects this position, however. In His divine nature, Christ is omniscient. He knows everything there is to know, for in Him there is no past or future but only the present where He knows everything there is to know or that can be known in all possible worlds. But in His mediatorial office, He revealed the will of the Father in and according to His human nature. Owen states, "For although the person of Christ, God and man, was our mediator…yet his human nature was that wherein he discharged the duties of his office."[10] Owen's point will have, as we will see, the same implications for Christ's other two offices, those of priest and king.

In keeping with the Reformed distinction of the two natures, Christ received the necessary gifts and graces to be able to perform His duty as a prophet. Besides His own natural abilities—that is, His human nature had natural gifts and was free from sin—Christ also had a "peculiar endowment of the Spirit, without and beyond the bounds of all comprehensible measures, that he was to

receive as the great prophet of the church, in whom the Father would speak and give out the last revelation of himself."[11] Though He received the Spirit at the moment of His incarnation, yet the full communication of the Holy Spirit came upon Christ at His baptism in the Jordan. In bringing forth new revelations, Christ received them from the Father by the Spirit. Thus, Owen writes, "All the mysteries of the counsel between the Father and the eternal Word for the salvation of the elect, with all the way whereby it was to be accomplished, through his own blood, were known unto him; as also were all the bounds, the whole extent of that worship which his church was to render unto God."[12] Unlike Moses, who was given revelations at particular times, Christ possessed all the treasures of wisdom, knowledge, and truth. More than any other prophet before Him, He could speak infallibly and with authority about the mind of God. Jesus had "perfect comprehension of all the mysteries revealed to him and by him by that divine wisdom which always dwelt in him."[13] In Owen's view, before Christ could reveal God's will to the church, God first had to reveal these truths to Christ. In that sense Christ is a true mediator of knowledge. This also means that because Christ revealed the will of God according to His human nature, if God did not reveal to Christ certain truths, then Christ, as a true man, was ignorant of those truths. This explains Christ's language in Matthew 24:36: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." He did not know because the Father had not revealed to Him at that time when the final day would be.

The Reformed axiom that the finite cannot contain the infinite remains true of Christ in His state of exaltation in terms of His prophetic office. But there is nevertheless a change in the scope of His knowledge. Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) explains that although the Spirit rested on Christ without measure (John 3:34) while on earth, and more abundantly after His baptism than before, it is nevertheless true that in heaven Christ "at once received the Spirit in the fullest measure that for ever he was to receive him…. Christ hath the Spirit in the utmost measure that the human nature is capable of."[14] This has important implications for all of His offices, but in terms of His prophetic office Christ's knowledge is enlarged—"for before he knew not when the day of judgment should be, but now when he wrote this book of the Revelation he did."[15] With His ascension and exaltation, Christ comes into such complete possession of the Spirit that His human graces are enlarged to the fullest measure possible. What He was ignorant of before (the day of the final judgment) He now no longer is—hence His revelation to the apostle John on the island of Patmos.

There remains yet one more aspect of Christ's prophetic office that warrants further discussion: His role as prophet in communicating revelation from God in

glory. Christians on earth now enjoy union and communion with the triune God, and the knowledge of God they possess, as well as their salvation, comes to them through the Mediator, Jesus Christ. This is not a temporary dispensation. Rather, as it is now, so will it be in eternity. The incarnate Son of God in His glorified humanity will be the mediator of the saints' knowledge and love for the triune God. Owen writes,

> *All communications* from the Divine Being and infinite fullness in heaven unto the glorified saints, are in and through Christ Jesus, who shall forever be the medium of communication between God and the church, even in glory. All things being gathered into one head in him, even things in heaven and things in earth…this order shall never be dissolved…. And on these communications from God through Christ depend entirely our continuance in a state of blessedness and glory.16

Revelation from God has not ceased with the sixty-six books. It has for this life. But in the life to come (i.e., heaven), God will continue to speak to His saints, and He will do so through Jesus Christ who, as the God-man, will forever reveal God's will to the church. Owen and the Puritans were agreed that Christ's offices will come to an end with the consummation of the new covenant when Christ returns to judge the world, but there is a sense in which Christ's office of prophet continues in heaven since He has the unique prerogative of revealing the mind of God to the redeemed.

Christ as Priest Returning again to the Shorter Catechism, the divines answer the question regarding Christ executing the office of priest in the following way: "Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us" (Q. 25). Stephen Charnock notes that there are two functions of Christ's priesthood: oblation and intercession; "they are both joined together, but one as precedent to the other…. The oblation precedes the intercession, and the intercession could not be without the oblation."17 Owen similarly argues that these two acts must not be separated, for "it belongs to the same mediator for sin to sacrifice and pray."18 In heaven, Christ's intercessory work is a continued oblation of Himself, "so that whatsoever Christ impetrated, merited, or obtained by his death and passion, must be infallibly applied unto and bestowed upon them for whom he intended to obtain it; or else his intercession is vain, he is not heard in the prayers of his mediatorship."19 Thus Owen makes a point about the particularity of Christ's death on the cross in relation to His intercessory work in heaven. This is a brief synopsis of how the

Puritans viewed Christ's priestly office, but more details need to be filled in.

In the first place, not all mediators are priests, but all priests are mediators. According to Edward Reynolds (1599–1676), some mediate by way of "entreaty, prayer, and request" and others "by way of satisfaction…and such a mediator was Christ."[20] Similarly, Thomas Manton (1620–1677) notes that Christ is an intercessor "not by entreaty, but by merit."[21] His satisfaction was meritorious before God because of the worth of His person. He is the God-man, and both natures were necessary in order for Christ to both represent His people and make sufficient payment on their behalf. Reynolds observes:

> Inasmuch as the virtue of the Deity was to be attributed truly to the sacrifice (else it could have no value nor virtue in it,) and that sacrifice was to be the life, soul, and body of the Priest who offered it, because he was not barely a Priest, but a Surety, and so his person stood in stead of ours, to pay our debt, which was a debt of blood, and therefore he was to offer himself, Heb. ix.26; 1 Pet. ii.24: and, inasmuch as his person must needs be equivalent in dignity and representation to the persons of all those for whom he mediated, and who were for his sake only delivered from suffering: for these causes it was necessary that God and man should make but one Christ, in the unity of the same infinite Person, whose natures they both were.[22]

The orthodox view of Christ's person gives Him such an importance for Reformed theologians that they can speak of His death in terms of satisfaction and substitution. The worth of Christ's person is such that He can be a competent substitute and render a sufficient satisfaction for all of God's elect. This is connected with the sufficiency-efficiency distinction that one finds in the writings of many Reformed theologians. Christ satisfied the Father, and He was able to act as surety (i.e., a substitute) because of the covenant between Father and Son. Christ's death on the cross, in the abstract, saves no one, but in terms of the covenantal agreement between the Father and the Son, the God-man's act of self-oblation saves those for whom He died.

What is true of Christ's oblation is necessarily true of His intercession because of the organic relation between the two. As Manton notes, in the Old Testament the High Priest "entered [the Holy of Holies] not for himself, but for the people, having the names of the twelve tribes upon his breast and shoulders; so Christ is entered on behalf of us all, bearing the particular memorial of every saint graven on his heart."[23] Before discussing the nature of Christ's intercession in heaven, Owen makes an interesting point concerning Christ's work of oblation. In Owen's view, Christ's oblation is not only His death on the cross, or even the time of His so-called "passive obedience," but rather Christ's oblation is "his

whole humiliation, or state of emptying himself, whether by yielding voluntary obedience unto the law…or by his subjection to the curse of the law, in the antecedent misery and suffering of life, as well as by submitting to death, the death of the cross."[24] Owen reasons this way because in his view none of Christ's mediatorial actions are "to be excluded from a concurrence to make up the whole means in this work. Neither by his *intercession* do I understand only that heavenly appearance of his in the most holy place for the applying unto us all good things purchased and procured by his oblation; but also every act of his exaltation conducing thereunto, from his resurrection to his 'sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, angels, and principalities, and powers, being made subject unto him.'"[25] Here Owen discerns a unity to the work of Christ that enables him in other places to defend the doctrine of the imputation of both the active and the passive obedience of Christ to believers. For Owen and his contemporaries, the suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and intercession of Christ are all part of one united work of redemption.

Christ's office as priest needs also to be understood in His twofold estate as mediator. After the humiliation of the cross, and indeed the whole of His earthly ministry, the resurrected Christ applies the benefits of His life and death to the church. Goodwin brings this out remarkably. He notes that the full justification of the elect has a "special dependence" on Christ's intercession.[26] Goodwin adds, "This all divines on all sides do attribute unto it, whilst they put this difference between the influence of his death, and that of his intercession into our salvation: calling his death *medium impetrationis*, that is, the means of procurement of obtaining it for us; but his intercession *medium applicationis*, the means of applying all unto us."[27] In other words, the application of justification is the direct result not of Christ's death nor His resurrection, but of His intercession (Heb. 5:8–10). Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) echoes Goodwin's contention: "But whence is it that we are justified? It is from Christ's intercession."[28] Christ's intercession is the continuing cause of the justification of believers; indeed, according to Goodwin, "we owe our standing in grace every moment to his sitting in heaven and interceding every moment."[29]

The eternal nature of Christ's priesthood stems from the fact that He is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (Heb. 7:17, 21); therefore, it continues forever. Christ as prophet will be the immediate means by which God reveals Himself to the saints in the new heavens and earth, but what of Christ as priest? The words of Hebrews 7:17 ("For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek") indicate that Christ's priesthood does not end. Owen suggests, however, that "forever" is a word that should not be taken absolutely. Christ is a priest "forever" according to the "execution of his office unto the final

end of it" with the goal of bringing salvation to all the elect.30 This "forever" has in view the new covenant, just as the Aaronic priesthood had in view the old covenant. The new covenant continues until the consummation. Therefore, when the present world ends, including the new covenant dispensation, "an end will be put unto all the mediatory offices of Christ, and all their exercise."31 Until then, Christ will continue to intercede for the church so that in this work Christ will "preserve the verdure of his glory ever fresh and green."32 As the sacrificial priest, Christ is glorified in His death, but because the application of redemption depends on His intercession, His exaltation is unquestionably a real exaltation, to the end that all that He did for His people on earth as their surety can be fully applied to the elect by His intercession as their high priest in heaven.33

Christ as King Christ's exercise of the office of king is described in the Shorter Catechism as His "subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies" (Q. 26). The Old Testament verse most quoted in the New Testament, Psalm 110:1, speaks of God subduing Christ's enemies ("until I make thine enemies thy footstool"). Edward Reynolds's exposition of Psalm 110 will guide us in understanding the kingship of Christ.

In His divine nature, the Son possesses dominion and majesty as an essential attribute of His Godhead. In this respect, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are coequal in wisdom, power, and glory. Their authority may be manifested more or less clearly, but it cannot be increased or diminished. In reference to Christ, the Puritans spoke of His office as king primarily in terms of His mediatorial role. That means, of course, that as His office of prophet and priest cease with the consummation of all things in the new heavens and the new earth, so too does His office as the mediatorial king when He hands the kingdom over to His Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Christ's mediatorial kingship is something given to Him; He received it "not by usurpation, intrusion, or violence; but legally, by order, decree, investiture from his Father" (John 5:22; Acts 2:36; 10:42; Heb. 3:2–8).34 Reynolds distinguishes between Christ's natural kingdom, described above in terms of His divine prerogative, and His dispensatory kingdom. The latter kingdom was given to Christ, which shows that it was not His by nature, but "by donation and unction from his Father, that he might be the Head of his church."35

To possess such a kingdom God had to (1) prepare a body for the Son to be hypostatically united to (Heb. 10:5); (2) anoint Him with the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34) in order to furnish Him with the requisite endowments for being a godly king (Isa. 11:2); (3) publicly declare that Christ is king (Matt.

3:17; 17:5); (4) give Him a sceptre of righteousness, put a sword in His mouth, and enable Him (as a Prophet-King) to reveal the will of God to mankind; (5) honor Christ with ambassadors and servants (Eph. 4:11–12; 2 Cor. 5:20); (6) grant to Christ the souls of men, not just Jews but Gentiles also (Ps. 2:8; John 17:6); (7) give Him power to regulate the church according to divine law (Matt. 5; Col. 2:14; (8) provide Him with power to judge and condemn His enemies (John 5:27); and (9) empower Christ to pardon sins (Matt. 9:6). These privileges given to the Son are given to Him as the God-man.[36]

Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom; it is not of this world (John 18:36), which is what makes Christ so powerful as king. Nonetheless, while it is a spiritual kingdom, Christ enters by way of conquest, "for though the souls of the elect are his, yet his enemies have the first possession."[37] And so Christ's death is conceived not only in terms of substitutionary atonement, but also in terms of representative victory over the forces of evil and of death. He is the priest-king, which means His triumph and rule as king is never considered apart from His office as priest (or His office as prophet).[38] Christ did not, however, become a king only by virtue of His death and resurrection. He is the Lord of creation by the dignity of His person (i.e., the God-man) and by the "grace of his heavenly unction."[39] Because of this, Reynolds makes a typical scholastic distinction between Christ's power and authority (*Aliud est potentia, aliud potestas in Christo*). So Christ is Lord in two respects: a Lord in power and in authority. Regarding the former, He has power to forgive sins, perform miracles, and subdue His enemies; concerning the latter, He has authority to judge, anoint, and command.[40]

The Puritans, and especially Reynolds, addressed the issue of Christ's exaltation in relation to His kingship. The exaltation of Christ as king is fully realized at His enthronement. But at His ascension, according to Goodwin, a military triumph is accorded Him ("leading captivity captive" [Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8]), which shows that He did in fact subdue His enemies at the cross.[41] The enthronement of Christ, however, is the full realization of His triumph over His enemies and has royal power to bless the church with the promised Holy Spirit. Christ receives the Holy Spirit in the fullest possible measure that the human nature is capable of at His enthronement. In receiving the Spirit, He necessarily, as the head of His people, received the Spirit for them, and so the Spirit dripped from His forehead (Ps. 133:2) onto the church, which accounts for the great multitude of conversions at Pentecost.

There is no question that being seated at the right hand of the Father in glory brings to completion the exaltation of Christ that began with His resurrection. Reynolds observes that sitting at God's right hand is a "metonymical expression

of the strength, power, majesty, and glory that belong unto him."[42] Christ's enthronement involves His exaltation as mediator, which necessarily involves both natures. Of course, Reynolds and the Puritans strongly affirmed that the divine nature cannot "receive any intrinsical improvement or glory…yet so far as it was humbled, for the economy and administration of his office, so far it was re-advanced again."[43] Christ's "emptying" was not the putting off of divine glory, but the veiling or concealing of it. In His state of humiliation the divine glory that was innate to His person was "over-shadowed with the similitude of sinful flesh"; thus the divine nature was only exalted in this sense: "by evident manifestation of itself in that Man who was before despised and accused as a blasphemer."[44] Christ's human nature was exalted as well. Because of the hypostatical union, the human nature of Christ had an "immediate claim to all that glory which might in the human nature be conferred upon him […therefore] there was in the virtue of that most intimate association of the natures in one person, a communicating of all glory from the Deity which the other nature was capable of."[45]

The glory of Christ was a theme to which Thomas Goodwin, more than any of his contemporaries (even Owen), gave copious attention.[46] His thoughts on Christ's glory have particular application to Christ's role of mediator, including His office as king. For Goodwin, Christ possesses a threefold glory. The first glory, which all the orthodox agreed upon, was that of His divine nature, which could not be increased or diminished in any way. The Son in His divine nature is coequal in glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This first glory is His essential glory.

Second, Christ has a personal glory not shared with the Father or the Spirit, namely, the glory of His person as the God-man. This glory belongs to Him alone on account of the hypostatical union. He is the visible image of the invisible God. This personal and native glory is of far more worth than the third glory He possesses, namely, the glory of His office as mediator of the covenant of grace. Christ's native and personal glory as the God-man will always shine forth in eternity, but His mediatorial glory must come to an end, as Owen and other Puritan theologians argue. Thus in Goodwin's view, 1 Corinthians 15:24 speaks of Christ handing over His kingdom to the Father. Goodwin makes an interesting point here. Christ has a natural inheritance based on the hypostatic union, and so He will remain king forever (absolutely considered) because the unity of His person allows for no other option. Separate from His natural inheritance is what Goodwin calls Christ's dispensatory kingdom. So in order to affirm both that Christ sits at the right hand of the Father forever and that He will hand over the kingdom to the Father, Goodwin posits a distinction between

Christ's natural kingdom based on the dignity of His person, and His dispensatory kingdom based on His office of mediator between God and the church.47 Christ's mediatorial kingdom was not His natural due; it was given to Him according to the terms of the eternal covenant of redemption. Christ received it as His reward for obeying the Father joyfully, constantly, and completely.

While all three persons are involved in every *ad extra* work of the Godhead, sometimes a particular work is attributed to a specific person in the Godhead (e.g., sanctification is attributed to the Holy Spirit). The Father and the Spirit rule with the Son until the day of judgment, but that rule is in a more especial manner appropriated to the Son.48 The Son has the privilege of a dispensatory kingdom because of the reward that was due to Him, "that he should draw all men's eyes to him, and have all the glory and honour as it were in a more immediate manner, because he veiled his Godhead in obedience to his Father."49 This is how Goodwin is able to affirm both that Christ must reign as king "for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15) and that He will hand over His kingdom to the Father. Here we note, among other things, that for Goodwin the person of Christ has a priority over His work.

Conclusion Christ's threefold office and His two estates are organically linked together. Reynolds notes how Christ's offices were works of ministry and service: "in the office of obedience and suffering for his church; others were works of power and majesty, in the protection and exaltation of his church."50 Christ the Savior must go through both states, and the unity of the two natures in His person allows for a real transition from His state of humiliation to His state of exaltation. Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) captures this so well in his penetrating work *Christ's Exaltation Purchased by Humiliation*, where he writes:

> Oh it is a sweet meditation, beloved, to think that our flesh is now in heaven, at the right hand of God; and that flesh that was born of the virgin, that was laid in the manger, that went up and down doing good, that was made a curse for us and humbled to death, and lay under the bondage of death three days; that this flesh is now glorious in heaven, that this person is Lord over the living and the dead. It is an excellent book to study this. Beloved, study Christ in the state of humiliation and exaltation.51

But to understand properly Christ's work as prophet, priest, and king, one must first come to a correct understanding of His person as the God-man who voluntarily humbled Himself to the lowest depths to fulfill the terms of the

covenant and was to be rewarded by His Father by exaltation to the highest place. We can correctly speak of Christ as the once-humbled prophet, priest, and king who is now, in those same offices, exalted in heaven where He reigns until the consummation. But, even then, based on the glory of His person, Christ will mediate God's revelation to His saints in heaven, be forever glorified by His people for His atoning and interceding work on their behalf as the faithful high priest, and continue as the king of all creation because of the hypostatic union.

1. John Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:468.

2. Nicene Creed, in "Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order," *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 2.

3. See the excellent works of Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and John A. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004).

4. John McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 238.

5. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 238.

6. For example, Paul Baynes (1573–1617) writes: "Much less is the Lutheran's sense to be approved, who make Christ's placing at God's right hand to import thus much, that the human nature of Christ is elevated to this honour, that it may freely use the divine attributes, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence; so as to become by them omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent no less properly than the divine…the divine nature being thus of it self by natural necessity, the human being thus by union with the divine, by gracious Communication of these unto it, with liberty to use them for the perfecting of it self…." *A Commentarie upon the First Chapter of the Epistle of Saint Paul, Written to the Ephesians…* (London, 1643), 196.

7. These reasons may explain in part why Puritan theologians did not often quote Lutheran theologians, with the notable exception of Luther himself. In fact, references to Roman Catholic theologians, such as Suarez and Estius, appear more often in Puritan writings than do those of Lutheran divines. Then, too, the campaign of the post-Luther Lutherans to root out Calvinism in Germany accounts for much of the Puritan perception that Lutheranism was hostile to their faith.

8. John Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 6:182.

9. John Owen, *Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 20:23.

10. Owen, *Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:30.

11. Owen, *Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:30.

12. Owen, *Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:31.

13. Owen, *Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:32.

14. Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4:121.

15. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ*, in *Works*, 4:121.

16. John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:414.

17. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses on Christ Crucified* (London: for the Religious Tract Society, 1830), 83.

18. John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone &

Hunter, 1850–1855), 10:91.

19. Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *Works*, 10:90. Thomas Manton likewise writes: "It is part of his priestly office, of which there were two acts—oblation and intercession. Oblation was made once on the altar of the cross, and intercession is the continuance of his sacrifice, or the presenting it in heaven." *Sermons upon John 17*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: James Nisbet, 1870–1875), 10:246.

20. Edward Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm…* (1656; repr., London: Religious Tract Society, 1837), 310.

21. Manton, *Sermons upon John 17*, in *Works*, 10:244.

22. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 313.

23. Manton, *Sermons upon John 17*, in *Works*, 10:244.

24. John Owen, *Salus Electorum*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 10:179.

25. Owen, *Salus Electorum*, in *Works*, 10:179–80.

26. Thomas Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4:63.

27. Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *Works*, 4:63.

28. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 181.

29. Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *Works*, 4:64.

30. Owen, *Hebrews*, in *Works*, 22:454.

31. Owen, *Hebrews*, in *Works*, 22:490.

32. Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, 4:67.

33. Another point worth noting about Christ's office of priest in His state of exaltation concerns how He is even more merciful and compassionate in heaven than He was on earth. This point is discussed in chapter 25, "Puritan Christology," so it will not be examined here.

34. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 5.

35. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 6.

36. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 6–7.

37. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 12.

38. Like the attributes of God, Christ's office is one, not three. He is prophet, priest, and king all at once. The one title, "Anointed," involves all three functions.

39. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 14.

40. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 14.

41. Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *Works*, 4:47.

42. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 17.

43. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 17.

44. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 17.

45. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 18–19.

46. See chapter 9 in Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 202–21.

47. Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 1:502–3.

48. Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:503.

49. Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians*, in *Works*, 1:503.

50. Reynolds, *An Explication of the Hundred and Tenth Psalm*, 22.

51. Richard Sibbes, *Christ's Exaltation Purchased by Humiliation*, in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 5:346.

Chapter 23

The Blood of Christ in Puritan Piety

> *Let us look upon a crucified Christ, the remedy of all our miseries. His cross hath procured a crown, his passion hath expiated our transgression. His death hath disarmed the law, his blood hath washed a believer's soul. This death is the destruction of our enemies, the spring of our happiness, and the eternal testimony of divine love.*
>
> —STEPHEN CHARNOCK[1]

Although the Puritans did not write prolifically on the doctrine of Christ's atonement as it relates to His imputed righteousness and the way in which that righteousness is received by sinners through Spirit-worked faith to their justification, they took a staunchly Reformed position on this foundational issue.[2] The reason that they were not more prolific is not hard to find: Reformers had already covered the subject so thoroughly. By and large the Puritans focused more on sanctification—that is, living as Christians on the basis of the shed blood of Christ in every sphere of life to the glory of God. For the Puritans, this was experiential piety at its best.

In this chapter, we will examine Puritan piety in relation to the blood of Christ specifically in Stephen Charnock's "The Cleansing Virtue of Christ's Blood" and "The Knowledge of Christ Crucified," Thomas Goodwin's "Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ," and Isaac Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus*.[3] These writings reveal the Puritan conviction that Christ's work outside of us (an objective, justifying salvation) finds its counterpart within us (a subjective, sanctifying salvation), thereby promoting an experiential piety that lives under the shadow of the cross.

First, we should define our terms within the historical and theological context of Puritanism. Let us look at two of the terms in our title: "the blood of Christ" and "piety." For the Puritans, "the blood of Christ" could depict (1) all of the

atoning sufferings of Christ endured for sinners; (2) all of His literal blood-shedding, from circumcision to death; (3) His vicarious blood-shedding and intense sufferings in Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha; (4) His atoning crucifixion—i.e., His blood-shedding particularly in His death; and (5) a combination of the above, with an emphasis on the substitutionary nature of His sufferings and death. Here, we will use the fifth definition: a combination of the other four definitions, with an emphasis on the substitutionary nature of Christ's sufferings and death.[4]

Within their historical and theological context, the Puritans were keen to demolish the errors of the semi-Pelagian Roman Catholics, antitrinitarian Socinians, and freewill Arminians. They opposed Roman Catholics such as the Jesuit preacher and professor Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). They rejected Socianianism, particularly the views of Laelius (1525–1562) and Faustus (1539–1604) and the Polish Racovian Catechism (1605), which expressed Socinian theology. (Socianians denied Christ's deity and His death as a punishment for sin, thus opposing the foundational Reformation doctrine of justification by Christ's imputed righteousness.) Some Arminians rejected the penal substitutionary view of the atonement; this rejection was developed by Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), who viewed the death of Christ as only illustrative of the punishment that rebellion against God may attract and therefore as only a deterrent in the interests of good government. Puritans also opposed the views of the Amyraldians and their hypothetical universalism, and some wrote against the neonomian views of Richard Baxter (1615–1691), who was a Puritan but was unsound on justification.

By "piety," we mean a childlike fear of God that combines living to the glory of God in every sphere of life with a reverential awe and zealous love for God in all His attributes. The truly pious are sensitive to God and His graciousness. They are like Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3 and Isaiah in his vision of God in the temple in Isaiah 6. They know by experience that Jesus' atoning death, resurrection, and heavenly intercession liberate us from the slavish fear of God and promote our filial fear. They have experienced great awe, heartfelt worship, childlike confidence, prayerful submission, and profound joy in Christ. This fear is what Calvin called *pietas* ("piety"), and he declared it to be the heart of all true religion and the major purpose for which he wrote his classic *Institutes*.[5] We will now summarize various aspects of the blood of Christ in Puritan piety, and then conclude with some practical lessons that promote such piety.

Redemptive Cleansing in Christ's Incarnation and Death For the Puritans,

the truth that God found a remedy for man's sin through the incarnation and death of His Son from eternity past (before man even sinned) was an astonishing cause for humility, joy, and worship. As Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) wrote, "Before the wound [of sin] was given, [God] provided a plaster and sufficient remedy to salve all again, which otherwise had been past finding out. For we, who could never have found out a remedy for a cut finger (had not God prescribed and appointed one), could much less for this life."[6]

The Puritans gloried in the divine love revealed in the passion of Christ. Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) wrote, "Come then, and let us learn to read this love-letter sent from heaven in bloody characters…. Christ is scourged all over, because all over, we were full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores, Isa. 1:6…. O it was a divine love, it was the love of a Jesus, a love far surpassing the love of men or women, or of angels."[7]

Christ's blood is sufficient to save the greatest of sinners from his sins. Christ's blood, Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) wrote,

> cleanseth from all sin universally. For since it was the blood of so great a person as the Son of God, it is as powerful to cleanse us from the greatest as the least. Had it been the blood of a sinful creature, it had been so far from expiation, that it would rather have been for pollution. Had it been the blood of an angel, though holy (supposing they had any to shed), yet it had been the blood of a creature, and therefore incapable of mounting to an infinite value; but since it is the blood of the Son of God, it is both the blood of a holy and of an uncreated and infinite person. Is it not therefore able to exceed all the bulk of finite sins, and to equal in dignity the infiniteness of the injury in every transgressor?[8]

The Puritans taught a threefold cleansing through the blood of Christ. First, there was an objective cleansing of believers in Christ's death and resurrection. Then, they argued for a subjective cleansing the moment when the soul passes from death to life by embracing Christ's merits in faith. Finally, they asserted that there was a sensible cleansing when the Holy Spirit sprinkles Christ's blood on the soul to make the soul conscious that it is washed clean, is forgiven of all its trespasses, and has a right to eternal life. This sensible cleansing was sometimes referred to as justification in the court of conscience. In the words of Stephen Charnock:

> This cleansing from guilt may be considered as meritorious or applicative. As the blood of Christ was offered to God, this purification was meritoriously wrought; as particularly pleaded for a person, it is actually wrought; as sprinkled upon the conscience, it is sensibly wrought. The first

> merits the removal of guilt, the second solicits it, the third ensures it; the one was wrought upon the cross, the other is acted upon his throne, and the third pronounced in the conscience.9

Substitution, Imputation, and Justification through the Blood The Puritans said that three things are involved in Christ's blood-cleansing of sin. First, there is *substitution*. In salvation, Jesus Christ takes our place, assuming our demerits and giving us all His merits. Again Charnock noted,

> He received our evils to bestow his good, and submitted to our curse to impart to us his blessings; sustained the extremity of that wrath we had deserved, to confer upon us the grace he had purchased. The sin in us, which he was free from, was by divine estimation transferred upon him, as if he were guilty, that the righteousness he has, which we were destitute of, might be transferred upon us, as if we were innocent. He was made sin, as if he had sinned all the sins of men, and we are made righteousness, as if we had not sinned at all.10

Ambrose said, "Christ now took the place of sinners, and God the Father shut him out (as it were) amongst the sinners; he drew his mercy out of sight, and out of hearing, and therefore he cried out in a kind of wonderment, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"11 This sorrow fulfilled "the mutual compact and agreement betwixt God and Christ," Ambrose wrote. "God the Father imposeth, by charging the sins of his elect upon Jesus Christ, 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all, Isa. 53:6.'… He bare them as a porter that bears the burden for another which himself is not able to stand under; he bare them by undergoing the punishment which was due for them."12

Second, there is *imputation*, which is closely related to substitution, though it looks at substitution in a more forensic or judicial way. Imputation is the belief that God reckons the unrighteousness of the ungodly to Christ's account and the righteousness of Christ to the ungodly sinner's account. As Charnock wrote,

> We are not righteous before God by an inherent, but by an imputed righteousness, nor was Christ made sin by inherent, but imputed, guilt. The same way that his righteousness is communicated to us, our sin was communicated to him. Righteousness was inherent in him, but imputed to us; sin was inherent in us, but imputed to him.13

Imputation is possible through our legal and covenantal union with Christ, much as the imputation of Adam's sin is grounded in our seminal and covenantal union with him. Charnock explained,

> If we had not had a union with Adam in nature, and been seminally in him,

> his sin could no more have been imputed to us than the sin of the fallen angels could be counted ours; so if we have not a union with Christ, his righteousness can no more be reckoned to us than the righteousness of the standing angels can be imputed to us. We must therefore be in Christ as really as we were in Adam, though not in the same manner of reality. We were in Adam seminally, we are in Christ legally; yet so that it is counted in the judgment of God as much as if there were a seminal union. Believers are therefore called the seed of Christ, Isa. liii.10, Ps. xxii.30.[14]

Third, there is *justification*, which consists of the forgiveness of sins and a right to eternal life. Christ's complete blood-atonement (called His passive obedience) and perfect law-obedience (called His active obedience) fully satisfy God's offended justice. This twofold obedience provides full justification, which the sinner receives by faith. Goodwin said that since "God had a bond against us" (Col. 2:15), Christ "hath discharged that debt, paid an equivalent ransom to it, *antilutron*, 1 Tim. 2:6, and cancelled that bond, Col. 2:13 [*sic* 14]."[15] Christ also "hath fulfilled all the active righteousness of the law; for so indeed 'it became him,' who is our high priest, 'who is holy, harmless, undefiled,' etc., Heb. 7:26…. [So Christ says,] John 8:29, 'I do always the things that please thee.'"[16]

Christ's blood-atonement is the ground of the sinner's forgiveness of sins, "yet actual pardon is not bestowed without believing."[17] Charnock commented on this:

> A *not guilty* is entered into the court of God when this blood is pleaded, and a *not guilty* upon the roll of conscience when this blood is sprinkled. It appeaseth God's justice and quencheth wrath. As it is pleaded before his tribunal, it silenceth the accusations of sin; and quells tumults in a wrangling conscience, as it is sprinkled upon the soul.[18]

Christ's obedience to the law is the ground of the sinner's right to eternal life. Charnock said, "Since the law is not abrogated [by the fall of man], it must be exactly obeyed, the honour of it must be preserved; it cannot be observed by us, it was Christ only who kept it, and never broke it, and endured the penalty of it for us, not for himself." The virtue of Christ's perfect obedience "must be transferred to us, which cannot be any other way than by imputation, or reckoning it ours, as we are one body with him."[19] As Thomas Goodwin concluded, "By this his both active and passive obedience, through the acceptation of his person, who performed it, [Jesus] hath completed the work of reconciliation with his Father."[20]

Not every one agreed with this view, especially not the Socinians. Ambrose

noted their opposition:

> A great controversy is of late risen up, "Whether Christ's death be a satisfaction to divine justice?" But the very words "redeeming and buying," do plainly demonstrate, that a satisfaction was given to God by the death of Jesus, "He gave himself for us that he might redeem us," Tit. 2:14. Ye are bought with a price, 1 Cor. 6:20. And what price was that? Why, his own blood. "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood," Rev. 5:9, (i.e.) by thy death and passion. This was the (*lutron*), that ransom which Christ gave for his elect. "The Son of man came to give himself a ransom for many," Matt. 20:28, or as the apostle, "He gave himself a ransom for all," 1 Tim. 2:6, the word is here (*antilutron*), which signifies an adequate price, or a counter-price; as when one doeth or undergoeth something in the room of another; as when one yields himself a captive for the redeeming of another out of captivity, or gives up his own life for the saving of another man's life; so Christ gave himself (*antilutron*) a ransom, or counter-price, submitting himself to the like punishment that his redeemed ones should have undergone.21

Ambrose warned about the danger of separating Christ's active and passive obedience:

> If Christ's death be mine, then is Christ's life mine. Christ's active and passive obedience cannot be severed; Christ is not divided: we must not seek one part of our righteousness in his birth, another in his habitual holiness, another in the integrity of his life, another in his obedience unto death. They that endeavor to separate Christ's active and passive obedience, they do exceedingly derogate from Christ, and make him but half a Saviour: was not Christ our surety? Heb. 7:22, and thereupon was he not bound to fulfill all righteousness for us? (*i.e.*) As to suffer in our stead, so to obey in our stead. Oh! take heed of opposing or separating Christ's death and Christ's life; either we have all Christ, or we have no part in Christ.22

Faith in the Blood By faith, Christ's blood is received and sprinkled on the believer's conscience by the Spirit of Christ. In this act of faith, the sinner is made willing, said Charnock,

> to receive Christ upon the terms he is offered. Since a mediator is not a mediator of one, but supposeth in the notion of it two parties, there must be a consent on both sides. God's consent is manifested by giving, our consent is by receiving, which is a title given to faith, John 1:12; God's consent in appointing and accepting the atonement, and ours in receiving the

> atonement, which is all one with 'receiving forgiveness of sin,' Rom. 5:11.[23]

Given the infinite value of Christ's atoning blood, no sin should stand in the way of the sinner's reception of mercy by faith. Charnock put this quaintly: "The nature of the sins, and the blackness of them, is not regarded, when this blood is set in opposition to them. God only looks what the sinners are, whether they repent and believe." He went on to say that justification by faith through Christ's blood is sufficient for all sin, "the sins of all believing persons in all parts, in all ages of the world, from the first moment of man's sinning, to the last sin committed on the earth."[24]

Ambrose said that it is easy for many men to believe that Christ died for sinners because they have no sense of their wickedness and unworthiness. But the person humbled by his sins exclaims, "Is it possible that Christ should die, suffer, shed his blood for me?…that the son of God should become man, live amongst men, and die such a death, even the death of the cross, for such a one as I am, I cannot believe it; it is an abyss past fathoming; the more I consider it, the more I am amazed at it."[25]

Ambrose also warned that faith in Christ is more than just an emotional response to the history of His sufferings. Natural human compassion can be stirred by the story of anyone suffering, but this is not faith in Christ. Faith looks to the "meaning, intent, and design of Christ in his sufferings," Ambrose said, namely to "redeem us from the slavery of death and hell," and "to free us from sin…destroy it, kill it, crucify it."[26]

Charnock precisely explained the role of faith in justification:

> This faith is not our righteousness, nor is it ever called so, but we have a righteousness by the means of faith. *By* faith, or *through* faith, is the language of the apostle: Romans 3:22, 25, 'Faith in his blood,' faith reaching out to his blood, embracing his blood, sucking up his propitiating blood and pleading it. Though faith is the eye and hand of the soul, looking up and reaching out to [the] whole Christ as offered in the promise, yet in this act of it to be freed from the guilt of sin, it grasps Christ as a sacrifice, it hangs upon him as paying a price, and takes this blood as a blood shed for the soul, and insists upon the sufficient value of it with God…. [So] we are *justified by faith*, not that *faith justifies us.* The efficacy is in Christ's blood, the reception of it in our faith (Rom. 5:1).[27]

Charnock stressed the sufficiency of Christ's blood received by faith by pointing out that

> the first sin we read of cleansed by this blood, after it was shed, was the

> most prodigious wickedness that ever was committed in the face of the sun, even the murder of the Son of God, Acts 2:36, 38. So that, suppose a man were able to pull heaven and earth to pieces, murder all the rest of mankind, destroy the angels, those superlative arts of the creation, he would not contract so monstrous a guilt as those did in the crucifying of the Son of God, whose person was infinitely superior to the whole creation. God then hereby gave an experiment of the inestimable value of Christ's blood, and the inexhaustible virtue of it. Well might the apostle say, "The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin."[28]

Sanctification through the Blood Christ's blood was shed not only for justification but also for sanctification. As Charnock pointed out,

> There is a cleansing from *guilt*, and a cleansing from *filth*; both are the fruits of this blood: the guilt is removed by remission, the filth by purification. Christ doth both: he cleanseth us from our guilt as he is our righteousness, from our spot as he is our sanctification; for he is both to us, 1 Cor. 1:30, the one upon the account of his merit, the other by his efficacy, which he exerts by his Spirit.[29]

Goodwin, quoting the covenant promises of Hebrews 10:14–17 which were fulfilled in Christ's offering of Himself on the cross, wrote, "The sum whereof is this, that justification is eternal…. And therefore sanctification is eternal also, and both he puts upon the merit of that one offering."[30]

The sanctification of the believer is objectively accomplished already in Christ's death, subjectively applied in conversion, and progressively perfected in spiritual growth. Ambrose wrote, "As Christ died for sin, so the believer died to sin."[31] Thus the mortification of all sin in its "reigning power" is "the very touchstone of a Christian," and the proof of our share in Christ's death.[32] Christ's death, Ambrose said, creates in the true believer a sorrow for sin, desire to be free of all sin, powerful fighting against sin, and growth in victory over the lusts of sin.[33]

The power of the cross does not operate anonymously, but rather through the word of the cross, the gospel of Christ. The knowledge of Christ crucified sanctifies us in several ways. Charnock mentioned five.

First, by enlivening our *repentance*. We cannot look on the blood of Christ without grieving that our sins nailed Him to the cross and brought on His bloodshed. "Should we not bleed as often as we seriously thought of Christ's bleeding for us?" asked Charnock. This grief, in turn, makes us detest our sin. He wrote,

> It is a 'look upon Christ pierced' that pierceth the soul, Zech. 12:10. Would not this blood acquaint us that the malignity of sin was so great, that it could not be blotted out by the blood of the whole creation! Would it not astonish us that none had strength enough to match it, but one equal with God! Would not such an astonishment break out into penitent reflections![34]

Second, by enlivening our *faith.* Charnock said, "When we behold a Christ crucified, how can we distrust God, that hath in that, as a plain tablet write this language, that he will spare nothing for us, since he hath not spared the best he had. What greater assurance can he give? Where is there anything in heaven or earth that can be a greater pledge of his affection?"[35]

Third, by enlivening our *prayer*. Charnock wrote, "We should think of it every time we go to God in prayer [that] it was by this death the throne of God was opened. This will chase away that fear that disarms us of our vigour [in prayer]. It will compose our souls to offer up delightful petitions."[36]

Ambrose added that looking to Christ will enliven our praises, writing,

> Be enlarged, O my soul! Sound forth the praises of thy Christ. Tell all the world of that warmest love of Christ, which flowed with his blood out of all his wounds into thy spirit; tune thy strings aright, and keep consort with all the angels of heaven, and all his saints on earth. Sing that psalm of John the divine, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen," Rev. 1:5, 6.[37]

Fourth, by enlivening our *holiness.* Charnock wrote,

> We should see no charms in sin, which may not be overcome by that ravishing love which bubbles up in every drop of the Redeemer's blood. Can we, with lively thoughts of this, sin against so much tenderness, compassion, grace, and the other perfections of God, which sound so loud in our ears from the cross of Jesus? Shall we consider him hanging there to deliver us from hell, and yet retain any spirit to walk in the way which leads thereto?[38]

Charnock then became even more direct: "Shall we see him groaning in our place and stead, and dare to tell him by our unworthy carriage that we regard him not, and that he might have spared his pains?… Can we take any pleasure in that which procured so much pain to our best friend?" Charnock concluded that when we do not meditate on Christ's substitutionary blood, we are prone to continue in sin, as if Christ died to give us a license for sin rather than to destroy sin. On the other hand, daily regarding His blood will stifle the worldliness and ungodliness that harasses our souls.[39]

Finally, by enlivening our *comfort.* "What comfort can be wanting when we look upon Christ crucified as our surety, and look upon ourselves as crucified in him; when we consider our sins as punished in him, and ourselves accepted by virtue of his cross," wrote Charnock. He then summarized these comforts:

> Let us look upon a crucified Christ, the remedy of all our miseries. His cross hath procured a crown, his passion hath expiated our transgression. His death hath disarmed the law, his blood hath washed a believer's soul. This death is the destruction of our enemies, the spring of our happiness, and the eternal testimony of divine love.[40]

Victory through the Blood Charnock taught that the believer may know victory through Christ's blood already in this life in terms of sin's "condemnation and punishment." His sin is blotted out of "the book of God's justice; it is no more to be remembered in a way of legal and judicial sentence against the sinner. Though the nature of sin doth not cease to be sinful, yet the power of sin ceaseth to be condemning. The sentence of the law is revoked, the right to condemn is removed, and sin is not imputed to them, 1 Corinthians 5:19."[41]

Ambrose said, "Let us joy in Jesus…. Hath he drunk all the cup of God's wrath, and left none for us? How should we be but cheered? Precious souls! Why are you afraid? There is no death, no hell, 'no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,' Rom. 8:1."[42] Goodwin quoted Hebrews 10:14, "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," and commented, "His offering, though but one, yet it was a perfect one, wanting nothing; once was enough; it is of everlasting force and merit, for it perfecteth forever."[43]

But that does not mean that the blood of Christ cleanses us perfectly in the here and now from all consciousness of sin and the stirrings of sin. Believers "need a daily pardon upon daily sin."[44] Yet the believer is on his way to victory in his ongoing battles with sin. Charnock described this graphically:

> Some sparks of the fiery law will sometimes flash in our consciences, and the peace of the gospel be put under a veil. The smiles of God's countenance seem to be changed into frowns, and the blood of Christ appears as if it ran low. Evidences may be blurred and guilt revived. Satan may accuse, and conscience knows not how to answer him. The sore may run fresh in the night, and the soul have not only comfort hid from it, but refuse comfort when it stands at the door. There will be startlings of unbelief, distrusts of God, and misty steams from the miry lake of nature.[45]

He went on to say of our cleansing,

> But it hath laid a perfect foundation, and the top stone of a full sense and

> comfort will be laid at last. Peace shall be as an illustrious sunshine without a cloud, a triumphant breaking out of love, without any arrows of wrath sticking fast in the conscience; a sweet calm, without any whisper of a blustering tempest; the guilt of sin shall be for ever wiped out of the conscience, as well as blotted out of God's book. The accuser shall no more accuse us, either to God or ourselves; no new indictment shall be formed by him at the bar of conscience; nay, conscience itself shall be for ever purged, and sing an uninterrupted *requiem,* and hymn of peace, shall not hiss the least accusation of a crime. As God's justice shall read nothing for condemnation, so conscience shall read nothing for accusation. The blood of Christ will be perfect in the effects of it. As it rent the veil between God and us, it will rend the veil between conscience and us; no more frowns from the one, nor any more janglings in the other.[46]

Charnock then concluded, "The blood of Christ shall still the waves, and expel the filth, and crown the soul with an everlasting victory. 'The spirits of just men' are then 'made perfect,' Hebrews 12:23."[47]

Heavenly Joy through the Blood The Puritans loved meditating on heaven; no subject is mentioned more frequently in all their tomes. Goodwin said that Christ lifts us even higher than Adam stood before the fall, for He gives us an "abundance of grace and righteousness" so that "we shall reign in life, be kings in heaven."[48] Heaven, said Charnock, is

> cemented and prepared by the blood of Christ. By the law against sin we were to have our bodies reduced to dust, and our souls lie under the sentence of the wrath of God. But our crucified Saviour hath purchased the redemption of our body, to be evidenced by a resurrection, Romans 8:23, and a standing security of our souls in a place of bliss, to which believers shall have a real ascent, and in which they shall have a local residence, which is called the purchased possession…. We lost a paradise by sin, and have gained a heaven by the cross.[49]

Ambrose put it this way,

> It is the blood of Christ that rends the veil, and makes a way into the holy of holies, that is, into the kingdom of heaven; without this blood there is no access to God; it is only by the blood of Christ that heaven is open to our prayers, and that heaven is open to our persons. This blood is the key that unlocks heaven, and lets in the souls of his redeemed ones.[50]

Practical Lessons That Promote Piety The Puritans offer the following

practical lessons learned from the atoning blood of Christ to promote piety.

1. If we are not saved personally by Christ's blood, we are on our way to condemnation. No one who lacks a saving interest in the cleansing blood for his own soul will ever be delivered from his guilt. He will remain unconverted as long as he remains in this condition. Charnock wrote, "The blood of Christ is so far from cleansing an unbeliever from all sin, that it rather binds his sins the faster on him. Unbelief locks the sins on more strongly, so that the violations of the law stick closer to him, and the wrath of God hangs over him."[51]

2. God's mercy is administered only on the basis of Christ's blood. "No freedom from the guilt of sin is to be expected from mere mercy," said Charnock. He further emphasized that the high priest could not approach the mercy seat in the Old Testament era without blood (Heb. 9:7), and "Christ himself, typified by the high priest, expects no mercy for any of his followers, but by the merit of his blood."[52] God's mercy is just mercy.

Christ's blood is the only way of justification and salvation. Because all that we think, say, and do by nature is tainted with sin, everything we do adds to our condemnation. Since none of our works are perfect, none are justifying. All that we do comes short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). God's way of justifying sinners strips us of all glory in ourselves or our own righteousness.

3. Our hope for salvation rests in Christ's righteousness being imputed to us. How comforting it is to know and experience that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses—yes, makes absolutely pure—from all—yes, *all*—sin. No sinner can ever say that Christ's satisfaction is not sufficient to annul his sin. Isaac Ambrose asserts that Christ's satisfaction is not only "copious and full," but that His "death and blood is superabundant to our sins: 'The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant [*hyperepleonasen*],' 1 Tim. 1:14, it was over full, redundant, more than enough." He goes on to say:

> Many an humble soul is apt enough to complain, "Oh! if I had not been so great a sinner, if I had not committed such and such transgressions there might have been hope." This is to undervalue Christ's redemption; this is to think there is more in sin to damn, than in Christ's sufferings to save, whereas all thy sins to Christ are but as a little cloud to the glorious sun, yea, all the sins of all the men in the world, are but to Christ's merits as a drop to the ocean. I speak this not to encourage the presumptuous sinner, for alas, he hath no part in this satisfaction, but to comfort the humbled sinner, who is loadened with a sense of his sins; what though they were a

> burden greater than he can bear, yet they are not a burden greater than Christ can bear. There is in Christ's blood an infinite treasure, able to sanctify thee and all the world; there is in Christ's death a ransom, a counter-price sufficient to redeem all the sinners that ever were or ever shall be.[53]

4. Christ's bloody satisfaction should make us deeply mourn over our sin that nailed Him to the cross. Isaac Ambrose is typical of the Puritans on this subject:

> O the curse and bitterness that our sins have brought on Jesus Christ! When I but think of these bleeding veins, bruised shoulders, scourged sides, furrowed back, harrowed temples, digged hands and feet, and then consider that my sins were the cause of all; methinks I should need no more arguments for self-abhorring! Christians, would not your hearts rise against him that should kill your father, mother, brother, wife, husband; dearest relations in all the world! O then, how should your hearts and souls rise against sin? Surely your sin it was, that murdered Christ, that killed him, who is instead of all relations, who is a thousand, thousand times dearer to you, than father, mother, husband, child, or whomsoever; one thought of this should, methinks, be enough to make you say, as Job did, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," Job 42:9. Oh! what is that cross on the back of Christ? My sins; oh! what is that crown on the head of Christ? My sins; oh! what is the nail in the right-hand, and that other in the left-hand of Christ? My sins; oh! what is that spear in the side of Christ? My sins; what are those nails and wounds in the feet of Christ? My sins…oh my sins, my sins, my sins![54]

5. No one who comes to Christ by faith and repentance shall be turned away. To those who fear that Christ will not accept them because they are full of sin and have flagrantly sinned against Him for so many decades, Thomas Goodwin said,

> The text [Colossians 1:20] tells us, that 'Christ hath all fullness in him to reconcile'; and till thou canst be fuller of sin than he of righteousness, there is enough to pardon thee: 'He is able to save to the utmost,' be the case never so bad, the matter never so foul…. Consider that this fullness…hath resided longer in Christ…than sin hath done in thee; yea, it will dwell in him for ever, it is an everlasting righteousness.[55]

"No matter how bad your heart and your record are," says Goodwin, "thou art the welcomer if thou wilt but come to him," for He delights to save the chiefest of sinners.[56]

6. Let us aspire after the blood of Christ more fervently and consistently. Pray for this inclination daily, says Ambrose, who then added, “Oh, my Jesus! that thou wouldst breed in me ardent desires, vehement longings; unutterable groans, mighty gaspings: O that I were like the dry and thirsty ground that gapes and cleaves, and opens for drops of rain! When my spirit is in right frame, I feel some desires after Christ’s blood, but how short are these desires? How unworthy of the things desired? Come, Lord, kindle in me hot, burning desires, and then give me the desirable object.”[57]

Are you washed in Christ’s blood? If not, ask God to show you your malady and fly to Christ’s blood today for your only remedy. And, as believers, “since we contract guilt every day, let us daily apply the medicine.” Let none of us rest without experiencing every day that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.”[58] Such experience, after all, is the goal of Puritan piety—living every day in the shadow of the cross.

1. Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1865; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 4:506. This chapter is an expanded version of Joel R. Beeke, “The Blood of Christ in Puritan Piety,” in *Precious Blood: The Atoning Work of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2009), 163–78.

2. See chapter 31, “John Owen on Justification by Faith Alone.”

3. Stephen Charnock, “The Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1865; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:501–34, and “The Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1865; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 4:494–506; Thomas Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:499–521; Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* (repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1986). Cf. David Clarkson, “Christ’s Dying for Sinners,” in *The Works of David Clarkson* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 3:63–80; Thomas Manton, “The Blood of Sprinkling,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: J. Nisbet, 1870), 22:106–22; Samuel Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* (London: Andrew Crooks, 1647); James Durham, “Remission of Sins Is through Christ’s Blood Alone,” in *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* (1685; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 306–40; John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 5 (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

4. For a helpful study on the biblical usage of the word *blood*, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 112–28.

5. See Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin’s Piety,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125–52.

6. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:501.

7. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 363.

8. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:518.

9. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:3:505.

10. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:519.

11. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 380.

12. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 382.

13. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:519.
14. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:521.
15. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:507–8.
16. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:508.
17. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:522.
18. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:505–6.
19. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:519.
20. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:509.
21. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 381–82.
22. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 385.
23. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:521.
24. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:518.
25. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 391.
26. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 392–94.
27. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:522.
28. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:518.
29. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:504.
30. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:510.
31. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 386.
32. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 386–87. A touchstone was a small, dark, flat stone across which precious metals were rubbed to determine their composition and alloy and thus their genuine value. It became a metaphor for a means by which to test or try the quality of a thing. Today we might call it a litmus test.
33. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 388–89.
34. Charnock, “Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *Works*, 4:504–5.
35. Charnock, “Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *Works*, 4:505.
36. Charnock, “Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *Works*, 4:505.
37. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 404.
38. Charnock, “Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *Works*, 4:505.
39. Charnock, “Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *Works*, 4:506.
40. Charnock, “Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *Works*, 4:506.
41. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:516.
42. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 400.
43. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:510.
44. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:517.
45. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:515.
46. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:515–16.
47. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:516.
48. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:510.
49. Charnock, “Knowledge of Christ Crucified,” in *Works*, 4:503.
50. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 384.
51. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:522–23.
52. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:523.
53. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 382.
54. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 372.
55. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:516.
56. Goodwin, “Reconciliation by the Blood of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:516.
57. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, 384–85.
58. Charnock, “Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood,” in *Works*, 3:531–34.

Chapter 24

Anthony Burgess on Christ's Intercession for Us

> *This mediatory prayer of Christ is the ground of all the acceptance of our prayers. Our prayers if not found in him are provocations rather than appeasements. If a godly man's prayer availeth much, it is because Christ's prayer availeth much. He is the altar upon which all the oblations are sanctified, and from hence it is that the incense of their prayers are perfumed, so that God finds a sweet savour in them.*
>
> —ANTHONY BURGESS[1]

Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) was a Puritan pastor and writer known for his piety, scholarship, and skill as a preacher, teacher, and apologist. He worked for a time as a teaching fellow at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Then from 1635 to 1662 he served as pastor of the church at Sutton-Coldfield in Warwickshire. His ministry was interrupted for several years in the 1640s, first, when the Civil War between the king and Parliament forced him to flee, and then by the Westminster Assembly, where he played a significant role in helping craft the Westminster Standards. Burgess returned to Sutton-Coldfield in 1649 and served there until he was ejected from public ministry by the Act of Uniformity (1662). Burgess retired to Tamworth, Staffordshire, where he attended a parish church until his death two years later.[2]

During a fifteen-year span (1646–1661), Burgess wrote at least a dozen books based largely on his sermons and lectures. His writings reveal a scholar's acquaintance with Aristotle, Seneca, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. He used many Greek and Latin quotations, but judiciously. He also reasoned in the plain style of Puritan preaching. This cultured scholar and experimental preacher produced astute, warm, devotional writing. His works show that he was a faithful steward of the mysteries of God. He wrote a vindication of the Puritan view of God's law, a defense of justification by faith alone, a treatise on original

sin, and massive discourses on 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 1. He also wrote *Spiritual Refining*, a work of more than a thousand pages on saving grace and assurance.[3] Burgess excelled in applying the Scriptures to the heart and distinguishing between the true believer and the unsaved, fulfilling his goal to "endeavor the true and sound exposition…so as to reduce all doctrinals and controversials to practicals and experimentals, which is the life and soul of all."[4]

Although Burgess never wrote a treatise on prayer, he did preach 145 sermons on the prayer of Christ in John 17. His sermons cover a broad range of doctrinal and experiential subjects, while consistently focusing on Christ.[5] He regarded John 17 as a mountaintop of divine revelation, "a pearl in the gold" of the Bible.[6] The Lord offers this prayer in the presence of His disciples, so that those who hear it (and later, those who read it) might be filled with joy (John 17:13).[7] Burgess writes,

> This prayer of Christ may be compared to a land flowing with milk and honey, in respect to that treasure of consolation which is contained therein…. Seeing therefore this is such a fountain for healing and refreshing, come with a spiritual thirst to be replenished thereby. Seeing here is the honey and the honeycomb, do not with Jonathan taste a little honey only, but eat freely and abundantly thereof. Thou wilt by a serious and constant meditation find this heavenly matter in Christ's prayer make thee heavenly also, and assimilate thee into his own likeness. How vain and empty will all the glory of the world appear to thee, when thou shalt be lifted up upon this Mount of Transfiguration! They that live under the torrid zone never feel any cold, and thou who shalt find this prayer of Christ active and vigorous in thy breast, wilt never have cause to complain of that dullness, formality and coldness which many other groan under.[8]

The prayer in John 17 is especially significant because Jesus utters it the night before His crucifixion, which is the climax of His earthly work. Burgess thus asks his readers, "If the words of a dying man are much to be regarded, how much more of a dying Christ?"[9] In this light, Burgess expounds John 17 as the prayer of Christ, both as our Mediator—if we are believers—and as the model of a godly man.

The Prayer of Christ Our Mediator In John 17:4, Jesus prayed, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." Burgess says Christ Jesus "came not into the world to have his ease and pleasure and outward glory, but to work." This work was to do the will of the Father who sent Jesus to earth (John 4:34). Christ came not "as a glorious Lord and Lawgiver" but as a servant under a law.

Indeed He not only had to obey the moral law but also a specific mandate given to Him in covenant with the Father (John 10:18) “to be a Mediator for those his Father had given him.” 10

On the eve of His crucifixion, Christ speaks in anticipation of completing His mission from God.11 He opens His prayer by offering His obedience to the Father, which is “not merely obedience, but a meriting obedience,” Burgess says. Christ’s prayer thus stands upon His finished work as “a Mediator and a Surety,” meaning that He has paid the debt owed by others to satisfy divine justice on their behalf.12 Burgess says, “Christ satisfied God as a just Judge…. Christ by his blood and satisfaction, undertook that the justice of God should never fall upon us to punish us.”13 That does not imply that Christ won over an angry Father, for Christ was sent by the loving Father for this very mission (John 17:18).14 Christ died as the representative and substitute of His people. As Isaiah 53:5 says, “He laid upon him the iniquities of us all, and by his stripes we are healed.” Thus, everywhere His death is said to be for us. Nothing in Christ made Him a curse upon the cross; it was for us and our sins that He was cursed and died.15

Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man. He is not merely an example for us to follow when we pray to God. He is the foundation on which to build our relationship to God. Burgess writes,

> Christ is to be set up the only foundation, in respect of mediation and intercession with God. We can have no approach to God without him, because of the great gulf sin hath railed between him and us. He is a consuming fire, and we are stubble, without Christ…. God is an enemy to me, and I to God. And for this end were all those sacrifices appointed in the old administration, to show, that by Christ was all reconcilement and atonement.16

Understanding that Christ’s mission was to reconcile sinners to God profoundly shapes how we view His prayer and its application to ourselves.

The Intercessions of the High Priest Burgess insists that the prayer in John 17 is a special kind of prayer. It is the prayer of the One appointed by God to give eternal life to a definite group of people (John 17:2). It is the prayer of the One who declared that if men would have eternal life, they must not only know God but also Jesus Christ through the gospel (John 17:3).17 Burgess writes,

> It’s a mediatory prayer, and so differs from all the prayers of other men. As they are bare mere men, so their prayers are bare mere prayers. There is no merit, no mediation in thee, but Christ’s prayer is of a far more transcendent

> nature, even as the blood of the martyrs came far short of Christ's. Their blood was not expiatory, it was not by way of a sacrifice for sins, whereas Christ's was. Thus there is a vast difference between prayers and prayers… but yet the prayer of Christ as in the office of a Mediator doth far surmount all. So then in Christ's prayer we are especially to look to the mediatory power, to the impetratory efficacy[18] of it. It's not a mere supplication as ours are, but a powerful obtaining of what is desired. His prayer can be no more refused than his blood.[19]

The prayers of the Mediator are powerful because He is both God and man. His divine nature imparts infinite worth to His prayers in God's sight. He is the only begotten Son of the Father, and God listens to His Son with great love. The Lord Jesus prays with perfect trust, love, and zeal to God. Burgess says, "The sea is not fuller of water than his soul was of such enlargements." Christ also prays in accordance with God's will, for He asks for the glory appointed for Him from the beginning.[20] And He prays as a man "whose affections and compassions are larger to thee than any of thy dearest friends can be." His heart is full of compassion because He suffered like us, was tempted like us, and experienced human weakness like us (Heb. 4:15).[21]

Christ also prays specifically in the mediating office of a priest.[22] Jesus says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself" (John 17:19). He is a priest whose sacrifices were consecrated to God.[23] His office as priest of His people requires two works: His offering and His prayers.[24] In Christ the types of the Old Testament priesthood find their fulfillment, for those priests were mortal sinners, but Christ is the sinless, immortal Intercessor (Heb. 7:25–27).[25] Burgess explains,

> This prayer Christ poured forth, so far as it relateth to the Church of God and all believers, is part of his priestly office, for the priest was to do two things, first to pray, then to offer a sacrifice. Now Christ in this chapter he prayeth and afterwards offereth up himself an holy and unspotted sacrifice for the sins of his people, and as the High Priest was to carry the names of the twelve tribes in his breast to present them to God, so doth Christ here, he presents all his children unto God the Father by this prayer. There is no godly man so mean, so weak, so inconsiderable but he is commended unto the Father, and may justly expect the fruit of this prayer.[26]

Christ's intercession bridges the gap between obtaining the right to all spiritual blessings by His blood and His application of those blessings by His Spirit. Christ did not merely purchase salvation and then leave the application of that salvation to man's free will. For then Christ might have suffered and died for nothing, which was unthinkable to Burgess, in light of the dishonor it would

cast upon God.[27] Christ intercedes for everyone for whom He died. Believers will certainly receive the blessings for which He paid so dearly (Rom. 8:34).[28]

The Scope of Christ's Mediatorial Prayer Jesus Christ prays to His Father, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9). Christ prays for those given to Him by the Father. In this Burgess notes that Christ's people are also called His "sheep," some of which are still enemies of God and are sheep "only in respect of God's purpose and election" (John 10:16). Others are "actually put into a possession of Christ, having new natures, and so enjoying a title and right to him." Both are covered under Christ's mediating prayers, though the latter group more so. Just as our Lord prayed for His sheep while on earth, so He continues to intercede for them in heaven, though now in a state of exaltation instead of with the cries and tears of His humiliation.[29]

Burgess says, "All the children of God are under the fruit and benefit of Christ's mediatory prayer." All believers have Christ as their advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). Christ has not set aside His love and affection for the good of His people, but lives to intercede for them (Heb. 7:25). Burgess writes, "It's good to have this friend in the court of heaven…. Oh the unspeakable dignity and happiness to be under Christ's intercession. If we do so much esteem the prayer of a godly man on earth…what then will the prayer of Christ himself do?"[30]

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus prays "for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). Burgess observes, "That such is Christ's care and love to his, that they are remembered in his prayer and death, even before they had a being." Christ's intercession comes out of the divine decree and purpose made from all eternity (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9).[31] Burgess writes, "The foundation of Christ's intercession is because they were given by election to Christ as a people to be saved through him."[32]

Christ says He does not pray for everyone—not the world, which Burgess says refers to those whom the Father has not given to Christ, who are the reprobate. Burgess says, "Christ's mediatory prayer, and so his death is not for all the world but only some certain persons who are given by the Father to Christ." Burgess understands that the doctrine of limited or particular atonement is controversial.[33] He does not deny that "all mankind, even reprobates themselves, do obtain a world of mercies through Christ's death." But when Christ died *for* sinners, He died not merely for their benefit but as their substitute, "in their stead to suffer all that anger of God which was due them." Those for whom God gave His Son will receive all of God's blessings, from

justification to glorification (Rom. 8:30–32). Those for whom Christ died receive Christ's intercession so that no one can condemn them (Rom. 8:34). Burgess preaches particular redemption not to stir controversy, but to establish the peace and joy of the flock of Christ, so that they might have full confidence in Christ's mediation.[34]

While Burgess limits the priestly mediation of Christ to the elect, he exults in the broad scope of His blessings, for every spiritual blessing comes through Christ's death and intercession. He writes, "Though it was once uttered by him upon the earth, and he ceaseth to pray any further, yet it liveth in the efficacy and power of it, yea that continual intercession of his in heaven, what is it but the reviving of this prayer? So that by the virtue of this prayer through his blood we are sanctified, we are justified, and shall hereafter be for ever glorified."[35] Burgess says that Christ prays for the conversion of His people: "There is no man to be converted by the word but Christ prayed for that man's conversion." He also prays for "pardon and forgiveness of sin, and that as oft as it is committed," for "preservation from sin…that their faith may not fail," and for "their glorification… that they may enjoy that glory which Christ had purchased for them." In short, the Lord Jesus prays "for the accomplishing of all grace here and glory hereafter. There is no heavenly or spiritual mercy but Christ hath prayed for it."[36]

Far from discouraging sinners from coming to God through Christ, Burgess teaches that Christ's death has a sufficiency or "value enough to redeem thousands of worlds," even though its effectual application is limited to the elect.[37] The greatness of one's sins cannot compare to the greatness of Christ's sufferings. So Burgess says, "If thou art a believer, if thou repenteth, question not but that Christ's death extends to thee. It is for such as hunger and thirst, and therefore whatsoever soul lieth under any burden of sin, and doth desire the grace of God through Christ, let him not stagger but confidently go unto him." The sacrifice and prayers of this priest are sufficient to cover all human need.[38]

The Exalted Position of Our Intercessor Jesus Christ says to His Father in John 17:11, "I come to thee." Of this, Burgess writes, "He goeth to the Father, and there will be a potent favorite in the court of heaven for them." Jesus' promise is for the comfort of His disciples and for believers today. Burgess refers to the shadow of Christ in Joseph, writing, "Our Saviour comforts their troubled hearts with this, that he was going to the Father, not merely for his own glory and honour, but also for their good—even as Joseph was advanced in Pharaoh's court for the good of his father and his brethren as for his own glory." But Burgess also notes that Christ came to the Father via the death of the cross. The

lowest humiliation must precede the highest exaltation so that divine justice is satisfied and men are redeemed.[39]

Burgess then says of Christ's ascension into heaven, "Herein is implied, that state of glory and honour he shall have in heaven…. Now he was no more to be like a servant but to be made the Prince of glory…. In this is the whole treasury of a Christian. The fountain of all our comfort is in this, that Christ is gone to the Father." Burgess lists some of these comforts of the ascended Christ:

> 1. "Hereby his Holy Spirit is given in, more plentifully and abundantly (John 7:39)."
>
> 2. "A second benefit of Christ's going to the Father is enabling us with all holy and heavenly gifts, either in a sanctifying way or a ministerial way (John 14:12; Eph. 4:8–12)."
>
> 3. "The third benefit of Christ going to the Father is to prepare a place for his children (John 14:3)."
>
> 4. "Christ goeth to the Father, to be an Advocate and plead our cause, 1 John 2. Heb. 7. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. Christ is not so affected with that glory and honour God hath put upon him, that he should forget the meanest [or least] of his children. He dealeth not as Pharaoh's butler that forgot poor Joseph, when he was promoted. No, when we are not and cannot think or mind ourselves, yet Christ is commending our estate to the Father. So we have this glorious friend speaking for us in the court of heaven, whensoever any accusation is brought against us."
>
> 5. "Christ's departure from the Father is not an eternal departure. He does not leave us forever, but he will come again and take us to the Father also."[40]

Burgess, who overflows with joy over the exaltation of our sacrificial and praying priest, says: "Oh then what glad tidings should this be in our ears. Christ hath ascended to the Father, for that is as much as to say, neither sin or devil or grave could prevail over him, and therefore he hath fully discharged the work of a Redeemer. He hath paid to the utmost farthing,[41] so that the love and justice of God cannot but be satisfied by the atonement he hath made."[42]

In heavenly intercession, Jesus Christ prays for His people as "one authorized and appointed thereunto" far above any earthly priest ordained by God. The prayers of our Lord stand upon His completed mission from the Father, His finished work of atonement. Our Lord prays for those whom He died for, so that "what he obtained for his people should be applied to them." These prayers are "of him who is the beloved Son of the Father, so that nothing can be in justice denied to Christ's prayer, because it is a meriting and an obliging prayer."[43]

Praying through Christ's Mediation We must therefore draw near to God by believing that God sent Christ as Mediator. Burgess says that "resting the soul upon Christ" is the only way to please God. Such faith in Christ is just as acceptable to God as if we had ourselves fulfilled His law. Faith is acceptable to God because it is "the most evacuating grace." It empties us wholly of ourselves. God delights in humility. "Now nothing humbleth us and takes us off all our seeming worth like faith in Christ, for therefore I wholly trust in him for righteousness, because I have none of my own," Burgess says.44 Faith is the only grace suited to receive Christ and His benefits. "As the hand of all parts of the body taketh a treasure when given, and thereby a man is enriched…. It is not the hand but the treasure taken by the hand that enricheth." Faith is the hand that receives Christ in His fullness in both justification and sanctification.45 Prayer without faith in the Mediator is futile; prayer that relies upon Christ enters the treasuries of heaven.

God's people should consciously depend upon Christ's intercession for the acceptance of their own prayers to God. This brings great comfort to those struggling to pray. Burgess writes, "This prayer of Christ sanctifieth all our prayers. They become accepted of God through him…. As our tears need washing in his blood, so our prayers need Christ's prayer. He prayed that our prayers may be received…. Though I am unworthy yet Christ is worthy to be heard."46 He also says,

> This mediatory prayer of Christ is the ground of all the acceptance of our prayers. Our prayers if not found in him are provocations rather than appeasements. If a godly man's prayer availeth much, it is because Christ's prayer availeth much. He is the altar upon which all the oblations are sanctified, and from hence it is that the incense of their prayers are perfumed, so that God finds a sweet savour in them…. This may unspeakably support thee under sad temptations, when thou canst not pray. Thy heart is bound up. Thy affections are faint and cold. Thou criest out, Oh the sins and infirmities of thy prayers, yet Christ's prayer is full and fervent for thee. There is no imperfection, no fault to be found with him. Oh it's a good refuge to run unto, when thou are almost overwhelmed because of thy dull, formal and distracted prayers!47

Why does a chapter about prayer dwell so much upon Christ and His work? It is because Jesus is the only way to God. Without the prayer of Christ our Mediator, we could pray to no one but an angry judge whose law demands our punishment. Burgess reminds us that the Mediator's work is a strong foundation

for praying with faith and peace.

The Prayer of Christ as the Model of a Godly Man Christ's prayers as Mediator are offered as human prayers because God cannot pray, being omnipotent and supreme in authority.[48] Christ prays as a man with limited power, subject to the law of God, using the divinely appointed means of seeking grace for His people, as an act of worship, and the model or example of a godly man, for us to follow.[49] Let us turn to Burgess's comments on John 17 as the exemplary prayer of the perfect man, Christ Jesus.

The Necessity and Benefits of Prayer After stressing the absolute sovereignty of God and complete sufficiency of Christ, Burgess asks, "But if Christ's prayer be thus all in all, what need we pray? Are not our prayers superfluous?" He answers, first, by reminding us that our prayers do not serve the same purposes as Christ's prayers, namely "for merit or mediation." Our prayers have other objectives, such as "to set up God," that is, to exalt Him as the God to whom we pray; "to debase ourselves," that is, to humble ourselves; "to quicken our graces," or stir up our souls to lively faith, hope, and love; "to give us an holy communion and fellowship with him"; and "to show our obedience to his command."[50]

Burgess strongly affirms the Reformed doctrines of predestination and sovereign providence. He says it is false and sinful for a man to pray thinking he can change God's mind and make Him alter His will. God is immutable and unchangeable, Burgess says. Yet even those things God has promised to give to His people must be accomplished by our praying for them, for God's purposes and promises require our supplications. Burgess says this is the order God has appointed: "Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you, Matt. 7." Burgess says some acts of God are independent of prayer, such as God's sending Christ into the world to save sinners, and the initial workings of grace in the beginning of our conversion. He explains, "Our prayers are not meritorious. They deserve not [anything] at God's hand." God does not give mercy because we pray, but He stimulates us to pray so that He may give us the mercy He intends for us. Our prayers are part of God's grace to us, for He gives us not just the opportunity to pray but our actual prayers. At the heart of Burgess's understanding of the necessity of prayer is the doctrine of God's sovereign use of means to accomplish His ends. He writes, "God in the wonderful things he hath predestined or promised for his people hath appointed means for the performance of them. Hence as he converts by the Word, so he bestoweth his mercy upon a praying people."[51]

God's people must thus pray for the success of the word. John 17:1 says, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven." From this Burgess infers that prayer is necessary for the good effect of all instructions and consolations. "Christ himself doth not think it enough to plant, but he prays there may be a watering from above," Burgess says. Thus all ministers are to take Christ's way, which may mean spending the day in preaching and the night in praying.[52] God is the source of all grace, and He commands men to pray that He might receive all the glory for the effects of His word. Men are utterly unable to do any good thing from their own fallen nature. So in all ministry "we are to be as the little child who leaneth only upon his father."[53]

God has reasons for requiring our prayers to accomplish His purposes:

1. God will have us pray to Him because "hereby he is acknowledged the author and fountain of all the good we have…. He that liveth without prayer liveth as if there were no God."

2. God graciously honors us when we pray, in "that we may be admitted into his presence, and have holy communion[54] with him…. Prayer is heavenly commerce with God."

3. "God will have us pray because prayer is an appointed means by him as well as faith and repentance. Now God's purposes and promises must never be opposed to, or separated from the means…. As Augustine said, If Stephen had not prayed for his persecutors, the church had never had such a glorious doctor as Paul was."

4. "God hath appointed prayer not only for our honour but also for our spiritual advantage and profit. By praying fervently the heart is raised up, made more heavenly, and lifted up even into the third heavens…. When we come into God's presence and pray effectually, a divine Spirit, a heavenly frame of heart, may come upon us. We shall go from prayer ravished with the church, saying, My Beloved is the chiefest of ten thousand."

5. "God will have us pray because hereby we must testify our desire and high esteem we have of the mercy prayed for. Do we not say that is little worth which is not worth asking?… Hence it is that God loveth wrestling and fervent prayers."

6. God has made prayer necessary "because hereby faith is drawn out in all the choice and excellent effects of it. Prayer without faith is like a musical instrument without a hand to make a sound melodious."[55]

Burgess says, "In our earnest petitions we do not bring God's will to ours but ours to him. Prayer is a golden chain that reacheth from heaven to earth, and although we think to move God to us, yet we move our selves to him. As the

ship that is fastened with the cable doth not bring the haven to it, but its self to the haven, so the change prayer makes is not in God, but in our selves."[56] In light of the necessity and benefits of prayer, Burgess asks pointed questions:

> Why in these latter days [is it that] the Word preached makes no more wonderful works? At first propagation of the gospel, so many fish were caught in the net that it was ready to break. And at the first Reformation out of Popery, the kingdom of God suffered violence, but now he that is profane is profane still, the blind are blind still, the proud still proud. What is the matter? Is not the Word of God as powerful as ever? Is not the Lord's arm as strong as ever? Yes, but the zeal of people is grown cold. There are not such fervent prayers, such high esteems of the means of grace. Men do not besiege heaven, giving God no rest day or night till he come with salvation into their souls, and truly the Spirit of prayer is a sure fore-runner of spiritual mercies to be bestowed.[57]

The Heavenly Manner of Prayer Christ "lifted up his eyes to heaven" and prayed, says John 17:1. From this, Burgess infers that all our prayers should come from a spiritual and heavenly heart. The very definition of prayer is lifting the whole mind and soul to God. "To pray is a far more difficult and noble exercise than most [people] are aware of," Burgess says. "It's not running over a few words like a parrot." Burgess further explains heavenly minded prayer in the following points:

> 1. It is necessary that the Spirit of God enable and move the soul to this duty (Rom. 8). Without the fire of the Spirit, our prayers are like a body without a soul or birds without wings.
>
> 2. A heavenly prayer must come from a heavenly heart that delights in heavenly things. We should first seek God's glory and spiritual blessings.
>
> 3. Prayer is heavenly when it purifies and sanctifies the heart and affections for the enjoyment of God.
>
> 4. A heavenly prayer stirs the heart to delight in heavenly things. Prayer must not only be heavenly in nature but in its effects. True prayer is like exercise to the body, making us more strong and active. It is like the rich ship that brings in glorious returns from God.[58]

Prayer is communion with the great God as well as the divine worship of God, Burgess says. Thus it calls for a "heavenly, holy, fervent and undistracted disposition." Most prayers are more like the utterances of an ape rather than a human. In our prayers we must give diligent attention to the following:

> 1. What we pray for; that it be lawful, good, and agreeable to God's will.

We should not pray like pagans in ignorance of what pleases God, for we have the Word of God to direct us and His Spirit to incline us.

2. The order of what we pray for; that we seek first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33), giving highest priority to God's glory and our salvation, then praying for temporal goods with submission and subordination, if these be God's will and could further our spiritual good.

3. The words we use in prayer; that they be grave, decent, and comely. Our prayers should be free of "vanity, affectation,[59] or irreverence." Prayer worships God.

4. The One to whom we pray, namely, to Almighty God. Our majestic King deserves the attention of an undivided heart. Who goes into the presence of a king without preparing to please Him?

5. How we should pray; that we pray with the concomitant graces, such as faith which is "the life and soul of all," as well as zeal, fervency, faith, heavenly-mindedness, and hatred of sin. Without those graces, prayer is like a bird without wings, or a rusty key.

6. Why we are praying; that we not lose sight of the true purpose of prayer. James 4:7 tells us, "You ask and have not because you ask amiss. You ask to spend on your lusts." We must seek God's kingdom before asking for temporal things.[60]

Since prayer engages the whole person, the character of the person who prays is crucial to the power of his prayers. Burgess says our prayer must be like that of a righteous man who is washed of sin, for sins "have a tongue, and they cry for vengeance, and will quickly cry louder than our prayers." Burgess does not demand perfection in order to prayer. He encourages sinners to pray, mourn, and repent, as the publican does in Luke 18:13. But he warns that a sinner who willfully continues in wickedness is an abomination to God when he prays (Prov. 28:9). He writes, "Oh then look to thyself and thy life when thou goest to pray. If the tongue that prayeth be a cursing, swearing tongue, if the eyes lifted up to heaven be full of wantonness and adultery, if the hands held out towards heaven be full of violence, fraud, and injustice, God is of purer eyes than to behold such."[61]

Though prayer begins in the heart, Burgess notes that Christ prays aloud. This too is a helpful model, for although God does not need to hear our words to know our hearts, vocal prayer helps to excite and stir up our affections, for the soul and body to mutually help each other. So we glorify God with both body and soul, expressing with the mouth what is strong in the heart.[62] Vocal prayer is also important when a minister, elder, or the head of a household publicly

leads others in prayer. In public, the one who prays must also consider what will edify listeners (1 Cor. 14:15–17). He must consider what they need and how to affect their hearts.[63]

Repetition can sometimes be helpful in prayer. Jesus prays, "Glorify thy Son" (John 17:1), and shortly afterward, "Glorify thou me" (John 17:5). Burgess thus infers, "Repetition of the same matter in a prayer is not always a sinful tautology, but is sometimes lawful, yea, useful and necessary."[64] Repetition is appropriate in prayer when a matter is pressing upon the heart, such as a sinner's cry for forgiveness (Ps. 51) or a person in great danger (Matt. 26:44). The same request may be repeated if the matter is very important, but the heart needs to be stirred to action. Fervent affections may also rightly move us to repetition in prayer, as when the Spirit moves God's children to pray, "Abba, Father," which means, "Father, Father" (Gal. 4:6). Repetition may also seal upon us the certainty of the truths we are praying.[65]

At the same time, Burgess recognizes the Lord's warning against vain repetition in prayer (Matt. 6:7). Burgess says such vain repetition includes babbling words without the understanding of the mind, eloquent or long-winded speech to cover coldness of heart, making prayers long to impress others, or repeating forms of prayer to appease God, such as the repetition of the Lord's Prayer or the *Ave Maria* to make amends for sins.[66]

Intercession for the Saints and the World Our duty is to pray for ourselves as well as others, just as our Lord did. Christ calls us to be intercessors. Burgess writes,

> It's the duty of godly men to pray for others. Our Saviour doth suppose that in his form of prayer, *Our Father*, and he extends this, Matt. 5, even to our very enemies that are enemies for our godliness sake, persecuting and reviling us, and that though continuing in their wickedness…. Yea, the apostle, 1 Tim. 2:1, exhorts, *that supplications and prayers be put up for all men*, that is, for all sorts of men.[67]

The doctrine of election is no obstacle to praying for the conversion of sinners. Burgess says we are to pray for the conversion of a particular person no matter how wicked he may be, because we cannot tell who is given by the Father to Christ and who is not. "God's decree about events is not the rule of our prayer, but his Word is."[68]

Christ's prayer in John 17 particularly encourages us to pray for those who belong to Christ. It is comforting to know that our prayers will more likely obtain powerful answers since Christ is praying for believers who are in the

covenant, who desire to walk with God, and in whom God has already begun a saving work. Burgess says, “Shall Christ regard the estate of such an one, and shall I forget him? It’s to be feared that the godly do not look upon this as so necessary a duty, and certainly such are the dissensions and alienations from one another, that I doubt not this great duty of prayer for one another is greatly neglected.”69

Burgess presses upon believers their responsibility to pray for one another, arguing:

> 1. God has made you part of the body of Christ. If a part of your own body is injured, how does it affect you? You should have the same empathy for the body of Christ as for your own body.
>
> 2. God instituted prayer as a means to help others. Instead we are quick to criticize each other. Rather than finding fault, we should pray for fellow believers. That is our duty.
>
> 3. Praying for one another will ease differences, jealousies, and suspicions. It will make the godly of one heart and one mind. If you find yourself thinking how poorly a brother has treated you, pray for that man. It will immediately “quiet those winds and waves.”70

Burgess imagines someone asking if we should pray only for the godly. If so, we may, like the priest and Levite in Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan, omit the needs of the wicked. Burgess forbids such a response, saying the only people God forbids us to pray for are those who are sinning unto death (1 John 5:16).71 When preaching on Judas as “the son of perdition” (John 17:12), Burgess observes, “There are some men so resolvedly and obstinately given to damn themselves, that let what will come in the way, they will go on.” But he also notes that it is not easy to tell who these people are, and that Judas himself ministered for a long time as an apostle.72 Therefore Burgess says, “It is our duty to pray for the wicked though wallowing in their sins, that they may be converted and brought home to God.” Christ prayed for the salvation of the wicked men who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Who knows what God may do for the sinner I pray for? Perhaps my prayer may serve to “the execution of God’s election.”73

Engaging the God of Glory Burgess recommends bringing holy arguments to God, just as Christ did (John 17:1–4). The best prayer is argumentative, he says, for “many words without arguments is like a great body without nerves or sinews.” By “argumentative,” Burgess does not mean prayers that arise from a critical or contentious spirit toward God. He refers to prayers that are

strengthened by faith and reasons why it is good and right for God to grant your requests. Burgess notes that our Lord began His prayer with three strong arguments, namely, that God was His Father and He was God's Son, God had appointed this hour, and Christ's purpose was to glorify the Father.[74]

The first argument in prayer is our relationship to God as our Father. Burgess carefully distinguishes Christ's sonship from our adoption, saying, "That which Christ hath by nature we have by grace. Christ therefore is Son to the Father, yet so that he is of the same nature with the Father, having all the properties of the Godhead with him, but we are sons only by grace and adoption." Yet, amazingly, Christ joined our sonship to His in John 20:17, when he called His disciples His "brethren" and said, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Therefore, successful prayer is prayer poured out to God as our Father. Christ taught us to pray "our Father" in "that directory of prayer which he hath left"—that is, the Lord's Prayer. Burgess asserts that all people are by nature enemies of God, but Christ purchased "this sweet relation of sonship to God the Father" by His sorrows. To pray as adopted sons, we need the following:

> To be able to call God Father is so great a matter that there needeth the Spirit of adoption to move us thereunto. Gal. 4:6, *He hath sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba Father*. Although it be easy for a presumptuous self-justifying man to call God Father, yet take the afflicted mourner for sin, who is sensible of the great dishonor he puts upon God, it's the hardest thing in the world to think God is a Father to him. Because therefore it is so great a work, God sends his Spirit into our hearts that enableth us to cry boldly, vehemently, and notwithstanding all opposition, Abba, Father. Where then we would use this compellation ["Father"][75] with power and life, with success and heavenly advantage, there the Spirit of God must inflame the heart, there all our servile fears and tormenting doubts must be removed.[76]

Praying to God the Father in the Spirit of adoption stirs the soul to much good. Approaching God as Father raises our confidence and hope, puts fervency and zeal in our prayers, quickens a childlike reverence and humility, breeds a peaceful and quiet spirit, makes us earnest to pursue a holy likeness to God, enflames our zeal for God's glory and honor, and supports us in our afflictions by trusting that our Father disciplines us for our good. Furthermore, such prayer engages God's heart to answer us, for He is a Father who loves His children more than any mother loves her baby (Isa. 49:15). It is for God's glory to hear His children when they pray, so He will not neglect them in their cries and

needs.77

The ultimate objective of all prayer is the glory of God. Christ prayed, "Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1). Burgess thus says, "As Christ [did], so much more all men are to pray for and desire any comfort or advantages, not so much for themselves as that thereby God may be glorified." Christ does all things for the glory of His Father, both in His humiliation and in His exaltation. Burgess laments, "Oh but in all our religious duties how much vain-glory doth infect and rotten them? That is the pirate which doth intercept the golden fleet of our prayers that they return not again freighted with good things for us." However, even our spiritual and heavenly well-being serves the larger purpose of God's glory. Certainly we should not seek earthly goods to advance ourselves or to satisfy our appetites, but only to glorify God. Burgess does not deny the legitimacy of human desires and happiness, if only our happiness serves the ultimate end of glorifying God.78

In heaven we will know that God's glorification and our happiness are one goal, not two. Burgess says in God we have "all our happiness and glory." In this life we are forbidden to glory in riches, honors, and greatness, but we must glory in knowing God (1 Cor. 1:31). How much more, then, will we experience the glory of enjoying God in heaven? All the happiness, excellence, and glory in heaven can be reduced to knowing that we are made partakers of God. In God is glory, and that glory and our utmost happiness will finally become one perfectly in heaven.79

Just as Christ prayed for His glorification in the presence of God, so Christians should pray for the eternal enjoyment of God's glory and seek it above all earthly glories. The Scriptures commend seeking after glory from God (Rom. 2:7) and praying for the coming of God's kingdom (Matt. 6:10). Praying for this glory will kindle our desires and strengthen our hope. As Burgess says, "This glory with God is an universal medicine for all our diseases. It's a full treasury for all our wants…. This is the ocean, other are but shells." Nothing else will fill and satisfy our hearts.80 The ultimate goal of prayer is communion with the altogether lovely triune God.

Concluding Comfort: Christ's Prayers Are Effectual The Bible has a high view of prayer. Christ gave us the perfect model for praying, which ought to humble us. Yet who prays with the frequency, filial fear, faith, and fervor that he should? Burgess says,

> To pray is such a solemn worship of God, that it requireth the whole man, the intellectual part, all our judgment, invention, and memory is to be employed therein, as also the whole heart, the will and affections, yea, and

> body also; and besides this there is also required the Spirit of God to enlighten the mind, and to sanctify the heart for mere judgment and invention, without God's Spirit enlivening of them, is like a sacrifice without fire. Oh then if all these things go together, may we not cry out, "Who is sufficient to pray?"[81]

In Christ, however, we need not despair. All honest attempts to pray will drive believers back to Christ, the perfect Intercessor. His blood and prayers cover our sins, even in the sins of our prayers. It is a great comfort to have a godly friend praying for you. Some have said Augustine thought it impossible that he should perish because of the way his mother, Monica, wept and prayed for him. Burgess did not put such confidence in the prayers and tears of mere men and women. But he did say, "It is impossible that a child of Christ's prayers and tears should perish."[82]

1. Anthony Burgess, *CXLV Expository Sermons upon the Whole 17th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John…* (London: Abraham Miller, 1656), 227 (42). The pagination is irregular, so the sermon number will also be cited in parentheses.

2. For a biography and overview of the writings of Anthony Burgess, see Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006), 172–74; Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 112–17.

3. Reprinted as Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or, A Treatise of Grace and Assurance*, 2 vols. (repr., Ames: International Outreach, 1996–1998).

4. Anthony Burgess, introduction to *An Expository Comment, Doctrinal, Controversial and Practical upon the Whole First Chapter of the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Abraham Miller for Abel Roper, 1661).

5. This work includes topics such as God the Father and God the Son; the love of God; providence over death; election; the deity of Christ; the Mediator as teacher, priest, and king; union with Christ; knowledge of God; eternal life; justification; sanctification; obedience; separation from the world; faith; prayer; perseverance; worship; Christian unity; gospel ministry; the glory of heaven, etc., all discussed according to the order of the text of John 17.

6. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 2 (1).

7. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 400 (76).

8. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, "The Epistle to the Reader."

9. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 1 (1).

10. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 108 (20).

11. In another sermon, Burgess noted that Jesus said in the present tense, "I am no more in the world" (John 17:11), though His departure from the world was obviously in the future. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 271 (50).

12. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 119–20 (22).

13. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted, and Vindicated* (London: Robert White, 1648), 101.

14. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 487–88 (95). Burgess here noted how all three persons in the Trinity cooperated in the redemption of sinners. The Father in His love sent the Son to purchase redemption. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to apply salvation.

15. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 193–94 (35).

16. Anthony Burgess, *The Scripture Directory for Church-Officers and People*…. (London: Abraham Miller, 1659), 147.

17. See Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, sermons 10, 11, and 18.

18. "Impetratory efficacy" is the power to obtain what you request.

19. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 10 (2).

20. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 10–12 (2).

21. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 225 (42).

22. Burgess, in continuity with Reformed tradition going back to Calvin, saw a threefold mediatorial office—prophet, priest, and king—corresponding to our threefold need: our ignorance, blindness, and darkness; our guilt under the wrath of God; and our bondage and captivity to sin and Satan. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 503–4 (98).

23. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 501 (98).

24. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 508 (99).

25. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 227 (42).

26. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 8 (2).

27. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 225–26 (42).

28. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 233 (43).

29. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 226 (42).

30. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 8 (2).

31. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 532–33 (105).

32. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 536 (106).

33. The Synod of Dort (1618–1619) had rejected the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement just a few decades earlier. John Cameron (c. 1579–1625) and Moses Amyraut (1596–1664) were also promoting a combination of particular election and universal atonement in Reformed circles in France. Burgess alluded to both the Arminians and the Amyraldians in *Expository Sermons*, 241 (44).

34. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 232–34 (43). Sermons 43 and 44 explain and defend this doctrine.

35. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 702 (145).

36. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 9 (2); see also 326–27 (42). Burgess's point is substantiated by the specific requests Jesus made for His own with respect to their preservation (John 17:11, 15), sanctification (John 17:17), conversion out of the world (John 17:20–21, cf. v. 6), and future enjoyment of His glory (John 17:24).

37. This classic distinction may be traced back to Peter Lombard (d. 1160), who said that Christ offered Himself "for all, with respect to the sufficiency of the ransom, but for the elect alone with regard to its efficiency, because it effects salvation for the predestined alone." *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae* 3.20.5, cited by Raymond A. Blackster, "Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective," in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 311.

38. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 233–34 (43).

39. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 289–90 (53).

40. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 290–92 (53).

41. A farthing was a small British coin worth a quarter of a penny.

42. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 292 (53).

43. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 508 (99).

44. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 211, 214 (38).

45. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 217 (39). Burgess rejected any so-called faith that tries to receive "some things of Christ but not the whole Christ. They think it's only believing on him as a Saviour for pardon of sin. They do not choose him as a Lord to whom in all obedience they resign themselves." *Expository Sermons*, 213 (38).

46. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 12 (2).

47. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 227, 225 (42). These pages immediately follow each other in this order in the book.

48. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 519 (102).
49. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 520 (102); see also 8 (2).
50. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 12 (2).
51. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 137–39 (25).
52. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 2 (1).
53. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 2–4 (1).
54. Burgess here does not use "holy communion" with respect to the Lord's Supper, but as sacred fellowship with the Lord.
55. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 139–41 (25).
56. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 141 (25).
57. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 5 (1).
58. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 5–6 (1).
59. "Affectation" is putting on a show of what is not real, here a show of spiritual desires that are not real in the heart.
60. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 131–33 (24); see also 8 (2).
61. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 141 (25).
62. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 7 (2).
63. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 133 (24).
64. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 131 (24).
65. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 133–35 (24).
66. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 135–36 (24).
67. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 229 (41).
68. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 229–30 (41).
69. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 230–31 (41).
70. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 232, 225 (41). These pages are immediately sequential in the book.
71. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 229, 231 (41).
72. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 364 (68), 372 (70).
73. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 231–32 (41).
74. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 13 (3).
75. A "compellation" is a manner of addressing or greeting a person. Here it refers to calling God "our Father."
76. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 13–15 (3).
77. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 15–18 (3); see also 658 (135).
78. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 30–34 (6).
79. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 144 (26).
80. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 146–47 (26).
81. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 136 (24).
82. Burgess, *Expository Sermons*, 9 (2).

Chapter 25

Thomas Goodwin on Christ's Beautiful Heart

O the deep, deep love of Jesus! Vast, unmeasured, boundless free:
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me.
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love;
Leading onward, leading homeward, to Thy glorious rest above!

—SAMUEL TREVOR FRANCIS[1]

In this chapter, we will contemplate the loving tenderness of Jesus Christ. In particular, we will meditate on the heart of Christ's glorified human nature that He shows to His people here on earth. Though we do not see Jesus in the flesh today, we can, by faith, rejoice in Him and His compassionate heart. Our guide for these insights is Thomas Goodwin, a seventeenth-century English Puritan, who wrote with peculiar unction and liberty about Christ's heart.

In presenting Goodwin's teachings on Christ's heart, we will speak first of the Puritan preacher; second, a problem; third, the promises; and fourth, the proof of Christ's compassionate heart. Prior to that we will briefly summarize Goodwin's life.

Goodwin's Life

Thomas Goodwin was born in 1600 and raised by God-fearing parents.[2] Shortly before his twentieth birthday, God deeply convicted him of his sins, and by grace he became a believer. Resolving to deny his personal ambitions for fame, he aspired to preach the Word of God plainly to bring Christ to the lost and to build up believers' souls.

Goodwin soon joined ranks with the spiritual brotherhood of the Puritans, which, based on a system of beliefs we now call Reformed orthodoxy, established an impressive network of relationships among believers and ministers and worked for Bible-based reformation and Spirit-empowered revival

on personal, familial, ecclesiastical, and national levels.[3] In the 1620s and early 1630s, Goodwin taught and preached at Cambridge University until Archbishop Laud drove the Puritans out of Cambridge in 1634. Goodwin left to serve as a minister in London, but that did not stop the persecution; five years later Goodwin fled to the Netherlands. He returned to London in 1641 when the Puritans rose in power. He was a leading figure in the Westminster Assembly, though he was an Independent and not part of the Presbyterian majority.[4] In 1650, Goodwin became president of Magdalen College at Oxford University, serving with John Owen (1616–1683). After King Charles II returned to England in 1660, Goodwin led the Independent Christians in London through persecution, plague, and the Great Fire of London, which consumed half of Goodwin's massive theological library.

Goodwin died in 1680. After his death, other Puritans collected and published his writings. They are now available in the twelve-volume set of his *Works*.[5] For an introduction to Goodwin in a small compilation of brief readings, consult *"A Habitual Sight of Him": The Christ-Centered Piety of Thomas Goodwin*.[6]

The Scotsman Alexander Whyte (1836–1921) said of Goodwin, "Full as Goodwin always is of the ripest scriptural and Reformation scholarship; full as he always is of the best theological and philosophical learning of his own day and of all foregoing days; full, also, as he always is of the deepest spiritual experience—all the same, he is always so simple, so clear, so direct, and un-technical, so personal, and so pastoral."[7]

Preacher of the Compassionate Christ Goodwin's writings are a shining example of Christ-centered Puritanism. Before examining Goodwin's teaching on the heart of Christ in heaven, we must begin with his teaching on Christ crucified on earth.

Goodwin loved to preach the good news of reconciliation between God and man. He stressed that God created all mankind in friendship with Him. But man rebelled against God, greatly offending God's justice. But God the Father, being infinite in love and rich in mercy, made an eternal covenant of peace with His Son before time began.[8] The Father determined to send His Son to serve as Mediator between sinful man and holy God. Christ took on the task of satisfying the Father for all the wrong done against God; He took on Himself the guilt and sin of His chosen people, dying under the curse of God's law against sinners. The Father was so satisfied with Christ's work that He not only forgives everyone who trusts in Christ alone for salvation but counts believers righteous through Jesus' very righteousness. On the basis of Christ's work, preachers may call the world to be reconciled to God.[9] Goodwin thus says to us, "Rest on

Christ alone, especially as crucified."[10]

Gordon Crompton says that Goodwin defined faith as the spiritual sight and knowledge of Christ. In Goodwin, "we see Christ's spiritual excellencies and His glory, and our heart is taken with them."[11] Michael Horton asserts that Goodwin's favorite definition of faith was this: "Now this Spirit, when he comes down thus into the heart, works eyes, and feet, and hands, and all to look upon Christ, and to come to Christ, and to lay hold upon Christ…. And faith is eyes, and hands, and feet, yea, and mouth, and stomach, and all; for we eat his flesh and drink his blood by faith."[12]

Goodwin also loved to preach on Christ's resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven. He had a beautiful view of Christ's intimate ministry in glory to His children. He wrote a helpful book on this subject titled *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth* (1645).[13] Its subtitle is *A Treatise Demonstrating the Glorious Disposition and Tender Affection of Christ, in His Human Nature Now in Glory, unto His Members, under All Sorts of Infirmities, Either of Sin or Misery*. The immediate purpose of the treatise was to reject the popular idea that Christians in the post-apostolic age were at a disadvantage to Christians who knew Christ on earth because Christ was now glorified and less affected by humanity. Goodwin asserted from the Holy Scriptures that Christ feels strong affections, deep compassion, and emotional sympathy toward His suffering people even while seated at God's right hand. This treatise was one of Goodwin's most popular works, reprinted several times in England and translated into German.[14]

"Goodwin wishes to express that Christ's exaltation has not diminished His emotions, but rather, has caused them to increase," Crompton writes. "Christ is still the compassionate One that He was while on earth."[15] Many Reformed theologians have written on Christ's exaltation and intercession, but writings about Christ's emotions in heaven toward us on earth, Paul Cook observes, was "an unusual theme."[16]

Goodwin did not write with the false colors of human speculation. Instead, he looked to the Scriptures, which, he said, "open a window into Christ's heart."[17] Scripture alone is our authority.[18] How else can our minds grasp what Christ is thinking and feeling in heaven?[19] Goodwin said that the Bible "doth, as it were, take our hands and lay them upon Christ's breast, and let us feel how his heart beats…toward us, even now [when] he is in glory."[20]

Goodwin was a Puritan preacher of the compassionate Christ. Before examining what this great preacher-theologian taught about the tender mercies of our Savior, we must consider a practical problem created by our Savior's exaltation.

The Problem of the Compassionate Christ Thomas Goodwin centered his discussion of Christ's heavenly heart of compassion upon Hebrews 4:14–15: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." This Scripture, as Goodwin saw it, contains both a problem and a solution for our faith in Christ.

The Problem: Our Great High Priest Passed into the Heavens Goodwin recognized that sinful men might be put off by the words "a *great* high priest that is passed into the *heavens*." We might think that the greatness of the exalted Christ might cause Him to forget us. Think of a boy from a small town who graduates from college, then finds a high-paying job in a big city. He puts his friends and family behind him, thinking them inferior to his new associates. Likewise, Goodwin wrote that we might think that, if Christ remembered us in heaven, "having cast off the frailties of his flesh which he had here, and having clothed his human nature with so great a glory, that he cannot now pity us, as he did when he dwelt among us here below, nor be so feelingly affected and touched with our miseries." Surely He has left behind Him all memories of weakness and pain.21

Goodwin saw this thinking as a "great stone of stumbling which we meet with (and yet lieth unseen) in the thoughts of men in the way to faith." Christ is absent from us on earth. Surely it would be better for us if we could talk with Him as Mary and Peter did on earth. He was so gentle with them. "But now He has gone into a far country, where He has put on glory and immortality," Goodwin points out.22 He sits as king at God's right hand in heaven. His human nature is aflame with glory. How can we boldly approach such a king? How can we expect Him, in exalted power and holiness, to bear patiently with us when we are so weak, foolish, and sinful? But Goodwin says that the same Scripture which speaks of Christ's exaltation also reveals His compassion.

Still Touched with Compassion Goodwin wielded the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God—against this obstacle. He taught that Christ's mercy is so certain that Scripture uses a double negative to forcefully declare the positive truth: "We have *not* a high priest which *cannot* be touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

Our infirmities stir Christ's compassion; Goodwin argues from Hebrews that "infirmities" include both our troubles and our sins. The letter to the Hebrews

addressed people facing pressure and persecution. So “infirmities” must be our earthly troubles. But our sin is also an infirmity. Hebrews 5:2 declares that a high priest “can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.” Even our foolishness and sinful choices awaken Christ’s compassion.[23]

Goodwin drives his point home with a bold comparison. He writes to believers: “Your very sins move him to pity more than to anger…even as the heart of a father is to a child that hath some loathsome disease, or as one is to a member of his body that hath the leprosy, he hates not the member, for it is his flesh, but the disease, and that provokes him to pity the part affected the more.”[24] If your child becomes very sick, you do not kick the child out; you weep with him and tend to his needs. Christ responds to our sins with compassion despite His abhorrence of them.

Christ’s compassion flows out of His personal human experience. Hebrews 4:15 says that He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Earlier, Hebrews 2:18 says, “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour [help] them that are tempted.” Goodwin explains how this works: in His days on earth, “Christ took to heart all that befell him as deeply as might be; he slighted no cross, either from God or men, but had and felt the utmost load of it. Yea, his heart was made more tender in all sorts of affections than any of ours, even as it was in love and pity; and this made him ‘a man of sorrows,’ and that more than any other man was or shall be.”[25]

Today in heaven, Jesus in His human nature knows everything that happens to believers on earth. Jesus says to His church in Revelation 2:2, “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience.” This is possible because Christ’s human nature is filled with the Holy Spirit beyond measure, and the Spirit is like Christ’s eyes in all the earth (Rev. 5:6). Knowing our distress, He remembers how He felt when facing similar miseries.[26] Christ even knows the experience of sin’s guilt and the horror of facing God’s wrath against sin. Although personally sinless, Christ bore all the sins of His people.[27] His knowledge of our pain along with the memory of His pain moves His heart to overflow with compassion.

Glorious Human Tenderness Christ sympathizes with us. That is not to say that Christ is still suffering in heaven; always a careful theologian, Goodwin clearly taught that Christ’s humiliation was completed at the cross and tomb. In His exaltation, His human nature is glorified and free from all pain.

How then can Christ be touched with the feeling of our infirmities? Goodwin said this is not an act of weakness but of the power of heavenly love. He writes, “And whereas it may be objected, that this were a weakness. The apostle affirms

that this is his power, and a perfection and strength of love surely, in him, as the word [*able*] importeth; that is, that makes him thus able and powerful to take our miseries into his heart, though glorified, and so to be affected with them, as if he suffered with us."[28]

On one hand, we should not think of Jesus suffering in heaven as He did on earth. He is no longer subject to any frailty, weariness, tears, exhaustion, or fear. On the other hand, He remains a person with human emotions and a human body. He is not a spirit or a ghost. And His frailty is replaced with a vastly expanded capacity for the affections of love. Christ is God and man. As God, Christ is infinite, eternal, and unchanging. But, as a man, He has been lifted up to a new level of glory. Goodwin said, "For it is certain that as his knowledge was enlarged upon his entering into glory, so his human affections of love and pity are enlarged in solidity, strength, and reality…Eph. 3:19, 'The love of Christ,' God-man, 'passeth knowledge.'"[29] So Christ is not hurt by our sufferings, but His human soul responds to our sufferings with glorious, beautiful tenderness.

Crompton summarized Goodwin's teachings, saying, "Christ, as our High Priest was not just touched with the feelings of our infirmities during His time on earth, taking only the memory of it to heaven. But now in heaven, in a glorified state, He is touched in His very feelings for us. This is by no means a weakness of any sort. Rather, this ability to feel for us is part of His power. It is a perfection and strength of love and grace."[30]

Let us now look at the promises in Scripture that reassure us of Christ's tender thoughts toward us. These promises are amazingly comprehensive and comforting.

The Promises of the Compassionate Christ Hebrews 4:14 says, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." Let us cling to our profession of the doctrines of Christ, which stands upon the promises of Christ. Later, Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)." As Goodwin said, God's promises are like coins held out in mercy's hands for God's children to take.[31]

Our text in Hebrews 4 speaks of Christ as the one who has "passed into the heavens." When did Christ promise that His heart would remain full of mercy while He was in heaven?

Promises before His Death Goodwin focuses here on John 13 to 17. He reminds us of these opening words in John 13:1: "Now before the feast of the passover,

when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Even when Jesus' mind was set on His imminent exaltation to supreme glory, Goodwin said, "his heart ran out in love towards, and was set upon, 'his own:'…his own, a word denoting the greatest nearness, dearness, and intimacy founded upon propriety [or ownership]."[32] At that precise time, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, demonstrating that Christ's glorification would not diminish but rather increase His love and grace service to His people.

Jesus said in John 14 to 16 that He would ascend to heaven to secure our happiness as believers. He would prepare a place for us, He said. And He would return like a bridegroom to bring us to our eternal home. Goodwin wrote, "It is as if [Jesus] had said, 'The truth is, I cannot live without you, I shall never be quiet till I have you where I am, that so we may never part again; that is the reason of it. Heaven shall not hold me, nor my Father's company, if I have not you with me, my heart is set upon you; and if I have any glory, you shall have part of it.'"[33]

Meanwhile, Christ would not orphan or abandon His bride but would commit her to the care of His "dearest friend," the Comforter. In Goodwin's words, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would comfort us with "nothing but stories of my love," for He would not speak of Himself but as one sent from Christ. Meanwhile, Christ promised to pray for us in heaven, and to send answers like love letters from a bridegroom to his beloved. He demonstrated His commitment to pray for us by interceding even then, as seen in John 17.[34]

Assurances after His Resurrection Goodwin asked, "Now when Christ came first out of the other world, from the dead, clothed with that heart and body which he was to wear in heaven, what message sends he first to them?" The answer is in John 20:17, where Jesus called His disciples "my brethren" and said, "I ascend to my Father, and your Father." What sweet words of grace to the men who had denied Christ and abandoned Him in His darkest hour! Christ who promises to intercede for us as a brother also intercedes with His Father for the rest of the family. When Jesus appeared to the disciples later, His first words were, "Peace be unto you" (John 20:19, 21). Even after His resurrection, Christ's heart remained full of mercy and concern for sinners.[35]

To be sure, Christ rebuked His disciples. But for what? Luke 24:25 tells us, "He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." Goodwin says that He gave this reprimand "only because they would not believe on him…. He desires nothing more than to have men believe in him; and this now when glorified." When Jesus restored Peter after his

denials, He reinstated Peter by commanding him, “Feed my lambs.” Christ asked Peter to feed His lambs to show his love for Christ. Goodwin observes that “His heart runs altogether upon his lambs, upon souls to be converted.”[36] Christ’s glorified heart still beats today for sinners.

Pledges with His Ascension Goodwin stresses that when Jesus ascended to heaven, His last earthly act was to pronounce a blessing on His disciples (Luke 24:50–51). His first official act as the enthroned king was to pour out the Holy Spirit upon His church (Acts 2:33)—all the works of the Holy Spirit testify of Christ’s present love for His church. Does a minister preach the gospel by the Holy Spirit? It is because of Christ’s heart for sinners. Does the Spirit move you to pray? It is because Christ is praying for you. Does the New Testament express Christ’s love for sinners? It was all written “since Christ’s being in heaven, by his Spirit.”[37]

Goodwin offers another pledge to sinners in Christ’s glorious appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus. In 1 Timothy 1:15–16, Paul writes, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” Goodwin comments that Paul is expressly stating that his own salvation is meant “to assure all sinners, unto the end of the world, of Christ’s heart towards them.”[38]

Goodwin’s final pledge of Christ’s compassion comes from Christ’s last recorded words. When the Spirit and the bride call out for Christ to come back to earth, Revelation 22:17 gives Jesus’ answer: “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Goodwin comments, “They cannot desire his coming to them, so much as he desires their coming to him…hereby expressing how much his heart now longs after them.”[39]

Christ gave us promises and pledges before and after His exaltation to help us trust that His heart is tender toward sinners. Let us now consider the proof of this compassion.

The Proof of the Compassionate Christ Goodwin explained that Christ is compassionate because of the influence of the Trinity on the ministry of Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity profoundly shaped Goodwin’s theology.[40] He believed the ancient doctrine that “the external works of the Trinity are undivided”—that is, everything God does in creation, providence, and redemption is the work of all three persons in cooperation with each other, each

acting in His own distinct manner.[41] Christ's ministry of compassion flows from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Christ's Mission from the Father Hebrews 4:14–15 describes Christ as our "high priest." Christ did not take this office by His own initiative but was appointed to it by His Father: "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:4–6). Goodwin argues that "God therefore called him to it…and therefore Christ calls it his 'Father's business.'"[42]

God the Father gave Christ the office of high priesthood to exhibit mercy and compassion. Goodwin says that the priesthood "requires of him all mercifulness and graciousness towards sinners that do come unto him…. As his kingly office is an office of power and dominion, and his prophetical office an office of knowledge and wisdom, so his priestly office is an office of grace and mercy." He proved this from Hebrews 5:2 and 2:18, which say that a high priest must have an inward ability to show compassion.[43] God the Father commanded God the Son to welcome and save to the end sinners who come to Him. Jesus Himself taught us this in John 6:37–40, where He says that He cannot fail to do His Father's will. Indeed, as Psalm 40:6–8 says, God wrote His law of mercy upon His Son's human heart.[44]

Everything the Father sent Christ to do, He has done for us. As Goodwin expounded, Christ died for us; He rose for us; He ascended into heaven for us; He sits at the right hand of God for us; He intercedes for us. From beginning to end, our high priest acts as the Father's appointed surety and representative of His elect people.[45]

So we look through Christ to see the Father's love. The ultimate object of faith is our covenant Father, for it is He who justifies (Rom. 8:33). We rest upon God through Christ because God sent Christ according to His covenant of grace.[46] In seeing the Father's heart, the believer knows the love that God has had for him before time began. All of redemption aims, as Stanley Fienberg puts it, "to reveal the fullness of God's love."[47]

Goodwin writes, "All that Christ doth for us is but the expression of that love which was taken up originally in God's own heart…. Christ adds not one drop of love to God's heart, [but] only draws it out."[48] The Son's beautiful heart is a manifestation of the Father's beautiful heart. So Goodwin invites us, "Come first to Christ, and he will take thee by the hand, and go along with thee, and lead thee to his Father."[49] In seeing the Father's loving heart, we are assured that His

obedient Son will love us forever. This is one important proof of Christ's compassion.

Christ's Divine Nature as the Son Hebrews 4:14 says that our great high priest is "the Son of God." On the basis of Christ's sonship, Goodwin concluded that Christ's love is not a forced love that He performs just because His Father commanded it. Christ has a "free and natural" disposition to love us because He is the natural Son of the "Father of mercies."[50] Whatever the Father wills, the Son wills, for they are one; they share one will and one power (John 5:19; 10:30). Therefore, Christ's heart in heaven as He intercedes for His people is the Father's heart.[51] The doctrine of the Trinity is so practical and comforting!

Goodwin also cites Matthew 11:28–29, which reveals Jesus as God's exalted Son. But Jesus also says in these verses, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Goodwin says, "We are apt to think that he, being so holy, is therefore of a severe and sour disposition against sinners, and not able to bear them. No, says he; 'I am meek,' gentleness is my nature and temper…. Yea, but (we may think) he being the Son of God and heir of heaven, and especially now filled with glory, and sitting at God's right hand, he may now despise the lowliness of us here below…. No, says Christ; 'I am lowly' also, willing to bestow my love and favour upon the poorest." Therefore, Goodwin said, we are to take the sweetest thoughts we ever had of a dear friend and raise them up infinitely higher in our thoughts of the sweetness of Jesus.[52]

What a friend we have in Jesus! His divine nature as the Son of God proves that He will have compassion on every sinner who comes to Him.

Christ's Humanity from the Holy Spirit Hebrews 4:14 says that our great high priest is not only the eternal Son of God, but also "Jesus." How did the Second Person of the Trinity become human like us? Luke 1:35 says that the Holy Spirit worked a miracle in the womb of a virgin. Goodwin writes, "It was the Spirit who overshadowed his mother, and, in the meanwhile, knit that indissoluble knot between our nature and the second person, and that also knit his heart unto us."[53]

But Goodwin says that the Spirit did more. All the "excellencies" or graces that filled Christ's human nature were a result of the Spirit's work in Him. Goodwin's comforting and cogent argument here is that "if the same Spirit that was upon him, and in him, when he was on earth, doth but still rest upon him now he is in heaven, then those dispositions must needs still rest entirely upon

him."[54]

Goodwin said that the Spirit's work in Christ is evident in nearly all the major events of Christ's life, from His incarnation to His ascension.[55] At His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Christ as a dove, an image of meekness and tenderness.[56] He sanctified Christ's human nature and constituted Him as the Christ.[57]

Entering His ministry thus filled with the Spirit, Jesus declared in Luke 4:18 that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed Him to preach good news to the poor. Jesus was the servant on whom the Lord had set His Spirit, as Isaiah prophesied; He would not break the bruised reed. Now that Christ is glorified, Goodwin wrote, "Christ hath the Spirit in the utmost measure that human nature is capable of."[58]

The Holy Spirit empowered Christ's human nature to be a channel of God's mercy to us. Christ's human heart has a greater capacity for kindness than the hearts of all men and angels.[59] God is infinitely merciful. Christ's humanity does not make Him more merciful, but makes Him merciful in a way suited to our needs. The incarnation does not increase God's mercy, but brings His mercy near to us.[60] Goodwin wrote, "'God is love,' as John says, and Christ is love covered over with flesh, yea, our flesh."[61] Jesus is mercy in the flesh.

> *O the deep, deep love of Jesus! Spread His praise from shore to shore;*
> *How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore;*
> *How He watches o'er His loved ones, died to call them all His own;*
> *How for them He intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from the throne!*[62]

The Wonder of Christ's Compassionate Heart Goodwin concluded his masterful *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth* with four applications to believers:

- Christ's heart of compassion affords us the strongest encouragements against sin. We know that Christ is not at rest in His heart until our sins are removed. Those sins move Him more to pity than to anger even though He hates them.
- Whatever trial, temptation, or misery we may suffer, we know that Christ also endured it and that His heart moves to relieve us in our distress.
- The thought of how much we grieve Christ's heart by sin and disobedience is the strongest incentive we have against sinning.
- In all our miseries and distresses, though every human comforter fails, we know that we have a Friend who will help, pity, and succor us: Christ in heaven.[63]

Dear believers, how full of compassion Christ is for us as He sits upon His throne of glory. Surely, reflecting on this truth should help us rejoice in Christ and set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.64 Goodwin writes, "What is it to have Christ thus dwell in the heart by faith?… It is to have Jesus Christ continually in one's eye, an habitual sight of him."65 As people live and walk in the light of the sun, we must learn to live and walk in the light of God's Son. May God focus Christ's glory upon us so that our hearts ignite and burn for Him until our dying day.

Goodwin experienced Christ's beautiful heart to the end of his life. His son wrote that on his deathbed, Goodwin said, "I could not have imagined I should ever have had such a measure of faith in this hour…. Christ cannot love me better than he doth; I think I cannot love Christ better than I do."66 What a way to die—and then to embrace and be united to Christ forever in glory!67

In his book *Heaven Help Us*, Steve Lawson tells of a young aristocrat, William Montague, who was stricken with blindness at the age of ten. In graduate school, he met the beautiful daughter of a British admiral. The courtship flamed into romance leading to engagement. Shortly before the wedding, William agreed to submit to a new eye surgery. With no assurance that it would restore sight, the doctors operated. William wanted his first sight to be his bride on their wedding day. So, hoping against hope, he asked that the bandages be removed from his eyes just as the bride came up the aisle. As she approached, William's father began removing the gauze from his son's eyes. When the last bandage was unwrapped, William's eyes opened, light flooded in, and he saw his bride's radiant face. Tears flowed from his eyes as he looked into her beautiful face and whispered, "You are more beautiful than I ever imagined."68

Goodwin teaches us that something like that will happen to us when glorification takes the veil from our eyes and we see Jesus no longer in part but in full as our Savior, Interceder, and Friend. We will behold His great love and beautiful heart. We will experience what Rutherford wrote of:

> The king there in His beauty,
> Without a veil is seen:
> It were a well-spent journey,
> Though seven deaths lay between:
> The Lamb with His fair army,
> Doth on Mount Zion stand,
> And glory, glory dwelleth
> In Emmanuel's land

O Christ, He is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love!
The streams on earth I've tasted
More deep I'll drink above:
There to an ocean fullness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth
But on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Emmanuel's land.[69]

Does your heart warm at the thought of being with Christ forever and increasingly knowing His beautiful heart? A true child of God can identify with this. If you cannot, you are not a child of God. You are still unconverted and dead to God. You will not enter heaven unless God's Spirit teaches you to hate sin, to repent of it, to forsake it, and to turn to Christ, believing in Him alone for salvation and loving Him above all.

Rejoice, dear believer! In glory, we will know the Bridegroom's beautiful heart, even as He knows ours, and both of our hearts will be perfect. Oh, to be sinless in the presence of our sinless Savior and Bridegroom! Forever we will experience Christ's high priestly heart—the heart of the Lamb of God, the Prince of peace and love. In glory we will be ravished with His love, even as He rejoices over us with singing (Zeph. 3:17).

Psalm 45:11 says of the anticipated marriage between Christ and His bride, "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty." Dear believer, the King of kings will make us His queen of heaven, and we will be beautiful in His sight. The angels will be our servants, and the King will take us by hand into His garden of paradise and show us His estate.

To that love, we will respond with singing and praise:

O the deep, deep love of Jesus! Love of ev'ry love the best;
'Tis an ocean vast of blessing, 'tis a haven sweet of rest.
O the deep, deep love of Jesus! 'Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee.[70]

1. Samuel Trevor Francis, “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus,” stanza 1. I thank Paul Smalley for his assistance on this chapter.

2. For a succinct treatment of his biography, see Joel R. Beeke, introduction to *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, by Thomas Goodwin, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 1:[2–10, 22]; and James Reid, “Life of Thomas Goodwin,” in *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* (1811; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 319–43. See also Brian Freer, “Thomas Goodwin, the Peaceable Puritan,” and Graham Harrison, “Thomas Goodwin and Independency,” and Paul E. G. Cook, “Thomas Goodwin—Mystic?” in *Diversities of Gifts*, Westminster Conference Reports, 1980 (London: The Westminster Conference, 1981), 7–56. For a more lengthy treatment, see Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 37–52.

3. “It has proved possible to trace a network of godly divines in early Stuart England, similar to William Haller’s ‘spiritual brotherhood,’ but going far beyond the great names of Sibbes, Gouge, Preston, and Dod to draw in the humblest of the painful preachers and the most junior of the aspirant ministers coming out of Oxford and Cambridge…. It was rooted in what Peter Lake called a ‘certain evangelical protestant world-view’ predicated upon the ‘potentially transforming effects of the gospel on both individuals and on the social order as a whole.’ It is Lake’s contention that if Puritanism is to be defined at all it must be in terms of this ‘spiritual dynamic’… the nature of that spiritual dynamic [being] a sense of communion with God, Scripturally informed, deeply emotional, and yet aspiring to something beyond the subjective.” Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 333. Webster cites William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), chap. 1; and Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 279, 282–83. Cf. Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), xvii.

4. Wayne Spear asserts that Goodwin gave more addresses at the assembly than any other divine. “Covenanted Uniformity in Religion: The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners upon the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1976), 362. Cf. Chad van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1642–1652” (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2004). For Goodwin’s role in the Presbyterian-Independent controversy, see Stanley Fienberg, “Thomas Goodwin, Puritan Pastor and Independent Divine” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1974), 80–265; “Thomas Goodwin’s Scriptural Hermeneutics and the Dissolution of Puritan Unity,” *Journal of Religious History* 10 (1978): 32–49; Berndt Gustafsson, *The Five Dissenting Brethren: A Study of the Dutch Background of Their Independentism* (London: C. W. K. Gloerup, 1955); R. B. Carter, “The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy with Special Reference to Dr. Thomas Goodwin and the Years 1640 to 1660” (PhD diss., Edinburgh, 1961); David R. Ehalt, “The Development of Early Congregational Theory of the Church with Special Reference to the Five ‘Dissenting Brethren’ at the Westminster Assembly” (PhD diss., Claremont, 1969); J. R. De Witt, Jus Divinum: *The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government* (Kampen: Kok, 1969); Gordon D. Crompton, “The Life and Theology of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.” (ThM thesis, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1997), 180–224; D. J. Walker, “Thomas Goodwin and the Debate on Church Government,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983): 85–99.

5. Reprinted, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006. For guidance on how to read Goodwin, see Beeke, introduction to *Works*, 1:[11–14].

6. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, eds., *“A Habitual Sight of Him”: The Christ-Centered Piety of Thomas Goodwin* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

7. Alexander Whyte, *Thirteen Appreciations* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1913), 170–71. Cf. J. C. Philpot, *Reviews by the Late Mr. J. C. Philpot* (London: Frederick Kirby, 1901), 2:479ff., who comments, “Being a man of choice experience, Goodwin so blends with [his sound expositions of Scripture] the work of the Spirit, in all its various branches, as to enrich his exposition with a heavenly

savour and unction which carries with it great force, and commends itself in a very sensible and profitable manner to the conscience."

8. For Goodwin on the covenant of grace, see Paul Edward Brown, "The Principle of the Covenant in the Theology of Thomas Goodwin" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1950).

9. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:3–5.

10. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:292.

11. Crompton, "The Life and Theology of Thomas Goodwin," 139, 142.

12. Michael S. Horton, "Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Reformed Tradition, 1600–1680" (PhD diss., Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Coventry University, 1995), 182. He quotes Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 8:147. For additional studies on Goodwin's views of faith and assurance, see Alexander McNally, "Some Aspects of Thomas Goodwin's Doctrine of Assurance" (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1972); and Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 245–68.

13. Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4:93–150. For a summary of this book, see Cook, "Goodwin—Mystic?," 49–56, and Crompton, "The Life and Theology of Thomas Goodwin," 289–308.

14. Crompton, "The Life and Theology of Thomas Goodwin," 289.

15. Crompton, "The Life and Theology of Thomas Goodwin," 290.

16. Cook, "Goodwin—Mystic?," 45.

17. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:96.

18. Goodwin writes, "First, that the holy Scripture is that rule of knowing God, and living unto him, which who so doth not believe, but betakes himself to any other way of discovering truth, and the mind of God instead thereof, cannot be saved" (Thomas Goodwin, et al., *The Principles of Faith* [London, 1654], quoted in Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth*, 88.

19. Commenting on how Christ suffers with His people (Heb. 4:15), Goodwin wrote, "Now, concerning this affection, as here thus expressed, how far it extends, and how deep it may reach, I think no man in this life can fathom. If *cor regis*, the heart of a king, be inscrutable, as Solomon speaks [Pro. 25:3], the heart of the King of kings now in glory is much more. I will not take upon me to 'intrude into things which I have not seen,' but shall endeavor to speak safely, and therefore warily, so far as the light of Scripture and right reason shall warrant my way." *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:143.

20. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:111.

21. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:112.

22. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:95.

23. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:111–12.

24. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:149.

25. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:141.

26. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:141–42.

27. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:149.

28. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:112–13.

29. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:143–46.

30. Crompton, "The Life and Theology of Thomas Goodwin," 299.

31. Goodwin, *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, 8:5–6. Cf. Horton, "Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance," 177.

32. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:96–97.

33. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:100.

34. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:98–103.

35. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:104–5.
36. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:106.
37. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:107–8.
38. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:108.
39. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:109.
40. Mark Jones writes, "Thomas Goodwin wrote a great deal on the Trinity, and his work, *The Knowledge of God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ*, represents one of the most detailed expositions of the doctrine of the Trinity in the seventeenth century…. His defense of the Trinity is exegetically rigorous and his emphasis on the union and communion of the three persons among themselves, and the practical implications this had for how Christians commune with God, figures prominently…. The triunity of God constitutes the necessary ground for Goodwin's theology, particularly in terms of the soteric role of the Trinity in the redemption and restoration of fallen humanity…. The Trinity represents the necessary ontological framework for Goodwin's soteriology." *Why Heaven Kissed Earth*, 99–100.
41. Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth*, 108–9.
42. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:23.
43. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:127–28.
44. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:113–14.
45. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:1–91.
46. Horton, "Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance," 183. Cf. Goodwin, *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, 8:133–34.
47. Fienberg, "Thomas Goodwin, Puritan Pastor and Independent Divine," 16.
48. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:86. He cited John 3:16 and Romans 5:8.
49. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:89.
50. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:115.
51. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:71, 81.
52. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:116–17.
53. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:118. Cf. Paul Blackham, "The Pneumatology of Thomas Goodwin" (PhD diss., University of London, 1995), 55–61.
54. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:118.
55. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:9–10. Cf. Jones, "Why Heaven Kissed Earth," 205–6. Jones points out (207) that Goodwin's emphasis here is reminiscent of Richard Sibbes's statement that "whatsoever Christ did as man he did by the Spirit." *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 3:162.
56. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:118.
57. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:43.
58. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:119–21.
59. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:116.
60. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:135–36, 139.
61. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:116.
62. Francis, "O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus," stanza 2.
63. Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven*, in *Works*, 4:149–50. Cf. Cook, "Goodwin—Mystic?," 55–56.
64. Cf. Paul Ling-Ji Chang, "Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) on the Christian Life" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001).
65. Thomas Goodwin, "The Second Sermon on Ephesians 3:16–21," in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 2:411.
66. *Memoir of Thomas Goodwin…by His Son*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), xl.
67. Goodwin, "Sermon on Ephesians 3:16–21," in *Works*, 2:411–12. For Goodwin's rather unique millennial views for a Puritan, see A. R. Dallison, "The Latter-Day Glory in the Thought of Thomas

Goodwin," *Evangelical Quarterly* 58 (1986): 53–68.

68. Steven J. Lawson, *Heaven Help Us!: Truths about Eternity That Will Help You Live Today* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995).

69. A. R. Cousin, "The Sands of Time are Sinking," based on Samuel Rutherford's *Letters.*

70. Francis, "O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus," stanza 3.

Chapter 26

The Puritans on Understanding and Using God's Promises

> *Promises…are the rays and beams of Christ the Sun of Righteousness, in whom they are all founded and established.*
>
> —EDWARD REYNOLDS[1]

The Puritans loved God's promises. One reason for this is that they loved Christ and saw Him in all the promises. Jesus Christ is the "sum, fountain, seal, treasury of all the promises," as Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) wrote.[2] In Him, the promises of God are yea and amen (2 Cor. 1:20). Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) stated in his catechism, "The new covenant is a mass of promises laying the weight of our salvation upon a stronger than we are, to wit upon Christ, and faith grippeth promises and maketh us to go out of ourselves to Christ as being homely [familiar] with Christ."[3]

The promises are the pathways where Christ meets the soul. Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) said, "For if one promise do belong to thee, then all do; for every one conveys [the] whole Christ in whom all the promises are made and who is the matter of them."[4] William Spurstowe (c. 1605–1666) wrote, "The promises are instrumental in the coming of Christ and the soul together; they are the warrant by which faith is emboldened to come to him, and take hold of him; but the union which faith makes, is not between a believer and the promise, but between a believer and Christ."[5]

Reynolds explained: "All the promises are made in Christ, being purchased by his merits, and they are all performed in Christ, being administered by his power and office…. Every promise by faith apprehended carries a man to Christ, and to the consideration of our unity with him, in the right whereof we have claim to the promises."[6]

In this chapter we will consider Puritan views first of the right understanding of God's promises as a form of biblical revelation, and secondly, of the right use

of God's promises. We will draw upon three books dealing with the promises of Scripture by William Spurstowe, Edward Leigh (1602–1671), and Andrew Gray (1633–1656).[7]

The Right Understanding of God's Promises One reason the Puritans are so impressive is because God blessed them with profound insights into the truths of Scripture, which, in turn, produced appropriate and thorough applications. The Puritans sought to unfold the essence of truth for our understanding even as they drew attention to the wide-ranging influence of this truth for our practical application.

This is precisely the strength and enduring blessing of their treatment of God's promises. The Puritans did not speak about the applications or uses of God's promises until *after* they had instructed the mind and educated the understanding with regard to those promises. "Before we can *apply* the promises," they reasoned, "we must first *understand* their nature and various kinds, and appreciate their excellence and worth; we must know the foundation on which they are built and the spring from which they gush forth; we must be certain as to whom they belong and the various properties or characteristics inherent in them that urge both our faith in them and our use of them. Only with these track lights in place can we traverse such a broad terrain, avoiding both neglect and presumption and encouraging both faith and use."

So we begin with the Puritan understanding of God's promises in terms of their nature, their kinds, and their excellence and worth, for we are certain that the best structures begin with the best foundations. The tree left standing when the storm is passed is the one with the deepest roots.

The Nature of the Divine Promises Edward Leigh began his treatise on the divine promises by saying the Word teaches us in three ways: through *precepts* or *commandments*, which teach obedience; *threats*, which restrain disobedience; and *promises*, which confirm our obedience.[8] The promises of God must be distinguished from His commandments and threats because the promises do not tell us our duty or what God will do if we fail in our duty. Rather, they confirm what God, motivated by His sovereign mercy and good pleasure, will do for us. Thus, a promise reveals a truth that will benefit us in particular. It declares God's will concerning the good with which He will bless us or the evil He will remove from us. The promises of God are a storehouse of blessings and a chest of goodwill bequeathed to us by our heavenly Father.

Leigh says the promises are "the grounds of our hope, the objects of our faith, and the rule of prayer."[9] We hope for what God has promised us because we are

unable to look for anything besides what He has already declared He will bestow. If we hope for the things the Lord has promised us, our hope is solid. Without God's promises, we are either hopeless or overly hopeful.

The promises of God are likewise the objects of our faith in that we may believe whatever is promised because of the one who promised it. We may believe the promises of God because they are the promises of *God*, not the promises of man. Balaam urges this belief in God's promises in Numbers 23:19, saying, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" The promises of God are sure words to be believed because God stands behind them. Whatever is believed without a promise is only presumed (Heb. 11:11).

Finally, the promises of God are the rule of prayer. Just as we hope for and believe what God has promised, so we must pray for what God has promised. David makes this evident in 2 Samuel 7:27 when he prays, "For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." Having the promise of God in hand not only emboldened David's hope and strengthened his faith, but it also fed and informed his prayer (cf. Luke 1:38). Truly, we do not have a prayer without the promises of God.

In the first of five sermons on God's promises, Andrew Gray defined a promise as "a glorious discovery of the *goodwill* of God towards sinners, and withal, a *purpose* and *intendment*, and, if we may say, an *engagement*, to bestow some spiritual or temporal good upon them, or to withhold some spiritual or temporal evil from them."[10] In other words, a divine promise declares God's goodwill, purpose, and intention toward sinners. It reveals what the Lord our God *will* do on our behalf; not what He *hopes* to do or will *attempt* to perform, but what He has already committed and bound Himself to *accomplish* for us. Gray goes even further in using the word *engagement* to stress that the Lord, by making a promise, so binds and engages Himself to it that it will assuredly come to pass. This agrees with Leigh's point that the promises of God are promises of *truth*, for the certainty of their fulfillment rests in the one who made them and bound Himself to them.

William Spurstowe indicated much the same regarding the nature of God's promises when he said that a promise is "a declaration of God's will, wherein he signifies what particular good things he will freely bestow, and the evils that he will remove."[11] In this sense, a promise is a kind of "middle thing," Spurstowe said, between God's purpose and performance, between His intention of good and His execution of it upon those whom He loves. This is so inasmuch as the

good that God purposes and intends to do for us, He reveals to us ahead of time by way of a promise, to grant us present comfort and to draw forth hope and expectancy. Thus, a promise is both the ground of present comfort and the expectation of future blessings.

Like Leigh, Spurstowe understood the importance of distinguishing God's promises from His threats and commands. A promise is different from a threat in that in a promise, God declares good rather than evil, and it is different from a command in that it concerns good things freely bestowed rather than a duty to be done.

Furthermore, Spurstowe suggested that the promises are "irreversible obsignations [seals] and declarations of God, which he has freely made" to believers.12 God's promises are objects of our faith and hope, for faith believes those things that God has promised are true, and hope expects the performance of what faith believes. We believe what God has promised because He has committed and bound Himself to act for us. We hope for what we believe because our faith is rooted in the sure Word spoken by Him who cannot lie.

As if singing three-part harmony, each of these Puritan writers saw God's promises as sovereign declarations of good to be bestowed or evil to be removed that God makes known to us *prior* to their performance, so that we might enjoy comfort and assurance as we await the fulfillment of His Word. However, while the divine promises enjoy this essential unity as to their nature, there is a great diversity in the kinds of promises the Lord has made. We should know and understand that diversity so that we might profit from the promises as the Lord intends.

The Various Kinds of Divine Promises In a most exhaustive yet helpful outline, Leigh suggested that the divine promises are legal or evangelical, general or particular, principal or less principal, direct or by consequence, absolute or conditional, and pertain either to this life or the life to come. Similarly, Gray distinguished the promises as absolute or conditional; temporal, spiritual, or eternal; and extraordinary (given to a particular believer as a singular privilege) or common (promises to which every believer in Christ has a right).

Legal promises are conditioned on perfect righteousness. An example of such a promise can be found in Jeremiah 7:23: "But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you." Given our sinful nature and inability to keep a single command of God, this class of promises would be ineffective for us had not Christ, as our Head, Representative, and Savior, rendered the righteousness on which they depend for

fulfillment. Through faith in Christ, we uphold the law of God (Rom. 3:31; 8:1–4) and thereby become heirs of these promises (Gal. 3:14, 29).

Evangelical promises are conditioned upon believing and repenting (John 3:36; 2 Cor. 7:10). Leigh said these promises are given "to the worker, not for the merit of his work, but for Christ's merit, in which both his person and work are accepted."[13] These promises are fulfilled, not for the sake of the person who believes or repents, as if those were meritorious acts in the sight of God, but rather because of Christ, the one in whom we have meritorious acceptance before God.

These two kinds of promises—legal and evangelical—are the root of all others. They not only show the importance of faith but make plain that the faith of those who inherit the promises of God must be in Christ, who alone has satisfied the righteous requirements of God's law. These promises are not for Christ but for those He came to save and to make partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Any other faith is misplaced and is therefore useless.

General promises are indefinite declarations of good that God offers to all. There is no limit on who may believe and receive such promises because God designed them as the refuge of many and as a primary means of drawing sinners to Christ (John 6:44–45). Those who by the grace of God see their sin and great need for Christ are wooed by these unrestricted promises to believe that *even they* may look to Christ and find salvation. John 3:16 states such a general promise: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." By contrast, *particular* promises are directed to special groups of people. In Exodus 20:12, God promises long life only to those *children* who honor their fathers and mothers. Likewise, in Numbers 25:12–13, the Lord promises a perpetual priesthood only to zealous *Phinehas and his descendants*.

Principal promises are spiritual and therefore are of the greatest concern. They include the promise of righteousness (Rom. 4:5) and the remission of sins (1 John 1:9). *Less principal* promises are temporal and include promises such as deliverance from affliction, safety in danger, health, and wealth. Isaiah brought such a promise to Hezekiah when the Lord said, "Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years" (Isa. 38:5).

Direct promises are explicit pledges given to people such as Paul, on his tempestuous voyage to Rome (Acts 27:22–25), when an angel said to him, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (v. 24). Promises implied or deduced by *consequences* are evident in the examples or prayers of faithful saints, since what God promises to one He promises to all who are in an equal state. For example, in

James 5:11, James encourages us to remain patient in suffering by promising God's blessing to those who remain steadfast. He then grounds that promise in the Lord's dealings with Job. In the same way, we discover promises in the prayers of the saints by considering those things for which they prayed and afterward obtained. As Leigh said, "The faithful calling upon God and God's gracious hearing of them are as much as a promise that God in such and such things will hear us calling upon him. David made this a ground of his faith [in] Psalm 22:4–5."[14] In addition, some promises can be distinguished as pertaining either to *this life*, whether spiritual or temporal, or to *the life to come*, such as the promise of eternal life.

Finally, and most importantly, we must distinguish between absolute and conditional promises. An *absolute* promise declares what the Lord determines to accomplish without any reference to what we do. Such a promise was indicated in Isaiah's prophecy about the virgin birth of Christ (7:14). The Lord made this promise absolutely and sovereignly.

Conditional promises, by contrast, are "no further promised than God in wisdom sees to be best for his own glory and his children's good."[15] In this conditional way, subject to His glory and our good, the Lord promises all temporal blessings (which Lazarus lacked), freedom from all crosses and troubles (which Job suffered), freedom from temptation (which even Christ faced), less principal graces and the common gifts of the Spirit (which are variously distributed [1 Cor. 12:8]), and sanctifying grace (which varies among saints). All of these blessings are promised, but they are conditional on what God knows to be best for His glory and our good in particular situations.

Thus, absolute promises make known a certain and sovereign purpose, while conditional promises reveal what God will do if the fulfillment of those promises glorifies Him and is best for His people. We might say that with absolute promises we are passive recipients of God's sovereign pleasure, while with conditional promises something is first required of us. If we fail to meet this requirement, we may lose much spiritual comfort.

In discussing the important distinction between absolute and conditional promises, Gray said that absolute promises, such as God's sending His Son into the world, have no condition annexed to the performance of them, while conditional promises, such as the promise that he who believes shall be saved, require some condition to be met by the Christian before the promise is fulfilled. Gray then reminds us, "Yet there is not a conditional promise that is in all the covenant of grace, but it may be reduced into an absolute promise, in regard that the *thing* promised…is an absolute free gift, and the *condition* of the promise is another."[16] In other words, the root of divine promises is the sovereign

goodness of God by which He purposes and engages Himself to do good to sinners, not because of any merit in them, but out of free grace, since even the condition required (faith, repentance, or the like) is itself of God (2 Tim. 2:25; Acts 13:48; John 6:44–45, 65).

What is the benefit of distinguishing between all of these kinds of promises? Leigh said that as "tradesmen sort their commodities, by which they live; so should believers sort their promises, upon which they trust."[17] Some promises, such as Isaiah 40:31, offer encouragement; some, such as 1 Corinthians 10:13, give comfort; some bring rewards (Ps. 84:11); and some, privileges (John 1:12). Knowing what kind of promise we are dealing with not only guides us in appropriating it but also guards us against the evil of presumption.

The Excellence and Worth of the Divine Promises Nothing is so excellent, so precious, and so sweet as a promise of God. The Scriptures call the promises the unsearchable riches of Christ, the bonds of love, and the inheritance of God's people. They are "a rich mine of spiritual and heavenly treasures; a garden of [the] most precious flowers [and] medicinal herbs; they are as the Pool of Bethesda for all diseases, for all sorts of persons, and at all times."[18]

Leigh said the promises are precious because God is the author who gave them and Christ is the one who purchased them. They are precious in the free manner in which they are given and in the great and inestimable profit that flows from them. They are also precious because they promise eternal glory and virtue, and because through them we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

Gray identified eight respects in which the promises are exceedingly precious. They are precious, first, because of the great price that was laid down for them, which was the blood of Christ. Second, they are precious because of the great things that are promised in them. Third, they are precious because of the great advantage afforded to a Christian who enjoys them. They are "the pencils that draw the…lineaments of the image of Christ upon the soul."[19] Fourth, they are precious because of their close relationship with Jesus Christ, for what are the promises but streams and rivulets that flow from Him? As Gray asked, "Can this fountain that is sweet in itself, send forth any bitter waters?"[20]

Fifth, the promises are precious because they are the objects of faith, the precious mother of all graces. Sixth, the promises guide and lead us to Christ, for there is not a single promise that does not cry out to us in a loud voice, "O, come to Christ!" and there is no access to Jesus but by a promise. Seventh, the saints of all ages have found great sweetness and unspeakable delight in the promises. Eighth, the saints have a high and matchless account of the promises and thereby

commend them to us. How can we doubt the preciousness of God's promises when these arguments surround us like a cloud of witnesses?21

Spurstowe summarized the excellence and preciousness of the promises in three main points. He said, first, the promises are precious because Christ is the root and principle from which the promises spring. Second, they are the objects of faith, through which they feed, nurture, and sustain every other grace. Third, the promises are precious because of what they contain to interest believers and give them a right to believe. Thus, we come full circle out of Christ and back to Christ: from Christ to the promises, from the promises to faith, and from faith to the things promised, the chief of which is Christ Himself, in whom are all other blessings!

Finally, as to the great and immeasurable worth of God's promises, Spurstowe suggested that while the principle of every believer's life is faith in Christ, the means of its preservation are the promises.22 From our implantation into Christ at the first to our full enjoyment of Him at the last, God's promises are the chief aids to our life and our growth. Using 1 John 2:12–14 ("Little children, young men, and fathers") as three stages of the Christian life, Spurstowe showed how the promises are suited to all phases of life. He said:

> The promises are the *babe's* milk by which they are nourished, the full breasts from which they suck both grace and comfort; they are the *young men's* evidences, by which they are animated to combat with the wicked one, and assured of being crowned with victory over him; they are the *old men's* staff, upon the top of which like aged Jacob they may safely lean, and worship God; it being a staff for power like Moses' rod, and for flourishing like Aaron's [rod], budding, blossoming, and yielding precious fruit. So that it is of more than ordinary concernment unto every one of them that look upon themselves as believers…not to be supine [negligent] and careless in the frequent use, and due application of the promises.23

We have now sketched with a Puritan pen the nature of God's promises, the various categories into which they are grouped, and why they are so precious to us. With these three points in mind, we already have a better understanding of the divine promises than we did before. Yet we have barely scratched the surface of what the Puritans taught. If such gems and treasures are so readily apparent on the surface of our study, what diamonds might we find by a daily, experiential, and practical use of the promises?

The Right Use of God's Promises If the promises are all that we have seen them to be, they are more useful to us in this world than the very air we breathe.

If God is behind them as their support and in them as their essential matter, then we have no greater security on earth for heaven and no greater access to the full enjoyment of God than in the divine promises. If the promises of God are His hand of bounty to us, nothing is more essential in life than to know what they are and how to profit from them. Having seen what they are, let us now consider how we as God's people are to use the promises that have been so freely given to us (2 Peter 1:3–4).

Edward Leigh began his chapter on the right use of the promises by saying, "The right use of the promise is a means to sweeten all our afflictions, confirm our faith, excite us to well doing, and to breed [contentment] of mind in all estates and conditions whatsoever."[24] If such benefits come from rightly using the promises, we are compelled to ask what that involves. We suggest that rightly using the promises involves believing them, applying them (depending on them), and praying them.

These exhortations may seem superfluous, but they are not. How difficult it sometimes is to believe the Word of God; how forgetful we are to make real-life application of its teachings so as to depend on the Word when other props are on hand; and how averse we are to take up the promises of God in prayer! Such exhortations must be regularly set before us if we are to profit from God's promises.

We Must Believe the Promises Many of us know that the Scriptures are full of God's promises. Many of us can quote some of those promises if called upon to do so. Yet few of us really believe them, and few of us can testify about a time when the promises sweetened our bitter afflictions, confirmed our weak and faltering faith under trial, compelled us to duty in the face of adversity, or provided us with unexplainable contentment in a time of disruption and upheaval. Few of us know the consolation of Jeremiah, who, after lamenting God's judgment on Jerusalem, found lasting comfort in God's covenant promise. In Lamentations 3:21–23, the prophet says, "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." We know God's promises are true and are given to us, but so often we fail in the elementary step of believing what God has promised, and therefore we fail to enjoy their fruits.

What the author of Hebrews said of Israel in the wilderness often describes our failure to believe God's promises: "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2). As Hebrews 3:19 says, "They could

not enter in [to God's rest] because of unbelief." Had Israel believed, she would have enjoyed the substance of God's promises, namely, His rest.

Thus, we must cry out to God like the father of the boy with the unclean spirit: "I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" (Mark 9:24), knowing that as we do so, God will be as good to us as Christ was to that father. He will forgive our weak faith and work by His Spirit to increase our faith so that we will not fail to enjoy in Christ all that God has promised us. When faced with the promises of God, we will be "not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39).

The need for an active and vital faith in God's promises is described in 2 Peter 1:4, where we are told that it is through them, or through our believing them, that we become partakers of the divine nature and escape from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. While being united to Christ and consecrated to God is a sovereign act of God upon us and not something we ourselves accomplish, it is still true, as Peter goes on to assert in verses 5–11, that we enjoy being in Christ and being separated unto Him in daily experience by appropriating this union and consecration through faith. While what we have is divinely given, we can enjoy it experientially only by faith. That faith is not mere assent but an embracing faith by which we cleave to the promises; it is a faith that welcomes the promises, clasps them, embraces them, and kisses them. When our hearts have such a grip on the promises of God, then, like Simeon, we indeed hold Christ in our arms (Luke 2:28).[25]

Andrew Gray said the unspeakable gain that flows to a Christian through the promises is enjoyed through the act of believing them, for in believing the promises, the soul "rises unto a likeness and conformity to [Christ] in holiness, wisdom, and righteousness."[26] We cannot expect to experience Christ's blessings if we fail to sincerely believe what God has said. As Gray noted, "We must lay this for a ground, that the fruit of all comes to him through the believing of the promises, and in making application of them."[27]

Gray then described the fruit of believing the promises.[28] He said, first, that believing the promises greatly promotes the difficult work of mortification. As 2 Corinthians 7:1 tells us, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Second, believing the promises helps a Christian in the spiritual and heavenly performance of prayer. In 2 Samuel 7:27, when David received God's promise, he concludes, "Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." In Psalm 119:147, he says, "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word."

Third, believing the promises upholds a Christian afflicted by spiritual desertions and temptations, for "faith will see a morning approaching in the time of the greatest trouble" (cf. Pss. 94:18; 119:81).[29]

Fourth, believing fosters patience and submission in the midst of the saddest afflictions. As David writes, "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me," and, "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction" (Ps. 119:50, 92).

Fifth, believing helps a Christian distance himself from the world and live more as a pilgrim on earth. Hebrews 11:13 tells us that the patriarchs died in faith, not having received the things promised but acknowledging the truth of them because the things promised were to be found not on earth but in God (v. 16). They experienced the promises as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Sixth, believing is the mother of much spiritual joy and divine consolation and helps a Christian to express praise. David's hope in the promises moved him to say to the Lord, "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more" (Ps. 71:14). Peter talked of inexpressible joy because of what the promises say about Christ and the assurance that is ours as we hope in Him (1 Peter 1:8–9).

Seventh, believing is a notable means to attain spiritual life (Isa. 38:16; Ps. 119:50). Gray asked, "What is the great occasion that our hearts are oftentimes dying within us like a stone, and we are like unto those that are free among the dead? Is it not because we do not make use of the promises?"[30]

Eighth, believing raises a Christian's esteem of the thing promised. Gray asked, "Why do we write above the head of the great things of the everlasting covenant: This is a Zoar, a little one? Is it because we do not believe?" He continued, "If we had so much faith as a grain of mustard-seed, we would cry forth, 'How excellent are these things that are purchased to the saints and how eternally are they made up, that they have a right but to one line of the everlasting covenant, that is well ordered in all things, and sure.'"[31]

Ninth, belief is the door through which the accomplishment of the promises enters (Luke 1:45; Isa. 25:9). Gray said, "Faith makes our thoughts to ascend, and misbelief makes our thoughts descend, in relation to the mercies of heaven."[32]

Tenth, believing secures the advantages mentioned in 2 Peter 1:4: we are brought to the blessed conformity with God that we lost in the fall, and we put off the ugly defilements that are Satan's images on our souls because of the fall.

How fruitful, then, is belief in the promises of God, and how barren is a life of unbelief! Not surprisingly, knowing the great harvest that comes by believing the promises, the devil feels compelled to strike at our faith in the promises—not so

much at our faith in the truth of them as at the faith by which we apply those promises to ourselves.[33]

Echoing Leigh and Gray, William Spurstowe cautioned us not to rest in "a general faith, which goes no further than to give a naked assent unto the promises of the Gospel as true; but does not put forth itself to receive and embrace them as good." True faith is not merely an act of understanding but a work of the heart, as Romans 10:10 tells us, he said.[34] True faith yields assent to the truth of the promise so that it might draw near to Christ and embrace the fruit of the promise, casting itself on Him for life and happiness. Indeed, the danger of a mere assenting faith is seen in Simon Magus (Acts 8:13, 23), the multitudes who heard Christ (John 2:23), and the five foolish virgins (Matt. 25:11), each of whom believed God's promises were true but did not receive and embrace the promises as good.

How great is the distance between the assenting faith of devils (Matt. 8:29) and the trusting faith of true believers (Matt. 16:16), for one is bare credence while the other is divine confidence.[35] Scripture makes this clear in describing the trusting faith of true believers as rolling and staying upon God (Isa. 50:10), trusting in Him (Isa. 26:4), receiving Him (Col. 2:6), and coming unto Him (John 6:36), "all which expressions do speak the spiritual motions and affections of the heart towards Christ in cleaving and adhering unto him, which believers only exercise."[36]

By contrast, unbelievers (often portrayed as hypocrites and castaways) do not rely on God or look to Him (Isa. 31:1), do not trust in Him (Ps. 78:22), do not receive Christ (John 1:11), and do not come to Him (John 5:40), for their faith is merely "a form of faith, [lacking] the power and efficacy which accompanies saving faith."[37]

Christ and His promises do not benefit anyone but those who make a particular application of both Christ and the promises to themselves, an application made by believing.[38] Whoever looks for "the real enjoyment of comfort and peace from the promises, [must not] please themselves in a general assent, which is little worth; but must endeavor to clear and evidence their peculiar interest in Christ and his promises, by a [trusting] application of them unto themselves."[39]

Let us, then, believe the promises of God, not merely assenting to their truthfulness, but trusting in their goodness and just application unto us in our estate, for, Gray wrote, "Christ would account it an excellent courtesy, that you should not dispute, but believe; and that you would look upon your necessities, as his call to believe the promises."[40]

We Must Apply the Promises Application of the promises, in brief, means that we do not sit idle and wait for the promises of God to come true in our lives, but rather, by the Spirit's grace, we lean on them as the king of Israel leaned on his captain's hand (2 Kings 7:2), resort to them as David resorted to the stone in his pouch (1 Sam. 17:40), and eye them as Elijah's servant eyed the sea, waiting for the rain cloud (1 Kings 18:43–44).

We lean on the promises as the king leaned on his captain's hand by serious and frequent meditation upon them. In other words, we make the promises our constant support so that we might "draw forth the sweetness and discover the beauty" within them, Spurstowe said.41 Do we expect to empty a well by drawing a single bucketful or mine a river of all its gold by washing a single panful of water and soil? Neither should we expect to empty a promise of all its worth, comfort, consolation, encouragement, and assurance with a cursory look at it or a rote recital of it.

Spurstowe said meditation on a particular promise is like looking at the night sky.42 At first, we see one or two stars that seem to be struggling to reach us with their light. As we look again, we are able to see other stars that we could not see at first. Finally, when we look once more, the light of those stars seems to so increase that the whole sky appears to be standing at attention as innumerable stars shine in every quarter.

In application, Spurstowe wrote, "When a Christian first turns his thoughts towards the promises, the appearances of light and comfort which shine from them do oft-times seem to be as weak and imperfect rays which neither scatter fears nor darkness; [but] when again he sets himself to ripen and improve his thoughts upon them, then the evidence and comfort which they yield to the soul, is both more clear and distinct; but when the heart and affections are fully fixed in the meditation of a promise, Oh! what a bright mirror is the promise then to the eye of faith! What legions of beauties do then appear from every part of it which both ravish and fill the soul of a believer with delight!"43

Our problem, then, is not so much a lack of faith but a failure to truly apply the promises, so as to depend on them. As we read the Scriptures and come across a particular promise that directly speaks to our situation, we yield a hearty amen to it, but then we quickly close our minds as we close our Bibles and think no more of it, trying once again to live independently from the promises. It is as if we expect the fulfillment of a promise to drop from the sky into our laps simply by our knowing and assenting to it. When the fulfillment of that promise does not happen, we look for another promise, hoping to light upon one with efficacy.

The problem is not the promise; it is our failure to lean and depend on it in

meditation, to confer with it and chew on it until we feel the sweetness of it in our mouths. It is by meditation that we "dive into the depths of the promise" and "make clefts into the promise."[44] For as Spurstowe said, "One promise thoroughly ruminated and mediated upon is like a morsel of meat well chewed and digested, which distributes more nourishment and strength to the body than great quantities taken down whole."[45] Applying the promises of God means fixing our minds on them until the very weight and number of our thoughts, like a winepress, turn the promise into "a strengthening and reviving cordial."[46]

Applying the promises means always keeping some specific promises on hand. We may not know when the waters will rise around us, but if we are prepared, we can make our escape to higher ground. We may not know when pain will lay us low, but if we have medicine on hand, we can often quickly find relief. Likewise, we may be ignorant of the temptations we will face in a given day, the hardships that will befall us, the effect the economy will have on us, and the doubts that might arise in our minds. But why should we be caught unawares? Why should we wait until the trial comes before we seek relief? Applying the promises means keeping those that pertain to various trials "at the ready" so that, come what may, we have recourse to divine support and comfort.

Spurstowe suggested several promises that we might keep on hand. In times when we find ourselves burdened with sin and giving way to despair, we can reach for the stone of Exodus 34:6–7: "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." If we are mourning a lack of holiness, we should reach for Hosea 14:5–7, in which God promises to plant and water all our graces: "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." Think of the encouragement and comfort we can draw from Isaiah 43:2–3 in times of danger: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." God promises either to deliver us from troubles or to support us in the midst of troubles, but in either case we have great comfort with such a promise on hand.

I witnessed this first hand only weeks after these words were written. I was called to minister to a dear middle-aged believer in London who had just been diagnosed with cancer even as she was seeking grace to cope with two blind

children with severe kidney problems, one of whom was expected to live for only a few weeks. When I asked, “How are you managing to cope with all these trials,” she responded with a smile, and said, “The Lord has been so good to me. He keeps bringing back His precious promises into my mind—often in the night seasons—even promises that I had long forgotten. His promises are more than sufficient for all my trials.”

How lost we are when we remain ignorant of the divine promises! We believe that we have recourse to them as the children of God, but we fail to remind ourselves of that. We neglect to keep them on hand as stones at the ready, and when a lion, a bear, or a Goliath approaches, we feel empty-handed and suffer the loss of available comfort and peace. As Spurstowe said, “Oh! how securely and contentedly then may a believer, who acts his faith in such promises, lay himself down in the bosom of the Almighty in the worst of all his extremities! Not much unlike the infant that sleeps in the arms of his tender mother with the breast in his mouth, from which, as soon as ever it wakes, it draws a fresh supply that satisfies his hunger, and prevents its unquietness.”47

Finally, applying the promises means eyeing them as Elijah’s servant eyed the sea in search of a rain cloud and waiting patiently for their fulfillment. Peter speaks of scoffers in the last days who mock the promise of Christ’s second coming because “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3–4). Because things do not materialize as expected and fulfillment is so long in coming, people accuse God of lying and give up on waiting. If we are to apply the promises, we must be patient, neither casting away our confidence in them nor neglecting to lean and depend on them daily for encouragement and hope. God has promised, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud…so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:10–11).

Spurstowe said we often act like sick people who conclude that medicine is unhelpful if it does not immediately remove their pain, when all the while the medicine is working to prevent the sickness from taking greater hold on their bodies. Even so, when we are in difficulty and the promises or ordinances of God offer no immediate relief, we grow impatient and are prone to throw off the use of such means, concluding that they are of no value.

The loss of faith in the promises is more devastating than can be imagined, for though we may not perceive what work God is doing in our hearts, and though we may not see the fruit that we expect to see, it always profits us to keep our eye on the promises of God. They have a cleansing and purifying effect on our

souls, which we may not perceive but which manifests itself in keeping us from evil things and from stumbling into sin. Without the quiet and insensible work of the promises in our hearts, we might be led far astray. As Spurstowe put it, "And so may I say to them that complain [that] they ruminate often upon the promises in their thoughts, plead them in their prayers, read them in the Word, but yet find no benefit or fruit from them; that in so doing, they are not only more holy and free from lusts than others who neglect them; but far better than otherwise [they] themselves would be, should they not be employed in such spiritual and blessed services."[48] Sometimes the promises fall like spring showers in the middle of the day, and at other times they light upon us as imperceptibly as the dew during the night hours. In the latter case, the virtue of their activity is as real as in the former.

Our hope in eyeing the promises is that their fulfillment will indeed come. Habakkuk 2:3 encourages us not to lose heart but to wait for the Lord. He says, "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." The Lord has set a date and time for the fruition of His promises, but that is His timing, not ours. We must look to Him as the all-wise God and wait on Him with submission and contentment, for His timing is perfect; He is never late but is always on time. Spurstowe said, "A good heart, though it will not let God wait long…for its obedience, yet it will wait as long as God sees good for his promises, saying only with David, Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope" (Ps. 119:49).[49] Indeed, we must remember that "promises are not made and fulfilled at the same time, no more than sowing and reaping are on the same day."[50]

Gray said we must wait on God's timing and not give up confidence when what we sense does not agree with what is promised. He says our sense is not part of the promise; rather, it is an indulgence that the Lord dispenses as He sees fit. In other words, when God promises something, He does not promise that sense and reason will precede or accompany the fulfillment. We must not judge the probability or certainty of a promise being fulfilled upon these grounds. Gray said, "Do not expect sensible comforts immediately after you have believed the promises. A Christian may apply the promises and yet want [lack] the joy and sweetness that is in them."[51]

David cries out for God to fulfill His Word: "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word" (Ps. 119:25). Gray explained, "I would press this upon you—prophesy nothing before your believing of the promise; but having believed, you may surely prophesy that the promise shall be accomplished in its own time, and the word that he has spoken shall certainly come to pass. But as for sense, as for quickening, as for comforting, as for

receiving, you must put a blank in the hand of Christ, to dispense these things to you as he sees fit."[52]

Furthermore, Gray said, those promises that are fulfilled after much faith and a long wait are more precious and sweet because we have spent many nights in the watchtower with our eyes on the horizon. In a sense, they have cost us much; therefore, we prize them when they come. If we cast off hope, though we may eventually see the fulfillment of a promise, it will not be as sweet to us as it would have been had we continued to watch for it. Gray concluded, "I think sometimes a Christian is like that misbelieving lord in 2 Kings 7:2, that though he meets with the accomplishment of a promise, yet he does not taste of the sweetness that is in it, because he did not believe the word of the Lord."[53]

Let us, then, who believe the promises of God go on to apply them to ourselves through serious meditation on them and habitual recourse to them. Let us patiently wait for their fulfillment, thereby preparing ourselves to take possession of and enjoy the full sweetness of them when, in the Lord's wise timing and way, they are fulfilled unto us.

We Must Pray the Promises Praying the promises is the most important element in the right use of the promises. This is because, despite all our striving to believe and apply the promises of God, we sometimes still find ourselves "troubled on every side; without [are] fightings, within [are] fears" (2 Cor. 7:5), and "pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we [despair] even of life," feeling that "we [have] the sentence of death in ourselves" (2 Cor. 1:8–9). Are we then without hope? When we find ourselves in such dire straits, are we destined to be tossed on the waves of life's storms without the anchor of divine promises?

Not at all. As distant and out of reach as the promises of God may seem to us in such straits, a mighty means of comfort is still available to us. That means is prayer. Even when everything seems to have failed and the very bottom of life seems to have fallen out, if we but cry out to God in prayer, even if we merely utter groans before the throne of God (Ps. 22:11–15), it will be enough. We will find almost unexplainable strength to go on, we will find hope for another day, and we will be enabled to boast of the Lord and His promises (Ps. 22:19, 22–24). Prayer, more than anything else, denies self, relinquishes control, confesses need, leans on God, goes outside of ourselves, and cries out for help. Prayer that is founded on the promises of God and puts Him in remembrance of them will more than make up for the deficit of our unbelief, impatience, and doubt. Prayer that pleads the promises of God and confesses our hope in His Word will never disappoint, but will strengthen us and carry us through the valley of the shadow

of death until the Lord grants relief (Pss. 27:12–14; 21:7).

Praying the promises, according to Leigh, means two things: using them as the ground for what we ask and as the rule for how we ask it. The promise of God for a certain blessing gives us a sure ground on which to plead for that blessing. "We must see the things we ask, made ours in some promise and engagement, before we presume to ask them," Leigh said.[54] Without that ground, we have no hope of being heard, for as the apostle says in 1 John 5:14–15, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." To ask in faith, believing that we are heard and will certainly be answered, is nothing other than pleading upon a particular promise. Leigh concluded, "Therefore he that prays without a promise, denies his own request,"[55] for "to pray in faith is to go as far as the promise goes."[56] Gray said belief in the promises is a great help to a Christian in his prayers because "a Christian that believes the promises can take the promise in his hand and present it unto God, and say, 'Fulfill this promise, since thou wilt not deny thy name, but art faithful.'"[57]

Several saints mentioned in the Scriptures did just that. Jacob was afraid that Esau, his brother, might kill him, so he called on God by pleading His promise (Gen. 32:9–12). Before crossing the Jabbok River, Jacob prayed, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (vv. 11–12).

Daniel also pleaded a promise of God in prayer. Daniel 9:2–3 says, "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." He then prayed that God would deliver His people as He had promised to do (vv. 4–19).

Likewise, David asked the Lord to bless his house on the basis of the Lord's prior promise to do that very thing (2 Sam. 7:28–29). Such prayers of faith have a particular promise of God as their object and call on the Lord to do as He has said.[58]

Does this mean we cannot pray in faith for things we may desire but for which we have no particular promise from the Lord? Leigh anticipated this question by asking, "If I pray for the salvation of another, I have no promise,[59] so how then can I pray in faith? So likewise when a man prays to be guided in business, to have such an enterprise to be brought to pass, to have deliverance from such a

trouble, such a sickness or calamity that he lies under, he finds no particular promise, and for aught he knows, it shall never be granted: how can he be said to pray in faith? For to pray in faith is to believe that the thing shall be done."[60]

Leigh's answer to his own question brings us back to the goodness and wisdom of God, reminding us that whether or not we have a promise to plead, faith involves our trust and submission. Leigh said, "To pray in faith is to go as far as the promise goes. Now no particular man has any particular promise, that he shall have such a deliverance, that he shall have such a mercy granted him; and therefore it is not required to believe, that that particular thing should be done, but [rather] that God is ready to do that which is best for me, in such a particular, that which shall be most for his own glory, and my good."[61] We may still pray in faith, but in the faith of submission and not with definite assurance. In this type of faith, we believe we will receive an answer of good tidings, knowing that the good we receive will be determined according to what most glorifies the Lord and is best for us and those for whom we pray.

In writing about the wisdom of God in fulfilling His promises in due season, Spurstowe also urged submissive praying. He said, "It is good in prayer to have the desires winged with affection and to be like an arrow drawn with full strength, but yet there must be a submission exercised unto the holy and wise will of God, that so it may appear that we seek him in a way of begging, and not by way of contest; that we make him not the object only of our duties and ourselves the end, but him to be both the object and the end of every service which we give unto him."[62] By submitting in prayer to God's wisdom and will, we show that what we want more than what we pray for is to glorify the Lord. We want His Name to be hallowed, and we trust Him to fulfill His promise to us when it best suits our welfare and His glory. We show that He is our portion, and there is nothing we desire beside Him (Ps. 73:25–26).

If the promises provide us a ground on which to pray, they also provide us a rule for how to pray. Leigh said we should pray for things as they are promised. Things absolutely promised should be absolutely asked for, with the great assurance that we will indeed, in the Lord's wise time and way, receive the thing He has pledged. But when the Lord has placed conditions and exceptions on a promise, our prayers must be conditional. We must then include some limitation on our prayers such as: "If God sees it to be good…"; "If it be according to His good pleasure…"; "If it may stand with His glory…"; or "If the Lord wills…."[63]

We should think back to the various kinds of promises outlined earlier. Once we see what kind of promise we are dealing with, we may pray in faith that God will do as He has spoken. If we are praying for spiritual things necessary to

salvation, we may pray absolutely because the Lord has absolutely promised in Luke 11:13 that the Holy Spirit will be given to those who ask. If we are praying for help in temptation, we may absolutely pray for it because 1 Corinthians 10:13 absolutely promises that with every temptation God will provide a way of escape so we may be able to endure it.

Even in such prayers for absolute promises, however, we must pray in submission to God's will and wisdom. Praying for things absolutely promised does not mean prescribing to God when or how He must keep His promise. We must trust Him with the circumstances of time, means, and measure, for He has reserved these things in His own power.[64] Spurstowe said,

> God has in his Word recorded [the promises], as so many discoveries of his immutable counsel and purpose, that thereby faith might have a sure ground to rely upon him in all exigencies, and to expect a relief from him, but the season and time of performance, God has reserved to himself, as best knowing not only what to give, but when to give; so that, believers, though they may plead to God his promise, must yet be careful not to confine and limit him to times which they judge fittest; but wholly to resign themselves to his wise disposal, to whom every creature looks, and receive their meat in due season (Ps. 145:15).[65]

How important this reminder is for correcting our impatience!

If we pray for temporal things that are not absolutely promised to us, we must pray conditionally, asking for something insofar as it will glorify God and be for our spiritual good. We must also pray in the belief that God will give us either what we pray for or the equivalent. For example, if we pray for peace in a trial, we must trust that He will grant it if peace will glorify Him, but that if it will not, the Lord will give us patience in its place. For this blessing we have the Spirit to thank, who intercedes for us according to the will of God when we do not know what to pray for, or when, in our ignorance or selfishness, we pray amiss. As Scripture promises, all things work together for our good as we are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:26–29). Take another example: If we pray for wealth or something as simple as a wage increase, we pray rightly when we believe that if it pleases God and will be in our best interest, He will indeed increase our income. But we also pray that, believing that if it does not please God and would be a bane for our spirituality, He will supply us with the necessary contentment to make do with what we have.

Let us, then, strive to rightly use the promises of God, believing them, applying them, and praying them. This is the only way to profit from the instructions of the Puritans on the promises. Knowledge is not meant to stay in

our heads as abstract truth, but must be applied to real life so that we can enjoy its true blessings and real transformation. May this chapter help you experience the inexhaustible richness and support of God's promises for all who call on Him in faith.

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2. Reynolds, *Three Treatises*, part 1, 365.
3. As cited in *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, ed. Alexander F. Mitchell (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1886), 176.
4. Thomas Goodwin, *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 3:321.
5. William Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened…* (London: T. R. & E. M. for Ralph Smith, 1655), 44–45.
6. Reynolds, *Three Treatises*, part 1, 356–57, 345.
7. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*; Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises* (London: A. Miller for Henry Mortlocke, 1657); Andrew Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *The Works of Andrew Gray* (repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 115–68.
8. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 1.
9. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 4–5.
10. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 117, emphasis added.
11. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 10.
12. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 29.
13. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 11.
14. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 12.
15. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 13.
16. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 117, emphasis added.
17. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 16.
18. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 16.
19. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 157.
20. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 157.
21. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 157–58.
22. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 2.
23. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 2–3.
24. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 23–24.
25. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 25–26.
26. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 158.
27. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 158.
28. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 158–63.
29. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 160.
30. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 162.
31. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 162.
32. Gray, "Great and Precious Promises," in *Works*, 163.
33. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 31.
34. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 111.
35. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 113.
36. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 114.
37. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 114.
38. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 115.

39. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 120–21.
40. Gray, “Great and Precious Promises,” in *Works*, 128.
41. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 78.
42. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 78.
43. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 78–79.
44. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 80.
45. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 79.
46. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 81.
47. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 95–96.
48. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 85.
49. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 89.
50. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 63.
51. Gray, “Great and Precious Promises,” in *Works*, 130.
52. Gray, “Great and Precious Promises,” in *Works*, 130.
53. Gray, “Great and Precious Promises,” in *Works*, 166.
54. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 39.
55. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 40.
56. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 41.
57. Gray, “Great and Precious Promises,” in *Works*, 160.
58. See also Nehemiah 1:8–11 and 2 Chronicles 20:1–12.
59. I.e., a promise that that *particular person* for whom we pray will indeed be saved.
60. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 40.
61. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 41.
62. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 65.
63. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 41–42.
64. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, 43.
65. Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened*, 63–64.

SOTERIOLOGY

Chapter 27

The Puritans on the Holy Spirit

> *There is a general omission in the saints of God, in their not giving the Holy Ghost that glory that is due to his person…. The work he doth for us in its kinds is as great as those of the Father or the Son.*
>
> —THOMAS GOODWIN[1]

In his introductory note to Abraham Kuyper's *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, B. B. Warfield makes the following claim: "The developed doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is an exclusively Reformation doctrine, and more particularly a Reformed doctrine, and more particularly still a Puritan doctrine…. Puritan thought was almost entirely occupied with loving study of the work of the Holy Ghost, and found its highest expressions in dogmatico-practical expositions of the several aspects of it."[2] Warfield certainly speaks the truth. While Martin Luther and Martin Bucer have been described as theologians of the Holy Spirit, that title most eminently belongs to John Calvin. The Holy Spirit is everywhere in Calvin's thought, and the third book of his magisterial *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is one of the finest treatments on the Holy Spirit ever written.

Like Calvin, post-Reformation Reformed theologians continued to give a prominent place to the role of the Holy Spirit not only in the area of soteriology, but also in the whole of their theological discourse (e.g., prayer, preaching, interpreting Scripture). If any tradition has the peculiar honor of bequeathing to the church a detailed understanding of the Holy Spirit's person and work, it is the Puritan tradition. Richard Lovelace comments that while Calvin retains his preeminent place among the Reformers as the theologian of the Spirit, the "English Puritans (particularly John Owen and Richard Sibbes) have given us the most profound and extensive biblical-theological studies of the ministry of the Holy Spirit which exist in any language."[3]

It seems strange that besides Geoffrey Nuttall's insightful analysis of the Holy Spirit in Puritan thought,[4] not much attention has been given to Puritan pneumatology in the secondary literature.[5] The pneumatology of the two most well-known Congregationalists of the Puritan era, Thomas Goodwin (1600–

1680) and John Owen (1616–1683),[6] has, however, been the subject of doctoral dissertations.[7] But there were other Puritan theologians who wrote extensively on the Holy Spirit's person and work.[8]

In this book, aspects of Puritan pneumatology find a place in practically every chapter, either explicitly or implicitly, much as they do in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). Nonetheless, given the prominent place accorded the Holy Spirit in the writings of the Puritans, a chapter specifically devoted to their pneumatology is warranted. The aims of this chapter are governed in part by the rest of the book. In the writings of the Puritans, the work of the Holy Spirit receives the most attention in the area of applied soteriology. Other chapters in this book, such as chapter 29, "The Puritans on Regeneration," discuss His work in bringing the elect from a state of wrath to a state of grace. The person of the Holy Spirit also comes under consideration in chapter 5, "The Puritans on the Trinity." Nevertheless, both His work and person will be discussed in some detail in this chapter before looking at the way in which the Holy Spirit was prominently featured in Puritan writings.

Trinitarian Context

After the apostolic era it took considerable time and thought to unpack all the insights of the New Testament regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the main pneumatological achievement from the period of the New Testament to the fourth century was focused on the clear recognition and defense of the full deity and personality of the Spirit. This recognition is well attested in the creedal statement of the Council of Constantinople in 381: "[We believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son is together worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets." The Puritan emphasis on the Spirit built on this ontological foundation of His deity and was a response to the rising threat of Socinianism.[9] Several important Puritan theologians spent extensive theological energy combating Socinian theology. Along with Goodwin and Owen, Francis Cheynell (1608–1665) penned a seventeenth-century classic on trinitarian theology, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*.[10]

Holding to a robust Trinitarianism, the Puritans were not tentative about the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is the Third Person of the Godhead, who is also Jehovah. As Cheynell notes, Christ refers to the Spirit as "He" in order to "point out the peculiar subsistence or person of the Spirit" (John 16:13).[11] Thus, given that the Holy Spirit is not, as the Socinians believed, merely the power of God, but omnipotent Jehovah Himself, He necessarily shares in all the divine attributes (e.g., omniscience and omnipresence). John Howe (1630–1705) forcefully argues this point. The Holy Spirit must be either an uncreated person (orthodox view) or a created power (heterodox view). The simplicity of God demands that His power be uncreated, for "every thing that is uncreated is God."[12] Howe then follows with a flurry of logic in order to prove that the Holy Spirit is God:

> If he be then a created power, the created power of God, or the power of God, but created, then it seems God did, without power, create this power, and was without power till he had created it; so that he did the act of creation (which is an act of omnipotency) when he was impotent. It supposes, first, an impotent God, and then supposeth him, when he was impotent, to create his own power; that is, when he was without all power he did that act which requires an infiniteness of power, to wit, to create. I know nothing that carries clearer evidence with it, than this doth, that the Holy Ghost cannot be that created power which these persons pretend to; or cannot be divine power distinct from God, from the very essence of God. Every thing of God is God, and cannot be otherwise.[13]

Related to this, Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) points out that works of omnipotency (power) are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Reasoning from the lesser to the greater, Charnock notes that the creation of man results from the power of God (Job 33:4). Accordingly, "that great power of changing the heart, and sanctifying a polluted nature, a work greater than creation, is frequently acknowledged in Scripture to be the peculiar act of the Holy Ghost."[14] The Holy Spirit must be God, for if He were not then a greater work is attributed to Him than God's own work of creation. Other divine attributes are assigned to the Holy Spirit. Owen lists several: eternity (Heb. 9:14), immensity (Ps. 139:7), prescience (Acts 1:16), omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10–11), and authority (Acts 13:2, 4).[15]

Owen adds another point—often made by the orthodox—that has reference to whether the Holy Spirit is Himself eternal and uncreated God or merely a created power. A "power" cannot be grieved or lied to. The apostle Peter asks Ananias why he "[lied] to the Holy Ghost" (Acts 5:3), and in the next verse Peter says that Ananias did not "[lie] unto men, but unto God," thus proving both the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit. Commenting on these verses, Owen addresses the personhood of the Spirit: "None is capable of lying unto any other but such an one as is capable of hearing and receiving a testimony.… This he that is lied unto must be capable of judging and determining upon; which without personal properties of will and understanding none can be."[16]

In addition, Owen presents the following arguments to prove the divinity and distinct personality of the Holy Spirit:

- The Spirit shares the same rank and order as Father and Son (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:3–6).
- He has "names proper to a divine person only" (Acts 5:3–4, 9).
- "He hath personal properties": a will and understanding (1 Cor. 12:11; 2:10).
- "He is the voluntary author of divine operations," including creation (Gen. 1:2), speaking through the prophets (2 Peter 1:21), and brings to life, sanctifies, comforts, and instructs.
- "The same regard is had to him in faith, worship, and obedience, as unto the other persons of the Father and Son" (Matt. 12:31–32; Acts 5:3–4, 9; 13:2, 4).[17]

In the last point, Owen notes that worship is given not only to the Father and the Son, but also to the Holy Spirit. Like Owen, Cheynell uses strong language against those who deny that the Scriptures attribute worship to the Spirit. According to Cheynell, besides the Socinians, Arminian and Jesuit theologians

also claim that worship is not to be given to the Holy Spirit. These "blasphemous Hereticks…belch out the language of Hell against the Spirit of Grace" by denying Him the worship that is due to His person.[18]

A principal argument of the Puritans that worship is to be given to the Holy Spirit comes from Christ's institution of baptism in Matthew 28:19, where His ministers are commanded to make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Owen remarks, "All our obedience and profession…are to be regulated by this initial engagement."[19] Consequently, because of the unity of the Godhead, "whatever is ascribed unto the other persons, either with respect unto themselves or our duty towards them, is equally ascribed unto the Holy Ghost."[20] Those who are baptized into the name of the triune God are therefore "sacredly initiated and consecrated…unto the service and worship of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"; otherwise, baptism loses its meaning.[21] Not to worship the Holy Spirit undercuts trinitarian theology, and this conviction explains why so many Reformed theologians accused Arminian divines of being sub-trinitarian at many points.

What is true ontologically of the Holy Spirit—that He is a distinct, divine person in the Godhead—has an important correlation to His work in the lives of believers in relation to the other two persons. The internal acts of the Godhead (*opera Dei ad intra*) are common to the three persons, and what is true *ad intra* (inwardly) has certain parallels with God's *ad extra* (outward) works. So, in the realm of soteriology, the three persons share in equal works. Of course, the Puritans affirmed that the outward works of the Trinity are undivided (*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*) because of the essential unity of the three persons. But the Puritans also held to the view that these "undivided works" often manifested one person in particular as author or agent of the work (*terminus operationis*).

Frequently these works were divided into immanent (e.g., the Father electing), transient (e.g., the Son purchasing), and applicatory (e.g., the Spirit applying) works.[22] In these three divisions there is equality in the works done by the Father, Son, and Spirit. In his treatise on the Holy Spirit, Goodwin emphasizes this point frequently. For example, he argues at the beginning that the work of the Holy Spirit done for the elect "in its kind is as great as those of the Father or the Son."[23] Why? Because "all that Christ did would have profited us nothing, if the Holy Ghost did not come into our hearts and bring all home to us."[24] Goodwin adds, "Christ leads us to the Father (as it were) with one hand, the Holy Ghost the other."[25] Christ showed His love for the elect by dying for them; the Spirit shows His love for the same people by indwelling them. For this reason, Goodwin asserts, provocatively, that believers must "set this grace of the

Holy Ghost's indwelling in us by it, and it riseth up to an equality; and though it fall lower in some respects, yet exceeding that of Christ in others, the scales will be acknowledged even."[26] If, then, the three persons are coequal in every respect, this must necessarily be true of their works in salvation.

Christological Context

The distinct works of each person in the Godhead toward and in the elect must also be carefully understood in light of the christological context of the Spirit's work. This was an area where the Puritans not only excelled, but also made perhaps a unique contribution to Christian theology. Chapter 21, "Puritan Christology," highlights the close connection between the work of the Spirit and the person and work of Christ. In short, in the realm of applied soteriology, all blessings that believers receive are first and foremost true of Christ himself.[27] As John Flavel (1628–1691) notes, "Whatever dignity is ascribed herein to the Saints, there is, and still must be, a Preeminency acknowledged, and ascribed to Christ."[28]

Examples of Puritan authors who highlighted the connection between the Spirit's and Christ's work include Flavel, Goodwin, Owen, Richard Sibbes (1577–1635), and Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664). Early on in their lengthy treatments on the Holy Spirit, Goodwin and Owen give attention to the Spirit in relation to Christ's humanity. The Spirit's work upon Christ equips Him for His work as the only Redeemer of God's elect. Indeed, as Ambrose states, in Christ there is a "compound of all the graces of the Spirit…. He received the Spirit out of measure; there was in him as much as possibly could be in a creature, and more than in all other creatures whatsoever."[29] The Spirit's work was instrumental not only in Christ's state of humiliation, but also in His state of exaltation.

In the state of humiliation, Christ was dependent on the Holy Spirit from His incarnation to the grave.[30] The Holy Spirit formed Christ's human nature in the Virgin Mary's womb. It is true that it was the Son's special act to assume a human nature, but the Holy Spirit formed Christ's human nature from Mary's substance. In His public ministry, Christ received the anointing with the Holy Spirit "above measure" (WCF, 8.3; John 3:34; Acts 10:38). Whether He was preaching (Luke 4:18), or performing miracles (Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:38), or offering up Himself on the cross (Heb. 9:14), Christ did all these things in the power of the Spirit. His human obedience, which included His prayer life, was by the power of the Spirit. When Christ read the Scriptures and learned of His messianic calling, it was the Spirit who confirmed and illuminated these truths in His heart and mind. As Owen remarked, "And hence is [the Spirit] the immediate operator of all divine acts of the Son himself, even on his own human nature. Whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon the human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit, as he is the Spirit of the Father."[31]

At work from the grave to the state of exaltation, the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 8:11).[32] The Spirit also transformed or glorifed Christ's

earthly body to “bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:48). As the king of heaven, Christ pours out the Holy Spirit into the hearts of men, which is the beginning of the application of redemption. That is to say, the Holy Spirit’s work in the hearts of men, from the moment of regeneration to the day of resurrection, is entirely contingent upon Christ’s enthronement and intercession as the victorious prophet, priest, and king. If Christ had not had faith, His people would remain in their unbelief; if Christ had not been justified (1 Tim. 3:16), adopted (Ps. 2:7; Rom. 1:4), sanctified (Rom. 6:9–10; John 17:19), and glorified (1 Cor. 15:35–49), His elect would not receive these blessings. The Holy Spirit bestows these blessings upon the members of the church only because they were first bestowed on Christ. So the Puritan christo-pneumatology may be summed up in this way: whatever is true of Christ’s people must first be true of Christ Himself.[33]

Therefore, any discussion of Puritan pneumatology is necessarily bound up with christological concerns, and vice versa. It is impossible to separate the two loci, as other chapters in this book make clear. Nonetheless, two areas worthy of further reflection concerning the Holy Spirit’s ministry to the members of Christ are His work in prayer and His work in relation to the Word of God. The importance of these two topics for the Puritans cannot be overstated, particularly because as means of grace, prayer and the preaching of the Word played a decisive role in the Puritan understanding of the life of the church as a whole and of the individual Christian.

The Holy Spirit and Prayer

The Holy Spirit and prayer, not surprisingly, are linked with Christ's person and work. A basic axiom of Reformed and Puritan thought on Christ's priestly office is that the Spirit intercedes in us because Christ intercedes for us.

Skilled navigators on the seas of Christian living, the Puritans rightly discerned, in the words of Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594), that "we draw near to God by means."[34] Greenham meant that there are various means of godliness, or spiritual disciplines, by which God enables Christians to grow in Christ until they reach the haven of heaven. Similarly John Preston (1587–1628) argued that there are various means of godliness that the Christian must be diligent in using to maintain spiritual life and growth, such disciplines as "hearing the word, receiving the sacrament, prayer, meditation, conference, the communion of saints, particular resolutions to [do] good."[35] None of these means of grace or spiritual disciplines were sufficient in and of themselves to nourish the soul of the believer or to sustain the spiritual life of a congregation. Only the Holy Spirit was competent for that. But the Puritans were also persuaded that to seek the Spirit's power apart from the appointed means was both unbiblical and misguided.

While Preston lists a number of means of grace, three were regarded as central by this tradition: prayer, the preaching of the Word, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. For example, Greenham could state, "The first means [of grace] is prayer…. The second means is hearing of his word…. The third means whereby we draw near, is by the Sacraments."[36]

Given their deep interest in the Holy Spirit, the Puritans invariably rooted their discussion of prayer in Him and His work. A cluster of biblical texts were central in giving shape and substance to their reflections on this vital subject: the description of the Spirit as "the spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zech. 12:10); the admonition both to ask the Father for the Spirit (Luke 11:13) and to pray always in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20); the experience of calling upon God as "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 4:6); and the encouragement in that unique passage on the Spirit's intercessory work, Romans 8:26–27.[37] In what follows, we will study what the Puritans had to say about prayer by means of two of these texts that explicitly link prayer to the Spirit, Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 8:26–27.[38]

The Spirit of Supplications (Zech. 12:10) John Owen said, "That eminent place of Zech. xii.10 is always in our thoughts."[39] This preoccupation is not surprising as there are a number of things in the text that appealed to Owen's Puritan mind: the idea of the outpouring of the Spirit; the designation of the Spirit as the "spirit

of grace," a subject of perennial interest to Calvinists; the prophetic reference to the crucified Christ; and, not least, the picture of the Spirit as the inspirer of prayer. Near the end of his life, Owen put into print some of the fruits of a life-long meditation on this Old Testament verse. His major treatise on prayer, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer* (1682), took this text as its theme verse.[40]

The Spirit is called "the spirit of supplications" in this verse, Owen reasons, because He creates within believers the desire to pray as well as enables them to engage in prayer: "He both disposes the hearts of men to pray and enables them so to do."[41] Left to ourselves, Owen notes, "we are averse from any converse and intercourse with God." For, "there is a secret alienation working in us from all duties and immediate communion with him."[42] In other words, if the Spirit did not stir up believers to pray, the remnants of their sinful nature would keep them from communing with God.

Owen's friend John Bunyan (1628–1688) said much the same thing in his inimitable style. Making reference to his experience in *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, which he wrote around 1662,[43] Bunyan stresses that only the Spirit can enable the believer to persevere in prayer once he or she has begun:

> May I but speak my own Experience, and from that tell you the difficulty of Praying to God as I ought; it is enough to make your poor, blind, carnal men, to entertain strange thoughts of me, For, as for my heart, when I go to pray, I find it so loathe to go to God, and when it is with him, so loathe to stay with him, that many times I am forced in my Prayers; *first* to beg God that he would take mine heart, and set it on himself in Christ, and when it is there, that he would keep it there (Psalm 86.11). Nay, many times I know not what to pray for, I am so blind, nor how to pray I am so ignorant; only (blessed be Grace) the *Spirit helps our infirmities* [Rom. 8:26].
>
> Oh the starting-holes that the heart hath in time of Prayer! none knows how many by-ways the heart hath, and back-lanes, to slip away from the presence of God. How much pride also, if enabled with expressions? how much hypocrisy, if before others? and how little conscience is there made of Prayer between God and the Soul in secret, unless the *Spirit of Supplication* [Zech. 12:10] be there to help?[44]

This passage displays two of the most attractive features of the Puritans: their transparent honesty and their in-depth knowledge of the human heart. From personal experience Bunyan knew well the old nature's allergic reaction to God's presence. So, were it not for the Spirit, none would be able to persevere in prayer. Little wonder that following this passage on the difficulty of praying,

Bunyan concludes with an allusion to Zechariah 12:10: "When the Spirit gets into the heart then there is prayer indeed, and not till then."[45]

Also commenting on this verse, John Flavel makes the same point: "The habit [of prayer] is given by the Spirit, when the principles of grace are first infused into the soul, Zech. xii.10. Acts ix.11."[46] Flavel illustrates this principle with the Lord's statement to Ananias about the newly converted Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9:11. The Lord tells Ananias, "Behold, he prayeth." We see the same texts cited together in the words of Flavel's fellow Presbyterian, Thomas Manton (1620–1677): "Habitual grace is necessary to prayer: Zech. xii.10, 'I will pour upon them a spirit of grace and supplication.' Where there is *grace* there will be *supplication*. As soon as we are new born we fall a-crying; 'Behold, he prayeth,' Acts ix.11, is the first news we hear of Paul after his conversion."[47]

Finally, to Christians who say they cannot pray, popular Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) responds with the same text. Surely this text indicates, he argues in *The Privie Key of Heaven; or, Twenty Arguments for Closet-Prayer* (1665), that all genuine believers are indwelt by the Spirit. And because the Spirit who indwells them is the "Spirit of prayer and supplication," they must then be able to pray.[48] Brooks is convinced on the basis of this text that "the more any man is now under the blessed pouring out of the Spirit of Christ, the more that man gives himself up to secret communion with Christ."[49]

The Intercessory Spirit (Rom. 8:26–27) If there is one Scripture text to which the Puritans gave first place in elucidating their doctrine of prayer, it was Romans 8:26–27.[50] This passage's focus on the inability of believers to pray as they ought and the Spirit's intercessory groaning is unique in Scripture. Surprisingly, the Puritans had difficulties with the idea of the Spirit actually "groaning" and praying for believers. To suppose that the Spirit actually prays for believers, Owen argues, would obviate the need for Christ's intercessory work. It would also indicate, Owen believes, that the Spirit is not fully God, for "all prayer…is the act of a nature inferior unto that which is prayed unto."[51] What the passage must then indicate is parallel to the thought behind Zechariah 12:10: the Spirit is the creator of all genuine prayer. David Clarkson (1622–1686), who assisted John Owen for a number of years, presents a detailed analysis of this passage along these lines in a sermon titled "Faith in Prayer." He speaks for the Puritan tradition when he states:

> It is his function to intercede for us, to pray in us, i.e., to make our prayers. He, as it were, writes our petitions in the heart, we offer them; he indites a good matter, we express it. That prayer which we are to believe will be accepted, is the work of the Holy Ghost; it is his voice, motion, operation,

> and so his prayer. Therefore when we pray he is said to pray, and our groans are called his, and our design and intent in prayer his meaning… Rom. viii.26, 27.[52]

That the Spirit stands behind all genuine praying should not be taken to mean that the Christian at prayer is simply passive in the Spirit's quickening hands or that he or she is to do nothing until the Spirit moves. William Gurnall (1616–1679), one of the few Puritans who remained in the Church of England after the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662, declares that the Holy Spirit "doth not breathe in us as one through a trunk or a trumpet, which is a mere passive instrument." There is, Gurnall suggests, "a concurrence both of the Spirit of God and the soul or spirit of the Christian" in the act of prayer.[53] Both are active. Manton also observes, "We are not to stay from our duty [of prayer] till we see the Spirit moving; but to make use of the power we have as reasonable creatures…and in the way of duty to wait and cry for the necessary influences of the Lord's Spirit: Cant. iv.16, 'Awake, O north wind! and come, thou south wind! blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow forth.'"[54] A well-turned Puritan saying from Owen sums up the matter well: "The gifts of the Holy Ghost are the fire that kindles all our sacrifices to God."[55]

The first two clauses of Romans 8:26–27 indicate why we need the Spirit's help when it comes to praying: we are beset by infirmities, and we do not know what to pray for "as we ought." Numerous Puritan authors commented at length on the meaning of these clauses. Taking together Manton's sermons on these verses,[56] Owen's *Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, and Bunyan's comments in *I Will Pray with the Spirit* as representative, we are brought to the very heart of the Puritan case for the vital necessity of the Spirit's aid in prayer.

Generally speaking, these Puritan authors were critical of written or form prayers. For example, at John Bunyan's trial in 1661, Judge John Kelynge asked Bunyan to justify his absence from worship in the local parish church. Bunyan, true to his Puritan heritage, stated that "he did not find it commanded in the word of God."[57] Kelynge pointed out that prayer was a duty. Bunyan agreed, but he insisted that it was a duty to be performed with the Spirit's aid, not by means of the Book of Common Prayer, which set forth the form and contents of public worship in the Church of England. Bunyan proceeded to argue:

> Those prayers in the Common Prayer-book, was such as was made by other men, and not by the motions of the Holy Ghost, within our hearts…. The scripture saith, that it is the Spirit as helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh

> intercession for us, with sighs and groanings which cannot be uttered. Mark…it doth not say the Common prayer-book teacheth us how to pray, but the Spirit.[58]

Bunyan's rejection of the use of written prayers cannot properly be understood apart from the view of his Puritan contemporaries and forebears.[59] John Calvin had defined prayer as essentially an "emotion of the heart…which is poured out and laid open before God."[60] At the same time Calvin also composed written prayers for public worship. Some of his spiritual children among the English Puritans, such as Richard Baxter (1615–1691), preserved both usages. Many Puritans, however, concluded from Calvin's view of prayer that there was little or no need for written forms of prayer.

Walter Cradock (c. 1606–1659), Welsh Independent preacher and author, stated forthrightly, "When it may be the poor [Minister]…would have rejoiced to have poured out his soul to the Lord, he was tied to an old Service Book, and must read that till he grieved the Spirit of God, and dried up his own spirit as a chip, that he could not pray."[61] Owen, Bunyan's friend and admirer,[62] similarly maintained that "constant and unvaried use of set forms of prayer may become a great occasion of quenching the Spirit."[63] Owen conceded that the use of written prayers is not intrinsically evil, but since the Spirit, whom God had given to the believer, is "the Spirit of grace and supplications" (Zech. 12:10), the believer has all the resources that he needs for prayer. Moreover, Owen affirmed that the "Holy Ghost, as a Spirit of grace and supplication, is nowhere, that I know of, promised unto any to help or assist them in composing prayers for others; and therefore we have no ground to pray for him or his assistance unto that end in particular."[64] These criticisms accurately reflect Puritan dissatisfaction with both the type and content of the prayers in the Book of Common Prayer.

Undergirding both Cradock's and Owen's approach to prayer was an intense interest in the work of the Spirit in general and the accompanying recognition that only with His empowering could God be rightly served and worshiped (John 4:24).

Word and Spirit: Owen's Refutation of Quakerism In June 1654, Elizabeth Fletcher (c. 1638–1658) and Elizabeth Leavens (d. 1665), Quakers from Kirby Kendal, Westmoreland, visited Oxford, the first to bring the Quaker message to the university town.[65] They sought to warn the students about the ungodly nature of academia and to convince them that their real need was not intellectual illumination but the inner light given by the Holy Spirit. Their message fell largely on deaf ears. Elizabeth Fletcher felt led by God to resort to a more

dramatic testimony to arrest the students' attention. She bared her breasts and walked half-naked through the streets of Oxford as "a sign against the Hypocritical profession they then made there, being then Presbyterians & Independents, which profession she told them the Lord would strip them of, so that their Nakedness should appear."66 Fletcher's "going naked as a sign," a practice common among the early Quakers,67 sparked a hostile reaction among the students. Some of them seized her and her companion, dragged them through a miry ditch, and then half-drowned them under the water pump on the grounds of St. John's College. At some point Fletcher was either thrown over a gravestone or pushed into an open grave, sustaining injuries that plagued her for the rest of her short life.

This ordeal did little to dampen the women's spirits. The following Sunday they visited an Oxford church where they interrupted the service in order to give a divine warning to the congregation. This time they were arrested and held in the Bocardo prison. The following day, Owen, who as vice-chancellor was responsible for discipline within the university, accused the two Quakers of blaspheming the Holy Spirit and profaning the Scriptures. Convinced that if the women's behavior were left unpunished it would incite disorder in the university, Owen ordered the women to be whipped and expelled from the town.

Two years later Owen had another memorable encounter with the Quakers. This time it was a theological debate in Whitehall Palace with the man who would come to be viewed as the foremost figure in the seventeenth-century British Quaker community, George Fox (1624–1691).68 Fox later recounted what transpired when he and another Quaker, Edward Pyott (d. 1670), visited Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), who was then ruling England as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth:

> Edward Pyott and I went to Whitehall after a time and when we came before [Cromwell] there was one Dr. John Owen, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford with him: so we was moved to speak to Oliver Cromwell concerning the sufferings of Friends and laid them before him and turned him to the light of Christ who had enlightened every man that cometh into the world: and he said it was a natural light and we showed him the contrary and how it was divine and spiritual from Christ the spiritual and heavenly man, which was called the life in Christ, the Word and the light in us. And the power of the Lord God did rise in me, and I was moved to bid him lay down his crown at the feet of Jesus. Several times I spoke to him to the same effect, and I was standing by the table; and he came and sat upon the table's side by me and said he would be as high as I was. And so he

continued speaking against the light of Christ Jesus.[69]

These two incidents display some of the central features of early Quakerism: its emphasis on the divine light within every human being (a conviction drawn from John 1:9), its fiery prophesying and proselytizing, its contempt of university learning, and its reliance on dramatic and socially disruptive gestures.

Quakerism during the Commonwealth The Quaker movement was a product of the turmoil of the English Civil War (1642–1651), when familiar social, political, and religious boundaries were swept away by the tides of conflict and when tried and true religious practices and beliefs no longer seemed to carry their former weight. Numerous individuals, many of them raised in a Puritan environment with its emphasis on radical depravity and the need for the sovereign, converting work of the Spirit, had begun seeking for a work of God to bring peace to their souls in the midst of the massive upheaval of the times. Some of these so-called Seekers longed for a restoration of the charismatic vitality and simplicity they believed to be characteristic of the apostolic church. As J. F. McGregor points out, they regarded the sign of a true church of Christ to be "its possession of the grace given to the apostles and demonstrated through miracles." Since none of the Puritan congregations claimed to be in possession of such charismatic or extraordinary gifts, the Seekers felt that they had to withdraw from those churches and wait for what they hoped would be a new divine dispensation.[70] For many Seekers, that divine dispensation appeared with the advent of the Quakers and their message.

Although there were a number of key figures in Quakerism's early days, men such as Edward Burrough (1634–1662), Richard Hubberthorne (1628–1662), William Dewsbury (c. 1621–1688), and James Nayler (1616–1660), it was George Fox who served as the principal catalyst to bring together many of these Seekers into "a loose kind of church fellowship with a coherent ideology."[71] By the late 1660s most of these early Quaker leaders were dead, but Fox survived to become the nucleus around which the Quaker community eventually coalesced in the late seventeenth century as the Society of Friends.

A one-time shepherd and shoemaker, "literate, but not learned,"[72] Fox left his native village of Drayton-in-the-Clay (now Fenny Drayton), Leicestershire, in 1643, and for lengthy periods over the next four years tramped through the Midlands and as far south as London. His goal during this period of physical wandering seems to have been the acquisition of spiritual wisdom. He spent considerable time with the General (i.e., Arminian) Baptists, whose influence on him may be seen in his later rejection of orthodox Puritan soteriology, in particular, the doctrine of predestination.[73]

Finally, in 1647 and 1648 Fox found wisdom "without," he wrote, "the help of any man, book or writing."[74] Through a series of what he called "openings," or experiences of inner enlightenment, he became convinced, among other things, "that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ,"[75] and that genuine Christianity was essentially a matter of inward spiritual experience. "The Lord God," Fox later recalled in his *Journal*,

> opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the light of life and became the children of it, but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man, neither did I then know, where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw in that Light and Spirit which was before Scripture was given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God, or Christ, or the Scriptures aright, which they that gave them forth were led and taught by.[76]

John 1:9, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," to which Fox alludes in the earlier part of this passage, was at the core of his distinctive message and that of his fellow Quakers. They understood this text to teach that every individual was born with the light of Christ, which, though darkened by sin, was never fully extinguished. For those who became convinced by the Quaker message, this light had succeeded in breaking through the barrier of sin to unite their souls with Christ.[77] This verse thus described what they knew "experimentally," to use Fox's own description of his spiritual illumination. Moreover, this light of Christ shone within their dark hearts, they believed, independent of the various means of grace normally stressed by the Puritans, means such as reading the Scriptures and hearing the preaching of the Word.

This text also helped define the Quaker mission. After his conversion, for instance, Fox was conscious of being commanded "to turn people to that inward light, spirit and grace, by which all might know their salvation, and their way to God; even that divine spirit, which would lead them into all Truth, and which I infallibly knew would never deceive any."[78] We "call All men to look to the Light within their own consciences," another Quaker convert, Samuel Fisher (1605–1665), who had been a Baptist, declared regarding the goal of Quaker

proselytizing. “By the leadings of that Light,” he continued, “they may come to God, and work out their Salvation.”[79]

In the first decade of the Quaker movement, this message enjoyed phenomenal success. Historians often regard 1652 as the start of Quakerism.[80] During the spring of that year Fox took his message north to the Pennines and Westmoreland. On Whitsunday that year, Fox preached to a large gathering of a thousand Seekers not far from Kirby Kendal. “As soon as I heard him declare… that the Light of Christ in man was the way to Christ,” recalled Francis Howgill (c. 1618–1669), a local preacher and one-time Baptist, “I believed the eternal word of truth, and that of God in my conscience sealed to it.” Not only was he convinced of the truth of Fox’s message, but, he remembered, so were “many hundred more, who thirsted after the Lord.”[81]

The Quaker message took root in northern England, particularly in the counties of Westmoreland, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cumberland. Over the next decade it spread south and had a profound impact on at least four other areas: Cheshire; London and those counties directly to the north and east of the capital, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, and Essex; the town of Bristol, along with Somerset and Wiltshire; and the Midlands shires of Warwick and Worcester.[82] Quaker missionary endeavors were not confined to the British Isles, however. By 1660 zealous Quaker evangelists had gone as far afield as Massachusetts, Germany, Rome, Malta, and Jerusalem.[83] As a result of these endeavors, it is estimated that there were at least between thirty-five and forty thousand Quakers in Britain alone by the early 1660s. According to Barry Reay, there may have been as many as sixty thousand.[84]

Exalting the Spirit at the Expense of the Word Alongside the Quaker emphasis on the illumination that came from the light within, which the Quakers variously called the indwelling Christ or indwelling Spirit,[85] there was, as Richard Bauman has noted, the vigorous assertion that Quaker experience involved hearing a divine inner voice. The Quakers did not deny that God could and did speak to people mediately through the written text of Scripture, but they were convinced that they also knew and enjoyed the Spirit’s immediate inspiration and guidance, as did the apostles and saints of the New Testament era.[86] In the words of the Quaker theologian William Penn (1644–1718), immediate experiences of the Spirit “once were the great Foundation of both [New Testament believers’] Knowledge and Comfort, though now mocked at…with great Derision in a Quaker.”[87] In Bauman’s words, “direct personal communion with God speaking within was the core religious experience of early Quakerism.”[88]

Bauman's comment is borne out by a letter that Isaac Penington the Younger (1616–1679) wrote to a fellow Quaker, Nathanael Stonar, in 1670. Penington, who is "a prime example of the intellectual sophistication" of a number of early Quaker converts,[89] told his correspondent that one of the main differences between themselves and other "professors," by whom he meant Congregationalists and Baptists, was "concerning *the rule*." While the latter asserted that the Scriptures were the rule by which men and women ought to direct their lives and thinking, Penington was convinced that the indwelling Spirit of life is "nearer and more powerful, than the words, or outward relations concerning those things in the Scriptures." As Penington noted:

> The Lord, in the gospel state, hath promised to be present with his people; not as a wayfaring man, for a night, but to *dwell in them and walk in them.* Yea, if they be tempted and in danger of erring, they shall hear a voice behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk in it." Will they not grant this to be a rule, as well as the Scriptures? Nay, is not this a more full direction to the heart, in that state, than it can pick to itself out of the Scriptures?… The Spirit, which gave forth the words, is greater than the words; therefore we cannot but prize Him himself, and set Him higher in our heart and thoughts, than the words which testify of Him, though they also are very sweet and precious to our taste.[90]

Penington here affirms that the Quakers esteemed the Scriptures as "sweet and precious," but he was equally adamant that the indwelling Spirit was to be regarded as the supreme authority when it came to direction for Christian living and thinking.[91]

Similarly, George Fox, listening to a sermon on 2 Peter 1:19, in which the preacher told the congregation "that the Scriptures were the touchstone and judge by which they were to try all doctrines, religions, and opinions," found himself unable to contain his disagreement. He cried out, "Oh no, it is not the Scriptures." He then proceeded to tell what presumably was a shocked audience that the touchstone and judge was "the Holy Spirit, by which the holy men of God gave forth the Scriptures, whereby opinions, religions, and judgments were to be tried; for it led into all Truth, and so gave the knowledge of the Truth."[92] And when some Baptists in Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire became Quakers, they were quick to assert that henceforth the "light in their consciences was the rule they desire to walk by," not the Scriptures.[93]

Quakerism thus tended to exalt the Spirit at the expense of the Word.[94] On many occasions this led the early Quakers into bizarre patterns of behavior and speech. Elizabeth Fletcher's going half-naked for a sign is but one example.

Others include Margaret Fell (1614–1702), Fox's future wife, describing him as "the fountain of eternal life" to whom "all nations shall bow";[95] Richard Sale's (d. 1658) acclamation regarding Fox: "Praises, praises, eternal praises to thee forevermore, who was and is and is to come, who is god over all, blessed forever";[96] and James Nayler's shocking reenactment of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem at Bristol in 1656.[97] It was this willingness on the part of the Quakers to go "behind and beyond" the Scriptures that explains much of the "unmitigated abhorrence" for them found in Puritan writings of the time.[98] John Owen was one of Puritanism's sharpest critics of Quakerism. Unlike some of his Puritan contemporaries, however, Owen formed his critique not primarily "by vituperation, but by close and careful argument."[99]

John Owen, Critic of Quakerism Owen was quite prepared to admit that some "edification" can be found in the "silent [worship] meetings" of the Quakers.[100] On the whole, however, he saw them as "poor deluded souls."[101] Their teaching about the inner light is an attack on the work and person of the Holy Spirit, a "pretended light," and possibly even "a dark product of Satan."[102] When they pointed to the trembling and quaking that sometimes gripped men and women in their meetings as evidence of the Spirit's powerful presence, Owen saw only "a spirit of bondage" that threw them "into an un-son-like frame." Their worship was further flawed by their discarding of the "sacraments…baptism and the supper of the Lord, which are so great a part of the mystical worship of the church."[103]

Owen was not surprised, though. Both of these ordinances speak about the heart of the Christian faith, "the sanctifying and justifying blood of Christ." But the Quakers, Owen is convinced, had forsaken the gospel's emphasis on the objective, atoning work of Christ for a focus upon the "light within men," and these two ordinances cannot "contribute any thing to the furtherance, increase, or establishment, of that light."[104] At the heart of this mistaken focus of the Quakers, Owen felt, was their failure to grasp the trinitarian nature of the work of redemption. "Convince any of them of the doctrine of the Trinity," he wrote in 1674, "and all the rest of their imaginations vanish into smoke."[105]

Owen argues that the Quaker lauding of the light within, which they often identified with the Spirit, seems to be a subtle attempt to exalt the Spirit by the Spirit. Jesus' statement in John 16:14, that the Spirit "shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you," is crucial to understanding the saving work of the Trinity, and it reveals that the message of the Quakers is actually an inversion of "the order of the divine dispensations." The Holy Spirit has not come to glorify Himself. According to Owen's reading of John 16:14,

the Father sent the Spirit in love to make the Son "glorious, honourable, and of high esteem in the hearts of believers," and to shed "abroad the love of God in our hearts." The Spirit's mission in this regard runs parallel to the Son's being sent by the Father "to suffer at Jerusalem…for us" and to bring glory to the one who sent Him.[106]

Owen's most concentrated attack on the Quakers is found in his *Pro Sacris Scripturis Exercitationes adversus Fanaticos*—literally, "A Defense of the Sacred Scripture against the Fanatics"—published in 1659.[107] In his biography of Owen, Peter Toon suggests that Owen's writing the treatise in Latin is a deliberate affirmation of traditional learning in the face of the Quakers' denigration of university education.[108] Toon may well be right, for Owen devotes a substantial portion of the second chapter of this treatise to a defense of sound exegesis and exegetical techniques, many of which were learned in the university environment of the theological college.[109]

The treatise is divided into four chapters. In the first Owen refutes the claim of the Quakers that the Scriptures should not be termed "the Word of God," since, they argued, this title properly belongs to Christ alone.[110] Owen, of course, knew there are biblical texts that do call Christ "the Word," such as John 1:1, John 1:14, and Revelation 19:13. Owen can thus agree with the Quakers that "Christ Himself is the Word of God, the essential Word."[111] Yet this term is also frequently used by the Bible as a self-description, as Owen easily shows. He cites Mark 7:13, for example, where Jesus accuses the Pharisees of preferring their traditions to the commands of Scripture and so "making the word of God of none effect." The Scriptures are also to be considered a spoken declaration of the will and mind of God and, as such, His Word. Owen then points his readers to verses such as Exodus 34:1 and Revelation 21:5, which refer to the inscripturation of God's spoken Word. He also notes a passage like Colossians 3:16, which mentions "the word of Christ," which, he rightly states, cannot be Christ Himself. "Scripture," he concludes, "is God's written Word, speaking of him to us."[112] Owen's quarrel with the Quakers over the use of the phrase "Word of God" is no mere matter of semantics. As he would later write in his 1678 treatise *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word*: "Our belief of the Scriptures to be the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the *two springs* of all our interest in Christian religion. From them are all those streams of light and truth derived whereby our souls are watered, refreshed, and made fruitful unto God."[113]

The second chapter of *Pro Sacris Scripturis* opens with what initially appears to be an extraneous issue—a refutation of the claim of the Roman Catholic

magisterium to be "the one, perfect, independent, visible judge and expositor" of Scripture.[114] The link between the Roman Catholic view of the Scriptures and that of the Quakers in Owen's mind seems to be that both groups effectively undermined the authority of God's written Word.[115] Roman Catholics rejected its sufficiency, while the Quakers denied its necessity. There is an area, though, where Owen is in agreement with seventeenth-century Roman Catholic thought: proper public interpreters of God's Word are necessary.[116]

Among the English Puritans, however, the question of who may publicly expound the Word of God had been a hotly debated one.[117] Some, like Richard Baxter, insisted that ordination was the regular pathway to preaching. Owen disagreed:

> Let a faithful man…being furnished with the knowledge of God and the requisite Spiritual gifts for the edification of others (graciously bestowed upon him by God), and also having the time and other things necessary for the right performance of this duty granted him by providence, then I certainly would allow him to interpret the Scriptures and to meet with others for their edification, even though he does not intend ever to holy orders—providing only that he makes no interruption of an established ministry…. Where Christ has provided the gifts there *must* be a vocation.[118]

Owen's insistence that lay preaching not be an "interruption of an established ministry" is an important point in this statement. It indicates his opposition to those radicals, like the Quakers, who wanted to go even further and secure the complete freedom of the pulpit for anyone who wanted to express his opinions.[119]

Having argued the propriety of properly qualified expositors of God's Word, laboring within proper bounds, Owen can now tackle the Quakers' dislike of exposition and expository technique as well as their rejection of the use of commentaries and other books to ascertain the meaning of Scripture. God's gift of human reason, which sets humanity apart from animals, and the necessity of Scripture knowledge to be instructed in the ways of God, require these very things the Quakers despise.[120] "God, in his infinite wisdom, not only arranged the declaration of his will in the Scripture," Owen remarks, "but also arranged that declaration in such a manner as absolutely necessitates the duty of exposition as a function of the Church as long as the Scriptures shall last."[121]

Chapter 3 deals with the perfection of the Scriptures. From personal conversation with Quakers and perusal of some of their books,[122] Owen lists a number of major Quaker opinions with regard to the Scriptures that he wishes to refute. Two in particular receive detailed attention. Owen notes their denial that

"the Scriptures are the settled, ordinary, perfect and unshakable rule for divine worship and human obedience." They also argued, he records, that the goal of the Scriptures is to bring men and women to heed the "inner light" within them, and once that has been achieved, the Bible's main purpose has been fulfilled.[123]

Owen's refutation of the first of these opinions begins by stressing that the Scriptures were given to fulfill two broad purposes. In line with his Reformed heritage, Owen reasons that the primary purpose of Scripture is doxological, namely, to glorify God. "Since God does all that he does for his own sake and for his own glory, and as he has produced this surpassing achievement of the written Scripture, given by his absolute sovereign will, then he can have given it for no less supreme purpose." A secondary purpose of the Scriptures is soteriological. They have been given for the salvation of sinners, "the instructing of men in the knowledge and worship of God." Owen insists that these two purposes dovetail, for as men and women are brought by the instruction of Scripture to salvation, God is glorified thereby. Since Scripture perfectly achieves that for which it has been given, it must be deemed "the one and only, absolute and perfect, rule for the whole of divine worship and obedience."[124] A chain of Bible verses is given as support:

> [Scripture's] purpose…is to engender faith. "These things have been written, that ye might believe" (John 20:31); "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). It is "the certainty of those things" (Luke 1:4) which is able "to make thee wise unto salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15); "a sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19), through which we may be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:17), and it is by it that we gain life eternal (John 5:39, 20:31)…. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7), and so it is "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105), it is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16), that which is "able to make thee wise unto salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15) and "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (verse 17). It is that which "is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). So Scripture accomplishes all things which are necessary for God's glory and man's salvation.[125]

Other arguments for Scripture's perfection are drawn from texts that condemn adding to the Scriptures and from the frequency of God's command in His Word that His people diligently heed the Scriptures. Owen also adduces the work of deception carried on by Satan, who has used the "mask of pretended revelations and interior inspiration" throughout history to ensnare human beings. In order to provide "a constant aid and guide" to embattled humanity, God thus caused His

Word to be inscripturated.[126]

Refutation of the other major Quaker argument, namely, their doctrine of the "inner light," is deemed by Owen to be so important that he devotes his fourth and final chapter to this subject. Owen initially sets his reply to the Quaker doctrine of the inner light within the context of a discussion of two central aspects of the history of salvation. First, there is the fact of the fall, an event that extinguished the "inborn spiritual light" that Adam and Eve possessed in the paradisal state. There was, in Owen's words, an "actual inrush of spiritual shade" when they fell, and they, as did their progeny, henceforth lived and walked in darkness.

This situation did not essentially change until the coming of Christ, though the darkness of humanity was alleviated to some degree by the light cast by the Old Testament prophets. It was the coming of Christ, the true Light of the World, and the outpouring of His Spirit that brought sight to the spiritually blind and so transformed "his people from the domain of darkness into the glory of his most marvelous light."[127] Owen's point in reciting these facts is to stress that any remnant of Adamic light that remains in human nature has power enough only to reveal that all human beings are "by nature dead, blind, deaf, darkened of intellect, nay, are very blindness and darkness itself." To obtain salvation requires "the infusion of an outside and spiritual light to irradiate hearts and minds."[128]

Owen rightly understands the Quaker concept of the inner light to be an assertion that the fall was not so radical an event as Reformed theology maintains and thus that the "inborn spiritual light" possessed prior to the fall can still impart a saving knowledge of God.[129] Although Owen was prepared to admit that this remaining natural light could attain to some valid knowledge about God,[130] he essentially rejected the Quaker position. As he stated a number of years later in his *Christologia: or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man* (1679), when he had occasion to comment on the best of Greek philosophical thought:

> There was a notion, even among the philosophers, that the principal endeavour of a wise man was to be like unto God. But in the improvement of it, the best of them fell into foolish and proud imaginations. Howbeit, the notion itself was the principal beam of our *primigenial light*, the last relic of our natural perfections…. But those persons who had nothing but the absolute essential properties of the divine nature to contemplate on in the light of reason, failed all of them, both in the notion itself of conformity unto God, and especially in the practical improvement of it.[131]

The lie is also given to the Quaker notion of the inner light being the common possession of all men by what Scripture tells us about the gift of the Spirit, which the Quakers often equated with the inner light. Owen notes that passages such as Jude 19 declare that "the Spirit of Christ is expressly *not* possessed by some." Referring to Romans 8:9b, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," Owen deduces that "Christ does not bestow his Holy Spirit…on all and sundry."[132]

Not surprisingly Owen devotes some space to the exegesis of John 1:9—"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world"—the textual linchpin of the Quaker position.[133] The Quaker reading of this verse assumed that the participle rendered as "cometh" referred to "every man." Owen's exposition of this text, on the other hand, is informed by his remarks earlier in the chapter about the history of salvation. Christ, the true light, by means of His incarnation, gives light to sinners who are sitting "shrouded in deep shadow." Thus Owen states, "It is not said that Christ illuminates every man coming into the world, but rather that he, coming into the world, illuminates every man." In other words, Owen understands the referent of the participle "coming" to be "the true Light."

Owen's interpretation means that the illumination of which John 1:9 speaks is spiritual light, not a natural light of which all human beings partake. In Owen's words, it is "a fruit of renewal by grace, rather than infusion by creation." As Owen further recognizes, his reading of the passage commits him to taking "every man" in a relative sense, as meaning "all of God's people," and not in an absolute sense, as "all people without exception."[134]

Owen asserts that the means by which this saving enlightenment comes is "the Word and the Spirit."[135] As Owen argues in his later treatise, *Christologia*, the Word is the objective light by which knowledge of Christ is conveyed to our minds (the *medium revelans* or *lumen deferens*). Without the Scriptures we can see nothing of Christ. The Spirit, on the other hand, is the light that illumines the mind (the *lumen præparans, elevans, disponens subjectum*) by means of the Scriptures, to "behold and discern the glory of God in the face of Christ."[136] Quaker assertions of the inner light and their devaluing of the Scriptures thus cut the nerve of true vital experience of the saving light of Christ. Nearly twenty years later, Owen summed up the difference between those of his persuasion and the Quakers along these lines:

> We persuade men to take the Scripture as the *only rule*, and the holy promised Spirit of God, sought by ardent prayers and supplications, in the use of all means appointed by Christ for that end, *for their guide*. They deal

with men to turn into themselves, and to attend unto the light within them. Whilst we build on these most distant principles, the difference between us is irreconcilable, and will be eternal…. Until, therefore, they return unto "the law and testimony,"—without which, whatsoever is pretended, there is no *light* in any,—we have no more to do but, labouring to preserve the flock of Christ in the profession of the "faith once delivered unto the saints," to commit the difference between the *word and Spirit* on the one hand, and the *light within* on the other, unto the decision of Jesus Christ at the last day.[137]

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit is a divine person in the Godhead. With the Trinity defined as one God subsisting in three persons, all sharing in the same divine essence (*tres personae in una essentia divina*), we are in a position to understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In this chapter we have addressed not only the Spirit's ontology, but also the manner in which, according to God's *ad extra* works, the Spirit acts. His specific works are not just important; they are equal with the works of the Father and the Son.

More specifically, our knowledge of the Spirit's work in redemption must be understood in connection with the distinctively Reformed Christology of the Puritans. Their Christology was pneumatic, and their pneumatology was christocentric. These elements come together not only in the specific blessings of salvation bestowed upon the elect, but also in terms of the prayer life of believers and the manner in which believers, by the Spirit, appropriate God's own revelation in His Word. Without the Spirit there is no spiritual life. To put it starkly, the prayers of God's people apart from the Spirit would be no more efficacious than the prayers of pagans. In similar manner, God's written Word apart from the Spirit would be as useful or efficacious as the Koran. At the same time, against the Quakers, the Puritans insisted that the Spirit without the Word is also not useful, but leads into false mysticism. The Spirit who has authored the Scriptures works by the Scriptures. God has appointed means to sanctify the members of the church, and those means, such as prayer and God's Word, are only helpful or effective insofar as they are combined with the Holy Spirit's work in relation to them.

1. Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:3.

2. B. B. Warfield, introductory note to *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, by Abraham Kuyper, trans. Henri de Vries (1900; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), xxxiii, xxviii.

3. Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 120.

4. See Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

5. See, however, Garth B. Wilson, "The Puritan Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: A Critical Investigation of a Crucial Chapter in the History of Protestant Theology" (ThD diss., Toronto School of Theology, 1978).

6. Goodwin, *Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, vol. 6; John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), vol. 3.

7. Paul Blackham, "The Pneumatology of Thomas Goodwin" (PhD diss., University of London, 1995); Dale Arden Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1967). Stover's dated and somewhat problematic dissertation has been critiqued by Kelly M. Kapic in *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 31–33; and Joel R. Beeke,

Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 221.

8. Richard Sibbes, *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Aberdeen: Printed by J. Chalmers, 1809), passim; Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: J. Nisbet, 1870–1875), passim; and William Gouge, *A Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews: Being the Substance of Thirty Years' Wednesday's Lectures at Blackfriars, London* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), passim.

9. For example, see the work of the English Socinian John Biddle, also referred to as the "father of English Unitarianism": *XII Arguments Drawn Out of the Scripture wherein the Commonly-Received Opinion Touching the Deity of the Holy Spirit Is Clearly and Fully Refuted: To Which Is Prefixed a Letter Tending to the Same Purpose, Written to a Member of the Parliament…* (London, 1647). For a response to this work, see Nicolas Estwick, *Pneumatologia: or, A Treatise of the Holy Ghost. In Which, the God-Head of the Third Person of the Trinitie Is Strongly Asserted by Scripture-Arguments. And Defended against the Sophisticall Subtleties of John Bidle…* (London, 1648). For a recent assessment of the impact of Socinianism in England during the seventeenth century, see Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On John Owen's response to Biddle's arguments, see the recent work of Kelly Kapic, "The Spirit as Gift: Explorations in John Owen's Pneumatology," in *The Ashgate Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham, England: Ashgate, forthcoming), chap. 7.

10. London, 1650; also note Cheynell's other earlier substantial work directly opposed to Socinianism, *The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianism* (London, 1643).

11. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 32.

12. John Howe, "The Principles of the Oracles of God," in *The Works of the Rev. John Howe*, ed. Edmund Calamy (New York: John P. Haven, 1838), 2:1094.

13. Howe, "Oracles of God," 2:1094.

14. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 86.

15. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:91.

16. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:87.

17. John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 2:401–3. Cf. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:72–92.

18. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity*, 39.

19. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:72.

20. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:72.

21. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:73.

22. See Goodwin, *Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, 6:47.

23. Goodwin, *Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, 6:3.

24. Goodwin, *Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, 6:15.

25. Goodwin, *Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, 6:21.

26. Goodwin, *Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, 6:41.

27. See the excellent short discussion of this by Richard Sibbes, "A Description of Christ," in The *Works of Richard Sibbes* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers, 1809), 1:98–104.

28. John Flavel, *The Method of Grace*… (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1853), 126.

29. Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*… (London, 1674), 201.

30. On this topic, see Goodwin, *Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, 6:10–13; Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:159–88; Alan Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 165–68.

31. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:162. Sibbes similarly comments,

"Whatsoever Christ did as man, he did by the Spirit." "Description of Christ," in *Works*, 1:102. While Owen provides the more technical discussion of the Spirit in relation to the person of Christ, Sibbes seems to be the Puritan forerunner who no doubt influenced those who came after him, such as Owen and Goodwin.

32. Note, however, Owen's discussion of the trinitarian nature of the resurrection in *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:181–82.

33. Consider Sibbes's words, which could have been echoed by any Reformed theologian of his time: "We must understand this, to give Christ his due honour and respect, and to know whence we have all we have. Therefore the Spirit is said here first, to be put upon Christ. We have not the Holy Ghost immediately from God, but we have him as sanctifying Christ first, and then us, and whatsoever the Holy Ghost doth in us, he doth the same in Christ first, and he doth it in us, because in Christ." "A Description of Christ," in *Works*, 1:104.

34. Cited in Simon K. H. Chan, "The Puritan Meditative Tradition, 1599–1691: A Study of Ascetical Piety" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1986), 11.

35. Cited in Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 13.

36. Cited in Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 11. In *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* ([Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987], xxv), Dewey D. Wallace Jr. has noted that the "major themes of late Puritan spirituality were expressed and cultivated in many ways. Important among these means for stimulation of the spiritual life were reading, attendance at sermons, conferring with the spiritually mature, partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, prayer, and meditation."

37. Roy Williams, "Lessons from the Prayer Habits of the Puritans," in *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1990), 279.

38. For general studies of this subject, see Gordon Stevens Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 67–82; Williams, "Lessons from the Prayer Habits of the Puritans," 272–85.

39. John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 2:230.

40. For a helpful study of Owen's understanding of prayer, see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 224–31.

41. John Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4:260.

42. Owen, *Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *Works*, 4:257–59.

43. For the date, see Richard L. Greaves, introduction to *John Bunyan: The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded and I Will Pray with the Spirit*, ed. Richard L. Greaves (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), x1–x1i. Subsequent quotations from *I Will Pray with the Spirit* will be taken from this text, which is the latest critical edition. For a recent modernization and abridgment of *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, see Louis Gifford Parkhurst Jr., ed., *Pilgrim's Prayer Book* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986).

44. Bunyan, *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, 256–57.

45. Bunyan, *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, 257.

46. John Flavel, *Preparations for Suffering, or The Best Work in the Worst Times*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 6:66.

47. Thomas Manton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Jude* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 338.

48. Thomas Brooks, *The Privie Key of Heaven; or, Twenty Arguments for Closet-Prayer*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980), 2:225.

49. Brooks, *Privie Key of Heaven*, in *Works*, 2:297.

50. Wilson, "The Puritan Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 222.

51. Owen, *Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *Works*, 3:258.

52. David Clarkson, "Faith in Prayer," in *The Practical Works of David Clarkson, B.D.* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 1:207. See also Owen, *Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *Works*,

4:288–90; Thomas Manton, *Several Sermons upon the Eighth Chapter of Romans*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (Worthington, Pa.: Maranatha Publications, n.d.), 12:226.

53. Cited in Williams, "Lessons from the Prayer Habits of the Puritans," 280.

54. Manton, *Sermons upon the Eighth Chapter of Romans*, in *Works*, 12:236.

55. Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *Works*, 4:320.

56. Manton, *Sermons upon the Eighth Chapter of Romans*, in *Works*, 12:225–57.

57. John Bunyan, *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan*, in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. W. R. Owens (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 95.

58. Bunyan, *Imprisonment of Bunyan*, 95–96.

59. The following discussion of "prayer in the Spirit" is indebted to Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), 62–74; A. G. Matthews, "The Puritans at Prayer," in *Mr. Pepys and Nonconformity* (London: Independent Press, 1954), 100–122; Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (1948; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 98–161; Wilson, "Puritan Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 208–23; Alan L. Hayes, "Spirit and Structure in Elizabethan Public Prayer," in E. J. Furcha, ed., *Spirit within Structure: Essays in Honor of George Johnston on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick Publications, 1983), 117–32.

60. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.20.29.

61. Walter Cradock, *Glad Tydings, from Heaven to the Worst of Sinners on Earth* (London, 1648), 29.

62. Owen helped Bunyan publish *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is also said that Owen told Charles II that he would willingly give up all of his learning if he could but preach like Bunyan. See N. H. Keeble, "'Of Him Thousands Daily Sin and Talk': Bunyan and His Reputation," in *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus, Tercentenary Essays*, ed. N. H. Keeble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 243.

63. John Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4:92.

64. John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4:139.

65. For brief biographical sketches of these two women, see "Fletcher, Elizabeth," by R. L. Greaves, and "Leavens, Elizabeth," by D. P. Ludlow, in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. R. L. Greaves and Robert Zaller (Brighton, U.K.: Harvester Press, 1982), 1:292; 2:182. For the following account of their visit to Oxford, see William Sewel, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People Called Quakers* (New York: Baker & Crane, 1844), 1:120–21; and Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen: Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1971), 76. For a similar account of the entrance of Quakerism into Cambridge University, see John Twigg, *The University of Cambridge and the English Revolution 1625–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 193–95.

66. Kenneth L. Carroll, "Early Quakers and Going Naked as a Sign," *Quaker History* 67 (1978): 80.

67. For two excellent studies of this phenomenon, see Carroll, "Early Quakers and Going Naked as a Sign," 69–87; and Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 84–94. See also two related studies by Kenneth L. Carroll, "Sackcloth and Ashes and Other Signs and Wonders," *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* 53 (1972–1975): 314–25; and "Quaker Attitudes towards Signs and Wonders," *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* 54 (1976–1982): 70–84.

68. For a recent biography of Fox, see H. Larry Ingle, *First among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

69. George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John L. Nickalls (Philadelphia: Religious Society of Friends, 1985), 274–75.

70. J. F. McGregor, "Seekers and Ranters," in *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, ed. J. F.

McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 122–23.

71. Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 9.

72. Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 139.

73. For this contact with Baptists, see Ingle, *First among Friends*, 35–38, 42.

74. Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, 11.

75. Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, 7.

76. Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, 33.

77. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 1:203; T. L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 105–11.

78. Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, 34–35. See Underwood's comments on this passage in *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War*, 112.

79. Cited in Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, 33.

80. Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964), 45; Arthur O. Roberts, "George Fox and the Quakers," in *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, ed. John D. Woodbridge (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 273.

81. Francis Howgill, *The Inheritance of Jacob* (1656), in *Early Quaker Writings*, ed. Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 173.

82. Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, 27–29.

83. Barbour, *Quakers in Puritan England*, 67–70.

84. B. G. Reay, "Early Quaker Activity and Reactions to It, 1652–1664" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1979), 218–20; Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, 26–27; Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War*, 10.

85. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War*, 105–7.

86. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War*, 26–27, 32–33.

87. Cited in Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War*, 26.

88. Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few*, 24–25.

89. J. W. Frost, "Penington, Isaac (the Younger)," in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. R. L. Greaves and Robert Zaller (Brighton, U.K.: Harvester Press, 1982), 3:23.

90. Isaac Penington, *Letters of Isaac Penington*, 2nd ed. (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1829), 202–3. For access to this text we are indebted to Heinz G. Dschankilic of Cambridge, Ontario.

91. See also the remarks by Richard Dale Land, "Doctrinal Controversies of English Particular Baptists (1644–1691) as Illustrated by the Career and Writings of Thomas Collier" (PhD diss., Oxford University, 1979), 205–11.

92. Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, 39–40.

93. Cited in Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution*, 34.

94. For a different perspective on this issue, see James L. Ash Jr., "'Oh No, It is not the Scriptures!' The Bible and the Spirit in George Fox," *Quaker History* 63, no. 2 (Autumn 1974): 94–107.

95. Watts, *Dissenters*, 1:209.

96. Cited in Richard G. Bailey, "The Making and Unmaking of a God: New Light on George Fox and Early Quakerism," in *New Light on George Fox (1624 to 1691)*, ed. Michael Mullett (York: William Sessions Limited, The Ebor Press, 1991), 114.

97. For a succinct account of this event, see Watts, *Dissenters*, 1:209–11. See also Charles L. Cherry, "Enthusiasm and Madness: Anti-Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century," *Quaker History* 74, no. 2 (Fall 1984): 7–9.

98 Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "The Quakers and the Puritans," in *The Puritan Spirit: Essays and Addresses* (London: Epworth Press, 1967), 170, 174–75.

99. Maurice A. Creasey, "Early Quaker Christology with Special Reference to the Teaching and Significance of Isaac Penington, 1616–1679" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1956), 158. Creasey's work

has been extremely helpful in following Owen's overall critique of Quaker teaching (see esp. 154–58).

100. Owen, *Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *Works*, 4:331.

101. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:66.

102. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:36–37. See also *A Defense of Sacred Scripture against Modern Fanaticism* (trans. Stephen P. Westcott, in *Biblical Theology*, by John Owen [Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994], 777), where Owen suggests that the Quakers, or, as some called them, "quiverers," were moved "by the power of the evil spirit."

103. Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 2:258.

104. John Owen, *The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel, and the Punishment of Apostates Declared*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 7:219–20.

105. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:66.

106. Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 2:257–58. On the crucial importance of the Trinity for Owen's theology, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1998).

107. This is readily available as an English translation in *Biblical Theology*, by John Owen, 775–854. For the date of this treatise, see Donald K. McKim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Perspective," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (Fall 1973): 198n16. For general studies of Owen's doctrine of Scripture, see Stanley N. Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 189–221; Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 185–201; John Wesley Campbell, "John Owen's Rule and Guide: A Study in the Relationship between the Word and the Spirit in the Thought of Dr John Owen" (MTh thesis, Regent College, Vancouver, 1991).

108. Toon, *God's Statesman*, 76n4.

109. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 805–16.

110. For this claim, see Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War*, 28.

111. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 781–82, 791.

112. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 790–91.

113. Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, in *Works*, 4:121. For further discussion of other aspects of this first chapter of Owen's *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, see Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 67–71.

114. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 793–98.

115. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 65–66. Owen makes the same link in *Causes, Ways, and Means*, in *Works*, 4:121–60.

116. Cf. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 156, 158.

117. For the debate, see especially Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, and Richard L. Greaves, "The Ordination Controversy and the Spirit of Reform in Puritan England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 (1970): 225–41.

118. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 802–3.

119. Greaves, "Ordination Controversy," 227. For further discussion of Owen's thought on the issue of the interpretation of Scripture, see Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 196–99; J. I. Packer, "John Owen on Communication from God," in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), 93–95; Campbell, "John Owen's Rule and Guide," 153–207; Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 84–90.

120. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 806–14.

121. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 814.

122. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 822.

123. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 823–24; see also 833–35.

124. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 824–25. In "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," Gundry notes only the soteriological purpose of the Bible (194).

125. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 828–29. For a brief summary of Owen's conception of the

purposes of Scripture, see Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 199–201.

126. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 829–32.

127. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 841–43.

128. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 846–47.

129. For the Quaker notion of the Spirit in every man, see Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 159–62.

130. See Creasey, "Early Quaker Christology," 164–65, and the texts quoted there. Cf. Owen's remarks in *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 853: "There are remains, although feeble ones, of creation light surviving in all men, but I strongly refute the suggestion that these remnants may be in any degree saving."

131. John Owen, *Christologia: or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:172–73.

132. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 848, 849.

133. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 850–54.

134. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 852.

135. Owen, *Defense of Sacred Scripture*, 852.

136. Owen, *Christologia*, in *Works*, 1:74–75.

137. Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, in *Works*, 4:159–60.

Chapter 28

Puritan Preparatory Grace

> *First, the law prepares us by humbling us: then comes the gospel, and it stirs up faith.*
>
> —WILLIAM PERKINS[1]

Few teachings of the Puritans have provoked such strong reactions and conflicting interpretations as their views on preparing for saving faith. Most twentieth-century scholars dismissed preparation as a prime example of how the Puritans traded the Reformation doctrine of grace for man-centered legalism. More recent scholars have offered a more positive assessment.

"Preparation" refers to God's use of His law to convince sinners of their guilt, danger, and helplessness so that by His grace they may come to Christ. Puritanism developed a vast discourse both explaining God's works of conviction and exhorting sinners to respond by examining themselves, grieving over their sins, and making diligent use of the means of grace (reading, hearing sermons, meditation, prayer, spiritual fellowship, etc.)—all as means of coming to Christ by faith. The Puritan preachers were ardent Reformed evangelists.

The concept of preparation for saving faith raises a number of questions.[2] Not least of these is the question of how a sinner can be prepared for conversion if he is dead in his sins and thus unable to do anything pleasing to God (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:7–8). In the history of the church, some medieval theologians, influenced by the teaching of William of Ockham (c. 1288–c. 1348), proposed that if men did what they could by their own will, then God would give converting grace as their appropriate reward.[3] Their efforts would gain "congruent merit" with the Savior.

As we will see in this chapter, this concept of preparation by free will unto congruent merit—the seeds of which can already by found in Pelagius's theology—was rejected by John Calvin and all the sixteenth-century Reformers as contrary to the biblical teachings of sinful man's spiritual inability and of salvation by grace alone. It was also rejected by mainstream Puritanism, as is

clear from the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), 9.3. At the same time, the Westminster Standards spoke of a common work of the Spirit by which He convicts men of sin through the law as an important precursor to saving faith and repentance unto life.4 The Westminster divines also warned unconverted sinners that though they cannot use the means of grace rightly without faith, "their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing to God" (WCF, 16.7).

But because many Puritans used the language of preparation for conversion and exhorted lost sinners to use the means of grace in hopes of being converted, they have been tarred and feathered with the label of "preparationism." Some New England Puritans have been particularly singled out as "preparationists" because of their extensive development of this theme. At times these so-called preparationists have been played off against Calvin and those faithful to his vision of God's sovereignty. Thus there is said to be a degeneration from pure Reformed theology in the Puritan movement, a degeneration driven by preparationism.

We do not believe that this dichotomy is helpful or true to the facts. Our contention is that there was a fundamental unity among Calvin and the Puritans regarding preparation for faith. Calvin believed in preparation. Most Puritans did also, though they debated among themselves the specifics of the doctrine. The labels "preparationism" and "preparationist" obscure the complexity of those discussions and the concord of Reformed theologians regarding the proper use of the law and exhorting the lost to attend to the means of grace. Calvin and the Puritans taught that man is dead in sin, God regenerates by grace alone, and that conversion ordinarily involves a process of conviction of sin and thoughtful listening to the preaching of the Word. The real preparationists were not the Puritans, but the Roman Catholics and Arminians.

In this chapter, we will do three things. First, we will present an exposition of one Puritan's view of preparation for saving faith. Second, we will review the Calvin-versus-the-Preparationists thesis. Third, we will offer an evaluation of Puritan preparation.

An Exposition of John Flavel's Doctrine of Preparation John Flavel (1628–1691) served as the pastor of a church in the English seaport of Dartmouth, continuing to minister there covertly even after he was ejected in 1662 for nonconformity. His commitment to preach Christ led him to preach at night in the woods and to travel in disguise. He wrote books on spiritual truths that specifically reached out to sailors and to farmers. One of his parishioners remarked that a man must have either a very soft head or a very hard heart not to be affected by Flavel's preaching. One person was converted by remembering a

sermon he heard Flavel preach eighty-five years earlier. Flavel exercised a powerful evangelistic ministry. What were his views on the preparation of sinners for faith?

The Need for Preparatory Conviction In his *Method of Grace* (1681), Flavel wrote that Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, taught two key truths about the law of God: he was "denying to it a power to justify us," but he was also "ascribing to it a power to convince us, and so prepare us for Christ."[5] Flavel believed that such legal preparation was necessary because "unregenerate persons are generally full of groundless confidence and cheerfulness, though their condition be sad and miserable."[6]

Though sinners are under the power of Satan, Flavel said, they are at peace in "carnal security" (Luke 11:21); they have a "presumptuous hope" (John 8:54–55); and they hear the Word with "false joy" (Matt. 13:20). They support this illusory confidence with ecclesiastical privileges, ignorance, and self-deceit, claiming signs of grace in external mercies, superficial responses to the gospel, self-evaluations biased by self-love, and comparing themselves to worse sinners —all of which Satan uses to blind and ruin them.[7] Flavel came to this grim conclusion, "Hence it follows that the generality of the world are in the direct path to eternal ruin."[8]

It is impossible for fallen men to come to Christ without a supernatural work of God, Flavel said. The Puritan doctrine of conversion is incomprehensible without the Reformed doctrine of human depravity. Men's minds are full of "errors, by which they are prejudiced against Christ." Flavel wrote, "The natural mind of man slights the truths of God, until God teach them; and then they tremble with an awful reverence of them."[9] Sin has such a firm grip on the hearts of men that "no human arguments or persuasions whatsoever can divorce or separate them."[10]

The Scriptures cannot penetrate the fallen human soul without divine assistance. Flavel wrote in *England's Duty* (1689) that God's law makes no more impression on the hearts of fallen men than a tennis ball thrown against a stone wall.[11] To men whose hearts are dead in unbelief, the gospel of free grace itself is nothing more than a sweet song to lull them to sleep all the more quietly in their sins.[12]

Therefore people need to hear the preaching of the Word in the power of the Spirit. Flavel said, "There is a mighty efficacy in the word or law of God, to kill vain confidence, and quench carnal mirth in the hearts of men, when God sets it home upon their conscience."[13] By the "word," Flavel meant not only the law but the combined ministry of the law and the gospel: "The law wounds, the

gospel cures."[14] He ascribed converting power not just to the law, but to the law and gospel together.

Flavel said in *England's Duty* that Christ is knocking at the door of the sinner's heart in both the convictions of the law and the sweet allurements of the gospel. The law is significant, but without the gospel, "no heart would ever open to Christ." Flavel said to illustrate, "It is not frosts and snow, storms and thunder, but the gentle distilling dews and cherishing sun-beams that make the flowers open in the spring. The terrors of the law may be preparative, but the grace of the gospel is that which effectually opens the sinner's heart."[15]

Nevertheless, the law has its own power and function in the hand of the Spirit: it has "an awakening efficacy" on slumbering sinners and "an enlightening efficacy" on blinded sinners.[16] The law has "a convincing efficacy" that draws up one's sins like a vast and terrifying army besieging the soul "so that the soul stands mute, and self-condemned at the bar of conscience."[17] The law also has "a soul-wounding, a heart-cutting efficacy: it pierces into the very soul and spirit of man."[18]

Given the power and presence of Christ in the means of grace, Flavel exhorted men "to attend and wait assiduously [diligently] upon the ministry of the word, and to bring all yours that are capable, there to wait upon Christ with you."[19] God is free to act as He pleases by the Word (John 3:8), but the ministry of the Word is "the way of the Spirit" where we hope to meet Him.[20] Though sinners cannot convert themselves, Flavel exhorted them to "strive" to the "uttermost" after salvation, for they do have it in their power to avoid external acts of sin, to attend the external worship ("Why cannot those feet carry thee to the assemblies of the saints, as well as to an ale-house?"), to apply their minds with more attention to the Word, to examine themselves, and to cry to God for mercy. The kingdom must be taken by force (Matt. 11:12).[21]

But sinners must not grasp the means of grace as if conversion could be produced mechanically by human power. Nor should the preacher think that he can induce conversion. Flavel said the word of law and gospel does not have this power in itself, nor from the preacher, but only from the "glorious sovereignty" of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is sovereign over the word, the soul, and the times of conviction and conversion (Isa. 55:10–11; Ezek. 36:26; John 16:8–9).[22] Sinners must be taught by the Father through the Holy Spirit (John 6:45) in order to be converted—not by a vision or immediate revelation, but through the Word.[23]

The Holy Spirit uses the law as part of His ordinary manner of drawing sinners to Christ "in the due method and order of the gospel." Flavel wrote, "In this order, therefore, the Spirit (ordinarily) draws souls to Christ, he shines into

their minds by illumination; applies that light to their consciences by effectual conviction; breaks and wounds their hearts for sin in compunction [pricking or grief]; and then moves the will to embrace and close with Christ in the way of faith for life and salvation."[24]

Clifford Boone notes that Flavel may vary somewhat in describing this process in other writings, but he follows the same general pattern of illumination of the mind, conviction of the conscience and compunction of the affections through the mind, and renewal of the will, with further illumination of the mind in the knowledge of Christ.[25] Flavel's understanding of conversion was shaped by his division of the soul into the faculties of mind, affections, and will. Boone writes, "The faculty psychology of Flavel was inextricably linked with his view of the effectual call. Each step was related to certain faculties. Effectual grace overcame the effect of sin on the faculties."[26] In the preparative stages of calling, the Lord wounds the soul to make way for healing in Christ. God plows the soil to make way for planting the seed which alone can produce a harvest.[27]

Flavel's intent was not to prescribe a set pattern of conversion to which all must conform as much as to describe the stages or steps of God's dealings in general. He said,

> These several steps are more distinctly discerned in some Christians than in others; they are more clearly seen in the adult convert, than in those that were drawn to Christ in their youth; in such as were drawn to him out of a state of profaneness, than in those that had the advantage of a pious education; but in this order the work is carried on ordinarily in all, however it differs in point of clearness in the one and in the other.[28]

Or, to use the language of *England's Duty*, in Acts 16 Christ pounded forcefully on the heart of the Philippian jailer but knocked quietly on the door of Lydia's heart: "The Spirit of God varies his method according to the temper of the soul he worketh on."[29]

In no case are such steps to be relied upon; rather, they are steps toward reliance on Christ as the only Savior. Flavel warned against "a more refined way of self-righteousness" which cloaks itself in such an appearance of humility as to be nearly invincible. He explained,

> I pity many poor souls upon this account, who stand off from Christ, dare not believe because they want [lack] such and such qualifications to fit them for Christ. O saith one, could I find such brokenness of heart for sin, so much reformation and power over corruptions, then I could come to Christ; the meaning of which is this, if I could bring a price in my hand to purchase him, then I should be encouraged to go unto him. Here now lies

> horrible pride covered over with a veil of great humility: Poor sinner, either come naked and empty-handed (Isa. 55:1; Rom. 4:5), or expect a repulse.30

Thus Flavel taught that preparation required humiliation and warned against preparation as a pretext for pride. The Puritans remained vigilant against a works-based righteousness that would deny the gospel principle of justification by faith alone.

Convicting Illumination versus Saving Illumination It is crucial to understand the difference between preparation and regeneration, as well as between conviction and conversion. Flavel explained this in his sermon on the text "Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). He said Christ's light can come to sinners in different ways. First, there is the light that shines in the means, that is, the knowledge given through preaching. Second, there is the light that shines in the soul, yet is "common, and intellectual only, to *conviction*." Third, there is "special and efficacious light" that shines in the soul, "bringing the soul to Christ by real *conversion*."31 All light reveals God. The difference between preparatory conviction and saving illumination is the contrast between the natural conscience's awareness of God's fearsome majesty and a new spiritual insight of Christ's beauty, which anticipates the "new spiritual sense" taught by Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758).32

Mere conviction or "partial conviction" acts upon the natural man's "understanding" to produce "knowledge" and "orthodoxy of judgment" and some "transient motions upon the affections."33 It "may actually shine into the consciences of men by those means, and convince them of their sins, and yet men may hate it, and choose the darkness rather than light."34 Mere conviction will "inform" and "rectify" the intellect and conscience, and may even "give check to the affections in the pursuit of sinful designs and courses," thus leading to moral reform.35 It is more than the "traditional" knowledge of sin possessed by uneducated men, and more than the "discursive" knowledge of sin held by learned men; it is an "intuitive sight of sin" which is as different from the previous two kinds of knowledge as a living, roaring lion is to a painting on a wall.36

In conviction, God's greatness and holiness become vivid and real to the sinner, and judgment day draws near in the conscience. So Flavel wrote, "But when a light from God enters the soul, to discover the nature of God, and of sin, then it sees that whatever wrath is treasured up for sinners in the dreadful threatening of the law is but the just demerit of sin."37 But this does not introduce into the soul a new spiritual sense or new kind of affection toward God. Rather it only energizes the natural conscience of fallen men. Indeed, such

conviction of sin casts Satan out of the faculty of the understanding, but "the soul is scarcely half won to Christ" because "Satan keeps the fort-royal, the heart and will are in his own possession."[38] As a result, sinners under such conviction fear hell but still hate the light.

Similarly, William Perkins (1558–1602) distinguished between the Holy Spirit's work upon the mind and His work upon the will.[39] John Owen (1616–1683) also wrote of preparatory conviction, "It may be observed, that we have placed all the effects of this work in the mind, conscience, affections, and conversation. Hence it follows, notwithstanding all that is or may be spoken of it, that the will is neither really changed nor internally renewed by it."[40]

Flavel wrote that saving illumination, in contrast to preparatory convicting illumination, is worked by "that spiritual and heavenly light, by which the Spirit of God shineth into the hearts of men, to give them 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'" (2 Cor. 4:6).[41] He quoted Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) in saying that saving illumination gives the heart "a due taste and relish of the sweetness of spiritual truth."[42] The new taste of the heart for the sweetness of God is central to Flavel's conception of saving illumination. He wrote, "No knowledge is so distinct, so clear, so sweet, as that which the heart communicates to the head"; it is a new "spiritual sense and experience" which puts Scripture in a whole new light; indeed, it writes "the word of God upon the heart of man" (cf. Jer. 31:33). To view Christ by faith is to see His unsurpassed loveliness with hearty affection.[43] Christ not only "breaks in upon the understanding and conscience by powerful convictions and compunctions," but also opens "the door of the heart," that is, "the will," conquering it and making it willing "by a sweet and secret efficacy." "When this is done," Flavel said, "the heart is opened; saving light now shines in it."[44]

In much the same way, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) said faith is "a spiritual sight" of Christ, the supernatural creation of a new "sense" which is as different from fallen human reason as hearing music with one's ears is different from reading music printed in a book.[45] Owen wrote,

> The effects of this [preparatory] work on the mind, which is the first subject affected by it, proceeds not so far as to give it delight, complacency, and satisfaction in the lively spiritual nature and excellencies of the things revealed unto it. The true nature of saving illumination consists in this, that it gives the mind such a direct intuitive insight and prospect into spiritual things as that, in their own spiritual nature, they suit, please, and satisfy it, so that it is transformed into them, cast into the mold of them, and rests in them.[46]

Flavel distinguished convicting illumination from saving illumination in two ways. First, he said that conviction touches the intellect and conscience, but salvation alone changes the will. Second, he taught a new sense of the heart by which a man sees God's beauty and tastes His sweetness in Jesus Christ. While conviction brings to a sinner a heightened awareness of God's terrible justice and power, only saving illumination grants him the spiritual sense of God's heart-captivating loveliness. This view of regeneration as the granting of a new spiritual sense was shared by other Puritans and perpetuated particularly by Edwards.

Conviction, Conversion, Hope, and Assurance The work of conversion is like conception and birth. Some souls are barren, never feeling the power of the Word. Others feel "some slight, transient, and ineffectual operations of the gospel on their souls." These are spiritual "abortives and miscarriages" which never come to a living birth.47 Yet upon others "the word works effectually and powerfully…to kill their vain hopes." Flavel classified these powerful works as either "embryos" under the initial working of the Spirit, or "complete births" regenerated by the Spirit.48 The language suggests that Flavel considered the new birth to be a process that was not complete until such persons had a living hope in Christ.

But even spiritual "embryos" may find hopeful and encouraging signs in themselves, Flavel said. Do they observe "deeper and more powerful" operations of the Word in their hearts than do those who miscarry?49 Flavel offered three questions that may help define the hopeful signs of the misery of conviction that the Spirit uses to lead to salvation:

- Does the Word show you not just the evil of this or that sin, but also the corruption and wickedness of your whole heart, life, and nature?
- Does the Word merely frighten you with hell or melt you with grief that you have sinned against a holy and good God?
- Does the Word only shake your hopes, or does it drive you to Christ alone as your only door to salvation?50

By asking these questions, Flavel was probing the ways in which saving grace may be at work prior to conscious trust in Christ. The convicted sinner longing for Christ may not as yet have grounds to count himself saved, but he is traveling "in the way of believing." He may in time observe his "sensible changes" and say,

> Time was, when I had no sense of sin, nor sorrow for sin; no desire after Christ, no heart to duties. But it is not so with me now; I now see the evil of

> sin, so as I never saw it before; my heart is now broken in the sense of that evil; my desires begin to be enflamed after Jesus Christ; I am not at rest, nor where I would be, till I am in secret mourning after the Lord Jesus; surely these are the dawnings of the day of mercy; let me go on in this way.[51]

Flavel considered an experiential knowledge of one's sin and God's wrath to be essential in true conversion and saw it as often present even in persons with only a dim hope of salvation. He counted such terrors as part of that inward teaching of God of which Jesus Christ said, everyone that "hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). Of this divine teaching, Flavel wrote, "No man can miss of Christ, or miscarry in the way of faith, that is under the special instructions and teachings of the Father."[52]

Thus an assured believer in Christ may look back to the days of heartrending convictions and pantings after the Savior and say, "Though I did not know it for certain at the time, already the Father's saving call was upon my life." We must view questions about preparation in the light of the Puritan belief that conversion is a process. A sinner is not always aware of the time when he crossed from death to life. What initially seemed to be preparation may later prove to have been salvation. The regenerating work of the Spirit is a mystery; we must acknowledge that the wind blows where it pleases and we do not see it (John 3:8).

Having introduced Puritan preparation through Flavel's *Method,* we will now consider a line of scholarship that heavily criticized Puritan preparation. We will focus upon the academic treatment of preparation by three prominent, twentieth-century scholars who said the Puritans deviated significantly from the Reformed doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty in salvation and man's total inability.

A Review of the Calvin-versus-the-Puritan Preparationists Thesis Perry Miller interpreted Calvin's doctrine of conversion as "a forcible seizure, a rape of the surprised will."[53] Miller thought this followed logically from the idea that God predestined men to salvation. There could be little process of human activity in conversion because everything had to be from God. However, we are told that the Puritans, shrinking from such an absolute sovereignty, softened it through covenant theology. One way they did this was through preparation, the idea that sinners could move toward God by their own power.

Miller wrote against such thinking, saying, "In many passages describing the extent to which an unregenerate man may go in the work of preparation, some of these writers passed beyond any limits that could be reconciled with Calvinism. In New England, clearly the most extreme was Thomas Hooker, who with great eloquence magnified the possibilities of a man's producing in himself a

receptive frame of mind."[54] Miller concluded, "Even while professing the most abject fealty to the Puritan Jehovah, the Puritan divines in effect dethroned Him."[55]

Not all Puritans agreed with Thomas Hooker (1586–1647). Miller said that William Pemble (c. 1591–1623) attacked Hooker's theology as "a sophisticated form of Arminianism."[56] Giles Firmin (1614–1697) attacked Hooker and his colleague, Thomas Shepard (1605–1649), for discouraging seekers after God.[57] According to Miller, most New England Puritans tracked with Hooker, with the "ominous exception" of John Cotton (1585–1652), whose love for Calvin's theology led him to deny preparation. He concluded, "Cotton was a better Calvinist."[58] Miller also saw Jonathan Edwards as a Calvinistic champion waging war against the harvest of Arminianism planted by his New England forefathers.[59] Though Miller's thesis was not followed in all its particulars, it proved very influential among scholars who came after him.

While offering a much more thorough review of primary sources than Miller, Norman Pettit propagates the Calvin-versus-the-Preparationists thesis. He writes quite astonishingly, "In orthodox Reformed theology of the sixteenth century no allowance had been made for the biblical demand to prepare the heart for righteousness. In strict predestinarian dogma the sinner was taken by storm—his heart wrenched from depravity to grace."[60] He says that Puritan preparation was the struggle to find liberty from "the shadow and tyranny of the doctrine of divine coercion."[61] His underlying assumption is that "anything done on man's part diminishes God's sovereignty."[62]

In his interpretation of various Reformed writers, Pettit constantly labors under the false dichotomy of trying to determine which side of the chasm they stand on with respect to conversion: the sudden intervention of absolute sovereignty or the gradual process of human activity—as if these are the only alternatives. For example, he writes, "Of all the preparationists, [Richard] Sibbes was by far the most extreme in terms of the abilities he assigned to natural man."[63] Of William Ames (1576–1633), he writes regarding the natural man, "He seizes upon the Law; the Law does not seize him."[64] On the other side is Cotton, he says, who "carried his doctrine to such an extreme that he was unable even to accept the divine exhortations to preparation as 'useful.'"[65] He adds this about Cotton, "Man cannot turn to God, as did Abraham, but must be seized. Man cannot willingly acknowledge God until he is wrenched, turned about, forced to believe in a new relationship which until that moment has played no part in this life."[66] By contrast, Hooker was "preaching an entirely different doctrine of conversion" than Cotton.[67] Thus, Pettit concludes, the Antinomian Controversy in New England (1636–1638) revolved around the validity of

preparation.[68] Pettit also depicts a division among English Reformed thinkers between preparationists and those loyal to Calvin's vision of God as an absolute sovereign.

Robert T. Kendall, following in the footsteps of Perry Miller, greatly popularized the Calvin-versus-the-Preparationists thesis, while making his own unique points. He said the Puritan defection from Calvin was due to Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Calvin's successor at Geneva. He was "the architect of a system fundamentally different from Calvin's,"[69] Kendall says. Beza's predestinarianism spread to England through the works of men such as Perkins, replacing a gracious system with a more legalistic system that included preparation. Kendall says Calvin's perspective "rules out any preparation for faith on man's part…. There is nothing in Calvin's doctrine that suggests, even in the process of regeneration, that man must be prepared at all—including by the work of the Law prior to faith." While the law might stir men to seek salvation, for Calvin this "is but an accidental effect."[70]

In direct contrast to Calvin, Hooker's preaching of salvation can be summed up, according to Kendall, in "preparationism."[71] Man "initiates the process of preparation," so all of Hooker's "pleadings about an 'effectual' calling of God are rendered meaningless by his appeal—indeed, his urgent and impassioned counsel—directly to man's will."[72] Therefore Kendall indicts Hooker as a prime example of a Puritan who defected from Calvin's doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace alone.

The Calvin-versus-the-Preparationists thesis fails because it seeks to impose on the historical sources an assumption about divine sovereignty that is foreign to the sources themselves. It assumes that God's sovereignty is incompatible with human responsibility and activity. William Stoever refutes this, saying, "The Reformed doctrine of divine sovereignty was not regarded in the orthodox period as excluding human activity from regeneration…. Human activity, in the context of the ordained means for dispensing grace, is instrumental in the application of redemption."[73] God works through human means, so a writer's affirmation of human activity does not imply a denial of divine sovereignty. The false assumption that these are incompatible has led scholars to misread and distort the writings of the Puritans. For example, Stoever has shown that the documents of the Antinomian Controversy do not revolve around the legitimacy of preparation; preparation is "relatively inconspicuous" in the debate.[74] Hooker and other New England divines were not closet Arminians. Stoever says, "The suggestion that the elders were departing from normative Reformed doctrine, judged by the formal divinity of the period, is simply incorrect."[75] Michael Winship writes, "Historians accepted Miller's argument until William K. B.

Stoever demonstrated, easily enough, that Cotton was a preparationist like the other ministers, and their debates revolved around other topics."[76]

An exploration of the primary sources confirms this conclusion.[77] Rather than a sharp divide between true-blue Calvinists and nominally Calvinistic preparationists, there is fundamental unity among sixteenth-and seventeenth-century Reformed writers regarding both sovereign grace and preparation for faith by the convicting ministry of the law. Thus, this line of scholarship misunderstood both Calvin and the Puritans, caricaturing the Reformer as utterly against all forms of preparation and the Puritans as semi-Arminian "preparationists."

John Calvin denied that fallen man can make even feeble motions toward God, and therefore rejected the medieval nominalist idea that man can prepare himself for salvation by his free will.[78] Man has no merit or ability to save himself; salvation must be entirely of God's grace. But there is also gracious preparation for it. Calvin believed that as a preparation for faith in His elect, "the Lord frequently communicates to them a secret desire, by which they are led to Him."[79] God especially uses His law, which serves not only to direct believers in their conduct, but to awaken the conscience of unbelievers to their guilt and need for a Savior.[80] God takes rough-hewn sinners and "prepareth our hearts to come unto him to receive his doctrine."[81] Thus Calvin rejected Roman Catholic preparationism but taught a Reformed view of how God prepares sinners for faith.

Elizabethan Puritans, such as Perkins, held the same line of thought—teaching unconditional election, human inability, salvation apart from all human merit, and divine preparation of sinners by the law before faith. For example, contrary to Pettit's statement, Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) did not assign an extreme degree of ability to natural men in preparation but said that humiliation is our duty though it is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit's conviction.[82] Sibbes said, "This bruising is required before conversion, that so the Spirit may make way for itself into the heart, by leveling all proud high thoughts."[83]

In 1633, Ames presented a scholastic disputation arguing the fine points of preparation and its distinction from the teachings of Roman Catholics and Arminians. He compared preparation to drying wood before putting it in the fire, to God's forming Adam's body before breathing life into it, and to the assembly of bones and flesh in the valley of Ezekiel's vision before the Spirit of life awakened them.[84] Ames's careful distinctions and gripping illustrations became the standard fare of later treatments of preparation by Puritans such as John Norton (1606–1663) and John Owen.

Hooker, often viewed as the arch-preparationist, certainly did a massive

amount of preaching on the preparation of sinners by contrition and humiliation. But in opposition to Kendall, his doctrine of preparation was presented within the context of God's sovereign and particular grace in Christ and the joy and love that men possess upon conversion.[85] Hooker insisted that true preparation was the work of the Holy Spirit upon unsaved men. He wrote, "The Lord by his Spirit prepares the soul."[86] He also preached the free offer of the gospel and urged all men to come to Christ.[87]

Miller said Pemble was an opponent of preparation, but his book on salvation by grace alone proves otherwise. Certainly Pemble attacked Arminian and Roman Catholic views of self-improvement or meritorious preparation by free will.[88] But he also taught that there is a good and useful preparation before conversion consisting of the conviction of sin and using the means of grace.[89] He said, "We deny not, but that there are ordinarily many preparations whereby God brings a man to grace, and that the Word works many effects both upon the hearts and lives of men even whilst they are as yet destitute of true grace."[90]

Cotton also proves not to be anti-preparation as he was reputed to be. He did make some confusing statements about union with Christ, which antinomians abused to his great embarrassment. However, Cotton also taught that God prepares sinners for conversion by giving them "a spirit of bondage" to convict them of sin and "a spirit of burning" to destroy their self-assurance.[91] He said that is God's ordinary way of bringing sinners to experience the covenant of works before bringing them into the covenant of grace.[92] He wrote,

> As a schoolmaster driveth his [student] through fear unto this or that duty… so the law of God driveth the soul through fear unto Jesus Christ…. For being once made sensible of his own inability to redeem himself, and unworthiness to be redeemed from the wrath of God, now is the soul fitted to hear the voice of the gospel, now is the news of Christ beautiful and glad tidings: and of this use is the law unto the elect of God, before they come under the covenant of the grace of God.[93]

Cotton also urged unbelievers to take action by diligently using the means of grace, such as reading the Word and hearing it preached and praying. The blind cannot give themselves sight, but they can cry out to the Son of David until He heals them, he said.[94] Pettit therefore errs in saying that Cotton and Hooker preached totally different doctrines of conversion. For all their differences, they shared a common core of Reformed preparation.

The Puritans did debate the specifics of preparation. But the idea of a division among them over predestination *versus* preparation is a fiction. A careful study of the theological writings from Calvin to Edwards shows that the Reformed

tradition speaks with remarkable oneness regarding both *sola gratia* and—to use William Ames's title—*praeparatione peccatoris ad conversionem*.[95]

Having reviewed and briefly rebutted the Calvin-versus-the-Preparationists thesis, we now turn to an evaluation of what the Puritans teach on this matter. It is not sufficient simply to demonstrate that preparation was not a betrayal of the Reformation heritage; we must also consider how to appropriate Puritan preparation for our own day.

An Evaluation of Puritan Preparation The Puritans had many admirable qualities. They mined the riches of Christ in the Scriptures and labored to draw from the best insights of the church through history. It is not surprising, then, that their view of preparation for faith contains many portions of biblical truth wisely applied to the soul. However, the very doctrine of sin that the Puritans preached reminds us that all Christians struggle with sin that clouds the mind and pollutes the conduct. Therefore we offer both some cautions about Puritan preparation and lessons we can learn from it.

Cautions against Misunderstandings, Errors, and Imbalances We must read the Puritans with discernment, as we should read any merely human writing. It is possible to misunderstand their exhortations to duty as affirmations of an ability to save ourselves. If we assume that duty implies ability, for example, then the Puritans would lead us into Pelagianism. Of course, so would Calvin, or anyone who has ever preached the commands of the Bible. No one would be more horrified at this conclusion than the Puritans or Calvin. John Norton thus warned, "because we are reasonable creatures God proceeds with us in the use of means; because we are dead creatures, in respect to the efficacy of the means, we depend wholly and absolutely upon God."[96]

Another problem is that the Puritans did not always choose their words as wisely as they should. For example, Norton wrote, "By preparatory work, we understand certain inherent qualifications…. Before sinners are invited immediately to believe, they must be such sinners, qualified sinners."[97] The terminology of "qualification" or "qualified sinner" suggests that preparation gives a sinner the right to trust in Christ or the right to consider himself elect. Norton used such language but plainly denied these misconceptions, teaching that the duty of all men is to believe the gospel,[98] and that preparation is common grace experienced by both the elect and the reprobate.[99] It would be better not to use the term *qualify* to avoid having to fight against such misconceptions.

Certain Puritans taught aspects of preparation that most other Puritans, indeed

most other Christians, rightly reject. The classic example is the teaching of Hooker and Shepard that sinners must be humbled to the point of being willing to be damned in order to be prepared to receive Christ.[100] This prerequisite is contrary to Scripture and to human nature as God created it. Firmin rightly took Hooker and Shepard to task for it.[101] Yet even in this error we recognize some truth, for a person cannot trust in Christ alone while clinging to his own merits, and abandoning all self-merit means recognizing that God could damn him to hell in perfect justice. Norton wrote, "To justify God is our duty, but to be contented to be damned is nowhere commanded; nay if taken without limitation, it is prohibited; because to be contented to be damned, is to be contented to be an enemy, and to sin against God, and that forever."[102]

More subtle is the idea that Hooker, Shepard, and Firmin taught that the heart must be separated from sin before being united with Christ, or that it must be cut off from the tree of Adam for a period of time, be it shorter or longer, before being grafted into the tree of Christ.[103] Other Puritans such as Norton and Edwards rejected this idea, and rightly so,[104] for this hints at the theological absurdity of an intermediate state between spiritual death and spiritual life, which Ames and many other Puritans rejected.[105] This view has no scriptural support and, to some degree, usurps the centrality of our union with Christ in His death.

Perhaps the greatest danger of some forms of Puritan preparation is the lack of balance in their presentation. By using the law to hammer away at sinners over long periods of time, men like Hooker often neglected to mingle the sweet with the bitter. Their listeners could easily have lost sight of Christ in the midst of several dozen sermons on contrition. Sibbes wisely advised, "It is dangerous…to press too much, and too long this bruising; because they may die under the wound and burden, before they be raised up again. Therefore it is good in mixed assemblies to mingle comforts, that every soul may have its due portion."[106]

We also see a lack of balance in the passion some Puritans exhibited in doctrinal analysis while lacking appreciation for the mystery of the Spirit's work. Though they made disclaimers along the way, some Puritans' rigorously developed and painfully applied sequences of steps in conversion could easily mislead people into thinking they were not yet saved because they were only at step three in a twelve-step process. Worse yet, they might think they had no right or warrant to come to Christ because they were still waiting on steps four through twelve. Edwards offered a helpful corrective to this, as did the Dutch divine Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), who reminded us that in the mystery of the Spirit's working, we often cannot tell exactly when a person is born again.[107]

Positive Lessons from Puritan Preparation Having given various cautions and warnings about Puritan preparation, let us now consider some of the positive lessons we can learn from it.

1. Puritan preparation assists the free offer of the gospel. It is false to portray preparation as the antithesis of an open invitation for all people to come to Christ. John Preston (1587–1628) wrote, "We preach Christ generally unto all, that whosoever will, may receive Christ; but men will not receive him, till they be humbled, they think they stand in no need of Christ."[108] To be sure, preparation can be presented in a way that inhibits people. But the Puritans labored to avoid this error by mingling teaching on preparation with gospel calls and compelling invitations.

Hooker preached, "Why, it is a free mercy, and therefore why mayest not thou have it as well as another?… If you will but come and take grace, this is all God looks for, all that the Lord expects and desires, you may have it for the taking."[109] But Hooker also understood that the "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17) implies that sinners must have a will for salvation to come to Christ.[110] Sinners must sense their need of Christ before they may rationally choose Him.

Regeneration is a simple and instantaneous act of God giving faith to the sinner, and with faith eternal life in Christ. So the gospel call has a simplicity to it: "Repent ye, and believe" (Mark 1:15). But the sinner's experience that precedes regeneration is ordinarily a process involving much thought, feeling, and activity. Thus the simple gospel call is accompanied by many subordinate duties such as: "hearken to my words" (Acts 2:14); "incline your ear" (Isa. 55:3); "let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18); "we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts 17:29); "examine yourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5); and "be afflicted, and mourn, and weep" (James 4:9). When the Puritans preached such duties to unbelievers, they did not present an alternative to trusting in Christ today, any more than Paul did when he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" with Felix (Acts 24:25). Preparatory duties are but the servants of faith.

Shepard said King Jesus commands all people to come to Him for grace. He offers Himself in a great exchange.[111] But sin makes it a "wonderfully hard thing to be saved."[112] So the Westminster divines taught that the first work by which God "doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel" is "convincing us of our sin and misery" (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 31). God thus invites us in Isaiah 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy,

and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." As Guthrie said, preparation stirs our first thirst and hunger.[113]

2. Puritan preparation is thoroughly Reformed. Calvin, Perkins, Pemble, Ames, Cotton, and Norton all distinguished between Reformed and Roman Catholic preparation, rejecting the latter as granting partial merit to fallen men but embracing the former as revealing to men their utter lack of merit.[114] They regarded Arminian preparation as crypto-Romanism but put the preparation of their Reformed brothers in another category.

We may illustrate the difference between the Roman view of preparation and the Reformed view by asking, "Is Mr. X prepared to sell his house?" The question could mean various things, first, depending on whether he is a rich man or a poor man. A rich man would say he is prepared to sell his house because he has cleaned it, decorated it, and made various repairs so that the house is as attractive as possible to a buyer. While no degree of preparation could obligate the buyer to purchase the rich man's home, such preparations do increase its "merit" on the market. This corresponds to the view that the Puritans rejected as unbiblical and man-centered thinking. According to the Roman doctrine of congruent merit, an unsaved person cannot obligate God to save him, but he can make himself as attractive as possible by doing what lies in him.

On the other hand, a poor man is prepared to sell his house when he realizes that he is no longer able to pay for it. He once treasured the home, but now he needs a buyer to deliver him from a burdensome mortgage. His preparation has nothing to do with the value of the house. It may have even devalued the house, for as his debts mounted, the owner had less money to maintain the house. But he is prepared to sell it. He even hopes a buyer will have mercy on him and take it off his hands. This corresponds to the Reformed preparation that the Puritans embraced. It is a preparation that does not consist of increased worthiness but an increased sense of need. It is a preparation that leads to conversion without boasting in self, for all the glory must go to the Redeemer of poor sinners.

3. Puritan preparation highlights the common works of the Holy Spirit. Rather than viewing the Spirit of God as passive until regeneration, the Puritans realized that the Spirit works mightily through the preaching of the Word to convict people of sin. Ames quoted the British representatives at Dort as saying, "There are certain internal effects, leading unto conversion or regeneration, which are stirred by the power of the word, and of the Spirit, in the hearts of those not yet justified."[115] Hooker described contrition as "an act of the Spirit of Christ, whereby it doth fling down those strongholds" by which sin and Satan resist the

Word.[116] Goodwin and Edwards developed their doctrine of preparation in the context of the threefold ministry of the Spirit promised by Christ in John 16:8–11.[117] Puritan preparation makes a vital contribution to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by expanding our dependency on and gratitude toward this divine person in His work of common conviction.

4. Puritan preparation engages sinners with the law but not with legalism. The convicting use of the law is central to preparation for faith. Calvin wrote, "Therefore the law summoneth all the world before God, not one except[ed]: it condemneth all the children of Adam…. Now seeing God thundereth against us, we must needs run to that mercy which is offered unto us in our Lord Jesus Christ."[118] Perkins said, "First, the law prepares us by humbling us: then comes the gospel, and it stirs up faith."[119] He wrote on Galatians 3:24,

> The law, especially the moral law, urgeth and compelleth men to go to Christ. For it shows us our sins, and that without remedy: it shows us the damnation what is due unto us: and by this means, it makes us despair of salvation in respect of ourselves: and thus it enforceth us to seek for help out of ourselves in Christ. The law is then our schoolmaster not by the plain teaching, but by stripes and correction.[120]

The law thus serves the gospel by showing that we cannot be justified by the law. John Bunyan (1628–1688) vividly portrayed this truth by telling how Christian wandered off the path to salvation by looking for Legality to remove his burden of sin. The rumblings of Mt. Sinai held him back so that Evangelist could encourage him to go quickly instead to the gate of salvation by grace.[121] As Edwards pointed out, a light application of the law tends to engender self-righteousness, but a searching preaching of the law, and hard labors to keep it, tend to destroy self-righteousness.[122]

5. Puritan preparation leaves open the mystery of when we are born again. In this chapter, we refer to preparation as preparation for conscious faith in Christ. The Puritans acknowledged that while a person may be saved by faith in Christ, he may not yet be conscious of his faith—only his longings for Christ and salvation.

Edwards said the new birth may come in "a confused chaos…exceeding mysterious and unsearchable." He referred to Ecclesiastes 11:5, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all."[123] Hooker also recognized the mystery of the spiritual womb.[124] Whereas the English Puritans tended to associate regeneration with the soul's initial and conscious closing with Christ, the Dutch Further Reformation

theologians tended to place it closer to the early convictions of sin and conscience. That's why Alexander Comrie (1706–1774), one of the last Dutch Further Reformation divines, taught that there are preparations to faith but not preparations prior to regeneration.[125] Much is dependent here on where one places regeneration in the soul's experience. Speaking of regeneration, Brakel wisely observed, "If he were to begin with the first serious conviction, in all probability he did not have faith as yet. If he were to begin with the moment when, for the first time, he exercised faith consciously and in a most heartfelt manner, he would reckon too late, for in all probability he already had faith."[126]

6. Puritan preparation honors God both as Creator and Savior. Ames said it was "crude" to treat man as nothing more than a "stone."[127] He said God created man with a mind and a will. God created a world where He works by means. His creations are good and are to be used with thankfulness. These things did not disappear with the fall. But sin has made man dead with respect to God. Only a sovereign and undeserved act of divine grace can raise the dead to a living faith, hope, and love in Christ. Honoring God as Creator requires us to treat people as rational and volitional beings. Honoring God as Savior also requires us to treat people as utterly incapable of regenerating themselves. The Puritans did both, exhorting the lost to use their natural abilities to read, think, listen, feel, and pray, while also teaching the lost that only a supernatural work of grace could give them faith.

Samuel Willard (1640–1707) said that in an effectual calling, "the Spirit of God, in the work of application, treats with men as reasonable creatures, and causes by counsel; not carrying them by violent compulsion, but winning them by arguments, by which they are 'made willing in the day of his power' (Ps. 110:3)."[128] Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646) said, "Jesus Christ doth work upon the heart in a rational way, as a rational creature, although he doth work above reason, and conveys supernatural grace that is beyond reason."[129] Edwards said, "God in the work of the salvation of mankind, deals with them suitably to their intelligent rational nature."[130]

7. Puritan preparation reveals the sufficiency of Christ. Preparation reveals the sufficiency of Christ by showing that everything that leads to salvation, from the first conviction to the discovery of peace, comes from Him. Hooker said that in preparation "the Lord Christ" comes to wage a merciful war against the power of sin.[131] Convictions are the knocking of Christ upon the door of the soul.[132] We may not conceive of preparation as an obstacle between Christ and the soul but rather as an encounter with the living Christ in which He calls to the soul with a

voice that shakes the thresholds.

Preparation also reveals the sufficiency of Christ by convincing sinners that apart from Christ they can do nothing, not even come to Christ. Hooker said, "That soul which was cured by any other means save only by Christ, was never truly wounded for sin…. But if the soul were truly wounded for sin, then nothing can cure him but a Savior to pardon him, and grace to purge him."133 Goodwin said that until sinners are humiliated they are like able-bodied men with no money—they think they can always go get a job. But humiliation shows them to be cripples without even the hands to receive Christ, so that they look to Christ, even for hands.134

8. Puritan preparation is biblical. The Puritans built their doctrine of preparation primarily through the exposition of specific texts in the Holy Scriptures. They used such texts as 2 Chronicles 33:12; 34:27; Job 11:12; Isaiah 40:3–4; 42:3; 55:1; 57:15; 61:1–3; 66:2; Jeremiah 4:3; 23:29; 31:19; Ezekiel 36:31; Hosea 5:15; 6:1–2; Matthew 3:7; 11:28; Mark 12:34; Luke 15:14–18; John 4:16–18; 16:8; Acts 2:37; 9:6; 16:13–14, 29–30; 24:24–25; Romans 3:19–20; 7:7–13; 8:15; 2 Corinthians 10:4; Galatians 3:19, 24; Revelation 3:17, 20; and more.

Perhaps most fundamentally, they looked to the threefold pattern of the epistle to the Romans, which undergirds the Heidelberg Catechism: Paul's treatment of sin and wrath (1:18–3:20), salvation in Christ (3:21–11:36), and our obedient response to God's mercies (12:1–15:13). Romans was perhaps the clearest presentation of the gospel in all Scripture and the most influential book in the Reformation. It gave the definitive pattern to Reformed thinking on conversion, which is that the knowledge of sin and misery precedes deliverance and peace with God. Those who despise Puritan preparation would do well to read Romans and meditate on Paul's rationale for spending so much time on the bad news about God's wrath against sin before expounding the good news of His justifying grace in Christ.

1. William Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (1617; facsimile repr., New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 200.

2. This chapter is adapted from material in Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Puritan Preparation by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming), where a much more thorough discussion of these questions and an investigation into the primary sources can be found.

3. Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 234.

4. See the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 68, 72, 76, 95, 96, 155; Shorter Catechism, Q. 31, 87, 89.

5. John Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 2:287.

6. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:288.

7. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:289–91.

8. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:294.
9. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:320.
10. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:321.
11. In the seventeenth century, tennis was played in an area enclosed by walls, not an open lawn.
12. John Flavel, *England's Duty*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 4:48. Also known as *Christ Knocking at the Door of Sinners' Hearts*.
13. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:295.
14. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:297. Many of the Scriptures he cited on this and the previous page to prove the power of the "word or law" refer to the preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:37; Rom. 1:16; Phil. 3:7–9; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 Thess. 1:9).
15. Flavel, "England's Duty," in *Works*, 4:95.
16. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:296–97.
17. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:297.
18. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:297.
19. Flavel, *England's Duty*, in *Works*, 4:39.
20. Flavel, *England's Duty*, in *Works*, 4:40.
21. Flavel, *England's Duty*, in *Works*, 4:52–53.
22. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:298–99.
23. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:309.
24. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:71. See also Stephen J. Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel's Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 65–66.
25. Clifford B. Boone, "Puritan Evangelism: Preaching for Conversion in Late-Seventeenth Century English Puritanism as Seen in the Works of John Flavel" (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2009), 156–60. Cf. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 31.
26. Boone, "Puritan Evangelism," 166. It should be noted that this "faculty psychology" was not original to Flavel nor was it uniquely his in his own day; it was "common currency" among the Puritan divines of the seventeenth century.
27. Boone, "Puritan Evangelism," 182, 184.
28. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:71.
29. Flavel, *England's Duty*, in *Works*, 4:99.
30. Flavel, *England's Duty*, in *Works*, 4:57.
31. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:440–41, emphasis original to contrast "conviction" and "conversion."
32. Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17, Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 414–18.
33. Flavel, *England's Duty*, in *Works*, 4:202.
34. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:441.
35. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:442.
36. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:310.
37. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:311.
38. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:449.
39. William Perkins, "Exposition of the Creede," in *A Golden Chaine* (London: John Legat, 1600), 192–93.
40. John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1855; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 3:238.
41. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:309.
42. John Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 1:133. See Edward Reynolds, *Animalis Homo*, in *The Whole Works of the*

Right Rev. Edward Reynolds (1826; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 4:368.

43. Flavel, the epistle dedicatory to *Fountain of Life*, in *Works*, 1:xviii–xx.

44. Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, in *Works*, 1:137.

45. Thomas Goodwin, *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861–1864), 8:258–59.

46. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:238.

47. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:301–3.

48. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:304.

49. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:304.

50. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:305.

51. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:317.

52. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:307.

53. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 56.

54. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 87n154.

55. Perry Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in New England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4, no. 3 (June 1943): 286.

56. Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in New England," 265.

57. Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in New England," 266.

58. Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in New England," 266–67.

59. Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in New England," 286.

60. Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), vii.

61. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 217.

62. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 218.

63. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 73.

64. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 83.

65. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 139.

66. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 138.

67. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 133.

68. Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 149.

69. R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1997), 38.

70. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 26.

71. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 128.

72. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 132, 138.

73. William K. B. Stoever, *'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven': Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 195.

74. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*, 193–94.

75. William K. B. Stoever, "Nature, Grace and John Cotton: The Theological Dimension in the New England Antinomian Controversy," *Church History* 44, no. 1 (1975): 32.

76. Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 69.

77. What follows is a summary of the more in-depth treatment of primary sources found in Beeke and Smalley, *Puritan Preparation by Grace.*

78. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.2.27; 2.3.7; *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 258–59 (on John 6:45).

79. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:433–34 (Luke 19:1–10).

80. John Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (1579; facsimile repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth

Trust, 1983), 50–51; *Institutes*, 2.7.11.

81. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (1583; facsimile repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 423.

82. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reede and Smoaking Flax*, 3rd ed. (London: M. F. for R. Dawlman, 1631), 33–35.

83. Sibbes, *The Bruised Reede and Smoaking Flax*, 13.

84. William Ames, "The Preparation of a Sinner for Conversion," trans. Steven Dilday, theses 6, 16, in *Disceptatio Scholastica de circulo pontificio* (1644). Dilday's translation is found in the appendix of *Puritan Preparation by Grace* by Beeke and Smalley.

85. Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption, by the Effectual Work of the Word, and Spirit of Christ… The First Eight Books* (1657; facsimile repr., New York: Arno Press, 1972); *The Soules Implantation into the Natural Olive* (London: by R. Young, 1640), 179–320.

86. Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ* (Leiden: W. Christiaens, 1638), 219.

87. T[homas] Hooker, *The Unbeleevers Preparing for Christ* (London: by Tho. Cotes for Andrew Crooke, 1638), 2, 19–20.

88. William Pemble, *Vindiciae Gratiae*, in *The Workes of the Late Learned Minister of God's Holy Word, Mr William Pemble*, 4th ed. (Oxford: by Henry Hall for John Adams, 1659), 27–29, 56.

89. Pemble, *Vindiciae Gratiae*, in *Workes*, 30, 76, 80–82.

90. Pemble, *Vindiciae Gratiae*, in *Workes*, 78.

91. John Cotton, *The New Covenant, Or, A Treatise, Unfolding the Order and Manner of the Giving and Receiving of the Covenant of Grace to the Elect* (London: by M. S. for Francis Eglesfield and John Allen, 1654), 21–23.

92. Cotton, *The New Covenant*, 20–21.

93. Cotton, *The New Covenant*, 109–10.

94. John Cotton, *The Way of Life, Or, Gods Way and Course, in Bringing the Soule into, and Keeping It in, and Carrying It On, in the Ways of Life and Peace* (London: by M. F. for L. Fawne and S. Gellibrand, 1641), 184–85.

95. "[Salvation] by grace alone" and "the preparation of the sinner for conversion."

96. John Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist, or A Treatise wherein Many Great Evangelical Truths… Are Briefly Discussed* (London: John Macock for Henry Cripps and Lodowick Lloyd, 1654), 271.

97. Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist*, 130; cf. p. 141.

98. Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist*, 17, 81, 84, 158, 162, 171, 191–92, 194, 199, 202, 231.

99. Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist*, 163, 170.

100. Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Humiliation* (London: by T. Cotes for Andrew Crooke and Philip Nevill, 1640), 112–17; Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Beleever. Or, a Treatise of Evangelicall Conversion* (London: for R. Dawlman, 1645), 147–54.

101. Giles Firmin, *The Real Christian, or A Treatise of Effectual Calling* (London: for Dorman Newman, 1670), 19–24, 107–49.

102. Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist*, 151.

103. Hooker, *The Application of Redemption… The First Eight Books*, 150–51; Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption by the Effectual Work of the Word, and Spirit of Christ… The Ninth and Tenth Books* (London: Peter Cole, 1657), 673–75, 679; Shepard, *The Sound Beleever*, 97–116; Firmin, *The Real Christian*, 87–93.

104. Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist*, 180–83; Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 862, 1019, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *The "Miscellanies" 833–1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 90–91, 350–51.

105. Ames, "The Preparation of a Sinner for Conversion," thesis 17, objection 5.

106. Sibbes, *The Bruised Reede and Smoaking Flax*, 37.

107. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E.

Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 160–62; "Miscellanies," no. 899, in *Works*, 20:156; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 2:245.

108. John Preston, "Pauls Conversion. Or, The Right Way to Be Saved," in *Remaines of that Reverend and Learned Divine, John Preston* (London: for Andrew Crooke, 1634), 187.

109. Hooker, *The Unbeleevers Preparing for Christ*, 19–20.

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111. Thomas Shepheard [Shepard], *The Sincere Convert, Discovering the Paucity of True Believers; and the Great Difficultie of Saving Conversions* (London: by T. P. and M. S., 1643), 106–12.

112. Shepard, *The Sincere Convert*, 144.

113. William Guthrie, sermon upon Isaiah 55:1–2, in *A Collection of Lectures and Sermons… Mostly in the Time of the Late Persecution*, ed. J. H. (Glasgow: J. Bryce, 1779), 113–14.

114. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.27; Ames, "The Preparation of a Sinner for Conversion," theses 1–2; Pemble, *Vindiciae Gratiae*, in *Workes*, 27–29, 56; Cotton, *The Way of Life*, 182; Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist*, 130. On Perkins, see Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 62.

115. Ames, "The Preparation of a Sinner for Conversion," thesis 5.

116. Hooker, *The Application of Redemption… The First Eight Books*, 151.

117. Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:359–61; Jonathan Edwards, "The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 14, *Sermons and Discourses 1723–1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 391.

118. Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus*, 50.

119. Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians*, 200.

120. Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians*, 200.

121. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: by A. W. for J. Clarke, 1738), 14–21.

122. Jonathan Edwards, "Pressing into the Kingdom of God," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 19, *Sermons and Discourses 1734–1738*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 284–85.

123. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works*, 2:160–61.

124. Thomas Hooker, "To the Reader," in *The Doctrine of Faith*, by John Rogers (London: for Nathanael Newbery and William Sheffard, 1627).

125. Alexander Comrie, *Verhandeling van eenige* (Leiden: Johannes Hasebroek, 1744), 222.

126. Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:245.

127. Ames, "The Preparation of a Sinner for Conversion," corollary.

128. Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726; facsimile repr., New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969), 432.

129. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Four Books on the Eleventh of Matthew* (London: Peter Cole, 1659), 1:22.

130. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works*, 2:152.

131. Hooker, *The Application of Redemption… The Ninth and Tenth Books*, 47–50, 98–99.

132. Hooker, *The Application of Redemption… The Ninth and Tenth Books*, 101, 111–12.

133. Hooker, *The Soules Preparation for Christ*, 133.

134. Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *Works*, 6:384–85.

Chapter 29

The Puritans on Regeneration

> *[The] new birth is necessary in every part of the soul…. Because there was an universal depravation by the fall, regeneration must answer it in its extensiveness in every faculty. Otherwise it is not the birth of the man, but of one part only.*
>
> —STEPHEN CHARNOCK[1]

The Reformation supplanted the whole Roman Catholic sacramental system through which it was held that grace was dispensed to the faithful. Since the primary effect that Rome attributed to baptism was regeneration, Protestants who rejected baptismal regeneration had to explain how else one could be regenerated.[2] The necessity of the new birth, or regeneration, was acknowledged by all. The Reformed view was well expressed by Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686), who said, "It is not baptism which makes a Christian; many are no better than baptized heathens. The essential part of religion lies in the new creature."[3] Being regenerate is more important than being religious. Watson recognized that unless we become new creatures, our religious duties will not be accepted.[4] While affirming with Rome that we must be born again, Watson denied that inward regeneration of the heart was effected by the outward washing of the body with water, in the sacrament of baptism.

The Puritans developed a robust theology of regeneration that emphasized the sovereignty of God and dissented strongly from the notion of baptismal regeneration. Personal regeneration serves as the foundation of their entire practical theology. Without regeneration, their practical and experimental exhortations would have made no sense. Like all of their theology, regeneration had a christological focus and was deemed never to happen apart from the sinner's union with Christ. Thus, closely connected to the doctrine of regeneration were not just particular saving benefits such as justification, adoption, and sanctification, but also union with Jesus Christ as the sum of them all. This chapter will consider the doctrine of regeneration, and the next chapter

will focus on the relationship between union with Christ, justification, and regeneration.

Effectual Calling and Regeneration The Puritan theology of regeneration completed the Reformed conception of what it means to be a Christian. Along the way, the Puritans sought to distinguish various aspects of regeneration, including the initial quickening of the sinner, previously dead in trespasses and sins; his conversion to God, including faith and repentance; and subsequently, the daily renewing of his life in the process of sanctification.5 The Reformers used the term "regeneration" in all these senses, not just in its narrowest sense of being identified only as the moment of new birth when a sinner is transferred from self-made darkness into God's marvelous light.6 It should be noted that for the Reformers and the Puritans, regeneration in its widest sense was understood at every point as a process or ongoing work of God, not a single event in the believer's experience.7 The Puritans did not believe in or expect merely "sudden" conversions, much less any experience of the Spirit that raised the believer to a state of sinless perfection in this life.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) presents the doctrine of regeneration first, as the effectual calling of the elect (8.8; 10.1) and the regeneration of elect infants who die in infancy (10.3); second, as the Spirit's work of sanctification in those who are effectually called and regenerated (13.1), increasing their faith (14.1, 3), moving them to repentance unto life (15.1, 2), and enabling them to do good works (16.3) and to persevere to the end in the state of grace and be saved (17.1, 2); and in this life, leading believers to assurance of grace and salvation (18). Regeneration further extends to death, when "the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens" (32.1), and to the last day, when Christ shall raise "the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honor," and make them conformable to His own (32.3). The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of calling, quickening, regeneration, renewing, enabling, bearing the fruits of lively faith, assurance, enlargement in peace and joy, restoration, being made perfect in holiness, and the resurrection of the body, all of which are works of regeneration attributed to God, wrought upon the elect, for Christ's sake.

Earlier, the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561) had introduced the concept of regeneration in article 24, "Man's Sanctification and Good Works," after the discussion of justification in articles 22 and 23.8 The Heidelberg Catechism affirms the necessity of regeneration (Q. 8), connecting it to Christ's resurrection (Q. 45) and to being washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ, as signified in baptism (Q. 69–70), but like the Belgic Confession, locates the full discussion of

it after justification by faith in the third part of the Catechism ("Of Thankfulness"), as the source of the good works Christians must do (Q. 86–91). The Canons of Dort use the terms "calling," "conversion," and "regeneration" interchangeably, stressing regeneration in its narrowest sense as the initial work of saving grace in the soul (head 3–4, articles 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17). Similarly, Scottish theologian Robert Rollock (1555–1599), who produced *A Treatise of Our Effectual Calling*,[9] describes regeneration as "the beginning of our glorification, and the beginning of a new creature."[10] Louis Berkhof offers a plausible explanation as to why the term "calling" was so commonly used. "The extensive use in Post-Reformation times of the term 'calling' rather than 'regeneration,' to designate the beginning of the work of grace in the life of sinners, was due to a desire to stress the close connection between the Word of God and the operation of His grace."[11]

Exactly when a firm, technical distinction between effectual calling and regeneration was made is difficult to ascertain, but it seems to have solidified by the mid-to-late seventeenth century. Early evidence of the distinction between regeneration and effectual calling can be found in William Ames's (1576–1633) posthumously published *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism* (1635).[12] David Dickson (c. 1583–1662) treated regeneration separately and explained how it was related to calling. He indicated that regeneration is "one in effect with effectual calling."[13] We see something similar in Francis Turretin (1623–1687). Working from the distinction between the visible and the invisible church, Turretin taught a "twofold calling," external and internal.[14] In explaining internal or effectual calling, he distinguishes between habitual (passive) and actual (active) conversion and says that in the order of nature, the habitual conversion precedes the actual. "A thing ought to exist before it can work." So, regeneration or habitual conversion precedes actual conversion (acts of faith). This "habitual or passive conversion," he says, "is more properly called regeneration."[15]

Though Turretin did not treat regeneration separately in his *Institutes*, he clearly saw it as a distinct work. Dickson said regeneration was "one in effect with effectual calling," that is, both effect renewal of the heart of man, and Samuel Willard (1640–1707) said it was the "first special work wrought by the Spirit" in his exposition on effectual calling.[16] Yet many Puritans gave regeneration much more attention.[17] Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) published several essays on regeneration, and both John Owen (1616–1683) and Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) focus on the doctrine in their treatises on the Holy Spirit. Herman Witsius (1636–1708) gave it a separate treatment in his *Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum hominibus (Economy of the Covenants of God with Men,*

1677). Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706) also developed it in his *Theoretico-Practica Theologia* (Theology: theoretical and practical, 1699).18 By the end of the seventeenth century, the doctrine of effectual calling was firmly established as a separate theological topic.

The Necessity of Regeneration Stephen Charnock uses John 3 to demonstrate the necessity of regeneration. Several other Puritans used John 3 to argue the same point.19 Commenting on our Lord's words in John 3:3, 5, Charnock declares, "These words contain the foundation of all practical religion here, and happiness hereafter."20

Charnock gives eight propositions concerning the necessity of regeneration and then offers a few additional arguments. Men are either in a state of sin or in a state of righteousness, and only regeneration can bring us into the state of righteousness.21 Regeneration is necessary on "account of the fall of man and the consequents of it." Man is not fit for anything good and is not even willing to be so. "We have not those affections to virtue as we have to vice. Are not our lives for the most part voluntarily ridiculous?" In addition to our *unwillingness* to do good, we are also *unable* to do good. Therefore, regeneration is universally necessary, argues Charnock: "It is necessary…in all places, in all professions."22

Charnock also proves the necessity of regeneration from the works of our triune God. He shows that man was created to have communion with God, but that there is no communion with God without regeneration.23 The Son's incarnation and sufferings would "seem insignificant without" regeneration, that is, if men were left to lie in death because of sin. It was "not his end only to save us from wrath to come, but to save us from the procuring-cause of that wrath" by purifying us. William Whately (1583–1639) is more pointed: "If Christ should come, and die, for one man, ten thousand times; all those deaths should profit that one man nothing at all for his salvation, unless he be made a new creature."24 The Spirit's indwelling also manifests the necessity of regeneration. "Can he dwell in a soul that hath an unholy nature?"25

The last two propositions arguing the necessity of regeneration are short and pointed.26 The seventh proposition is a deduction from all the previous propositions. "From all this it follows that this new birth is necessary in every part of the soul." Every faculty is corrupted and needs to be restored. "Because there was an universal depravation by the fall, regeneration must answer it in its extensiveness in every faculty. Otherwise it is not the birth of the man, but of one part only."27 In his eighth and last proposition Charnock argues for the necessity of regeneration from "the dim eye of natural reason."28 Natural reason

has concluded (among some thinkers) that man as he is at present needs some kind of change.

This last point was a matter of controversy. Thomas Cole (1627–1697) says that none "but a regenerate Person understands the true nature of Regeneration."[29] Regeneration "is a great Mystery, and cannot be understood, till it is in some measure felt," Cole says, adding that regeneration is not a notion but a nature.[30] Cole focuses on understanding the *nature* of regeneration while Charnock addresses the general assent to *some kind of need* for regeneration, yet one wonders if Charnock has not given too much to "the dim eye of natural reason."

Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) gave a whole sermon explaining that the natural man is utterly ignorant of regeneration, while noting that there exists a "twofold knowledge of regeneration." One is "merely speculative, and Theoretical" while the other is "Practical and Experimental."[31] Though Nicodemus did not seem to have even the theoretical understanding of regeneration, Burgess shows that having the speculative only is insufficient and ultimately unprofitable. Cole argued that the natural man tends to compel this spiritual truth to conform to "the level of Man's Understanding," that is, the unbeliever perverts its supernatural necessity to fit man's natural understanding.[32]

In the end, Charnock's last proposition may not have garnered universal assent among the Puritans. However, in his "uses" he makes a clearer distinction. He ends by asserting that natural knowledge is insufficient and also how possessing spiritual knowledge (knowledge about spiritual things) may be just as deficient: "An evangelical head will be but drier fuel for eternal burning, without an evangelical impression upon the heart and the badge of a new nature."[33]

Charnock offers many other reasons regeneration is necessary. Without regeneration, one cannot perform gospel duties or enjoy gospel privileges.[34] This "gospel state" requires regeneration, for while on earth, we cannot please God or enjoy Him without being regenerate. The next phase that requires regeneration is the "state of glory." "Heaven is the inheritance of the sanctified, not of the filthy," Charnock says. After showing that no meritorious connection exists between our regenerate state and the state of glory, he says, "Justification and adoption give us right to the inheritance, but regeneration gives us a 'meetness to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,' Col. i. 12."[35]

Charnock covers every period of redemptive history from Adam's fall to our entrance in glory and shows that without regeneration, man must perish. Its necessity therefore demanded a careful exposition of its nature. If man really needs this supernatural work of regeneration, then its supernatural character also

needs to be defended.

The Nature of Regeneration Several aberrant views had emerged by the time Reformed theologians developed their understanding of regeneration. At the time of the Reformation, the Lutheran Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575) taught that regeneration required a physical or substantial change (much like a germ or physical seed implanted in man).[36] He taught that "sin is man's substance."[37] Therefore regeneration involved a miraculous "substantial" (physical) change in man. On the opposite extreme, the Socinians (late sixteenth century) believed that the Spirit only assists us to be better.[38] For them, regeneration was nothing more than moral improvement. Man can, by imbibing the divine Spirit, "create for himself the power of obeying God as far as He…requires."[39] Spiritual regeneration is not required; the person needs just to change his behavior. Man needed correct knowledge and encouragement to persevere in following Christ's example.[40]

The Arminian view (one of several errors) that the Canons of Dort rejected is found in head 3–4, rejection of errors 7:

> That the grace whereby we are converted to God is only a gentle advising, or (as others explain it) that this is the noblest manner of working in the conversion of man, and that this manner of working, which consists in advising, is most in harmony with man's nature; and that there is no reason why this advising grace alone should not be sufficient to make the natural man spiritual; indeed, that God does not produce the consent of the will except through this manner of advising; and that the power of the divine working, whereby it surpasses the working of Satan, consists in this that God promises eternal, while Satan promises only temporal goods.

These various views had to be refuted in the context by a well-defined, biblically informed doctrine of regeneration.

1. Regeneration Is More Than Reformation of Manners[41]

This error has been historically maintained by Pelagians, and it may be the most common misconception in many modern minds. Man simply needs to change his ways, alter his behavior, be a kinder person, and be more generous. Once a man reforms his manners, then no problem exists. In the civil sphere, laws are enacted to restrain bad behavior or to constrain good behavior. Compliance with these laws is the duty of a law-abiding citizen. If regeneration were merely civil compliance, then even an enemy of the state could comply in order to advance his personal and treacherous ends. It certainly had to be more than that. Yet the Socinians maintained that regeneration consisted in a moral reformation of one's

life (*in morali reformatione vitae*) and not in a spiritual renovation of one's nature (*in spirituali renovatione naturae*).42 Of course, regeneration does produce moral reformation, but the latter is only the effect and not the substance of regeneration.

Jesus says we must be born again because in our fallen state we are dead in trespasses and sins. Man needs to be regenerated and not merely reformed. The change must be from the inside out. The good tree produces good fruit; out of the treasure of the heart, a man brings forth good or evil (cf. Matt. 12:33–37). Whitewashing the tomb does not change the corruption that lies within. It is the heart that needs to be changed, and that fundamental, essential change is regeneration.

The Puritans recognized that outward reformation could proceed from natural (unregenerate) principles, such as desire for promotion or fear of punishment. Regeneration is more than "outward conformity to the law of God,"43 more than "civil practices,"44 more than theological learning, and more than high professions.45 Charnock says that "we may be outward Christians without an inward principle" because "outward reformation only…is but a new appearance, not a new creature, a change of life, not of the heart."46 Ezekiel Hopkins (1634–1690) notes that the natural man changes either by growing tired of sins or else by changing one sin for another. Some sins drop off as a man ages because he can no longer perform them.47 This kind of change falls short of new birth. George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673) warns, "Thy Civility is a mercy, and thou art bound to bless God for it. But Oh take heed of trusting to it as a sure evidence of thy good estate."48 They did not deny that the regenerate person must also give evidence of it by a reformed life but they also knew you could have at least the semblance of one without the other. "Regeneration is never without reformation of life," insisted Charnock, "but this may be without that."49 Anthony Burgess says that one may be a "new man," changed from his old ways, but is not a "new Creature" in Christ.50 Our Lord's call for a new birth was more than a mere exhortation to reformation of behavior and manners. Such outward change could spring from nature and not from grace—adopting new manners is not the same as being a new creature in Christ Jesus.

2. Regeneration Is the Sovereign Work of God Semi-Pelagians and Arminians admit that man has been impaired by sin. Man needs grace to excite the will and yet, the final hinge on which regeneration swings is man's will. Man can resist and stifle grace; God's purpose can be thwarted. Regeneration is therefore an act of the human will, in a cooperative effort between man and God. There were even some "synergists" among the Lutheran divines who believed that the

"power which man naturally has may contribute something towards their regeneration." The natural man can, as an act of the will, allow the Spirit of God to work in him.[51] This means that regeneration is in part the cooperative act of man. The Puritans vigorously denounced cooperation or synergism in regeneration. Charnock emphatically states that the "will cannot concur in the actual infusion of a gracious principle, because it hath no spark in itself by nature, suitable to that principle which is bringing it into the soul itself."[52]

The Bible makes it clear that man is not merely impaired, but dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1–3). Regeneration involves a new heart and a new spirit—the natural man, being spiritually dead, cannot produce this new birth in himself. Van Mastricht says, "If man were, either in whole or in part, the author of his own regeneration, he would enable himself to differ, contrary to the apostle's assertion (1 Cor. 4:7)."[53]

Man is passive in regeneration; he is born of the Spirit (John 3:5–6), born of God, and not born of anything in man, not his blood, his flesh, or his will (John 1:13). Regeneration must be the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit.[54] There is no cooperation or synergism when it comes to regeneration. Man is not born of the Spirit *and* of his own will. The new birth is monergistic, not synergistic. New birth is an "effect or work of the Spirit in us" and not a "begetting of a nature or being, the same that the Spirit himself is of."[55] The Spirit of God is the "efficient" cause or the "principal, the sole author" of regeneration.[56] In this work we have no part. The believer can concur with the Spirit in his sanctification, says John Flavel (1628–1691), "but in the first production of this spiritual principle he can do nothing." Furthermore, if human nature could concur in regeneration, then "the best natures would be soonest quickened," but we more often see the worst of men regenerated.[57] In regeneration, man does not "contribute toward this work" because it is the sovereign and supernatural work of God.[58] The Spirit is the "efficient principal of it."[59] In saying this, they were saying that in regeneration, divine grace reigns and human nature is passive. Grace works on nature to give it life; nature cannot and does not cooperate with grace.

3. Regeneration Is More Than Moral Suasion Owen and others emphatically state that regeneration is more than moral suasion (persuasion).[60] That is not to say that all forms of persuasion were denied, but only that regeneration required something more. The Westminster Confession states that Christ's work of applying redemption to the elect involves "effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey" (8.8). There is also intellectual moral persuasion through the preaching of the Word as the external call. Yet that is not the entire

work but only the beginning. Without the internal work changing the person, such moral suasion would be ineffectual. The outward call is made effectual only by the inward work of grace.

The necessity of such a change of the heart and will of man was passionately denied by the Saumur congruist Claude Pajon (1626–1685). In his famous fifth sermon of the parable of the wedding feast, he declared that man was "neither a stone…nor a wooden tree-trunk…. He has understanding and will-power; his understanding can judge and deliberate, his will can choose; things must be proposed to him outwardly, and that is how vocation works."[61] All that was needed was a well-instructed mind and a will disposed to believe. The net effect of his theory was that the Spirit really did not do much more than concur with the movement of the human will and that an internal work in the heart was unnecessary.[62] Warfield described Pajon's theory in these terms: "Grace wins those to whom it is 'congruously' offered, that is to say, that the reason why some men are saved and some are not lies in the simple fact that God the Holy Spirit operates in his gracious suasion on some in a fashion that is carefully and infallibly adapted by him to secure their adhesion to the gospel."[63] In other words, God accommodates Himself to human beings, making the gospel agreeable to them, at least to some men, so that they can will to believe and be saved.

Pajon developed his position in reaction to the way the Puritans explained the work of grace in regeneration in terms of a "physical operation," that is, an operation of the Spirit changing the nature of the sinner, beyond a mere change of mind. They had argued that a supernatural work was done in the interior part of the sinner (heart, will, soul, etc.).[64] This great work is designated as a new heart, a new spirit, new creature, *etc.* (cf. Ezek. 36:25–27; Jer. 31:33). The person is not a "stock or a stone" but a man who is affected in all his inward faculties. Though he does not cooperate, he is acted on as a man. Van Mastricht writes, "Regeneration is wrought in man after he has been externally called, to whom grace has been conferred in a way of moral persuasion, and he has been invited to the reception of it."[65] Charnock defines it in these terms: "Regeneration is a mighty and powerful change, wrought in the soul by the efficacious workings of the Holy Spirit, wherein a vital principle, a new habit, the law of God, and a divine nature, are put into, and framed in the heart, enabling it to act holily and pleasingly to God, and to grow up therein to eternal glory."[66] Similarly, Turretin explains that regeneration is "the infusion of supernatural habits by the Holy Spirit."[67] In all these definitions, something happens inwardly, by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

Leonard Rijssen (1636–1700) asks, "Does God infuse new life by a physical

action of the Spirit?" This is an important question that gets at the heart of regeneration. He answers,

> Yes, against the *Remonstrants* and *Socinians*. The view of the orthodox on this question is that the movement of effectual grace is strictly speaking to be called neither physical nor ethical, but supernatural and divine, which practically includes each schesis. It is not simply physical, because the moral faculty is involved, which must be moved in accordance with its nature; nor simply ethical, because God would be acting only in an objective way and using gentle persuasion, as the Pelagians used to insist; but it is supernatural and divine, transcending all these categories.[68]

That said, van Mastricht does not shy away from using the phrase "physical operation" (*operatio physica*) in regeneration.[69] Arminians limited effectual calling (regeneration) to mere moral persuasion.[70] Charnock recognized that if regeneration is nothing more than moral suasion, then "the most eloquent preaching were like to do most good" and the "most eloquent preaching would then most fill the gospel nets."[71] Owen therefore says that there is a "*real physical work* of the Spirit on souls of men in their regeneration."[72] Sinclair Ferguson explains why Owen and many of the Puritans readily used the word "physical" to denote the way God regenerated. They often pitted the word "physical" against the adjective "moral." "Richard Hooker," says Ferguson, "wrote that 'Sacraments are not physical but moral instruments of salvation.'"[73] This may be the background.[74] We can also see that the Puritans consciously resisted the Arminian explanations, and the term "physical" (in the sense of natural, actual, or real) would serve that very purpose. The Puritans contrasted the "physical" with the "moral" in the same way, and in the same sense, that we today contrast the "real" with the "virtual." When arguing that regeneration was more than moral suasion and was in fact a "physical operation" of the Spirit, they were consciously confronting and rejecting the Arminian notion of regeneration. In fact, however obscure the word "physical," it perfectly conveyed the supernatural element in regeneration. Moral suasion left the sinner to do the work; nothing outside came in. A physical operation of the Spirit was His invasion of the soul from without. This insured the supernatural character of regeneration. The term also hinted at how the Spirit actually works on the soul, which brings us to the next element in understanding the nature of regeneration.

4. Regeneration Works with and without Means on the Person Anthony Burgess observed, "The work and Grace of Regeneration, is rather felt and perceived by him that hath it, than that which can be expressed, or made known to a man's

self or others, it being a wonderful hidden, and secret life."[75] It is a mysterious work, but one that a person can perceive. Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) recognized that even though the person cannot comprehend the manner in which it was accomplished, the Spirit nonetheless *immediately* touched his soul. Alexander Comrie (1706–1774) also maintained that regeneration was *immediate*.[76]

It is probable that when the Puritans utilized the term "physical" in their description of the Spirit's activity of regeneration, they were highlighting the Spirit's *immediate* work on the sinner.[77] That is, there is a direct contact between God and the soul of a sinner. If the seat of regeneration is the soul, then the contact between the soul and Spirit is immediate, that is, without means. So we read in Thomas Cole that the regeneration of elect infants dying in infancy "is the sole immediate act of the Spirit of God, without the Word; it is indeed according to the Word, and pursuant to the Covenant and Promise made to *Abraham*."[78] In this special case, he insisted upon the efficient and immediate work of the Spirit. In the case of "elect infants," one can easily see why it has to be immediate. Owen, however, does not limit the immediate work of the Spirit to elect infants but describes the entire work of regeneration as "the internal immediate efficiency of grace."[79]

There was also emphasis, however, on the *instrumental* means God used to regenerate the sinner. Ezekiel Hopkins declares that the Word of God is "the seminal virtue or means" of regeneration.[80] Charnock produced a whole discourse on this, "A Discourse of the Word, the Instrument of Regeneration."[81] Cole would affirm the same and say that the Word of God is the "instrumental cause" of regeneration.[82]

Whately made a further distinction. He says that the Spirit is the *efficient* cause; the Word is the *instrumental*, and holiness is the *material* cause of regeneration.[83] He explains all of this more fully. "The holy Ghost himself… doth convey and insinuate himself into the man, whom he will beget again to a new life…. And yet the Spirit of God, that could work of himself, and without means, pleaseth not so to do in this great work: but of his own free-will makes choice for himself, of a fit and blessed instrument for that purpose; even the law of God, the whole doctrine of the Scriptures."[84] Like most Reformers and Puritans, he believed that the Lord more often uses ("more often, more usually, more ordinarily") the Word preached than the Word read.[85] Because that is the case, we should greatly value the preaching of God's Word and labor to sit under it. "Oh therefore how careful should people be both to get and to live under the preaching of God's Word! This is the wind that must make dry bones live: This is the voice of a trump, that must make the dead come out of the grave. How

mean [insignificant], impotent, contemptible, men may esteem it, yet God hath appointed no other means to convey supernatural life, but after this manner."[86] That means the Spirit must be present with the Word. Without Him, the preaching of the Word would be ineffectual. John Owen recognized that the bare preaching of the Word without the Spirit could do nothing. "The word itself, under a bare proposal to the minds of men, will not so effect them." The "ministration of the Spirit" is required because the Spirit is the "fountain of all illumination."[87]

Though the Puritans would be quite clear in maintaining the truth that God alone is the "prime efficient cause of regeneration,"[88] yet they also maintained that God ordinarily used the Word of God as His instrument. As noted above, Cole says that God immediately regenerates elect infants, but in adults, He uses the Word as His instrument—God regenerates adults "not without the Word, but by the Word as the instrumental Cause."[89] They were emphatic: the Word is required; that is the ordinary and appointed way. Yet, we must also observe Turretin's distinction. He says, "The Spirit works immediately upon us, not so much before or after the word as together with it."[90] Though the Word is instrumental, the Spirit is still ultimately the efficient and immediate cause of regeneration.

Arthur Dent's popular work *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* presents this point tersely and clearly. Philagathus asks, "Cannot a man attain unto regeneration and the new birth without the word and the Spirit?" Theologus responds, "No verily: for they are the instruments and means whereby God doth work it."[91] That short dialogue perfectly conveys the Puritans' understanding of the work of the Spirit with the Word in regeneration.

5. Regeneration Renews the Whole Man God does not merely speak to us or offer terms of life through the preaching of the gospel. God really and effectually renews the mind to understand the gospel, renews the heart to believe it, and renews the will to desire and respond to God. This work of God is not manipulation but regeneration. As a result of regeneration, the person can finally believe. Francis Burmann (1632–1679) says, "The first act of regeneration and the first movement of the new man is faith."[92] If the will has been affected, then the will must act. As the Word is preached, the man is enabled to believe—the will is set free to believe. God does not coax a person to "make a decision," but instead He supernaturally quickens a person and works in his will by giving him "a new propensity towards spiritual good."[93] He also illumines the mind and stirs the affections. The Puritans spent much time explaining exactly what happens inside the person even though they all acknowledged that the workings

of God were mysterious.

Puritan definitions of regeneration will help us to better understand this internal work, and Charnock's definition is as good as they come. He says that regeneration "is a universal change of the whole man. It is a new creature, not only a new power or new faculty. This…extends to every part…. [It] is as large in renewing as sin was in defacing."[94] In agreement, Swinnock says that the subject of God's renewal is "the whole man."[95] But the "proper seat of grace" is the soul, which in turn influences every faculty of the soul.[96] He does not lean toward one faculty over another. That, however, was not universally believed.

Some, like Thomas Cole, will say that it "appears most in the Will," or that it "usually appears first in the Will."[97] Van Mastricht concurs and argues for its impact on the will. But he also notes that some in the Reformed tradition (e.g., John Cameron) "allow indeed a physical operation upon the will, but that only by the medium of the understanding, which God in regeneration so powerfully enlightens and convinces that the will cannot but follow its last practical dictate."[98] John Owen seems to be sympathetic to John Cameron's (c. 1579–1625) view. In explaining the faculties of the soul on which regeneration works, Owen says, "The leading, conducting faculty of the soul is the *mind* or understanding."[99] This leading faculty is not replaced but renewed, which enables us "to know God savingly."[100] Then the Spirit works on the will. The will is so acted upon immediately by the Spirit that its inclination is determined. The will is not left "remaining undetermined," but the Spirit determines it "in and unto the acts of faith and obedience." The Spirit does not leave men to "the undetermined liberty of their wills." At the same time, He does this "without the least impeachment of its liberty or freedom."[101]

So there were differences among the Puritans as to which faculty of the soul is first impacted. Regardless of these differences, they all believed that the whole soul is regenerated. How they describe the effects on each respective faculty is the same; they simply differ as to the order. Since regeneration involves the whole soul, that means each renewed believer's mind, will, emotions, affections, *etc*. have been changed. Mere mental assent is insufficient, and mere outward compliance to God's law without the affections panting after God also falls short of regeneration—all the faculties of the soul are affected (however we might prioritize them). For that reason, the Puritans could appeal to the believer to honor the Lord in every aspect of his life. The whole man was regenerated, and the whole man must subject itself to the Savior.

6. Regeneration Is Irresistible Pelagians, Socinians, and many Arminians believe that regeneration can be resisted. Though Reformed writers did not necessarily

like the word *irresistible* in this context, they found it nonetheless helpful. Turretin says that the "expressions 'resistibility' and 'irresistibility' of grace are both barbarous and little adapted to unfold what is sought…we are compelled to use them *ad hominem* that we may draw off the mask from our adversaries."[102] Van Mastricht pointed out that moral suasion may be resisted, but not regeneration.[103] Nonetheless, Owen emphatically states that the Spirit's work on sinners is "*infallible*, victorious, irresistible, or always efficacious."[104] Anthony Burgess agreed with the orthodox, who declared that regeneration is "irresistibly wrought in us by an insuperable efficacy of God's spirit."[105]

What does the Bible say to all this? Paul's rhetorical question perfectly conveys the truth: "For who hath resisted [God's] will?" (Rom. 9:19). The answer is no one! The force of the excuse in Romans 9 would have been completely lost had Paul answered, "Nay but, O man, thou canst always resist God's will; thou hast the final say." Paul never would have dreamed of saying such a thing, for he shared the conviction of King Nebuchadnezzar: "The most High…doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:34–35). The new birth therefore is irresistible because it is God's will acting upon us: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

In Acts 7:51, Stephen says, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." This verse does not teach that regeneration can be resisted. Rather, the external call of the gospel and the common operations of the Spirit that do not issue in regeneration can be resisted (WCF, 10.4). External calls of the gospel are always resisted; the natural man cannot, will not, and does not comply with the demands of the gospel. Such is the natural response of sinful man. When the regenerating Spirit draws sinners to Christ, however, He first makes them willing to come by renewing their wills and determining them to that which is good (WCF, 10.1).

Van Mastricht cites other Scripture texts to confirm the irresistibility of regeneration. He argues, "If anyone could at his pleasure resist the divine agency in regeneration, then all could, and so it might be the case that not one would be regenerated, and thus the whole glorious design of redemption might be frustrated."[106] God's purposes cannot be thwarted.

This irresistible work does no violence to the will. John Owen says, "The will, in the first *act* of conversion…*acts* not but as it is *acted*, moves not but as it is moved; and therefore is *passive* therein." What this means is that a mighty gracious "secret act" "is antecedent unto its own acting."[107] That is, grace acted on the will before the will acted and set the will free to do according to its inclination. The will has been determined or given a new propensity—a new

principle. Irresistible grace therefore does not compel the will or debase the nature of man. Regeneration does not destroy but perfects human nature; "it implies a change of state, and a change of nature."[108] Its irresistible work therefore frees the will—"infallibly determining it in its free acts."[109]

The Puritans believed that the Spirit was omnipotent and that the spiritually dead sinner needed an omnipotent, physical operation of the Spirit immediately performed upon him. Nothing less could surmount the defiance of an incorrigibly wicked will. For them, the irresistibility of the Spirit's work flowed alike from the necessity of the new birth, from the helplessness of man lying dead in trespasses and sin, and from the sovereign nature of God.

7. Regeneration Cannot Be Undone Can a man undo this work of regeneration? Pelagians argued that one could, on account of their doctrine of free will. Man's will "can either divest itself of grace received or receive it at pleasure (with whom, in this point at least, the Lutherans agree, as they hold that one truly regenerate may totally fall from grace)."[110] Since in this view regeneration is nothing more than moral suasion, what a person may be persuaded of today can change drastically tomorrow. If we can be talked into the kingdom, we may just as easily be talked out of it.

The Puritans taught otherwise. John Flavel says that the new life of regeneration is "no transient, vanishing thing, but a fixed, permanent principle, which abides in the soul for ever." Furthermore, "grace cannot be separated from the soul: when all forsake us, this will not leave us."[111]

The apostle John says that the seed of God remains in those who are born of God (1 John 3:9). Furthermore, Jesus says that a second birth is required to enter the kingdom of heaven. He makes an absolute distinction between the two births: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). The verse implies that the move is only one way, from flesh to spirit and not from spirit to flesh.

Van Mastricht explains the new life produced in us by regeneration can never be lost. "The Reformed hold that it can never be wholly lost, but this they suppose to depend not upon the power of the regenerate, but upon God's immutable decree of election, and His almighty upholding power."[112] God preserves what He begins.[113] Regeneration is not an inherent power but a work that God sustains in us because all the acts of the new creature and the continuance of the regenerate are of God.[114] Charnock reasons, "Why did he take pains to write the law anew in the heart, if he would suffer it to be dashed out again?… It is not reasonable to think that God should be at so much cost, only to restore man to Adam's mutable condition, whereby to incur a greater

condemnation."[115]

8. Regeneration Is Only for the Elect There are some who broadly define regeneration as to make it universal, says van Mastricht. That is, they hold that everyone has been given the ability to perform good deeds, including those things necessary for salvation. Van Mastricht notes the Papists teach that "sufficient grace is given to every man whereby he can be saved."[116] Many tend to believe that every person can be regenerated if he chooses to believe. No doctrine of election applies to them. For this reason Reformed theologians such as John Cotton (1585–1652) were compelled to say that the first cause of our "Spiritual life, is the holy and gracious will of God" (citing James 1:18). In particular, Cotton says it is from "God's will in the Covenant, that begets a child of God."[117] Regeneration therefore is limited to those whom God has appointed to eternal life, namely, the elect.

From a human standpoint, we must regard everyone as possible candidates for salvation and eternal life until they die. For that reason, we proclaim the gospel to all, indiscriminately. Yet, theologically, we know that only the elect are regenerated. Peter writes his epistle to persons "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2) and begins with praise to God the Father, "which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope" (v. 3), and so draws a straight line from election to regeneration.

Thomas Cole says that the subjects of regeneration are "The Elect, only the Elect, and all the Elect."[118] Swinnock says, "Those whose names are registered in heaven, their natures are regenerated on earth."[119] Van Mastricht also restricts regeneration to the elect.[120] This is not a debate among the Puritans. They all agreed with Ezekiel Hopkins when he said that whom God "predestined, them he regenerated."[121] The external call must be extended to all, but only the elect will be "effectually called," that is, regenerated and so enabled to respond to the preaching of the gospel with understanding, faith, and repentance.

Regeneration and Baptism How did the Puritans' understanding of regeneration relate to baptism? A few were credobaptists, but most were paedobaptists who sought to define their position over against the Roman Catholic view on the one hand, and the "bare sign" position on the other. Without getting into all the complexities and controversies, a few things still need to be said.[122]

Charnock says regeneration is not the same as an "external baptism" because baptism "confers not grace, but engageth to it: outward water cannot convey inward life. How can water, a material thing, work upon the soul in a physical manner?"123 He is insistent that one cannot assume that baptism infallibly effects regeneration.124 "Baptism is a means of conveying this grace [of regeneration]," he says, but only "when the Spirit is pleased to operate with it." The Westminster Confession of Faith says that baptism is ordained "for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church" and a sign and seal "of his ingrafting into Christ," and "of regeneration" (28.1). Even though "the efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered,…the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto" (28.6). But Charnock is not comfortable with those who teach that regeneration "is conferred in baptism upon the elect" because he cannot fathom how spiritual life can remain dormant until conversion.125 John Owen, not wanting to jump into this debate, suggests that in this context regeneration means no more than that a person who was baptized as an infant ends up professing faith as an adult. Admittedly, baptism can be the means of regeneration, but baptism by itself followed by a profession of faith is not regeneration—that is, just because a person was baptized and subsequently made a profession of faith does not mean the person himself was regenerated.126

Ezekiel Hopkins did not believe in baptismal regeneration in the truest sense of the words. He, however, believed in a "baptismal regeneration of infants" that is "external and ecclesiastical." They are not internally regenerated or cleansed by the Spirit, but only "externally sanctified" by the sacrament.127 By so defining his terms, he was able to retain the language of baptismal regeneration while emptying it of its natural meaning. In this way, what he maintained in *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration* took a different twist in *The Doctrine of the Two Sacraments*. Does not this explanation weaken his whole doctrine of "regeneration"?

We have already encountered complex issues related to this topic, and much more could be said. However, this short survey should be sufficient to show that the Puritans unanimously rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration but had slightly different nuances among themselves as to exactly how baptism and regeneration related to each other. Further discussion of the matter lies outside the scope of this chapter.128

Signs of Regeneration Much can be said regarding the signs or "marks" of regeneration. In fact, the Puritans expended much energy on this topic because

they wanted to be eminently practical. Teaching the necessity of regeneration without explaining what it actually looks like in real life would be useless. Though we cannot develop this topic as fully as we would like, a few things need to be considered.

Puritans often spent time pointing out false signs of regeneration. We have already noted one example in our survey of the nature of regeneration. Other false signs include formal professions of faith in Christ not validated by works: "In works they may deny Christ, while in words they do acknowledge him." As to moral reformation, a person can be a new creature "upon old grounds." Others profess Christ out of "temporal fears" and out of their love for "outward mercies." Another false sign is a change in life that is founded on "confused principles of the mind"—that is, a mixture of things spiritual and carnal.[129]

Ezekiel Hopkins gives several "Signs of the Truth of Grace." The first one is that the person is "willing to search and examine himself, whether he be gracious or not." The hypocrite hates the light, much like a thief hates being exposed, but the regenerate says with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts" (Ps. 139:23). The second sign is genuine love for the saints of God (1 John 3:14). The truly gracious man loves them because they are godly, and he loves them all. Another sign is "universal Respect and Obedience unto all God's Commandments." Though we do not perfectly obey, we "restlessly aspire" to do so. "Universal" means to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.[130]

The last example Hopkins gives is that the believer does not commit sin (1 John 3:9–10). What does that mean? It means "he doth not sin in that malignant manner, in which the children of the Devil do: he doth not make a trade of sin, nor live in the constant and allowed practice of it." The regenerate man opposes *all* sin: "Is there no lust, that your eye spares, nor that your heart pities?"[131]

On this point, Thomas Cole goes a little further, taking it in the absolute sense and saying that the regenerate believer *cannot* sin, that is, not as he did before: "He that is a new creature may sin, but not as a new creature." He means by this that the regenerate "cannot go on in sin; 'tis against his Nature; he may be surprised into an act of sin, but the new Nature will quickly recover itself, and cast out that sin by Repentance."[132] When a regenerate does sin, he would not—the antipathy exists because "sin is not so connatural to a Regenerate Person."[133] Cole is concerned to underscore the living power of the regenerate believer's antipathy to sin. This inherent principle of opposition to sin is a sure sign of regeneration. Charnock says that "no creature can easily act against a rooted habit." He says that it is "impossible for the new creature to sin by the influence of habit."[134]

Of course, the true child of God would want to know all these things. Perhaps Hopkins's main point on this issue is correct—that is, the one who is a new creature in Christ wants his life to be examined. Concern to know our spiritual state is the *sine qua non* of regeneration. Regarding these signs, Hopkins gave four broad signs while Cole gave six. Many more "signs" could be listed, but the reader begins to understand the importance of these lists. After giving the signs, the Puritans used them to exhort believers to live up to what they have become in Christ.135 Cole challenges his reader to remember that he is "more given to contemplation than practice."136 It is not enough to know we are born again; we must also live as children of God, forsaking the world, crucifying our old nature, and walking in a new and holy life.

1. Stephen Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1845; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:26–27.

2. See the Decree Concerning Original Sin from the Council of Trent, session 5.

3. Thomas Watson, *A Plea for the Godly* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 287.

4. Watson, *A Plea for the Godly*, 288.

5. In addition there is the regeneration of creation itself, a topic beyond the scope of this chapter.

6. Cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 466; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:581; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 3.3.9. Here is an example from the citation: "Therefore, in a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression."

7. Even more remote from the thought of orthodox Puritanism is the modern evangelical heresy that one can "accept Christ" and claim to be "born again" and expect to go to heaven while living an unsanctified life.

8. Berkhof believes the Belgic Confession uses the term broadly.

9. Robert Rollock, *Select Works of Robert Rollock* (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1849), 1:29–288.

10. Rollock, *Treatise of Our Effectual Calling*, in *Select Works*, 1:244–45.

11. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 470.

12. William Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, trans. Todd M. Rester, Classic Reformed Theology (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 108, 148–153.

13. David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra*… (Edinburgh: Printed by Evan Tyler, 1664), 10.

14. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 2.15.1.6.

15. Turretin, *Institutes*, 2.15.4.13.

16. Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (Boston: B. Green and S. Kneeland for B. Eliot and D. Henchman, 1726), 441.

17. Thomas Cole said that regeneration was "of a larger Extent and Signification than Justification and Sanctification; 'tis initially all that belongs to a state of Grace." *A Discourse of Regeneration* (London: for Thomas Cockerill, 1692), 9.

18. The portion on regeneration was translated into English in 1769 by an unknown author and republished in 2002; Peter van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002). Van Mastricht's entire, massive multivolume work, which Jonathan Edwards deemed to be the best theological books ever written, is currently being translated into English by Todd Rester and edited by Joel R. Beeke and Nelson Kloosterman under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society and will

be published by Reformation Heritage Books.

19. E.g., Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration; Or, the New Birth*, in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 2:221–98; Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 1.

20. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:7.

21. George Swinnock would say, "There must be a change from Nature to Grace, before there can be a change from Grace to Glory." *The Door of Salvation Opened by the Key of Regeneration* (London, 1660), 9.

22. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:16–22.

23. With this William Whately would also agree, "Yea, as possible is it, that God should cease to be God, as that any man, not made anew according to the image of God, should be received into the blessed vision, possession, fruition of God…that there should bee any communion betwixt God and man…, so long as man remaineth in the estate of his corrupted nature, not being created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness." *The New Birth* (London, 1622), 4–5.

24. Whately, *The New Birth*, 13.

25. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:22–26.

26. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:26–27.

27. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:26–27.

28. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:27.

29. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 8.

30. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 2.

31. Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or A Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A. Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), 211.

32. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 4–5.

33. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:59.

34. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:28–48.

35. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:48–51.

36. Cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 467.

37. "Flacius, Illyricus, Matthias," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2:110–11. Also see the entry for Flacius in the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. It seems he wanted to show the true fallen nature of man against what he perceived Melanchthon and his followers were espousing. Nonetheless, Flacius was charged with Manichaeanism, and his novel view was subsequently refuted by Reformed divines, *e.g.* Charnock, *Works*, 3:91: "Some thought that the substance of Adam's soul was corrupted when he sinned, therefore suppose the substance of his soul to be altered when he is renewed." Anthony Burgess also answers this question in *Spiritual Refining*, 258.

38. Thomas Rees, trans., *The Racovian Catechism* (London: Longman, et al., 1818), 331.

39. Rees, *Racovian Catechism*, 326.

40. Cf. "Socinus and Socinianism," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988), 649.

41. Many of these major points have been drawn from van Mastricht's work on regeneration.

42. John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 3:219.

43. David Clarkson, "The New Creature," in *The Works of David Clarkson* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 2:9.

44. Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 61.

45. Swinnock offers ten "sandy foundations" in *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 60–107.

46. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:59–60.

47. Hopkins, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration*, in *Works*, 2:225–26.

48. Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 65.

49. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:59.

50. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 278.

51. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 34–35.

52. Stephen Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1845; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:207.

53. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 36.

54. Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 6:47–49.

55. Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost*, in *Works*, 6:158.

56. Whately, *The New Birth*, 15.

57. John Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 2:96–98.

58. Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:92.

59. Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 10.

60. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:301ff.; Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:238–39.

61. Cited in Émile G. Léonard, *A History of Protestantism*, trans. Joyce M. H. Reid (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), 2:393.

62. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:532.

63. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 91. Warfield believed Pajonism was a "debased form" (92) of Amyraldianism, while Brian Armstrong believed it was not "representative of Amyraldian thought." See *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), xix–xx. The prevailing opinion seems to be in favor of Warfield's interpretation. On Pajonism, see George Park Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 346–47; J. A. Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, trans. George Robson and Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), 2:28–29; for short summaries, John Macpherson, *Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 271; John Anderson, *Precious Truth* (Pittsburgh: Ecclesiastical and Literary Press of Zadok Cramer, 1806), 261.

64. Charnock notes the disputes over the nature of regeneration. The debates centered on this very question we are developing: "whether it be quality, or a spiritual substance; whether, if a quality, it be a habit or a power, or whether it be the Holy Ghost personally" ("A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:86–87).

65. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 39.

66. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:87–88.

67. Turretin, *Institutes*, 15.4.13.

68. Leonard Rijssen, *Francisci Turretini Compendium Theologiae…* (Amsterdam, 1695), 13, 18, cited in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 522. The word *schesis* means the nature of a thing, the habit of a body. For example, βίου σχέσις is translated in classical Greek as "the way of life."

69. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 39–40; *Theoretio-Practica Theologia* (Utrecht: Thomas Appels, 1699), 6.3.25–26.

70. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n.d.), 155.

71. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:238.

72. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:307 (emphasis in the original).

73. Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 42–43.

74. It is also evident in van Mastricht when he asks, "Is the action of God which regenerates a man moral or physical?" (*A Treatise on Regeneration*, 37).

75. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 225.

76. Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and J. Mark Beach (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 52–53.

77. Owen combines the two: "There is not only a *moral* but a *physical* immediate operation of the Spirit…in their regeneration." *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:316.

78. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 68.

79. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:330. He also mentions that the Holy Spirit works "immediately and effectually upon the will," in *Works*, 3:334; cf. 3:317.

80. Hopkins, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration*, in *Works*, 2:245.

81. Stephen Charnock, "A Discourse of the Word, the Instrument of Regeneration," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1845; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:307–35.

82. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 49; Whately, *The New Birth*, 17; Isaac Ambrose, *The Compleat Works* (London, 1674), 12; Hopkins, *Works*, 3:245.

83. Whately, *The New Birth*, 22.

84. Whately, *The New Birth*, 16–17.

85. Whately, *The New Birth*, 17–18. John Cotton lists the Word of God as the second "cause" of new life and argues that God "ordinarily" uses "a word of Promise" preached while insisting that He does not give life through "the words of the Law." *Christ the Fountaine of Life* (London, 1651), 95–96.

86. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 207.

87. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:235–36. Turretin's words are helpful here: "But whatever may be its efficacy, still it is not sufficient without the immediate operation of the Spirit" (*Institutes*, 15.4.23).

88. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:169.

89. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 69.

90. Turretin, *Institutes*, 15.4.51.

91. Arthur Dent, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven; Wherein Every Man May Clearly See Whether He Shall Be Saved or Damned* (1599; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 19.

92. Francis Burmann, *Synopsis Theologiae…* (Amsterdam, 1699), 6, 4, 1 (*Primus regenerationis actus, primusque novi hominis motus est fides.…*), cited in Heppe and Bizer, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 526.

93. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 40.

94. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:95.

95. Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 22.

96. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:96; cf. Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 24. Whately also says it pertains to the whole man and focuses on the "principal faculties" of understanding, conscience, and will, *The New Birth*, 69. Isaac Ambrose says all the "powers of the soul" and lists a few more (e.g., memory and affections), see *The Doctrine of Regeneration*, in *Compleat Works*, 5–11.

97. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration* (London, 1689), 12.

98. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 40.

99. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:330. Kelly Kapic shows that Owen was more of a practical voluntarist. *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 50–53.

100. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:331. He lists the mind first in the list on pp. 318–19; also, on p. 334 he makes it clear that the renovation in the sinner is first of all rational.

101. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:333–34.

102. Turretin, *Institutes*, 15.6.3.

103. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 43–46.

104. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:317, 324, 336.

105. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 226. Charnock says it is "insuperably victorious…. The power of the Spirit is sweet and irresistible" ("A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:288).

106. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 43–44.
107. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:319–20.
108. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 14.
109. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:324. Cf. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:286–87.
110. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 47.
111. Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:91.
112. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 47.
113. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:292–93.
114. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:252–53.
115. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:253.
116. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise of Regeneration*, 49.
117. Cotton, *Christ the Fountaine of Life*, 92–93.
118. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 33.
119. Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 53.
120. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise of Regeneration*, 50.
121. Hopkins, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration*, in *Works*, 2:230.
122. For an overview of the debates in England over this issue, see E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570–1720* (1974; repr., Eugene, Ore: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 75–108.
123. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:93.
124. Cf. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 277–78.
125. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:93–94. Men like Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) maintained this view; see Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*, 84ff.
126. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:216.
127. Hopkins, "The Doctrine of the Two Sacraments," in *Works*, 3:324.
128. See chapter 45 for more on the Puritan view of paedobaptism.
129. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 277ff.
130. Hopkins, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration*, in *Works*, 2:277–85.
131. Hopkins, *The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration*, in *Works*, 2:285–91.
132. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 120–21.
133. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 121–22.
134. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:117–18.
135. Ezekiel Hopkins, "Discourses Concerning Sin," in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 2:29–98.
136. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 156.

Chapter 30

The Puritans on Union with Christ, Justification, and Regeneration

> *By a true and real union, (but which is only passive on their part,) [the elect] are united to Christ when his Spirit first takes possession of them, and infuses into them a principle of new life: the beginning of which life can be from nothing else but from union with the Spirit of Christ…. Further, since faith is an act flowing from the principle of spiritual life, it is plain, that in a sound sense, it may be said, an elect person is truly and really united to Christ before actual faith.*
>
> —HERMAN WITSIUS[1]

How does regeneration relate to the believer's union with Christ and his justification by faith alone? As on other matters, the Puritans were not silent on this question. Thomas Halyburton (1674–1712), a Puritan-minded minister and theologian in the Church of Scotland, provides a particularly incisive look into the relationship between regeneration and justification in his work *A Modest Inquiry Whether Regeneration or Justification Has the Precedency in Order of Nature*.[2] Does justification, "in the order of nature, precede the renovation of our natures by the spirit of Christ…. Or, on the other hand, are elect sinners first renewed, regenerated, and furnished with a principle of life…whereon justification follows in the same instant of time, yet as consequent in order of nature?"[3] Sensitive to the intricacies bound up with this question, Halyburton catalogs a number of difficulties on both sides of the question.

Supposing that regeneration precedes justification, Halyburton lists the following seven difficulties: (1) How can God, in His wisdom, impart His image to a sinner who is under a curse? (2) How then can a sinner who is under God's curse be "dignified with the image of God"? (3) How can the object of justification be a renewed saint, which would seem to contradict Romans 4:5? (4) Can a soul partake of spiritual life before union with Christ? "Union is by

faith, by which we come to Christ for life: but this renders it needless, because we have life before union." (5) This order would make receiving the Spirit antecedent to union and faith, but we receive the Spirit by faith (Gal. 3:14). (6) This would make the heart purified before faith, but the heart is purified by faith (Acts 15:9). (7) A person becomes a Christian by the Word; the Word is received by faith, which suggests that faith should precede regeneration.[4] These various problems and mysteries follow from the view that regeneration precedes justification.

On the other hand, if justification precedes regeneration, there are also several difficulties involved. The first is ecclesiastical in nature, namely, Reformed divines "harmoniously teach the contrary"; and the Reformed confessions likewise deny that justification precedes regeneration. Moreover, how can acts of life exist if there is not an abiding principle for them from which to proceed? Even more pertinently, how can a dead soul "be the subject of this noblest act of faith that unites to Christ"? After all, there are many acts of justifying faith, such as assenting, choosing, approving, and resting in Christ. Can a dead soul do these things? The fruit of faith needs a root, and a dead root will not do.[5] Halyburton claims that these and other difficulties exist with the view that justification precedes regeneration.

Threefold Union Reformed theologians in seventeenth-century Britain typically posited a threefold union with Christ in terms of God's immanent, transient, and applicatory works. Some even spoke of justification in relation to these three stages, which led to the doctrine of eternal justification.[6] "Immanent union" refers to being elected in union with Christ from all eternity, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); "transient union" refers to believers' union with Christ in time past, in His mediatorial death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–11); and "applicatory union" refers to the believer's experience of union with Christ in the present time (Eph. 2:5–6). Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) follows this threefold pattern when he refers to the doctrine of justification, first, "as purposed and determined in the mind and will of God…. Second, as impetrated and obtained for us by the obedience of Christ…. Third, as actually applied unto us."[7] The third stage of union with Christ is often referred to as our "mystical" union with Christ.

Halyburton notes these distinctions and stresses that each part of this threefold union with Christ is related to the others in a fundamental way. Those who were elected in Christ in eternity past are those for whom Christ died and rose again in time past, and they are the ones to whom the Holy Spirit applies all the benefits of Christ's mediatorial work. There is a unity in God's will. All three persons of

the Godhead concurred in the work of salvation in the eternal covenant of redemption. That is to say, the salvation of the elect is certain because it is rooted in the eternal, unchangeable decree of God. Moreover, there was a "general justification" effected by Christ's oblation, but this is not "justification properly and strictly called."[8] Even for those who spoke of justification as eternal (e.g., Thomas Goodwin [1600–1680]), a sinner nevertheless abides under the wrath of God until he or she believes.[9]

Clearly, therefore, there are various ways in which believers are united to Christ, and they are all necessary for salvation. No one will come to faith in Christ who has not been elected in eternity, and not without the benefit of Christ's oblation and intercession. This chapter will address "applicatory union," the mystical or experiential union between the believer and Christ. The Puritans seemed to be agreed on the relationship between the believer's experiential union with Christ and the believer's personal regeneration.

The Chief Blessing?

Of all the blessings of salvation, which is the chief or primary blessing? Is it justification by faith, that "article of faith by which the church stands or falls" (*articulus stantis aut cadentis Ecclesiae*)?[10] In the judgment of several significant Puritan theologians, union with Christ, not justification by faith, is the chief blessing a Christian receives from God. The believer's union with Christ enables him to receive all the benefits of Christ's work, including justification, adoption, and sanctification. To have Christ is to have all.

John Calvin's famous statement in the opening words of the third book of the *Institutes*, on the importance of union with Christ shows the basic continuity between the Reformers and the Puritans on this point.[11] Calvin asks, "How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ's own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men?" He answers, "First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."[12] In plain terms therefore Calvin argues the absolute necessity of union with Christ for salvation. So long as we stand apart from Christ, nothing He did as mediator can be of use to us.

The Puritans agreed with Calvin on the necessity of union with Christ. For John Owen (1616–1683), union with Christ is the "principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations."[13] He notes moreover that the first spiritual grace is "dignity," that is, "it is the greatest, most honourable, and glorious of all graces that we are made partakers of."[14] Thomas Goodwin

similarly comments that “being in Christ, and united to him, is the fundamental constitution of a Christian.”[15] These comments provide insight into how union with Christ relates to justification, adoption, and sanctification.

Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*

As Halyburton notes, the common Reformed view on the order of justification and regeneration is that the latter precedes the former. But what about the role of union with Christ in relation to regeneration and justification? Goodwin affirms, as one would expect, that union with Christ is the “first fundamental thing of justification, and sanctification and all.”[16] Thus, in specific relation to justification, Goodwin maintains that “all acts of God’s justifying us depend upon union with Christ, we having him, and being in him first, and then thereby having right to his righteousness.”[17] But in relation to regeneration or, more specifically, effectual calling, Goodwin argues that union with Christ precedes regeneration. Christ first “apprehends” the believer: “It is not my being regenerate that puts me into a right of all those privileges, but it is Christ [who] takes me, and then gives me his Spirit, faith, holiness, &c. It is through our union with Christ, and the perfect holiness of his nature, to whom we are united, that we partake of the privileges of the covenant of grace.”[18] This statement appears to indicate that union with Christ logically (not chronologically), precedes not only justification—a typical Reformed view—but even regeneration (narrowly considered).

What makes Goodwin’s views on this matter perplexing is the fact that within the space of six pages he affirms there is a “threefold union with Christ”[19] and a “twofold union with Christ.”[20]The first union is a relational union, like the union between a husband and wife. “And this union is fully and completely done when first we are turned to God, and when Christ takes us.”[21] The second union involves the dwelling of Christ in the human body (Eph. 3:17)—“an actual inbeing of his person.” The third is objective, that is, having Christ as an object of faith “as the faculty doth view an object.”[22] When Goodwin later speaks of the twofold union, he has in mind the first two under the heading of a “substantial union and communicative union.”[23] The union that we are especially concerned with is the first union, the union whereby the sinner is married to Christ. How does this happen? Returning to Goodwin’s comment above that “Christ takes me, and then gives me his Spirit, faith, holiness, &c.,” we are faced with the question of whether union with Christ precedes faith itself.

Goodwin’s *The Object and Act of Justifying Faith* is helpful in answering this question. In it, he speaks of the act of the will completing the union between Christ and the believer, which makes believers “ultimately one with him.”[24]

However, as the bride, we are simply confirming the union that has taken place. So, contrary to the common view of marriage, which requires the consent of both partners since a man cannot marry a woman against her will, there is a spiritual union on Christ's part to the elect that does not require assent from the sinner "because it is a secret work done by his Spirit, who doth first apprehend us ere we apprehend him."[25] That is to say, Christ establishes a union with the elect sinner by "apprehending" him and then giving the Spirit to him. But this union is only complete ("ultimate union") when the sinner exercises faith in Christ. This basic pattern is confirmed later in Goodwin's work on justifying faith:

> It is true indeed the union on Christ's part is in order of nature first made by the Spirit; therefore Philip. iii. 12, he is said first to "comprehend us ere we can comprehend him;" yet that which makes the union on our part is faith, whereby we embrace and cleave to him…. It is faith alone that doth it. Love indeed makes us cleave to him also, but yet faith first.[26]

Goodwin is at his finest when he speaks of Christ "taking," "apprehending," and "comprehending" the sinner. Christ "takes hold of us before we believe" and "works a thousand and a thousand operations in our souls to which our faith concurs nothing…. Christ dwells in us and works in us, when we act not and know not our union, nor that it is he that works."[27] Before the new believer is aware, our Lord unites us to Himself ("takes hold of us") and works in us. The Spirit then regenerates the sinner, who in turn exercises faith toward Christ and completes the union. From that union flow all other spiritual blessings.

Owen highlights a number of ways in which union with Christ functions as the "greatest" of all graces. In terms of the present question, his point that union with Christ is the "first and principal grace in respect of causality and efficacy" is most pertinent to how we locate union with Christ in the *ordo salutis*. Like Goodwin, Owen claims that union with Christ is the cause of all other graces a believer receives: "Hence is our adoption, our justification, our sanctification… our perseverance, our resurrection, our glory."[28] Therefore, union with Christ is the ground of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers.[29] Owen's lengthy work on justification (volume 5) confirms the logical priority of union with Christ before other graces such as justification.[30] But regarding the relationship between union and regeneration, Owen seems to take a view similar to Goodwin's. At first glance it appears this is not so, for Owen argues that no one "who hath not been made partaker of the washing of regeneration and the renovation of the Holy Ghost, can possibly have any union with Christ."[31] This seems to posit a logical priority of regeneration to union. But Owen then remarks

immediately after that statement: “I do not speak this as though our purifying were in order of time and nature antecedent unto our union with Christ, for indeed it is an effect thereof; but it is such an effect as immediately and inseparably accompanieth it, so that where the one is not, there is not the other.”[32] With a little more precision than Goodwin, though basically affirming the same position, Owen asserts that the act whereby Christ unites Himself to His elect is the same act whereby He regenerates them.[33]

Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1636–1708), writing on the Continent in the same period as Owen and Goodwin—his work was a contribution to the British Antinomian and Neonomian debates—takes a similar position concerning the relationship between regeneration and union with Christ. He affirms,

> By a true and real union, (but which is only passive on their part,) [the elect] are united to Christ when his Spirit first takes possession of them, and infuses into them a principle of new life: the beginning of which life can be from nothing else but from union with the Spirit of Christ…. Further, since faith is an act flowing from the principle of spiritual life, it is plain, that in a sound sense, it may be said, an elect person is truly and really united to Christ before actual faith.

Witsius sounds very much like Goodwin and Owen in insisting that the elect are united to Christ when Christ’s Spirit “takes possession of them” and regenerates them. And he likewise affirms that union precedes actual faith. But then he makes a similar point to Goodwin’s, namely, that a “mutual union” inevitably follows from the principle of regeneration:

> But the mutual union, (which, on the part of an elect person, is likewise active and operative), whereby the soul draws near to Christ, joins itself to him, applies, and in a becoming and proper manner closes with him without any distraction, is made by faith only. And this is followed in order by the other benefits of the covenant of grace, justification, peace, adoption, sealing, perseverance, *etc*.[34]

Not only is the “mutual union” emphasized by the act of faith in the sinner, but also by the fact that the benefits of the covenant of grace (e.g., justification) flow out of this union.

Goodwin, Owen, and Witsius are affirming what John Ball (1585–1640) had said earlier in *A Treatise of Faith*. Speaking of the order of spiritual blessings that believers receive from Christ, Ball affirms that faith is the “band whereby we are united unto Christ; after Union followeth Communion with him; Justification, Adoption, Sanctification be the benefits and fruits of

Communion."[35] Commenting on the importance of union with Christ, Ball later affirms that after we are made one with Christ, "he and all his benefits are truly and verily made ours; his name is put upon us, we are justified from the guilt and punishment of sin, we are clothed with his righteousness, we are sanctified against the power of sin, having our nature healed and our hearts purified."[36]

John Preston (1587–1628) likewise affirms that "to be in Christ is the ground of all salvation."[37] Thus, union with Christ is the motive for good works since all graces and privileges flow from this union.[38] Christ will take away not only the guilt but also the power of sin in those to whom He is united, which explains the importance of union with Christ for soteriology.[39]

Thomas Cole (1627–1697) entertains a very important question that helps explain the subtle ways in which regeneration and justification relate. He asks, "Whether the first step in Regeneration be from Sin to Holiness, or from a sinful state and nature to Christ, that we may be made holy by him?" That is, are we made clean first, or are we joined to Christ first? Cole says,

> There can be no Change made in our Nature by the Spirit of Christ in our Sanctification, but upon a Change of State from our closing in with the Blood of Christ for Justification. The Spirit of Christ doeth always follow the Blood of Christ; 'tis the Purchase of that Blood; so that the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, extends himself in all his saving Operations, no further than the Body of Christ; none but Members vitally joined to Christ their Head, can be quickened by him; therefore no man or woman can be savingly wrought upon by the Spirit of Christ, who continue in a state of separation from him.[40]

Cole has carefully noted how all these benefits come from Christ, and therefore regeneration must be seen in the light of our union with Christ. He then offers a very precise definition of regeneration, saying that "*Regeneration* is the Implantation of the Soul into Christ."[41]

William B. Evans has recently argued that for the Puritans, communion with Christ "tended to displace 'union with Christ.'"[42] This charge is utterly unconvincing as the evidence above shows. Union with Christ is the basis for communion with Him and, like Calvin, the Puritans viewed union with Christ in His divine-human person as the necessary context in which, and the means by which, redemptive benefits were applied to the elect. Evans's point assumes that the Puritans deviated from a Reformed christological focus, but clearly they understood how union and communion worked together. William Bridge (1600–1671) said that "union is the root of communion" and "union is the ground of communion." In context, Bridge is explaining the benefits of our union with

Christ. He did not displace union with Christ but instead affirmed it as the foundation for his practical theology.[43] Similarly, Obadiah Grew (1607–1689) said, "Union is the ground of all our comfort, and privilege we have by the Lord Jesus Christ: Our communion springs from our Union with him."[44] Bridge and Grew did not sever the believer's communion with Christ from his union with Him.

There is a reason union with Christ is first in the order of nature and regeneration precedes justification. When Christ takes and unites the sinner to Himself, the Spirit regenerates the sinner. In regenerating the sinner, he is still guilty, that is, legally in a state of sin. True, he has a new nature, but that has not altered his legal status for past offenses (and all offenses thereafter)—no more than a murderer is exonerated because afterwards he becomes a model citizen. According to Stephen Charnock (1628–1680), it is when the sinner looks in faith to Christ that his status changes.[45] Justification "gives us a *right*, the other [regeneration] a *fitness.*" He also says, "In justification we are freed from the guilt of sin, and so have a title to life; in regeneration we are freed from the filth of sin, and have the purity of God's image in part restored to us."[46] Sinners are not justified because they were regenerated, but because Christ has paid the penalty of His sins and has applied all His benefits to them.[47] The real is before the legal because both are needed, and in one sense neither depends on the other; both depend on the believer's union with Christ from whom the believer derives all saving benefits. Yet there is another sense in which justification depends on regeneration—that is, the person is enabled to believe by regeneration and is justified by faith alone. Charnock says, "Justification is *relative*; regeneration *internally real*. Union with Christ is the ground of both; Christ is the meritorious cause of both."[48]

Another aspect of union with Christ is addressed by William Lyford (1598–1653). He very precisely stated that we are united to Christ before we exercise faith, and that we in turn exercise faith to lay hold of Christ. Such a statement may be misunderstood, however carefully stated. Apparently the Synod of New England charged John Cotton (1585–1652) of teaching an error when he allegedly stated "that we are completely united to Christ, before, or without any faith wrought in us by the Spirit."[49] Cotton refuted the charge to the Synod's satisfaction, yet it seems the word "completely" was the source of his problem. Lyford believed it could be misleading to distinguish between the *act of faith* we exercise and the *habit of faith* we possess in our union with Christ, for "it seems to favour of the Leaven of *Antinomianism* and *Enthusiasm.*" Yet he also recognized that it does impart some truth as long as the "Faith is begun in action"—he was weary of viewing this union as being complete without the

immediate exercise of faith. “The Union then is begun by action of the Spirit on us, and of Faith put forth by us to lay hold on Christ.”[50]

Lyford adds one more point that is critical to the Puritans’ view of union with Christ and justification. How can someone else’s righteousness become ours? This was a question raised by the Papists. Lyford answers by pointing to our union with Christ: “Christ and the Believer be not Two, but One.” He explains, “*Peter* cannot be saved by the righteousness that is in *Paul*, because they be two; but the Members are saved by the righteousness of their Head, because Head and Members are not two.”[51] The same answer is offered by Obadiah Grew. “A man’s capacity for such propriety in Christ’s righteousness, is this union with Christ.” Union with Christ is the ground on which His righteousness can become ours. “As by marriage-union the Wife is honourable by her Husbands honour…. Thus comes it to pass by our union of espousals to Christ, My beloved is mine, and I am his: that we have an interest and propriety in his merit and spirit, in his righteousness and life.”[52] Lyford and Grew believed that our union with Christ was the best refutation of the Papists’ denial of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Because we are united to Christ, His righteousness can be and is imputed to us by faith.

Conclusion

For the Puritans, the doctrine of regeneration was a fundamental aspect of soteriology, and its relation to the believer’s union with Christ was hugely significant. Union with Christ was typically understood in a threefold manner: immanent/eternal, transient/redemptive-historical, and applicatory/mystical. The redemption purposed by God in eternity and accomplished by Christ in time is incomplete until it is applied in the experience of the believer.

The special work of the Spirit is to apply the benefits of Christ’s mediation to the elect. There is a strict correspondence between Christ’s work and the Spirit’s work. For this reason, regeneration must never be considered apart from Christ; positively stated, regeneration must always be understood in relation to union with Christ.

What this chapter has shown is not only the fundamental necessity of regeneration for salvation but also its close connection to union with Christ. The risen Savior first apprehends the elect and makes them alive by His Spirit operating as the Spirit of Christ, so they can receive from Christ all the benefits of the work He accomplished on their behalf, as their mediator. Faith is only possible because Christ, through the Spirit, has joined Himself to the sinner. In response, the sinner exercises faith toward Christ, as an effect of regeneration. With the union complete, the sinner receives from Christ everything that Christ

merited, including justification, adoption, and sanctification. This, in a nutshell, is the Puritan understanding of the relationship between regeneration and union with Christ.

1. Herman Witsius, *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians*, trans. Thomas Bell (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807), 68.

2. Thomas Halyburton, *A Modest Inquiry Whether Regeneration or Justification Has the Precedency in Order of Nature*, in *The Works of the Rev. Thomas Halyburton*… (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1835).

3. Halyburton, *A Modest Inquiry*, in *Works*, 547.

4. Halyburton, *A Modest Inquiry*, in *Works*, 547.

5. Halyburton, *A Modest Inquiry*, in *Works*, 548.

6. See chapter 8, "Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius on Justification from Eternity."

7. Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant* (London: Tho[mas] Parker, 1674), 358.

8. Halyburton, *A Modest Inquiry*, in *Works*, 550.

9. That is, "until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them" (WCF, 11.4).

10. Interestingly, Robert J. McKelvey has shown that Martin Luther may never have called justification the article by which the church stands or falls, even though the concept belongs to him. McKelvey writes: "Though the 'stands or falls' wording is often attributed to Martin Luther a primary source has never been cited. He could still be the originator of the phrase, as attribution to him comes as early as the seventeenth century. For example, William Eyre refers to justification as '*articulus stantis aut cadentis Ecclesiae*, as Luther calls it'…. Thus, Richard John Neuhaus…wrongly argues that the 'stands or falls' phrase did not originate until the eighteenth century." Robert J. McKelvey, "That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism: Eternal Justification," in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), chap. 10.

11. Three recent studies on Calvin that address his doctrine of union with Christ are worth considering, though they are not without their different emphases and disagreements in places. See Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The "Twofold Grace of God" and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Todd J. Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008). Cf. Lee Gatiss, "The Inexhaustible Fountain of All Goodness: Union with Christ in Calvin's Commentary and Sermons on Ephesians," *Themelios* 34, no. 2 (July 2009): 194–206.

12. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.1.1.

13. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 20:146.

14. Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:148.

15. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:350.

16. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:350.

17. Thomas Goodwin, *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 8:406.

18. Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works*, 5:350.

19. Thomas Goodwin, *Exposition of Various Portions of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 2:404.

20. Goodwin, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:409.

21. Goodwin, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:409–10.
22. Goodwin, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:404.
23. Goodwin, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Works*, 2:410.
24. Goodwin, *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, 8:273.
25. Goodwin, *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, 8:273.
26. Goodwin, *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, 8:463.
27. Goodwin, *Works*, 2:404.
28. Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:150.
29. Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *Works*, 20:150.
30. See chapter 31, "John Owen on Justification by Faith Alone."
31. John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 3:464.
32. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:464.
33. Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:464.
34. Witsius, *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain*, 68.
35. John Ball, *A Treatise of Faith* (London: for Edward Brewster, 1657), 85.
36. Ball, *Treatise of Faith*, 132.
37. John Preston, *The Saints Qualification*, in *An Abridgment of Dr. Preston's Works…* (London: J. L. for Nicholas Bourn, 1648), 738.
38. Preston, *The Saints Qualification*, in *An Abridgment*, 739–40.
39. Preston, *The Saints Qualification*, in *An Abridgment*, 749.
40. Thomas Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration…* (London: for Will Marshall, 1698), 81–82.
41. Cole, *A Discourse of Regeneration*, 83.
42. William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 78.
43. William Bridge, *The Works of the Rev. William Bridge* (1845; repr., Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1989), 1:371. This reference is taken from the fourth sermon of the series, "The Spiritual Life and InBeing of Christ in All Believers."
44. Obadiah Grew, *The Lord Jesus Christ the Lord Our Righteousness* (London, 1669), 97.
45. Stephen Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1845; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:89.
46. Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:90.
47. "We are not justified by an inherent righteousness; yet we are not justified without it. We cannot be justified by it [i.e., regeneration]." Stephen Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1845; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:43.
48. Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:43.
49. William Lyford, *The Plain Mans Senses Exercised…* (London: for Richard Royston, 1655), 120. See David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 34–42, which deals with the believer's union with Christ.
50. Lyford, *The Plain Mans Senses Exercised*, 121–22.
51. Lyford, *The Plain Mans Senses Exercised*, 125–26.
52. Grew, *The Lord Jesus Christ*, 96–98.

Chapter 31

John Owen on Justification by Faith Alone

> *There is no Doctrine like that so naturally inclining to increase humility, an holy fear and self-emptiness, for by this we are taught even in the highest degree of our Sanctification, to look out of our selves for a better righteousness.*
>
> —ANTHONY BURGESS[1]

Since the Reformation, opponents of true biblical religion have assailed the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In the seventeenth century, John Owen (1616–1683) wrote one of the lengthiest defenses of the Protestant doctrine of justification, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith.* He devotes more than four hundred pages to the subject and shows himself to be a polemical theologian par excellence.[2] The importance of this subject was not lost on Owen: "I shall take the boldness, therefore, to say, whoever be offended at it, that *if we lose the ancient doctrine of justification through faith in the blood of Christ*, and the imputation of his righteousness unto us, public profession of religion will quickly issue in Popery or Atheism."[3] Elsewhere, he argues, "In my judgment, Luther spake the truth when he said, "The loss of the doctrine of justification involves the loss of all Christian doctrine" (*Amisso articulo justificationis, simul amissa est tota doctrina Christian*).[4]

Owen's work on justification, published in 1677, was written in the later years of his life and therefore represents his most mature thought on the subject. This is important because there is incontrovertible evidence that Owen changed his theological position on a number of issues, most notably his views on ecclesiology and the necessity of the atonement.[5] However, there is no evidence that Owen's views on justification underwent any significant change.

At present there is no in-depth study of Owen's doctrine of justification.[6] However, Alan Clifford, in an attempt to buttress the Calvin-versus-the-Calvinists thesis, devotes a third of his study trying to prove that John Wesley's doctrine of justification is closer to John Calvin's than is Owen's.[7] This chapter

will provide a detailed synopsis of Owen's doctrine of justification with the intention of showing how his covenant theology played a crucial role in his exposition of justification by faith alone. Earlier, both John Calvin and Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587) related the blessing of justification to the doctrine of the covenant.[8] Owen's treatment of the doctrine of justification in relation to the covenant is no departure; rather, it represents continuity with and further development of the basic ideas of some of the major covenant theologians of the sixteenth century.

Covenant and Justification According to Owen, in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15, the beginning of the covenant of grace, saving benefits such as justification, evangelical repentance, eternal rewards, and the resurrection of the body were contained, albeit obscurely.[9] Speaking of the covenant made with Abraham (Gen. 17:7), Owen notes that the title "God Almighty" is directly linked with the covenant promise. Because of Christ, Abraham and his believing seed received the promise of grace, namely, that God would prove Himself to be a merciful, sanctifying, justifying, and saving God, requiring faith and repentance from Abraham and his seed. The question remains, however, of what Owen means by "justifying" and how, specifically, it relates to the covenant.

According to chapter 19 of his *Greater Catechism*, justification is "the gracious free *act* of God, *imputing the righteousness of Christ to* a believing sinner and for that speaking peace unto his conscience, in the pardon of his sin, —pronouncing him to be just and accepted before him."[10] This gracious justification is received by faith alone.[11] Owen's doctrine of justification reflects historic Protestant orthodoxy on how a sinner is justified before God. The grounds on which Owen argued for such a definition require further investigation.

Preliminary Considerations The goal of Owen's study is no less than to display the "glory of God in Christ," manifested when a sinner finds "acceptance before God, with a right and title unto a heavenly inheritance."[12] Whether God is glorified depends on whether one believes justification is "wrought in and by us," or else "not inherent in us…yet imputed to us." The latter view, for Owen, is axiomatic to a true understanding of the grace and glory of God, while the former is the hallmark of all false religion and philosophy.[13] It should be remembered that there is a deep pastoral intent in Owen's writings, especially on the issue of justification. For example:

> And small hope is there to bring such men to value the righteousness of Christ, as *imputed* to them, who are so unacquainted with their own

> unrighteousness *inherent* in them. Until men know themselves better, they will care very little to know Christ at all…. Those who are pricked unto the heart for sin, and cry out, 'What shall we do to be saved?' will understand what we have to say.[14]

The only hope for sinners who ask "What shall we do to be saved?" is "laid in the first promise; wherein the destruction of the work of the devil by the suffering of the seed of the woman is proposed as the only relief for sinners, and only means of the recovery of the favor of God. 'It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,' Gen. iii. 15."[15] Here Owen ties the *protoevangelium*, the beginning of the covenant of grace, to how a sinner may find favor with God, through the mediatorial work of Christ as the victorious seed of the woman.

The importance of grace in justification stems from the aforementioned considerations. The Christian's new relationship to God as a justified sinner is entirely of grace. The antithesis of this relationship is found in the covenant of works, where there was no mystery of redemptive grace; the principal of man's "sole rule of [his] relation to God" was "do this, and live."[16] The two contrasting covenants (works and grace) reflect the Protestant distinction between law and gospel. Without understanding this law-gospel antithesis, readers will find Owen's doctrine of justification and his teaching on the covenants of works and grace unintelligible.

Nature and Use of Faith Owen takes the proposition that the "means of justification on our part is faith" as granted, even by the Romanists and Socinians.[17] His main concern, however, is to consider what is meant by faith. He considers faith under two heads: first, its nature, and second, its use in our justification. Regarding its nature, Owen distinguishes between true saving faith and spurious faith:

> For there is a faith whereby we are justified, which he who has shall be assuredly saved; which purifies the heart and works by love. And there is a faith or believing, which does nothing of all this; which who has, and has no more, is not justified, nor can be saved…. Thus it is said of Simon the magician, that he "believed," Acts viii.13, when he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.[18]

Owen views the conviction of sin as a necessary prerequisite to the exercise of saving faith. That conviction consists in the "*opening of the eyes* of the sinner, to see the filth and guilt of sin in the sentence and curse of the law applied unto his conscience, Rom vii. 9, 10."[19] This results in the sinner being "sensible of his guilt before God," which is a condition that comes about by the act of sovereign

grace. This sense of guilt does not merely consist in the assent (*assensus*) of the mind because believing is an "act of the heart."[20] If it is "*assentia* alone," then Owen rejects such a faith. Assenting faith must be coupled with a "*fiducial* trust in the grace of God by Christ declared in the promises."[21] While many Reformed theologians spoke of justifying faith involving three elements—knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*)—Owen seems to have placed knowledge and assent together in this context. The reason for that is that in this context he particularly focuses on the saving nature of assent since he is combating the Roman Catholic idea that faith is bare assent.

Owen identifies Christ as the object of justifying faith. Notwithstanding, Owen argues that not only Christ but the Father also is the proper object of faith. He argues this because Christ is not the object of our faith absolutely but as "the *ordinance of God*, even the Father…who is also the immediate object of faith as justifying…. 'He that believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life.'"[22] Related to the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), we are to understand "God the Father as *sending*, and the Son as *sent*,—that is, Jesus Christ in the work of his mediation, as the ordinance of God for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners" as the object of faith.[23] Owen argues that this ordinance of God contains "the grace of God, which is the cause; the pardon of sin, which is the effect; and the promises of the gospel, which are the means, of communicating Christ and the benefits of his mediation unto us."[24]

The nature of justifying faith, then, consists in the "heart's approbation of the way of justification and salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ proposed in the gospel, as proceeding from the grace, wisdom, and love of God."[25] This includes a renunciation of attaining righteousness and salvation by any other means except through Christ. Because the nature of saving faith is not merely *assensus* for Owen, he makes an important distinction regarding obedience in relation to faith. Those who are justified must be united to Jesus Christ and be made partakers of the Holy Spirit. Such faith thus enables sinners to be renewed in their minds so they can live in obedience to God. Yet, Owen insists, "Only we say, it is not any other grace, as *charity* and the like, nor any *obedience*, that gives life and form unto this faith; but it is this faith that gives life and efficacy unto all other graces, and form unto all evangelical obedience."[26]

This brings up another important issue, According to Owen, some maintain, wrongly, that whatever is a necessary condition of the new covenant is, therefore, also a necessary condition of justification.[27] Perseverance to the end, for example, is a condition of the covenant of grace. As a result, if perseverance, as a condition of the covenant, is also a condition of justification, then no man can be justified while he is in this world. "For," says Owen, "a condition doth

suspend that whereof it is a condition from existence until it be accomplished."[28] Consequently, he does not equate instatement in the new covenant with justification or make salvation co-extensive with justification. Perseverance—the promise that those who are effectually made partakers of the covenant of grace will persevere to the end—is also a blessing of the covenant of grace.[29] However, justification in this present world is not contingent upon final perseverance to the end. The Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 73, states similarly, "Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness." Justification, then, as a blessing of the covenant of grace, is distinct from other blessings such as sanctification and perseverance.

Owen considers next the use of faith in our justification. Here he affirms, as did the Reformers and Westminster divines,[30] that faith is "the *instrumental cause* of our justification."[31] He argues from Romans 3:28 where Paul speaks of the righteousness of God that is "through faith." Owen adds, "It follows, therefore, that where…we are said to be justified…'by faith,' an instrumental efficiency is intended."[32] Owen, aware that some argue "faith is the condition of our justification," allows that faith may be called the condition of our justification so long as no more is intended than God requires faith from us so that we may be justified.[33] He warns, however, regarding faith and obedience, that

> if it be intended that they are such a condition of the covenant as to be by us performed *antecedently* unto the participation of any grace, mercy, or privilege of it, so as that they should be the consideration and procuring cause of them,—that they should be all of them, as some speak, the *reward of our faith and obedience*,—it is most false, and not only contrary to express testimonies of Scripture, but destructive of the nature of the covenant itself.[34]

Here Owen speaks of the nature of both the covenant and justification. The covenant is conditional insofar as it is understood that faith is required on our part to apprehend the blessings of the covenant. However, this faith, which is the gift of God, brings forth obedience so that the grace, mercies, and privileges of the covenant are not dependent upon obedience; rather, obedience flows from the grace, mercies, and privileges of the covenant.

The Meaning of "Justification"

The scriptural meaning of the word "justification," for Owen, has significant implications for his covenant theology and the doctrine of justification. He was aware that the Latin word for justification, *justificatio*, can denote an internal change, from inherent unrighteousness to inherent righteousness, as the process of being "made just." However, he argues that concepts represented by the Latin words *justificatio* and *justifico* do not belong to the Latin tongue, "nor can any good author be produced who ever used them, for the *making of him inherently righteous*, who was not so before."[35] So, he says, "Hereon, in the whole Roman school, justification is taken for *justifaction*, or the making of a man to be *inherently* righteous."[36] Because of this misreading of the term, some of the "ancients," as Owen put it, confused justification with sanctification. The Reformation dictum of "the Bible alone" (*Scriptura sola*), a hallmark of Protestant exegesis, meant for Owen that the meaning of the word justification must be determined by its use in Scripture. Consequently, Owen argues, "all Protestants…affirm that the use and signification of these words is *forensic*" because, in the Hebrew, justification comes from *tsadaq*. And the sense may be taken from any one of them, such as Job 13:18:

> הנה-נא ערכתי משפט ידעתי כי-אני אצדק—"Behold, now I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified." The ordering of his cause (his judgment), his cause to be judged on, is his preparation for a sentence, either of absolution or condemnation: and hereon his confidence was, that he should be justified; that is, *absolved*, *acquitted*, *pronounced righteous.* And the sense is no less pregnant in the other places.[37]

Furthermore, all of these verses use the verb *tsadaq* in the *hiphil* and translate it as *dikaioō* in the Septuagint. In defending the forensic sense of the term and, therefore, imputation, Owen argues that *tsadaq* is not used in any other sense but to "absolve, acquit, esteem, declare, pronounce righteous, or to *impute righteousness*; which is the *forensic sense* of the word we plead for…so vain is the pretence of some, that justification consists only in the pardon of sin, which is not signified by the word in any one place of Scripture."[38] Owen does note, "Wherefore, although *tsadaq* in *Kal* signifies *justum esse* [to be just], and sometimes *juste agere* [to do justly],' which may relate unto *inherent righteousness*, yet where any action towards another is denoted, this word signifies nothing but to *esteem*, *declare*, *pronounce*, and *adjudge* any one absolved, acquitted, cleared, justified: there is, therefore, no other kind of justification once mentioned in the Old Testament."[39] Owen takes pains to establish that forensic justification is the primary sense of the word "justify" in the Old Testament.

A study of the New Testament use of the word "justification" bears similar results. Owen posits, "Neither is this word used in any good author whatever to signify the making of a *man righteous* by any applications to produce internal righteousness in him; but either to absolve and acquit, to judge, esteem, and pronounce righteous; or, on the contrary, to condemn."[40] Owen's primary aim is to establish the forensic sense of the term because of its implications for the doctrine of justification. If it can be established that the term is primarily used in a forensic sense, namely, to declare righteous, and thus means more than mere forgiveness, then the Reformed doctrine of justification can be maintained against the position of Roman Catholic theologians.

Double Justification?

Owen's polemic against Rome includes proving its distinction of a double justification to be false. The first justification, according to Rome, is the infusion of grace through baptism, which operates infallibly (*ex opere operato*), whereby original sin is extinguished and the habits of sin are expelled. The second justification is a consequence of the first, namely, justification by good works done is the exercise of the infused habit of grace:

> Paul, they say, treats of the *first justification* only, whence he excludes all works…but James treats of the *second justification*; which is by good works…. Sanctification is turned into a justification…. The whole nature of *evangelical justification*, consisting in the gratuitous pardon of sin and the imputation of righteousness…is utterly defeated by it.[41]

Elsewhere, Owen argues that the distinction of two justifications as defended and articulated by the Roman Catholic Church leaves us with no justification at all.[42]

There are only two ways by which a man may be justified, according to Owen. The first way is justification "by the works of the law," wherein sinners must fulfill all the demands of the law, as Christ did; the second way is "by grace," that is, by faith in Christ as the one who fulfilled all the demands of the law on behalf of the elect. Justification is a work of God "by grace…in all the causes and the whole effect of it, though not as unto the full possession of all that it give right and title unto."[43] In other words, a man is declared righteous as soon as he puts his faith in Christ. However, the further benefits of justification, such as heaven, for example, are a future possession. Moreover, by believing with justifying faith, Christians become "sons of God" and have a right to all the benefits of His mediation, which leaves any other justification unnecessary. Moreover, through faith in Christ, believers' sins are forgiven so that no one can

lay a charge against God's elect, for "he that believeth hath everlasting life." If justification is not at once complete and in need of a second justification, "no man can be justified in this world":[44]

> For no time can be assigned, nor measure of obedience be limited, whereon it may be supposed that any one comes to be justified before God, who is not so on his first believing; for the Scripture does nowhere assign any such time or measure. And to say that *no man is completely justified* in the sight of God in this life, is at once to overthrow all that is taught in the Scriptures concerning justification, and wherewithal all peace with God and comfort of believers. But a man acquitted upon his legal trial is at *once discharged* of all that the law has against him.[45]

Regarding the place of justified sinners in the covenant, Owen makes several pertinent comments. The justified sinner is forgiven for all future sins unless "they should fall into such sins as should, *ipso facto*, forfeit their justified estate, and transfer them from the covenant of grace into the covenant of works; which we believe God, in his faithfulness, will preserve them from."[46] Here Owen is speaking of apostates who reject Christ and His benefits, and so become subject to the full demands of God's law. However, according to his doctrine of perseverance, Owen insists that elect believers cannot fall away. He continues by arguing that although sin cannot be pardoned before it is committed, the curse of the law does not apply to justified persons, which is "consistent with a justified estate, or the terms of the covenant of grace."[47] Believers derive their security in justification from the fact that "it is God that justifieth," and this depends on "the unchangeableness of the everlasting covenant, which is 'ordered in all things, and sure.'"[48] Owen emphasizes the unconditional nature of the covenant when dealing with the doctrine of justification, even though he often spoke about conditions required of those in covenant with God.

Imputation and Surety In defending the doctrine of imputation, especially the imputation of Christ's active obedience, Owen stands squarely within the Reformed theological tradition.[49] Alan Clifford wrongly posits a sharp dichotomy between Owen's formulation of justification and Calvin's by arguing that Owen's emphasis on the active obedience of Christ "reflects the high orthodoxy of a later generation."[50] Interestingly, while Owen uses the classical Reformed terminology of "active obedience," he regards the expression of "passive obedience" in reference to Christ's work as improper because obedience, by its very nature, could never be merely passive.[51] Central to Clifford's argument is the contention that Calvin's doctrine of justification

speaks only of the remission of sins, not the imputation of Christ's active obedience. "Clearly, then," Clifford alleges, "the high Calvinists of Owen's generation departed significantly from the Reformers."[52] This, however, is a misreading of the Reformer. Calvin says,

> We must seek from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it; or, what is the same thing, that we obtain through Christ's grace what God promised in the law for our works: "He who will do these things, will live in them" [Lev. 18:5, cf. Comm.]. This is no less clearly confirmed in the sermon delivered at Antioch, which asserts that by believing in Christ "we are justified from everything from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses" [Acts 13:39; cf. Vg., ch. 13:38]. For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law?… Hence, that imputation of righteousness without works which Paul discusses [Rom., ch. 4]. For the righteousness found in Christ alone is reckoned as ours.[53]

As for Owen, so for Calvin: justification means something more than just the forgiveness of sins. Imputation is "an act of God…whereby…he makes an effectual grant and donation of a true, real, perfect righteousness, even that of Christ himself, unto all that do believe; and accounting it as theirs, on his own gracious act, both absolves them from and granteth them right and title unto eternal life."[54] Imputation includes, of course, not only that Christ's righteousness, both active and passive, is imputed to believers, but also the sins of believers are imputed to Christ.[55]

The foundation of imputation is the union between Christ and His church. For Owen, this means that Christ and His church coalesce into one mystical person through the uniting efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Because of this mystical union, wherein Christ is the head and believers are the members of the body, whatever the merit of what He accomplished is imputed to His elect, as if what He did was done by them. This mystical union also means, of course, that what His elect deserved on the account of sin was imputed to Christ, hence the necessity of His atoning sacrifice.[56] The cause of this union lies in the "eternal compact that was between the Father and the Son concerning the recovery and salvation of fallen mankind."[57] Wanting to put forth a distinctly trinitarian theology, Owen also speaks of the Holy Spirit, who effects this union between Christ and the church.

The covenant of redemption meant that Christ was to be "the *surety of the new covenant*," as the final administration of the covenant of grace on behalf of the elect.[58] Owen adds that sinners require a surety on their behalf, that the

covenant might be firm and everlasting. In the covenant of works, Adam did not have a surety; God and man were the immediate covenanters. Adam possessed the ability to perform the duties of the covenant, but it was broken and therefore annulled. Since man alone, not God, broke the covenant of works, a new covenant was necessary that required a surety on man's behalf that would undertake to perform the duties of the covenant so that justification before God would not be contingent upon anyone's obedience except that of Christ alone.[59] The Lord Christ was, as the voluntary surety of the covenant, able to "perform all that is required on our part, that we may enjoy the benefits of the covenant."[60] Owen rejects the view of those who deny "that the *grace of the covenant*, *in conversion unto God*, *the remission of sins*, *sanctification*, *justification*, *adoption*, and the like, are the effects or procurements of the death of Christ." Christ's work is in fact the "*principal promise* of the covenant."[61] The "sole cause" of the covenant of grace, promising salvation through the mediatorial work of Christ as the surety, is the grace, love, and wisdom of God.[62]

Formal Cause of Justification Owen was aware of diverse opinions, but he taught that the formal cause of justification was the imputation of the righteousness of Christ that includes "his whole obedience unto God."[63] Owen's most famous theological opponent, Richard Baxter (1615–1691), in his *Aphorisms of Justification*, argued that the formal cause of justification was the faith of the believing individual, imputed or reputed as righteousness on account of the righteousness of Christ.[64] Behind this doctrine, Baxter made a distinction between the old and new covenants. By this distinction he meant, essentially, the difference between the Old and New Testaments. This distinction is based upon Christ fulfilling the old covenant and therefore making it possible for a man to be justified on the basis of the more lenient terms of the "new law" of the gospel, hence the term "neonomianism." In Baxter's theology, the righteousness of Christ in fulfilling the old covenant becomes the meritorious cause of justification, which in turn allows the faith of the believer to be the formal cause of justification under the new covenant. Referring, it seems, to Baxter's neonomianism, Owen dismisses the view that there can be a "*relaxation* of the law…for if there be, it respects the whole being of the law, and consists either in the suspension of its whole obligation, at least for a season, or the substitution of another person to answer its demands, who was not in the original obligation, in the room of them that were."[65]

Imputation as the formal cause of justification is crucial to Owen's argument as a whole. For a sinner to stand before God, two things are required: first, his

iniquities must be forgiven; and second, he must possess a righteousness that will meet the requirements of God's justice. Our own inherent righteousness at best is imperfect and cannot meet the demands of God's law. In his doctrine of sanctification, Owen does speak of an "inherent righteousness." However, this righteousness must not be confused with the righteousness that is from God, the righteousness that is imputed, received by faith alone, and peculiar to justification. Owen says, the "Scripture plainly affirms that there is such an inherent righteousness in all that believe…. [However], that it is the *condition of our justification*, and so antecedent unto it, is expressly contrary unto that of the apostle…. Nor is it the condition of the covenant itself."66 The condition of justification is not our personal righteousness, and neither is our righteousness the condition of the covenant itself. Rather, the covenant is inseparable from righteousness in Christ because both justification and sanctification are by grace alone. The distinction, then, between our personal righteousness, which does not justify, and the righteousness of Christ, which does justify, is an all-important distinction made by Owen.

The Law's Demands The argument for justification by faith alone is buttressed by the nature of the obedience God requires and the unchangeableness of His law that all men are obliged to keep. The moral law is in no way altered or abrogated over the course of redemptive history. For Owen, while the covenant of works is formally abrogated, the moral law still remains in force after the entrance of sin. The debate then is not about the "*federal adjunct* of the law, but about its *moral nature* only."67 The law continues to oblige mankind to respond in perfect obedience under the original penalty of death, as stipulated in the covenant of works. Therefore it necessarily follows that unless God's law is perfectly obeyed and fulfilled, the penalty of death will fall on all who transgress it.68 But even if someone who was once a sinner "should afterward yield all that perfect obedience unto God that the law requires, [he] could not thereby obtain the benefit of the promise of the covenant… because he is *antecedently a sinner*, and so obnoxious unto the curse of the law."69 Then it is impossible for man to keep the law perfectly, as God never renewed the law "as a covenant a second time."70 Owen's argument is consistent with his doctrine of original sin, which makes all humans guilty before God at the time of their conception.

The law, then, abides and is not "relaxed" in any way. Moreover, springing forth from the nature of God, the law demands perfect obedience in all its parts. As a result, there is no other way whereby the immutable law of God may be "established and fulfilled with respect unto us, but by the imputation of the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ, who is the end of the law for

righteousness unto all that do believe."[71] Thus, the law cannot be abrogated but continues as it did before the fall, although it has no salvific value. Hence, Christ's work, as the covenant mediator, secures the justification of those for whom He died.

Justification Proved from the Two Covenants Owen's doctrine of justification is shaped by his use of the covenants. He speaks of the "two covenants" and the difference between them. By the two covenants, he means the covenant of works as it was given to man, with promises and threats, and the covenant of grace, revealed and proposed in the *protoevangelium*.[72] Justification is proved from the difference of the covenants, not vice versa. The covenant of works, for Owen, consists in this: "that upon our personal obedience…we should be accepted with God, and rewarded with him."[73] Because there was no mediator in this covenant, all "*things were transacted immediately between God and man*" so that the blessings of the covenant depended not upon a mediator but on personal obedience.[74] Stemming from this, Owen argues that "nothing but perfect, sinless, obedience would be accepted with God."[75] There could be no new covenant made "unless the *essential form of it* were of another nature,—namely, that our *own personal obedience* be not the rule and cause of our acceptation and justification before God."[76]

The importance of what Owen argues here cannot be overemphasized. Whatever grace is introduced into the covenant of works, namely, mere condescending grace as distinct from saving grace, the result cannot be that our works are "excluded from being the cause of our justification." However, "if a new covenant be made, such grace must be provided as is absolutely inconsistent with any works of ours, as unto the first ends of the covenant."[77] Owen sets up a line of demarcation between the two covenants to prove that justification takes on a decidedly different character with reference to our works in each respective covenant. This law-gospel dichotomy is used to preserve the gracious nature of justification in the new covenant, which wholly excludes works. Furthermore, the covenant of grace has a mediator (surety); this reality is built on this supposition: "that what we cannot do in ourselves which was originally required of us, and what the law of the first covenant cannot enable us to perform, that should be performed for us by our mediator and surety."[78] The essence of the Christian religion consists in Christ being given to the elect as mediator on their behalf, to do what they could not do, with the result that

> instead of our own righteousness, we have the "righteousness of God"; instead of being righteous in ourselves before God, he is "The LORD our Righteousness." And nothing but a righteousness of another kind and

> nature, unto justification before God, could constitute another covenant. Wherefore, the righteousness whereby we are justified is the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us, or we are still under the law, under the covenant of works.[79]

The distinction between the two covenants provides the reason for justification apart from works.

Faith Alone That sinners are justified by faith alone is a key aspect of the biblical Reformed doctrine of justification. The term "by faith alone" *(sola fide)* originated with Luther, though the idea is much older. In his German translation of Romans 3:28, Luther added the word *allein* ("alone"), rendering "justified by faith" as "justified by faith alone."[80] Owen might not translate Romans 3:28 that way, but he did embrace the meaning that Luther wanted to emphasize. His defense of *sola fide* finds its basis not in isolated proof-texts, but in the totality of Scripture's teaching concerning the nature of salvation, the covenants, and man's utter inability to save himself. He adds:

> That it is *faith alone* which on our part is required to interest us in that righteousness, or whereby we comply with God's grant and communication of it, or receive it unto our use and benefit; for although this faith is in itself the radical principle of all obedience,… yet, as we are justified by it, its act and duty is such, or of that nature, as that no other grace, duty, or work, can be associated with it, or be of any consideration.[81]

Owen's argument for faith alone is fivefold. Not surprisingly, it has a definite christocentric emphasis. First, in the New Testament justifying faith is most frequently expressed as "receiving." Only faith can receive Christ, "and what it receives is the cause of our justification" (John 1:12). Moreover, even the grace of God and righteousness itself, "as the efficient and material cause of our justification, are received also." Second, "faith is expressed by *looking*" (John 3:14–15). By looking upon Christ alone "the nature of faith is expressed" and is therefore "exclusive of all other graces and duties whatever." Third, faith denotes coming to Christ (Matt. 11:28). "To come unto Christ for life and salvation, is to believe on him unto the justification of life; but no other grace or duty is a coming unto Christ: and therefore have they no place in justification." Fourth, faith is expressed by "*fleeing* for refuge" (Heb. 6:18):

> For herein it is supposed that he who believeth is antecedently thereunto convinced of his lost condition, and that if he abide therein he must perish eternally; that he hath nothing of himself whereby he may be delivered from it; that he must betake himself unto somewhat else for relief; that unto

> this end he considers Christ as set before him, and proposed unto him in the promise of the gospel; that he judges this to be a holy, a safe way, for his deliverance and acceptance with God.[82]

Finally, the terms by which faith is expressed in the Old Testament are "*leaning on* God…or Christ…*resting* on God…*cleaving* unto the Lord…as also by trusting, hoping, and waiting."[83] Those who acted on this type of faith "declare themselves to be lost, hopeless, helpless, desolate, poor, orphans; whereon they place all their hope and expectation on God alone."[84] Owen is aware that the Scriptures do not explicitly say "justification is by faith alone."[85] However, he points out that "faith alone" is implied in the words "by faith in his blood"; for "faith respecting the blood of Christ as that whereby propitiation was made for sin,—in which respect alone the apostle affirms that we are justified through faith—admits of no association with any other graces or duties."[86] The chief theme manifesting itself throughout Owen's writings is that of upholding the doctrine of justification apart from any consideration of human merit. In other words, the word "alone," attached to justification, is the necessary outworking of Owen's overall aim to show that all the glory of our salvation belongs to God alone (*soli Deo gloria*).

Christ and Adam According to Owen, Paul's first consideration in setting forth the doctrine of justification in Romans is to show that all men are sinners and therefore guilty before God, so that the "righteousness whereby we are justified is the righteousness of God, in opposition unto any righteousness of our own, chap. i. 17, iii. 21, 22."[87] The righteousness Paul speaks of in Romans 3:21–31 is "without the law" (χωρις νομου); that is, it excludes any righteousness obtained by works of obedience to the law. Moreover, the law and the prophets bore witness to this righteousness. It was promised, as we have noted already, in "*the first promise* of the blessed seed…for he alone was 'to make an end of sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.'"[88] This righteousness of God is promised only to those who trust in Jesus Christ. Faith in Him, according to Owen, is the only ground on which this righteousness of God is conferred on His people.

Owen further argues that justification is emphatically defined as "being justified freely by his grace" (δικαιουμενοι δωρεαν τη αυτου χαριτι). Because God is the principal efficient cause of our justification, His grace, not our works, is the only moving cause of salvation. Stemming from this, *sola fide* is proved because Paul denies any human sufficiency in Romans 3:27: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded." In evangelical justification, pride is excluded because no place for human effort is admitted; indeed, if there were a place for works, then

boasting must be admitted. The parallel between Christ and Adam (Rom. 5:12–21) is also crucial to Owen's argument as a whole and carries with it significant implications for his doctrine of the covenants as well. Owen recognizes that theologians historically have found Romans 5:12–21, because of its "ellipses, antapodota, hyperbata, and other figures of speech," particularly hard to understand.89 However, those "acquainted with the common principles of Christian religion" can see that the apostle is showing that, "as the sin of Adam was imputed unto all men unto condemnation, so the righteousness or obedience of Christ is imputed unto all that believe unto the justification of life."90 Indeed, even Socinus acknowledged this passage to be the clearest statement of what the Reformed hold to be true concerning double imputation.

Owen sees in Romans 5:12–21 a comparison between the two men, Adam and Christ. Through the first man, Adam, sin was brought into the world. Through the second man, Christ, sin is taken away. When sin entered the world through Adam, so did death as the consequence for sin. Death, on its entrance, passed on all, "that is, all men became liable and obnoxious unto it, as the punishment due to sin." Owen continues:

> All men that ever were, are, or shall be, were not then existent in their own persons; but yet were they all of them then, upon the first entrance of sin, made subject to death, or liable unto punishment. They were so by virtue of divine constitution, upon *their federal existence* in the one man that sinned. And actually they became obnoxious in their own persons unto the sentence of it upon their first natural existence, being born children of wrath.91

The specific sin imputed to all humanity is Adam's sin, which means that this imputation of sin is not mediated through natural "generation" or propagation.92 The phrase "for that all have sinned" (ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον) is used by Paul to declare "how all men universally became liable unto the punishment of death."93 All are accountable to the curse of death not because of their own actual sin, for "the apostle, in the next verses, affirms that death passed on them also who never sinned actually, or as Adam did, whose sin was actual."94 In his argument for immediate imputation, Owen argues that "if the actual sins of men…were intended, then should men be made liable to death before they had sinned; for death, upon its first entrance into the world, passed on all men, before any one man had actually sinned but Adam only."95

> But that men should be liable unto death, which is nothing but the punishment of sin, when they have not sinned, is an open contradiction. For although God, by his sovereign power, might inflict death on an innocent creature, yet that an innocent creature should be guilty of death is

> impossible: for to be guilty of death, is to have sinned. Wherefore this expression, "Inasmuch as all have sinned," expressing the desert and guilt of death, then when sin and death first entered into the world, no sin can be intended in it but the sin of Adam, and out interest therein: "Eramus enim omnes ille unus homo;" and this can be no otherwise but by the imputation of the guilt of that sin unto us.[96]

For Owen, the argument for imputation in Adam, as representing all his posterity, seen in Romans 5:12–21, buttresses the argument for the forensic imputation of the righteousness of Christ to all who believe. He considers this argument based on Romans 5:15–16 where the apostle explains the comparison between Adam and Christ by way of a dissimilitude, between "trespass" (παραπτωμα) and "free gift" (χαρισμα). By contrasting the obedience of Christ with the disobedience of Adam, the federal nature of both condemnation in Adam and salvation in Christ are most clearly delineated by the apostle.[97] This federal structure posited by Owen also means that when Adam was in a state of acceptation before God, so was his posterity. The covenant was coeval with humanity, but voluntary obedience, on Adam's part, was a means of signing and sealing it. Adam's obedience would have resulted in the eternal enjoyment of God due to the law's principle of "do this and live."

Romans 5:19 provides further evidence for Owen's argument. The words "by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" are decisive for Owen because it allows him to press the dissimilitude between Adam and Christ still further. The words "by the obedience" (δια της ὑπακοης) speak of Christ's actual obedience to the whole law of God, in contrast to Adam's transgression of the whole law of God. For Owen, then, the words, "many are made righteous" describe the result of the whole obedience of Christ, that is, His active and passive obedience.[98]

Union with Christ In Owen's thought, the doctrine of justification in relation to the covenant is only fully understood as it relates to the doctrine of union with Christ. The primary function of the covenant is to bring sinners into union with Jesus Christ, whereby they are then made partakers of the blessings promised in the covenant. This union is effected by the Spirit, who is given according to the economy of salvation based upon the eternal covenant of redemption. "Union with Christ," says Owen, "is the principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations."[99] He continues:

> And hence is our *justification*: for…being united unto Christ, we are interested in that *acquitment* from the condemning sentence of the law

> which was granted unto himself when he satisfied it to the utmost…. Our union with him is the ground of the *actual imputation* of his righteousness unto us; for he covers only the members of his own body.[100]

Owen's close friend Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) places a similar emphasis on union with Christ in his discussion of justification. He refers to union with Christ as the "fundamental constitution of a Christian."[101] In fact, union with Christ is the "first fundamental thing of justification, and sanctification, and all." The goals of the covenant are that God should be glorified in His Son and that sinners should be brought into union with Christ and abide in Him. In specific relation to justification, Goodwin maintains that "all acts of God's justifying us depend upon union with Christ, we having him, and being in him first, and then thereby having right to his righteousness."[102] Similarly, John Ball (1585–1640) argues: "This is the order of spiritual blessings conferred upon us in Christ, faith is the band whereby we are united unto Christ; after union follows communion with him; justification, adoption, sanctification be the benefits and fruits of communion."[103] For these Puritans, union with Christ functions as the ground and context for the justification of the elect. In other words, union with Christ precedes justification, not vice versa.

Conclusion

Owen fully appreciated the importance of justification by faith alone to Christian doctrine. For him, as well as Luther, it was the "article of faith by which the church stands or falls" (*articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*). Moreover, his contention that "all true theology is…based on a covenant" provides the redemptive context for his doctrine of justification by faith alone.104 The chief aim of his study on justification is to treat it "usefully unto its proper ends, which are the glory of God in Christ, with the peace and furtherance of the obedience of believers."105 As a result, running throughout his work is a consistent motif of man's total dependence on God's grace for justification, apart from works of the law. John Owen's exposition remains to this day one of the most erudite and comprehensive defenses of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and this chapter has attempted to provide an introduction to his thought on this most important of Christian doctrines.

1. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted & Vindicated…* (London; for Thomas Underhill, 1654), 149.

2. In addition to Burgess's *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted & Vindicated*, another work that should be consulted, along with Owen, is Thomas Goodwin's *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith* (vol. 8), in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006). It is important to look at Goodwin as he writes more pastorally in his work on justification.

3. John Owen, *Justification*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:206–7.

4. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:67.

5. On Owen's shift concerning his view of the necessity of the atonement, see Carl Trueman, "John Owen's Dissertation on Divine Justice: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33, no. 1 (1998): 87–103.

6. Carl Trueman devotes a chapter to Owen's doctrine of justification in *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 101–21.

7. Alan Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 169–244.

8. On Calvin, see Peter Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 176–93. On Olevianus, see R. Scott Clark, *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2005), 137–80.

9. "*Hisce autem capitibus omnem de mediatoris persona et officio, de justificatione gratuita, de resipiscentia, de morte aeterna, vita, et praemio, de resurrectione carnis, doctrinam (utut obscurius) contineri, facile esset probare*." John Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 2.i.4.

10. John Owen, *Two Great Catechisms*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:487. The Protestant scholastic Johannes Maccovius provides a similar definition of justification in his first disputation on the subject: "Justification is the act of God in which he accepts the sinner because of Christ into grace in such a way that he declares him righteous after having forgiven his sins and imputed Christ's righteousness unto him." ("*Iustificatio est actus Dei, qua hominem peccatorem, gratis, propter Christum in gratiam suscipit, ita, ut peccatis remissis, ac Christi justitia imputata, eum justum pronunciet*.") *Collegia Theologica…* (Franeker: U. Balck, 1641), 128. See also Maccovius, *Thesium Theologicarum per Locos Communes* (Franeker: U. Balck, 1641), 309–10.

11. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:290–95.
12. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:7.
13. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:9.
14. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:21–23.
15. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:27.
16. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:44.
17. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:70–71.
18. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:71.
19. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:79.
20. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:81.
21. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:84.
22. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:84.
23. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:84.
24. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:87. Thomas Goodwin's language on the object of justifying faith has a similar emphasis: "that God in Christ, God as justifying, God as rewarding and pardoning sin, as he is thus, is the special object of faith." *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, 8:290.
25. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:93.
26. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:104.
27. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:105.
28. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:105.
29. See John Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), vol. 11.
30. The Westminster Confession of Faith states: "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification" (11.2). The Westminster Larger Catechism explains that justification is "received by faith alone" (Q. 70; see also Shorter Catechism, Q. 33) and that God requires "nothing of them for their justification but faith" (Q. 71).
31. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:108.
32. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:109.
33. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:113.
34. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 113–14. For a defense of both antecedent and consequent conditions in the covenant of grace, see John Flavel, *Planelogia…* (London: R. Roberts, 1691), 244–48. Flavel's main polemic focuses on the Antinomian theologians who refused to call faith a condition of the covenant.
35. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:124.
36. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:124.
37. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:125.
38. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:125–26.
39. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:128. See also Maccovius, *Collegia*, 128–29.
40. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:128.
41. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:138.
42. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:141.
43. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:143.
44. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:145.
45. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:145.
46. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:146.
47. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:146.
48. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:147.
49. See Westminster Confession of Faith, 11.1.
50. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, 170.
51. See John Owen, *On Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 2:157, 163.

52. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, 173.

53. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 2.17.5. However, Chad van Dixhoorn argues with some caution: "The Reformers provide mixed treatments of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. Calvin is the most frequently cited Reformer in the minutes of the Assembly's justification debate (five times), but does not teach the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in his catechism. See Calvin's catechism in *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Churches*, ed. T. F. Torrance (London: James Clarke, 1959), 13; or in Calvin's commentary on Romans, s.v. 5:19, or in his *Institutes*…. Dr Mark Garcia has pointed out to me that Calvin comes close to a doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in sermons preached after the final edition of the *Institutes* was published. E.g., Sermons on Genesis 15:6 preached c. 1560–61…. These references can be read as statements supporting the imputation of active obedience but not with confidence." "Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1642–1652" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), 1:327n247. However one interprets Calvin, Clifford is surely wrong to call Owen's formulation a significant departure from Calvin. And we tend to think the idea is certainly present in Calvin's formulation, even if the exact terminology is not used.

54. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:173.

55. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:175.

56. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:176.

57. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:179.

58. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:181.

59. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:186.

60. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:187.

61. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:194.

62. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:193, 195.

63. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:209.

64. Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness in Two Books* (London: for Nevil Simons and Jonathan Robinson, 1676), 29, 88, 129–30. On Baxter's doctrine of justification, see Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

65. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:248.

66. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:232.

67. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:243.

68. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:243.

69. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:243.

70. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:244.

71. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:250.

72. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:275.

73. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:275.

74. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:276.

75. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:276.

76. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:276.

77. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:276.

78. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:276.

79. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:277.

80. His German translation reads: *So halten wir nun dafür, daß der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, allein durch den Glauben*.

81. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:291.

82. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:292–94.

83. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:294.

84. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:294.

85. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:311.
86. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:311–12.
87. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:307.
88. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:308.
89. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:322.
90. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:322.
91. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:323.
92. Owen is here expounding what is called "representationalism," which is the view favored by those Reformed theologians who are also federal theologians. It states that Adam is the federal head of humanity and the representative of the race; that is, Adam acts on behalf of humanity. It is also referred to as "immediate imputation" in contradistinction to "mediate imputation." Mediate imputation is the notion that God imputes sin via natural generation. That is, original sin is passed down the generations mediately. This was the view of the French Saumur School of theology, following Joshua Placaeus.
93. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:324.
94. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:325.
95. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:325.
96. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:325.
97. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:325–27.
98. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:334.
99. John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 21:146. Elsewhere, Owen argues: "The foundation of the imputation asserted is union. Hereof there are many grounds and causes, as hath been declared; but that which we have immediate respect unto, as the foundation of this imputation, is that whereby the Lord Jesus and believers do actually coalesce into one mystical person. This is by the Holy Spirit inhabiting in him as the head of the church in all fullness, and in all believers according to their measure, whereby they become members of his mystical body. That there is such a union between Christ and believers is the faith of the catholic church, and hath been so in all ages." Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 209.
100. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:150.
101. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:350.
102. Goodwin, *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works*, 8:406.
103. John Ball, *A Treatise on Faith* (London: [William Stansby] for Edward Brewster, 1631), 85.
104. Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *Works*, 17 (1.4.10).
105. Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:7.

Chapter 32

The Puritans on Coming to Christ

His heart is open to you, his arms stretched wide.
—THOMAS BOSTON[1]

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the great question has been this: "How can sinful man be brought back to God?" In Genesis 3, God sent Adam and Eve away. Genesis 3:24 says, "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." But Scripture makes it clear that there is a remedy. In Revelation 22, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven. In it we discover again the Tree of Life planted by a refreshing river flowing from the throne of God (Rev. 22:1–2). John therefore testifies, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (v. 17). Man was *sent away* from God, but now he is *brought to* God. Man was barred from the Tree of Life, but now a way to God has been opened through Christ (cf. Rev. 2:7). The question that remains is this: *How do you and I come to Christ?*

Today, as in Puritan times, many people do not understand how a fallen sinner comes to Christ. Mistaken views abound. In some evangelistic meetings, people are asked to make a decision for Christ in their own strength, as an act of the will. They may be asked to raise their hand during a silent prayer, to recite the sinner's prayer, or to walk forward in response to an altar call.

Some teach that baptismal regeneration is the key to coming to Christ. Others equate coming to Christ with mental assent; they think they only need to know and assent to some basic truths about Christ to come to Christ. Others require unbiblical, mystical experiences to come to Christ. They claim to have received revelations from the Holy Spirit or miraculous experiences that assure them of having come to Christ.

Still others never fully grasp what it means to come to Christ. They wrestle with a fearful lack of assurance, always asking, "Have I come?" "How do I

know if I have come?" "What does it truly mean to come?" "Has God truly begun His saving work in me?"

The Puritans grappled with these and other false views as they tirelessly labored to show people how sinners come to Christ. Let us briefly examine the biblical doctrine of coming to Christ through the Puritan lens. First, we will look at the *invitation* to come, second, the *impetus* for coming, and third, the *impediments* in coming to Christ. Thus, we will deal with *how* we come, and *why* some do not come. With the Spirit's blessing, this examination may provide solid answers to those who question whether they have truly come to Christ.

The Universal Invitation to Come to Christ William Ames (1576–1633) wrote that the redeeming work of Christ is applied through "union with Christ," and God accomplishes this union by "calling," which has two components: "the offer of Christ and the receiving of him."[2] He then explained, "The offer is an objective presentation of Christ as the sufficient and necessary means to salvation. 1 Cor. 1:23, 24, *We preach Christ…the power of God and the wisdom of God*."[3]

Puritan ministers taught that Christ's call to come to Him is universal, that is, addressed to the whole world, to every human being. Christ says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Whether you are young or old, rich or poor, male or female, Christ calls, even commands you, to come to Him. As Thomas Boston (1676–1732) said, "This I will ever preach, that all, under pain of damnation, are obliged to come to him, and that they shall be welcome on their coming, be their case what it will."[4] God commands all people everywhere to repent and come to Christ (Acts 17:30). Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) wrote that as surely as Christ the King has authority over all nations and all places, so also all persons are called to submit to Him and serve Him (Matt. 28:18–20).[5]

The Puritans represented God as lovingly and sincerely calling sinners to come to Him. Joseph Alleine (1634–1668), a Puritan minister with a great heart for evangelism, wrote, "The God that made you most graciously invites you. His most sweet and merciful nature invites you. O the kindness of God, His boundless compassion, His tender mercies!"[6] Richard Baxter (1615–1691) thundered, "Shall the living God send so earnest a message to his creatures, and should they not obey? Hearken then all you that live after the flesh; the Lord that gave thee thy breath and being, hath sent a message to thee from heaven, and this is his message, 'Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?'"[7] The Puritans therefore called everyone to come to Christ. They preached evangelistic sermons.[8] They wrote long evangelistic tracts.[9] They wrote manuals for ministers on how to

direct people anxious about their salvation.[10] James Janeway (1636–1674) and Cotton Mather (1663–1728) each published a book of stories about children coming to Christ and walking with Him faithfully to encourage children to embrace Jesus Christ offered to them in the gospel.[11]

The terms *labor* and *heavy laden* in Matthew 11:28 are universal in scope. Jesus is not saying that only those who have awareness of their sin are invited to come. He is not saying, as some hyper-Calvinists teach, that only sensible sinners are welcome to fall at Jesus' feet. He is not saying that only those in whom the Holy Spirit has begun to stir the waters of soul-interest are invited to come. Christ calls *all* people who are weary of toil, all for whom life is but a heavy burden (cf. Eccl. 1:8; Isa. 55:2), to come to Him for rest. Shepard imagined men's objections and answered that Christ offers Himself even to those who feel no need for Him:

> If I was willing to receive Christ, I might have Christ offered to me; but will the Lord offer him to such a one as desires not to have Christ?
>
> Yes; saith our Saviour, "I would have gathered you as the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and you would not" [Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34]….
>
> O, I fear time is past! O, time is past! I might once have had Christ, but now mine heart is sealed down with hardness, blindness, unbelief. O, time is now gone!
>
> No; not so. See Isaiah 65:1–3, "All the day long God holdeth out his hands to a backsliding and rebellious people." Thy day of grace…still lasts.[12]

God has issued a universal call to come to Christ because all men, no matter how depraved and disabled by sin, possess an understanding and a will. As we will see, the Puritans denied that the fallen human will had the power to choose God, but Puritans such as Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) also insisted that a sinner is not "a beast"; instead, "man hath a faculty to understand and will, which makes him a man." Therefore, "the commands and exhortations are suitable to our nature."[13] The Puritans did not treat men like blocks of stone or wood. They evangelized them as men with minds and wills, and thus with responsibility for their actions. This explains why, when the Puritans called men to come to Christ, they reasoned with lost sinners and exhorted them.[14] The universal call dignifies its hearers as human beings endowed with intelligence, personality, and moral accountability.

Do you realize how this universal call magnifies the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you see how willing Christ is to save sinners? He calls sinners to

Himself to receive His rest with this promise: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:29–30). Christ calls sinners to Himself because He alone is the willing Savior—not because of our good works, our righteousness, or anything else. He calls sinners to Himself as the exclusive way of coming to God (cf. John 14:6). He is willing to save us, and we must come to Him to be freed from our burdens and enter into His rest.

Some might question this, saying, “If the call is universal and goes out to everyone, and not everyone comes, then the invitation must be insufficient.” This is false reasoning. Think of Christian fleeing the City of Destruction in the tale of John Bunyan (1628–1688). Christian spoke earnestly to his family and neighbors, warning them of the wrath to fall upon their city. Most people responded to the warning by mocking Christian, but their refusal to listen did not make Christian’s invitation to go with him insufficient or insincere. The warning itself was not insufficient or insincere.15

When you invite someone to a wedding reception and they decline to come, does that mean the invitation was not sufficient? Does it show insincerity on the part of the people who issued the invitation? No, the insufficiency in Christian’s case was not in the warning but rather in the people who refused to heed the warning. So, too, there is no insincerity in the wedding invitation; the fault lies in those who refuse to come.

So it is with the call to come to Christ. There is no fault, insufficiency, or lack of sincerity in Christ’s invitation; all blame rests upon those who refuse to come to Him for eternal life. This is clearly taught in the Canons of Dort. William Ames, an English Puritan, played a significant role in defending the Reformed faith in the Netherlands during the debates leading up to the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) and served as a theological consultant to the synod’s moderator.16 The Canons of Dort explain the international Puritan and Reformed perspective well in head 3–4, articles 8–9:

> As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly [sincerely] called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what will be acceptable to Him; namely, that all who are called, should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to Him, and believe on Him…. It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ, offered therein, nor of God…that those who are called by the ministry of the word, refuse to come, and be converted. The fault lies in themselves.17

The Canons make plain that there is no insufficiency in God’s willingness to

save sinners. The invitation does not lie or deceive; it is a true, rich, full, free invitation. The gospel is a well-meant offer. Christ has declared Himself ready and willing to receive all who come to Him and to save them. This is what Bunyan referred to as the conditional promise.[18] This call is based on the condition of faith, but it is a true invitation. To all who will come to Him, Christ freely gives eternal life, "even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12c). Nonetheless, no one comes to Christ simply because of this universal calling. In our fallen, helpless condition, we cannot and will not respond as we should. Our persistence in unbelief and sin keeps us from responding to Christ's call—the blame is wholly on us. Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

Judgment day will confirm this truth. No one will stand before God on the last day and say, "I did not think that the invitation was addressed to me, and therefore I did not come," or "I received the invitation, but I did not think it was sincere." The call to come to Christ is a well-meant offer of salvation addressed to every human being. That leaves us asking, "What must I do to come? How can I come? How can I be assured that I have truly come to Christ?"

The Divine Impetus for Coming to Christ There are two extremes we must avoid in seeking proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of coming to Christ. On the one hand, we should avoid the problem of *easy belief*, usually called *easy-believism*. Coming to Christ is not accomplished simply by performing some ritual act, such as reciting a little prayer, raising a hand, signing a card, or responding to an altar call. Anyone can do these things in his own strength, and none of these things are prescribed in Scripture. The other extreme we should avoid is concluding that we cannot know at all, and should not even make the attempt. We do not want to give up, saying, "There is nothing I can do to assure myself of coming to Christ." This usually involves *spiritual distortion* and perhaps *spiritual laziness* as well.

Avoiding these two extremes, the Puritans clarified how we truly come to Christ. They took care to show that coming to Christ is possible because Christ is not only willing but also able to save sinners. Not only does He hold out His hands, but He also takes sinners into His arms. Not only does He offer salvation, but He also secures salvation.

In addition to God's outward, universal call, there is His inward, effectual call. This effectual call is inseparable from what the Puritans called God's absolute or unconditional promises. Unconditional promises *give* what conditional promises require. Consider faith, for example. Faith is essential for coming to Christ. Mark 9:23 represents a conditional promise concerning faith: "If thou canst

believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Acts 16:31 is another: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But faith is the gift of God. Faith is unconditionally promised by God to His people. Zephaniah 3:12 represents an unconditional promise concerning faith: "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD." Ephesians 2:8 is another: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

John Bunyan explains it this way:

> The conditional promise calls for repentance, the absolute promise gives it (Acts 5:31). The conditional promise calls for faith, the absolute promise gives it (Zeph. 3:12; Rom. 15:12). The conditional promise calls for a new heart, the absolute promise gives it (Ezek. 36:25–26). The conditional promise calls for holy obedience, and the absolute promise giveth it, or causeth it (Ezek. 36:27).19

The unconditional promises grounded in Christ's atoning work reveal that Christ is able and willing to bring sinners to Himself. The unconditional promises are made to those who are chosen by God and appointed to eternal life in Christ. Accordingly, Christ Himself fulfills the conditions He requires of us when we come to Him. Acts 5:31 says, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

John Flavel (1628–1691), commenting on the *need* of the effectual call, stated, "But yet, all the preaching in the world can never effect this union with Christ in itself, and in its own virtue, except a supernatural and mighty power go forth with it for that end and purpose. Let Boanerges and Barnabas try their strength, let the *angels* of heaven be the preachers; till God draw, the soul cannot come to Christ."20 Thus, a universal calling is not sufficient to draw people to Christ, but Christ does not stop at a universal call. He goes further, illuminating the minds, penetrating the hearts, and renewing the wills of the elect through an effectual call, rooted in the unconditional promises. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to work faith in their hearts, draws them to Christ, and by His grace makes them both willing and able to come to Him.

The Divine Overcoming of Human Inability The Puritan understanding of man's inability to respond rightly to God was grounded in a biblical theology of the fall of man in Adam. Thomas Hooker (1586–1647) wrote that since the fall sin has taken the human heart captive, saying that "corruption exerciseth a sovereign power and command over the will."21 Not only is mankind unable to redeem

itself, but men cannot even receive Christ's redemption apart from Christ's grace. Hooker wrote, "For such is that helpless condition and nothingness, unto which Adam had brought himself by his rebellion, that as he hath no sufficiency of his own to do anything that may redeem himself out of his misery, so neither hath he ability of his own to apply that to himself which is done for him, further than he is fitted by the preventing grace of Christ thereunto."[22]

Alleine reflected on his own inability as a preacher to save lost sinners: "Shall I go and speak to the grave, and expect the dead will obey me and come forth?… Shall I make the blind to see?"[23] Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) wrote of the hardness of men's hearts: "Any natural man, he is iron to God and wax to the devil."[24] Though God himself appeals to us to come to Christ through His Word, our hearts are as hard iron. Men have much freedom in natural things, and even some freedom to impose moral reform on their lives, but no freedom in spiritual things. William Greenhill (1598–1671) wrote,

> The sacred writ is plentiful in setting out the impotency of man. It tells us, that he "is not subject to the law of God, neither can be" (Rom. 8:7); that he "cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8); that he cannot come to Christ (John 6:44); that he can do nothing without Christ (John 15:5); that he cannot believe (John 12:39; 5:44); that he cannot love God (1 John 4:20); that he cannot do good (Jer. 13:23); that he cannot yield good fruit (Matt. 7:17); that he cannot think a good thought (2 Cor. 3:5).[25]

The Puritans did teach that men should do all that they can to seek after God, and that no one does all he can and should do. Greenhill said that the unconverted have the ability to do many helpful things. They can attend the powerful preaching of the Word, pay attention to God's providential judgments on sin, observe the difference true conversion made in other people's lives, and recognize that it is just and fair for them to serve the Lord who created them. The lost can be convinced of their sin with grief and mourning, confess their sins and reform their lives, declare that it is just for God to condemn them, meditate on the great evil of their sin, acknowledge that neither they nor any created thing can save them, and resolve to seek salvation at any cost. They can see that there is a hope of salvation for sinners, thirst for this salvation, pray for salvation, and wait upon God to do His supernatural work in them. Such actions or attitudes put them near to the kingdom. But none of these actions or attitudes deserves or empowers conversion—in doing them the unconverted remain God's enemies under His curse.[26]

To come to Christ, helpless sinners need God's effectual calling. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines effectual calling: "Effectual calling is

the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel" (Q. 31). Christ clearly teaches the effectual call in John 6:37, 44, 63: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out…. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day…. It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." What we observe here is that no one can come to Christ unless he or she is drawn by the Father; those who are drawn to Christ *will* come to Christ, and they do so not of themselves but by God's Spirit. The unconditional promise in these verses is that those whom the Father draws will by God's sovereign grace come to Christ, and Christ, being an able and willing Savior, will not cast them out. Therefore, as Baxter said, conversion "is a work of the Spirit of Christ, by the doctrine of Christ, by which he effectually changeth men's minds, and heart, and life."[27]

God's work in changing the sinner's heart is deeply mysterious. Who can understand how the infinite Spirit works upon a human being's invisible spirit? Our Lord Jesus in John 3:8 compared the Spirit to the wind: "The wind bloweth where it listeth [where it wills], and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Thomas Hooker wrote, "The almighty power of God in the conversion of a sinner is the most mysterious of all the works of God."[28]

The Puritans insisted that this effectual calling did not force anyone to act against his will. Rather, the will itself is renewed and changed by an inward work of grace. John Brinsley (1600–1665) wrote that God draws men to Christ by the Word and Spirit, "sweetly overpowering their wills, making them willing to come unto him."[29] Sibbes wrote,

> As the minister speaks to the ear, Christ speaks, opens, and unlocks the heart at the same time; and gives it power to open, not from itself, but from Christ…. The manner of working of the reasonable creature, is to work freely by a sweet inclination, not by violence. Therefore when he works the work of conversion, he doth it in a sweet manner, though it be mighty for the efficaciousness of it.[30]

So it is that Christ both calls the sinner to come and enables him to answer that call. He sends out His messengers to deliver the invitation and sends forth the Holy Spirit to move the hearts of His chosen ones to respond and come to Him for salvation. Christ is our Savior in every way!

"This is good news indeed!" you say. "But I am still unsure. How do I know if

Christ is effectively calling me? How do I know if I am a recipient of this inward, effectual call? How is this call *applied* to the hearts of unworthy, yes, even hell-worthy sinners?"

Divine Conversion Described Because of its nature, this effectual call is an inward, *spiritual* call, not an audible or corporeal call. What we mean is that the effective call is not experienced as a visible or physical coming to Christ. It does not involve raising a hand when the pastor asks you to, or coming forward during an altar call, making the sign of the cross, receiving baptism, or taking the elements in the Lord's Supper. Bunyan, who was well aware of the deceitfulness of equating the effective call with a physical act, said that many people came to Christ "carnally, or bodily, that had no saving advantage."31 A physical act is not and cannot be the true means of coming to Christ for salvation. Brinsley said that coming to Christ must be "inward and real," not coming with the feet but coming with the affections of the heart, that is, with faith that is an eye to look on Christ, a hand to grasp Him, a mouth to feed on Him, and feet to bring us near to Him.32 Coming to Christ is a motion or activity of the soul.

Nor is coming to Christ a matter of mere intellectual agreement with truth. The Bible speaks of faith as looking to Christ (Heb. 12:1–3), not just a look of the understanding, but, as Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) wrote, an inward experiential look that involves "knowing, considering, desiring, hoping, believing, loving, joying, calling on Jesus, and conforming to Jesus."33 It is a reorientation of our entire being in a new direction: Christward. The soul goes out to Christ and receives Christ. Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) wrote, "Faith is an assimilating grace…. Looking on a bleeding Christ causes a soft bleeding heart; looking on a holy Christ causes sanctity of heart; looking on a humble Christ makes the soul humble."34

Likewise, coming to Christ is not merely a volitional act. Making a decision to follow Jesus is not what makes Christ's calling effective. The motion of our wills toward Christ results from a new creation by God in our souls. Charnock wrote, "Regeneration is a spiritual change, conversion is a spiritual motion…. Conversion is related to regeneration, as the effect to the cause. Life precedes motion, and is the cause of motion…as a child in its first formation in the womb, contributes nothing to the first infusion of life; but after it hath life, it is active."35

The Bible says that no one is able to come to Christ of his own volition or in his own strength. We cannot meet the conditional promises of this calling; we are so helpless that we need something more than our volitional or physical acts. If salvation were left to our wills to come to Christ, we would all be hopelessly

lost. None of us would come. None would follow Christ. God makes the call effective by a *spiritual* act, which, as John Flavel says, is a "supernatural and mighty power" that causes us to come to Christ.[36] Effectual calling, therefore, is God's powerful work in us which then results in our volitional act of coming to Christ. We are made willing to come in "the day of [Christ's] power" (Ps. 110:3), that is, when the gospel is preached, and the Holy Spirit and the Word of God work powerfully in us.

The Puritans labored to show *how* sinners can know if they have come to Christ, or, as they often put it, have closed with Christ, or appropriated Christ, or apprehended Christ. All of these terms were synonymous in the Puritan mind. The Puritans defended their explanations by anchoring them in Scripture. We come to Christ, they said, when we are (1) *drawn actively by faith to Christ,* (2) *as He offers Himself to sinners in the gospel,* (3) *through the power of the Holy Spirit.* Let us look at each of these briefly.

1. We must be drawn actively by faith to Christ. Bunyan spoke of coming to Christ as a mental act. He said those who come to Christ are so affected in their hearts that they mentally come to Him. What he meant is that the person who comes to Christ is made willing to come; he comes voluntarily. This coming is by no means easy belief, as we have already shown. Rather, Bunyan said, "the Lord Jesus positively determineth to put forth such a sufficiency of all grace as shall effectually perform this promise."[37]

Christ does not force us to come to Him; He changes our minds and wills so that we can do nothing other than come to Him. So He makes us willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3). Faith willingly believes from the heart what the Scriptures teach about man's sinfulness, God's holiness, and Christ's saving work. As the sinner encounters God's awesome holiness, his faith repudiates self-righteousness. Grace makes him long for Christ as revealed in Scripture. Faith abandons all self-merit as it is increasingly attracted to the beauty of Christ and His merits (Rom. 7:24–25).

It is important to emphasize that Christ is the object of this active faith. Properly speaking, faith has never saved anyone. As believers, we do not have faith in our faith; we must exercise faith in Christ. True faith lays hold of Christ, embraces Christ, and rests upon Christ alone for total salvation. Watson wrote that true justifying faith is

> 1. "Self-renunciation. Faith is going out of one's self, being taken off from our own merits, and seeing we have no righteousness of our own… (Phil. 3:9)."

2. “Reliance. The soul casts itself upon Jesus Christ; faith rests upon Christ’s person…. It glories in the cross of Christ…. It is called therefore ‘faith in his blood’ (Rom. 3:25).”

3. “Appropriation, or applying Christ to ourselves. A medicine, though it be ever so sovereign, if not applied, will do no good…. This applying of Christ is called receiving him (John 1:12).”[38]

The two brief words *to Christ* refer to two important causes of coming to Christ. Bunyan said, “For the first of these, there is in Christ a fullness of all-sufficiency of all that, even of all that which is needful to make us happy. Second. Those that indeed come to him, do therefore come to him that they may receive it at his hand.”[39] We must look *to Christ*. We must turn *to Christ*. We must come *to Christ*, to receive from His hand alone the gospel bounty of forgiveness of sins and everlasting life.

Faith surrenders to the gospel and falls into the outstretched arms of Christ. Faith looks away from self to Christ, moved entirely by grace. Faith renounces the soul’s poverty in favor of Christ’s riches. Faith flees from the soul’s guilt to Christ as reconciler, from the soul’s bondage to Christ as liberator. Faith confesses with Augustus Toplady (1740–1778):

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

Faith unites a sinner with his Savior. As John Calvin said, faith “justifies in no other way but in that it leads us into fellowship with the righteousness of Christ.”[40] It apprehends (*fides apprehensiva*), closes with, and cleaves to Christ in a believing embrace, surrendering self, renouncing sin, clinging to His Word, and relying on His promises.

Christ is not only the object of faith; He is also present to faith. Faith rests in the person of Christ by coming, hearing, seeing, trusting, taking, embracing, knowing, rejoicing, loving, and triumphing in Him. Faith leaves its case in the hands of Christ as the Great Physician, following His directions and trusting in the remedy of His finished work. As Martin Luther wrote, “Faith lays hold of Christ and grasps him as a present possession, just as the ring holds the jewel.”[41] Faith wraps the soul in Christ’s righteousness. Faith appropriates with a believing heart Christ’s perfect righteousness, satisfaction, and holiness. Faith tastes the efficacy of Christ’s blood-righteousness as the righteousness of God

Himself (Rom. 3:21–25; 5:9; 6:7; 2 Cor. 5:18–21). Faith weds the soul to Christ, experiences divine pardon and acceptance in the Beloved, and makes the soul partake of every other covenant blessing.

2. We come to Christ as He is offered in the gospel to sinners. The Christ we must come to is not an abstract idea. He is not a Christ of our imagination. He is not a Christ of our own choosing, but the Christ revealed to us by God in Holy Scripture.

The Christ we come to is held out to sinners in the gospel. This means you can only come to Christ as you are, in your sin and as a sinner. Bunyan explained, "It is a moving of the mind towards him, from a sound sense of the absolute want that a man has of him for his justification and salvation. Indeed without this sense of a lost condition without him, there will be no moving of the mind towards him."[42] Alleine directed the unconverted, "Labour to get a thorough sight and lively sense and feeling of your sins."[43]

The Puritans said that an awareness of our need of Christ for justification and sanctification is a primary means or motivation for coming to Christ. William Perkins (1558–1602) said that the sharp needle of the law must first pierce the heart before the scarlet thread of the gospel is drawn in.[44] Among his fundamental principles of the Christian faith, Perkins wrote,

> Q. But how mayest thou be made partaker of Christ and his benefits?
> A. A man of a contrite and humble spirit, by faith alone apprehending and applying Christ with all his merits unto himself, is justified before God and sanctified….
>
> Q. How doth God bring men truly to believe in Christ?
> A. First, he prepareth their hearts, that they might be capable of faith, and then he worketh faith in them.
>
> Q. How doth God prepare men's hearts?
> A. By bruising them, as if one would break a hard stone to powder; and this is done by humbling them. Ezek. 11:19; Hos. 6:1–2.
>
> Q. How doth God humble a man?
> A. By working in him a sight of his sins, and a sorrow for them.
>
> Q. How is this sight of sin wrought?
> A. By the moral law: the sum whereof is the Ten Commandments. Rom. 3:20; 7:7–8.[45]

Flavel said the law is given to "kill vain confidence, and quench carnal mirth in the hearts of men."[46] We come to the Christ of the gospel, who lived, died, rose again, and ascended on high to fulfill our every *need*. David Clarkson

(1622–1686) argued that men by nature are unwilling to come to Christ because they cling to self-righteousness, whereas those who come to Christ do so "sensible of their misery by reason of sin and wrath…convinced of an absolute necessity of Christ," so that they think, "Give us Christ, or else we die."[47] Sibbes said our hearts are like criminals that will never cry to the judge for mercy until they are driven out of their hiding places.[48]

Have you begun to see how much you have sinned against God? How much you need this Christ, revealed in Scripture and offered in the gospel as your only hope for salvation? Has your heart been drawn to Him, to love Him and to long for the precious gifts He alone can bestow? This is a sure sign of effectual calling, drawing you into the way that leads to eternal life.

3. We come to Christ only through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the efficient cause of our coming to Christ. Faith comes by God the Spirit through the hearing of the word (Rom. 10:17), that is, the preaching of the gospel, with its promise of salvation to all who call upon the name of Christ. Those who hear can do so only because the Spirit's power has regenerated them. This is the kind of faith that a person must have in order to come to Christ. Only after the Holy Spirit works upon sinful men, removes their blindness, unstops their ears, and regenerates them can people have any hope of obtaining God's spiritual, unconditional promises. Thus Paul wrote that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3).

As the Spirit applies salvation in the offered Christ to the hearts of the elect, He gives supernatural power to sinners to stretch out withered arms and hands to embrace Christ by active faith. What we do not want to do and cannot do by ourselves, the Spirit enables us both to desire and do. Flavel put it this way: "For though God does not force the will contrary to its nature, yet there is a real internal efficacy implied in this *drawing*, or an immediate operation of the Spirit upon the heart and will, which, in a way congruous and suitable to its nature, takes away the rebellion and reluctance of it, and of unwilling, makes it willing to come to Christ."[49]

The Puritans stressed that *the works of the Trinity are undivided*,[50] and this was true in a sinner's coming to Christ. Christ makes the promise in John 6:37 that all the Father gives to Him will come to Him. In John 6:44, Christ says that only those whom the Father draws will come to Him. Jesus says in John 6:63 that the Spirit gives life, but the flesh profits nothing. Christ is saying that He is willing to save by the operation of the Holy Spirit all those whom the Father is willing to draw to Him. There is no division in the work of the Godhead. The Father freely, graciously, and mercifully draws souls to His blessed Son by the

power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when Christ makes His unconditional promises, we can be assured that the Father and the Holy Spirit are of the same mind. The Father is a willing drawer (Eph. 1:4–6), the Son is a willing Savior (John 6:37b), and the Holy Spirit is a willing enabler (Rom. 8:15). All three persons of the Trinity are equally able and willing to save sinners through Christ's atoning work.

When God exercises His power to convert a sinner, it is the work of new creation. Conversion does more than reform morality; it is the manifestation of a new, inward life. Arthur Dent (1553–1607), whose dialogue about salvation influenced Bunyan, wrote that "all outward honesty and righteousness, without the true knowledge and inward feeling of God, availeth not to eternal life."[51] Therefore, *the marks of saving grace* are an important means of assuring us that we have truly come to Christ by faith. The Puritans gave us many marks to distinguish hypocrites and legalists from the truly converted.[52] We can sum up what they say by pointing to a few characteristics.

- Those who come to Christ know the urgency of the gospel. They know the seriousness of their sin and whom they have sinned against.
- They know that only Christ can relieve them of their burdens, so they covenant with Him and He becomes theirs.
- They love God as God and choose Him as their full portion.
- As a result, they fight their sinful flesh by the Spirit.
- They share in communion with Christ and walk in the newness of life.
- They despise their own righteousness and the accolades of the world and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The Puritan understanding of coming to Christ is, therefore, a holistic approach. Those who come to Christ learn throughout the remainder of their lives that God must be glorified in *everything*. Their purpose for living, as the Puritans said, is to "glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" (Shorter Catechism, Q. 1).

Have you, too, come to Christ holistically? Is your heart's desire that you might "glorify God and enjoy Him forever"? Such a change of life and heart can only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in you.

Human Impediments in Coming to Christ Despite the freeness and graciousness of the gospel offer and Christ's willingness and ability to save sinners, many people do not come to Him. Some hold back, lingering in doubt while others flatly refuse to come. Why do people hesitate or vacillate about whether to come? Why would people refuse the only remedy for their fatal

sickness? What impediments are present? What stands in the way of their coming to Christ?

The Puritans addressed these questions thoroughly. Richard Baxter wrote of twenty hindrances of conversion: (1) the willful neglect of the means of grace, (2) bad company, (3) gross ignorance of biblical truths, (4) unbelief, (5) thoughtlessness, (6) hardness of heart, (7) great esteem and interest in the world, (8) habits of sin subduing the mind, (9) foolish self-love and presumption, (10) counterfeit conversion, (11) living among strong temptations to sin, (12) scandal and division in the church, (13) the poor education of children, (14) striving against the Holy Spirit, (15) half-heartedness in religion, (16) delay, (17) failure to follow through on good beginnings, (18) misunderstanding some Scriptures, (19) pride and unteachableness, and (20) willful obstinancy.[53] Though several hundred years separate us from Puritan times, we are still very much connected to them in terms of the tendencies of human nature. As in the days of the Puritans, there are many obstacles that prevent sinners from coming to Christ today.

Let us address several of these obstacles. As we do, we encourage you to examine yourselves and see if these obstacles stand in your way. If so, cast yourself at the feet of the merciful Savior to find relief from your burdens and to find help to overcome these impediments through the gracious Holy Spirit. Know that, with God, you are always welcome to come to Jesus Christ. Any impediments therefore must be man-made. The fault lies with us, not God.

Impediment 1: Neglecting the Christ of the Bible. Some people refuse to come to Christ because they fail to apprehend Him as revealed in the Scriptures. This happens in at least two different ways. First, some seek comfort in coming to Christ without paying any regard to Scripture; they seek Him on their own terms. This should not be. We do not urge people to read their Bibles out of a legalistic mentality. We do not encourage people to read their Bibles so they can commend themselves to God and others. Nor do we say that people should read their Bibles to receive some mystical experience or vision. We encourage reading the Scriptures because in them the Holy Spirit reveals Christ as He truly is, and the true way of coming to Him for salvation. Without Scripture, we cannot know or come to Christ.

A second group fails to apprehend Christ, even though they may read the Bible, or listen to sermons, while persisting in a false view of what Scripture teaches. As a result, they are blind to the way Scripture reveals Christ. They are like the Pharisees, of whom Christ says, “Ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye

think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:38–39). They see the Bible as a book of sentiments and morals, intended for inspiration and self-improvement, and fail to see that the Bible lifts up Christ as the Savior of sinners and the only hope for fallen humanity to escape the wrath of God. They fail to understand that the Scriptures revolve around Him. Thomas Watson said that the promises of the Bible are just the box; Christ is the jewel in the box. The Scriptures are the dish; Christ is the food on the dish.[54]

These people miss the mark. To have any hope of coming to Christ, we must turn to the Bible as the testimony of God to Christ. We must look to Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. We must come to Christ on God's terms, not ours.

Impediment 2: False Conversion. Some people think they have already come to Christ, but their conversion is a superficial sham, not a conversion of heart. Alleine said that a man may take a soft mass of lead and shape it into a plant, and then into the form of an animal, and then into the likeness of a man, but it remains lead. In the same way an unsaved man may acquire some knowledge of the Bible, refrain from using profanity, avoid gross sin, and even perform religious duties; but if his nature is not changed, he remains unsaved.[55] Conversion is not just a new manner of living; it is a new life. Alleine wrote, "Conversion is a deep work, a heart work. It makes a new man in a new world. It extends to the whole man, to the mind, to the members, to the motions of the whole life."[56]

The Puritans would not allow people to delude themselves in thinking they are saved simply because they had reformed their outward lives or because they assented to the proposition that Christ died for sinners. Alleine wrote, "Many urge this as a sufficient ground for their hope, that Christ died for sinners; but I must tell you, Christ never died to save impenitent and unconverted sinners, so continuing."[57]

Impediment 3: Despair Due to Great Sins. Some people refuse to come to Christ because they are convinced that they are such great sinners that they cannot be saved. "Why would God save such as me?" they ask. They believe that they are beyond the hope of salvation. They think, "If people could see the real me, they would realize that I could never come to Christ." They see themselves beyond the mercy and grace of Christ. They believe their sins are too great to be forgiven.

Dear friend, why would your sin prevent you from coming to Christ? Does not the cross itself testify of the exceeding sinfulness of your sin? Does not Christ's promise of rest to all who labor and are heavy laden speak to you? We do not

come to Christ in the smallness of our sins or the greatness of our works. David cried unto the Lord, "For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great!" (Ps. 25:11).

Consider as well what an insult to Christ it is to hold that there is a limit on His power to forgive sin, or on the power of His atoning death to justify from the guilt of all sin, or on the power of His cleansing blood to wash away sin and uncleanness. In effect, you are saying that what God has provided in Christ simply falls short of what you need. God hasn't done enough for you, even though He sent His Son to the cross to suffer and to die as the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2).

There is hope for you. John Flavel said, "The Lord is pleased to nourish still some hope in the soul under the greatest fears and troubles of spirit…. In hell, indeed, there is no hope to enlighten the darkness, but it is not so upon earth."[58] Come to Christ with your enormous sin, with all of your baggage, and discover that He is a great Savior. The hymn writer rightly says,

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.

Let not conscience make you linger,
Not of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.

Come to Christ now, come as you are, and receive the pardon of Jesus Christ!

Impediment 4: Spiritual Complacency. Some people refuse to come to Christ because of spiritual laziness. They think there is no need to do today what they can put off until tomorrow. The gospel does not suit such people because they refuse to come to Christ today, while it is still the day of salvation. They presume on tomorrow, thinking that the gospel call will later come to them. Even worse, they calculate that they can go on sinning for the present and always make it up with God another day.

They get immersed in everyday concerns. They are consumed with the world's pleasures. They see coming to Christ as an uncomfortable, unwanted burden. They would rather sit in the imagined ease of unbelief than endure the hardships of faith. Many of these people will die for refusing to endure any difficulty or discomfort. As David Clarkson said, "Many will not part with that which keeps them at a distance from Christ. They will not part with sin to come

to Christ, and there is no coming to him without turning from that."[59]

Alleine said that true conversion is a man's turning to the triune God "as his all sufficient and eternal happiness." As long as the heart seeks its rest in idols it has not yet turned to the living God. "Have you taken God for your happiness? Where does the desire of your heart lie?" Alleine asks us.[60] He calls us to set the world with all its "pleasures and promotions" on one hand, and God with all His excellencies on the other hand, and to choose God. By grace, choose the Father as your Father, the Son as your redeemer and righteousness, and the Spirit as your sanctifier and comforter. Choose God in His forgiveness and His holiness. Choose Him in His all-sufficiency to meet your needs and His sovereignty to rule your life.[61]

Do not fall into the rut of spiritual laziness. Do not get comfortable living among the dead. Do not perish because you find the treasures of this world more worthy than the glories of Jesus Christ. Listen to the plea of Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661): "I exhort you and beseech you in the [compassion] of Christ, faint not, weary not. There is a great necessity of heaven; you must needs have it.… Think it not easy; for it is a steep ascent to eternal glory; many are lying dead by the way, that were slain with security."[62] Rather, come to Christ, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light!

Impediment 5: Despair Due to Backsliding. Some people refuse to come to Christ because they believe their backsliding has disqualified them from doing so. They believe they have committed the unforgivable sin. They think they might have been saved at one time, but now all hope is lost because they have committed a terrible transgression. They have sinned against the Holy Spirit, and thus they are cast off forever.

O backsliding friend, come to Christ, for He says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." This includes you. There are no exceptions in Christ's promise. *All* whom the Father gives to Christ, He will raise up. The Lord says in Jeremiah 3:12, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever." Matthew Henry (1662–1714) wrote that these words reveal "God's readiness to pardon sin and to receive and [welcome with blessings] returning repenting sinners."[63] He is ready to forgive you when you come to Him! Remember that Christ taught that we must forgive the sin of a brother, "until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22). Divine forgiveness must exceed such a human standard.

You may object: "I am clearly not one that the Father has given to His Son. For if I were, I would not have backslidden so grievously." Dear friend, do you

long after Christ? Do you despise your sin? Do you feel remorse for what you have done? If you say yes, the gospel promise is for you. But if you continue to push it away, saying, "It can't belong to me," think of David or Peter, and many others, who returned to Christ after a lapse into gross sin. You, too, are not beyond the reach of sovereign grace. Heavy laden as you are, come to Christ and cast your burden at His feet. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Impediment 6: Confusion about Election. Some people refuse to come to Christ because they do not think they are among the elect of God. They say, "If Christ only saves His elect, and I don't think I'm elect, then all my attempts to come to Him will fail." You, dear friend, have misunderstood the doctrine of election. This doctrine does not keep people away from Christ; when rightly understood, it draws people to Christ. Without the glorious doctrine of Christ's free election, no one would come. Election is the friend of sinners; it paves the way for sinners to come to Christ. The door is open.

"But it is not open to me," you say. Dear friend, do not let your election decide your coming; let your coming decide your election. The doctrine of election should drive us to Christ. Come to Christ, and He will enable you to make both your calling and your election sure.

Alleine wrote, "You begin at the wrong end if you first dispute about your election. Prove your conversion, and then never doubt your election…. Whatever God's purposes be, which are secret, I am sure His promises are plain…. Do not stand still disputing about your election, but set to repenting and believing."[64]

Impediment 7: Ignorance of the Gospel Call. Some people refuse to come to Christ because they have never heard the command to come to Christ; they have never repented of their sins and have never felt the Spirit open their hearts to embrace the Christ offered in the gospel. For such persons there is a message of warning and a message of hope. The message of warning is that if you continue in your ignorance and unbelief, you will perish in it, and there will be no hope of coming to Christ. The door of the kingdom of heaven will be barred fast. You will be kept far away from the Lord Jesus Christ, forever and ever. To you, I warn, I admonish, I exhort, learn of Christ, come to Christ, and trust in Christ, while there is time to do so.

Impediment 8: Unbelief. All of these impediments—and there are many more—are rooted in the soil of unbelief. Unbelief is the "mother sin" of all sin, the root

and receptacle of all sin. Unbelief is the belief of Satan's lie. Unbelief is the ultimate reason for not coming to Christ. Unbelief makes us cling to the world rather than to Christ.

John Calvin wrote, "The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clarity of the gospel; the sun is no less bright because blind men do not perceive its light…. Unbelief makes us rebels and deserters; [it] is always proud…. Our own unbelief is the only impediment which prevents God from satisfying us largely and bountifully with all good things."[65]

I once pastored a man who strove hard against his unbelief. With tears streaming down his face, he cried out, "I hate my unbelief! O my cursed, cursed, cursed unbelief!" Do you hate and curse your unbelief? Do you flee from it as that which is most offensive to God?

Matthew Henry said, "Nothing is more offensive to God than disbelief of his promise and despair of the performance of it because of some difficulties that seem to lie in the way…. Unbelief may truly be called the great damning sin, because it leaves us under the guilt of all our other sins; it is a sin against the remedy."[66] Ultimately, it is unbelief that will drag to hell all those who refuse to come to Christ. "No sin makes less noise, but none so surely damns the soul, as unbelief," J. C. Ryle said.[67]

Conclusion: Reject the World's Pig Food and Be Christ's Willing Slave

Rowland Hill (1744–1833), a popular, evangelical, English preacher, hit a low point in his ministry for a few months in the midst of his ministerial career. He was sorely disappointed with the lack of fruit in his ministry. One day he looked out of his study window and saw a pig farmer going to market. To Hill's amazement, the pigs followed the farmer straight into the slaughter house. When he later saw the farmer emerge from the slaughter house without the pigs, Hill went out to meet him. The minister said, "How did you get those pigs to follow you to their own death? I cannot get people to follow Christ to their eternal life." The farmer replied, "Didn't you see that as I walked along I had some pig feed in my pockets and that I just dropped a few crumbs every few steps as I walked? For a few crumbs of food they followed me to their death."

Will you believe and follow Satan for a few crumbs of this world's pleasures to your eternal death? Or will you believe in and follow to eternal life the Savior who said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35)?

Take to heart the words of Charles Spurgeon, "Unbelief will destroy the best of us. Faith will save the worst of us."[68] If, by grace, you do come to Jesus, think of what you will have. David Clarkson said, "You shall be admitted to

such union with him, such a relation to him, as will not only engage his tenderness and love, but his joy and delight…. He will join you to himself in an everlasting covenant, a marriage-covenant, that shall never be broken, nor you ever divorced."[69]

A wealthy Englishman went to California in the 1850s to enrich himself during the gold rush. After much success, he left to go back to England. He stopped at New Orleans on the way home, and, as all tourists did at that time, visited the infamous slave trading block. As he approached the place where people were sold for cash, he saw a beautiful, young, African woman standing on the block. He overheard two men who were trying to outbid each other for the woman, talking about what they would do to her if they could buy her. To their surprise, the Englishman joined in the bidding by offering twice the price.

The auctioneer was astonished. "No one has ever offered this much for a slave," he said.

After purchasing her, the Englishman stepped forward to get her. When he helped her down to his level, she spat in his face. He wiped away the spit and led her to a building in another part of town. There she watched uncomprehendingly as he filled out forms. To her astonishment he handed her some manumission papers and said, "There, now you are a free woman." She spat in his face again.

"Don't you understand?" he asked, as he wiped her spit away again. "You are free! You are free!"

She stared at him in disbelief a long while. Then she fell at his feet and wept —and wept some more. Finally, she looked up and asked, "Sir, is it really true that you paid more than anyone has ever paid to purchase me as a slave, only to set me free?"

"Yes," he said, calmly.

She wept some more. Finally, she spoke: "Sir, I have only one request. Can I be your slave forever?"

This illustrates vintage Puritan teaching: Come to Jesus Christ, for He will not cast out those who come to Him. He alone has purchased them with the price of His own blood. He alone can set them free from bondage to sin and death. He alone can lead them to eternal life. And in so doing, He makes them willing and ready to live unto Him, as His willing servants in this life and forever.

1. Thomas Boston, *The Beauties of Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (Inverness, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1979), 256.

2. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 157 (1.xxvi.1, 3, 7).

3. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 157 (1.xxvi.8).

4. Boston, *The Beauties of Thomas Boston*, 263.

5. Thomas Shepard, *The Sincere Convert and the Sound Believer* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999),

49.

6. Joseph Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted* (Evansville, Ind.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1959), 97.

7. Richard Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live*, in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme (London: James Duncan, 1830), 7:395.

8. Cf. Joel R. Beeke, "Evangelism Rooted in Scripture: The Puritan Example," in *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 143–69.

9. Such as Alleine's *Alarm* and Baxter's *Call*—see notes 6 and 7.

10. Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993).

11. James Janeway and Cotton Mather, *A Token for Children* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994).

12. Shepard, *The Sincere Convert and the Sound Believer*, 51.

13. Stephen Charnock, "A Discourse of the Efficient of Regeneration," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1864–1866; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:227.

14. E. F. Kevan, *The Puritan Doctrine of Conversion* (London: Evangelical Library, 1952), 7–13.

15. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 1–2, 4–7, 51–52.

16. John D. Eusden, introduction to *The Marrow of Theology*, by William Ames, 6–7.

17. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, eds., *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 88.

18. John Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:255.

19. Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 1:255.

20. John Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 2:67. "Boanerges and Barnabas" is a biblical allusion meaning "son of thunder and son of encouragement." Flavel's point is that neither severe preaching of hell nor warm preaching of God's love will move those dead in sin.

21. Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption…The Ninth and Tenth Books* (1657; repr., Ames: International Outreach, 2008), 273.

22. Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption, by the Effectual Work of the Word, and Spirit of Christ, for the Bringing Home of Lost Sinners to God, The First Eight Books* (1657; repr., New York: Arno, 1972), 4.

23. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 1.

24. Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 403.

25. William Greenhill, "What Must and Can Persons Do towards Their Own Conversion," in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 1:39. These sermons are often called "The Morning Exercises."

26. Greenhill, "What Must and Can Persons Do," in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:44–48.

27. Quoted in Timothy K. Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion: A Study of the Puritan Concept of Becoming a Christian* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007), 79. Baxter deviated from the common Puritan view of the atonement and justification by imposing a rationalistic, political theory on the Scriptures. But his view of conversion was mainstream Puritanism. See also 39–40, 142–43.

28. Quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 115.

29. John Brinsley, *Three Links of the Golden Chain* (London: S. Griffin, 1659), 29.

30. Richard Sibbes, *Bowels Opened*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 2:63. Quoted in Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2000), 123.

31. Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 1:247.

32. Brinsley, *Three Links of the Golden Chain*, 22–23.

33. Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 28.

34. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 219.

35. Stephen Charnock, “A Discourse of the Nature of Regeneration,” in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:88.

36. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:67.

37. Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 1:246.

38. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 215–16.

39. Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 1:258.

40. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.11.20.

41. Quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 202.

42. Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 1:247.

43. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 71.

44. Quoted in Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 92n109.

45. William Perkins, “The Foundation of Christian Religion Gathered into Six Principles,” in *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appleford, U.K.: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 147, 156.

46. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:295.

47. David Clarkson, *Men by Nature Unwilling to Come to Christ*, in *The Works of David Clarkson* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 1:341.

48. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 1:44.

49. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:70.

50. Carl Trueman wrote of John Owen, “Throughout his works—whether those dealing with God, redemption, or justification—the doctrine of the Trinity is always foundational…. Time and again, he insists that all external works of God are to be understood as works of the one God, and that all such are also to be ascribed in particular and distinct ways to each of the three persons of the Trinity.” *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 124.

51. Arthur Dent, *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 14–15.

52. See Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining, or a Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (1652; repr., Ames, Iowa: International Outreach, 1990); Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *Religious Affections*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959); Thomas Shepard, *The Works of Thomas Shepard*, vol. 2, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (1852; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1967).

53. Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion*, in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme (London: James Duncan, 1830), 7:251–332.

54. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 216.

55. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 7.

56. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 13.

57. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 36.

58. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, in *Works*, 2:163.

59. Clarkson, *Men by Nature Unwilling to Come to Christ*, in *Works*, 1:337.

60. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 23.

61. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 77–79.

62. Samuel Rutherford, to Lady Cardoness, in *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Chicago: Moody, 1951), 170.

63. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 4:331.

64. Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 12.

65. Quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 661.

66. Quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 662.

67. Quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 663.

68. Quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 663.

69. Clarkson, *Men by Nature Unwilling to Come to Christ*, in *Works*, 1:347.

Chapter 33

The Puritans on Living in Christ

> *The Lord Christ…sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts, which is the efficient cause of all holiness and sanctification—quickening, enlightening, purifying the souls of his saints.*
>
> —JOHN OWEN[1]

We have examined the Puritan view of coming to Christ, looking at the matter in terms of the twofold call to come to Him, as set forth in Scripture. The first call is *universal:* Christ calls and commands all sinners who hear the gospel to come to Himself, but this call is not sufficient because people are sinful by nature. Thus, Christ extends an *effectual call* to His elect. Rather than erecting a barrier, election opens a doorway to Christ for sinful human beings who are God's elect. They *can* and *do* come to Jesus Christ. The Puritans taught that we can be confident of coming to Christ if we are drawn by faith to Christ as offered in the gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now let us examine the practical side of coming to Christ. Coming to Christ is not a once-in-a-lifetime decision. Nor is it a momentary act of the will that has no implications for the present and future. Rather, as Thomas Boston (1676–1732) reminded us, coming to Christ is our first and last step toward Christ. Boston wrote that by our union and communion with Christ, the believer "launches forth into an ocean of happiness, is led into a paradise of pleasures, and has a saving interest in the treasure hidden in the field of the Gospel, the unsearchable riches of Christ."[2] Therefore, the saints must strive constantly to draw "fresh supplies of grace from the fountain" of Christ by faith.[3] We must come to Christ not just once, for justification from the guilt of sin, but every day of our lives, for ongoing sanctification. Christ is not just the door; He is also the way to heaven; indeed, He is the glory of heaven itself.

Many people put trust in their initial coming to Christ, saying, "I came to Christ when I was a child. Why do I need to come again?" Jesus is not concerned whether your initial coming to Him was twenty years ago or last

week. He is concerned whether you are still coming to Him now. We are to come to Him daily by faith to grow in Christlikeness, to cultivate holiness, and to live in and with Him. Every moment we are to seek Christ's glory. Coming to Christ is a lifelong pursuit.

Living in Christ by Faith John Flavel (1628–1691) wrote, "The soul is the life of the body, faith is the life of the soul, and Christ is the life of faith."[4] Many people today are consumed with looking inward at their faith rather than outward, to the *object* of their faith. The Reformers taught that faith is only as good as the object it beholds. Faith is only the means to bring us to union with Christ, for, as Flavel said, "Christ is the life of faith." Without Christ, faith is meaningless; He is the goal of faith. So George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673) wrote, "First, Faith must look out for Christ; secondly, Faith must look up to Christ for grace; thirdly, Faith must take Christ down, or receive him and grace."[5]

Hebrews 12:1–2 commands us to cast off sin and to run the race set before us, "looking unto Jesus." Looking unto Jesus is the great means of grace by which all other means find their potency. Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) said that this looking to Christ is not a bare, intellectual knowledge but an "inward experimental [experiential] looking unto Jesus, such as stirs up affections in the heart, and the effects thereof in our life…inward experimental knowing, considering, desiring, hoping, believing, loving, joying, calling on Jesus, and conforming to Jesus."[6] Ambrose urged us to look to Jesus in every stage of His redemptive work: eternal election, historical promises, incarnation, birth, earthly ministry, death, resurrection, intercession, and His coming in glory.

John Owen (1616–1683) reminded us that "one of the greatest privileges and advancements of believers, both in this world and unto eternity, consists in their beholding the glory of Christ."[7] This they do presently by faith in the Scriptures. Owen wrote, "For here in this life, beholding his glory, they are changed or transformed into the likeness of it (2 Cor. 3:18)."[8] It is from our spiritual sight of Christ's glory that our faith is exercised in "life and power," our love for Christ does "arise and spring," and we find "rest, complacency, and satisfaction."[9] Owen said that Christ is the "treasury of all that goodness, grace, life, light, power, and mercy" that the new creation needs.[10] The Holy Spirit dwells in Christ "in all fullness" and "immeasurably," and this same Spirit Christ "gives unto all believers, to inhabit and abide in them also (John 14:14–20; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:9)."[11]

United by faith to Christ, believers possess all of Christ's benefits (Eph. 1:3). True believers abundantly experience these benefits as the Spirit applies them through faith. Since grace and faith are given in Christ, the righteousness of the

believer remains outside of himself, though Christ is present within him. Thomas Manton (1620–1677) said, “Faith hath two hands, one to lay hold on Christ, and another to sweep the heart, which is Christ’s house.”[12] Faith not only enables us to receive Christ and His righteousness for justification; it also stirs us to cast off sin and purify ourselves, to be temples where Christ dwells by His Spirit. This shows our need of daily sanctification in Christ. Christ dwelling at the right hand of God is the ground of our justification; Christ dwelling in us is the source of the fruits that accompany justification and the evidence of our union with Christ.

Simply put, if we are united with Christ, this union affects our lives for good. To live out of Christ means to live by faith, evidencing the fruits of sanctification. Then, by faith, Christ is for us the chief among ten thousand, white and ruddy, altogether lovely (Song 5:10, 16). We can say with the Queen of Sheba, when gazing upon the person and benefits of the greater Solomon, “Behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: for thou exceedest the fame that I heard” (2 Chron. 9:6). In faith we exclaim, “Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11). The Puritans delighted to meditate on how God has made Christ the all in all of believers. Ralph Robinson (1614–1655) published a series of meditations on how Christ is our life, food, robe of righteousness, protector, physician, light, shepherd, vine, horn of salvation, dew, cornerstone, sun of righteousness, precious ointment, consolation, fountain, lamb, bundle of myrrh, way, truth, glory, gift, author and finisher of our faith, rock, sword, desire, covenant, hope, river, power, wisdom, Holy One, altar, and passover.[13]

“Without faith it is impossible to please [God],” says Hebrews 11:6. God is pleased with faith because faith is pleased with Christ. Every day faith takes refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.[14] Faith is not only for the first-time believer; it is the instrument the Spirit uses daily to renew and sanctify all believers. James Durham (c. 1622–1658) wrote, “We must by faith look for everything that is useful and needful for us, from Christ…. O sweet and desirable, but mysterious life!”[15] Faith commits the total person of the believer to the total person of Christ. Christ-centeredness, more than anything else, makes faith inseparable from justification and superior to all other graces in justification.

Faith has been called the captain of all spiritual graces. Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) wrote, “Love is the crowning grace in heaven, but faith is the conquering grace upon earth…. Faith is the master-wheel; it sets all the other graces running.”[16] Watson said, “Other graces make us like Christ, faith makes us members of Christ.”[17] Swinnock added, “Call forth first that commander-in-chief, for then the private soldiers, the other graces, will follow.”[18] Faith is enamored with the person of Christ. Living in Christ is to live in such a way that

Christ becomes everything.

Faith, then, daily brings us to Christ. Faith is living, active, and holistic. Friend, has coming to Christ influenced your whole life? Are you continuing to come? Do you come to Christ daily to be renewed by His blood and to seek refuge and grace at His side? Do you have a lively and active faith that propels you toward Christ, day by day, hour by hour?

Throughout the centuries, the Puritans have stood as mighty beacons dedicated to the matter of living in Christ in the way of sanctification. Their practical suggestions offer us wisdom and encouragement. Let us look first at the Puritans' *idea* of sanctification and then at their *practice* of sanctification.

The Puritan Idea of Sanctification Sanctification can scarcely be overemphasized today, for many people want Christ's salvation but show no interest in His call to pursue holiness. Whether in Jesus' day, in Puritan times, or in our own time, many souls are blind to the need for sanctification. Nonetheless, Scripture declares that without holiness, "no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Many assume that justification by faith in Christ does away with the need to be sanctified. Of such persons Owen wrote, "There is no imagination wherewith man is besotted more foolish, none so pernicious, as this, that persons not purified, not sanctified, not made holy, in this life, should afterwards be taken into that state of blessedness which consists in the enjoyment of God."[19]

Many people erroneously believe that sanctification leads to justification, that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by our own efforts to obey Him. Or, that justification is by faith alone, but sanctification is all about trying to please God by obeying His commands. We must realize that sanctification flows from justification, but that both are a work of grace. To paraphrase Calvin, to have Christ is to have all of Christ—His justifying grace as well as His sanctifying grace (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30), lest we rend Christ in two.[20]

The classic Puritan definition of sanctification is stated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 35: "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." In other words, sanctification is a lifelong process of becoming conformed to the image of Christ, as God's grace works in us.

Question 36 asks, "What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?" and the answer follows: "The benefits which *in this life* do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end"

(emphasis added). Living a life of holiness helps us more and more to delight in and relish peace with God. It gives us confidence, joy, and perseverance. How comforting it is to know that God has so ordered it that holiness allows us to taste these benefits. For joy in Christ, peace with God, and assurance of His love, we should actively pursue a life of holiness. When considering the Puritan doctrine of sanctification, we must keep the following truths in mind.

Sanctification Is Rooted in the Nature of God The Puritans view holiness as God's crowning attribute, which sheds light on all of His other attributes. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) asserted that "holiness is in a peculiar manner the beauty of the divine nature…. This renders all his other attributes glorious and lovely. 'Tis the glory of God's wisdom, that 'tis a holy wisdom, and not a wicked subtlety and craftiness. This makes his majesty lovely, and not merely dreadful and horrible, that it is a holy majesty."[21]

In God's holiness, we see two important truths. First, God is separate from His creation and especially from evil. His holiness sets Him above all things. He is the first and final source of all holiness. Second, because God is holy, His creatures cannot approach Him in their unholy state, unaided by sacrifice (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22). In the power of Christ's blameless life and perfect sacrifice, sinners who trust in Him can now draw near to this holy God. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Through His own sacrifice, Christ takes us by the hand, as it were, and leads us into the presence of His Father (1 Peter 3:18).

Sanctification Magnifies God's Holiness Those who have a weak view of God's holiness are prone to fashion God after their own image. We must return to the biblical view of God's holiness. We must remember Isaiah's vision of God on His throne, surrounded by seraphim who call to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!" (Isa. 6:3). Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) wrote, "Holiness is the life of God; it endures as long as his life; he must be eternally averse from sin, he can live no longer than he lives in the hatred and loathing of it."[22]

Though believers are in a *state* of perfect holiness before God, they are not yet in a *condition* of perfect holiness. They are still sinners who wrestle with their old natures. Paul prayed that the Thessalonians may be *wholly* sanctified, meaning that sanctification has begun in the believing Thessalonians but still needs to progress to completion (1 Thess. 5:23). Do not say, "I'm only human." God created man in His perfect image and intends to renew that whole image. "Let us labor after a conformity to God in this perfection," Charnock said. "A

short line may be as straight as another," even if it does not have "the immense length of it."[23] We are called to be "short lines" as straight as God though infinitely smaller.

If we are true believers, we must cultivate holiness in Christ's strength (Eph. 1:4). Through Christ, God makes us holy and calls us to pursue holiness in daily life (Phil. 3:12). Do not be deceived; without holiness, no one shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). The battle for holiness, therefore, is always a major part of a believer's life, for God says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

Sanctification Is Comprehensive and Moral The Puritans viewed sanctification as comprehensive, or *universal*. They said that all things are meant to be sanctified (cf. 1 Tim. 4:4–5). Holiness should be evident in our lives alone with God, the confidentiality of our homes, the competitiveness of our work, the pleasures of social friendship, and the diligence of our Lord's Day worship. All times and all things (except what is sinful) are meant for holiness, both externally and internally. As Boston said, "Holiness…is a constellation of graces."[24] Watson wrote, "Repentance works a change in the whole man; as wine put into a glass where water is, the wine runs into every part of the water, and changeth its colour and taste."[25]

Sanctification is also moral. Sanctification propels the believer toward moral excellence and practical righteousness. As question 36 of the Shorter Catechism shows, the Puritans stressed that you cannot expect God's Holy Spirit to give you strong, joyful assurance unless you strive on a daily basis to live a holy life.

Sanctification Is a Progressive Battle The Puritans saw this laboring for sanctification as a spiritual warfare (Rom. 7:14–25).[26] William Gurnall (1616–1679) said the conflict between the saints and Satan's forces was a war that made all the bloody battles of mankind look like "sport and child's play."[27] Obeying the Ten Commandments is not as easy as some think because it involves motives of the inward attitude as well as the outward act. Sanctification is the Spirit's warring against the flesh. It is a spiritual necessity, lest sin kill the believer. The Puritans said that we must battle for holiness in Christ's strength every step of the way, or we will fail in the attempt (Eph. 6:10–12). Boston wrote, "It is a difficult fight; but faith will help you out in it, as difficult as it is…. The blood of Christ is of infinite value, the Spirit of Christ of infinite efficacy, and faith must rely on these."[28] The believer cannot afford to stand still, said Andrew Gray, for, "he is like the morning sun, 'that shineth more and more unto the perfect day' (Prov. 4:18). He grows in grace until he attains the height in eternal glory."[29]

Sanctification Involves Both Repentance and Righteousness Repentance is turning from sin, the Puritans asserted. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience" (Q. 87). It is a daily work of faith (Isa. 1:16–17). However, repentance is more than remorse. While true repentance may start there, remorse alone will not change a life. Repentance is essentially a changed life. True repentance is more than being sorry; it is turning away from sin to righteousness. We turn from death to life. In and through Christ, we turn from evil deeds to righteous ones.

Sanctification Must Be Seen in a Covenantal Context To be sanctified is to receive covenant blessing from a covenant God who has brought us to new birth to bring us to glory, the Puritans said. After writing that the covenant of grace brings the benefits of having God as our God and the forgiveness of sin, Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) wrote, "The third benefit of the covenant, is the renewing and sanctifying of our natures, by the graces of the Spirit." He represented the Lord as saying to His covenant people, "I will renew, alter and change that sinful and wicked nature that is in you, I will make your heart a new heart, so as you shall be enabled to do my will, and walk in my ways. I will sanctify you to be an holy and precious people to my self."[30]

Sanctification is rooted in God's covenant with believers in Christ. Thus, according to the promise of the covenant, the believer is the object of God's sanctifying work in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Our covenantal relationship with God includes both promises made to the believer and obligations imposed on the believer. It is the work of the Spirit to regenerate us, but it is our calling to bring forth the fruits of regeneration in our lives. We must be conformed into Christ's image within the context of the covenant of grace that God makes with His people.

The Puritan Practice of Sanctification The Puritans stress that sanctification in Christ involves ordinary duties in daily life. Walking daily in and with Christ by faith produces large lives of holiness, they said. It benefits us, then, to examine several *elements* of the Puritan approach to living in Christ by faith.

Believers Must Pursue Trinitarian Likeness to the Triune God Each person of the Trinity shapes the believer's life of holiness. Believers are, first, to imitate

the character of God the Father by walking in love (Eph. 5:1; 1 John 4:16). Charnock said, "We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expression, or pompous services for him, as when we aspire to a conversing with him with unstained spirits, and live *to* him in living *like* him."[31]

Second, believers are to conform to the image of Christ by living in obedience to the Father's will. Pursuing Christlikeness is not a condition of salvation but a fruit of it. In Christ we have not only a perfect example of a total life of true holiness, but He is also the source of our holiness. He makes believers holy. As Martin Luther said, "Christ in us equals sanctification."[32]

Third, believers are to submit to the mind of the Spirit as revealed in the Scriptures, who in turn will sanctify us. The Puritans said the Spirit does this by showing us our need of holiness, by convicting us of sin, by implanting a desire for holiness, by working on our whole nature to resist sin, and by helping us to persevere in holiness. Edwards said that the Holy Spirit is the indwelling principle of our holiness, for the Spirit "unites himself with the mind of a saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new, supernatural principle of life and action."[33] God's holiness should be our primary reason for cultivating holy living.

Believers Must Practice Both Mortification and Vivification Mortification means continually putting to death every form of sin. Owen warned that we must be mortifying sin "every day, and in every duty."[34] He wrote, "It will no otherwise die but by being gradually and constantly weakened; spare it, and it heals its wounds, and recovers strength."[35] We must continually watch against the operations of this principle of sin: "in our duties, in our calling, in our conversation with others, in our retirements, in the frames of our spirits, in our straits, in our mercies, in the use of our enjoyments, in our temptations. If we are negligent on any occasion, we shall suffer by it…. Every mistake and every neglect is perilous."[36] We must find strength in Christ to mortify our sins; He has enough grace for us to do so. Our sins must be killed by the cross of Christ. As Boston explained: "His lusts are upon the cross, nailed through and pierced to the heart, not to come down till they have breathed out their last. Gal. 5:24. Like a dying man taking leave of friends, he is parting with his old lusts."[37]

The complement of mortification is *vivification*. Vivification is the quickening, or bringing to life, of the new nature we have received from God. We must not only seek to kill sin; we must also seek to do the will of God. We must conform our lives to the standards God has given. The Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and other ethical teachings throughout the New Testament are not merely good advice; they are meant to shape the way we live.

Boston pictured vivification as a man raised from the dead: "So the sanctified sinner lives as one of another world, not conforming himself to the sinful courses of this world, but being transformed into the likeness of those of the better world, Rom. 12:2; Phil. 3:20."[38]

It is essential to balance mortification and vivification in our lives. Killing earthly lusts is not enough, nor, by itself, the attempt to live an obedient life. We need both killing and quickening, ceasing to evil and learning to do well (Isa. 1:16, 17). Do not give up fighting against sin; be on guard against growing cold to living a life of holy righteousness.

Believers Must Diligently Use the Means of Grace Flavel said that God has called us to pursue "the diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties, to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God."[39]

The Puritans suggested various spiritual disciplines to cultivate Christlikeness and holiness. These disciplines affect all areas of life and every relationship. All areas of life, whether private or public, in family, church, or business, have specific disciplines. Today we tend to compartmentalize our lives. For example, we may live as Christians only on Sundays, divorcing it from the need for sanctification on other days of the week. Or we live holy lives before our family and neighbors, but elsewhere we live as unregenerate people. We may sing God's praises in church while we belittle our spouse or neighbor in the privacy of our homes. The Puritans said every aspect of life must be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. As Paul says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

The Puritans viewed Scripture as the Christian's rule or directory for holy living. Without the Scriptures, it is impossible to be sanctified (John 17:17). Henry Smith (1560–1591) wrote, "We should set the Word of God always before us like a rule, and believe nothing but that which it teacheth, love nothing but that which it prescribeth, hate nothing but that which it forbiddeth, do nothing but that which it commandeth."[40]

Flavel pointed out that "the Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying."[41] To disregard the Word of God is to disregard God's directives on how to become sanctified. We must not neglect the powerful and effective Word used by the Spirit to bring us to God's salvation and keep us in His grace. To neglect or set aside the Scriptures in pursuit of sanctification promotes moralism, legalism, or vain efforts at self-improvement. Above all, by the Spirit's grace, we find in the Scriptures the means to bolster our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ,

the very heartbeat of true sanctification.

The Puritans also stressed the importance of meditating on the Scriptures (Ps. 1:2). They said that meditation adds depth to the knowledge received by reading. Thomas Hooker (1586–1647) defined meditation as "a serious intention of the mind, whereby we come to search out the truth and settle it effectually upon the heart."[42] It includes praying for soundness of mind and selecting a verse or doctrine within a text to meditate on. Such meditation strengthens faith, helps our witness, and promotes divine guidance. The Puritans believed that such meditation should be used to stir up our affections to glorify God and to arouse our minds to dutiful, holy resolutions. They usually concluded their meditation time by thanking God for His assistance and then singing a psalm.

In addition to reading and meditating on the Scriptures, the Puritans emphasized prayer and work *(ora et labora)* every bit as much as the ancient monastic orders of the pre-Reformation church. They bathed all their work in prayer and worked prayerfully for the glory of Christ. They viewed prayer and work as two oars in a boat: without using both oars, the boat goes only in circles. They not only taught the necessity of prayer, but also the need to go forward in confidence that the Lord had heard and would answer their prayers. The Puritans recognized that holiness takes planning, hard work, and prayer. Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) said, "Think it no easy matter to take heaven by violence."[43]

To be a believer is to affirm the difficult labors of the soul and to pursue with godly zeal a life conformed to God and to Christ. In this life, work is our lot, but rest is waiting for us in eternal glory. Samuel Rutherford's last words were, "Glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land."[44]

The Puritans were not super-Christians unhindered by the obstacles of their day. They understood the difficulties of prayer and therefore admonished Christians to give prayer priority. John Bunyan (1628–1688) said, "You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed."[45] Bunyan also said, "Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge for Satan."[46] The Puritans said that prayer must involve one's whole person, and it must be done regularly so it becomes a habit. The best way to pray is to pray the Scriptures, using the very words of the Bible as the content of our prayers.

Family and corporate discipline is also necessary. The Puritans emphasized worship in private and within families as well as in the greater family of the church. They urged the explanation and application of the Word to families and society, because the Word is effectual in softening hearts. And they urged participation in the sacraments, which make the Word visible. Robert Bruce

(1555–1631) wrote, “While we do not get a better Christ in the sacraments than we do in the Word, there are times when we get Christ better.”47 The sacraments administer grace as the visible Word to those who partake of them by faith. Without Christ, the sacraments would be nothing more than empty signs.

Believers Should Practice Holiness in Their Daily Vocations The Reformation restored to Christians a sense of the holiness of all kinds of work. Devotion was largely confined by medieval Catholicism to the monastery; the Reformers released it into the marketplace. Sexual purity was once limited to celibacy; the Puritans celebrated the purity of human sexuality in marriage. The Puritans aimed to bring all of life under the whole counsel of God, and so filled all human endeavors with spiritual significance. For them a “vocation” was not just a job, a way to make a living; it was a calling from God the Creator. Each person should be a busy worker bee in the hive of human society, and not a useless drone. William Perkins (1558–1602) wrote that every person should have a specific vocation to “become a servant to his brother in all the duties of love” with all diligence and contentment.48

The Puritan concept of the Christian’s vocation neither reduces Christian devotion to the common life of natural men, nor limits Christian devotion to the special activities of ministers and evangelists. Instead it fills ordinary life with new spiritual motivations, a sense of the presence of the living God, and a heavenly hope. Swinnock wrote,

> Thy duty is…to drive a trade in heaven, whilst thou art following thy trade on earth. When thou art called to the Lord, thou art not called from thy labour; nay, as thou art a servant of Christ, thou art bound to be serviceable to thy country, in some mental or manual calling; but thy diligence must proceed from conscience, not from covetousness—from subjection to God’s word, not from affection to thy wealth.49

Thus holiness does not mean leaving the busy world for a life of solitude, but engaging in business in this world with Christian wisdom, diligence, justice, truth, contentment, and constant devotion to God, as Richard Steele (1629–1692) said in his practical book, *The Religious Tradesman*.50 The labors of Christian men and women do not “centre in themselves,” but each “considers himself, whatever may be his station in life, as the servant of divine providence, and makes the word of God the rule, and the honour of God the end, of his common employments.”51

Believers Should Focus on the Benefits of Sanctification The Puritans viewed striving after holiness as hard work, but also work that reaps great benefits. They

said God calls us to holiness for our good and His glory. Flavel commented, "What health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul."[52] Likewise, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) said, "A sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue."[53] And Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) stated that we should treasure holiness even above our spiritual comfort because "holiness makes most for God's honour."[54]

If we are believers, we have been freed from the curse of the law to live for Christ, in true holiness of life. We know that our works do not commend us to God, but in commending the work of Christ, we may and should, by the Spirit's grace, abound in good works. We are holy—not based on a righteousness that comes from the law, but by seeking to please our heavenly Father. Seeking holiness brings us into conformity to the image of Christ, for He is holy. As Watson wrote, "We must endeavor to be like God in sanctity. It is a clear glass in which we can see a face; it is a holy heart in which something of God can be seen."[55]

The Puritans asserted that holy living is for our good and our joy. By living in Christ, we attain to the supreme joy of fellowship with God, abiding assurance, and the eternal reward laid up for those who love Christ.

Believers Should Remember That God Uses Holiness to Fit Them for Heaven

Holiness prepares us to meet God in righteousness and peace, that "at the last day [we] may appear without terror before the judgment of Christ" (Rev. 21:27).[56] That kind of meeting is impossible for those who do not bear fruits of holiness, for as Hebrews 12:14 says, we are to "follow [literally, pursue]… holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Brooks wrote, "The way of holiness that leads to happiness is a narrow way; there is but just room enough for a holy God and a holy soul to walk together."[57] If God is so concerned about holiness, and we have such need of it, then, dear friends, you will not feel at home in a holy heaven if you did not strive for holiness on earth. As Edwards said, every true believer yearns for a "heaven of holiness."[58] If you show no interest for holy living now, you will show no interest for it in the life to come.

Conclusion

God saves us to live in Christ and to walk in holiness. Christ purchased us with His precious blood so that we could partake of *all* of His benefits. The Holy Spirit is given to us for our growth in grace and holiness of life. Every moment of our day is a call to holiness. God demonstrated His own heart for holiness by crucifying His Son, the Lord of Glory, for our sin. Let this be a reminder that we must seek our all in all in Christ, so that Christ is the very context for our living. For faith to live in Christ, strive, in the strength of Christ and His Spirit, to bring

every thought, word, and deed captive to the obedience of Christ.

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2. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 285.

3. Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 316.

4. John Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 2:104.

5. George Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 1:203.

6. Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* (repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 28.

7. Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 1:286.

8. Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:287.

9. Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:291.

10. Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:362.

11. Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:365.

12. Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton* (repr., Vestavia Hills, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009), 2:455.

13. Ralph Robinson, *Christ All and in All: or Several Significant Similitudes by Which the Lord Jesus Christ Is Described in the Holy Scriptures* (1660; repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992). Cf. Philip Henry, *Christ All in All: or What Christ Is Made to Believers* (1676; repr., Swengel, Pa.: Reiner Publications, 1970).

14. See the Belgic Confession (1561), article 29.

15. James Durham, *Christ Crucified: The Marrow of the Gospel in 72 Sermons on Isaiah 53*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 2001), 160–61.

16. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: A. Fullarton, 1845), 145.

17. Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, 376.

18. Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, in *Works*, 1:202.

19. John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 4:574.

20. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2008), 3.11.6 and 3.16.1; and *Commentaries* on Genesis 14:18; Romans 4:1; Romans 8:9; and 1 Corinthians 1:30.

21. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 257.

22. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God* (1682; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:181.

23. Charnock, *Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:199.

24. Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 294.

25. Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, 354.

26. *E.g.* see John Downame, *The Christian Warfare against the Devil, World, and Flesh* (1604; facsimile repr., Vestavia Hills, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009).

27. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour: A Treatise of the Saints' War against the Devil* (1662–1665; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 2.

28. Thomas Boston, "The Christian Warfare; or, The Good Fight of the Faith," in *The Complete Works*

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29. Andrew Gray, *A Door Opening into Everlasting Life* (Sioux Center, Iowa: Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee, 1989), 88.

30. Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant; or The Covenant of Grace Opened* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1651), 241–42.

31. Charnock, *Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:201 (emphasis added).

32. Quoted by John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 301.

33. Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 411.

34. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:545.

35. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 17:411.

36. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:546.

37. Thomas Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (1853; repr., Stoke-on-Trent, U.K.: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 1:657.

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Chapter 34

The Puritans on Adoption

> *We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us, therefore exalt free grace, begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises who hath blessed you in making you his sons and daughters.*
>
> —THOMAS WATSON[1]

The Puritans have gotten bad press for their supposed lack of teaching on adoption, that is, the biblical doctrine that every true Christian is God's adopted child. In his otherwise excellent chapter titled "Sons of God" in the classic *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer writes, "The Puritan teaching on the Christian life, so strong in other ways, was notably deficient" on adoption.[2] Similarly, in his otherwise fine article on adoption, Erroll Hulse asserts that "the Puritans did little in exploring this truth apart from a few paragraphs here and there."[3] Statements such as these promote the familiar comment that adoption is *the* neglected aspect in the Puritan *ordo salutis.*

The evidence, however, suggests that adoption, though not developed as thoroughly as several closely-knit doctrines such as justification, sanctification, and assurance, was certainly not a neglected topic among the Puritans. William Ames, Thomas Watson, Samuel Willard, and the Dutch Puritan-minded theologian Herman Witsius gave it ample treatment in their systematic theologies—Witsius devoting twenty-eight pages to it in *The Economy of the Covenants between God & Man.*[4]

William Perkins, often denominated the father of Puritanism, addressed various aspects of adoption at some length in at least nine different places in his works.[5] William Bates, Hugh Binning, Thomas Brooks, Anthony Burgess, Stephen Charnock, George Downame, John Flavel, Thomas Goodwin, William Gouge, Ezekiel Hopkins, Edward Leigh, and John Owen all provide some treatment of the subject.[6] Other Puritans, such as Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Cole, Roger Drake, Thomas Hooker, Thomas Manton, Stephen Marshall, Richard Sibbes, John Tennent, and John Waite preached one or more sermons on

adoption.[7]

So significant was the Puritan emphasis on adoption that the Westminster divines were the first to include a separate chapter on the subject of adoption in a confessional statement: the Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 12). The Larger Catechism (Q. 74) and the Shorter Catechism (Q. 34) also addressed it, as did numerous commentators of the Westminster Standards ever since.[8] Most importantly, some English Puritans wrote entire treatises on adoption, which sadly are very rare today, some never having been reprinted after the Puritan era.[9] Then, too, Scottish and Dutch divines of Puritan persuasion also wrote at length on adoption.[10] In this chapter, we show how Puritanism recognized adoption's far-reaching, transforming power and comfort for the sons and daughters of God.

The Greatness and Definition of Adoption The Puritans were fond of stressing the superlative value and surprising wonder of adoption. They spoke often of its greatness, excellency, dignity, and comprehensiveness.

William Perkins (1558–1602) said that a believer should esteem his adoption as God's child to be greater than being "the childe or heir of any earthly Prince [since] the son of the greatest Potentate may be the child of wrath: but the child of God by grace, hath Christ Jesus to bee his eldest *brother*, with whom he is *fellow heir* in heaven; he hath the holy Ghost also for his *comforter*, and the kingdom of heaven for his everlasting *inheritance.*" Perkins lamented how few people realize this experientially: "At earthly preferments men will stand amazed; but seldom shall you find a man that is ravished with joy in this, that he is the child of God."[11] The Puritans often shared the apostle John's sense of awe when he declared, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1).

And how comprehensive adoption is! Most Puritans place their treatment of adoption in the *ordo salutis* between justification and sanctification, following the order set forth by the Westminster divines. Logically, that makes considerable sense, given the inevitable ties between justification and adoption, and sanctification and adoption, as we shall see shortly. Other Puritans, however, have pointed out that though adoption can at times be viewed as one aspect of salvation, or one part of the *ordo salutis*, at other times it can be understood best as comprehending all of soteriology. For example, Stephen Marshall (1594–1655) wrote, "Though sometimes in the holy Scriptures our Sonship is but one of our Privileges, yet very frequently in the Scripture all the Believers do obtain from Christ in this world and the world to come, here and to eternity, all is comprehended in this one, *That they are made the Children of God.*" Marshall

went on to cite several examples: “I know not how often the whole Covenant of Grace is expressed in that word, *I will be their Father, they shall be my children,”* or consider Ephesians 1:5, he said, where Paul comprehends all of salvation “in this one expression, *having predestinated us to the adoption of children.”*12 Clearly, the Puritans ascribed a lofty and comprehensive place to adoption in their soteriology.

What Adoption Is Not

To more precisely analyze the Puritans' teachings on adoption, it is advantageous to first consider what they thought adoption is not.

1. Adoption Is Not Regeneration

We might be prone to treat regeneration and adoption as synonymous because in regeneration the Christian is someone born from above. Adoption, at first glance, seems to be another way of describing the new birth. The Puritans assure us, however, that this is not so. These are two distinct blessings, though all who are born again are adopted, and everyone who is adopted is born again, as Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646) wrote.[13]

Regeneration and adoption deal with two different problems. Adoption deals with our status, taking us from alienation to cherished children. Regeneration deals with our nature, changing us from God-haters to lovers of the heavenly Father.

The Puritans taught that regeneration and adoption are to be distinguished in several ways. Here is a summary of points made by Thomas Manton (1620–1677) and Stephen Charnock (1628–1680):

- Regeneration brings us to close with Christ; adoption causes the Spirit to abide in our hearts.
- Regeneration is the Spirit's renewing; adoption, the Spirit's inhabiting. In regeneration, the Holy Spirit builds a house for Himself; in adoption, He dwells in the house—much like bees that "first make their cells, and then dwell in them."
- Regeneration is not conditioned by faith; adoption is.
- Regeneration enables us to believe unto justification and adoption.
- Regeneration engraves upon us the likeness of the Father; adoption relates us to God as our Father.
- Regeneration makes us God's sons by conveying the principle of new life (1 Peter 1:23); adoption keeps us God's sons by conferring the power of new life (John 1:12).
- Regeneration makes us partakers of the divine nature; adoption makes us partakers of the divine affections.
- Regeneration affects our nature; adoption, our relationships.[14]

2. Adoption Is Not Justification

Justification is the primary, fundamental blessing of the gospel; it meets our most basic spiritual need—forgiveness and reconciliation with God. We could

not be adopted without it. But adoption is a richer blessing because it brings us from the courtroom into the family. Gordon Cooke wrote of Burroughs, "Justification is conceived of in terms of law, adoption in terms of love. Justification sees God as a judge, adoption as a father."[15]

Justification and adoption obviously have much in common. The Puritans taught that the status of adoption, like justification, is an act rather than a process. Contrary to the Roman Catholic apologist Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), Puritan George Downame (1560–1634) said that this act is administered by imputation, not infusion.[16] It is punctiliar, not linear. Believers are not progressively adopted, becoming more and more the children of God; adoption is no more subject to degrees than justification is. When sinners believe, they are made full children of God and remain such. Justification declares them to be righteous—in a moment! They become His children, sons and heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ.

The majority of the Puritans supported the position of the Westminster Assembly, stressing that justification and adoption, though intimately related, are two distinct privileges and ought to be handled separately in theology. For example, in expounding the Shorter Catechism, Samuel Willard (1640–1707) emphasized that the Bible clearly distinguishes justification and adoption in Romans 8:14ff., Ephesians 1:5, and elsewhere. Scripture makes plain that it is one thing to be judged righteous and another to be placed among God's children; "one thing to have God accept us as a Judge, another to do so as a Father," with all the love and care that that involves.[17] Justification involves a *legal* relationship; adoption, a *personal* relationship.

3. Adoption Is Not Sanctification

Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) asserted that sanctification is simply a living out of one's adoption and sonship (John 1:12; Rom. 8:17). He wrote, "If thou art a holy person, then of a child of wrath thou art become a child of God, a child of love; and of an heir of hell thou art become an heir of heaven; and of a slave, thou art become a son."[18]

The Puritans would resonate well with J. I. Packer's assertion that sanctification is "simply a consistent living out of our filial relationship with God, into which the gospel brings us. It is just a matter of the child of God being true to type, true to his Father, to his Saviour, and to himself. It is the expressing of one's adoption in one's life. It is a matter of being a good son, as distinct from a prodigal or black sheep in the royal family."[19]

Through sanctification the believer is brought into a fuller experiential awareness of his adoption. He learns to grasp more fully what adoption is, and

learns to live out of its wonders.

The Westminster Assembly's Definitions of Adoption The Westminster Assembly, which included scores of Puritans, offered three formal definitions of adoption—a basic definition in the Shorter Catechism (SC), an intermediate definition in the Larger Catechism (LC), and a more comprehensive definition in the Confession of Faith (WCF):

> *SC, Q. 34:* Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God.
>
> *LC, Q. 74:* Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of His children, have His name put upon them, the Spirit of His Son given to them, are under His fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow heirs with Christ in glory.
>
> *WCF, Chap. 12:* All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have His name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.[20]

Several significant points may be made relative to the Westminster Assembly's work on adoption.

First, how intriguing it is that the Westminster divines, often accused of being too "scholastic" in their theology, provided the Christian church's first confessional chapter and formal articles on adoption—one of the least "scholastic" doctrines of the Christian faith![21] Why the assembly decided to allot adoption a separate *locus* is not clear. Both the published and unpublished minutes of the Westminster Assembly tell us no more than the basic dates and facts that it happened.[22] Perhaps the divines were motivated by a growing awareness of the scripturalness and importance of adoption both doctrinally and experientially as it relates to justification, sanctification, assurance of faith, perseverance, and other ancillary doctrines.

Second, the Westminster divines had good reasons for their brevity in treating adoption, including the lack of treatment in former confessions, the lack of dissent or heresy that needed to be addressed, and the overlap of material with

the chapters on assurance and perseverance. All of these factors assist the divines to expound a large doctrine with remarkably succinct brevity.[23]

Third, the Westminster divines were concerned to apply predestination in personal salvation. That is evident already in Confession of Faith, 3.6, where the first reference to adoption is made in conjunction with predestination: "They who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; are justified, *adopted*, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are there any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, *adopted*, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only" (emphasis added). Later, the assembly stressed that adoption originates as "an act of the free grace of God" (LC, 74; cf. SC, 34 and WCF, 3.5), and involves being "taken" (WCF, 12) or "received into the number" of the elect (SC, 34; LC, 74). Tim Trumper rightly concludes that "as the Westminster commissioners were as concerned as Calvin to apply predestination soteriologically, there is little purpose in driving a wedge between Calvin and the later Calvinists" on this issue, as is often done.[24]

Fourth, union with Christ is inseparable from adoption. The sonship we receive is Christ's in the first place. Adoption transpires "in and for His Son Jesus Christ," so that the adopted "have His name put upon them, the Spirit of His Son given to them" (LC, 74; WCF, 12). Justification, adoption, and sanctification all flow from union with Christ (LC, 69). Contrary to what some scholars have suggested, the Westminster divines were as concerned as Calvin to maintain that "to be adopted is to be united with Christ in his Sonship," as Trumper writes.[25]

Fifth, the Westminster divines harmonized the forensic and familial elements of adoption. They spoke of both the judicial pronouncement of adoption (LC, 74; WCF, 8.5, 12) and the adoptive experience of sonship, referred to as the "liberties and privileges" of adoption (LC, 74; WCF, 12). This is evident in the chapter on justification also, where forensic and familial aspects are united in stating that though the justified "can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's *fatherly* displeasure" (WCF, 11.5, emphasis added). Adoption, therefore, is not exhausted by its forensic aspects; rather, the forensic aspects imply an ensuing familial life of sonship that manifests itself in the visible church, which is described as "the house and family of God" (WCF, 25.2).[26]

Finally, the Westminster divines emphasize that adoption is an act of free grace (SC, 34; LC, 74; WCF, 12). In adoption, the unlovable sinner is freely loved by God and taken into the divine family. Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) put it this way: "Adoption is a mercy spun out of the bowels of free grace; all by

nature are strangers, therefore have no right to sonship, only God is pleased to adopt one, and not another, to make one a vessel of glory, another a vessel of wrath. The adopted heir may cry out, 'Lord, how is it, that thou wilt show thyself to me, and not unto the world?'"[27]

The Transforming Power of Adoption When we are born again, God delivers us from Satan's enslaving family and, by His astounding grace, transfers us to the Father's sonship. He calls us sons; we are adopted into His family, transferred "from a state of sin and misery" to "a state of excellency [and] dignity," wrote Watson. "It were much for God to take a clod of dust and make it a star; it is more for God to take a piece of clay and sin and adopt it for his heir."[28]

Adoption in the time of the apostle John usually took place in adolescence or adulthood, not infancy. Under Roman law, adoption was a legal act by which a man chose someone outside of the family to be an heir to his inheritance. Likewise, believers become children of God through the gracious act of God the Father who chooses them to be His heirs and joint heirs with Christ.

William Ames (1576–1633) said there are four differences between human and divine adoption:

- "Human adoption relates to a person, who, as a stranger, has no right to the inheritance except through adoption. But believers, though by natural birth they have no right to the inheritance of life, are given it because of rebirth, faith, and justification."
- "Human adoption is only an outward designation and bestowal of external things. But divine adoption is so real a relationship that it is based on an inward action and the communications of a new inner life."
- "Human adoption was introduced when there were no, or too few, natural sons. But divine adoption is not from any want but from abundant goodness, whereby a likeness of a natural son and mystical union is given to the adopted sons."
- "The human [adoption] is ordained so that the son may succeed the father in the inheritance. But divine adoption is not ordained for succession, but for participation in the inheritance assigned. Both the Father and his first-begotten Son live forever and this admits no succession."[29]

How astonishing it is that, unlike people's heirs who don't share their estates with their friends, we as God's adopted children share the same privileges that belong to God's only begotten Son! The Puritans reveled in what Christ prays in John 17:23: "and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."[30] This love is the

essence of God's fatherhood. It shows us how far God is willing to go to reconcile us to Himself.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1)—we who deserve His judgment, dethroned Him from our lives, spurned His love, and defied His laws. Here, surely, is the great assurance of the child of God, that God the Father loved him when he was bound for hell. How wonderful is the assurance of the Father's words: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3).

Love and communion with God lie at the heart of adoption, according to John Owen (1616–1683). Owen listed five elements of adoption, which Sinclair Ferguson summarizes as follows: "(1) that the person first belongs to another family; (2) that there is a family to which he has no right to belong; (3) that there is an authoritative legal translation from one family to another; (4) that the adopted person is freed from all the legal obligations of the family from which he came; and (5) that by virtue of his translation he is invested with all the rights, privileges, and advantages of the new family."[31]

The Puritans emphasize that all the members of the Trinity are involved in our adoption. Stephen Marshall summarized it this way: Adoption is the gracious act of God the Father whereby He chooses us, calls us to Himself, and gives us the privileges and blessings of being His children. God the Son earned those blessings for us through His propitiatory death and sacrifice, by which we become children of God (1 John 4:10), and applies them to us as Elder Brother. And the Holy Spirit changes us from children of wrath, which we are by nature, into children of God by means of regeneration; unites us to Christ; works in us a "suitable disposition" toward God and Christ; and seals our sonship as the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirits that we are the sons of God. In that witnessing, the Spirit shows us God's work of grace in our hearts and lives and also "carries our hearts to God, and testifies to the Soul that God is [our] Father."[32]

The Marks of Adoption

The Puritans gave clear marks for us to determine which family we belong to, God's or Satan's. They believed that when self-examination is undertaken biblically, the Holy Spirit often uses it as a positive transforming power in the lives of God's children.

William Perkins provided six marks that may help certify one's adoption:

- "An earnest and hearty desire in all things to further the glory of God."
- "A care and readiness to resign our selves in subjection to God, to be ruled by his word and spirit, in thought, word, and deed."
- "A sincere endeavor to do his will in all things with cheerfulness, making conscience of everything we know to be evil."
- "Upright walking in a mans lawful calling, and yet still by faith to rely upon Gods providence, being well pleased with Gods sending whatsoever it is."
- "Every day to humble a mans self before God for his offenses, seeking his favour in Christ unfainedly, and so daily renewing his faith & repentance."
- "A continual combat between the flesh and the spirit, corruption haling and drawing one way, and grace resisting the same & drawing another way."[33]

Roger Drake (1608–1669) offered these marks: a spirit of faith and dependency (2 Cor. 4:13); a spirit of prayer (Acts 9:11); a spirit of evidence (Rom. 8:16); a spirit of liberty (2 Cor. 3:17); a spirit of waiting (Rom. 8:23); and a spirit of love (1 John 5:2).[34]

Cotton Mather (1663–1728) said that we belong to God's family when we can positively answer that our only trust for salvation lies in Jesus Christ and His atoning blood, that we are effectually called by the Spirit, and that we exercise vital piety, which consists of fearing God, giving glory to Him, and loving our neighbor.[35] Stephen Marshall said we must answer questions like these: "Is the Holy Ghost come to dwell in you to unite you to Christ? Doth the Holy Ghost work a Childs heart in you? Can you honor God, and reverence him, and turn to him? And can you walk before God as obedient Children, at least in the constant bent and tenure of your Souls?"[36]

Transformed Relationships in Adoption The consciousness of personal adoption into God's family impacts the entire life of the believer. The Puritans would agree with Packer: "Sonship must be the controlling thought—the normative category, if you like—at every point."[37] Every relationship in the believer's life is transformed by it, just as all of Christ's life was ruled by His

consciousness of His unique filial relationship with the Father (John 5:30; 10:37).

John Cotton (1585–1652) made plain in expounding 1 John 3 that the significance of adoption affects the following relationships:

Our Relationship to God "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1a). God's household becomes our true security. God's fatherhood and love for His children is flawless, despite our shortcomings that incline us to confess what Cotton said: "Surely I am not a child of God, because I find much pride in my heart, and much rebellion and corruption in my spirit. Surely if I were born of Christ, I should be like him. But what says St. John here? We are the sons of God even now, though there is much unbelief in our hearts, and much weakness and many corruptions within us."[38] Despite all our sin, Jesus will show us that our heavenly Father's love is expansive and glorious beyond imagination.

Our Relationship to the World "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1b). The world's rejection of us is one evidence of God's adoption of us. "If God saw it meet that his Son should be thus afflicted in the world and drink of such a bitter portion of God's wrath," wrote Cotton, "let us not think we shall go to heaven and partake of those heavenly mansions which Christ has prepared for us, without also drinking of the same cup that he drank of. Let us account ourselves happy that God will so esteem us as to make us his sons."[39]

Our Relationship to the Future "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The prospects for God's adopted family are great, for His children will receive a glorious inheritance. They cannot even imagine the extent of that inheritance. God keeps that hidden, said Cotton, so that they may (1) be like their suffering Head, (2) have their faith kept in exercise and be watchful, and (3) be tolerated to some degree in this world, for "if God should allow them to be perfectly holy in this world, the men of the world would not allow them to live among them long (Deut. 7:22)."[40]

Our Relationship to Ourselves "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). Cotton draws this doctrine from this text: "Every child of God has hope in Christ, to be made like him at his appearing." That hope is "a patient, certain, and grounded expectation of all those promises in Christ which by faith we believe to belong to us." God gives

this hope through the means of grace so that we "might not be tossed and hurried up and down the world."[41] So we are to purify ourselves daily, using Christ as our pattern. Purifying ourselves involves "the whole man," said Cotton, including what we do with our minds, affections, will, thoughts, tongue, eyes, hands, disappointments, injuries, and enemies.[42]

Our Relationship to the Church as the Family of God As God's adopted sons and daughters, we have been placed in a great family. If we rightly understand this, our attitude toward our brothers and sisters in the family of God will be profoundly affected (1 John 3:14–18). As Cotton said, "The sons of God ought to be the men of our love and delight (3 John 1, 2, 5; 1 Peter 2:11; Phil. 4:1)."[43] We are to love fellow adoptees of God, Cotton said, because of (1) "God's singular love to them," (2) "their love to God," and (3) "the truth that is in every Christian believer (2 John 1, 2)."[44] Those who have experienced much love from Him cannot help but love others. As Cotton concluded, "The lack of love to any of our brethren is a sign of abiding in the state of damnation, or in an unregenerate and carnal state."[45]

Privileges and Benefits of Adoption The Puritans spend more time expounding what are variously called the privileges, liberties, benefits, blessings, or rights of adoption than any other aspect of adoption. This is also evident in the Westminster Confession of Faith (12) and Larger Catechism (Q. 74), where more than half of the material on adoption is devoted to a listing of these "liberties and privileges," each of which the Spirit uses to exercise His transforming power and comfort in the lives of God's children.

The overarching privilege can best be summarized as *heirship.* God's adopted children are all royal heirs apparent and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16–17). "Men may have many children yet but one is an heir," wrote Burroughs. "But all the children of God are heirs."[46] Hebrews 12:23 calls them "first-born" heirs.

The Puritans make much of joint-heirship with Christ. As co-heirs with Christ, believers share in Christ's kingship and therefore partake of the kingdom of heaven as their inheritance. Believers are made kings of the Father in His spiritual kingdom in three respects, wrote Thomas Granger (b. 1578): "1. Because they are Lords and Conquerors of their enemies, Sin, Satan, the World, Death, Hell. 2. They are partakers of the kingdom of Christ and of salvation; for we have received of Christ grace for grace, and glory for glory. 3. They have interest, dominion, and sovereignty of all things by Christ."[47] Herman Witsius (1636–1708), again showing the continuity between the Dutch Reformed and English Puritans, stressed that this "all things" includes the right of "possession

of the whole world," which was given to but lost by Adam (Gen. 1:28; 3:24), promised to Abraham (Rom. 4:13), and repurchased by Christ "for himself and his brethren" (Ps. 8:6), so that now all things, both present and to come, are His people's.[48] Ultimately, believers are lords and possessors of all things, because they belong to Christ who belongs to God (1 Cor. 3:21–23).[49]

Nothing in this world can match the inheritance of believers. It knows no *corruption* (1 Peter 1:4)—not "by outward principles, as fire, violence, &c.; nor by inward principles, as sin and other taints which defile" (1 Peter 1:18). It has no *succession*. The heavenly Father and His children always live out of the same inheritance, so believers' inheritance is as unchangeable as Christ's priesthood is (Heb. 7:24). It faces no *division.* Every heir enjoys the whole inheritance, since God is both "infinite and indivisible." Drake wrote, "God gives his all, not half, but his whole kingdom" (Gen. 25:5; Rev. 21:7).[50]

Specific blessings that accrue for us as believers from His divine inheritance and spiritual adoption include the most wonderful privileges one could ever imagine, both in this world and in the world to come. Here is a summary of them, drawn from the Puritans.

• Our Father cuts us off from the family to which we naturally belong in Adam as children of wrath and of the devil and grafts us into His own family to make us members of the covenant family of God. "Adoption translates us out of a Miserable estate, into a Happy estate," wrote Thomas Cole (1627–1697). "God is in covenant with us, and we in him."[51] By nature, Stephen Marshall said, we are "Children of wrath, Children of *Belial*, Children of old *Adam*, Children of Sin and Death, we are cut off from that Family, no longer to be reckoned of it, [or of its] Bondage, Baseness, Obligations, Curses" and are "taken into Gods Family as his Sons and Daughters, that is…he hath engaged himself perpetually forever" to us, so that this family relationship will last forever (John 8:35).[52]

• Our Father gives us freedom to call on Him by His Father-name and gives us a new name, which serves as our guarantee of admission to the house of God as sons and daughters of God (Rev. 2:17; 3:12). We are a peculiar people—His people, called by His name (2 Chron. 7:14). That means, said Thomas Boston (1676–1732), that our "old name is for ever laid aside. [We] are no more called children of the devil, but the sons and daughters of God" (Heb. 12:5).[53] John Cotton went a step further, saying expressly that this name is *Adoption:* "[We] have this white Stone, that is Absolution for sin, and in that a new name written, that is, Adoption: and if we be of a meek, humble, innocent, frame of mind, we have this comfort."[54] By the Spirit of adoption, we have access to God as a

reconciled Father through Christ. We have liberty to call God Father, which "is more worth than a thousand worlds" (Jer. 3:4).[55]

• Our Father gifts us with the Spirit of adoption. Believers are, by grace, partakers of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, Burroughs told us, enlightens our mind, sanctifies our heart, makes God's wisdom and will known to us, guides us to eternal life, yes, works the entire work of salvation in us and seals it to us unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).[56] Willard wrote that the Spirit "ratifies our Sonship to be immutable, and confirms our title to all the Promises irreversible. As such a Spirit, he gives his testimony in us, to ratify all our evidences, and fully assure us of our Sonship and Heirship."[57]

• Our Father grants us likeness to Himself and His Son. The Father imparts to His children a filial heart and disposition that resemble His own. Roger Drake wrote, "All God's adopted children bear their Father's image, as Gideon's brethren did his (Judg. 8:18). They are like God, in holiness [and] in dignity" (Matt. 5:44–45; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:7; 1 John 3:2–3).[58]

Thomas Cole wrote similarly from a christological perspective: "Christ is formed in them all (Gal. 4:19). As Christ is, so are they, each one resembles the children of a King (Judg. 8:18). They will be exactly like Christ was at the Resurrection (Ps. 17:15). They were from Eternity predestinated unto this (Rom. 8:29)."[59] Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) reminded us that this includes the privilege of being "made conformable unto Christ in his sufferings" (Phil. 1:29).[60]

• Our Father especially strengthens our faith through His gifts of promises and prayer. "If we are adopted," wrote Thomas Watson, "then we have an interest in all the promises: the promises are children's bread." They are like a garden, Watson went on to say, in which some herb is found to cure every ailment.[61] Or, as William Spurstowe (c. 1605–1666) put it, God's promises are like a bag full of coins that God unties and pours out at the feet of His adopted children, saying, "Take what you will."[62] Willard wrote that the Spirit "enlivens" the faith of believers, enabling them "to Go to God as a Father, and claim this relation, and upon the claim, believingly to plead with him for the acceptance of their persons, the audience of their Prayers, the granting of their requests, and supplying of all their wants" (Rom. 8:15).[63]

• Our Father corrects and chastens us for our sanctification. "He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). All chastisements involve discipline that comes from our Father's hand and works together for our best

welfare (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:32–33; Rom. 8:28, 36–37; 2 Cor. 12:7). Our sufferings are "for our education and instruction in his family," wrote Owen;[64] or, as Willard put it, "All our afflictions are helps toward heaven." They contribute to the "increase of their eternal glory: every reproach and injury doth but add weight to their Crown."[65] We foolishly think that God chastens us to destroy us, but 1 Corinthians 11:32 teaches us, "We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."[66]

God's chastenings are badges of our sonship and of the Father's love (Heb. 12:3–11). They are meant only for believers in this life. Owen said, "There is no chastisement in heaven, nor in hell. Not in heaven, because there is no sin; not in hell, because there is no amendment."[67]

• Our Father comforts us with His love and pity, and moves us to rejoice in intimate communion with Him and His Son (Rom. 5:5). He does that in several ways, as Willard noted: "He applies the precious promises to their souls, he gives them cordials of comfort, communicates unto them the sips and foretasts of glory, [and] fills them with inward joys and refreshings."[68] The Father commends and encourages us even for the smallest act of obedience.[69] He comforts us in accord with the afflictions He has measured out for us.[70] How precious then is the love of the heavenly Father toward His children! Jeremiah Burroughs wrote, "God, who is the infinite glorious first-being, embraces them with an entire fatherly love. All the love that ever was in any parents towards children, is but as one drop of the infinite ocean of fatherly love that there is in God unto his people."[71]

• Our Father offers us spiritual, Christian liberty as His sons and daughters (John 8:36). This liberty releases us from bondage (Gal. 4:7). It delivers us from the slavish subjection, the servile pedagogy, the condemning power, the intolerable yoke, and the thundering curses of the law as a covenant of works (Gal. 3:13), though not from the law's regulating power.[72] We are not dependent upon our obedience to the law for our justification and happiness (Rom. 3:28), but as sons of God—not mercenaries—we obey the law as "a service of love."[73] Christian liberty must not be abused. As Cole wrote, "'Tis a dangerous thing to speak too freely of Christian Liberty, because many under that pretence, allow themselves in very unwarrantable courses, running into excess, laying aside all Moderation."[74]

Spiritual liberty delivers us from the world and all its powerful temptations, persecutions, and threatenings (1 John 5:4). It delivers us from the bondage of Satan, from hypocrisy and anxiety, and from the traditions of men, so that we

may freely bind ourselves to the teaching of God. It grants us liberty to live transparently before God, to serve and love God and His ways with heart, mind, and strength (Ps. 18:1), so that we gladly take His yoke upon us and serve Him with filial obedience each day (1 Peter 1:14), confessing, "This is my Father's world."[75]

• Our Father preserves us and keeps us from falling (Ps. 91:11–12; 1 Peter 1:5). He restores us from every backsliding way, recovering and humbling us, always preventing our hypocrisy.[76] Samuel Willard said, "God's Sons in this life are like little Children, always tripping, and stumbling, and falling, and so weak that they could never get up again but for him: but by reasons of his hand that is upon them, his everlasting Arm that is under them."[77]

• Our Father provides everything that we need as His children, both physically and spiritually (Ps. 34:10; Matt. 6:31–33), and will protect us from all harm. He will defend us from our enemies—Satan, the world, and our own flesh—and right our wronged cause. He will assist and strengthen us, always lending us a helping hand to carry us through every difficulty and temptation (2 Tim. 4:17). We may safely leave everything in His fatherly hands, knowing that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5–6). We are children under our Father's special inspection and care (1 Peter 5:7) for the entirety of our earthly pilgrimage, "sealed to the day of redemption" (WCF, 12) in glory where we will be beyond all danger (Rev. 21:25).[78]

• Our Father gives His angels, as ministering spirits, to serve us for good (Ps. 34:7; Heb. 1:14).[79] They guard us and watch for us. Willard called them "tutelary Angels," who guard and defend us from evil and watch for our good (Ps. 91:11). "They pitch their tents round about [believers] (Ps. 34:1), they bring down messages of peace from heaven, even answers of their Prayers (Dan. 9:23), strengthen and confirm them in their secret conflicts (Luke 22:43), and when they come to die, they are a convoy to carry their Souls home to eternal rest (Luke 16:22)."[80]

Responsibilities or Duties of Adoption The Puritans taught that every privilege of adoption had a corresponding responsibility or duty, each of which transforms the way believers think and live. These may be summarized as follows.

Show Childlike Reverence and Love for Your Father in Everything Reflect habitually upon your Father's great glory and majesty. Stand in awe of Him;

render Him praise and thanksgiving in all things.

Remember, your holy Father sees everything. Children sometimes commit dreadful acts in the absence of their parents, but your Father is never absent. Anthony Burgess explained, "*There is nothing done in secret, but thy Father seeth it.* There is no heart-pride, no heart-earthliness, but thy Father seeth it. There is never a time thou prayest, hearest the word, but thy Father seeth with what form of Spirit it is. Oh therefore if thou art a Son of God, thou wilt discover it in thy whole carriage: a Son feareth the frowns of his Father; I dare not do this; my father will be offended; and I, Whither shall I go? Thus the Apostle *Peter, If ye call him Father, pass your sojourning here with fear,* 1 Pet. 1.17."[81]

Let childlike reverence overflow in love to your Father—a love that constrains you to employ all the means of grace, to obey His commands, and to work for Him. Burroughs wrote, "Do all you do out of love, be not mercenary. A servant doth not care to do anything any further than he may be paid for it, but a child doth not so; he doth what he doth out of love."[82]

Submit to Your Father in Every Providence When He visits you with the rod, don't resist or murmur. Don't immediately respond by saying, "'I am not a child of God, God is not my Father, God deals harshly with me; if He were my Father, He would have compassion on me; He would then deliver me from this grievous and especially this sinful cross'—to speak thus does not befit the nature of an upright child," wrote Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711). Rather, "it is fitting for a child to be quiet, to humbly submit, and to say, 'I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him'" (Mic. 7:9).[83]

Burgess said, "If thou hadst a Childlike disposition, thou wouldst say, although all I feel be bitter, yet he is a Father still. I have been an ill Child, and this makes him a Good Father in chastising."[84]

Obey and Imitate Your Father, and Love His Image-Bearers Strive to be like Him, to be holy as He is holy, to be loving as He is loving. We are to be "followers of God" (Eph. 5:1) to show that we bear the family likeness.

We are, then, to love the Father's image wherever we see it. Willard wrote, "The Saints are living Images of the Lord, we may see in them, not only the likeness to, but the shining reflection of his communicated perfections: Hence we should love the Saints."[85] We are to live as God's children in mutual love and patience with each other, having the same Father, Elder Brother, and indwelling Spirit. "It is enough that the children of the world wrangle one with another and fight; let not those that profess God to be their Father, oh let them not in the presence of their Father wrangle and fight one with another, for

certainly the Spirit of God cannot bear it," Burroughs concluded.[86]

Resist Every Hindrance That Keeps You from Relishing Your Father's Adopting Grace Simon Ford (c. 1619–1699) listed these hindrances:

- "A secret *murmuring* frame of spirit against God's present dispensations towards thee."
- "A kind of *delight in complaining* against thy self, and taking Satan's part many times in bearing false witness against thy own soul."
- "An *unthankful denial* of the works of God's sanctifying spirit in the heart."
- "An unwarrantable *thrusting off* those promises and comfortable truths which God in the Ministry of the Word or otherwise brings home to our condition."
- "A groundless *surmising* of an irrecoverableness in our condition from such and such *threatenings of Scripture* as concern us not."
- "*Keeping Satan's counsel.*"
- "Secret *tempting of God*, and *dependence* upon such means and such men for *peace*, and *limiting* God to such and such a time, and *resolving* not to wait on God beyond that time, or not to expect it from any other means."
- "A sinful *ambition of self-preparations* for comfort and peace: were I so much humbled, saith the poor soul, so kindly and ingenuously affected with my sins; could I recover of this deadness, and flatness of spirit into any measure of liveliness and spiritualness in my performances; then I would believe comfort, and assurance of God's love belonged to me."
- "Giving too much way to *prejudices against God,* and his love, from *present sense and feeling.*"
- "*Slackness* and *remissness in* (occasioned by successlessness) Ordinances and Duties."
- "*Over-scrupulousness, and skeptical-question-fulness*."[87]

Rejoice in Being in Your Father's Presence Delight in communing with Him. Burgess wrote, "A Son delights to have letters from his Father, to have discourse about him, especially to enjoy his presence."[88]

In heaven, this joy will be full; our adoption will then be perfected (Rom. 8:23). Then we will enter into the Father's "presence and palace," where we will be "everlastingly enjoying, delighting, and praising God."[89] Let us wait and long for that, as children who eagerly anticipate our full inheritance, where the triune God shall be our all in all.[90]

Concluding Applications

The classic Puritan statement on adoption in the Westminster Standards leaves much unsaid. Tim Trumper makes a case for it being insufficiently Pauline, insufficiently pervasive, and insufficiently redemptive-historical.[91] The first two of these concerns are adequately addressed in Puritan literature. The redemptive-historical development of adoption was explored by the Dutch "Puritan" Herman Witsius.[92] But the Puritans are by no means exhaustive in their doctrine of spiritual adoption. For example, they have not adequately addressed the centrality of sonship in biblical doctrine nor as an organizing principle for understanding salvation along the lines that Sinclair Ferguson suggests.[93]

Nevertheless, the Puritans teach us a great deal more about spiritual adoption and its transforming power than has been acknowledged. They teach us the importance of fleeing from sin and pursuing a conscious sense of our adoption.[94] They show us, as Packer helpfully summarizes, that our adoption helps us better grasp the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the power of gospel holiness, our own assurance of faith, the solidity of the Christian family, and the glory of the Christian hope.[95]

The Puritans also warn us of the danger of remaining a member of Satan's family—especially while under the means of grace. "Many a gospel-call has sounded in your ears, sinner," wrote Thomas Boston. "Hast thou not come away on the call? Then thou art yet a child of the devil, Acts xiii. 10. and therefore an heir of hell and of wrath." When the unbeliever objects, Boston responded, "Whose image dost thou bear? Holiness is God's image, unholiness the devil's. Thy dark heart and unholy life plainly tell the family thou art of."[96]

As strongly as the Puritans admonish, so strongly they invite. Willard wrote, "What do you think of it, who have been often invited in the Gospel to embrace [Christ]? Will not [adoption] present him before you as one worth the entertaining? Receive him by a true Faith, and he will make you, not only Friends, but Children unto God."[97]

Above all, the Puritans use the truth of adoption as a source to transform God's needy children through powerful comforts. Thomas Hooker shows how adoption comforts them in the face of the sight and sense of their unworthiness, outward poverty, the contempt of the world, infirmities, afflictions, persecutions, and dangers.[98] When oppressed with sin, buffeted by Satan, enticed by the world, or alarmed by fears of death, the Puritans encourage believers to take refuge in their precious, heavenly Father, saying with Willard, "Am I not still a Child? And if so, then I am sure, that though he correct me (and I deserve it, nor will I refuse to submit my self patiently unto it) yet he cannot take away his loving kindness from me."[99]

Willard concluded, “Be always comforting of your selves with the thoughts of your Adoption: Draw your comforts at this tap, fetch your consolations from this relation; be therefore often chewing upon the precious privileges of it, and make them your rejoicing. Let this joy out-strip the verdure of every other joy. Let this joy dispel the mists of every sorrow, and clear up your souls in the midst of all troubles and difficulties” as you await heavenly glory, where you will live out your perfect adoption by forever communing with the triune God. There you will “dwell at the fountain, and swim for ever in those bankless, and bottomless Oceans of Glory.”100

1. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity in a Series of Sermons on the Shorter Catechism* (London: A. Fullarton, 1845), 160. This chapter is a shortened version of Joel R. Beeke, “Transforming Power and Comfort: The Puritans on Adoption,” in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spear*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 2007), 63–105. For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Joel R. Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).

2. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 207.

3. Erroll Hulse, “Recovering the Doctrine of Adoption,” *Reformation Today* 105 (1988): 10.

4. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 164–67; Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 155–60; Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969), 482–91; Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (repr., Escondido, Calif.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 1:441–68.

5. William Perkins, *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612–13), 1:82–83, 104–105, 369–70, 430; 2:277–80; 3:154–55, 205; 138 and 382 of 2nd pagination.

6. William Bates, *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates, D.D.*, ed. W. Farmer (repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1990), 4:299–301; Hugh Binning, *The Works of the Rev. Hugh Binning, M.A.*, ed. M. Leishman (repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 253–55; Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 4:419–20; Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or A Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A. Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), 237–43; Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), 3:90; George Downame, *A Treatise of Justification* (London: Felix Kyngston for Nicolas Bourne, 1633), 239–42; John Flavel, *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 6:197–99; Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (repr., Eureka, Calif.: Tanski, 1996), 1:83–102; William Gouge, *A Guide to Goe to God: or, An Explanation of the Perfect Patterne of Prayer, The Lords Prayer*, 2nd ed. (London: G. M. for Edward Brewster, 1636), 10–21; Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, ed. Charles W. Quick (repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 2:120–21, 569–76; 3:198–99; Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London: E. Griffin for William Lee, 1646), 510–11; John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 2:207–22; 4:265–70; 23:255–76.

7. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints’ Happiness, Delivered in Divers Lectures on the Beatitudes* (repr., Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1988), 193–202; Thomas Cole, *A Discourse of Christian Religion, in Sundry Points…Christ the Foundation of Our Adoption, from Gal. 4. 5* (London: for Will. Marshall, 1698); Roger Drake, “The Believer’s Dignity and Duty Laid Open…,” in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-five Ministers of the Gospel in or near London* (repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 5:328–44; Thomas Hooker,

The Christians Two Chiefe Lessons (repr., Ames, Iowa: International Outreach, 2002), 159–73; Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1870), 1:33–57; 10:116–21; 12:111–39; Stephen Marshall, *The Works of Mr Stephen Marshall, The First Part* (London: Peter and Edward Cole, 1661); Richard Sibbes, *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 4:129–49; John Tennent, "The Nature of Adoption," in *Salvation in Full Color: Twenty Sermons by Great Awakening Preachers*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, Ill.: International Awakening Press, 1994), 233–50; John Waite, *Of the Creatures Liberation from the Bondage of Corruption, Wherein Is Discussed…* (York: Tho. Broad, 1650).

8. For example, for the Westminster Confession, see Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (repr., Inverness: Christian Focus, 1974), 137–41; for the Larger Catechism, see Thomas Ridgley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (repr., Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993), 2:131–37; and for the Shorter Catechism, see John Brown (of Haddington), *An Essay towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1849), 162–65; James Fisher, *The Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained, by Way of Question and Answer* (repr., Lewes, East Sussex: Berith Publications, 1998), 184–87; Thomas Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly Explained and Proved from Scripture* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 96–97. For additional confessional statements that address adoption, see Tim Trumper, "An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2001), 5–10.

9. John Crabb, *A Testimony Concerning the Works of the Living God….* (London: John Gain, 1682); Simon Ford, *The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption…* (London: T. Maxey, for Sa. Gellibrand, 1655); M. G., *The Glorious Excellencie of the Spirit of Adoption* (London: Jane Coe, for Henry Overton, 1645); Thomas Granger, *A Looking-Glasse for Christians. Or, The Comfortable Doctrine of Adoption* (London: William Jones, 1620); Cotton Mather, *The Sealed Servants of Our God, Appearing with Two Witnesses…* (Boston: Daniel Henchman, 1727); Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit. Or, An Essay towards a Discoverie of the Witnessings of the Spirit* (London: Livewell Chapman, 1654); Samuel Willard, *The Child's Portion: Or the Unseen Glory of the Children of God, Asserted, and Proved…* (Boston: Samuel Green, to be sold by Samuel Phillips, 1684). Crabb and Granger's books have recently become available as facsimile reprints through EEBO Editions.

10. John Forbes, *A Letter for Resolving This Question: How a Christian Man May Discerne the Testimonie of Gods Spirit, from the Testimonie of His Owne Spirit, in Witnessing His Adoption* (Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1616); Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 1:612–53, 2:15–27; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 2:415–38; 3:486–87.

11. William Perkins, *A cloud of Faithfull Witnesses, Leading to the Heavenly Canaan: or, A Commentarie upon the 11. Chapter to the Hebrews*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612–13), 3:138 (2nd pagination).

12. Marshall also uses Romans 8:23 and the beginning of Galatians 4 to buttress his point about Scripture's frequent comprehensive use of adoption (*Works*, 37–38).

13. Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness*, 192.

14. Thomas Manton, Sermon 23 upon Romans 8, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: James Nisbet, 1870), 12:113–14; Charnock, "A Discourse on the Nature of Regeneration," in *Works*, 3:90.

15. Gordon Cooke, "The Doctrine of Adoption and the Preaching of Jeremiah Burroughs," in *Eternal Light, Adoption, and Livingstone* (Congregational Studies Conference papers, 1998), 23.

16. Downame, *A Treatise of Justification*, 241–42.

17. Willard, *Compleat Body of Divinity*, 483.

18. Thomas Brooks, *The Crown and Glory of Christianity: or, Holiness, the Only Way to Happiness*, in

The Works of Thomas Brooks (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 4:419.

19. Packer, *Knowing God*, 201.

20. *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 107.

21. The term "scholastic" is used here in an ironic sense according to the false caricature of Protestant scholasticism as a rigid system of rationalistic theology built on fatalistic predestination with the methods of Aristotle. This straw man is set against the warm, biblical teachings of the Reformers like Calvin. In reality, Protestant scholasticism was not a philosophy but an academic method of discussing questions about biblical truth. It presented largely the same theology and piety as the sixteenth-century Reformers but in a different style. See Richard A. Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism—A Review and Definition," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 45–64.

22. See Trumper, "Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition," 227–29, for a detailed study of Westminster's minutes relative to adoption.

23. Chad van Dixhoorn, "The Sonship Program, for Revival: A Summary and Critique," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999): 235–36.

24. Trumper, "Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition," 231.

25. Trumper, "Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition," 232.

26. Trumper, "Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition," 234–36.

27. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 155.

28. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 156.

29. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 165–67.

30. Anthony Burgess, *CXLV Expository Sermons upon the whole 17th Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John*… (London: Abraham Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1656), 641–48.

31. Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 90–91; cf. John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 2:207ff.

32. Marshall, *Works*, 43–48.

33. William Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition of Christs Sermon on the Mount*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612–13), 3:154.

34. Drake, "The Believer's Dignity and Duty," in *Puritan Sermons*, 5:344.

35. Mather, *The Sealed Servants of Our God, Appearing with Two Witnesses*, 9ff.

36. Marshall, *Works*, 54–55.

37. Packer, *Knowing God*, 190.

38. John Cotton, *An Exposition of First John* (1657; repr., Evansville, Ind.: Sovereign Grace, 1962), 319.

39. Cotton, *An Exposition of First John*, 318.

40. Cotton, *An Exposition of First John*, 320–21.

41. Cotton, *An Exposition of First John*, 327–29.

42. Cotton, *An Exposition of First John*, 331.

43. Cotton, *An Exposition of First John*, 316.

44. Cotton, *An Exposition of First John*, 317.

45. Cotton, *An Exposition of First John*, 372.

46. Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness*, 192.

47. Granger, *A Looking Glasse for Christians*, 26.

48. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 1:452–53.

49. William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine: or, The Description of Theologie*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612–13), 1:82; *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration, Whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of*

Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins (London: John Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612–13), 1:369.

50. Drake, "The Believer's Dignity and Duty," in *Puritan Sermons*, 5:334; cf. Owen, *Of Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:218–21; and Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness*, 196.

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52. Marshall, *Works*, 50–51.

53. Thomas Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion…upon the Plan of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 1:624.

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57. Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, 489.

58. Drake, "The Believer's Dignity and Duty," in *Puritan Sermons*, 5:333.

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60. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 242.

61. Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, 160.

62. William Spurstowe, *The Wells of Salvation Opened: or A Treatise Discovering the Nature, Preciousness, and Usefulness, of the Gospel Promises, and Rules for the Right Application of Them* (London: T. R. & E. M. for Ralph Smith, 1655), 34ff.

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64. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 24:257.

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66. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:82; Willard, *The Child's Portion*, 18–19; Granger, *A Looking Glasse for Christians*, [31–32].

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68. Willard, *The Child's Portion*, 22.

69. Willard, *The Child's Portion*, 19.

70. Perkins, *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration*, in *Works*, 1:369.

71. Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness*, 194.

72. Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, in *Works*, 1:625; Cole, *Christ the Foundation of Our Adoption*, 352–53.

73. Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness*, 194.

74. Cole, *Christ the Foundation of Our Adoption*, 355.

75. Willard, *The Child's Portion*, 23–27.

76. Ridgley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism*, 2:136.

77. Willard, *The Child's Portion*, 17.

78. Willard, *The Child's Portion*, 16–18; Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, in *Works*, 1:625.

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81. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 239.

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83. Brakel, *Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:437.

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90. Drake, "The Believer's Dignity and Duty," in *Puritan Sermons*, 5:342; cf. Willard, *The Child's Portion*, 71.

91. Trumper, "Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition," 238–48.

92. Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1:447–52.

93. Cf. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "The Reformed Doctrine of Sonship," in *Pulpit and People: Essays in Honour of William Still on his 75th Birthday*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1986), 84–87.

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98. Hooker, *The Christian's Two Chief Lessons*, 170–74.

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Chapter 35

The Puritans on the Third Use of the Law

Obedience carries in it the life-blood of religion.
—THOMAS WATSON[1]

Much of the Protestant Reformation and the Puritan movement revolved around questions about God's law. Ernest Kevan wrote in *The Grace of Law,* his masterful treatment of the law in Puritan theology, "The place occupied by the moral Law of God is observable in every department of theology, and particularly of Puritan theology. Sin is the transgression of Law, the death of Christ is the satisfaction of Law, justification is the verdict of Law, and sanctification is the believer's fulfillment of the Law."[2]

The emphasis on God's law is based on the Holy Scriptures. Bible scholar Leon Morris writes, "To the men of the Old Testament God was a God of law, and a great deal in their religion cannot be understood if this is lost sight of."[3] Christ and His apostles affirmed and delighted in the writings of the Hebrew prophets and their perspective; they constantly quoted the Old Testament as the Word of God and repeatedly referred to God's law. The Reformation, with the Renaissance impulse to return *ad fontes* ("to the sources"), took the church back to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. In part, this consisted of returning to the law of God.

This chapter focuses on a specific aspect of the Puritan theology of law, namely, the third use of the law: its command upon the conduct of the Christian. Other aspects such as covenants, justification by faith alone, the conscience and casuistry (or moral theology and ethics), and the abiding relevance of the Sabbath are covered in other chapters. In our focus on the third use of the law, we will consider its historical context, Puritan teaching on the third use of the law, and Puritan practical divinity of the law.

The Historical Context of Puritan Theology of the Law of God The Puritans' discussions of Christian obedience to the law took place in the wake of the

Protestant Reformation and in the midst of the turmoil of their own times. We should, therefore, consider the historical context in terms of both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Sixteenth-Century Context: Protestantism against Antinomianism

Antinomianism teaches that "the believer was completely free from all obligation to the Law, and… any concession to legal duty was an infringement of free grace."[4] The Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation attacked Protestantism for allegedly granting a license to sin through its doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Council of Trent, in its decree on justification (1547), implicitly accused the Reformers of abolishing the law for the Christian.[5] The Antinomian perspective was earlier expressed in the teaching of the radical Lutheran, Johannes Agricola (1492–1566), whose views Martin Luther denounced.[6] Antinomianism found its most substantial embodiment in the bizarre and immoral excesses of the extreme Anabaptists.[7]

In their view of the law, the Reformers spoke of three distinct "uses" or applications of the law. The first use of the law is *civil*: it is a guide for the civil magistrate in rewarding good and punishing evil (Rom. 13:3–4; 1 Tim. 2:1–2). On this use of the law, the Protestant Reformers were in complete accord. Martin Luther wrote, "The first understanding and use of the Law is to restrain the wicked…. This civic restraint is extremely necessary and was instituted by God, both for the sake of public peace and for the sake of preserving everything, but especially to prevent the course of the Gospel from being hindered by the tumults and seditions of wild men."[8] John Calvin concurred, saying, "The… function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law."[9]

The second use of the law is *evangelical:* it drives sinners away from their own righteousness to trust in Christ alone (Gal. 3:10, 24). Here, too, Luther and Calvin were in accord. Typical of Luther's writings are his comments on Galatians 2:17:

> The proper use and aim of the Law is to make guilty those who are smug and at peace, so that they may see that they are in danger of sin, wrath, and death, so that they may be terrified and despairing, blanching and quaking at the rustling of a leaf (Lev. 26:36)…. If the Law is a ministry of sin, it follows that it is also a ministry of wrath and death. For just as the Law reveals sin, so it strikes the wrath of God into a man and threatens him with death.[10]

Calvin was no less intense in stating:

> [The law] warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own righteousness…. After he is compelled to weigh his life in the scales of the law, laying aside all that presumption of fictitious righteousness, he discovers that he is a long way from holiness, and is in fact teeming with a multitude of vices, with which he previously thought himself undefiled…. The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both—just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face.[11]

The third use of the law is *directive or normative:* it serves as a didactic "rule of life" to guide believers in ways that are pleasing to their God and Savior. Luther never explicitly developed this concept in his theology, leaving scholars to debate over just what he believed.[12] But he did implicitly endorse the third use of the law by including the Ten Commandments in the Smaller Catechism (1529), explaining how each commandment teaches us to "fear and love God."[13] Luther said that prior to conversion the law is the beating stick in God's hand against our sins, but after our conversion the law is the walking stick in our hands to help us walk with God. The law thus drives sinners to Christ through whom they "become doers of the law."[14]

The theological history of the term *third use of the law* began with Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), Luther's coworker and right-hand support.[15] In 1521, Melanchthon planted the seed in affirming that "believers have use of the Decalogue" to assist them in mortifying the flesh.[16] In a formal sense, he first increased the number of functions or uses of the law from two to three in the third edition of his work on Colossians, published in 1534,[17] two years before Calvin produced the first edition of his *Institutes*. Melanchthon argued that the law coerces (first use), terrifies (second use), and requires obedience (third use). He wrote, "The third reason for retaining the Decalogue is that obedience is required."[18]

Calvin fleshed out the doctrine that the primary use of the law for the believer is a rule of life. "What is the rule of life which [God] has given us?" he asked in the Genevan Catechism, then answered, "His law." Later in the catechism, he wrote,

> [The law] shows the mark at which we ought to aim, the goal towards which we ought to press, that each of us, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon him, may endeavour to frame his life according to the highest rectitude, and, by constant study, continually advance more and more.[19]

In the *Institutes*, Calvin stressed that believers profit from the law in two ways: first, "here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it"; and, second, by "frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression. In this way the saints must press on."[20] I. John Hesselink correctly says that, for Calvin, "the law was viewed primarily as a positive expression of the will of God…. Calvin's view could be called Deuteronomic, for to him law and love are not antithetical, but are correlates."[21]

The sixteenth-century English Puritans continued to develop this emphasis on covenantal law-keeping. Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603), commenting on Colossians 2:14–17, wrote that the ceremonies of the law were abolished, but the Sabbath or Lord's Day, as part of God's law of creation, "is yet to be kept wholly, and holily unto the Lord."[22] William Perkins (1558–1602) said that, on the one hand, "the sentence of the law pricking the conscience" sends us "flying to the throne of grace" in faith, and, on the other, the sanctified man has a settled purpose "to live a Christian life, according to all God's commandments."[23]

This was the heritage the later Puritans received from their sixteenth-century Reformation forbears, a third use of the law that gave it continuing authority and evangelical sweetness for believers. This doctrine the Puritans would defend in the midst of their contentious times.

The Seventeenth-Century Context: Puritanism against Antinomianism At the peak of the Puritan era, the issue of Antinomianism erupted again into political and theological controversy. In the chaos of the mid-seventeenth century, the English Reformed community witnessed a dizzying multiplication of religious sects, each propagating its own deviation from standard Protestant beliefs.[24] Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) complained, "It is undeniable that thousands of godly people are carried away to Familism, Antinomianism, and love to follow strangers."[25] Thomas Edwards (1599–1647) listed 176 theological errors, including such diverse beliefs as pantheism, the equality of animals with men, universal salvation through all religions, Arminianism, Pelagianism, and Unitarianism. Edwards listed the following particular Antinomian errors:

- "That the Scriptures of the Old Testament do not concern nor bind Christians now under the new Testament."
- "That if a man by the spirit knew himself to be in the state of grace, though he did commit murder or drunkenness, God did see no sin in him."
- "That sanctification is not an evidence of justification, and all notes and

signs of a Christian's estate are legal and unlawful."

• "That the moral law is of no use at all to believers, that 'tis no rule for believers to walk by, nor to examine their lives by, and that Christians are freed from the mandatory power of the law."[26]

During this time, some orthodox men were falsely accused of Antinomianism. Tobias Crisp (1600–1643), a former legalist for whom the pendulum swung far in the other direction, was so identified by his critics with Antinomianism that what he proposed was sometimes called "Crispianism."[27] Crisp did make some careless statements about free grace that could have led men into error,[28] but he lived a godly life and taught that the law directed believers in holiness. Crisp wrote, "In respect of the rules of righteousness, or the matter of obedience, we are under the law still, or else we are lawless, to live every man as it seems good in his own eyes, which I know no Christian dares so much as think."[29] He continued, "Again, the rules and precepts of the law are very subservient, unto Christ, as they adorn the life with a conversation beseeming a companion of Christ, who calls us not unto uncleanness, but to holiness. Now had we not directions from the law, men would live as they list; Christians would be rather monsters than men."[30]

Thus the Antinomian controversy at times produced more heat than light. Within this polemical context, the Puritans asserted the authority of the law, which is not to damn the believer for his sins but to direct the believer to obedience in Christ.

Puritan Theology of the Third Use of the Law The Puritans continued Calvin's emphasis on the law as a rule of life for the believer which arouses heartfelt gratitude, and, in turn, promotes genuine liberty rather than Antinomian licentiousness. Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) condemned those who asserted they were above the law or that the law written in the heart by regeneration "renders the written law needless."[31]

Typically Puritan was Thomas Bedford's (d. 1653) affirmation of the need for the written law as the believer's guide: "There must also be another law written in tables, and to be read by the eye, to be heard by the ear: Else…how shall the believer himself be sure that he doth not swerve from the right way wherein he ought to walk?… The Spirit, I grant, is the justified man's Guide and Teacher…. But he teacheth them…by the law and testimony."[32]

The Spirit's teaching results in Christians being made "friends" with the law, Rutherford quipped, for "after Christ has made agreement between us and the law, we delight to walk in it for the love of Christ."[33] That delight, grounded in

gratitude for the gospel, produces the greatest measure of liberty. Samuel Crooke (1575–1649) put it this way: "From the commandment, as a rule of life, [believers] are not freed, but on the contrary, are inclined and disposed, by [their] free spirit, to willingly obey it. Thus, to the regenerate the law becomes as it were gospel, even a law of liberty."[34]

The Westminster Larger Catechism, composed largely by Puritan divines, provides the most fitting summary of the Reformed and Puritan view on the believer's relationship to the moral law:

> *Q. 97. What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?*
>
> A. Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to shew them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.

In our further consideration of Puritan theology on the third use of the law, we will examine the law with respect to its curses, commands, continuity, and sufficiency.

Freedom from the Curses, But Not the Commands of the Law In *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (1645), Samuel Bolton (1606–1654) offers Puritan teaching on the law in its ripest, fullest form. He analyzes the purposes of the law in a Ramist set of dichotomies that reflects the Reformers' "three uses" of the law. We may summarize his view of the ends of the law as follows: I. Political End: The Punishment and Restraint of Criminals II. Theological Ends

A. In Those Not Yet Justified
    1. To Reveal Sin
    2. To Humble Sinners and Drive Them to Christ
B. In Those Already Justified
    1. To Teach Believers Their Duties
    2. To Reflect, Restrain, and Reprove Their Defects to Keep Them Humble and Dependent on Christ
    3. To Spur Believers Forward in Obedience[35]

The law of God still reveals divine purposes for the believer who has grace and freedom in Jesus Christ. The law remains relevant for believers' lives. Bolton explains that Christian freedom does not release Christians from

obedience to the law, but does release them from sin and death so they may obey the law. He says that Christ frees us from the law in some significant respects, however (Rom. 7:3, 6; Gal. 2:19; 5:18; Rom. 6:14):

- Christ freed us from the law as a covenant of works, that is "as a condition upon the obedience whereof we expected life."[36]
- Christ freed us from the law in its curses against lawbreakers (Gal. 3:10); there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ (Rom. 8:1).[37]
- Christ freed us from the law in its "indictments and accusations,"[38] particularly unto condemnation, though it still convicts and humbles us.[39]
- Christ freed us from the law's "rigor." This does not release us from "exact obedience" but from the law's demand of perfection for acceptance.[40]

The Puritans insisted that a Christian was not freed, however, from the moral law as the authoritative guide for his life. Ezekiel Hopkins (1634–1690) rebuked those who tried to join together "an unholy life here, and a happy life hereafter." He boldly proclaimed, "This law is the very gate of heaven," quoting Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."[41] Hopkins explained,

> Although our salvation be the purchase of Christ; and he alone hath redeemed us from death, and procured for us glory and immortality by his own most precious blood: yet here the Scripture affirms, that we obtain a "right to the tree of life"; *i.e.* to everlasting life, by our obedience, and doing the commandments of God: a right, not indeed of merit; but a right of evidence. Our obedience to the law is the only sound evidence, that we can have for our right to the promises of the gospel.[42]

Thomas Boston (1676–1732) said a believer may follow a theological "chain" into assurance that he is in the grace of God. We grasp the chain at the first link: "I do works of obedience to the law of Christ." Then we take the next link: "I do good works because my heart acts with sincere love." The next link is, "My heart acts with sincere love because God's grace has given me transformed habits." The next is, "My gracious habits flow from a conscience cleansed and justified." Next is, "My conscience is cleansed by faith." Finally we grasp the link: "By faith I have embraced Jesus Christ."[43] Thus the believer finds assurance through justification by faith in Christ alone, but the first step is to take account of obedience to the law of Christ, summed up in the Ten Commandments.[44]

John Bunyan (1628–1688), an ardent defender of justification by faith in

Christ alone apart from works of the law, nevertheless taught that justifying faith produces a holy life of good works.[45] Bunyan defined this life which is centered upon God's law: "By an holy life I mean, a life according to the moral Law, flowing from a Spirit of thankfulness to God, for giving of his Son to be my Redeemer. This I call an holy life, because it is according to the rule of holiness, the law."[46]

This view was not that of the Papists, however. Samuel Bolton wrote in opposition to the Papists, "We preach obedience to the law, but not as they do; they preach obedience to justification, and we preach justification that we may obey. We cry down works in opposition to grace in justification; and cry up obedience as the fruits of grace in sanctification."[47] Those who labor for self-justification strive like oxen in the yoke only to be slaughtered, Bolton said. He lamented at how people tend to build their own righteousness: "Alas, we are all too apt to it; it is hard to do all righteousness and rest in none; hard to be in duties in respect of performance; and out of duties in respect of dependence. Alas, there are a thousand in the world that make a Christ of their works."[48]

The law is abolished as a covenant for our justification, but it remains a rule for obedience, Bolton said.[49] He explained, "We are not under the curses, but we are under the commands of it; we are not under the law for judgment, but we are under the law for conduct."[50] The law no longer has the power to condemn us, but it still has the power to humble us and to build us up for our greater good. Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) summed up the matter this way: "Though the moral law be not a Christ to justify us, yet it is a rule to instruct us."[51]

We are safe under Christ's justifying righteousness, so the imperfections of our good works no longer call forth the severity of God's law. Bolton said, "In the gospel God accepteth of affections for actions, of endeavors for performances, of desire for ability."[52] God is pleased with the baby steps of His children who stumble down the narrow way. So instead of bondage under threats and terror, the Christian is obediently drawn forth by God's "sweetness and love," in which "all terror is gone."[53] Watson wrote, "The gospel sweetens the law, it makes us serve God with delight."[54]

The Continuity of the Law as a Rule of Obedience in Christ Bolton recognized that Scripture contains some texts that seem to speak of the "abrogation" of the law (Jer. 31:31–33; Rom. 6:14; 7:1–3; 8:2; 10:4; Gal. 3:19, 24; 4:4–5; 5:18; 1 Tim. 1:8–10), but it also contains other texts that speak of the remaining "obligation of the law" (Rom. 3:31; Matt. 5:17).[55] To explain this apparent paradox, Bolton explained the classic, threefold division of the law in moral, ceremonial, and judicial categories.[56] This division predates the Puritans and

even the Reformation itself. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) clearly distinguished these three aspects of the law.[57] Augustine distinguished "between moral and symbolical precepts" in the Old Testament.[58] And Calvin, who was well-versed in church history, regarded this threefold division as a teaching of "the ancient writers."[59] Ultimately this threefold division is grounded in Scripture itself (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Prov. 21:3; 1 Cor. 7:19).

Bolton said the ceremonial law was "an appendix to the first table of the moral law," which defined the worship of the church in its historical infancy to preserve the hope of believers, protect them from human-will worship,[60] and serve as "a wall of separation" between Israel and the Gentiles.[61] The ceremonial law was abolished, so the judicial law became "an appendix to the second table" concerning civil government in Israel to give a rule of public justice, to distinguish Israel from others, and to be a type of Christ's government. Insofar as the judicial law is "of common and general equity," it remains in force; otherwise, it too has ceased.[62]

What was controversial was the relation of the Christian to the moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments. The Puritans recognized the distinct character of the Decalogue. James Durham (c. 1622–1658) wrote, "Though all the Scripture be his word," God marked the Ten Commandments with an excellency "as a comprehensive sum of his people's duty." It was uniquely spoken by the voice of God at Mount Sinai, written twice by God's "finger" on stone tablets, kept in the holy ark, and was expounded by Christ and the apostles.[63] In the "ten words" the Puritans found principles for all of life.[64]

Though Christians receive the law, not under the storm cloud of Sinai, but in the sweet grace of Christ, they still receive the law, for the authority of the law is based upon God's majesty and glory. Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) wrote, "For to be God and sovereign are inseparable; he could not be God, if he were not supreme; nor could he be a creator without being a lawgiver."[65] John Barret (1631–1713) said, "While man is God's creature, 'tis impossible that he should not owe all possible subjection and obedience unto God his Maker. He must first cease to be a creature, or God cease to be his rightful and supreme Governor, before this obligation to obey God can cease."[66] Law is embedded so deeply in human nature that our radical and pervasive sin cannot change our orientation toward God's moral law; whether in rebellion against it or obedience to it, we cannot escape the rule of law.[67] Thomas Blake (c. 1597–1657) said, "When God became a Saviour to the elect of mankind, he did not cease to be a Sovereign."[68]

The moral law is based upon God's unchanging righteousness. Bolton asserted, "The law as it is considered as a rule can no more be abolished or changed, than the nature of good and evil can be abolished and changed."[69] The

law's teaching about piety toward God and love toward our neighbors and self-control toward ourselves "is moral and eternal, and cannot be abrogated."[70] The law is "the express idea, or representation of God's own image; even a beam of his own holiness, which cannot be changed or abolished."[71] Hopkins said, "Christ is given to us, not to save us in our sins, but from them."[72] Thus, Bolton wrote, the Reformed confessions affirm the continuing obligation of Christians to obey the moral law.[73] The Roman Catholics had falsely charged the Reformed church with teaching that Christians have the freedom to live however they please.[74]

William Fenner (1600–1640) asked in his catechism, "What is that sense, wherein believers are under the law?" He answered that believers are under the law:

> First, because they are commanded to keep it (Ps. 105:45) and to order their lives according to it, as a rule (Ps. 119:9).
>
> Second, because of the necessity of good works, not as causes of, but as a way unto life (Titus 3:14).
>
> Third, because God is displeased with them when they break it (2 Sam. 11:27) and will punish them (Amos 3:2) as a father doth his son that doth offend him (Heb. 12:7), nay sometimes with the sleep of temporal death (1 Cor. 11:30).
>
> Fourth, because they are bound to repent whenever they sin (Rev. 3:19) and to pray for the pardon of sin (Ps. 51:1).
>
> Fifth, because the threats of the law must motivate them to take heed (Job 31:23), for though their God is a loving and everlasting Father, yet he is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29) for unbelievers, who shall be damned (2 Thess. 2:12). Yet believers must hear of God's judgments and see them so that their flesh may be curbed with fear (Ps. 52:6).
>
> Sixth, because they are to be humbled by the law and cry out against themselves because of their often transgressions of it (Rom. 7:14).[75]

Bolton quoted a number of Scriptures to prove the continuity of the law as a rule of life. Christ said in Matthew 5:17–18, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Christ proceeded in the Sermon on the Mount to expound the moral law revealed to Moses. Paul wrote that the law is holy, just, and good, the object of his delight, and the focus of his mind's service (Rom. 7:12, 22, 25). He quoted the Ten Commandments and Leviticus

19:18 to direct the conduct of believers (Rom. 13:8–10; Eph. 6:2). James 2:8 says, “If ye fulfil the royal law…ye do well,” and verse 11 explicitly refers to the Ten Commandments. John warns those who claim to know God but do not keep His commandments that they are liars (1 John 2:4). Sin continues to be defined as lawbreaking (1 John 2:4; 3:4).[76] So Bolton concluded “that the law for the substance of it, doth still remain a rule of life to the people of God.”[77]

Bolton also argued that the consciences of believers testify experientially to the abiding force of the law as a rule of life.[78] For the Christian’s conscience excuses or accuses him on the basis of his observance or transgression of God’s law. The law of God binds the believer’s conscience with respect to both what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Bolton explained, “Though it cannot say, this ought not to be done on pain of damnation, or on pain of the curse: or this ought to be done in reference to justification, or life, *etc.* yet it shows it ought to be done as good, and pleasing to God: and this ought not to be done as displeasing to him.”[79] This is the proper function of the conscience, for the Scriptures define sin as a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), and since believers are “bound not to sin,” therefore they are “bound to keep the law.”[80]

Someone might seek to escape this obligation, Bolton said, by saying that believers in Christ no longer sin. Bolton demolished this argument with 1 John 1:8, which says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” A person might then admit that believers sin but still insist that God sees no sin in them. Bolton anticipated such a distortion of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. He said in response, “Indeed he sees not sin either to condemn believers for sin, or to approve, or allow of sin in believers”; but “God does see it, for he sees all, and brings all to judgment.”[81]

The objector might go on, saying that though God sees sin in a believer, He is not displeased with it. Bolton’s response was that a perfectly good God must always hate evil. He added the crucial distinction: “In a wicked man God hates both sin and sinners, but here he hates the sin, though he pities and loves the poor sinner” who is in Christ.[82] So once again Bolton stressed that the law binds Christians not for justification but to please their loving heavenly Father with their service to Him.

Therefore, our freedom in Christ does not release us from obedience to the law, for then it would release us from what is for our good and our glory.[83] Obedience to the law is part of God’s grace to sinners. Thomas Manton (1620–1677) responded, “If the law might be disannulled as to new creatures, then why doth the Spirit of God write it with such legible characters in their hearts?… Now that which the Spirit engraves upon the heart, would Christ come to deface and abolish?”[84]

The Sufficiency of the Law for Moral Instruction The Reformers debated with the Romanists whether the moral law contained all of the will of God for His people, or if human devotion could please Him or even go above-and-beyond the call of duty (works of supererogation).[85] Other challenges to the Reformed view of the law sought a higher ethic in the New Testament or in hyperspirituality. The Puritans continued the Reformation emphasis on the sufficiency of the law. Fenner asked, "Is the Law of God so perfect, that it commands whatsoever can be said to be good, and pleasing unto God; and, is there no room for Popish supererogation or the doctrine of distinguishing of evangelical counsels from precepts?" He answered, "God's law is so broad, that it contains all the latitude of good, and of its perfection there is no end (Ps. 119:96). It implies a contradiction, that we should perform obedience to God in a thing that he hath not commanded (Deut. 12:32). He that says he adds over and beyond the word of God is a liar (Prov. 30:6). And therefore there can be no supererogation."[86]

Fenner said the law "requires all the soul, and all the heart, and all the mind, and all the strength" (Luke 10:27). What can be beyond that "all"? No one can keep all that the law requires, not even the best and holiest among us (Matt. 6:12; Eccl. 7:20). If men command beyond what God commands, "the Lord tells them flatly they evacuate his law (Matt. 15:9)." Commandments devised by human hearts and minds, however highly esteemed among men, are contrary to the commandment of God, and hateful to Him (Num. 15:39; Luke 16:15).[87]

Fenner did not naively assume that the law spelled out every detail of the duty of every person. He advised Christians to use syllogistic logic to discover the will of God, in which the major premise is a precept of Scripture, the minor is the circumstances of the individual person, and the conclusion is God's will for the person in that situation. Thus Paul knew by revelation that God commands us to live for His glory and to give no occasion for stumbling or offense to others. He also knew his own circumstances, as an apostle called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and the way in which, then as now, corrupt men make merchandise of religion. Therefore, he concluded that he should preach at no charge or cost to his hearers,[88] even though it is not wrong for those who preach the gospel to be supported financially by their congregations.

Puritan Practical Divinity of the Law *Law-Keeping and Freedom in Christ* The law and the gospel complement each other; they work together to build the spiritual life, like the two hands of a workman. Bolton wrote,

> The law…is subservient to the gospel, to convince and humble us, and the gospel…enables [us] to the obedience of the law. The law sends us to the

> gospel for our justification, and the gospel sends us to the law to frame our [conduct]; and our obedience to the law is nothing else but the expression of our thankfulness to that God, who hath so freely justified us.89

The law serves "evangelical purposes" in driving us to Christ, while the gospel provides "evangelical principles" to motivate law-keeping: "faith, love, and delight."90 The inward principles give us strength from communion with God and direct our lives toward the glory of God and the adorning of the gospel.91 In this regard, the law and gospel cooperate to attain the purpose of redemption: "You were redeemed that you might serve, that you might live unto him that died for you" (cf. Luke 1:74–75).92

Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646) said that a life worthy of or befitting the gospel must be a life of obedience to the law: "The excellency of the Law more clearly appears in the gospel than in the doctrine of the Law itself…. Surely God set a high price on His Law, that He would not save any soul living that had broken it other than by His Son who must come to fulfill it."93 Therefore, he said, Christians must "learn to prize the Law of God."94 Those who say that the gospel annuls our obligation to obey the law should realize that nothing shows how highly God values His law than the gospel of Christ, proclaiming that Christ was sent to satisfy the demands of the law for us at His own expense. "Christ's ready and full subjection" to the law should move us to submit ourselves as well to the revelation of God's will in it.95 So Watson wrote, "Though a Christian cannot keep God's law, yet he loves his law; though he cannot serve God perfectly, yet he serves him willingly."96

Someone may object that being tied to a duty is inconsistent with Christian freedom. Bolton's answer would be that Christ has not redeemed us from serving God, but has redeemed us from serving God in a spirit of bondage and slavery so that we can serve him in a spirit of liberty and sonship. Christ's yoke is light (Matt. 11:30).97

However, the objector might go on to say more specifically that the obligation to do good *because God commanded it* infringes on Christian liberty. This objection suggests a higher spiritual ground for doing good: because we *want* to do it, not because we *have* to do it. This reasoning has no grounds in Scripture. So Manton wrote, "Sometimes God giveth no other account of his law but this: 'I am the Lord.'"98

Bolton's response to this objection was to say that that turning from God's authority to inward inclinations leads to unhealthy subjectivism. It puts us at the mercy of impulses that might come from the devil. It makes us whimsical and flighty instead of settled, orderly, and disciplined in our calling. We cannot wait

until we feel the Spirit moving us, since the Spirit may work secretly, Bolton said. We must obey God even when our heart is not yet in it—often to discover our hearts come alive to our duty even while we do it.[99]

Ironically, reliance upon the guidance of our own hearts instead of the written law may lead us to another kind of legalism, a bondage to our own religious impulses, which naturally incline toward works righteousness. With this, some may feel the compulsion to pray repeatedly for salvation, relying on their prayers instead of Christ.[100]

Motivations for obedience vary according to the kind of law. Bolton said that some of God's commands rest merely upon His will (positive law), such as ceremonies that are indifferent by nature. Other commands rest upon His nature (natural law) and so are intrinsically good.[101] Commands founded on God's mere will require obedience because God said so. These commands, such as the Old Testament rituals (Acts 15:10), can be a heavy burden, but in certain cases should still be done "out of love of the God who commanded them."[102] Commands founded upon God's nature, which therefore are holy and good in themselves, call for obedience out of loving submission to God's authority as well as for personal delight in the action. For example, we pray not merely because God requires it but also because we want to be close to God in prayer.[103] With both types of commandments, positive and natural, obedience springs from love for God.

Salvation produces submission, or voluntary servitude. Deliverance from the law's curse results in a believer's heart being bound to the law as never before. According to Fenner, those who are not under the law's curse are known through their obedience, specifically, by their submission to the gospel, "thankful walking worthy of the gospel," "steadfast working the Lord's work," exercising "a universal respect to all God's commandments," "groaning and sighing after God, that they may more and more be directed and ordered by his statutes," and "by doing all this out of love, not for fear of hell and judgment, for they are a willing people" (Pss. 119:5–6; 110:3).[104]

Bolton said that evangelical obedience consists of submission to the law fueled by love for God. The child of God "esteems access to God and communion with him, to be his top happiness."[105] The reward a believer seeks is the enjoyment of God; the punishment he flees is the lack of communion with God. In all duties his heart pants after God.[106] It is wrong to set obedience to the commandment against love from the heart, for God writes His commandments on the heart.[107]

Law-Keeping and Biblical Interpretation The Westminster Larger Catechism

reveals that the Puritans found a great deal more instruction in the Ten Commandments than initially appears in the words. Following the method of Christ's exposition of specific commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, they employed a method of interpretation that explains each commandment as representing a broad and deep field of ethical truth. George Downame (1560–1634) offered these five rules for expounding each commandment:

- "Where any duty is commanded, there the contrary vice is forbidden; and where any vice is forbidden, there the contrary duty is commanded." So there are both sins of omission and sins of commission under each precept.
- The law of God is spiritual and perfect, reaching to the heart and requiring obedience to every duty commanded, and abstinence from all forms of sin forbidden. Tracing each precept in its roots and fruits led Downame to say that "under one particular vice mentioned in the commandment, all of the same kinds are forbidden; and under one particular commanded, all the same kind are commanded."
- "Where any duty is commanded, there the means that tend thereto are enjoined; and where any vice is forbidden, there the means, provocations and allurements tending thereto are also forbidden."
- The commandment of any duty or prohibition of any vice implies the command or prohibition of outward "signs" of it. Our good works must shine before men for the praise of our Father, but we should also avoid any appearance of evil in gesture, clothing, or places that we frequent.
- The commandments speak not only of our responsibility toward ourselves but also about our responsibility to instruct, admonish, encourage, rebuke, and reclaim others with respect to the duties and vices set forth.[108]

Law-Keeping and Meditation on the Word The Christian should meditate on the law of the Lord (Ps. 1:2). Thus Bolton quoted Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." He then quipped, "And I hope the law is of this number."[109]

Another major Scripture that drove Puritan practical divinity on the law was Psalm 119.[110] Fenner wrote that the Ten Commandments "are the rule of my steps (Ps. 119:133) continually (v. 117) in my memory (v. 109), in my understanding (v. 130), being my meditation always (v. 97), that I may refrain my life from every sin (v. 101), idle vain thoughts and all (v. 113), and endear them unto me above thousands of gold and silver [coins] (v. 72)."[111] Watson

said, “If God spake all these words, then love the commandments, ‘O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day’ (Ps. 119:97)…. The moral law is the copy of God’s will—our spiritual directory…. The ten commandments are a chain of pearls to adorn us, they are our treasury to enrich us, they are more precious than lands of spices, or rocks of diamonds.”[112]

In calling Christian people to meditate on the Ten Commandments, the Puritans followed a well-established medieval tradition. John McNeill wrote, “The Commandments, with the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, constitutes a topic of lay instruction in countless medieval handbooks of religious guidance, such as the English *Lay Folk’s Catechism*, attributed to John Thoresby, archbishop of York (d. 1373).”[113] Despite this tradition, the Puritans witnessed a time of dismal ignorance of the divine law. In 1551 Bishop John Hooper (c. 1495–1555) examined the 311 clergy in his diocese and discovered that 168 of them could not repeat the Ten Commandments.[114] In response to this situation, the Puritans produced a host of catechisms and expositions on the Ten Commandments.[115] They promoted the use of these catechisms in the church by the pastor and in family worship led by heads of households. They aimed to raise up a generation of Christians soaked in moral wisdom and ignited unto obedience to the law of God, the commandments of Christ, and the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture.

Conclusion

Several conclusions may be drawn from the Christian's third use of the law.[116] First, the third use of the law is *biblical*. Old and New Testament Scriptures teem with expositions of the law directed primarily at believers to assist them in the abiding pursuit of holiness of heart and life. The Psalms repeatedly affirm that a believer relishes the law of God both in his heart and in his outward life. One of the psalmists' greatest concerns is to ascertain the good and perfect will of God, then to run in the way of His commandments (Ps. 119:32). The Sermon on the Mount and the ethical portions of Paul's epistles are prime New Testament examples of using the law as a rule of life for Christians.

Second, the third use of the law combats both *Antinomianism* and *legalism*. Antinomians wrongly appeal to justification by faith alone, which, though granted apart from works of the law, does not preclude the need for sanctification. One of sanctification's most important elements is the daily cultivation of grateful obedience to the law. Moreover, neglect of the third use of the law can result in legalism, and often does, for we cannot live without law. When, as an alternative to God's law, an elaborate man-made code is developed for believers to follow, covering every conceivable problem and tension in moral living, no freedom is left for believers to make personal decisions based on the principles of Scripture. In such a context, man-made law smothers the divine gospel, and legalistic sanctification swallows up gracious justification. The Christian is brought back into bondage akin to that of medieval Roman Catholic monasticism. Equally enslaving is the freedom that allows the Christian to follow his own emotions and impulses. Healthy Christian spirituality arises from careful meditation upon the principles of the law of God combined with heartfelt self-consecration to do the will of God (Rom. 12:1–2).

Third, the third use of the law promotes *love*. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous," says 1 John 5:3. God's law is a gift and evidence of His tender love for His children (Ps. 147:19–20). It is not a cruel or hard taskmaster for those who are in Christ. God is no more cruel in giving His law to His people than a farmer who builds fences to protect his cattle from wandering onto the highway. God's people treasure the law as the gift of a loving God (Ps. 147:19, 20; Rom. 9:4). In Scripture, law and love are not enemies but the best of friends. The very essence of the law is love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37–40; cf. Rom. 13:8–10).

Finally, the third use of the law promotes *freedom*—genuine Christian freedom. Today's widespread abuse of Christian liberty, which views liberty as an occasion to serve the flesh, that is, as human autonomy or independence from God, is simply wrong. True Christian freedom is defined and protected by the lines drawn for a believer in the law of God. When God's law limits our freedom, it is for our greater good; and when God's law imposes no such limits, the Christian may enjoy freedom of conscience from the doctrines and commandments of men. In matters of daily life, true Christian freedom consists of the willing, thankful, and joyful obedience that the believer renders to God and to Christ. As the Lord Himself proclaims in John 8:34, 36, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin…. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

1. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: A. Fullarton, 1845), 211. Portions of this chapter are adapted from Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 101–11.

2. Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), 21.

3. Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 253.

4. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 22.

5. Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons 19–21, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 2:114–15.

6. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 23.

7. George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 133, 202. The Belgic Confession singles out these extremists for special mention in article 36.

8. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26:308–9.

9. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.7.10.

10. Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, in *Works*, 26:148, 150.

11. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.6–7.

12. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 267; Hans Engelland, *Melanchthon, Glauben und Handeln* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1931); Werner Elert, "Eine theologische Fal-schung zur Lehre vom tertius usus legis," *Zeitschrift für Religions-und Geistesgeschichte* 1 (1948): 168–70; Wilfried Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit: Das Problem des tertius usus legis bei Luther und die neutestamentliche Parainese* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951); Hayo Gerdes, *Luthers Streit mit den Schwarmern um das rechte Verständnis des Gesetzes Mose* (Göttingen: Gottiner Verlagsanstalt, 1955), 111–16; Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); Eugene F. Klug, "Luther on Law, Gospel, and the Third Use of the Law," *The Springfielder* 38 (1974): 155–69; A. C. George, "Martin Luther's Doctrine of Sanctification with Special Reference to the Formula *Simul Iustus et Peccator*: A Study in Luther's Lectures on Romans and Galatians" (ThD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1982), 195–210; Donald MacLeod, "Luther and Calvin on the Place of the Law," in *Living the Christian Life* (Huntingdon, England: Westminster Conference, 1974), 10–11.

13. Luther's Small Catechism, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:74–77.

14. Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, in *Works*, 26:260.

15. For an examination of Melanchthon's possible influence over Calvin in this matter, see Ralph R. Sundquist Jr., "The Third Use of the Law in the Thought of John Calvin" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1970), 305–22.

16. Philip Melanchthon, *The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon*, trans. Charles L. Hill (1521; repr., Boston: Meador, 1944), 234.

17. Philip Melanchthon, *Scholia in Epistolam Pauli ad Colossense iterum ab authore recognita* (Wittenberg: J. Klug, 1534), 48r, 82v–83v.

18. Melanchthon, *Scholia in Epistolam Pauli ad Colossense*, 93v.

19. John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (1849; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 2:56, 69.

20. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12.

21. I. John Hesselink, "Law—Third Use of the Law," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 215–16. Cf. Edward A. Dowey Jr., "Law in Luther and Calvin," *Theology Today* 41, no. 2 (1984): 146–53; I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1992), 251–62.

22. Thomas Cartwright, *A Commentary upon the Epistle of St Paul Written to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: James Nichols, 1864), 39. This is bound together with Henry Airay's lectures on Philippians.

23. William Perkins, "The Foundation of Christian Religion: Gathered into Sixe Principles," in *A Golden Chaine: or, The Description of Theologie* ([London]: John Legat, 1600), 1038–39.

24. Meic Pearse, *The Great Restoration: The Religious Radicals of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1998), 224. See also David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

25. Samuel Rutherford, "A Brotherly and Free Epistle," in *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist*… (London: J. D. & R. I. for Andrew Crooke, 1648), n.p. The "Familists" believed in a direct mystical union of the believer with God such that he received direct revelations from God apart from the Bible.

26. Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena: or, A Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of This Time*, 3rd ed. (London: by T. R. and E. M. for Ralph Smith, 1646), 1:16, 20, 21. The 176 errors count only part 1 of this book.

27. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 26.

28. On Crisp, see K. M. Campbell, "The Antinomian Controversies of the 17th Century," in *Living the Christian Life* (Huntington, England: Westminster Conference, 1974), 70–75.

29. Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, ed. John Gill, 7th ed. (London: for John Bennett, 1832), 2:401.

30. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 2:399–400.

31. Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or a Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A. Miller, 1652), 563.

32. Thomas Bedford, *An Examination of the Chief Points of Antinomianism* (London, 1646), 15–16. For Bedford's life, see Joel R. Beeke, "Bedford, Thomas," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4:776–77.

33. Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (Edinburgh: William Collins, 1845), 102; Samuel Rutherford in *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, ed. Alexander F. Mitchell (London: James Nisbet, 1886), 226.

34. Samuel Crooke, *The Guide unto True Blessedness* (London, 1614), 85.

35. Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome*… (London: for P.S., 1656), 109–19. This outline combines Bolton's outline with his subsequent development of these points. Bolton's book has been edited and published in a more contemporary form as *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001).

36. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 21.
37. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 28.
38. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 36.
39. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 42–44.
40. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 47–52.
41. Ezekiel Hopkins, "Discourses on the Law," in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, ed. Charles W. Quick (1874; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 1:537–38.
42. Hopkins, "Discourses on the Law," in *Works*, 1:537–38.
43. Thomas Boston, editorial notes, in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (repr., Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), 188.
44. Boston, editorial notes, in *Marrow*, 172.
45. Brian G. Najapfour, "'The Very Heart of Prayer': Reclaiming John Bunyan's Spirituality" (ThM thesis, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2009), 92–94.
46. John Bunyan, "Israel's Hope Encouraged," in *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 9:79. See also Anjov Ahenakaa, "Justification and the Christian Life in John Bunyan: A Vindication of Bunyan from the Charge of Antinomianism" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), 259–63.
47. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 96.
48. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 97.
49. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 25.
50. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 45.
51. Watson, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 219.
52. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 51.
53. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 52.
54. Watson, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 241.
55. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 65–67.
56. See also Edward Elton, *Gods Holy Mind Touching Matters Morall, Which Himself Uttered in Tenne Words, or Tenne Commandements* (London: by A. M. and I. N. for Robert Mylbourne, 1625), 1–2; Hopkins, *On the Commandments*, in *Works*, 1:245–52.
57. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd ed. (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1920–1922), part 2a, q. 99, art. 3–4.
58. Augustine, "Reply to Faustus the Manichaean," 6.2, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Series 1 (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Co., 1887), 4:167.
59. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.14.
60. Greek: *ethelothreskia* (Col. 2:23).
61. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 71–72.
62. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 72.
63. James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 2002), 51. This was originally published as *The Law Unsealed*.
64. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Preaching the Law of God—Reformers and Puritans," in *Puritans and Spiritual Life* (Mirfield, U.K.: Westminster Conference, 2001), 20.
65. Stephen Charnock, "The Existence and Attributes of God," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 1:192.
66. Quoted in Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 48.
67. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 53; Renfeld E. Zepp, "Covenant Theology from the Perspective of Two Puritans" (MAR thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2009), 28–31.
68. Quoted in Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 156.
69. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 74.
70. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 75.

71. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 77.
72. Hopkins, "Discourses on the Law," in *Works*, 1:540.
73. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 78–79.
74. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 95.
75. William Fennor [Fenner], *The Spirituall Mans Directory* (London: for John Rothwell, 1651), 51–52. This quotation is one paragraph in the original.
76. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 80–82.
77. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 83.
78. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 88–89.
79. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 89.
80. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 90.
81. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 90.
82. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 91.
83. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 94–95.
84. Quoted in Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 157.
85. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.5; 3.14.12–15. The term "supererogation" means paying more than is due (Latin: *super erogare*).
86. Fenner, *The Spirituall Mans Directory*, 48.
87. Fenner, *The Spirituall Mans Directory*, 48.
88. Fenner, *The Spirituall Mans Directory*, 49.
89. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 100.
90. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 101.
91. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 102.
92. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 103.
93. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Conversation*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando, Fla.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 95.
94. Burroughs, *Gospel Conversation*, 95.
95. Burroughs, *Gospel Conversation*, 96–97.
96. Watson, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 342.
97. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 196.
98. Quoted in Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 50.
99. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 197–203.
100. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 204–5.
101. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 205–6.
102. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 207.
103. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 208–9.
104. Fenner, *The Spirituall Mans Directory*, 50.
105. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 211.
106. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 213.
107. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 220.
108. George Downame, preface to *An Abstract of the Duties Commanded and Sinnes Forbidden in the Law of God* (n.p., 1615), n.p. For similar rules for interpreting the law, see Elton, *Gods Holy Mind*, 5; Fenner, *The Spirituall Mans Directory*, 20; Hopkins, *On the Commandments*, in *Works*, 1:253–65; Watson, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 242–43. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.6–9.
109. Bolton, *True Bounds*, 99.
110. Thomas Manton preached 190 sermons on Psalm 119. See *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1872), vols. 6, 7, 8, 9. See also John Calvin, *Sermons on Psalm 119* (Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths Publications, 1996).
111. Fenner, *The Spirituall Mans Directory*, 19–20.

112. Watson, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 220.

113. John T. McNeill, editorial note, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 367n1.

114. John Hooper, *Later Writings of Bishop Hooper* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1852), 130, 151.

115. For example, see Thomas Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion…upon the Plan of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston* (Stoke-on-Trent, U.K.: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 2:84–374; John Dod, *A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandements*, 17th ed. (London: by I. D. for Thomas and Jonas Man, 1628); Downame, *Abstract;* Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*; Elton, *Gods Holy Mind*; Fenner, *The Spirituall Mans Directory*, 19–46; Hopkins, *On the Commandments*, in *Works*, 1:267–535; William Twisse, *A Brief Catecheticall Exposition of Christian Doctrine* (London: for John Wright, 1645), 21–41; Watson, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 244–339; Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726; facsimile repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1969), 585–753.

116. These conclusions echo those of Donald MacLeod, "Luther and Calvin on the Place of the Law," 12–13.

Chapter 36

Richard Sibbes on Entertaining the Holy Spirit

> *I shall never cease to be grateful to…Richard Sibbes, who was balm to my soul at a period in my life when I was overworked and badly overtired, and therefore subject in an unusual manner to the onslaughts of the devil…. I found at that time that Richard Sibbes… was an unfailing remedy. His books* The Bruised Reed *and* The Soul's Conflict *quietened, soothed, comforted, encouraged and healed me.*
>
> —MARTYN LLOYD-JONES[1]

Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) was one of the greatest Puritans of his age. He greatly influenced the direction and content of Puritan preaching, theology, and writing in England and America.[2] His theology of the Holy Spirit was especially important because of its emphasis on how the Spirit operates in the daily life of the Christian. Sibbes winsomely referred to that process as "entertaining the Spirit" in the soul. For Sibbes, that entertaining meant to welcome with hospitality and nurture our friendship with the indwelling Spirit. "There is nothing in the world so great and sweet a friend that will do us so much good as the Spirit, if we give him entertainment," Sibbes wrote.[3]

Sibbes's teaching on entertaining the Holy Spirit can be divided into the following four categories: (1) the indwelling of the Spirit, (2) the sealing of the Spirit, (3) the comfort of the Spirit, and (4) grieving the Spirit. Before exploring Sibbes's work on the Holy Spirit, let's take a brief look at who Richard Sibbes was.

Synopsis of Richard Sibbes's Life Richard Sibbes was a native of Suffolk, the Puritan county of old England that furnished numerous illustrious emigrants to New England.[4] He was born a few miles from Bury St. Edmonds, in 1577, the year the Lutherans drafted their Formula of Concord. He was baptized in the

parish church in Thurston, where he grew up and went to school. He was the oldest of six children.

As a young child, Sibbes loved books. His father, Paul Sibbes, who was a hardworking wheelwright and (according to Zachary Catlin, a contemporary biographer of Sibbes) "a good, sound-hearted Christian," became irritated with his son's book expenses.[5] The father tried to cure his son of book-buying by offering him wheelwright tools. But the boy was not dissuaded. With the support of others, Sibbes was admitted to St. John's College in Cambridge at the age of eighteen. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1599, a fellowship in 1601, and a master of arts degree in 1602. In 1603 he was converted under the preaching of Paul Baynes (1573–1617). Baynes, who is remembered most for his commentary on Ephesians, succeeded William Perkins (1558–1602) at the Church of St. Andrews in Cambridge.

Sibbes was ordained to the ministry of the Church of England in Norwich in 1607, was chosen as one of the college preachers in 1609, and received a bachelor of divinity degree in 1610. From 1611 to 1616 he served as lecturer at Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge. His preaching awakened Cambridge from the spiritual indifference into which it fell after the death of Perkins. A gallery had to be built to accommodate the visitors. John Cotton and Hugh Peters were converted under Sibbes's preaching. During his years at Holy Trinity, Sibbes also helped turn Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) from Arminianism and moved John Preston (1587–1628) from witty preaching to plain, spiritual preaching.

Sibbes came to London in 1617 as a lecturer for Gray's Inn, the largest of the four great Inns of Court, which still remains one of the most important centers in England for the study and practice of law. In 1626, Sibbes complemented this lectureship by becoming master of Catharine Hall (now St. Catharine's College) at Cambridge. Under his leadership, the college returned to its former prestige. It graduated several men who would serve prominently at the Westminster Assembly, including John Arrowsmith (1602–1659), William Spurstowe (c. 1605–1666), and William Strong (d. 1654). Soon after his appointment, Sibbes earned the doctor of divinity degree at Cambridge. He soon became known as "the heavenly Doctor," due to his godly preaching and heavenly conversation. Izaac Walton (1593–1683) wrote of Sibbes:

> *Of this blest man, let this just praise be given,*
> *Heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.*[6]

In 1633 King Charles I offered Sibbes the vicarage of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, which was the very church Sibbes had been forced to relinquish eighteen years earlier. Sibbes continued to serve as preacher at Gray's Inn,

Master of St. Catharine's Hall, and vicar of Holy Trinity until his death in 1635.

Sibbes never married, but he established an astonishing network of friendships that included a variety of godly ministers, illustrious lawyers, and parliamentary leaders of the early Stuart era. Mark E. Dever observes that Sibbes believed "godly friends are walking sermons."[7] On thirteen occasions he wrote introductions to the writings of his Puritan colleagues.

Sibbes was a gentle and warm man who avoided the controversies of his day as much as possible. "Fractions breed factions," he insisted.[8] His battles with Archbishop Laud, Roman Catholics, and Arminians were exceptions rather than the rule for him. He remained close friends with many pastors and leaders who espoused more radical reform than he did for the Church of England.

Sibbes was an inspiration to many of his brethren. He influenced Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Independency, the three dominant parties of the church in England at that time. He was a pastor of pastors, who lived a life of moderation. "Where most holiness is, there is most moderation, where it may be without prejudice of piety to God and the good of others," he wrote.[9]

The historian Daniel Neal described Sibbes as a celebrated preacher, an educated divine, and a charitable and humble man who repeatedly underestimated his gifts.[10] Yet Puritans everywhere recognized Sibbes as a great, Christ-centered, experiential preacher. Both learned and unlearned in upper and lower classes profited greatly from Sibbes, who was an alluring preacher.

Sibbes meant to woo. He wrote, "To preach is to woo,"[11] and said, "The main scope of all [preaching] is, to allure us to the entertainment of Christ's mild, safe, wise, victorious government."[12] Sibbes brought truth home, as Robert Burns would say, "to men's business and bosoms." Catlin wrote of Sibbes, "No man that ever I was acquainted with got so far into my heart or lay so close therein." Maurice Roberts adds, "His theology is thoroughly orthodox, of course, but it is like the fuel of some great combustion engine, always passing into flame and so being converted into energy thereby to serve God and, even more, to enjoy and relish God with the soul."[13]

David Masson, known for his biography of John Milton, wrote, "From the year 1630, onwards for twenty years or so, no writings in practical theology seem to have been so much read among the pious English middle classes as those of Sibbes."[14] The twentieth-century historian William Haller judged Sibbes's sermons to be "among the most brilliant and popular of all the utterances of the Puritan church militant."[15]

Sibbes's last sermons, preached one week before his death, were expositions of John 14:2: "In my Father's house are many mansions…. I go to prepare a

place for you." When asked in his final days how his soul was faring, Sibbes replied, "I should do God much wrong if I should not say, very well."[16] Sibbes's will and testament, dictated on July 4, 1635, the day before his death, commences: "I commend and bequeath my soul into the hands of my gracious Savior, who hath redeemed it with his most precious blood, and appears now in heaven to receive it."[17]

The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, meticulously edited with a 110-page memoir by Alexander Grosart, were published by James Nichol of Edinburgh in the 1860s and reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust.[18] Sibbes's most famous work, *The Bruised Reed*, which has done so much good in healing troubled souls, is now available in paperback from Banner of Truth Trust.[19]

The Indwelling Spirit Let's turn now to Sibbes's teaching on the entertainment of the Spirit. The Spirit's indwelling is requisite to entertaining Him, Sibbes said. Sibbes taught that when the Spirit of God enters the heart of a sinner, regenerating him and persuading him of the truth of the gospel, the Spirit immediately begins to live within that person.[20] The Spirit does not draw attention to Himself, however. Rather, the Spirit works to knit our hearts to God and to Jesus Christ. Sibbes wrote:

> He [the Spirit] sanctifieth and purifieth, and doth all from the Father and the Son, and knits us to the Father and the Son; to the Son first, and then to the Father…because all the communion we have with God is by the Holy Ghost. All the communion that Christ as man had with God was by the Holy Ghost; and all the communion that God hath with us, and we with God is by the Holy Ghost. For the Spirit is the bond of union between Christ and us, and between God and us.[21]

While the Father and Son perform no work without the Spirit, the Spirit also does no work apart from the Father and the Son. Sibbes explained, "As the Spirit comes from God the Father and the Son, so it carries us back again to the Father and the Son. As it comes from heaven, so it carries us to heaven back again."[22] The role of the Spirit is to introduce and intimately acquaint us with the Father and the Son.

Thus, if we are believers, the Spirit establishes communion between us and the other two persons of the Trinity. It is as if He captures us and lifts us up to know the Father and the Son's love for us. The Holy Spirit lifts us to see by faith the crucified and resurrected Jesus seated in glory. That is why the Spirit comes, and that is how He functions in our lives. Therefore we may say that while, in one sense, fellowship between ourselves and God is reestablished once and for

all, yet in another sense the Spirit maintains and increases that fellowship during our entire lives.

Sibbes said that as the Spirit draws us to the Father and the Son, He confirms His government in our hearts. This government is not at odds with the Spirit's purpose of revealing the things of Christ to us; rather, His internal governing reveals Jesus Christ seated on the throne of grace. Indeed, the Spirit helps us conform to the character and behavior of Christ. The Spirit lives in us to restore and transform our souls and ripens us for glory. Submitting to the Spirit is thus critical, Sibbes said. In *A Fountain Sealed*, he wrote,

> Let us give up the government of our souls to the Spirit. It is for our safety so to do, as being wiser than ourselves who are unable to direct our own way. It is our liberty to be under a wisdom and goodness larger than our own. Let the Spirit think in us, desire in us, pray in us, live in us, do all in us; labor ever to be in such a frame as we may be fit for the Spirit to work upon.[23]

The believer is like a "musical instrument," tuned and played by the Spirit. Sibbes wrote, "Let us lay ourselves open to the Spirit's touch."[24] When the Spirit has ruling sway in our lives, He fine-tunes our souls much like a musical instrument, and then he plays our lives as a piano concerto before God.

Sibbes described this process of tuning and the touch of the Holy Spirit: "He must rule. He will have the keys delivered to him; we must submit to his government. And when he is in the heart, he will subdue by little and little all high thoughts, rebellious risings, and despairing fears."[25]

How may we know that we have this blessed, indwelling, governing Spirit? Sibbes said, "By living and moving, by actions vital, *etc.* even so may a man know he hath the Spirit of God by those actions that come only from the Spirit, which is to the soul, as the soul is to the body…. Every saving grace is a sign that the Spirit is in us."[26] Wherever the indwelling Spirit is, He gradually transforms the soul to be holy and gracious like Himself. The government of the Spirit is not realized immediately. The revolution and overthrow of our old nature comes upon conversion, while the government of the Spirit is established only in a process as we learn more of and abide more to the constitution of our new life in Jesus Christ.

Restored communion with God the Father and the Son by means of the government of the Spirit cannot but produce spiritual warfare. The transformation that the Holy Spirit effects in the believer is accompanied by external and internal struggle. Externally, we face the powers of darkness, even the prince of darkness himself, Sibbes warned, because the devil is profoundly

envious of the man that walks in the Spirit.[27] Satan will do all within his power to destroy that comfort.

Indeed, all spiritual graces meet with conflict, Sibbes said, "for what is true, is with a great deal of resistance of that which is counterfeit."[28] What is of the Spirit is always in conflict with what is not of the Spirit. Internally, our fleshly desires are continually at war with the Spirit, for when the Spirit comes to a person, He pulls down all strongholds. He carves out a path for Himself in the thick of battle.

Our soul is the battlefield upon which the Spirit marches, and He will have the final victory, Sibbes said. For wherever the Spirit dwells, He also rules, for He will not be an underling to lusts. He repairs the breaches of the soul. In this battle we must submit to the Spirit in all things, however, for only then will we experience the victorious life that is the inheritance of believers in Jesus Christ. To be sure, the greatest battles were won on Calvary and in our hearts when we were brought to new birth, but we must also fight daily battles in our life of sanctification. Our ever present foes—our flesh, the world, and the devil—will unceasingly strive to tear up the foundation upon which we stand as children of the Most High.

Sibbes said that we must show that we treasure the indwelling power of the Spirit. We cannot value God's love and holiness granted to us in the Spirit without exercising self-denial. Life in the Spirit, while beginning at regeneration, must continue to bear fruit. As Sibbes wrote, "As we may know who dwells in a house by observing who goes in and them that come out, so we may know that the Spirit dwells in us by observing what sanctified speeches he sends forth, and what delight he hath wrought in us to things that are special, and what price we set upon them."[29]

The believer's greatest encouragement in spiritual warfare is the *abiding presence of the Spirit.* The Spirit is the leader and enabler of our soul. Sibbes wrote, "If we be sound Christians, the Spirit of God will enable us to do all things, evangelically, that we are called unto."[30] He said, "Therefore let us have an high esteem of the Holy Spirit, of the motions of it, and out of an high esteem in our hearts beg of God the guidance of the Spirit, that he would lead us by his Spirit, and subdue our corruptions, that we may not be led by our own lusts."[31] It is through what Sibbes termed "the motions," or "holy stirrings of the Spirit," that the Spirit enables us to overcome the sin that attacks us internally and the forces of darkness set against us externally.[32] The Spirit of Christ is powerful and strong. Through His indwelling, we are able "to perform duties above nature, to overcome ourselves and injuries," Sibbes said.[33] He added, the Spirit will "make us to be able to live and die, as it enabled Christ to do things that

another man could not do."[34]

Sibbes's conclusion was inevitable: "Where there is no conflict, there is no Spirit of Christ at all."[35] In this he echoed the apostle Paul's teaching that if you mortify the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit, you are led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). You then, by grace, entertain the Spirit. You befriend and show hospitality to that Spirit who gives you the victory over all enemies by faith (1 John 5:4).

But the Spirit does more than indwell the believer and give victory in spiritual warfare. He is also the sealer of our souls.

The Sealer of Our Souls Sibbes often preached on the Spirit's sealing. A series of his sermons transcribed by a noblewoman, Lady Elizabeth Brooke, was published in 1637 as *A Fountain Sealed*.[36] His sermons on 2 Corinthians 1:22–23, published in 1655 in *Exposition of Second Corinthians Chapter One*,[37] were about the Spirit's sealing. So was a sermon on Romans 8:15–16, *The Witness of Salvation: or, God's Spirit Witnessing with Our Spirits,* which was published in 1629.[38]

According to Sibbes and many other Puritans, looking at the role of the Spirit in sealing the soul of believers is very much like examining His work in personal assurance of faith and salvation. Sibbes did view our sealing in the Spirit as two distinct matters, however. Sibbes distinguished between the office or function of the Spirit as a seal given in regeneration to a sinner and the work of the Spirit in applying that seal to the believer's consciousness.

John Owen (1616–1683) would later disagree with this distinction, for he said we are sealed when we are regenerated, and the Bible gives no justification for a second kind of sealing. Owen, following the early Reformers, taught a one-to-one correlation between those regenerated by the Spirit and those sealed by the Spirit. Calvin, for example, said that it was impossible to believe without being sealed by the Spirit. For Calvin, sealing represented the presence rather than the activity of the Spirit. Thus, the sealing work of the Spirit belongs to the essence of faith.[39]

By the time of William Perkins, who was often called the father of Puritanism, more attention was devoted to the Spirit's activity in sealing the promises of the gospel to the believer. The focus was no longer on the Spirit Himself as the indwelling seal but on His activity in sealing or attesting the promises. Perkins's successor, Paul Baynes, attempted to reconcile the thoughts of Calvin and Perkins on the sealing of the Spirit. Baynes taught that sealing could be applied both to the Spirit as indweller and to the consequences of that sealing in the regenerate life. Baynes wrote, "The Holy Spirit *and* the graces of the Spirit are the seal assuring our redemption."[40] Thus, Baynes distinguished between being

sealed by the Spirit (which all believers possess) and being made conscious of such sealing (which only those who are conscious of the graces of the Spirit possess).

Sibbes agreed with his predecessor, Baynes, though he emphasized the sealing of the Spirit as a "superadded work" and "confirmation" of the believer's faith.[41] In so doing, Sibbes turned the doctrine of the sealing of the Spirit in a direction that would gain prominence among the Puritans for several decades.

Sibbes thought of the Spirit's sealing in two ways: (1) a one-time sealing, and (2) a sealing that came later as one matured in the Christian life. The once-and-for-all sealing of salvation is granted when a person first believes in Christ and God's promises. Sibbes taught that as a king's image is stamped upon wax, so the Spirit stamps believers' souls with the image of Christ from the very moment of believing.[42] Such sealing produces in every believer a lifelong desire to be transformed fully into the image of Christ.

This seal, which every believer possesses, whether conscious of it or not, serves as a mark of authenticity. It distinguishes the believer from the world. As merchants mark their wares and herdsmen brand their sheep, so God seals His people to declare that they are His rightful property and that He has authority over them, Sibbes said.[43]

The second aspect of Sibbes's doctrine of sealing is more elusive. Owen argued that Sibbes said sealing had to occur twice in the life of the believer. But Sibbes was not arguing for a second measure of *positional assurance*, as if to imply that God was not altogether sure of our stance with Him or His stance toward us upon conversion. Sibbes plainly stated, "Sealing of us by the Spirit is not in regard of God but ourselves. God knoweth who are His, but we know not that we are His but by sealing."[44] The sealing then is *for our benefit exclusively*, and not for God.

So the second kind of sealing Sibbes wrote about was a process. It was the kind of assurance that could increase gradually throughout our lives by means of singular experiences and by daily, spiritual growth. This sealing had degrees; it could grow with spiritual maturity. Sibbes wrote, "The Spirit sealeth by degrees. As our care of pleasing the Spirit increaseth so our comfort increaseth. Our light will increase as the morning light unto the perfect day. Yielding to the Spirit in one holy motion will cause him to lead us to another, and so on forwards, until we be more deeply acquainted with the whole counsel of God concerning our salvation."[45]

Sibbes learned through pastoral experience that many believers are content with the measure of faith and assurance they receive upon their conversion and do not labor for further growth. That prompted Sibbes to suggest that there are

three kinds of Christians.[46]

First, there are those who have saving faith but live under a spirit of bondage. They are filled with doubts and fears. They lack the reflex act of faith which ascertains marks and evidences of the Spirit's saving work in their lives. Sibbes said that they ought to pray for more faith and light to discern the Spirit's work within them.

Second, some Christians are under the Spirit of adoption but still have fears. They are sealed with evidences of faith but are often still beset with perplexity and doubt. Their degree of assurance is usually highest when their trials are greatest. Sibbes wrote, "For those who have been sealed by the Spirit and yet not so fully as to silence all doubts about their estate: those should, out of that beginning of comfort which they feel, study to be pliable to the Spirit for further increase."[47]

Third, Sibbes said that some believers are "carried with large spirits to obey their Father" as the fruit of the superadded, direct seal of the Spirit that persuades them of their sonship to God.[48] Those who experience the freedom of a "large spirit" receive a private seal—an unmistakable witness of the Spirit to their soul. The Spirit's private seal is a "stablishing, confirming grace," Sibbes said.[49] He identified this sealing with the immediate testimony of the Holy Spirit, by which the Father's love is pronounced upon the believer in particular, usually through the application of such texts as "I am thy salvation" or "thy sins are pardoned."[50] According to Sibbes, this establishing seal grants believers freedom to appropriate full assurance through the work of each person in the Trinity, though the emphasis is on the Spirit in His saving activity. Sibbes wrote, "Every person in the blessed Trinity hath their several work. The Father chooseth us and passeth a decree upon the whole groundwork of our salvation. The Son executeth it to the full. The Spirit applieth it, and witnesseth our interest in it by leading our souls to lay hold upon him, and by raising up our souls in the assurance of it, and by breeding and cherishing sweet communion with Father and Son, who both of them seal us likewise by the Spirit. This joy and comfort is so appropriated to the Spirit, as it carrieth the very name of the Spirit."[51]

Sibbes sounds mystical at times in describing this special sealing, particularly in statements such as "the Holy Ghost slides and insinuates and infuseth himself into our souls."[52] But Sibbes warded off mysticism in two ways. First, he maintained that this special sealing must never be divorced from the Word of God.[53] By speaking of sealing in degrees, Sibbes linked all advancement in grace to the Spirit and Word, for any consciousness of sealing by the Spirit is always through the applied Word.

Second, Sibbes said that the genuineness of such sealing may be readily

examined. One may know the voice of the Spirit of God by inquiring what followed "this ravishing joy" of experimental sealing, Sibbes wrote.[54] Fruits of sanctification, such as peace of conscience, the spirit of adoption whereby we cry "Abba, Father," prayers of fervent supplication, conformity with the heavenly image of Christ, and applying ourselves to holy duties rather than old lusts inevitably result from such "a secret whispering and intimation to the soul."[55] Sibbes thus emphasized both the intuitive testimony of the Spirit and the sanctifying fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit's sealing is inward in its essence and outward in its fruit.

Sibbes taught that this special sealing was granted by the Spirit to saints particularly in times of great trial. He said that the Spirit gave such seals "even as parents [who] smile upon their children when they are sick and need comfort: so above all other times God reserves this hidden sealing of his children with a spirit of joy when they need it most."[56] Such sealing was "a sweet kiss vouchsafed to the soul."[57] Paul in the dungeon, Daniel in the lion's den, and his three friends in the fiery furnace all experienced that encouragement. It was the hidden manna and the white stone with its written name that none could know but he that had it (Rev. 2:17).[58]

The sealing of the Spirit consoles the believer especially in the hour of death, Sibbes said. Even if the stamp of the Spirit is almost worn away, it is still valid if there are "some evidences, some pulses, some sighs and groans against corruption."[59] The cause of the effacing of the stamp lies in the believer's yielding too much to his corruptions; nevertheless, the stamp abides.

In summary, Sibbes's interest in sealing was more pastoral than academic. He knew that true assurance results in an increased desire for holiness and for more intimate communion with God. Sibbes's argument was clear: When the Holy Spirit puts His holy seal on a believer, that person will bear the fruits of holiness. Sealing prompts assurance, and the more assurance we have, the more love we will feel for God and the more we will obey Him. Consequently, all Christians ought to pray for "a spirit of revelation that we may be *more* sealed," Sibbes said.[60]

Owen understood why Sibbes and other Puritans in his era proposed the notion of a sealing subsequent to regeneration. He recognized that Sibbes and others were attempting to call believers to a life of *assuredness*. Owen affirmed the call for this kind of assurance, yet he argued against equating full assurance with the sealing of the Spirit. He felt that the exegesis of Ephesians 1:13 didn't support such a view.

Though some of us may also fear that Sibbes went beyond Scripture at times in his doctrine of sealing, yet we should recognize that Sibbes was discussing a

different sort of event than what Owen suggested. Sibbes had a dynamic view of sealing. Sealing is a continuous and progressive activity, Sibbes said. Owen held a more static view of sealing. He viewed the seal "as sealed," whereas Sibbes viewed the seal primarily as "a sealing." Sibbes was talking about an experiential, behavioral, and character-modifying realization of the depth of the love of God—the witness of the Spirit which grows through life. Sibbes was saying that this kind of sealing is a great boost to our sanctification.

The Comforter Sibbes taught that sanctification is not only promoted by the Spirit's indwelling and sealing, but also by the Spirit's activity as comforter. He wrote, "Is it not the greatest comfort to a Christian soul when God, in want of means, comes immediately Himself unto us and comforts us by His Spirit?"[61] By "want of means" Sibbes meant those times when circumstances and earthly comforts fail us.

If you are a Christian, you know that life and its difficulties can be discouraging. Especially when God's promises and providence seem to contradict each other, we are prone to lose our quiet confidence in God and become, like David, cast down and disquieted within. We yield to the discouragements of the flesh. Sibbes said such disquiet and grief is "like lead to the soul, heavy and cold."[62]

At those times, especially, we need the Holy Spirit to draw close to our souls. In his book *Yea and Amen*, Sibbes wrote, "It must needs be so because no less than the Spirit of God can quiet our perplexed spirits in times of temptation."[63] He went on to say, "Spiritual comforts flow immediately from the Spirit of comfort who hath His office designed for that purpose."[64]

Sibbes excelled in showing why the Spirit alone can comfort our battered souls. He wrote,

> When the soul is distempered, it is like a distempered lock that no key can open. So when the conscience is troubled, what creature can settle the troubled conscience, can open the ambages [the winding passages] of a troubled conscience in such perplexity and confusion? And therefore to settle the troubled conscience aright, it must be somewhat *above* conscience; and that which must quiet the spirit must be such a Spirit as is *above our spirits.*[65]

Sibbes appreciated the complexity of individuals and understood how that complexity remains even after we become believers. Hardships are part of being a Christian, for a Christian is engaged in the pursuit of holiness. Yet the Spirit is able to give grace to the believer to rise above discouragements, no matter how

great they are. Sibbes wrote, “Oh, therefore get this blessed Spirit to enlighten thee, to quicken thee, to support thee, etc., and it will carry thy soul courageously along above all oppositions and discouragements whatsoever in the way to happiness.”[66] As surely as the difficulties of life are genuine, so too the comfort of the Spirit is genuine and able.

The Spirit is more than just a spiritual bandage. He is *the* Comforter, the healing balm for our hearts. We wholeheartedly agree with Sibbes that the Holy Spirit “is a comforter, bringing to mind useful things at such times when we most need them.”[67] What are these useful things if not the profound love of the Lord for us *in spite of our wretched state*—a love that ushers us through suffering and gives purpose to all our life.

Sibbes also taught that the role of the Holy Spirit as comforter is tied to the Word of God. “The Spirit gives no comfort but by the word…. If it be God’s comfort, assure thyself God would have his word to make way unto it,” Sibbes wrote.[68] He said that in times of discouragement the believer must question his own soul about the causes of discontent. He must charge himself to trust God and His Word, recognizing that with the Spirit as his indwelling comforter, there is no good reason to be discouraged. He must be “meditating on the promises of God, and wedging them home upon the heart,” Sibbes said.[69] By using the promises, he must labor for a calmed spirit by insisting that until the Spirit “meekens” the soul, it is not quiet enough to receive the seed of the Word. As Sibbes wrote, “It is ill sowing in a storm; so a stormy spirit will not suffer the word to take [its] place.”[70]

Sibbes taught that in applying the Word to the believer’s troubled soul, the Spirit calls forth answering motions in the believer, leading him to find quiet and rest in God. Indeed, the believer must continue to examine his soul by faith until he finds rest in God. Perfect rest in God will only be found in heaven, Sibbes said. Here on earth, however, the believer can find rest by means of “sanctifying and quieting graces.”[71]

Quieting the soul helps a believer recover some of the communion with God that was destroyed by the fall. Prior to the fall, man’s soul was like “an instrument in tune, fit to be moved to any duty; as a clean, neat glass [or mirror], the soul represented God’s image and likeness,” Sibbes wrote.[72] After the fall, the only way to find such harmony of a soul “fitted as a clean glass to receive light from above”[73] is to depend on the Spirit and aim for peace and harmony with God, who is “the God of peace, [and] the God of order.”[74] Sibbes called believers to “the beauty of a well-ordered soul” that is in tune with the Spirit of God.[75] Such a soul is comforted even in great trials, Sibbes said. It receives with meekness the engrafted Word and, by keeping its affections in due proportion,

responds to the Holy Spirit's internal motions, which lead the soul to find rest and peace in God. All such motions tend to rest and end in God, "the center and resting-place of the soul," Sibbes wrote; "then whatsoever times come, we are sure of a hiding-place and sanctuary."[76]

Would you be comforted and quieted in your soul? Labor to entertain the Spirit. Give room to His motions in your soul, remembering, as Sibbes concluded, "the soul without the Spirit is darkness and confusion, full of self-accusing and self-tormenting thoughts. If we let the Spirit come in, [He] will scatter all and settle the soul in a sweet quiet."[77]

Grieving the Spirit If the Spirit helps us commune with the Father and the Son, governs our spirit, defends us in spiritual conflict, leads us in faith, seals our souls, and comforts us till death, then what happens when we fail Him and succumb to our own sin and folly?

At such times we grieve the Spirit, Sibbes said. In *A Fountain Sealed*, Sibbes cried, "What greater indignity can we offer to the Holy Spirit than to prefer base dust before his motions leading us to holiness and happiness. What greater unkindness, yea, treachery to leave directions of a friend to follow the counsel of an enemy; such as when we know God's will, yet will consent with flesh and blood…in leaving a true guide and following the pirate." [78]

Like his fellow Puritans, Sibbes was most critical of people in the established church who didn't exhibit the fruits of saving faith. He challenged those who claimed to have walked with God for many years but whose lives showed little effect of their relationship with the Almighty. He warned, "Of all the sins, the sins of professors of religion [those who profess to be Christians] grieve the Spirit most. And of all professors, those that have most means of knowledge, because their obligations are deeper and their engagements greater…. The offense of friends grieves more than the injuries of enemies."[79]

Sibbes did not stop there. He went on to say that as the Holy Ghost is a spirit, so spiritual sins like pride and envy and an evil spirit grieve Him most.[80] Carnal sins grieve the Spirit, too, for they drown the soul in physical delights and defile the Spirit's temple. We need to be changed from the inside out by the Spirit of God. As long as we do not aim for a life of devotion and conformity to Jesus Christ, we grieve the Spirit.

Sibbes offered still more ways in which we grieve the Spirit. He wrote, "We commonly grieve the Spirit of God…when the mind is troubled with a multitude of busyness; when the soul is like a mill where one cannot hear another; the noise is such as takes away all intercourse [communication]."[81] That is to say, when we fill our lives with things other than spiritual concerns, we bring grief to

the blessed Spirit. Activity is not synonymous with spirituality, as popular Christian culture would have us believe. Rather, we are called to humble dependence and meditation upon the Spirit. As Sibbes said, “This grieves the Holy Spirit also when men take the office of the Spirit from him,” that is, when we will do things in our own strength and by our own light.82 We all too willingly go about our Christian tasks in our own strength, never realizing that in doing so we become our own end, and our activities become meaningless.

Conclusion: Rely on the Spirit According to Sibbes, the Spirit must be an integral part of our lives, our churches, and our world. The Spirit must be entertained in every facet of Christian life and experience. We must relish His indwelling, His sealing, and His comforting work, while striving not to grieve Him. Sibbes labored to make biblical theology relevant to the person in the pew. His books challenge us to pursue a biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit and to faithfully communicate that understanding to others in the body of Christ.

Today, the relationship between believers and the Holy Spirit is too often like a bad marriage in which a husband takes advantage of his wife’s contributions but fails to appreciate and celebrate his relationship with her. To reverse this situation, Sibbes advised that we should make a daily effort to appreciate the Holy Spirit, and to share our thoughts and plans with Him in prayer as we gaze by faith into the face of God. We should walk in daily communication with the Spirit through the Word, relying upon every office that the Holy Spirit provides, as described in Scripture. As Sibbes wrote, “The Holy Spirit being in us, after he that prepared us for a house for himself to dwell in and to take up his rest and delight in, he doth also become unto us a counselor in all our doubts, a comforter in all our distresses, a solicitor to all duty, a guide in the whole course of life, until we dwell with him forever in heaven, unto which his dwelling here in us doth tend.”83 Thus by the Holy Spirit, we, like Richard Sibbes, can have a measure of heaven in us before we are in heaven.

1. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 175.

2. For further sources on Sibbes, see Frank E. Farrell, “Richard Sibbes: A Study in Early Seventeenth Century English Puritanism” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1955); Sidney H. Rooy, “Richard Sibbes: The Theological Foundation of the Mission,” in *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition: A Study of Representative Puritans: Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter, John Eliot, Cotton Mather, and Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 15–65; Bert Affleck Jr., “The Theology of Richard Sibbes, 1577–1635” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1969); Harold P. Shelly, “Richard Sibbes: Early Stuart Preacher of Piety” (PhD diss., Temple University, 1972); Beth E. Tumbleson, “The Bride and Bridegroom in the Work of Richard Sibbes, English Puritan” (MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1984); Cary Nelson Weisiger III, “The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Preaching of Richard Sibbes” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1984); Maurice Roberts, “Richard Sibbes: The Heavenly Doctor,” in *The Office and Work of the Minister* (London: Westminster Conference Papers, 1986), 96–113; J. William

Black, “Richard Sibbes and *The Bruised Reed*,” *Banner of Truth*, no. 299–300 (Aug.–Sept. 1988): 49–58; Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2000); Paul Oliver, “Richard Sibbes and the Returning Backslider,” in *Puritans and Spiritual Life* (London: Westminster Conference papers, 2001), 41–56; Ronald N. Frost, “*The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes (1577–1635),” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 79–91.

3. Richard Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862–1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 5:431. In this chapter, this edition of Sibbes’s complete works will be cited as *Works*.

4. Portions of this section are adapted from Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003), 534–37.

5. Alexander B. Grosart, “Appendix to Memoir,” in Richard Sibbes, *Works*, 1:cxxxv.

6. Walton wrote this in his copy of Sibbes’s *The Returning Backslider*. Stapleton Martin, *Izaak Walton and His Friends* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1903), 174.

7. Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 50.

8. Quoted by Alexander B. Grosart, “Memoir,” in Richard Sibbes, *Works*, 1:lxi.

9. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax*, in *Works*, 1:57.

10. Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1843), 1:323.

11. Richard Sibbes, “The Fountain Opened,” in *Works*, 5:505.

12. Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax*, in *Works*, 1:40.

13. Roberts, “Richard Sibbes,” 104.

14. David Masson, *The Life of John Milton* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1859), 1:406.

15. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 152.

16. Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 94.

17. Grosart, “Memoir,” in Sibbes, *Works*, 1:cxxviii.

18. For an English translation of the concluding Latin sermon in volume 7, see Richard Sibbes, “Antidote against the Shipwreck of Faith and a Good Conscience,” *Banner of Truth*, no. 433 (Oct. 1999): 11–22, and no. 434 (Nov. 1999): 11–22.

19. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (1630; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998).

20. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:413–14; *Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations*, in *Works*, 7:199–200.

21. Richard Sibbes, “A Description of Christ,” in *Works*, 1:17.

22. Richard Sibbes, *The Church’s Echo*, in *Works*, 7:545.

23. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:426.

24. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:426.

25. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:431.

26. Richard Sibbes, *Exposition of 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:478.

27. Sibbes, *Exposition of 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:478.

28. Sibbes, *Exposition of 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:478.

29. Sibbes, *Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations*, in *Works*, 7:199.

30. Richard Sibbes, *The Soul’s Conflict with Itself*, in *Works*, 1:188.

31. Sibbes, “A Description of Christ,” in *Works*, 1:26.

32. Sibbes, “The Ungodly’s Misery,” in *Works*, 1:392.

33. Sibbes, “A Description of Christ,” in *Works*, 1:22.

34. Sibbes, “A Description of Christ,” in *Works*, 1:22.

35. Sibbes, “A Description of Christ,” in *Works*, 1:22.

36. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:409–56.

37. Sibbes, *Exposition of 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, vol. 3.

38. Sibbes, “The Witness of Salvation,” in *Works*, 7:367–85.

39. See Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors*

(Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 201–8.

40. Paul Bayne [Baynes], *Commentary upon the Whole Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians* (repr., Stoke-on-Trent, England: Tentmaker Publications, 2001), 81.

41. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:455–56.

42. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:453.

43. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:454.

44. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:446–47.

45. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:452.

46. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:447–48.

47. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:447–48.

48. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:447–48.

49. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:422.

50. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:440.

51. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:439.

52. Sibbes, "A Description of Christ," in *Works*, 1:24.

53. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:441.

54. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:441.

55. Richard Sibbes, *Yea and Amen; or, Precious Promises and Privileges*, in *Works*, 4:134.

56. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:458.

57. Sibbes, *Yea and Amen*, in *Works*, 4:134.

58. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:458.

59. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:461.

60. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:454.

61. Richard Sibbes, "The Saint's Safety in Evil Times," in *Works*, 1:319.

62. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:142.

63. Sibbes, *Yea and Amen*, in *Works*, 4:144.

64. Sibbes, *Yea and Amen*, in *Works*, 4:144.

65. Sibbes, *Exposition on 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:477.

66. Richard Sibbes, "The Difficulty of Salvation," in *Works*, 1:399.

67. Sibbes, *Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations*, in *Works*, 7:200.

68. Richard Sibbes, "The Witness of Salvation," in *Works*, 7:383.

69. Sibbes, "The Witness of Salvation," in *Works*, 7:383.

70. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:143.

71. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:279.

72. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:173.

73. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:211.

74. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:168.

75. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:167.

76. Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict*, in *Works*, 1:289.

77. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:452.

78. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:416.

79. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:417.

80. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:419.

81. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:422.

82. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5.422.

83. Sibbes, *A Fountain Sealed*, in *Works*, 5:414.

Chapter 37

William Perkins and His Greatest Case of Conscience

> *The Lord increase the number of them which may rejoice that their names are written in heaven.*
>
> —WILLIAM PERKINS[1]

Contemporary scholars have called William Perkins (1558–1602) "the principal architect of Elizabethan Puritanism," "the Puritan theologian of Tudor times," "the most important Puritan writer," "the prince of Puritan theologians," "the ideal Puritan clergyman of the quietist years," "the most famous of all Puritan divines," and the "father of Puritanism."[2] They have classed Perkins with Calvin and Beza as third in "the trinity of the orthodox."[3] Perkins was the first theologian to be more widely published in England than Calvin, and the first English Protestant theologian to have a major impact in the British Isles, on the European continent, and in North America. Many Puritan scholars marvel that Perkins's rare works have been largely unavailable until recently.[4]

Perkins's attempt to wed decretal and experimental theology makes his works worthy of attention.[5] Interweaving supralapsarian predestination with experimental soul-examination, Perkins attempted the daring feat of setting forth a lively order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) that challenged all people, whether converted or not, to search for the fruits of predestination within their own souls on the basis of Christ's work.

In this chapter, we will provide, first, an overview of his doctrine of assurance, and second, an examination of his short treatise that succinctly presents his greatest case of conscience, *How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God, or No*.[6]

Election and Assurance of Faith By the late sixteenth century, the question of personal assurance of faith, or "how one could be sure of his election," became prominent for at least two important reasons. First, second-and third-generation Protestants were compelled to clarify the Reformers' doctrine of assurance in

part because of the tendency of many growing up in the church to take for granted God's saving grace. The early Puritans in particular reacted to dead orthodoxy, which minimized the seriousness of sin and regarded mere assent to the truths of Scripture as sufficient for salvation. It thus became essential to distinguish between assurance of personal grace and certainty based on mere assent to Bible truth. In this context, Puritans like William Perkins labored to lead their flocks into a well-grounded assurance of their election and salvation.[7]

Second, the construction of a doctrine of assurance became important within the Puritan movement because the Puritans took sin and self-examination seriously. The more people become occupied with sin and its gravity in God's sight, the more likely they are to despair over both sin and themselves. Such despair makes fertile soil for cases of conscience that revolve around assurance of election and salvation.

Ever the conscientious pastor, Perkins predictably sought to provide the means whereby a sincere seeker could be persuaded of his own favorable state before a merciful God. He wrote several books in the late 1580s and 1590s that explained how one may know he is saved: *A Golden Chaine: Or, The Description of Theologie: Containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation*;[8] *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration, Whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace*;[9]*A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was: How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Childe of God or No*;[10] *A Discourse of Conscience: Where Is Set Down the Nature, Properties, and Differences Thereof: As Also the Way to Get and Keepe a Good Conscience*;[11] and *A Graine of Musterd-Seede: Or, the Least Measure of Grace That Is or Can Be Effectuall to Salvation*.[12]

Through his prolific writings, Perkins taught people how to search their consciences for even the least evidence of election based on Christ's saving work. Perkins viewed such efforts as part of the pastor's fundamental task to keep "balance in the sanctuary" between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.[13] Sinners had to be shown how God's immovable will moved the will of man and how to look for evidences of election and inclusion in God's covenant. They also had to be taught how to make their election sure by living as the elect of God.

Assurance through the Covenant of Grace Perkins taught that one primary means God uses to work out His election is the covenant of grace. The golden chain of salvation as recorded in Romans 8:29–30 (predestination, effectual calling, justification, and glorification) was linked to the elect through the instrument of preaching God's gracious covenant. Consequently, while Perkins

preached about God's sovereign grace toward His elect from eternity and God's covenant acts of salvation by which election is realized, he was particularly concerned in his practical theology with how this redemptive process breaks through into the experience of the elect. He wanted to explain how the elect respond to God's overtures and acts, that is, how the covenant of grace impacts the will of the elect so as to move them from initial faith to full assurance, which enables them to say, "I am sure that I am a child of God, elected by the Father, redeemed by the blood of the Son, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit."

Perkins offered the covenant as a basis for assurance, maintaining that "God becomes our God not by any merit of ours, but by means of the gracious covenant propounded in the Gospel, promising pardon and remission of sin in and by Christ." This prompts the question, "What must we do to say truly and in assurance that God is our God?" Here are the basics of Perkins's answer:

> We must for our parts make a covenant with him, unto which is required a consent on either party; first on God's part, that he will be our God…. On our part is required consent…. When we receive the Sacraments…there is required in our consent a further degree which standeth in an outward consent of the heart, whereby a man taketh God for his God; which is then begun, when first a man acknowledgeth and bewaileth his sins…when he endeavoureth to be reconciled to God…when he purposeth never to sin again: when this covenant is thus concluded by consent of both parties, a man may safely and truly say that God is his God. Now seeing we know these things, our duty is to labor to be settled and assured…. First in this assurance is the foundation of all true comfort: all the promises of God are hereupon grounded…and not only is it the foundation of all comfort in this life, but of all happiness after death itself,…for by virtue of this covenant shall we rise again after death to life, glory, and immortality.[14]

According to Perkins, then, man has a great deal of responsibility to fulfill in his covenant relation with God. Yet Perkins acknowledges that assurance can never be gleaned from a conditional covenant alone, for human conditionality can never answer all the questions conjoined with human depravity, divine sovereignty, and election. For Perkins, the covenant contains both a conditional and an absolute relationship. Assurance flows out of the covenant's absolute nature which is grounded in God's gracious being and promises, not out of the covenant's conditional nature which is connected with man's performance. Perkins wrote, "God hath spoken to us: he hath made promise of blessing to us: he hath made covenant with us: and he hath sworn unto us. What can we more require of him? What better ground of true comfort [is there]?" And later, he

wrote, “The promise is not made to the work, but to the worker, and to the worker, not for the merit of his work, but for the merit of Christ.”15

Thus, though Perkins encourages people to strive after assurance, ultimately he thrusts us back on the one-sided grace of God for our assurance, declaring that the covenant itself is a divine gift rooted in the merits of Christ. Assurance, in the final analysis, rests on God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises, making even the fulfillment of the condition of faith on man’s part possible only by God’s gracious gift.

The Christ-Centeredness of Faith For Perkins, faith is a supernatural gift given by God to the sinner to take hold of Christ with all the promises of salvation.16 The object of faith is not the sinner or his experiences or faith itself; it is Jesus Christ alone. Faith sees Christ, first, as the sacrifice on the cross for the remission of sins, then learns to experience Him as the strength to battle temptation, the comfort in a storm of affliction, and ultimately as everything needed in this life and in the life to come.17 In sum, faith shows itself when “every several person doth particularly apply unto himself, Christ with his merits, by an inward persuasion of the heart which cometh none other way, but by the effectual certificate of the Holy Ghost concerning the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.”18

Faith has no meaning apart from Jesus Christ. “Faith is…a principal grace of God, whereby man is ingrafted into Christ and thereby becomes one with Christ, and Christ one with him,” Perkins says.19 All of Perkins’s references to faith as an “instrument” or “hand” must be understood in this context. Faith is a gift of God’s sovereign pleasure that moves man to respond to Christ through the preaching of the word.

Perkins’s use of the term “instrument” or “hand” conveys the simultaneously passive and active role of faith in this redemptive activity. As Hideo Oki writes, “The connotation of ‘instrument’ suggests activity. This activity, however, is never simply ‘positive’; on the contrary, it means that when it is most active, then it is moved and used by something other and higher than itself. Thus, in the midst of activity there is passivity, and in the midst of passivity it [is] most efficient in activity.”20

This is precisely what Perkins means. Initially, faith is the passive “instrument” or “hand” granted by God to the sinner to receive Jesus Christ. Yet precisely at the moment when Christ is received, faith responds to the gift of grace. Thus the response is most active when it has completely yielded to and is centered in the person it has received.

This concept of faith, within the context of covenant, is the genius of

Perkins's theology. His intense concern for the godly life rises alongside his equally intense concern to maintain the Reformation principle of salvation by grace alone. For man is never granted salvation on account of his faith but by means of faith.

Faith and Assurance At times, Perkins seems to equate faith and assurance. He writes, "True faith is both an infallible assurance, and a particular assurance of the remission of sins, and of life everlasting."[21] On other occasions, he tends to separate faith and assurance: "Whereas some are of the opinion that faith is assurance or confidence, that seems to be otherwise; for it is a fruit of faith," he says.[22]

Such apparent contradictions have led some scholars to assert that either Perkins was not a first-rate theologian or that he simply wrote from his limited context.[23] When opposing Roman Catholicism, scholars say, Perkins confirmed the certainty of faith. But when he spoke against the strong assertions of the early Reformers on assurance, Perkins tended to divorce faith and assurance.[24] Such views cannot be maintained in light of Perkins's own thought. Perkins knew very well what he was saying; he intended to teach that assurance both is and is not part of the essence of faith, depending on what kind of assurance is being discussed.

To understand Perkins on faith and assurance, we must understand the two ways he used the term *assurance.* The first kind of assurance, which is more objective in nature, enables a sinner to be assured that his sins are pardonable apart from the personal realization of such forgiveness. The second kind, which is more subjective in nature, is the full assurance that enables the sinner to believe that God, for Christ's sake, has personally forgiven all his sins.

Then, too, Perkins (as well as many later Puritans) tends to categorize the operation of faith "into a succession of recognizable stages" beyond what Calvin did.[25] For example, in *A Golden Chaine,* Perkins presents us with "five degrees in the work of faith," all of which, he says, are "linked and united together":

- Knowing the gospel by the illumination of God's Spirit.
- Hoping for pardon, "whereby a sinner, albeit he yet feeleth not that his sins are certainly pardoned, yet he believeth that they are pardonable."
- Hungering and thirsting after the grace offered in Christ Jesus, "as a man hungereth and thirsteth after meat and drink."
- Approaching the throne of grace, "that there flying from the terrour of the Law, he may take hold of Christ, and find favor with God." The first part of this is "an humble confession of our sins before God particularly, if they be

known sins, and generally, if unknown." The second part is "craving pardon of some sins, with unspeakable sighs, and in perseverance."

• Applying, by the Spirit's persuasion, "unto himself those promises which are made in the Gospel."[26]

These degrees of faith are dependent upon the preaching of the Word of God as well as the inner witness of the Spirit, which leads to a personal assurance of having been "grasped" by God's grace to embrace Christ. In this context, Perkins developed a major contribution to the discussion of assurance by making a distinction between *weak faith* and *strong faith.* Weak faith is like a grain of mustard seed or smoking flax, "which can neither give out heat nor flame, but only smoke." Weak faith has low levels of illuminating knowledge and of applying to the promises (the first and last steps of saving faith mentioned above), but shows itself by "a serious desire to believe, & an endeavor to obtain Gods favor." God does not despise even the least spark of faith, Perkins said, providing the weak believer diligently uses the means of grace to increase it. He must "stir up his faith by meditation of Gods word, serious prayers, and other exercises belonging unto faith."[27]

For Perkins, even weak faith is a "certain and true" persuasion, since there can be no doubt in faith, but strong faith is a "full persuasion of the heart, whereby a Christian much more firmly taking hold on Christ Jesus, maketh full and resolute account that God loveth him, and that he will give to him by name, Christ and all his graces pertaining to eternal life."[28] Strong faith, or "full assurance," claims God's promises as a personal possession, remembering that evangelical promises exclude only those who exclude themselves (Isa. 55:1; Matt. 11:28). It accomplishes this by meditating upon the promises concerning Christ's life and work and by depending on the Spirit to stir up and increase faith.[29] Then, Perkins says, "to believe in Christ, is not confusedly to believe that he is a Redeemer of mankind, but withal to believe that he is my Savior, and I am elected, justified, sanctified, and shall be glorified."[30]

Several thoughts converge in Perkins. First, in weak faith, God's promises are seen, but the believer does not yet have freedom to appropriate them by the co-witness of the Spirit in his conscience. Second, the distinction between weak and strong faith is helpful pastorally to keep weak believers from despair by encouraging them to believe that weak faith is still authentic faith. Third, each believer must seek for strong faith, but the typical believer will not receive it "at the first, but in some continuance of time, after that for a long space he hath kept a good conscience before God, and before men: and hath had divers experiences of Gods love and favor towards him in Christ."[31] Finally, in strong faith, full

assurance arises not as intrinsic to faith, but as a fruit of faith, ascertained by a personal, Spirit-worked appropriation of the benefits of faith.

Grounds of Assurance Perkins proposed three grounds of assurance: the promises of the gospel, which are ratified by God's covenant; the testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God; and the fruits of sanctification. These three interconnected grounds, all of which depend on the applying ministry of the Holy Spirit, are so important that Perkins called them "the hinge upon which the gate of heaven turns."[32] The believer ought always strive to grow in assurance by seeking as large a degree of assurance as possible from all three of these grounds or means.

The promises of God are always the primary ground of assurance. When embraced by faith, the promises of God bear the fruits of sanctification and often are combined with the witnessing testimony of the Spirit. The believer may have difficulty at times realizing one or more of these grounds in his own experience. That is particularly true of the testimony of the Spirit. Yet that ought not to distress the believer, Perkins says, because even when the Spirit's testimony is not felt deeply enough to persuade the believer of his election, the effects of the Spirit will be demonstrated in sanctification.

Perkins spent the most time expounding assurance by means of sanctification in part because this kind of assurance generated the most pastoral questions. Perkins asserted that the works of sanctification are a "sign or document of faith," not a principal ground or basis for it. Nevertheless, these works are important for assuring the believer of his election and salvation in Christ, for they provide assurance of the essential effects of justification. The believer can draw comfort from their heat even if no flame is visible.[33] These works are also benefits of Christ, and so they direct the believer's gaze to Christ. In no way do they justify the believer before God, but as Perry Miller says, "The chief value of a Puritan's actions in his own eyes was symbolical; they were emblems of his election rather than ethically commendable deeds…. His principal interest in behavior was its source."[34]

Perkins thus moves down his golden chain from God's assurance of salvation in eternity to the elect's assurance in time. The chain of divine sovereignty, covenant-establishment, mediatorial satisfaction, faith in Christ, and the Spirit's corroborating witness result in assurance within the soul through a "practical syllogism" *(syllogismus practicus).* A practical syllogism, simply put, is a conclusion drawn from an action. It involves a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. The basic form of the syllogism Perkins uses to explain salvation is as follows:

Major premise: Only those who repent and believe in Christ alone for salvation are children of God.

Minor premise: By the gracious work of the Spirit, I repent and believe in Christ alone for salvation.

Conclusion: Therefore I am a child of God.[35]

Though assurance by syllogism provides secondary grounds of assurance dependent on the primary grounds (the sovereign work of the Father, the redeeming work of the Son, and the applying work of the Spirit), such assurance is nonetheless real. J. I. Packer says, "In my opinion, Perkins was right, first to analyse conscience as operating by practical syllogisms, and second to affirm that scriptural self-examination will ordinarily yield the Christian solid grounds for confidence as to his or her regeneration and standing with God."[36]

Perkins stressed that the human spirit's syllogistic response to God's saving work does not degrade Christ in any way. Rather, it magnifies the unbreakable strength of God's golden chain of salvation merited by the Son and applied by His Spirit. Though one might argue that Perkins links these secondary grounds of assurance to a personal profession of faith, these grounds are only valid as evidence of the primary grounds. The smoke of sanctification must rise from the fire of grace; therefore, works, when evidenced as the fruits of grace, "certify election and salvation."[37] Perkins maintains, as did Calvin, that works do not save the elect but often succeed in assuring the elect. Works are the evidence of election, not the cause of it.[38] Scholars who assert that assurance is essential to faith in Christ and that sanctification cannot forward assurance in any way are guilty, as Andrew Woolsey says, of separating Christ and His benefits.[39]

In his writings, Perkins lists various marks or works of sanctification that the believer, in dependency on the Spirit, can use syllogistically. Here is one such list:

> I. To feel our wants, & in the bitterness of heart to bewail the offense of GOD in every sin. II. To strive against the flesh, that is, to resist, and to hate the ungodly motions thereof, and with grief to think them burdensome & troublesome. III. To desire earnestly and vehemently the grace of GOD, and merit of Christ to obtain eternal life. IV. When it is obtained, to account it a most precious jewel. Phil. 3.8. V. To love the minister of Gods word, in that he is a minister, & a Christian, in that he is a Christian: and for that cause, if need require, to be ready to spend our blood with them. Matth. 10.42. 1 Joh. 3.16. V. To call upon GOD earnestly, and with tears. VII. To desire and love Christs coming and the day of iudgement, that an end may be made of the days of sin. VIII. To flee all occasions of sin, and seriously to endeavor to

> come to newness of life. IX. To persevere in these things to the last gasp of life.[40]

If a believer has, even to a small degree, experienced some of these marks of grace, he can be assured that he is being sanctified by the Spirit of God. In turn, since the entire golden chain of salvation—election, vocation, faith, justification, sanctification, and eternal glorification, etc.—are "inseparable companions," the believer "may infallibly conclude in his own heart, that he hath, and shall have interest in all the other in his due time."[41]

Mark Shaw summarizes Perkins,

> The child of God can grab that link [of sanctification, or good works] in the golden chain and feel with certainty the tug of all the rest…. [Perkins's] general principle is clear: grab any part of the *ordo salutis* within reach and you have the whole chain. Anyone clutching the middle links (the covenant of grace, justification by faith, and sanctification by the Spirit) can be assured of possessing the end links (election and glorification).[42]

It is impossible for the human will to foil the divine decree. Knowing that breeds certainty—not uncertainty—even in the weakest of saints. Assurance is assurance because election is the sinner's solid hope. As Dewey Wallace writes,

> The piety of predestinarian grace as an experience was particularly focused on providing assurance and certainty, as anxieties dissolved in the experience of being seized, in spite of one's unworthiness, as one of the chosen of that awesome yet gracious number upon which one was totally dependent. It must be remembered that the powerful religious experience was always that of being chosen, not of being left out, and thus certainty and reassurance, not despair, were derived from the unique logic of this way-of-being-religious.[43]

How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God, or No Having given an overview of Perkins's doctrine of assurance of faith, let us now examine his short treatise *A Case of Conscience, The Greatest That Ever Was: How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God, or No.* This treatise (not counting the attached article by Jerome Zanchius)[44] is six folio pages in length[45] and primarily consists of a dialogue between the living church and the apostle John. The church, or the believer seeking assurance, asks questions, and John responds to the struggles of the soul with the exact words of his first epistle (Geneva Bible translation). To this Perkins added marginal notes and minor clarifications in brackets.

In addition to this short treatise, Perkins wrote two major works on

conscience. The first, *A Discourse of Conscience,* deals with the conscience from a theoretical perspective.[46] Perkins translates the biblical word for conscience as "co-knowledge" or "co-testimony." He shows that the word itself witnesses to the divine dimension of conscience, for who can "co-know" our deepest thoughts and feelings but God and ourselves? Hence Perkins said, "Conscience is of a divine nature, and is a thing placed of God in the midst between him and man, as an arbitrator to give sentence and to pronounce either with man or against man unto God."[47] Perkins concludes that the conscience has two main duties: to give testimony and to pass judgment.[48]

Perkins's largest work on conscience, *The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience*, went through thirteen English and six Continental editions to become the paradigm for numerous Puritan manuals of practical divinity.[49] In this work, Perkins deals with a wide range of specific cases of conscience, covering man's relationship to himself, to God, and to others.[50] In the first section of this book, Perkins discusses what a person must do to be saved, how believers can be assured in their conscience of their salvation, and how they can be restored when they have fallen. Throughout this section, Perkins reverts to questions that relate to assurance, making it clear that he regards assurance as the greatest case of conscience.

By explicitly affirming assurance of faith as the greatest case of conscience in the title of his shorter work based on 1 John, Perkins is not falling into a kind of subjectivism that ultimately leads to unhealthy pietism, as some have affirmed. Rather, he had a more helpful goal in mind. Perkins stressed that if a person is assured of God's favor to him in Christ, he is able to live victoriously in whatever state he finds himself. Perkins was a practical theologian; he defines theology as "the science of living blessedly for ever." All his teaching on Christian living is based on a good conscience that rests with assurance of God's salvation in Christ Jesus.[51]

In each of these works, Perkins sees a good conscience as the major purpose of John's first epistle. In *A Discourse of Conscience*, Perkins devotes only one paragraph to prove this point.[52] In *The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience*, Perkins summarizes the teaching of 1 John under three propositions:

• *Communion with God brings undoubted assurance* (1 John 1:3–7). If we have fellowship with God, Perkins asserts, we need not worry about God's eternal decree. In Christ we find certain salvation. We may know we are in Him by forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Christ, the work of the sanctifying Spirit within us, holiness and uprightness of heart and life, and perseverance in the knowledge of and obedience to the gospel.

• *Every adopted son of God will undoubtedly be saved* (1 John 3). God's adopted sons will truly believe in the Son of God, will strive to obey Him as Lord, and will love other Christians as their brothers and sisters, thereby giving assuring evidence of their salvation.

• *Knowing the love of God provides assurance of salvation* (1 John 4:9). That love, in turn, will be manifest by our love for God and our brethren.[53]

Perkins offered more detail on 1 John in his short treatise *A Case of Conscience*. When John states that he is writing so that the joy of his readers might be full (1:4), Perkins added, "i.e., might have sound consolation in your consciences."[54] Perkins repeatedly returns to the theme of conscience. He speaks of our consciences not accusing us for sin (commenting on 1 John 2:28; 3:19–21), of the "checkings and torments of conscience" (on 1 John 4:18), and of a conscience "inwardly purified" (on 1 John 5:6).[55]

Other bracketed comments by Perkins are like a checklist of the marks of grace by which believers may be assured in their conscience that they are adopted of God. Here are a few of those marks:

• *Desiring to obey God's commandments*. On keeping God's commandments in 1 John 2:3, Perkins notes that "to keep is not to fulfill, but to have a care and desire to do it, for God of his mercy, in his servants accepts the will for the deed."[56] Perkins is anxious not to set the bar of conversion too high, for the conscientious believer will be the first to admit that he does not keep God's commandments as he should, though he cannot deny his desire to do so. God's acceptance of the inward desire for the deed is most comforting for the trembling believer. At the same time it reaches what Perkins called "the inward heart motions."

• *Possessing sincerity of heart.* In addressing 1 John 2:5, which speaks of the love of God being perfect, Perkins interpreted *perfect* as "sincere and sound perfection being opposed not to imperfection, but to hypocrisy." When John speaks of loving in "deed and truth" (1 John 3:18), Perkins adds: "sincerely."[57] For Perkins, it is impossible to have a sound and healthy conscience without being sincere.

• *Delighting in God and His grace.* In commenting on 1 John 2:13, Perkins speaks three times of the delights of God's children. He addresses fathers "delighting to tell and hear of old and ancient matters," young men "delighting to show your valour and strength," and children "who delight always to be under the father's wing."[58] For Perkins, delighting in God is a key mark of grace,

common to young children and old fathers in grace. Christianity that falls short of delighting in God is pharisaism.

• *Fleeing the lusts of the world.* Commenting on 1 John 2:16, Perkins summarizes the lust of the flesh as "the corruption of nature, which chiefly breaketh out in evil concupiscence," the lust of the eyes as the fruit of the lust of the flesh "stirred up by outward provocations, as it is manifest in adultery or covetousness," and the pride of life as "arrogance and ambition." Because believers live as adopted sons and daughters, they are reckoned as the "refuse and offscouring of the world" (on 1 John 3:1).59

• *Loving one another as believers.* This love is the fruit of God adopting us by His grace into His family. The church responds to 1 John 3:15 by saying, "You have showed us fully that love is a work of adoption." That adoption is possible because of God's love for us. Perkins commented on 1 John 4:12, "That love wherewith he loveth, is thoroughly made manifest towards us by our love; as the light of the moon shining on us, argueth the light of the sun shining upon the moon, of whom (as from the fountain) the moon takes her light."60

• *Purifying of one's self.* On 1 John 3:3, Perkins made clear that believers purify themselves, but he adds that they do so as a fruit of adoption and by the grace of God. In an accompanying marginal note, Perkins says that "a desire, & an endeavor to use good means to cleanse ourselves of our corruptions and private sins is a mark of adoption."61

Perkins reinforced these and additional marks of grace by other marginal notes, such as:

1. "Sincerity of life and religion, a note of communion with God" (1 John 1:7).
2. "Humble confession of sin to God, is a note [mark] of remission of sin" (1 John 1:9).
3. "An endeavor to keep the commandments, a sign of faith" (1 John 2:1).
4. "Love of our brother, a sign of regeneration" (1 John 2:10).
5. "God's Spirit dwelling in the heart, a sign of perseverance" (1 John 2:20).
6. "Perseverance in the knowledge and obedience of the gospel, a sign of communion with Christ" (1 John 2:25).
7. "To love a Christian because he is a Christian or godly man, is a note of God's child" (1 John 3:14).

8. “Compassion stirring in the heart, a note of love” (1 John 3:17).
9. “Works of mercy, signs of love” (1 John 3:18).
10. “Sincere love, a note of sincere profession” (1 John 3:19).
11. “Boldness in prayer, a sign of a pacified conscience” (1 John 3:20).
12. “The operation of Gods Spirit in sanctifying us, a sign of communion with God” (1 John 3:24).
13. “A sincere confession of the Gospel, a note of communion with Christ” (1 John 4:15).
14. “To be like God in holiness of life, is a sign of his love to us particularly” (1 John 4:17).
15. “Our love to God, a sign that he loveth us particularly” (1 John 4:19).
16. “An endeavor to obey the commandments, a sign of love of our brother” (1 John 5:2).
17. “A sign of our prayers granted us, if God do but hear them” (1 John 5:15).

Several marginal notes describe the hypocrite:

1. “Profession without practice, a note of an hypocrite” (1 John 1:6).
2. “To profess perfect sanctification in this life, a note of an hypocrite” (1 John 1:8).
3. “Faith without obedience, a note of an hypocrite” (1 John 2:4).
4. “Profession joined with hatred and malice, a note of an hypocrite” (1 John 2:9).
5. “Looseness of life or the practice of sin, a note of the child of the devil for the present time” (1 John 3:10).[62]

Perkins was keenly aware of the need to set all marks of grace in a trinitarian framework so that they did not result in a man-centered religion. In commenting on 1 John 4:7, Perkins wrote that believers know God “by a special knowledge, whereby they are assured that God the father of Christ is their father: Christ their Redeemer: the holy Ghost their sanctifier.”[63] All assurance is christological. It is based on Christ’s merits (commenting on 1 John 2:12), received by faith in Him (on 1 John 5:4), and patterned after Him (on 1 John 3:3).[64] It depends on the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Perkins viewed the ointment John refers to in 1 John 2:20, 27 as the grace of God’s Holy Spirit that we receive of Christ, which is the fulfillment of the anointings in the Old Testament.[65] In sum, one may know whether he is a child of God by examining the marks of saving grace in his life as they flow out of Christ and are ratified by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Perkins's doctrine of assurance of faith emphasized the covenant, secondary grounds of assurance, active pursuit of assurance, subjective experience, and degrees of faith more than the Reformers did.66 Perkins also stressed the role of conscience in relationship to covenantal obedience, particularly in his practical syllogism.67 In his theology, growth in grace as a sign of assurance was inseparable from a close examination of the conscience.

Perkins did not abandon the Reformers' teaching on faith and assurance, however. Rather, his emphases rose out of pastoral concerns. Though at times Perkins emphasized salvation more than the primacy of God and His grace, he did not shift the ground of assurance from Christ, nor did he abandon *sola gratia*. He differed from Calvin and the Reformers in emphasis, but not in substance.

Perkins was not a voluntarist in matters of salvation.68 He asserted that the conditions of the covenant must be fulfilled, but he also said that God enables the believer to fulfill them. "He that turns to God must first of all be turned of God, and after that we are turned, then we repent," he wrote.69 Perkins maintained that the object of saving faith is Jesus Christ, and the primary ground of assurance rests in the christological promises of a triune God as they are apprehended by faith.70

Perkins's dialogue on First John and his other writings reveal a doctrine of assurance that resonates with biblical, warm piety along with "high Calvinism" and scholastic methodology. Perkins earned the titles of both "scholastic, high Calvinist" and "father of pietism."71 His theology affirms divine sovereignty in the predestining decree of the Father, the atoning satisfaction made by Christ for the elect, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Yet, Perkins also offered a practical, evangelical emphasis on the individual believer working out his own salvation as a hearer of the Word, follower of Christ, and warrior of the conscience. Divine sovereignty, individual piety, Spirit-worked assurance, and the gospel offer of salvation are always in view.

Perkins's emphasis on sound doctrine and the sanctification and assurance of souls influenced Puritanism for many years.72 As J. I. Packer writes, "Puritanism, with its complex of biblical, devotional, ecclesiastical, reformational, polemical and cultural concerns, came of age, we might say, with Perkins, and began to display characteristically a wholeness of spiritual vision and a maturity of Christian patience that had not been seen in it before."73

Perkins's theology did not make him cold and heartless when dealing with sinners and saints in need of a Savior. Rather, his warm, practical theology set the tone for Puritan literature on assurance of faith and a host of other doctrines

that would pour forth from the presses in the seventeenth century. The projected reprinting of *The Works of William Perkins* will be a fitting capstone to the past half-century of reprinted Puritan literature.74

1. William Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612–1613), 1:422—hereafter *Works*.

2. J. I. Packer writes, "Puritanism was an evangelical holiness movement seeking to implement its vision of spiritual renewal, national and personal, in the church, the state, and the home; in education, evangelism, and economics; in individual discipleship and devotion, and in pastoral care and competence…. It was Perkins, quite specifically, who established Puritanism in this mould." "An Anglican to Remember—William Perkins: Puritan Popularizer" (London: St. Antholin's Lectureship Charity Lecture, 1996), 1–2.

3. John Eusden, *Puritans, Lawyers, and Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1958), 11; Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560–1662* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), 114; Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 38; Packer, "An Anglican to Remember," 1.

4. Cf. Louis Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 171; George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 48.

5. By "experimental" we mean vital spiritual experience directed by the doctrines of Scripture. For a fuller definition, see Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 2008), chap. 19.

6. Perkins, *Works*, 1:421–28.

7. Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 18.

8. Perkins, *Works*, 1:9–116.

9. Perkins, *Works*, 1:353–420.

10. Perkins, *Works*, 1:421–28.

11. Perkins, *Works*, 1:515–54.

12. Perkins, *Works*, 1:627–34.

13. Irvonwy Morgan, *Puritan Spirituality* (London: Epworth Press, 1973), chap. 2.

14. William Perkins, *A Godlie and Learned Exposition upon the Whole Epistle of Jude* (London: Felix Kyngston for Thomas Man, 1606), 520.

15. William Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (1617; repr.,New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 243, 393.

16. William Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, in *Works*, 1:124.

17. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, in *Works*, 1:124.

18. William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, Or, The Description of Theologie, Containing the order of the causes of Salvation and Damnation*, in *Works*, 1:79.

19. William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, in *Works*, 2:18.

20. Hideo Oki, "Ethics in Seventeenth Century English Puritanism" (ThD diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1960), 141.

21. William Perkins, *A Reformed Catholicke: Or, A Declaration Shewing How Neere We May Come to the Present Church of Rome in Sundry Points of Religion: and Wherein We Must For Ever Depart from Them*, in *Works*, 1:564.

22. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, in *Works*, 1:125.

23. Marshall Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 219.

24. Robert W. A. Letham, "The Relationship between Saving Faith and Assurance of Salvation" (ThM

thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1976), 29–30.

25. Edmund Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: University Press, 1963), 68–69.

26. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:79–80.

27. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:80.

28. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:80.

29. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:87.

30. William Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience: Wherein Is Set Downe the Nature, Properties, and Differences Thereof: As Also the Way to Get and Keepe Good Conscience*, in *Works*, 1:523.

31. William Perkins, *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration, Whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace*, in *Works*, 1:367.

32. Perkins, *Galatians*, 278.

33. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:82, 115.

34. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 52.

35. Cf. Robert T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 71; Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 65–72, 131–41.

36. Packer, "An Anglican to Remember," 19.

37. Ian Breward, "The Significance of William Perkins," *Journal of Religious History* 4, no. 2 (1966): 123.

38. Gordon J. Keddie, "'Unfallible Certenty of the Pardon of Sinne and Life Everlasting': The Doctrine of Assurance in the Theology of William Perkins," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 48 (1976): 30–44; Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 105–18.

39. Andrew Alexander Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1988), 2:212.

40. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:113.

41. Perkins, *William Perkins, 1558–1602, English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: "A Discourse of Conscience" and "the Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience,"* ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraaf, 1966), 111–12.

42. Mark R. Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins" (PhD diss., Westminister Theological Seminary, 1981), 166.

43. Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 195–96.

44. Jerome Zanchius, or Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), was an Italian Reformed theologian who taught in Strasburg and Heidelberg. Zanchius emphasized three testimonies to the believer's salvation: the Spirit of God, which 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, Perkins shows that he will not stray beyond the boundaries already established by Continental Reformed theology (Perkins, *Works*, 1:429–31).

45. Perkins, *Works*, 1:423–28.

46. Perkins, *English Puritanist*, 1–78.

47. Perkins, *English Puritanist*, 6.

48. Perkins, *English Puritanist*, 7.

49. Ian Breward, "William Perkins and the Origins of Puritan Casuistry," in *Faith and a Good Conscience*, Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, 1962 (London: A. G. Hasler, 1963), 3–17. Cf. James F. Keenan, "Was William Perkins' *Whole Treatise of Cases of Consciences* Casuistry?: Hermeneutics and British Practical Divinity," in *Contexts of Conscience in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700*, ed. Harald Braun and Edward Vallance (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 29. Keenan concludes that Perkins's work is best classified as a spiritual directory rather than as casuistry, and argues

that its uniqueness was not in its genre so much as in its broad scope (30).

50. Perkins, *English Puritanist*, 79–240.

51. Breward, "William Perkins and the Origins of Puritan Casuistry," 14.

52. Perkins, *English Puritanist*, 53–54.

53. Perkins, *English Puritanist*, 114–16.

54. William Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:423.

55. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:427.

56. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:423.

57. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:424, 426.

58. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:424.

59. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:424, 425.

60. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:426–27.

61. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:425.

62. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:423–28.

63. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:427.

64. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:423, 427, 425.

65. Perkins, *A Case of Conscience, the Greatest That Ever Was*, in *Works*, 1:424, 425.

66. Perkins, *Whether a Man*, in *Works*, 1:363.

67. Coleman C. Markham, "William Perkins' Understanding of the Function of Conscience" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1967), 26.

68. Here, "voluntarist" means someone who teaches that the human will can produce faith in Christ apart from God giving that faith to the sinner.

69. William Perkins, *Of the Nature and Practice of Repentance*, in *Works*, 1:455.

70. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, in *Works*, 1:124; *Whether a Man*, in *Works*, 1:363.

71. Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der reformierten Kirche namentlich in der Niederlande* (Leiden: Brill, 1879), 24–26.

72. Richard Muller, "William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition: Interpretation, Style, and Method," in *William Perkins, A Commentary on Hebrews 11*, ed. John H. Augustine (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 72.

73. Packer, "An Anglican to Remember," 4.

74. For a comprehensive listing and annotated bibliography of Puritan literature reprinted since the 1950s, see Joel R. Beeke and Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006). Reformation Heritage Books is presently working on a newly edited, ten-volume edition of the *Works of William Perkins* under the general editorship of Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. Thomas.

Chapter 38

The Puritans on Perseverance of the Saints

> *Did Christ finish His work for us? Then there can be no doubt but He will also finish His work in us.*
>
> —JOHN FLAVEL[1]

Since the Puritans routinely preached consecutively through books of the Bible, or else from selected Scripture texts, and seldom preached catechetically,[2] they did not frequently preach through the loci of systematic theology. For this reason, most of the works of the Puritans—with the notable exception of John Owen—do not deal with the perseverance of the saints as a doctrine distinct from other doctrines in Scripture. The Puritans rather dealt with this doctrine in connection with the doctrines linked to it in Scripture: the order of salvation, saving faith, good works, and assurance of salvation.

The Puritans expounded the doctrine of perseverance as they did all the doctrines of the *ordo salutis*, that is, with an *experimental* emphasis. This allowed them to apply the doctrine to their own Christian pilgrimage to the celestial city. This method of theologizing also has the distinct benefit of making the doctrine easily transferable to pastoral theology in general, and pastoral oversight and counseling in particular.

As we consider what the Puritans taught about the perseverance of the saints, we will investigate the certainty of perseverance, objections against the doctrine of perseverance, the grounds of perseverance, the difficulty of perseverance, the necessity of perseverance, and the means of perseverance.

The Certainty of Perseverance One of the cardinal truths of Reformed soteriology is that the elect of God, called by Him to the communion of His Son, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and delivered from the dominion of sin, are preserved in this salvation and persevere in faith, not by their own merits or strength, but by God's free mercy in Christ, according to the Canons of Dort (fifth head, articles 1, 8, and 9). The Puritans embraced this doctrine fully,

stressing that all who are truly brought into saving union with Christ can never be severed from Him, and will forever continue in that union, with all its benefits and fruits. John Flavel (1628–1691) answered the question, "What is perseverance unto the end?" with, "It is a steady and constant continuance of Christians in the ways of duty and obedience, amidst all temptations and discouragements to the contrary."[3] The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), chapter 17, "Of the Perseverance of the Saints," provides a more carefully nuanced definition of perseverance in its opening words: "They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." The Westminster divines begin by asserting the *certainty* of perseverance, connecting it to other links in the golden chain of salvation. As they assert the interconnection of calling, sanctification, and perseverance, the reader cannot help but think of Jude 1: "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are *sanctified* by God the Father, and *preserved* in Jesus Christ, and *called*" (emphasis added).

The Westminster divines go on to say that no believer can *finally* fall away. They do not say that true people of God cannot *temporarily* fall away. It is important to notice that distinction, because when the divines discuss the difficulty of perseverance in the Westminster Confession of Faith (17.3), they acknowledge that the elect may indeed "fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein." The Puritans did not define this doctrine as "Once saved, always saved," because this assertion can easily be misunderstood to mean that the true Christian never falters in the face of temptation and is never troubled by any lack of assurance. Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) quoted Augustine as saying, "Grace may be shaken with fears and doubts, but it cannot be plucked up by the roots."[4] What the Puritans taught about salvation was, "If you have it, you can never lose it." They also taught, "If you lose it, you never had it." Hypocrites do indeed fall away, but not true believers, Watson wrote, adding that "though comets fall, it does not follow that true stars fall."[5]

The Puritans used 1 Peter 1:3–5 to support this assertion: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, asserts that true believers, in contrast to nominal Christians, are preserved by the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable omnipotence of God.

Watson commented on this passage, “The heavenly inheritance is kept for the saints, and they are kept to the inheritance.”[6] William Greenhill (1598–1671), a member of the Westminster Assembly, asserted, “A man pardoned, and justified by faith in Christ, though he may, and sometimes doth, fall into foul sins, yet they never prevail so far as to reverse pardon, and reduce [him] to a state of non-justification.”[7] Elisha Coles (c. 1608–1688) quoted Proverbs 24:16: “A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.”[8]

Paul says in Philippians 1:3–6, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Commenting on these verses, William Bridge (1600–1671) encouraged his congregation by saying, “God’s *calling* grace doth assure us of his *confirming* grace.”[9] Thomas Manton (1620–1677) wrote,

> The children of God would be troubled if grace should fail; for as grace is sure, so are also the privileges of grace. This was figured under the law; an Israelite should never wholly alienate his inheritance and title to the land: Lev. 25:23, “His title to the land shall not be cut off, nor sold for ever.” This was a type of our spiritual inheritance in Christ, which cannot be alienated from us; he might for a while pass it away, but it is to return again; so those that are made co-heirs with Christ are never disinherited. It is true we forfeit it by the merit of our actions, but God doth not take the advantage of every offence. It is true we lose the evidences that are in our keeping, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost; but the estate itself is undefeatable, and cannot be made [taken] away from us.[10]

The Puritans understood the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints as one of the benefits of the three cardinal blessings of salvation that the believer receives in this life: justification, adoption, and sanctification. The Westminster divines in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC), Q. 32, ask, “What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?” The answer is: “They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits flow from them.” The Puritans generally included perseverance of the saints with four additional benefits or gifts of God that are both objectively true and subjectively either accompany faith or are experienced in the Christian’s life. The Shorter Catechism (Q. 36) says, “The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.”

The Puritan doctrine of perseverance is opposed to that of Rome. The Council of Trent pronounced an anathema on anyone who said that a justified man cannot "lose grace, and that therefore he that falls and sins was never truly justified."[11] Roman Catholicism teaches that if you have committed a mortal sin, you fall from the state of grace,[12] and unless you do works of penance and receive priestly absolution, you cannot be restored to this state. According to this teaching, the Christian is constantly falling from the state of grace by committing mortal sin, then being restored to it through the sacrament of penance. Taking their stand on the Word of God, the Puritans rejected every aspect of this view, denying that there is a divinely instituted sacrament of penance, that Christians must confess their sins to a priest, and that unless they receive priestly absolution, they forfeit the salvation that is promised to us in Christ.

Objections against the Reformed Doctrine of Perseverance No writer has matched the profound thinking, thorough exposition, and rigorous application of the Reformed view of perseverance put forth by John Owen (1616–1683) in *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed* (1654). Owen's defense of perseverance was a response to a treatise written by John Goodwin (1594–1665), titled *Redemption Redeemed* (1651), in which Goodwin denied that God secures the continuance of faith in a believer.[13] John Goodwin (to be distinguished from Owen's Independent colleague and friend Thomas Goodwin) was an Arminian. Owen's rebuttal of Goodwin is helpful for understanding how Puritans dealt with Arminian objections to the Reformed view.

Because Goodwin's work was rambling, repetitious, and lacking logical progression, Owen's rebuttal also lacked structure. Nonetheless, Owen responded to the three major objections Goodwin raised against the doctrine of perseverance, for he believed that leaving those objections unanswered would ultimately undermine the doctrines of grace.[14]

Objection One: The Reality of Apostasy John Goodwin insisted that passages such as Hebrews 6:1–8 and 10:26–39 taught the possibility of a believer's defection from a state of grace. He said that was confirmed by large numbers of churchgoers who were once zealous but then became indifferent.

Owen did not deny the existence of backsliders and apostates. However, he suggested that Goodwin's error, like that of all Arminians, was to assume that all who profess faith in Christ are true believers. In exhaustive detail, Owen examined scriptural passages describing people who fell away from faith, concluding that they had never been true believers. Owen said these apostates

had experienced only a "temporary holiness" that did not change their natures.15 Each time Scripture mentions a Hymenaeus or Philetus, for example, it makes a declaration, such as, "nevertheless, the firm foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:17–19; cf. Heb. 6:1–9; 10:26–39). Thus biblical references to hypocrites, who are the tares sown among the Lord's wheat, are no argument against perseverance of the true Christian in faith.

Before stating his own position, Owen established a biblical basis for perseverance by exegeting Philippians 1:6, 1 Peter 1:5, and John 10:27–29. He then offered the following syllogism to respond to Goodwin's objections:

1. The elect cannot fall away (John 10:27–29, etc.).
2. Some who profess to believe fall away from the faith.
3. Hence, professors who fall away are not elect believers.16

Next Owen explained the doctrine of perseverance in relationship to three potent forces. (1) *The immutable nature of God as well as His promises and eternal purposes*, which extend to His electing love and covenant. The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).17 These gifts include perseverance, for God is bound to His people through His promises, which form the heart of the covenant of grace.18 The covenant then becomes an unconditional promise of grace and perseverance for the believer through the mediatorial work of Christ.19 God's foreknowledge, power, promises, covenant, and immutability are all part of His sovereign, eternal love. And perseverance is part of the unbreakable chain of salvation granted to the elect.

(2) *The nature of grace itself*, which in Scripture always triumphs. Since grace perseveres, God Himself also perseveres with the believer, making grace a conquering power and Christ a conquering king.20 Christ has also granted His Spirit to Christians. This Spirit secures their perseverance, for in fulfilling the covenant of grace, the Comforter will dwell with the elect forever (John 14:16).21

(3) *The integral unity of the plan of salvation.* If the outcome of God's saving activity in the believer is questionable, the entire enterprise of salvation must fail. If the Holy Spirit does not keep believers in grace, neither can He call, regenerate, sanctify, and assure them, for all of these are indissolubly linked.22 Christ must then be only an impotent intercessor.23

Objection Two: Human Responsibility Goodwin's second argument against perseverance was based on Scripture passages that urge Christians to maintain themselves in a state of grace. Goodwin said such texts prove that perseverance

is the sole responsibility of the believer.

Owen's response was that Goodwin failed to see that *obligation does not entail ability*. In other words, sinners are obligated to repent and believe, but this does not prove they have the power to do so. Similarly, God commands His saints to use the means of grace and to persevere in faith, but that does not mean they can do so in their own strength. Granted, they must strive to enter the narrow gate (Luke 13:24), must hold fast the Word preached (1 Cor. 15:2), and must be diligent to make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10), but they can only do these things in Christ, by the power of God. Believers work out their salvation with fear and trembling, not because of doubt or uncertainty but in holy awe, for they know that God Himself is at work in them, both to will and do (Phil. 2:12–13). Owen wrote, "It is utterly denied, that men, the best of men, have in themselves, and of themselves, arising upon the account of any considerations whatsoever, a power, ability, or strength, vigorously or at all acceptably to God, to incline their hearts to the performance of anything that is spiritually good, or in a gospel tendency to walking with God."[24]

To believe, as the Arminians do, that the saints maintain their own faith is to minimize the doctrine of total depravity, for even after regeneration the believer does not have perfect knowledge of what is good, much less the unwavering desire or unimpaired ability in himself to do it.[25] The believer works out his salvation in his ongoing sanctification, but only through God's eternal power, which works mightily in him (Col. 1:29). In short, Owen taught that assurance is to perseverance what perseverance is to divine election and faithfulness. Election therefore must be the motive for perseverance in faith, holiness, and assurance. Owen wrote,

> [Election] hath the same *tendency* and effect in the *assurance* we have from thence, that notwithstanding all the oppositions we meet withal, we shall not utterly and finally miscarry. God's "election" will at last "obtain" (Rom. 11:7); and "his foundation standeth sure" (2 Tim. 2:19). His purpose, which is "according unto election," is unchangeable; and, therefore, the final perseverance and salvation of those concerned in it are everlastingly secured…. And there is no greater encouragement to grow and persist in holiness than what is administered by this assurance of a blessed end and issue of it.[26]

Owen taught what Philip Craig calls "the concurrence of divine grace and human duty."[27] Owen said, "Our duty and God's grace are nowhere opposed in the matter of sanctification, yea, the one doth absolutely suppose the other. Neither can we perform our duty herein without the grace of God; nor doth God give us

this grace unto any other end but that we may rightly perform our duty."[28] So our responsibility to work out our perseverance does not nullify God's promise to work perseverance in us, but instead depends upon it (Phil. 2:12–13).

Objection Three: The Danger of Antinomianism Goodwin said widespread teaching of the doctrine of perseverance would give rise to lawlessness and disregard for the moral code of Scripture. He also said perseverance minimizes the importance of God's exhortations and commands. He wrote, "If it is absolutely certain that God will preserve his people from apostasy, and he intends so to do, why then does he appeal to them to strive and to use the means of grace? This doctrine empties God's every command of all meaning."[29]

The essence of Owen's reply to Goodwin concerning Antinomianism was simple: God preserves His saints *in holiness*. Christ saves His people *from*, not *in*, their sins. Justification is inseparable from sanctification; reconciliation with God goes hand in hand with regeneration, which necessarily results in new life. Rather than promoting loose living, perseverance promises the assurance of eternal salvation by the only path that will get the believer to heaven: the King's highway of holiness.[30] The doctrine of perseverance stimulates love that can only yield obedience, for "it is the Spirit of Christ in the gospel that cuts [sin's] throat and destroys it," Owen wrote.[31] Though a Christian may fall into sin, Christ effectually prays that his faith may not fail.[32] Consequently, perseverance guarantees the believer's continued sanctification and eventual glorification (cf. 2 Thess. 1:3–5; 2:13; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Eph. 5:3–6).

Owen responded to Goodwin's concern that perseverance undercuts God's exhortations to holiness by pointing out that it is the moral duty of everyone to obey God's commands and, further, that when believers do so, their obedience signifies God's work within them. Hence, the sovereign activity of God negates neither the means of grace nor their efficacy. God has created the universe to work through cause and effect. Consequently, no one has an excuse for disobeying God's moral imperatives. Owen explained, "As well might we argue that it is unnecessary for us to breathe because God gives us breath, or that Hezekiah need no longer to eat and drink because God had promised he should live another fifteen years…. Grace does not annul our responsibility but fits us to discharge it; it relieves from no duties, but equips for the performance of them."[33]

Owen thus exemplified the Puritan combination of human responsibility and divine sovereignty in the doctrine of perseverance. Whereas Arminianism affirmed human responsibility in a way that undermined the biblical doctrine of God's sovereign will, the Reformed Puritan response affirmed both human

responsibility and divine sovereignty, while subjecting man's will to God's will. This biblical duality of agency is worked out in the Puritan explanation of the divine grounds of perseverance and the human use of means to persevere.

The Grounds of Perseverance The Westminster divines (WCF, 17.2) also spoke of the *grounds* of perseverance: "This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit and, of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof." This superstructure of perseverance has deep foundations. The Puritans recognized how important it is for a believer to understand the foundation of perseverance while living in a valley of tears.

The Puritans said perseverance is not ultimately based upon the believer's will but upon God's will. They based this teaching upon texts such as John 10:28–29, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."[34] According to the Puritans, the words of this promise and others like it stand upon a fourfold foundation, laid by God and set forth in His Word.

Ground One: The Father's Electing Love The four grounds of perseverance start with the love of God the Father. The believer's perseverance depends first of all "upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father" (WCF, 17.2). The attached proof text is 2 Timothy 2:19: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."Watson said, "The foundation of God is nothing else but God's decree in election; and this stands sure; God will not alter it, and others cannot."[35]

Coles wrote that God's fatherly love toward believers in Christ secures their future: "Believers are the product of his love, both in respect of election and regeneration; and being so, he cannot but have a paternal affection for them."[36] His infinite love will provide for them and protect them without fail. Coles added, "All the natural affections that are in creatures towards their own, are but drops of his immense fullness: a mother might possibly forget the child of her womb; but the Lord cannot forget his offspring" (cf. Isa. 49:15).[37]

The Puritans stressed that our perseverance in faith is based on God's preservation of us in grace. The Arminian approach to God's commands and

man's responsibility fails to account for the way God's sovereignty overarches all our actions (WSC, Q. 11). Coles said the saints' perseverance must be set in the context of the all-controlling providence of God, which never fails to accomplish His purposes (Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:35).38 The labors of a child of God to persevere ultimately depend not on the child's human strength but on the power of his heavenly Father. Watson wrote, "It is not your holding God, but his holding us, that preserves us. When a boat is tied to a rock, it is secure; so, when we are fast tied to the Rock of Ages, we are impregnable."39 Our perseverance is grounded in God's love and election, as they come to fruition in His works of creation, redemption, and providence.

Ground Two: Christ's Merit and Intercession The Westminster divines said the perseverance of the saints is also based on "the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ" (WCF, 17.2). They cite texts such as the following:

- Hebrews 9:14–15: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that…they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance," and,
- Hebrews 7:25: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The Puritans said our union with Christ cannot be dissolved. Watson explained, "If one believer may be broken off from Christ, then, by the same rule, why not another? Why not all? And so Christ would be a head without a body."40 Christ will not let His people be sundered from Him, anymore than a head will willingly be cut off from its body or a husband from his wife. Hosea 2:19 says, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies." Watson explained, "God does not marry his people unto himself and then divorce them; he hates putting away (Mal. 2:16). God's love ties the marriage-knot so fast that neither death nor hell can break it asunder."41

The Puritans taught that the merit or value of the sacrifice Christ made at the cross guarantees that those for whom He died will be eternally saved. On the nature of Christ's purchase of believers, Watson asked the rhetorical question, "Would Christ, think ye, have shed his blood that we might believe in him for a while, and then fall away? Do we think Christ will lose his purchase?"42 Obadiah Sedgwick (c. 1600–1658) wrote,

> Hath Jesus Christ our Mediator confirmed the covenant by his death! Then O Christian, keep up thy faith, and draw out thy faith, and exceedingly rejoice in Christ; for thy estate is sure, and thy soul is sure, and thy salvation is sure, all is sure, because all is surely confirmed by the death of Christ: the death of Christ was a ratification to the whole testament, to the whole covenant, and to every part and tittle of it: and as sure as Christ hath died, so sure art thou to enjoy all that God hath covenanted with thee for there shall not fail one word of all the good [which he] hath promised.[43]

The Puritans viewed the intercessory work of Christ as our high priest as integral to the believer's perseverance in faith. Owen said Christ's prayer in John 17 is "a manifest declaration on earth of that which Christ lives in heaven to do."[44] Owen said Christ's intercession for His people must prevail because He prays for the very things the Father has willed and sealed in the covenant of redemption, and Christ has already fulfilled His responsibilities in that covenant:

> That which the Lord Jesus, as mediator, requesteth and prayeth for continually of the Father, according to his mind, in order to the accomplishment of the promises made to him and covenant with him (all his desires being bottomed upon this exact, perfect performance of the whole will of God, both in doing and suffering), that shall certainly be accomplished and brought to pass; but thus, in this manner, upon these accounts, doth the Lord Jesus intercede for the perseverance of believers, and their preservation in the love of the Father unto the end: therefore, they shall undoubtedly be so preserved.[45]

William Gurnall (1616–1679) put it in much more personal terms: "Does Christ pray for us? Yea, does He not live to pray for us? Oh, how can children of so many prayers, nay of such prayers, perish? Say not, your weak faith shall perish, till you hear that Christ has left praying, or meets with a repulse."[46] Christ's praying for us does not encourage us to be lazy or indifferent, however. Gurnall said, "Christ's prayers in heaven for His saints are all heard already, but the return of them is reserved to be enclosed in the answer God sends to their own prayers. A Christian cannot in faith expect to receive the mercies Christ prays for in heaven, so long as he lives in the neglect of his duty on earth."[47] We persevere in grace because of the Father's eternal love and election, but also because of the value of Christ's work on the cross and His continual intercession for us.

Ground Three: The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit The Westminster divines said perseverance depends, thirdly, "upon the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of

God within them" (WCF, 17.2). Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) said, "There are none that hold out but those that have the Spirit of God to be their teacher and persuader."[48] Watson says, "The reason men persevere not in religion, is for want of a vital principle; a branch must needs wither that has no root to grow upon."[49]

In Ephesians 1:13–14, Paul tells believers that they "were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." John Owen wrote, "To have this stamp of the Holy Ghost, so as to be an evidence unto the soul that it is accepted with God, is to be sealed by the Spirit; taking the metaphor from the nature of sealing."[50] In response to the question, "What is the privilege of being sealed with the Spirit?" Flavel said, "Consider the designs and aims of the Spirit in his sealing thy soul, which are, 1. To secure heaven to thee for ever, 2. As intermediate thereunto, to bring very much of heaven into thy soul, in the way to it; indeed to give thee two heavens, whilst many others suffer two hells."[51] Owen wrote,

> Men set their seals on that which they appropriate and desire to keep safe for themselves. So, evidently, in this sense are the servants of God said to be sealed (Rev. 7:4); that is, marked with God's mark, as his peculiar ones, —for this sealing answers to the setting of the mark (Ezek. 9:4). Then are believers sealed, when they are marked for God to be heirs of the purchased inheritance, and to be preserved to the day of redemption. Now, if this be the sealing intended, it denotes not an act of sense in the heart, but of security to the person. The Father gives the elect into the hands of Christ to be redeemed; having redeemed them, in due time they are called by the Spirit, and marked for God, and so give up themselves to the hands of the Father.[52]

The ground of perseverance is closely connected with the Word of God which abides in us, for the Word of God and the Spirit of God are always closely connected. The apostle John said, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). The Puritans said that to correctly understand this passage, we must first examine its broader context: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8–9). Clearly, 1 John 3:9 is speaking of a radical break with sin in a believer, but not a perfect sinlessness. John Trapp (1601–1669) commented, "He sinneth not totally and finally, he cannot so fall as apostates; for the seed of God abideth in

him."[53] Owen said, "The scope and intendment of the apostle in the place is, to give a discriminating character of the children of God and the children of the devil."[54]

The apostle John in 1 John 5:4 writes, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith" (emphasis added). Gurnall wrote, "Mark from whence the victory is dated, even from his birth: there is victory sown in his new nature, even that seed of God which will keep him from being swallowed up by sin or Satan."[55]

Ground Four: The Covenant of Grace The fourth ground cited is "the nature of the covenant of grace" (WCF, 17.2). The agreement of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity is intimately connected with God's covenant mercies to us because in the covenant God revealed the order of the cooperative work of the Trinity through the incarnate Mediator. John Owen wrote, "The *principium essendi* [principle of its being] of this truth [of perseverance], if I may so say, is in the decrees and purposes of God; the *principium cognoscendi* [principle of knowing it], in his covenant, promise, and oath, which also add much to the real stability of it, the truth and faithfulness of God in them being thereby particularly engaged therein."[56]

God revealed to David "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure," says 2 Samuel 23:5. Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) called this "a sure and eternal covenant bottomed upon infinite love."[57] God promises to all believers, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3). The covenant promises that God will be faithful to His people, and He will ensure their faithfulness to Him. Oliver Heywood (1630–1702) wrote, "But may they not depart from God? No, not totally and finally, 'for God hath put his fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from him'" (Jer. 32:40).[58] Gurnall said of the parallel passage in Ezekiel 36:27, "He does not say they shall have His Spirit *if* they will walk in His statutes; no, His Spirit shall *cause* them to do it."[59]

Solid Ground for Hope Standing upon these grounds, the Puritans said, the Christian's hope is solid, substantial, and certain. David Dickson (c. 1583–1662), in refuting errors related to the doctrine of perseverance, gave eleven reasons to support his affirmative answer to the question "Do not the Papists, Socinians, Arminians, and some ringleaders among the Quakers err, who maintain, That the saints may totally and finally fall away?" They include the following:

1. The saints are built upon a rock, and not upon sand. Therefore, when

temptations of any kind assault, they can never fail, nor can the gates of hell prevail against them (Matt. 7:24; 16:16, 18).

2. He that hath begun a good work in the saints, will finish it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

3. Paul says nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35, 38–39).

4. They that fall away have never had true justifying faith (Luke 8:4–15; 1 John 2:19).

5. It is impossible for the elect to be seduced (Matt. 24:24).

6. They that believe in the Son of God have life eternal (1 John 5:13; John 6:47, 54, 58); and they that have passed from death to life, shall never thirst nor hunger any more (John 6:35).

7. God hath promised in his covenant, that though he may chastise his own children for their faults, yet he will never take away his mercy and lovingkindness from them (Ps. 89:30–34; Jer. 32:38–40).

8. That golden chain, that Paul speaks of, cannot be broken (Rom. 8:30), whom he did predestinate, them he also called, *etc.*

9. Christ says, This is the Father's will, which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I shall lose nothing (John 6:39).

10. We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5).

11. He hath prayed for us, that our faith fail not (Luke 22:32; John 17:20).[60]

Having set forth these grounds for perseverance, the Westminster divines concluded, "from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof" (WCF, 17.2). The Puritans held as a consequence that, by the exercise of faith upon these objective truths, the Christian can experience the subjective full "assurance of grace and salvation" (WCF, 18). Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) could say, "To suppose that a right to life is suspended on our own perseverance that is uncertain, and has nothing more sure and steadfast to secure it than our own good wills and resolutions…is exceeding dissonant to the nature and design of the gospel scheme."[61] It robs the believer of comfort and forces him to depend upon his own strength.

Owen concluded by warning those who said God's will was dependent upon man's will:

> Notwithstanding the undertaking of God on both sides in this covenant; notwithstanding his faithfulness in the performance of what he undertaketh;

> notwithstanding the ratification of it in the blood of Jesus, and all that he hath done for the confirmation of it;…notwithstanding the seal of the oath that God set unto it,—they, I say, who, notwithstanding all these things, will hang the unchangeableness of this covenant of God upon the slipperiness, and uncertainty, and lubricity [slipperiness] of the will of man, "let them walk in the light of the sparks which themselves have kindled"; we will walk in the light of the Lord our God.62

The security of believers grounded in the covenant of grace is ultimately grounded in God's promise of Himself to be our God. Thus, this fourth ground of perseverance ties together the previous grounds of the Father's election, the Son's purchase, and the Spirit's sealing. True believers may be assured that they will have heaven because they already have the Lord as their covenant God, and that is the essence of heaven on earth. Richard Alleine (c. 1610–1681) said that when the Lord gives Himself in the covenant, all that He is in His glory, omnipotence, omniscience, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, all-sufficiency, and faithfulness becomes ours as our friend, portion, sun, and shield forever.63 Coles said "all the attributes of God do stand engaged" to guarantee that the saints will persevere to the end.64 So Puritan logic presses the application home: Is anything too hard for the Lord? The divine grounds of assurance are very important for the peace of the soul, for perseverance is no easy matter for mere men.

The Difficulty of Perseverance Having dealt with the certainty and the grounds of perseverance in the first two sections of chapter 17, the Westminster divines went on to identify the difficulty of perseverance, that is, the dangers to which believers are exposed in this life. The third section says, "Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein." The word *nevertheless* is an important admission, for with it the Puritans admitted that true Christians still sin and sometimes sin grievously. But the words *for a time* are also added as a contrast to the word *finally* in Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1.

The confession goes on to cite the consequences of these temporary lapses into sin for believers: "they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves" (WCF, 17.3). Here the focus is not on the apostasy of an unbeliever, but on the sins of believers who do not *totally* and *finally* fall away, but who do stumble, sometimes badly. Matthew Henry

(1662–1714) wrote, “Is every fall a falling away? No: for though he falls he shall not be utterly cast down (Ps. 37:24). May they be secure then? No: be not high-minded, but fear (Rom. 11:20). But may they be encouraged? Yes: he will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18).”[65]

John Bunyan (1628–1688) illustrated both the struggle and the certainty of perseverance with the image of a fire burning by a wall. The fire represents the work of grace in a heart. A man, symbolizing the devil, pours water upon the fire to quench its flame. But the fire keeps burning because behind the wall, another man (Christ) continually yet secretly pours oil (grace) onto the fire. Here we see both the conflict of the believer with the devil and the prevailing yet often unseen work of God to sustain and preserve His people.[66]

The Puritans contrasted temporary and partial backsliding with “drawing back unto perdition” (Heb. 10:39), or apostasy. Consider the parable of the soils. The stony ground and the thorny ground hearers listen to the Word and respond positively to it for a time, but they bear no fruit evident of true faith. As Watson said, “All blossoms do not ripen into fruit.”[67] Richard Fairclough (1621–1682) wrote, “It is one thing to fall in the way; another thing to deviate from the way.”[68] He added: “There is a difference between recession from grace, and excision [cutting off] of grace: the first is possible to happen for a time to a believer; but God will never suffer the second to come upon him: for although a believer may fall, yet he falls only as cork falls into the water, which may for a time be immersed, but it will rise again, and get aloft; but a hypocrite falls as lead into the water, which sinks, and rises no more.”[69]

The Puritans recognized the possibility of temporary backsliding, or lapsing into sin, in such notable cases as those of David and Peter. Think of Christ’s intercession for Peter in Luke 22:31–32: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” Watson said Christ prayed for Peter’s faith, “that it be not totally eclipsed.”[70] In one sense we could say that Peter’s exercise of faith failed. His faith was not strong enough to overcome three temptations to deny Christ. But his weakness also manifested Christ’s strength (2 Cor. 12:9), specifically, the power of Christ’s intercession for us. Thomas Manton said, “The greater the pressures are the more visible and conspicuous is the perfection of the divine assistance. More goeth to the keeping of a saint here in the world than to the preserving of an angel; for the angels are…out of gunshot and harm’s way, but we are making our way to heaven almost every step by conflict and conquest.”[71]

What God has promised in Hosea 14:4 is true: “I will heal their backsliding.” What a blessing it is that God heals our backsliding! Furthermore, God uses our

backslidings to bring us to further progress in sanctification. God actually uses our sin for our good, for sin humbles us and creates in us a fear of falling again. Sibbes wrote, “Often times God’s children gain by their slips, which makes them look the more warily to their way forever after that. He that walks in the way to heaven, if he be a good man, he looks to make a surer footing in the ways of God after he slips and falls.”72 Coles said, “Satan got nothing by his winnowing Peter: Peter lost some of his chaff, which well might be spared, and the tempter lost many an after-advantage; for the world of believers have been the warier ever since.”73

The Necessity of Perseverance The Puritans said the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints teaches that all who are truly in a state of grace will most assuredly persevere unto the end. They must do so to gain eternal glory. As Augustine said, “The promise is not to him that fights, but to him that overcomes.”74 Watson said, “The crown is set at the end of the race; and if we win the race, we shall wear the crown.”75 And Gurnall wrote, “He that will be Christ’s soldier, must persevere to the end of his life in this war with Satan. Not he that takes the field, but he that keeps the field; not he that sets out, but he that holds out in this holy war, deserves the name of a saint.”76

Edwards stated, “The want of perseverance is as much an evidence of the want of true conversion, as the want of conversion is a sign of the want of election.”77 John Bunyan encouraged his readers, “Friend it is a sad thing to sit down before we are in heaven, and to grow weary before we come to the place of rest; and if this should be thy case, I am sure thou dost not so run as to obtain.”78

The Puritans were quick to differentiate the biblical view of perseverance from the views of Romanists and Arminians. The Puritans said Scripture teaches both the certainty of perseverance and the necessity of persevering. Believers should find comfort and encouragement in the certainty of perseverance promised to them in God’s Word, but they must also feel the weight of the obligation Scripture lays on them to persevere in their confession of faith, the practice of obedience to Christ, and the pursuit of holiness.

In harmony with the Word of God, the Puritans maintained that a Christian must be actively engaged in the work of persevering in the faith while knowing that Christ is preserving him in the enjoyment of salvation (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 31). Watson wrote, “A man may lose a single battle in the field, yet win the victory at last. A child of God may be foiled in a single battle against temptation, as Peter was, but he is victorious at last. Now, if a saint be crowned victor, if the world be conquered by him, he must needs persevere.”79 Edwards

said, “If Christians cease to take care to persevere, that very thing is falling away.”80

The Means of Perseverance The Puritans said the perseverance of the saints is a *certainty* because it is grounded in the work of the three persons of the Godhead, the abiding truth of God’s Word, and the unchangeable nature of the covenant of grace. The Puritans said that from our perspective, the perseverance of the saints is both *difficult* and *necessary*. Perseverance assumes our active engagement to make diligent use of those means that God has ordained for the achievement of His saving purpose. The Puritans recognized that this doctrine has no affinity with antinomianism. Edwards summarized the Puritan position well, saying, “He that to his utmost endeavours to persevere in ways of obedience, finds out that his obedience and righteousness is true; and he that does not, discovers that ’tis is false.”81

The means appointed by God to be the conduits of His continuing grace for His people are known as the means of grace: “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation are all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation” (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 154). Through such means Christians maintain a living and active faith. Watson exhorted his readers to “keep your faith, and your faith will keep you. While the pilot keeps the ship, his ship keeps him.”82 Owen wrote that a grasp of this truth should promote faith: “The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and stability of God’s love to them, giving him the glory of his excellencies, which in his promises are to be considered, is suited to the carrying on of faith in its growth and increase.”83 And Sibbes said in *Faith Triumphant*, “Faith resting in the power of God quiets the soul, carrying it to the thing it is made for…. Where there is true faith, there is always love, and joy, and delight in the things believed…. Our precious faith is made to embrace precious promises, and to carry the whole soul to them.”84

The quantity of faith is not as critical as the quality of it. Weak faith, as long as it is true faith, will carry a man to heaven. Yet, as Owen so aptly put it, weak faith “will never carry him comfortably nor pleasantly thither…. The least true faith will do its work safely, though not so sweetly.”85 Nonetheless, believers must strive to grow in their faith, and the means of grace are appointed for this end.

The Puritans stressed the necessity of maintaining a good conscience. They said Paul’s watchword in Acts 24:16 should also be ours, “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and

toward man." Samuel Annesley (c. 1620–1696) said,

> There is no greater riches, no greater pleasure, no greater safety, than a good conscience. Let the pressures of the body, the hurry of the world, the affrightments of Satan be ever so great, they cannot reach the conscience. A good conscience singularly cheers the dying body, joyfully accompanies unto God the departed soul, triumphantly presents both soul and body unto the desired tribunal. There is no more profitable means, nor surer testimony, nor eminent conveyer of eternal happiness, than a good conscience.[86]

Maintaining a good conscience compels intense watchfulness, the Puritans said. They took seriously Christ's warning to the disciples: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). They also took seriously Paul's warning to Hebrew Christians tempted to draw back from their profession to "take heed…lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). Watson warned, "Take heed of presuming. Fear begets prayer, prayer begets strength, and strength begets steadfastness."[87] Consider Bunyan's description of the "Man of Despair" shut up in the iron cage in the Interpreter's House. Asked how he came into his present condition, the man declares, "I left off to watch, and to be sober. I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts."[88] The Interpreter exhorts Christian, "Let this man's misery be remembered by thee, and be an everlasting caution to thee."[89] To watch and to pray as one should requires humility before God. Watson said, "The lower the tree roots in the earth, the firmer it is; so the more the soul is rooted in humility, the more established it is, and is in less danger of falling away."[90]

The Puritans knew that apostasy was not a fantasy but a real danger. They understood that the only alternative to apostasy was perseverance to the end. They recognized that though the *grounds* of our perseverance are in the three persons of the Godhead, the *means* are in our own hands, by God's appointment. He will preserve us by His grace, making our use of the means of grace effectual to the accomplishment of His purpose. Therefore they taught that for anyone to expect to be preserved without using the God-appointed means of grace is to insult God and to trifle with His grace. Watson wrote, "As Paul said, 'Except ye abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved' (Acts 27:31). Believers shall come to shore at last, arrive at heaven; but 'except they abide in the ship,' *viz.*, in the use of ordinances, 'they cannot be saved.' The ordinances cherish grace; as they are the breast-milk by which it is nourished and preserved to eternity."[91] Bunyan closed his treatise *The Heavenly Footman* by saying, "If thou dost not know the way, inquire at the Word of God; if thou wantest company, cry for God's Spirit; if thou wantest encouragement, entertain the promises. But be sure thou begin

betimes; get into the way; run apace, and hold out to the end, and the Lord give thee a prosperous journey."92

Conclusion

The biblical doctrine of perseverance is not rightly understood by many Christians today. As proof of this assertion, the fruits of the doctrine of perseverance—diligent use of the means of grace, perseverance in heartfelt obedience to God's will, desire for fellowship with God, yearning for God's glory and heaven, love for the church and intercession for revival—appear to be waning. Many settle for an "easy believism" that grossly oversimplifies and misrepresents the true doctrine of perseverance, while others get used to living without any robust sense of the enduring love and grace of God to comfort them amid the struggles of this life.

The Puritans' doctrine of the perseverance of the saints offers a biblical understanding of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. If, on the one hand, we proclaim a doctrine of "once saved, always saved" without any call to persevere in following Christ to the end, we encourage or reinforce a false hope grounded on self-deception. But if, on the other hand, we teach that believers cannot know if they will go to heaven, then we deny the sovereignty of God and throw our hearers back on their own efforts to attain salvation. Watson said, "A Christian's main comfort depends upon this doctrine of perseverance. Take this away, and you prejudice religion, and cut the sinews of all cheerful endeavors."93 The true doctrine of perseverance enables the church to walk both in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31).

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3. Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism*, in *Works*, 6:206.

4. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), 285.

5. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 284.

6. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 279.

7. William Greenhill, *Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 461.

8. Elisha Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty* (Newburyport: Edmund Blunt, 1798), 307.

9. William Bridge, "The Good and Means of Establishment," in *The Works of the Rev. William Bridge* (1845; repr., Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 4:262.

10. Thomas Manton, *Commentary on Jude* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), 51.

11. Philip Schaff, ed., "Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent," Sixth Session (Jan. 13, 1547), "Decree on Justification," canon 23, in *The Creeds of Christendom* (1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 2:115.

12. "The state of the soul which is free of original sin and actual mortal sin." Donald Attwater, ed., *A Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 502.

13. On John Goodwin, see John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2008); Thomas Jackson, *The Life of John Goodwin* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872); Dewey D. Wallace Jr., "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1965), 242–47. Parts of this section are adapted from Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 167–72.

14. John Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 11:82ff.

15. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:90.

16. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:113ff.

17. Owen similarly treated the everlasting covenant of God, the irrevocable promises and oath of God, and the irresistible grace of God. *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11, chapters 4–8.

18. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:227.

19. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:289ff.

20. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:172–73.

21. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:308–15.

22. John Owen, *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It, Etc.*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 6:145–46.

23. Owen, "The Saints Perseverance," in *Works*, 11:499.

24. John Owen, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*, in *Works*, 6:165.

25. Owen based this on Romans 7:17–21 and John 15:5. *Indwelling Sin*, in *Works*, 6:153–56.

26. John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 3:601–2. Cf. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 4:155–57.

27. Philip A. Craig, "The Bond of Grace and Duty in the Soteriology of John Owen: The Doctrine of Preparation for Grace and Glory as a Bulwark against Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Antinomianism" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2005), 89.

28. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:384.

29. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:243.

30. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:254ff.

31. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:393.

32. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:495.

33. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:280.

34. See Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty*, 307.

35. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 282.

36. Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty*, 311.

37. Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty*, 311.

38. Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty*, 315–20.

39. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 289.

40. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 282.

41. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 281.

42. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 283.

43. Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Bowels of Tender Mercy Sealed in the Everlasting Covenant*… (London: Edward Mottershed for Adoniram Byfield, 1661), 272.

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49. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 288.

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51. John Flavel, *Sacramental Meditations*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968), 6:407.

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58. Oliver Heywood, *Sure Mercies of David*, in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Oliver Heywood* (Idle, U.K.: by John Vint for F. Westley, et al., 1825), 2:319.

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67. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 279.

68. Richard Fairclough, "The Nature, Possibility, and Duty of a True Believer's Attaining to a Certain Knowledge of His Effectual Calling, Eternal Election, and Final Perseverance to Glory," in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689*, ed. James Nichols (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 6:411.

69. Fairclough, "Nature, Possibility, and Duty," in *Puritan Sermons*, 6:412.

70. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 281.

71. Thomas Manton, "Sermon upon Luke 22:31, 32," in *The Works of Thomas Manton* (Homewood, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), 17:401.

72. Richard Sibbes, *The Returning Backslider*, in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 2:427.

73. Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty*, 309.

74. Quoted by Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 287.

75. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 289.

76. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 258–59.

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78. John Bunyan, *The Heavenly Footman*, in *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (London: Blackie and Son, 1862), 3:392.

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81. Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 84, in *Works*, 13:249.

82. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 289.

83. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:404.

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85. Owen, *The Saints Perseverance*, in *Works*, 11:28.

86. Samuel Annesley, "How We May Be Universally and Exactly Conscientious?", in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-five Ministers of the Gospel in or near London*, trans. James Nichols (1674; reprint, Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 1:32–33. This is enlarged upon in chapter 55.

87. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 287.

88. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 32.

89. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 33.

90. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 288–89.

91. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 280.

92. Bunyan, *The Heavenly Footman*, in *Works*, 3:394.

93. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 279.

ECCLESIOLOGY

Chapter 39

The Puritans on the Government of the Church

> *There is…no authoritative way to relieve a Brother oppressed by the major part of his congregation…. There is no authoritative way to heal the major part of a Congregation, when it falls into fundamental errors…. There is no Authoritative way to keep out pluralities of Religions. For if the whole power of Church-government be in the Congregation-Independently, then let a Congregation set up what Religion they think fit…. There is no Authoritative way for unity and uniformity in Church administrations.*
>
> —A VINDICATION[1]

The importance of ecclesiology to the Puritans cannot be overstated. Puritanism was about reforming the national church. Among the Puritans there were sharp disagreements as what form of government should prevail in the church. Historians have continued to reappraise the ecclesiastical landscape of the English Revolution, each new assessment suggesting a seemingly more complex, nuanced (or blurry) taxonomy than the last.[2] For example, Hunter Powell—whose recent work has been an invaluable guide to reassessing Puritan ecclesiology[3]—has shown that the "axiomatic binary conflict model of 'presbyterian versus independent'" has led to "monolithic and static categories," which unfortunately fail to do justice to the variety of ecclesiologies that emerged during the seventeenth century, even within the Presbyterian camp.[4] Moreover, the term "Independent" was not a label that the Dissenting Brethren (the Apologists), such as Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Philip Nye (c. 1595–1672), William Bridge (1600–1671), and later John Owen (1616–1683), embraced. In their *Apologeticall Narration* (1643) the Apologists were quite clear about their desire to be known as Congregationalists and not Independents: "That proud and insolent title of Independencie was affixed unto us […which is] a trumpet of defiance against what ever Power, Spiritual or Civil; which we abhor and detest."[5]

In this chapter, while we acknowledge a complex spectrum of ecclesiological positions, it is nonetheless important to recall that “Congregationalist” and “Presbyterian” are labels that many seventeenth-century figures used of themselves. Yes, they often sought nuanced clarification about their particular beliefs, practices, and terminology—especially in response to the attacks of their critics—but they did not see such labels as altogether hopeless and useless. This is especially important in the case of John Owen. Though he can be found, at times, to bemoan the problematics of the typical denominating terms of his own day,[6] he also (much more frequently) places himself voluntarily under banners such as “Presbyterian” or “Congregationalist” at different times in his life.[7] This chapter will, therefore, occasionally note the complexity and nuances of simple labels and party lines but will otherwise utilize the terms Presbyterian and Congregationalist to delineate the general differences of polity.

Presbyterianism was the form of church government favored by the majority of the Puritan divines. Darryl G. Hart and John R. Muether have suggested that the “interests of Puritans were different from those of the Presbyterians,” as if to imply the Puritans were not Presbyterian.[8] This is a rather astounding claim given that most of the Puritans were convinced Presbyterians in regard to the government of the church. There were, of course, differences between English and Scottish Presbyterians; in fact, some of the Scottish divines had much in common with the English Congregationalists.[9] Nonetheless, the first section of this chapter will examine the general concerns of Presbyterianism polity before looking at the Congregationalist position through the eyes of John Owen, who, because of his transition from Presbyterianism to Congregationalism, is an intriguing case study and representative of Congregationalism in seventeenth-century England.

Presbyterianism

Chapters 30 and 31 in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) set forth the basic elements of the Presbyterian form of church government. On the one hand, the Confession asserts that "the Lord Jesus as king and head of his church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate. To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed…to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require" (30.1, 2). On the other hand, the Confession says, "For the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods or Councils" (31.1). The decisions of such assemblies "if consonant with the word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed in his word" (31.3). Beyond that, the Westminster Confession of Faith is silent on the way in which these basic ideas are to be worked out.

These chapters represent a compromise, albeit one that satisfied the Presbyterian majority at Westminster. As Powell has noted, "They could disagree—and did disagree—over how a synod received its power of jurisdiction, but they could agree that it had binding jurisdiction."[10] The authority of synods was and is today a hallmark of Presbyterian ecclesiology. For a more detailed account of Presbyterian church government, see *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government, and of Ordination of Ministers; Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (1645) and the famous work *Jus Divinum Ministerii Evangelici, Or The Divine Right of the Gospel-Ministry* (1654). This work addresses the subject of church power. After rejecting the various positions (popery, prelacy, Brownism, Erastianism, and the so-called "Independents"), the document argues that the "Proper Subject wherein Christ hath seated and entrusted all Church-power, and the exercise thereof, is Only his own Church-officers."[11] The debate over the keys was the primary exegetical dispute over church government at the Westminster Assembly and thus marks the fundamental difference between Presbyterian and Congregationalist church government.[12] *Jus Divinum* was also written—incidentally, not by any members of the Westminster Assembly[13]—in part against Congregationalist John Cotton's famous work, *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), but most especially against Erastianism. In addition to *Jus Divinum*, there is a work written by the London Presbyterians and spearheaded by Edmund Calamy, *A Vindication of the Presbyteriall-Government, and Ministry* (1649), which also

deserves close consideration as a fair representation of English Presbyterianism. In this treatise, the authors attempt to prove some of the following tenets of Presbyterianism: "That the Scripture holds forth a Church, consisting of divers Congregations; 2. Synods with Ecclesiastical Authority; 3. Subordination of Congregations unto Synods, together with Appeals thereunto."[14] These points will be described in more detail, but first, the role of the keys of the kingdom in the Presbyterian system warrants discussion.

The Presbyterian "Keys"

Jus Divinum takes up a number of important questions concerning church power, particularly the issue of whether church power was committed to the elders alone or the elders and the body of people (*coetus fidelium*). The keys of the kingdom were first given to Peter (Matt. 16:19). Whom did Peter represent? Answers to this question were many, with Presbyterians and Congregationalists disagreeing even among themselves. Even so, Powell notes that some of the English Presbyterians were "horrified by any power belonging to the people," yet the Apologists "found sympathizers in men like Charles Herle who warned the assembly against the danger of pushing the denial of Peter's representing the faithful too far."[15] As a result, many were caught between two extremes. If power does not belong to the people in some sense, then the officers cannot represent the church; on the other side lurked the danger of Anabaptist democracy ("member rule").

In *Jus Divinum*, there is great respect for the views of Congregationalists such as John Cotton (1585–1652) and Thomas Goodwin. Nonetheless, the Congregational view is rejected in favor of the Presbyterian model by use of a number of scholastic distinctions and clarifications. The keys of the kingdom given by Christ to the church were specifically given to church officers (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; 28:18–20). Aware that the Scriptures seem to involve the congregation in acts of "power," the document speaks of an "improper private popular power, which belongs to the People in some cases."[16] This type of power is both passive and active. The passive power of the people is submission to the authoritative acts of the elders, for example, in the act of excommunication. The active power is both the duty of the congregation to test or "prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21) by Scripture and to nominate and elect church officers. However, these powers are not "proper powers," that is, they are not the power of the keys themselves. The "proper, public, official, authoritative power" of the church belongs to the officers and not the officers and the congregation.[17]

The unique power that the presbyters or elders possess for the government of

the church does not altogether exclude the congregation. The authors of *Jus Divinum* make an important distinction between the object and the subject of the "proper powers." The visible church is the object of the power that Christ gives to the church, whereas the officers of the church are the subjects who receive the power for the various exercises of "binding and loosing." There is a further distinction made between the donation of power and the designation of power. The church has a right to elect certain persons to office, but "the Donation of the power it self, is not from the Church, as the fountain, but immediately from Christ himself" (2 Cor. 13:10).[18] Christ thus designates church officers as those who exercise power on His behalf in the context of the visible church. Congregations have received no such prerogative, by way of a positive law, from Christ. The ordinary officers receive their office from Christ and therefore act as the immediate successors of the apostles. That is to say, ministers and elders derive their power immediately from Christ and not from the church. The Presbyterians felt that Congregationalism gave too much power to the congregation, which left the elders potentially vulnerable. But this was not the only point of contention.

Ecclesiae Primae *and* Ecclesiae Ortae: *Ascending and Descending* In his work on church government, Congregationalist Thomas Goodwin highlights one of the more significant disputes between Presbyterians and Congregationalists.[19] Presbyterians believed the visible, universal church to be a political body, a seat of government instituted by Christ.[20] There were two general ways of explaining its nature. Goodwin describes the different Presbyterian views in terms of power ascending or descending: "That it cometh to be a political body *ascendendo*, so making a congregation to be *ecclesia prima*, a church first designed in the institution, and which the institution falleth upon…. Others form the institution to be *descendendo*, as asserting the first principal charter to be given to the church universal, so as that is by institution first a church, and particular congregations have it but by a derived right."[21] According to these views, some Presbyterians argued that church power derived from a single congregation to a presbytery (*ascendendo*), but there were others who argued for church power being devolved from presbyteries to local congregations (*descendendo*). Powell notes that the *descendendo* position "seems to be the position held by those clerical presbyterian ministers, and Seaman, Gataker and Burgess whose positions, distinct although they were, may have reflected residual traces of their Episcopalian tradition."[22]

Of course the whole idea of church power ascending or descending is suited to a Presbyterian model of government, but, against many of the English

Presbyterians, the Scottish Presbyterians rejected these ways of looking at the church, even though they insisted with the English on a universal political body. Congregationalists, like Goodwin, certainly would not have entertained such ideas. Even so, this issue does highlight a distinguishing trait of Presbyterianism: the function of the presbytery or synod as an authoritative body, which was a point of departure from the Congregationalist view of synods. The London Presbyterians argued that "by divine law" (*jure divino*), the synod was a church and thus possessed the keys of the kingdom. Particular churches therefore submit to the decisions of synods as subordinate to their authority. According to Powell, other Presbyterian theologians, such as Robert Parker (1569–1614) and John Paget (d. 1640), who were less hierarchical than many of the London Presbyterians, "believed that those churches who consociated should submit to the synod, but not because the synod was a church itself…. The Westminster assembly split the difference."[23] In order to understand the nature and authority of a Presbyterian synod, a discussion of the Presbyterian view on the universal, visible church is required.

One Visible, Universal Church In *The Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication* (1646), Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) takes aim at the views of men like John Cameron (c. 1579–1625) and Thomas Hooker (1586–1647), who understand Christ's kingdom as strictly or only spiritual, invisible, and mystical.[24] On this view, according to Rutherford, Christ "is not a King to bind the external man, nor doth he as King take care of the external government of his own house," such as the civil magistrate.[25] For the Presbyterians, the church is also a universal, visible, political kingdom (cf. WCF, 25.1–2). That is to say, Christ reigns "politically and externally in his Church."[26] Christ governs the visible church "in his Officers, lawful Synods, Ordinances, giving them Laws in all Positive externals."[27] This was a typical Presbyterian position, and English Presbyterians hoped that the Church of England would adopt their polity, which would have meant a single national church in England ruled according to Presbyterian principles of church government. Owen and Goodwin also believed in a visible catholic church, and Goodwin spoke of a "political church," but they limited the power of church government to the local congregation, not the universal visible church.[28]

In the preface to *Jus Divinum*, the authors present a helpful graph, or chart, that highlights the differences between the Presbyterians and Independents on this question. Among the many differences listed, the authors draw attention to the fact that for the Congregationalists "no other visible Church of Christ is acknowledged but only a single Congregational meeting in one place to partake

of all Ordinances," whereas for the Presbyterians "one general visible Church of Christ on earth is acknowledged, and all particular Churches, and single Congregations are but as similar parts of the whole."[29] Similarly, *A Vindication* maintains that the Scripture speaks of a church that consists of multiple congregations, as in the case of the church of Jerusalem. This is evidenced by the multitude of believers, apostles, and preachers in that church, as well as the diversity of languages.[30] A significant document from the Westminster Assembly, titled *The Grand Debate Concerning Presbitery and Independency by the Assembly of Divines Convened at Westminster*…(1652), reveals much about the principles of both Presbyterian church government and Congregationalism. The first proposition makes the same point noted in *A Vindication*, namely that "many Congregations in Scripture, are made one Church."[31] This point was, of course, debated between the two parties. According to Presbyterian polity, the visible church in the New Testament is denoted in the singular. Thus, as shown above, the Presbyterians favored describing the church as a single, visible, catholic body. In connection with this principle, and in relation to the Jerusalem church, Elliot Vernon reports that in 1644 the "majority in the Assembly concluded that the scriptural church of Jerusalem consisted of many congregations under one presbytery."[32] The Jerusalem church may have started out as one congregation, but as it grew into many congregations, it did not lose its right still to be considered the singular church at Jerusalem, even as it gained the right at the same time to be thought of as the churches at Jerusalem.

So insistent upon the primacy of the universal church were some English Presbyterians that they held that the universal church was the first subject of the power of the keys. Samuel Rutherford rejected this view, but it was popular in England.[33] As Powell notes, the English Presbyterians saw "all power as derivative from the Universal visible church, and therefore whether power trickled down to the particular congregation was not vital, in their mind, to a functioning presbyterian government."[34] In relation to the keys, the Presbyterians affirmed that the keys were given to the universal visible church, which is represented in its officers.[35] That explains their emphasis on the church as a national, political body, with the elders exercising authority over the local church and its members through sessions, presbyteries, and synods as the assemblies of the church.

Synods

A Vindication argues that synods have been given ecclesiastical authority. Acts 15 proved to be a major exegetical battlefield in terms of the legitimacy of synods and their exercise of authority. The London Presbyterians argue in *A Vindication* that the apostles in Acts 15 "did not act as Apostles with infallible authority, but as Elders, in such a way as makes that Meeting a pattern for ordinary Synods."[36] A number of arguments are advanced to prove this point. In the first place, Paul and Barnabas willingly agreed to be sent from Antioch to Jerusalem, "which they needed not have done…had they acted as Apostles, and not as Members, for that time, of the Presbytery of Antioch."[37] Moreover, both Paul and Barnabas were sent to the apostles and what would have been a large group of elders in the church, especially given the growth of the Jerusalem church. This establishes Presbyterian polity insofar as Paul and Barnabas were not sent to the apostles as "extraordinary and infallible (for then what need the advice of the Elders?) but as wise and holy Guides of the Church, who might not only relieve them by some wise counsel, but also set a precedent unto succeeding Ages."[38] Building on the point about the presence of the elders at the Jerusalem council, the authors contend that the dispute was not settled by apostolic authority (i.e., immediate revelation from God), but ordinarily by way of deliberation and searching of the Scriptures. When the whole synod was satisfied with the argument, an authoritative judicial ruling was given. Thus the decree of this particular synod is given by the apostles and elders.[39]

With this view of synodical authority, Presbyterian polity maintains that congregations are subordinate to synods. *A Vindication* uses Matthew 18:15–18 to prove this point. As Polly Ha notes, this portion of Scripture was "central to presbyterian arguments against congregationalism."[40] The premise is that there "is the same relation between Church and Church, as between brother and brother; and if a brother offending, is subordinate unto a particular Congregation; then by a like reason, an offending Congregation is subordinate unto greater Assemblies."[41] To deny the subordination of the local congregation to a synod would be to affirm, among other things, that Christ has "appointed no effectual remedy to heal the scandals of an offending Congregation."[42] As the Westminster Confession of Faith makes clear, synods can "determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience"; they can also "set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power

whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word" (31.3). At stake in the debate with the Congregationalists was whether a presbytery had binding authority over local congregations. It is not that the Congregationalists did not have synods,[43] but rather, they rejected the idea that a synod had been given the keys to excommunicate.[44] Ha remarks that "even if the congregationalists were to have ultimately conceded that synods could play a role beyond essential doctrines, they rejected the Presbyterians' view on the authority and nature of those judgments."[45]

One Presbyterian response, as seen in *A Vindication*, was to list the various defects that resulted from the Congregationalist rejection of authoritative synods, such as:

> • There is…no authoritative way to relieve a Brother oppressed by the major part of his congregation….
>
> • There is no authoritative way to heal the major part of a Congregation, when it falls into fundamental errors….
>
> • There is no Authoritative way to keep out pluralities of Religions. For if the whole power of Church-government be in the Congregation-Independently, then let a Congregation set up what Religion they think fit….
>
> • There is no Authoritative way for unity and uniformity in Church administrations.[46]

The crux of the issue has to do with authority. According to the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists may have ways to deal with these types of issues, but their polity does not allow them to take any authoritative, and therefore effective, action when various problems inevitably arise in particular congregations. Thus, synods are a spiritual necessity for the well-being of the universal visible church. The major difference between the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists centered on the issue of authoritative synods. When synodical authority was discussed, it was inevitably tied to the question of who possessed the keys to the kingdom.

Congregationalism

The limitations of this chapter prohibit entering the choppy waters of the debate regarding the origins of nonseparatist Congregationalism. However, as noted, the ecclesiology of John Owen provides a fascinating window into Congregationalism for a number of reasons, including his transition from Presbyterianism to Congregationalism and his penetrating theological mind that enabled him to provide a robust defense of almost any position he chose. This section aims to explain Congregationalism in its seventeenth-century context according to the principles set down by Owen and others, such as John Cotton, who were much closer to their Presbyterian brethren than the "separatist" movements of their time.

The Key of "the Keys"

Though Cotton was far from being Congregationalism's only spokesman, he was indeed an influential figure for the articulation of that form of church polity in the 1640s.[47] Owen is a case in point. More than once he insisted that Cotton's *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644) was uniquely persuasive for his own move to Congregationalism.[48] He also took up Cotton's defense after the latter's death.[49] Unfortunately, Owen never provided details as to what parts or arguments of Cotton's *Keyes* were most persuasive to him as he converted to Congregationalism. But those arguments that distinguish Presbyterianism from Congregationalism and addressed recurring questions in debates between the two parties must have played no small role in Owen's reevaluation of his own ecclesiology.

As the title indicates, Cotton's work seeks to cut the Gordian knot by addressing the question of the recipients of the "keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19) and the extent of the power they represent. This had become a central battleground for debates about church government in mid-seventeenth-century England. Indeed, Powell has demonstrated that the matter of the keys occupied the main part of the Assembly's discussion and writing in October 1643.[50] All sides agreed that Christ gave the keys to Peter in Matthew 16. The question was whom Peter represented. Did Peter simply represent Peter, as Rome alleged? Or did Peter represent all of the apostles and, by extension, ministers of the Word and ruling elders as their successors? According to Powell it "was a central tenet of some English presbyterians that [quoting Samuel Rutherford] 'the proper subject wherein Christ hath seated and intrusted all Church-power, and the exercise thereof, is only his own Church-officers.'"[51] The Dissenting Brethren, on the other hand, argued that Peter represented the communicant membership of the church. The keys were given to Peter "considered as a believer, having

made his confession of faith, that Christ was the Son of God and therefore representing the Church of Believers, as unto whom all Church power should be first given."[52] As such, they meant that the keys had been given to the church "not as an Institution Political […but] representing both Saints and Minister, to be divided into several bodies" or particular assemblies.[53]

About the same time that this debate was underway in the Westminster Assembly, Owen was writing *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* (1643).[54] In that work, he maintains that "the power of keys" had been given to "the office"—i.e., to ministers and/or synods, but not the "people."[55] In other words, he sided with the Presbyterian majority in the Assembly. This idea was only briefly touched upon in Owen's earliest ecclesiological work but was very much the central issue in the October debate in the Assembly. Not coincidentally, it was also the focus of Cotton's argument in *Keyes*. As we shall see, it is a matter to which Owen would often return in his later ecclesiological works. Therefore, a quick overview of the salient points of *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* will help to explain its influence on Owen and facilitate further examination of some core matters in Owen's Congregationalist ecclesiology.

Summarizing Cotton's Keyes Like the Apologists at the Assembly, Cotton insists that "the key is given to the Brethren of the Church."[56] Having the "power" of the keys means that the assembly as a whole "hath the power, privileges and liberties"

- to "choose their Officers,"
- to "send forth one or more their Elders" for "the public service of Christ,"
- to refuse those unfit "to be admitted unto their communion" and its "seals," and
- to "join with the Elders, in inquiring, hearing, [and] judging public scandals," so as to either "censure" or "forgive the repentant."[57]

Cotton acknowledges that excommunication, because it is one of the "highest acts of Rule," cannot happen "but by some Rulers." The "brethren," therefore, cannot exercise this power of the keys without the elders. But neither can the elders do so by themselves, if for no other reason than they must "tell it to the church."[58]

It may surprise some readers that Cotton's *Keyes* is not opposed to synods. The "Church hath liberty in case of dissension amongst themselves to resort to a Synod."[59] Similarly, each particular church has the "Liberty of communion with other churches." Individuals of one church may occasionally come to another

church for “participation.” These churches in communion should communicate with each other, especially for the movement of members between churches, but also for consultation and “receiving mutual supplies and succours from one another.”60 This communication between churches may also involve the consideration of “propagation and multiplication of Churches,” such as the division of a large church into two churches or the merging of two smaller neighboring assemblies into one.61

One section of Cotton’s work argues that there is one aspect of the keys that is uniquely committed to the elders of a particular church. The “key” of power, according to Cotton, was given to the people, but the “key” of authority belonged to elders. The latter mostly relates to the calling and conducting of the public assemblies of the church.62 Note the uniqueness of Cotton’s position among his Congregationalist brethren. While practically all Congregationalists believed in the unique leadership of ministers and elders within the body, most of them did not arrive at this position by way of Cotton’s view, apportioning a part of the keys to the elders.

Another section of the *Keyes* is devoted to the power and authority of synods. Here Cotton insists that the elders’ collective authority in a synod is derivative, delegated by each congregation represented, and subject to their instruction. But, according to Cotton, this does not mean that elders “assembled in a Synod, have no authority to determine or conclude any act that shall bind the churches, but [only] according to the instructions which before they have received from the churches.”63 Simultaneously, he qualifies that no synod has the power to “enjoin” things “indifferent” to their churches—only those things which are according to the “Truth and Peace of the Gospel.”64 In the *adiaphora* of “worship” and “order,” synods have not “any such power”65 since “Christ never provided uniformity, but only for unity.”66

Also pertinent to the limits of the synod’s authority is the question of whether it has “the power of Ordination and Excommunication.”67 As noted above, this is the real fork-in-the-road between Congregationalist and Presbyterian ecclesiologies. Cotton is judicious in approaching this matter, no doubt fearful that the Congregationalists’ position would be too easily lumped together with the less refined forms of raw “independency” and “separatism.” Nevertheless, he acknowledges that a synodical decision on an ordination or excommunication is a matter that should not be taken up “hastily” by a synod. A synod may choose to “determine, and to publish and declare” a “determination” on such matters, but “the administration of” any determinations would be left “to the Presbytery [i.e., the local officers] of the several churches.”68 In other words, only reluctantly would a Congregationalist synod involve itself in a matter of

ordination or excommunication, and, if it happened, the synod's "determination" would simply be "published." The "exercise"or implementation of any such "determination" would be left to the leadership of particular assemblies since the authority of synods is only declaratory.69

The Nature of the Church: Catholic-Visible?

As noted above, both Presbyterians and Congregationalists firmly believed in the existence of the invisible catholic or universal church—that is, the church viewed as "the whole number of the elect" of all times (WCF, 25.1). It was a different matter when it came to affirming the existence of a visible catholic church. This point became one of the key battlegrounds in the ecclesiological debates among English Puritans.70 Opinions about this catholic-visible category did not always fall neatly along Presbyterian and Congregationalist party lines, for there were certainly more than two opinions on the matter.71 Some Congregationalists, for instance, wholly denied the category. See, for example, the preface written by Isaac Chauncy (1632–1712) to the posthumous publication of Owen's *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*. "The Scripture speaks of no church as catholic visible," claims Chauncy. "The thing itself is but a chimera of some men's brains."72 Cotton also rejected the idea entirely.73 Most Congregationalists, however, affirmed the existence of a visible catholic church, but denied that any structural-political authority attached to it.74

Owen's position was consistent from his first real treatment of the matter in 1657 and thereafter for the rest of his life, but it was not the same as the position taken by Chauncy in his preface to Owen's work.75 Like the majority of his Congregationalist brethren, Owen defines the catholic-visible category as the church "in its outward profession…whereunto they all belong who profess… Christ." It is "comprehensive of all who throughout the world outwardly own the gospel."76 Like other Congregationalists, Owen is also adamant that because it is a universal category rather than particular, it does not have "any law or rule of order and government, as such, given unto it;…it is [impossible], as such" for it "to put any such law or rule into execution." In fact, there is no "homogeneous ruler or rulers, that have the care of the administration of the rule and government of the whole, as such, committed to him or them by Jesus Christ."77 Or, put another way, no "ordinary church-officer" (no doubt distinguishing from the extraordinary case of the apostles) is intended to relate to "more churches… or any other church, than a single particular congregation."78

The question of a visible catholic church was closely connected to and overlapped with the question of the recipients of the keys in seventeenth-century debates. As noted, Presbyterians believed that the keys had been given to the

visible catholic church, as represented in its officers.[79] Therefore, there had to be a national, political, synodical exercise of that authority over believers in multiple parishes.[80] Congregationalists, on the other hand, insisted that there was no ecclesiastical authority and power outside of assemblies in the local church. In the words of the Savoy Declaration, Christ gave the "power for the institution, order, and government of the church" to "particular societies or churches" (articles 1–4), and this gift comes "immediately from himself" and not through intermediaries (article 5). Thus, "besides these particular churches, there is not instituted by Christ any church more extensive or catholic entrusted with power for the administration of his ordinances, or the execution of any authority in his name" (article 6).[81]

Owen's earliest ecclesiological work, *Pastors and People*, uses the word "church" primarily to speak of the universal or catholic-visible church. Similarly, in his brief references to the keys of the kingdom in that work, he assigns their power to the "officers" or "ministers." He even hints, using a play on words, that if the keys were given to "the people" they might use them to "lock [the clergy] out of the church."[82] For some unknown reason, Owen's ecclesiological writings in 1646 to 1648 make no reference to the matter of the keys in Matthew 16, but they do clearly and repeatedly articulate the nature and composition of the church. In his works "Country Essay" and *Eshcol*, he defines the church almost solely in terms of its particular expression of gathered local assemblies. Their membership should be regenerate and volitional, making up a society of visible covenanting saints who appoint their own elders and, with those elders, admit new members and exercise discipline. All signs indicate that had Owen addressed the question of the keys in his earliest Congregational writings, he would have argued, like other Congregationalists, that it is the church of believers who are the recipients of the keys, and not the ministers or officers. Owen's later and more thorough works of ecclesiology do, however, deal with the question of the keys, but in them we see a new wrinkle in Owen's ecclesiology.

The Authority of the Church: Who Holds the Keys?

It is not easy to determine Owen's position on the recipients of the keys. Simply put, he does not comform to the typical lines of Congregationalist interpretation: sometimes he seems to be emphatic that the keys of Matthew 16 have been given to the elders and not to the people, and at other times he seems to insist with equal emphasis that they have been given to the people and not to the elders. To further complicate matters, in anyone's reckoning there are multiple uses of the keys, or several areas in which the keys are to be exercised: for example, the

appointment of elders, the admittance of new members, the exercise of discipline, the ministry of the word (whether in lay prophesying or in pastoral preaching), the worship of the church, and the overall leadership or "rule" of the church. We have already referred to Cotton's approach, which distinguished between the power and authority of the keys—the former was given to members, the latter to elders. Goodwin and Nye suggested a distinction between "Ministerial Doctrinal Authority" (authority to preach and teach) and the "power of Excommunication," which rests in the "whole church."[83] Others proposed distinguishing between the "first-subject" (*proton dektikon*) and "secondary-subjects" of the keys, or between "authority" and "jurisdiction."[84] Another view was that the church received the keys in the first place, but elders now "acted as their representatives."[85] Then there were those who cast their lot more wholly on one side than the other. For example, though Rutherford believed in a comprehensive national church, he asserted that "the Keys were given to Peter representing the Apostles, and his successors in the pastoral charge, not as representing all believers."[86]

In the case of Owen, however, it does not seem that there was either a clear, wholesale acceptance of one particular view or a consistently nuanced, categorical delineation between the two main views. Neither does it seem that this is simply one of those occasions where Owen changes his position. Rather, his approach to the keys is rather complexly, even confusingly, stated in several works, spread out over multiple years. His most thorough treatments of the keys are found in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* (1689) and *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches* (1667).[87]

Owen's lengthy treatment of the keys in *True Nature of a Gospel Church* begins by arguing that Peter's confession in Matthew 16 "was the ground whereon [Christ] granted the keys of the kingdom"; therefore, "all church-power [was given] unto believers."[88] This power and its place in the church body is to be exercised in several ways, Owen suggests: (1) as a place of privilege granted by spiritual adoption in Christ; (2) in meeting together for "mutual edification"; (3) in the performing of "all church duties" commanded by Christ, such as making a unified confession; (4) in the "administration of his solemn ordinances of worship"; (5) in ordaining and appointing "officers"; and (6), a clarifying statement, that it is the church to whom the "right and power is granted by Christ to call, choose, appoint, and set apart persons" for these offices.[89] A few pages later, Owen reiterates: "This power, under the name of 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' was originally granted unto the whole professing church of believers." Here he suggests that the church's handling of the keys has "a double exercise—first, in the call or choosing of officers; secondly, in their voluntary

acting with them and under them in all duties of rule."[90] This duality of the church's calling of officers and their subsequent submission to those officers is, as we shall see, significant to Owen's understanding of ecclesiastical authority.

Owen comments that, to this point, he has considered the matter only "objectively," but it must also be considered "subjectively." It is not clear what he means by this distinction, except that the latter entails the "officers of the church" in "exercise" of "the government in it appointed by Jesus."[91] He gives a similar distinction later on. The calling of elders, he says, "is an act of the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and these "keys are originally and properly given unto the whole church."[92] And yet, they are also given "unto the elders…ministerially." Or, put slightly differently: the "grant of church-power" is "given to the whole church, though [it is] to be exercised only by its elders."[93] This distinction already begins to show the difficulty of ascertaining Owen's exact position. As he proceeds to provide explanations to the above, the picture may become even less clear.

First, Owen insists that the church is always a "voluntary society," and thus the relationship between "a pastor and a flock" must consist in "mutual voluntary" relationship between "one another." Therefore, the "subjection of the church" to those "qualified for office" must always be by "consent."[94] Or as he writes similarly in his *Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*:

> Election, by the suffrage and consent of the church, is required unto the calling of a pastor or teacher…. Nothing is more contrary to this liberty than to have their guides, rulers, and overseers imposed on them without their consent. Besides, the body of the church is obliged to discharge its duty towards Christ in every institution of his; which herein they cannot, if they have not their free consent in the choice of their pastors or elders, but are considered as mute persons or brute creatures.[95]

Owen is adamant that the particular churches must be free to choose their ministers and elders. He is clear and consistent on this point. Sometimes he couches this in terms of the power of keys.[96]

His second explanation about the church's consent heads in a slightly different direction. Now Owen adds that the church's voluntary choice and election of its leaders "doth not communicate a power from them that choose unto them that are chosen, as though such a power…should be formally inherent in the choosers." The process of appointment "is only an instrumental, ministerial means to instate them in that power and authority which is given unto such officers."[97] In *Brief Instruction* the same principle is unfolded, here at greater length and with added nuance. It is worth letting Owen speak for himself for

several paragraphs regarding the elders' rule and power:

> In that the rule of the church and the guidance thereof, in things appertaining unto the worship of God, is committed unto them. And, therefore, whatever they do as elders in the church, according unto rule, they do it not in the name or authority of the church by which their power is derived unto them, nor as members only of the church by their own consent or covenant, but in the name and authority of Jesus Christ, from whom, by virtue of his law and ordinance, their ministerial office and power are received. So that, in the exercise of any church-power, by and with the consent of the church, there is an obligation thence proceeding, which ariseth immediately from that authority which they have received of Jesus Christ, which is the spring of all rule and authority in the church…whereby the elders of the church do come to participate of the power and authority which Christ hath appointed to be exercised in his church….
>
> Though they have their power by the church, yet they have it not from the church; nor was that power whereof they are made partakers, as was said, formally resident in the body of the church, before their participation of it, but really in Christ himself alone, and morally in his word or law. And thence is the rule and guidance of the church committed unto them by Christ….
>
> When, as elders, they do or declare any thing in the name of the church, they do not, as such, put forth any authority committed unto them from and by the church, but only declare the consent and determination of the church in the exercise of their own liberty and privilege…committed to [them…] by Jesus Christ.
>
> The reason, therefore, why the consent of the church is required unto the authoritative acting of the elders therein is, not because from thence any authority doth accrue unto them anew, which virtually and radically they had not before, but because by the rule of the gospel this is required to the orderly acting of their power, which without it would be contrary to rule, and therefore ineffectual….98

Here Owen claims that the authority of the elders is not received from the people, but only and directly from Christ. They are uniquely His "stewards" for the ministry of the church. The "consent" of the church is "required" (in what matters Owen does not say), but this consent is not derived from congregational authority. It is simply a "rule of the gospel." It is necessary to be "orderly"; anything else would be "ineffectual." The keys receive no mention in the above citation, but the emphasis seems to be on the authority of and the sole exercise of

power by the elders.

Further on in the work, Owen returns to these matters, specifically in regard to the important test case of church discipline and excommunication. Here the language of the keys reappears. Once again a lengthy quote will help demonstrate the possible peculiarities in Owen's formulation:

> It hath been showed that this power [of the administration of discipline] is granted unto the church by virtue of the law and constitution of Christ. Now, this law assigns the means and way whereby any persons do obtain an interest therein, and makes the just allotments to all concerned in it. What this law, constitution, or word of Christ assigns unto any, as such, that they are the first seat and subject of, by what way or means soever they come to be intrusted therein. Thus, that power or authority which is given unto the elders of the church doth not first formally reside in the body of the church unorganized or distinct from them…; but they are themselves, as such, the first subject of office-power…. Nor is the interest of the whole church in this power of discipline, whatever it be, given unto it by the elders, but is immediately granted unto it by the will and law of the Lord Jesus…. In this way and manner the authority above described is given in the first place, as such, unto the elders of the church…. And it is that power of office whereby they are enabled for the discharge of their whole duty…called the "power of the keys."[99]

In short, at least in this paragraph, Owen sees the elders as the "first subject" (*proton dektikon*) of the "keys." The exercise of discipline is primarily in their hands.

As he proceeds, he makes clear that he does not agree with the distinctions between "order" and "jurisdiction," or between "ministry" and "discipline," that others had proposed. Rather, he believes that the "power" is given to the whole "office"; and it is all "ministerial," arising from the "authority of Christ committed" to them.[100] He does clarify that the "body of the church" also has an interest in the "administration of this power of discipline." He lists two ways in which this is so: (1) as they "consider, try, and make a judgment" in cases of discipline; (2) by giving their "consent unto all acts of church-power." Clarifying the second way, Owen writes that "though [the disciplinary power] belong not formally to" their "authority," the consent of the people is "necessary for" the overall "validity and efficacy" of the discipline.[101] Further, Owen insists, the people do maintain a "liberty of dissent, when anything is proposed to be done" without "warrant…from the word."[102]

In *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, the topics of "admission and exclusion"

of members are treated together. Owen makes clear here that the basis and exercise of authority is the same for both the front and the back doors of the church. “Both of these are acts of church power…to be exercised by the elders only.”103 Yes, the church body has a “power inherent” in it to “receive into its incorporation,” also to “reject or withhold” its privileges, but in these “actings” of the church, “there is no exercise of the power of the keys.”104 Conversely, the “elders or rulers” have a “peculiar authority committed” to them “for those acts” of “admission and exclusion of members.” In sum, “the key of rule is committed unto the elders of the church, to be applied with the consent of the whole society.”105

Owen’s Position Analyzed

What can be said for Owen’s treatments of the keys in these two important, late ecclesiological works? A number of observations suggest themselves.

First, we must note where there seems to be possible inconsistency or at least uncertainty. The foremost example is that Owen sometimes assigns the keys to the church body based on confession of faith, and other times to the elders as directly from Christ and not mediated through the saints. Sometimes these statements have added nuance, explanation, and qualification in context but not consistently or uniformly so. His contemporaries often adopted their own taxonomies to break down the lines of authority and repeatedly referred to these distinctions when speaking of the keys. Not so with Owen. Thus, it is not clear whether his view is that the keys were given to the church and are exercised by the elders, or given to the church of which the elders are representatives, or that there are distinguishable keys or distinguishable parts of the keys that are distributed between the officers and the people. Perhaps further studies will clarify Owen’s view of the keys. At this stage, however, it would seem that, unlike many others who articulated their views of ecclesiastical power in the seventeenth century, Owen never seems to have arrived at one clear, consistently worded, categorically nuanced description of the keys.

Second, when Owen speaks of the keys being assigned directly to the elders for the exercise of “admission and exclusion” of members, he is more generally identifying with the interpretive lines of Presbyterianism rather than his Congregationalist brethren. Surprisingly, he is also demonstrating that his later position is basically consistent with the brief references in his earliest ecclesiological work, written while he was an avowed Presbyterian; there he assigned the keys to the “office” rather than the “people.” The test case of discipline and excommunication is telling. Almost all Congregationalists recognized the necessary leadership role of the elders in admonition and

excommunication, but the key of discipline (or that function of the keys) was usually tied to the congregation as a whole rather than to ministers.106 Owen assigns this part of the keys to the elders, and only briefly acknowledges the necessity of obtaining "consent" from the congregation. It is the reverse in Cotton's *Keyes*.107 Perhaps Owen's model in actuality functioned no differently from Cotton's or Goodwin's, but the theological/exegetical lines and points of emphasis differ. On this point, Owen's trek into Congregationalism did not uniformly follow any one path and model. Yet it must also be noted that his treatment of the keys probably comes closer to Cotton's than any others, since Cotton also assigned no small portion of the keys directly to the elders.108

Third, in light of this, it must also be firmly stated that there is nothing in Owen's later ecclesiological works that deviates from the basic tenets of Congregationalism. The keys being given to the "brethren" was one argument for Congregationalism—and one not infrequently used by Owen's contemporaries—but the other main view, that the keys were given to the ministers, did not by itself demand a Presbyterian view of the church. Owen is proof of that because, starting in 1646 and throughout the rest of his life, he viewed the nature of the church as gathered, volitional, regenerate, and local or particular. He was also clear and consistent that the appointment of officers is to be handled in the local church and must always be subject to the consent of the congregation. It is telling that there is nothing in Owen's view that directly contradicts anything in the Savoy Assembly's documents.109 He never ties the keys to the catholic visible church or envisions a body of officers exercising authority over multiple congregations. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that Owen's last published work of ecclesiology, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, was a return to Presbyterianism, as some have claimed.110 Owen may be unique in certain ways as a Congregationalist, with a slightly less democratic model of Congregationalism, and thus may indeed have points of agreement with Presbyterianism, but that does not make him a Presbyterian.

Fourth, it is not clear what congregational "consent" would look like, according to Owen, in the life and function of an ideal Congregational church.111 He, in fact, seems to acknowledge his intention to avoid such particulars when he writes, "How far the government of the church may be denominated democratical from the necessary consent of the people unto the principal acts of it in its exercise, I shall not determine."112 In other words, as to just how democratic a church's governance should be—such as whether a mere majority-opinion is sufficient, in what matters there must be consent—he will not say. Rather, he insists on only two scriptural principles for the church's government: (1) that it is "voluntary, as unto the manner of its exercise," and (2)

that it is “in dutiful compliance with the guidance of the rule.”113 On the one hand, Owen speaks of “consent” not infrequently throughout his ecclesiological writings—sometimes even when making his firmest statements about the elders’ power and authority. He also clearly sees “suffrage” (consent expressed by voting) as essential to determining that consent.114 On the other hand, he is regularly critical of what is merely “democratical.”115 He also insists that “where any thing is acted and disposed in the church by suffrage, or the plurality of voices, the vote of the fraternity is not determining and authoritative, but only declarative of consent and obedience.”116 This distinction between “consent” and “authority” for the people of the church seems to be unique to Owen: the people’s consent is “naturally” necessary, but their “vote” is not an exercise of authority.117 Also telling is his advice to officers when their church assembly refuses to give its consent to their decisions or actions. The shepherds must: (1) instruct; (2) warn; (3) wait; and, if necessary, (4) seek advice from other churches.118 This is telling for both sides of the relationship between officers and members of the church. The officers cannot rule autocratically, sovereignly, or absolutely, but must lead “naturally”; the members cannot overthrow the “beautiful order which Jesus Christ hath ordained,” which would tend toward “disorder” or even “anarchy.”119 In sum, it is not precisely clear where the lines of ministerial authority and congregational consent intersect, overlap, and at times conflict in Owen’s ecclesiology and practice, but he is determined to hold the two in tension—a unique tension based on his own blend of exegetical, doctrinal, historical, practical, and scholastic arguments.

Conclusion

A well-considered ecclesiology is one of the most important contributions that Puritans made to the generations of the church that followed them. But like most other theological contributions in the church's history, it was not so much their points of agreement but rather their sharp disagreements and heated debates that have proved most instructive for those who follow in their footsteps. In the mid-seventeenth century, "the godly" were united on the need for a "further reform" of the polity of the church. The Westminster Assembly in the 1640s and the attempts at a Cromwellian church settlement in the 1650s are prime examples of this hope for "uniting the godly" in one national church.120 But in the end, ecclesiological differences—especially between the two main parties, Presbyterians and Congregationalists—constituted an insurmountable barrier to such visible unity.121 Nevertheless, in their desire for Reformed unity, in the passion of their convictions, and in their thorough discussions and debates, we find a model for their heirs and successors to follow. This chapter, we hope, has shown that if any theological topic is filled with complexities for Reformed believers, it is ecclesiology.

1. *A Vindication of the Presbyteriall Government, and Ministry: Together with an Exhortation to All the Ministers, Elders, and People, within the Bounds of the Province of London, whether Joyning with Us, or Separating from Us. Published by the Ministers and Elders Met Together in a Provinciall Assembly, Novemb. 2d 1649* (London, 1650), 31–32. This work was written by the London Provincial Assembly, with Edmund Calamy functioning as a leading member.

2. For example see Joel Halcomb, "A Social History of Congregational Religious Practice during the Puritan Revolution" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2010); Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism, 1590–1640* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011); Hunter Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren and the Power of the Keys, 1640–44" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2011); Jacqueline Rose, *Godly Kingship in Restoration England: The Politics of the Royal Supremacy, 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

3. We wish to thank Hunter Powell for his help on this chapter and his willingness to discuss these issues with us from his soon-to-be-published work. Interested students and scholars of Puritan ecclesiology will find some rather surprising results from reading Powell's work.

4. Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 6. Powell adds that there were "marked, and important, ecclesiological differences between the Scottish and English presbyterians, and also within those two groups" (7).

5. ["Dissenting Brethren"], *An Apologeticall Narration*…. (London: for Robert Dawlman, 1643), 23.

6. John Owen, "The Glory and Interest of Nations Professing the Gospel," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 8:470.

7. Ryan Kelly analyzes this and other shifts or developments in Owen's thought in his forthcoming doctoral dissertation (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam). Parts of this chapter are drawn from that work.

8. D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2007), 6.

9. For example, the Scottish Covenanter David Calderwood was quite unhappy that the Scottish commissioners at the Westminster Assembly sounded like Congregationalists at times. Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 103.

10. Powell, “The Dissenting Brethren,” 244. Interestingly, Powell also claims that John Cotton’s *Keyes* “could have certainly been a compromise document between the Scots and the Apologists, but men like [Lazarus] Seaman and Cornelius Burgess would never have allowed it” (244).

11. [Provincial Assembly of London], *Jus Divinum Ministerii Evangelici. Or The Divine Right of the Gospel-Ministry: Divided into Two Parts….* (London: John Legat and Abraham Miller, 1654),71.

12. See Hunter Powell, “October 1643: The Dissenting Brethren and the Proton Dektikon,” in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 52–82.

13. Elliot Vernon informs us, in personal correspondence, that he does not think that the authors were Assembly members. However, we do know that *Jus Divinum* was written by four Presbyterian ministers, Samuel Clarke definitely being one of them. “I was one of the four Ministers that made the *Jus Divinum regiminis Eclesiastici*; which was Printed three times, and enlarged.” Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in This Later Age in Two Parts….* (London: for Thomas Simmons, 1683), 9. We are thankful to Elliot Vernon for alerting us to this reference.

14. *A Vindication*, 20.

15. Powell, “The Dissenting Brethren,” 81.

16. [Provincial Assembly of London], *Jus Divinum*, 92.

17. [Provincial Assembly of London], *Jus Divinum*, 92.

18. [Provincial Assembly of London], *Jus Divinum*, 93.

19. For a more detailed account of this debate, see Powell, “The Dissenting Brethren,” 83–91.

20. Hence Goodwin aims to prove against the Presbyterians that the church “is not, in the whole, and in all the subordinate parts of it, a church political, and the seat of instituted government.” Thomas Goodwin, *The Government of the Churches of Christ*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 11:179.

21. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:50.

22. Powell, “The Dissenting Brethren,” 86.

23. Powell, “The Dissenting Brethren,” 197.

24. Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication* (London: Printed by John Field for Christopher Meredith, 1646), 13. Defending the Congregational position against the Presbyterian conception of the universal, visible church, Goodwin writes, “It is true, that Christ’s internal kingdom is thus large, and managed by himself, both in whole and in part, and by his Spirit; but that his external kingdom should be such, is inconceivable.” *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:181.

25. Rutherford, *The Divine Right*, 13.

26. Rutherford, *The Divine Right*, 16.

27. Rutherford, *The Divine Right*, 18.

28. See Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:132. Owen argues against the Presbyterian view of the church as a “visible, organical, political body.” John Owen, *Of Schism: The True Nature of It Discovered and Considered wiht Reference to the Present Differences in Religion*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 13:151–53.

29. [Provincial Assembly of London], preface to *Jus Divinum*.

30. *A Vindication*, 20–21.

31. [Westminster Assembly of Divines], *The Grand Debate Concerning Presbitery and Independency by the Assembly of Divines Convened at Westminster…* ([London]: Anthony Williamson, 1652), 1.

32. Elliot Curt Vernon, “The Sion College Conclave and London Presbyterianism during the English Revolution” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1999), 106.

33. See Powell, “The Dissenting Brethren,” 56.

34. Powell, “The Dissenting Brethren,” 91.

35. As a Congregationalist, Goodwin argues that the “whole universal church hath not all the keys.”

Government of the Churches, in *Works*, 11:179.

36. *A Vindication*, 21.

37. *A Vindication*, 21.

38. *A Vindication*, 21.

39. *A Vindication*, 22.

40. Ha, *English Presbyterianism*, 62.

41. *A Vindication*, 25.

42. *A Vindication*, 26.

43. See Goodwin's discussion on synods in *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:232–84.

44. Goodwin comments that if a Presbytery has authoritative power over "many congregations, besides their general relation, they would also bear a particular relation to each congregation." *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:213. On Goodwin's view of synods, see *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:232–84. See also Powell's description of how close the Dissenting Brethren came to Presbyterianism regarding the matter of synods. "The Dissenting Brethren," 225–27.

45. Ha, *English Presbyterianism*, 95.

46. *A Vindication*, 31–32.

47. Besides the works of Owen and Goodwin, other important Congregational writings of the 1640s include John Cotton's *The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church* (London: for Samuel Satterthwaite, 1642), *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1645), *The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared* (London: Matthew Simmons for John Bellamie, 1648); the work of the Dissenting Brethren, in *The Petition for the Prelates Briefly Examined* (London, 1641), *An Apologeticall Narration…* (London: for Robert Dawlman, 1643), *A Copy of a Remonstrance Lately Delivered into the Assembly* (London, 1645), and *The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren against…Presbyteriall Government* (London: T. R. and E. M. for Humphrey Harward, 1648); Jeremiah Burroughs, *Irenicum…* (London: for Robert Dawlman, 1646); Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* (London: A. M. for John Bellamy, 1648); Richard Byfield, *Temple Defilers Defiled, Wherein a True Visible Church of Christ Is Described* (London: John Field for Ralph Smith, 1645); Henry Burton, *A Vindication of Churches Commonly Called Independent* (London: for Henry Overton, 1644); William Bartlet, *Ichongraphia, Or A Model of the Primitive Congregational Way* (London: W. E. for H. Overton, 1647). Also important is the eleven-page preface to Cotton's *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven…* (London: M. Simmons for Henry Overton, 1644), written by Goodwin and Nye for its 1644 London publication.

48. See also John Owen, *An Answer to a Late Treatise of Mr Cawdrey* (1658), in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 13:293.

49. Cotton apparently committed to Owen an unpublished manuscript that was a reply to Cawdrey's recent printed complaints of Cotton's work. Owen saw to the publishing of the work, *A Defence of Mr. John Cotton* (London, 1658), and included a hundred-page preface of his own.

50. Powell, "October 1643," 52–82.

51. Powell, "October 1643," 67. The quote comes from *Jus Divinum*, 67.

52. Powell, "October 1643," 65, quoting Goodwin's *Constitution, Right Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ* (1696). Powell argues that Goodwin wrote this important work from his personal Assembly notes; thus, it represents his verbal arguments in the Assembly, despite its 1696 publication ("October 1643," 55)—a proposal first suggested by Rembert Carter, "The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy with Special Reference to Dr. Thomas Goodwin and the Years 1640–1660" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1961), 14–15.

53. Powell, "October 1643," 68, quoting Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:44.

54. John Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 13:1–49.

55. Owen, *Duty of Pastors*, in *Works*, 13:5, 18–19.

56. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 12.

57. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 12–13.
58. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 16.
59. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 16–17.
60. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 18.
61. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 19.
62. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 20–23.
63. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 26.
64. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 26–27.
65. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 27.
66. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 28.
67. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 28.
68. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 28.
69. Goodwin's language is that "occasional synods" have "subordinate" power. His treatment of synods in *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:232–84 is much more thorough than the *Keyes*, and his view is slightly more limiting on the role of the synods than Cotton's. Goodwin and Nye, in their preface to Cotton's *Keyes of the Kingdom*, state their disagreement with Cotton's use of Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council for the basis of synods (no pagination). Their view of the place of synods is more representative of mainstream English Congregationalism in the mid-seventeenth century than Cotton's. A similar approach to synods can found as early as the 1629 edition of William Ames's *Medulla theologica* (Amsterdam: apud Robertum Allottum), chap. 39.27.
70. See Powell, "October 1643," 71–82, for an analysis of this matter in the Westminster Assembly. Powell argues that this was a uniquely British debate for Reformed ecclesiology.
71. This is demonstrated well in Powell, "October 1643," 71–79.
72. Isaac Chauncy, preface to *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, by John Owen, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 16:4. Several other similarly rhetorical comments are made by Chauncy in surrounding pages 3–5.
73. John Cotton, *The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared* (London: Matthew Simmons for John Bellamie, 1648), 2:5–6.
74. Thus, the Savoy Declaration of Faith reads: "The whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel and obedience unto God by Christ according to it…are, and may be called the visible catholic church of Christ; although as such it is not entrusted with the administration of any ordinances, or have any officers to rule or govern in, or over the whole body" (1658; repr., London: Evangelical Press, 1971), chap. 26.2.
75. For Owen's approval of the category, see *Of Schism*, in *Works*, 13:156, 160, 248.
76. John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 15:81–82.
77. Owen, *Of Schism*, in *Works*, 13:152.
78. Owen, *Of Schism*, in *Works*, 13:126 (emphasis added). Goodwin's treatment of this and the surrounding issues of authority, office, and nature of the church is the most thorough of the Puritan Congregationalists. See Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:1–298.
79. See Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries* (London: E. Griffin for Richard Whittaker and Andrew Crook, 1644), 9–19.
80. See Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries*, 54–62; *The Divine Right of Church-Government*, 13–18.
81. For the Congregationalists, the authority of the magistrate was a different matter, not strictly ecclesiastical; not strictly a function of the keys. See John Owen's treatment of this in *An Inquiry Concerning…Evangelical Churches*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 15:238–47.
82. Owen, *Duty of Pastors*, in *Works*, 13:5.
83. Goodwin and Nye, "To the Reader," in *Keyes of the Kingdom*, by John Cotton, n.p.

84. See Powell, “October 1643,” 54–82.
85. Powell, “October 1643,” 81.
86. Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries*, 18–19 (see also 9–17).
87. Owen, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 16:1–208 and 15:445–530 respectively.
88. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:15.
89. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:36–37.
90. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:40.
91. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:40.
92. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:63.
93. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:63 (emphasis added).
94. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:67.
95. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:495–96.
96. See Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:63–65.
97. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:67.
98. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:499–501.
99. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:514.
100. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:513–14.
101. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:515–16.
102. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:516.
103. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:136.
104. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:136–37.
105. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:137.
106. Another example would be the New England document *A Platform of Church Discipline* [*The Cambridge Platform*] (Cambridge, Mass.: S[amuel] G[reen], 1649), chap. 5.
107. Cotton, *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, 12–16.
108. For example, see John Cotton, *The Doctrine of the Church…* (London: for Ben. Allen, 1644): “Q.30 To whom hath Christ committed the Government of his Church? Ans. Partly to the body of the Church, in respect to the slate or frame of it, but principally to the Presbytery [or eldership] in respect of the order and administration of it” (10). In light of the above, Geoffrey Nuttall’s assessment of the Savoy Assembly is unfortunate: “Many of them carried forward the more radical, Separatist tradition which descended from Browne and Robinson rather than from Cotton.” *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640–1660* (Weston Rhyn, Shropshire: Quinta Press, 2001), 19.
109. While the Savoy’s Church Order speaks much about “power,” there are no explicit references to the keys of Matthew 16.
110. Contra Francis Nigel Lee, *John Owen Represbyterianized* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 2000); cf. William Goold’s comments on this issue in his preface to *Gospel Church*, by John Owen, in *Works*, 16:2.
111. While unfortunately very little attention is given to Owen’s church experience, the recent work of Halcomb provides an excellent portrait of actual Congregational church life during the English Revolution. See Halcomb, “Congregational Religious Practice,” esp. chps. 2–4.
112. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:131.
113. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:131.
114. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:131. Very rarely does Owen use the term “vote,” preferring instead the less specific terms “consent” and “suffrage.”
115. See, for example, John Owen, *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 15:194.
116. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:131.
117. See Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:131–36 for Owen’s arguments that consent is simply

according to nature.

118. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:502. Each of these four points is given elaboration in context.

119. Owen, *Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:131.

120. See Ryan Kelly, "Reformed or Reforming: John Owen and the Complexity of Theological Codification for Mid-Seventeenth-Century England," in *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen*, ed. Kelly Kapic and Mark Jones (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming 2012).

121. England's Presbyterians and Congregationalists remained separate from each other until 1972, when the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church in England and Wales coalesced as the United Reformed Church.

Chapter 40

The Puritans on the Offices of the Church

> *The [teacher] hath the Bible, and the system or form of wholesome words for his text; the other studies men more, and seeks to fit the word to them. And the pastor is one able to discern what is peculiarly fit for men's spirits, and so speaks wisely to men, whereas the other speaks pertinently to truths. The one brings scripture to scripture, and compares each with each; the other deals and divides the word, and brings Scripture and men's consciences together…. The pastor deals with points of practice more, with things to be done; the other with points of faith, with things to be believed…. The pastor deals with men's sins more, the teacher with men's errors more; the one in information, the other in mortification. The one hath more of Christ's priestly office, in slaying the old man…the other hath Christ's prophetical office more imported, in opening truths, as the elder hath more of Christ's kingly office in ruling over men's consciences.*
>
> —THOMAS GOODWIN[1]

The question of what was the proper form of government that Christ decreed for His church sparked intense debate and resulted in lasting disagreement among Puritan theologians. The previous chapter looked at some of these debates and disagreements between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Notwithstanding the differences between the two parties, the Puritans were agreed in their rejection of "popery," the claim of the pope or bishop of Rome to be the head of the visible catholic church, and "prelacy," the notion that one man should be "preferred" or set over others, exercising sole power as the bishop of a diocese or the archbishop of a province. There was also general agreement on what offices Christ had given to the church, both those that were intended to be perpetual in the church, and those that were not.

Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646) sums up the basic Puritan position by affirming that "the Church may have no officebearers, but such as are by divine appointment, which are Elders or Deacons, or more particularly, Teachers, Elders, and Deacons, by which Christ hath provided for all the necessities of the Church."[2] Puritan theologians used various names to denote these officebearers, but they were united in rejecting the claims of episcopacy for the office of bishop. For example, the Apologists (Congregationalists) at the Westminster Assembly, John Owen (1616–1683), and the Scottish Presbyterians were all basically of one mind on the offices of the church. English Presbyterians such as Lazarus Seaman (d. 1675) and Cornelius Burgess (c. 1589–1665) had a more hierarchical view of the assemblies of the church than the Scots or the Apologists, but they were still self-consciously opposed to episcopacy. The well-known Presbyterian work, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici, or, The Divine Right of Church-Government* (1646), affirms common agreement with the Independents on the offices of the church: "Wherein is the excellency of the Independent way of Government? Have they only those Officers which Christ himself hath appointed Pastors and Teachers, Ruling Elders & Deacons? So the Presbyterians."[3]

As part of their case against prelacy and popery, the Puritans set forth the basic nature and function of each office in the local church. Whether Presbyterian or Congregationalist, the local church required ministers, elders, and deacons to function according to the pattern found in the New Testament. Because Puritan theologians were covenant theologians, the concept of the church was not confined to the new covenant dispensation, but had its beginning with Adam in Genesis. Thus the offices of the church are not altogether new to the gospel era of the church but are rooted in the Old Testament. That said, the explicit nomenclature of the various perpetual offices (i.e., pastor/teacher, ruling elder, deacon) is peculiar to the new covenant and will be the focal point of this chapter. Moreover, this chapter will attempt to set forth the basic Puritan position on the offices, but the focus will be primarily on John Owen and Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), though not to the exclusion of other important thinkers on this topic.

Trinitarian Ecclesiology Thomas Goodwin was, like John Owen, insistent on a thoroughgoing trinitarian theology, not simply a trinitarian doctrine of salvation. For that reason, Goodwin argues that the officers of the church and their requisite gifting "are the joint and distinct work of all three persons" of the Godhead.[4] Likewise, Owen draws attention to the fact that Christ was called to His office by His Father through the unction of the Holy Spirit, which highlights

the trinitarian context for Christ's own ministry.5 Goodwin references 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 which shows that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have a role in the distribution of gifts, including church officers, in the church. The offices in the church are gifts given by the ascended Christ; they are His legacy (Eph. 4:11).6 Christ's leaving was also His returning insofar as the descent of the Spirit is the coming of the Spirit of Christ to possess and indwell believers (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 3:17). In building the church, Christ gives gifts to His officers by means of the Holy Spirit. The gifting of the Spirit by Christ builds the church not only extensively (i.e., more members), but also intensively (i.e., more graces), according to Goodwin.7 The various offices are given to the church (e.g., apostle, prophet, pastor/teacher) according to the will of God (1 Cor. 12:18). Far from being a random act, God's choice of officers for the church reflects His wisdom and depends on His power to equip each person for His office.8 But which offices were intended to remain in the church across the ages of time?

Extraordinary and Ordinary Ministers In his famous work, *The Marrow of Theology*, William Ames discusses the difference between two classes of ministries in the church, extraordinary and ordinary.9 This distinction was a commonplace among the Puritans, and Ames's work seems to have influenced Owen and Goodwin, as well as the London Presbyterians.10 According to Ames, an "extraordinary" ministry has a "certain higher and more perfect direction than can be attained through ordinary means."11 Thus an "extraordinary minister" is one who ministers without error and receives his authority directly from God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.12 By "directly," Ames does not mean to necessarily exclude human instrumentation, for Elisha and Matthias were called by men. Yet nonetheless, infallible direction was involved in their call. Thus, the prophets, apostles, and evangelists of the New Testament were extraordinary ministers who, in an extraordinary manner, instituted churches, conserved them, or restored them after collapse.13 Men such as John Wycliffe (c. 1328–1384), Martin Luther, and Ulrich Zwingli, were not, however, "strictly speaking, extraordinary ministers." But it is not altogether wrong to call them extraordinary, because they "performed something similar to what was done by the extraordinary ministers of old."14 However, the church was not built on the foundation of these men, but on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and on Christ Himself, being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

Extraordinary ministers not only spoke the divine word but also instructed the church perpetually by their writings. These writings "set down the rule of faith and conduct" for the church and are "free from all error because of the direct and

infallible direction they had from God."[15] Conversely, ordinary ministry is based on the will of God as revealed in those writings, preserved as Holy Scripture. The Scriptures are now a "fixed rule" for ordinary ministers, and they are only permitted to do what is prescribed in the Word of God. Moreover, ordinary ministers are only called by God indirectly, not directly. "They are called ordinary because it is according to the order established by God that they may be and usually are called to minister." Their purpose is "to preserve, propagate, and renew the church through regular means."[16] For this reason, in the new covenant church, there are now three permanent offices, ministers of the word (pastors and teachers), elders, and deacons.[17] It should be noted that the Puritans argued from the New Testament that ministers of the word, like the apostles, were also presbyters or elders (1 Peter 5:1), and further, that the words "elder" (*presbuteros*) and "bishop" (*episcopos*) were two names for the same office.

Pastors/Bishops According to Owen, in the local church, Christ has placed authority into the hands of bishops (elders) and deacons. There are two sorts of elders: those who teach, preaching the Word and administering the sacraments, which Owen refers to as the "power of order," and those who rule, which is a "power of jurisdiction."[18] While there is a distinction between teaching and ruling elders, it is not as absolute or categorical as that between elder and deacon.

The Puritans were united in their rejection of the office of bishop as understood in Episcopal terms.[19] In refuting the claims of the prelatists the Puritans argued that the terms "elder" and "bishop" are synonymous. Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) relates that "before a Committee of Parliament," he argued that "Bishops were not only not an Order distinct from Presbyters, but that in Scripture a Bishop and Presbyter were all one."[20] Owen notes that the claims of episcopacy regarding the specific authority and control of the diocesan bishop are "managed with great variety"; and however one understands the role of the bishop, there is no doubt that "prelatists" affirm the "superiority in bishops over presbyters in order and degree."[21] Owen thinks, however, that the New Testament shows "undeniably" that they are one office, "have the same function, without distinction in order or degree."[22] To prove this, he turns to Titus 1:5–9, which speaks of the qualifications for elders and uses the word "bishop" synonymously with "elder." And in the congregation in Philippi there are several bishops, not just one bishop (Phil. 1:1), which refutes the idea that a single bishop has authority over the presbyters/elders. Owen makes the telling point that since bishops must give an account at the judgment seat of Christ

concerning their care of souls (Heb. 13:17), they should perhaps think more carefully about "contending for the enlargement of their cures."[23]

"The first officer or elder of the church is the pastor…the elder that feeds and rules the flock… who is its teacher and its bishop."[24] Owen affirms that a pastor —which is a metaphorical name—must exhibit "love, care, tenderness, [and] watchfulness" as he feeds the flock entrusted to his care. In the pastoral office, there are two parts involved in "feeding," namely, teaching and ruling. While there is a distinction among elders between those who teach and those who rule, the pastor must both teach and rule.[25] To teach and rule well requires a special gifts and abilities communicated by the Holy Spirit, such as those imparted to Christ as the Chief Shepherd. Like Christ, a pastor must show compassion and love to the flock, keep constant watch over the whole flock, be zealous for the glory of God, and be holy and blameless in life.[26]

No man can take this office without a lawful, outward call (Heb. 5:4). If this was true for Christ, how much more so for His undershepherds? The Puritans insisted that the call of the church was essential to valid ordination. For this reason, Church of England ministers William Bridge (1600–1671), John Ward (c. 1599–c. 1658), and Sydrach Simpson (c. 1600–1655) renounced their "prelatic" ordination and were "ordained anew" as ministers of the churches they were called to serve.[27] Most Puritans would have seen these reordinations as unnecessary, but all of them were adamant that the power to call a pastor belongs to the local church, and not the local landowner, magistrate, or bishop. Owen makes the point that in the calling of pastors two things are required: election and ordination. Prior to election, candidates for the ministry should be examined with regard to their "meetness," or qualification and preparation for the work, and tried with regard to their gifts for edification, "those spiritual endowments which the Lord Christ grants and the Holy Spirit works in the mind of men for this very end."[28]

In terms of the new covenant church, which Owen calls the "evangelical church," the right of calling ministers belongs to the whole church. Owen notes that what is descriptive in the book of Acts is prescriptive for the church in the post-apostolic era, in regard to the election of officers.[29] The election of elders and deacons in the church has an obvious connection to how the keys are to be understood in relation to Christ, the officers of His church, and believers. In the view of the Apologists and Owen and Presbyterians such as Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), the people possessed a kind of shared power with the elders. As Powell notes, "Cotton and the Apologists' unique construct of the keys meant that there could be a power in the elders and a power in the people, but those powers were distinct. The elders were the first subject of the elders' power and

the church was the first subject of the church's power. Rutherford believed the people could have the right to vote for their pastors, but he would not call this anything more than a 'popular power of the keys.' Thus we are introduced to complex logical concepts of 'virtual' and 'formal' power."[30] Owen certainly held the view that believers are responsible for electing elders and deacons, under the supervision of the elders, like the apostles in Acts 1, "presiding in the action, directing of it, and confirming that by their consent with them."[31] Owen notes that the calling of elders is an exercise of the power of the keys, and these keys are given to the whole church. Thus, the elders exercise the keys only ministerially; that is, elders are "eyes to the church. But God and nature design…light to the whole body, to the whole person; thereunto it is granted both subjectively and finally, but actually it is peculiarly seated in the eye. So is it in the grant of church-power; it is given to the whole church, though to be exercised only by its elders."[32]

Whereas the whole body has the right to elect elders and deacons, the power to ordain them belongs exclusively to the elders.[33] In ordaining officers, the elders acting in concert as the presbytery of the local church should fast, pray, and then visibly lay hands upon the ordinand. Owen's view was, of course, consistent with that of the Dissenting Brethren, but, as noted, Owen's view was also consistent with that of many Scottish Presbyterians.[34] As Packer observes, "Owen's adoption of Independent principles of polity did not affect in the least his adherence to Presbyterian principles regarding ministerial order, character, and authority."[35] Like Owen, Rutherford distinguishes between election and ordination. In fact, Powell shows that George Gillespie (1613–1648), a Scottish Presbyterian, argued at the Westminster Assembly that "election 'doth ordinarily belong to the congregation', because the people's election was not a matter of 'jurisdiction and authority' like excommunication and ordination were."[36] Powell notes moreover that the English Presbyterian Lazarus Seaman "responded, 'that in all these particulars the people have no power at all, but are merely passive, that is, they have a measure of liberty, and a privilege of consent, but the power is only in the presbytery.'"[37] Here we note that the English and Scottish Presbyterians were not agreed on the details of the election of officers. The Scots were in fact closer to the Apologists and Owen than the likes of Seaman and other English Presbyterians.[38] It is also significant that on this point Scottish Presbyterianism agreed with Continental Reformed views, such as those expressed in the Church Order of Dort, article 4. Of course Rutherford and Owen would both say that ordination should be performed by the presbytery, but they disagreed on the membership of that presbytery, whether it was only the eldership of the local church (Owen) or the collective eldership of

the several churches of a city or region banded together under one “presbyterial government” (Rutherford and the Westminster divines).39

The lively debate over the relationship between election and ordination reveals much about the tensions and disagreements not only between Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, but also among the Presbyterians themselves. That said, Presbyterians and Congregationalists agreed on the necessity of both election and ordination, even if their differing views of the visible church led to inevitable disagreements on this subject. Polly Ha notes that for Presbyterians, ordination is to the office of pastor, but election is to a particular body of people.40 She adds, “That ordination was performed through particular congregations did not conflict with the authority to ordain vested in the universal visible church, since ‘a thing may be given to the church general and yet the exercise of it must be in particulars.’”41 In other words, for the Presbyterians, ordination meant something more than simply election to serve a particular church, since the local church was acting on behalf of the larger church, represented in the presbytery.

There was, however, general agreement on the manifold duties of pastors in the local church. Owen highlights eleven responsibilities, including:

- Feeding the flock by preaching the Word. Before the pastor can powerfully preach the truths of the Scriptures to his congregation he must preach to his own soul.
- Continued fervent prayer for his flock. A sign of a pastor’s sincerity in his office can be summed up by his prayer life or lack thereof toward his people. Moreover, prayer has an important connection to the preaching of the Word; for, “to preach the word, therefore, and not to follow it with constant and fervent prayer for its success, is to disbelieve its use, neglect its end, and to cast away the seed of the gospel at random.”42
- Administering the sacraments. The principal end of the sacraments “is the peculiar confirmation and application of the word preached.”43
- Preserving and defending of the doctrine of the gospel. A pastor must have a “clear, sound, and comprehensive knowledge” of God’s word; he must love the truth so much that he shows care and fear when encouraging new views/opinions. Owen notes that “vain curiosity, boldness in conjectures, and readiness to vent their own conceits, have caused no small trouble and damage to the church.”44
- Laboring for the conversion of souls. Owen argues that the ordinary means of conversion belong to the church since the instrumental cause of conversions comes from the preaching of God’s word, which is a duty of

pastors.[45]

• Caring for the needs of believers. From spiritual problems to physical ones, the pastor is to care for his flock's needs, whatever they may be (e.g., visitation of the sick, caring for the poor, and showing compassion to suffering members).[46]

• Leading a godly life. Owen states, "If the pastors of [churches…] are not exemplary in gospel obedience and holiness, religion will not be carried on and improved among the people."[47]

Owen's emphases reveal a lot about the marks of a faithful gospel minister. The above is entirely consistent with Paul's charge to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:16) to "take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." This text is frequently cited in the writings of Puritans on the necessity of personal godliness and soundness in the faith as marks to be sought for in a pastor.

Teachers The vast majority of Puritan theologians posited a distinction between pastors and teachers, but as Owen acknowledges, "The thoughts of learned men about those who in the Scripture are called teachers are very various."[48] Some argued for the office of "doctor of the church" or "professors of theology," in the manner of Calvin and the Church Order of Dort (art. 2). Others wanted to locate both teachers and pastors in the ministry of the local church as two different kinds of ministers of the word. Those who took this latter position were hard pressed to show a categorical difference, but they endeavored to do so nonetheless.

These writers typically set forth the difference by showing similarities between the two offices and then the differences. In Goodwin's discussion on this topic, he notes first that there are no things, such as the sacraments, that a pastor may administer that a teacher may not. Moreover, pastors and teachers are deserving of the same respect and honor (1 Tim. 5:17). Yet there are differences between the two offices.[49] Owen holds to the view that a teacher is a distinct officer to that of pastor, yet "his office is of the same kind with that of the pastor, though distinguished from it as unto degrees, both materially and formally."[50] Both Owen and Goodwin first highlight the difference between pastor and teacher by noting the differing gifts that each officer possesses. Goodwin, for example, notes that doctrine and exhortations are required of both officers. Nonetheless, there is a different emphasis in handling these two parts. The pastor "turns all his sermons into applications, by way of comfort and exhortation, the [teacher] endeavours to inform the judgment."[51] Goodwin adds:

> The [teacher] hath the Bible, and the system or form of wholesome words for his text; the other studies men more, and seeks to fit the word to them. And the pastor is one able to discern what is peculiarly fit for men's spirits, and so speaks wisely to men, whereas the other speaks pertinently to truths. The one brings scripture to scripture, and compares each with each; the other deals and divides the word, and brings Scripture and men's consciences together…. The pastor deals with points of practice more, with things to be done; the other with points of faith, with things to be believed…. The pastor deals with men's sins more, the teacher with men's errors more; the one in information, the other in mortification. The one hath more of Christ's priestly office, in slaying the old man…the other hath Christ's prophetical office more imported, in opening truths, as the elder hath more of Christ's kingly office in ruling over men's consciences.[52]

Goodwin's point, of course, is that pastors and teachers share in the gifts required for their respective offices as ministers of the word. But they excel or possess an eminency of gifts in one direction more than the other. The gifts given by Christ to the church (Eph. 4:11) result in a distinction between a pastor and a teacher, but both are valuable to the differing needs of God's people.

Ruling Elders In her fascinating work on English Presbyterianism, Polly Ha has noted that debate was usually between the Episcopal form of church government and the Reformed or Presbyterian form: "The Presbyterians again tied abuses in Episcopal practice to the nature of the bishop's office while advocating a practical plan for reform through the institution of their church polity, specifically through the role of the lay elder."[53] The concept of lay elder did not have any place in the order of the Church of England. Thus the reformation the Puritans proposed for the Church of England included the introduction of the ruling elder as a vital part of the government of Christ's church. According to the Westminster divines, "As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ…hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders."[54]

The Puritans were insistent that the rule of Christ's church belongs to presbyters or elders. While not all elders are pastors or teachers, all have been entrusted with authority to rule on Christ's behalf. The elders hold the keys to the kingdom and these keys are, according to Owen, "usually referred unto two heads,—namely, the one of order, the other of jurisdiction."[55] Only pastors and teachers possess the key of order, which involves preaching, including binding

and loosing men's consciences, and the administration of the sacraments. The key of jurisdiction refers to the "rule, government, or discipline of the church."[56] Lay elders have a right to the key of jurisdiction, as do pastors and teachers. Owen sets forth the differences between pastors and ruling elders in terms of their different gifts: "Some men are fitted by gifts for the dispensation of the word and doctrine in a way of pastoral feeding who have no useful ability for the work of rule, and some are fitted for rule who have no gifts for the discharge of the pastoral work in preaching; yea, it is very seldom that both these sorts of gifts concur in any eminency in the same person, or without some notable defect."[57] This does not excuse pastors and teachers from ruling, for the duty of ruling is indispensable for the office of elder. But ruling elders are those men who "watch over the walking or conversation of the members of the church with authority, exhorting, comforting, admonishing, reproving, encouraging, directing of them, as occasion shall require."[58] This is not to suggest that the pastor should not do these things, but his duties of preaching and prayer, including the administration of the sacraments, "with all the duties that belong unto the especial application of these things…unto the flock, are ordinarily sufficient to take up the whole man, and the utmost of their endowments who are called unto the pastoral office in the church."[59]

Exegetical evidence for the distinction of elders into pastors and ruling elders comes from 1 Timothy 5:17, a text to which Owen gives copious attention. In sum, Owen claims that this text proves to any "rational man who is unprejudiced" that there are two "sorts" of elders, namely those who labor in word and doctrine and those who do not. For the benefit of the church Christ appointed that each church should have more than one elder. A plurality of elders in each church necessitates a plurality of gifts, and each elder's gifts are necessary for the work to which they have been called. Elders are to rule not in an autocratical or legislative manner, but rather in a ministerial way, declaring the will of Christ according to the Scripture. Christ alone is the lawgiver of the church, and thus "no other law is effectual…upon the objects or unto the ends of church-rule."[60] These prerogatives belong to all the elders in each particular church.

There is no doubt that rule, government, and discipline belong to ruling elders as much as to pastors and teachers. Ruling elders are given the responsibility to "watch diligently" with "courage" over the lives of the members in the church, making sure that commands of Christ are obeyed by those who claim Him as Lord.[61] More than that, ruling elders are to "watch against all risings or appearances of such differences and divisions" that typically occur in churches.[62] The great commandment of love is to be obeyed for the sake of

Christ and His church. Following from this, ruling elders are also to remind members of their specific duties in the church, which depend on their talents, whether spiritual or temporal. Other duties include, for example, visiting the sick, giving advice and direction to the deacons, and acquainting the pastor with the state of the flock. All of this suggests that for Owen the work of the ministry is an involved one. The pastor has his responsibilities, but he cannot fulfill all of the duties that are required for the growth, stability, and health of the church. Alongside the pastors and teachers, the church needs ruling elders who will effectively minister to the various needs of the congregation.

Deacons

The office of deacon was established for the poor and needy. Both Owen and Goodwin cite Acts 6 as the report of the institution of this office in the new covenant church.[63] The diaconate was not a temporary institution, but rather, like the eldership, perpetual in the church (1 Tim. 3:15). The qualifications for deacons are laid out in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. As Paul makes clear to Timothy, the spiritual requirements for both elders and deacons are almost identical. For this reason, the office of the deacon is, like the eldership, a spiritual office, one that has significant importance for the health and well-being of the church. Goodwin addresses the requirements of deacons in his catechism on church offices by expounding 1 Timothy 3:8–13. Paul's description of what a deacon should be enables deacons to understand what is required of them that they "may faithfully discharge the trust that God and his church have committed unto them" and the members in the church are in a position to know "what manner of men they are to choose for this office."[64]

The function of the diaconate is not only to relieve the poor and needy, but also to receive the offerings of the church. They, in turn, distribute the offerings to the minister or ministers in the church and to other members who are in need (Acts 6:3–4). The diaconate was instituted because the apostles at that time were functioning as teachers, elders, and deacons. Hence they were overburdened and so relieved themselves of the "lowest part of their spiritual work," that is, serving tables.[65] With this, a different office or order of ministry emerged in the church. Owen argues that the difference between an elder and a deacon is "not in degree but in order. A deacon made a presbyter is not advanced unto a farther degree in his own order, but leaves it for another."[66] In fact, Owen goes on to argue that far from being a "stepping-stone" to the eldership, the diligent discharge of diaconal duties actually hinders one from being a pastor or elder; "for it lies wholly in the providing and disposal of earthly things, in a serving of tables of the church, and those private, of the poor; but preparation for the

ministry consists in a man's giving himself unto study, prayer, and meditation."[67]

Conclusion The risen Christ gave gifts to the church upon His ascension including an array of offices, extraordinary and ordinary (Eph. 4:10–12). Extraordinary offices were temporary, connected to the special needs of their time and place; but the ordinary offices appointed by Christ continue in the church to the end of this age. These offices include ministers of the Word (pastors and teachers), ruling elders, and deacons. An entry in *Mercurius Britannicus* by a convinced Presbyterian shows the agreement between Presbyterians and Congregationalists on a number of points, including the permanent offices of the church. According to Powell, the author of the entry writes, "There is a late book…by our Reverend brethren, but by no independents, *viz.* Master Goodwin, Master Nye, Master Bridges, Master Simpson, Master Burroughs, in this you may see how long they hold us by the hand, and where they let go, and take us by the finger."[68] Regarding the government of the church, they have these similarities: "the same worship, preaching and praying, and form of Sacrament, the same Church Officers, Doctors, Pastors, Deacons, and same Church censures in the abridgement, but not as large."[69]

The differences among the Puritans regarding the government of the church notwithstanding, they all believed that each of the perpetual, ordinary offices needed to be in place for the maintenance, growth, and well-being of the church. Each officer, whether minister, elder, or deacon, must first be a godly man; he must also have the necessary gifts to fulfill his office in the church, whether preaching, teaching, ruling, or serving tables. When duly qualified men are lawfully elected by the church and ordained by the elders to fill the three offices Christ has appointed in His church, these "ordinary ministries" are sufficient, in the words of Ames, to "preserve, propagate and renew the church through regular means" for the glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.[70]

1. Thomas Goodwin, *The Constitution, Right Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 11:338–39.

2. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Petition for the Prelates Briefly Examined. Wherein You Have These Pleas for Prælacy, Discussed, and Answered, etc.* (London, 1641), 31–32. See also Hunter Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren and the Power of the Keys, 1640–44" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2011), 29.

3. [Provincial Assembly of London], *Jus Divinum Ministerii Evangelici. Or The Divine Right of the Gospel-Ministry: Divided into Two Parts…* (London: John Legat and Abraham Miller, 1654), preface.

4. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:309.

5. John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 16:56.

6. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:310.

7. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in 11:310.

8. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:315.

9. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 183.

10. See John Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 13:29–49; John Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 13:73; Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:320, 499; *Jus Divinum*, 96. See also J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 227–28.

11. Ames, *Marrow*, 183.

12. Ames, *Marrow*, 183–84.

13. Owen claims that Christ called "the apostles and evangelists, in whom that call ceased." *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:56; see also 73.

14. Ames, *Marrow*, 185.

15. Ames, *Marrow*, 185–86.

16. Ames, *Marrow*, 190.

17. Note, however, Goodwin's exegetical treatment of Romans in *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:326–33.

18. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:42.

19. See *Smectymnuus, An Answer to a Book Entituled, An humble Remonstrance. In Which, the Originall of Liturgy Episcopacy Is Discussed…* (London: for I. Rothwell, 1641). "Smectymnuus" refers to the Smectymnuan divines, and was an acronym for Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, and William Spurstowe.

20. Edmund Calamy, *A Just and Necessary Apology against an Unjust Invective Published by Mr. Henry Burton.*..(London: for Christopher Meredith, 1646), 9. Commenting on the *Petition Examined*, a Congregational manifesto, Powell notes: "The emphasis in the pamphlet centres around two connected themes. Firstly, that the individual congregation is the primary church in the New Testament. Citing Cyprian, Burroughs says, 'The bounds of a Church were not greater than a Bishop might call together the whole multitude about the affairs of it.' The other theme, common to all the Calamy house pamphlets, was, as Burroughs quoted 'Doctor Whitaker' to have said, 'that *jure divino*, a Presbyter and Bishop are both one.' He also cited the Continental divine Johan Gerhard, who was very influential in the Apologists' thinking on polity. From Gerhard's use of Acts 20:17, 18, Burroughs claimed, 'We do not acknowledge any inequality of jurisdiction that Bishops have over Presbyters.'" Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 30.

21. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:43.

22. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:44.

23. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:43.

24. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:47.

25. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:48.

26. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:50–51.

27. Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 325. Writing about "reordination," the Provincial Assembly of London in 1654 asserts: "To this truth we have the consent of the Universal Church, who do not only not allow but condemn a second Ordination; Neither do we know any of the Reformed Churches that teach or practice after this manner, but many that teach and practice the contrary." *Jus Divinum*, 147.

28. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:55.

29. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:56–57.

30. Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 175–76.

31. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:61.
32. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:63.
33. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:64, 73.
34. See Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries* (London: E. Griffin for Richard Whittaker and Andrew Crook, 1644), 191–94; George Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland*… (Edinburgh: for James Bryson, 1641), 2.
35. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 226.
36. Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 240.
37. Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 240.
38. Powell notes that the "Scottish Covenanter David Calderwood rebuked the Scottish commissioners at Westminster for sounding too much like 'independents' in the paper on church government they wrote in early 1644." "The Dissenting Brethren," 248. See also Powell's discussion of the views of Gisbertus Voetius and John Cotton on the role of the congregation in the election of elders. "The Dissenting Brethren," 183–85.
39. See Rutherford, *Due Right*, 199.
40. Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism, 1590–1640* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011), 107.
41. Ha, *English Presbyterianism*, 107. The chapter on the government of the church explains in more detail the differences between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists on the nature of the visible church.
42. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:78.
43. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:79. Note that Goodwin affirms that "teaching is a higher ordinance than the sacrament." Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:337.
44. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:82.
45. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:83.
46. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:87–88.
47. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:88–89.
48. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:97.
49. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:337–38.
50. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:103.
51. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:338.
52. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:338–39.
53. Ha, *English Presbyterianism*, 38.
54. "The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government," *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994), 402.
55. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:106.
56. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:106.
57. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:109.
58. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:109.
59. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:110.
60. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:135.
61. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:138.
62. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:138.
63. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:143–51; Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:510–21.
64. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:512.
65. Goodwin, *Government of the Churches*, in *Works*, 11:512.
66. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:149.
67. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:149.
68. Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 101.
69. Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren," 101.

70. Ames, *Marrow*, 190.

Chapter 41

John Owen on the Christian Sabbath and Worship

> *The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is just, good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.*
>
> —SAVOY DECLARATION, 22.1

For John Owen (1616–1683) defending the continuing validity of the fourth commandment and the Christian Sabbath as the weekly day of spiritual rest was a hugely important aspect of his views on worship. Protestant theologians have not always agreed upon the fourth commandment. Luminaries such as John Calvin and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) affirmed a Sabbath for Christians, but they did not understand Sabbath-keeping quite like the Puritans did.[1] Neither Calvin nor Cocceius rooted the Sabbath in creation. For them, the weekly day of rest was not instituted in the garden of Eden, but rather was peculiar to the nation of Israel, instituted at Sinai when they received the Torah.[2]

In Holland there was significant controversy on this point between the followers of Cocceius and the followers of Gijsbert Voetius (1589–1676).[3] Owen was clearly aware of the differences among Reformed theologians concerning the Sabbath, and his detailed defense of the concept not only answers the various objections leveled against the position he defends but also makes a positive case for the continuance of a holy day of rest in relation to Christian worship. The title of his work on this subject shows this to be true: *Exercitations Concerning the Name, Original, Nature, Use, and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest: Wherein the Original of the Sabbath from the Foundation of the*

World, the Morality of the Fourth Commandment, with the Change of the Seventh Day, are Inquired Into; Together with an Assertion of the Divine Institution of the Lord's Day, and Practical Directions for its Due Observation.[4]

Owen certainly spoke for the vast majority of the Puritans by insisting upon a specific day (i.e., the first day of the week) as a day for rest and worship.[5] A full-scale treatment of Owen's position within his religio-political context remains a desideratum in the secondary literature. This chapter will concentrate specifically on aspects of Owen's theological basis for the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath, and what was done on the day in Christian worship. Before that, however, a brief background concerning the so-called "rise of the Puritan Sabbath" is in order.

Historical Context

J. I. Packer credits the Puritans with creating the "English Christian Sunday—that is, the conception and observance of the first day of the week as one on which both business and organized recreations should be in abeyance, and the whole time left free for worship, fellowship, and 'good works.'"[6] Puritan-style Sabbath-keeping may have been strongest in Britain, but nonetheless there were many Reformed theologians on the Continent who held the same position as the English and Scottish theologians. As Keith Sprunger has noted, a number of "prominent Reformed theologians…(Tremellius, Zanchius, Junius, to name a few), affirmed aspects of Sabbatarianism. However, they did not spark a full-scale Sabbath observance movement in their areas."[7] Strict Sabbath-keeping was certainly a hallmark of the Puritans in their quest for further reformation of the Church of England during the latter part of the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth century. Thomas Shepard's (1605–1649) comments on this phenomenon are telling: "But why the Lord Christ should keep his servants in England, and Scotland, to clear up and vindicate this point of the Sabbath, and welcome it with more love then some precious ones in foreign Churches, no man can imagine any other cause then God's own Free Grace and tender Love, whose wind blows where and when it will."[8] In sum, the Sabbath cause on the Continent did not reach quite the fervor that one finds in England during the seventeenth century.

A weekly day of rest from work was not a controverted point in civil life, but the Puritans went further than that. Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe provides an accurate account of the Sabbath as very much a hallmark of Puritanism:

> While rest from work was a long-accepted social norm, the notion of devoting the day to worship, family and private devotions, and other religious practices had never been required of the laity, who were entitled to spend at least portions of the day in physical recreation. Puritans were ridiculed as fanatics for embracing for themselves a rigorous spiritual regimen more typical of the monastery. They were derided even more harshly when they lobbied for such Sabbath reform as national policy. In the Book of Sports, promulgated by James I in 1617 (reissued by Charles I in 1633) and by law announced in every parish, the Church of England rejected the Puritan programme for the Sabbath by officially endorsing such activities as archery and dancing for Sunday recreation. When the Puritans gained the opportunity to plan their own Sunday schedules…they typically committed themselves to six full hours of public worship, three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon. The seriousness with which the saints

> approached the work of glorifying God on the Sabbath set them apart as a peculiar people. Indeed, it was such rigour that first earned them the snide epithet ‘Puritan’ in the early days of the movement.[9]

It was in this context that the Puritans attempted their reform of the Church of England. They were largely successful in achieving not simply a day of rest during the week—after all, that was something that existed long before the rise of Puritanism, as early as the seventh century—but a day of rest given to worshiping the triune God according to the requirements of His Word. From about 1600 to 1650 the Puritan understanding of the Sabbath gained in popularity, though there was some backlash from several quarters (e.g., Seventh-Day Sabbatarians).

Puritanism may have failed in many respects, but Packer points out that in 1677, well after the Great Ejection (1662), the anti-Puritan Parliament passed the Sunday Observance Act. This Act “prescribed that all should spend Sunday, not in trading, travelling, ‘worldly labour, business, or work of their ordinary callings,’ but in ‘exercising themselves…in the duties of piety and true religion, publicly and privately.’”[10] The passing of this act should not be understated. Anti-Puritans, including those who did not believe that Sunday should be a day given to worship in the Scriptures, still advocated a day of rest that was Puritanesque. This was an advance on the earlier view that a day of rest should be mandated on social and political grounds. In the words of Leland Ryken, “The Puritans provided the theological basis for Sunday observance. Thus, although all Puritans were Sabbatarians, not all Sabbatarians were Puritans.”[11] What were those theological reasons? To answer that question, John Owen’s rigorous defense of the Lord’s Day Sabbath will be examined, with some of his central arguments brought into focus.

A Creation Ordinance

A major source of contention between the Puritan view espoused by Owen and his fellow Puritans and the so-called "Continental" view was whether the Sabbath was instituted in the garden of Eden or not.12 William Gouge (1575–1653), for example, begins his short treatise on the Sabbath with an appeal to Genesis 2, rooting the doctrine in creation.13 Likewise, John Prideaux (1578–1650) spends a great deal of time countering the various arguments against seeing Genesis 2 as the origin of the Sabbath.14

In Owen's view, the institution of the Sabbath at creation is based on two texts in the Bible, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. "And," writes Owen, "both of them seem to me of so uncontrollable an evidence that I have often wondered how ever any sober and learned persons undertook to evade their force or efficacy in this cause."15 These two texts are, of course, Genesis 2:1–2 and Hebrews 3–4. Concerning Genesis 2:1–2, Owen notes that God "sanctified" this day: "Not that he kept it holy himself, which in no sense the divine nature is capable of; nor that he celebrated that which in itself was holy, as we sanctify his name, which is the act of an inferior towards a superior; but that he set it apart to sacred use authoritatively, requiring us to sanctify it in that use obediently."16 Some "learned men" posit that Genesis 2:3 was not actually part of the historical narrative, but that the text ("And God blessed the seventh day…") was inserted "by way of prolepsis or anticipation."17 That is to say, these authors contend that God rested after the seventh day, that is, the next day (the "8th"), which may be an indefinite time after the initial seven-day week of creation. In Owen's mind, he simply cannot understand how such learned men can provide such an unnatural reading of the text: "so monstrous and uncouth a prolepsis as this would be…[the like of which] no instance can be given in the Scripture."18 Owen develops this argument more fully in his exposition of Hebrews 4, but he clearly understands all of the various arguments that had been made against his position; therefore, he responds with his characteristic precision, with devastating effect, often without explicitly naming those he is refuting, partly out of respect for those who were Reformed luminaries in their own right.

Some divines argued that the Sabbath was introduced to Israel as part of the giving of the law. If so, for Owen, it would have been introduced with a "strange abruptness."19 As noted, he was fully aware of the arguments of Reformed divines who held that the Sabbath commandment was first given to the Israelites at Sinai because this command, unlike the other ten, was partly ceremonial.20 Owen responds by suggesting that this commandment was "accommodated unto the pedagogical state of the church of the Israelites."21 Whatever modifications (i.e., positive laws) were made to the fourth commandment, Owen argues that

that is no reason for suggesting that the substance of the commandment was not given to Adam and the patriarchs after him. Richard Gaffin shows that for Calvin the "meaning of the Sabbath institution prior to the fall seems not to have crossed his mind."22 For Calvin, the Sabbath was given as an antidote to sin, and believers keep the fourth commandment by resting from their sinful works. In contrast, Owen views the Sabbath more positively than Calvin and certainly as a more fundamental aspect of creation law.

In arguing that the Sabbath was a creation ordinance given to Adam in Eden, Owen considers the difference between positive laws and moral laws. Positive laws are those that "have no reason for them in themselves"; they are commanded by God out of His own mere will, such as the sacrifices in the Old Testament.23 Conversely, moral laws are grounded in the nature of God Himself and cannot be abrogated, whereas positive laws, which are fixed by the determination of God, can be changed if God so desires. In the controversy over the Sabbath, Owen claims that his opponents affirm that the Sabbath commandment is a positive law in general, and specifically, both ceremonial and typical; but Owen views the Sabbath as a moral law in its substance, which means the obligation to keep this commandment is universal. Yet the specific day to be sanctified is positive, thus explaining how the Sabbath can be moved from the seventh day to the first day of the week.

Owen grounds his defense of the Sabbath in natural law. First, for him, the Sabbath is a time set apart for the solemn worship of God, appointed according to the law of nature. Indeed, there was universal consent among the Puritans that this law or light of nature requires humans to set apart certain times for worship. Owen then proceeds to show that the principle of one day in seven is a perpetual command because the Sabbath is a moral law, finding its basis in God Himself. In giving the commandment, God reminds His people that He rested from His work on the seventh day (Ex. 20:11), having completed His work of creation. God's work may be understood naturally (the effects of His power and wisdom) and morally (the glory He receives from the obedience of rational creatures). So, when God "rests" on the seventh day He does not cease working altogether. Rather, His rest "is of a moral, and not a natural signification; for it consists in the satisfaction and complacency that he took in his works."24 Consequently, men are bound to glorify God "according to the revelation that he makes of himself unto us, whether by his works of nature or of grace."25 Puritan theologians discoursing on this subject typically held that Adam's Sabbath-keeping in the garden consisted in meditating on the works of creation and thanking God for them. The primary purpose of Sabbath-keeping after the fall focuses on sinners worshiping God in light of redemption (Deut. 5:15).

Not only Adam and Eve, but also their descendants are bound to keep God's commands, including the Sabbath, because the law of nature is constant. All other laws "are but deductions from it and applications of it."26 For this reason, the Sabbath (i.e., the weekly setting apart of a day to worship God) is a command that is natural and therefore moral. Yet it may also be understood as a "moral-positive law," because in certain contexts, such as the Old Covenant, additions are made to the duties required by God.27 Thus Owen turns to the meaning of the fourth commandment as written in the Decalogue to further vindicate his Sabbath argument.

The Decalogue

The Decalogue had a definite political use and was a part of the old covenant that the Israelites were under. In this particular redemptive-historical context, the law functioned as a schoolmaster to lead the Israelites to Christ. Moreover, some of the commandments (first, fourth, fifth) had additions peculiar to the state of the church at that time. Nonetheless, the applications added to these commands did not prove that they were merely positive commands, which were subject to change or abolition. With this context in mind, Owen makes his case that the fourth commandment has "an equal share with the other nine in all the privileges of the whole," thus showing the perpetuity of the fourth commandment.[28]

He provides a number of reasons to show that the fourth commandment is distinguished, along with the other nine, from the ceremonial laws given to Israel, some of which are worth listing. For one thing, the Ten Commandments, unlike the ceremonial or judicial laws, were spoken immediately by the voice of God. In addition, the fourth commandment, along with the other nine, was written down twice by God's "finger" on the tablets of stone. God did this, first, in order to republish objectively the law that was first implanted in Adam's heart in the state of innocence. This was necessary because the intrusion of sin meant that the law written on Adam's heart, and the hearts of his descendants, had been effaced. Furthermore, the objective law of God written on tablets of stone pointed to the spiritual reality of the law being written by the Spirit on the hearts of the elect. The promise of the new covenant includes God's law being written on the hearts of God's people. And since the Sabbath commandment is part of the moral law, it is necessarily written upon the hearts of the elect under the new covenant. Finally, the Ten Commandments, unlike the ceremonial ordinances, were preserved in the ark of the covenant. "And the reason of the different disposal, of the moral law in the ark, and of the ceremonial in a book by the side of it, was to manifest…accomplishment, and answering of the one law in Christ, with the removal and abolishing of the other by him."[29] Owen cannot be tentative about these points, for his whole argument rests on this premise, namely, that the Sabbath is intrinsically moral and not ceremonial, and therefore perpetually binding upon humans in all dispensations.

The "learned" opponents of Owen's position typically argued that since Christ has come, the type has been abrogated. Believers now find their rest in Christ, by resting from their evil works and resting in and living for Him. J. I. Packer sums up the basic position of Owen and his Puritan contemporaries, saying they "insisted, with virtual unanimity, that, although the Reformers were right to see a merely typical and temporary significance in certain of the detailed prescriptions of the Jewish Sabbath, yet the principle of one day's rest for public and private

worship of God at the end of each six days' work was a law of creation, made for man as such, and therefore binding upon man as long as he lives in this world. They pointed out that, standing as it does with nine undoubtedly moral and permanently binding laws in the decalogue, it could hardly be of a merely typical and temporary nature itself."[30]

The force of this argument was powerful, but, in itself, it is not complete. Owen would turn to Hebrews 4 to solidify his position and thus prove that the Sabbath, which experienced a change of day, was binding on Christians in the church under the new covenant.

Hebrews 4

Both those who argue for the Christian Sabbath and those who argue against it have often turned to Hebrews 4 to prove their case.[31] Owen, of course, continues his argument for the Christian Sabbath in his commentary on Hebrews 4. A full analysis of his exegetical argument lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but a number of his points give us the general picture of his argument from the New Testament on this subject.

The interpretation of Hebrews 4:3 historically has provided a significant impact upon the position taken on the Sabbath. The question concerns whether, with the inauguration of the new covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers have entered into their Sabbath rest—albeit in an "already and not yet" way—or whether that rest is still future. Should the emphatic be understood as a real present or as futuristic? With verbs of movement we might prefer to understand *eiserchometha* as futuristic, which means that a weekly Sabbath-rest remains (v. 9) for the people as a type of the future Sabbath rest that awaits them in eternity. John Owen wrestled with this verse as he put forth his case for the Christian Sabbath. Owen takes the view that the rest spoken of in verse 3 is "that *spiritual rest of God, which believers obtain an entrance into by Jesus Christ, in the faith and worship of the gospel*, and is not to be restrained unto their eternal rest in heaven."[32]

For the constitution of a rest, three things are required: (1) a work that God accomplishes and finishes so that He rests Himself; (2) a spiritual rest for believers to enter into that reflects God's own resting; and (3) a new or renewed day of rest "to express the rest of God unto us, and to be a means and pledge of our entering into it."[33] According to Owen, the church has been under three different types of rests: the church in the garden of Eden; the church in the old covenant, with Canaan acting as a type of gospel rest; and the rest that the church enters into under the gospel. In the gospel, a new rest is established because of the new work that God performed. Thus Christ, who rested after His

work, enables believers to enter into His rest. The new or renewed day of rest is now the Christian Sabbath. A new creation has taken place, and a new church-state is founded.

Before commenting on verse 10, "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his works, as God did from his," Owen reaffirms from Hebrews 4:9 that God established a day for worship and rest from labor at the very beginning of creation, which He reestablished formally in the land of Canaan so that His people could worship Him at the appointed time of the week, the seventh day. Owen has no doubt in his mind that the apostle Paul, whom Owen considers to be the author of Hebrews, "proves and asserts the granting of an evangelical Sabbath, or day of rest, for the worship of God to be constantly observed."[34] In the threefold state of the church there is always a rest promised to believers that they may worship God; hence the "constancy" of the Sabbath in the new covenant.

Owen holds that verse 10 does not refer to believers, though many expositors differ from him on this point. If believers are intended in verse 10, Owen questions what works they are resting from. Some argue that believers are resting from their sinful works by finding their rest in Christ, who empowers them to do good works. Owen rejects this position because believers do not rest from their works "as God did from His," since God delighted in His works, whereas believers do not delight in their sinful works. God "so rested *from them* as that he rested *in them*, and blessed them, and blessed and sanctified the time wherein they were finished."[35] To suggest that believers enter this rest only in heaven excludes the rest that Paul is talking about, which is gospel rest. For that reason, verse 10 has reference to God and Christ, not God and believers. Christ rested from His works, which suits the analogy with God resting from His works at creation and delighting in them.

This provides the basis for the change of the Sabbath day from the seventh day to the first day of the week: "For as that rest which all the world was to observe was founded in his works and rest who built or made the world and all things in it; so the rest of the church of the gospel is to be founded in his works and rest by whom the church itself was built, that is Jesus Christ; for he, on the account of his works and rest, is also Lord of the Sabbath, to abrogate one day of rest and to institute another."[36]

Upon His resurrection, Christ entered into His rest; He ceased from His works, and "the foundation of the new creation [was] laid and perfected."[37] Therefore, when the apostle informs his readers in verse 9 that there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, Owen contends that he does not exhort them to enter into that "sabbatism" (*sabbatismos*). By using "sabbatism" he intends

“to express the rest of the gospel not absolutely, but with respect unto the pledge of it in the day of rest” whereby they worship God on the Christian Sabbath.[38] If Paul had wanted to speak of the eternal heavenly rest he would have used the Greek word *katapausis*, which is found in Hebrews 3:11, 18 and 4:1, 3, 5, 10. By using *sabbatismos* in 4:9 Paul intends the Christian Sabbath.[39]

Because there remains a Sabbath for the people of God, it is not merely a day of rest from six days of labor, but rather a time appointed for corporate and private worship. In the Christian Sabbath, the Puritan vision for worshiping God was not limited to attending the public services of the church, but the whole day was set apart for worshiping God in public as the church, as households or families, and in private, with the necessary proviso that works of necessity and mercy were permitted, according to Christ’s own teaching and example. Thus, the Puritans believed that those who wanted to find proof-texts that would support recreation on the Sabbath would look in vain.

Sanctifying the Sabbath

Peter Heylyn (1599–1662), chaplain to King Charles and historian of the Church of England, wrote against the Puritan understanding of the Sabbath, decrying their overzealous application of spiritual duties to be practiced on that day.[40] He was reacting against the Puritan effort to sanctify the entire day as a day of worship. George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673), in answering the question whether the Sabbath is a time for secular or temporal affairs, writes, "Reader, as thy duty is to rest the whole day from wickedness and worldly work, so also to employ the whole day in God's worship, be either praying, or reading, or hearing, or singing, or meditating, or discoursing with others about the works or word of God. Be always taken up either with public, private, or secret duties."[41] And John Flavel (1628–1691) echoes Swinnock's thoughts by contending that on the Sabbath the "mind is most active and busy in the work of God, though the body be at rest."[42] There is no question that Swinnock and Flavel are advocating the standard Puritan position on the application of the Sabbath. Even before the Sabbath, Christians are to prepare their hearts and minds to worship God. As the Westminster Confession of Faith makes clear, the Lord's day Sabbath "is to be kept holy unto the Lord when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy" (21.8).[43]

Owen was aware that some "learned" men complained that there "hath been some excess in the directions of many given about the due sanctification of the Lord's day."[44] And he candidly admits that it is possible to be overzealous on this matter. Owen wants to avoid the error of the Pharisees as well as the error of an antinomian view of the Lord's Day. Nevertheless, he understands that the world does not naturally embrace the commandments of God, particularly Sabbath-keeping. "But," writes Owen, "the way to put a stop to this declension, is not by accommodating the commands of God to the corrupt courses and ways of men."[45] What Owen pleads for is Sabbath-keeping (and worship) that is founded upon nothing else but God's Word. From various portions of Scripture, Owen posits that Sabbath-keeping should be "commensurate unto the use of our natural strength on any day, from morning to night."[46] He gives a number of practical guidelines for Christians as they seek to do their duty before God in terms of keeping the fourth commandment.

The Sabbath is a day when saints have the privilege and duty to worship God because He is God. On this day, the people of God, reflecting their Maker, rest;

specifically, they rest in God and use the day to meditate upon the eternal Sabbath rest that awaits them. The elect also rest as those who are participants in God's covenant of grace. God Himself "rests and is refreshed in Christ, in his person, in his works, in his law…in all these things is his soul well pleased."[47] Accordingly, those who have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb have a duty to rest and be refreshed in Him, just as God does and is.

Owen also speaks of the specific duties Christians are to perform on the Sabbath. In the first place, they are to prepare. The evening before is not part of the Sabbath in Owen's mind, but Owen suggests, not based upon a command but only in order to help the saints of God, that meditation, prayer, and instruction are useful duties that prepare a soul to worship God on the Lord's Day. On the day of worship, Owen divides duties up into public and private, with the former taking precedence over the latter.[48] Private duties, which may be done before or after public worship, include the exercises of "prayer, reading the Scripture, meditation, family instructions from the advantage of the public ordinances…to be recommended unto every one's conscience, ability, and opportunity, as they shall find strength and assistance for them."[49]

Public Worship: Introduction

One of the great themes that forms John Owen's theology of worship is the sufficiency of Scripture (*sufficientia Scripturae*).[50] As a theologian of high Reformed orthodoxy, Owen viewed Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi,* or foundation, of knowing true theology.[51] This was most succinctly stated by the early orthodox theologian in Basel, Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf (1561–1610): *Principium Theologiaenostrae est Verbum Dei* ("The foundation of our theology is the Word of God").[52] The Franeker theologian, Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644), wrote in his posthumously published *Distinctiones et Regulae Theologicae ac Philosophicae* (1652) that the Word of God was the "first truth" (*prima veritas*) and "the first rule for all things that must be believed and done" (*regula prima omnium credendorum et faciendorum*).[53]

Owen viewed Scripture in the same way, as "the central integrating point of his intellectual life."[54] He described Scripture's role as *principium cognoscendi* with the imagery of a spring: "Our belief of the Scriptures to be the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the two springs of all our interest in Christian religion. From them are all those streams of light and truth derived whereby our souls are watered, refreshed, and made fruitful unto God."[55] This foundational place of Scripture in his thought can be seen in *Theologoumena Pantodapa* (1661), where Scripture supplied not only the substance but the structure of his entire project as

he described these "theological affirmations of all sorts" according to the covenants God made with man.[56]

For the Reformed in general, and for Owen especially, Scripture is sufficient to determine and regulate the church's worship. This was true in the period of early orthodoxy, as expressed in documents such as the Belgic Confession of Faith: "We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large" (art. 7).[57] In the era of high orthodoxy, Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) stated in his typically memorable way, that "[Scripture] shows the *Credenda*, what we are to believe; and the *Agenda*, what we are to practise."[58] Owen believed in this doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture for worship, as will be shown principally from his *Lesser* and *Greater Catechisms*[59] as well as *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*.[60]

A Puritan Doctrine?

Is this conviction that Scripture is sufficient for both salvation and worship only a Puritan doctrine? Was Owen an inheritor of an idiosyncratic belief in relation to the rest of Reformed orthodoxy? R. J. Gore and J. I. Packer have recently explained Owen's doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture as it applies to worship as uniquely a "Puritan approach to worship."[61]

Packer, for example, argues that "the idea that direct biblical warrant…is required to sanction every substantive item included in the public worship of God was a Puritan innovation."[62] Before examining Owen's doctrine, he must be contextualized in order to refute this oversimplification on the part of Gore and Packer.

It is without controversy that Owen stood in harmony with the "spiritual brotherhood" of Puritans on this doctrine. For example, in his 1605 polemical tract, *English Puritanism*, William Bradshaw (1571–1618) summarized the Puritans' concern that because the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, they should be viewed as sufficient for serving God in public worship, because "they hold and maintain, That the Word of God contained in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles, is of absolute perfection, given by Christ the head of the Church, to be unto the same, the sole Canon and rule of all matters of Religion, and the worship and service of God whatsoever. And that whatsoever done in the same service and worship cannot be justified by the said word, is unlawful. And therefore that it is a sin, to force any Christian to do any act of Religion or Divine service, that cannot evidently be warranted by the same."[63] Bradshaw's argument was a standard Puritan one. Positively, because

Christ gave His Word to His church, it is "perfect," that is, sufficient for the "worship and service of God." Negatively, what is not commanded in the Word is "unlawful" in public worship. The practical result is that Christians are freed from being bound to serve God in ways contrary to His Word.

In 1601, William Perkins (1558–1602) wrote *A Warning against the Idolatry of the Last Times* in order to instruct an "ignorant multitude touching the true worship of God. For the remainders of Popery yet stick in the minds of many of them, and they think, that to serve God, is nothing else but to deal truly with men, and to babble a few words morning and evening, at home, or in the Church, though there be no understanding."[64] In order to instruct the ignorant, Perkins first had to warn against idolatry. Besides the idolatry of false conceptions of God and Christ, Perkins said the second kind of idolatry was "when God is worshipped otherwise, and by other means, than he hath revealed in the word. For when men set up a devised worship, they set up also a devised God."[65] For Perkins, to worship according to the Word was to worship the true God; to worship contrary to the Word was to worship another God entirely. After warning against such idolatry Perkins concluded this treatise with a positive instruction about the rule of divine worship, in which he wrote, "that nothing may go under the name of the worship of God, which he hath not ordained in his own word, and commanded to us as his own worship."[66] According to Perkins, then, the Word of God is the source and rule of true worship.

Another example comes from Thomas Watson. In expositing the answer to Shorter Catechism Question 1, that "man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever," Watson explained that "glorifying God consists in adoration, or worship."[67] This worship was twofold, either civil reverence to persons of honor, or divine worship given to God. Of divine worship Watson eloquently and passionately wrote:

> This divine worship God is very jealous of; this is the apple of his eye, this is the pearl of his crown, which he guards, as he did the tree of life, with cherubims and a flaming sword, that no man may come near it to violate it: divine worship must be such as God himself hath appointed, else it is offering strange fire, Lev. x. 2. The Lord would have Moses make the tabernacle, "according to the pattern in the Mount," Exod. xxv. 40.; he must not leave out any thing in the pattern, nor add to it. If God was so exact and curious about the place of worship, how exact will he be about the matter of his worship! Surely here every thing must be according to the pattern prescribed in his word.[68]

For Watson, divine regulation of worship was an extension of the jealousy of

God. This led Watson to ask rhetorically that if God cared about the place of His worship, how much more so the matter of His worship?

Owen stood in this line of Puritan tradition on the issue of worship. While his understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture as it applied to worship was in harmony with his Puritan brotherhood, it was not unique either to him or to them. Admittedly, John Calvin was not the touchstone of Reformed orthodoxy in this or any other period,[69] but since Gore and Packer invoke him to show the alleged discontinuity between earlier Reformed theology and that of Owen and the Puritans, Calvin's doctrine needs to be stated succinctly. There was unanimity between Calvin and the Reformers and Owen and the Puritans on this subject. Scholars have considered in detail Calvin's doctrine of worship, but a few brief selections from his writings will nevertheless be helpful.[70]

Calvin's basic stance on worship, in terms of why it needed to be reformed and how that reform was to take place, was not better stated than in his 1544 letter to Emperor Charles V titled *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*:

> I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do, has in itself, a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," (1 Sam. xv. 22; Matt. xv. 9.) Every addition to His word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere "will worship"…is vanity. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.[71]

For Calvin, like the Puritans, all worship commanded in the Word of God was disapproved, fruitless, an abomination, and "will worship." He later defined "will worship" in his commentary on Colossians as "a voluntary worship which men choose of their own will without a command from God."[72] Without God's command, worship is merely devised from the minds of men. He stated this in his commentary on Psalm 9:11:

> Farther, we see that the holy fathers, when they resorted to Sion to offer sacrifices to God, did not act merely according to the suggestion of their own minds; but what they did proceeded from faith in the word of God, and was done in obedience to his command; and they were, therefore, approved

> of by him for their religious service. Whence it follows, that there is no ground whatever to make use of their example as an argument or excuse for the religious observances which superstitious men have, by their own fancy, invented for themselves…. Let us know and be fully persuaded, that wherever the faithful, who worship him purely and in due form, according to the appointment of his word, are assembled together to engage in the solemn acts of religious worship, he is graciously present, and presides in the midst of them.[73]

Again, Calvin clearly contrasted worship according to the minds of men and worship proceeding from faith in the Word of God. The former is superstition, while the latter is approved by God. This led Calvin to enjoin his sixteenth-century hearers to worship God according to the commands of His Word and to receive the spiritual blessings of that worship. In this it is clear that Calvin was as concerned to apply Scripture to public worship as any of the Puritans, including Owen, who said in a posthumously published work, "Religious worship not divinely instituted and appointed is false worship, not accepted with God."[74] For Owen, this approach to Scripture and worship was a part of his inheritance as an international Reformed theologian and not a doctrine that was peculiar either to him or to English Puritanism. This will be seen in greater detail from the examination of Owen's *Lesser* and *Greater Catechisms,* as well as his post-1662 catechism, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God.*

Background to Owen's Catechisms

After becoming minister of the parish in Fordham on July 16, 1643, John Owen encountered the pastoral problem of doctrinal ignorance. His impressions were grim: Fordham was "full of grossly ignorant persons."[75] Besides public preaching, his remedy was to catechize his people from house to house. This was a classic pastoral strategy rooted in Paul's ministry among the Ephesians (Acts 20:20) and the medieval and Reformation method of catechizing. In 1645, he wrote a *Lesser Catechism* and *Greater Catechism*, published together as *Two Short Catechisms: Wherein the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ are Unfolded and Explained.* More than two decades later, he wrote another catechism consisting of fifty-three questions and answers. The first eighteen questions of *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God* pertain to instituted worship, while questions 19 to 53 deal with instituted discipline.

While all three of these documents are catechisms, the differences between the *Lesser Catechism* and *Greater Catechism,* on the one hand, and *A Brief Instruction*, on the other, are many. The former were written for "ignorant persons" in Fordham, while the latter was composed for a national audience. The

former contained the minimum knowledge necessary to partake of communion, while the latter was written as a doctrinal treatise in the midst of political turmoil. This fact gives great clarity to *A Brief Instruction*. Despite the Clarendon Code, dissenting congregations were growing in the early years of Charles II's reign. *Brief Instruction* became one of the sources Congregational churches looked to for guidance. As a summary of Congregational doctrine and polity, it became so popular that it was known as the Independents' Catechism.[76] Its influence is also seen in the negative response it received. In 1668 Benjamin Camfield, rector of Whitby, in Derbyshire, attacked it in an octavo volume of 347 pages, *A Serious Examination of the Independents' Catechism, and Therein of the Chief Principles of Nonconformity to, and Separation from, the Church of England*.[77] Later, in 1670, another attack came in the form of George Vernon's (c. 1638–1720) *A Letter to a Friend Concerning some of Dr Owen's Principles and Practices*.[78]

Man's Chief End

In *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, Owen begins where Calvin and the Westminster Assembly of divines began,[79] with the question of man's chief or highest end: "What doth God require of us in our dependence on him, that he may be glorified by us, and we accepted with him?" Note that this question is formulated in the language of covenant relationship. Although the term covenant is not explicitly used, when Owen spoke of what God requires of us, "that he may be glorified in us, and we accepted of him," he alludes to the basic idea of the covenant: "Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Jer. 30:22).

Owen's answer to this question was twofold. First, believers are to worship God. Second, believers are to do so "by the ways of his own appointment." This worship was not the "natural or moral" worship reflected in the first commandment—natural because it depended upon the nature of God Himself and because it was "concreted with the nature of man"—instead, Owen's treatise concerned "those outward ways and means whereby God hath appointed that faith, and love, and fear of him to be exercised and expressed unto his glory… upon his free and arbitrary disposal."[80] This instituted worship was not merely an internal act; it also required external actions. As he went on to say, sinners cannot find acceptance with God if they neglect His external and freely appointed worship. If they do, they are like Adam, who also transgressed an institution of God. Further, by external worship, believers are helped and assisted in their natural worship, having the habit of natural worship strengthened and the practice of it increased.[81]

Worship and the Word

In his *Greater Catechism*, Owen clearly taught that Scripture was the *principium cognoscendi* in chapter 1, "Of the Scripture." He described the Christian religion as "the only way of knowing God aright, and living unto him," that is, worshiping Him (*Greater Catechism*, Q. 1). In this description, Owen follows in the line of English Puritans such as William Ames (1576–1633), who conceived of theology in practical terms: *theologia est doctrina Deo vivendi* (theology is the doctrine of living to God).[82]

How were men to know God aright and live unto Him? In the *Lesser Catechism*, Owen opened with this overall basic question, "Whence is all truth concerning God and ourselves to be learned?" His answer was, "From the holy Scriptures, the Word of God."[83] Writing in English for those whom he described as "grossly ignorant," he expressed in a catechetical way that Scripture is the *principium cognoscendi*. So also in his *Greater Catechism*: "Whence is this to be learned? From the holy Scripture only" (Q. 2). The fullest description in Owen's catechisms, however, comes from *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, which asked, "How, then, are these ways and means of the worship of God made known to us? In and by the written word only, which contains a full and perfect revelation of the will of God as to his whole worship and all the concernments of it" (Q. 3). These questions and answers show his belief that both the knowledge of God and the knowledge of how to live unto Him in a life of worship was derived *ex Scriptura sola*. This led to the question of the nature of Scripture that allowed him to speak of it as he did in terms of knowledge and worship: "What is the Scripture? The books of the Old and New Testament, given by inspiration from God, containing all things necessary to be believed and done, that God may be worshipped and our souls saved" (*Greater Catechism*, Q. 3). He not only limited Scripture to the canonical books of the two Testaments but also limited the scope of its sufficiency to the objects of faith leading to salvation and the objects of duty leading to right worship.[84] Of note concerning Scripture's sufficiency in worship are his marginalia. Concerning question 3 he wrote, "All human inventions unnecessary helps in the worship of God." He could say this because of what he said about the nature of Scripture. He also drew this conclusion: "The word thereof is the sole directory for faith, worship, and life."[85] Far from being a meager or partial source for the knowledge of worship, he said that *sola Scriptura* implied *sufficientia Scripturae*, as the Word was "full" and "perfect" concerning worship (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 3). The all-sufficiency of Scripture, then, was the place to find the matter and manner of true worship. As he earlier affirmed in the Savoy Declaration, taken from the Westminster Confession of Faith (22.1):

> The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is just, good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

God's purpose in giving His Word was that His people might know His mind and will as to the worship and obedience He requires of them. This instruction was necessitated by the darkened state of the mind of fallen man, so that "of ourselves we are ignorant [of] how God is, how he ought to be, worshipped."[86] Owen rooted God's right to determine His own worship in the fact that He is a jealous God, which he described as "that holy property of his nature in an especial manner about his worship."[87]

What exactly is the church to do in worship, according to the Word? Owen spoke of the calling of assemblies for worship, prayer, singing of psalms, preaching, sacraments, and discipline as the principal institutions of new covenant worship (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 17).[88] With regard to the singing of psalms, Owen joined twenty-four others in authoring a preface to *The Psalms of David in Meeter* (1673).[89] According to this preface, "Now though spiritual songs of mere human composure may have their use, yet our devotion is best secured, where the matter and words are of immediately divine inspiration; and to us *David's Psalms* seem plainly intended by those terms of '*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*,' which the apostle useth (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)."[90]

Creation, Worship, and the Word

After chapters on God, the Trinity, and the internal works of God (*opera ad intra*), chapter 5 of the *Greater Catechism* moves on to "Of the Works of God that Outwardly are of Him." In this chapter, Owen dealt with the creation of man and his purpose: worshiping his Creator. In this connection, he explained why the Word was necessary to lead man in his worship even before the fall. He briefly wrote about the works of creation and providence (*Greater Catechism*, Q. 1, 2) and their relevance to worship and the Word: "Wherefore did God make man? For his own glory in his service and obedience" (*Greater Catechism*, Q. 3). The *Lesser Catechism* follows this same line of teaching, applying its opening question concerning the Word to the truth that man's entire life was to be one of worship: "Q. What is required from us towards Almighty God? A. Holy and spiritual obedience, according to his law given unto us."[91] We were

made to obey and glorify God (cf. Westminster Larger Catechism and Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 1). The key phrase in the *Lesser Catechism* is that man is to do this "according to his law given unto us." The Word rules man's life of worship. This was a rudimentary polemic for his parishioners, not only against Roman Catholicism but also against one of Owen's other polemical targets, the Quakers. As he explained in some detail in *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, the Quakers rejected Scripture as their guide for worship.92

Man was created to glorify God through service and obedience, that is, worship in its widest meaning. In the garden, man's worship was of the "state of pure, uncorrupted nature."93 He was made to be a servant, wholly devoted to his Creator, "in his person—in his soul and body—in all his faculties, powers, and senses—in all that was given unto him or intrusted with him."94 Every aspect of his created state was to be engaged in worship. Owen used the classic Aristotelian categories of man's constitution: mind, will, and affections.95 Originally, all these parts or faculties were in what Owen called "an habitual conformity unto God…an habitual disposition unto all the duties of that obedience that was required of him."96

The fact that God was to be worshiped according to His own will and appointment was "a principle branch of the law of our creation" that was written on the heart and restated and confirmed in the second commandment (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 2). Here Owen linked worship both to the law of nature, citing the classic texts to that effect (Rom. 1:21; 2:14–15; Acts 14:16–17; 17:23–31),97 and also to the Mosaic law, in the second commandment (Ex. 20:4–6). As Owen said, no matter what conception people had of God, they knew naturally that God was to be "worshipped with some outward solemn worship," and not merely as individuals but as societies.98

Although this was true naturally, he did specify one way in which the old covenant law was distinct from natural law: the means of knowing precisely how to worship God. This aspect was most important to him: "The ways and means of that worship depend merely on God's sovereign pleasure and institution."99 In explaining the second commandment, Owen followed the standard Reformed argument that man was "severely forbidden" to add worship "of our own inventions."100 God's purpose in this command was to send believers to Jesus Christ as our chief prophet, the one whom God "hath endowed with sovereign authority to reveal his will and ordain his worship." One of the proofs Owen gave for this assertion was John 1:18: "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."101

In the marginal notes to *Greater Catechism*, question 3, Owen explained one

of the implications for man's creation for the purpose of worship, saying, "The approaching unto God in his service is the chief exaltation of our nature above the beasts that perish."[102] Owen connected man's original ability to perform this service of worship with the *imago Dei* in man that distinguished him from animals: "Was man able to yield the service and worship that God required of him? Yea, to the uttermost, being created upright in the image of God, in purity, innocence, righteousness, and holiness" (*Greater Catechism*, Q. 4). God gave man the ability to worship by virtue of his created nature.[103] Kapic has recently made the claim that, like many of the church fathers, Owen distinguished the image of God from the likeness of God in Genesis 1:26. He says that while "image" denoted man's original faculties properly oriented toward God, likeness denoted righteousness and the ability to respond to God in obedience.[104] Yet the citations Kapic offers from Owen's *Works* (10:80; 12:156–58; 22:158) do not clearly show this distinction, a point McDonald has made in response.[105] Evidence that Owen used these terms interchangeably is found in his 1679 treatise, *Christologia*: "We had by sin lost the image of God, and thereby all gracious acceptance with him,—all interest in his love and favour. In our recovery, as we have declared, this image is again to be restored unto us, or we are to be renewed into the likeness of God."[106]

The importance of the foregoing for worship and the sufficiency of Scripture is then brought to a conclusion in these words: "What was the rule whereby man was at first to be directed in his obedience? The moral or eternal law of God, implanted in his nature and written in his heart by creation, being the tenor of the covenant between God and him, sacramentally typified by the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (*Greater Catechism*, Q. 5).[107] According to Owen, even in the state of innocence Adam's worship was directed by God by means of a rule He gave. As his marginal note stated: "God never allowed, from the beginning, that the will of the creature should be the measure of his worship and honour."[108] By virtue of his creation, man had the moral law written on his heart to direct him in glorifying God. Being in covenant with God, man was to follow the law of his Lord. Owen would later state in his Hebrews commentary that the covenant between God and man always has had external worship annexed to it.[109]

Behind this teaching lay a key distinction. The Reformed orthodox adopted a distinction from the medieval church to describe theology in terms of *theologia archetypa* (archetypal theology) and *theologia ectypa* (ectypal theology). Franciscus Junius (1545–1602) was the first to use these terms.[110] This distinction is between theology as God knows it (*theologia archetypa*), as the original, and theology as man knows it (*theologia ectypa*), as a copy. These

categories express not only the nature of theological knowledge but also how man comes to know it.111 Owen also adopted this terminology.112 Rehnman asserts that "Reformed scholars regard man's knowledge of God properly as ectypal, not a copy of the infinite divine knowledge and, since human knowledge rests upon the revelatory initiative of God, it seems to imply that man cannot conceive a theology by way of *analogia entis*" (the analogy of being).113 This statement illuminates Owen's point that even before the fall, before original sin and its noetic effects, man still needed revelation to guide him in his duties toward God, because man's knowledge of God, of His will and worship, is always a creaturely knowledge, a derived knowledge.114 Before the fall, this revelation was the innate sense of God either from creation or providence. After the fall, this knowledge was greatly diminished and therefore insufficient to lead humanity to worship properly. Thus, there was a necessity for further revelation regarding true worship.115 This necessity is located in the fact that the fall has effaced the image of God in humans who are now unrighteous; it has marred the image and rendered man unable to worship naturally as he could before. At the same time, the faculties that enabled Adam to have a relationship with God remained in humanity.116

Worship and the Patriarchs

In his 1643 work,[117] *The Duties of Pastors and People Distinguished*, Owen traced the theme of worship from Adam to Christ, showing the necessity of the Word to divine service. One of the questions he seeks to answer concerning the patriarchs before the giving of the law was how they worshiped since they had no canon of Scripture. His answer was that families and their neighbors gathered to "perform those things which they knew to be required, by the law of nature, tradition, or special revelation (the unwritten word of those times), in the service of God."[118] He did not see these three as differing sources of revelation but as different modes of the one revelation by which humanity worshiped its Creator, even apart from any order of ministers, for "God would never allow that in any regard the will of the creature should be the measure of his honour and worship."[119] Concerning the law of nature, he said the earliest family worshiped by means of Adam's oral instruction, while the church later did what had become tradition, which was sporadically "helped forward by such which received particular revelations in their generation, such as Noah."[120]

After the giving of the law, worship was much more clearly regulated by the special revelation of the Word of God. In contrast, during the period before the law, "we sought for the manner of God's worship from the practice of men." When God's covenant began to be administered differently in the time of Israel, the content and forms of worship were determined "from the prescription of God." He went so far as to say that from post-fall Adam to Moses, humanity "guessed at what was commanded by what was done," reasoning *a posteriori*. From Moses onward, "what was done [was determined] by what was commanded," reasoning *a priori*.[121] While much of the worship in the Mosaic period of covenant administration was the ceremonial worship of sacrifices and offerings performed by priests in the tabernacle or temple, the people of God still had an interest in worship in two primary ways: hearing the Word read and expounded, and meditating upon it.[122]

Worship from Old Covenant to the New Another of Owen's major concerns was the issue of continuity and discontinuity between worship under the old covenant and under the new. He asked whether "these ways and means have been always the same from the beginning."[123] His answer was that while the "internal" acts of worship remained the same, the "external" forms of worship differed greatly.[124] This was a common Puritan distinction. Owen's contemporary, Thomas Manton (1620–1677), drew upon the same distinction in expounding Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit." This implied, Manton said, that believers worshiped God "with the inward and

spiritual affections of a renewed heart."[125] This internal worship consisted of faith, reverence, love, and delight in God.[126] In contrast, external worship is "those offices and duties by which our honour and respect to God is signified and expressed." It consists in the Word, prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and the sacraments, as well as the entire Christian life, which was "a constant hymn to God, or a continual act of worship."[127] This distinction showed "therefore a Christian should not rest in an external form,"[128] but should realize that "external worship is but a means to the internal."[129] Manton gave a rhetorical way of remembering his point with a Latin phrase, *finis est nobilior mediis* (the end is more excellent than the means).

What Owen drew from Scripture was that God worked in different ways at different times throughout the history of redemption (cf. Heb. 1:1–2). After the promise was given in Genesis 3:15, worship was offered by means of sacrifice in the days of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), then by circumcision in the days of Abraham (Gen. 17:10), then by the Passover (Exodus 12), then by the law and all its ordinances (Exodus 20).[130] Since God ordained all these external forms of worship by His authority, by that same authority they ceased after the coming of Christ.[131] Would there be further alterations under the gospel since God had once changed the external form of worship? No, because God's final revelation of His will came in and through His incarnate Son, and "all his commands and institutions are to be observed inviolably unto the end of the world, without alteration, diminution, or addition."[132] The old forms of worship were abolished since they pointed forward to Christ, "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4), and because He came as Lord over the house of God with full authority unlike those before Him. Here Owen went on to expound the words of Hebrews 3:1–6, locating the authority of Christ to change the worship of the house of God in His being the Son. Christ came as one greater than the angels, the prophets, and Moses himself.[133] Christology, then, was and remains the key to the worship of the new covenant.[134]

Worship and Antinomianism

In light of the distinction between old and new covenant worship, one key question for the Puritans was whether the abolishing of the old covenant and its forms of worship meant that new covenant Christians are freed from all obligations. Chad van Dixhoorn has shown in his doctoral dissertation that one of the great challenges facing the Westminster Assembly and the Reformed churches of the seventeenth century was antinomianism.[135]

The precise question Owen asked was whether believers could enter "an estate of faith and perfection in obedience" and so be freed from "the observation of gospel institutions" (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 6). His answer was an appeal to covenant theology.[136] His rejection of such a possibility was based on the reality that the ordinances of gospel worship were "inseparably annexed unto the evangelical administration of the covenant of grace," and any rejection of these ordinances was a rejection, not only of the covenant, but also of the "wisdom and authority of Jesus Christ."[137] Owen went on to make the following points.

First, the Christian life is one of walking with God in the covenant of grace. All faith and obedience belongs to this covenant and "other ways of communion with him, of obedience unto him, of enjoyment of him, on this side of heaven and glory, he hath not appointed nor revealed."[138] Owen cited Hebrews 8:9–12 as the substance of this covenant, which consists of the law being put into the minds of God's people and inscribed onto their hearts.[139] However, in this life there is no grace promised "to give them up unto a state of perfection, short of glory."[140]

Second, annexed to this covenant are the institutions of gospel worship. If these institutions were "omitted or deserted," the covenant itself and its grace would be renounced and relinquished.[141] Owen could not imagine a situation in which Christians thought they did not need "the grace of God, nor the mercy of God, nor the blood of Christ, nor the Spirit of Christ." Those that thought so had no standing with Owen: "It is not much material what they think of the ordinances of worship…. Their pride and folly…will speedily be their ruin."[142]

Third, Owen once again cited Hebrews 3:3–6 to demonstrate that "the Lord Christ is the absolute Lord 'over his own house'…and he has given out the laws whereby he will have it guided and ruled whilst it is in this world." The result of pleading "exemption from the obligation of those laws…is nothing but to cast off the lordship and dominion of Christ himself."[143] For Owen, then, refusing to worship according to the commands of Christ is a concrete refusal to submit to the lordship of Christ revealed in His Word.

Worship and the Believer's Experience As a Puritan, Owen's doctrine of the

sufficiency of the Word for worship was no mere intellectual exercise but one intended to effect change in the churches of England and evoke devotion in the hearts of believers. In *A Brief Instruction*, he taught that the believer was to have several aims in worship.

The first aim was sanctifying of the name of God (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 8). Believers were to reverence God's sovereign authority as God. This reverence should arise out of the consideration that God has appointed His own worship in His Word and should lead to submission and not worship that is a matter of adhering to form, custom, or the precepts of men.144 Another reason God's name is to be sanctified is that where He has commanded worship there He has placed His special presence. God made "blessed promises to his people, to grant them his presence and to bless them in their use" of His ordinances (*Brief Instruction*, Q.15). He went on to use the imagery of marriage to describe this special presence and its blessings, since the ordinances of worship were the "tokens of the marriage relation that is between him and them."145 The believer's obedience to God's ordinances is a part of the "conjugal covenant" He has made with him in Christ. When he comes to worship he shows that he is married to Christ, but when he neglects His worship or profanes it "by inventions or additions of [his] own," he commits "spiritual disloyalty, whoredom and adultery, which his soul abhorreth, for which he will cast off any church or people, and that for ever."146

Believers also sanctify God's name by exercising faith in the promises He annexed to His ordinances. Faith was necessary. Owen reached into Reformed sacramental theology to explain "that sacred relation which, by virtue of divine institution, is between the sacramental elements and the especial graces of the covenant which they exhibit and confirm; and the mixing of these promises with faith."147 Christians also sanctify God's name by delighting in His "will, wisdom, love, and grace" as manifested in the gospel ordinances.148 This delight is not to be a "carnal self-pleasing" or a "satisfaction in the outward modes or manner of the performance of divine worship." Here Owen sought to cut off any idea that worship was for personal pleasure, whether in serving the emotions or even serving the eyes, such as in the Roman Mass or the ceremonies associated with the Book of Common Prayer. Instead, to delight in worship sanctifies the name of God when believers engage in "contemplation on the will, wisdom, grace, and condescension of God" who was pleased "of his own sovereign mere will and grace, so to manifest himself unto such poor sinful creatures as we are, so to condescend unto our weakness, so to communicate himself unto us, so to excite and draw forth our souls unto himself, and to give us such pledges of his gracious intercourse with us by Jesus Christ."149 Finally,

to persevere in obeying God's ordinances sanctifies God's name. Owen's pastoral heart can be seen in this point. Perseverance was necessary in the times in which the Congregationalists lived. They followed the pure worship of God and were persecuted because of it and were tempted to turn away to an easier path.150 Those who persevered like Antipas (Rev. 2:13), took up their crosses (Matt. 10:38–39), and held on to what they had done (2 John 8) would "receive a full reward."151

The second aim of the believer in worship is "owning a profession of Christ as Lord" (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 9). The term "owning" was used by the Puritans to speak of a personal appropriation of the gospel promises God has made, so as to make them their very own. Believers "owned" or embraced their profession when they subjected themselves to Christ by observing His gospel ordinances.152 This profession, "so much abused and mistaken in the world, consists in the keeping of his commandments."153 Because He is Lord of the church and the institutions of worship "are his most especial commands," believers' obedience of them is a profession of His lordship and their subjection to Him.154 In *The Duties of Pastors and People Distinguished*, Owen contrasted sincere believers' submission with that of false professors in a striking way. He said, "There be many Uzzahs amongst us, who have an itching desire to be fingering of the ark." These, he said, wanted to worship in their own way. He warned, though, that none should "under a pretence of Christian liberty and freedom of conscience, cast away all brotherly amity, and cut themselves off from the communion of the church."155 For Owen, then, submission to God's commands in worship was a mark of true godliness.

The third aim is the building up of faith. By observing Christ's institutions, God builds up His people's faith (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 10). Later in the treatise, he said that true devotion is the effect of faith—faith in the precepts and promises of God. This is a crucial point. Only when used in faith do the institutions of God build up faith. On the contrary, one cannot put true faith in human additions to worship that have no authority in the Word of God, and so they cannot build up true faith and true devotion.156 Owen clearly evidences that he believed the institutions of gospel worship to be instrumental causes of edification. He said "in and by them" believers' faith was built up. The efficient cause of edification, though, was "the exercise of that communion with God in Christ Jesus, which, in their due observation, he graciously invites and admits us unto."157 As Owen went on to say, all the efficacy of these institutions depends upon God Himself.158

The fourth aim is mutual love and communion among believers. God's ordinances accomplish this for two reasons. First, in their appointment to this

purpose: for example, the fact that the Lord's Supper is intended to unite believers as one bread. Second, by their nature they bring believers into communion with each person of the holy Trinity.159

Believers should be concerned to worship according to the Word (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 12). This means observing everything the Lord commanded (cf. Matt. 28:18–20), since "if we are his friends and disciples, we will keep his commandments."160 Owen drew a lesson for his own time from the days of the Reformation, saying despite "the defilement of all the ordinances of the gospel, under the antichristian apostasy, yet the temple and the altar are to be measured again, Rev. xi.1, and the tabernacle of God was again to be raised amongst men, chap. xxi.3."161 Every member of Christ's church, then, is "to search the Scriptures, to inquire into the mind of Christ, and to find out whatever is appointed by him, or required of his disciples, and that with hearts and minds prepared unto a due observation of whatever shall be discovered to be his will."162 In commenting upon Hebrews 8:3, "For every high priest is ordained," Owen stated the injunction to worship according to the Word in negative terms: "Whoever undertakes any thing in religion or divine worship without it [God's appointment or ordination], besides it, beyond it, is a transgressor, and therein worshippeth God in vain. He whom God doth not ordain in his service, is an intruder; and that which he doth not appoint is a usurpation. Nor will he accept of any duties, but what he himself hath made so."163 God's worship is serious business to the believer, since by offering worship according to God's Word, he will be accepted; but worship contrary to that Word will cause him to be rejected.

Owen also appealed to sincere Christians to be mindful that they are living in the last days and to respond appropriately in worship. His eschatological expectation is found not only in his post-ejection treatise, *A Brief Instruction*, but also in his pre-ejection treatises. As Jeffrey Jue has demonstrated, this eschatological understanding permeated the age of the Puritans and was a continued expectation even after the Act of Uniformity and Great Ejection on St. Bartholomew's Day 1662.164 As an example, in *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, Owen's preface began with these words: "The glass of our lives seems to run and keep pace with the extremity of time. The end of those 'ends of the world' which began with the gospel is doubtless coming upon us…. Much sand cannot be behind, and Christ shakes the glass; many minutes of that hour cannot remain."165 Again, his end-time expectations can be seen in the title of his 1649 sermon before Parliament, "The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth."166

Owen spoke of the relationship between eschatology and worship, saying,

“The great apostasy of the church in the last days…consists principally in false worship and a departure from the institutions of Christ—Rev. xiii. 4, 5, xvii. 1–5” (*Brief Instruction*, Q.16).[167] In his 1676 treatise, *The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel and the Punishment of Apostates Declared*, he spoke of apostasy from evangelical worship being “that great defection foretold by our apostle, 2 Thess. ii.3–12, which is also prophesied of in the Revelation, and did accordingly come to pass.”[168] It came to pass because men lost faith in the gospel. This led Satan in his craftiness to cause men to “introduce a carnal, visible, pompous worship, suited unto that inward principle and light whereby they were acted.”[169] In *A Brief Instruction*, he described this false worship as “fornication” and “whoredom” that consisted in the “adulterating of the worship of God, and the admission of false, self-invented worship.”[170] Because of this, he said, “it is easy, then, to gather of how great concernment unto us it is, especially in these latter days.”[171]

The True Beauty of Worship

In connection with the change in worship from old covenant to new, Owen discusses the beauty of worship. In *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, one of the objections he sought to answer was that since some of Christ's commandments such as the holy kiss and foot washing have ceased, this meant that the church was free to appoint new rites in order to further devotion by making worship "more decent, beautiful, and orderly" (*Brief Instruction*, Q. 14).172 Yet for Owen, the beauty of gospel worship is not to be found in the outward ceremonies and rites of men but in the triune God Himself: "It consisteth in its relation unto God by Jesus Christ, as the merciful high priest over his house, with the glorious administration of the Spirit therein."173 In his sermon "The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship," he cited Ephesians 2:18 as confirmation of this beauty. Earlier in his ministry, he described this passage as a "heavenly directory."174 "In the spiritual worship of the gospel the whole blessed Trinity, and each person therein distinctly, do in that economy and dispensation wherein they act severally and peculiarly in the work of our redemption, afford distinct communion with themselves unto the souls of the worshippers."175 If worship is not trinitarian, then it is not Christian worship. The trinitarian nature of salvation cannot be divorced from worship. Both are organically related so that our worship of the triune God is a reflection of our trinitarian salvation.

Owen expounded this fellowship with the triune God most fully in his treatise *Communion with God*. The apex of the Christian's fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was found in worship according to the rule of Scripture. Owen warned, however, that the Holy Spirit should not be worshiped without worshiping the Trinity. In his polemic against the Book of Common Prayer, he said, "Hence is that way of praying to the Trinity, by the repetition of the same petition to the several persons (as in the Litany), groundless, if not impious."176 Furthermore, he argued that worshiping the Father through Christ in the Spirit, according to the language of Ephesians 2:18, was "the great rubric of our service," and "this is the great canon, which if it be neglected, there is no decency in whatever else is done in this way."177

Owen cited passages such as Hebrews 9:1, 2 Corinthians 3:7–11, Ephesians 2:18, and Hebrews 10:19–21 to contrast the worldly and carnal worship of the old covenant with the heavenly and spiritual worship of the new covenant.178 Owen at once concludes, "This is the glory of gospel worship and the beauty of it; whose consideration whilst the minds of men are diverted from, to look for beauty in the outward preparation of ceremonies, they lose the privilege purchased for believers by the blood of Christ."179 In this way, Owen connected

the beauty of worship to that which is spiritual, simple, and heavenly.

Conclusion

In discussing the Sabbath and worship in the thought of John Owen, we have touched on two distinctive features of seventeenth-century Puritan theology. Perhaps nowhere else in history do we find such profound concern for keeping the Lord's Day holy. This concern sprang from the Puritan belief that the Lord's Day was the Christian Sabbath, rooted in creation and hence a universal ordinance that was confirmed in the second commandment and solidified in redemption, which accounts for the change of day. As the Christian Sabbath, corporate worship on that day for Owen was the height of Christian experience. In the new covenant, believers have the light of the completed Scriptures to provide the rule for worshiping God in a spiritual and not carnal way. As noted, Owen's views on worship were formed in the context of debates with Roman Catholics, Laudians, Antinomians, and Quakers. These debates did not, however, lend themselves to a purely negative apologetic for Reformed worship. Rather, in this context, Owen was able to set forth with remarkable clarity the nature, content, and form of biblical worship under the new covenant, reflecting all of the glorious beauty of God's final revelation in Christ.

1. For an analysis and critique of Calvin's doctrine of the Sabbath, see Richard B. Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 1998). The idea that Calvin was a "nascent Sabbatarian" in the Puritan sense simply will not stand up to the evidence in our opinion, particularly as one considers his comments on Hebrews 4 and the fact that keeping the Sabbath was something that could be done on other days of the week because the believer is resting in Christ.

2. In response to Cocceius, see the work of Johannes Hoornbeeck, *Heyliginghe van Gods Naam en dagh*… (Leiden, 1655).

3. See H. B. Visser, *De geschiedenis van den sabbatsstrijd onder de gereformeerden in de seventiende eeeuw* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1939).

4. John Owen, *Exercitations Concerning the Name, Original, Nature, Use, and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest*…, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 19:265–546. Besides Owen's lengthy defense of the Christian Sabbath, other significant works of the period include: Nicholas Bownd, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath Plainely Layde Forth…* (London: Widdow Orwin for Iohn Porter and Thomas Man, 1595); William Twisse, *Of the Morality of the Fourth Commandement as Still in Force to Binde Christians…*(London: E. G. for John Rothwell, 1641); and Thomas Shepard, *Theses Sabbaticae…* (London: S. G. for John Rothwell, 1655). The most detailed defense that we know of comes from the Westminster divines Daniel Cawdrey and Hebert Palmer, *Sabbatum Redivivum: or The Christian Sabbath Vindicated: The First Part* (London: Robert White for Thomas Underhill, 1645); and *Sabbatum Redivivum: or, The Christian Sabbath Vindicated, The Second Part* (London: Thomas Maxey for Samuel Gellibrand and Thomas Underhill, 1651).

5. In the secondary literature, James T. Dennison's work on the Sabbath in Puritan England provides a fascinating analysis of the Puritan view of the Sabbath in relation to the position of theologians in the sixteenth century as well as the various threats to the doctrine in England during the seventeenth century. *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532–1700* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983). See also Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Keith L. Sprunger, "English and Dutch Sabbatarianism and the Development of Puritan Social Theology

(1600–1660)," *Church History* 51, no. 1 (March 1982): 24–38; Patrick Collinson, "The Beginnings of English Sabbatarianism," in *Studies in Church History*, vol. 1, ed. C. W. Dugmore and C. Duggan (London: Nelson, 1964), 211–14; and Winton U. Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

6. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 235.

7. Sprunger, "English and Dutch Sabbatarianism," 25.

8. Shepard, preface to the reader, in *Theses Sabbaticae*.

9. Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "Practical Divinity and Spirituality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 199.

10. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 236.

11. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 129.

12. While the Puritans almost unanimously held to the Lord's Day Sabbath, there was a great deal more diversity among the Continental theologians. So any talk of a "Continental" position on the Sabbath should be guarded, perhaps even abandoned. That said, it is clear from Owen's treatise on the Sabbath and the works of other Puritans that they were in dialogue with many Continental Reformed theologians with whom they agreed and disagreed on this much disputed topic.

13. William Gouge, *The Sabbaths Sanctification*… (London, 1641).

14. John Prideaux, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*… (London: E. P. for Henry Seile, 1634), 5ff.

15. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:294.

16. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:298.

17. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:299. Prideaux brings this up and refers to the Papist exegete Tostatus Abulensis, who argued that Moses spoke in Genesis 2:1–3 "by way of *anticipation*." *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, 10.

18. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:300.

19. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:298.

20. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:313.

21. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:314.

22. Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 146.

23. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:328.

24. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:334.

25. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:335.

26. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:339.

27. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:355.

28. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:366.

29. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:368.

30. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 237.

31. Interested readers may wish to consult Andrew T. Lincoln's article, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 197–220. Lincoln makes use of Hebrews 3:7–4:13 in an attempt to show that the Lord's Day is not the Sabbath. In response, Richard Gaffin provides what may be the best treatment of Hebrews 3–4 from a Sabbatarian perspective. Incidentally, Gaffin's exegesis differs from Owen's at several points, even though they are arguing for the same position. See "A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 33–51.

32. John Owen, "An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 21:256.

33. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:276.

34. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:327.

35. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:332.

36. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:332–33.

37. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:335. Owen explains how Christ rested from His works after His resurrection and yet continues to work by means of His graces and the Holy Spirit in *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:409.

38. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:338.

39. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 21:327.

40. Peter Heylyn, *The History of the Sabbath. In Two Books* (London, 1636).

41. George Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1849), 1:245.

42. John Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 6:235.

43. Flavel speaks of recreations of the body, which are otherwise lawful the rest of the week, as sinful. The works that are permissible are those of necessity and mercy, according to the example of Christ (Matt. 12:3–4). See *An Exposition*, in *Works*, 6:236.

44. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:438.

45. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:440.

46. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:443.

47. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:448.

48. Cf. David Clarkson, "Public Worship to Be Prefered Before Private," in *The Works of David Clarkson* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 3:187–209.

49. Owen, *Day of Sacred Rest*, in *Works*, 19:460. See also Flavel, *An Exposition*, in *Works*, 6:236–37.

50. On Owen's liturgical theology, see Daniel R. Hyde, "'Of Great Importance and of High Concernment': The Liturgical Theology of John Owen (1616–1683)" (ThM thesis, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2010).

51. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 245–46; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 2:151–223.

52. Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanau, 1615), *Synopsis, libri 1*. On Polanus, see Robert W. A. Letham, "Amandus Polanus: A Neglected Theologian?", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, no. 3 (1990): 463–76.

53. Johannes Maccovius, *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*, trans. Willem J. van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink and Rein Ferwerda (Apeldoorn, The Netherlands: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), 57.

54. Carl R. Trueman, "John Owen as a Theologian," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2002), 47. On Owen's doctrine of Scripture, see Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1998), 64–101.

55. John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein…*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4:121.

56. Trueman, "John Owen as a Theologian," 52–53. For a similar treatment of Christian doctrine via the unfolding of God's covenants with man, see John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace…* (London: Simeon Ash, 1645). On the issue of theological methodology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 155–77.

57. The Latin text reads *"Credimus Sacram hanc Scripturam Dei voluntatem perfecte complecti et quodcumque ab hominibus, ut salutem consequantur, credi necesse est, in illa sufficienter edoceri. Nam*

cum illic omnis divini cultus ratio, quem Deus a nobis exigit, fusissime descripta sit." De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften, ed. J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1976), 79.

58. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 30. On Watson, see Barry Till, "Watson, Thomas (d. 1686)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 57:671–72. For a typical Puritan sermon on the sufficiency of the Word, see Thomas Manton, "The Scripture Sufficient without Unwritten Tradition," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1870), 5:487–500.

59. John Owen, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:465–94.

60. John Owen, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 15:447–530.

61. R. J. Gore, *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2002), 93–95; Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 245–57.

62. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 247.

63. William Bradshaw, *English Puritanism, Containing the Main Opinions of the Ridgedest Sort of Those Called Puritans in the Realm of England*, 1.1, in *Several Treatises of Worship & Ceremonies* (London: Printed for Cambridge and Oxford, 1660), 35.

64. William Perkins, *A Warning against the Idolatry of the Last Times*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ…* (London: John Legatt and Cantrell Ligge, 1612–13), 1:670.

65. Perkins, *Warning against Idolatry*, in *Workes*, 1:672, col. 2.

66. Perkins, *Warning against Idolatry*, in *Workes*, 1:698, col. 2.

67. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 7.

68. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 8.

69. See Richard A. Muller, "Was Calvin a Calvinist? Or, Did Calvin (or Anyone Else in the Early Modern Era) Plant the 'TULIP'?" Calvin College, accessed March 10, 2011, http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/lectures/Richard%20Muller%20-%20Was%20Calvin%20a%20Calvinist.pdf.

70. On Calvin's doctrine, see W. Robert Godfrey, "Calvin and the Worship of God," in *The Worship of God: Reformed Concepts of Biblical Worship* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 31–49; and *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2009); Hughes Oliphant Old, "Calvin's Theology of Worship," in *Give Praise to God*, ed. Philip G. Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2003), 412–35; John D. Witvliet, "Images and Themes in John Calvin's Theology of Liturgy," in *The Legacy of John Calvin: Calvin Studies Society Papers 1999*, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2000), 130–52. On Calvin's doctrine vis-à-vis the Puritans, see William Young, "The Puritan Principle of Worship," in *Puritan Papers, Volume 1: 1956–1959*, ed. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2000), 141–53.

71. John Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1:128–29.

72. John Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, in *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (1965; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 11:343. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.8.17.

73. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, in *Commentaries* (1845–1849; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 4:121–22.

74. John Owen, "An Answer unto Two Questions: with Twelve Arguments against Any Conformity to Worship Not of Divine Institution," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 16:249.

75. Owen, *Lesser Catechism*, in *Works*, 1:465.

76. Not to be confused with an earlier catechism of the same name by J. C.: *The Independants*

Catechism (London, 1654).

77. Benjamin Camfield, *A Serious Examination of the Independents' Catechism, and Therein of the Chief Principles of Nonconformity to, and Separation from, the Church of England* (London: J. Redmayne, 1668).

78. George Vernon, *A Letter to a Friend Concerning Some of Dr Owen's Principles and Practices* (London: J. Redmayne for Spencer Hickman, 1670).

79. See Q. 1, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Larger Catechism, Shorter Catechism.

80. John Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches of the New Testament*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 15:447.

81. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:448.

82. William Ames, *Medulla theologica* (Amsterdam: apud Robertum Allotum, 1627), 1. On this practical aspect of theology, see A. C. Neele, "Post-Reformation Reformed Sources and Children," *Hervormde teologiese studies* 64, no. 1 (2008): 653–64.

83. Owen, *Lesser Catechism*, in *Works*, 1:467. For some of the history of catechisms, see Fred H. Klooster, *The Heidelberg Catechism: Origin and History* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1981), 171–72; Gottfried G. Krodel, "Luther's Work on the Catechism in the Context of Late Medieval Catechetical Literature," *Concordia Journal* 25, no. 4 (October 1999): 364–404.

84. For a brief introduction to the scope of Scripture's sufficiency, see Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 2:318–22.

85. Owen, *Greater Catechism*, in *Works*, 1:470.

86. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:450.

87. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:450.

88. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:477.

89. The list of signatories includes Thomas Manton, Henry Langley, John Owen, William Jenkyn, James Innes, Thomas Watson, Thomas Lye, Matthew Poole, John Milward, John Chester, George Cokayn, Matthew Meade, Robert Francklin, Thomas Dooelittle, Thomas Vincent, Nathanael Vincent, John Ryther, William Tomson, Nicolas Blaikie, Charles Morton, Edmund Calamy, William Carslake, James Janeway, John Hickes, and John Baker.

90. *The Psalms of David in Meeter. Newly Translated and Diligently Compared with the Original Text, and Former Translations: More Plain, Smooth and Agreeable to the Text, Than Any Heretofore* (London: for the Company of Stationers, 1673).

91. Owen, *Lesser Catechism*, in *Works*, 1:467.

92. John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, trans. Stephen P. Westcott (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), 823–24, 833–35. For Owen's refutation see 824–25. On the dating of *A Defense of Sacred Scripture*, see Donald K. McKim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Perspective," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (Fall 1973): 198.

93. John Owen, *Christologia: or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:48. In this state, the original religion was "orderly, beautiful, and glorious."

94. Owen, *Person of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:206.

95. Kelly M. Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 45–56.

96. John Owen, *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 3:285. Cf. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 274.

97. On the use of these passages and others in relation to natural law as *sedes doctrinae*, see J. V. Fesko and Guy M. Richard, "Natural Theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century, Volume 3: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009), 223–66; David VanDrunen, "Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin,"

American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 80, no. 1 (2006): 77–98.

98. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:448, 449.

99. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:448.

100. E.g., the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 96–98; the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 108–109.

101. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:449.

102. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 1:474.

103. See Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 156–58.

104. Kapic, *Communion with God*, 37–42.

105. Suzanne McDonald, "The Pneumatology of the 'Lost' Image in John Owen," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 324–25.

106. Owen, *Person of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:218.

107. Owen, *Greater Catechism*, in *Works*, 1:474.

108. Owen, *Greater Catechism*, in *Works*, 1:474.

109. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *Works*, 6:185. In *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:473, he said, "In no state or condition, then, of the church did God ever accept of moral obedience without the observation of some instituted worship, accommodated in his wisdom unto its various states and conditions." Cf. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 22.

110. A. Kuyper, ed., *De Vera Theologia* IV–V, in *Opera Selecta* (Amsterdam, 1882), 51–56; cf. H. Bavinck, ed., *Synopsis purioris theologiae*…, 6th ed. (1625; repr., Leiden: D. Donner, 1881), 1:3–4; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 3.2.6.

111. See Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 1:225–38; Willem van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Thought," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 319–35; R. Scott Clark, "Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel and Westminster Theology," in *The Pattern of Sound Words: A Festschrift for Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2004), 149–80; and *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2008), 142–50.

112. Trueman, "John Owen as a Theologian," 49–51; cf. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 54–56; Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 57–71.

113. Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 63.

114. Cf. John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 2:150.

115. On this, see Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 73–89; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 56–60.

116. John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae; or The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 12:143; John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 18:387.

117. While the title page says 1644 (*Works*, 13:1), Owen corrected that in *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 13:222.

118. Owen, *Pastors and People*, in *Works*, 13:7.

119. Owen, *Pastors and People*, in *Works*, 13:8.

120. Owen, *Pastors and People*, in *Works*, 13:8.

121. Owen, *Pastors and People*, in *Works*, 13:11. Owen dismisses the speculations of Augustine, Josephus, Sixtus Senesis, and Chrysostom whether there was a written Word of God in the patriarchal period as "not worth contending about." *Pastors and People*, in *Works*, 13:11.

122. Owen, *Pastors and People*, in *Works*, 13:12–13.

123. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:450.

124. Cf. John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and Their Imposition*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 15:8, where he said, "The worship of God is

either moral and internal, or external and of sovereign or arbitrary institution."

125. Thomas Manton "A Description of the True Circumcision," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1870), 2:24.

126. Manton, "True Circumcision," in *Works*, 2:24–25.

127. Manton, "True Circumcision," in *Works*, 2:25; cf. 2:29.

128. Manton, "True Circumcision," in *Works*, 2:24.

129. Manton, "True Circumcision," in *Works*, 2:27.

130. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:450–51.

131. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:451–52.

132. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:452; cf. 7, 217.

133. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:453–54. For Owen's exposition of Hebrews 3:1–6, see *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold (1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 3:487–572.

134. See Owen, *Hebrews*, 3:521.

135. Chad B. van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1642–1652" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), 1:276–96, 302–3, 307–9, 342–44; cf. David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); "Radical Puritanism, c. 1558–1660," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 241–58; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

136. In *Hebrews*, 6:71–73, Owen contrasted the worship of the old covenant with that of the new covenant in five ways (cf. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 29–30):

1. The distinct way Christ's love is declared;
2. The distinct way grace is communicated;
3. The distinct way access was opened to God;
4. The distinct way worship was legal in the old and is gracious in the new;
5. The distinct way the gospel is spread universally in the new covenant.

137. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:454.

138. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:454. On Owen's doctrine of the covenant grace, see Trueman, *John Owen*, 76–80.

139. See Owen's comments on the law being put into the mind and written on the heart in *Hebrews*, 6:147–51.

140. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:454.

141. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:454–55.

142. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:455.

143. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:455.

144. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:456.

145. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:471. Owen saw this special presence and the blessings that come from, again, all of Scripture, in the tabernacle of the old covenant and in Christ in the new covenant. *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:475.

146. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:475.

147. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:458. On Owen's theology of the Lord's Supper see Jon D. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004).

148. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:456.

149. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:458.

150. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:458.

151. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:459.

152. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:459.

153. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:460.
154. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:460.
155. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:45.
156. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:467–68.
157. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:460.
158. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:461.
159. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:461–62.
160. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:463.
161. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:463. On the corruptions of worship in the Roman Mass, see John Owen, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*…, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 4:241–49.
162. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:464.
163. Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:25.
164. Jeffrey K. Jue, "Puritan Millenarianism in Old and New England," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 257–76. On the topic of eschatology in sixteenth-and seventeenth-century Protestantism, see Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Bryan W. Ball, *Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in England Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975); Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978); Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000); Howard B. Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001); Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006).
165. Owen, *Pastors and People*, in *Works*, 13:5.
166. John Owen, "The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 8:247–79.
167. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:476; cf. Owen's sermon on 2 Timothy 3:1 in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 9:320–34.
168. John Owen, *The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel and the Punishment of Apostates Declared*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 7:217.
169. Owen, *Nature of Apostasy*, in *Works*, 7:221.
170. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:477.
171. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:477.
172. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:467.
173. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:467.
174. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 2:269; cf. *Works*, 9:57; Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 275.
175. John Owen, "The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship," in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 9:56–57; cf. 9:73–74. On communion with God see J. I. Packer, "The Puritan Idea of Communion with God," in *Puritan Papers, Volume Two: 1960–1962*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2001), 103–18.
176. Owen, *Communion with God*, in *Works* 2:268.
177. Owen, "Gospel Worship," in *Works* 9:57.
178. For an expansion of Owen's comments on the "worldly" worship of the old covenant in contrast to the heavenly of the new, see Owen, *Hebrews*, 23:186–89, 498–509.
179. Owen, *Brief Instruction*, in *Works*, 15:469.

Chapter 42

Puritan Preaching (1)

> *Preaching is the ordinance of God, sanctified for the begetting of faith, for the opening of the understanding, for the drawing of the will and affections to Christ.*
>
> —WILLIAM AMES[1]

The Puritan movement from the mid-sixteenth century to the late seventeenth century has been called the golden age of preaching.[2] Through preaching and the publication of sermons, the Puritans sought to reform the church and the everyday lives of the people.[3] Though they failed to reform the church, they succeeded in reforming everyday lives, ushering in, as Alexander F. Mitchell says, "a season of spiritual revival as deep and extensive as any that has since occurred in the history of the British Churches."[4]

With few exceptions, Puritan ministers were great preachers who lovingly and passionately proclaimed the whole counsel of God set forth in Holy Scripture. No group of preachers in church history has matched their comprehensively and powerfully biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical preaching.[5]

The common people gladly heard Puritan preaching. Henry Smith (1560–1591), sometimes called the golden-tongued Chrysostom of the Puritans, was so popular as a preacher that, as Thomas Fuller writes, "persons of good quality brought their own pews with them, I mean their legs, to stand upon in the aisles."[6] No wonder the Puritan minister was called "the hero of sixteenth-century Puritanism."[7]

So what made Puritan preaching so effective and so distinctive? It was, we believe, a combination of the preachers' intense love for God and souls, their style of preaching, their loyalty to the Word, their zeal for preaching, their dependency on the Spirit, and their lifestyle of holiness. So this chapter focuses primarily on how the Puritan preachers excelled in motivating and cultivating their preaching by love. We limit ourselves in two chapters to five areas influenced by this love: the primacy of preaching, their power in preaching, their plainness in preaching, their program of preaching, and their passion for

preaching. If we could cultivate even half of the love for preaching that Puritan preachers had, the church would soon know better days. Let's pray earnestly for God to revive such love for preaching throughout the church universal, in the pulpit and in the pew in our needy day. The Puritans developed an intense love for preaching. John F. N. New quips, "Preaching, by mouth or by pen, was life for the Puritan."8 Let us consider how this was so.

Primacy of Preaching

The Puritans had a profound sense that God built His church primarily by the instrument of preaching. This understanding created an ethos where preaching stood at the center of worship and devotion. This Puritan mindset or psyche about preaching involved numerous things. We will comment on four of the most important.

The Character of Preaching For the Puritans, preaching was God's ordained servant echoing and explaining His holy Word to the saved and unsaved, with a view to changing their thinking and altering their wills so as to convert sinners and sanctify saints. John Preston (1587–1628) provided us with a simple, yet typically Puritan, working definition of preaching: "a public interpretation or dividing the Word, performed by an ambassador or minister who speaks to the people instead of God, in the name of Christ."[9]

The Puritans were insistent that preaching must be fenced in by the Word. John Mayer (1583–1664) wrote, "Every preacher of the word speaketh only what God putteth into his mouth whilst he keepeth him to preaching according to the Word. And therefore St. Paul commendeth the Thessalonians, for they received his preaching as God's Word, such as indeed it was (1 Thess. 2:13)."[10] This is why the Puritans often placed behind their name "Preacher of the Gospel" or "Preacher of the Word," rather than listing their degrees.[11] Ministers are God's ambassadors and "God's counselors"[12] through His Word by way of the pulpit.

In typical Puritan fashion, Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) stressed that ministers "must dress every Sermon at the [mirror] of the Word; they must preach as they read in Scripture."[13] Ministers must preach the Word only, Burgess said, for three reasons: (1) for God's sake—because it is *His* Word that ministers are proclaiming, His honor that is at stake, and He does not think lightly of a minister's thoughts replacing His own; (2) for man's sake—because if the Word preached is not God's Word, it loses all its power and nourishment, and becomes only hay and stubble; and (3) for the minister's sake—because the preacher is given a ministry, not a "magistery," that is, a calling to be a servant, not the Lord, so he must not endanger his own soul by bringing his own words, but must remember that God, and not he, can best determine what his hearers need.[14]

The Puritans expected biblical results from preaching, which, according to Nicholas Byfield (1579–1622), includes opening men's hearts (Acts 16:14), begetting faith (Rom. 10:14), giving the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44), imparting the childlike fear of God (Acts 13:16), trembling and humbling the proud heart (Isa. 66:2), and speaking via the Spirit to the churches (Eph. 1:13). The Puritans

trusted that God's Word would not return to Him void (Isa. 55:10–11). Like John Calvin, they believed every sermon had two ministers preaching—the external minister, who "holds forth the vocal word and it is received by the ears," as well as the internal minister, who is the Holy Spirit and who "truly communicates the thing proclaimed, [which] is Christ."[15]

The Necessity of Preaching The Puritans viewed preaching as the minister's "principal work" and the hearers' "principal benefit."[16] Preaching is God's great "converting ordinance," they said. Seldom would anyone be converted apart from it. William Ames (1576–1633) wrote, "Preaching is the ordinance of God, sanctified for the begetting of faith, for the opening of the understanding, for the drawing of the will and affections to Christ."[17] Not surprisingly, therefore, they were experientially acquainted with Paul's statement, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16), and loved to quote it. Thomas Hall (1610–1665) put it this way: "Ministers must be preachers. They not only may but they *must* preach. There is a necessity backed with a woe (1 Cor. 9:16). So that they must either preach or perish: this must be done or they are undone."[18] "An unpreaching minister is a sort of contradiction," concluded Robert Traill (1642–1716).[19]

Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603) said preaching is vitally necessary above merely reading the Bible. He wrote, "As the fire stirred giveth more heat, so the Word, as it were blown by preaching, flameth more in the hearers, than when it is read."[20] John Owen (1616–1683) wrote: "The word is like the sun in the firmament…. It hath virtually in it all spiritual light and heat. But the preaching of the word is as the motion and beams of the sun, which actually and effectually doth communicate that light and heat unto all creatures."[21] Nehemiah Rogers (c. 1594–1660) put it this way: "The text is the word of God abridged: preaching is the word of God enlarged."[22]

The Dignity of Preaching The Puritans were in awe that a mere man could be the mouthpiece and ambassador of the almighty, triune God. Richard Baxter (1615–1691) wrote, "It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God, in the name of our Redeemer."[23]

Other than the Holy Spirit, the ascended Christ bestows no higher gift on earth than the call to preach to His New Testament church, said Richard Sibbes (1577–1635). "This is the gift of all gifts, the ordinance of preaching. God esteems it so, Christ esteems it so, and so should we esteem it."[24] Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) wrote, "God had but one Son in the world and He made

Him a minister."

To accent the centrality of preaching, the Puritans put the pulpit rather than the altar at the center of their churches. On the pulpit would be an open Bible to indicate the source of all true preaching. The Puritans regarded preaching as far more important than the sacraments and the liturgy.[25]

With such dignity at stake, the Puritans said, the need for a personal, divine call to the ministry is paramount.[26] The need for ongoing holiness in a minister's life is also critical: who he is and what he does must be consistent with his sermons.[27]

The Momentousness of Preaching The Puritans believed that a preacher should ascend the pulpit each time as if it were his first time and might well be his last time, praying that it might be the best sermon he ever preached. William Gurnall (1616–1679) said, "The Word of God is too sacred a thing, and preaching too solemn a work, to be toyed and played with."[28] "There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell," wrote John Preston.[29] One of John Cotton's (1585–1652) listeners wrote in response to a sermon, "Mr. Cotton preaches with such authority, demonstration, and life that, methinks, when he preaches out of any Prophet or Apostle I hear not him; I hear that very Prophet and Apostle; yea, I hear the Lord Jesus Christ speaking in my heart."[30]

Puritans were earnest preachers who made it their aim to please God rather than people. God was their witness. All masks were stripped away; all flattery was abhorred. Listen to Richard Baxter: "In the name of God, brethren, labor to awaken your hearts before you come, and when you are in the work, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. Remember, they must be awakened or damned. And a sleepy preacher will hardly awaken them…. Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened either here or in hell."[31]

Everything about preaching is so majestic that one can scarcely give too much of oneself. John Flavel (1628–1691) caught the ethos of Puritan preaching when he wrote: "How many truths we have to study! How many wiles of Satan and mysteries of corruption, to detect! How many cases of conscience to resolve! Yea, we must fight in defense of the truths we preach, as well as study them to paleness, and preach them unto faithfulness: but well-spent: head, heart, lungs and all; welcome pained breasts, aching backs, and trembling legs; if we can all but approve ourselves Christ's faithful servants, and hear that joyful voice from his mouth, 'Well done, good and faithful servants'!"[32]

Power in Preaching

The power of Puritan preaching can best be understood, first, by looking at how the Puritan approach differed from the Anglican view and, second, by considering how the Puritans preached out of a biblical framework to address the mind, the conscience, and the heart.

Puritan vs. Anglican Preaching The Anglicans, representing the established church in England, felt that the Puritans greatly exaggerated the role of the sermon in salvation and a proper understanding of God while undermining other means of grace. Horton Davies said the Anglicans viewed "conversation in the bosom of the church, religious education, the reading of learned men's books, information received by conference, as well as the public and private reading of the Scriptures and of homilies as other avenues that lead to a saving knowledge of God."[33] For Queen Elizabeth and other Anglicans, books of homilies (essentially sermons that were read) were preferable to sermons preached extemporaneously because they were more carefully constructed and subject to control.

Conversely, the Puritans complained that Anglican sermons were too ornate, oratorical, metaphysical, and moralistic and not sufficiently evangelical, experiential, and practical. What a contrast there is between Richard Baxter's urgent description of preaching as "a dying man [speaking] to dying men"[34] and Anglican sermons critically described as "orations of the excellent Constitution of their Church, or of Passive Obedience, or an Exclamation against Schism, or a Discourse of Morality, or only exclaiming against such vices as the very light of Nature condemns."[35] After describing the rhetorical flourishes of Anglican preaching, John Owen wrote: "Such things become not the authority, majesty, greatness, and holiness, of Him who speaks therein. An earthly monarch that should make use of them in his edicts, laws, or proclamations, would but prostitute his authority to contempt, and invite his subjects to disobedience by so doing. How much more would they unbecome the declaration of His mind and will, given unto *poor worms*, who is the great possessor of heaven and earth!"[36]

The Anglicans thought Puritan sermons were too intense and marked by "enthusiasm," which at that time meant fanaticism. Their hostility to Puritan preaching, however, only reinforced the Puritan tendency to emphasize preaching. Meantime, the Puritans thought Anglican sermons lacked urgency and holy zeal and were too focused on displaying the preacher's classical learning. Preaching became an oratorical performance but lacked Spirit-worked power. Anglican sermons became mere moralistic homilies and philosophical discourses that were dependent on Aristotelian dialectic to the point of being

soul-stultifying. The Puritans grieved that Anglican preaching included no note of "thus saith the Lord," no authoritative proclamation of the Word and will of God. It contained too many forced parallelisms and fanciful subdivisions. Rhetorical devices, including repetitions, numerous examples, gradations of words, and innumerable quotations from the church fathers and various secular sources, many of which were given in original Greek or Latin, all contributed to a lack of urgency and directness in preaching so that the sharp, two-edged sword of biblical preaching was dulled.[37]

No doubt in response to this Anglican preaching, Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) wrote, "Starched oratory may tickle the brain, but it is plain doctrine that informs the judgment, that convicts the conscience, that bows the will and that wins the heart."[38] Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), at the very end of the Puritan era, said, "I had rather be fully understood by ten than admired by ten thousand."[39]

Preaching to the Mind, Conscience, and Heart In this context, the Puritans developed their theology of preaching that powerfully addressed the whole man. Three characteristics of that preaching need to be recovered by today's preachers.

(1) Puritan preaching addressed the mind with clarity. This preaching was directed to people as rational beings. The Puritans viewed the mind as the palace of faith. They refused to set mind and heart against each other, teaching that knowledge was the soil in which the Spirit planted the seed of regeneration. John Preston stressed that reason is elevated in conversion, and Cotton Mather (1663–1728) added that ignorance is the mother of heresy rather than devotion. Puritans thus preached that we must *think* in order to be holy. They challenged the idea that holiness is only a matter of emotions.

Puritan preachers labored to show sinners the unreasonableness of persisting in sin. They tore away every excuse for remaining unregenerate, whether an unbeliever's own inability and unwillingness or divine sovereignty and election. As John Owen told his listeners, election is no excuse for remaining in unbelief. He stressed that though election is first from God's side, it is known last from the believer's side.[40] Joseph Alleine (1634–1668) added,

> You begin at the wrong end if you dispute about your election. Prove your conversion and then never doubt your election…. Whatever God's purposes be, which are secret, His promises are plain. How desperately do rebels argue, "If I am elected I shall be saved, do what I will. If not, I shall be damned, do what I can." Perverse sinner, will you begin where you should end? Is not the word before you? What saith it? "*Repent and be converted*

> *that your sins may be blotted out." "If you mortify the deeds of the body you shall live." "Believe and be saved"* (Acts 3:19; Rom. 8:13; Acts 16:31). What can be plainer? Do not stand still disputing about your election, but set to repenting and believing. Cry to God for converting grace. Revealed things belong to you; in these busy yourself.[41]

The Puritans thus reasoned with sinners through plain preaching, using biblical logic to persuade each listener that because of the value and purpose of life as well as the certainty of death and eternity, it was foolish not to seek and serve God.

God gave us minds for a reason, the Puritans said. It is crucial that we become like Christ in the way we think. Our minds must be enlightened by faith and disciplined by the Word, then put to God's service in the world. We should be challenged by the Puritans to use our intellect to further God's kingdom through scriptural evangelism. Without clear thinking, we cannot evangelize and counter the culture in which we live, work, and minister. We are empty, nonproductive, and narcissistic when we fail to develop an interior life based on the Word.

The Puritans understood that a mindless Christianity fosters a spineless Christianity. An anti-intellectual gospel spawns an irrelevant gospel that does not get beyond felt needs. We fear that is what is happening in our churches today: we have lost our intellectual understanding of faith, and for the most part we don't see the necessity of recovering it. We do not understand that when we are no different from non-Christians in what we think and believe, we will soon be no different from unbelievers in how we live.

(2) Puritan preaching confronted the conscience pointedly. The Puritans regarded the consciences of sinners as the "light of nature." Plain preaching named specific sins, then asked questions to press home the guilt of those sins upon the consciences of men, women, and children. As one Puritan wrote, "We must go with the stick of divine truth and beat every bush behind which a sinner hides, until like Adam who hid, he stands before God in his nakedness." They believed such confrontation was necessary because until the sinner gets out from behind that bush, he will never cry to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

So the Puritans preached *urgently* to the conscience, believing that many of their listeners were on their way to hell. They also preached *directly*, confronting listeners with death in Adam and life in Christ. They preached *specifically*, too, taking seriously Christ's command "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name" (Luke 24:47).

Today, many preachers are reticent to confront the conscience. We need to learn from the Puritans that the friend who loves you most will tell you the most

truth about yourself. Like Paul and the Puritans, we must testify earnestly and with tears of the need for "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

(3) Puritan preaching wooed the heart passionately. Their preaching was affectionate, zealous, and optimistic. Walter Cradock (c. 1606–1659) said to his flock, "We are not sent to get galley-slaves to the oars, or a bear to the stake: but He sends us to woo you as spouses, to marry you to Christ."[42] It is unusual today to find a ministry that feeds the mind with solid biblical substance and moves the heart with affectionate warmth, but this combination was typical with the Puritans. They did not just reason with the mind and confront the conscience; they also appealed to the heart. They preached out of love for God's Word, for the glory of God, and for the soul of every listener. They preached with warm gratitude for the Christ who had saved them and made their lives a sacrifice of praise. They presented Christ in His loveliness, hoping to make the unsaved jealous of what the believer has in Christ Reaching the heart is the most important part of preaching, the Puritans believed. Thus Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Our people do not so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched, and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching which has the tendency to do this."[43]

The Puritans used compelling preaching, personal pleading, earnest praying, biblical reasoning, solemn warning, joyful living—any means they could—to turn sinners from the road of destruction and to God via the mind, the conscience, and the heart—in that order. Samuel Willard (1640–1707) put it this way:

> The Truths of the Word are first applied to the Understanding, by which we may know the meaning, and discern the reasons of them; for here all human Actions begin; and being approved by the Judgment, it must be passed over to the will for its Election [decision]; whereby it embraceth the Truth commended, and is won over to it; and from thence it is imprinted on the Affections.[44]

The Puritans believed that God would use their powerful preaching as a weapon to conquer and convert sinners. They believed that God exalted Christ "with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). They knew from Scripture and by experience that only an omnipotent Christ can arrest a sinner who is wedded to sinful lusts, divorce him from the primary love of his heart, make him willing to forsake his bosom sin, and turn him to God with full resolve to obey and honor Him. They preached that only being in Christ was sufficient for these things. So

William Ames wrote, “Preaching, therefore, ought not to be dead, but alive and effective so that an unbeliever coming into the congregation of believers should be affected and, as it were, transfixed by the very hearing of the word so that he might give glory to God.”[45]

Plainness in Preaching

In terms of style, the Puritans believed in a plain style of preaching. William Perkins, a leading proponent of this, wrote that preaching "must be plain, perspicuous, and evident…. It is a by-word among us: *It was a very plain sermon*: And I say again, *the plainer, the better.*"46 Later, Thomas Fuller wrote of Perkins's preaching: "His sermons were not so plain but that the piously learned did admire them, nor so learned but that the plain did understand them."47

Plainness Defined

This plainness did not mean anti-intellectualism. Henry Smith said, "To preach simply, is not to preach unlearnedly, nor confusedly, but plainly and perspicuously, that the simplest which doth hear, may understand what is taught, as if he did hear his name."[48] Cotton Mather wrote in his eulogy for John Eliot (1604–1690), a great Puritan missionary to the Indians, that his "way of preaching was very plain; so that the very *lambs* might wade into his discourses on those texts and themes, wherein *elephants* might swim."[49]

The plain style was not drab and unadorned but dignified communication. The Puritans used the plain style of preaching because they wanted to reach everyone so that all might know the way of salvation. In New England, Increase Mather (1639–1723) wrote of the preaching of his father, Richard: "His way of preaching was plain, aiming to shoot his arrows not over his people's heads, but into their hearts and consciences."[50]

The goal was to teach, not to dazzle. Human wisdom must be hidden both in the content of the sermon and in its delivery. So Perkins wrote, "The preaching of the word is the testimony of God, and the profession of the knowledge of Christ, and not of human skill. Furthermore, the hearers ought not to ascribe their faith to the gifts of men, but to the power of God's word."[51]

Puritan preaching aimed at people with a middle-school vocabulary, but that does not mean it failed to cover the great theological terms of the Bible, such as justification and sanctification. Plainness does not sacrifice rich doctrinal content; rather, such terms, the Puritans said, must be periodically defined by the preacher. Both obscurity and eloquence must be avoided in favor of communicating God's Word so that anyone can understand it.

Plain Biblical Exposition Plain preaching, according to Perkins, generally followed three steps in exposition:

- It gave the meaning of a text of Scripture in its context;
- It taught a few profitable points of doctrines gathered from the natural sense of the text;
- It applied, in plain speech, the doctrines "rightly collected to the life and manners of men."[52]

The first part of a Puritan sermon was exegetical and expositional; the second, doctrinal and didactic; and the third, applicatory.[53] The first part was usually concise and showed that Puritans excelled in exegeting Scripture. The second part of the sermon could become quite lengthy because Puritan ministers were good at backing the doctrines they found in their texts with numerous

testimonies, proofs, and reasons from Scripture. They viewed doctrine as an essential scriptural and practical discipline. They saw no tension between doctrinal and practical sermons; doctrine was simply the unfolding of the meaning of Scripture. The Puritans believed that to live well, people must know doctrine.

The sober, Word-centered plainness of Puritan preaching was bolstered by Puritan hermeneutics. J. I. Packer says that plain preaching helped the Puritans interpret the Bible literally and grammatically; consistently and harmonistically; doctrinally and theocentrically; christologically and evangelically; experimentally and practically; and with a faithful and realistic application.[54] Thomas Lea says Puritan ministers used the following principles in sermon preparation, all of which are thoroughly Reformed:

- They emphasized the importance of words in the text of Scripture.
- They recognized the importance of the context of a text.
- They demonstrated reasonable thinking in understanding and applying Scripture.
- They used Scripture to interpret Scripture, underscoring the analogy of faith, which means that each part of Scripture must be interpreted in harmony with the whole.
- They focused on the literal meaning of the text unless the context pointed them in another direction.
- They judiciously handled the figures of speech in Scripture.
- They insisted on the perspicuity of Scripture in all matters related to faith.
- They depended on the illumination of the Holy Spirit for a correct interpretation.[55]

Plain Doctrine

William Perkins called doctrine "the science of living blessedly for ever";[56] William Ames referred to "the doctrine or teaching of living to God."[57] Ferguson writes of the Puritans: "To them, systematic theology was to the pastor what a knowledge of anatomy is to the physician. Only in the light of the whole body of divinity (as they liked to call it) could a minister provide a diagnosis of, prescribe for, and ultimately cure spiritual disease in those who were plagued by the body of sin and death."[58]

Puritans aimed to preach the whole counsel of God in all its numerous doctrines. They felt the awesome responsibility of handling eternal truth and addressing immortal souls in a doctrinally sound manner (Ezek. 33:8). Packer describes their convictions: "To the question, 'Should one preach doctrine?,' the Puritan answer would have been, 'Why, what else is there to preach? Doctrinal preaching certainly bores the hypocrites; but it is only doctrinal preaching that will save Christ's sheep. The preacher's job is to proclaim the faith, not to provide entertainment for unbelievers."[59]

Here are three examples of how the Puritans preached doctrine.

1. When dealing with the doctrine of sin, they called sin *sin* and declared it to be moral rebellion against God which reaps eternal guilt. They preached about sins of commission and sins of omission in thought, word, and deed. Works such as *The Evil of Evils: The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin* by Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646) stressed the heinousness of sin. In sixty-seven chapters, Burroughs exposed sin and said that the least sin involves more evil than the greatest affliction, sin and God are contrary to each other, sin opposes all that is good, sin is the poison of all evils, sin bears an infinite dimension and character, and sin makes us comfortable with the devil.[60]

2. The Puritans preached the doctrine of God without equivocation. They proclaimed God's majestic being, His trinitarian personality, and His glorious attributes.[61] The Puritans said the doctrines of atonement, justification, and reconciliation are meaningless apart from a true understanding of God, who condemns sin and atones for sinners, justifies them, and reconciles them to Himself.

3. The Puritans also stressed sanctification.[62] Believers must walk the King's highway of holiness in gratitude, service, obedience, love, and self-denial.[63] They must experientially exercise the twin graces of faith and repentance.[64] They must learn the arts of meditation, fearing God, and childlike prayer.[65] And they must press on by God's grace, seeking to make their calling and election sure.[66]

In preaching doctrine, the Puritans promoted the following.

1. Scripture must dictate the emphasis for each sermon. The Puritans did not preach sermons that balanced a diversity of doctrines. Rather, they let the biblical text determine the content and emphasis of each message. When Jonathan Edwards preached on hell, for example, he did not make a single reference to heaven. When he later preached on heaven, he did not include a word about hell.[67]

2. Preaching must instill appreciation for each scriptural doctrine. The typical member of a Puritan congregation might hear a sermon one week on Genesis 19:17 (“Escape for thy life”), warning listeners to flee wickedness and follow God, and the next week a message on how impossible it is to follow God unless God draws us to Himself (John 6:44). Puritan pastors and people treasured the full scope of God’s truth rather than just favorite passages or particular doctrines by which they rated a sermon.

3. Preaching must cover a wide variety of sermon topics. An appreciation for all scriptural doctrine allowed the Puritans to cover nearly every topic imaginable. For example, a single volume of Puritan sermons includes the following:

> How May We Experience in Ourselves, and Evidence to Others, That Serious Godliness Is More Than a Fancy?
>
> What Are the Best Preservatives against Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow?
>
> How May We Grow in the Knowledge of Christ?
>
> What Must We Do to Prevent and Cure Spiritual Pride?
>
> How May We Graciously Improve Those Doctrines and Providences That Transcend Our Understanding?
>
> What Distance Ought We to Keep, in Following the Strange Fashions of Apparel Which Come Up in the Days in Which We Live?
>
> How May We Best Know the Worth of The Soul?[68]

Plain Application

The third part of a sermon, often called the "uses" of the text, could become lengthy as the minister applied Scripture to various listeners. Those applications could be piercing in their warnings to "reform the life from ungodliness," as Perkins put it,[69] or penetrating in their note of comfort.[70] The goal always was to drive the Word of God home or, as Baxter put it, to screw it into men so they would grow in holiness.

These uses, or applications, are beautifully summarized in a short chapter titled "Of the Preaching of the Word" in the Directory for the Public Worship of God, composed by the Puritan Westminster divines:

> [The preacher] is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.[71]

The Westminster divines identified six kinds of application: 1. *Instruction*: doctrinal application.

2. *Confutation*: refuting current error.

3. *Exhortation*: pressing and admonishing the sheep to obey the imperatives and duties suggested in the text being preached as well as expounding "the means that help to the performance of them."

4. *Dehortation*: rebuking sin, stirring up conviction of its heinousness and hatred for it, as well as declaring its dread consequences and showing how to avoid it.

5. *Comfort*: encouraging believers to press on in the good fight of faith, despite various troubles and afflictions.

6. *Trial*: preaching standards and marks of grace for purposes of self-examination and correction to stir believers to do their duty, to be humbled by their sin, and to be strengthened with comfort, according to their spiritual condition.[72]

To this list we might add *doxological application*, or applying those truths of Scripture that help people sense the beauty and glory of God and His truth and move them to praise Him as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. This kind of preaching lifts up our hearts and affections to wonder at the beauty, glory, and

love of the triune God in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.[73]

These applications must target the right people, or they might do more spiritual harm than good. Williams Perkins told us how to direct Scripture's applications to seven categories of listeners.

1. *Ignorant and unteachable unbelievers.* These unbelievers need to hear the doctrine of the Word in clear, reasonable teaching as well as by reproof and pricking of their consciences.

2. *Ignorant but teachable unbelievers.* These unbelievers must be taught the foundational doctrines of the Christian religion. Perkins recommended they learn from his book *Foundations of the Christian Religion,* which covers repentance, faith, the sacraments, the application of the Word, the resurrection, and the last judgment.

3. *Those who have some knowledge but are not humbled.* To such listeners, the preacher must proclaim the law to stir up sorrow and repentance for sin; then he must preach the gospel.

4. *The humbled.* The preacher must not offer comfort to such people too soon but must first determine whether their humility results from God's saving work rooted in faith or from mere common conviction. To the partly humbled who are not yet stripped of self-righteousness, Perkins says the law must be propounded still more, albeit tempered with the gospel, so that "being terrified with their sins, and with the meditation of God's judgment, they may together at the same instant receive solace by the gospel." To the fully humbled, "the doctrine of faith and repentance, and the comforts of the gospel ought to be proclaimed and tendered."

5. *Those who believe.* Believers must be taught the key doctrines of justification, sanctification, and perseverance, along with the law as the rule of conduct rather than its sting and curse. "Before faith, the law with the curse is to be preached; after conversion, the law without the curse," Perkins wrote.

6. *Those who are fallen, either in faith or in practice.* These are backsliders in faith, in knowledge, or in apprehending Christ. If they fall in knowledge, they are to be instructed in the particular doctrine from which they have erred. If they fail to apprehend Christ, they should examine themselves by the marks of grace, then fly to Christ as the remedy of the gospel. Those who have become involved in sinful behavior must be brought to repentance by the preaching of the law and the gospel.

7. *A mixed group.* This may refer to both believers and unbelievers in a church, or it may refer to individuals who contain within themselves a combination of the first six kinds of listeners. If the latter is what Perkins

intended, much wisdom is needed to know how much law and how much gospel to bring to them.[74]

Puritan preachers addressed all seven types of people over a period of time but not in each sermon. The Westminster Directory for Public Worship advised ministers not to pursue "every use" contained in the text being expounded. However, each sermon included directions to both believers and unbelievers. The unbeliever was usually called to examine how he was living and what behavior needed changing, then he was admonished to flee to Christ, who alone could fulfill his needs. For the believer, "uses" usually contained points of comfort, direction, and self-examination.[75] The applicatory part is "the life of preaching," wrote James Durham (c. 1622–1658). "Hence, preaching is called persuading, testifying, beseeching, entreating, or requesting, exhorting."[76]

Plain Delivery

Most Puritan ministers preached about one hour and took lengthy note outlines with them into the pulpit. Some wrote out their sermons in full—particularly their applications—but used only parts of them. Some took no notes at all, relying totally on memory. Levy observes that in New England, the Puritans first felt that it was best for a minister to preach extemporaneously. But when John Warham, a popular preacher who served at Windsor, Connecticut, from 1636–1670, used extensive notes during delivery, others began to imitate his practice.77 They usually wrote out their sermons, particularly their applications, much more fully than they were actually preached.

The Puritan plain style of preaching avoided all that was not clear or perspicuous to an ordinary listener. Since the minister was God's appointed interpreter of the Word, no oratorical interest was to obscure the gospel's truth and clarity. For the sake of plainness, the preacher should deny himself in his style of preaching so that Christ and the gospel might be extolled. "A crucified style best suits the preachers of a crucified Christ," wrote John Flavel. "Words are but servants to the matter. An iron key, which fits the lock, is more useful than a golden one, which will not open the door to the treasure."78 The heart of the true Christian, said Robert Bolton (1572–1631), "feels itself more soundly comforted, and truly Christianized by one sermon woven out of a feeling soul by the strength of meditation, supported by the true, natural, and necessary sense of the Word of life, managed with the powerful incomparable eloquence of Scripture…than with a world of general [discourses] though they should be stuffed with the flower and quintessence of all the arts, humanities, philosophies."79

Such preaching is most challenging and involves intense, prolonged study. Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) was probably typical in spending three full days each week preparing for the two Sabbath services.80 Cotton Mather said that all of John Cotton's sermons "smelt of the lamp."81 The Puritans despised laziness in a minister; they taught that penetrating the mind of God in Holy Scripture involved earnest prayer, the arduous task of tracing the etymology of words, tracking down the intricacies of grammar, and laboring over points that expressed the text at hand as fully and accurately as possible. After all that praying, thinking, and wrestling with the text, the Puritan minister was to seek with all his might to open up the mind of God to His people with such simplicity that even elementary school children would be able to understand a good part of the message. Richard Baxter wrote, "It is no easy matter to speak so plain that the ignorant may understand us, so seriously that the deadest hearts may feel us, and so convincingly that contradictory cavaliers may be silenced."82

As the preacher targeted different groups in his church, the manner of his preaching had to confirm the seriousness of his message. The Westminster divines understood this fundamental link between style and substance. They conclude their discussion on preaching in the Directory for the Public Worship of God by charging that both preaching and ministry must be performed in the following ways:

1. *painfully*, that is, painstakingly, not negligently;
2. *plainly*, so that the most uneducated may be able to grasp the teaching of Scripture;
3. *faithfully*, yearning for the honor of Christ, the salvation of the lost, and the edification of believers;
4. *wisely*, teaching and admonishing in a manner most apt to prevail with the parishioners;
5. *gravely*, as becomes the Word;
6. *lovingly*, with godly zeal and hearty desire for the welfare of souls;
7. *earnestly*, being inwardly persuaded of the truth of Christ and walking before the flock in a godly manner, both privately and publicly.[83]

If these seven marks of true preaching were offered more fully in today's preaching and ministry, might we not see more of the transforming power of the Word of God in His churches?

Plain Dependency

The plain style must stress the spiritual nature of preaching, Perkins said. The work of the Spirit is evident when the minister's speech is spiritual and gracious, in accord with his text, and evidences of God's grace are received in the heart.[84]

Ministers must show a profound dependence on the Holy Spirit in everything they say and do. They must feel keenly their inability to bring anyone to Christ as well as the magnitude of conversion. "God never laid it upon thee to convert those he sends thee to. No; to publish the gospel is thy duty," William Gurnall said to ministers.[85] And Richard Baxter wrote, "Conversion is another kind of work than most are aware of. It is not a small matter to bring an earthly mind to heaven and to show man the amiable excellencies of God, till he be taken up in such love to him that can never be quenched: to break the heart for sin, and make him flee for refuge unto Christ, and thankfully embrace him as the life of his soul; to have the very drift and bent of his life to be changed; so that a man renounceth that which he took for his felicity, and placeth his felicity where he never did before."[86]

The Puritans were convinced that both preacher and listener are totally dependent on the work of the Spirit to effect regeneration and conversion in whom He will.[87] The Spirit brings God's presence into human hearts. He persuades sinners to seek salvation, renews corrupt wills, and makes scriptural truths take root in stony hearts. As Thomas Watson wrote, "Ministers knock at the door of men's hearts, the Spirit comes with a key and opens the door."[88] Joseph Alleine said: "Never think you can convert yourself. If ever you would be savingly converted, you must despair of doing it in your own strength. It is a resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:1), a new creation (Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10), a work of absolute omnipotence (Eph. 1:19)."[89]

Plain Holiness

A gracious speech in preaching was possible only when accompanied by the grace of a holy life in the ministry. A minister must be a holy man. Puritan quotations abound on this subject:

- "If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts and to subdue corruption and to walk with God, if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong and you will starve your hearers…. We must study as hard how to live well as how to preach well" (Richard Baxter).
- "If a man teach uprightly and walk crookedly, more will fall down in the night of his life than he built in the day of his doctrine" (John Owen).
- "Our ministry is as our heart is. No man rises much above the level of his own habitual godliness" (Thomas Wilson).90

Puritan preaching was backed by right living. The preachers lived what they preached. For them, balanced doctrine was inseparable from balanced living. Puritan ministers were teaching prophets, interceding priests, and governing kings in their own homes as well as their congregations and society. They were men of private prayer, family worship, and public intercession.

Conclusion: The Need for Prayer After reading this chapter, one is inclined to exclaim, "Who is adequate for these things?" But rather than lower the standard for preaching, we should lower ourselves to our knees before the Father. The Puritans saturated all their preaching in prayer. They were great preachers only because they were also great petitioners who wrestled with God for divine blessing on their preaching. Richard Baxter said, "Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching; he preacheth not heartily to his people, that prayeth not earnestly for them. If we prevail not with God to give them faith and repentance, we shall never prevail with them to believe and repent."91 Robert Traill wrote, "Some ministers of meaner [fewer] gifts and parts are more successful than some that are far above them in abilities; not because they preach better, so much as because they pray more. Many good sermons are lost for lack of much prayer in study."92 And John Owen said, "He that is more frequent in his pulpit to his people than he is in his closet for his people is but a sorry watchman."93 Let us therefore bring ourselves and our preaching into the presence of God, and find grace in the time of our need (Heb. 4:16).

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Chapter 43

Puritan Preaching (2)

Preaching is the chariot that carries Christ up and down the world.
—RICHARD SIBBES[1]

In the last chapter we examined the characteristics of Puritan preaching in its primacy, power, and plainness. In this chapter we will look at the Puritan's program and passion for preaching.

Program for Preaching The Puritans' love for preaching enabled them to focus on establishing an impressive program for comprehensive reform of the church. Basically, the Puritans used a five-part approach to influence people and promote pastoral reform through preaching.

Preaching Itself

First was reforming *preaching* itself. Being great believers in preaching, the Puritans preached often. They gained access to pulpits in a variety of ways and used every possible opportunity to preach, both on the Sabbath and during the week. Nominations to livings in parish churches were often in the hands of patrons, so where the bishop was tolerant and the patron had Puritan sympathies, a Puritan minister would most likely be invited to become the official pastor. Others found parishes in which they were not forced to conform to all the requirements of the Church of England so that their consciences allowed them to continue on with preaching and ministry. Still others preached in villages far from home or in private homes, barns, and out-of-the-way places. It was not unusual for Puritan ministers to preach five times a week.[2]

In addition to being doctrinal, Puritan preaching was known for being *biblical.* The Puritan preacher found his message in God's Word. "The faithful Minister, like unto Christ, [is] one that preacheth nothing but the word of God," said Puritan Edward Dering (c. 1540–1576).[3] John Owen (1616–1683) agreed: "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word."[4] Millar Maclure noted that "for the Puritans, the sermon is not just hinged to Scripture; it quite literally exists inside the Word of God; the text is not in the sermon, but the sermon is in the text…. Put summarily, listening to a sermon is being in the Bible."[5]

"Feed upon the Word, and that makes [us] to rejoice in the Word," the Puritan preacher John Cotton (1585–1652) said to his congregation.[6] The preface to the Geneva Bible contains similar advice, saying the Bible is "the light to our paths, the key of the kingdom of heaven, our comfort in affliction, our shield and sword against Satan, the school of all wisdom, the glass wherein we behold God's face, the testimony of his favor, and the only food and nourishment of our souls."[7]

It is no wonder, then, that a typical page of a Puritan sermon contains five to ten biblical citations and about a dozen references to texts. Puritan preachers were conversant with their Bibles; they memorized hundreds, if not thousands, of texts. They knew what Scripture to cite for any concern. "Long and personal familiarity with the application of Scripture was a key element in the Puritan ministerial makeup," Sinclair Ferguson writes. "They pondered the riches of revealed truth the way a gemologist patiently examines the many faces of a diamond."[8] The Puritans used Scripture wisely, bringing cited texts to bear on the doctrine or case of conscience at hand.[9]

In addition, Puritan preaching was almost always *experimental and practical.* Puritan preaching explained how a Christian experiences biblical truth in daily living. The term "experimental" comes from the Latin word *experimentum*, a

noun that is derived from the verb to "try, test, prove, or put to the test." The same verb can also mean "to find or know by experience," and so gives rise to the word *experientia*, meaning "trial, experiment" and "the knowledge gained by experiment."[10] John Calvin used experiential (*experientia*) and experimental (*experimentum*) interchangeably, since both words, from the perspective of biblical preaching, indicate the need for examining or testing experienced knowledge by the touchstone of Scripture (Isa. 8:20).[11]

Experimental preaching stresses the need to know by experience the truths of the Word of God. Experimental preaching seeks to explain in terms of biblical truth how matters *ought to go* and how they *do go* in the Christian life. It aims to apply divine truth to all of the believer's experience in his walk with God as well as his relationship with family, the church, and the world around him. We can learn much from the Puritans about this type of preaching.

The Puritans said any preaching in which Christ does not have preeminence is not valid experiential preaching. According to Thomas Adams (1583–1652), "Christ is the sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost in every line, the Scriptures being but as it were the swaddling bands of the child Jesus."[12] "Think of Christ as the very substance, marrow, soul, and scope of the whole Scriptures," Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) said.[13]

In the context of Christ, Puritan preaching was marked by a discriminating application of truth to experience. Discriminatory preaching defines the difference between the non-Christian and the Christian. Discriminatory preaching pronounces the wrath of God and eternal condemnation upon the unbelieving and impenitent. It likewise offers the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord by true faith (Matt. 7:22–27; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2:2).

The Puritans knew the deceitfulness of the human heart. Consequently, Puritan preachers took great pains to identify the marks of grace that distinguish the church from the world, true believers from merely professing believers, and saving faith from temporary faith.[14] Thomas Shepard in *The Ten Virgins*, Matthew Mead in *The Almost Christian Discovered*, Jonathan Edwards in *Religious Affections*, and other Puritans wrote dozens of works to differentiate imposters from true believers.[15]

That kind of discriminatory preaching is scarce today. Even in conservative evangelical churches, head knowledge of scriptural truth is often a substitute for heart experience—or, conversely, heart experience is substituted for head knowledge. Experimental preaching calls for both head knowledge *and* heart experience; its goal, according to John Murray, is "intelligent piety."

The Puritans taught that when God's Word is preached experimentally, the Holy Spirit uses it to transform individuals and nations. Such preaching transforms because it connects with vital experience of the children of God (Rom. 5:1–11), clearly explains the marks of saving grace in the believer (Matt. 5:3–12; Gal. 5:22–23), proclaims the high calling of believers as the servants of God in the world (Matt. 5:13–16), and shows the eternal destination of believers and unbelievers (Rev. 21:1–9).16

Examples of the transforming power of Puritan experiential preaching abound in Puritan autobiographical writings and diaries. Captain John Spilman provides us with a typical example:

> Once in a *carnal condition* as I was, I did slight the *Ministers of Christ*, especially your long *Preachers*, and could not abide that any should *preach long*; but at last I was *catched* [caught] by one, and he was [preaching] on *Hebrews* 8:8, 10 [on] the new covenant made in Christ, which was applied to *my* very *home*, and touched me to the *heart*.17

Lectureships

Another form Puritan preaching took was *lecturing*, although that term had a different meaning at that time than it does today. In the days of the Puritans, a typical church parish had one vicar and one or two curates (i.e., pastor and assistant pastors). Puritan lecturers had no parochial duties; their exclusive calling was to preach and teach. They were usually hired by wealthy private supporters, by a town council, or by the Inns of Court (the law schools of London) to work in a Puritan-minded church or group of churches (which had the support of the local rector, vicar, or curate) to satisfy the spiritual appetite of the people.18 Formally, lectureships were supplemental to the ministry, but in reality they offered preaching at times other than those set aside for prayer book services of the Church of England. They thus circumvented the rules of conformity.

The lecturers were often shielded by noblemen, such as the Earl of Leicester, as well as by the authority and influence they held.19 William Haller describes the position:

> The lecturer was not as a rule, though he might be, designated or approved by the patron of the parish, nor did he enjoy the revenue from tithes vested in the regular incumbent. He was selected to preach by the congregation, or by some member or group of members, or by some wealthy adherent, any of whom might undertake the expense of his support. His ministrations might be sought out by people of many parishes round about. His duty was to lecture upon the Bible, that is to preach, on Sundays at times others than those of the usual services and in most instances upon week days as well. He was supposed to be licensed by the bishop or other proper authority in the church, to whom he was accountable under pain of being silenced.20

Paul Seaver, an authority on Puritan lectureships, writes: “Not all lecturers were Puritans nor all Puritans lecturers, but there can be no question that the lectureship was essentially a Puritan institution, that the impetus behind it was Puritan in motivation, and that it was staffed predominantly by Puritan preachers.”21 The lectureships became increasingly popular throughout the first century of Puritanism (1560–1662); they sprang up everywhere in England—in towns and villages, as well as in Cambridge and Oxford, and, of course, in London, where more than a hundred lectureships were maintained during the first three decades of the seventeenth century.

Many of the greatest Puritans served as lecturers, such as William Ames, Paul Baynes, Thomas Cartwright, Laurence Chaderton, John Dod, John Field, Richard Greenham, Arthur Hildersham, William Perkins, John Preston, and

Richard Sibbes.22 In the 1640s, many lecturers became leaders in the Long Parliament, which called the Westminster Assembly. Then, too, Marshall M. Knappen says the nobility's private chaplains also were often lecturers in disguise, "since the family chapel was thrown open to the neighborhood when the weekly sermon was preached. In the course of time many of these lectureships became endowed, after the fashion of the pastoral posts before them."23

These "freelance clergy," as Christopher Hill calls them,24 provided lectures that were, as Peter Lewis says, "a sort of grandparent of our modern Bible-study: a preaching service of considerable length and great depth, usually being attended by pastors and members from neighboring Puritan congregations."25 The lectures were usually either expository or doctrinal in nature and were often later printed as commentaries or treatises.

Most Puritans preferred the sermons of the lecturer to the sermons of their conforming pastor. The Puritan lecturers stole their hearts and affections. Typically, people went to church faithfully to sit through a rather dry morning sermon by a Church of England minister, then went in the afternoon to hear a lecturer powerfully unfold the Scriptures doctrinally, experientially, and practically. So popular were the lecturers that Seaver concludes, "In Puritan strongholds, control of the lectureships gave the laity ecclesiastical power rivaling that of the Crown and the Anglican bishops."26

Prophesyings

A third form of Puritan preaching was the *prophesyings*—also called "exercises" or "godly exercises." Prophesyings were a kind of biblical conference or form of continuing education for the ministers.[27] Though the forms varied in different localities, prophesyings were held at centrally located churches where three to six ministers would preach on the same text, moving from the youngest to the oldest. The last preacher would summarize the findings and emphasize the practical "uses" of the doctrines that were expounded. A senior moderator would then lead a session critiquing the sermons. In these "iron-sharpens-iron" sessions, ministers could hone their exegetical and preaching skills.

From the early 1570s on, the public was invited to some of these preaching seminars, since they too had a passion for sound preaching. Not all ministers were in favor of this practice, however. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) later wrote, "I know that prophesyings were subject to great abuse, and would be more abused now; because heat of contentions is increased. But I say the only reason of the abuse was, because there was admitted to it a popular auditory, and it was not contained within a private conference of ministers."[28] The public—sometimes as many as a few hundred—sat in the back of a conference, usually with the Geneva Bible open on their laps, looking up each text cited by the ministers. Afterward, they often could ask questions that the ministers would answer. Sometimes, however, they were excluded from the critiquing sessions so they would not intimidate ministers whose sermons were being "censured."

The scriptural precedent for prophesyings was 1 Corinthians 14:29, 31, which says, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge…. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." These prophesyings, which started in the 1520s in Zurich, were imported by the early Puritans in the 1550s, used extensively at Christ's College by Laurence Chaderton (c. 1536–1640), and soon proliferated in several counties in England. They grew out of a need for Puritan ministers to improve their preaching, though they were sometimes initiated by bishops who felt the need to remedy "ignorant preaching." The prophesyings reached their peak in the mid-1570s. In 1577, against the advice of Archbishop Grindal, Queen Elizabeth—who viewed the prophesyings as a threat to her control of state and church—encouraged her bishops to prohibit them.[29] In this, she was only partially successful; some prophesyings continued into the reign of King James I, particularly where bishops tolerated them.[30]

Books of Sermons

Fourth, Puritan preaching was greatly augmented by *the printing and publishing of sermons.* The Puritans printed numerous sermons in the form of books, which became a major means of grace and communication. In the 1560s, nine volumes of Puritan sermons were published; in the 1570s, sixty-nine volumes; in the 1580s, 113 volumes; and in the 1590s, 140 volumes.[31] A. F. Herr writes, "The printing of sermons constituted a rather large business in Elizabethan England. It has been estimated that more than forty per cent of all publications issued at that time were religious or philosophical in nature and it is evident that sermons account for a large part of those religious publications."[32]

As J. I. Packer has said, the Puritan writers were popular because they were educators of the mind, expositors to the conscience, physicians of the soul, enforcers of the truth, and men of the Spirit.[33] A number of Puritan sermon books went through scores of English editions, and some books were translated into various European languages. In the seventeenth century, more than seven hundred Puritan volumes were translated and printed in the Dutch language alone.[34] Only recently have we begun to return the favor by translating some of the great Dutch classics of the Further Reformation, a period in the Netherlands that parallels English Puritanism.[35]

The Puritan sermon books were frequently and widely read, and God used them for many conversions and growth in grace of thousands of believers. Today, as any antiquarian book dealer knows, old Puritan tomes tend to be badly beaten up through extensive use, whereas it is not uncommon to find Anglican volumes in pristine condition for lack of use.

More than 90 percent of the Puritan books were first presented as sermons. The same is true of the seven hundred Puritan volumes that have been reprinted in the past fifty years, since the resurgence of Puritan literature that began in the late 1950s.[36]

Ministerial Training Finally, the Puritan program for preaching took the form of *ministerial training*, which promoted good preaching. The Puritans demanded a college-trained clergy. To accomplish this, the Puritans were educated at universities such as Cambridge. Joseph Pipa writes:

> At Cambridge, Christ's College led the way with a long list of Puritan fellows and tutors, led by Laurence Chaderton. St. John's and Trinity, as well, produced many with Puritan convictions. In the early days of Elizabeth, these colleges produced a veritable "Who's Who" of Puritan divines. Later in Elizabeth's reign the Puritans established two colleges of their own in Cambridge. In 1584 Walter Mildmay founded Emmanuel with

> Laurence Chaderton as its first master, and in 1596 the Countess of Sussex established Sidney Sussex.[37]

Due to the influence of Chaderton and Perkins, Emmanuel College eventually overtook Christ's College in the early years of the seventeenth century as the hotbed of Puritanism.[38]

Oxford also trained numerous Puritan preachers. Paul Seaver reckons that of the numerous Puritan-minded London lecturers, 59 percent received training at Cambridge and 56 percent at Oxford—several being trained in part in both universities.[39] Trinity College in Dublin also trained numerous Puritan preachers. And the founding of Harvard College in New England (1636), six years after the Puritans' arrival, shows their dread of leaving "an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust."[40]

All these colleges, together with the influence of fellows and tutors and fellow students, were a mighty force in shaping young men with staunch Puritan convictions about preaching.[41] In harmony with Puritan convictions that Spirit-anointed preaching is better caught than taught, local churches were often filled with fine Puritan preachers, such as William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, and Laurence Chaderton, who also had a profound influence on ministerial students. When Chaderton resigned his lectureship at St. Clement's, forty ministers petitioned him to continue, "alleging that to him they owed their conversion."[42] Often there was a chain reaction of influence—most notably, the use of Richard Sibbes's preaching in the conversion of John Cotton, whose preaching in turn was used for the conversion of John Preston (1587–1628).[43]

Passion for Preaching The extensive Puritan program for preaching was driven by an inward passion created by the Spirit of God. The Puritans' love for preaching was passionate in several ways.

The Puritans Loved the Gospel of Christ They loved to proclaim the entire gospel, which included, as Packer has pointed out, diagnosing the plight of man and the issue of sin; stressing the goal of grace and the sufficiency of Christ in His humiliation and exaltation; and offering grace together with proclaiming the demands of evangelical repentance and faith.[44]

Puritan preaching, then, primarily refers to how the Puritan ministers proclaimed God's Word regarding the salvation of sinners in the Lord Jesus Christ. That salvation is granted by grace, received by faith, and reflective of the glory of God. For the Puritans, preaching presents Christ so that, by the power of the Spirit, people come to God through Him. After all, initial conversion is only the beginning of personal transformation and conformity to Christ, they said.

Hence their preaching presents Christ so that the believer may grow in Him and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of His church and in the extension of His kingdom in the world. Puritan preaching involves declaring redemption by focusing on the saving work of all three persons of the Trinity, while simultaneously calling sinners to a life of faith and commitment and warning that the gospel will condemn forever those who persist in unbelief and impenitence. Thomas Manton (1620–1677) put it this way:

> The sum of the gospel is this, that all who, by true repentance and faith, do forsake the flesh, the world, and the devil, and give themselves up to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as their creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, shall find God as a father, taking them for his reconciled children, and for Christ's sake pardoning their sin, and by his Spirit giving them his grace; and, if they persevere in this course, will finally glorify them, and bestow upon them everlasting happiness; but will condemn the unbelievers, impenitent, and ungodly to everlasting punishment.[45]

The Puritans especially loved to preach Christ—biblically, doctrinally, and typologically.[46] "Preaching is the chariot that carries Christ up and down the world," wrote Richard Sibbes (1577–1635).[47] John Flavel (1628–1691) said, "The excellency of a sermon lies in the plainest discoveries and liveliest applications of Jesus Christ." Richard Baxter (1615–1691) added, "If we can but teach *Christ* to our people, we teach them all." And Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) concluded, "Dispensers of the gospel are the Bridegroom's friends, and they must not speak one word for the Bridegroom and two for themselves."[48]

In works such as Thomas Taylor's *Christ Revealed*, Thomas Goodwin's *Christ Our Mediator*, Alexander Grosse's *Happiness of Enjoying and Making a Speedy Use of Christ*, Isaac Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus*, Ralph Robinson's or Philip Henry's *Christ All in All*, John Brown's *Christ: The Way, the Truth, and the Life*, John Owen's *The Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ*, and James Durham's *Christ Crucified*, the Puritans preached Christ to the whole man.[49] They offered Him as prophet, priest, and king. They did not separate His benefits from His person or offer Him as a Savior from sin while ignoring His claims as Lord.

Preaching Christ with winsomeness and grace was the most essential task of the Puritan preacher. Perkins concluded his masterful treatise on homiletics by saying: *The sum of the sum: Preach one Christ by Christ to the praise of Christ.*[50]

"Christ crucified" must be "the subject matter of gospel-preaching," Robert Traill (1642–1716) said. "Two things ministers have to do:… 1. To set him forth

to people; to paint him in his love, excellency, and ability to save. 2. To offer him unto them freely, fully, without any limitation as to sinners, or their sinful state."[51] Robert Bolton (1572–1631) agreed: "Jesus Christ is offered most freely, and without exception of any person, every Sabbath, every Sermon."[52] The Puritan preachers repeatedly presented Christ in His ability, willingness to save, and preciousness as the only redeemer of lost sinners. They did so with theological articulation, divine grandeur, and human passion.

The Puritans Loved the Work of Preaching "God knows, I would much rather preach for nothing than not at all," wrote Philip Henry (1631–1696).[53] The Puritan ministers also loved *preparing for preaching*. They spent long hours poring over the meaning of the text of Scripture within its context. They were expository and didactic preachers. They almost always preached straight through passages. Then, too, they loved the *act of preaching*, not for its own sake, but because they believed that God uses preaching to save those who must believe. Consequently, most Puritan preachers also spoke with considerable passion, particularly when they preached about Christ. "Next to Christ I have one joy, to preach Christ my Lord," wrote Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661).[54]

Since Puritan ministers believed that preaching is the primary means of conversion and of building up believers in their faith—or, as Perkins put it, "to collect the church and to accomplish the number of the elect"[55]—the loss of their living or lectureship—which they often feared, and that for good reason—was a disaster not only to themselves personally, but also to the congregation they served. When Richard Rogers (1551–1618) received word that he was suspended from his lectureship, he was overwhelmed with "a deep heaviness" and grieved that the "void of a preaching ministry" would lead to the scattering of his people, the loss of godly fellowship, and the hardening of the unsaved in their ways of sin.[56]

No wonder, then, that many Puritans, like John Bunyan (1628–1688), said that they would rather go to jail than give up preaching. When told that he could be released from jail if he agreed to stop preaching, Bunyan replied that if he were released, he would be preaching the next day.

For Puritans like Bunyan, preaching was their life; it was paramount to their own soul. Puritan preachers loved to *preach to themselves* first and foremost; they despised cold professionalism. The best sermons, they said, are those that the preacher first preaches to his own heart. "No man preaches his sermon well to others if he does not first preach it to his own heart," John Owen said.[57] "I preached what I felt, what I smartingly [painfully] did feel," wrote Bunyan. "Indeed I have been as one sent unto them from the dead. I went myself in

chains to preach to them in chains; and carried that fire in my own conscience that I persuaded them to beware of."[58] Richard Baxter put it this way: "Preach to yourselves first, before you preach to the people, and with greater zeal. O Lord, save thy church from worldly pastors, that study and learn the art of Christianity, and ministry; but never had the Christian, divine nature, nor the vital principle which must difference them and their services from the dead."[59] At times, Baxter taught, this will mean preaching against oneself—against the sins of one's own heart, such as hypocrisy, pride, worldliness, and laziness. It will necessitate stirring up one's own soul through meditative and prayerful sermon preparation.[60]

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) noted, "I go out to preach with two propositions in mind. First, every person ought to give his life to Christ. Second, whether or not anyone else gives him his life, I will give him mine."[61]

The Puritans Loved People Finally, the Puritans loved the people they preached to and relentlessly sought their conversion and edification. John Owen wrote, "A sermon is not made with an eye upon the sermon, but with both eyes upon the people and all the heart upon God…. Ministers are seldom honoured with success unless they are continually aiming at the conversion of sinners."[62]

Puritan preachers understood that the minister with great preaching gifts who failed to love his people would fail miserably in his calling. They knew that to fail in love is to fail in all. They said a minister must strive to preach and shepherd his people with so much love that he mirrors the Father's love as pictured in the father's reception of the prodigal son and his response to his elder brother (Luke 15:11–32).

Here are two examples. The first is Thomas Manton's loving pastoral advice to those who are caught in spiritual bondage. Manton suggested four ways to help the weak in faith call on God as their Father and to come to greater liberty in Christ.

(1) They should "disclaim when they cannot apply." If you cannot say, "Father," Manton said, you must plead on your fatherless condition, using such texts as Hosea 14:3: "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

(2) They must "own God in the humbling way." Like the prodigal son, they can come to the Father confessing their unworthiness, or, like Paul, come as the chief of sinners, Manton said. They can come to God as their Father-Creator if they cannot come to Him as their Father-Savior.

(3) They should "call Him Father in wish." If you cannot call Him Father with directness, do it with desire, Manton said. "Let us pray ourselves into this relation, and groan after it, that we may have a clearer sense that God is our

Father in Christ."

(4) These weak ones should make use of Christ. "If you cannot come to God as your Father, come to him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (from Eph. 3:14), who means so much in heaven, Manton said. "Let Christ bring you into God's presence. Take Him along with you in your arms. Go to God in Christ's name for 'Whatsoever you ask in my name, shall be given to you.'"[63]

A second example is that the Puritan pastor preached passionately to the unsaved among his people. Often, he would say something like this: "I have good news for you; I have a Savior for you; I have forgiveness of sins to offer you. God loves sinners so much that He is making you the tremendous offer of eternal life, and God beseeches you now to receive it. He has no desire in your death. He does not want you to perish, but to live." The Puritan preacher strove to be like His Sender in love, to be utterly faithful to that God who stretches out His hands to a gainsaying and disobedient people, and cries out of immeasurable love, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (Ezek. 33:11).

Thomas Brooks summarized it this way: "Ministers must so speak to the people as if they lived in the very hearts of the people; as if they had been told all their wants, and all their ways, all their sins, and all their doubts."[64] When ministers so love their people and love seeing God's grace at work in them, they can agree with Thomas Manton's saying: "The hearer's life is the preacher's best commendation."[65]

How sorely love is missing in many ministries today! When it is lacking, people sense it even when they cannot always identify it. "Love your people," the Puritans advised. "Repent of your lack of it. Complain against yourself to the Lord, and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with it." Baxter wrote, "The whole course of our ministry must be carried on in a tender love to our people…. When the people see that you [sincerely] love them, they will hear anything, and bear anything, and follow you the more easily."[66]

Conclusion: Revival of Puritan Love Needed Puritan preaching is transforming. Brian Hedges says that Puritan preachers "lift our gaze to the greatness and gladness of God. They open our eyes to the beauty and loveliness of Christ. They prick our consciences with the subtlety and sinfulness of sin. They ravish and delight the soul with the power and glory of grace. They plumb the depths of the soul with profound biblical, practical, and psychological insight. They sustain and strengthen the soul through suffering by expounding the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. They set our sights and focus our affections on eternal realities."[67]

Puritan preachers help us shape our lives by Scripture. They encourage us to

pray without ceasing and teach us how to meditate. They rebuke our pride and move us to rely on the Spirit. They help us to live with one eye on glory and the other on earth. They open our eyes to the beauty of covenanting with God and one another. They show us how to practice genuine piety, how to preach experientially, how to maintain biblical balance in our lives, and, above all, how to find our all in Christ so that as pilgrims we can live in Him.[68]

We need the Puritans, as Packer says, to teach us how to integrate our faith into our daily lives, to upgrade the quality of our religious experience, to move us to effective action, to promote a deeper sense of human worth, to strive more for the ideal of church renewal, and especially to move us to embrace their double desire of glorifying God and magnifying Christ.[69]

The Puritans can make us better preachers, too. Like John Piper, we can learn from Jonathan Edwards as well as nearly all the Puritans to saturate hearers with Scripture, enlighten their minds, stir up their holy affections, employ analogies and images, use threats and warnings, plead for a response, probe the workings of the heart, yield to the Holy Spirit in prayer, be broken and tenderhearted, and be intense.[70] We should heed the call of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: "Let us make sure that that 'plain practical preaching' which was begun by the Puritans may not be lost among us."[71]

Puritan ministers and their sermons were not perfect. At times, some of them took on a legalistic tone. Some of their sermons are so packed full of doctrine that one forgets the text being expounded. Sometimes their "uses" seem endless. Sometimes they focus so heavily on the individual that these lose sight of the corporate body of Christ. But let us seriously ask ourselves: Are we, like the Puritans, thirsting to glorify the triune God? Are we and our sermons pulsating with biblical truth and biblical fire?

Let us challenge one another. Who among us will live godly in Christ Jesus like the Puritans? Who will go beyond studying their writings, discussing their ideas, recalling their achievements, and berating their failures? Who will practice the degree of obedience to God's Word for which they strove? Who will love preaching as they did?

It is not enough just to read the Puritans. We need the authentic, biblical, intelligent piety of the Puritans in our hearts, our lives, our sermons, and our churches.

1. Richard Sibbes, *The Fountain Opened; or, The Mystery of Godliness Revealed*, in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862–1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 5:508.

2. For example, Oliver Heywood preached an average of five times a week in 1690, according to Horsfall Turner, *The Reverend Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1630–1702: His Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdotes*

and Event Books (London: Bingley, 1883), 3:238.

3. Edward Dering, *M. Derings Workes* (1597; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 456.

4. John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 16:74.

5. Millar Maclure, *The Paul's Cross Sermons, 1534–1642* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 165.

6. John Cotton, *The Way of Life. Or, Gods Way and Course, in Bringing the Soule Into, Keeping It In, and Carrying It On, in the Wayes of Life and Peace* (London: M. F. for L. Fawne and S. Gellibrand, 1641), 432.

7. *Geneva Bible* (1599; reprint Ozark, Mo.: L. L. Brown, 1990), 3.

8. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Evangelical Ministry: The Puritan Contribution," in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1998), 267.

9. E.g., *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist. His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: "A Discourse of Conscience" and "The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience,"* ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraaf, 1966). These works earned Perkins the title of "the father of Puritan casuistry."

10. *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, rev. J. R. V. Marchant and J. F. Charles (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), s.vv. "experimentum," "experientia."

11. Willem Balke, "The Word of God and *Experientia* according to Calvin," in *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor*, ed. W. H. Neuser (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1978), 20–21; cf. Calvin's commentary on Zechariah 2:9.

12. Thomas Adams, *Meditations upon Some Part of the Creed*, in *The Works of Thomas Adams* (1862; repr., Eureka, Calif.: Tanski, 1998), 3:224.

13. Isaac Ambrose, *The Works of Isaac Ambrose* (London: for Thomas Tegg & Son, 1701), 201.

14. Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man's Picture* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 20–188, sets forth twenty-four marks of grace for self-examination.

15. Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990); Matthew Mead, *The Almost Christian Discovered; Or the False Professor Tried and Cast* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1988); Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959).

16. See the Heidelberg Catechism for a Reformed confessional statement that facilitates experimental preaching. This is evidenced by (1) the Catechism's exposition of an outline (misery, deliverance, and gratitude) that is true to the experience of believers, (2) its application of most doctrines directly to the believer's conscience and spiritual profit, and (3) its warm, personal character in which the believer is regularly addressed in the second person. Cf. Tae-Hyeun Park, *The Sacred Rhetoric of the Holy Spirit: A Study of Puritan Preaching in Pneumatological Perspective* (Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit, 2005), 373–74.

17. Quoted in Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 58.

18. The origins and varieties of the lectureships are documented by Paul S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560–1662* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), 72–87. Cf. Irvonwy Morgan, *The Godly Preachers of the Elizabethan Church* (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 33–60; William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1972), 330.

19. D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 378.

20. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, 53.

21. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, 22.

22. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, 30–31.

23. Marshall M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 221–22.

24. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Schocken,

1964), 80.

25. Peter Lewis, *Genius of Puritanism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 61–62.

26. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, dust jacket.

27. See especially Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 168–76, and Morgan, *The Godly Preachers of the Elizabethan Church*, 61–101. For shorter treatments, see Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 253–54; Joseph A. Pipa Jr., "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985), 25–26; Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (Stoke-on-Trent, U.K.: Tentmaker, 2006), 1:181–82; Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria), 188–89.

28. Francis Bacon, *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longman, 1857), 8:88.

29. S. E. Lehmberg, "Archbishop Grindal and the Prophesyings," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 24 (1965): 87–145.

30. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 168.

31. A. F. Herr, *The Elizabethan Sermon: A Survey and a Bibliography* (New York: Octagon, 1969), 27.

32. Herr, *The Elizabethan Sermon*, 67.

33. J. I. Packer, *Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 11–34.

34. Fred A. van Lieburg, "From Pure Church to Pious Culture: The Further Reformation in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 423–25. Cf. C. W. Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind* (Leiden: Brill, 1983); Willem Jan op 't Hof, *Engelse pietistische geschriften in het Nederlands, 1598–1622* (Rotterdam: Lindenberg, 1987).

35. For a review of these translated Dutch titles, see Joel R. Beeke and Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: A Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 739–823.

36. See Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, for a review of all seven hundred titles. For the impact of these books on personal lives, see Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, 59–61.

37. Pipa, "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching," 24. Cf. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 195, 218–19; Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, 20.

38. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, 183.

39. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, 183.

40. From *New England's First Fruits*, quoted in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *The Puritans*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1963), 2:701.

41. For a Puritan curriculum, see Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 466–80; H. C. Porter, *Puritanism in Tudor England* (New York: MacMillan, 1970), 180–203, 223–27.

42. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, 54.

43. John Norton, *Abel Being Dead Yet Speaketh* (Delmar, N. Y.: Scholars Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978), 14; Pipa, "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching," 25.

44. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 170–75.

45. Thomas Manton, "Wisdom Is Justified of Her Children," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, ed. T. Smith (Worthington, Pa.: Maranatha, 1980), 2:102ff.

46. See Chad Van Dixhoorn, "Preaching Christ in Post-Reformation Britain," in *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson*, ed. Robert L. Penny (Philipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2008), 361–89.

47. Sibbes, *Fountain Opened*, in *Works*, 5:508; cf. Lewis, *Genius of Puritanism*, 50–52.

48. John Blanchard, comp., *Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 476, 477, 490.

49. Thomas Taylor, *Christ Revealed: or The Old Testament Explained; A Treatise of the Types and Shadowes of Our Saviour* (London: M. F. for R. Dawlman and L. Fawne, 1635) is the best Puritan work on Christ in the Old Testament. Thomas Goodwin, *Christ Our Mediator*, vol. 5 of *The Works of Thomas*

Goodwin (Eureka, Calif.: Tanski, 1996) ably expounds primary New Testament texts on the mediatorship of Christ. Alexander Grosse, *The Happiness of Enjoying and Making a True and Speedy Use of Christ* (London: Tho: Brudenell, for John Bartlet, 1647) and Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1986) are experiential Christology at its best. Ralph Robinson, *Christ All and In All: or Several Significant Similitudes by Which the Lord Jesus Christ Is Described in the Holy Scriptures* (1660; repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), Philip Henry, *Christ All in All, or, What Christ is Made to Believers* (1676; repr., Swengel, Pa.: Reiner, 1976), and John Brown, *Christ: The Way, the Truth, and the Life* (1677; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995) contain precious sermons extolling Christ in all His relations to believers. John Owen, *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ* (reprinted in vol. 1 of *The Works of John Owen*, Banner of Truth Trust edition) is superb on the relation of Christ's natures to His person. James Durham, *Christ Crucified, or The Marrow of the Gospel, Evidently Set Forth in 72 Sermons on the Whole Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: Alex Adam, 1792) remains unrivaled as a scriptural exposition of Christ's passion.

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51. Robert Traill, "By What Means May Ministers Best Win Souls?", in *The Works of the Late Reverend Robert Traill* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 1:246.

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63. Thomas Manton, *A Practical Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, ed. T. Smith. (Worthington, Pa.: Maranatha, 1980), 1:36, 50–51; cf. Simon Ford, *The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption* (London: T. Maxey, for Sa. Gellibrand, 1655), 200; and Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit: or, An Essay towards a Discovery of the Witnessings of the Spirit* (London: Livewell Chapman, 1654), 56–62.

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68. Cf. Joel R. Beeke, "Learn from the Puritans," in *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Thomas K. Ascol (Cape Coral, Fla.: Founders Press, 2004), 219–70; for additional lessons to learn from the Puritans see Park, *The Sacred Rhetoric of the Holy Spirit*, 378–86; and Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 11–34.

69. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 23–27; 175–76.

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Chapter 44

John Bunyan's Preaching to the Heart

> *To see a prince entreat a beggar to receive an alms would be a strange sight; to see a king entreat a traitor to accept of mercy would be a stranger sight than that; but to see God entreat a sinner, to hear Christ say, 'I stand at the door and knock,' with a heart full and a heaven full of grace to bestow upon him that opens, this is such a sight as dazzles the eyes of angels.*[1]
>
> —JOHN BUNYAN

Today we are witnessing the erosion of biblical preaching on an unprecedented scale.[2] In his definitive biography on the great evangelist, George Whitefield (1714–1770), Arnold Dallimore called for biblical preachers who would be

> men mighty in the Scriptures, their lives dominated by a sense of the greatness, the majesty and holiness of God, and their minds and hearts aglow with the great truths of the doctrines of grace…men who are willing to be fools for Christ's sake, who will bear reproach and falsehood, who will labour and suffer, and whose supreme desire will be, not to gain earth's accolades, but to win the Master's approbation when they appear before His awesome judgment seat. They will be men who preach with broken hearts and tear-filled eyes.[3]

Where are the ministers who have descended from Mount Zion, conquered by sovereign grace? When we look at the landscape around us, it appears that the church is faltering as the pulpit grows cold.

Yet even in such a time, there is hope. While Scripture itself sets forth the requirements of gospel ministry, a survey of the history of preaching shows us that the Lord has never abandoned His flock. In every generation He has raised up men who stormed the gates of hell with the simplicity of heaven's wisdom. For us, the past becomes a beacon of hope in which we find encouragement for

our own times. In the midst of sound Puritan preachers, John Bunyan (1628–1688) stands among the highest, for he had the God-given ability to engage not only the mind but also the heart through his preaching. Let us focus on Bunyan as a preacher—especially as a preacher to the heart.[4]

Bunyan the Preacher Charles II once asked John Owen (1616–1683), "the prince of Puritans," why he went to hear the preaching of the unlearned tinker of Bedford, John Bunyan. Owen responsed, "May it please your majesty, could I possess the tinker's abilities for preaching, I would willingly relinquish all my learning."[5]

In 1655, at the request of several brethren in his local church, twenty-seven-year-old Bunyan began preaching to various Bedford congregations while he was still afflicted sorely by doubts about his own eternal state. Of that early preaching he writes: "The terrors of the law, and guilt for my transgressions, lay heavily on my conscience. I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel, even that under which my poor soul did groan and tremble to astonishment…. I went myself in chains to preach to them in chains; and carried that fire in my own conscience that I persuaded them to beware of."[6]

Hundreds came to hear Bunyan, which genuinely astonished him. Ola Winslow writes, "Incredulous at first that God would speak through him 'to the heart of any man,' he presently concluded it might be so, and his success became a reassurance."[7] Anne Arnott says that Bunyan "was a sinner saved by grace, who preached to other sinners from his own dark experience. 'I have been as one sent to them from the dead,' he said. 'I had not preached long before some began to be touched by the Word, and to be greatly afflicted in their minds at the apprehension of the greatness of their sin and of their need for Jesus Christ.'"[8]

Within two years, Bunyan began preaching less about sin and much more about Christ. He lifted up Christ, as Gordon Wakefield put it,

> in his 'offices,' that is, in the whole range of what he could do for the human soul and for the world; Christ as the saving alternative to the bogus securities of getting and spending or of the philosophies of godless self-interest. And in consequence of this, 'God led me into something of the mystery of union with Christ' [Bunyan said] and this he came to preach also, the union, which was the heart of Calvinist spirituality.[9]

Bunyan's preaching no longer brought only "a word of admonition," but also edification and comfort to believers. This greatly strengthened his sense of internal calling, powerfully assisting in persuading him that he was proclaiming truth.

While preaching in a farmhouse in 1660, five years after he began proclaiming God's Word, Bunyan was arrested on the charge of preaching without official rights from the king. Though Bunyan was certainly no rebel and no politician, the Bedfordshire gentry appear to have regarded his preaching as "dangerous rabble-rousing" that "fanned the discontent that many felt with the restored regime and church."[10] Sir Henry Chester, a local justice, put his case against Bunyan even more strongly: "He is a pestilential fellow, there is not [another] such a fellow in the country."[11] So Bunyan was thrown into prison, where he wrote prolifically and made shoelaces for twelve and a half years (1660–1672).

Prior to his arrest, Bunyan had married a godly young woman named Elizabeth. She pleaded repeatedly for his release, based on her care of four small children (including one who was blind) and a recent miscarriage. The presiding judge told her to get him to stop preaching. She replied, "My lord, he dares not leave off preaching as long as he can speak."[12] Bunyan did offer to hand over the notes of all his sermons to the judicial authorities to assure them that he was not preaching seditiously in any way. But that too was to no avail. So Bunyan remained in prison for violating the statute that required adult participation in Church of England worship services at least monthly and forbade religious meetings (conventicles) not authorized by that church.[13]

Throughout his imprisonment, Bunyan maintained a zealous love for preaching. He wrote, "When, by the good hand of my God, I had for five or six years together, without any interruption, freely preached the blessed gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ…the devil, that old enemy of man's salvation, took his opportunity to inflame the hearts of his vassals…that at last I was laid out for by the warrant of a justice, and was taken and committed to prison."[14] When asked what he would do if he was released from prison, he responded, "If I was out of prison today I would preach the gospel again tomorrow, by the help of God."[15] On another occasion, he said, "Neither guilt or hell could take me off my work";[16] he went so far as to state that he "could not be content, unless [he] was found in the exercise of [his] gift."[17]

In all his adversity, the Word was like a burning fire in Bunyan's heart. In fact, he anticipated dying for that Word. He later wrote, "It was for the Word and way of God that I was in this condition, [and] I was engaged not to flinch a hair's breadth from it…. It was my duty to stand to his Word, whether he would ever look upon me or no, or save me at the last; wherefore, thought I, I will leap off the ladder even blindfold into eternity, sink or swim, come heaven come hell, Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do; if not I will venture for thy name."[18]

In 1661 and from 1668–1672, certain jailers permitted Bunyan to leave prison

at times to preach. George Offer noted, “It is said that many of the Baptist congregations in Bedfordshire owe their origins to his midnight preaching.”19 Prison years were times of difficult trials, however. Bunyan experienced what his *Pilgrim’s Progress* characters Christian and Faithful would later suffer at the hands of Giant Despair, who thrust pilgrims “into a very dark dungeon, nasty and stinking.” Bunyan especially felt the pain of separation from his wife and children, particularly Mary, “my poor blind child,” describing it as “pulling the flesh from my bones.”20

Bunyan’s popularity as a preacher did not wane in his later years. He often visited London, “where,” Robert Southey says, “his reputation was so great, that if a day’s notice was given, ‘the meeting-house at Southwark at which he generally preached, would not hold half the people that attended. Three thousand persons have been gathered together there; and not less than twelve hundred on week days, and dark winter’s mornings at seven o’clock.”21

Bunyan preached to men’s hearts as well as to their minds. No doubt this was possible because he was personally acquainted with temptations, sins, and fears and had experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ in a remarkable way. In his introduction to Bunyan’s *Some Gospel Truths Opened,* John Burton wrote of its author, “He hath, through grace taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and experience of the temptations of Satan, which do more fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the gospel, than all university learning and degrees that can be had.”22

Bunyan had a high regard for the office of preacher. When Christian of *Pilgrim’s Progress* journeys to Interpreter’s house, he is shown a picture of a preacher, “a very grave person,” whose eyes are “lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand.” Bunyan continues, “The law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back, and a golden crown on his head. He stood as if pleading with men.” The Interpreter tells Christian what this picture represents: “It is to show thee, that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners…to show thee that slighting and despising the things that are present, for the love that he hath to his Master’s service, he is sure in the world that comes next to have glory for his reward.”23 This, for Bunyan is the ideal of what a preacher should be. For Bunyan, the preacher is God’s authorized spiritual guide. Gordon Wakefield writes,

> The Interpreter explains, in New Testament metaphors, that this man begets (spiritual) children, travails in bringing them to birth, and then is their nurse. His posture and his biblical resource and the truth written upon his lips make plain “that his work is to know and unfold dark things to

> sinners." He opens the divine secrets of mercy and judgment. And he must do this from a renunciation of this world and a belief that his reward is in the world to come, for here he may well receive obloquy, scorn and persecution, as Bunyan and many others did under the Stuarts.[24]

Bunyan's love for preaching was not confined to words; he also had a passionate zeal for his congregation. He loved preaching, *and* he loved people's souls. He once said, "In my preaching I have really been in pain and have as it were travailed to bring forth children unto God; neither could I be satisfied unless fruits did appear in my work."[25] Elsewhere, he wrote, "If any of those who were awakened by my ministry did after that fall back, as sometimes too many did, I can truly say their loss hath been more to me than if one of my own children, begotten of my body, had been going to its grave."[26] Bunyan was also overwhelmed with the greatness of the soul: "The soul, and the salvation of it, are such great, such wonderful great things; nothing is a matter of that concern as is, and should be, the soul of each one of you. House and land, trades and honours, places and preferments, what are they to salvation?"[27]

If ever a man was called for gospel ministry, it was Bunyan. The Holy Spirit granted him divine benediction, and he could not, without a serious breach of conscience, lay aside those gifts. Even when he was imprisoned, he spent the bulk of his time repackaging his preached sermons into books. Christopher Hill concludes, "It would appear that all his writings published before *Grace Abounding* derived from sermons, and probably most of what he published later." Hill speculates that Bunyan's spoken sermons were likely much more personal and demonstrative than his published works. He adds, "We may also suppose that the colloquialisms, the homely touches which survive in the dignity of print, may have played a larger part in his spoken words."[28]

Understanding the Heart Oratory skill or passion did not make Bunyan such a powerful preacher. Neither did degrees from Cambridge or any other university. Bunyan had a lively, experiential faith, which acquainted him with the full scope of religious troubles and affections. He experienced things that cannot be learned in any schoolbook but only as a student of living faith. This is what made Bunyan such a powerful weapon in God's hand for tearing down strongholds; by his own admission he preached what he felt.[29] While much more could be said about Bunyan's spiritual history, we will restrict ourselves to a few areas and suggest further reading about Bunyan in his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners,* where he opens his mind and heart.

Terror Assessing his own spiritual condition, Bunyan remarked that even from

childhood his unrighteousness had "but few equals."[30] At the age of nine, Bunyan recalled being "greatly afflicted, while asleep, with the apprehensions of devils and wicked spirits."[31] But, despite these outward shakings, he continued to delight in sin and ungodly companionship. As a young married man, Bunyan came under conviction of sin, particularly in how lightly he had treated the Sabbath. Yet this conviction did not result in true reformation; rather, it hardened his heart to grace. He said, "I was persuaded I could never attain to other comfort than what I should get in sin."[32]

The chastisement of an ungodly woman and an encounter with a confessor of religion brought Bunyan to an outward change. By the measure of some men, he was made anew as he put away some of his besetting sins. Yet, even in this, he said that he "knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope."[33] Despite external praise, Bunyan knew his hypocrisy and was overwhelmed with fear, particularly of death. In his autobiography, he tells about a time he wanted to see a church bell rung. As he stood below the tower, however, he began to fear the bell might fall and crush him, so he positioned himself under the main beam. Then he began to worry that the main beam might fall, so he removed himself to the steeple door. Then he was persuaded the whole steeple could fall upon him, so he fled from the building altogether.

Bunyan tells of a day prior to his conversion when he heard four women in Bedford speaking about the temptations of Satan and the hope of new birth. Eavesdropping on this conversation, Bunyan experienced a deep affliction in his soul: "I saw that in all my thoughts about religion and salvation, the new birth did never enter into my mind, neither knew I the comfort of the Word and promise, nor the deceitfulness and treachery of my own wicked heart."[34] Bunyan frequently visited Bedford to listen to people spiritually fellowship with one another, resulting in "a very great softness and tenderness of heart, which caused me to fall under the conviction of what by Scripture they asserted."[35] Yet, even then, the terrors of the law and guilt of his transgressions lay heavy on Bunyan's conscience.[36]

Doubt In the midst of many temptations, Bunyan experienced the Lord's protective hand. The Bible gradually became precious to him, but the more he read, the more he recognized his ignorance. In this faithless state, Bunyan realized he was afraid to see his lack of faith. Yet he could not be content until he came to certain knowledge of faith. "This was always running in my mind," he said.[37] As Bunyan wrestled on, he was overcome with concerns about his eternal state: "I began to find my soul to be assaulted with fresh doubts about my future happiness, especially with concerns as whether I was elected? But how

could I be, if the day of grace was now past and gone?”[38]

Even though grace moved upon his soul, doubt assailed Bunyan. “I should cry with pangs after God that he would be merciful unto me; but then I should be daunted again with such conceits as these; I should think God did mock at these, my prayers, saying… This poor simple wretch doth hanker after me as if I had nothing to do with my mercy but bestow it on such as he,” he wrote. “Alas, poor fool! How art thou deceived!”[39]

Grace Despite times of terror and doubt, Bunyan gradually experienced God’s grace. He wrote, “The Lord did more fully and graciously discover himself unto me; and indeed, did quite, not only deliver me from the guilt that, by these things, was laid upon my conscience, but also from the very filth thereof; for the temptation was removed, and I was put into my right mind again.”[40] From this time on, the wickedness and blasphemy of his heart prompted Bunyan to fly to the blood of Christ that made him and God friends.

In 1651, a group of God-fearing women introduced Bunyan to John Gifford, their Bedford pastor. Bunyan particularly found help in a sermon that Gifford preached on Song of Solomon 4:1: “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair.” He also discovered blessing in reading Luther’s commentary on Galatians, in which he found his own experience “largely and profoundly handled, as if [Luther’s] book had been written out of my heart.”[41] While walking through a field one day, Christ’s righteousness was revealed to Bunyan’s soul and gained the victory. Bunyan wrote of that unforgettable experience:

> One day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Thy righteousness is in heaven; and methought withal, I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand; there, I say, as my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was adoing, God could not say of me, He wants my righteousness, for that was just before Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.
>
> Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my afflictions and irons, my temptations also fled away; so that, from that time, those dreadful scripture of God left off to trouble me; now I went home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God….
>
> I lived for some time very sweetly at peace with God through Christ; Oh

> methought, Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes. I was now not for only looking upon this and the other benefits of Christ apart, as of his blood, burial, and resurrection, but considered him as a whole Christ!…
>
> It was glorious to me to see his exaltation, and the worth and prevalency of all his benefits, and that because of this: now I could look from myself to him, and should reckon that all those graces of God that now were green in me, were yet but like those cracked groats and fourpence-halfpennies that rich men carry in their purses, when their gold is in their trunks at home! Oh, I saw that my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ my Lord and Saviour! Now Christ was all.[42]

Bunyan knew sin, conviction, temptation, doubt, fear, Satan, forgiveness, and grace. He wrote, "When God shows a man the sin he has committed, the hell he has deserved, the heaven he has lost; and yet that Christ, and grace, and pardon may be had; this will make him serious, this will make him melt, this will break his heart…and this is the man, whose heart, whose life, whose conversation and all, will be engaged in the matters of the eternal salvation of his precious and immortal soul."[43] Bunyan's experience was the life of his preaching. His words were not merely a rhetorical exercise but the words of one who has seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the glorious truth of the gospel of grace. Bunyan preached as a man touched by God.

Preaching to the Heart Experiential knowledge led Bunyan to aim the arrow of his preaching at people's hearts. Because it is by the heart that a person "understands, wills, affects, reasons, and judges,"[44] Bunyan purposefully sought in his preaching to deliver an "awakening word" to the understanding, the will, the affections, the reason, and the judgments.[45] Ola Winslow writes, "Bunyan had the gift of being able to put emotional compulsion behind his words, and he also knew how to bring the here and now of the urgency home to his hearers."[46]

Preparing primarily with a Bible and concordance, deeply rooting his sermons in the Scriptures, Bunyan preached what he felt and longed for in his hearers. He wrote, "O that they who have heard me speak this day did but see as I do what sin, death, hell, and the curse of God is; and also what the grace, and love, and mercy of God is, through Jesus Christ."[47] To better grasp how he preached to the heart, let us examine three particulars of Bunyan's preaching: it was *participatory*, *pleading*, and *Christ exalting.*

Participatory Preaching Bunyan believed that those listening to preaching should be not only spectators but also participants. To that end, he usually

addressed his hearers very personally, commonly using the second person. He was direct, often calling upon various cases of conscience by name. He was also illustrative and simple, so that even the common people heard him gladly.[48] Wakefield says, "He was folksy and colloquial as he confronted his hearers with the issues of life and death, heaven and hell," often using sanctified, imaginative enlargement of Scripture. For example, when he preached on John 6:37 that those whom the Father gave to Christ "shall come to Him, Bunyan turns the words 'shall come' into a character by that name. He answers the objections of trembling doubters by assuring them that they need not worry, for '*Shall-come* answered all this…. *Shall-come can raise them from this Death.*'"[49] In all of these ways, and many more, Bunyan drew his hearers into the sermon so that they became participants.

Examples of Bunyan's directness in preaching abound. In his The Jerusalem Sinner Saved, Bunyan depicts Peter preaching:

> Repent, every one of you; be baptized, every one of you, in his name, for the remission of sins, and you shall, every one of you, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
>
> *Objector*. 'But I was one of them that plotted to take away his life. May I be saved by him?'
>
> *Peter*. Every one of you.
>
> *Objector*. 'But I was one of them that bare false witness against him. Is there grace for me?'
>
> *Peter*. For every one of you.
>
> *Objector*. 'But I was one of them that cried out, Crucify him, crucify him; and desired that Barabbas, the murderer, might live, rather than him. What will become of me, think you?'
>
> *Peter*. I am to preach repentance and remission of sins to every one of you, says Peter.
>
> *Objector*. 'But I was one of them that did spit in his face when he stood before his accusers. I also was one that mocked him, when in anguish he hanged bleeding on the tree. Is there room for me?'
>
> *Peter*. For every one of you, says Peter.
>
> *Objector*. 'But I was one of them that, in his extremity, said, Give him gall and vinegar to drink. Why may not I expect the same when anguish and guilt is upon me?'
>
> *Peter*. Repent of these your wickednesses, and here is remission of sins for every one of you.

Objector. ‘But I railed on him, I reviled him, I hated him, I rejoiced to see him mocked at by others. Can there be hopes for me?’

Peter. There is, for every one of you. ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.’[50]

Bunyan’s writings suggest that he preached by laying powerful evidence before his hearers of both sin and grace, then calling upon them to render a verdict. Not that Bunyan viewed the preaching of the Word as something subservient to our judgment; rather, he sought to disarm his hearers, plainly show them their own sin and misery, then reveal the glories of grace. In this, Bunyan forged an intimate connection with his hearers. He wrote, “I thank God he gave unto me some measure of bowels and pity for their souls, which also did put me forward to labor with great diligence and earnestness, to find out such a word as might, if God would bless it, lay hold of and awaken the conscience.”[51]

Bunyan passionately reasoned with his listeners to respond to the truth of sin and judgment as well as forgiveness and grace. He said, “Poor sinner, awake; eternity is coming. God and his Son, they are both coming to judge the world; awake, art thou yet asleep, poor sinner? Let me set the *trumpet* to thine ear once again! The heavens will be shortly on a burning flame; the earth, and the works thereof, shall be burned up, and then wicked men shall go into perdition; does thou hear this, sinner?”[52] Bunyan was not satisfied with simply asserting the truth; he “put the trumpet” to the ear of his listeners, compelling them to respond. He preached, “Sinner, be advised; ask thy heart again, saying, ‘Am I come to Jesus Christ?’ For upon this one question, ‘Am I come, or, am I not?’ hangs heaven and hell as to thee. If thou canst say, ‘I am come,’ and God shall approve that saying, happy, happy, happy man art thou! But if thou are not come, what can make thee happy? Yea, why can a man be happy that, for his not coming to Jesus Christ for life, must be damned in hell?”[53]

Bunyan encouraged heart-searching. He would not let a listener be content only to hear words, but prodded them to seek truth in the heart. So he warned, “Ah, friends, consider there is now hopes of mercy, but then there will not; now Christ holds forth mercy unto you, but then he will not. Now there are his servants that do beseech you to accept of his grace, but if thou lose the opportunity that is put into thine hand, thou thyself mayest beseech hereafter, and no mercy be given thee.”[54]

In all of his preaching, Bunyan urged his congregation to respond to the preached word. Preaching was not a classroom lecture. Rather, it drew in the sinner to engage the faculties of the heart and to force a response. There was

urgency in his preaching. It was not enough for Bunyan merely to declare the truth and hope it would yield a response in the future. As the blacksmith knows he must strike the steel while it is hot, so Bunyan demanded an immediate response. He could not rest content until each person he preached to had responded to that message; he could not afford to see his congregants go home, putting off what should be done. His command was, "*Today*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 4:7).

Pleading Preaching Aware of the power of Satan's temptation, Bunyan wrote, "Oh! The rage and the roaring of this lion, and the hatred that he manifests against the Lord Jesus, and against them that are purchased with his blood!"[55] In one sense, pastors have something to learn from Satan's devices. The devil lives to torment the soul, to induce men's hearts to forsake Christ, and to entice them to embrace sin and temptation. The best way to respond to Satan's pleading, Bunyan said, is for preachers to "outshoot the devil in his own bow."[56] He did not merely set life and death before the eyes of people, but by all means possible implored them to forsake sin and embrace life in Christ.

In his pleading, Bunyan painted terrible pictures of eternal condemnation. He said, "In my preaching of the Word I took special notice of this one thing, namely, that the Lord did lead me to begin where his Word begins with sinners; that is, to condemn all flesh, and to open and allege that the curse of God, by the law, doth belong to, and lay hold on all men as they come into the world, because of sin."[57] Again, "The soul that is lost will never be found again, never be recovered again, never be redeemed again. Its banishment from God is everlasting; the fire in which it burns, and by which it must be tormented, is a fire that is everlasting fire, everlasting burning. That is fearful." Bunyan continued, "Now tell the stars, now tell the drops of water, now tell the blades of grass that are spread upon the face of all the earth, if thou canst; and yet sooner mayest thou do this than count the thousands of millions of thousands of years that a damned soul shall lie in hell."[58]

Bunyan often impersonated God, Christ, and the hell-bound sinner as he pleaded with the sinner to turn to Christ and live. This is particularly true of his sermon that compares a person who claims to be a Christian but bears no fruit to a barren fig tree. Note how Bunyan pleads:

> Death, come smite me this fig-tree. And withal the Lord shakes this sinner, and whirls him upon a sick-bed, saying, Take him, death, he hath abused my patience and forbearance, not remembering that it should have led him to repentance, and to the fruits thereof. Death, fetch away this fig-tree to the fire, fetch this barren professor to hell! At this death comes with grim looks

> into the chamber; yea, and hell follows with him to the bedside, and both stare this professor in the face, yea, begin to lay hands upon him; one smiting him with pains in his body, with headache, heart-ache, back-ache, shortness of breath, fainting, qualms, trembling of joints, stopping at the chest, and almost all the symptoms of a man past all recovery. Now, while death is thus tormenting the body, hell is doing with the mind and conscience, striking them with its pains, casting sparks of fire in thither, wounding with sorrows, and fears of everlasting damnation, the spirit of this poor creature. And now he begins to bethink himself, and to cry to God for mercy; Lord, spare me! Lord, spare me! Nay, saith God, you have been a provocation to me these three years. How many times have you disappointed me? How many seasons have you spent in vain? How many sermons and other mercies did I, of my patience, afford you? but to no purpose at all. Take him, death![59]

Bunyan describes the fruitless professor's death so powerfully that you feel that you are standing at the bedside. As Erroll Hulse says, "Bunyan carries forward the illustration of the tree being felled so well, that you are left at the end with both the echoes of the chopper and the ghastly death rattles and chokings of the unrepentant one."[60]

While Bunyan pleaded with people to see the severity of sin and hell, he also pleaded the mercies of God. He urged, "Cast but up thine eyes a little higher, and behold, there is the mercy-seat and throne of grace to which thou wouldest come, and by which thou must be saved."[61] He added, "Coming sinner, what promise thou findest in the word of Christ, strain it whither thou canst, so thou dost not corrupt it, and his blood and merits will answer all; what the word saith, or any true consequence that is drawn there from, that we may boldly venture upon…take it then for granted, that thou, whoever thou art, if coming, may come."[62]

If Satan will not rest for a moment in pleading with men's souls, so preachers must not rest from their great duty to plead with men's souls. And, in all of our pleading, we must labor to reveal sin as ugly and hateful, and to make Christ altogether lovely (Song 5:16), for our enemy labors to do the opposite. Bunyan's ability to plead with the heart was largely due to his own spiritual journey. Because of his experience with the weight of sin and guilt, Bunyan could plead with those under conviction; because he had tasted divine grace, he could equally plead the mercies of God. In sum, Bunyan wrote,

> I went for the space of two years, crying out against men's sins, and their fearful state because of them. After which the Lord came in upon my own

> soul with some staid peace and comfort through Christ; for he did give me many sweet discoveries of his blessed grace through him…. I still preached what I saw and felt; now therefore I did much labour to hold forth Jesus Christ in all his offices, relations, and benefits unto the world.[63]

Listen to one example. Bunyan impersonates a great sinner, writing, "Say, when thou art upon thy knees, Lord, here is a Jerusalem sinner! a sinner of the biggest size! one whose burden is of the greatest bulk and heaviest weight! one that cannot stand long without sinking into hell, without thy supporting hand…. I say, put in thy name with Magdalene, with Manasseh, that thou mayest fare as the Magdalene and the Manasseh sinners do!"[64]

Christ-Exalting Preaching The singular aim of a heart mastered by grace is to lift up and magnify Jesus Christ, both as the Christ of the revealed Word and as the Christ of personal experience based on that Word. Bunyan excelled in both.[65] He particularly focused on Christ and the riches of His grace, moving his listeners to exalt their Savior. He preached: "O Son of God! grace was in all the tears, grace came bubbling out of thy side with thy blood, grace came forth with every word of thy sweet mouth. Grace came out where the whip smote thee, where the thorns pricked thee, where the nails and spear pierced thee. O blessed Son of God! Here is grace indeed! Unsearchable riches of grace! Grace enough to make angels wonder, grace to make sinners happy, grace to astonish devils."[66] For Bunyan, this is persevering grace, for it will never perish.[67]

Bunyan's first love was to exalt Christ through preaching Him doctrinally with passion and theological grandeur:

> For I have known my preaching, especially when I have been engaged in the doctrine of life by Christ, without works, as if an angel of God had stood at my back to encourage me. Oh! it hath been with such power and heavenly evidence upon my own soul, while I have been laboring to unfold it, to demonstrate it, and to hasten it upon the consciences of others, that I could not be contented with saying, "I believe and am sure"; methought I was more than sure (if it be lawful so to express myself) that those things which I then asserted were true.[68]

Bunyan's preaching was not only doctrinal in dealing with the weighty matters of the faith, but it was also *doxological*, calling forth praise from awakened hearts. He said, "O grace! O amazing grace! To see a prince entreat a beggar to receive an alms would be a strange sight; to see a king entreat a traitor to accept of mercy would be a stranger sight than that; but to see God entreat a sinner, to hear Christ say, 'I stand at the door and knock,' with a heart full and a

heaven full of grace to bestow upon him that opens, this is such a sight as dazzles the eyes of angels."[69]

For Bunyan, exalting Christ means much more than just praising Him because He converts us. Ultimately, Bunyan has in mind that the saved will exalt Jesus Christ in glory forever:

> Then shall we have perfect and everlasting visions of God and that blessed one his Son, Jesus Christ…. Then shall our will and affections be ever in a burning flame of love to God and his Son Jesus Christ…. Then will our conscience have that peace and joy that neither tongue nor pen of men or angels can express…. Then will our memory be so enlarged to retain all things that happened to us in this world…and how God made all work together for his glory and our good, to the everlasting ravishing of our hearts.[70]

Bunyan taught that such exaltation is only possible by the Spirit's gracious ministry in believers' souls:

> By this Spirit we come to see the beauty of Christ, without a sight of which we should never desire him, but should certainly live in the neglect of him, and perish. By this Spirit we are helped to praise God acceptably, but without it, it is impossible to be heard unto salvation. By this blessed Spirit the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, and our hearts are directed into the love of God.[71]

Finally, Bunyan repeatedly stresses that this glorious, Christ-exalting salvation ought to move us with longing and excitement toward God. This should be especially true as we catch a vision of the warmth and sincerity of His invitation to come to Him and partake of such a glorious Savior. Bunyan writes:

> O sinner! what sayest thou? How dost thou like being saved? Doth not thy mouth water? Doth not thy heart twitter at being saved? Why, *come* then: 'The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely' (Rev. 22:17).[72]

Conclusion John Bunyan experienced the failures and victories of the Christian life. His soul had been weighed down by sin, but he also learned to drink deeply of the riches of Jesus Christ's grace. His spiritual journey enabled him to meet sinners and saints where they were. We can learn much from this famed Puritan preacher. Though the church in America weakens as pulpits become showcases for humorists, storytellers, and pop psychologists, the tinker from Bedford remains a remarkable memorial to the Spirit's mighty power in days of laxity

and spiritual deadness. It is amazing to see how God uses the weak and foolish things of this world to shame the wise: Bunyan's college was a dungeon; his library, the Bible; clad in the armor of Ephesians 6, he came forth with power to grapple with the prince of darkness.

God blessed Bunyan with extraordinary abilities, even on the purely human and natural level. There were many other tinkers in England in those days, no doubt some very devout Christians among them, but only one Bunyan. His verbal gifts, powers of imagination, and remarkable achievements as an autodidact point to the providential hand of God that enriched him far above the average preacher to reach the minds and hearts of sinners and saints. This does not wholly explain his success and usefulness as a preacher, but neither does it count for nothing at all.

Bunyan's pointed preaching had a plain style, which made him appealing to average people, yet powerfully eloquent, shaming the finest orator. He was an evangelistic fisher of men and experiential preacher par excellence, warmly inviting sinners to come to Christ, proclaiming emphatically both what Christians should experience and what they actually do experience in their spiritual pilgrimage. The three elements we studied—*participating*, *pleading*, and *exalting*—were just a few of the mighty weapons that Bunyan wielded to reach the hearts of men. They are, in part, what gave Bunyan's preaching such heavenly force and, under the Spirit's blessing, brought forth great fruit.

Stories abound about the fruitfulness of Bunyan's preaching. Remarkable conversions took place under his ministry. Anne Arnott provides an example: "Bunyan was going to preach in a certain village church. Rather the worse for drink, a Cambridge scholar said he was resolved 'to hear the tinker prate.' So he went into the church to laugh, but stayed to listen, and as a result was himself converted and became a preacher."[73]

Though Bunyan was an unusually gifted preacher, the same Spirit upon whom he depended is still at work in the church of Jesus Christ today. Bunyan's life and ministry remind us that in God's hands, the preaching of the Word is a powerful weapon. For Bunyan, "the battle is for the hearts of men—their minds are in darkness because their hearts are in captivity. For Bunyan the reality of that dreadful condition led him to use every weapon in his armory to assail the fortress and to break through to the inner being" as he preached to the heart. As Spurgeon says, if we wish to "cause a burning which will set the forests of error on fire, and warm the very soul of this cold earth,"[74] we must preach with the fire of hell behind us and the glory of heaven before us. We must strive by all means to invite listeners to *participate* in the divine drama of loving their souls and *plead* with them to close with Christ in order to *exalt* King Jesus forever.

May the Spirit be pleased to give us men like John Bunyan who, being mastered by free and sovereign grace, are aglow with divine truth and are made willing to be counted fools and even imprisoned for the sake of Christ.

1. John Bunyan, *Saved by Grace*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:350. This chapter is an enlarged version of an address given on October 22, 2010, for the New England Reformed Fellowship at its Bolton Conference in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. I am indebted to John Harris's "Moving the Heart: The Preaching of John Bunyan," in *Not by Might nor by Power*, Westminster Conference Paper, 1988 (London: Westminster Conference, 1989), 32–51, for several useful thoughts and quotations. I also wish to thank Kyle Borg for research assistance.

2. T. David Gordon recently stated that, in his opinion, fewer than 30 percent of those ordained to the ministry in Reformed churches can preach a mediocre sermon. *Why Johnny Can't Preach* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009), 11.

3. Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 1:16.

4. For a brief summary of Bunyan's life, see Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 101–8.

5. Andrew Thomson, "Life of Dr. Owen," in *The Works of John Owen* (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965–1968), 1:xcii.

6. Cited in Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628–1688* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 103–4.

7. Ola Winslow, *John Bunyan* (New York: MacMillan, 1961), 75.

8. Anne Arnott, *He Shall with Giants Fight* (Eastbourne, U.K.: Kingsway, 1985), 67.

9. Gordon Wakefield, *Bunyan the Christian* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 32.

10. Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 106–7.

11. Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 108.

12. John Bunyan, *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:61.

13. Bunyan, *Relation of Bunyan's Imprisonment*, in *Works*, 1:57, 59.

14. Bunyan, *Relation of Bunyan's Imprisonment*, in *Works*, 1:50.

15. Bunyan, *Relation of Bunyan's Imprisonment*, in *Works*, 1:57.

16. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:42.

17. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:41.

18. Cited by Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 109.

19. George Offor, "Memoir of John Bunyan," in *The Works of John Bunyan*, by John Bunyan, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:lix.

20. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:48.

21. Robert Southey, "A Life of John Bunyan," in *John Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress* (London: John Murray and John Major, 1830), lxxiii.

22. John Bunyan, *Some Gospel Truths Opened*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 2:141.

23. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 3:98.

24. Wakefield, *Bunyan the Christian*, 34. "Obloquy" is contemptuous and reproachful speech.

25. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:43.

26. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:43.

27. John Bunyan, *The Greatness of the Soul and Unspeakable of the Loss Thereof*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:105.

28. Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 104–5.
29. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:42.
30. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:6.
31. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1.6.
32. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:8–9.
33. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:9.
34. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:10.
35. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:11.
36. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:42.
37. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:12.
38. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:13.
39. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:19.
40. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:19.
41. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:22.
42. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:36.
43. John Bunyan, *The Acceptable Sacrifice*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:719.
44. John Bunyan, *The Greatness of the Soul*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:108.
45. While only one treatise in Bunyan's works is labeled as a sermon, much of his writings elsewhere were either reworked sermons or at least mirrored the way he preached. Consequently, I have taken liberty to draw from many of his writings and apply it to the way he would preach.
46. Winslow, *John Bunyan*, 75.
47. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:42.
48. John Brown, *Puritan Preaching in England* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), 149.
49. Wakefield, *Bunyan the Christian*, 38–39.
50. John Bunyan, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:71–72.
51. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:41.
52. John Bunyan, *The Strait Gate*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:386.
53. John Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:296.
54. John Bunyan, *A Few Sighs from Hell*, in *Works*, 3:702.
55. Bunyan, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*, in *Works*, 1:96.
56. John Bunyan, *The Law and Grace Unfolded*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:572.
57. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:42.
58. Bunyan, *The Greatness of the Soul*, in *Works*, 1:124.
59. John Bunyan, *The Barren Fig Tree*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 3:579–80.
60. Erroll Hulse, *The Believer's Experience* (Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey, 1977), 64.
61. Bunyan, *The Saint's Privilege and Profit*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:647.
62. Bunyan, *Come and Welcome*, in *Works*, 1:263.
63. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:42, emphasis added.
64. Bunyan, *Jerusalem Sinner Saved*, in *Works*, 1:89.
65. Austin Kennedy DeBlois, "England's Greatest Protestant Preacher," in *John Bunyan, the Man* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1928), 156–57.
66. John Bunyan, *Saved by Grace*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (1854; repr.,

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:346.

67. See Robert Alan Richey, "The Puritan Doctrine of Sanctification: Constructions of the Saints' Final and Complete Perseverance as Mirrored in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*" (ThD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990).

68. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works*, 1:42.

69. Bunyan, *Saved by Grace*, in *Works*, 1:350.

70. Bunyan, *Saved by Grace*, in *Works*, 1:341–42.

71. Bunyan, *Saved by Grace*, in *Works*, 1:346.

72. Bunyan, *Saved by Grace*, in *Works*, 1:342.

73. Arnott, *He Shall with Giants Fight*, 69.

74. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), 1:83.

Chapter 45

The Puritans and Paedobaptism

> *Note, that the persons with whom that Gospel-Covenant was made, were Abraham and his Infant-seed, and all Nations, even us Englishmen and our Infant seed, as appears [in] Genesis 17:4, 12.*
>
> —WILLIAM LYFORD[1]

Polemics concerning the practice of infant baptism (paedobaptism) were very much alive in seventeenth-century England.[2] A massive amount of literature flowed from the pens of paedobaptists and antipaedobaptists alike. In fact, in his study on Richard Baxter (1615–1691), Paul Lim shows that the "rhetoric of 'Anabaptism' so galvanized the community of the godly into action that the London bookseller George Thomason collected over 125 tracts written between 1642–1660 on this issue."[3] Lim notes that in addition to the many tracts there were "at least seventy-nine public disputes."[4] These debates often centered on the interpretation of key texts of Scripture, and occasionally a single text provided the matter of a prolonged exegetical dispute.

From earliest times Reformed theologians argued for the validity and necessity of infant baptism in the context of the covenant of grace.[5] The Heidelberg Catechism's question 74 is typical of the Reformed view: "Are infants also to be baptized? Yes, for…they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God.… They must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church, and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant." This tie between infant baptism and the covenant of grace was also a strong conviction for those English Puritans who believed in infant baptism. What makes the debate particularly interesting in seventeenth-century England was that a good number of antipaedobaptists embraced John Owen's (1616–1683) position on the new covenant in Hebrews 8:6–13. One such antipaedobaptist was the seventeenth-century Baptist pastor Nehemiah Coxe (d. 1688). Present-day Reformed Baptist scholar James Renihan, in his introduction to a reprint of

writings on the covenant by Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, notes:

> So far as the Baptist Nehemiah Coxe was concerned, John Owen's work on this part of Hebrews clearly articulated the things that Coxe himself would have said (and he recognized that Owen said them better as well). This does not imply that Coxe endorsed every jot and tittle of Owen's work, but simply indicates the massive agreement between the two. Owen, for his own part, exegetically demonstrates that the New Covenant is profoundly different from the Old—it is characteristically *new*. For Coxe…and Confessional Reformed Baptists who agree with his theology, Owen's emphasis on the newness of the New Covenant is a helpful step forward in the discussion.[6]

Incidentally, on the website for the Institute for Reformed Baptist Studies, Renihan includes this quotation in a post titled "Why We Like John Owen So Much."[7] Renihan clearly does not mean to suggest that Owen was a Baptist, but only that Owen's sharp distinction between the old and new covenants fits nicely within an antipaedobaptistic framework. This chapter will explore perhaps the most important contention between the two sides, namely, whether covenant theology provides a justification for the inclusion of infants in the new covenant.

To do this, we will first consider John Owen's covenantal argument for paedobaptism, to show that his views on the new covenant in relation to the old in no way play into the hands of his antipaedobaptist opponents. A number of Owen's contemporaries will also be cited to show that his argument for paedobaptism was not unique but shared by such men as Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Stephen Marshall (1594–1655), and Samuel Petto (1624–1711), to name but a few. Next, we will look at a debate that took place between the paedobaptist John Flavel (1628–1691) and the antipaedobaptist Philip Cary (d. 1710). A blow-by-blow account of their debate will make clear that covenant theology was at the heart of the debate.

Abraham, Not Moses

Among the Puritans who were self-consciously Reformed theologians, very few posited an absolute distinction or opposition between the old and new covenants. Most Reformed theologians viewed the old and new covenants as one in substance and kind; they differed only in degree and in the form of administration. This was clearly the view of John Calvin in the sixteenth century and John Ball (1585–1640) in the seventeenth century. The idea that the old covenant was different in kind from the new was a view that theologians from both the Lutheran and Salmurian traditions embraced, albeit with variations.[8]

Owen's position on the old and new covenants has been explored in more detail in chapter 18 of this book. In brief, Owen affirms that the old and new covenants are different in kind, not degree, in distinction from most of his Reformed orthodox contemporaries. Both positions fall within the broader outlines of Reformed covenant theology, but Owen's position is certainly not the majority view. Importantly, in light of the argument of this present chapter, Owen's distinction is not between the Old and New Testaments, even though he views the old and new covenants as testaments, but rather between two historical covenants that are actually named in Scripture, unlike the covenants of works and grace, which are terms not found explicitly in the Bible. Renihan is certainly correct to note Owen's emphasis on the newness of the new covenant, but this emphasis really has little impact on Owen's reasons for the inclusion of infants in the New Testament church.

Paedobaptist theologians argued for the inclusion of children in the new covenant on the basis of the perpetuity of the promises made to Abraham. Axiomatic to Owen's thinking is the idea that the church existed in the Old Testament from the giving of the first promise (Gen. 3:15) and, likewise, that the covenantal privileges of the church in the Old Testament are communicated to the infant seed of believers in the new covenant because of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:7).[9] Similarly, Owen's friend, Thomas Goodwin, who held similar views on the old and new covenants, finds justification for paedobaptism in the promises made to Abraham.[10] Goodwin argues that the covenant made with Abraham is "made the primary and fundamental ground of this great privilege by our divines."[11] Stephen Marshall, who wrote what became perhaps the most famous seventeenth-century sermon on the lawfulness of infant baptism, made the Abrahamic covenant a significant point of departure for advancing his argument.[12] Samuel Petto's work defending infant baptism is taken up largely with the matter of proving that the Abrahamic covenant provides the warrant for infant baptism.[13] These men all make essentially the same arguments, some of which are worth considering in more detail.[14]

Goodwin acknowledges that one main point of dispute centers on whether Gentile believers derive privileges from the Abrahamic covenant; otherwise the main ground for the practice of infant baptism would be utterly overthrown. Goodwin begins by making a connection between Eve as the mother of the living, and Abraham as the father of the faithful of the many nations of the world. As a result, the Gentiles are engrafted into the same "tree" (covenant) that the Jews belonged to (Rom. 11).[15] Believing Gentiles have the very same spiritual privileges that believing Jews have in the old and new covenants.[16] And thus, "to have the covenant entailed unto children is so great a spiritual

privilege, as would tend infinitely to the comfort of godly parents now, as then it did to theirs, to have our seed within the covenant, as theirs were."17 With this same point in mind, Marshall makes the contention that the privileges of believers in the new covenant are "enlarged, made more honorable, and comfortable, then ever they were in the time of the Jews administration."18 He adds that there is no place in Scripture where the infants of believers are "expunged out of the covenant of grace; certainly whoever will go about to deprive them of it, to cut off such a great part of the comfort of believing parents, must produce clear testimonies, before they can persuade believers to part with either of them."19 Again, basing his argument on Genesis 17, Owen likewise adds that a "spiritual privilege once granted by God unto any cannot be changed, disannulled, or abrogated, without an especial divine revocation of it, or the substitution of a greater privilege and mercy in the room of it."20 Petto also makes this point: the infant seed of believing Gentiles, even in the Old Testament, were partakers of the promises to Abraham and so were in covenant with God; "therefore they are in it still, unless God hath repealed it."21 In fact, argues Owen, to omit infants from the new covenant is "contrary to the goodness, love, and covenant of God, [and] especially derogatory to the honour of Jesus Christ and the gospel."22 As Marshall would also point out, the antipaedobaptist view "puts all the Infants of all Believers into the self-same condition with the Infants of Turks, and Indians, which they all readily acknowledge."23 Clearly for Owen and Marshall a lot was at stake in this debate.

These points serve to clarify the major hermeneutical issue in the debate. Reformed theologians have always made it clear that the warrant for paedobaptism does not come from Moses. Nowhere do we read of anyone contrasting the new covenant with the promises made to Abraham. There was indeed disagreement concerning what is meant by the "old covenant," and how it relates to the new covenant, but Reformed theologians all affirmed that the new covenant was the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.24 Indeed, there is nothing substantially different between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant, except that the latter is the fulfilment of what was only a promise in the former, which is why Reformed theologians had no difficulty affirming a "covenant of grace" that included God's gracious dealings with the church from the time of Adam to the time of Christ. One may argue that the new covenant is different in kind than the Sinaitic or old covenant, as did Owen and Goodwin, among others; but Owen and Goodwin could join with those who viewed old and new covenants as one in substance to affirm paedobaptism because all agreed that the command to baptize infants was based on the perpetual promises

made to Abraham, the father of many nations, and not derived from any law or ordinance of Moses.

Of course, the argument that Abraham, not Moses, provides the rationale for paedobaptism has been acknowledged by the more learned antipaedobaptists.[25] What follows is an account of a debate between two men from opposing sides, John Flavel and Philip Cary. This debate will show, among other things, that at the heart of the contention between Baptists and Paedobaptists was covenant theology. It also shows how to relate the various covenants in Scripture to one another.

A Precursor to the Debate: Philip Cary in 1684

Philip Cary was an apothecary of Dartmouth, a separatist, and a Baptist. On January 19, 1682, some years before his debate with Flavel, he signed his name to his final letter to the Dartmouth physician and Presbyterian, Richard Burthogge, in a private debate over the proper subjects of baptism.[26] Cary writes that their debate began when both were sent to care for a sick gentleman in the Dartmouth area, and the doctor there provoked Cary to dispute with him about infant baptism, and that in the presence of ladies![27] Cary admits that Burthogge had bettered him in public, and so, after a time, Cary changed the debate to a written one.[28] Cary probably fared better in this medium, but the disputants were still rather unevenly unmatched.[29]

Much of their dispute centered on the right interpretation of Genesis 17. Dr. Burthogge appealed to the text to argue that he had discovered what he termed a new foundation for the baptism of infants, one that exceeded all former arguments. His appeal to Genesis 17—nothing new in itself—found in this chapter the "first Solemn Formal Covenant of Grace," which constituted the first "Separate and Instituted Church" with its "Rite of Initiation." The logic of this appeal was that there was no church apart from the Genesis 17 covenant, and therefore the sacrament found in that chapter and applied to infants was intrinsic to the church's constitution from the beginning, even if its form had later been changed. Verse 9 presented in general terms God's requirement to keep the covenant, and verse 10 specified a particular requirement that applied to Abraham and all that were his—circumcision.[30] In this covenant, Abraham had to "restipulate" (reaffirm his covenant with God) by dedicating himself and all that was his to God, and, as a sign of this dedication, Abraham had to administer the sign of circumcision to all in his household that were capable of receiving it. According to Burthogge, circumcision's later supersession by baptism followed from the text because a division was to be made between what was everlasting and what was restricted to Israel. The "ye" and "seed" in verse 10 had different

referents (“between me and ye and thy seed after thee”), the “ye” referring to the Jews and the “seed” referring to believing Gentiles.[31] Burthogge’s exegesis was not necessarily representative of the mainline Reformed view, especially in his view of the beginning of the church, but he clearly did rely on Genesis 17 as the main ground for baptizing the infant children of believers.[32]

Cary, whose position is of more interest because he would soon go head to head with John Flavel, used covenant arguments to remove Genesis 17 as a support for infant baptism. He held that the covenant with Abraham could not be the “evangelical” or “gospel” covenant because it contained a mixture of both temporal and eternal elements (cf. Gen. 17:7–8).[33] He added that verse 10, where circumcision as such was first commanded, explained verse 9, where the keeping of the covenant was commanded—both verses described a covenant of circumcision only. Thus, when circumcision was abrogated with Christ, the command to keep this covenant ended with it. No “substance” remained from Genesis 17. Cary did hold that believing Gentiles were the seed of Abraham according to Romans 4, but they were not referenced at all in the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision.

Although the two men had much in common in their view of Scripture, their theology, and their exegetical sources and methods, their difference on the practical question of infant baptism was tied to a difference in their understanding of the nature of the Abrahamic covenant and the participants in this covenant. Burthogge writes, “It is true, the Covenant does run in *Absolute* and Promissory Terms, and therefore is called the *Covenant of Promise*; but yet *to be* a Covenant, as there must be *Parties*, so there must be a *Mutual* Stipulation between them.”[34] Burthogge’s covenant view, then, clearly has both absolute and conditional aspects. Cary on the other hand—in spite of the fact that he was the Baptist in this debate who emphasized that repentance is a prerequisite for baptism—held the unconditional view of the covenant of grace. He asserts, “There was a Covenant betwixt God the Father and Christ; and after that a Covenant taking in all his Seed.”[35] His absolute covenant position also explains his questioning whether circumcised males could be “in the covenant of grace or no.” In other words, circumcision as a sign did not entail being “in” the covenant of grace.[36] For this reason, Cary likewise could not abide Burthogge’s appeal to a “federal holiness” in the latter’s explanation of 1 Corinthians 7:14.[37] The covenant, for Cary, is made with the elect; only they can be holy in the proper sense. Also, the “root” of the olive tree in Romans 11—for Burthogge the covenant of grace—is for Cary the Christ.[38]

This debate—one among many—helps contextualize the Flavel-Cary disputation that would follow six years later. The account shows that the debate

was focused on exegesis (especially of Genesis 17), shaped by Reformed theological commitments, conducted in rough scholastic form, and driven by the practical question of the proper subjects of baptism.

Round 1: Cary's *A Solemn Call* and Flavel's *Vindiciae Legis & Foederis*

In 1690, Cary issued a new work in support of the Baptist position titled

> A Solemn Call unto All That Would Be Owned as Christ's Faithful Witnesses, speedily, and seriously, to attend unto the primitive purity of the Gospel doctrine and worship: or, A Discourse concerning Baptism: Wherein that of Infants is Disproved…. Wherein the Covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai, Exod. 20. That in the Land of Moab, Deut. 29. As also the Covenant of Circumcision made with Abraham Gen. 17:7, 8, 9. Whereon so much stress is laid for the Support of Infants Baptism, are plainly proved to be no other than three several Editions of the Covenant of Works; And, Consequently, that no just Argument can thence be deduced for the Justification of that Practice. Together with a Description of the Truly Evangelical Covenant God was pleased to make with Believing Abraham.[39]

This title indicates continuity with Cary's arguments in 1684 but also an advance, especially regarding the core argument, for now he has pulled together more specific covenants and united them all under the covenant of works. In the preface he states that no other writer has published material on "the true Nature and Difference betwixt the two Covenants, that of Works, and that of Grace."[40] By treating Genesis 17, Exodus 20, and Deuteronomy 29 together under the covenant of works, Cary could treat them all as discontinuous in nature, purpose, and extent with the covenant of grace wherein God ordained baptism. No commands from the former could affect the latter; the two covenants are "contra-distinct, or essentially different."[41] This did not mean that Abraham was not in the covenant of grace. Rather, he was in two covenants at the same time, as were all the elect in the Old Testament.

Cary's treatise runs on for some 244 pages. Point by point, he engages the arguments of William Allen, Richard Baxter, Cuthbert Sydenham, and Richard Burthogge.[42] Without naming Flavel, he also addresses his concerns, for Cary had shared portions of the manuscript with Flavel before publication and received his responses.[43] Flavel and Cary were neighbors in Dartmouth, as Flavel is wont to repeat in his prefaces. Cary's published responses brought Flavel into the debate.

When Flavel replied in full, he summarized the dispute in a way instructive of

the parameters of late seventeenth-century covenant theology. He begins with Cary's position that the law at Sinai was a pure covenant of works:

> The difference betwixt us here is not (1.) Whether both these be called Covenants in Scripture? nor (2.) Whether there was no Grace at all in both, or either of them; for we are agreed, it is Grace in God to enter into Covenant with Man, whatever that covenant be; nor (3.) Whether the *Sinai*-law be not a Covenant of Works to some Men, by their own fault and occasion? nor (4.) Whether the scriptures do not many times speak of it in that very sense and notion wherein *Carnal Justiciaries* apprehend and take it? and by rejecting Christ, make it so to themselves? nor (5.) Whether the very matter of the *Law of Nature* be not reviv'd and represented in the *Sinai Law?* These are not the Points we contend about: But the question is, Whether the *Sinai Law* do in its own nature, and according to God's purpose and design in the promulgation of it, revive the Law of Nature, to the same ends and uses it served to in *Adam's* Covenant; and so be properly and truly a Covenant of Works? Or whether God had not gracious and evangelical ends and purposes, *viz.* by such a dreadful representation…to convince them of the impossibility of legal righteousness, humble proud Nature, and shew them the necessity of betaking themselves to Christ…. The latter I defend according to the Scriptures, the former Mr. Cary seems to assert and vehemently argue for.[44]

By narrowing the question to the precise function of the law at Sinai, Flavel illustrates a scholastic bent for precision, just as he later reminds Cary to stick to "limiting, distinguishing, or denying, as a disputant ought to do."[45] Within the two treatises he writes for this debate, Flavel repeatedly constructs his arguments with overt syllogisms. His careful distinctions, however, also indicate a conciliatory nature, for he wants to affirm the common ground between Cary and himself and to construct a clear and succinct argument.[46]

Cary's characterization of Exodus 20 as a republication of the covenant of works, not only materially but formally in terms of its framework and intention, may have acceptance from others, but certainly was not the view of Flavel, Ball, Burgess, or Roberts, to name but a few. Cary's equation of Genesis 17 with Exodus 20 was a sharp break with Reformed exegesis and covenant theology. Interestingly, Flavel pursues the Sinai question first since overthrowing his position there will overthrow Cary's view of Genesis 17 also.

In Flavel's view, Cary's second main argument was that because the particular covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 included an obligation, namely circumcision, it obliged one to keep the whole law and was therefore a covenant

of works. Flavel pinpoints this difference as follows:

> The Controversie betwixt us in this point, is not whether Circumcision were an Ordinance of God, annexed by him to his Covenant with *Abraham*? nor (2.) Whether *Abraham's* ordinary and extraordinary Seed ought to be, and actually were signed by it? nor, (3) Whether it were a Seal of the righteousness of Faith to any individual Person, for he allows it to be so to *Abraham*? nor (4.) Whether it pertained to the Ceremonial Law, and so must cease at the death of Christ? But the difference betwixt us is, Whether (1.) it was a seal of the covenant to none but *Abraham*? and (2.) Whether in the very nature of the Act, or only from the intention of the Agent, it did oblige men to keep the whole Law, as *Adam* was obliged to keep it in innocency? (3.) Whether it were utterly abolished at the death of Christ, as a condition of the Covenant of works? or being a sign of the same Covenant of Grace we are now under, it be not succeeded by the new Gospel-sign, which is Baptism? Mr. Cary affirms that it was in it self a condition of the Covenant of Works, and being annexed to God's Covenant with *Abraham*, Gen. 17, it made that a true *Adam's* Covenant of works also. This I utterly deny.[47]

Here, the question involves the place of circumcision within the covenant structure. Cary, by placing it within the covenant of works, could argue that it had no connection to baptism, which was within the covenant of grace.[48] Cary thus has it function like the trees in Paradise. Flavel keeps both circumcision and baptism within the one covenant of grace, since "God's covenant with Abraham, Gen. 17, is the same Covenant for substance, we Gentile Believers are now under," as the Reformed fathers have proved from Luke 1:54–74; Matthew 21:41, 43; Romans 11; Galatians 3:8, 14, 16; and Ephesians 2:13.[49]

Flavel discerned one other key difference that lay in the nature of the covenant of grace as either "altogether free and absolute" (Cary's view), or including certain conditions (Flavel's view). Flavel lays out these differences as follows:

> The Controversie here betwixt us is not (1.) Whether the Gospel-Covenant requires no duties at all of them that are under it? nor (2.) Whether it requires any such conditions as were in *Adam's* Covenant, namely, perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience, under the severest Penalty of a Curse, and admitting no place of Repentance? nor, (3.) Whether any condition required by it, on our part, have any thing in its own nature Meritorious of the Benefits promised? Nor (4.) Whether we be able in our own Strength, and by the Power of our Free Will, with the *preventing*, as well as the *assisting* Grace of God, to perform any such Work or Duty as we call a

> Condition? In these things we have no Controversie, but the only Question betwixt us is, Whether in the New Covenant some act of ours, (though it have no Merit in it, nor can be done in our own single Strength) be not required to be performed by us, antecedently to a Blessing or Privilege consequent by vertue of a Promise? And whether such an Act of Duty, being of a Suspending Nature to the Blessing promised, it have not the true and proper Nature of a Gospel Condition? This I affirm, and he positively denies.[50]

Flavel has ably summarized the main issues and thereby demonstrated for us the intricate nature of the arguments. Clearly both positions had a lot in common with each other and with the Reformed tradition. In Cary's case, although his doctrinal covenant construct was defective to a fault, his language included a rich variety of covenant expressions. As was common in the period, the covenant of works can as easily be termed the "legal covenant," and sometimes the "covenant of life," while the covenant of grace is more commonly the "gospel covenant" and sometimes the "covenant of faith," or "covenant of Gospel-grace." Cary also speaks of the "ceremonial covenant," the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. 24:7), and the "covenant of circumcision."[51] Cary takes special notice of the covenants with Aaron and Phinehas.[52] He does not remark on the difference between covenant (*foedus/pactum*) and testament (*testamentum*), although one of his quotations from Sedgwick may make something of the distinction.[53]

However, Cary restricts all matters of law to one covenant, namely, the covenant of works. This restriction compels him to interpret everything in a mechanical, if not arbitrary way. Promises that do not contain overt demands alongside them are necessarily unconditional, whereas every demand or law necessarily belongs to the covenant of works, even if it is located precisely next to a promise of grace. Cary consistently applies this distinction to the point that his covenant construct becomes a law-versus-gospel template imposed on every text. For instance, Genesis 17:1–9 espouses an absolute covenant of grace, but verse 10 must involve a shift to a conditional covenant of works because it introduces the demand for circumcision—indeed, his law-gospel hermeneutic is a rule more important to him than the unity of the testaments, the rule of faith, or interpreting a text according to its context (*usus loquendi*). For example, the prologue to the Ten Commandments reveals a covenant of grace, but the commands that follow form a covenant of works.[54] Imposing such a template on texts forces Cary to posit that Moses and the elect in Israel were under two contrary covenants at once; for the covenant of works is made with Moses and in

him with all Israel while the covenant of grace, made with Christ, is extended to the elect in Israel, of whom Moses was obviously one. Similarly, Abraham and his physical posterity are parties to a covenant of works, yet the elect among them are also included in the covenant of grace.[55] Flavel thinks this is impossible; Cary evades Flavel's objection by appealing to Romans 11:33. "O the depth!" he writes.[56]

When Flavel lays out his own position, he unequivocally states that the gospel covenant is conditional; therefore he sees no conflict in attaching the condition of circumcision or baptism to the covenant of grace. The demand to perform something in a covenant does not make it a covenant of works by default. Rather, divine grace and human responsibility belong together in the covenant of grace.

Flavel begins with an important definition: "A Condition is the Suspension of a Grant, till something future be done."[57] In the covenant of grace this means, "The Grant of Salvation by God in the Gospel-Covenant is suspended from all Men, till they believe, and is due by Promise, (not Merit) to them as soon as they do truly believe."[58] We may observe: something is "due" from God, but not tied to human merit. It is due only because God has bound Himself by promise. We then encounter a very clear demarcation of the difference between a promise and a covenant, one that gets at the distinction between unconditional and conditional. Flavel writes,

> A Covenant is a mutual Compact or Agreement betwixt Parties, in which they bind each other to the Performance of what they respectively promise: So that there can be no other proper Covenant where there is not a Restipulation or Re-obligation of one part, as well as a Promise on the other. But an absolute Promise binds only one Party and leaves the other wholly free and unobliged to any thing in order to the enjoyment of the good promised. So then, if all the *New Testament* Promises be unconditional and absolute, they are not part of a Covenant…. They are absolute Promises, binding no Man to whom they are made, to any Duty, in order to the enjoyment of the Mercies promised.[59]

By analyzing the language of promise and covenant, Flavel reduces Cary's "unconditional covenant" view to a mere "promise," and as such, not truly "covenant." He adds that Cary's view leads to antinomian licentiousness, for the persons to whom these absolute promises are made will be saved, whether they repent or not. Scripturally, therefore, God's promises must be conditional. Cary, of course, objects, and calls the imposition of new conditions, "a new *covenant of works* with some mercy, but not a *covenant of grace*, properly so-called."[60]

Flavel responds that if the true faith God requires is His gift, the covenant is not of works. Cary retorts that if faith is both a condition and a gift, then the covenant is absolute. This brings Flavel to advance the distinction between power and act, as follows:

> This is a mistake, and the mistake in this leads you into all the rest; though Faith (which we call the condition on our Part) be the Gift of God, and the power of Believing be derived from God; yet the act of believing is properly our act…else it would follow, when we act any grace, as Faith, Repentance, or Obedience, that God believes, repents, and obeys in us, and it is not we, but God that doth all these.[61]

Flavel is saying that the conditionality of the covenant derives theologically from the relationship of sovereign divine causality and "the liberty or contingency of second causes" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 3:1). In fact, it is rooted in the Creator-creature distinction. Since God made humans distinct from Himself with a mind and will, the act of believing must be theirs. Therefore the covenantal obligations on their side are conditions they must meet, albeit God graciously gives them the power to do so. Thus Flavel holds together the acts of the divine and human wills, not as though they are in tension, nor by being Calvinist in his election doctrine and Arminian in his covenant doctrine, but by the scholastic method of careful distinctions regarding conditions. All of this is clearly within the Reformed tradition.[62] Contra the Perry Miller thesis, Flavel not only clearly and unequivocally affirms divine grace—he states that he knows of no orthodox divine who would espouse human works in the covenant in the Arminian sense, done by the power of free will, nor of any who would count such works as having any merit, whether of condignity or congruity—but in further discussion he also unequivocally upholds unconditional divine election and the perseverance of the saints.[63]

As for Cary's argument that Abraham's circumcision was a seal to him only and not to his descendants, Flavel traces the view to the Baptist Tombes, who, he says, had found it in Bellarmine.[64] Implicitly, then, Flavel accuses the Baptists of relying on a Counter-Reformation construct. In fact, the Puritans noted this more often and often recalled that Ames had ably refuted Bellarmine on this point; Bellarmine wanted to restrict circumcision's referent to the earthly benefits of land and physical posterity for Abraham. In 1663 Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) traced most of what he called the Anabaptist views on covenant and baptism to various Papist errors, which he cites.[65]

In order to set his views within a proper redemptive-historical framework, Flavel summarizes the relationship between the covenant of works and grace in

seven points. First, in Paradise Adam's covenant contained the perfect natural law, which he was able to keep (Eccl. 7:29). Secondly, once this covenant of works was broken, it could never again be a means of salvation; only curses were left for the sinner (Gen. 3:24). Thirdly, God immediately published His covenant of grace (Gen. 3:15), which would progressively unfold through redemptive-history. The first covenant was then closed forever, since it is contrary to God's will to have two ways of salvation standing open at once—Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life. Fourthly, God revives the substance of the law of nature at Sinai to check human pride and gives the law in subservience to the promise. Although the bare law contains the law of nature for substance, the *ends* of the law were the typical first and third uses.66 When the ceremonial law is included for consideration, the law also exhibited and taught much of Christ. Fifthly, this meant that the Sinai covenant was added to God's promise "in respect of its *Evangelical* purposes and designs." Sixthly, many of the Jews mistook the aim of the law, rested in law, and were married to it as a husband (Rom. 10:3; 2:17; 7:2–3). Finally, this fatal mistake provides the ground for explaining the seeming contradictions in Paul's letters, for "we know that the law is good, *if* we use it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1:8, emphasis added).67 Clearly, Flavel's view is more nuanced than reading all law as a covenant of works and all promises as a covenant of grace. The two covenants, like law and grace, stand in a complex relation. One could say that there is grace in law and law in grace.68

Flavel clearly held to three covenants: redemption, works, and grace. The covenant of works was abrogated at the fall in terms of its aims; only its curse and threat remain for unbelievers. The covenant of grace began as a promise, with no conditions in the subject for receiving such a promise. Once given, however, it obligated the subjects to live responsively within the established bond; in short, it became a bilaterally administered pact. As such, it required of God's people a response, and this response in no way diminished the grace of the promise. The human recipients of the promise were given the power to believe, yet the act of believing was their own. Therefore the continuity of the one covenant of grace, from the time of Abraham when circumcision was required to the era of the apostles when baptism was required in its place, remained firm. As a result, it is legitimate to look to the old covenant sacrament of circumcision to determine who are the proper recipients of the sacrament of baptism in the new covenant. Further clarification unfolded early the next year, in the second stage of the dispute.

Round 2: Cary's *A Just Reply* and Flavel's *Vindiciarum Vindex*

Even before Flavel's *Vindiciae Legis* was published, Cary was responding to it, so that Flavel includes a few pages of rebuttal to this response at the end of *Vindiciae Legis*. Of the 184 pages of *A Just Reply*, Cary devotes 128 pages to refute Flavel. Cary repeatedly alleges that Flavel has misrepresented him, but it also appears that Flavel had effected some modifications in Cary's views.[69]

One of the more unusual modifications involves a new way of relating the two covenants to the lives of the Old Testament elect. Flavel had argued that it is contrary to God's purpose to place believers in two contrary covenants at once. Cary now argues that,

> [T]here was a two fold Covenant betwixt God and *Israel*, the one called theirs, the other Gods, yet both Gods Covenants; the first was called theirs, because they were required to perform the Conditions of it: the one a Covenant of Works, whereof *Moses* was the Mediator, wherein themselves were immediately concerned to procure their own Salvation by their own Duties of Obedience, which was impossible, which was the true nature of the *Sinai* Covenant; *Rom.* 10.5. *Gal.* 3.10, 12. The other, a Covenant of Gospel Grace, which is wholly free and absolute; whereof Christ is the only Mediator and Surety, *Rom.* 10.6, 7, 8, &c. *Heb.* 8.6, 7, &c. This is properly God's Covenant; and this is the Covenant, saith God, that I will establish.[70]

This twofold covenant would have engendered a rather schizophrenic existential situation for the Old Testament believer, who would labor to fulfil conditions in ignorance of the fact that such labor is both useless and unnecessary. In fact, wouldn't such labor in the covenant of works be detrimental to the faith required in the covenant of grace? It seems as though Cary has taken the position Flavel dared him to affirm—that those Jews who sought to use the law for justification ("concerned to procure their own Salvation by their own Duties of Obedience") rightly understood its proper purpose.

On the other hand, Cary now seems to move toward Flavel by at least speaking of conditions. He introduces a distinction between *procuring* pardon and *receiving* it. Faith is required as a condition for the latter but not the former. If it belonged to the former, the condition would be meritorious, but under the latter term, faith is only a means or instrument.[71] Cary cites Ames's approval of conditions in the "Kingdom of Grace" as "Concomitants or Effects."[72] Similarly, we now hear that God's first call is "absolutely gracious," but later there is an "Order 'tis true…namely, that Faith and Obedience shall Precede the Increase and Inlargement of them."[73]

In response to Flavel's distinction between an absolute, nonbinding promise and a covenant that necessarily involves commitments by more than one party,

Cary dusts off a fine passage from John Owen's commentary on Hebrews. Owen discusses *berith* and its translation as *diatheke*, characterizing God's covenant with the day and night (Jer. 33:20, 25) and with Noah (Gen. 9:10) as instances of *berith* as an unconditional "Free Gratuitous Promise." Cary alleges that Owen thereby exonerates him of Flavel's charge of holding merely to a promise rather than to a covenant per se. Unfortunately, Cary does not recognize that Owen is discussing the precise meaning of a Hebrew word and not the theological meaning of "covenant."74 Nevertheless, Cary sticks to his view of the Sinaitic covenant and Genesis 17.

Flavel digs into the material more deeply. This time he marches out a veritable army of authorities, with generous quotations on the relationship between the two covenants and conditions in the covenant of grace (Turretin, Owen, Pool, Roberts, Burgess, Mather, Bolton, Strong, Reynolds, Greenhill, Charnock, Burroughs, Pemble, Perkins, Ball, Davenant, Downham, and even Crisp, the last because Cary might approve).75 His remarks on conditions set forth first, the difference between antecedent and consequent conditions, finding the controversy to lie with the former (there is agreement on the latter). Within that category, he rules out antecedent conditions with respect to "the first sanction of the covenant in Christ," and so moves to those conditions antecedent to "the application of the benefits of the covenant unto men." In other words, Flavel is distinguishing the unconditional establishment of the covenant from its conditional administration. Then he once more distinguishes, disclaiming any antecedent conditions in this category which would "have the force of a meritorious and impulsive cause." This leaves him with the following category (which subsequently receives yet one more distinction):

> An Antecedent Condition signifying no more than an Act of ours, which though it be neither perfect in every degree, nor in the least meritorious of the benefit conferred; nor performed in our own natural strength; yet according to the constitution of the Covenant, is required of us in order to the blessings consequent thereupon by virtue of the Promise: and consequently the benefits and mercies granted in the Promise in this order are, and must be suspended by the Donor or Disposer of them, until it be performed. Such a condition we affirm Faith to be.76 But here again, Faith (in this sense the Condition of the New Covenant), is considered: 1. Essentially; or,
>
> 2. Organically and instrumentally. In the first consideration, of faith, according to its essence, it is maintained under obedience, and in that respect we exclude it from justifying our persons…. But we count it

> organically, relatively, and (as most speak) instrumentally, as it receives Christ.[77]

With his final distinction, Flavel has brought us to consider the instrumental nature of faith, the *fides qua* (the faith by which [one is justified]), as a necessary condition of salvation, remembering, of course, that it is a gift with respect to its power.[78] We have, then, a correlation between causality and conditionality. That which is instrumentally causal is, ipso facto, instrumentally conditional, and whatever is causal must be antecedent to its effect.

As we see it, Flavel's conclusions derive from several unshakeable pillars he has raised up from Scripture: first, salvation and faith are all of grace; second, faith is nonetheless a human act, and; third, no person is saved apart from faith. By means of his scholastic method, he has found a way to hold all of these truths together in a system.[79] In doing so, he stands well within the broad Reformed tradition, as may be evidenced by the variety of authors he cites afterward.

One further passage reiterates the nature of a condition, stating that it is the will of the "*testator, legislator,* or *donor,* that his law or testament, should act, or effect, when the condition is performed, and not before." Such a condition may be neither one of congruity nor condignity, since it is not essential to a condition to be meritorious, and thus human faith is truly the condition of the new covenant without meriting anything.[80]

For the rest, Flavel maintains the covenant structure explicated in his first reply to Cary. He closes by gathering together the key arguments for baptizing the infant children of believers in seven theses for the sake of those who do not have the leisure to read the more involved works of his colleagues.[81]

"One Blow More": Keach's *The Ax Laid to the Root*

Flavel's death in 1691 might have ended the debate, but evidently Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), the prolific Baptist writer, thought that Flavel's answers could not be left unanswered. His support of Cary's arguments is important, for Keach was among those who signed the preface of Cary's *Solemn Call* (1690). However, we are faced with the interesting problem that in spite of twice titling a book as containing an answer to Flavel and then stating in each book that "the second part" containing his answer to Flavel was in the press, Keach actually never published his response. The best we can do is judge its contents by the title he had drafted and note a few comments in one of his sermons. From his title, Keach argues against deriving infant baptism from Genesis 17 on the same basis as Cary—that God made two distinct covenants with Abraham, and circumcision belongs to the covenant of works, not grace. We read, "Wherein is shewed that God made a twofold covenant with Abraham, and that circumcision appertained

not to the covenant of grace, but to the legal and external covenant God made with Abraham's natural seed, as such: together with an answer to Mr. John Flavel's last grand arguments in his *Vindiciarum Vindex*."[82] In the aforementioned sermon, Keach expresses appreciation for and agreement with Cary, while verbally chastising Flavel.[83] Keach refines Cary's position by arguing for "several Ministrations" of the covenant of works (although he asserts, incorrectly, that this was Cary's own position).[84] Keach also maintains the view that the sealing function of Abraham's circumcision was for him alone.[85]

Just as many paedopbatist treatises of the day affirmed Flavel's position, so Keach's *Ax Laid to the Root* and other works confirm that Cary was not alone in taking for the Baptist position a two-covenant view and holding to an unconditional covenant of grace.[86] Their position is one step closer to what would later be affirmed in dispensationalist circles—that the Old Testament saints were saved in a different way from the New Testament saints.[87]

Conclusion

Covenant theology is not something exclusively limited to the Reformed theological tradition, but just as certainly, it is, to use Richard Muller's words, "primarily a Reformed phenomenon."88 In seventeenth-century England, "Calvinistic Baptists" developed their own covenant theology, which, unlike their Reformed brethren, would justify excluding infants from the new covenant church, hence the term "antipaedobaptist." To accomplish this, Baptist theologians such as Cary and Keach developed a covenant theology that was in many respects quite unlike the covenant theology of orthodox Reformed theologians such as Owen and Flavel. As we have noted, the debate is not about differences, whatever they may be, between the old and new covenants. Even Owen, who held to a minority position on the relation between the old and new covenants, did not see any problems for his paedobaptist convictions arising from the newness of the new covenant in relation to the old covenant. Rather, the debate focused on how the Abrahamic covenant relates to the new covenant. The question, as this chapter has demonstrated, is whether we may speak of the Abrahamic covenant (singular, so the Reformed) or Abrahamic covenants (plural, so the Baptists). The antipaedobaptists had to speak of two covenants made with Abraham: works and grace. By doing so, they were able to argue that circumcision belonged to the Abrahamic covenant of works and not to the Abrahamic covenant of grace. Reformed paedobaptists would view this as forced exegesis that is wholly unpersuasive—particularly in light of Romans 4:11—and a major departure from classic Reformed covenant theology. All of this is to suggest that antipaedobaptists in the seventeenth century did in fact use the concept of the covenant to justify their convictions, but did so in a manner that differed substantially from the way Reformed theologians had formulated their doctrine of the covenant of grace. For all of their agreement on other points of doctrine, this antipaedobaptist presentation represented a significant divide between the two traditions.

1. William Lyford, *An Apologie for Our Publick Ministerie, and Infant-Baptism* (London, 1653), 32.

2. For example, see the study by Hans Boersma, *Richard Baxter's Understanding of Infant Baptism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2002); Jonathan D. Moore, "The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Sin of Neglecting Baptism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 63–86.

3. Paul Chang-Ha Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty: Richard Baxter's Puritan Ecclesiology in Its Seventeenth-Century Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 55.

4. Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty*, 55.

5. Ulrich Zwingli, *Refutation of the Tricks of the Katabaptists, 1527*, in *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, ed. Samuel M. Jackson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), 219–37, 248–51.

6. Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*, ed. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, Calif.: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 2–3.

For a good short theological biography of Coxe, see James Renihan's essay in this book, "An Excellent and Judicious Divine" (pp. 7–24).

7. James Renihan, "Why We Like John Owen So Much," The Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies, May 12, 2008, http://www.reformedbaptistinstitute.org/?p=93, accessed December 13, 2010.

8. See Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis* (London: James Young for Thomas Underhill, 1647), 251; Richard Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional: John Cameron and the Early Orthodox Development of Reformed Covenant Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 11–56; Sebastian Rehnman, "Is the Narrative of Redemptive History Trichotomous or Dichotomous? A Problem for Federal Theology," *Nederlands archief voor kergeschiedenis* 80 (2000): 296–308; J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 264–65, 301–16.

9. John Owen, *Theologoumena*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 17:266 (4:i.13). "*Et quintò, communicatio privilegiorum foederis et ecclesiae, cum semine infantili (quod postquam modo peculiari Deo curae esse coeperat, ecclesia nunquam absolute defecit) conceditur, Gen. xvii. 7.*"

10. Thomas Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 9:428.

11. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:428.

12. Stephen Marshall, *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants* (London: Richard Cotes for Stephen Botwell, 1645).

13. Samuel Petto, *Infant Baptism of Christ's Appointment or A Discovery of Infants Interest in the Covenant with Abraham, Shewing Who Are the Spiritual Seed and Who the Fleshly Seed* (London: for Edward Giles, 1687).

14. Michael Hall shows that the New England Puritans likewise defended infant baptism because of the promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:7. *The Last Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather, 1639–1723* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988), 55. And J. David Hoeveler notes that "Antipaedobaptism suggested to New England Puritans an extreme, dangerous Protestantism." *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 39.

15. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:429. See also Marshall, *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants*, 17–18.

16. Petto likewise argues: "And this promise extending to the Jews and their Seed, must also reach to the Seed of believing Gentiles, else the Jews should have more privileges then they." *Infant Baptism*, 13.

17. Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *Works*, 9:430.

18. Marshall, *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants*, 30. See also Petto, *Infant Baptism*, 16–17.

19. Marshall, *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants*, 30–31.

20. John Owen, *Of Infant Baptism and Dipping*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 26:258–59.

21. Petto, *Infant Baptism*, 17.

22. Owen, *Of Infant Baptism*, in *Works*, 26:259.

23. Marshall, *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants*, 7.

24. As Marshall notes: "The substance of the Covenant on God's part was, to be Abraham's God, and the God of his seed, to be an All-sufficient portion, an All-sufficient reward for him, to give Jesus Christ to him, and Righteousness with him, both of Justification and of Sanctification, and everlasting life. On Abraham's part the substance of the Covenant was, to believe in the promised Messiah, to walk before God with a perfect heart, to serve God according to his revealed will, to instruct his family, &c." *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants*, 10.

25. For example, see Mike Renihan, *Antipaedobaptism in the Thought of John Tombes: An Untold Story from Puritan England* (Auburn, Mass.: B&R, 2001).

26. Richard Burthogge, *An Argument for Infants Baptisme…* (London: Jonathan Greenwood, 1684). On page 78 Burthogge identifies himself as a Presbyterian.

27. Philip Cary, *A Disputation between a Doctor and Apothecary: or A Reply to the New Argument of Dr. R. Burthogge, M.D. for Infants Baptism* (London: B. W., 1684), 16–17. Cary later (p. 130) declines Burthogge's challenge to a public disputation on grounds of persecution: "But besides, the Law allows no such Meetings; and I and my Friends are secluse, and incapable of appearing on such a score."

28. Burthogge published his side first; then Cary his side. Cary, *Disputation*, 17–19; compare A4r–v. Burthogge, *Infants Baptisme*, A7v–A8v; A15v–A16v. Since the two works contain portions of each other's letters, references in this essay for one author may refer to the publication of the other.

29. Burthogge cites not only Latin, but also his Greek New Testament, alludes to knowing Hebrew, and once even discusses Greek manuscript variations. Cary knew only English and Latin. Burthogge, *Infants Baptisme*, A15v–A16v; cf. 37, 39, 47, 51. Acknowledged by Cary, *Disputation*, 2; cf. A2r–A3r, 129. Precisely because his views depended on more learned authors such as Nehemiah Coxe, Richard Allen (his earlier writings), John Tombes, and Benjamin Keach, Cary forms an excellent figure for study. His views are in line with theirs, as various notes in this chapter will demonstrate.

30. Cary, *Disputation*, 57.

31. Cary, *Disputation*, 53–54. Burthogge linked "seed" with "Isaac in the letter and the spirit," but "ye" with "thou Abraham and Ishmael thy son according to the flesh."

32. The next year Burthogge argued that Genesis 3:15 could not supply the same because it was no promise but a curse on the devil. Christ is predicted there and prefigured in sacrifices (before Gen. 17), "yet nothing *there* doth pass by way of Covenant, or is spoken of *there* by way of promise to *Adam*; all is by way of Denunciation on the *Serpent.*" Burthogge, *Vindiciae Paedo-baptismi, or, a Confirmation of an Argument Lately Emitted for Infants Baptism.*.. (London: Thomas Simmons, 1685), 34, 35. Cf. Burthogge, epistle dedicatory, *Infants Baptisme*, A4–A5, 99–106.

33. As relayed in Burthogge, *Infants Baptisme*, 13.

34. Burthogge, *Infants Baptisme*, 17; cf. Burthogge, *Vindiciae Paedo-baptismi*, 36–37.

35. Cary, *Disputation*, 121. For his emphasis on repentance, see *Disputation*, 99.

36. Cary, *Disputation*, 29.

37. Burthogge, *Infants Baptisme*, 36; cf. 32–48.

38. Cary, *Disputation*, 35–36.

39. Philip Cary, *Solemn Call* (London: John Harris, 1690). Benjamin Keach and five other Baptists signed the opening letter to the reader.

40. Cary, *Solemn Call*, A7v.

41. Cary, *Solemn Call*, A7v.

42. Of these four, William Allen is particularly interesting for this discussion. In 1653 he defended both separatism and antipaedobaptism. Over time, however, he altered his views, retracting his views on separation in 1660, publishing on the covenants in 1672, and finally publishing *against* the antipaedobaptists in 1676. Small wonder, then, that Cary cited Allen's treatise as the occasion for his own discourse (in spite of saying he had no idea who Mr. Allen was). Cary, *Solemn Call*, A10r–v. Within the work, Cary also opposes Obadiah Sedgwick and Francis Roberts.

43. John Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis & Foederis, or, A Reply to Mr. Philip Cary's Solemn Call* (London: M. Wotton, 1690), A8r; cf. John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (London: W. Baynes, 1820), 4:322. (Hereafter, this will be referred to as *Works*, specifically the common 1799 and 1820 editions, not the eight-volume 1770 edition.) Note that Flavel's title draws together two previous titles, one from Burgess and the other from Blake. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*. Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis.*.. (Able Roper: London, 1658). Both works explain covenant doctrine extensively.

44. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis & Foederis*, A9r–v; in *Works*, 4:323. Note that we have followed the sixteenth-century publication in its punctuation and use of upper case letters. The alterations found in the works of 1820 are puzzling, particularly in regard to italicizing.

45. "If you think fit to rejoin to this my Answer, I desire you will avoid as much as you can a tedious Harangue of Words, and speak strictly and regularly to my Arguments, *by limiting, distinguishing, or*

denying, as a Disputant ought to do." Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 140; in *Works*, 4:378, emphasis added.

46. Flavel's conciliatory nature comes through at the beginning and end of the treatise. Note he had lent his own copies of Francis Roberts and Obadiah Sedgwick to Cary. *Vindiciae Legis*, 133–34; in *Works*, 4:375. Compare also Flavel's friendly interchange of letters with a nearby Quaker named Clement Lake. See John Galpine, ed., *Flavel, the Quaker, and the Crown: John Flavel, Clement Lake and Religious Liberty in Late 17th Century England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Rhwymbooks, 2000), 4–7.

47. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, A11v–A12r; in *Works*, 4:325.

48. Compare William Allen, *Some Baptismal Abuses Briefly Discovered* (London: J. M., 1653), 30–32. Allen denies the continuity of circumcision to baptism because circumcision was "a principle part of the Legal Ministration" and did not belong to the "Gospel-Ministration."

49. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 7–8.

50. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, A12v–A13r; in *Works*, 4:325–26.

51. Cary, *Solemn Call*, 138, 143, 168, 173, 178–82, 192.

52. Cary, *Solemn Call*, 216.

53. Cary, *Solemn Call*, 146.

54. Cary, *Solemn Call*, 175; cf. 224, 229 for other examples.

55. Cary, *Solemn Call*, 138, 140, 179, 223. Compare Nehemiah Coxe, who argues that the covenant of grace, established with Abraham some twenty-five years before the covenant of circumcision, had no outward signs added to it. Later he treats Genesis 17 and states that it is a "Praeludium to the Sinai covenant." He argues that God's command to Abraham in Genesis 17:1 to be blameless introduces the covenant of circumcision as a covenant of works. "The Lord was pleased to draw [in Gen 17:1–11] the first Lines of that Form of Covenant-Relations, which the natural Seed of *Abraham*, were fully stated in by the *Law of Moses* which was a *Covenant of Works*, and its Condition or Terms, *Do this and live.*" *A Discourse of the Covenants…Wherein the Covenant of Circumcision is more largely handled…* ([London]: J. D., 1681), 90, 104–5.

56. Cary, *Solemn Call*, 174–75; cf. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 11–31; in *Works*, 4:331–38.

57. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 62, 66; in *Works*, 4:348–49.

58. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 63; in *Works*, 4:349.

59. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 70; in *Works*, 4:352.

60. Cary, *Solemn Call*, 233.

61. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 72; in *Works*, 4:352–53.

62. See Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

63. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 73, 115–16; in *Works*, 4:368.

64. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 46, 58; in *Works*, 4:343, 347. Already in 1654, Tombes had highlighted the difference between the Abrahamic national covenant and the universal gospel covenant. See Michael J. Walker, "The Relation of Infants to Church, Baptism, and Gospel in Seventeenth-Century Baptist Theology," *Baptist Quarterly* 21 (1966): 254. In the same article, on page 257, Walker also relates an early Baptist interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14.

65. Thomas Shepard, *The Church Membership of Children and Their Right to Baptism* (Cambridge, New England: Samuel Green, 1663), A4r–B2v.

66. Elsewhere Flavel distinguishes between the law "strictly taken for the Ten Commandments" and the law "complexly taken," or, "in the complex sense." Flavel's description of the first category matches what Hesselink has observed in Calvin regarding the *nuda lex*. See I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1992), 158, 188. For further occurrences of the distinction in Flavel and his attribution of the same to Roberts and Sedgwick, see his next reply to Cary, *Vindiciarum Vindex* and appended to his *Planelogia, a Succinct and Seasonable Discourse of the Occasions, Causes, Nature, Rise, Growth, and Remedies of Mental Errors* (London: R. Roberts, 1691), 192, 302; in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (London: W. Baynes, 1820), 3:503, 549. See also *Vindiciae Legis*, a9r–v; in *Works*, 4:323.

67. Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis*, 32–37*;* in *Works*, 4:338–40.

68. Ernest Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

69. Accusations of misrepresentation fill pages 17–18, 68, 82–83, 94, and more. He is especially sensitive to "Antinomian slurs." See Philip Cary, *A Just Reply to Mr. John Flavell's Arguments by Way of Answer to a Discourse Lately Published, Entitled, A Solemn Call…* (London: John Harris, 1690).

70. Cary, *A Just Reply*, 9; cf. 123–25.

71. Cary, *A Just Reply*, 34; cf. 106.

72. Cary, *A Just Reply*, 111.

73. Cary, *A Just Reply*, 85–86.

74. In addition, Owen begins the entire discussion with a "not only…but also." Owen intimates that "A Covenant properly is *suntheke*. But there is no Word in the whole *Hebrew* Language of that Precise Signification.… As unto the Word *diatheke*, it signifies a Covenant improperly. Properly it is a Testamentary Disposition; and this may be without any Conditions on the part of them unto whom any thing is Bequeathed." Note Owen's ambiguity: "This *may be* without any Conditions." Cary, *A Just Reply*, 118–19.

75. Flavel, *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 181–86, 196–213, 230, 237–46, 250–55; in *Works*, 3:499–501, 505–12, 520, 523–24, 528–30. Flavel adds references to particular works of some "Eminent foreign Divines," namely, Cameron, Ursinus and Paraeus, Poliander, Rivet, Wallaeus, Thysius, plus the *Leiden Synopsis*, *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 255; in *Works*, 3:530. The fact that Flavel could marshal so many witnesses for the mainline view that held together the unilateral establishment with the bilateral administration of the covenant of grace—witnesses from both the Continent and from England—argues for substantial continuity in covenant thought throughout the Reformed world in this period and stands as strong evidence against a number of historiographical trajectories in twentieth-century scholarship on the covenant.

76. See also *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 256–57; in *Works*, 3:536–37, where Flavel repeats that the application of God's mercy to the soul of sinners is suspended upon and consequent to the human act of believing. "And if you did but see the true suspending nature of Faith…you would quickly grant the conditional nature of it." *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 257; in *Works*, 3:537.

77. Flavel, *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 248–50; in *Works*, 3:526–28.

78. Flavel introduces this distinction with a quote from Turretin, whose position Flavel follows.

79. One might quibble that faith itself, being the gift of God, is the beginning of the application of the salvific benefits of Christ. While this is true, it does not reduce the more detailed fact that actual participation in salvation logically follows only where the instrumental cause functions first.

80. Flavel, *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 264–65; in *Works*, 3:534.

81. Flavel, *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 280–96; in *Works*, 3:540–47.

82. Benjamin Keach, *The Ax Laid to the Root, or, One Blow More at the Foundation of Infant Baptism, and Church-Membership, Part I* (London: B. Keach, 1693).

83. This work has no section dedicated to Flavel. We can glean only a few mentions of Flavel and Cary from the sermon. Benjamin Keach, *The Ax Laid to The Root: Containing an Exposition of that Metaphorical Text of Holy Scripture, Mat. 3:10. Part II. Wherein Mr. Flavel's Last Grand Arguments…* (London: B. Keach, 1693), 5–6, 16, 18, 26–27.

84. Keach, *The Ax Laid to the Root, Part II*, 17–18, 26.

85. Keach, *The Ax Laid to the Root, Part II*, 27–28.

86. Keach's two-covenant view, with the covenant of grace encapsulated by the *pactum salutis*, is set forth in Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace, or, The Covenant of Peace Opened* (London: S. Bridge, 1698).

87. Flavel, *Vindiciarum Vindex*, 177; in *Works*, 3:497.

88. Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 120.

Chapter 46

The Puritans on the Lord's Supper

> *As God doth bless the bread and wine, to preserve and strengthen the body…so Christ apprehended and received by faith, shall nourish [the believer], and preserve both body and soul unto eternal life.*
>
> —WILLIAM PERKINS[1]

The Lord's Supper is an earthly encounter with the heavenly Christ, said the Puritans. In this they agreed with the teaching of John Calvin.[2] John Knox (c. 1505–1572), the link between Calvin and British Puritanism,[3] wrote that just as Christ said "he himself was the lively bread, wherewith our souls be fed unto everlasting life," so Christ,

> in setting forth bread and wine to eat and drink, he confirmeth and sealeth up to us his promise and communion…and representeth unto us, and maketh plain to our senses, his heavenly gifts; and also giveth unto us himself, to be received with faith, and not with mouth, nor yet by transfusion of substance. But so through the virtue [power] of the Holy Ghost, that we, being fed with his flesh, and refreshed with his blood, may be renewed both unto true godliness and to immortality.[4]

Thus "we receive Jesus Christ spiritually" in the Lord's Supper.[5]

Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) said of the Supper, "There is in this action more communion with God…than in any other religious act…. We have not so near a communion with a person, either by petitioning for something we want, or returning him thanks for a favour received, as we have by sitting with him at his table, partaking of the same bread and the same cup."[6] He explained, "Christ is really presented to us, and faith really takes him, closes with him, lodgeth him in the soul, makes him an indweller; and the soul hath spiritual communion with him in his life and death, as if we did really eat his flesh and drink his blood presented to us in the elements."[7]

John Willison (1680–1750) wrote that in partaking of the Supper we should exercise a remembrance of Christ that is full of awe, reverence, brokenhearted

mourning over our sins, hatred against our sins, thankfulness, and trust in Christ for our full justification. He wrote, “Our hearts should even burn with affection to him, when we remember the great floods of wrath that brake in upon Christ’s soul, and yet could not drown his love to us.”[8]

It is easy to understand why the Puritans, who had such a high view of the Lord’s Supper, placed such great value upon understanding the sacrament biblically and practicing it spiritually. Consequently, this chapter will address two concerns at the heart of the Puritan treatment of the Lord’s Supper: the doctrinal questions about the meaning of the Supper and the pastoral questions about how church members should partake of the Supper.

The True Meaning of the Lord’s Supper The Puritans were heirs of the Reformation debates concerning the Lord’s Supper. Few people appreciate that today. “From a modern point of view, the eucharistic controversies of the sixteenth century seem unchristian,” writes Thomas J. Davis. He said, “What one finds is that eucharistic theology was not simply about church ritual but, rather, it was about who God is, how God operates, how humanity is saved, where God might be found.”[9]

The Lord’s Supper became the focal point of doctrinal debates during the Reformation. Martin Luther had led Reformation churches away from the Roman Mass as a continuing priestly sacrifice in which, by the miracle of transubstantiation, the flesh and blood of Christ are offered anew as an atoning sacrifice.[10] To be sure, some of the Protestant revulsion against the Mass arose from abuses acknowledged even by the Roman Catholic Church. One Roman Catholic scholar laments “the commercialization of the holy sacrifice” by which masses were sold by greedy priests promising release from purgatory, and health and prosperity in this life.[11] However, the most significant division between the Church of England and the papacy in this matter was in doctrinal differences rather than practical abuses.[12] The English Reformer Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), together with Nicholas Ridley (c. 1500–1555) and John Bradford (1510–1555), sealed their doctrinal opposition to the Roman Mass with their own deaths during the Marian persecutions.[13] During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, ratified in 1571, codified for subsequent generations the English rejection of Papist teachings about the Eucharist (articles 28–31).[14]

By the time of the Puritans, theological differences had hardened between the Reformed and Lutherans, despite the efforts of Calvin and Beza.[15] Luther taught that Christ’s body and blood were so united with the elements as to be locally and physically present and so eaten with the mouth. By contrast, Calvin taught

that by faith, partakers of the Supper lift up their "hearts and minds on high, where Jesus Christ is, in the glory of his Father, and from whence we look for him for our redemption" to be made partakers of Christ's body and blood in a spiritual but nonetheless real manner.16 This highlights a difference between Calvin and the Puritans. There is little emphasis of heavenly participation in the Puritans. Rather than lifting up our hearts to Christ and partaking of Christ on high, the Puritans stressed, as did Thomas Cranmer, that Christ comes down to us in the sacrament by His Word and Spirit, offering Himself as our spiritual food and drink.

Luther's teachings were influential in the English Reformation.17 Yet Robert Barnes (c. 1495–1540) seemed to be the only English Reformer who adopted a Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper.18 In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Luther's writings continued to be translated into English but mostly on the subject of spiritual consolation through justification by faith, particularly in his commentary on Galatians.19 His view of the Supper seemed to have had little impact on the Puritans, who asserted the Reformed doctrine of real spiritual presence, while rejecting the Roman Catholic idea of a corporeal or physical presence .

The Puritans opposed both the Roman Catholic and Lutheran positions that Christ was physically present in the elements of the Lord's Supper.20 E. Brooks Holifield writes, "In their opposition to Lutheran and Roman Catholic doctrine, the Puritans were unambiguous."21 On the other hand, the Puritans did not follow Zwingli or the Anabaptists in de-emphasizing the physical sacraments.22 While some Puritans had Zwinglian tendencies,23 most Puritans belonged to a more Calvinistic group. William Perkins (1558–1602) said, "We keep the middle way, neither giving too much, nor too little to the sacraments."24

Papal Errors in the Lord's Supper The Puritans viewed transubstantiation as "repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 29.6). John Owen (1616–1683) wrote, "This is one of the greatest mysteries of the Roman magic and juggling, that corporeal elements should have a power to forgive sins, and confer spiritual grace…. No part of Christian religion was ever so vilely contaminated and abused by profane wretches, as this pure, holy, plain action and institution of our Savior: witness the Popish horrid monster of transubstantiation, and their idolatrous mass."25 Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) explained, "The end of the sacrament is not that we may eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ without a metaphor. And if we should suggest a thing so horrid and so monstrous as the papists do in their doctrine of transubstantiation, would that be any benefit to us?"26

Perkins said the signs of the Supper do not change with respect to their "substance" but in their being set apart "from a common to a holy use."[27] He refuted the doctrine of transubstantiation with these arguments: (1) How could Christ's body literally be eaten before He was crucified? His disciples ate the bread in the first institution of the Supper. (2) The bread is broken into parts, but every communicant receives the whole body of Christ. (3) The bread is the "communion" of Christ's body (1 Cor. 10:16) and therefore is not itself the body. (4) If this were truly Christ's body, would that body not only be made from the substance of Mary but also "of baker's bread"? (5) Over time, remainders of the bread will mold and leftover wine will sour, proving they retain their substance as food. (6) Transubstantiation overthrows the analogy between a sign and what it represents by replacing the sign with the reality.[28]

Transubstantiation turns bread into an idol, Perkins said, adding, "By this means, bread is exalted above men and angels, and is received into the unity of the Second Person" of the Trinity. Perkins said that this is evident in how Roman Catholics treat the bread after the Supper: "Therefore the Host (as it is called) or the bread in the box, carried in procession and worshiped, is nothing else but a wheaten or bread-god, and an idol, not inferior to Aaron's calf."[29] For this reason, the Puritans objected to the Anglican practice of kneeling to receive the Supper, saying it implied the superstitious worship of the bread and cup.[30]

Perkins was willing to acknowledge that the Supper was a sacrifice of praise for Christ's death on the cross and the presentation of ourselves as living sacrifices in response to His mercies, accompanied by the sacrifice of alms given to the poor (Heb. 13:15–16; Rom. 12:1). In the Supper, Christ's sacrifice is sacramentally present in the symbols and mentally present in the believing remembrance of communicants.[31]

But Perkins rejected the notion that the minister serves as a priest who offers a real, bodily sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, for the Puritans recognized "only Christ's oblation [offering] on the cross once offered."[32] He presented the following arguments:

> 1. The Holy Spirit says in Scripture that "Christ offered himself but once" (Heb. 9:15, 26; 10:10). The Papist response that this is true of a bloody sacrifice, but not the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, fails to account for the teaching that without blood there is no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). This distinction is not based on Scripture and so "is but a forgery of man's brain."
>
> 2. The offering up of Christ's substance in the sacrifice of the Mass must either continue His sacrifice or repeat it, either of which implies that

Christ's work on the cross was incomplete (Heb. 10:1–3). But Christ said of His work, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

3. Christ commanded us to partake of the Supper in remembrance (Luke 22:19), which means we look back to something done in the past, not something happening right now.

4. The Scriptures teach that Christ did not hand off His priesthood to another but continues in it forever (Heb. 7:24–25). Human priests, if they indeed offered sacrifices, would be taking Christ's place as the only priest.

5. If the priest does offer Christ's real body and blood to God, that priest becomes a mediator between God and Christ. It is absurd for mere men to mediate for Christ.

6. The fathers of the ancient and medieval church said the sacrifice of our worship and our eating of Christ are spiritual, not the drinking of human blood.[33]

The Puritans opposed the Roman doctrine that the sacraments had inherent power from God to confer grace; Perkins said the effect of a sacrament is subject to God's will. He wrote, "No action in the dispensation of a sacrament conferreth grace as it is a work done, that is, by the efficacy and force of the very sacramental action itself." On the contrary, the sacraments work by addressing the mind of believers with the promises of the covenant, leading them to consider those promises rationally and so be confirmed in faith, Perkins said. He also specified that the grace conferred is not the grace of justification but an increase of sanctification. "A man of years must first believe and be justified, before he can be a meet [qualified] partaker of any sacrament," Perkins said.[34] To make a sacrament effective by doing the work (*ex opera operato*) makes it an idol, for only God can give grace.[35]

Christ's Presence in the Lord's Supper "One reason why we so little value the ordinance [of the Lord's Supper], and profit so little by it, may be because we understand so little of the nature of that special communion with Christ which we have therein," wrote Owen.[36]

Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) affirmed "a real, true, and perfect presence of Christ" in the Lord's Supper.[37] He said this was not merely Christ's divine omnipresence, nor was it the physical presence of His human body. Christ is present "by the powerful working of his Holy Spirit" just as the sun is present to the earth in the shining of its warm rays.[38] Reynolds wrote, "The main end of the Sacrament…is to unite the faithful unto Christ." Since our union with Christ is mystical and not physical, His presence is mystical and not physical.[39] It is

indeed a union with Christ's "sacred body" in heaven, but this does not require the physical presence of His body in the bread for communicants to receive the graces of His glorified humanity.[40]

Perkins said there is a "sacramental union" between the signs and realities to which they point, which explains how sign and reality are often interchanged in Scripture (Gen. 17:10; Ex. 12:11; Deut. 10:16; Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20; John 6:51, 53; Acts 7:8; 1 Cor. 5:7; 10:17; 11:24; Titus 3:5). The sacramental union is not a natural union or "mutation of the sign into the thing signified" but a "respective" union, or union by way of analogy, so as to draw the soul of the Christian to consider the spiritual reality and apply it.[41] As a result, unconverted persons "receive the signs alone without the things signified," while the converted "do to their salvation receive, both the sign and the thing signified."[42] Matthew Henry (1662–1714) explained, "We live in a world of sense, not yet in the world of spirits; and, because we therefore find it hard to look above the things that are seen, we are directed, in a sacrament, to look through them, to those things not seen, which are represented by them."[43]

Matthew Poole (1624–1679) wrote, "When he saith, *Take, eat*, he means no more than that true believers should by the hand of their body take the bread, and with their bodily mouths eat it, and at the same time, by the hand and mouth of faith, receive and apply all the benefits of his blessed death and passion to their souls."[44] Thomas Doolittle (1630–1707) agreed, saying that the believer eats the bread and drinks the wine to signify "my union with Christ and enjoyment of Him; my feeding upon Christ by faith for the strengthening of the graces of God's Spirit in my soul."[45]

Some scholars say the Puritans became overly scholastic in their view of the Lord's Supper. Holifield, for example, says that Puritan pastors performed the sacramental actions, "hoping that the service would thus *convey doctrinal information*."[46] Contrasting the Puritan approach with Calvin's approach, he says, "Calvin had been wary of overemphasizing the *merely didactic possibilities* of sacramental worship, but in Puritan circles the Lord's Supper was unreservedly a vivid spectacle *calling to mind the saving truths of the gospel*."[47] The result of this distortion was that "Calvinist mystery collapsed under the weight of [the Puritans'] psychological explanation."[48] In this, Holifield underestimates the role that truth played in the Puritan heart and invents a dichotomy that Puritans would have found unbiblical. For the Puritans, doctrinal information was not the antithesis of emotional engagement and Spirit-led worship. As Edwards wrote about his own preaching, "I should think…my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable

to the nature of what they are affected with."[49] The Father seeks believers who worship in spirit and truth, and the Third Person of the Trinity is the Spirit *of truth* who guides believers into truth (John 16:13).

Biblical Simplicity in the Lord's Supper If the material principle of the Reformation was justification by faith alone, the formal principle was that Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) is the rule of faith and obedience. The Puritans viewed this truth as nothing less than the enthronement of Christ as king among His people. Willison said a true sacrament must be instituted by Christ "to show that Christ is the sole king and head of the church, who alone hath the power to appoint her ordinances."[50] The Puritans earnestly applied the principle of *sola Scriptura* to worship. Owen wrote in question-and-answer format:

> *Q: What doth God require of us in our dependence on him, that he may be glorified in us, and we accepted with him?*
> A: That we worship him in and by the ways of his own appointment….
>
> *Q: How then are these ways and means of the worship of God made known to us?*
> A: In and by the written word only, which contains a full and perfect revelation of the will of God as to his whole worship and all the concernments of it….
>
> *Q: What is principally to be attended unto by us in the manner of the celebration of the worship of God, and observation of the institutions and ordinances of the gospel?*
> A: That we observe and do all whatsoever the Lord Christ hath commanded us to observe, in the way that he hath prescribed; and that we add nothing unto or in the observation [observance] of them that is of man's invention or appointment.[51]

The Puritans also applied the principle of *sola Scriptura* to the Lord's Supper. Perkins wrote, "The right manner of using the Lord's Supper…is the observing of the institution, without addition, detraction, or change."[52] For this reason, the Puritans preferred to call the sacrament "the Lord's Supper" rather than "Holy Communion" or "the Eucharist," thus rooting it in the words of Scripture (1 Cor. 11:20).[53] For the Puritans, the sacrament revolved around the Word, especially Christ's words of institution (Matt. 26:26–28, 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Perkins said, "Therefore this word in the administration of the sacrament ought to be pronounced distinctly and aloud, yea, and as occasion serveth, explained also." He wrote, "All the efficacy and worthiness" of a sacrament depends on Christ's words of institution.[54] Indeed, the elements of the sacrament are "visible

words,”[55] “the signs representing to the eyes what which the word doth to the ears.”[56]

Each action of the Supper has spiritual significance. Perkins said the minister in his sacramental acts represents God in these ways: (1) by taking the bread and wine as a sign of the Father electing His Son to the office of mediator; (2) by blessing it through the words of institution for sacred use as a seal of God sending His Son in the fullness of time to do His work; (3) by breaking the bread and pouring the wine as a seal of the death of Christ for our transgressions; (4) by distributing the bread and wine to the communicants as a seal of God offering Christ to all, but giving Christ only to the faithful to increase their faith and repentance.[57]

According to Perkins, the actions of the person who receives the Supper also symbolize spiritual events: (1) taking the bread and wine into his hands is a seal of apprehending Christ by faith, (2) while eating the bread and drinking the wine is a seal of applying Christ to himself by faith to increase his union and communion with Christ.[58] More than a century later, Willison attributed the same meanings to these sacramental actions of the minister and communicant, showing the continuity of the Puritan tradition.[59]

The simplicity of the form of the Supper was determined by biblical authority. The Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God (1645) instructed ministers to celebrate the Supper “frequently” as “most convenient,” especially after the morning sermon and prayers. The Presbyterian form for the Supper included the following parts: (1) a short exhortation on the blessings of the Supper and necessity of faith, repentance, love, and spiritual hunger; (2) a warning that the “ignorant, scandalous, profane, or those that live in any sin or offence” not partake, but that brokenhearted penitents should come; (3) the reading of the words of institution from a Gospel or 1 Corinthians 11:23–27 with explanation and application; (4) a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving for the redemption of sinners by Christ, and petition for God’s blessing on the ordinance, “that we may receive by faith the body and blood of Jesus Christ, crucified for us, and so to feed upon him, that he may be one with us, and we one with him”; (5) introductory words spoken by the minister to account for the actions performed: institution, command, and example of Christ—“According to the holy institution, command, and example of our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, I take this bread, and, having given thanks, break it and give it unto you…”; (6) breaking the bread and distributing it and the cup with the words of Christ, “Take ye, eat,” etc.; (7) an exhortation to walk worthy of the grace of Christ held forth in the sacrament; (8) a prayer of thanksgiving; and (9) a collection for the poor.[60] The Puritans concluded the Lord’s Supper service with the singing of a

psalm, following the example of Christ (Matt. 26:30).[61]

Since some aspects of the Supper's manner of administration are not given in Scripture, Puritan practice varied. The ceremonial details of the Lord's Supper were hotly debated at the Westminster Assembly; three weeks alone were spent on whether to seat communicants at a table.[62] In general, the English Independents celebrated the Supper every Lord's Day, the Baptists once a month, and the Presbyterians four times a year. The Baptists at times preferred to celebrate the Supper in the evening, following scriptural examples (Mark 14:17; 1 Cor. 11:23).[63] But Willison, a Presbyterian, argued, "The circumstances of time, place and company, in the first administration, not being essential to the ordinance, were not intended for our imitation. We are no more required to receive it at night, than to do it in an upper room, with but twelve in company. Moreover, the time was occasioned by the Passover, that was always eaten at night, and in private families."[64] The Scottish Presbyterians seated communicants at a table, while Independents carried the elements to people in the pews.[65] Within each group there were variations.

Regardless of the specifics of the Lord's Supper, they were to be ordered for what Reynolds called the sacrament's "most express end," namely, "to celebrate the memory of Christ's death and passion."[66] This was not just a "historical memory" but what Reynolds called a "practical memory," that is, the memory of faith, thankfulness, obedience, and prayer.[67] This leads us to the manner of spiritually partaking the Supper, as the Puritans understood it.

The Spiritual Partaking of the Lord's Supper Given the awesome potential of communion with Christ within the Supper, the Puritans took the matter of right participation seriously. The awakened conscience cannot consider partaking of such a sacred meal without asking, "What does God require of me?" Participation in the sacraments was not optional, though Perkins said sacraments were not "absolutely necessary" for salvation, but were only "a prop or stay for faith to lean on." Those unable to participate because of an untimely death or geographic isolation were not condemned. Nevertheless, "contempt" for a sacrament by willful and unrepentant neglect did bring God's condemnation upon the offender.[68] God's people were urged to partake of the Lord's Supper, and were not to avoid the question of how to "communicate worthily" (Larger Catechism, Q. 170).

Qualifications for Admission to the Lord's Supper Puritan writers paid close attention to the qualifications for admission to the Lord's Supper. Most Puritans followed Calvin's teaching that "if the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can

accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears."[69] Charnock wrote, "It is a sad thing to be Christians at a supper, heathens in our shops, and devils in our closets."[70] Jonathan Edwards viewed the Lord's Supper as a sacrament reserved for believers, celebrating the unity that they have in Christ. He wrote in a sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:17, "The Lord's Supper was instituted as a solemn representation and seal of the holy and spiritual union Christ's people have *with…one another*."[71]

A few Puritans, notably Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729) and William Prynne (1600–1669), viewed the Lord's Supper as a "converting ordinance."[72] They said the sacrament was also intended for unbelievers who had a basic knowledge of Christian beliefs as a means of their eventual conversion by "evoking their internal assent to the Gospel."[73] This minority view was refuted by George Gillespie (1613–1648) and Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661). Holifield summarizes,

> Neither Rutherford nor Gillespie intended to rob the sacrament of efficacy. The Lord's Supper was still "the nourishment of those in whom Christ liveth," increasing "the conversion which was before" by adding "a new degree of faith." Like Calvin, they linked sacramental efficacy with the doctrine of sanctification, which described the Christian's growth in faith and holiness. Moreover, the sacrament sealed God's promises to the elect. Since the seal applied to the worthy communicant "in particular, the very promise that in general is made to him," he could leave the table with assurance of God's mercy.[74]

The emphasis on conversion as a qualification for communicants implied that young children should not participate in the Lord's Supper.[75] The Westminster Larger Catechism fenced the Table against the "ignorant" (Q. 173), saying that one difference between baptism and the Lord's Supper is that baptism should be administered "even to infants," but the Lord's Supper is to be administered "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves" (Q. 177).

Perkins said that to be qualified to receive the Supper, one must have a knowledge of God, the fall of man, and the promise of salvation by Christ, plus true faith in Christ and repentance from sin, with faith and repentance being renewed daily. If a person with these qualifications hesitates at the Table because he feels he has "a corrupt and rebellious heart," Perkins said, "thou art well disposed to the Lord's Table, when thou art lively touched with a sense of thy crooked disposition." Medicine is for the diseased.[76] That does not say that believers may come unrepentant over known sins, for "the Corinthians had both

faith and repentance; yet because they failed in this point, of the renovation of their faith and repentance, they are said many of them to be unworthy receivers, and to eat judgment to themselves."[77]

The Puritans did not require a believer to have full assurance to partake of the Supper. Assurance was desirable but not necessary.[78] Edward Taylor (c. 1642–1729) wrote, "It [assurance] is not that which anyone is to wait for in order to his coming to the Lord's Supper."[79] "It's not the faith of assurance that is necessary to this ordinance," Taylor said, "but of affiance and trust."[80] Neither was moral perfection required. Edwards wrote: "Your sins need to be no hindrance. Christ procured those benefits for such. He gave Himself for such."[81] Doolittle went further, saying a person may come to the Lord's Table "if a man cannot say he loves God, and cannot say he has faith, but yet finds he hungers and thirsts for Christ."[82] Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) summarized this thinking in stating, "A weak faith can lay hold on a strong Christ. A palsied hand may tie the knot in marriage."[83] Henry made this practical appeal: "If thou doubt, therefore, whether Christ be thine, put the matter out of doubt by a present consent to him: I take Christ to be mine, wholly, only, and forever mine."[84]

Right Reception of the Lord's Supper The Lord's Supper was to be taken seriously, after much preparation, careful self-examination, and Christ-centered participation. Edwards wrote, "'Tis the most solemn confirmation that can be conceived of…. It is more solemn than a mere oath."[85] He later added, "Those who contemptuously treat those symbols of the body of Christ slain and His blood shed, why, they make themselves guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, that is, of murdering Him."[86] This solemnity is in keeping with the magnitude of the sacrament. Edwards said, "Christ is the greatest Friend of His church, and that which is commemorated in the Lord's Supper is the greatest manifestation of His love, the greatest act of kindness that ever was in any instance, infinitely exceeding all acts of kindness done by man one to another. It was the greatest display of divine goodness and grace that ever was."[87]

The Lord's Supper is an encounter with Christ, the Puritans said. Both God and the believer act toward each other. Perkins said God's action is "either the offering, or the application of Christ and his graces to the faithful." The action of faith in the believer "is the consideration, desire, apprehension, and receiving of Christ in the lawful use of the sacrament."[88]

Jon Payne describes Owen's view of the Lord's Supper as "a sanctified dramatization of the love of God for His people," in which "those who exercise faith in Christ experience and partake of Him in the Supper."[89] Owen called the elements of the Supper "the cream of the creation: which is an endless

storehouse, if pursued, of representing the mysteries of Christ."[90]

The Puritans said participants should prepare for the Lord's Supper with quantitatively large and qualitatively rich periods of time engaged in meditation. Owen said, "The using of an ordinance will not be of advantage to us, unless we understand the institution, and the nature and the ends of it."[91] More than mere understanding is required, since "God's covenant promises are not 'spiritually sealed' by the sacraments unless received by faith and an obedient heart."[92]

This meditation should not cease when the sacrament begins; rather, it should intensify. Owen preached *Twenty-Five Discourses Suitable to the Lord's Supper* between 1669 and 1682. In this work, Owen instructed the congregation under his care to receive the most benefit from participating in the sacrament. He urged his congregation to first meditate on "*the horrible guilt and provocation that is in sin*."[93] Next he urged the congregation "to meditate on God's *purity and holiness*, that is, that holiness that would not 'pass by sin, when it was charged upon his Son.'"[94]

The focal point of the Lord's Supper is the person and work of Jesus Christ. These are "together received through the exercising of sincere faith."[95] This outworking of faith is the attempt to *see* the Son as it were with spiritual eyes. Owen said to his congregation, "That which we are to endeavour in this ordinance is, to get…a view of Christ as lifted up; that is bearing our iniquities in his own body on the tree…. O that God in this ordinance would give our souls a view of him!"[96]

One result of this spiritual sight is the mortification of sin. Owen said, "We labour by faith so to behold a dying Christ, that strength may thence issue forth for the death of sin in our souls."[97] Another result is the vivification of faith: "God hath appointed him to be crucified evidentially before our eyes, that every poor soul that is stung with sin, ready to die by sin, should look up unto him, and be healed."[98]

These results are not due to the pursuit of some extrabiblical, mystical experience, but to the cooperative work of the Spirit along with the believer's personalization of objective biblical truth. At the Lord's Supper, Owen said, "Christ and His benefits are *objectively offered*, and received through the exercising of faith and the sovereign agency of the Holy Spirit."[99] Doolittle wrote, "Let faith make particular application of this blood in all its virtues and efficacies, and say, 'Here, O my soul, here is pardoning blood, and it is yours. Here is quickening, softening blood, and it is yours. Here is justifying, sanctifying, pleading blood, and this belongs to you.' This will draw forth faith to do its work at the Lord's Supper."[100]

Goodwin compared the sacrament with the sermon and wrote, "Of sermons,

some are for comfort, some to inform, some to excite; but here in the Sacrament is all thou canst expect. Christ is here light, and wisdom, and comfort, and all to thee. He is here an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame; yea, everything to everyone."[101]

Just as careful meditation and preparation were to be used prior to the sacrament, the believer should continue meditating and thinking afterward. As a believer, said Doolittle, I must

> consider with myself if I have received any benefit thereby…. [I will know this] by the increase of my faith in Christ and love for God; by my greater hatred of sin and power against it; by my longing after the enjoyment of God in heaven; by my prizing this ordinance above my necessary food; and by my resolutions, in the strength of Christ, to suffer for Him who died for me.[102]

Intense participation in the Supper was no mere mental assent to the doctrinal accuracy of the cross, but a heartfelt engagement. Willison offered this meditation for the communicant at the Table: "O now let the sight of a bleeding Saviour make me a weeping sinner. Had I been upon Mount Calvary…could I have stood by with dry eyes or an unconcerned heart, especially when I considered that he suffered all this in my room, and for my sins?"[103] Emotional engagement is so integral to the sacrament that multiple emotions should be expected. If these emotions conflict, the believer should be encouraged, for sorrow (because the believer's sins put Christ to death) will not prevent joy (at Christ's death for those sins). Doolittle anticipated a believer's question: "'But must I both rejoice and sorrow too? Will not either sorrow keep me from rejoicing, or rejoicing prevent my sorrowing?' No, he responded, both these may be; both these must be. This mixture of affection well becomes a believer at the Lord's Table. You may mourn that your sins put Christ to death, and yet you may rejoice that Christ would die for your sins."[104]

Hindrances to the Lord's Supper While the Lord's Supper was open to all believers, not all believers participated fully and regularly in it. There are several hindrances that prevented believers from receiving all the benefits of the sacrament.

The first hindrance is *the devil*. Doolittle said the devil "will be with you at the sacrament to rob you of the comfort and hinder you from that joy that there you might be filled with."[105] Watson wrote, "Satan would hinder from the sacrament, as Saul did the people from the honey (1 Sam. 14:26)."[106] Careful observance of the Lord's Supper opposes Satan's work, however. Owen said, "In

our celebration of the death of Christ, we do profess against Satan, that his power is broken, that he is conquered—tied to the chariot wheels of Christ, who has disarmed him."[107] Matthew Henry went further, stating, "Christ having thus trodden Satan under our feet, he calls to us, as Joshua to the captains of Israel, 'Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings.'"[108]

The second hindrance is *forgetfulness*. God's children must battle spiritual amnesia in observing the Lord's Supper (Pss. 103:2; 106:12–13). "None can be ignorant," wrote Edmund Calamy (1600–1666), "of how apt our hearts are to turn aside like a deceitful bow, and to lose the sense of those things which ought continually to influence and govern us."[109] Doolittle said, "What is most to be wondered at is that we are too prone to forget God our Savior, to forget Him who delivered us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us; who delivered us from the wrath of God by bearing it Himself; who delivered us from the sting of death by dying for us."[110] Similarly, Matthew Henry wrote, "Remember him! Is there any danger of our forgetting him? If we were not wretchedly taken up with the world and the flesh, and strangely careless in the concerns of our souls, we could not forget him. But, in consideration of the treachery of our memories, this ordinance is appointed to remind us of Christ."[111] Opposing forgetfulness is one of the main purposes of the Lord's Supper, which constantly challenges us to "Remember me."

The third hindrance is *neglect*. The Puritans stated several reasons for the neglect of the sacrament, ranging from a sense of personal unworthiness to a sense of personal pride. Either way, neglect is hypocrisy, the Puritans warned. Doolittle wrote of the dangers of neglect while suggesting the remedy. He said, "It is hypocrisy to complain of the hardness of your heart and yet not use the means to have it softened, to complain of the power of your sin and not use the means to have it weakened."[112] Willison wrote, "Is not the frequent use of this ordinance, in the way Christ hath appointed, an excellent help, to soften our hearts, renew our repentance, strengthen our faith, inflame our love, increase our thankfulness, animate our resolutions against sin, and encourage us to holy duties, and shall we willingly neglect it?"[113] Against a repeated neglect of the Supper, Henry offered this warning: "Thou hast no desire to the wine of the love of God, but rather choosest the puddle water of sensual pleasures; but canst thou 'drink of the wine of the wrath of God,' which shall be poured out without mixture in the presence of the Lamb?"[114]

Benefits of the Lord's Supper Perkins listed several benefits of the sacraments: (1) "For the better confirmation of our faith: for by it, as by certain pledges given, God of his great mercy, doth as it were, bind himself unto us." (2) "That it

might be a badge and note of that profession, by which the true church of God is distinguished from the other congregations." (3) "That it might be a means to preserve and spread abroad the doctrine of the gospel." (4) "It serveth to bind the faithful, that they do continue both loyal and grateful to their Lord God." (5) "It is the bond of mutual amity [love] betwixt the faithful."[115] Truly it is a sign and seal of the covenant bond.

Reynolds said the Supper was ordained "to exhibit Christ" so as "to increase the mystical union of the church unto Christ their head."[116] Just as natural food strengthens our bodies by becoming part of them, so we receive "spiritual nourishment" from the Supper in "the vital Spirit of Christ" so that "Christ, being united unto us by these holy mysteries, doth comfort, refresh, strengthen, rule, and direct us in all our ways."[117] Sin battles against our spiritual health, but the sacrament is a means "to strengthen our faith" by linking us to Christ so that we grow spiritually.[118] Reynolds also noted that the Supper increases the unity of the church, partly because eating together naturally knits men's affections together.[119]

Thomas Watson wrote, "Let not Christians rest in lower measures of grace, but aspire after higher degrees. The stronger our faith, the firmer is our union with Christ, and the more sweet influence we draw from him."[120] Similarly, Matthew Henry wrote, "If thou didst duly attend on this ordinance, and improve it aright, thou wouldst find it of unspeakable use to thee for the strengthening of thy faith, the exciting of holy affections in thee, and thy furtherance in every good word and work."[121] The practice of self-examination, so important to Puritans, is itself a means of assurance.[122]

Tethered to the Scriptures is the mystical element of the Supper: fellowship with Christ beyond words. Willison said the Supper is rightly called a feast, even a marriage feast, "because hereby the believers are richly entertained by Christ, have sweet intimacy with him, and great expressions of his love; and their souls are nourished and strengthened for duty."[123] The Supper seals our place in the covenant of grace, for, as Willison said, "Christ puts a sealed copy of his testament into every worthy communicant's hand, at the Lord's table."[124]

Reynolds said another effect of this Supper is "to signify and obsignate [seal], unto the soul of each believer, his personal claim and title unto the new covenant of grace."[125] It is a means of our receiving "the pledges of our salvation" so that "we might, at this spiritual altar, see Christ (as it were), crucified before our eyes, [and] cling unto his cross."[126] Thus the sacrament is both a sign and a seal of our redemption in Christ, "for the nature of a sign is to discover and represent that which in itself is obscure or absent…but the property of a seal is to ratify and establish that which might otherwise be ineffectual."[127]

Thomas Doolittle said every believer seeks deeper assurance when going to the Lord's Table. He said God's children come to the Table for the following reasons: "To have communion with God. To increase our faith in Christ and love for God. To further our joy in the Holy Ghost. Our peace of conscience and hope of eternal life…. To make us thankful to God for His mercy bestowed upon us in Christ. To get power against our sins. And especially to remember and show forth the death of Christ."[128] Doolittle said strong believers pursue these benefits even more earnestly than weak ones. They come to the Table seeking to have their hearts inflamed with love for God and desires after Christ; they come to have their Savior more endeared to their souls, their hearts softened, their sin subdued, their faith strengthened, their evidences cleared, and their souls assured of eternal life.[129]

Doolittle advised weak believers to "draw near unto this Table of the Lord, and have a share of these gospel benefits and be assured of them."[130] "I am persuaded that if you would go unto this ordinance, you would in time hear God speaking peace and comfort to your soul."[131] He said that the believer with strong assurance finds complete joy in participating in the sacrament. When I as a believer apprehend "the truth of my faith in Christ, love for God, and hatred of sin, and the promise that God has made to such in Christ," so "as surely as I ate the bread and drank the wine, so sure has God pardoned my sins and will save my soul."[132] In addition, the assured believer finds "the Spirit, God bearing witness to and with my spirit that it was thus with me, and, oh, how sweet was Christ then to my soul!"[133]

The Puritans believed the Lord's Supper, properly received by faith, "would provide the occasion for the *extension of faith*," Holifield said.[134] Watson wrote, "Christ gives us his body and blood for the augmenting of faith; he expects that we should reap some profit and income, and that our weak, minute faith should flourish into a great faith."[135] Owen offered helpful parallels between physical eating and spiritual eating, saying there is "an increase and quickening of the vital principles, there is growth, and there is satisfaction."[136] Similarly, Edwards wrote, "You have been hungry and thirsty in times past, but if you come to this gospel feast you shall hunger and thirst no more."[137]

As believers meditate on the cross of Christ, they are reminded that God keeps His promises. Owen believed the sacraments were "instituted of Christ to be visible seals and pledges whereby God in him *confirmeth the promises* of the covenant to all believers, re-stipulating of them growth in faith and obedience."[138] Similarly, Matthew Henry wrote, "Give up thyself in sincerity to Jesus Christ, and then come and feast with him: thou shalt then have in this ordinance the pledges of his favour, assurances of thy reconciliation to him, and

acceptance with him, and all shall be well, for it shall end everlastingly well."[139]

The sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, evidenced in the Lord's Supper, further reminds believers that they no longer face divine condemnation. Those who fear the wrath of God can find reassurance in the sacrament. Owen wrote, "Look, whatever the justice of God, the law of God, whatever the threatening of God did require to be inflicted as punishment for sin, Christ underwent it all."[140] Richard Vines (1600–c. 1655) said the sacrament "is needful for relief of our doubts, fears, and waverings; for this is the great question of anxiety which troubles the soul: Are my sins pardoned? Are my sins blotted out? God has… instituted this sacrament to resolve this question for the weak in faith."[141]

Finally, believers are reminded that they have peace with God. Owen said, "What is the issue of all this? It is to bring us unto God—to peace with God and acquitment from all our sins; and to make us acceptable with the righteous, holy, and faithful God; to give us boldness before him—this is the issue."[142]

Conclusion

For all their love of the Bible and spiritual simplicity, the Puritans had no desire to jettison the sacraments ordained by Christ in the Bible. They especially delighted in the Lord's Supper. Reynolds wrote, "Here then, inasmuch as these sacred elements are instituted to present and exhibit Christ unto the faithful soul, we may infer with what affection we ought to approach unto him, and what reverent estimation to have of them." Christ is the desire of all nations, the sum of our happiness. But we cannot enjoy Him without being united to Him. Reynolds wrote, "Union unto Christ we cannot have, until it please him, by his Spirit, as it were, to stoop from that kingdom where now he is, and to exhibit himself unto those, whom it pleaseth him to assume into the unity of his body."143

We cannot rise up to heaven and see Christ there as Stephen once did in a vision.144 However, Reynolds said, Christ is pleased to glorify His power by working through weak, created things. He is pleased to confirm and strengthen our union with Him "by those poor and ordinary elements of bread and wine in his sacrament." Therefore, the Lord requires us to come with reverence and hunger and affection to His Table.145

The Puritans teach us that we should approach the Supper with reverence and spiritual hunger, remembering Christ, and seeking to grow in the grace and knowledge of Him (2 Peter 3:18) to the glory of God Triune. By grace, we will then leave the Supper with a holy resolution to live wholly and solely for Him.

1. William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion, Gathered into Six Principles*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612–1613), 1:8. Parts of this chapter are taken from Matthew Westerholm, "The 'Cream of Creation' and the 'Cream of Faith': The Lord's Supper as a Means of Assurance in Puritan Thought," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3, no. 1 (2011): 205–22.

2. Primary sources for Calvin's sacramental views include *Treatises on the Sacraments, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, and Confessions of Faith*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002), 119–22, 163–579; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.14, 17–18.

3. On Knox's role in transmitting the Genevan eucharistic liturgy to English Puritanism, see Stephen Mayor, *The Lord's Supper in Early English Dissent* (London: Epworth, 1972), 1–12.

4. John Knox, "A Summary, according to the Holy Scriptures, of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Club, 1854), 3:73.

5. Knox, "A Summary…of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," in *Works*, 3:75.

6. Stephen Charnock, "A Discourse of the End of the Lord's Supper," *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1864–1866; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 4:407.

7. Charnock, "The End of the Lord's Supper," in *Works*, 4:408.

8. John Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *The Whole Works of the Reverend and Learned Mr John Willison* (Edinburgh: J. Moir, 1798), 2:88–89.

9. Thomas J. Davis, *This Is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 13–14.

10. “Transubstantiation” is the doctrine that the elements of the Eucharist are physically transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ through a change of substance though not in appearance. It was affirmed as church dogma by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and again, contra the Reformers, at the Council of Trent (1551).

11. Francis Clark, S. J., *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, 2nd ed. (1967; repr., Devon: Augustine Publishing, 1981), 59. See Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 146.

12. Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, 64.

13. For the writings of British Reformers against the Papist view of the Supper, see Thomas Cranmer, *A Defense of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Saviour Christ*, in *The Remains of Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1833), 2:275–463; Nicholas Ridley, *A Brief Declaration of the Lord’s Supper* (London: Seeley and Co., 1895); John Bradford, “Sermon on the Lord’s Supper,” in *The Writings of John Bradford* (1848–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 1:82–110; Thomas Becon, “The Displaying of the Popish Mass,” in *Prayers and Other Pieces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 251–86; Knox, “A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass Is Idolatry,” in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Club, 1854), 3:29–70.

14. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:505–7.

15. E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 4–26; Richard A. Muller, “Calvin on Sacramental Presence, in the Shadow of Marburg and Zurich,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (2009): 147–67; Jill Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza: Development of Reformed Doctrine,* AAR Studies in Religion, no. 4 (Chambersburg, Pa.: American Academy of Religion, 1972), 2–7.

16. See “The Manner of Celebrating the Lord’s Supper,” in Calvin’s *Treatises on the Sacraments*, 119–22. John Knox agreed with Calvin, teaching that “as the only way to dispose our souls to receive nourishment, relief, and quickening of his substance, let us lift up our minds by faith above all things worldly and sensible, and thereby enter into heaven, that we may find and receive Christ, where he dwelleth undoubtedly, very God and very man, in the incomprehensible glory of his Father.” Charles W. Baird, *Presbyterian Liturgies: Historical Sketches* (repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 123–24.

17. See Carl R. Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525–1556* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

18. Carl. R. Trueman and Carrie Euler, “The Reception of Martin Luther in Sixteenth-and Seventeenth-Century England,” in *The Reception of the Continental Reformation in Britain*, ed. Polly Ha and Patrick Collinson, Proceedings of the British Academy, 164 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65–67.

19. Trueman and Euler, “The Reception of Martin Luther,” 68–76.

20. See William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612–1613), 1:75–76; Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Supper* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 17–19; Edward Reynolds, “Meditations on the Holy Sacrament,” *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds* (1826; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 3:68–72.

21. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 59.

22. Ulrich Zwingli, *Writings* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1984), 1:92–127; 2:127–45, 187–369. For a recent appreciative survey, see Bruce A. Ware, “The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the Theology of Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531),” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 229–47.

23. See the discussion in Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 59.

24. William Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612–1613), 1:611.

25. John Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold (repr.,

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:490–91.

26. Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper* (Orlando, Fla.: Northampton Press, 2007), 5.

27. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:71.

28. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:76. For further Protestant polemics against the Mass published in English, see Alexander Cooke, *Worke, More Worke, and a Little More Worke for a Mass-Priest* (London: Jones, 1628); David de Rodon, *The Funeral of the Mass, or, The Mass Dead and Buried without Hope of Resurrection*, trans. out of French (London: T. H. for Andrew Clark, 1677); John Owen, *A Vindication of the Animadversions on* 'Fiat Lux,' in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust), 14:411–26; William Payne, *The Three Grand Corruptions of the Eucharist in the Church of Rome* (London: for Brabazon Ayler, 1688); and three sermons: Edward Lawrence, "There Is No Transubstantiation in the Lord's Supper"; Richard Steele, "The Right of Every Believer to the Blessed Cup in the Lord's Supper"; and Thomas Wadsworth, "Christ Crucified the Only Proper Gospel-Sacrifice," in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689* (repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 6:453–529.

29. William Perkins, *The Idolatrie of the Last Times*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612–1613), 1:680. For "bread-god" the original text says "breaden god."

30. Mayor, *The Lord's Supper in Early English Dissent*, 18–19, 50–51. See Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *Works*, 2:80.

31. Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, in *Works*, 1:593.

32. Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, in *Works*, 1:593.

33. Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, in *Works*, 1:594–95.

34. Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, in *Works*, 1:610–11.

35. Perkins, *The Idolatrie of the Last Times*, in *Works*, 1:680.

36. John Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 9:523.

37. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:68.

38. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:72.

39. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:73.

40. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:73–74.

41. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:72.

42. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:72–73.

43. Matthew Henry, *The Communicant's Companion* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1843), 32.

44. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 3:127.

45. Thomas Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998), 146.

46. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 54.

47. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 54, emphasis added.

48. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 61.

49. Jonathan Edwards, *Select Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 391.

50. Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *Works*, 2:42.

51. John Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 15:447, 449–50, 462. See also William Ames, *A Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship* (Rotterdam, 1633); George Gillespie, *A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the Church of Scotland* (1637; repr., Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1993).

52. Perkins, *The Idolatrie of the Last Times*, in *Works*, 1:713.

53. Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications,

1997), 204. It should be pointed out, however, that the terms *communion* and *thanksgiving (eucharisteia)* are associated with the holy supper in Scripture in 1 Corinthians 10:16. *Euchariasteia,* or giving of thanks, is part of the sacrament, as instituted by Christ (1 Cor. 11:24).

54. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:71.

55. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:72; Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, in *Works*, 1:611.

56. Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, in *Works*, 1:610.

57. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:75.

58. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:75.

59. Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *Works*, 2:74–78.

60. "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God," in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003), 384–86.

61. Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, 216.

62. Mayor, *The Lord's Supper in Early English Dissent,* 76.

63. Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, 205–8, 213.

64. Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *Works*, 2:68.

65. Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, 214.

66. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:87.

67. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:104, 107, 108, 110.

68. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:72.

69. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.9.

70. Charnock, "The End of the Lord's Supper," in *Works*, 4:400.

71. Edwards, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper,* 70, emphasis added.

72. William Prynne, *Lord's Supper Briefly Vindicated, and Clearly Demonstrated to Be a Grace-Begetting, Soul-Converting…Ordinance* (London: Edward Thomas, 1657); Solomon Stoddard, *An Appeal to the Learned, Being a Vindication of the Right of the Visible Saints to the Lords Supper…* (Boston: B. Green for Samuel Phillips, 1709); Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard: The Nature of the Lord's Supper* (Boston: Twayne, 1981).

73. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 109–10.

74. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 115. He cites, respectively, Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London: Printed by John Field for Christopher Meredith, 1646), 340, 523; George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1985), 500; and Rutherford, *Divine Right,* 253.

75. Cornelis P. Venema, *Children at the Lord's Table?: Assessing the Case for Paedocommunion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 22–26.

76. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:76.

77. Perkins, *The Idolatrie of the Last Times*, in *Works*, 1:713.

78. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed,* 56.

79. Edward Taylor, *Edward Taylor's Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper* (Boston: Twain Publisher, 1988), 121.

80. Taylor, *Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper,* 189.

81. Edwards, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper*, 156.

82. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper*, 137. Cf. Edwards's sermon "The Lord's Supper Ought to Be Kept Up and Attended in Remembrance of Christ," in *Sermons on the Lord's Supper*, 54–69.

83. Watson, *The Lord's Supper*, 73.

84. Henry, *The Communicant's Companion*, 73. Henry writes, "You think you are not serious enough, nor devout enough, nor regular enough, in your conversations, to come to the sacrament; and perhaps you are not: but why are you not? What hinders you? Is any more required to fit you for the sacrament, than is necessary to fit you for heaven?" *The Communicant's Companion*, 70.

85. Edwards, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper*, 76.

86. Edwards, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper*, 107.

87. Edwards, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper*, 86. In his sermon "Christians Have Communion with Christ," Edwards writes, "I would exhort you to…a serious and careful and joyful attendance on the Lord's Supper." *Sermons on the Lord's Supper*, 150.

88. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:72.

89. Jon D. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 64.

90. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:540.

91. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:583.

92. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper*, 34. See Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 211.

93. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:559, emphasis in original.

94. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:559, emphasis in original.

95. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper*, 62.

96. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:593.

97. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:582, emphasis removed.

98. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:571. Cf. Galatians 3:1.

99. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper*, 75, emphasis added.

100. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper*, 96.

101. Thomas Goodwin, *The Government of the Churches of Christ*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 11:408.

102. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper*, 146.

103. John Willison, *A Sacramental Directory…to Which Are Added (by Way of Appendix) Meditations and Ejaculations Proper for Communicants Before, in Time of, and After Partaking of the Holy Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Sam. Willison and Matt. Jarvie for Alexander Donaldson, 1761), 301.

104. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper*, 100. Cf. Paul's paradoxical description of himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10).

105. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper*, 94–95.

106. Watson, *The Lord's Supper*, 60.

107. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:543.

108. Henry, *The Communicant's Companion*, 175.

109. Edmund Calamy, "The Express Renewal of Our Christian Vows," in *The Puritans on The Lord's Supper*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 39.

110. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper*, 14.

111. Henry, *The Communicant's Companion*, 44. Later Henry adds, "Ought we not to remember, and can we ever forget a friend, who though he be absent *from us*, is negotiating our affairs, and is really absent *for us*?"

112. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper*, 155.

113. Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *Works*, 2:10.

114. Henry, *The Communicant's Companion*, 61.

115. Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1:72.

116. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:68, 75.

117. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:75.

118. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:76–77.

119. Reynolds, "Meditations on the Holy Sacrament," in *Works*, 3:82.

120. Watson, *The Lord's Supper*, 73.

121. Henry, *The Communicant's Companion*, 69.

122. Meditations on self-examination include Edwards, "Persons Ought to Examine Themselves of their Fitness Before They Presume to Partake of the Lord's Supper," in *Sermons on the Lord's Supper*, 97–109; Joseph Alleine, "Self Examination," in *The Puritans on the Lord's Supper*, 85–109; and Watson, *The Lord's Supper*, 39–47.

123. Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *Works*, 2:70.
124. Willison, *A Sacramental Catechism*, in *Works*, 2:90.
125. Reynolds, “Meditations on the Holy Sacrament,” in *Works*, 3:83.
126. Reynolds, “Meditations on the Holy Sacrament,” in *Works*, 3:83.
127. Reynolds, “Meditations on the Holy Sacrament,” in *Works*, 3:84.
128. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, 139.
129. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, 153.
130. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, 154.
131. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, 156.
132. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, 175.
133. Doolittle, *A Treatise Concerning the Lord’s Supper*, 175.
134. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 57.
135. Watson, *The Lord’s Supper*, 68.
136. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:592.
137. Edwards, “The Spiritual Blessings of the Gospel Are Fitly Represented By a Feast,” in *Sermons on the Lord’s Supper,* 126.
138. Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, in *Works*, 1:490.
139. Henry, *The Communicant’s Companion*, 62–63.
140. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:522.
141. Richard Vines, “The Fruit and Benefit of Worthy Receiving,” in *The Puritans on the Lord’s Supper*, 124.
142. Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *Works*, 9:569.
143. Reynolds, “Meditations on the Holy Sacrament,” in *Works*, 3:111.
144. Reynolds, “Meditations on the Holy Sacrament,” in *Works*, 3:111.
145. Reynolds, “Meditations on the Holy Sacrament,” in *Works*, 3:112.

Chapter 47

Puritan Prayers for World Missions

> *We glorify God by laboring to draw others to God; by seeking to convert others, and so make them instruments of glorifying God.*
>
> —THOMAS WATSON[1]

Reformed, experiential Christianity birthed the pioneer missionary efforts of men such as John Eliot (1604–1690), David Brainerd (1718–1747), William Carey (1761–1834), Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), and John G. Paton (1824–1907). This mission effort was small and struggling until it exploded into the modern missionary movement begun by Carey at the end of the eighteenth century. Persecution from Roman Catholic authorities in Europe, numerous wars, the need to first evangelize homelands in Europe and North America, the deaths of missionaries by disease and martyrdom, and the slowness of the church to respond to the Great Commission all hindered the development of Reformed missions. However, from the start, Reformed and Puritan Christians fervently prayed for worldwide evangelization and revival. In some respects, the Great Awakening and today's missionary movement may be regarded as an answer to centuries of persevering prayer.

John Calvin wrote with regard to prayer, "We must daily desire that God gather churches unto himself from all parts of the earth; that he spread and increase them in number; that he adorn them with gifts; that he establish a lawful order among them; on the other hand, that he cast down all enemies of pure teaching and religion; that he scatter their counsels and crush their efforts."[2] Calvin saw prayer as a weapon of missionary effort for the sake of lost souls and the glory of God on earth.

This mission perspective in prayer continued in the Puritans, the heirs of Calvin's theology. Walter Smith, a Scottish martyr (d. 1681), wrote some guidelines for prayer meetings in southwest Scotland two years before his death. Among them, he wrote:

> As it is the undoubted duty of all to pray for the coming of Christ's kingdom, so all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and know what it is to bow a knee in good earnest, will long and pray for the out-making of the gospel promises to his Church in the latter days, that King Christ would go out upon the white horse of the gospel, conquering and to conquer…. That the Lord's written and preached word [may be sent] with power, to enlighten the poor pagan world, living in black perishing darkness without Christ and the knowledge of his name.3

What motivated the Reformed and the Puritans to pray for the world? What guided their prayers for missions? To answer these questions, we turn to the writings of Calvin and the Puritan leaders of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

The Puritan Motivation for Missionary Prayer Both the Reformation and Puritanism sought to strip away human ideas accumulated in the church over centuries and restore the divine Word to its authoritative place, directing and energizing God's people. Since the Bible is a missionary book written by the God who sent His Son into the world to save sinners, it provided the Puritans with compelling reasons to pray for the lost world.

The Destiny of the Human Soul Christians of all times have been deeply affected by Christ's words in Matthew 16:26, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" John Flavel (1628–1691) observed that the human soul was specially created by God and thus has intrinsic worth and excellence, including the capacity for divine grace and glory. God prepared a place in heaven for souls that He purchased with the blood of His own Son. The actions of the soul have eternity stamped upon them, for every obedient action is a seed of joy and every sinful action a seed of sorrow.4 Flavel said, "The soul of man is the prize about which heaven and hell contend: the great design of heaven is to save it, and all the plots of hell to ruin it."5 But though the soul is so precious, it may be lost forever in hell.6

The value of a human soul remains the same, regardless of one's nationality or social status. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) noted of Christ's preaching in Matthew 9:35–38, "He visited not only the great and wealthy cities, but the poor, obscure villages; there he preached, there he healed. The souls of those that are meanest [least] in this world are as precious to Christ, and should be to us, as the souls of those that make the greatest figure…. Jesus Christ is a very compassionate friend to precious souls."7 Such considerations led the Puritans to

value the souls of all their fellow human beings and to pray for the extension of gospel preaching to the entire world.

The Efficiency of the Holy Spirit The Reformation rediscovered the work of the Holy Spirit as opposed to that of human religious activity, such as the priestly administration of the rites of the church. Zechariah 4:6 says God's temple will be built "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts." Calvin said, "We ought to be so dependent on God alone, as to be fully persuaded that his grace is sufficient for us."[8] This belief led men and women to rely upon God in prayer and to resist their innate tendency to rely upon human ability. John Howe (1630–1705) wrote, "There is as great an aptness to trust in other means and let out our hearts to them. An arm of flesh signifies a great deal, when the power of an almighty Spirit is reckoned as nothing. And persons are apt to be very contriving, and prone to forecast, how such and such external forms would do our business and make the church and the Christian interest hugely prosperous."[9]

Scripture and experience awakened the Reformers and Puritans to the reality of large-scale outpourings of the Holy Spirit for the conversion of many sinners, lifting up the church to new degrees of holiness. John Knox (c. 1505–1572) wrote of a remarkable work of God in Scotland in 1559, saying, "God did so multiply our number that it appeared as if men had rained from the clouds."[10] The Holy Spirit can do great things, far beyond our limited aspirations.

Confidence in the promises of God and the power of the Holy Spirit should thus lead us, in the words of Howe, "to wait patiently and pray earnestly" for a worldwide spiritual harvest. We can be sure as well that "he will give his Spirit to them that ask him."[11]

The Instrumentality of the Gospel Like Calvin, the Puritans taught the doctrine of sovereign or unconditional election: that God has chosen certain individuals and ordained them to eternal life, to glorify His grace in their salvation (Eph. 1:4–6). At the same time, they said that God brings His elect to faith and salvation through the preaching of the gospel (Eph. 1:13). Therefore, the Puritans labored to spread the gospel.[12] They trained and sent out gospel preachers and prayed for the propagation of the gospel in the lost world.

William Perkins (1558–1602), a patriarch of English Puritanism, said a fundamental principle of Christianity is that Christ and His benefits must be applied to the soul by faith, and faith comes only by the hearing of the Word.[13] The gospel is "the instrument, and, as it were, the conduit pipe of the Holy Ghost, to fashion and derive faith into the soul: by which faith, they which

believe, do, as with a hand, apprehend Christ's righteousness."[14] Perkins taught people to pray for God to send gospel preachers into the world. He wrote in his exposition of the Lord's Prayer, "When we shall see a people without knowledge, and without good guides & teachers, or when we see one stand up in the congregation not able to teach, here is matter for mourning…. It is time to say, *Lord, let thy kingdom come*." Perkins said Christians must pray for gospel ministers and "pray that their hearts may be set for the building of God's kingdom, for the beating down of the kingdom of sin and Satan, and for the saving of the souls of his people."[15]

Christ has given His church the commission to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20). So Henry wrote, "Salvation by Christ should be offered to all, and none excluded that did not by their unbelief and impenitence exclude themselves."[16] In light of Christ's compassion and command to pray for laborers (Matt. 9:35–38), Henry said, "All that love Christ and souls, should show it in their earnest prayers to God…that he would send forth more skillful, faithful, wise, and industrious labourers into his harvest; that he would raise up such as he would own in the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints; would give them a spirit for the work, call them to it, and succeed them in it."[17] God's appointment and use of this great means of grace for the salvation of men encourages us to pray for the calling, training, and sending forth of men who will preach the gospel to the very ends of the earth.

The Victory of Our Lord Jesus Christ Missionary work finds its foundation in Christ's mediatorial triumph over sin, death, and the world. Nonetheless, massive obstacles stand in the way of mission endeavors, such as distance; expense; language; culture; the sinful hostility and hardened hearts of fallen human beings; the sins and infirmities of Christians; coldness of heart, strife, and error in the church; and the wide-ranging opposition and destructive activity of Satan. Missionary work and missionary prayer must be fueled by confidence in the power of Christ enthroned as Head of the church and Lord of all to overcome these obstacles.

Though the government in Calvin's homeland of France harshly suppressed evangelical preaching, Calvin wrote to the king: "Indeed, we are quite aware of what…lowly little men we are…. But our doctrine must tower unvanquished above all the glory and above all the might of the world, for it is not of us, but of the living God and his Christ whom the Father has appointed to 'rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth' [Ps. 72:8]."[18]

As Calvin's successors, the Puritans prayed earnestly from a biblical vision of the sovereign Christ whose kingdom must fill the earth (Ps. 72; Dan. 2:34–35,

44).19 Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) wrote *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time* (1748). In this book, he called for regular prayer meetings for revival and world evangelization. The motivation for this prayer, he explained, was that "it is natural and reasonable to suppose, that the whole world should finally be given to Christ, as one whose right it is to reign, as the proper heir of him who is originally the King of all nations, and the possessor of heaven and earth." God the Father has made His Son the mediator of His kingdom and heir of all the nations (Ps. 2:6–8; Heb. 1:2; 2:8).20

In *An Humble Attempt*, Edwards argued for the great advance of the kingdom of God on earth. He cited as evidence the promises that all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), all nations would serve the Messiah (Ps. 72:11, 17), all nations would come to the Lord (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 3:17), true religion would prevail throughout the world (Pss. 22:27; 65:5, 8; 67:7; 98:3; 113:3; Isa. 11:9; 54:1, 2, 5; Mal. 1:11), idols and idolatrous nations would perish from the earth (Isa. 60:12; Jer. 10:11, 15), and the full number of Jews and Gentiles would be saved (Rom. 11:12, 25).21 In typical Puritan fashion, Edwards urged believers to turn these promises into prayers, calling upon the Lord to extend the kingdom of His Son. Christ's victorious position at God's right hand should move us to pray for God to establish Christ's royal dominion ("the rod of thy strength") in the very midst of His enemies (Ps. 110).

The Glory of the Living God The very marrow of the Puritan movement was its God-centeredness. The Puritans were enamored with the sovereign God and overwhelmed with His majestic beauty.22 They composed the famous words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism's first answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) wrote, "Glory is the sparkling of the Deity."23 He said glorifying God consists of the following:

> • Appreciation. To glorify God is to set God highest in our thoughts…. There is in God all that may draw forth both wonder and delight; there is a constellation of all beauties…. We glorify God, when we are God-admirers.
>
> • Glorifying God consists in adoration, or worship…. Divine worship must be such as God himself has appointed, else it is offering strange fire (Lev. 10:1).
>
> • Affection…. It is intense and ardent. True saints are…burning in holy love

to God.

• Subjection. This is when we dedicate ourselves to God, and stand ready dressed for his service.[24]

Watson went on to say, "We glorify God by laboring to draw others to God; by seeking to convert others, and so make them instruments of glorifying God."[25] The Great Commission is a further expression of the Great Commandment, for missions must be driven by love of God and longing for His name to be glorified by all nations in the earth.

Experiencing God's overflowing glory causes one's heart to overflow in prayers for others. David Brainerd, missionary to Native Americans, wrote in his journal, "I saw that God is the only soul-satisfying portion, and I really found satisfaction in him: My soul was much enlarged in sweet intercession for my fellow men everywhere, and for many Christian friends in particular, in distant places."[26] Brainerd suffered from depression and severe hardships in his work. He died in his twenties after a long bout with tuberculosis. In all of that difficulty, he was sustained in missionary labor by his love for the glory of God. He wrote, "I felt my soul rejoice, that God is unchangeably happy and glorious; and that he will be glorified, whatever becomes of his creatures."[27] By the end of 1646, Brainerd's illness was so severe that he could do little more than pray. But he had seen God work among the Native Americans he served, and he testified:

> Prayer was now wholly turned into praise; and I could do little else but try to adore and bless the living God: The wonders of his grace displayed in gathering to himself a church among the poor Indians here were the subject matter of my meditation and the occasion of exciting my soul to praise and bless his Name…. I could only rejoice that God had done the work himself; and that none in heaven or earth might pretend to share the honor of it with him; I could only be glad that God's declarative glory was advanced by the conversion of these souls, and that it was to the enlargement of his kingdom in the world…. Oh, that he might be adored and praised by all his intelligent creatures to the utmost of their powers and capacities.[28]

This vision for the glory of God in all nations also propelled William Carey to "expect great things from God and attempt great things for God." The rising flame of prayer for world missions thus bursts forth from burning coals in a heart in love with God. The essence of all true missionary prayer is found in Christ's words, "Hallowed be thy name!"

The Puritan Method of Missionary Praying In all their ways, the Puritans

were orderly, that is, they governed their lives by principles. This was so even in their prayers for the spread of the gospel in the world. While the Puritans tended to resist prescribed forms and relied on the Holy Spirit's help for prayer, they also embraced methods of promoting and guiding such prayer.

A Passionate Missionary Tradition: The Westminster Standards The first Puritan method was to build missionary prayer into the public worship of the local church. The Westminster Assembly, famous for its Confession of Faith and two catechisms, also produced the Directory forS the Public Worship of God (1644). The Directory instructed that the minister, prior to delivering his sermon, was to lead the people in prayer to confess sins and to pray for grace through Christ Jesus. He was also instructed

> to pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations, for the conversion of the Jews, the fullness of the Gentiles, the fall of Antichrist [the Roman Catholic papacy], and the hastening of the coming of our Lord; for the deliverance of the distressed churches abroad, from the tyranny of the Antichristian faction, and from the cruel oppositions and blasphemies of the Turk [the Muslim power]; for the blessing of God upon all the Reformed churches, especially upon the Churches and Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland…and for our plantations [colonies] in the remote parts of the world.29

The Puritans were thus concerned that public worship regularly include prayer for the cause of Christ throughout the world, including world missions and the relief of the persecuted church suffering in Europe under Roman Catholicism and in the Middle East under Islam. Similarly, the Westminster Larger Catechism (1647) in its exposition of the Lord's Prayer (Q. 191), said, "In the second petition (which is, *Thy kingdom come*,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan; we pray, that the kingdom of sin, and Satan, may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in."30 The Westminster Standards shaped the piety of generations of international Reformed Christians, leading many into intercession for the world.

Thomas Boston (1676–1732) preached a series of sermons on the Westminster Shorter Catechism. In his sermon on "Thy kingdom come," Boston echoed the language of the *Directory* and the Larger Catechism. He said this petition in the Lord's Prayer teaches us that the duty and disposition of God's children is to desire His kingdom to come in, destroying the power of sin and Satan over men's hearts. "Every saint prays it down," he wrote. He said we are to pray for

"the conversion of sinners to God, 2 Thess. 3:1, 'Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified.' Converts are the church's children, for which she travails in birth, in her ministers and members, as naturally longing for the conversion of souls, as a travailing woman to see the fruit of her womb." This petition also requires us to pray for God to overcome Satan's opposition to the preaching and power of the gospel "and make the gospel triumph over them all." Likewise, Boston said, God's children must desire and pray for "the propagation of the gospel through the world, that it may be carried through all nations…that Christ may be King in all the earth."[31]

This pattern of praying was not merely a public formality, for it engraved itself upon the hearts of the people. The last words of English housewife Elizabeth Heywood (d. 1661) were a prayer "for the church of God, that the Jews might be converted, and that the gospel might be preached to the remainder of the Gentile nations."[32] May God make prayer for the nations so integral to our church's worship that it will even be included among our own last wishes.

A Divine Missionary Book: The Holy Scriptures The second Puritan method for praying for world missions was teaching people to pray the Scriptures. Matthew Henry wrote *Method for Prayer* (1710), which followed the Westminster Standards in providing prayers for "the lost world," specifically for the spread of the gospel to foreign nations, the growth of the church by many conversions, the salvation of the Jews, the relief of the Eastern churches from Islamic oppression, and the blessing of the churches in English colonies such as America.[33]

The key to Henry's method was putting the words of Scriptures into the mouths of God's people. Henry wove together the words of the Bible to impress upon the hearts of Christians in prayers such as these:

> Let the people praise thee, O God, yea, let all the people praise thee.
>
> O let thy salvation and thy righteousness be openly showed in the sight of the heathen, and let all the ends of the earth see the salvation of our God.
>
> O give thy Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; for thou hast said, It is a light thing for him to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, but thou wilt give him for a light to the Gentiles.
>
> Let all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ.
>
> O let the gospel be preached unto every creature; for how shall men believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without preachers? And how shall they preach except they be sent? And who shall

send forth labourers, but the Lord of the harvest?

O let the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.[34]

As these selections indicate, the Psalms contain many expressions of God's dominion over all the earth and the future reign of the anointed King over the nations. According to the design of the Holy Spirit, the Psalter is a missionary hymnal and prayer book. The Puritans loved the Psalms and sang from the Psalter every day.

The call of the gospel sounds forth in the version of Psalm 2 that appeared in the Psalter of Sternhold and Hopkins (1560), used in Britain and North America for many generations:

Now ye O Kings and Rulers all,
be Wise therefore and Learn'd:
By whom the matters of the World
be Judged and discern'd.
See that ye serve the Lord above,
in trembling and in fear:
See that with reverence ye rejoice,
to him in like manner.

See that ye kiss and eke [also] embrace,
his blessed Son, I say:
Lest in his wrath ye suddenly,
perish in the mid way.
If once his wrath never so small,
shall kindle in his breast:
Oh then all they that trust in Christ,
shall happy be and blest.[35]

New England's *Bay Psalm Book* (1640) celebrates the triumph of the gospel over all the earth in this version of Psalm 96:

Sing to the Lord a new song: sing
all the earth the Lord unto:
Sing to Jehovah, bless his name,
still his salvation show.
To the heathen his glory, to all
people his wonders spread.
For great is the Lord, much to be praised,
above all gods in dread….
Ye kindreds of the people all

unto the Lord afford
Glory and mightiness also
give ye unto the Lord.[36]

Likewise, the Scottish Psalter of 1650 foresees a world redeemed by Christ, renewed by the preaching of the gospel, and rejoicing in God in its famous version of Psalm 100:

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell,
Come ye before Him and rejoice.[37]

The Puritans believed that the greatest means the Lord uses to teach His people to pray for the world is the Word of God. Still today, if we want people to be faithful in praying for the spread of the gospel throughout the world, we should fill our worship services with the words of *the* missionary book. Colossians 3:16 says, "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." The practice of singing the Psalms in public and family worship would help turn the church's inward focus outward to a world that desperately needs to worship the true God.[38]

Conclusion: "Walk Over the Vast Ocean"

William Gurnall (1616–1679) asked, "Is there none, O man, that needs the mercy of God besides thyself?" In contemporary language, is there no one else that you want to be saved besides yourself? God gives us permission for our love to begin at home. So pray for your family. After that, consider what is happening in your neighborhood. Then pray for your community. Go on to pray for your nation, but do not stop there. As Gurnall said,

> Let thy prayers walk over the vast ocean…. Visit the churches of Christ abroad; yea, the poor Indians and other ruins of mankind that lie where Adam's sin threw them with us, without any attempt made as yet upon them by the gospel for their recovery, and carry their deplored condition before the Lord. Our Drake is famous for compassing the earth with his ship in a few years; thou mayest by thy prayers every day, and make a more gainful voyage of it too than he did.[39]

1. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: A. Fullerton, 1845), 15.

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.20.42.

3. Quoted in Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 101–2.

4. John Flavel, *Pneumatologia: A Treatise on the Soul of Man*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 3:153–61.

5. Flavel, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:161.

6. Flavel, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:180–81.

7. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 5:104.

8. Calvin, *Commentaries*, 15:110.

9. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 243.

10. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 5.

11. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 254–55.

12. Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2004), 54–72, 143–69.

13. William Perkins, *The Foundation of Religion, Gathered into Sixe Principles*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612), 1:2.

14. William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine: or, The Description of Theologie, Containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation, according to Gods Word*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612), 1:70.

15. William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Lords Prayer*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612), 1:336, 339. These pages are consecutive in the book; the latter should read 337.

16. Henry, *Commentaries*, 5:361–62.

17. Henry, *Commentaries*, 5:105.

18. Calvin, *Institutes*, 12 (prefatory address to King Francis).

19. The subject of Iain Murray's *The Puritan Hope* is this vision and the eschatology connected with it.

20. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 5, *Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977), 330.

21. Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings*, in *Works*, 5:329–34.

22. Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 2008), 39–42.

23. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 6.

24. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 7–8.

25. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 16.

26. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 7, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), 177. See Tom Wells, *A Vision for Missions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 121–29.

27. Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, in *Works*, 7:275–76.

28. Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, in *Works*, 7:404.

29. [Westminster Divines], "A Directory for Publique Prayer, Reading the Holy Scriptures, Singing of Psalmes, Preaching of the Word, Administration of the Sacraments, and other parts of the Publique Worship of God, Ordinary and Extraordinary," in *The Westminster Standards: An Original Facsimile* (1648; repr., Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths Publications, 1997), 10.

30. [Westminster Divines], "The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines…Concerning a Larger Catechism," in "A Directory for Publique Prayer," 62.

31. Thomas Boston, "The Third Petition," in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (1853; repr., Stoke-on-Trent, England: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 2:578–80.

32. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 99.

33. Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:48–49.

34. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:48–49.

35. *The Booke of Psalms, Collected into English Meeter, by Thomas Sternhold, Iohn Hopkins, and Others: Conferred with the Hebrew, with Apt Notes to Sing Them Withal* (London: for the Company of Stationers, 1628; repr., Columbus, Ohio: Lazarus Ministry Press, 1998).

36. *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640; repr., Bedford: Applewood, 2002), 185–86.

37. *The Psalms of David in Metre, According to the Version Approved by the Church of Scotland, and Appointed to Be Used in Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.).

38. For a modern edition of the Psalms for church worship, see *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999). On the historic practice of psalm singing, which has largely fallen out of favor in the contemporary church, see Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio, *Sing a New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

39. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour.*… (1662–1665; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 2:524–25. Francis Drake (1540–1596) was an English sea captain who circled the earth from 1577 to 1580.

ESCHATOLOGY

Chapter 48

"The City on a Hill": The American Puritans' Optimistic View of the End Times

> *For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill; the eyes of all the people are upon us.*
>
> —JOHN WINTHROP[1]

Despite the unrest of the seventeenth century, the English Puritans maintained an optimistic eschatology, or view of the end times. The trials and persecutions of their day did not make them despair but gave them constant hope of better days for the Reformed church. This optimism was most visible in the Puritans' massive migrations to the New World. Thomas Tillman's short poem "Upon the First Sight of New England" lauds the hope of this move to a new land. God encourages the emigrants, saying:

> Possess this Country; free from all anoye,
> Here I'll be with you, here you shall enjoy,
> My sabbaths, sacraments, my ministry
> And ordinances in their purity.[2]

The Puritans believed reformation was an ecclesiastical matter that also had far-reaching implications for the civil realm. J. I. Packer says they inherited the medieval vision of a Christian society: "Their vision of reality was not fragmented; they did not need to argue the point that Christian concern may not be limited to church order or to the welfare of individuals, but must embrace both together, along with the politics, economics, and culture of nations."[3] Their unwavering hope was that New England could be what England was not—a place to cultivate a uniquely Christian society, which they called "a city upon a hill." This hope fueled their eschatological expectations; the Puritans did not conceive of the end times only in abstract theological terms but saw themselves moving through history toward its final consummation. Let us examine the Puritan optimism for the New World, grounding it in their view of history and Scripture, and showing how it affected the daily life of the American Puritans.

Challenges in Puritan Eschatology The study of Puritan eschatology has some challenges that we should explain at the outset. First is the problem of Puritan historical research, which only recently has produced a number of serious studies that have re-examined the Puritan apocalyptic tradition.[4] Second is our tendency to impose twentieth-and twenty-first-century eschatological categories of a-, pre-, or postmillennialism on Puritan eschatology, which had no such categories. Crawford Gribben persuasively argues that Puritan theology can "defy and transcend the contemporary concepts."[5] Third, the seventeenth century was a time of "eschatological explosion."[6] Since the specific views developed during this time varied among Puritans,[7] we should avoid the temptation of simplistic thinking in defining the development of "last time" outlooks.

While seventeenth-century Puritans had differing views on eschatology, they were united in recasting Augustinian eschatology. Augustine maintained that the millennial reign of Christ was inaugurated at Christ's resurrection and that the millennial period of Revelation 20 extends from the resurrection until the end of the world.[8] Martin Luther largely followed Augustine but introduced a shift in millennial thinking by embracing a historicist approach to interpreting Revelation. Calvinists soon followed his lead and continued to modify the Augustinian historicist approach by developing an eschatological optimism, which proposed a future day of glory in which the Protestant gospel would triumph.[9] This approach to interpreting unfulfilled prophecy was a unifying factor among the Puritans. Undoubtedly, disagreement arose over specific fulfillments and dates, but generally speaking, the Puritans interpreted prophecy via a historicist hermeneutic.[10]

A Historicist Hermeneutic This historicist hermeneutic was not meant to be vain speculation or incongruent with the Reformation principle *sola Scriptura*. In defending his father's cause in the preface to *An Exposition of the Revelation*, the son of Thomas Goodwin said, "And as his assertions herein are no other than according to those measures the word of God has prescribed, he has fetched his proofs from the same magazine…. Nay, he asserts nothing but what divine authority in Scripture does countenance."[11] The Puritans sincerely believed that "the Reformation was a mighty act of God which must surely triumph because of its divine origin."[12] In the midst of great political and ecclesiastical upheavals, they saw themselves living in the last days, as Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) contends: "We are fallen into the latter end of the world."[13] Geoffrey Nuttall rightly concludes, "Many Puritans believed themselves to be living in a remarkable age, a new age, perhaps the last age."[14]

The Puritans, therefore, interpreted the signs of the times and the unfulfilled

prophecies of the Old and New Testaments (particularly Daniel and Revelation) within their own historical context. For them, Scripture was referring to the times in which they lived. While the Puritans were largely cessationists, believing that special revelation ceased after the New Testament, they did not preclude the idea of mediate prophecy and at times would make predictions about future events as fulfillments of scriptural prophecy. Mediate prophecy is not the revelation of new truth from God but the Spirit-enabled interpretation of biblical prophecies and application of those prophecies to unfolding history. Garnet Milne suggests, "It is a belief in mediate prophecy, in which Scripture plays the central role, which explains why the cessation of immediate prophecy was not seen to nullify the availability of insight into the future for those who lived by the written Word of God."[15] The Puritans maintained that Scripture was given to the church for learning and instruction (Rom. 15:4). Thus, in discerning Scripture, we can discern the providence of God, for "God's word… is our *line*, able to reach unto all particular affairs of the churches."[16] Thomas Manton (1620–1677) summarizes this, saying, "Yet now in the times of the gospel, he does not altogether fail his people; for though they can have no certain knowledge of future contingencies, yet he begets some strong instinct in the mind of his children, puts it into their hearts to avoid this and avoid that: we have no infallibility of the event, yet we may discern much of the providence of God."[17]

For Puritans, the cessation of special revelation does not imply that God left His church without a seasoned word for the present hour. Rather, by working through the Word, believers find all they need to make fallible predictions about their own times.

The Socio-Political Atmosphere in England Since the American Puritans cannot be understood properly without considering the historical milieu of England, we should briefly consider the socio-political atmosphere of Puritan England. Political life in seventeenth-century England was full of unrest. The church was in the midst of a great upheaval and reformation, but so was the monarchy in its vacillation between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. To the watching world, Protestantism took a severe blow in 1553 when Mary I (1516–1558) became queen of England. She had an intense hatred for Protestantism and sought to replace it with the Roman Catholic faith. Hundreds of Protestants, later called the Marian exiles, fled to the Continent to escape her reign of terror. While in exile, the British divines came into contact with some of the leading Continental theologians, especially in Geneva.[18]

For many, this exile mirrored Daniel's exile in Babylon and John's on the Isle

of Patmos. Gribben says, “Apocalyptic interest had always seemed to thrive when the godly were both persecuted and geographically estranged.”19 The homes in exile became laboratories in which the Puritans began to modify classical Augustinian eschatology. Gribben says, “History would be rewritten as a polemical exposition of Revelation, and the imminent climax of all ages would be postponed to allow for an increasingly optimistic eschatology.”20

After the death of Mary I in 1558 and the accession of Elizabeth (1533–1603) to the throne, Protestantism was restored. The Marian exiles returned to England in 1559 with their newly formed eschatology and apocalyptic hopes. Under a Protestant queen, many of the exiles sought further Reformation by advocating the termination of all popish practices. However, Elizabeth was eager to maintain some unity in the church. She tried to control ecclesiastical unrest by publishing acts of conformity and uniformity. Under the Act of Supremacy, the queen declared herself governor of the established church, and her Act of Uniformity made the Book of Common Prayer mandatory in all public services. Refusal could result in monetary fines or imprisonment.21 That was far from what the exiles had hoped for; in their view, these new requirements catered to the errors of Rome.22

Under Elizabeth’s reign, these acts were not rigidly enforced. However, as time progressed, an increasing number of nonconforming Puritans who refused to follow the so-called popish practices of the acts were punished. James I (1566–1625), who succeeded Elizabeth in 1603, decided to continue her policies, and his son, Charles I (1600–1649), along with Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645), implemented numerous anti-Puritan policies. As their homeland grew increasingly hostile to the Puritans, their hopes that England would be filled with glory diminished as they tired of “fighting valiantly, but unsuccessfully.” They turned their eyes toward America, seeking to find new hope there.23

Apocalyptic thought was augmented in the political upheavals and the English civil war in the 1640s. The monarchy was abolished, and the Commonwealth of England established, with Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) as the Lord Protector. Cromwell was not hostile to Puritan sympathies; his protectorate was known for toleration.24 This dramatic turn of events sparked a frenzy of millennial views that spread quickly. Gribben writes: “Events in the early years of that decade were identified by many as those which would give birth to the millennium.”25

Influential Millennial Writers In the background of this socio-political chaos was a flurry of writing on the apocalypse in literature, poetry, songs, and homiletics,26 much of it millenarian in nature, meaning that the vision in

Revelation 20 of the thousand-year period "in which Satan is bound and the saints reign is a prophecy which will be fulfilled literally, on earth, and in the future," as Howard Hotson wrote.[27]

Thomas Brightman (1562–1607), a Puritan preacher and commentator who purportedly read through his Greek New Testament every two weeks for many years,[28] made a substantial contribution to the first "important and influential English revision of the Reformed, Augustinian concept of the millennium"[29] in *A Revelation of the Revelation*. In this work, Brightman advocated that the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3 portrayed seven periods of church history, running from the apostolic time to the last days. The book itself, Brightman taught, followed the unfolding of church history in a chronological way, culminating in chapters 20–22, which embraced the optimistic conviction of a latter-day glory when the world would be "filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."[30] Brightman interpreted the first resurrection of Revelation 20 figuratively to be the Reformation's revival of biblical preaching and sound theology.[31] The millennium was the time between 1300 and 2300, during which period the Reformation would crush the enemies of the church, particularly the papacy, and the conversion of the Jews would brighten the world.

Joseph Mede (1586–1638), a Hebraist scholar known for his works on biblical eschatology, was a professor at Christ College, Cambridge, who often wrote like a Puritan but showed Church of England sympathies on such critical issues as the Lord's Supper and church government.[32] In his *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627), which was translated into English posthumously by Richard More and published by the authority of The Long Parliament as *The Key of Revelation* (1643), Mede only partially followed in Brightman's footsteps. He certainly upheld Brightman's eschatological optimism. The millennium would be a time of victory for the church over Satan, he said: "During this period the church would enjoy a happy peace and security from the persecution and sufferings of former times."[33] But Mede disagreed with the timing of Brightman's millennium; rather reluctantly, Mede came to the position that the millennium was wholly futuristic. As Davidson notes, "Accordingly Mede presented a series of seven key synchronisms which helped to make sense out of the Revelation."[34] In espousing synchronistic prophecies, Mede also embraced some tendencies toward what would later be called premillennialism. Toon even refers to Mede as the possible father of premillennialism.[35] Regardless, the frequently republished *Key of Revelation*, writes Bryan Ball, "enjoyed the almost universal praise of contemporaries in England and on the continent and deeply influenced the development of eschatological thought in seventeenth-century England."[36]

Brightman and Mede had a profound effect on later millennial thinking.[37] Apocalyptic writings became popular among the English Puritans. William Perkins (1558–1602), William Twisse (1578–1646), Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), William Gouge (1575–1653), Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), James Ussher (1581–1656), and Johannes Piscator (1546–1625) wrote various works about millennial expectations.[38] Chief among their expectations were three dominant themes. The first was that the pope was the Antichrist, and thus Revelation predicated the eventual collapse of the Roman Catholic Church.[39] Gribben notes that Ussher's identification of the pope as the Antichrist was axiomatic for nearly all the Puritans.[40] Based on their historicist readings of Daniel and Revelation, they believed that the papacy, which they considered an embodiment of satanic power, would soon collapse.

The second theme was the expected conversion of the Jews. This theme became foundational for Puritan eschatology, though the Puritans themselves treated it in a variety of ways.[41] Iain Murray summarizes four different views among the Puritans: (1) a majority view into the mid-seventeenth century that the conversion of the Jews would transpire "close to the end of the world"; (2) a minority view that believed that the future conversion of Israel would result in a glorious time of spiritual prosperity in the church but "opposed the idea of a millennium to be introduced by Christ's appearing and a resurrection of saints"; (3) a smaller and short-lived minority view that advocated a general conversion of the nations, followed by "a premillennial appearing of Christ, when Israel would be converted and Christ's kingdom established in the earth for at least a thousand years before the day of judgment"; and (4) only a few who, like the Reformers, rejected a future conversion of the Jews and denied any kind of a coming "golden age."[42]

The third theme, and most pertinent to our study, is the latter-day glory of the church and the New Jerusalem. A number of the Puritans moved beyond simply believing in the conversion of large numbers of Jews. Toon notes that Brightman, Gouge, John Owen (1616–1683), and James Durham (c. 1622–1658) "connected the conversion and restoration of the ancient people of God with a period of latter-day glory for the world." In turn, "the millenarians (e.g. Mede, Twisse, Goodwin, and Holmes) expected that the return of the Jews to the true Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and to the land promised to Abraham by God, would usher in the millennium, or, at least, be one of the first things accomplished in the millennium. Inspired by the gentle Mede, these men looked for the appearance of Christ to resurrect the martyrs and inaugurate the reign of the saints on earth." Toon concludes that that is why "the millenarians looked for at least two appearances of Christ, one at the beginning of, and one at the close of,

the millennium."[43]

With all these views of the end times swirling around, most of which were historicist in nature, one can easily understand how the Puritans identified New England, with all its promise, as the very mission of God. For the New England Puritans as well as many English Puritans who never emigrated, the New World was truly "a city on a hill," called to be God's light to the nations.

The Divine Mission in New England The unrest of the seventeenth century and the transition from strict Augustinian eschatology to a more optimistic view bloomed into great hopes and expectations for the New World. In the days of early emigration, New England was noted as a present-day "promised land." Thomas Morton (1575–1646), a Church of England minister and founder of Quincy, Massachusetts (later known as Merrymount), said of New England: "I will now discover…a country whose endowments are by learned men allowed to stand in a parallel with the Israelites' Canaan, which none will deny to be a land far more excellent than Old England, in her proper nature."[44]

Similar convictions and hopes about America abound in Puritan literature coming out of England. For example, William Twisse wrote to Joseph Mede that America could be the New Jerusalem.[45] John White (1575–1648), a Puritan minister in Dorchester (England) who was instrumental in obtaining charters for the New England Company and the Massachusetts Bay Company but never sailed to America himself, "proposed that God had chosen the English to settle New England and prosper there as a counterweight to Antichrist's empire created by Spain elsewhere in the Americas."[46]

The important point to realize is that the Puritans did not view eschatology as mere theological speculation. Rather, they saw themselves as participants in events that would lead to full eschatological realization. Emigration to America was a major event that they believed was led by the providence of God. They viewed their move to the new land as a divine mission rather than mere human work. That conviction is clear in Edward Johnson's (1598–1672) statements: "Oh yes! oh yes! oh yes! All you the people of Christ that are here Oppressed, Imprisoned and scurrilously derided, gather yourselves together, your Wives and little ones, and answer to your several Names as you shall be shipped for his service, in the Western World…where you are to attend the service of the King of Kings."[47]

Because the Puritans saw themselves on a divine mission, certain obligations followed. In 1630, John Cotton (1585–1652)—the most famous New England preacher who fully embraced an optimistic Puritan eschatology—preached a sermon in Boston, England, titled *God's Promise to His Plantation*.[48] Based on

2 Samuel 7:10, the sermon offered listeners a vision of what God expected and what He promised, or, as William Barker has noted, "a vision intended to define the New World to which the emigrants were going."[49] Specifically, Cotton urged his congregation to discern whether God was calling them to "build a house" in America. Second, he noted what it means for God to plant a people and what role this people will have. He ends with exhorting "all that are planted at home, or intended to plant abroad, to look well to your plantation."[50] De Jong notes, "The settlers were obviously 'Israel,' the 'seeds' that would serve the Lord. Their faithfulness would be a witness to all the nations of the world, which in the future would acknowledge the God of New England."[51] Cotton laid this moving hope before the emigrants.

Cotton was also instrumental in developing other optimistic Puritan eschatological themes, particularly in three published books: *An Exposition upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation; The Powring Out of the Seven Vials*, a commentary on Revelation 16; and *The Churches Resurrection*, a sermon on the millennial promise of Revelation 20. James F. Maclear writes: "The first two works identify the final stages of terrestrial history and place the contemporary scene within them; the last is Cotton's anxious welcome to the dawning glory. Significantly, all were composed in the critical years between 1639 and 1641 when the Puritan mood in England lifted from despair to soaring optimism. Cotton's general system as revealed by these works was consistent with the Independents' development of Brightman's ideas and was paralleled in the famous millennial sermons that Goodwin was contemporaneously delivering in Holland."[52]

In his book on Revelation 13, Cotton argued that the first beast (vv. 1–9) was the Roman Catholic Church and the second beast (vv. 11–18), the papacy itself.[53] God would pour the seven vials of His wrath upon "papal Rome," Cotton taught, until it was stripped of its power by true ministers of the gospel who are promoting and will promote pure preaching and pure Christianity in its place.[54] For Cotton, Revelation 20:4–5 refers "to the condition of the godly on earth who live after the extinction of papal power and influence in politics and religion."[55] The preaching of true ministers will then be so effectual by divine grace that New England, and indeed, even the world, will become free of satanic influence, for Satan will be bound for a thousand years.[56]

Parting ways with Brightman, Cotton thought there would only be one future millennium. He told his congregation that the millennium would probably begin in the next decade ("about the time 1655"). It would emerge from faithful preaching rather than from Christ's physical presence and would result in a prolonged and remarkable revival that would usher in a large conversion of the

Jews and establish Christ's kingdom in both state and church through the unchallenged worldwide rule of believers. After a thousand years, Satan would be released briefly, Roman Catholicism would be revived, wicked men would prevail, and persecution of the saints would run rampant.[57]

The theme of New England as God's mission was more fully developed by John Winthrop (1588–1649) in a sermon titled "A Model of Christian Charity."[58] Winthrop preached this sermon in 1630, aboard the ship *Arbella*, on his way to New England with other Puritans who responded to Cotton's call. In the sermon, Winthrop emphasizes the need for the community to yield obedience to God in the building of this new house, for there are spiritual responsibilities. He ends the sermon with the lines:

> When we shall keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us as his own people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when he shall make us a praise and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantations: the Lord make it like that of New England. *For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill; the eyes of all the people are upon us*, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and by-word through the world; we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God.[59]

Citing Christ's words in Matthew 5:14, Winthrop and his fellow settlers of Massachusetts Bay Colony believed they were establishing a city upon a hill before a watching world.

The New World gave the Puritans a chance to do in New England what could not be done in England. Their new settlement was not simply about starting over or gaining individual religious freedom; it was about fulfilling God's design for His corporate people in both the ecclesiastical and civil realms. The settlers of New England believed that through their emigration and settlement they, with the Holy Spirit's blessing, would bring their eschatological hopes to reality. When New England was established as a "city on a hill," the rest of the world, including Old England, would repent of its ways and follow the example of New England by instituting necessary reforms. De Jong writes, "The New England Puritans hoped to found a city on a hill, a light shining in the darkness, which would call England and their mother church back to true reformation. The

fulfillment of this mission by God's faithful, covenant people would serve as the basis for the full realization of the kingdom of God in America."[60]

Persevering in Eschatological Hope Despite Disappointment Not surprisingly, New England did not live up to this vision and eschatological optimism. Within years, this "city on a hill" was only a name. As De Jong says, "Rather than calling England to repentance and reformation, she was whoring after the heathens' gods."[61] Yet in the midst of these trying times for the church in New England, eschatological optimism did not fade; rather, the Puritan preachers unceasingly urged New England to repent.[62]

At the forefront of such preachers stood the New England dynasty of the Mathers, consisting of the father, Richard (1596–1669), the son, Increase (1639–1723), and the grandson, Cotton (1663–1728). Collectively, they preached powerfully from the pulpits of Massachusetts from 1635 to 1728, often trumpeting the need for repentance and reform. Taken together, they highlight the changing perceptions of the millennium during the first century of settlement. Richard Mather arrived as an exile, having been expelled from his church in England for his Puritan convictions. He viewed New England as God's New World where a pure church could be established and the Antichrist could be kept at bay. He viewed the first conversions among the native Indians during the 1650s as a sign that the millennium was at hand; as soon as the Jews would be converted, Christ would return physically to usher in the millennium. Robert Middlekauff writes that almost everything Richard Mather wrote is "shot through with an eschatological expectation."[63]

Increase Mather succeeded his father in the pulpit.[64] Realizing that his father's generation was disappointed with the New England church developments, he minimized millennial expectations in his first decades of preaching. He cautioned against viewing such events as the Great Fire of London (1666) as signs of the last times by which God's will and timeline could be determined.[65] By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, his own disillusionment with New England contributed to his growing conviction that Christ's second coming was imminent. That was reinforced by such events as the Austrian defeat of the Turks (1697) and the conversion of hundreds of Jews in Hamburg, which he viewed as signs that the second coming was near. Christ was on His way to usher in the millennium.

Cotton Mather, who outlived his father by only five years, was more aggressive in his views about New England and about the millennium—both in its specific happenings and its chronology. Unlike most Puritan New England ministers, who were content to simply claim that they lived "in the last days,"[66]

Cotton Mather became involved in more precise predictions and, unlike his father, chronological projections.

In recounting the ecclesiastical history of New England in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Cotton Mather waxed nostalgic when he wrote that the plantation's original charter was to "raise a bulwark against the kingdom of anti-christ." The community would also serve as a refuge for those who needed to escape the desolation God often visited upon England. They were to do the noble work of establishing "a reformed particular Church."[67] The people sealed these particular duties in a national covenant with God, saying, "We covenant with our Lord, and one with another; and we do bind our selves in the presence of God, to walk together in all his ways."[68]

For Cotton Mather, this was all well and good, but the large, diverse society of his own day was vastly different from the small colony of Puritans that had founded Massachusetts. Mather was deeply disappointed with the new settlement. He writes, "Much more may we, the children of such fathers, lament our gradual degeneracy from that life and power of Godliness, that was in them, and the man provoking evils that are amongst us; which have moved our God severely to witness against us."[69] In short, the national covenant that the Puritan fathers had established was broken.

As far as the church was concerned, it was rife with schisms, heresies, and immorality—a far cry from what the founders had envisioned! To counteract his fears that the New England church would never be the foundation for God's new kingdom, Cotton Mather devoted considerable time to dating the millennium. He first opted for 1697 as the date for Antichrist's final defeat and the ushering in of the millennium. Severe earthquakes and the Ottoman defeat in 1697 augmented his expectations, but in the end he was disappointed. He then imbibed the thinking of William Whiston (1667–1752), an English theologian, millennialist, historian, mathematician, and close friend of Isaac Newton, who determined that 1716 would be the beginning of Antichrist's downfall. Meanwhile, Mather, having heard of how Louis XIV was persecuting believers in France, determined that the forces of Antichrist to battle Christ would not hail from America (as Mede had taught), but would come from Europe. This was a great relief to many New Englanders who wanted to continue to see America as God's new kingdom and Europe as old and morally corrupt.

Like his father, Cotton Mather believed in a literal fulfillment of eschatological promises. Both of them embraced the idea of two resurrections and asserted that believers would be literally raised from the dead in the first resurrection, which in their view meant that only unbelievers would be judged at the end of time. As for those who were still alive at Christ's coming, they were

not as definite. They taught that there would be a conflagration upon Christ's arrival, such that He would be surrounded with flames. Mede's view that America would then serve as an unburned refuge for Gog and Magog was probably correct, they thought. After the conflagration, the saints would be wonderfully rewarded. Cotton Mather went beyond Increase by stating that an age of miracles was dawning, which would end in a paradise on earth in which believers would not be subject to temptation nor sin any more, nor experience any physical ailments.[70]

When 1716 proved to be another disappointment, Cotton Mather's hopes seemed only to be augmented. He concluded that believers needed to work harder at making converts, for Christ would only come again, he taught, when the numbers of converted people had been multiplied. Believers, therefore, played a role in fostering the conditions for Christ's second coming. So Cotton Mather worked hard, publishing a large number of books and articles in the last years of his life, predicting that revival would dawn shortly after his death.

Twelve years after Cotton Mather died, God sent the Great Awakening, which led to a great increase of religious activity throughout the United States. In New England, the Great Awakening was influential among the Congregationalists; in the Middle and Southern colonies, it impacted the Presbyterians; and in the southern Tidewater and Low Country, Baptists and Methodists saw many converted. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), sometimes called the last Puritan, was a principal leader of the pro-revival movement in New England. His writings on the subject of revival, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion* (1742) and *Religious Affections* (1746), helped define the revival theologically.

Edwards was convinced that the church was on the verge of entering into its day of glory and that the New England preachers had a major role in bringing that about. In *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards explains the future state of the church as a glorious time filled with knowledge, holiness, beauty, and perfection.[71] Instead of viewing humanity as worsening progressively, as the Mathers had, Edwards and his contemporary preachers tended to see the church becoming stronger and purer. For Edwards, that meant that the kingdom was close at hand. Christ would return only once physically, as soon as the millennium was completed. For Edwards, the millennium was more spiritual than physical, and more symbolic than a precise period of time. Satan would return at the very end briefly to lead a rebellion against Christ, but Christ would return to defeat Satan, raise the dead, hold the last judgment, remove the saints to glory, and cast Satan and the reprobate into hell.

Edwards's eschatology, which differed substantially from the Mathers', was

by no means unique. It had the support of other notable Puritan-minded divines of his day, such as Samuel Willard (1640–1707) and Benjamin Colman (1673–1747).[72] Thus, the New England Puritans, much like their English counterparts, did not succeed in developing a unified view of the last times. As Davidson concludes: "Historians have generally taken the Mathers' views as representative [of the New England Puritans], partly because Increase and Cotton as a rule beat everybody else to the press, and partly because the debate itself was often abstruse and allusive. In fact, the Mathers were quite unable to impose their brand of chiliasm on everyone else—much to their distress."[73]

John Eliot, Christianized Indians, and Eschatological Hope The renowned Puritan missionary to the American Indians, John Eliot (1604–1690), strove to plant Christ's monarchy among his Christianized Indians as a model for God's rule among the nations. James Holstun calls Eliot's vision "the single most ambitious utopian project within the large Puritan utopia of New England…. No other Puritan, Old or New World, worked so long or with such concentration on a single utopian project, and no other Puritan utopist remained so committed to connecting utopian writing and practice."[74]

Like most Puritans, Eliot believed strongly that the last times were near. Since the gospel shall be heard by all the earth before Christ's second coming, the Indians must be evangelized immediately.[75] Eliot spent three years studying the Algonquian language and then began preaching to the natives in their own language in 1646.

Eliot was not alone among the New England ministers in this conviction. Citing Brightman, Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) wrote in 1648 that he expected Turkish power to soon collapse, the Jews to be converted, and "these Western Indians [to] soon come in" to embrace the gospel. Convictions like these led the following year to the founding of the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which was established to support the work of Eliot and other evangelists to the Indians.[76] Over the next twenty years, Eliot wrote or sponsored a great many works that became known as the Eliot Indian Tracts, which were published in London as aids in fundraising.

Eliot began to set up towns of "praying Indians." Natick was the first "praying town" (1651). God blessed his work with numerous conversions, which in turn enflamed his eschatological hope for the Indian converts. By 1652, Eliot was already writing in one of his many tracts, *Tears of Repentance*, that Christ's kingdom was "rising up in these Western Parts of the World,"[77] which, according to James Maclear, encouraged Cromwell to promote the reign of Christ everywhere.[78] In his zeal to evangelize the Indians, Eliot added two

rather extreme convictions to his thinking, as Maclear notes: “First, he added a new dimension to speculation about the Indians’ place in eschatology by his conviction that they were Hebrews, retrograde descendants of the biblical patriarchs and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Second, he believed that his own humble Indian flock at Natick was destined to take the first step toward the millennium.”[79]

Despite these views, Eliot had set up nineteen praying towns by 1674, with an estimated population of 3,600 Indians; approximately 1,100 had been converted. In each town, the natives made a solemn covenant to give themselves and their children “to God to be His people” as the basis of the new civil government. Eliot organized the new government following Jethro’s advice to Moses in Exodus 18: he appointed rulers over hundreds, fifty, and ten in each town to keep law and order. These towns were almost entirely self-governing, though major issues could be referred to the Massachusetts General Court. For the most part, the natives were expected to adopt the Puritan lifestyle along with the Christian faith.

After organizing the civil government, Eliot started establishing churches with the Congregationalist form of government. After overcoming numerous difficulties in a fifteen-year period, the first native church was officially established in 1660 at Natick. The establishment of other churches in praying towns soon followed.

In the meantime, Eliot had been working hard since 1653 on translating the Bible into the Native American language. One of the most difficult tasks was inventing a vocabulary as well as grammar to express the relationships of time and space that were missing from the native language. With the help of English supporters, Eliot established a printing press in Cambridge. In 1661, Marmaduke Johnson printed the first New Testament in the Massachusett language. The Old Testament with metrical psalms followed in 1663, making it the first complete Bible printed on the American continent. The Algonquian Bible is considered by many to be Eliot’s greatest accomplishment, but for Eliot, that Bible was only an aid to the conversion of Native Americans before Christ would return.

Eliot translated more works into Massachusett, ranging from classics of Puritan piety to primers and one-page catechisms. By this time, Eliot had some coworkers. They kept the society’s printing press busy until King Philip’s War. They also founded schools in the native towns. To help in the schools, Eliot published *The Indian Grammar Begun* (1666), *The Indian Primer* (1669), and *The Logic Primer* (1672). A building was even put up for an “Indian college” at Harvard, although few natives enrolled due to a scarcity of teachers and students.

The souls of natives so dominated Eliot’s thinking that he did not fear for his

life. When once challenged by a Native American sagamore with a knife, Eliot said, “I am about the work of the great God, and He is with me, so that I fear not all the sachems of the country. I’ll go on, and do you touch me if you dare.”[80]

Eliot’s work prospered until the onset of King Philip’s War in 1675. Fearing for their lives, numerous native converts moved to an island in the Boston harbor. Many died there. That pattern was repeated in other towns, where praying Indians were destroyed by either warring tribesmen or angry colonists. Unfortunately, the praying Indians were considered enemies of both the English and native Indians; only Eliot and a few others stood by them during the war. A dreadful genocide wiped out the praying towns and the vast majority of Indians living in them.

After the war, the surviving Native Americans returned to Natick. Eliot attempted to start over, rebuilding Natick and three other towns despite the distrust of the English. It seemed at first that Eliot’s experiment in the New World might still be successful, but that effort never recovered its millennial promise. By the nineteenth century, not one convert remained who could read the Bible in the Massachusett language.

Eliot is a classic example of how a renowned, godly man, who lived and died well (his last words were, “Welcome joy!”), could be carried to some extreme eschatological views. Despite those views, however, God used him mightily for the conversion of hundreds of Indians.

The Practical Influence of Eschatological Optimism These eschatological anticipations had an overwhelming effect on the Puritans individually and corporately in the ecclesiastical and social realms.

First, these hopes *influenced the preaching of the Word.* Millennial optimism was never separated from the ordinary means of grace. As Toon writes, “They agree in the belief that the latter-day glory or the millennium will enter the world through the means of grace and especially through preaching inspired by the Holy Spirit.”[81] Likewise, Edwards promised that when the millennial period came, “the end for which the means of grace have been instituted shall be obtained.”[82] The latter-day glory would not be inaugurated immediately by Christ, but rather by the ordinary ministry of the church. So the church was an integral participant, not only in bearing witness to the future, but also in bringing that future to full realization.

Second, these eschatological hopes *motivated world missions*. The future glory of the church was not limited to one nation or locality but would cover the world as the waters cover the sea. Mission efforts in evangelizing the Jews became particularly important among the English Puritans. Gouge, along with

many others, maintained that the end would be marked by a conversion of the Jews and the Gentiles into one visible church.[83] In New England, this emphasis was eclipsed by other concerns, but millennial expectations did fire a passion for evangelizing the Indians. Joseph Caryl (1602–1673), an English Puritan, saw mission efforts among the Indians as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies. He therefore encouraged support for New England missions.[84]

Third, in the social realm, these eschatological hopes *invigorated people to avoid the sins of England.* As the England monarchies swung between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, instituting acts of toleration, the Puritans sought to establish a nation that would honor God. Many of them believed the established church in England forced ministers to conform to objectionable, papal practices. By establishing a Christian society, the Puritans believed they could worship according to the pure ordinances of God, which, in turn, would give the church an opportunity to advance eschatological hopes through the means of grace. The national covenant on which New England was founded, in essence, established a kind of Puritan holy society bound up with millennial expectations.[85] Church and state worked together to be a city on a hill, or a light for all the nations.

Fourth, Puritan eschatology in New England also *augmented personal piety*. Scripture says eschatological hope does not always produce piety (2 Thess. 3). "Puritan pastors were alive to this danger and took steps to prevent aberrations," says Murray. "The people were warned of the danger of giving to prophecy a place disproportionate to its importance."[86] Puritan piety was marked by a devotion to prayer. Murray writes, "There was no duty higher in Puritan esteem than the duty of prayer."[87] This is reflected in the confessional documents produced in the Puritan era. For example, the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 191) teaches that, in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "we pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed." George Newton (1602–1681) encouraged his congregation to "strive with Christ in prayer."[88] And John Cotton recorded in his diary his earnest cries for the conversion of Jews.[89] The Puritans believed that through the prayers of the faithful, God would fulfill His gracious promises.

Finally, perhaps the greatest impact of Puritan eschatology was the way it *encouraged hope*. Amid the wars and persecutions of England, in dangers and personal loss, in traveling to unknown lands and foreign territories, in seeking to establish a pure and Reformed church, the Puritans always had before them the

glorious hope of better days. They did not live in the cold and stale vacuum of defeat. Rather, even as the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, so they, who had suffered violence, were motivated in society, church, and personal piety by the overwhelming conviction that King Jesus had conquered sin and death and would continue to do so. That fueled their passions and ignited their ministries. Whatever lot they were given in this life was to be lived with an eye toward future glory.

A Call to Hope

Let us conclude by saying, first, that the study of Puritan eschatology is no easy matter. There are a number of obstacles to this study, the chief being that various historical interpretations have certain biases. Contemporary interpreters sometimes impose twenty-first-century categories onto the Puritans, while the Puritans themselves had no definite unifying themes. We must grasp their historicist hermeneutic, which gave them flexibility to judge the signs of the times according to the Word of God. Their eschatology is connected to the socio-political circumstances of their day, which was steeped in disorder and unrest. Amid the trying times of seventeenth-century England, the Puritans began to break from historical Augustinian doctrine and to formulate a more optimistic future for the church. This optimism, developed by numerous Puritan writers, became the backbone of New England settlements. Their new society would serve as a "city on a hill," calling Old England to repentance and ushering in the future millennia with all its hopes. This optimism overflowed into the everyday lives of the Puritans and influenced the ministry of the church—especially in mission outreach to the Indians and society and in personal piety.

Practically, we can learn much from the Puritans through a study like this. While many of their predictions fell short over time, and while many current trends in theology have strayed from their eschatological optimism, the Puritans teach us that the life and ministry of the church is one of hope. As Iain Murray said, they were "men of hope." Their hope

> coloured the spiritual thought of the American colonies; it taught men to expect great outpourings of the Holy Spirit; it prepared the way to the new age of world-missions; and it contributed largely to that sense of destiny which came to characterize the English-speaking Protestant nations. When nineteenth-century Christian leaders such as William Wilberforce viewed the world not so much as a wreck from which individual souls must escape, but rather as the property of Christ, to whose kingdom the earth and the fullness thereof must belong, their thinking bore the genuine hall-mark of the Puritan outlook.[90]

We desperately need this well-grounded hope. The state of the church in America today is marked by profound weakness and ignorance. Churches still abound, yet our nation is experiencing a religious famine. The Puritans remind us that one of the chief principles of the Christian life is hope. We must hope that God yet has work to do, and He accomplishes this through the ordinary means of grace and through the preaching of the Word. Let us be moved by the great hope of the gospel to join in the great work of promoting the gospel to go

forth to cover the world as the waters cover the sea. And let us be stirred up to the fervency of prayer. Maranatha!

1. Cited in William S. Barker and Samuel T. Logan Jr., eds., *Sermons That Shaped America* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2003), 35–36. My thanks to Kyle Borg for his research assistance on this chapter.

2. Quoted in Alan Heimert and Andrew Delbanco, eds., *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 127.

3. See introduction to Edward Hindson, ed., *Introduction to Puritan Theology: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 10; cf. Barker and Logan, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 2.

4. E. g., Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 1–4.

5. Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2008), 239; cf. 27–28; see also James A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea* (Laurel, Miss.: Audubon, 2006), 37; Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), xviii; Nancy Koester, "The Future in Our Past: PostMillennialism in American Protestantism," *Word & World* 2 (Spring 1995): 137–44.

6. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 21.

7. This becomes even clearer when the relationship is traced between eschatology and ecclesiology. Each of the mainline Reformed polities—Presbyterian, Independent, and Episcopalianism—felt that God was progressively leading the church into their own preferred ecclesiology. E.g., see Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of the Revelation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 3:128–33, 140. Gribben writes of Mede advocating God's preference for Episcopalianism. *The Puritan Millennium*, 42.

8. Augustine, *The City of God* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2006), 20:7.

9. Peter Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600 to 1660* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke, 1970), 6.

10. Murray traces out the different lines of thinking regarding unfulfilled prophecy; see *Puritan Hope*, 39–55.

11. Thomas Goodwin Jr., preface to *An Exposition of the Revelation*, in *Works*, 3:xxviii.

12. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 25.

13. Richard Sibbes, *The Spiritual Man's Aim*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 4:43.

14. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 102, 109.

15. Garnet Howard Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 210.

16. William Bridge, "Sermon on Zechariah 1:18–21," in *The Works of William Bridge* (Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 4:339.

17. Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon Hebrews 11*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton* (Homewood, Ala.: Solid Ground, 2008), 14:179.

18. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 34. Murray comments that while in exile the influence of Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli affected apocalyptic thought. *Puritan Hope*, 6–7. Toon has pointed out that Calvin "confidently expected that the Gospel would make progress throughout the whole world…. The English Puritans…found this doctrine most acceptable and developed it." *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 26. The Genevan influence can easily be discerned in Puritan writings.

19. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 59.

20. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 60.

21. Ezra Hoyt Byington, *The Puritans in England and New England* (Boston: Roberts Brother, 1896), 13.

22. Byington, *The Puritans in England and New England*, 13.

23. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 35. According to Gribben, many in that day believed Laud was bringing the Church of England back into harmony with Rome (see p. 51); see also De Jong, *As the Waters*, 6; Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 21.

24. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 35.

25. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 36.

26. De Jong and Gribben offer excellent reviews of the literature of this period (De Jong, *As the Waters*, 13–33; Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 21–58).

27. Howard Hotson, "The Historiographical Origins of Calvinist Millenarianism," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, vol. 2, *The Later Reformation*, ed. Bruce Gordon (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 1996), 160.

28. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 26–27.

29. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 26.

30. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 31.

31. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 29.

32. Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638), a contemporary of Mede, also greatly impacted later millennial thinking, but is not included in this study since he cannot be classified as a Puritan. For Alsted's influence, see Robert G. Clouse, "Johann Heinrich Alsted and English Millennialism," *Harvard Theological Review* 62 (1969): 189–207.

33. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 60.

34. James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977), 46.

35. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 62.

36. Bryan W. Ball, "Mede, Joseph," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 37:684. Cf. Robert Clouse, "The Apocalyptic Interpretation of Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11 (1968): 181–93.

37. Thomas Goodwin used both men liberally in his *Exposition of Revelation*. Even the extreme Fifth Monarchists were said to have continued in the line of Mede—but Mede would not have gone to the extremes that they did (cf. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 48). Mede would be highly influential also among the New England Puritans (Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 248). Jue's published dissertation provides an excellent study on Mede's theology and influence.

38. Goodwin, for example, was Mede's student. His work on Revelation follows the interpretive tradition pioneered by Mede (*An Exposition of the Revelation*, in *Works*, 3:1–218). Of Mede's interpretation of Revelation, William Twisse comments: "Many interpreters have done excellently, but [Mede] surmounteth them all." Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, trans. Richard More (London, 1643), 1.

39. E.g., William Bridge, "Babylon's Downfall," in *The Works of William Bridge* (Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 4:290–313.

40. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 23–26; cf. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 126.

41. The early Protestants, such as Luther and Calvin, did not see a future conversion of the Jews, though the Italian Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), began to write about it in his commentary on Romans. Frank A. James III, ed., *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).That was enlarged upon by Theodore Beza in his comments on Romans 11:25ff; Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 6. Many others followed suit in developing this theme, both in England and on the Continent (e.g., see De Jong, *As the Waters*, 9, 27; Gribben, *Puritan Millennium*, 37–38; Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 39–55).

42. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 52–53. The listed views correspond to views 2, 4, 3, 1 in Murray.

43. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 127.

44. Heimert and Delbanco, *Puritans in America*, 50.

45. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 25, 93.

46. Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 124.

47. Edward Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence 1628–1651*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 24.

48. Barker, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 6–17.

49. Barker, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 5.

50. Barker, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 15.

51. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 30.

52. James F. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism," in *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, and Culture*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan and Francis J. Bremer (New York: St. Martin's, 1977), 70.

53. John Cotton, *An Exposition upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation* (London: Livewel Chapman, 1655), the whole of which is taken up as a polemic against the Roman Catholic Church.

54. John Cotton, *The Powring Out of the Seven Vials: or An Exposition of the 16. Chapter of the Revelation, with an Application of It to Our Times* (London, 1642).

55. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 35.

56. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 34–36. Bryan W. Ball asserts that this optimistic "postmillennialism of John Cotton and Edmund Hall was taken up by Daniel Whitby in the eighteenth century and re-appeared again in Methodism, Anglicanism, and The Brethren with, for example, Adam Clarke, Thomas Scott, and Alexander Campbell respectively." *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 10.

57. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 70.

58. Barker, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 23–36.

59. Barker, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 35–36, emphasis added.

60. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 29.

61. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 86.

62. For this section, I am indebted to Baumgartner, *Longing for the End*, 125–30.

63. Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 372n25.

64. Michael Hall calls Increase Mather the last of the American Puritans—see *The Last American Puritan, The Life of Increase Mather, 1639–1723* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988). Barker and Logan agree with him (*Sermons That Shaped America*, 37–38).

65. Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 179. Middlekauff provides a discussion of Increase and Cotton Mathers's eschatological views, including the changes in their views, in chapters 10 and 18.

66. Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 38–42.

67. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (Hartford, Conn.: Silas Andrus and Son, 1855), 1:69–70.

68. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:71.

69. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:14.

70. Cotton Mather, *Things for a Distress'd People to Think upon* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen for Duncan Cambel, 1696), 36; cf. Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 60–63.

71. Jonathan Edwards, *The History of the Work of Redemption* (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), 395–408.

72. Samuel Willard, *The Fountain Opened* (Boston, 1700), 106–14; Benjamin Colman, *Practical Discourses* (London: for Thomas Parkhurst, 1707), 416–20.

73. Davidson, *Logic of Millennial Thought*, 76.

74. James Holstun, *A Rational Millennium: Puritan Utopias of Seventeenth-Century England and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 103.

75. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 76. Parts of this section are adapted from Joel R.

Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 234–39.

76. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 76.

77. Thomas Shepard, *The Clear Sun-shine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New-England* (London: R. Cotes for John Bellamy, 1648), 30.

78. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 76.

79. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 77; cf. John Eliot, *The Light Appearing More and More towards the Perfect Day, or a Farther Discovery of the Present State of the Indians in New-England* (London: T. R. & E. M. for John Bartlet, 1651), 14–18, 24–25.

80. Ola Winslow, *John Eliot: Apostle to the Indians* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1968), 1.

81. Toon, *Puritans, The Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 36.

82. Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 408.

83. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 49.

84. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 53.

85. De Jong, *As the Waters*, 39; see Barker, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 20–21 for more on this communal aspect in Puritan living.

86. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 86.

87. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 99.

88. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 91.

89. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 101.

90. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, xxi–xxii.

Chapter 49

Thomas Manton on the Judgment according to Works

> *But there are some learned and Orthodox Writers, that do admit of a first and second Justification, but not in the Popish sense, they utterly abhor that, yet they affirm a first and second Justification.*
>
> —ANTHONY BURGESS[1]

The Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone has not always been received well in the history of the church. A particular area of debate concerns how best to reconcile the definitive nature of present justification by faith alone, whereby a sinner receives the imputed righteousness of Christ, with the clear scriptural testimony that there will be a future and final judgment when "all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil" (WCF, 33.2).[2] Several prominent Puritan theologians were aware of this tension, and in their writings they attempted to reconcile these two truths rather than abandon one in order to maintain the other.[3] Presbyterian Thomas Manton (1620–1677) wrote on the final judgment according to works in a series of sermons on 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Typical of Manton, his exposition of this verse is thorough and clear. He was one of the premier Puritan exegetes; like many of his contemporaries, his works are principally sermons, and his goal in these sermons is faithfully to explain and apply the particular text in question coupled with the pastoral sensitivity that this topic requires. This chapter will look at Manton's exposition of 2 Corinthians 5:10 in order to provide a specimen of how one Puritan, as an orthodox Reformed theologian who held to justification by faith alone, understood the nature of the final judgment according to works.

To prove his position that "there will certainly come a day when every person that ever lived shall be judged by Christ according to his works," Manton divides

his exposition into six points that arise out of 2 Corinthians 5:10: (1) the final judgment is necessary, not optional; (2) all people, without exception, will be judged; (3) Christ will be the judge; (4) the manner of the final judgment; (5) the subject of the final judgment, namely, "things done in the body"; and (6) the end of the judgment, that is, the rewards and punishments that await each person.[4] Manton's approach is lucid and orderly, and his exposition combines compelling exegesis with basic Reformed axioms and distinctions that enable him to explain his view with the type of exactness required to satisfy those who are suspicious about any talk of judging Christians according to their works.

The Necessity of the Final Judgment The certainty of the fulfilment of God's decree explains why a final judgment will take place, since He has decreed or appointed it, but there are other equally compelling reasons that a future judgment awaits all persons who have ever lived, or shall live upon earth. First, that God's grace may be glorified in His people (1 Peter 1:13), that is, His mercy may be fully and openly manifested toward the elect. For Manton the final judgment is not principally about striking fear into the hearts of the wicked, but rather the occasion for God publicly and definitively to demonstrate His love for the godly. Present justification and sanctification provide believers with a taste of God's love and mercy, but the final judgment will be the occasion to experience "another manner of grace and favour indeed, when pardon and approbation shall be pronounced and ratified by the judge's own mouth, Acts iii.19, when he shall not only take us into his family, but into his immediate presence and palace (John 12:26; Matt. 25:34)."[5] Second, that the wicked and impenitent may be finally convinced of their guilt, and be tried according to the standard of God's righteousness (Rom. 3:20; Ps. 50:21). The sins of the ungodly will be remembered afresh at the final judgment, thus proving (publicly) that God's sentence of condemnation is both righteous and just; hence, third, that God's justice may be vindicated (Ps. 51:4). His justice demands that a difference should be placed between the righteous and the wicked; "that it should be well with them that do well, and evil with them that do evil; that every man should reap according to what he hath sown."[6]

In the final judgment, God's justice will not only render to everyone according to their works, but also rectify inequities in the present age between the sufferings of the righteous and the "pomp and ease" of the wicked; the wicked who prosper now will one day be punished, whereas the godly can look forward to the promised reward. The nature of God Himself as the righteous God demands such a final judgment, but the providence of God also demands it. Temporal judgments, such as the destruction of the world with the flood and the

overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, were sent as warnings of a future judgment. Those who sin after the manner of the sins of Sodom are certainly going to be punished if they do not repent. Particular judgments show that God is not indifferent to the evil that human beings work in the earth, but sins that are not punished now will certainly be punished in the future. Likewise, human conscience demands such a final judgment, for even unbelievers are aware that their sins are worthy of death (Rom. 1:32; Acts 24:25). Believers confess to believe in such a final judgment because God's Word declares it to be so (Matt. 12:36–37; 13:49–50; John 5:28–29; Heb. 9:27; Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:12).[7]

Besides these reasons, Christ has a fourfold personal interest in the final judgment. First, that His glory may be manifested for the world to see. His first coming was in His state of humiliation, but His second coming will be in His state of exaltation. At His first coming, "he stood before the tribunals of men, and was condemned to the cursed death of the cross; now he shall sit upon a glorious throne…. Then he came not to judge, but to save, now to render unto every one according to their works."[8] Second, that Christ may possess what He has purchased.[9] Third, Christ may receive His sheep into His presence, and also, as king, publicly and definitively triumph over all His enemies; He that publicly suffered will publicly triumph. Fourth, that He may inquire what His servants have done with their talents (Matt. 25) and how the church has used the ordinances given to her. Thus Manton bases the necessity of the final judgment on God's righteous character, His works of providence, the light of conscience, and the mediatorial glory of Christ.

The Universality of the Judgment Manton understands the "all" of 2 Corinthians 5:10 to include all persons without exception: "All mankind which ever were, are, and shall be. No age, no sex, no nation, nor dignity, nor power, nor wealth, nor greatness, can excuse us."[10] To further explain the various classes of persons that will be judged, Manton speaks of seven distinctions: (1) between grown persons and infants; (2) between those who are dead and those who are alive at the time of Christ's return; (3) between those who are good and those who are bad; (4) between believers and unbelievers; (5) between the rich and the poor (Matt. 25:33); and (6) between people according to the calling they had in the church (e.g., apostles, ministers, lay persons). Quite apart from the basic law of Christianity, officers in the church will give an account of their faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:4–5; Heb. 13:17); consequently, they will be judged not only as Christians, but as officers, whether they were faithful in their particular calling. (7) Finally, every individual who has ever lived will be judged (Matt. 25:33).[11] Manton is emphatic that the final judgment will include every soul

who was born into this world. The idea that only nonbelievers will be judged is utterly foreign to Scripture in Manton's mind, and so those in the church, particularly ordained officers, must be told that their deeds will be tried before the person of Christ, which brings Manton to his next heading: that Christ will be the judge.

The Judge of the Living and the Dead (Acts 10:42) The question of who will judge the world involves important christological issues for Manton. He considers why the honor of judging falls to the Second Person of the Trinity and also whether the Son will judge according to His divine or human nature, or both. Manton answers that Christ will judge according to both natures, but he emphasizes the role of the divine nature in this particular function. To hold this honor of judging the whole world, Christ must possess wisdom, justice, power, and authority. Wisdom is needed in order to weigh the evidence and to know what is right or just (i.e., conforming to the law). Justice is needed in order to pronounce an unbiased sentence according to what is just and good (*ex aequo et bono*). No one will be unfairly judged at the final judgment because Christ is holy and just. Power is needed in order to compel persons to stand trial, and to subject the wicked to punishment. Finally, the sanction of God's authority is needed, according to which Christ has been appointed to judge as the God-man. Rewards come from a superior; much more so must one who punishes possess authority to pass sentence on those who have done wrong. Wisdom, justice, power, and authority all belong to Christ in His state of exaltation, so that He can judge the world in righteousness.[12]

As noted, Manton argues that Christ will judge as the God-man, that is, according to both of His natures as the incarnate Son. As the God-man, Christ's wisdom and understanding is twofold—divine and human. Concerning His divinity, His wisdom and understanding are infinite. He knows "all things that are, have been, yea, that shall be, or may be."[13] However, in line with Reformed orthodoxy, Manton affirms that "the finite cannot contain the infinite" (*finitum non capax infiniti*). Thus, His human wisdom and knowledge is not coextensive with His divine wisdom and knowledge, yet He certainly knows more in His human nature than all men and angels. Manton adds:

> When Christ was upon earth, though the forms of things could not but successively come into his mind (as a man, he must understand as men do in understanding because of the limited nature of the mind and understanding), yet then he could know whatever he would. To whatsoever thing he did apply his mind he did presently understand it, and that in a moment all things were presented to him; so that he accurately knew the

> nature of things he had a mind to know.[14]

Manton clearly holds to the distinction between the two natures in the one person. Reformed theologians recognized the various mysteries involved in understanding the relationship between the two natures, especially how best to describe the limitations of Christ's human nature. Manton acknowledges the human limits of Christ's understanding in His state of humiliation, but, like his contemporaries, such as Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) and John Owen (1616–1683), Manton notes that Christ's wisdom and understanding have been enlarged in His state of exaltation so that at the final judgment, He "shall bring an incomparable knowledge, far exceeding the manner and measure of all creatures."[15] Yet, while Christ's human nature is now glorified, and thus He understands and knows as much as possible, Manton suggests that Christ's infinite knowledge as God will shine forth in the work of the final judgment. Nevertheless, without being explicit, Manton surely would agree with the basic Reformed scholastic position that Christ's human knowledge is as wide as God's decree and would by itself be sufficient to judge the world at the last day, because of the Holy Spirit's illumination.

These christological questions also have reference to Christ's ability to judge "in righteousness" (Acts 17:31). If Christ possesses a double knowledge, one according to His divine nature and one according to His human nature, He also possesses a double righteousness, "and both are exact and immutably perfect."[16] Righteousness is essential to God's being. For humans and angels, holiness is a superadded quality and therefore something that can be lost, as it was with Adam and a number of angels. So, regarding Christ's divine nature, He is holiness itself. Because of the hypostatic union, His human nature was sanctified, and it was impossible for Him to sin during His states of humiliation and exaltation. Both natures will play a part in the final judgment, but, as above, His righteousness belongs chiefly to His divine nature. Manton then speaks of the "communication of operations" (*communicatio operationum*) to illustrate his point:

> Look, as in the works of man, all the external actions he doth, they are done by the body and soul—the body works, the soul works, according to their several natures,—yet both conspire and concur in that way that is proper to either; only in some actions there is more of the soul discovered, as in a brutish action, or action that requires strength, more of the body is required; yet the body and the soul concur,—so the two natures always concur in Christ's divine actions, only in some works his human, in others his divine nature more appears. Look, as in the works of his humiliation his human

> nature did more appear, but still his divine nature manifested itself, also he offered up himself as God-man; but in the works that belong to his exaltation and glorified estate his divine nature appeared most; so in this solemn transaction, wherein Christ is to discover himself to the world in the greatest majesty and glory, he acts as God-man, only the divine nature more appears and discovers itself, because it belongs to his exaltation.[17]

John Owen gave more prominence to the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ during His public ministry than did any other Puritan. In fact, Owen argued that the "only singular immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with himself."[18] The Holy Spirit was the "immediate operator of all divine acts of the Son himself, even on his own human nature. Whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon the human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit."[19] Manton does not speak so explicitly to this christological question, but he definitely affirms that Christ's divine nature operates directly/immediately (rather than mediately through the Spirit) in His state of exaltation. Consequently, in His state of humiliation, Christ acts as the righteous judge because His divine nature is righteousness itself. For that reason, Christ will judge in righteousness. But he will also judge in power, as is requisite in a judge.

So that none will escape the judgment, the judge (Christ) must possess a divine power. At the final judgment, Christ will show Himself to be God by His divine power (Matt. 24:30). His power also gives Him authority to judge. In fact, as God, Christ must judge because He is the offended party; His law has been broken; His glory has been trampled under foot. Of course, Manton recognizes that God's glory and happiness cannot be diminished in any way, but the sins of His creatures are nevertheless "a wrong [done] to his declarative glory."[20] Sins are principally against God (Ps. 51:4) because He is the highest authority and the lawgiver. For that reason, the peculiar privilege and right of judgment belongs to the triune God, which shows that Christ may execute judgment because God is one (1 John 5:7). According to the maxim, "the outward works of the Trinity are undivided" (*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*), Manton shows that because the three persons have a common nature (i.e., the divine essence), judgment, like creation, is equally attributed to each person.

However, Reformed theologians also kept in mind the idea that these "undivided works" often manifest one person in particular as author or agent of the work (*terminus operationis*).[21] Consequently, Manton argues that the Son is ordained by mutual consent of all the persons to judge on their behalf. An order belongs to the persons of the Trinity; "as in their manner of subsisting, so also

there is a certain order and economy according to which all their operations are produced and brought forth to the creature."[22] Manton provides several reasons why judgment belongs both to the Father and to the Son. In the context of redemption, Christ, as surety for His people, offered Himself to bear the punishment His people deserved. In this context, judgment belonged to the Father, to whom satisfaction was made. However, because Christ provided salvation, He has a right to judge both those who partake of that salvation by faith, and those who reject it by unbelief.

As mediator, Christ is also judge by deputation and ordination: "The primitive sovereignty belongs to God as supreme king, and the judge by derivation and deputation is the Lord Jesus Christ, as mediator, in his manhood united to the second person of the godhead; so the judgment of the world is put upon him. In regard of the creature, as to us, his authority is absolute and supreme; but in regard of God it is deputed; so he is ordained and appointed to judge" (John 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:25).[23] Christ's right to judge is accorded to Him as His reward for purchasing the salvation of His people and being faithful to the covenant of redemption. As the God-man, in both natures, Christ will judge the world. The judgment will be visible, and so too, the judge. Believers and unbelievers will alike appear before their judge, but with very different results.

As a judge, Christ will be a terror to those who have (1) despised God's kingdom (Luke 19:27); (2) refused God's grace (Ps. 81:11); (3) despised God's benefits (Heb. 2:3); (4) abused His grace and turned to lasciviousness (Jude 4); (5) broken His commandments (John 15:10); (6) questioned the truth of God's promises (2 Peter 3–4); and (7) perverted God's ordinances (Matt. 24:48–51). Christ as judge will be a comfort to those who have (1) believed Christ's doctrine (John 11:25); (2) loved Christ (Eph. 6:24; 1 Cor. 16:22); (3) warred against Christ's enemies, the devil, the world, and the flesh (Rev. 3:21); and (4) obeyed His commandments (1 John 2:28; 4:17). Believers will be comforted because the judge is their friend, their brother, their high priest, and the one who died for their sins. Christ will come to take them to mansions prepared for them in heaven.[24] So it is clear that the person judging is of the utmost importance. Because Christ is the judge, there is a necessary element of both salvation and judgment, of terror and comfort, because His person and work demand such a final outcome. For those united to Christ by faith, the final judgment should not be a terrifying experience, but rather a rewarding one.

The Manner of Judging Manton now looks at the manner of judging. He shows that the Greek *phanerōthēnai* means both "to appear" and "to be made

manifest." The words, "for we must all appear," imply four things: (1) the wisdom and justice of the judge; (2) the power, impartiality, and faithfulness of Christ's angels; (3) the requirement or summons to appear, for the judgment to take place; and (4) the ends of the judgment.25

Manton argues that nothing can be hidden from Christ (Heb. 4:13). For a judgment to be perfect and just, God must have perfect knowledge of each person's works, good or evil (Ps. 69:5; Jer. 17:10). Second, Manton suggests angels will carry out much of the work at the final judgment (Matt. 24:31); they will be employed to bring the righteous and unrighteous out of the grave and escort them to their respective eternal dwellings (Matt. 13:39–41, 49–50). Third, the judgment requires a visible appearance of both Christ as judge and all persons to be judged, because no one can be judged *in absentia*. The wicked will have no defense (Ps. 130:3); they will stand and yet not stand in the judgment (Rom. 14:10; Ps. 1:5). Because the sentence is one of life or death, all must be present to be tried, as for a capital offense. "Every one must give an account of himself before God" (Rom. 14:12). Those who are sentenced to die will be condemned on clear evidence of their ungodliness. Christ will vindicate the righteousness of God, for He will reward the faithful on the evidence of their good works: "When his people come to be judged, and have been found obedient to his commands…Christ will confess them before God, men and angels" (Rev. 3:5).26 And He will punish the wicked on the basis of their evil works. At bottom, God is justified when each person is rewarded according to his works.

Besides meaning "to appear," *phanerōthēnai* also means "to be made manifest." By this, Manton understands that not only will all persons physically appear for trial, but also that the secrets of their hearts will be exposed and judged (Luke 12:2; 1 Cor. 4:5). "The innocency of God's servants is beclouded for a while, and the sin of men lieth hid for a while, but at length shall be open, hypocrisy shall be disclosed, and sincerity shall be rewarded" ("Every man's work shall be manifested" [1 Cor. 3:13]).27 The books that are opened at the last day (see Rev. 20:12) are (1) the book of Scripture, as a rule; (2) the book of conscience, as a witness; and (3) the book of God's remembrance as the notice.28

God will perfectly discover the sins of the ungodly (Ps. 33:13–16), and the good angels will be produced as witnesses. Also, the Word of God will accuse sinners (John 5:45). More than that, ministers of the gospel who have been faithful will make up part of the evidence that convicts sinners; "the preaching of the word will be a witness that men had warning enough" (Mark 6:11). Consciences will likewise convict sinners of their guilt; "God will open our eyes, not by a holy illumination, but by a forced conviction…. God can make all occur

to memory as fresh as if newly committed, and in an instant the story of an ill-spent life."[29] As their consciences convict them, they will condemn themselves by "vomiting up their own shame," by speaking actual words against themselves ("I will judge you by your own words" [Luke 19:22]). Apart from condemning themselves, wicked men shall accuse one another. Manton suggests that the words uttered by Adam and Eve against each other after the fall (Gen. 3:12–13) represent "a notable presignification of the general judgment."[30] Not only will the wicked judge one another, but the godly will also play an active role in the judgment (Heb. 11:7; 1 Cor. 6:2). Finally, the circumstances of unbelievers' wickedness shall be a witness against them (Hab. 2); that is, their achievements or attainments in life will reveal their greed, selfishness, and other sins.

The precise logistics of the final judgment, particularly the fact that each person who has ever lived will be judged, have no doubt left many Christians wondering just how this will happen. Marshaling a number of scriptural references, Manton shows that the judgment will involve Christ, His angels, His ministers, the righteous, and the wicked, all testifying in one way or another to God's righteousness in His decision to reward the righteous and condemn the wicked.

Judgment according to Works Christ's judgment will be rendered according to works one has done "in the body," whether good or bad (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 20:12). In his fifth major point, Manton explains his understanding of the role of works in the final judgment under three heads: (1) why works are produced, (2) how they are considered in the judgment passed upon every man, and (3) their role in the consequent punishments and rewards.[31] The two principal ends of the final judgment are the manifestation of the glory of God and the vindication of God's righteous judgments. Examination of the works done by humans, with God rewarding or damning according to the character of those works, will inevitably glorify God in His holiness, justice, truth, love, and mercy.

First, in His holiness: God delights in the holiness of His saints, and detests sin and sinners. At the final day, God will "reward the graces and services of his people…on the other side, he will show his hatred against sin and sinners in their sentence and punishment; and so by necessary consequence, their different works must come into consideration, that the holy may have their due praise and commendation, and the wicked, their just reproof from the judge of the world."[32]

Second, in His justice: Manton posits that God possesses a threefold justice: (1) His general justice; (2) His strict justice; and (3) His justice of goodness according to gospel-law.[33] God's general justice demands that each person must

be judged according to his own works, for a man must reap what he sows (Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:6–7). God's strict justice was first declared in the covenant of works, whereby God promised to reward Adam for perfect obedience and threatened to punish him for any violation of God's moral law. At the final judgment, humans will be judged according to the covenant (i.e., works or grace) they are under. In other words, "some shall be judged by the law of liberty, according to which God will accept their sincere though imperfect obedience."[34] However, some will be judged according to the tenor of the covenant of works. Those who did not repent are "justly left to the old covenant, under which we were born, and so undergo judgment without mercy."[35] God's justice of goodness operates according to His gospel-law. On these terms, God shows His righteousness in remembering and rewarding the works of faith and love wrought by His people (Heb. 6:10).

God's truth or faithfulness to His covenant will become fully evident at the final judgment. He has promised life to the those who trust and obey. For that reason, God will make good on His promises and reward the righteous according to their works. Manton quotes Romans 2:6–9 to show that God will reward the righteous and condemn the wicked.[36] Consequently, if God's Word has promised life to the righteous, God's faithfulness will be vindicated when He makes good on that promise.

Finally, God's free grace will be magnified, particularly His love and mercy. As unworthy sinners, who, according to God's strict justice deserve condemnation, God's people will receive eternal life as a gift from the hands of Christ. "But for the grace of the new covenant, we might have perished as others do."[37] At the final judgment, God's saints will have a more magnified understanding and appreciation for their redemption. Indeed, the grace of God to sinners "is never seen in all its glory or graciousness" till the final judgment when Christ will speak from His own mouth about the inheritance that awaits His bride (Matt. 25:34).[38] The good works of Christ's people merit nothing when measured against the standard of God's law (Luke 17:10). For God to reward any of our sin-tainted works reveals His grace—much more so, to reward them with eternal life, glory, and blessedness.

The second major end of the judgment is to convince all persons present that their sentence is just, and Christ will accomplish this end by examining their works, according to the rule of His law. Christians are under a double law, the law of nature and the law of grace. This distinction proves to be a crucial point in Manton's exposition and helps to explain why he argues that Christians will also be judged according to their works at the final judgment. Non-Christians are, of course, under the first covenant (i.e., the covenant of works), and they are

required to obey the law perfectly and perpetually. However, there are those who have accepted the second covenant, the covenant of grace. According to Manton, Christ must examine their claim of repentance and acceptance of God's grace, which brought them out of the covenant of works into the covenant of grace, to reveal whether they were true penitents. The way to do this "must be seen by our works."[39] Thus two accusations may be brought against a man at the final judgment: first, that he has breached the covenant of works by his sinning, or that he was a spurious professor of Christ. Manton argues that to escape the first accusation we must be justified by faith alone (Rom. 3:24); to escape the second we must be justified by works; "and so James and Paul are reconciled."[40] Manton adds:

> To this double judgment there answereth a double justification: of a sinner, by virtue of the satisfaction of Christ, apprehended by faith, without the works of the law; of a believer, or one in the state of grace, so justified by works; for here it is not inquired whether he have satisfied the law, that he may have life by it, but whether, professing himself to be a Christian, he be a true believer—and that must be tried by his works; for as God in the covenant of grace giveth us two benefits, remission of sins and sanctification by the Spirit, so he requireth two duties from us—a thankful acceptance of his grace by faith, and also new obedience, as the fruit of love.[41]

Manton, then, affirms a double justification: one declarative, the other demonstrative. The former answers the problem of fulfilling God's law perfectly; the latter answers the problem of a barren faith. To speak of justification according to works is not necessarily to slip back into a form of popery, but rather is a way to distinguish between those in the church who truly have embraced the benefits of the covenant of grace and those in the visible church who have not. Works will provide the requisite evidence for the judge to produce a fair verdict, for a judge must base his judgment on the evidence, the facts of the case, or the works of the accused.

Manton proceeds to look at how the works of believers and unbelievers will be considered. The principal issue at stake is the heart, which provides the motives for all actions. Good works spring from the principle of grace in the heart. Manton, wanting to protect the monergistic nature of salvation, notes that the "principles are infused, and then the action follows…. A godly man cannot satisfy himself in some external conformity to the law, but he must know that the actions come from God, from his grace and Spirit in us…. A little outside holiness will not content Christ."[42] This raises an important point for Manton:

all good works must be done in a justified state; they are not the ground of justification, but only the evidence of justification. Works performed by the unregenerate are an abomination to the Lord because they proceed from an evil heart of unbelief. Christ will consider not simply a few actions or works, but the whole course of one's life; there will be a correspondence or consistency when reviewing the works of both the unrighteous and the righteous. Accordingly, not one or a few good works will qualify a man for the day of judgment; instead, a man ought to spend all of his days "being filled with the fruits of righteousness."[43] But in performing these works the aim should be as good as the action; the glory of God is the great aim or intention of the Christian in performing any good work. Christians should increase in holiness and righteousness as they grow in their faith. Sincere actions will give rise to more sincere actions; and though some be less considerable than others, Christ will take note of them all (Matt. 10:42). Likewise, the impenitent will increase in the wickedness of their acts the longer they live.[44]

Finally, Manton discusses how these works relate to punishments and rewards. The works of the unregenerate will influence their punishment. Sins committed against an infinite God deserve infinite punishment. However, on the other side, because of God's majesty as their Creator, humans are obliged to love and obey Him. Whatever good they do is only the duty they owe to the God who made them. He "is not bound by any right or justice from the merit of the action itself to reward it…. [God] is not bound by his natural justice to reward us, but only inclined so to do by his own goodness, and bound so to do by his free promise and covenant of grace."[45] This point cannot go unnoticed. The Reformed orthodox typically located the rewards God bestows to creatures in the context of the covenant, as Manton does here. In sum, sin deserves punishment, but good works do not merit a reward. But, in the context of the covenant, they do have a relation to the reward that believers will receive at the final judgment. First, good works enable believers to be a more "capable object of God's delight and approbation."[46] Second, they qualify believers to be more "capable of rewards." By persisting in obedience, believers will have a crown put upon their heads (2 Tim. 4:7–8). Third, works are the evidence of saving faith; they demonstrate "by signs more noticeable" (*a signis notioribus*) before the world who the true believers are. Fourth, good works are a measure of the rewards each believer will receive (2 Cor. 9:6).[47] This discussion of the nature and necessity of good works enables Manton to prove in his final point that every person will either be rewarded or judged according to their works.

What Awaits Each Person If rewards and punishments did not await each

person at the final judgment, the "whole process of that day would be but a solemn and useless pageantry."[48] On that day, the goats will be separated from the sheep, the unrighteous from the righteous. This distinction outlives time; "this distinction will last for ever, and the one of them will fill heaven and the other hell."[49] The godly will be comforted; the ungodly will be tormented. All believers recognize that this present life is burdened with many miseries; it has a beginning and an end. But the life to come has no end and is full of joy. Conversely, for the ungodly, their punishment is torment (1 John 4:18). Manton makes the common distinction between the "punishment of loss" (*poena damni*) and "punishment of feeling" (*poena sensus*) to describe both loss and pain (Matt. 25:41), which means: "God doth not take away the being of a sinner, but he taketh away the comfort of his being; he is banished out of his sight for evermore, and deprived of his favor, and all the joys and blessedness which are bestowed on the godly; and that is enough to make him miserable."[50] The unrighteous do not care to have God in this life, but they will understand more fully the reality of that loss in hell, for the condemned sinner will have no "comforts to divert his mind, no plays, or balls, or pleasures, or meat and drink," which keep such people from embracing Christ now.[51] There be not only loss, but also pain. "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). According to Manton, the worm is the conscience, which will reflect upon a life of sin; the fire is the wrath of God, "which bringeth on unspeakable torments on the body."[52]

Life is eternal, both for the righteous in heaven and for the wicked in hell. For the righteous, there "shall never be change of and intermission in their happiness, but after millions and millions of imaginary years, they are to continue in this life, as if it were the first moment" (1 Thess. 4:17).[53] God's judgment on the wicked will be everlasting judgment whereby those judged will forever be deprived of God and feel the force of His wrath. Hell will be a place of utter and unending misery. Manton answers the objection raised by some (e.g., the Socinians) who ask how a momentary action deserves everlasting punishment. Reformed theologians denied that any human can positively merit any reward from God, but they did affirm that humans could merit eternal punishment. Such is the asymmetry of human merit. Manton gives several reasons why the momentary actions of finite creatures can merit infinite and eternal punishment from God.

In the first place, God governs the world according to His own ways and reasons. God has every right as the lawgiver to determine the sanctions of His law, which include both punishments and rewards. Next, God plainly warns people of the threat of punishment to come for impenitent sinners (Rom. 8:13).

Manton argues that “it is agreeable to the wisdom of our lawgiver, that things to come should have some advantage in the proposal, above things present, that the joy and pain of the other world, which is a matter of faith, should be greater than the joy and pain of this world” (Luke 16:25).54 Third, punishments for transgressing laws, even human laws, last longer than the time of the offence; the duration of punishment (*mora poena*) is generally longer than the duration of the offense (*mora culpa*). All sins are committed against the majesty of God, as the supreme lawgiver. Moreover, men refuse eternal life “to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25). They are aware of the consequences, but rather than flee from the wrath to come they tarry to enjoy their sin. Worse, they would continue in sin for eternity if they could. Accordingly, Manton reasons, “Since they break the laws of the eternal God, and the very nature of the sin is a despising his favour for some temporal pleasure or profit, and this they would do everlastingly, if they could subsist here so long,” God is just when He condemns them eternally for their temporal sins.55

Finally, Manton explains that God’s sentence is irrevocable. In this age, God may revoke his judgment56 and show compassion (Jer. 8:7–8). Nonetheless, at the final judgment, there will be no possibility of revocation once the verdict has been rendered. The verdict will be rendered speedily, and no help will be offered to the wicked, nor will they escape (Matt. 13:42). Moreover, the sentencing will begin with the godly, but execution of the sentence will begin with the wicked because the godly will not only be judged, but will also judge the world with Christ and His angels (1 Cor. 6:2). Before they can judge, they must be acquitted of all guilt before the judge of heaven and earth. Execution will, however, begin with the wicked; “first the wicked are cast into hell-fire, Christ and all the godly with him looking on…. And the godly have the deeper sense of their own happiness by seeing from what wrath they are delivered.”57 This joining of the righteous with Christ to judge the wicked, then, concludes the final judgment, when the righteous will attest to God’s justice in damning the ungodly and receive the full benefits of their redemption as they are ushered into the eternal state of glory, happiness, and love to God forever.

Conclusion

Those who hold to Reformed theological convictions treasure the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and rightly so. However, the temptation may exist for some to infer from this doctrine that the final judgment will have nothing to do with the works of believers. As Manton's exposition of 2 Corinthians 5:10 has shown, this inference is mistaken. The major point in Manton's exposition is worth reiterating. His doctrine of "double justification" affirms that Christians are under a double law of nature and grace. From this, two accusations may be brought against a professing believer at the final judgment. First, that he has breached the first covenant and has not obeyed God perfectly and perpetually during his life on earth. Christ alone rendered such obedience to the will of God, and therefore only Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer by faith can answer the first accusation. The second accusation concerns whether the faith of the Christian was a true saving faith, or a dead faith that cannot save. Regarding the second accusation, the good works that proceed from true faith may be said to justify the believer. In this way, Paul and James are reconciled, and the believer may be assured by his faith and its fruits that he has nothing to fear when at the last day he is summoned to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Manton was not alone in speaking of such a double justification. His contemporary, Thomas Goodwin, also affirmed a double justification. If Steven Coxhead's analysis of Calvin's subordinate doctrine of justification by works is correct, then these Puritan authors were following in the steps of the great Genevan Reformer.[58] More recently, other Reformed theologians have given attention to this particular topic. They do not always express themselves in the same manner, but the evidence suggests that just as it is Reformed to affirm justification by faith alone, it is equally Reformed to affirm that Christians will be judged according to their works at the final judgment.[59] These works do not merit salvation, but they certainly will mark the difference between those in the church who loved Christ in sincerity (Eph. 6:24) and those who were only hypocrites. Those who performed good works in obedience to Christ can expect, according to God's gracious covenant promise, to receive rewards based on their good works. In bestowing such rewards, God's grace is magnified, for not only does He freely justify sinners by imputing to them the righteousness of Christ, but enables them by grace to do good works, and to reward them for the works they perform after having been justified. As Calvin argued, "As we ourselves, when we have been engrafted into Christ, are righteous in God's sight because our iniquities are covered by Christ's sinlessness, so our works are righteous and are thus regarded because whatever fault is otherwise in them is buried in

Christ's purity, and is not charged to our account. Accordingly, we can deservedly say that by faith alone not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified."[60]

The idea of a final judgment according to works that involves all persons, both Christians and non-Christians, received its confessional formulation in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 33.1, which reads: "God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged; but likewise all persons, that have lived upon earth, shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil."[61] Manton's lengthy treatise provides an exposition of what is summarized in the Westminster Confession. And to that end, this chapter has attempted to provide an example of how one Reformed orthodox theologian understood the doctrine of a final judgment according to works.

Postscript

Is it possible to maintain the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone, while affirming a twofold or "double" justification? This particular question warrants an extensive study in its own right that cannot be dealt with here, but there is no question that Reformed theologians affirmed a double justification as early as Martin Bucer (1491–1551), whom Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) had in mind in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Certainly, Alister McGrath sees a doctrine of twofold justification in Bucer, who was involved in writing the "Regensburg Book" (*Liber Ratisboniensis*).62 McGrath notes that Bucer speaks of moral action (*habitus*) in the context of justification; indeed, "what was later termed *sanctificatio* by Calvin is termed 'secondary justification' or *iustificatio pii* by Bucer."63 McGrath is correct, but there is no question that Bucer held to the Protestant view that the imputed righteousness of Christ is the only formal cause of justification: "With one accord we acknowledge and teach that [the ground] on which we are righteous, or justified before God unto eternal life, is the righteousness of Christ alone."64 Bucer may have affirmed a twofold righteousness (*duplex justitia*), one forensic and the other inherent; however, this is not the same thing as the Roman Catholic Tridentine view that allows for a double formal cause of justification.

Besides Martin Bucer, Burgess also refers to Ludovic (Loedwijk) de Dieu (1590–1642) and John Calvin as proponents of this view. Ludovic de Dieu was a highly regarded professor and pastor at the University of Leiden (the Walloon College). In his exposition of Romans 8:4 de Dieu puts forth his view of a double or "first and second" (*primam* & *secundam*) justification.65 Like all Protestants, de Dieu affirms a justification that is received by faith alone whereby the sinner is justified outside of himself. Similar to the views of Bucer, Vermigli, Goodwin, and Manton, for example, de Dieu affirms that sinners are also justified before God in themselves. The second justification (by works) results from the first (by faith alone); the second demonstrates that the first did in fact take place. In all of this, de Dieu rejects the idea that the godly are justified by the works of the law. As Burgess notes in his interpretation of de Dieu's view: "these works of Sanctification are not the works of the Law *ratione originis* [i.e., in terms of their origin], for the Spirit of God doth work them, but *ratione normae* [i.e., in terms of the pattern to which they conform], in respect of the rule by which they are prescribed."66 As noted, Burgess recognizes that de Dieu's view has much in common with Bucer's, but Burgess also claims that Calvin spoke in this manner and references the *Institutes*, 3.17.8, which, taken on its own, does not necessarily prove a double justification, though the wider corpus of Calvin's writings shows that he does hold to such a position.67

Nonetheless, Burgess sees no ground in Scripture for a double justification. What this shows was that some Reformed theologians were quite willing to affirm a double justification and a twofold righteousness, one alien/forensic and the other personal/inherent. Others, like Burgess, refrained from such language for various reasons. But this dispute at least represents yet another area where diversity existed in the tradition of orthodox Reformed theology.

1. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated*… (London: for Thomas Underhill, 1654), 151.

2. Steven Coxhead addresses this issue in John Calvin and argues, in opposition to a number of scholars, that Calvin taught a doctrine of justification on two levels: "In Calvin's thinking, justification by faith *alone* operates on the level of absolute righteousness, and justification by works on the level of God's gracious covenant. Those who deny that Calvin taught a subordinate and legitimate doctrine of justification by works have arguably not understood the genius of Calvin's teaching on this issue." "John Calvin's Subordinate Doctrine of Justification by Works," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 1–19. See also Coxhead's first part of the article, "John Calvin's Interpretation of Works Righteousness in Ezekiel 18," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 303–16. See also Anthony Lane, "Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification (Reflections on Article 5 of the Regensburg Colloquy)," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 205–24.

3. Continental Reformed theologians also gave attention to this subject. For a relatively brief discussion of this topic, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1997), 20.6.1–22. Manton and Turretin marshal essentially the same argument.

4. Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.* (London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1875), 13:45. Manton also discusses the final judgment according to works in his *Sermons upon Matthew XXV*, in *Works*, 10:3–106. Like many of his contemporaries (e.g., Thomas Goodwin), he appears to have done some "copying and pasting."

5. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:46.

6. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:46.

7. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:47–48.

8. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:49.

9. See Thomas Goodwin's comments on Christ longing for His own return in *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4:100.

10. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:50.

11. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:50.

12. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:51–52.

13. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:53.

14. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:53.

15. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:53.

16. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:54.

17. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:55. Note also the Westminster Confession of Faith: "Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures; by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes, in Scripture, attributed to the person denominated by the other nature" (8.7).

18. John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 3:160.

19. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *Works*, 3:162. See also Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), 195.

20. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:56.

21. For example, concerning the Son's special act of assuming the human nature, John Owen argues that it was an outward act (*ad extra*) of the triune God, "As unto *original efficiency*." However, "As unto *authoritative designation*, it was the act of the Father…. As unto the *formation of the human nature*, it was the peculiar act of the Spirit…. As unto the *term of the assumption*, or the taking of our nature unto himself, it was the peculiar act of the person of the Son." *Of the Person of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:225.

22. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:59.

23. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:59.

24. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:62–63.

25. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:63.

26. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:65.

27. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:65.

28. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:66.

29. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:68.

30. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:69.

31. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:72.

32. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:73.

33. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:73.

34. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:74.

35. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:74.

36. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:74.

37. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:75.

38. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:75.

39. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:76.

40. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:76.

41. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:77. Chapter 19, "The Puritans on Covenant Conditions," shows that Thomas Goodwin also affirmed a double justification in this manner. See also his *Gospel Holiness*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:181.

42. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:78.

43. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:78.

44. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:79.

45. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:79.

46. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:79.

47. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:80.

48. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:81.

49. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:82.

50. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:84.

51. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:84.

52. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:84.

53. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:85.

54. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:86.

55. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:87.

56. "He alters the sentence, but not the law He has decreed" (*mutat sententiam, sed non decretum*). Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:88.

57. Manton, *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *Works*, 13:88.

58. See also Cornelis P. Venema's exposition of Calvin's doctrine of a double justification: *Accepted*

and Renewed in Christ: The "Twofold Grace of God" and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 163–70. The recent work of Luca Baschera shows that Peter Martyr Vermigli held to a doctrine of double justification, the one a forensic righteousness, the other an inherent righteousness (*habitus*). *Tugend und Rechtfertigung: Peter Martyr Vermiglis Kommentar zur Nikomachischen Ethik im Spannungsfeld von Philosophie und Theologie* (Zurich: TVZ, 2008).

59. I have found the following works particularly helpful: Richard Gaffin, *"By Faith, Not by Sight": Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2006), 94ff.; Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1979), 261–87; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 178–81; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 1 to 8* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 1:78–79; Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 181–86.

60. Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.17.10.

61. The proof-texts given are the same ones used by Manton in his own exposition (e.g., Acts 17:31; John 5:22, 27; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eccl. 12:14; Rom. 2:16; 14:10, 12; Matt. 12:36–37; 25:31–46; 25:21; Mark 9:48).

62. Alister McGrath, Justitia Dei: *A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 222.

63. McGrath, *Doctrine of Justification*, 222.

64. "*Consentienter agnoscamus et doceamus id, quo accepto apud Deum ad vitam aeternam iustificati ac iusti sumus, solam esse iustitia Christi*." Martin Bucer, *De vera ecclesiarum in doctrina, ceremoniis et disciplina reconciliatione et compositione* (Strasbourg: Wendelin Rihel, 1542), 179v°.

65. See Ludovic de Dieu, *Animadversiones in D. Pauli Apostoli Epistolam ad Romanos* (Leiden: Elzevir, 1646), 101–13.

66. Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification*, 121.

67. Venema writes: "When Calvin participated in the Regensburg Colloquy in 1541 with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church…, he expressed his willingness to speak of a 'double justification' or 'twofold righteousness.'" *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*, 163.

Chapter 50

How History Informs the Historicist: Thomas Goodwin's Reading of Revelation

> *And tho' they have prov'd to be mistaken in their Calculations, yet many things occur in drawing them up, which are not altogether unworthy of being remark'd. Their Account indeed is now superannuated, yet it was proper enough for the Author to mention it at the time of his writing this Discourse, which was in the Year 1639.*
>
> —THOMAS GOODWIN, JR.[1]

So wrote Thomas Goodwin Jr. in 1683, three years after the death of his father, Congregationalist divine Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680). Goodwin Jr.'s comments suggest a number of areas that can be explored in more detail so that we can more accurately and more profitably understand his father's reading of the book of Revelation in its seventeenth-century context.

Dating Goodwin's Exposition Most of Goodwin's *Works* were published posthumously between 1681 and 1704. His exposition of Revelation was published in 1683 as the second of five large folio volumes. Goodwin's son suggests that Goodwin wrote his commentary on Revelation in 1639. Since this preface was retained in the somewhat less reliable Nichols edition of 1861–1866, most scholars have argued that Goodwin developed this commentary while serving in a Congregational church in the Netherlands.[2] Michael Lawrence has noted, however, that Samuel Hartlib's diary, the *Ephemerides*, indicates that Goodwin's exposition of Revelation "commenced, not in 1635, but in the second half of 1634."[3] Thus, Lawrence has persuasively argued, based upon the evidence in Hartlib, that some of Goodwin's dominant themes in Revelation were in place well before his emigration to Holland. Indeed, the events of the years leading up to 1634 help explain the reason for and the content of Goodwin's exposition on Revelation.

Goodwin's Context On March 2, 1622, Goodwin was ordained a deacon at

Peterborough. Three years later, having been licensed as a university preacher, he began preaching in the Church of St. Andrew the Great, Cambridge. In 1626, Goodwin was influential in bringing Richard Sibbes (1577–1635), "that holy and reverend Man," to be master of St. Catherine's Hall.[4] Goodwin eventually became curate at St. Andrew the Great, and in 1628 was elected to succeed John Preston (1587–1628) as lecturer at Trinity Church. Preston had chosen Goodwin, along with Sibbes, John Davenport (1597–1670), and John Ball (1585–1640), to edit his sermons.[5]

While at Trinity, John Buckeridge (d. 1631), the bishop of Ely, "in pursuance of the King's Proclamation," attempted to impose an oath on Goodwin "not to preach about any controverted Points in Divinity."[6] Goodwin responded, arguing that he would be left with little to preach on given that almost all points of divinity are disputed. Specifically, he made no mention of refuting Arminianism to Buckeridge, but only the gross errors of popery. Because Goodwin subscribed to the Three Articles of Canon 36,[7] he was admitted as lecturer and continued at Trinity Church, where he also held the post of vicar after 1632 until 1634.[8] Tom Webster explains Goodwin's resignation from Trinity Church in terms of scruples against "popish ceremonies."[9] "Samuel Hartlib," writes Webster, "reported only that Goodwin had resigned his place at Cambridge because of his changed views on ceremonies."[10] In connection with this, and based upon his exegesis of Revelation 11, Goodwin's vision for the national church was to purify it in light of the eschatological age in which he lived.[11] In his opposition to Rome, Goodwin, the Puritan, saw himself as a reformer of what he hoped would become a more pure Church of England.

Goodwin, now convinced from his exegesis of Revelation 11 of the necessity of a second reformation, hoped to organize the Church of England "around particular congregations composed of true, or visible, saints."[12] His ecclesiology had also been rethought in light of the influence of Congregationalist John Cotton (1585–1652).[13] In 1644, Cotton entrusted Goodwin and Philip Nye (c. 1595–1672) with the printing of his work *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*. In the preface, Goodwin and Nye describe Congregationalism as the "middle-way" between Brownism and Presbyterianism. Goodwin, then, became a Congregationalist in England, not in the Netherlands. However, the Netherlands, specifically Arnhem, allowed Goodwin to put into practice what he had come to believe several years before while in England. Fleeing to Holland in 1638, Goodwin originally settled in Amsterdam along with the other "dissenting brethren." They agreed to separate, and Goodwin went to serve alongside Nye, who had been settled in Arnhem for some time, as co-pastors of a congregation of about one hundred people.

These facts have caused historians to view Goodwin as the founder of Congregationalism.[14] However that may be, his views on church government must be understood in the context of his eschatology. The evidence from Goodwin's exegetical work on Revelation suggests that he viewed himself as a reformer of the Church of England, not as a rigid separatist.[15] If the Church of England were to undergo a thorough reformation of the type prophesied in Revelation 11, it would need to emanate from particular congregations of visible saints within her pale.

Robert Halley remarks that after Goodwin left Cambridge in 1634, due to his refusal to submit to Archbishop William Laud's articles of conformity, "little more is known of him for the next five years than his marriage in 1638 to Elizabeth [Prescott]," a marriage that would bring him significant financial benefits and social connections.[16] Sometime in November 1638, Goodwin fled to the Netherlands and eventually settled in Arnhem, "where he might exercise his Ministry in the Gospel, and enjoy the ordinances of Christ, according to his Conscience," something he was unable to do in England.[17] While there may be some truth that Goodwin was unwilling "to live wholly upon his wife's means, and so needed a Church to allow him maintenance,"[18] there were other forces at play. The determined opposition to Puritanism on the part of Matthew Wren (1585–1667), the newly appointed bishop of Ely, and his desire to enforce conformity, aligning himself with Charles I and Archbishop Laud, meant that Goodwin had little choice but to flee. At this time, debate over worship practice in the Church of England intensified, contributing in no small measure to the outbreak of civil war in 1642.[19] The anti-Calvinists not only attacked the Reformed doctrine of predestination, but also replaced "the Calvinist emphasis on internal piety with an elaborate public worship service based on the prayer book and canons."[20] Goodwin's flight to Holland, then, not only kept him safe but also allowed him to worship according to his conscience.

All of this is to suggest that Goodwin's reading of Revelation must be set against the historical context in which he wrote. In terms of the religious and political history of the seventeenth century, Goodwin's thoughts and conclusions about eschatological realities are not altogether surprising. That said, not all of Goodwin's contemporaries, especially those from Scotland, agreed with Goodwin's exegesis of Revelation. In fact, Goodwin's thoughts on Revelation evince a decisive break not only from some of his Reformed orthodox contemporaries, but also from the Reformation tradition. The religious and political climate of Goodwin's age may partly account for this break, yet there is more to the story.

The Rebirth of Millenarianism Jeffrey Jue has noted that both the early church and the Protestant church of the sixteenth century rejected millenarianism (from the Latin word *millennium,* a period of a thousand years) or chiliasm (from the Greek word *chilias,* meaning "a thousand"). Interestingly, however, by the seventeenth century "millenarianism was acceptable and popular amongst many Puritans."[21] What were the reasons for this doctrinal shift among theologians who otherwise committed heart and soul to the Reformation tradition? In Goodwin's case, a number of elements work together that explain why he embraced a hitherto unorthodox position. As has been noted, the rising influence of the Arminian party in the Church of England, coupled with Goodwin's change in ecclesiology (to Congregationalism), cannot be overstated. In this ecclesiological context, the position taken by Joseph Mede (1586–1638) proved to be attractive to his students at Cambridge, including Goodwin.[22] The prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, William Twisse (1578–1646), highlights Mede's influence by suggesting that regarding the book of Revelation, "many Interpreters have done excellently, but [Mede] surmounteth them all."[23] Goodwin's work on Revelation follows in the interpretive tradition pioneered by Mede.

In general, Goodwin's *Works* evince his wide-ranging interaction with writers, both Christian and non-Christian. His exposition of Revelation is no exception. Goodwin candidly admits that his exegesis of chapters 6, 8, and 9 follows the same line of interpretation as the best expositors, especially "Mr. Mede, whose Scheme and Division also of this whole Prophecy into the Seal-Prophecy and Book-Prophecy…I ever accounted an happy Notion for the understanding of this Book…although, in the Exposition of the 7th Chapter, I altogether differ from him, as also in some few things else."[24] This shows that while differing from Mede on some particulars, Goodwin adopted Mede's hermeneutical presuppositions, and that choice naturally affected his exegesis of Revelation quite substantially.[25] Mede's use of synchronisms unquestionably exercised a significant influence upon Goodwin's method for interpreting Revelation.[26] Using this hermeneutical structure, both Mede and Goodwin concluded that the millennium was near, that is, it would begin in the seventeenth century, whereupon true saints would rule on earth because of the overthrow of popery (i.e., Antichrist). The exact details of how this would take place, including the events leading up to the millennium, need to be developed in order to understand Goodwin's contribution to Puritan eschatology.

Goodwin's Exposition of Revelation *Interpretive Outline of Revelation* Goodwin's hermeneutical approach to Revelation can be understood as an

"historicist" (as opposed to "futurist") reading, or what Jue terms "historical-prophetic exegetical method."[27] This was the dominant hermeneutic in the seventeenth century.[28] While the first three chapters of Revelation make reference to seven churches in John's time, the focus from the fourth chapter onward is "a more general Prophecy from John's Time to the Worlds end."[29] This prophecy "is the story of all Times acted and represented," that is, not just ecclesiastical history, but world history in relation to ecclesiastical history.[30] To arrive at these conclusions, Goodwin divides Revelation into the "seal" prophecy (chapters 6–12) and the "book" prophecy (chapters 12–20).[31] As noted, Goodwin is following Mede, who writes: "The first prophecy of the seals, comprehendeth the destinies of the Empire. The other of the little book, destinies of the Church…until at length both shall be united in the Church reigning."[32] Though these two prophecies address different contexts, they nevertheless run concurrently over history.[33] The "seal" book is the external interpretation of history; it contains the affairs of the church in relation to the state, specifically the Roman Empire.[34] The "book" prophecy has reference to the internal state of the church of Christ in all ages. Like Mede, Goodwin writes, "The Seal-Prophecy treats of things Outward, and of the temporal State of the Church; whereas the Book-Prophecy treats of Spiritual Things within the Church…the Ecclesiastical Story is contained in the one; and the Imperial Story in the other."[35] That said, Goodwin does not deny that elements of each part may be found in the other. Moreover, to order and synchronize the prophecies in these two prophecies according to their times in history is, for Goodwin, "the chief Key of Interpretation."[36]

In the secondary literature on Goodwin's eschatology, the seal prophecy has received very little attention. This can partly be explained because the book prophecy is more immediately relevant to the religious and political climate of the seventeenth century; of course, the largest part of Goodwin's exposition is taken up with the book prophecy. As a result, scholars have focused the bulk of their attention on the contents of the book prophecy,[37] but in order to understand Goodwin's exposition of Revelation, his understanding of the seal prophecy cannot go unaddressed.

The "Seal-Prophecy"

According to Goodwin, Revelation can be summarized as Christ's ultimate conquest of His enemies, both in the church and outside. Those enemies outside have reference only to "Kingdoms or Monarchies of the Gentiles" that had immediate interaction with the church, since for Goodwin, Revelation was written for the comfort of the church.[38] Consequently, the Roman Empire, and

its relation to the church, is the main subject of the "seal-prophecy."[39] Revelation 6 describes the various judgments of God upon the Roman Empire for its persecution of God's people (Rev. 6:10; 8:3), which had earlier been prophesied in Daniel 7.

Beginning in Revelation 6, Goodwin has in view Christ subduing the idolatrous Roman Empire that existed under the power of Satan. According to Goodwin's understanding of history, the preaching of the gospel conquered the Roman Empire roughly three hundred years after Christ's ascension in Constantine's victory at Milvian Bridge (AD 312). The Roman Empire submitted to the Christian faith, at least in "outward Profession."[40] Yet, chapters 8 and 9 highlight Christ's further struggle for dominion against the civil and imperial powers that had subsequently been divided into East (Constantinople) and West (Rome).[41] In Revelation 8, the angels sound four trumpets. These trumpets correspond to the various wars that befell the Western Empire, including the city of Rome, as a result of the incursions of the Goths and Vandals. Their rule obliterated Rome's original monarchy and allowed the Pope to assume power. For Goodwin this meant essentially that one beast (the pope) replaced another (the emperor of Rome). These four trumpets against the Western Empire are, however, "lesser Evils in respect of those that are to fall upon the Eastern Part."[42] Revelation 9 describes two more trumpets, the first of which has in view the rise of "Mahumetanism [Islam], the greatest Imposture that ever the World knew."[43] The sixth trumpet represents God's judgment against the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. This empire, beginning circa AD 1300, would not be overthrown till "396 Years from his first breaking out," that is, 1696.[44] These six seals and trumpets last from Christ's time until Goodwin's own day, when the final trumpet (the seventh) would usher in the millennial reign of Christ. Indeed, the seventh trumpet, as Mede had argued, was to inaugurate the millennium. Therefore, Goodwin believed at the time of writing that the seventh trumpet had not yet sounded. Goodwin's historicist hermeneutic has implications not only for the church of Christ, but history in general as it relates to Christ's ultimate conquest of the world, which includes those empires that had persecuted the true church of Christ.

The "Book Prophecy"

The book prophecy begins in Revelation 12 and describes the years between Christ's resurrection and the inauguration of His millennial reign. Those years may be divided into two periods, the church during the first four hundred years after Christ, and the church during the time of Antichrist, the age of the papacy.[45] Following his historicist reading of Revelation, Goodwin argues that

Revelation 12 describes the state of the church during the first four hundred years after Christ's ascension, and Revelation 13–14 describe the church during the reign of Antichrist, that is, the pope of Rome exalting himself against Christ as head of the church.

In Revelation 12, the apostle John refers to "a man child, who was to rule all nations" (Rev. 12:5); clearly, for Goodwin, this child was Constantine, the first Christian emperor. If Revelation 12 represents the height of Christianity in the early church, there is no question that chapter 13 marks the beginning of the church's slide into idolatry as the pope and his clergy remolded Christian religion and worship "into a true likeness and conformity to the Heathenish Religion, which the Empire before was framed unto."[46] So long as the pope is exalted as its head, the church is a "False Antichristian Church"; nevertheless, Revelation 14 describes the true church, of which Christ alone is the head, in the time of Antichrist. Those who belong to the true church are the seed of the woman, understood as the fulfillment of the first gospel promise (*protoevangelium*) of Genesis 3:15.[47] Goodwin argues that the conditions of the true church of Christ during the time of popery fall into a threefold distinction: (1) the period when there were believers who, during the darker times of popery, did not formally separate from the Papists, but still preserved themselves from idolatrous worship, "and this during the space of 700 Years from the Pope's Rising"; (2) the period when the true church first began (c. AD 1100) to separate from Rome and to preach the gospel; and (3) the Reformation when the true church formally separated from Rome in the time of Luther and Calvin.[48]

The latter two eras of the history of the true church during the time of popery occupy the lengthiest part of Goodwin's exposition of Revelation, so only a few comments are necessary regarding those believers who did not separate from popery during its darkest times (c. AD 400–1100). These believers who were united to Christ constitute the redeemed 144,000 in Revelation 14. They did not possess distinct churches or officers, but they did recoil against the various Papist superstitions such as the setting up of images and the doctrine of transubstantiation.[49] In this first phase the light was dim, but still present; in the second and third stages of the true church more light broke forth as the necessary unfolding of Christ's purposes for His church on earth, which would ultimately result in the triumph of Congregationalism in the millennium. But before that could happen, the last two stages had to reach their fulfillment. For Goodwin, history corresponded perfectly with his exegesis of Revelation. Indeed, one might argue that history practically informed his exegesis of Revelation to the point that, upon adopting his historicist interpretation of Revelation, exegesis became subservient to history.[50]

The Reformations Revelation 14:6 and the following verses highlight the first formal separation from Antichrist, where the gospel breaks forth to such a degree that true churches were erected and "a glorious Reformation made."[51] This Reformation, of which there are three phases, represented by three different angels, was carried out by believers in opposition to the "False Church." Pierre Waldo (d. 1218) and his followers, the Waldensians, were the first to separate from "Popish Doctrine and Worship."[52] They were conspicuous by the fact that they preached the gospel—an article of their faith—and called men to turn from idolatrous worship. John Wycliffe (c. 1328–1384), John Hus (1372–1415), Jerome of Prague (1379–1416), and their followers furthered the cause of Reformation in the church in much the same way as the Waldensians, through their preaching and translation of the Scriptures.[53] "But then follows," says Goodwin,

> a Third Angel, more vehement than the rest, and that was Luther and his Followers…[Luther] showing that her Worship and Doctrine…was a damned Doctrine…laying open the Falsehood and Errors of it manifestly, that now under so clear a Light of the Gospel as this age held forth, it could never stand with Salvation to live therein.[54]

Calvin and others were, however, chiefly responsible for this Reformation, both in terms of doctrine and worship. This Reformation was a time of "glorious Peace and Sunshine of the Gospel."[55] For Goodwin, these reformations marked the process by which popery had been overthrown; indeed, he was convinced that "the Light which hath broken forth in many of our Reformed Churches, since Calvin's Time, and which still increaseth, and shall, until Antichrist be consumed, is both in Matter of Doctrine, Interpretation of Scriptures, Worship, Church-Government, &c. much purer…than what shines in the Story and Writings of those three latter Primitive Ages."[56]

Despite the advances made by Calvin and others, Goodwin was convinced that the church of his day was in need of "a New Reformation," or "a second Reformation."[57] Based upon his dating system and detailed exegetical analysis of Revelation 11, Goodwin believed that he was living in an age that would include heightened persecution of Reformed ministers. The problem of popery was, of course, not limited to the Church of Rome. Goodwin felt that popish worship, ceremonies, and doctrine had infiltrated the Church of England, especially with the growing influence of Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645). Lawrence notes that "without doubt, Goodwin thought Laud and his fellow-travellers, men such as White, Cosin, and Montagu, were the Pope's last

champions. These men and their policies would in time either literally or figuratively slaughter the godly ministers and magistrates of England. That time had not yet come."[58] But it would come, being only a few decades away at most. Thus, a final reformation was necessary, one that had immediate consequences for Goodwin as he sought to reform the Church of England—by reformation he meant the introduction of Congregationalist principles of church government—along godly lines. This Congregationalist reformation, according to Goodwin, was described in Revelation 11.

Revelation 11

Goodwin could not hide his delight at how Revelation so accurately described ecclesiastical history. He writes: "It is wonderful to me, to see how exactly this Vision…represents the present Face, the Affairs, Stirrings, and Alterations now a working in the Churches of Europe."[59] This plays out in the following manner: the Gentiles who trample on the holy city for forty-two months are the pope and his "Idolatrous Crew"; they set up worship analogous to that of heathen Rome and exercised their "Power and Jurisdiction…till 42 Months were fulfilled."[60] Towards the end of the forty-two months, Antichrist begins to lose power, which corresponds to the Reformation in northern Europe. However, even in Protestant churches, corruptions and defects entered and continued to the point that further reformation was necessary.[61] In fact, among the Protestants, "not one of an hundred are True Worshippers."[62] Reformation among Protestants, for Goodwin, was urgently needed.

Goodwin claimed to derive these insights from his exegesis of Revelation 11. Interestingly, Thomas Brightman (1562–1607), perhaps the second biggest influence on Goodwin in his exposition of Revelation, had interpreted Revelation 11 as "a repeating of matters long since past."[63] Goodwin, however, departed from both Brightman and Mede at this point.[64] As Lawrence notes, Goodwin's "interpretation not only charted new territory in the history of exegesis of this text, but…also revealed the logic behind his adoption of a new ecclesiology."[65]

Goodwin bases his answer to the problem of false professors in Protestant churches on the "reed" described in Revelation 11:1, insisting on the need for true worship, that is, only the worship that the Bible commands. Against the unscriptural idolatrous inventions of the Papists, Goodwin argued, "We admit of nothing in Matters of the Church, which the Word does not warrant."[66] The "reed" used to measure the temple of God is the rule that identifies what a true church is, namely, one that follows the "right way of the administration of all Church-Worship and Ordinances, as Excommunication, Sacraments, [and]

ordaining Officers of Holy Things."[67]

Excommunication played a significant role in Goodwin's ecclesiology; the reed given to the apostle John is used to distinguish between true and false worshipers. Whether men are admitted to or excommunicated from the fellowship of God's people depends on the "Rules of the Word."[68] All must be done with a view to the proper constitution of true churches, which "hath been the chief work of the Godly Ministers in England, in this last age."[69] Besides the advancement of this final reformation, Goodwin also believed that Revelation 11 spoke of those carnal Protestants who belong only to the "outer court." The persistence of Rome's idolatrous worship in the Church of England was actually prophesied by the apostle John (Rev. 11:1–2).[70] Thus, as Lawrence notes, "Laudian innovations and godly resistance to them had a mutually reinforcing effect on Goodwin's belief that the second reformation had begun."[71] Goodwin's separation from what he perceived as the crypto-popish Church of England was, in many respects, the natural outcome of his eschatology. Therefore, Goodwin's position must be understood as a combination of factors, two of which involve the important relationship between eschatology and ecclesiology.

The Two Witnesses Before the dawn of eschatological glory, there must be suffering. For Goodwin, this idea is outlined in the rest of Revelation 11 in the identification of the two witnesses and their eventual persecution, which he feared might include martyrdom. As Rodney Peterson has noted, Protestants had typically identified the "two witnesses" as either the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments or as faithful preachers; Luther and Brightman adopted a variation of the former interpretation whereas Bullinger and Mede opted for the latter.[72] The difference between these interpretations should not be exaggerated since faithful gospel preaching is always grounded in the Scriptures. Following Mede and Bullinger, Goodwin identified the witnesses as "eminent…Ministers and Magistrates."[73] These witnesses quarrel against those of the "Popish party"[74] who seek to introduce what Goodwin calls "Humane Inventions in God's Worship, which himself commanded not."[75] However, as Revelation 11:7 makes clear, the witnesses will be killed. Here, Goodwin departs from Brightman, who maintained the "killing" of the witnesses "to be long since fulfilled." Goodwin argues that the persecution of the witnesses awaits fulfillment.[76] Goodwin's view of the precise nature of the persecution of the witnesses was, as Lawrence notes, a more "politically charged view" than that of Mede.[77]

Thus the beast that overpowers the two witnesses represented not only the

Papists, but also other secular enemies.78 Besides possible martyrdom, Goodwin predicted that the persecution would include a "general silencing of Ministers, and deposing Magistrates and Men of worth, that profess and uphold Religion,… shutting their Shops, [and] burning their Books."79 This persecution did not necessarily include, however, their literal death since their "Resurrection is not from a Natural Death, and therefore such not their killing."80 This heightened persecution of godly ministers and magistrates finds its parallel in the life of Christ who suffered before He entered into His glory. Just as the cross represented the nadir of Christ's sufferings before He was delivered, so too will the saints know that deliverance is near as they suffer at the hands of the Papists. These "last Champions"81 of the beast no doubt included anti-Calvinists such as William Laud, Richard Montagu (1575–1641), and John Cosin (1595–1672). As Lawrence notes, "These men and their policies would in time either literally or figuratively slaughter the godly ministers and magistrates of England. That time had not yet come."82 But Goodwin believed it would soon, partly because of an elaborate date-setting scheme he inherited, though with some modification, from Mede.

Dates and Date-Setting The prophecies of major events in Western history, both imperial and ecclesiastical, were finding their present-day fulfillment, according to Goodwin's reading of Revelation. This judgment was further confirmed by his analysis of the precise time when the apocalypse would reach its climax. For example, regarding the "killing" and "rising" of the witnesses, Goodwin notes that the writers of "this age" arrive at one of two dates, between 1650 and 1656, or else 1666, "both which Periods are not far off to come."83 One such writer was Goodwin's fellow Congregationalist, William Bridge, who equated the 1,260 days in Revelation 11:3 with years, "as it is ordinary in Scripture."84 These 1,260 years, or forty-two months, began about the year "400 or 406 or [4]10 or thereabouts."85 These dates have reference to the fall of the Western Empire, and, here again, the importance of secular history finds its way into seventeenth-century interpretations of Revelation. For Bridge, then, 1666 was the year when God would deliver His people from the persecutions of the past 1,260 years.86 As Jue notes, Goodwin understood the earlier date of 1650–1656 because Mede had "synchronized the sounding of the first trumpet with the beginning of the pope's reign in AD 395. By adding 1,260 years (the prophetic days of the beast's reign) [Goodwin] concluded the end of that reign would be at the end of the year 1655. Thus Christ would return in 1656."87 However, according to Jue, Goodwin's reading of Mede's date for the beginning of the millennium was "not entirely accurate."88 In fact, in a letter to Archbishop

James Ussher (1581–1656), Mede actually suggested that the beast's reign would end in 1736.89 Even so, Goodwin came to his own conclusions about the beginning of Christ's millennial kingdom. And, not surprisingly, though somewhat different from Bridge's and Mede's views, these conclusions looked for their fulfillment in the seventeenth century.

For Goodwin, the key to arriving at the correct date is found in Daniel 12:11–12.90 The Roman Emperor Julian (c. 331–363)—nicknamed "the Apostate"—was, according to Goodwin, the one described in Daniel 11 as the king who took away the daily sacrifice.91 Besides persecuting the Christians, Julian was responsible for "setting up Heathenish Idolatry in the World."92 With this basic presupposition in place, Goodwin approaches Revelation 11 with the view of understanding how long Antichrist's reign would be and when it would end. In the light of Daniel 11 there are two periods to be noted. The first, as noted, refers to the "ceasing of the daily Sacrifice" from Julian's time. The 1,290 "days," spoken of in Daniel 12:11, added to 360 (i.e., Julian's time) amounts to the year 1650 or thereabouts.93 Daniel 12:12, however, gives a further number of 1,335 "days," which ends "between 1690, and 1700."94 Goodwin describes these two periods as "two Posts, the one at the beginning, and the other at the ending of that whole Stage of Time, which is allotted for the dispatch of those great Things prophesied of, to fall out afore the Kingdom of Christ."95 Between 1650 and 1700, the course of history will unfold in a manner that ushers in the kingdom of Christ, namely, "the ruin of Rome, and so, the end of AntiChrist's Reign; and then the destruction of the Turkish Empire."96 In other words, 1650 does not signal the end of Antichrist's reign; rather, it marks the turning point of history and the beginning of preparations for the coming of the kingdom of Christ.

In all of this, Goodwin did not fail to acknowledge that his date-setting scheme might be proved wrong. Thus, he declares that "All these Notions and Conjectures…I give up to further Light, and second Considerations, knowing that such have often failed, and deceived others. And considering also, that in fixing the Times and Seasons for God's great Works of Wonder, there is the greatest Modesty that may be…expressed."97 This caveat notwithstanding, Goodwin insisted that these great events in history were fast approaching and the godly should prepare for them, for, "the Truth is, both the Killing and Rising of the Witnesses, and also the Calling of the Jews, may fall out sooner than we are aware of."98 All of this, of course, has a definite goal in view: the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom on earth.

The Millennium

Goodwin's *Exposition of Revelation* is conspicuous because for all of his conjectures about the unfolding of history leading up to the millennium, there is actually very little discourse on the millennium itself. However, what he does argue about the millennial kingdom of Christ is particularly fascinating, especially since, as Crawford Gribben notes,[99] Goodwin departs from the likes of Theodore Beza, Thomas Brightman, Joseph Mede, William Ames (1576–1633), and James Ussher, by suggesting that "this Kingdom of Christ on Earth to come, is a far more glorious condition for the Saints, than what their Souls have now in Heaven."[100] As Gribben suggests, "Goodwin was staking a claim for the millennial kingdom far beyond Mede's conservative caution."[101]

One important factor driving Goodwin's millennialism is the glory of the God-man, Jesus Christ. In fact, of all the Puritans, Goodwin scales the theological heights of Christ's glory in a manner that surpasses all his contemporaries, even John Owen (1616–1683). And this, no doubt, is partly driven by his eschatology. For Goodwin, Christ possesses a threefold glory: (1) an essential glory that cannot be increased or diminished, on account of His divine nature; (2) a native glory that belongs to Him alone because of the hypostatic union; and (3) a mediatorial glory, which is His reward for His work.[102] The latter two glories correspond to Christ's person and work. The third glory—His mediatorial glory—provides the ground for Goodwin's thoughts on the millennium, what he calls the "world to come." While his *Exposition of Revelation* contains only a few comments on the millennium, in his *Exposition of Ephesians*—specifically, Ephesians 1:21–22—Goodwin "lingered on the theme."[103]

The world to come, in which Christ exercises a particular rule as the exalted mediator, includes heaven and earth. The resurrection and ascension of Christ inaugurate a new creation (Eph. 1:21). As a result, Goodwin suggests that Christians mark creation not from Genesis 1, but rather from Christ's resurrection: "But we say *One thousand and six hundred*…as reckoning from Christ, for then our New world began."[104] The "new world," then, has reference to Christ's rule in heaven over the world since the time of His resurrection. At His resurrection He had "thrown down *Heathenism* and *Judaism* (which was his first day's work…) then cometh a Night of *Popery*…. He will have a second day's work, and he will not cease till he hath thrown out every rag…[of] that *Antichrist* or *Popery*."[105]

The goal in mind, for Goodwin, is the ushering in of the millennium: "that this state of Glory, of a glorious Church on Earth, shall continue for a Thousand years, during which time the *Jews* shall have it, and the *Gentiles* together with

them."[106] In the new world, Christ will "bring Heaven down" to earth, that is, Christ will not come down physically ("that is the old Error of some"), but He will reign from heaven over the earth because the Devil is "shut up for a Thousand years" (Rev. 20:1–3).[107] The means by which Christ reigns is through the resurrection of martyrs. The souls of martyrs in heaven will return to earth, be united to resurrected bodies, and reign during the millennium until Christ returns on the day of judgment.[108] Before Goodwin, Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) made similar comments regarding the nature of the millennium on earth. Alsted divided the New Testament church into four periods. The third period marks the thousand years spoken of in Revelation 20.[109] During this period martyrs will rise. A "double Conversion or calling of the Gentiles" will take place, and the Jews will be converted.[110] After Goodwin, even after 1666, a significant date for millennialists, the fifth monarchist and Congregationalist minister, Samuel Petto (1624–1711), argued the same emphases as Goodwin and Alsted, namely, that the resurrection of the "witnesses" (i.e., martyrs) and conversion of the Jews will usher in the millennial age.[111] He writes, "The Conversion of the Jews, of multitudinous number of that Israel is to be expected."[112] Petto's work in 1693 shows that millennialism did not die out with the Restoration in 1662, but remained very much alive in the latter part of the seventeenth century, albeit with slightly different exegetical conclusions.[113]

As noted, the millennium represented for Alsted the third of four periods in the history of the New Testament church. The church in general included not only the four periods belonging to the New Testament church, but also the time before the fall and after the fall. This is the church on earth. Alsted also recognized the place of the church in heaven where Christ reigns.[114] This, too, is consistent with Goodwin's basic pattern of christological and ecclesiastical glory. Remaining bodily in heaven, Christ is the king of kings; "he is the King of Angels, the Head of all Principalities and Powers."[115] Owen notes that the head, "wherein God hath gathered up all things in heaven and earth into one, one body…is Jesus Christ."[116] This glory was "reserved for him" and only Christ alone "could bear the weight of this glory."[117] Like Goodwin, Owen understands the glory of Christ in the world to come to include both His glory as the God-man (i.e., His native glory) and His glory as the mediator (superadded glory). Reconciliation between God and man could be achieved by no one but the God-man. Herein the organic relationship between Christ's person and work reaches its consummate expression in the "new world," which includes heaven and earth.[118]

What Goodwin means by Christ's glory and reign in heaven must be carefully

understood, especially in light of 1 Corinthians 15:24, which speaks of Christ delivering up His kingdom to God the Father. According to Goodwin, Christ possesses a natural kingdom because He is God. Christ receives a kingdom by natural inheritance because, as man, He is united to the divine Son, "for he inheriteth the privileges of the Second Person."[119] As the God-man, then, Christ continues to retain and experience in heaven many privileges such as the "Fullness of Joy" and "All that Personal Honour and Glory…which he was crowned with indeed when he came first to Heaven. All these remain to eternity…and they are a natural due to him."[120] Besides this natural inheritance, there is what Goodwin calls a "Dispensatory Kingdom," which has reference to Christ as mediator between God and the elect. This kingdom was not Christ's natural due. Rather, it was given to Him by the Father as a reward for His obedience. Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) refers to this glory as a debt owed to Christ.[121] These statements highlight the distinction between Christ's native glory and His mediatorial glory. Until the day of judgment, Christ has been entrusted with the kingdom, the kingdom of the "new World." However, after the day of judgment, the kingdom will be "appropriated more eminently unto God the Father."[122]

The reason for this is twofold. First, the Father gave Christ a dispensatory kingdom so that Christ would receive more glory and honor. Goodwin writes: "that as for every work there is a season; so there should be for every Person and season wherein they shall be in a more especial manner more glorious."[123] Second, Christ's reign in heaven was a reward due to Him that consisted in Him receiving "all the glory and honour" because He "veiled his Godhead in obedience to his Father."[124] Thus upon Christ's ascension into heaven, the Father commits all judgment to the Son. After having "made all his enemies his footstool," the Father is honored by the Son, as Christ delivers up the kingdom to Him and becomes subject to Him (1 Cor. 15:28).[125] In other words, He hands over to His Father His mediatorial kingdom when the church is complete and cleansed of all imperfection. This kingdom then "ceaseth, for there will be no need of it."[126] Though Christ's mediatorial kingdom ceases, Goodwin makes clear that Christ's glory does not, since Christ will always possess His natural or native glory as the God-man, which, as noted, far exceeds the superadded glory of His mediatorial office.

Conclusion

Goodwin's conclusions about Revelation are bound up with a number of important factors. First, the religious and political climate of the seventeenth century clearly influenced Goodwin, as it did all of the English Puritans. However, Goodwin firmly believed the threat of a renewal of popery in the Church of England would be defeated, and the cause of true religion would flourish in the form of pure Congregationalism. He discerned such a promise in the book of Revelation. In addition, building on the hermeneutical insights of Joseph Mede, Goodwin's historicist reading of Revelation, incorporating both ecclesiastical and imperial history, provided the necessary exegetical platform for him to predict the imminent—if by imminent we understand within decades—overthrow of popery and the empire of the Ottoman Turks. Indeed, his date-setting scheme predicted that the millennial glory would dawn toward the end of the seventeenth century. But before the dawn of glory there must be a night of suffering (1650–1666); the suffering of the godly would, however, mark the beginning of Antichrist's downfall. If history was moving in this direction, and the book of Revelation provided the interpretive key to understanding the unfolding of history, it was ultimately because the glory of Christ demanded such an outcome. Christ's mediatorial glory, a superadded glory given to Him by the Father, would achieve its consummation in the millennial age before He hands His kingdom over to the Father at the final judgment.

Scholars, particularly historians, continue to debate the reasons behind British apocalyptic thought, with no firm consensus.[127] And while their insights into the religious-political context of the seventeenth century have yielded some important conclusions, there is no question that theological concerns were equally prominent in the example of Goodwin. To that end, the glory of Christ, realized on earth in the churches that adopted the "Congregational way," functions as a powerful reason for further explaining Goodwin's reading of Revelation.

It remains only to acknowledge that Goodwin, as fascinating as his interpretation may be, was largely mistaken in his reading of prophecy. The seventeenth century came and went without witnessing the overthrow of the pope of Rome and his false church, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the further reformation of the Church of England, or the final triumph of Congregationalism over all other forms of church government. In fact, three more centuries have come and gone without any of these things coming to pass, apart from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but far more sinister "empires of evil" arose in the course of the twentieth century to take its place. The lesson is not that men should refrain from trying to make sense of Revelation, but only that all

interpreters need a healthy measure of self-awareness and should take care not to read prophecy strictly in terms of their own knowledge of history and current events or in terms of their own personal hopes and dreams. The danger of imposing our own meanings on the sacred text is all too real.

1. Thomas Goodwin Jr., in his preface to *An Exposition upon the Book of Revelation*, by Thomas Goodwin, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London: J. D. and S. R. for T. G., 1681–1704), 2:1.

2. On the superiority of the 1681–1704 edition (5 folio volumes) and the Nichols 1861–1866 edition (12 volumes), see Michael Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation: Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Project 1600–1704" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2002).

3. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 126.

4. Thomas Goodwin [Jr.], "The Life of Dr. Thomas Goodwin: Compos'd from His Own Papers and Memoirs," in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford*, by Thomas Goodwin (London: J. D. and S. R. for T. G., 1681–1704), 5:xiv. For a good modern treatment of Sibbes's theology in the seventeenth-century context, see Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2000).

5. Besides editing Preston's sermons, Goodwin was an editor or publisher of the works of Sibbes, Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646), John Cotton, (1585–1652), and Thomas Hooker (1586–1647).

6. Goodwin, "Life," in *Works*, 5:xvii. Lawrence notes that it "is not clear to what Buckeridge was referring as 'the King's proclamation.'" "Transmission and Transformation," 88–94. If the proclamation spoken of is the royal Declaration, issued by Charles I, prefaced to the Thirty-Nine Articles, it would have had particularly negative implications for Goodwin's Calvinistic doctrines.

7. A requirement dating from 1604, that ministers of the Word declare, in the form of an *ex animo* oath, their assent to the king's supremacy as governor of the Church of England, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, and the Book of Common Prayer.

8. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 95; see also Robert Halley, "Memoir of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.," in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* by Thomas Goodwin, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 2:xxiv.

9. Examples of "popish ceremonies" in the Book of Common Prayer that troubled Puritan consciences include making the sign of the cross in baptism, the giving and receiving of the ring in marriage, and kneeling to receive holy communion.

10. Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 306.

11. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2.

12. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 113.

13. Cotton Mather records that prior to his departure for New England in 1633, John Cotton convinced Goodwin and others of Congregationalism. See Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana: *or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 1:264–65.

14. It is important to note that terms such as "Congregationalism" and "Presbyterianism" are somewhat anachronistic prior to 1640. See Webster, *Godly Clergy*, 310–32. "Congregationalism," however, as a theological term, is useful in terms of understanding the trajectory of Goodwin's ecclesiological convictions.

15. For a discussion of the relationship between Goodwin's ecclesiology and eschatology, see Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 95–141. Goodwin's exegesis of Revelation 11 will be discussed below.

16. Halley, "Memoir," in *Works*, 2:xxiv.

17. Goodwin, "Life," in *Works*, 5:xviii.

18. Thomas Edwards, *Antapologia* (London: G. M. for John Bellamie, 1644), 25. Edwards's

Antapologia was the most controversial reply to the "Dissenting Brethren's" *An Apologeticall Narration…* (London: for Robert Dawlman, 1643). Goodwin, Nye, Sydrach Simpson (c. 1600–1655), William Bridge (1601–1671), and Burroughs were the five Independent ministers who presented *An Apologeticall Narration*, concerning matters of church government, to the Westminster Assembly.

19. As Peter Lake, Anthony Milton, and Kenneth Fincham have demonstrated, besides predestination, there were other religio-political causes that led to the first civil war in England during the seventeenth century. Their goal has been to "nudge the current historiographical debate away from an obsessive preoccupation with one doctrine—predestination—and towards an appreciation of a range of contentious issues: conformity, order, worship, clerical authority and wealth." Kenneth Fincham, ed., *The Early Stuart Church: 1603–1642* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 1–2.

20. Esther Gilman Richey, *The Politics of Revelation in the English Renaissance* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 9.

21. Jeffrey Jue, "Puritan Millenarianism in Old and New England," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul Chang-Ha Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 259. On page 261 Jue notes that "the majority of Protestants in the sixteenth century followed the medieval tradition of interpreting Revelation 20 according to Saint Augustine. Instead of viewing the millennium as a strictly future event, Augustine believed the millennium was symbolically describing the period between Christ's first advent and his Second Coming at the end of history."

22. On Mede's apocalypticism see Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006).

23. Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, trans. Richard More (London: R. B. for Phil Stephens, 1643), 1.

24. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:75.

25. For an example on a particular where Goodwin differed from Mede, see Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:129–30.

26. On Mede's use of synchronisms see Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, 1:1–29; Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 102–6.

27. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 151.

28. However, Jue notes that there were two historicist options—millenarianism and preterism—which were "debated vociferously in England well into the eighteenth century." *Heaven upon Earth*, 151.

29. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:1.

30. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:1.

31. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:18, 75.

32. Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, 1:38.

33. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:18.

34. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:7, 22–23.

35. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:25.

36. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:76.

37. See Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 177–80, 219–23; Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 44–48.

38. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:22–23.

39. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:23.

40. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:26.

41. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:27, 29.

42. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:52.

43. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:53.

44. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:54. At its zenith the Ottoman Empire extended from the outskirts of Vienna eastward to the Gulf of Aden, and from Egypt north to the Black Sea. Having cast in its lot with the Central Powers in World War I, the Ottoman Empire expired when it suffered defeat and dismemberment at the hands of the Allies in 1918.

45. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:61.
46. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:64.
47. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:70.
48. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:70.
49. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:70–71.
50. Note Goodwin's comments in *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:75.
51. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:83.
52. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:84.
53. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:85.
54. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:85.
55. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:86.
56. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:129.
57. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:78–79.
58. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 124–25.
59. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:118.
60. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:118. Goodwin's date-setting in relation to the forty-two months will be discussed later in this chapter.
61. Goodwin writes, "So that, in what sense soever the Papists…might be called the Outward Court, these also may." *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:120.
62. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:121.
63. Thomas Brightman, *A Revelation of the Revelation* (Amsterdam, 1615), 348.
64. On Mede's interpretation, see *The Key of the Revelation*, 1:11–12.
65. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 117.
66. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:122.
67. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:123.
68. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:123.
69. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:124.
70. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:125.
71. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 120.
72. Rodney Peterson, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of "Two Witnesses" in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 99–100, 203–9.
73. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:135.
74. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:139.
75. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:138.
76. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:144–45.
77. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 123.
78. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:151.
79. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:154.
80. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:154. Goodwin elsewhere writes: "This lying Dead here of these Witnesses, must needs be Metaphorically meant, and understood of such a Civil Death, and of a suppression of them and their Cause, and, as they are Witnesses, to be so put down and extinguished, that they, for a Time, remain as Men laid forth by the Walls for dead, and as Men in whose Testimony there is in appearance no Life, or likelihood of a Revival, their Enemies having now got such a Power over them…. And oppositely, the revival of them and their Cause, is set forth by a Resurrection from the Dead." *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:155. However, on that same page, Goodwin fears that some may in fact be martyred.
81. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:151.
82. Lawrence, "Transmission and Transformation," 125.
83. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:182.
84. William Bridge, *Seasonable Truths in Evil-Times in Several Sermons* (London: for Nath. Crouch,

1668), 113.

85. Bridge, *Seasonable Truths*, 113–14.

86. Bridge, *Seasonable Truths*, 115.

87. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 179.

88. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 179.

89. Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 179.

90. Daniel 12:11–12: "And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days."

91. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:183. On Julian's religion, see Rowland Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London: Routledge, 1995); Adrian Murdoch, *The Last Pagan: Julian the Apostate and the Death of the Ancient World* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003).

92. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:183.

93. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:184.

94. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:184.

95. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:184.

96. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:185.

97. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:190. Paul Ling-Ji Chang has suggested that in Goodwin's *Exposition of Ephesians* he "became more cautious" regarding date-setting. Chang adduces Goodwin's comments on Ephesians 2:7 in support. Chang writes: "To the question 'when shall this be accomplished,' [Goodwin] answered that 'We see none of this, it is hidden to us.' Goodwin did not provide any date as before. He avoided unfounded conjectures." "Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) on the Christian Life" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001), 61. However, contrary to Chang's claim, Goodwin's comments clearly refer to the response of the Ephesian church regarding the full apprehension of their soteric benefits.

98. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:190.

99. Gribben, *Puritan Millennium*, 45.

100. Goodwin, *Revelation*, in *Works*, 2:14.

101. Gribben, *Puritan Millennium*, 45.

102. See Thomas Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, 1:402; *Of the Knowledge of God the Father*, 2:131ff.—both titles are in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen College in Oxford* (London: J. D. and S. R. for T. G., 1681–1704).

103. Gribben, *Puritan Millennium*, 47.

104. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:454.

105. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:455.

106. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:456.

107. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:456.

108. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:457–59. Goodwin refers to Augustine's comments on the millennium, namely, that if only spiritual delights come from heaven, then the opinion of the chiliasts may be tolerated. But, according to Augustine, the chiliasts were indulgent materialists. See also Jue, *Heaven upon Earth*, 119–21.

109. Johann Heinrich Alsted, *The Beloved City, or, The Saints Reign on Earth a Thousand Yeares Asserted and Illustrated from LXV places of Holy Scripture*, trans. William Burton (London, 1643), 7. On Alsted's eschatology, see Howard B. Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*: *Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000).

110. Alsted, *The Beloved City*, 7–9. Jue provides a particularly illuminating discussion of English millenarianism and the various debates surrounding chiliasm. See *Heaven upon Earth*, 141–74.

111. Samuel Petto, *The Revelation Unvailed…* (London: for John Harris, 1693), 142–43. Petto

recognizes that many had failed in their predictions of dates during the seventeenth century and writes a postscript addressing that issue. See 161–64.

112. Petto, *The Revelation Unvailed*, 157.

113. Warren Johnston has shown that apocalyptic convictions were very much alive after the Restoration (1660), which the Revolution of 1688–1689 shows. "Revelation and the Revolution of 1688–1689," *The Historical Journal* 48 no. 2 (2005): 351–89. See also Ernestine van der Wall, "'Antichrist Stormed': The Glorious Revolution and the Dutch Prophetic Tradition," in *The World of William and Mary: Anglo-Dutch Perspectives on the Revolution of 1688–89*, ed. Dale Hoak and Mordechai Feingold (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 152–64.

114. Alsted, *The Beloved City*, 11.

115. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:425.

116. Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:371.

117. Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:371.

118. See Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:371–74.

119. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:438.

120. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:438.

121. Thomas Brooks, *Paradice Opened.*.. (London: for Dorman Newman, 1675), 166.

122. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:439.

123. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:439.

124. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:439.

125. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:439.

126. Goodwin, *Ephesians*, Pt. 1, in *Works*, 1:440.

127. See Jue's helpful summary of the debate in *Heaven upon Earth*, 1–5.

Chapter 51

Christopher Love on the Glories of Heaven and Terrors of Hell

Sir, I bless God, my heart is in heaven. I am well.

—CHRISTOPHER LOVE AT HIS EXECUTION, AUGUST 22, 16511

The Puritans strongly emphasized the need for an eternal perspective on this present life, which they maintained served as preparation for either heaven or hell. An example of such an approach comes among the sayings of John Dod (c. 1549–1645): "Directions for every day. First, For morning. Every morning presuppose, 1. I must die. 2. I may die ere night. 3. Whither will my Soul go, to Heaven or to Hell?"2 Richard Baxter (1615–1691) epitomized such an approach in his famous *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, a directory to heaven and away from hell, for those "in motion, seeking Rest."3 He later confessed that the book came in the context of a serious illness that left him "sentenced to death by the Physicians." At such a point, he affirmed, "I began to contemplate more seriously on the Everlasting Rest which I apprehended myself to be just on the Borders of."4

The focus of this chapter will be to consider such contemplation on eternity in writings upon heaven and hell in the Puritan tradition generally, and in Christopher Love (1618–1651) specifically. In Love's numerous writings, many of which were published posthumously, there appear seventeen sermons opening up the subjects of heaven and hell in *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1653).5 The preface to this work, penned by friends of Love two years after his own flight to heaven, exhorts us to meditation on both heaven and hell. The former spurs us on to good works, while the latter acts as a deterrent to evil. "It is the greatest folly in the world for men," declare the writers, "to be busied about many things which little concern them, and in the mean time neglect the one thing necessary, never seriously thinking upon the joys of Heaven, how they may attain unto them, or of the torments of hell, how they may escape them. Until they be convinced of their folly when it is too late, by being irrecoverably deprived of the one, and remedilesly plunged into the other."6

As he preached and wrote upon heaven and hell, Christopher Love lived and died under the reality of them as a Puritan. The problem was that he died in 1651 at the hands of Puritans accusing him of high treason against Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth government. He was tried and executed for his involvement in the so-called Love's Plot to restore Charles II to the throne. Under the parliamentary rule of the Commonwealth, this was hardly a good time for a Presbyterian to assert the divine right of kings. Still, as Don Kistler observes, "there were many who still believed that God has appointed kings and man could not dethrone them. Christopher Love was among those, as would be expected of a staunch Presbyterian."[7] Although he admitted to being a minor participant, along with notable Puritan ministers (and fellow Presbyterians) such as Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) and Thomas Case (1598–1682), he faced allegations of being a ringleader in conspiring and financing the military resistance of the Scots, with whom Charles had solemnly covenanted to establish Presbyterianism.[8] Though the evidence for some of the charges was lacking and the witnesses were unconvincing, Love was found guilty and beheaded on Tower Hill on August 22, 1651, as a traitor.[9] Elliot Vernon notes that while Love was technically guilty, his trial was "little more than a demonstration of the republic's brute power dressed up as legal sovereignty. This point is graphically exemplified by Sir Henry Vane, who told Cromwell that Love should be executed because the presbyterians 'do not judge us a lawful magistracy, nor esteem anything treason that is acted by them to destroy us, in order to bring in the king of Scots as the head of the Covenant.'"[10] Richard Baxter bemoaned the tyranny behind Love's execution that removed such a worthy and renowned light from the world and "cut off so much excellency at a blow."[11]

Love's letters to his wife, Mary, who tried with friends to have his sentence reversed, reveal much not only about their relationship, but also about his strong beliefs in the mercy and goodness of God to those in covenant with Him. Love died with remarkable assurance that he was destined for heaven's glory, not hell's terror.[12]

The Glories of Heaven

The glories of heaven were a major source of encouragement for Puritan pastors and their flocks during the turbulent times of the seventeenth century. As Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) noted in his penetrating work *Of the Blessed State of Glory Which the Saints Possess after Death*, "There is nothing more powerful to bring men to Christ…and there is nothing that is a greater encouragement to the godly, that they may willingly and with cheerfulness pass through the afflictions of this life, that they may pass through the evil world with their hearts raised up to heaven."[13]

When discussing the glories of heaven, the Puritans were thoroughly christocentric.[14] Entrance into heaven was usually discussed in the context of Christ's work of mediation. Further, enjoyment of heaven typically focused on the glories of Christ's person. Saints who live by faith in the Son of God on earth hope for the blessed sight (beatific vision) of the God-man, who is the visible image of the invisible God.[15] The sight of Christ will be transforming for the elect (1 John 3:2), and they will behold Him by sight in heaven just as a man beholds his neighbor by sight on earth. Heaven's glory was never considered apart from Christ's presence.

The night before his death, in his final meetings with his wife, Love held out such a hope of glory: "As soon as my head is severed from my body, it shall be united with Christ my Head in heaven, and I am persuaded that I shall tomorrow go up to Tower Hill as cheerfully to be everlastingly martyred unto my Redeemer as I went to Giles's church to be married to thee."[16] In such testimony, we are reminded of the speech of Mr. Standfast at the end of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 2: "I see my self now at the end of my Journey, my toilsome Days are ended. I am going now to see that Head that was Crowned with Thorns, and that Face that was spit upon, for me."[17] Words spoken by Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) on his deathbed are equally poignant: "I shall shine—I shall see him as he is—I shall see him reign…. Mine eyes shall see my Redeemer, these very eyes of mine, and no other for me."[18] Heaven had many glories, but the sight of Christ the Redeemer was the chief glory.

Christ the Author of the Glorified Life Christopher Love's text for his ten sermons in *Heaven's Glory* was Colossians 3:4: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Love exhorts us as Christians to seek the "things above" in heaven, since we are dead to the world and possess a life hidden in Christ that others "cannot see." As those who have a glorious life awaiting them in eternity, we should right now seek "that life and

that world" and not merely "the things that are below in this despicable world." Christ is our life in that He has become the "Author and cause" of a Christian's life by His death. He procures both a "life of grace" (progressive sanctification) and a "life of glory" (final glorification) "when the world is ended." Further, Christ became the author of our life after His resurrection, "spiritually" in the preaching of the gospel, and will become such an author "gloriously" at his second coming. This life is for us a growth and perfection in both desire for God and hatred of evil. Both are motivated by an internal principle of grace, and not just external motivations that dread the terrors of hell and long for the bliss of heaven as it makes us "dead to the world."[19] That Jesus is the author of such life and glory forever ought to prompt us to "make provision for this eternal life" now, argues Love. For example, we should beware of the "trivial employments" that get in the way of our glorious "pursuit." Further, we must always be "longing and panting after this glorified condition" now while taking heed of whatever sinfully tramples it.[20]

Love testifies that we can in a sense lay hold of the glorified life now by attaining to assurance of grace and salvation, through repentance from sin and faith in Christ; love toward all that are "partakers of this life of glory"; and conscientiously walking in obedience while mortifying sin.[21] For the Puritans, as heirs of the Reformers and contrary to Roman Catholicism and Arminianism, we can move beyond the possession of eternal life to the possession of a certainty that it belongs to us. As Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) asserted in *Heaven on Earth* (1654), the Christian must make it his duty not simply to believe, but to attain comfort by knowing that he believes. Thus, assurance of faith will "bring down heaven into your bosoms; it will give you a possession of heaven, on this side of heaven. Heb 11:1. An assured soul lives in paradise, and walks in paradise, and works in paradise, and rests in paradise; he hath heaven within him and heaven over him; all his language is Heaven, heaven! Glory, glory!"[22] This is why Love, immediately prior to his beheading on Tower Hill, could say to the lieutenant of the Tower, Sheriff Tichburn, "Sir, I bless God, my heart is in heaven. I am well."[23]

Christ the Finisher of the Glorified Life Love moves on to consider Christ, who as the Christian's life "shall one day appear in glory to judge the world." The sudden appearance of Jesus Christ will be glorious because He, like "the sparkling of a diamond before the Sun," possesses excellence in His person (Heb. 1:3) as He comes with authority, majesty, and equity of judgment to darken and eclipse "all the glory of the world." Further, this glory is shared by His attending angels and is revealed in His saints who in turn will greatly admire

the Prince at His coming. God the Father deemed that such an appearance should be glorious to wipe away the reproach that came upon Christ and His people on earth, and simultaneously "cast a greater dread, conviction and vexation upon wicked man."[24] Love desires the concept of Christ's coming in glory to "strike the nail of terror" into you if you find yourself among such categories of people as: (1) those living "a life of sensuality, and riot, seldom or never thinking of that account they must make to Jesus Christ at his appearing" (Luke 17:26–27); (2) "hardhearted and unrepentant sinners," whose hearts are never stirred by commands and reproofs (Rom. 2:4–5); and (3) apostates, that is, "backsliders from Religion," who made a profession, yet have "turned aside from Christ" (Heb. 10:26). At the same time, Love wants to comfort you with Christ's appearance as a judge if you suffer for Him and labor for Him as "misjudged by the world." Your day of rejoicing is coming, and you can be certain that Christ "will judge over all things misjudged against" you. [25]

Regarding the time of Christ's coming, Love cautions those who "read fancies about this time" from being "ensnared and taken up in a trap" in thinking we know what Christ as a man did not (Matt. 24:36). While we cannot know the day, month, or year, the Scriptures do give indication that "the day and hour is not far off." In the end, "God in his wisdom hath reserved that time in his own breast, that [we] might set about the work of [our] own salvation betimes."[26] Concerning "the place where this appearing of Jesus Christ shall be," Love notes that He will come from heaven (Phil. 3:20) to an unspecified location. Letting Scripture speak for itself, he notes that Acts 1:11 deals only with "the manner [of] how Christ shall come, not of the place to which he shall come." The only location noted specifically is that of the air, where the saints dead and alive will be caught up to Christ, "shining in glory above all the world." In the end, there will be no place in which any will be able to hide "from the Judgment of Jesus Christ; though you call to the mountains and rocks to cover you from his presence you cannot be hid."[27]

Love later asks whether Jesus Christ shall "take up any length of time in executing judgment on the world." He contends that this judgment will take "very little time" as the "*day and hour*" thereof remains a matter unknown. For Love, the length of time it takes to render judgment is inversely proportional to the amount of evidence. God possesses an abundance of evidence, and, besides, man's own conscience condemns him (Rom. 2:14–16). This swiftness of judgment ought to strike "the nail of terror and astonishment" into men's hearts and should serve as a "curb" to five sins in particular in us: (1) drunkenness, as those who "love [their] liquor too well" will have their mouths filled with the fire of judgment as that day comes upon the drunk "*unawares*" (Luke 21:34); (2)

adultery, as God judges in a "special manner" such a sin (2 Peter 2:10); (3) railings, or "reviling against the people of God" (Jude 15); (4) ignorance and disobedience (2 Thess. 1:7–8); and (5) oppression and cruelty; or those who "grind" the faces of others (James 2:13).[28]

The Glorified Life in Body and Soul At the second coming, Christ will fully glorify the elect only at His glorious appearance to judge the world. To be fully glorified denotes, maintains Love,

> that most happy, most blessed, and unchangeable estate which God of his free grace through Jesus Christ, hath provided for his elect in heaven, to be enjoyed after the day of judgment, at which time the body shall arise from the grave, and be united to the soul, and both takers of glory with God, Jesus Christ, the holy Spirit, Saints and Angels for ever. This is what we call glory, That reuniting of the body and soul together, whereby both shall be partners in glory, in the enjoyment of the three persons of the Trinity, all the Saints and Angels for ever.[29]

This state involves the glorification of both body and soul. A delegate to the Westminster Assembly, Love reflects the standard Puritan teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), 32.1, which speaks of bodies "united again to their souls for ever" in the resurrection of the last day, the time of Christ's return. These bodies at death had returned to dust seeing "corruption," while their souls were "received into the highest heavens."[30] Regarding the body, it must be glorified because the bodies of the elect have "suffered for the sake of Jesus Christ in this world" (Gal. 6:17) and should appropriately be glorified "by Christ also." Also, the body is "copartner" with the soul in its duties (2 Cor. 5:10), such as prayer, and will also share with it in its glory. Finally, the "natural sympathy" or union between body and soul in suffering (e.g., sadness) and blessing (e.g., joy) will necessarily continue in glory as it has on earth.[31]

The glorification to come will afford us spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15:44), which arise after the life and death of a merely natural body, "which needs natural refreshment to maintain life, as food, sleep, raiment, and the like." Love denies the Platonic idea that spiritual bodies no longer possess physical substance. Instead, it simply means that natural nourishment will no longer be necessary in heaven. Instead, our resurrected bodies will be "refreshed with the spiritual enjoyment of [our] God."

Further, the glorified will attain "immortal bodies" that no longer die but will live forever in an incorruptible state (1 Cor. 15:42–52). Such immortality is not

equivalent of God's immortality, which He alone possesses in His essence (1 Tim. 6:16). Instead, we are immortal by God's grace alone, and such goes beyond the conditional immortality enjoyed by Adam in his probation. Such immortality also involves "the perfect renovation of Gods Image in us."

As a result, our bodies will also be "impassible," incapable of suffering or experiencing sorrow, disease, poverty, hunger, thirst, cold, or nakedness. In heaven, you may "bid sorrow and sufferings fly away." Finally, our bodies will be beautifully fashioned after the glorious body of Christ with all corruptions and deformities removed (Phil. 3:21). Likewise, we will possess "agile" bodies free from our current "lumpish and heavy" state as we are "spurred on to all good duties" in a nimble manner. These bodies will also be pure, free from the clogging and enslavement of sin (Rom. 7:8; 8:27). In summary, our bodies will be "glorious" as we appear with Christ in glory (Col. 3:4). Thus, if we are to be glorified not just in soul but also in body, we should not "suffer these bodies…to be Instruments" of our Savior's dishonor. "O take heed of sin while you are in the body," exhorts Love, "because your body shall be Glorified by Jesus Christ."[32]

Regarding the glorification of the soul, Love notes that we will "know more then either the Scripture doth speak, or our hearts can conceive" (1 Cor. 2:9). This glory is both "privative" in terms of freedom from misery and "positive" in terms of blessings bestowed. Some of the privative aspect involves freedom from sin in terms of the battle of the flesh against the spirit (Gal. 5:17); the causes and provocations of sin, such as corruption of our human nature, the suggestions of Satan, and the allurements of the world, such as the lust of the eyes and the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16); and the effects of sin, such as punishment, "losses and crosses," death and the wrath to come. The positive aspect involves such gains as a "beatificall vision of God," seeing Him as He is (Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2; Job 19:26–27), regarding the favor He has toward us in Christ, and understanding the triune God in His nature, attributes, and majesty; and a true enjoyment of God, which is the fruition and perfection of all Christian graces.

Love focuses more on the intellectual nature of the beatific vision in much the same way that Francis Turretin (1623–1687) did.[33] But John Owen (1616–1683) made the beatific vision of Christ in His human nature the central focus of heaven's glories. In heaven, Christ appears as the head of glorified humanity; He is the immediate means by which God reveals His mind to His creatures; the object of divine glory; and the sight of Him will be transforming for those who have loved Him with an undying love. The saints on earth hope for heaven, but never heaven apart from the visible sight of Christ.[34] In line with such a

concept, Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) eloquently observes: “Heaven is not heaven without Christ. It is better to be in any place with Christ than to be in heaven itself without him. All delicacies without Christ are but as a funeral banquet. Where the master of the feast is away, there is nothing but solemnness. What is all without Christ? I say the joys of heaven are not the joys of heaven without Christ; he is the very heaven of heaven.”[35] The christocentric focus of Sibbes, shared by many Puritans, demands the beatific vision in heaven of the resurrected Christ in His glorified humanity. Goodwin, who seems to have learned so much from Sibbes, likewise relates the glories of heaven to the vision of Christ:

> Is Christ so glorious? What will heaven be, but the seeing of the glory of Christ? If God had created worlds of glorious creatures, they could have never expressed his glory as his Son; therefore heaven is thus expressed, John xvii., ‘I will that they be with me, to behold my glory.’ Wherein lies therefore that great communion of glory that shall be in heaven? It is in seeing the glory of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God that is worshipped…. It is therefore the seeing of Christ that makes heaven; wherefore one said, If I were cast into any hole, if I could have but a cranny to see Christ always, it would be heaven enough.[36]

Love posits that this sight of God will be accompanied by a “fruition” in which we will enjoy God in full measure, an ocean of enjoyment compared to the bucket we have now, and without interruption.[37] Similarly, in his typically provocative way of contrasting heaven and earth, Goodwin argues that “one saint in heaven hath more glory and joy in his heart than all the joy that is on earth, and yet at the latter day, their glory will as far transcend that they have now.”[38] Further, we shall possess a “perfection of all graces” in our glorified state as in the areas of love toward God and others, knowledge of God in the fullness of His glory, and joy or delight in God. Considering what we shall possess in glory, we should be engaged now as much as possible to turn from our lusts, ignorance, and hardness of heart in the pursuit of God.[39]

In our glorified state, God will love all saints alike, and all will be totally free from sin. Still, some will enjoy God in this state more fully than others. This Love concludes from passages such as Daniel 12:3 and 1 Corinthians 15:41–42, which seem to indicate a greater radiation of glory from some of the Lord’s servants; and Matthew 19:28, which shows a greater degree of eminence for some believers based on the affliction they suffer. This scale of glory also manifests itself when we consider the degrees of torment in hell (Luke 12:47–48), the ranks of angels in heaven, and differing gifts and degrees of grace

among earthly saints and their use of them (1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Luke 19:16–17). Varying degrees of glory in heaven will not be based on merit, nor do they imply that anyone's enjoyment of heaven will be impeded by them; nor will they stir up envy as varieties of gifts do on earth, nor do they make God unjust in His unequal distribution of them. That the degrees exist provides an incentive for becoming more "eminent in grace" in this life. "Get more strength of grace," exhorts Love, "and the more gracious you live in this life, the more glorious you shall be in that life which is to come."[40]

Heaven the Place of the Glorified Life Love tells us that heaven, the dwelling place of God and the seat of His kingdom, high above all the kingdoms of this world (1 Kings 8:30; Isa. 66:1; Matt. 25:34; Acts 14:22; 2 Cor. 12:2), is the place where the glorification of the soul at death and later in body and soul at the resurrection will take place. Heaven exists as a paradise (Luke 23:43), an eternal habitation (John 14:2; 2 Cor. 5:1; Luke 16:9), a city to come (Heb. 13:14), a glorious inheritance (Col. 1:12), and a place of joy (Ps. 16:11). Regarding the location of this heaven, Love rejects the idea "that there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, and here [i.e., on the new earth] the elect shall live and be glorified." He also rejects the idea that heaven is simply wherever God dwells, without being attached to a particular place.[41]

Instead, he argues, as do other Puritans, for a three-tiered heaven as follows: an "aerean"[42] (atmospheric) heaven concerning the space between the earth and the moon (e.g., Matt. 6:26); an "etherean"[43] (astral) heaven as the realm of the rest of the planets and stars (e.g., Deut 17:3); and an "empyrean"[44] (celestial) heaven "above all" the rest as the "third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). This is the place where Christ is seated (Col. 3:1), and it is "above the Air; above the Sun, Moon, and Stars, to which Jesus Christ is ascended…. The Scripture tells us, that Heaven is that most bright and glorious space far above the visible Heavens, called the third Heaven; where God manifests his glory to blessed Angels and Saints. And so *Ursin*[45] and divers others back fully this opinion." While we cannot describe in detail such a place, attests Love, we can certainly affirm its glory. Love challenges us to consider that if heaven is the place of final rest, then it demands leaving off "looking after your pompous and glorious houses, that shall one day not have one stone left upon another, and that shall one day be laid level upon the ground; do not for your earthly houses here, lose that eternal house which lasts for ever in the Heavens."[46]

This demarcation of a three-tiered heaven as aerian, etherean, and empyrean is at least as old as Aristotle. In his explanation of it, Love was likely influenced by Robert Bolton (1572–1631) as advanced in his work *Mr. Boltons Last and*

Learned Worke of the Foure Last Things, Death, Iudgement, Hell, and Heaven (1632).[47] In his treatment of the three-tiered heaven, Love does not cite Bolton but quite obviously depends upon him.[48] In this work, Bolton speaks of the third heaven as a "glorious Empyrean Heaven."[49] The third heaven is that to which Christ ascended and where God dwells especially, and it is the place where "all the blessed Ones shall be for ever."[50] Bolton and Love reflect the common, historic, Christian view that the eternal dwelling place of the resurrected saints, not only the souls of just men made perfect, will be the third heaven.

That is not to say, however, that the Puritans rejected the renovation of the earth. Thomas Brooks notes that learned divines differ on some questions related to the earth's future but says that most affirm a renovation of the earth, not its destruction.[51]

Concerning the question of whether saints will recognize one another in heaven, Love affirms that the fellowship we have now will certainly be enjoyed in heaven, in light of the following scriptural support: (1) the recognition of a glorified Moses and Elijah by Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:3); (2) the awareness of the rich man even from hell of Abraham and Lazarus (Luke 16:23), which even if expressed in a parable, confirms (along with other texts) that the damned will see the righteous dead (Luke 13:28); (3) if the glorified will know those damned to hell they will certainly know others who are glorified (Luke 16:22); (4) recognized fellowship with saints such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; and (5) if Adam knew his wife in innocency, we shall know other believers in glory (Matt. 8:11). To the objection that knowing saints in glory necessitates grievously knowing the damned in hell, Love argues that far from bringing grief, it will be a catalyst to joy for having escaped such torment. Our knowledge of others in glory will not be a fleshly or sensual bodily one as in marriage, but in the manner of the holy angels, all will "love and delight" to the same extent in one another. Thus, we should strive for "a true and grounded knowledge" that we will surely come to glory and simultaneously labor for the conversion of others that we may have fellowship with them in glory.[52]

Death the Beginning of the Glorified Life Love next takes up the matter of what happens to the souls of believers when they die in the intermediate state, that is, before Christ comes. What happens to the soul at death? Those denying that the soul does not immediately go to heaven are left with few options. The soul goes either to hell or purgatory or ceases to exist altogether (annihilation).[53] Regardless, all three contribute to atheism and a lack of motivation to strive for heaven in this life. First, we must reject any possibility that the redeemed soul

could go to hell. Second, to argue that the soul is mortal gratifies the Platonists, who believe that the soul dies with the body. Third, to admit the idea of purgatory capitulates to Roman Catholic error, and the notion that we need to be "purified for the sins done in this world," as if Christ's death to purge our sins were not "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction"[54] for our sins.

Regarding purgatory, Love asserts the following:

> Now if this be true, That the Elects' souls immediately after death go to glory; Then, Oh Believer, do not trust to a Purgatory to do away thy sins; if the blood of a Jesus be not thy Purgatory; (for this only will purge thy conscience from dead works) a Purgatory will never cleanse thee. There is no time after thy death to labour after salvation. O labour in thy life time to be saved, and labour in thy life time to be happy; for as soon as breath is gone out of thy body, thy soul is gone either to Heaven to be happy, or to Hell to be in endless misery.[55]

For the following scriptural reasons, Love maintains that our souls go straight to heaven after death while our bodies rest in the grave until the day of resurrection: (1) In Luke 23:43, Jesus promises the thief on the cross that He will that very day be present with Him in paradise, which is just another term for heaven (2 Cor. 12:4). (2) In Luke 16:22, 26, Lazarus is portrayed as being in the bosom of Abraham before the day of resurrection.[56] (3) In Philippians 1:23, Paul makes it clear that we can be absent from the body in death but present with the Lord in our souls. (4) In 2 Corinthians 5:6–7, Paul notes that in death we are absent from our earthly tabernacles (bodies) and present with the Lord.[57]

In his refutation of unacceptable options for the intermediate state, Love does not deal with "soul sleep" *(psychopannychy)*, which refers to the controversial idea that between death and the day of resurrection, the soul rests in a "dreamless" sleep or nonresponsive, uncomprehending state. Love would have been familiar with John Calvin's refutation of the position in *Psychopannychia* (1534). Further, the position was well-known in England and had connections, for example, with the radical sectarianism of the Interregnum. It was clearly a minority position and was officially condemned, along with mortalism (soul annihilationism), in the Edwardine Forty Two Articles (1553), article 40 asserting that "the souls of them that depart this life do neither die with the bodies, nor sleep idly." The Westminster Confession of Faith likewise says that the souls of men "neither die, nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence" (32.1). The associated doctrine of thnetopsychism, the idea that the soul is mortal and dies with the body, and is to be resurrected with the body on judgment day, was

also generally rejected.[58]

Resurrection the Consummation of the Glorified Life Love next addresses concerns over whether the bodies we now have will be raised and glorified. Specifically, he has in mind those who deny a bodily resurrection on the basis of 1 Corinthians 15:50, which states, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." This cannot be the meaning of this text, since it would deny other passages clearly speaking of the bodily resurrection of Christ, who is now bodily present in heaven along with Enoch and Elijah. Instead, "flesh and blood" here refers to the perishable flesh that will one day give way to a resurrected imperishable state. Further, while it is "above reason" to understand how God could resurrect decayed, worm-eaten, disintegrated bodies, it is not "against reason" to argue that an omnipotent God is able to do so. The following passages attest to such a bodily resurrection. (1) Love maintains that Job 19:26–27 gives assurance that we will see our Redeemer in our "flesh" even after worms destroy our earthly bodies, which testifies to a glorified state in a resurrected body. (2) First Corinthians 15:35–36 speaks of seed being sown and dying to bring forth life, which implies that the mortal body must die and see corruption in the grave before being raised up as a glorified body. (3) Second Corinthians 5:2 refers to believers longing to be clothed with a heavenly house, "that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (v. 4). Since our bodies will be raised to a glorified state, we should not fear death (2 Cor. 5:1), nor be discouraged in the midst of suffering (Heb. 11:35), or grieve excessively over the death of believing friends (1 Thess. 4:13), or use the members of our bodies for unrighteousness (Rom. 6:13).[59]

Regarding the reasons Christ has reserved this full glorification until His second coming, Love maintains that it makes the glory of the elect more visible and more of an aggravation to the wicked, and therefore "most acceptable to the Saints of God to be glorified" when Christ returns in glory. That the elect will be glorified body and soul when Christ returns should move us to try to examine ourselves as to whether we may "warrantably conclude in your own conscience, that you shall appear with Jesus Christ in glory."[60] For Love, such a trial of self bore great fruit for him personally when it came time for his own earthly trial for treason in 1651. That his body would one day be raised with Christ allowed him to face death fearlessly.

Marks of the Glorified Life Love argues that those who will partake of this eternal glory will show the following marks. First, we will be new creatures changed from a state of nature to grace, which is worked in the heart to

transform it (2 Peter 1:3). Second, we will be with Christ in glory only if we are made like Him in this life, in holiness (2 Cor. 3:18) and suffering (2 Tim. 2:12). Third, we will seek to glorify Christ in this world now with a view to glorifying and worshiping Him in eternity (Rom. 15:6–7). Fourth, we will possess a conscience powerfully and majestically convicted and quickened by the ministry of the Word (1 Thess. 2:12–13). Fifth, we will long for the appearing of Christ and the glory He brings in salvation and judgment (2 Tim. 4:8). Sixth, we will possess a burning love for Christ now in this world (1 Peter 1:7–8). Seventh, we shall be able to put to death the "power of sin and lusts" in our hearts (Col. 3:3–5). Eighth, we will be constant in well-doing in spite of the sufferings we endure in this world (Rom. 2:6–7, 10). Ninth, we will experience sanctification that progresses with a view to eventual glorification (Rom. 8:30; 2 Thess. 2:13–14). Tenth and finally, we will be zealous to maintain a good conscience on our way to glory (Acts 24:15–16; 2 Peter 3:11).61 Clearly for Love, those on their way to heaven will be looking and longing for Christ here on earth (Heb. 9:28) and will experience the power of His resurrection together with the fellowship of His sufferings.

To "infuse some thoughts of comfort into troubled breasts," Love affirms that this doctrine of glory at the appearing of Christ brings comfort to those undergoing reproach in this world, such as pastors who faithfully discharge their duties (1 Peter 5:1–4) and those standing for Christ in spite of opposition (1 Peter 4:14). Further, some saints live in "a mean and obscure condition in regard of their livelihood here in this world" (James 2:5) and suffer for Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:13), yet are not ashamed to confess Christ in this world (Matt. 10:32; Mark 8:38).62 Regardless of pain or loss, we who know the fellowship of Christ's suffering will certainly know the power of His resurrection. This certainty gives us hope in a world with no end of troubles that arise in our lives physically, financially, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

The Terrors of Hell

Not only did the Puritans seek to stir up a longing for heaven, they also sought to instill a terror of hell. So, for example, John Bunyan wrote his *Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680) as the antithesis to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1 (1678), well before he published Part 2 of the journey to the Celestial City (1684). "As I was considering with my self," attests Bunyan in *Badman*, "what I had written concerning the Pilgrim's Progress from this World to Glory; and how it had been acceptable to many in this Nation: It came again into my mind to write, as then, …so now, of the Life and Death of the Ungodly, and of their travel from this world to Hell." This work, then, traces the fall of the reprobate Mr. Badman to hell by way of a dialogue between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive. Bunyan tells us that he traces the life of Mr. Badman "from his Childhood to his Death," that we may, "as in a Glass, behold with thine eyes, the steps that take hold of Hell," and whether we are "treading" the same path, and "gravely enquire" whether we are "one of his Lineage or no." Indeed, "the very World is overspread with his Kindred" and "rarely" can we find even "a Family or Household in a Town, where he has not left behind him either Brother, Nephew or Friend." 63

Bunyan was no stranger to the use of dialogue to convey such truth, as *Badman* manifests the influence of Arthur Dent's *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* (1599), a manual of repentance in dialogue form that Bunyan read with his wife. Saturated with an eternal perspective, the work eventually addresses the reader personally and powerfully on the subject of Christ's judgment, including the terror of it and the judgment to come in connection with it. Dent says that "we should always live as if we should die, or that our bed should be our grave; [we] must live continually as if Christ should come to judgment presently." He later proceeds to speak of "the torments of hell" in terms of the "extremity, perpetuity, and remedilessness thereof." This typically Puritan approach was meant to instill terror and expose sin, but always with a view to opening the way for the mercies of Christ. In Dent's dialogue, Theologus, the appointed pastor, causes Asunetus, the ignorant man, to "quake and tremble" with his talk of hell-fire and judgment: "I feel great terror in my conscience—I am afraid I shall be damned." Antilegon, the "caviller," foolishly objects to this talk of hell and the thought of the upright Asunetus going there: "If you should be damned, I know not who should be saved." Theologus encourages Asunetus, and all who groan in their misery and grieve for their sin, to believe that "Christ is for you," and that they must "apply Christ, and all the promises of the gospel" to themselves, "for we have not other remedy or refuge but only his merits and righteousness—he is our city of refuge, whither we must fly, and where we must take sanctuary—he is the balm of Gilead, whereby our souls are cured."64

Within such a Christ-centered hell-fire tradition, and in light of the ten sermons preached on the glory of the saints in heaven, Love turns his attention to "the tormented condition of the damned in Hell." For those for whom he has not "gained [their] affections" with preaching on the glory to come, Love seeks to "startle [their] Consciences." These seven sermons by Love on the doctrine of hell are introduced with 2 Corinthians 5:11, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," but are based on Matthew 10:28, "But rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." In this text, Christ attests that we will suffer in this life at the hands of others, but human power is limited as men can only kill the body. We should not fear them but rather the One who "can kill both body and soul." This killing does not refer to destruction or annihilation, but a "continual tormenting of body and soul for all eternity" (Matt. 22:13; 25:30; Rev. 20:14–15).65

Love maintains that the word translated "hell" in the Scripture can refer to the grave ("Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell" [Ps. 16:10]), the "belly of the Whale" ("Out of the belly of hell, I cried unto the Lord" [Jonah 2:2]), the devil himself ("The tongue of man is set on fire by hell" [James 3:6]), and the place of eternal torment (Matt. 5:29; Luke 12:5; 16:23).66 In seeking to motivate us to fear God more than men and to awaken "drowsy consciences," Love focuses on the power of God to subject men to eternal torment, which ought to "work an awful fear of God" in our hearts. Hearing of such torments should "startle" our consciences out of a false sense of security, strip away ungrounded hopes of glory, and drive us away from wallowing in sin.67

Even in Love's time, people objected to preaching on hell, since "this is not to preach the Gospel, but the Law." He replies that Jesus was not a legal but a gospel preacher yet He spoke directly on hell more than anyone else in Scripture. Also, the devil does all that he can to give preaching on hell a bad name as he seeks to "nuzzle men in security in their sins." So, if preaching terror is legal preaching, why is the doctrine of hell more clearly set forth in the New Testament, where the gospel of Christ is even more clearly revealed, than in the Old Testament? Love boldly claims that "sermons of terror have done more good upon unconverted souls, than Sermons of comfort have ever done." In short, we cannot claim to preach the whole counsel of God if we "run only upon strains of free grace."68

Is There a Hell?

Love presents fifteen queries or questions about hell. He first asks, "Is there a hell?" To this question, he calls attention to the confessions of the heathen who "by the glimmering light of Nature" had some notion of hell. Most importantly

there exists the clear testimony of different Scripture passages, such as Matthew 23:33, which speak of the "damnation of hell," and 2 Peter 2:3–4, which refers to those reserved for judgment as being "cast down to hell."[69] As noted earlier, Love rejects the idea of mortalism, that the soul ceased to exist or was annihilated. This necessitated the reality of the immortality of the soul in a state of either bliss or torment.

John Bunyan considers the reality of hell in *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658). In this work, he opens up Luke 16:19–31, which treats the account of the rich man, or Dives, and Lazarus. Bunyan identifies the passage as a parable, but one teaching powerfully on the realities of heaven and hell. He finds that Satan will do all that he can to keep the thoughts of hell from men so that they go on in their sins with "no fear of death, and judgment to come." In this manner, for many in this world, there exists a practical if not theoretical denial of the reality of hell in a manner similar to practical atheism manifested by a life of wickedness. Bunyan calls attention to Luke 16:23, "And in hell [the rich man] lift up his eyes, being in torments." From this phrase he concludes that "there is a hell for souls to be tormented in when this life is ended…after he was dead and buried." Such words make it "evident that there is an hell for souls; yea, and bodies too, to be tormented in after they depart this life." He denies that Christ uses the word figuratively to represent the grave or some concept of torment "in this life." He then warns those who make a "mock" of preachers who tell them of hell that they will "find such an hell after this life is ended, that thou wilt not get out of again for ever and ever." As Bunyan could testify from his own experience, he wants us to allow the thought of hell to stir us up "to seek to the Lord Jesus Christ" rather than "slight it, and make a mock at it."[70]

Why Must There Be a Hell?

Love next asks, "Why must there be a hell?" First, "because of the filthy nature of sin," as sin against an infinite God, necessitating proportionate punishment in the world to come. Second, because Christ did not satisfy the justice of God for the wicked, who must therefore bear the wrath of God themselves in hell. Third, the terrors of conscience that afflict the wicked in their dying days "demonstrate that there is a time of torments to be endured."[71] Thomas Goodwin spends roughly 490 pages on man's guiltiness before God before discussing the punishment of hell (80 pages). Because hell is a punishment "so great that it cannot be comprehended by our thoughts, nor ever be sufficiently expressed," the justice of God in condemning sinners for their sins against God was of paramount concern for Goodwin.[72] The sinfulness of sin against a holy God is the chief reason for the doctrine of hell. And the Puritans commonly held that

the heinousness of sin can only be rightly inferred from the cost of redemption, the death of God's beloved Son.

What Is Hell?

Love takes up the foundational question next: "What is hell?" This place in which "the bodies and souls of wicked men are tormented" can be described by the following characteristics from Scripture: *unquenchable fire*, never extinguished (Luke 3:17); a *furnace of fire* (Matt. 13:42), recalling Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (Dan. 3:21–22), where only the godly were not affected; *a lake of fire* (Rev. 19:20), with an abundance of torments as the plentiful waters of a lake; *eternal fire* (Jude 7), with everlasting torment; *outer darkness* (Matt. 22:13), where we are "deprived of the light of God's countenance"; *the blackness of darkness forever* (Jude 13), as a place of terror that ought to cause men to tremble now; *chains of darkness* (2 Peter 2:4), referring to its binding nature and the impossibility of escape; *the damnation of hell* (Matt. 23:33), from which none will escape; *this place of torment* (Luke 16:28), a "dreadful expression" for what takes place there; the *wrath to come* (1 Thess. 1:10), as the wrath of God expressed there; *prison* (1 Peter 3:19), referring to the way the pre-incarnate Christ, through the ministry of Noah, preached to men who are now imprisoned in hell; *Tophet* (Isa. 30:33), referring to the fire of the god Molech, into which children were cast as sacrifices and from which shrieking and howling were heard; *the bottomless pit* (Rev. 9:1), "out of which you shall never come"; *the second death* (Rev. 2:11); *destruction* (Matt. 7:13); *everlasting punishment* (Matt. 25:46); and *corruption* (Gal. 6:8), as that reaped for "sowing to the flesh."[73]

Summarizing these graphic scriptural descriptions, Love provides this general and fitting description of hell: "Hell is a place of torment, ordained by God for Devils and reprobate sinners, wherein by his Justice he confines them to everlasting punishment; tormenting them both in Body and Soul, being deprived of God's favour, objects of his wrath, under which they must lie to all eternity."[74]

Where Is Hell?

Love asks, "Where is hell?" Some say that it is "in the air," since the devil is "the prince of the powers of the air" (Eph. 2:2; 6:12); but such texts refer to his place of rule or conflict. Others claim for different reasons, scripturally and otherwise, that hell is "under the Globe of the earth," in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:12), the middle of the earth, or at the bottom of the sea. All of these claims Love dismisses, saying that while Scripture does not relate to us

the exact location, it surely tells us that there is such a place as hell, distinct from and below heaven (Prov. 15:24; Luke 10:15). That God has chosen not to give us the exact location may be to "prevent Curiosity" and unrest in our hearts, to keep us from fearing hell more than the sin that leads us to it, to stir us to faith in God about something we do not "know distinctly" what or where it is, and to put more stress on the normal means of conversion by the preaching of the Word, not by an extraordinary manifestation such as the rich man sought for his brothers (Luke 16:27–31). This query reminds us to be more concerned with avoiding hell than finding out where it is, to realize that though we do not know where it is, we can be certain that "sin is the very high road" to get there directly. We can use our uncertainty of the location to our advantage to "take heed of sin in every place, for hell follows sin at the heels" (see Gen. 4:7), and recognize that even without knowing where hell is, we can see people with wicked lives and guilty consciences as a "lively picture of Hell it self."[75]

Connected to the location of hell later comes the question "Is there any place of torment other than hell after this life?" Here Love rejects the Papist idea of purgatory as the region above hell, where fires of purgation purify the souls of Christians, preparing them for heaven. He repudiates the appeal to 1 Corinthians 3:12–14, which refers to the testing and loss of our works by fire metaphorically, and does not refer to the purging of sin. He concludes that there "can be no such place of torment as a Purgatory," since it derogates the merit of Christ's suffering and blood (1 John 1:7; Heb. 1:3); denies that Christ has fully satisfied the justice of God; makes God cruel and unjust, as if He torments His children "for sins already pardoned"; and makes a "traffic" of pardons in the Church of Rome, as a money-making scheme that argues against its legitimacy. There exists ample evidence from Scripture (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:6, 8) that at death the soul is immediately caught up into glory. That there exists "no Purgatory to purge away your sins" warrants Christians not to fear torments when they die, and warns the wicked that "as soon as you are dead, you shall go, not into Purgatory, but into hell, where a fire kindled by the breath of the Lord shall burn you forever: No better place than this is provided for thee, when thy soul and body parts asunder."[76]

Is God Just in Damning Men Eternally?

As many question the validity of a place of judgment, Love asks, "Is God just in damning men eternally who sin temporarily in this life?" Even if someone lives only a brief time on earth, Love claims that such divine action is just for the following reasons. First, our punishment is not based on the amount of time that we sin, but on the fact that we sin, as when a thief is sentenced to prison for

much longer than the time it took him to break into a house. Second, we commit sin against an infinite God and so deserve infinite punishment, just as the penalty for striking a public person, such as a prince, is much greater than for striking an ordinary man in the street. Third, if we lived forever we would sin forever, or "as long as" we can, while we are alive. Fourth, we continue to sin in hell even after we leave earth, and so further provoke the wrath of God. Finally, even a momentary lapse into sin shows that we reject the infinite kindness of God and so deserve infinite punishment. That momentary sin justly brings eternal punishment ought to cause us to avoid "slight thoughts" of sin against an infinite and just God who imposes such torments, and any accusations of severity against Him for imposing them. Apart from His secret work of grace in salvation, He may even choose to do so in an infant who lives "but a minute in this world."[77]

This discussion brings up an important point about the asymmetry of merit among Puritan theologians. A debate took place among Reformed theologians concerning Adam's reward. Was it heaven or earth?[78] Some argue that heaven was Adam's reward, since if Adam did not merit eternal life through obedience then he could not merit eternal death through disobedience. Reformed theologians denied that humans could positively merit any reward from God, but they agreed that creatures can merit eternal punishment. This "asymmetry of human merit" was a commonplace in the Reformed theological tradition. Thus William Ames (1576–1633) writes: "In this covenant the moral deeds of the intelligent creature lead either to happiness as a reward or to unhappiness as a punishment. The latter is deserved, the former not."[79] Similarly, Goodwin argues that there is "so transcendent an undueness, yea, an injury done to the great God himself by the creature in sinning, over and above the proportion of all created grace or obedience" that only God "could satisfy God for the demerit of sin."[80] In other words, one sin against an infinite God cannot be repaired by one act of obedience. The greatest good done by all the creatures in the world cannot offset the least sin done by one creature because of the asymmetry of merit.

In connection with justice in general comes a question related to the impartiality and universality of judgment: "Will most men and women in the world be tormented in hell?" Love believes that most will, and his confirmation of it he considers to be "one of the most dismal Doctrines" that a pastor can preach. First, most will go to hell because most do not look to Christ to deliver them from such torment—whether Jews, Muslims, heathen, or Papists. Second, even among those who "profess Jesus Christ," many are called, but few chosen (Matt. 22:14), as most are "either profane in life, or hypocrites in heart." Third,

when you see such descriptions of men as grasshoppers (Jer. 46:23), bees (Ps. 118:12), briars and thorns (Isa. 10:17), mire and dirt (Isa. 57:20), stones (Matt. 13:5), and wooden vessels (2 Tim. 2:20), you realize that they were ordained for destruction as "the greatest number of men in the world." Fourth, most live and die in the very sins that lead people to hell, as they die without repentance in "a course of sin" seeking pleasures, whores, and lusts, while few "seek after Jesus Christ." Fifth, when you consider all of the different men in the world and the greatest of them, you will find that most "are ordained for hell, this place of torment." Sixth, this is the testimony of Scriptures as it speaks of the "broad" way of destruction (Matt. 7:13), the "strait" gate that few will enter (Luke 13:24), the "little" flock of God (Luke 12:32), and the "remnant" of Jews that shall be saved (Rom. 9:27). If most are to be damned, we must see the folly of allowing the opinions of the majority to lead us in life and should try our hearts to know whether we are of the few that will be saved. We should not be offended at the "fewness of the number of believers," but lament over the majority that will face such torments, rouse ourselves from delusions of the great number of believers in the world, and not hold "any ill thoughts against the mercy of God" that most men perish.[81]

Still, how can it be that God would damn the majority of the men and women that he created? Such a query comes from universalists such as Origen and from the Arminians, who believe that this notion impugns the mercy of God. In seeking to vindicate the mercy of God, Love first calls attention to God's sovereign right as Creator to save those He desires to save (Rom. 9:21). Second, from an infralapsarian perspective, Love claims that God sends no man to hell who is not already regarded as a vessel fit for destruction (Rom. 9:22). Third, whatever "stands with God's decree doth well stand with his mercy," for the two cannot clash with one another. Fourth, that God chooses to save any at all makes His mercy shine, in making some the "vessels of mercy" (Rom. 9:22–23). Fifth, "God would show more mercy, if he should save but one man in the world, then would show extreme justice in damning all the world." We foolishly "harbour ill thoughts" for the afflictions that He sends, while we readily acknowledge His mercy to us, in not punishing us for our sins as we deserve and delivering us from wrath in Jesus Christ.[82]

What Are the Torments of Hell?

The subject that Love spends most of his efforts considering in these sermons is the torments of hell. He asks, "What are the torments of the damned in hell?" Love testifies that to speak of this "makes my heart tremble." First, he speaks of hell in its *privative* punishment in the sense of loss or deprivation, which

includes the loss of the presence of God, who declares, “Depart from me, ye cursed” (Matt. 25:41); of the company of saints and angels (Matt. 22:13; 24:41); of the blessedness of heaven (Luke 16:23); of the mercy of God and Christ, and the godly with them (Prov. 1:26); and of all “hope of recovery,” as the damned are “past redemption.” Regarding the *positive* punishment of hell, Love calls attention to the variety of torments in terms of the multitude of ways the damned are made miserable in hell: the universality of torments affecting the wicked in body and soul; the extremity of torments that can neither be quenched or tolerated; the continuity of torments having no cessation and “no intermission at all”; the society of torment in terms of those with whom the wicked suffer, making the experience of hell all the more grievous; the quality of the torments as a misery devoid of all comfort and pleasure; the cruelty of torments at the hands of demons (Matt. 18:34) and the devil himself, who “torment wicked men”; and the eternity of torments that will forever be heaped upon the wicked, with no hope that “my pains shall be ended.” He exhorts us to consider what we will lose in hell and what afflictions we shall take upon ourselves to reflect upon the madness of such folly and tremble at it. Will we “run the hazard” of entering an eternal hell for the pleasures of sin in this life?[83] Love would have us feel the conviction of Bunyan, who, before his conversion, thought he heard a voice from heaven “dart” into his soul: “Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to Heaven? Or have thy sins and go to Hell?”[84]

In connection to the degrees of enjoyment he noted in glory, Love asks, “Are there degrees of torment in hell?” Contrary to the Stoics, who hold that all sins and punishments are alike, he, like nearly all the Reformed and the Puritans, affirms that degrees of punishment exist. He affirms that all punishments are the same in the sense that all will be eternal, all who experience them will be deprived of Christ, and none have hope of escaping them. Still, that those in torment experience degrees of pain is evidenced in the following Scriptures: Matthew 10:15, which states that the unrepentant in the days of the gospel will be worse off than those in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah; Matthew 11:22, which says the same is true for Chorazin, where the gospel was preached, compared to the heathen cities of Tyre and Sidon; Luke 12:47–48, where we read of more “stripes” for those who knew the will of God than for those who did not; and Matthew 23:14, which appoints “greater damnation” for hypocrites than for the wicked in general. These degrees of torment exist because some commit greater sins than others, like Caiaphas, who delivered Jesus to Pilate and had the power to sentence Him to death (John 19:11). “Doubtless,” maintains Love, “the Justice of God so strikes at sin, that they have most sins, shall have greatest torments (John 15:22; Matt. 7:4; Matt. 23:24).” It stands to reason that,

as those “most eminent in grace” will enjoy heaven to a greater degree, so those “most vile in sin” will suffer torment to a greater degree. Therefore, those who “rush into the vilest sins” have great cause to tremble. Love writes, “Though the least measure of the torments of the damned are enough to make them miserable, yet woe to thee that treasurest up the greatest measure of Gods wrath.”[85]

Regarding the duration of suffering, Love asks, “Are the torments of hell eternal?” According to Scripture, the fire of hell is called unquenchable (Matt. 3:12) and eternal (Jude 7), and it is everlasting (Matt. 25:46) in terms of its torments and destruction (2 Thess. 1:9). Further, Love reasons, the torments must be eternal because the justice of God can never be satisfied without them (Luke 12:59), except in the case of the elect in Christ; as men will sin eternally, so they must be punished to all eternity; as the godly experience everlasting joy, the ungodly will undergo everlasting torment. Further, he sets forth the following reasons that hell is eternal. God, who assigns the wicked to hell, is eternal, and hell must exist as long as He does (Isa. 33:14); the worm that “gnaws the conscience” is eternal (Isa. 66:24); and both the body and soul that suffer will be immortal and eternal. This being the case, it is impossible that men such as Origen could be correct in setting forth the idea of a universal salvation for all men;[86] we should avoid the pursuit of temporal vanities by considering the eternal risk of having them; men should think twice before wishing damnation upon themselves, before God would put them there; we should learn patience in the midst of temporary trials, considering the eternal pains we will avoid in glory (1 Thess. 1:6); and we must labor now diligently with hope to avoid this eternal state.[87]

The Puritans argued for the eternity of hell in a number of ways, the principal reason having to do with the attributes of God. So, for example, the Scriptures speak of the fearfulness of falling into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). The unregenerate fall into the hands not only of a great, powerful, just, and avenging God, but also of a living God. Thus Goodwin argues that God, as the living God, will execute punishment to all eternity and “that during the whole space of eternity he will permanently continue to inflict it.”[88] Because He is the “living God,” He is eternal and continually acts toward the wicked. As long as God lives, so shall the wicked exist. The duration of hell is fixed to God’s duration, which means necessarily that hell is eternal, not temporal. In hell the wicked will despair, for the “wretched soul in hell…finds that it shall not outlive that misery, not yet can it find one space or moment of time of freedom and intermission, having for ever to do with him who is the living God.”[89] The wicked will despair because there is no end to the wrath of the living God. For that reason, there will be perfect fear, because wicked souls in hell will not only

be tormented by what they experience in the present moment, but also by what they will experience forever.[90]

Considering the torment itself as defined by Scripture, Love asks, “Is there literal fire in hell?” He maintains that under present conditions, fire does not burn in hell but will when Christ comes in judgment, “in flaming fire.” In other words, the “fire” afflicting the soul in hell is not physical or corporeal in terms of heat and light, but one in some manner involving agony, as a literal fire inflicts pain on the body. Still, at the resurrection, the fire will indeed be corporeal and one that burns without consuming, while ever tormenting. In the end, we should not “cavil about hell fire so much as to make it your care to avoid it.” We should seek to avoid it and the “fiery sins” leading to its fire as we live in a godly manner and, as those who are redeemed in Christ, not fear it. “And as Mr. *Dod* saith,” testifies Love, “if the fire of hell will make a man look after Christ, those thoughts of the fire of hell are to be cherished and kept alive.” “Whenever therefore you are tempted to any lusts, put this to your consideration, that to burn in hell fire it will be intolerable, and the thoughts of the fire of hell will be a great check, to keep out fiery lusts.”[91]

Also related to the nature of the torment, Love asks, “What is meant by the worm that shall never die but shall gnaw the conscience forever?” This question calls attention to Mark 9:44 and Luke 13:28. Love makes it clear that he does not agree with those who view this as a “corporal worm, that shall be gnawing the flesh of the body, after the Resurrection.” Instead, this refers to the horror of conscience overcoming the “damned soul, because it lies under the wrath of a revengeful and an incensed God, to all eternity.” Men on earth have seared consciences that never bother them, but in hell, “conscience shall be as a worm to them, ever gnawing them and ever perplexing them under disquietness, and horror, as lying under the wrath of a God to everlasting, without hopes of escape. As worms are continually gnawing on a carcass, so shall sin on the conscience.” We ought then, reasons Love, to strive for a good conscience here on earth without defiling it with the burden of unrepentant sin and with it, a burden of hell while on earth. Within this section, he also takes up the matter of the gnashing of teeth in hell (Luke 13:28), which refers to the “implacable enmity that the damned carry in their hearts towards all them that shall be saved.” Further, they will express indignation toward Jesus Christ that He did not save them and they cannot take revenge upon Him. They will be enraged that they spurned the opportunity to embrace Jesus Christ. Laments Love, “O this shall greatly torment the damned, even the thought of this, that they have had many an opportunity of grace here in this world, yet have neglected them all.”[92]

Preaching on Hell

Regarding the general idea of preaching on hell, Love testifies that hearing a sermon on hell is good if it causes you to tremble and keeps you from feeling hell itself and turns you from the sins that lead you there. He addresses the following types of people: those who will neither live in a holy way nor allow others to do so (e.g., wicked husbands in relation to their Christian wives), and so receive the "greater damnation" (Matt. 23:14–15); those who live under the means of grace without "any betterness or amendment" (Matt. 10:22–23), as in countries such as England that "lie under the Gospel unreformed"; those who make a great profession and have much knowledge of religion, "yet have least practice" (Luke 12:47–48); those who have provoked others to sin by their own wicked example (e.g., fathers in relation to their children);93 those who die as unrepentant adulterers (2 Peter 2:9–10; Heb. 13:4); those who as hypocrites use religion as a mere "cloak and cover" to carry out "more gross and abominable sins" (Mark 12:40); and those who continue to live unrepentantly "against a patient and longsuffering God" (Rom. 2:5).94 Some of the sins that Love hopes to restrain by preaching on hell include lust, gluttony, pride, covetousness, and the fear of man.

The Descent into Hell

Related to the phrase "He descended into hell" in the Apostles' Creed, Love asks, "Did Jesus personally descend into hell as the place of torment?" Love argues that he did not for the following reasons. First, Luke as the historian that he was (see Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1) does not record this personal descent, which he would have, had it occurred.95 Second, such a descent could not involve His body, for it lay in the grave the very day He died. Further, on "this day" of death He was present with the Father in His soul (Luke 23:43). Third, there exists no good reason why He should make such a descent. Unacceptable explanations include that He had to deliver souls out of hell ("as the Papists hold"); that He had to make further satisfaction, as though that on the cross were not sufficient; or that He went there to "vanquish and overcome the devil." Yet, souls in hell "cannot" come out (Luke 16:26); Christ's satisfaction was "finished" at His death (John 19:30); and Christ overcame the devil "by dying" (Heb. 2:14). Love does not flinch at any appeal to the Apostles' Creed to support the idea of a literal descent into hell, for the doctrine "is both disagreeable to Scripture and Reason," and he appeals to William Perkins (1558–1602) and some of the councils for the denial of its validity.96

Love rejects interpretations that mitigate the phrase to say that it refers not to a literal descent into hell but only to Christ's experience of the power of death and hell while on the cross (WCF, 8.4; Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 44). Such interpretations corrupt "men's judgments more," as they sweep aside the "generality of Intrepreters" who believe that the phrase refers to a physical descent into hell. Our only option in such "matters of Reformation" is "to alter the word, or else expunge it."97

This is a significant statement from Love. Most Reformed theologians did not wish to change ecumenical creeds. They preferred to give a new meaning to Christ's descent into hell. The Creed says "*ad inferos*" ("to Hades," the place of the dead), not "*ad infernum*" (hell/Gehenna). William Perkins referred to four views on Christ's descent: (1) a local descent; (2) descent as a synonym for "buried"; (3) descent as a metaphor to describe Christ's sufferings; and (4) descent as a reference to the curse of death.98 The majority of Reformed theologians held to the second view (the grave where Christ was entombed). Calvin famously held to the third view, and Zacharias Ursinus joined with him in that interpretation of the Creed. The Westminster Assembly held to the second and third views (WCF, 8.4), although the catechisms express primarily the second view, that Christ was held under the power of death until His resurrection (Larger Catechism, Q. 50). Some at the assembly, like Goodwin, nevertheless adopted Calvin's view.99 Love seems to join with Goodwin when he writes

“that though Christ did not go down to hell, yet he suffered a great part of the pains and torments of hell upon the cross for thy sake.”100

Love shows that the appeal to Christ’s preaching to the “spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19) does not help, for this text refers simply to the ministry of Christ through Noah’s preaching, in the days of Noah. He also deals with the supposed support of texts such as Psalm 16:10, which speaks of Christ’s not seeing “corruption” not literally in “hell,” but only in the grave; and 1 Peter 4:6, which refers to preaching to the “dead,” not those in hell (to give them a second chance) but those who (as mentioned in 1 Peter 3:19) once received the gospel, but died rejecting it.101

Conclusion

Christopher Love's writings on heaven and hell are a fair representation of the common Puritan views on heaven and hell. While Love's views, and those of his contemporaries, on heaven may not have the same nuances we find in present-day Reformed treatments on the subject (e.g., Gregory K. Beale's impressive commentary on Revelation), there is little doubt that up until the seventeenth century no generation of theologians matched the Puritans in terms of setting forth the glories of heaven and the terrors of hell. Love's work ranks among the best. It is a testimony to his work that it made its way into the relatively small library of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758).102 And it is a testimony to Love's faith that in the face of death he had before him not the terrors of hell—of which he had written so much—but the glories of heaven. His heart was in heaven, and so he was well. His desire, and the desire of Puritan writers on these themes, was that the preaching of heaven and hell might lead to the same confession on the part of all who hear about these realities: that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the praise of God the Father. That confession, arising out of the gift of faith, was, is, and always will be, the difference between those destined for heaven and those on the way to hell.

1. Cited in Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), 108.

2. John Dod, *Old Mr. Dod's Sayings* (London: A. Maxwell, 1671), saying 20.

3. Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest: Or a Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in Their Enjoyment of God in Glory* (London, 1649), 13.

4. Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxters Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times* (London, 1696), 1:108.

5. Christopher Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror. Or, Two Treatises; The One Concerning the Glory of the Saints with Jesus Christ, as a Spur to Duty: The Other, Of the Torments of the Damned, as a Preservative against Security* (London: [T. M.] for John Rothwell, 1653).

6. Edmund Calamy, Simeon Ashe, Jeremiah Whitaker, William Taylor, Allen Geare, "To the Christian Reader," in Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror*.

7. Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God*, 50. See pages 50–56 for the account of the events leading up to his trial and execution.

8. Viz., in the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, subscribed to by the king at Spey in 1650; parties to this covenant not only vowed to bring the churches of Britain "to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship and catechizing," but also promised "to preserve and defend the King's Majesty's person and authority."

9. Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God*, 50–53, 63–71.

10. *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Love, Christopher (1618–1651)."

11. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 1:67.

12. See Love's work written shortly before his death where he thanks his friends for their attempt to try to save his life: *A Cleare and Necessary Vindication of the Principles and Practices of Mr Christopher Love, Since My Tryall Before, and Condemnation by, the High Court of Justice…* (London: s.n., 1651).

13. Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Blessed State*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:457.

14. See Goodwin, *Of the Blessed State*, in *Works*, 7:461, where he makes Christ the efficient cause, meritorious cause, and exemplary cause of heaven.

15. The best Puritan treatment on the beatific vision is John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:285–415.

16. Cited in Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God*, 95.

17. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*, Parts 1 and 2, ed. James Blanton Wharey, 2nd ed., rev. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 311.

18. Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of the Rev. Samuel Rutherford* (Glasgow: Printed for William Collins, 1827), 44.

19. Love, *Heaven's Glory* (1653), 3–5, 6–15. See pp. *5–6*, where Love maintains that appearing with Him in glory denotes, contrary to the millenarians who affirm a personal thousand-year reign "upon earth," that we shall be glorified with Christ at the time of judgment when He returns, not after He has ruled on earth for such a period of time. See also pp. 68–85 and p. 190 for further refutation of the premillennial return of Jesus Christ.

20. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 19–28.

21. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 28–30.

22. Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth: A Treatise on Christian Assurance* (1654), in *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 2:3.

23. Cited in Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God*, 108.

24. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 30–32, 34–40.

25. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 40–53.

26. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 61–62.

27. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 63–67.

28. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 83–85. One of the accusations brought against Love in the proceedings of his trial was that of adultery. He vehemently denied such a charge, and no evidence was produced to substantiate it.

29. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 86.

30. [Westminster Divines]. *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms, Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster Together with Their Humble Advice Concerning Church Government and Ordination of Ministers* (London: for Robert Bostock, 1649). See Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God*, 33 for the involvement (and lack thereof) of Love likely due to his relationship with the prolocutor, William Twisse.

31. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 86–87.

32. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 88–91.

33. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992), 20.8.1–18.

34. Owen, *Meditations*, in *Works*, pt.1.

35. Richard Sibbes, *Christ Is Best, Or St. Paul's Strait*, in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 1:339.

36. John Owen, *Three Sermons on Hebrews, 1.1,2*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 5:547–48.

37. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 98–99.

38. Goodwin, *Of the Blessed State*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 7:459.

39. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 99.

40. Love, *Heaven's Glory*, 99–104.

41. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror. Or, Two Treatises; The One Concerning the Glory of the Saints with Jesus Christ, as a Spur to Duty: The Other, Of the Torments of the Damned, as a Preservative against Security* (London: for Peter Barker, 1671), 148–52. This later edition is utilized from this point, due to a pagination error in the 1653 edition.

42. Obsolete form of "aerial."

43. Obsolete form of “ethereal.”

44. From medieval Latin, *empyreus*, “of or pertaining to the highest heavens, seat of the element of fire.”

45. German Reformer Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583).

46. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 153–56. See Ursinus’s three-tiered position in *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, Ohio: Scott & Bascom, 1852), 242–43. Like Love, William Ames refers to the third heaven as the “empyrean, the heaven of heavens, and paradise… 2 Cor. 12:2, 3.” *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 103.

47. See Robert Bolton, *Mr. Boltons Last and Learned Worke of the Foure Last Things, Death, Iudgement, Hell, and Heaven* (London: George Miller, 1639), 117–20.

48. See Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 153, where he refers to the third heaven as “above all the aspectable and moving orbs,” and Bolton, *Foure Last Things*, 119, where he writes that it is “above all the aspectable moving Orbs.” On the same respective pages, Bolton calls Aristotle, “the most eagle-eyed in the mysteries of nature” of all philosophers, with Love copying him in labeling Aristotle as “the most Eagle-eyed into the mysteries of Nature.” Love also makes use of several of Bolton’s Scripture references in the three tiers. For examples of direct reference to Bolton, see Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 157, 217.

49. Bolton, *Foure Last Things*, 117.

50. Bolton, *Foure Last Things*, 118.

51. Thomas Brooks, *Paradise Opened*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 5:404–5.

52. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 156–64.

53. There is also the option of pyschopannychy, or “soul sleep.”

54. Order for Holy Communion, in Book of Common Prayer (1662).

55. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 167.

56. Love realized that this could be a parable.

57. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 164–67.

58. [Church of England], *Articles Agreed upon by the Bishoppes, and Other Learned Menne in the Synode of London* (London: Richardus Craftonus, 1553); John Calvin, *An Excellent Treatise of the Immortalytie of the Soule…* (London: John Daye, 1581). For a treatment of Calvin’s work on soul sleep as foundational for his 1536 *Institutes*, see George H. Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Joshua Scodel, in *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University, 1991), 81, overstates the temporary nature of the intermediate state for Calvin in the *Institutes* and wrongly attributes to him a denial that believing souls enter paradise immediately at death. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.25.6. For discussion of soul sleep and mortalism from pre-to post-Reformation England, see Christopher Hill, *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, vol. 2, *Religion and Politics in 17th Century England* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 103; Peter Marshall, *The Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 223–25; and N. T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

59. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 168–76.

60. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 177–79, 191.

61. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 192–203.

62. Love, *Heaven’s Glory, Hell’s Terror* (1671), 203–7.

63. See John Bunyan, “The Author to the Reader,” in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman, Presented to the World in a Familiar Dialogue Between Mr. Wiseman, and Mr. Attentive*, eds. James F. Forrest and Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), xliii, 1.

64. Arthur Dent, *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven; Wherein Every Man May Clearly See Whether He Shall Be Saved or Damned* (1599; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 1, 277, 285, 287, 295–97,

300, 305. Bunyan's first exposure to Dent came before his conversion when he read with his wife "The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven…which her Father had left her when he died." Though without conviction, he "found some things that were somewhat pleasing" to him in the book. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 8, §15.

65. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 211–14.

66. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 214–15.

67. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 216–18. He says that very little was written on the subject at this point though he refers to Bolton's *Four Laste Things*.

68. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 218–20, 223.

69. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 224–25.

70. John Bunyan, *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976–94), 1:246–47, 261, 266, 267.

71. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 226–27.

72. Thomas Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness before God*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 10:490.

73. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 230–34.

74. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 235.

75. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 248–55.

76. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 305–11.

77. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 280–85. Cf. WCF, 10.3 and the Canons of Dort, 1.17.

78. On this debate, see Mark A. Herzer, "Adam's Reward: Heaven or Earth?", in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), chap. 7.

79. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 111.

80. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:516.

81. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 286–300.

82. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 300–304.

83. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 255–68.

84. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 10, §22.

85. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 235–37.

86. Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218, 255–56, suggests that later in life Origen (c. 185–254) placed "limitations on the redemptive work of God" as he compares the earlier Alexandrian with the later Caesarean Origen, especially with *Contra Celsum* (248) and his teaching on the destruction of Satan in mind. This challenges the conclusions of such scholars as J. W. Hanson, *Universalism: The Prevailing Doctrine of the Christian Church during Its First Five Hundred Years* (Boston: Universalist Press, 1899), 61, 64, 67–74, who argues for a consistency in Origen as a "distinctive Universalist." In comparing the earlier and later Origen, such consistency appears to manifest itself. In *De Principiis* (before 231), Origen views God as a consuming fire of the wicked in the sense of a refining medicinal fire who remedially restores all to a perfect state, as he becomes "all" to every individual not simply "in the case of a few individuals, or of a considerable number, but he himself is 'all in all'" through the purging effects of this fire. *De Principiis*, 3:6. Still, even later in *Contra Celsum* (248), Origen says the following of Christ as Savior: "But our belief is, that the Word shall prevail over the entire rational creation, and change every soul into His own perfection…. For although, in the diseases and wounds of the body, there are some which no medical skill can cure, yet we hold that in the mind there is no evil so strong that it may not be overcome by the Supreme Word and God. For stronger than all the evils in the soul is the Word, and the healing power that dwells in Him; and this healing He applies, according to the will of God, to every man." *Contra Celsum*, 8:72. Both of these works are quoted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, trans. Frederick Crombie, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, N. Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885).

87. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 269–80.

88. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:547–48.

89. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:548.

90. Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness*, in *Works*, 10:549.

91. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 322–30.

92. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 333–34, 337.

93. This is the sense that Love takes for Luke 16:27–28, arguing that the rich man out of self-love wanted to warn his brothers due to the provocation his own life had been to them and would cause greater suffering for him.

94. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 238–47.

95. Love gleans too much here from Luke's silence, for it would necessitate that he omit no historical detail recorded by the other gospel writers. This is clearly not the case.

96. On John Calvin, William Perkins, and the debate over the descent of Christ, see Mark Jones, "John Calvin's Reception at the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649)," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1–2 (2011): 215–27. Cf. Danny Hyde, *In Defense of the Descent: A Response to Contemporary Critics* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

97. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 316–17.

98. William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole, or Creed of the Apostles* (London: John Legat, 1621), 1:231.

99. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 5:284.

100. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 321.

101. Love, *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror* (1671), 316–18, 321.

102. Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God*, vii.

THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

Chapter 52

Puritan Theology Shaped by a Pilgrim Mentality

> *Puritans saw themselves as God's pilgrims traveling home, God's warriors battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil; and God's servants under orders to do all the good they could as they went along.*
>
> —J. I. PACKER[1]

An increasing number of pastors, Christian workers, and godly young people around the world today are seeking to put the biblical, Reformed faith into practice. They are hungry to develop a biblically distinctive lifestyle that brings glory to God and builds families, churches, and nations.

At the same time, a growing number of people around the world today are embracing only part of Reformed theology. They affirm all five points of Calvinism's basic soteriology (TULIP) and teach in a Christ-centered and God-glorifying way that salvation is by grace alone, but they are clinging to a worldly style of living. That worldly living manifests itself in various ways, from participating in contemporary forms of church worship not commanded in Scripture to indulging in forms of entertainment that blatantly conflict with God's moral law, the Christian's guide for life.

Today we need to sound the call that salvation by grace goes hand in hand with godly living and the pursuit of practical holiness, without falling into the trap of legalism. Likewise, when rightly understood, the doctrines of grace stand opposed to moral indifference and to a worldly style of living that makes it difficult for the church and the world to discern who is Christian and who is not. Perhaps no other group of Christians in church history got this issue rightly balanced in a more biblical way than the Puritans.

The Puritans' entire theology and walk of life was shaped by what J. I. Packer has called a pilgrim mentality.[2] The Puritans saw themselves as pilgrims traveling through this world, much like the characters in John Bunyan's (1628–1688) *Pilgrim's Progress.* Pilgrims are in the world but not of the world, which involves an acute tension. On the one hand, Christians are in the world because

they were created as God's image-bearers in this world. They are indigenous to this world and yet called to be salt and light in it. The Puritans believed that the gospel must be manifested by Christians in every sphere of life, in every culture, and to every people group on our planet (Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Thess. 4:11–12). Leland Ryken thus titles his helpful introductory work on the Puritans *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*.[3] In that sense, the Puritans were very much in the world and thoroughly engaged with all that happens in it.

On the other hand, Puritans believed that Christians must distance themselves from this world. This dimension of Christian living emphasizes the pilgrim status to which Scripture calls every believer (Heb. 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). Christians are called to pull away from the world's culture and live antithetically to it (2 Cor. 6:17). They are to view themselves as aliens in their own society, sometimes even in their own families (Luke 12:53; cf. Matt. 10:34–35). They are not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14), nor "have…fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:6–11). With love for God and their neighbor, they are to walk humbly and circumspectly, living as pilgrims in this world, which groans with travail because of the pervasiveness of sin (Rom. 8:23). Because of sin, believers are in perpetual conflict, fighting endless battles with the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:15–17; Rom. 7:14–25; Eph. 6:10–20).[4]

This world is a Vanity Fair, as Bunyan put it, and the Christian must pass through its gates, but as he does so, he must constantly distance himself from its ungodly influences. These ungodly influences are powerful because the Christian's flesh naturally craves what is worldly, and Satan entices him with its pleasures. As pilgrims, Christians must live for God's glory, hastening on to the celestial city and looking for the coming of Christ's kingdom (Heb. 11:13–16).

As a diamond shows various facets of its beauty when it is turned in the light, so the Puritans' pilgrim mentality shines with various facets. We will examine six facets of the pilgrim mentality. True, no man, Puritan or otherwise, can live up to all these ideals, but, nonetheless, the ideal walk of the Puritans gives us a target on which to set our sights in our Christian walk today.

Facet 1: Biblical Outlook A biblical outlook is living as determined by the Word of God. The Puritans were people of Holy Scripture, which they viewed as the only living book. They loved, lived, and breathed Scripture, relishing the power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word.[5] They regarded the sixty-six books of Scripture as the library of the Holy Spirit that was graciously bequeathed to them. They viewed Scripture as God speaking to them as a father speaks to his children. They saw the Word as truth they could trust in and rest

upon for all eternity. They saw it empowered by the Spirit to renew their minds and transform their lives.

The Puritans read, heard, and sang the Word with delight and encouraged others to do the same. Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594) suggested eight ways to read Scripture: with diligence, wisdom, preparation, meditation, conference [fellowship with other believers], faith, practice, and prayer.[6] Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) provided numerous guidelines on listening to the Word. Come to the Word with a holy appetite and a teachable heart, he said. Sit under the Word attentively, receive it with meekness, and mingle it with faith. Then retain the Word, pray over it, practice it, and speak to others about it.[7] "Dreadful is the case of those who are loaded with sermons to hell," Watson warned. By contrast, those who respond to Scripture as a "love letter sent to you from God" will experience its warming, transforming power.[8]

Feed upon the Word, the Puritan preacher John Cotton (1585–1652) told his congregation.[9] The preface to the Geneva Bible contains similar advice, saying the Bible is "the light to our paths, the key of the kingdom of heaven, our comfort in affliction, our shield and sword against Satan, the school of all wisdom, the glass wherein we behold God's face, the testimony of his favor, and the only food and nourishment of our souls."[10]

The Puritans urged people to become Word-centered in faith and practice. They regarded the Bible as an authoritative and trustworthy guide for testing religious truth, for guidance in matters of morality, for determining the form of the church's worship and government, and for help in every kind of spiritual trial.[11] "We should set the Word of God always before us like a rule, and believe nothing but that which it teacheth, love nothing but that which it prescribeth, hate nothing but that which it forbiddeth, do nothing but that which it commandeth," said Henry Smith (1560–1591) to his congregation.[12] And John Flavel (1628–1691) wrote, "The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying."[13]

Puritan preachers set the example for this outlook on life by grounding their messages in God's Word. "The faithful Minister, like unto Christ, [is] one that preacheth nothing but the word of God," said Edward Dering (c. 1540–1576).[14] John Owen (1616–1683) agreed: "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word."[15] Millar Maclure noted, "For the Puritans, the sermon is not just hinged to Scripture; it quite literally exists inside the Word of God; the text is not in the sermon, but the sermon is in the text…. Put summarily, listening to a sermon is being in the Bible."[16]

A typical page of a Puritan sermon contains five to ten citations of biblical texts and about a dozen references to texts. Puritan preachers were conversant

with their Bibles; they memorized hundreds, if not thousands, of texts. They knew what Scripture to cite for nearly any concern. “Long and personal familiarity with the application of Scripture was a key element in the Puritan ministerial makeup,” Sinclair Ferguson wrote. “They pondered the riches of revealed truth the way a gemologist patiently examines the many faces of a diamond.”[17] Then Puritans used Scripture wisely, bringing cited texts to bear on the doctrine or case of conscience[18] at hand, all based on sound hermeneutical principles.[19]

Puritan preachers, for the most part, were well-grounded in biblical languages and classical learning. But they were also convinced of the need to be “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Peter 1:23). They were persuaded that the Holy Spirit worked through Scripture to bring truth home to sinners. The very thought patterns of the Puritans were steeped in the phraseology of the Bible.

If we are prone to be proud of our Bible knowledge, we should open a volume by John Owen, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), or Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), noting how some obscure passage in Nahum is quoted along with a familiar passage from John, both of which perfectly illustrate the point the writer is making, then compare our knowledge to theirs. How can we explain this marvelous grasp of Scripture other than that these divines were *studied ministers of the Word?* These men studied their Bibles daily, falling to their knees as God’s Spirit burned the Word into their hearts. Then, as they wrote or preached their evangelistic messages, one Scripture passage after another would come to mind.

Our efforts to live to God’s glory must be similarly grounded in the Bible. We must search the Scriptures more frequently and love the Word of God more fervently. As we think, speak, and act more biblically, our messages will become more authoritative, our conversation more fruitful, our witness more effective, and our lifestyle more distinctive.

Our problem today is that our thinking is not grounded in Scripture. A mindless Christianity can only produce a spineless and carnal Christianity. Either through ignorance of Scripture or through twisting Scripture to suit our pleasure, we have lost our antithetical convictions regarding the ungodly world around us. Thus churches can without shame justify ordaining female ministers or show leniency to homosexual practice and a host of other evils, despite the clear testimony of the Scriptures to the contrary. Recently when someone was approached about a sin in which he was engaging, he responded, “Well, the way I look at it, everyone disagrees about what the Bible really says, so I’m going to keep doing what I’m doing because I feel it is all right.”

Today, it is not uncommon to hear a self-professing Christian begin a sentence this way: "Well, I know this is wrong, but…." An elder in a Reformed church said to me with a laugh after he had stared at an attractive young woman, "My wife told me that it was OK to look as long as I don't touch." He said this without a twinge of guilt or recollection of Jesus' warning that he who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart (Matt. 5:28). Worse yet, a newly retired evangelical minister whom I was sitting next to on a plane said to me, "The way I figure is that I gave my entire life to the Lord and His church, so now I'm going to live the rest of it for me."

The Puritans would be aghast at such statements, but I fear that many of us read them without abhorrence, for unbiblical secularism that values self-affirmation rather than self-denial has got its foothold among us. This came home to me last month when I read Jeremiah Burroughs's (c. 1600–1646) work on Moses' choice and self-denial.20 How I wish every Christian today would read this book, repent of his sin, and plead with God for mercy and strength to live a godly lifestyle. I fear that the Puritan view of self-denial and our modern view are worlds apart.

What about you, friend? Are you serious about living a distinctively godly, biblical lifestyle that calls for self-denial? When is the last time you denied yourself something you wanted to do because you knew the Bible did not give you sanction for it? Do you daily deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24), or are you the double-minded person, unstable in your ways, that James describes (1:8), because you are trying to live both as a Christian and as a worldling?

Facet 2: Pietist Outlook The second facet of Puritan pilgrim mentality is its *pietist* outlook.21 A *pietist* sees personal holiness in our relationships to God and man, both in the church and in the community around him, as his primary concern. In this sense, the Puritans were pietists.

The word *piety* has become a pejorative term today. Classifying someone as "pietistic" most often connotes excessive religiosity, self-righteousness, or a holier-than-thou attitude. The etymology of the word *piety*, however, is more positive. The Old Testament term for this word means "the fear of the Lord," and its equivalent in the New Testament, *eusebeia*, means "reverence for God" and "godliness." The Latin term for piety (*pietas*) indicates conscientiousness and scrupulousness with regard to one's duty to God, to family, and to the fatherland (*patria*). As such, *pietas* is rooted in love and shows itself in loyalty, kindness, honesty, and compassion. The German word (*fromm*) signifies "godly and devout" or "gentle, harmless, and simple." The English word implies pity

and compassion.[22]

The sixteenth-century Reformers, most notably John Calvin, would be shocked to see how poorly piety is regarded today, even among those who profess to be Reformed. For Calvin, piety involves developing right attitudes to God. It flows out of theology and includes heartfelt worship, saving faith, filial fear, prayerful submission, and reverential love.[23] Knowing who God is (theology proper) includes right attitudes toward God and doing what He wants (piety). Calvin connected theology and piety, stating, "I call 'piety' that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces."[24] Calvin said piety embraces every aspect of one's life. He wrote, "The *whole* life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness."[25] This same concern for pious living is reflected in the subtitle of Calvin's first edition of the *Institutes*: "Embracing almost the whole sum of piety, & whatever is necessary to know of the doctrine of salvation: A work most worthy to be read by all persons zealous for piety."[26]

For Calvin and his successors—the Protestant scholastics, the English Puritans, the Dutch Further Reformation divines, and, to some extent, the German Pietists—theology and practice were inseparably wed. Reformed theologians viewed piety as the heartbeat of their theology and of godly living. This was particularly true of the Puritans. For example, William Ames (1576–1633), a renowned Puritan who authored a classic book titled *The Marrow of Theology*, defined theology as "the doctrine or teaching [*doctrina*] of living to God."[27] For Ames, theology was a divine-human encounter that is not merely speculative but culminates in a practical end—the alignment of the human will with the will of a holy God.[28] Ames went on to say that everything in the study of theology is related to practical godly living. He said, "This practice of life is so perfectly reflected in theology that there is no precept of universal truth relevant to living well in domestic morality, political life, or lawmaking which does not rightly pertain to theology."[29]

The Puritans used a number of means to promote piety. These include (1) encouraging Word-focused, doctrinal, experiential, and soul-saving preaching; (2) reading and searching the Scriptures; (3) meditating on biblical truths and duties; (4) engaging frequently and at length in fervent prayer; (5) communing with the saints, particularly through conventicles or spiritual fellowships; (6) emphasizing continuing repentance; (7) cultivating an inward devotional life through daily devotions and the means of grace; (8) singing psalms; (9) monitoring and making diligent use of the Lord's Supper; (10) obeying the Decalogue out of gratitude to God; (11) accenting the invisible church more than the visible; (12) maintaining family worship; (13) catechizing the laity; (14)

publishing sermons and other edifying literature; (15) stressing theological education for clergy; (16) keeping the Sabbath by dedicating the entire day to God; and (17) keeping journals or spiritual diaries.[30]

At its heart, Reformed and Puritan theology is pietistic; the concern of Reformation theology is as practical as it is doctrinal. As the majority of the orthodox divines affirm, theology is partly theoretical, partly practical (*partim partim*);[31] the head and heart are necessary corollaries of each other. For Calvin and the Puritans, reformation of the church involved the reform of piety, or spirituality, as much as a reform of theology. As Matthew Poole (1624–1679) wrote, biblical doctrine is that truth "which is productive of a godly life, lying in the true worship of God, and a universal obedience to the Divine will."[32] The spirituality that was cloistered behind monastery walls for many centuries reduced piety to celibate, ascetic, and penitential devotion. Reformed theologians, however, helped Christians to understand that true spirituality flows from its principal source, Jesus Christ. The Christian's actions in the family, field, workshop, and marketplace—in short, the entire scope of life—are to be a grateful, pious reflection of the grace found in Jesus Christ.

This dual emphasis of nurturing the mind and the soul is sorely needed today. On one hand, we confront the problem of dry, Reformed orthodoxy, which correctly teaches doctrine but lacks emphasis on vibrant, godly living. The result is that people bow before the doctrine of God without yearning for a vital, spiritual union with the God of doctrine. On the other hand, Pentecostal and charismatic Christians propose emotionalism in protesting a formal, lifeless Christianity, but this emotionalism is not solidly rooted in Scripture. The result is that people put human feeling above the triune God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. The genius of genuine Reformed piety is that it marries theology and piety so that head, heart, and hand motivate one another to live for God's glory and our neighbor's well-being.

Piety understood in this sense is not something to be despised or shunned; rather, we are called to promote it in the Reformation teaching of holy, dependent, loving, and godly living. Being called "pious" or "pietistic" in its true sense is a compliment! If we think otherwise, we need to reconsider our definition of piety. Does our definition stem from its proper use in Scripture or from its improper application in radical Pietism and in much of contemporary society? Godliness, spirituality, or piety is not a means to an end (i.e., eternal, felicitous life), but an expression of this life merited by Jesus Christ. For this reason, the cultivation of piety is preeminently connected to the means of grace. In short, piety means experiencing sanctification as a divine, gracious work of renewal expressed in repentance and righteousness, which progresses through

conflict and adversity in a Christ-like manner for all of a believer's life, anticipating the day when piety will be perfected in eternal sanctification in heaven.

Facet 3: Churchly Outlook The Puritans embraced what Packer calls a *churchly* outlook. They taught that the true church is the invisible company of the redeemed, with Christ as its head. The church is a spiritual reality rather than an institutional, hierarchical, or physical structure. That is one reason the Puritans called their church buildings "meeting houses," so as "to divert attention from the physical place to the spiritual activities that were the true core of church worship."[33] For the Puritans, this implied voluntary church membership rather than the enforced uniformity of a state church.

The Puritans had great respect for the local church and its fellowship. James Ussher (1581–1656), whose writings strongly influenced the Westminster Standards, wrote that God makes His church visible on earth in "particular congregations" to which "all that seek for salvation must gladly join themselves."[34] Paul's epistle to the Ephesians abundantly justifies the Puritan conviction that no Christian is called to be a lone ranger for God. We are born again into a church family; we were made for fellowship, and we are to live in fellowship. Believers are to identify with the church and become part of the church, bending their prayers and efforts to advancing the well-being of the church in every way, for the church is the center of the purposes of God. However much the gospel makes an individual aware that he must personally deal with God and that no one can do it for him, the gospel does not turn someone into an individualist who goes off to do his own thing, oblivious to whether the rest of God's people know or care.

The Puritans were churchmen, and so they were concerned that God be glorified in the church's worship. From the beginning of the Puritan movement, their consciences were most vigorous in protesting against corruptions in public worship. The Puritans wanted the church's worship to be ordered by Scripture just as they wanted all of life to be ordered by Scripture. This became a problem because the Puritans' understanding of Bible-ordered worship did not harmonize with the legally established worship pattern of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer.

Those who compiled the Prayer Book supported Luther, Melanchthon, and Bucer in their view about the *adiaphora*, or "things indifferent." This view taught that while everything the Bible prescribes for worship must be present, additional features not prescribed by Scripture but which have proved their value as furthering reverence, godliness, and edification should be retained. On that

basis, the Prayer Book retained four ceremonial elements to which the Puritans objected: the wearing of the surplice (special liturgical clothing of priests), kneeling to receive Holy Communion (a remnant of medieval worship of the bread and cup), the giving of the wedding ring (as a sign of a Roman Catholic sacrament), and the tracing of the sign of the cross on the forehead of a person on whom the water is poured in baptism.[35] The Puritan understanding of biblical authority in relation to worship did not permit the continuance of such *adiaphora,* since none of these things were commanded in the Word of God.

So the Puritan conviction already in the 1560s and 1570s was that by retaining these ceremonies, the Book of Common Prayer was corrupting worship by adding to God's Word. The Puritans said these things must be eliminated from our worship, or it is not true worship according to God's Word, and we cannot expect God to be pleased with it. The goal of worship must be to please God, not ourselves. John Owen wrote, "The worship of God is not of man's finding out…. It is not taught by human wisdom, nor is it attainable by human industry; but by the wisdom and revelation of the Spirit of God. It is every way divine and heavenly in its rise, in its discovery; and so becoming the greatness and holiness of God. For what doth please God, God himself is the sole judge."[36] The Puritan stance, which came to be called the regulative principle of worship, was that nothing that is not explicitly commanded or sanctioned by example in the New Testament should be allowed in Christian worship.[37] The regulative principle of worship was derived from the basic Reformed understanding of the second commandment, "that we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 96).

Whether in Puritan times or today, those who adhere to the regulative principle believe that God is offended by unauthorized, man-made additions to His worship. The royalty of Christ is violated, and His laws are impeached.[38] The Puritans believed that these additions are sinful and irreverent, suggesting that Scripture is not sufficient. They viewed these matters the way many evangelicals view certain peoples' claims concerning prophecy—that they impugn the sufficiency of Scripture and are now out of place because the canon has been closed.

We can learn much from the Puritans, especially when so many churches today give scant attention to purity in worship and put all their emphasis on what pleases people rather than God. The Puritans did precisely the opposite. Their goal was to please God through holy worship. The question was never, "What do I want in worship?" but always, "What does God want in worship?"

In all of church life, the Puritans aimed for purity: purity of worship, purity of

doctrine, purity of soul experience (meaning experience grounded in Scripture and the church's sound doctrine), purity of government and discipline, purity in dedicating the entire Lord's Day to God's service, and purity of life itself as the fruit of worship. They aimed for a pure church with a pure doctrine, a pure pattern of worship, and pure lives in its adherents. Their goal was individual holiness and church holiness that flowed out of the orthodoxy of doctrine and life. They had a comprehensive view of what God requires of us and what we must yield to Him.

Puritans are known for their comprehensive churchly outlook about what is right and what we should aim for as we seek to honor God. Today the church is full of people who have been so preoccupied with one thing that they forget the importance of another. The Puritans did not forget the importance of anything in their churchly outlook; *everything* was important. We can learn much from this, for we cannot afford to be unconcerned about any dimensions of purity and rightness.

Facet 4: Warfaring Outlook The church on earth is a militant church. A battle rages within each believer's soul. This too is part of the life of a pilgrim, the Puritans taught. The Puritans saw the inner life as a field of conflict and tension on which the most momentous warfare is happening. Ussher wrote that "spiritual warfare" is

> the daily exercise of our spiritual strength, and armour, against all adversaries, with assured confidence of victory. For the state of the faithful in this life is such, that they are sure in Christ, and yet fight against sin: there being joined with repentance a continual fighting against and struggling against the assaults of man's own flesh, against the motions of the Devil, and enticements of the world.[39]

The Puritans cited Romans 7:14–25, which they believed describes the holy war that rages within believers.[40] Paul's inner life contained ongoing strife between his new nature and the remains of his old nature.

John Owen helps us understand this. Owen said that as believers we experience sin like a law. When we will to do good, sin is always "present" (Rom. 7:21); it is always at our elbow. Owen draws here upon the Greek word *parakeimai*, which infers that sin is always at hand and acts like an unwelcome foreigner who walks into our home to nag us and plague us.[41]

This inclination to do evil is like a law because it won't go away. It argues against the good law placed within the soul from the moment of regeneration. The good law wants to do what is right and good. But as soon as we proceed on

a right course, this evil law objects to what we are doing. Paul says that it wars "against the law of my mind" (Rom. 7:23).

The evil law knows no boundaries. There seems to be no limit to the evil suggestions that it persuasively puts forward. This evil law will not be satisfied until it has made us its prisoner. It wants all of us at any price. Today, we sometimes read about the black market sale of various human body parts. Well, Satan owns the blackest market, and he works through the law of our natural inclination, seeking to take possession of our eyes, our hands, our feet, our affections, our will, and our heart at any price.

Our battle against Satan and his hosts of devils is fierce. William Gurnall (1616–1679) reminded us that Satan's army is aggressive, malignant, cruel, and too powerful for us to fight in our own strength, yet we cannot compromise with Satan or surrender to him, nor need we be dismayed if we are in Christ.[42] We must engage ourselves in this spiritual battle. We must wrestle against Satan's invisible army in hand-to-hand spiritual combat to the death.[43] In this battle, Satan enlists our old nature as his ally and also the enticing world, which, together with Satan, seeks to satisfy the cravings of our old nature to move forward rather than upward. Ultimately, Satan wants us to succumb to worldliness, which is human nature minus God, or practical atheism. The people of this world are controlled by worldly pursuits such as the quest for pleasure, profit, and position. A worldly person yields to the spirit of fallen mankind, which is the spirit of self-seeking and self-indulgence without regard for God.[44] Through Satan, our old nature, and the world, which are often called "the triple-headed enemy" by the Puritans, Satan seeks to take us down through the law of sin.

Paul says these two laws within believers are always waging war against each other. John Bunyan wrote *The Holy War* to depict the holy struggle that goes on within the soul of the true believer by means of the eye-gate and ear-gate and other human senses.[45]

As true believers, we find rest and peace with God in Jesus Christ through the atonement. Paul says, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). But we must not make peace with sin. Rather, we experience the clash of two great armies fighting within us. On one side, Satan battles to bring our flesh and its lusts under his command; on the other, the Holy Spirit commands the new principle of life planted in our heart. So the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit strives against the flesh.

The Christian life is not a middle way between extremes but a narrow way between precipices. It involves living by faith through self-denial and waging a holy war in the midst of a beckoning yet hostile world. And what a war it is, for

the world does not fight fairly or cleanly, does not agree to cease-fires, and does not sign peace treaties.[46]

Sadly, we do not always triumph in this strife. The expression that Paul uses in Romans 7:23—"bringing me under captivity"—actually means in the original Greek, "makes and takes me prisoner." We believe that by the outpouring of God's grace in our souls, the Holy Spirit subdues our old natures. During the enjoyment of Christ's tender, saving presence, we may even feel as if we have overcome sin and worldliness. Yet later, we find that our spiritual enemies—the world, Satan, and our flesh—rear their ugly heads again, and the battle once again becomes critical.

The remains of our old nature resemble a volcano. Sometimes they lie dormant like a volcano, sending up only a small waft of smoke. But fire still resides within the volcano and, if not restrained by grace, may break out again. Then we experience once more the power of that contrary law in our members that brings us captive to the law of sin within us. When we would be holy, unholiness breaks out. When we would be heavenly minded, earthly-mindedness drags us down.

Do you, too, experience defeat in the battle against our triple-headed enemy? Does this make you confess with Paul in Romans 7:19, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do"? This dilemma makes us cry out with Paul, "O wretched man that I am!" (v. 24).

Do not misread Paul's words. No one in this world is as happy as true believers. God is our portion forever; we have found Christ and rest in His atonement. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Our sins are forgiven; our guilt purged. We have the hope of eternal glory before us. Still, we often cry: "O wretched man that I am!"

The Puritans said that war with sin is a healthy sign. When John Bradford (1510–1555) wrote a letter shortly before his death to a fellow prisoner, he signed off with these words: "the most miserable, sinful, hard-hearted, and unthankful sinner." A few days later he joyfully died as a martyr in Christ. Can you say this with Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661): "This body of sin and corruption embittereth and poisoneth our enjoyments—oh, that I were home where I shall sin no more!"[47]

Happily, the Puritans found an answer to this distressful warfare, which is the *Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul writes, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25a). Paul and the Puritans saw that by faith in Christ alone believers are more than conquerors over sin, even though the warfare continues until they die. They saw that Christ has already won the battle on the cross and through the empty tomb. They saw that they were fighting a winning battle in His strength,

and that though they might lose skirmishes along the way, they would ultimately win the war in the strength of Christ.

Paul speaks with full assurance. Christ has already defeated sin on the cross and has blotted out the handwriting of the law against us. Though sin will continue to do its damage and will at times rob us of inward peace by disturbing our consciences, Christ will have the final victory. Sin may take heaven temporarily out of the soul, but sin cannot keep the soul of the believer out of heaven, because of Jesus, who is our wisdom, justification, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). In Christ's strength, the believer finds strength to put on the whole armor of God described in Ephesians 6:10–20, to fight the good fight of faith. The Christian fights against the devil, the world, and his old nature by looking to Jesus and using the armor of His provision to stay upright as he progresses from this world to the next.

In self-examination, which the Puritans maintained far more diligently than we are prone to do, they were very conscious of the ups and downs of the inner life. They wrote spiritual journals in which they recorded their walk with God to evaluate themselves. They used their journals as private confessionals to help them express thoughts to God and to themselves that they might otherwise have buried. The Puritans believed that journaling could assist them in meditating, praying, remembering the Lord's works and faithfulness, monitoring their goals and priorities, and maintaining other spiritual disciplines.[48] They did not write journals to show to others; they wrote them so that they might reread them to discern whether they were progressing or failing to progress in their walk with God. To learn more about Puritan journals, you might look at the reprinted journal of Richard Rogers in *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, edited by Marshall Knappen,[49] or at the book by Owen Watkins titled *The Puritan Experience*,[50] which explains what is revealed by a study of these journals. You might find it very instructive to compare Puritan journaling with the modern equivalent of writing a diary.

Facet 5: Methodical Outlook Puritan piety, with its passion for a distinctive, disciplined lifestyle, represents something like the monastic ideal of the ordered life when removed from the monastery and plunked down in public life. The word *methodical* as a description of holiness is a Puritan word.[51] The Puritans believed that the *method* of getting everything straight and organized in the proper way was vital to succeed in any enterprise. Certainly, it was true of the Christian life.

It is misleading, of course, to describe the Puritans as reformed monks because they lived in the world, enjoyed God's creation, married, raised

families, and saw this as part of their Christian calling. Yet their approach to the structure of personal Christian living emphasizing order, method, planning, and the wise use of time does invite comparison with the ideals of the monastery and its rules. There is also something methodical about the Puritans and their passion for holiness. Lewis Bayly's (c. 1575–1631) *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian Walk, That He May Please God* is one example of this.[52] Bayly tells you what to meditate about as you rise from your bed, as you get dressed, then as you have breakfast, and so on throughout the day.

To most of us in a free-spirited day, this methodical aspect of Puritan living seems over the top. Perhaps in some cases it was. But we can learn from the Puritans that our lives ought to be more disciplined than they are.

Before condemning the Puritans for their methodical living, let us consider that their lifestyle practice of incorporating spiritual disciplines is something that we sorely need to learn. Recently, I heard a professor from a conservative Reformed seminary tell his Sunday school class that if they did not maintain their daily devotions, they should not worry about it, for maintaining daily spiritual disciplines was not significant. The only significant thing was to worship God in His house on the first day of the week. He then went on to assure his class that they should not feel guilty about failing to pray or read their Bible or to follow other spiritual disciplines. The Puritans would rightly view such teaching as disastrous for the believer and the church.

Facet 6: Two-Worldly Outlook The *two-worldly* Puritan view of life, which includes both this world and the world to come, is explained at great length in Richard Baxter's (1615–1691) first devotional treatise, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest.* This book was a bestseller in Baxter's day as well as a major contributing factor to the Puritans' meditation on heaven.[53] It was reprinted every year for ten years, despite its size of more than eight hundred pages. It became household reading in many Puritan homes. It was recognized as a first-class statement of what was basic to the Puritan view of life. That same view of life is explored in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.*

Unlike modern Christians, the Puritans believed that you should have heaven "in your eye" the whole time you are walking on earth. For the most part, evangelical Christians today do not live that way. I believe we are poorer for it. The New Testament is constantly exhorting us to live in two-worldly terms: to keep the hope of heaven before our minds so as to keep our life on earth straight, controlled, and energized. We tend to live more like Epicureans, assuming that this life is all that we have and what we don't get now we will never get at all. Thus it is terribly important to us to find fulfillment, contentment, and

satisfaction in the here and now. The thought of radical self-denial would make us miserable if we allowed ourselves to take it as our rule for existence.

We are not strong on self-denial these days; we are self-indulgent and spiritually flabby. We do not live in two-worldly terms as the New Testament exhorts us to do and as the Puritans did. They were persuaded that the joys of heaven will make amends for any losses, crosses, strains, and pains that we endure on earth if we follow God faithfully. This outlook was integral to the Puritans. I hope it becomes integral to us today.

The Puritans lived to the full in this life, but as they did so they kept an eye fixed on eternity. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) wrote, "O God, stamp my eyeballs with eternity!"[54] How much more in our secular age should we cry out, "Stamp eternity, O God, also upon my mind and soul, my hands and feet, and the totality of my being!"

If we would be true pilgrims in this life for God, we must be active pilgrims for the life to come. It is said that some believers are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use. That could not be more wrong with regard to the Puritans, who show us that we can be of no earthly use unless we are heavenly minded. I have often discovered that the more I am focused on future glory, the more zeal I have for the real well-being of those around me. When I visited the Puritan-minded Robert Murray M'Cheyne's (1813–1843) church in Dundee, Scotland, and its adjacent cemetery, I noticed a large flat stone which, though weathered, had one word written across it. I got down on my knees to trace with my finger the word: ETERNITY. Apparently, M'Cheyne wanted every visitor to consider his eternal destiny while walking among the dead.

Friend, if you were to die today, would you be ready to enter eternity? Do not live just for this life; live for eternity as well. Remember, you must be in Christ now to fare well in eternity. You must look for Christ in this life if you would spend eternity with Christ. Hebrews 9:27–28 clearly says, "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Soon, Christ will execute judgment on all people. Matthew 25:46 says, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Those who refused to respond to the winsome invitations of the gospel in this lifetime will be compelled to hear the dreadful sound of Christ's rod. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," says 2 Corinthians 5:11. How dreadful will it be to be cast together with Satan into hell, to be ever dying but never dead—to be ever being consumed, yet never consumed!

Unless you are in Christ on that day, God will say of you, "Bind him hand and

foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13). *Cast*—what a word this is! Joseph was *cast* into a pit; Paul and Silas were *cast* into an inner prison (Acts 16:23), but there is no pit or prison like hell. Jesus, the Greater Joseph, the Lion out of the tribe of Judah, will cast all unbelievers into the bottomless pit, where the fiery wrath of God and a burning conscience will forever eat away at them. Nebuchadnezzar's burning fiery furnace would be ice compared to the heat of God's wrath.

The city of hell has no exits, the building of hell no doors of escape, the society of hell no relationships. Hell is radical loneliness, radical forsakenness of the favor of God and men. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" asks Hebrews 2:3. J. C. Ryle said: "The saddest road to hell is that which runs under the pulpit, past the Bible, and through the midst of warnings and invitations."[55] Make haste for your life's sake; flee the wrath to come. Stop putting your heart into this world. What will it profit you if you gain the entire world but lose your soul? Repent and believe the gospel while it is still the day of grace and salvation.

Soon it will be too late to repent. Christ will say on the judgment day, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev. 22:11). There will be no atheists in hell, but *"Too late"* is written across the gates of hell. Consider, friend, that the eternity of eternity is the hell of hell. An endless hell can no more be removed from the Bible than can an endless heaven.

We are but a heartbeat from eternity, which hangs upon the thin thread of time. Consider that if you have no vision of eternity, you have no understanding of time. Our lives are not just a journey to death; we are journeying to heaven, that eternal day that knows no sunset, or to hell, the eternal night that knows no sunrise. Which destination are you heading for? Are you a follower of Christ Jesus? If you were arrested today for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Dear believers, you will receive a never-fading crown on judgment day. Your Savior will usher you into the heaven of heavens with other believers as one family. As a living member of His perfected church, He will present you as His bride without spot or wrinkle to His Father to enter glory. You will dwell forever with Christ, who will feed you and lead you to living waters. You will drink of the fountains of the triune God, praising Him for all eternity in the most holy, glorious activities, many of which are beyond imagination (1 Cor. 2:9). All that you have experienced here of God and His gracious salvation will be but shadows compared to what you will enjoy in heaven.

In heaven, every negative will disappear and every positive will be multiplied. The negative is that we no longer will battle with Satan, the tempting world, our old nature, tears and sorrow, ill health, and ill treatment from others, for all will pass away when we come to that better world. There will no more fear of temptation, of death, of falling, of bringing shame on Christ's name, or of departing from the faith.

Heaven will also be full of positives. The supreme positive will be the fulfillment of the last words of Robert Haldane (1764–1842), who saw revival in Geneva when he preached to students. He cried out repeatedly with his dying breaths, "Forever with the Lord!"[56] In that world, Christ will never be out of your sight, dear believer. He will be in your eye, before your face, and within earshot for you to talk to and to worship. He will be there to adore, to answer your questions, and to thank for what He has done for you.

Heaven will also be a place of perfect activities, such as worshiping God with praise and singing, serving God and exercising authority by reigning with Christ, fellowshiping with saints and angels, learning about God and His truth, and resting in perfect peace. Then, too, heaven will be a place of gracious reward for believers' faithfulness here below and of abundant compensation for their suffering on earth. Heaven will also be a place of perfect holiness. As Rowland Hill (1744–1833) said, "If an unholy man were to get to heaven, he would feel like a hog in a flower garden."[57] Heaven will be absolutely pure and clean. There will be no infirmity there and not one speck of dust. All evil will be walled out; all good walled in.

Finally, heaven will be a world of love. Spurgeon put it this way: "A fish can more easily drink the oceans dry than we can ever exhaust the love of God in heaven." He added: "Drink away little fish, you'll never drink it all dry!" Oh, magnificent hope; magnificent love! Edwards said God's love in heaven is an ocean without a floor and without a shore![58] Dear pilgrim, keep your eye on the celestial city!

Conclusion

The Puritan mentality was biblically based, pietistic, churchly, warfaring, methodical, and two-worldly. In these ways, the Puritans were pilgrims, heavenly visionaries who traveled through this world to a land they could see only in the Scriptures with the eyes of faith. The Puritans were strong where we are weak. Because we are biblically illiterate, stress godly piety so little, fail to cherish the church, do not oppose sin with might and main, and live undisciplined lives that consist more of trivial pursuits than traveling as pilgrims to the celestial city, we would do well to study the Puritans. They can teach us, as no other group of writers in church history, how to live a disciplined life to God's glory without falling into dead orthodoxy or deadly legalism.

May God grant that we all can say with Bunyan's pilgrim, "I am come from the City of Destruction, and am going to Mount Zion."[59]

1. J. I. Packer, "A Man for All Ministries: Richard Baxter, 1615–1691," *Reformation & Revival* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 55.

2. I am indebted to an address I heard by J. I. Packer decades ago for the basic framework of this chapter and for several thoughts contained in it.

3. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

4. Cf. Jeffrey Volkmer, "The Indigenous Pilgrim Principle: A Theological Consideration of the Christian, the Church, and Politics," *Bible.org*, http://bible.org/article/indigenous-pilgrim-principle-theological-consideration-christian-church-and-politics, accessed June 10, 2010.

5. Parts of this section are drawn from Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 9–14, and Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning, "The Transforming Power of Scripture," in *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position of the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 221–76.

6. Richard Greenham, "A Profitable Treatise, Containing a Direction for the Reading and Understanding of the Holy Scriptures," in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Jesus Christ, M. Richard Greenham*, ed. H.[enry] H[olland] (1599; repr., New York: Da Capo, 1973), 389–97. Cf. Thomas Watson, *How We May Read the Scriptures with Most Spiritual Profit*, in *Heaven Taken by Storm: Showing the Holy Violence a Christian Is to Put Forth in the Pursuit after Glory*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (1669; repr., Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 113–29.

7. Watson, *How We May Read the Scriptures*, in *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 16–18, and Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 377–79.

8. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 379. "There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell." John Preston, *A Pattern of Wholesome Words*, quoted in Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1967), 46.

9. John Cotton, *Christ the Fountain of Life* (London: Robert Ibbitson, 1651), 134.

10. *Geneva Bible* (1599; repr., Ozark, Mo.: L. L. Brown, 1990), 3.

11. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 142.

12. Henry Smith, "Food for New-Born Babes," in *The Works of Henry Smith*, ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 1:494.

13. Cited in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006), 49.

14. Edward Dering, *M. Derings Workes* (1597; repr., New York: Da Capo, 1972), 456.

15. John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1853; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 16:74.

16. Millar Maclure, *The Paul's Cross Sermons, 1534–1642* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 165.

17. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Evangelical Ministry: The Puritan Contribution," in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1998), 267.

18. E.g., William Perkins, *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist. His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: "A Discourse of Conscience" and "The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience,"* ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraaf, 1966). These works earned Perkins the title of "the father of Puritan casuistry."

19. See J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 81–105; Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 143–49, 154; Thomas D. Lea, "The Hermeneutics of the Puritans," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 2 (1996): 271–84.

20. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Moses' Self-Denial* (repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

21. I am using "pietist" in a generic way here. The term *pietist*, much like the term *puritan*, may be properly applied to more theologians than is sometimes done, provided we use the term *pietist* with a lowercase "p," rather than *Pietist*, with an uppercase "P," which refers to members of the historical movement of Pietism that developed in Germany. See Joel R. Beeke, *Piety: The Heartbeat of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming); and Carter Lindberg, ed., *The Pietist Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). For a succinct summary of the similarities and differences between German Pietism, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Further Reformation, see Joel R. Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 288–93. Cf. Horst Weigelt, "Interpretations of Pietism in the Research of Contemporary German Church Historians," *Church History* 39 (1970): 236–41.

The roots of German Pietism have been variously designated. Heinrich Schmid believed it to be largely confined to the Lutheran church (*Die Geschichte des Pietismus* [Nördlingen: Beck, 1863]). Others viewed it as a renaissance of medieval mysticism (Albrecht Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, 3 vols. [Bonn: Marcus, 1880]; Ronald R. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism* [Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1974]). Most scholars agree, however, that German Pietism has its roots in English Puritanism and/or the Dutch Further Reformation. Consult Heinrich Heppe, *Geshichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879); August Lang, *Puritanismus und Piëtismus: Studies zu ihrer Entwicklung von M. Butzer his zum methodismus* (Ansbach: Brugel, 1941); F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973); Edgar C. McKenzie, "British Devotional Literature and the Rise of German Pietism," 2 vols. (PhD diss., St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, 1984); Peter Damrau, *The Reception of English Puritan Literature in Germany* (London: Many Publishing, 2006). Dale Brown provides a simple summary of this school of thought: "By the age of fourteen Spener had read Lewis Bayly's *Praxis Pietatis* ("Practice of Piety") as well as other English Puritan devotional works by Dyke, Sonthom, and Baxter. Such Puritan literature, focusing on the conscience, the scrutinization of daily life, and the formulation of rules of living, was eagerly received in Pietist circles. Pietistic manifestations emerged in seventeenth-century Holland through Teellinck and his mysticism, Voet[ius] and his disciplined conventicles which spawned the movement called Precisianism, Koch [Cocceius] and his covenant biblical theology, Lodensteyn and his more charismatic conventicles, and Labadie (who had a profound influence on young Spener) and his radical and separatist tendencies. The impact of these Dutch reform activities spilled over onto German terrain, and historians have confirmed the similarity of the Dutch experience to what was to occur later in Germany by attaching the name Reformed Pietism to the movement." Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 17–18.

22. This paragraph is adapted from Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 9.

23. For Calvin on piety, see Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald C. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125–52, and *"The Soul of Life": The Piety of John Calvin*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009); Lucien Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974), 100–101; Sou-Young

Lee, "Calvin's Understanding of *Pietas*," in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*, ed. W. H. Neuser and B. G. Armstrong (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteeenth Century Studies, 1997), 226–33; H. W. Simpson, "*Pietas* in the *Institutes* of Calvin," in *Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation* (Potchefstroom, South Africa: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984), 179–91.

24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.9.

25. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.2 (emphasis added).

26. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). The original Latin title reads: *Christianae religionis institutio total fere pietatis summam et quidquid est in doctrina salutis cognitu necessarium complectens, omnibut pietatis studiosis lectu dignissimum opus ac recens editum* (*Joannis Calvini opera selecta*, ed. Peter Barth, Wilhelm Niesel, and Dora Scheuner [Munich: C. Kaiser, 1926–52], 1:19). From 1539 on, the title was simply *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, but "zeal for piety" continued to be a primary goal of Calvin's work. See Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 106–7.

27. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (1629, 3rd ed.; repr., Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 1.1.1. For the Latin, see Guilielmum Amesium, *Medulla s.s., theologiae: Ex sacris literis, earumque interpretibus, extracta, & methodice disposita per, Editio Quarta* (London: Apud Robertum Allotium, 1630). For a biographical sketch of William Ames and a summary of his classic, see Joel R. Beeke and Jan van Vliet, "*The Marrow of Theology* by William Ames," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 52–65. Cf. Jan van Vliet, "William Ames: Marrow of the Theology and Piety of the Reformed Tradition" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002).

28. Ames, *Marrow*, 1.1.9–13.

29. Ames, *Marrow*, 1.1.12.

30. For an explanation of many of these marks, see Brown, *Understanding Pietism* and Stoeffler, *German Pietism.*

31. For a representation of the *partim partim* construction, see Johannes Wollebius's *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, translated as *The Abridgment of Christian Divinity*, trans. Alexander Ross, 3rd ed. (1626; repr., London: T. Mabb for Joseph Nevill, 1660), 1.29.10, where he wrote, "Faith that is not united to firm trust, is no better than historical faith. The papists teach that faith is only in the intellect, not in the will and the heart. Scripture expressly declares the contrary: 'With the heart man believes unto justification' (Rom 10:10)."

32. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 3:800 (on Titus 1:1). Poole's much fuller Latin *Synopsis* comments on the biblical phrase "*et agnitionem veritatis quae est secundum pietatem*" (Titus 1:1), by citing Piscator, "*cujus finis ac fructus est pietas*." Matthaeo Polo [Matthew Poole], *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae* (Francofurti: Balthasaris Christophori Wustii, 1679), 5:1082.

33. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 117.

34. James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity*, ed. Michael Nevarr (1648; repr., Birmingham, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 358 (43rd head).

35. Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (repr., New York: Harper & Bros., 1843), 1:107.

36. John Owen, "The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1853; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 9:72.

37. Owen, "Gospel Worship," in *Works*, 9:71. Cf. Daniel R. Hyde, "'Of Great Importance and of High Concernment': The Liturgical Theology of John Owen (1616–1683)" (ThM thesis, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2010).

38. Christopher J. L. Bennett, "Worship among the Puritans: The Regulative Principle," in *Spiritual Worship: Being Papers Read at the 1985 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1986), 20.

39. Ussher, *A Body of Divinity*, 301 (32nd head).

40. Cf. John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, Etc.*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1853; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 6:2–322.

41. Owen, *Mortification of Sin*, in *Works*, 6:161–69.

42. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour, Two Volumes in One* (1662–1665; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 1:140–48.

43. Joel R. Beeke, *Striving against Satan* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2004), 13–15.

44. Joel R. Beeke, *Overcoming the World: Grace to Win the Daily Battle* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), 15–16.

45. John Bunyan, *The Holy War* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007).

46. Beeke, *Overcoming the World*, 14.

47. Alexander Whyte, *Samuel Rutherford and Some of His Correspondents* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1894), 75.

48. Cf. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 196–210.

49. Knappen, *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries.*

50. Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Schocken, 1972).

51. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 330–31. See, e.g., John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life: A Display of Christ in His Essential And Mediatorial Glory*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 1:21–23.

52. Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian How to Walk, That He May Please God* (1611; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997).

53. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 90.

54. Gabe Phillips, "Stamp My Eyeballs with Eternity," *Life Changers*, Feb. 24, 2010, http://www.lifechangers.org.za/popular/stamp-my-eyeballs-with-eternity/, accessed June 15, 2010.

55. J. C. Ryle, *Home Truths* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt, 1860), 14.

56. Alexander Haldane, *Memoirs of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and His Brother, James Alexander Haldane* (New York: Robert Carter, 1853), 549.

57. Vernon J. Charlesworth, *Rowland Hill: His Life, Anecdotes, and Pulpit Sayings* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), 224.

58. Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven, A World of Love* (Amityville, N.Y.: Calvary Press, 1992), 43 (cf. http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/Worldoflove.html, accessed June 14, 2010).

59. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1895; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 46.

Chapter 53

The Puritans on Walking Godly in the Home

> *Now I know not any thing that will contribute more to the furtherance of this good work than the bringing of family religion more into practice and reputation. Here the reformation must begin.*
>
> —MATTHEW HENRY[1]

The Puritans taught that usefulness in the church is wedded to godliness in the home. Public holiness stands or falls with private holiness. Aside from God Himself, no one sees our true character more clearly than our wife and children. It is in the home that our spiritual life thrives or fails, they said.

William Gouge (1575–1653) was a man of great usefulness to our Lord. He preached three times a week for forty-five years, helped the poor, mentored other pastors, wrote eleven books, and served in the Westminster Assembly to help craft excellent doctrinal standards for the church. He devoted himself to prayer and the Word. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had thirteen children together, of which eight lived to adulthood. Gouge's family knew great sorrows. But Gouge's family also knew a great Christ. A contemporary of Gouge said that he labored to magnify Christ and to humble himself. William Gouge prayerfully led his family in worship each day. He also led his family with great love. One man observed of Gouge, "No one, his wife, nor children, nor servants with whom he lived and worked all those years ever observed an angry countenance, nor heard an angry word proceed from him toward any of them."[2]

The great evangelist George Whitefield (1714–1770) spent a weekend in the home of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who is often called America's greatest theologian. What Whitefield, an unmarried man at the time, saw in the household deeply affected him. He wrote:

> Mr Edwards is a solid, excellent Christian…. I think I have not seen his fellow [or equal] in all New England…. [I] felt great satisfaction in being at the house of Mr Edwards. A sweeter couple I have not yet seen. Their children were…examples of Christian simplicity. Mrs Edwards is adorned

> with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which for some months, I have put up to God, that he would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.[3]

What if someone stayed in your home for a while? What would he see? What would he hear? These are searching questions. In this chapter, we will examine Puritan teachings on faithful leadership and family worship in the home.

Faithful Leadership in the Christian Home The patriarch of Puritanism, William Perkins (1558–1602), said, "The only rule of ordering the family, is the written Word of God. By it David resolved to govern his house, when he saith, 'I will walk in the uprightness of my heart in the midst of my house' (Ps. 101:2)."[4] The Puritans found rich guidance regarding the home in Psalm 101. This psalm in brief compass sets forth a leader's commitment to integrity in his home and sphere of authority. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) named Psalm 101 "the householder's psalm" and said that it sets "a pattern both of a good magistrate and a good master of a family."[5]

William Plumer (1802–1880) observed,

> Some old writers call this *The Householder's Psalm*. In the seventeenth century and perhaps earlier, it was customary among pious people to have a sermon preached at the setting up of each new family, or at the occupation of a new domicil. Old books give us accounts of these discourses. Some of them are expositions of this Psalm. Nor is this perverting Scripture. A good king in his dominions ought to be like a good father and head of a family in his house.[6]

To further illuminate Puritan views on this subject, we will consider their comments on the first few verses of the psalm.

Lead Your Family with Justice and Mercy In Psalm 101:1, David prefaced his commitment to integrity by saying, "I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing." David Dickson (c. 1583–1662) observed that David's determination to "sing" of these matters showed that he saw his first duty as a leader as being "to delight himself in all royal virtues." Specifically, David was rejoicing in "mercy and judgment" because "all the duties of righteous government may be comprehended under these two heads, *mercy and judgment*; for, *mercy* taketh in the care of the poor, needy, oppressed, or injured, and *judgment* taketh in the care of equity and righteous dealing among his subjects."[7] Thus heads of households must lead their families with both love and

righteousness.

Given the stereotype of Puritans, one might assume they were harsh legalists at home. But this is not the case. Following Ephesians 5:25 and 6:4, the Puritans called men to compassion and kindness toward their families. William Gouge wrote,

> No duty on the husband's part can be rightly performed except it be seasoned with love…. His look, his speech, his carriage [or conduct], and all his actions, wherein he hath to do with his wife, must be seasoned with love…. As salt must be first and last upon the table, and eaten with every bit of meat, so must love be first in an husband's heart, and last out of it, and mixed with every thing he hath to do with his wife.8

Gouge likewise warned against "too much austerity and severity" on the part of fathers to their children such as "sourness in countenance, threatening and reviling in words, too hard handling, too severe correction, too much restraint of liberty, too small allowance of things needful."9

A father must correct his wife and children, but with gentleness, fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:1–2). Samuel Lee (1625–1691) said, "Let seasonable and prudent rebukes be administered, according to the nature and quality of their offenses. Begin gently; use all persuasive motives to draw and allure them, if possible, to the ways of God. Tell them of the rewards of glory, of the sweet society in heaven; endeavor to satisfy their hearts, that God is able to fill their souls with such joys as are not to be found in the creatures."10

At times, rebuke is needed, even rebuke with holy anger if a family member persists in sin. Yet even here the Puritans cautioned against "passions" and "horrid noise and clamours," as Lee said.11 Rebuke should be administered humbly and respectfully. He wrote, "A wife ought not to be rebuked before children and servants, lest her subordinate authority be diminished…. Yea, for smaller offenses in children and servants, if they be not committed openly, rebuke them apart, and in private. But, above all, take heed thou be not found more severe in reproving faults against thyself, than sins against the great God."12 In ruling your family with justice and mercy, Lee counseled fathers to distinguish between weaknesses, sin not committed in blatant defiance, and open, scandalous, and persistent rebellion and to wink at the first, merely frown upon the second, and to reserve sharp and public rebukes for the last.

Practice Personal Devotion In Psalm 101:2 David committed himself to integrity because he longed for God's gracious presence, as he exclaimed, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me?" He

sought fellowship with God. The pursuit of holiness is the pursuit of God (Ps. 15:1–5; Isa. 57:15; Matt. 5:8; John 14:21, 23; Heb. 12:14). Therefore walking godly in our homes requires times of seeking personal communion with God. Henry wrote, "It is a desirable thing, when a man has a house of his own, to have God come to him and dwell with him in it."[13]

King David's desire for closeness with God shows that God's fellowship with us and the operations of His kingdom through us are inseparably bound together. In other words, the Puritans recognized that David's wish for God to come to him was in part a desire for God's kingdom to come in David's rule.[14] Matthew Poole (1624–1679) wrote, "God is oft said in Scripture to *come* to men when he fulfils a promise to them, or confers a favour or blessing upon them, as Gen. 18:10; Exod. 20:24; Ps. 80:2; Isa. 35:4, etc." Thus he paraphrased David as praying, "O when wilt thou give me the kingdom which thou hast promised me, that so I may be capable of executing these good purposes, both for my own comfort, and for the benefit of thy people?"[15]

Applied to heads of households, this insight reminds us that we must seek God's gracious presence since apart from Christ we can do nothing as Christian parents (John 15:5). Before we teach our children diligently (Deut. 6:7), if we truly love the Lord (Deut. 6:5), we must cause His words to be on our own hearts through prayerful meditation (Deut. 6:6).

Therefore the Puritans advocated setting a time in your daily schedule when you will meet with the Lord for the reading of the Scriptures, meditation, prayer, and perhaps reading other solid devotional material. Be disciplined; do it every day. Find a quiet, private location. Follow a plan to read the Scriptures.

The Puritans abounded in practical directions on how to meditate on the Word. Christian meditation is not like Eastern religions where you empty your mind, but instead in meditation your mind hovers over a truth like a bee over a flower to draw out all its sweetness. Reading and study discover truths in the Bible. Meditation preaches those truths to your own soul to warm your heart, stir your affections, and lift up your will to love God and hate sin.

First, pray for the Holy Spirit to help you. You might use Psalm 119:18, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Second, read a portion of the Scriptures. Don't read so much that you have no time to meditate. Third, focus on one verse or doctrine, something easy and applicable to your life. Repeat the verse or doctrine to yourself several times to memorize it. Fourth, analyze it in your mind by its various names, properties, causes, and effects, together with illustrations, comparisons, and opposites. Be careful not to speculate further than what God has spoken. Fifth, preach the truth to your soul to stir up your faith, love, desire, hope, courage, grief, gratitude, and

joy in the presence of God. Examine your life and make detailed application. Sixth, resolve with prayer to grow in grace. Seventh, praise the Lord with thanksgiving. So to meditate is to pray, read, focus, analyze, preach to yourself, resolve with prayer, and praise God in a manner that revolves around a single truth of Scripture. By regular times of meditation, you will practice personal devotion to the Lord and experience John 15:5: "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."[16]

Walk with Godly Integrity in Your Home Psalm 101:2 also says, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." The Hebrew word translated "perfect" refers to completeness or integrity, as opposed to half-hearted, hypocritical religion. This is not sinless perfection but sincere piety.[17] John Trapp (1601–1669) wrote, "Follow hypocrites home to their houses, and there you shall see what they are."[18] George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673) wrote, "David was no hypocrite; he did not put on his best clothes when he went out, and put them off when he came in; but purity was his livery [or suit], as abroad, so at home."[19] Matthew Henry said, "It is not enough to put on our religion when we go abroad and appear before men; but we must govern ourselves by it in our families. Those that are in public stations are not thereby excused from care in governing their families; nay, rather, they are more concerned to set a good example of ruling their own houses well (1 Tim. 3:4)."[20]

The Puritans based their domestic godliness upon a keen awareness of God's omnipresence. They sought always to live *coram Deo*, before the face of God. Psalm 119:168 says, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee." Thomas Manton (1620–1677) commented:

> So masters of families are to walk in their houses with a perfect heart (Ps. 101:2); though they are shut up in their families from the observation of others, yet at home as well as abroad they must be careful to walk with God in their domestical converse, where men are wont most to discover [or reveal] themselves, and should behave themselves prudently, and holily, and faithfully there. The apostle mindeth masters of their Master in heaven (Eph. 6:9); one who noteth and observeth your dealings, and will call you to an account for all your carriage: your sins and graces are not hid from him.[21]

Manton also wrote, "David saith, Psalm 101:2, 'I will walk in my house with a perfect heart.' If a man be truly holy, he will show it at home as well as abroad, in his family where his constant converse is; yea, in his closet and secret retirements. A Christian is alike everywhere, because God is alike

everywhere."[22]

Guard the Purity of Your Home In Psalm 101:3 David wrote, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me." The word translated "wicked" refers to something evil that corrupts morals—an instrument of Satan. The word "cleave" suggests intimate bonding—it is the same word used of marriage (Gen. 2:24). We must beware of allowing corrupting influences into our private lives and homes. Such things become glued to us and give Satan a place.

Trapp paraphrased David: "I will not gaze upon forbidden objects, nor venture upon a temptation to or an occasion of sin."[23] This is the battle for the purity of our minds. Poole wrote, "If any ungodly or unjust thing shall be suggested to me…I will cast it out of my mind and thoughts with abhorrency."[24]

John Bunyan (1628–1688) is most famous for *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but he also wrote *The Holy War*, not a call to physical jihad but a spiritual parable where the giant Diabolus takes control of the city of Mansoul, and the city's king must take back his rightful reign there. He wrote that the city had invincible walls and gates, the latter of which could never be opened except at the will of the city's people. The only way Diabolus conquered the city was by persuading the city by his lies to open "Eargate" and "Eyegate" to him.[25] Thus the Puritans warned that if ever we would resist the devil's attacks, we must guard what we let into our souls by our ears and eyes.

The Puritans would have had much to say to us about this if they lived today. They could speak here of many influences, such as the music that we hear or the jokes we tell. Psalm 101 speaks specifically of our "eyes." We find a similar resolution expressed as a prayer in Psalm 119:36–37: "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way." Many temptations invade the soul through the eye-gate. The image or visible idol was always the great stumbling block of Israel. When Satan tempted our Lord Jesus, he took him to a high mountain and showed him the glory of the kingdoms of this world (Matt. 4:8). Today we live in an age of images. Televisions, computer screens, books, magazines, posters, billboards, even cell phones surround us with pictures. We may not be able to stop the world from posting lurid and idolatrous images. But we must control what images we let into our homes. It might be pornography. It might be the more subtle danger of worldliness. Spiritual leadership in the home may require us to limit, turn off, or discard some form of media or technology in our homes.

Ask yourself how these influences in your home help you to keep Philippians

4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

The Puritans recognized that it is not enough to guard the gates of our senses against temptations. We must welcome into our homes those influences that make for holiness. This leads us to consider another major aspect of walking godly in the home.

Family Worship in the Christian Home Christians have long recognized that God often uses the restoration of family worship to bring reformation and revival to the church. For example, the 1677 church covenant of the Puritan congregation in Dorchester, Massachusetts, included the commitment “to reform our families, engaging ourselves to a conscientious care to set before us and to maintain the worship of God in them; and to walk in our houses with perfect hearts[26] in a faithful discharge of all domestic duties, educating, instructing, and charging our children and households to keep the ways of the Lord.”[27]

Reformed Christians might be surprised to learn that the Westminster Standards were prefaced in the seventeenth century by appeals to parents to teach Christianity to their children. So seriously did the Puritans take the duty of family worship that they regarded the neglect of family devotion and catechism to be “covenant-breaking with God, and betraying the souls of their children to the devil.”[28] The kingdom of Satan is built upon the twin pillars of “ignorance and error,” and so “the disuse of family instruction” was regarded as one of the greatest sins “to open the flood-gates” of ungodliness into society.[29] The Puritans said,

> How much the serious efforts of godly parents and masters might contribute to an early seasoning the tender years of such as are under their inspection, is abundantly evident, not only from their special influence upon them, in respect of their authority over them, interest in them, continual presence with them, and frequent opportunities of being helpful to them; but also from the sad effects which, by woeful experience, we find to be the fruit of the omission of this duty.[30]

The Puritans held up family worship as a mark of the ideal father. Family life under Sir Thomas Abney (1640–1721), the lord mayor of London, was described with these words: “Here were every day the morning and evening sacrifices of prayer and praise, and reading the Holy Scriptures…. Persons coming into such a family…might well cry out, ‘This is none other than the house of God, this is

the gate of Heaven.'… Through the whole course of his life he was a priest in his own family, except when a minister happened to be present."[31]

Family worship was a striking example of the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Christian fathers shared in Christ's anointing to function as prophets, priests, and kings, exercised through their divinely appointed authority in the home (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 32). While the Puritans taught that God especially visits public worship with His presence (Ps. 87:2),[32] and public worship is the only setting for the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper,[33] they also taught that private worship in homes is essential to daily Christian living.

Biblical Foundations of Family Worship George Hamond (1620–1705) wrote, "The eternal, living, and true God is to be worshipped by all." This he proved from Psalm 22:27–28, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations," and Psalm 66:4, "All the earth shall worship thee."[34] Worship should not only be "secret and solitary" but also "social" (Ps. 34:3; Acts 12:12).[35] Worship need not be confined to a special building, as if only the church's meeting house was a sacred space (John 4:24).[36] Hamond said, "And, we may add, there are many commands that we should pray without ceasing and offer to God the sacrifice of praise continually; and God is to be worshipped in every place."[37] What reason or right do we have, the Puritans asked, to exclude our homes and family times from this call to worship?

God's right to the worship of our households arises from His sovereignty over each family. Thomas Doolittle (1630–1707) argued that since God is "the Founder of all families," "the Owner of our families," "the Master and Governor of your families," and "the Benefactor of your families" (Gen. 2:21–24; Eph. 5:22–6:9), families are bound to worship Him.[38]

The Puritans saw family worship as a pattern of godliness exemplified throughout the Holy Scriptures. They set before their readers "the examples of Abraham, of Joshua, of the parents of Solomon, of the grandmother and mother of Timothy, the mother of Augustine, whose care was as well to nurse up the souls as the bodies of their little ones."[39]

Thomas Manton wrote, "Religion was first hatched in families, and there the devil seeketh to crush it; the families of the Patriarchs were all the Church God had in the world for the time; and therefore, (I suppose,) when Cain went out from Adam's family, he is said to go out from the face of the Lord (Gen. 4:16)."[40]

In Genesis 18:19, the Lord said of Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." Henry observed, "He not only prayed with his family, but he taught them as a man of knowledge, nay, he commanded them as a man in authority, and was prophet and king, as well as priest, in his own house…. Those that expect family blessings must make conscience of family duty."41

God delights in showing men His goodness by answering prayers when God knows that such men will make known their experiences of God's goodness to others, especially their children. Matthew Poole pictured God as saying, "And so I shall get the end I aim at in all my works, which is, that they may be known for the good of others,… his children and his household, who will live when he is dead. He will so diligently imprint these things in their minds, that they shall never forget them."42

Henry also took note of the words "keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment," and wrote, "Abraham made it his care and business to promote practical religion in his family. He did not fill their heads with matters of nice speculation, or doubtful disputation; but he taught them…to be serious and devout in the worship of God and to be honest in their dealings with all men."43

The Puritans taught that Jacob was leading his family in worship in Genesis 35:1–15, where he received a revelation from the Lord to go to Bethel and make an altar there, and taught and consecrated his family, and led them in worship. Oliver Heywood (1630–1702) wrote, "As holy Jacob, the famous patriarch, was a prophet to instruct his family in true religion, and a king to govern them for God; so a priest to set up an altar, offer sacrifices and perform religious worship for and with his family: even the poorest man that has a family is to be a prophet, priest, and king in his own home."44

Duty of Family Worship Many Christians today view family devotions, indeed personal devotions, as a matter of Christian liberty. They do not see them as a divinely commanded duty but an opportunity to excel spiritually above what is absolutely required by God. Hamond warned that while Christians do enjoy liberty in Christ, this distinction between duty and opportunities to excel is no different from the Roman Catholic error of "works of supererogation" by which they excuse ordinary Christians from obeying God's Word and elevate some Christians into super-spiritual saints whose extra merits gain indulgences for the common church member.45

William Perkins wrote that the family's "duty unto God, is the private worship

and service of God, which must be established and sealed in every family."[46] He argued that this was a binding duty based upon (1) the commandment of 1 Timothy 2:8, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting"; (2) the examples of Abraham (Gen. 18:19), Joshua (Josh. 24:15), and Cornelius (Acts 10:2); and (3) the necessity of God's blessing, gained through worship, in order for the family to prosper in love and unity between husband and wife and obedience from children to their parents (Pss. 127 and 128).[47]

The Puritans also noted the examples of Job and David. Job regularly gathered his grown children in the morning for a sacrifice to atone for their sins (Job 1:5).[48] David returned from public worship and prayed a blessing over his household (2 Sam. 6:20).[49]

Joshua 24:14–15 says:

> Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood [i.e. back in Ur of Chaldees], or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell [i.e. here in Canaan]: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Hamond wrote, "To serve the Lord undoubtedly includes and intends worshipping Him" (citing Ex. 8:1 with 5:3; 20:5; Deut. 11:16; Matt. 4:10).[50] Thus even if all Israel fell away from God, including the priests with their tabernacle service, Joshua was determined that he would still worship God with his family.

Hamond also set the example of Christ before fathers for their imitation. Christ gathered His disciples, who were His spiritual family, together regularly for private teaching (Matt. 13:51; Mark 4:34), discussion of their questions (Mark 13:3–4; Luke 11:1), prayer (Luke 9:18), and singing of praises (Matt. 26:30). Shall fathers do less for their physical children?[51]

Heywood further established the duty of family worship upon the apostle's general commands to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), "pray every where" (1 Tim. 2:8), and to be "praying always with all prayer and supplication," that is all varieties of prayer (Eph. 6:18). Heywood said, "If prayer at all times, in all places, of all sorts, be a duty, surely family prayer is a duty, for it must be included in these."[52]

William Perkins explained this duty as having two main branches.

1. *Daily instruction in the Word of God.* Perkins said that the first component of "household service to God" is "a conference upon the Word of God, for the edification of all the members thereof to eternall life."[53] God should be worshiped by daily reading and instruction from His Word. Through questions, answers, and instructions, parents and children are to daily interact with each other about sacred truth. Perkins quoted Deuteronomy 6:6–7: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Noting that these words follow the Great Commandment to love God, Matthew Henry wrote, "Those that love the Lord God themselves should do what they can to engage the affections of their children to him…. Take all occasions to discourse with those about thee of divine things."[54] The goal of this instruction was love, the Puritans said, not merely "a brain knowledge, a mere speculation," but "an inward, a savoury, an heart knowledge."[55]

The activities Deuteronomy 6 commands are *daily* activities that accompany lying down at night, rising up in the morning, sitting in the house, and walking by the way. The Westminster Confession (21.6) cites this Scripture as a proof-text when it says, "God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so, more solemnly, in the public assemblies." In an orderly home, these activities are done at specific, regular, consistent, and daily times of the day.

A parallel text in the New Testament is Ephesians 6:4: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition [i.e. instruction] of the Lord." When fathers cannot fulfill this duty in person, they should encourage their wives to carry out this precept. For example, Timothy benefited greatly from the daily instruction of a God-fearing mother and a God-fearing grandmother. Matthew Henry wrote that fathers should bring up their children "as Christians," saying, "Instruct them to fear sinning; and inform them of, and excite them to, the whole of their duty towards God."[56]

2. *Daily prayer and praise before the throne of God.* Perkins said that the second branch of family worship is "invocation of the name of God, with giving of thanks for his benefits."[57] He quoted Psalm 14:1, 4: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt…and call not upon the LORD," and 1 Timothy 4:4–5, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

Furthermore, don't families commit daily sins? Shouldn't they daily seek forgiveness? Does not God bless them in many ways every day? Should not these blessings be acknowledged with daily thanksgiving? Shouldn't they daily acknowledge God in all their ways, begging Him to direct their paths? Shouldn't they daily commend themselves to His care and protection?

Psalm 118:15 says, "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles [or tents] of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly." Philip Henry (1631–1696), father of the famed Matthew Henry, believed this text provided a biblical basis for the singing of psalms in families.[58] He argued that joyful singing comes from the individual tents of the righteous. It involves family singing as well as temple singing. Therefore, the sound of rejoicing and salvation should rise from family homes on a daily basis.

Even aside from biblical arguments, the Puritans saw family worship as a duty imposed by the law of nature and recognized by human reason. Richard Baxter (1615–1691) argued that God instituted families and gave them "special advantages and opportunities" for training people to serve Him. These are "talents" entrusted by God to His servants (Matt. 25:14–30). Therefore fathers and mothers should be faithful servants and make use of their family life for His glory.[59]

Implementing Family Worship In addition to the famous Westminster Confession, in 1647 the Church of Scotland adopted the Directory for Family-Worship.[60] Douglas Comin writes that the Directory, not to be confused with the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God (1645), was "not a direct product of the Westminster Assembly" but rather was "produced and adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland."[61] This remarkable document shows the Scots' concern for family worship and offers concise directions for its implementation. Given the cross-fertilization between English Puritan and Scottish Presbyterian theology at this time, we may regard the Directory for Family-Worship as representing the broad sentiments of British Puritanism.

Prior to addressing family worship, the Directory for Family-Worship called for private, individual "prayer and meditation…this being the mean whereby, in a special way, communion with God is entertained, and right preparation for all other duties obtained."[62] In this way, the authors reminded members of the church that family worship cannot replace personal devotions, and in fact personal prayer and meditation are essential preparations to lead the family.

Hamond said that the head of the household has the responsibility and liberty to determine the time and place of family worship. Ministers should avoid being

dogmatic about such circumstances of worship.63 Nevertheless, Hamond wrote, "I add this caution: do not use your liberty as an occasion to the flesh, to patronize your omission or careless performance of your family worship."64 Planning and preparation for family worship is a necessary part of a father's God-given duties.

The Directory taught that daily family worship ordinarily included the following six elements: (1) "prayer," (2) "praises," (3) "reading of the Scriptures," (4) "catechizing in a plain way," (5) "godly conferences tending to the edification of all," and (6) "admonition and rebuke, upon just reasons, from those who have authority in the family."65 Let us explore each of these elements, with some practical advice in the spirit of the Puritans.66

1. "Prayer." Pray for the church, the nation, the family, and each member. The family prayers were shaped by their experiences in public worship, as regulated by the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God. This document established a rhythm of prayer moving from adoration, to confession, to petition for spiritual blessings, to intercession for world missions, the persecuted church, the nation and government, to thanksgiving.67 Matthew Henry also wrote a guide for prayer rich in the language of Scripture that many Puritans used.68

Here is some Puritan-like advice on family prayer. Be short. With few exceptions, don't pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good. Don't teach in your prayer; God doesn't need the instruction. Be simple without being shallow. Pray for things that your children know something about, but don't allow your prayers to become trivial. Don't reduce your prayers to self-centered, shallow petitions.

Be direct. Spread your needs before God, plead your case, and ask for mercy. Name your teenagers and children and their needs one by one on a daily basis. Be natural yet solemn. Speak clearly and reverently. Stir up your heart to take hold of God (Isa. 64:7). Sleepy prayers will put your children to sleep. Doolittle advised heads of households to "come to prayer with a lively heart, and quickened affections yourselves; your heat might warm them."69

Be varied. Don't pray the same thing every day; that becomes tedious. Develop more variety in prayer by remembering and stressing the various ingredients of true prayer, such as calling upon God to hear your prayers, adoring God for His titles and attributes, declaring your humble dependence and need, confessing family sins, asking for family mercies (both material and spiritual), interceding for friends and churches and nations, giving thanks for God's blessings, and blessing God for His kingdom and glory. Mix these ingredients with different proportions to get variety in your prayers.

2. “Praises.” Praises consisted primarily of the singing of psalms as in public worship, as prescribed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 21.5. Other songs and hymns were introduced for private and household use as the Puritan era progressed.

Sing doctrinally pure songs. There is no excuse for singing doctrinal error no matter how attractive the tune might be. Sing psalms first and foremost without neglecting sound hymns. Sing heartily and with feeling. As Colossians 3:23 says, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Meditate on the words you are singing. On occasion discuss a phrase that is sung.

3. “Reading of the Scriptures.” Whereas the Roman Catholic Church had severely limited the Scriptures to the Latin language and the priests’ control, the Reformers and Puritans labored to bring the Bible into every home. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 156) queries, “Is the word of God to be read by all?” and answers, “Although all are not to be permitted to read the word publickly to the congregation, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families: to which end, the holy scriptures are to be translated out of the original into vulgar [that is, common] languages.”

Have a plan. Read ten or twenty verses from the Old Testament in the morning and ten to twenty from the New Testament in the evening. Or read a series of parables, miracles, or historical portions. Just be sure to read the entire Bible over a period of time.

Involve the family. Every family member who can read should have a Bible to follow along. Set the tone by reading Scripture with expression, as the living, “breathing” book it is. Assign various portions to be read by your wife and your children. Teach your children how to read clearly, understandably, and reverently. Provide a brief word of explanation as needed.

4. “Catechizing in a plain way.” The catechisms were written so that children and untaught adults could grow in their understanding with increasing fullness and depth.[70] Do not shuffle off catechizing onto the church. Matthew Henry wrote, “Public catechizing will turn to little account without family catechizing.”[71] Anyone who has worked with children knows that those children whose parents work with them at home learn far more than those who study only in church meetings.

Thomas Manton introduced the Westminster Confession and Catechisms by writing, “How careful should ministers and parents be to train up young ones

whilst they are yet pliable, and, like wax, capable of any form and impression, in the knowledge and fear of God; and betimes to instill the principles of our most holy faith, as they are drawn into a short sum in Catechisms, and so altogether laid in the view of conscience!" Manton compared the questions and answers of a biblical catechism to seeds of truth which grow in the memory, to a bridle restraining sin, and to cold water quieting the boiling passions of youthful lusts.[72]

Using the catechisms not only helps the children, but also helps the parent who often lacks theological training. It guards the household teacher from losing sight of central doctrines, becoming entangled in difficult texts of Scripture, and wandering into error. Baxter wrote, "But ordinarily it is the safest, humblest, wisest, and more orderly way for the master of the family to let controversies and obscure Scriptures alone, and to teach the plain, few necessary doctrines commonly contained in catechisms, and to direct in matters of necessary practice."[73]

5. "Godly conferences tending to the edification of all." The word "conferences" refers not to a big meeting with preachers, but to ordinary fellowship and spiritual conversation among believers. Family worship is not a time to preach so much as to discuss and apply. The Directory expanded on this by considering possible cases arising from the Scriptures:

- If any sin is reproved, discuss it as a family so as to be watchful against it.
- If any divine judgment is threatened, talk about it so as to fear it and beware sin.
- If any duty is required, stir each other up to depend on Christ to enable you to do it.
- If any comfort offered in a promise, discuss how to apply it to your hearts.[74]

Family worship offers great potential for children to ask their questions. The Directory says, "In all which the master of the family is to have the chief hand; and any member of the family may propose a question or doubt for resolution."[75]

Be plain in meaning. Ask your children if they understand what you are reading. Be plain in applying scriptural texts. Encourage family dialogue around God's Word in line with the Hebraic procedure of household question and answer (cf. Ex. 12; Deut. 6; Ps. 78). Especially encourage teenagers to ask questions; draw them out. If you don't know the answers, tell them so, and encourage them to search for answers. Have one or more good commentaries on

hand, such as those by John Calvin, Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, and John Gill.

Be pure in doctrine. Don't abandon doctrinal precision when teaching young children; aim for simplicity and soundness. Be relevant in application. Don't be afraid to share your experiences when appropriate, but do that simply. Use concrete illustrations. Ideally, tie together biblical instruction with what you recently heard in sermons.

Require attention. Proverbs 4:1 says, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding." Fathers and mothers have important truths to convey. You must demand a hearing for God's truths in your home. That may involve repeated statements at the beginning like these: "Sit up, son, and look at me when I'm talking. We're talking about God's Word, and God deserves to be heard." Don't allow children to leave their seats during family worship.

6. "Admonition and rebuke, upon just reasons, from those who have authority in the family." Do not be afraid to exhort your children with warm, loving calls to trust and obey the Lord. Be affectionate in manner. Proverbs continually uses the phrase *my son*, showing the warmth, love, and urgency in the teachings of a God-fearing father. When you must administer the wounds of a father-friend to your children, do that with heartfelt love. Tell them you must convey the whole counsel of God because you can't bear the thought of spending eternity apart from them. My father often said to us, with tears, "Children, I cannot miss any of you in heaven." Tell your children, "We will allow you every privilege an open Bible will allow us to give you—but if we say no to you, you must know that flows out of our love."

During family worship, aim for brevity. Don't provoke your children. Thomas Lye (d. 1684) said, "Nothing more disgusts a child's spirit, than long and tedious discourses."[76] Samuel Lee wrote, "Be frequent, and pithy, and clear in family instruction…. But in all your instructions, have a care of tedious prolixity; make up the shortness of your discourse by frequency…. Long orations burden their small memories too much, and through such imprudence may occasion the loathing of spiritual manna."[77] If you worship twice a day, try ten minutes in the morning and twenty-five in the evening. Aim for consistency.

Do not attempt to pack all six of the above elements into a single session each day. Trying to do too much will wear people out. Lee wrote, "It is of good use, likewise, to vary the duties of religion; sometimes sing and sometimes read, sometimes repeat, sometimes catechize, sometimes exhort…. Time will seem short which is exercised with such variety of works."[78] For example, father

might read a short devotional and pray at breakfast; mother might help the children learn the catechism or memorize a Scripture verse at lunch; and father could read a portion of Scripture, lead a discussion of how to apply it, and have family praise and prayer at supper.

After family worship, when you retire for the night, pray for God's blessing on family worship. "Lord, use the instruction to save our children and to cause them to grow in grace that they might put their hope in Thee. Use our praise of Thy name in song to endear Thy name, Thy Son, and Thy Spirit to their never-dying souls. Use our stammering prayers to bring our children to repentance. Lord Jesus Christ, breathe upon our family during this time of worship with Thy Word and Spirit. Make these life-giving times."

Objections against Family Worship The Puritans anticipated that some people would object to regular times of family worship. Here are some of these objections, with answers.

• *There is no explicit command in the Bible to have family worship*. Though there is no explicit command, the texts cited earlier make clear that God would have families worship Him daily. The Bible gives general rules that prayer should fill all our lives and specific examples of family prayer. God expects us to make the applications to our particular cases.[79]

• *Family worship is just a trait of Puritans*. On the contrary, the mandate for family worship arises from Holy Scripture and thus from God, not from men. While the Puritans did insist upon it, they did so only out of zeal to obey Scripture. Furthermore, the Puritans were careful students of history and tried to stand in the mainstream of Christian belief insofar as Scripture authorized them to do so. Historian Philip Schaff wrote, "Chrysostom [c. 349–407] urged that every house should be a church, and every head of a family a spiritual shepherd, remembering the account which he must give even for his children and servants."[80] Family worship was not a Puritan innovation.

• *This kind of planning tries to control and limit God's Spirit*. Truly God's Spirit, like the wind, moves when He pleases, and we neither control nor comprehend His ways (John 3:8). But God requires us to stir ourselves up to take hold of Him (Isa. 64:7; 2 Tim. 1:6). We do this by regular, disciplined putting ourselves in the paths where He travels—the means of grace. This objection, if accepted, would overthrow all the ordinances of worship.[81]

• *Our family doesn't have time for this.* If you have time for recreations and pleasures but no time for family worship, think about 2 Timothy 3:4–5, which warns about people who love pleasures more than God; they have a form of godliness, but deny the power of it. Time taken from family activity and business to seek God's blessing is never wasted. If we take God's Word seriously, we will say, "I can't afford *not* to give God and His Word priority in my family."[82] Samuel Davies (1723–1761) once said, "Were you formed for this world only, there would be some force in this objection, but how strange does such an objection sound coming from an heir of eternity! Pray, what is your time given to you for? Is it not principally that you may prepare for eternity? And have you no time for what is the greatest business of your lives?"[83]

• *I'm not good at leading our family in worship.* Such an objection might come from being bashful of speaking before others, or ignorant of what and how to speak.[84] Heywood encouraged his readers,

> God stands [insists] not upon gift, elocution [eloquence], or ready utterance; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit [Ps. 51:17]…. If thou canst not pray, canst thou not fall down upon thy knees and tell God thou canst not pray? Canst thou not desire him to help thee to pray? Canst thou not say, as much as the poor publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." If it be not willfulness but weakness, God will indulge thee much, his Spirit will help thy infirmities, both what to say, and how to pray.[85]

If this is where you are, permit me to give you a few suggestions in the spirit of the Puritans. Read James W. Alexander or Matthew Henry on family worship.[86] Second, ask for guidance from God-fearing pastors and fathers. Ask if they can visit your home and either show you how to lead family worship, or observe how you do it and make suggestions. Third, start simply. I trust you are already reading Scripture and praying together. If not, begin to do so. If you are reading and praying together, add one or two questions on the portion read and sing a few psalms or hymns. Add a minute or two each week until you are up to twenty-five minutes.

It may be, however, that your hesitancy to lead family worship arises not out of a lack of courage or knowledge, but an awareness that you are not right with God. You need to repent of your sins and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew Henry wrote, "Proceed in the right method; first set up Christ upon the throne in your hearts, and then set up a church for Christ in your house. Let Christ dwell in your hearts by faith, and then let him dwell in your houses…. And when your hearts, like Lydia's, are opened to Christ, let your house, like hers, be opened to

him too (Acts 16:14–15).”[87]

• *Some of our family members won’t participate.* There may be homes in which it is difficult to hold family worship. Such cases are rare, however. If you have difficult children, follow a simple rule: no Scripture, no singing, and no praying means no food. Say, “In this house, we will serve the Lord. We all breathe, therefore every person in our home must praise the Lord.” Psalm 150:6 makes no such exception, even for unconverted children. It says, “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.” Heywood challenges us, “Who is the master, thou or they?… If the cause be God’s, in the name and strength of God own it, and he will stand by thee; fear not man in the way of duty.”[88]

• *We don’t want to be hypocrites.* Some of our family members may be unconverted, and God hates the prayer of the wicked (Prov. 15:8). But one sin—praying in an unconverted state—doesn’t justify another—not praying at all. The mindset that offers this objection is dangerous. An unconverted person may never plead an unconverted state to neglect duty. His graceless heart does not excuse him from prayer. Don’t encourage your children to use this excuse for avoiding family worship. Stress their need to use every means of grace. Might this not be the means of their conversion?[89]

Motivations for Family Worship The Puritans not only taught that family worship is a duty before God, but a delight driven by deep, heartfelt convictions shared by all who love and fear the Lord. Here we mention three.

• *The eternal welfare of your loved ones.* God uses means to save souls. Most commonly He uses the preaching of His Word. But He also may use family worship. Matthew Henry wrote, “Consider especially what they [your children] are designed for in another world: they are made for eternity. Every child thou hast hath a precious and immortal soul, that must be for ever either in heaven or hell, according as it is prepared in this present state,—and perhaps it must remove to that world of spirits very shortly.”[90] How have you prepared your family for eternity?

• *Desire for your family to glorify God and enjoy Him.* Perkins said that families that do not practice family worship are like “swine” greedily gobbling up their food but never looking to the hand that brought it to them. On the other hand, he said that “those families wherein this service of God is performed, are (as it were) little churches, yea, even a kind of Paradise upon earth.”[91] Matthew

Henry wrote, “It is a very desirable thing to have the gracious presence of God with us in our families,—that presence which is promised where ‘two or three are gathered together in his name.’”[92]

Godly parents want to glorify God and seek His face. Has your family nothing for which to thank God? Have you no troubles to bring together before the Lord? Henry said, “Family-mercies and family-afflictions are both of them calls to family-religion.”[93]

• *Love for God’s church and kingdom.* Psalm 78:5–6 says, “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children.” Henry commented that God “appointed that parents should train up their children in the knowledge of his law…that, as one generation of God’s servants and worshippers passes away, another generation may come, and the church, as the earth, may abide forever, and thus God’s name among men may be as the days of heaven.”[94]

Thomas Manton challenged fathers to consider this: Will you “beget children, and keep families, merely for the world and the flesh,” or will you “bring up a child for God, and govern a family as a sanctified society”? You are the head of the household, and God will call you to account. Mothers, you have a special opportunity here for eternal good. Manton wrote,

> Especially women should be careful of this duty; because as they are most about their children, and early and frequent opportunities to instruct them, so this is the principal service they can do to God in this world, being restrained from more public work [offices of public authority]. And doubtless many an excellent magistrate hath been sent into the Commonwealth, and many an excellent pastor into the Church, and many a precious saint to heaven, through the happy preparations of a holy education, perhaps by a woman that thought herself useless and unserviceable to the Church.[95]

Blessed is the church where family worship takes place in the home! In that place the pastor need not exhaust himself trying to do the work of many spiritual fathers at once. Church members well-catechized by their parents “will be able to read other books more understandingly, and hear sermons more profitably, and confer [have Christian fellowship] more judiciously, and hold fast the doctrine of Christ more firmly, than ever you are like to do by any other course,” Manton said.[96]

Godly parents want to give the church spiritually stalwart sons and daughters. Pray that your sons and daughters may be pillars in the church. Blessed is the parent who can one day see among the crowd of worshipers their own sons and daughters. Family worship is the foundation of such a future.

Conclusion

Faithful leadership and family worship are the right and left hand of godliness in the home. Family worship sets up the structure of godliness in the household. Faithfulness fills that structure with life and power. Never separate the outward forms of worship from the personal practice of the fear of God. George Hamond warns that your life will be "a dangerous stumbling block" if those in our homes "hear you speak with tongues of angels when you are on your knees" but once worship is done they hear you "venting your distemper in words of bitterness and railing, or observe in you the unsavory belching of pride or passion."97 On the other hand, to attempt to cultivate godliness in your home without the structure of family worship would be like trying to live during the winter in a house with neither walls nor roof. We need structure, habits, and discipline in our lives. As Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) said, "A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of heaven."

1. Matthew Henry, "A Church in the House, A Sermon Concerning Family Religion," in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:248.

2. Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 284–86.

3. Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield, The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 1:475, 537–38.

4. William Perkins, "Oeconomie: or, Houshold-Government," in *The Works of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. William Perkins* (London: John Haviland, 1631), 3:669.

5. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 3:502.

6. William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms* (Philadelphia: Lippinscott, 1867), 898.

7. David Dickson, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Two Volumes in One* (1653–1655; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 2:197.

8. William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (1622; Edinburgh, Ind.: Puritan Reprints, 2006), 252–53 (4.2).

9. Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 113–14 (1.117).

10. Samuel Lee, "What Means May Be Used towards the Conversion of Our Carnal Relations?", in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689* (repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 1:154–55.

11. Lee, "What Means May Be Used Towards the Conversion of Our Carnal Relations?", in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:154.

12. Lee, "What Means May Be Used Towards the Conversion of Our Carnal Relations?", in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:155.

13. Henry, *Commentary*, 3:503.

14. Dickson, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 2:198.

15. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 2:154.

16. For a more detailed prescription of the Puritan practice of meditation, see chapter 55 of this book.

17. Hebrew *tom* from the root *tamam* (Gen. 20:5–6; 1 Kings 9:4; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; Pss. 7:9; 25:21; 26:1, 11).

18. John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Hugh Martin (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1868), 2:624.

19. George Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 1:331.

20. Henry, *Commentary*, 3:503 (Ps. 101).
21. Thomas Manton, “Sermons upon Psalm 119,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1872), 9:241.
22. Thomas Manton, “Sermons upon 1 John 3,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1872), 21:203.
23. Trapp, *Commentary*, 2:624.
24. Poole, *Commentary*, 2:154.
25. John Bunyan, *The Holy War*, in *The Works of John Bunyan* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1859), 3:256, 260.
26. Note the allusion to Psalm 101:2.
27. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 80.
28. Thomas Manton, “Epistle to the Reader,” in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003), 10.
29. Henry Wilkinson, et al., “To the Christian Reader,” in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 5.
30. Wilkinson, et al., “To the Christian Reader,” in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 5.
31. Quoted in Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (1948; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 281.
32. David Clarkson, “Public Worship to Be Preferred before Private,” in *The Works of David Clarkson* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 3:187–209 (first pagination); Oliver Heywood, “A Family Altar, Erected to the Honour of the Eternal God; or, A Solemn Essay to Promote the Worship of God in Private Houses,” in *The Whole Works of Rev. Oliver Heywood* (Idle: John Vint, 1826), 324.
33. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 1:410.
34. George Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship* (1694; repr., Orlando, Fla.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2005), 1.
35. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 9.
36. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 12.
37. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 13.
38. Thomas Doolittle, “How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family,” in *Puritan Sermons*, 2:212–17.
39. Wilkinson, et al., “To the Christian Reader,” in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 5.
40. Manton, “Epistle to the Reader,” in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 9.
41. Henry, *Commentary*, 1:95.
42. Poole, *Commentary*, 1:43.
43. Henry, *Commentary*, 1:95.
44. Heywood, “A Family Altar,” in *Works*, 4:303.
45. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 19.
46. Perkins, “Oeconomie: or, Houshold-Government,” in *Works*, 3:669.
47. Perkins, “Oeconomie: or, Houshold-Government,” in *Works*, 3:669.
48. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 38.
49. Heywood, “A Family Altar,” in *Works*, 4:317.
50. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 60.
51. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 72–74.
52. Heywood, “A Family Altar,” in *Works*, 4:312–13.
53. Perkins, “Oeconomie: or, Houshold-Government,” in *Works*, 3:669–70.
54. Henry, *Commentary*, 1:586.
55. Wilkinson, et al., “To the Christian Reader,” in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6.
56. Henry, *Commentary*, 6:578.
57. Perkins, “Oeconomie: or, Houshold-Government,” in *Works*, 3:670.

58. Matthew Henry, *An Account of the Life and Death of Mr. Philip Henry* (London: J. Laurence, 1712), 60.

59. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 1:410–11.

60. "The Directory for Family-Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 417–22.

61. Douglas W. Comin, *Returning to the Family Altar: A Commentary and Study Guide on the Directory for Family Worship* (Aberdeen: James Begg Society, 2004), 7.

62. "The Directory for Family-Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 419.

63. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 15–17.

64. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, 17.

65. "The Directory for Family-Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 419.

66. Portions of this section are adapted from Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

67. "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 375–81.

68. Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions Proper to Be Used under Each Head*, in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:1–95. This has been republished as Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1994).

69. Doolittle, "How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family," in *Puritan Sermons*, 2:239.

70. Thus the Shorter Catechism, the Larger Catechism, and the Confession form a ladder of three steps.

71. Henry, "Family Religion," in *Works*, 1:252.

72. Manton, "Epistle to the Reader," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10.

73. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 1:414.

74. "The Directory for Family-Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 419.

75. "The Directory for Family-Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 420.

76. Thomas Lye, "By What Scriptural Rules May Catechising Be So Managed as That It May Become Most Universally Profitable?" in *Puritan Sermons*, 2:120.

77. Lee, "What Means May Be Used towards the Conversion of Our Carnal Relations?", in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:150.

78. Lee, "What Means May Be Used towards the Conversion of Our Carnal Relations?", in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:156.

79. Heywood, "A Family Altar," in *Works*, 4:328.

80. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 3:545.

81. Heywood, "A Family Altar," in *Works*, 4:329–30.

82. Cf. Heywood, "A Family Altar," in *Works*, 4:338–39.

83. Samuel Davies, "The Necessity and Excellence of Family Religion," in *Sermons on Important Subjects* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 60.

84. Heywood, "A Family Altar," in *Works*, 4:337, 343.

85. Heywood, "A Family Altar," in *Works*, 4:344.

86. These books were recently reprinted as James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (1847; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998); Matthew Henry, *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family* (repr., Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008).

87. Henry, "Family Religion," in *Works*, 1:262–63.

88. Heywood, "A Family Altar," in *Works*, 4:336.

89. Heywood, "A Family Altar," in *Works*, 4:329–30.

90. Henry, "Family Religion," in *Works*, 1:253.

91. Perkins, "Oeconomie: or, Houshold-Government," in *Works*, 3:670.

92. Henry, "Family Religion," in *Works*, 1:258.

93. Henry, *Commentary*, 3:503 (Ps. 101).

94. Henry, *Commentary*, 3:434 (Ps. 78:1–8).

95. Manton, “Epistle to the Reader,” *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10.
96. Manton, “Epistle to the Reader,” *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 11–12.
97. Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, xviii.

Chapter 54

Matthew Henry on a Practical Method of Daily Prayer

> *When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is set them a-praying.*
>
> —MATTHEW HENRY[1]

Few Bible commentators are better known than Matthew Henry (1662–1714). The *Commentary on the Whole Bible* that bears Henry's name continues to be reprinted, although Henry himself died after finishing Genesis through Acts and the remainder was written by friends drawing from his notes. The great evangelist George Whitefield (1714–1770) repeatedly read through Henry's commentaries on Scripture during his devotions and found them rich food for his soul. But for all the fame of his commentaries, few people know that Henry also wrote a book on prayer that has been a best-seller for a century and a half.[2] And though his commentaries are read around the world from the United States to the Philippines, many people do not know much about Henry's life.

Matthew Henry was an English Puritan born the same year that Puritan ministers were ejected from the Church of England for refusing to conform to prescribed forms of worship. His father, Philip Henry (1631–1696), had already lost his pulpit in 1661. The period of the 1660s to the 1680s was a dark time of persecution for the Puritans. Though frail in health, Matthew Henry distinguished himself intellectually early in life, reading the Bible to himself when he was only three. He initially studied to be a lawyer. But the Lord had other plans for him. From age twenty-four to fifty, Henry served as pastor of a church in Chester, having been privately ordained by Presbyterian ministers such as Richard Steele (1629–1692). The church began in private homes but over time grew to 350 communicant members plus attendees. Henry spent eight hours a day in study, sometimes rising at 4 A.M. In addition to serving his own church, he preached monthly in five nearby villages and to prisoners. Henry's first wife

died in childbirth, and three of the children from his second wife died in infancy.

Henry began writing his Bible commentary at age forty-two, drawing from the well of his years of expository preaching and research in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French. He spent the last two years of his life serving a prominent church in London. Henry died after falling from his horse, leaving the task of writing his commentary on the New Testament epistles to thirteen of his ministerial friends.[3]

In 1710, Henry published *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions Proper to Be Used under Each Head*.[4] In 1712, he preached sermons that were published as *Directions for Daily Communion with God*.[5] Those books reveal Henry's passion for biblical spirituality, for it was incredibly difficult for a busy pastor and author of a massive Bible commentary to find time to also write about prayer. We will consider Henry's directions on prayer from his second book, then move to his method of praying the Scriptures.

Directions for Praying All Day Henry wrote in his diary, "I love prayer. It is that which buckles on all the Christian's armour."[6] Since the Christian must wear God's armor at all times, he must pray without ceasing. According to Henry, the access that Christians have to God in Christ gives them:

> 1. "a companion ready in all their solitudes, so that they are never less alone than when alone. Do we need better society than fellowship with the Father?"
>
> 2. "a counselor ready in all their doubts…a guide (Ps. 73:24), who has promised to direct with his eye, to lead us in the way wherein we should go."
>
> 3. "a comforter ready in all their sorrows…[to] support sinking spirits, and be the strength of a fainting heart."
>
> 4. "a supply ready in all their wants. They that have access to God have access to a full fountain, an inexhaustible treasure, a rich mine."
>
> 5. "a support ready under all their burdens. They have access to him as *Adonai* [my Lord], my stay and the strength of my heart (Ps. 73:26)."
>
> 6. "a shelter ready in all their dangers, a city of refuge near at hand. The name of the Lord is a strong tower (Prov. 18:10)."
>
> 7. "strength ready for all their performances in doing work, fighting work. He is their *arm every morning* (Isa. 33:2)."
>
> 8. "salvation insured by a sweet and undeceiving earnest…. If he thus guides us by his counsel he will receive us to glory."[7]

Since God has made Himself available to us in such rich fullness, we must go

to God throughout the day. Henry wrote, “David solemnly addressed himself to the duty of prayer three times a-day, as Daniel did; ‘Morning and evening, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud,’ Ps. 55:17. Nay, he doth not think that enough, but ‘seven times a day will I praise thee, Ps. 119:164.”[8] Accordingly, Henry wrote three discourses of directions for prayer: beginning the day with God, spending the day with God, and closing the day with God.

Directive One: Begin Every Day with God David wrote in Psalm 5:3, “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.” Henry wrote, “It is our wisdom and duty to begin every day with God.” He spent much of his discourse motivating us to prayer. Henry reminded us that we can pray with assurance that “wherever God finds a praying heart, he will be found a prayer-hearing God.” If we pray to God as Father through Christ the Mediator according to God’s will revealed in the Bible, then we can know that He has heard us and will answer according to His kindness.[9] God requires us to pray to remind us of His authority over us and His love and compassion toward us. We always have something to talk to God about. He is a dear friend, so it is a pleasure to know Him personally and to walk with Him intimately. He is also the Lord of us and everything that touches our lives. Shall a servant not talk to his master? Shall a dependent not talk to his provider? Shall one in danger not converse with his defender?[10]

Let no obstacle hinder you from coming to God. Though God is in heaven, He will hear your cries from the depths (Ps. 130:1). Though God be fearsome, He grants believers the Spirit of adoption to have freedom with Him (Rom. 8:15). Yes, God already knows what you need, but He requires your prayers for His glory and to fit you to receive mercy (Ezek. 36:37–38). Though you are busy with many things, only one thing is necessary: to walk with God in peace and love.[11]

In beginning a time of prayer, Henry advised directing prayers with “a fixedness of thought, and a close application of mind,” like an archer shooting an arrow with a steady hand and an eye fixed on his target. The target of our prayers is always “God’s glory, and our own true happiness,” which, Henry cheerfully reminded us, God has been pleased to “twist” together into one indivisible object in the covenant of grace, “so that in seeking his glory, we really and effectually seek our own true interests.” Just as a shooter aims with one eye while shutting the other, so in prayer we must “gather in our wandering thoughts.” When you pray, close your eye to the glory and praise of men (Matt. 6:2) and the glitter and honors of this world (Hos. 7:14).[12] In light of the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, Henry wrote:

> Let not self, carnal self, be the spring and centre of your prayers, but God; let the eye of the soul be fixed upon him as your highest end in all your applications to him; let this be the habitual disposition of your souls, to be to your God for a name and a praise; and let this be your design in all your desires, that God may be glorified, and by this let them all be directed, determined, sanctified, and, when need is, overruled.[13]

Just as a letter must be properly addressed to reach its intended recipient, so our prayers must be addressed to God. Henry wrote, "Give him his titles, as you do, when you direct to a person of honour…. Direct your prayer to him as the God of glory with whom is terrible majesty, and whose greatness is unsearchable." Do not forget also that sweet name which Christ especially taught us to use in prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven." Then take your letter and put it in the hand of "the Lord Jesus, the only Mediator between God and man… and he will deliver it with care and speed, and will make our service acceptable."[14]

David testified in Psalm 5:3 that the morning hours are especially good for prayer. Likewise, Henry observed that the priests offered a sacrificial lamb and burned incense every morning (Exod. 29:39; 30:7), and singers thanked the Lord every morning (1 Chron. 23:30). He cited these examples to indicate that all Christians, who are spiritual priests in Christ, should offer spiritual sacrifices every morning to God. God who is Alpha, requires our first-fruits; therefore, we should give Him the first part of our day. God deserves our best, not just leftovers of the day when we are tired and worn out.[15] Henry wrote, "In the morning we are most free from company and business, and ordinarily have the best opportunity for solitude."[16] God gives us fresh mercies every morning, so we should give Him fresh thanksgivings and fresh meditations on His beauties. In the morning as we prepare for the work of the day, let us commit it all to God.[17] Begin every day with God.

Directive Two: Spend Every Day with God David wrote, "On thee do I wait all the day" (Ps. 25:5). Henry said this waiting involves "a patient expectation" of God to come in mercy at His time and "a constant attendance" upon the Lord in the duties of personal worship. The saints need patient expectation, for they often wait through long, dark, stormy days for God to answer their prayers. But they wait in hope.[18] Henry quoted Church of England priest and poet George Herbert (1593–1633) in saying:

> Away despair! my gracious God doth hear;
> When winds and waves assault my keel,

He doth preserve it: he doth steer
Ev'n when the boat seems most to reel.
Storms are the triumph of his art,
Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart.[19]

The Christian's attendance upon God throughout the day is captured in the phrase *to wait upon the Lord*. "To wait on God, is to live a life of desire towards him, delight in him, dependence on him, and devotedness to him," Henry wrote. We should spend our days desiring God, like a beggar constantly looking to his benefactor, hungering not only for His gifts but for He who is the Bread of Life. We should live in delight of God, like a lover with his beloved. "Do we love to love God?" Henry asked. Constant dependence is the attitude of a child toward his father on whom he trusts and on whom he casts all his cares. A life of devotedness is that of a servant toward his master, "ready to observe his will, and to do his work, and in every thing to consult his honour and interest." It is "to make the will of his precept the rule of our practice," and "to make the will of his providence the rule of our patience."[20] Henry thus stressed the disposition of the heart in praying without ceasing, or waiting upon the Lord all through the day.

We must wait on God *every day*, both in public worship on the Lord's Day and in the work of our callings on weekdays and on days off. We must wait on Him in the days of prosperity when the world smiles on us and in the days of adversity when the world frowns on us. We must lean on Him in the days of youth and in the days of old age. We must wait on God *all the day*.

Are you burdened with cares? Cast them on the Lord. Do you have responsibilities to fulfill? Does your business know that God assigned you this "calling and employment" and require that you work according to the precepts of His Word? God alone can bless your efforts, and the glory of God should be the ultimate goal of all your work. Are you tempted to follow another way? Shelter yourself under His grace. Are you suffering? Submit to His will, and trust the love behind His fatherly corrections. Is your mind caught up in hopes or fears about the future? Wait on God who rules over life and death, good and evil.[21] Henry's writings show us that every minute of every day contains ample reasons to look to the Lord.

We put into practice this constant attendance upon God by exercising private prayer with God repeatedly. Henry called men to secret prayer lest their prayers prove to be temptations to spiritual pride and self-display. He wrote, "Shut the door lest the wind of hypocrisy blow in at it."[22]

In addition, Henry called us to family worship in which we train our

household in godliness. Henry strongly advocated family devotions in *Family Hymns* (1694) and *A Church in the House: Family Devotions* (1704). He promoted such devotions not to withdraw from the local church but to strengthen the church by promoting godliness in the home. Henry practiced in his home what he preached. Every morning he reviewed a portion of the previous Sunday's sermon with his family and prayed with them. He catechized his children in the afternoon and taught the older children after the little ones went to bed.[23] He considered family worship as a time for the whole family to come to God in prayer, seeking His blessing, thanking Him for His mercies, and bringing Him fractures in our relationships so He might heal them. Pray for your children to grow in wisdom and to "wait upon God for his grace to make the means of their education successful," Henry said. He reminded parents that prayer begets patience, saying, "If they are but slow, and do not come on as you could wish, yet wait on God to bring them forward, and to give them his grace in his own time; and while you are patiently waiting on him, that will encourage you to take pains [make diligent efforts] with them, and will likewise make you patient and gentle towards them."[24]

When you go to work, Henry wrote, your job "calls for your constant attendance every day, and all the day." But do not neglect God in your work. Work in the presence of God. Open the doors of your shop with the thought that you are on God's appointed road of obedience and you depend on God to bless you on it. See every customer or client as a person sent by divine providence. Perform every transaction in justice as if God's holy eye were upon you. Look to God for the skill to make an honest profit by honest diligence.[25]

If you take a book into your hands, be it "God's book, or any other useful good book," and rely on God to make it profitable to you. Do not waste time reading unprofitable books. When you sit down for lunch, remember that the Creator gave us the right to eat of His created provisions, but we must eat and drink for the glory of God. When you read, do so not out of vain curiosity but with love for God's kingdom, compassion for human beings, and the intent to turn what you learn into prayers and praises. When you visit friends, be thankful to God that you have friends and clothing, houses, and furniture to enjoy with them. If you go on a trip, put yourselves under God's protection. "See how much you are indebted to the goodness of his providence for all the comforts and conveniences you are surrounded with in your travels," said Henry.[26]

Wherever you go or whatever you do each day, search for abundant reasons for prayer and praise, Henry said. As James wrote, if you are sad, then pray to God; if you are happy, then sing praises to God (James 5:13). That covers all of life.

Directive Three: Close Every Day with God The psalmist David wrote, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety” (Ps. 4:8). Henry said we may end our days in contentment if we have the Lord as our God. He wrote, “Let this still every storm, command and create a calm in thy soul. Having God to be our God in covenant, we have enough; we have all. And though the gracious soul still desires more of God, it never desires more than God; in him it reposeth itself with a perfect complacency; in him it is at home, it is at rest.”[27]

When we lay down to rest at night, Henry advised us to lie down with thanksgiving to God. We should review His mercies and deliverances at the end of each day. “Every bit we eat, and every drop we drink, is mercy; every step we take, and every breath we draw, mercy,” he said. We should be thankful for nighttime as God’s provision for our rest, for a place to lay our heads, and for the health of body and peace of mind which allows us to sleep.[28]

Bedtime also offers an opportunity to reflect upon our death and Christian hope. Henry encouraged us to think that just as we retire from work for a time when we go to bed, so we shall retire for a time in death until the day of resurrection. Just as we take off our clothes at night, so we will put off this body until we receive a new one the morning of Christ’s return. Just as we lie down in our beds to rest, so we will lie down in death to rest in Christ’s presence where no nightmares can trouble us.[29] Henry’s focus on death was not unhealthy morbidity, but a realistic consideration in a fallen world where many people die each day with or without the Christian hope that extends beyond this life to eternal glory.

As the light of eternity breaks upon us even after the sun has set, we should reflect upon our sins with repentant hearts, remembering our corrupt natures and examining our conscience for particular transgressions of the law. Henry taught us to continue to plead for repentance with godly sorrow, making fresh application of the blood of Christ to our souls for forgiveness, and drawing near to the throne of grace for peace and pardon each night. Let us commit our bodies to the care of God’s angels and our souls to the influence of His Holy Spirit who works mysteriously in the night (Job 33:15–16; Pss. 17:3; 16:7). Then we may lie down in peace, resting our soul upon the intercession of Christ to grant us peace with God, and forgiving our fellow men of all their offenses against us so that our hearts may be at peace with God and man.[30]

Henry suggested we might fall asleep with thoughts such as these,

> To thy glory, O God, I now go to sleep. Whether we eat or drink, yea, or sleep, for this is included in whatever we do,—we must do it to the glory of

> God…. To thy grace, O God, and to the word of thy grace I now commend myself. It is good to fall asleep, with a fresh surrender of our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, to God; now, 'return to God as thy rest, O my soul; for he has dealt bountifully with thee'…. O that when I awake I may be still with God; that the parenthesis of sleep, though long, may not break off the thread of my communion with God, but that as soon as I awake I may resume it![31]

Henry directed the Christian to the wonderful experience of walking with God in prayer. From morning throughout the day and until our eyes close at night, we are invited to enjoy access to God given us by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:18 says, "For through him [Christ Jesus] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Henry wrote, "Prayer is our approach to God and we have access in it. We may come boldly…come to speak all our mind. We may come with freedom…. We have access to his ear, 'tis always open to the voice of our supplications. We have access in all places, at all times." We need not wait until heaven to enjoy God. "What's heaven but an everlasting access to God, and present access is a pledge of it," Henry said.[32] "This life of communion with God, and constant attendance upon him, is a heaven upon earth."[33]

A Method for Praying the Scriptures When a Christian devotes himself to prayer, whether privately or publicly, his prayers should be copious and full because his burdens, concerns, needs, desires, and sins are many, and God's mercies are great, Henry said. This commends the use of some method in prayer. Yet, there are times when a Christian's heart is so lifted up in prayer that a method would clip his wings. But those times are rare; ordinarily our prayers require a method, for we do not want to speak rashly before "the glorious Majesty of heaven and earth." The Bible shows us that our prayers should consist of short, clear, potent sentences (e.g., the Lord's Prayer) rather than a rambling stream of consciousness (or semiconsciousness) in which you forget what you are saying before your prayer is even done.

To help us form prayers that are better focused, Henry directs us to the source that is sufficient for every good work: the Holy Scriptures.[34] He said, "Hear him [God] speaking to you, and have an eye to that in every thing you say to him; as when you write an answer to a letter of business, you lay it before you. God's word must be the guide of your desires and the ground of your expectations in prayer."[35]

At the heart of Henry's method is praying God's Word back to God. O. Palmer Robertson wrote, "Prayer in this form is nothing more and nothing less

than what the old Puritans called ‘pleading the promises.’ God has made promises to his people. His people respond by redirecting those promises to the Lord in the form of prayer.”[36] Henry did not restrict himself entirely to Bible promises, however. Ligon Duncan notes of Henry, “He ransacks the Scriptures for references to God’s attributes and turns them into matters of adoration.”[37] In every respect, Henry sought to fill the mouth of God’s people with God’s own words, although he acknowledged that “it is convenient, and often necessary, to use other expressions in prayer besides those that are purely Scriptural.”[38]

Henry’s method included adoration, confession, petition for ourselves, thanksgiving, intercession for others, and a conclusion. This pattern generally follows what is offered in the Westminster Directory for Public Worship (1645).[39] In each section, Henry briefly introduced the focus and gave an outline of its parts. Each point of the outline includes Scripture after Scripture woven together as possible expressions of prayer. Henry warned readers against merely reading these prayers aloud without meditation, saying, “But after all, the intention and close application of the mind, the lively exercises of faith and love, and the outgoings of holy desire toward God, are so essentially necessary to prayer, that without these in sincerity, the best and most proper language is but a lifeless image [i.e. a dead idol].”[40] Yet Henry clearly believed that the Bible should supply words to our prayers that have penetrated our hearts.

Let us consider a small sample of Henry’s method. He was first concerned that we pray in the fear of the Lord, saying, “And in every prayer remember you are speaking to God, and make it to appear you have an awe of him upon your spirits. Let us not be ‘rash with our mouth; and let not our heart be hasty to utter any thing before God’; but let every word be well weighed, because ‘God is in heaven, and we upon earth,’ Eccl. 5:2.”[41] Henry introduced the reader to the adoration of God by writing,

> Our spirits being composed into a very reverent serious frame, our thoughts gathered in, and all that is within us charged, in the name of the great God, carefully to attend the solemn and aweful [awe-inspiring] service that lies before us, and to keep close to it; we must—with a fixed intention and application of mind, and an active lively faith—set the Lord before us, see his eye upon us, and set ourselves in his special presence; presenting ourselves to him as living sacrifices, which we desire may be holy and acceptable, and a reasonable service; and then bind those sacrifices with cords to the horns of the altar, with such thoughts as these….
>
> Let us now with humble boldness enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, in the new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through

the veil.[42]

Henry then offered page after page of suggested prayers of adoration in scriptural language, arranged by different topics. It is very much like a study of the biblical doctrine of God turned into prayer. To appreciate the fullness of Henry's method, consider his outline of biblical materials to direct our adoration:

I. Address the Infinitely Great and Glorious Being
A. With Holy Awe and Reverence
B. Distinguishing Him from False Gods
II. Reverently Adore God as Transcendently Bright and Blessed
A. The Self-Existent, Self-Sufficient, Infinite Spirit
B. His Existence Indisputable
C. His Nature beyond Our Comprehension
D. His Perfection Matchless
E. Infinitely Above Us and All Others
In particular, adore the Lord as:
1. Eternal, Immutable
2. Present in All Places
3. Perfect in His Knowledge of All
4. Unsearchable in Wisdom
5. Sovereign, Owner, and Lord of All
6. Irresistible in Power
7. Unspotted in Purity and Righteousness
8. Always Just in His Government
9. Always True, Inexhaustibly Good
10. Infinitely Greater than Our Best Praises
III. Give God the Praise of His Glory in Heaven
IV. Give Him Glory as Our Creator, Protector, Benefactor, and Ruler
V. Give Honor to the Three Distinct Persons of the Godhead
VI. Acknowledge Our Dependence on Him and Obligation to Our Creator
VII. Declare God to be Our Covenant God Who Owns Us
VIII. Acknowledge the Inestimable Favor of Being Invited to Draw Near to Him
IX. Express Our Unworthiness to Draw Near to God
X. Profess Our Desire for Him as Our Happiness
XI. Profess Our Hope and Trust in His All-Sufficiency
XII. Ask God to Graciously Accept Us and Our Poor Prayers
XIII. Pray for the Assistance of the Holy Spirit in Our Prayers
XIV. Make the Glory of God as the Highest Goal of Our Prayers

XV. Profess Our Reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ Alone.[43]

Each point of the outline includes several prayers drawn from the Scriptures. For example, one prayer under the topic of God's matchless perfection is, "Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful [fearsome] in praises, doing wonders?"[44] In the section on professing hope in God's sufficiency, Henry wrote, "In thee, O God, do we put our trust, let us never be ashamed; yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed. Truly our souls wait upon God, from him cometh our salvation; he only is our rock and our salvation! In him is our glory, our strength, and our refuge, and from him is our expectation."[45]

In adoration of God's power, he wrote,

> We know, O God, that thou canst do every thing…. Power belongs to thee; and with thee nothing is impossible. All power is thine, both in heaven and on earth. Thou killest and thou makest alive, thou woundest and thou healest, neither is there any that can deliver out of thy hand. What thou hast promised thou art able also to perform.[46]

Other sections such as confession and petition also have detailed outlines. Henry's method would give remarkable depth and variety to our prayers if we consulted his book regularly for guidance. His method would deliver our prayers from bland repetition and thoughtless irreverence. It would help us become more specific and broken hearted in our confession, leading us to pray: "We have not had the rule we ought to have over our own spirits, which have therefore been as a city that is broken down and has no walls. We have been too soon angry, and anger hath rested in our bosoms: and when our spirits have been provoked, we have spoken unadvisedly with our lips, and have been guilty of that clamour and bitterness which should have been put far from us."[47]

Henry's words of confession are humbling. In our glib and frivolous day, we might hesitate to give such thought to confessing our sins. But Duncan writes, "Henry understood that without the inclusion of sufficient confession of sin in our prayers, we will never attain a real and right sense of divine forgiveness and reconciliation…. We will be burdened by unresolved guilt—or else cope with that nagging guilt through denial, delusion, and self-deception."[48]

Our intercessions for the church would be more powerful as well if we used words such as these: "Let pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, flourish and prevail every where; that kingdom of God among men, which is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. O revive this work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known, and let our times be times of reformation."[49] We might then cry out with scriptural boldness, "Let no weapon formed against thy church prosper,

and let every tongue that riseth against it in judgment be condemned."[50]

Henry also marshaled Scriptures for our intercession for the lost world and the propagation of the gospel to foreign nations. He called us to pray for all men, to cry out that the nations would praise the Lord and sing for joy, to pray for the conversion of the Jewish people, for the suffering churches in Islamic nations, and for the conversion of atheists and deists. He instructed his readers to pray, "O give thy Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; for thou hast said, It is a light thing for him to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, but thou wilt give him for a light to the Gentiles. Let all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ."[51] Praying the Scriptures back to God will lead us to pray for missions.

We have only scratched the surface of Henry's book. In addition to many more scriptural prayers of adoration, confession, petition for ourselves, thanksgiving, and intercession for others, Henry also assembled Scriptures into a multipage paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, a set of simple Bible prayers for children, prayers for children based on catechism answers, scriptural prayers for family devotions in the morning and evening and on the Lord's Day, a parent's prayers for children, prayers to prepare for the Lord's Supper, and prayers to say at mealtimes. Henry's *Family Hymns* (1694), a collection of selections from the Psalms and New Testament in poetic form, can also enrich family worship with biblical truth.[52] Duncan says of the *Method for Prayer*, "Reading and rereading Henry's book will train us in the use of biblical truth and language in prayer, and thus assist and encourage modern Christians in both public and private prayer." Praying the Scriptures will "engrave in our minds biblical patterns of thought" and move us to a "God-centered way of praying."[53]

If nothing else, we should learn from Matthew Henry the great maxim: Pray the Scriptures. In this assertion, Henry stood with Reformed writers through the ages. William Gurnall (1616–1679) wrote, "The mightier any is in the Word, the more mighty he will be in prayer." Similarly, Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843) said, "Turn the Bible into prayer."[54] All this echoes the magisterial words of our Lord Jesus, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

1. Cited in John Blanchard, comp., *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 462.

2. "Matthew Henry's *A Method of Prayer* was, by its sheer popularity, a classic which for a hundred and fifty years went through more than thirty editions." Hughes Oliphant Old, "The Reformed Daily Office: A Puritan Perspective," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 12, no. 4 (1978): 9.

3. Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 323–28; J. Ligon Duncan III, "A Method for Prayer by

Matthew Henry (1662–1714)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 239–40.

4. Matthew Henry, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:1–95. These "complete works" do not include his commentaries or the recently published *Matthew Henry's Unpublished Sermons on The Covenant of Grace*, ed. Allan Harman (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002).

5. Matthew Henry, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:198–247. Both *A Method for Prayer* and *Directions for Daily Communion with God* have been republished as a single book: Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1994).

6. J. B. Williams, *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:210.

7. Henry, *The Covenant of Grace*, 200.

8. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:199.

9. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:199–200.

10. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:201–2.

11. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:203–4.

12. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:204–5.

13. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:205.

14. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:205–6.

15. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:207–8.

16. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:208.

17. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:208–11.

18. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:213–15.

19. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:215. The quotation is from "The Bag" in George Herbert, *The Temple* (1633), accessed from *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, http://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Bag.html, on December 3, 2010.

20. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:216–18.

21. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:219–24.

22. Williams, *Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*, 2:211. See Matthew 6:5–6.

23. Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 327.

24. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:224–25.

25. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:225.

26. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:225–27.

27. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:231.

28. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:235–36.

29. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:237.

30. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:238–40.

31. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:243.

32. Henry, *The Covenant of Grace*, 185, 200.

33. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:228.

34. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:2–3.

35. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:204.

36. O. Palmer Robertson, introduction to Matthew Henry, *A Way to Pray: A Biblical Method for Enriching Your Prayer Life and Language by Shaping Your Words with Scripture*, ed. O. Palmer Robertson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), xii. Robertson writes of this republication of Henry's *Method for Prayer*, "This current edition does not represent simply an effort to modernize the language of Matthew Henry's original. Instead it is an effort to provide a respectful but thorough reworking of the text of Matthew Henry in light of careful exegetical considerations" (xvii). Robertson has removed some of Henry's materials, added some of his own, and presented a fresh translation of the Scriptures.

37. Duncan, “A Method for Prayer,” in *The Devoted Life*, 241.

38. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:2–3.

39. Duncan, “A Method for Prayer,” in *The Devoted Life*, 240. The Westminster Directory set forth this order of worship: (1) a call to worship, (2) a prayer acknowledging God’s greatness, (3) Scripture reading, (4) singing a psalm, (5) a prayer of confession and petition for grace through the Mediator for the church, worldwide missions, and the governing authorities, (6) preaching the Word, (7) a prayer of thanksgiving and petition for grace, (8) the Lord’s Prayer, (9) singing a psalm, and (10) dismissal. See *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship Discussed by Mark Dever and Sinclair Ferguson* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008).

40. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:3.

41. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:204.

42. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:4.

43. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:4–12.

44. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:5. See Ex. 15:11.

45. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:10–11. See Pss. 31:1; 25:3; 62:1, 2, 5–7.

46. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:6. See Job 42:2; Ps. 62:11; Luke 1:37; Matt. 28:18; Deut. 32:39; Rom. 4:21.

47. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:15. See Prov. 25:28; 14:17; Eccl. 7:9; Ps. 106:33; Eph. 4:31.

48. Duncan, “A Method for Prayer,” in *The Devoted Life*, 244.

49. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:50. See James 1:27; Rom. 14:17; Hab. 3:2; Heb. 9:10.

50. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:51. See Isa. 54:17.

51. Henry, *Method for Prayer*, in *Works*, 2:48–49. See Ps. 2:8; Isa. 49:6.

52. Henry, *Communion with God*, in *Works*, 1:413–43.

53. Duncan, “A Method for Prayer,” in *The Devoted Life*, 249.

54. Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold*, 473.

Chapter 55

The Puritan Practice of Meditation

Meditation applieth, meditation healeth, meditation instructeth.
—EZEKIEL CULVERWELL[1]

Spiritual growth is intended to be part of the Christian life of believers. Peter exhorts believers to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The Heidelberg Catechism says that true Christians are members of Christ by faith and partake in His anointing. By Christ's power they are raised up to a new life and have the Holy Spirit given to them as an earnest, by whose power they "seek those things which are above" (Col. 3:1). Spiritual growth is only to be expected, since "it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 32, 45, 49, 64).

One hindrance to growth among Christians today is our failure to cultivate spiritual knowledge. We fail to give enough time to prayer and Bible-reading, and we have abandoned the practice of meditation. How tragic that the very word *meditation*, once regarded as a core discipline of Christianity and "a crucial preparation for and adjunct to the work of prayer," is now associated with unbiblical "New Age" spirituality. We rightly criticize those who engage in transcendental meditation and other mind-relaxing exercises because these practices are connected with false religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and have nothing to do with Scripture. Such forms of meditation focus on emptying the mind to become detached from the world and to merge with the so-called Cosmic Mind. There is no living, personal God to attach to, to listen to, and to be active for. Yet, we can learn from such people the importance of quiet reflection and prolonged meditation.[2]

At one time, the Christian church was deeply engaged in biblical meditation, which involved detachment from sin and attachment to God and one's neighbor. In the Puritan age, numerous ministers preached and wrote on how to meditate. In this chapter, we will look at the Puritan art of meditation, considering the nature, duty, manner, subjects, benefits, obstacles, and self-examination of

meditation.[3] With the Puritans as mentors, perhaps we can recover the biblical practice of meditation for our time.

The Definition, Nature, and Kinds of Meditation The word *meditate* or *muse* means to "think upon" or "reflect." "While I was musing the fire burned," David said (Ps. 39:3). It also means "to murmur, to mutter, to make sound with the mouth…. It implies what we express by one talking to himself."[4] A person involved in such meditation would recite aloud to himself in a low undertone passages of Scripture he had committed to memory.

The Bible often speaks of meditation. "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide," says Genesis 24:63. Despite Joshua's demanding task of supervising the conquest of Canaan, the Lord commanded Joshua to meditate on the book of the law day and night so that he might do all that was written in it (Josh. 1:8). The term *meditation*, however, occurs more often in the Psalms than in all other books of the Bible put together. Psalm 1 calls that man blessed who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. In Psalm 63:6, David speaks of remembering the Lord on his bed and meditating on Him in the night watches. Psalm 119:148 says, "Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word" (cf. Pss. 4:4; 77:10–12; 104:34; 119:16, 48, 59, 78, 97–99.) Thinking, reflecting, or musing presupposes something to meditate on. Formal meditation implies weighty subjects. For example, philosophers meditate on concepts such as matter and the universe, while theologians reflect on God, the eternal decrees, and the will of man.

The Puritans never tired of saying that biblical meditation involves thinking upon the triune God and His Word. By anchoring meditation in the living Word, Jesus Christ, and God's written Word, the Bible, the Puritans distanced themselves from the kind of bogus spirituality or mysticism that stresses contemplation at the expense of action and flights of the imagination at the expense of biblical content.

For the Puritans, meditation exercised both the mind and the heart; he who meditates approaches a subject with his intellect as well as his affections. Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) defined meditation as "a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves."[5]

Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) wrote, "A true meditation is when a man doth so meditate of Christ as to get his *heart* inflamed with the love of Christ; so meditate of the Truths of God, as to be transformed into them; and so meditate of sin as to get his heart to hate sin." Calamy went on to say that, to do good, meditation must enter three doors: the door of understanding, the door of the

heart and affections, and the door of practical living. “Thou must so meditate of God as to walk as God walks; and so to meditate of Christ as to prize him, and live in obedience to him,” Calamy said.[6]

For the Puritans, meditation was a daily duty that enhanced every other duty of the Christian life. As oil lubricates an engine, so meditation facilitates the diligent use of means of grace (reading of Scripture, hearing sermons, prayer, and all other ordinances of Christ) (cf. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 154), deepens the marks of grace (repentance, faith, humility), and strengthens one’s relationships to others (love to God, to fellow Christians, to one’s neighbors at large).

The Puritans wrote of two kinds of meditation: occasional and deliberate. “There is a *sudden, short, occasional meditation* of Heavenly things; and there is a *solemn, set, deliberate meditation*,” Calamy wrote. Occasional meditation takes what one observes with the senses to “raise up his thoughts to Heavenly meditation.” The believer makes use of what he sees with his eyes or hears with his ears “as a ladder to climb to Heaven.” That’s what David did with the moon and stars in Psalm 8, what Solomon did with the ants in Proverbs 6, and what Christ did with well water in John 4.[7] Thomas Manton (1620–1677) explained: “God trained up the old church by types and ceremonies, that upon a common object they might ascend to spiritual thoughts; and our Lord in the new testament taught by parables and similitudes taken from ordinary functions and offices among men, that in every trade and calling we might be employed in our worldly business with an heavenly mind, that, whether in the shop, or at the loom, or in the field, we might still think of Christ and heaven.”[8]

Occasional meditation—or “extemporal” meditation[9]—is relatively easy for a believer because it may be practiced at any time, any place, and among any people. A spiritually minded man can quickly learn how to spiritualize natural things, for his desires run counter to the worldly minded, who carnalize even spiritual things.[10] As Manton wrote, “A gracious heart is like an alembic [distillation apparatus], it can distil useful meditations out of all things it meeteth with. As it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things.”[11]

Nearly every Puritan book on meditation mentions occasional meditation. Some Puritans, such as William Spurstowe (c. 1605–1666), Thomas Taylor (1576–1633), Edward Bury (1616–1700), and Henry Lukin (1628–1719), wrote entire books of occasional meditations.[12]

Occasional meditation had its dangers, however. Bishop Joseph Hall (1574–1656) warned that when left unbridled, such meditations could easily wander from the Word and become superstitious, as was the case in Roman Catholic spirituality.[13] One’s imagination must be reined in by sacred Writ.

Puritans differed among themselves in how far to go with such meditation. In *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation,* U. Milo Kaufmann said there were two divergent traditions in Puritan meditation. He said that Joseph Hall, a moderate Puritan in theological orientation though not in church polity, led the way in developing literature on meditation among the Puritans through his work *Art of Divine Meditation,* first published in 1606. Hall reined in imagination in meditation by confining it to the content of the Word. That greatly influenced Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) and Thomas Hooker (1586–1647), who wrote in the 1650s, and John Owen (1616–1683) and Edmund Calamy, who wrote a generation later. Kaufmann asserted that, unlike Roman Catholic writers, most Puritans were "not likely to meditate upon events in the life of Christ but rather upon doctrines or specific propositions of Scripture."[14]

According to Kaufmann, Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) and Richard Baxter (1615–1691) broke out of this tradition in recommending meditation on the sacraments and heaven. Sibbes, particularly, asserted that though the soul can receive much hurt from unbridled imagination, it can also "have much good thereby." Representing heavenly things in earthly terms, such as presenting the kingdom of heaven in terms of a banquet and union with Christ as a marriage, offered "a large field for our imagination to walk in…with a great deal of spirituall *gain*," Sibbes wrote.[15] Kaufmann believed that Baxter, in emphasizing imagination by comparing objects of sense with objects of faith, was moved by Sibbes's *Soules Conflict.* In turn, John Bunyan (1628–1688) was encouraged to write *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in which he applied his imagination to a wide variety of topics affecting the believer's spiritual pilgrimage.[16]

Though Kaufmann's assessment has grains of truth, he has too little feeling for the Puritan fear of allowing imagination to have free reign beyond Scripture. The Puritans rightly feared the excesses of Anselm, Ignatius of Loyola, and other Roman Catholics in visualizing gospel stories—particularly the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ—to open imagination through the five senses.[17] Moreover, Kaufmann's negative assessment of Hall and Ambrose fails to take into account the remarkable freedom that both writers gave to scriptural imagination and use of the senses.[18] Hall's *Contemplations* and Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus* freely indulged in meditation without trespassing the boundaries of Scripture. That balance is critical in Puritan tradition, and as those who have achieved such a balance, the Puritans serve as mentors on how we can use sanctified imagination.[19]

The most important kind of meditation is daily, deliberate meditation, engaged in at set times. Calamy said deliberate meditation takes place "when a man *sets apart*…some time, and goes into a private Closet, or a private Walk, and there

doth solemnly and *deliberately meditate of the things of Heaven*." Such deliberation dwells upon God, Christ, and truth like "the Bee that dwells and abides upon the flower, to suck out all the sweetness." It "is a reflecting act of the soul, whereby the soul is carried back to it self, and considers all the things that it knows" about the subject, including its "causes, fruits, [and] properties."[20]

Thomas White (c. 1577–c. 1610) said deliberate meditation draws from four sources: Scripture, practical truths of Christianity, providential occasions (experiences), and sermons. Sermons in particular are fertile fields for meditation. As White wrote, "It is better to hear one Sermon only and meditate on that, than to hear two Sermons and meditate on neither."[21]

Some Puritans divided deliberate meditation into two parts: meditation that is direct and focuses on the meditated object, and meditation that is reflective (or reflexive) and focuses on the person who is meditating. Direct meditation is "an act of the contemplative part of the understanding," whereas reflective meditation is "an act of conscience." Direct meditation enlightens the mind with knowledge, while reflective meditation fills the heart with goodness.

Deliberate meditation can be dogmatic—having the Word as its object—or practical—having our lives as its object.[22] Thomas Gouge (1605–1681) combined several aspects of deliberate meditation in writing: "A set and deliberate Meditation, is a serious applying of the mind to some spiritual or heavenly subject, discoursing thereof with thy self, to the end thine heart may be warmed, thine affections quickened, and thy resolutions heightened to a greater love of God, hatred of sin, &c."[23]

Richard Baxter said that "set and solemn" meditation differs from "occasional and cursory" meditation much as set times of prayer differ from spontaneous prayers uttered in the midst of daily business.[24] Both kinds of meditation are essential for godliness. They serve both the needs of the head and the heart.[25] Without heart application, meditation is no more than study. As Thomas Watson wrote, "Study is the finding out of a truth, meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth; the one searcheth for the vein of gold, the other digs out the gold. Study is like a winter sun that hath little warmth and influence: meditation…melts the heart when it is frozen, and makes it drop into tears of love."[26]

The Duty and Necessity of Meditation The Puritans stressed the need for meditation. They said that, first, our God who commands us to believe commands us to meditate on His Word. That should be sufficient reason alone. They cite numerous biblical texts (Deut. 6:7; 32:46; Pss. 19:14; 49:3; 63:3;

94:19; 119:11, 15, 23, 28, 93, 99; 143:5; Isa. 1:3; Luke 2:19; John 4:24; Eph. 1:18; 1 Tim. 4:13; Heb. 3:1) and examples (Melchizedek, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, David, Mary, Paul, Timothy). When we fail to meditate, we slight God and His Word and reveal that we are not godly (Ps. 1:2).

Second, we should meditate on the Word as a letter God has written to us. "We must not run it over in haste, but meditate upon God's wisdom in inditing, and his love in sending it to us," wrote Thomas Watson.[27] Such meditation will kindle our affections and love for God. As David said, "I will lift up my hands also to thy commandments, which I have loved, and I will meditate in thy statutes" (Ps. 119:48).

Third, one cannot be a solid Christian without meditating. As Thomas Manton said, "Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises; as David saith, Ps. cxix. 92, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.'"[28] Watson wrote, "A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation, the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost."[29]

Fourth, without meditation, the preached Word will fail to profit us. Reading without meditation is like swallowing "raw and undigested food," wrote Scudder.[30] Richard Baxter added, "A man may eat too much but he cannot digest too well."[31]

Watson wrote, "There is as much difference between the knowledge of a truth, and the meditation of a truth, as there is between the light of a torch, and the light of the sun: set up a lamp or torch in the garden, and it hath no influence. The sun hath a sweet influence, it makes the plants to grow, and the herbs to flourish: so knowledge is but like a torch lighted in the understanding, which hath little or no influence, it makes not a man the better; but meditation is like the shining of the sun, it operates upon the affections, it warms the heart and makes it more holy. Meditation fetcheth life in a truth."[32]

Fifth, without meditation, our prayers will be less effective. As Manton wrote, "Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer, and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation, and meditation feedeth prayer; we must hear that we be not erroneous, and meditate that we be not barren. These duties must always go hand in hand; meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer."[33]

Sixth, Christians who fail to meditate are unable to defend the truth. They have no backbone. And they have little self-knowledge. As Manton wrote, "A man that is a stranger to meditation is a stranger to himself."[34] "It is meditation that makes a Christian," said Watson.[35] "Thus you see the necessity of

meditation," wrote Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656); "we must resolve upon the duty, if ever we mean to go to heaven."[36]

Finally, it may also be added that such meditation is an essential part of sermon preparation. Without it, sermons will lack depth of understanding, richness of feeling, and clarity of application. Johann Albrecht Bengel's (1687–1752) directive to students of the Greek New Testament captures the essence of such meditation: "Apply your whole self to the text; the whole matter of it, apply to yourself" (*Te totam applica and textum; rem totam applica ad te*).[37]

The Manner of Meditation For Puritan authors, there were requisites and rules for meditation. Let us consider what they wrote about the frequency and time of meditation, preparation for meditation, and guidelines for meditation.

Frequency and Time First, divine meditation must be frequent—ideally, twice a day, if time and obligations permit; certainly, at least once a day. If God ordered Joshua, a busy commander, to meditate on His law day and night, shouldn't we also delight in meditating on God's truth every morning and evening? Generally speaking, the more frequently we meditate on the triune God and His truth, the more intimately we will know Him. Meditation will also become easier.[38]

Lengthy intervals between meditations will hinder their fruit. As William Bates (1625–1699) wrote, "If the bird leaves her nest for a long space, the eggs chill and are not fit for production; but where there is a constant incubation, then they bring forth: so when we leave religious duties for a long space, our affections chill, and grow cold; and are not fit to produce holiness, and comfort to our souls."[39]

Second, set a time for meditation and stick to that time, the Puritans advised. That will put brackets around duty and defend you "against many temptations to omission," wrote Baxter.[40] Let it be the most "seasonable time" for you, when you are most alert and not stressed by other obligations. Early morning is an excellent time, because your meditations then will set the tone for the remainder of the day (Ex. 23:19; Job 1:5; Ps. 119:147; Prov. 6:22; Mark 1:35). Still, for some, evenings may be more fruitful (Gen. 24:63; Ps. 4:4). The busyness of the day is behind them, and they are ready to rest in "the bosom of God by sweet meditation" (Ps. 16:7).[41]

Use the Lord's Day for generous doses of meditation time. In their Directory for the Public Worship of God, the Westminster divines advised "that what time is vacant, between, or after the solemn meeting of the congregation in public, be spent in reading, meditation, and repetition of sermons."[42] Thomas Gouge admonished, "Had you ever tasted of the sweetness of this duty of Divine

Meditation, you would find little time for vain talk, and idle discourses, especially upon the Lords day."[43] Baxter asked, "What fitter day to ascend to heaven than that on which our Lord did arise from earth, and fully triumph over death and hell, and take possession of heaven for us?"[44]

Use special times as well for meditation. According to the Puritans, those include the following: "1. When God doth extraordinarily revive and enable thy spirit. 2. When thou art cast into perplexing troubles of mind, through sufferings, or fear, or care, or temptations. 3. When the messengers of God do summon us to die; when either our grey hairs, or our languishing bodies, or some such-like forerunners of death, do tell us that our change cannot be far off."[45] 4. "When the heart is touched at a Sermon or Sacrament, or observing of any judgment or mercy, or act of Gods providence, [for then] it is best striking when the Iron is hot (Ps. 119:23)."[46] 5. "Before some solemn duties, as before the Lord's supper, and before special times of deep humiliation, or before the Sabbath."[47]

Third, meditate "ordinarily till thou doest find some sensible benefit conveyed to thy soul." Bates said that meditating is like trying to build a fire from wet wood. Those who persevere will produce a flame. When we begin to meditate, we may first garner only a bit of smoke, then perhaps a few sparks, "but at last there is a flame of holy affections that goes up towards God." Persevere "till the flame doth so ascend," Bates said.[48]

There will be times when the flame does not ascend. You must not then carry on indefinitely. "Neither yield to laziness, nor occasion spiritual weariness: the devil hath advantage upon you both ways," Manton wrote. "When you torture your spirits after they have been spent, it makes the work of God a bondage."[49]

Most Puritans did not advise a specific amount of time to be spent on meditation. However, James Ussher recommended at least one hour per week, and Thomas White suggested "considering the parts of Meditation are so many, *viz.* Preparation, Considerations, Affections, Resolutions, &c. and none of them are to be past slightly over, for Affections are not so quickly raised, nor are we to cease blowing the fire as soon as ever it beginneth to flame, until it be well kindled, half an hour [each day] may be thought to be the least for beginners, and an hour for those that are versed in this duty."[50]

Preparation Puritan writers suggested several ways to prepare for effective meditation, all of which depend "much on the frame of thy heart": 1. Clear your heart from things of this world—its business and enjoyments as well as its internal troubles and agitations. Calamy wrote, "Pray unto God not only to keep out outward company, but inward company; that is, to keep out vain, and worldly, and distracting thoughts."[51]

2. Have your heart cleansed from the guilt and pollution of sin, and stirred up with fervent love for spiritual things. Treasure up a stock of scriptural texts and spiritual truths. Seek grace to live out David's confession in Psalm 119:11: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

3. Approach the task of meditation with utmost seriousness. Be aware of its weightiness, excellence, and potential. If you succeed, you will be admitted into the very presence of God and feel once again the beginning of eternal joy here on earth (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 58). As Ussher wrote, "This must be the thought of thy heart, I have to do with a God, before whom all things are naked, and bare, and therefore I must be careful to not speak foolishly before the wise God, that my thoughts be not wandering. A man may talk with the greatest Prince on earth, his mind otherwise busied; Not so come to talk with God; his eye is on the heart, and therefore thy chief care must be to keep the rudder of thy heart steady. Consider the three persons in the Trinity are present."[52]

4. Find a place for meditation that is quiet and free from interruption. Aim for "secrecy, silence, rest, whereof the first excludeth company, the second noise, the third motion," wrote Joseph Hall.[53] Once a suitable place is found, stick with that place. Some Puritans recommended keeping the room dark or closing one's eyes to remove all visible distractions. Others recommended walking or sitting in the midst of nature. Here one must find his own way.

5. Maintain a body posture that is reverent, whether it be sitting, standing, walking, or lying prostrate before the Almighty. While meditating, the body should be the servant of the soul, following its affections. The goal is to center the soul, the mind, and the body upon "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).[54]

Guidelines The Puritans also offered guidelines for the process of meditation. They said to begin by asking the Holy Spirit for assistance. Pray for the power to harness your mind and to focus the eyes of faith on this task. As Calamy wrote, "I would have you pray unto God to enlighten your understandings, to quicken your devotion, to warm your affections, and so to bless that hour unto you, that by the meditation of holy things you may be made more holy, you may have your lusts more mortified, and your graces more increased, you may be the more mortified to the world, and the vanity of it, and lifted up to Heaven, and the things of Heaven."[55]

Next, the Puritans said to read the Scriptures, then select a verse or doctrine upon which to meditate. Be sure to pick out relatively easy subjects to meditate on at the beginning, they advised. For example, begin with the attributes of God rather than the doctrine of the Trinity. And consider subjects one at a time.

In addition, select subjects that are most applicable to your present circumstances and that will be most beneficial for your soul. For example, if you're spiritually dejected, meditate upon Christ's willingness to receive poor sinners and pardon all who come to Him. If your conscience troubles you, meditate on God's promises to give grace to the penitent. If you're financially afflicted, meditate on God's wonderful providences to those in need.[56]

Now, memorize the selected verse(s), or some aspect of the subject, to stimulate meditation, to strengthen faith, and to serve as a means of divine guidance.

Next, fix your thoughts on the Scripture or a scriptural subject without prying further than what God has revealed. Use your memory to focus on all that Scripture has to say about your subject. Consider past sermons and other edifying books.

Use "the book of conscience, the book of Scripture, and the book of the creature"[57] as you consider various aspects of your subject: its names, causes, qualities, fruits, and effects. Like Mary, ponder these things in your heart. Think of illustrations, similitudes, and opposites in your mind to enlighten your understanding and enflame your affections. Then let judgment assess the value of what you are meditating upon.

Here's an example from Calamy. If you would meditate on the subject of sin, "begin with the description of sin; proceed to the distribution of sin; consider the original and cause of sin, the cursed fruits and effects of sin, the adjuncts and properties of sin in general and of personal sin in particular, the opposite of sin —grace, the metaphors of sin, the titles given to sin, [and] all that the Scripture saith concerning sin."[58]

Two warnings are in order. First, as Manton wrote, "Do not bridle up the free spirit by the rules of method. That which God calleth for is religion, not logic. When Christians confine themselves to such rules and prescriptions, they straiten themselves, and thoughts come from them like water out of a still, not like water out of a fountain."[59] Second, if your mind wanders, rein it in, offer a short prayer for forgiveness, ask for strength to stay focused, read a few appropriate Scriptures again, and press on. Remember, reading Scripture, meditation, and prayer belong together. As one discipline wanes, turn to another. Persevere; don't surrender to Satan by abandoning your task.

Next, stir up affections, such as love, desire, hope, courage, gratitude, zeal, and joy,[60] to glorify God.[61] Hold soliloquies with your own soul. Include complaints against yourself because of your inabilities and shortcomings, and spread before God your spiritual longings. Believe that He will help you.

Paul Baynes (1573–1617), in discussing meditation as a "private means" of

grace, compared it first with the power of sight to affect the heart, then with the process of conception and birth: “Now look as after conception, there is a travail to bring forth & a birth in due season: so when the soul by thought hath conceived, presently the affections are tickled and excited, for the affections kindle on a thought, as tinder doth, when a spark lighteth on it. The affections moved, the will is stirred and inclined.”62

Now, following the arousal of your memory, judgment, and affections, apply your meditations to yourself, to arouse your soul to duty and comfort, and to restrain your soul from sin.63 As William Fenner (1600–1640) wrote, “Dive into thy own soul; anticipate and prevent thy own heart. Haunt thy heart with promises, threatenings, mercies, judgments, and commandments. Let meditation trace thy heart. Hale thy heart before God.”64

Examine yourself for your own growth in grace. Reflect on the past and ask, “What have I done?” Look to the future, asking, “What am I resolved to do, by God’s grace?”65 Do not ask such questions legalistically but out of holy excitement and opportunity to grow in Spirit-worked grace. Remember, “Legal work is our work; meditation work is sweet work.”66

Follow Calamy’s advice, “If ever you would get good by the practice of meditation, you must come down to *particulars;* and you must so meditate of Christ, as to apply Christ to thy soul; and so meditate of Heaven, as to apply Heaven to thy soul.”67 Live out your meditation (Josh. 1:8). Let meditation and practice, like two sisters, walk hand in hand. Meditation without practice will only increase your condemnation.68

Next, turn your applications into resolutions. “Let your resolutions be firm and strong, not [mere] wishes, but resolved purposes or Determinations,” wrote White.69 Make your resolutions commitments to fight against your temptations to sin. Write down your resolutions. Above all, resolve that you will spend your life “as becomes one that hath been meditating of holy and heavenly things.” Commend yourself, your family, and everything you own to the hands of God with “sweet resignation.”

Conclude with prayer, thanksgiving, and psalm singing. “Meditation is the best beginning of prayer, and prayer is the best conclusion of meditation,” wrote George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673). Watson said, “Pray over your meditations. Prayer sanctifies every thing; without prayer they are but unhallowed meditations; prayer fastens meditation upon the soul; prayer is a tying a knot at the end of meditation that it doth not slip; pray that God will keep those holy meditations in your mind for ever, that the savour of them may abide upon your hearts.”70 Thank the Lord for assistance in meditation, or else, Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594) warned, “we shall be buffeted in our next

meditation."[71]

The metrical versions of the Psalms are a great help in meditation. Their metrical form facilitates memorization. As God's Word, they are a proper subject for meditation. As a "complete anatomy of the soul," as Calvin called them, they afford abundant material and guidance for meditation. As prayers (Ps. 72:20) and as thanksgivings (Ps. 118:1), they are both a proper vehicle for meditation and a fitting way to conclude it. Joseph Hall wrote that he found much comfort in closing his meditations by lifting up his "heart and voice to God in singing some verse or two of David's Psalms—one that answers to our disposition and the matter of our meditation. In this way, the heart closes up with much sweetness and contentment."[72] John Lightfoot (1602–1675) added, "Singing God's praise is a work of the most meditation of any we perform in public. It keeps the heart longest upon the thing spoken. Prayer and hearing pass quick from one sentence to another; this sticks long upon it."

Finally, don't shift too quickly from meditation to engagement with things of this world, lest, as Thomas Gouge advised, "thereby thou suddenly quench that spiritual heat which hath in that exercise been kindled in thine heart."[73] Remember that one hour spent in such meditation is "worth more than a thousand sermons," Ussher said, "and this is no debasing of the Word, but an honour to it."[74]

The Subjects of Meditation The Puritans suggested various subjects, objects, and materials for meditation. The number after each entry represents the number of Puritan writers we found who called for meditation on that subject. This list follows the traditional loci of Reformed systematic theology.

Prolegomena the sacred Word of God (3)
the defense of Christianity (1)
Theology Proper the nature and attributes of God (7) the works and providences of God (7) the glory of God as man's chief end (4) the majesty of God (3)
the mercies of God (3)
God as Creator (2)

Anthropology the sinfulness of sin and our personal sin (9) the corruption and deceitfulness of the heart (5) the fall in Adam and estrangement from God (4) the vanity of man (4)
the value and immortality of the soul (3) the frailty of the body (2)
the uncertainty of earthly comforts (1) the sin of covetousness (1)
the contrast between God and man (1)

Christology the passion and death of Christ (8) the love of Christ (5)
the person of Christ (4)
the mystery and wonder of the gospel (4) the natures of Christ (2)
the offices of Christ (2)
the life of Christ (2)
the states of Christ (1)

Soteriology and the Christian Life the promises of God (7)
self-examination for evidences of grace (5) the rich privileges of believers (3) the grace and person of the Holy Spirit (3) the benefits of faith (2)
sanctification (2)
prayer (2)
the commandments of God (2)
the admonishments and threatenings of God (2) the danger of apostasy (1)
the small number of the saved (1) spiritual dangers (1)
love, joy, hope (1)
the Sabbath (1)
self-denial (1)

Ecclesiology the ordinances of God (5)
the Lord's Supper (4)
baptism (2)
hearing and reading the Word (2) the joys and sorrows of the church (1)
Eschatology heaven (10)
death (8)
judgment (7)
hell (7)
eternity (5)

The Puritans called these subjects the plain, powerful, useful truths of God. Some Puritans, such as Joseph Hall, offered more detailed lists than others. Hall listed eighty-seven subjects upon which to meditate as well as a paragraph with each on how to do so. They include

> fame and greatness, ignorance, depravity, holy living, gossip, evil companions, God's promises, love of the world, contentment, hypocrisy, happiness, companions, heaven and earth, work and pain, riches, heaven and hell, death, affliction, godly warfare, sin, success, growing in grace, pride, hatred of sin, prejudice, covetousness, prayer, love, blasphemy, nobility, temptation, the use of means, worship, happiness, obedience,

repentance, ambition, conceit, the shortness of life, self-examination, adversity, affliction, faith and philosophy, pleasure, sin, faithful friends, schism and truth, grief and worry, fear, the heathen and the Christian, the light of the eye, the mind and the heart, heartfelt religion, hurting ourselves, the heart and the tongue, the use of time, cares, providence, love, displeasure, friendship, bargain hunting, reproof, envy, worldly pleasures, following good examples, time, enjoyment, good works, fruitfulness, foolishness, doing good, hermitage, a happy life, heavenly correction, heavenly hunger, repentance, spiritual warfare, strength in trials, heavenly mindedness, humility, death, purpose in life, good from evil, madness, and the practice of meditation itself.[75]

Clearly for the Puritans, some topics ought to be more focused on than others. That led John Owen to say, "If I have observed anything by experience, it is this: a man may take the measure of his growth and decay in grace according to his thoughts and meditations upon the person of Christ, and the glory of Christ's kingdom, and of His love."[76]

For the Puritans, probably the most important theme for meditation was heaven—the place where God is supremely known and worshiped and enjoyed, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, and where the saints rejoice as they are transcribed from glory to glory. "Meditation is the life of most other duties: and the views of heaven is the life of Meditation," wrote Baxter.[77] Heaven was the supreme subject for meditation for these reasons:

- Christ is in heaven now and our salvation consists of union through the Holy Spirit with Christ. He is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Christ, the center of heaven, ought to be the center of all our faith, hope, and love.
- We can only live as Christians in the present evil age if we have the mind of Christ, that is, if we are genuinely heavenly minded, seeing our earth and this age from the perspective of heaven.
- Heaven is the goal of our pilgrimage. We are pilgrims on the earth, journeying in faith, hope, and love toward heaven to be with Christ.[78]

The Puritans taught that meditations on heaven and other subjects take priority on three occasions. First, special meditation is necessary in conjunction with worship, particularly with regard to the sermon. "God requires you to hear Sermons, requires you to meditate on the Sermons you hear," wrote Calamy.[79] As James Ussher wrote, "Every sermon is but a preparation for meditation."[80]

Good sermons not only inform the mind with sound doctrine but also stir up the affections. They turn the will away from sin and toward loving God and

one's neighbor. Meditation enlarges and directs the affections through the reception of the Word of God in the heart from the mind. When people stop meditating on sermons, they stop benefiting from them.

Richard Baxter wrote, "Why so much preaching is lost among us, and professors can run from sermon to sermon, and are never weary of hearing or reading, and yet have such languishing, starved souls, I know no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and unconscionable neglect of meditation." Some hearers have anorexia, Baxter said, for "they have neither appetite nor digestion," but others have bulimia—"they have appetite, but no digestion."[81]

Conscientious Puritans often took sermon notes to help facilitate meditation. In my own congregation, an elderly Christian woman decided to emulate that practice. Every Sabbath evening she spent an hour on her knees with notes from the sermons of the day, praying and meditating her way through them. She often said that was the best part of her Sabbath.

Second, to rightly receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, a believer is expected to meditate on the Lord Jesus as sacrifice for his sin. As Thomas White wrote, "Meditate upon your preparatory, concomitant and subsequent duties: Meditate upon the love of God the Father, upon the love of God the Son, Jesus Christ, consider the excellency of his person, the greatness of his sufferings, and how valid they be to the satisfaction of God's Justice, and so likewise to consider of the excellency, nature, and use of the Sacrament."[82]

Calamy listed twelve subjects for meditations during the sacrament: "the great and wonderful love of God the Father in giving Christ; the love of Christ in giving himself; the heinousness of sin; the excellency of this Sacramental feast; your own unworthiness; your spiritual wants and necessities; the cursed condition of an unworthy receiver; the happy condition of those that come worthily; the Sacramental Elements [bread and wine]; the Sacramental actions [how the minister's actions represent Christ]; the Sacramental Promises; what retribution to make unto Christ for [the gift of His Supper]."[83] Some Puritan divines, such as Edward Reynolds (1599–1676), wrote entire treatises to help believers during the Lord's Supper.[84] John Owen showed how preparation for the Lord's Supper involved meditation, examination, supplication, and expectation.[85] Every believer was expected to share in that preparation (cf. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 171, 174, 175).

Third, every Sabbath was a special season for meditation. It was a time of spiritual nourishment for the God-fearing who stocked up on spiritual goods for the week to come. Hence the Sabbath was fondly called "the market day of the soul."

Finally, Puritans such as Nathanael Ranew (c. 1602–1677), who wrote

extensively on meditation, gave various directions to believers, depending on their spiritual maturity. Ranew wrote chapters for "young Christians newly converted," "more grown and elder Christians," and for "old Christians." The older the Christian, the greater the expectation for more profound meditations.[86]

The Benefits of Meditation The Puritans devoted scores of pages to the benefits, excellencies, usefulness, advantages, or improvements of meditation. Here are some of those benefits:

- Meditation helps us focus on the triune God, to love and to enjoy Him in all His persons (1 John 4:8)—intellectually, spiritually, aesthetically.
- Meditation helps increase knowledge of sacred truth. It "takes the veil from the face of truth" (Prov. 4:2).
- Meditation is the "nurse of wisdom," for it promotes the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7).
- Meditation enlarges our faith by helping us to trust the God of promises in all our spiritual troubles and the God of providence in all our outward troubles.[87]
- Meditation augments one's affections. Watson called meditation "the bellows of the affections." He said, "Meditation hatcheth good affections, as the hen her young ones by sitting on them; we light affection at this fire of meditation" (Ps. 39:3).[88]
- Meditation fosters repentance and reformation of life (Ps. 119:59; Ezek. 36:31).
- Meditation is a great friend to memory.
- Meditation helps us view worship as a discipline to be cultivated. It makes us prefer God's house to our own.
- Meditation transfuses Scripture through the texture of the soul.
- Meditation is a great aid to prayer (Ps. 5:1). It tunes the instrument of prayer before prayer.
- Meditation helps us to hear and read the Word with real benefit. It makes the Word "full of life and energy to our souls." William Bates wrote, "Hearing the word is like ingestion, and when we meditate upon the word that is digestion; and this digestion of the word by meditation produceth warm affections, zealous resolutions, and holy actions."[89]
- Meditation on the sacraments helps our "graces to be better and stronger." It helps faith, hope, love, humility, and numerous spiritual comforts thrive in the soul.

• Meditation stresses the heinousness of sin. It "musters up all weapons, and gathers all forces of arguments for to presse our sins, and lay them heavy upon the heart," wrote Fenner.90 Thomas Hooker said, "Meditation sharpens the sting and strength of corruption, that it pierceth more prevailingly."91 It is a "strong antidote against sin" and "a cure of covetousness."

• Meditation enables us to "discharge religious duties, because it conveys to the soul the lively sense and feeling of God's goodness; so the soul is encouraged to duty."92

• Meditation helps prevent vain and sinful thoughts (Jer. 4:14; Matt. 12:35). It helps wean us from this present evil age.

• Meditation provides inner resources on which to draw (Ps. 77:10–12), including direction for daily life (Prov. 6:21–22).

• Meditation helps us persevere in faith; it keeps our hearts "savoury and spiritual in the midst of all our outward and worldly employments," wrote William Bridge.93

• Meditation is a mighty weapon to ward off Satan and temptation (Ps. 119:11, 15; 1 John 2:14).

• Meditation provides relief in afflictions (Isa. 49:15–17; Heb. 12:5).

• Meditation helps us benefit others with our spiritual fellowship and counsel (Pss. 66:16; 77:12; 145:7).

• Meditation promotes gratitude for all the blessings showered upon us by God through His Son.

• Meditation glorifies God (Ps. 49:3).94

In short, as Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) wrote, "meditation is the food of your souls, it is the very stomach and natural heat whereby spiritual truths are digested. A man shall as soon live without his heart, as he shall be able to get good by what he reads, without meditation…. It is not he that reads most; but he that meditates most, that will prove the choicest, sweetest, wisest, and strongest Christian."95

The Obstacles of Meditation Puritan leaders frequently warned people about hindrances or obstacles to meditation. Here is a summary of their responses to such obstacles:

Obstacle 1: Unfitness or ignorance. Such say they "cannot confine their thoughts to an object." Their "thoughts are light and feathery, tossed to and fro."

Answer: Disability, ignorance, and wandering thoughts offer no exemption from duty. Your "loss of ability" does not imply God's "loss of right." Truth be

told, you are probably unfit because you have neglected meditation and have not loved the truth. “Sinful indispositions do not disannul our engagements to God, as a servant’s drunkenness doth not excuse him from work,” Manton wrote.[96] Remedy your problem by getting “a good stock of sanctified knowledge” and by “constant exercise” of that knowledge, all the while leaning on the Holy Spirit for assistance. You will find meditation becoming easier and sweeter in due course.

Obstacle 2: Busyness. Such say “they are so harassed by the employments of this world, that they cannot spend time in this duty solemnly, and seriously.”

Answer: True religion is not performed merely in leisure time. Great busyness should move us to more meditation, as we then have more needs to bring before God and to meditate upon.

Obstacle 3: Spiritual lethargy. Such admit that though they may have good intentions, their soul is prone to divert itself from meditation.

Answer: Matthew 11:12 says heaven is the reward of “the violent [who] take it by force.” Why are you lazy in spiritual pursuits that can reap eternal rewards when you are not lazy in pursuing secular work in this world, which produces only temporary rewards? Spiritual “drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Prov. 23:21b). As Manton said, “It is better to take pains than to suffer pains, and to be bound with the cords of duty than with the chains of darkness.”[97]

Obstacle 4: Worldly pleasures and friendships. Such say they don’t want to be righteous overmuch and hence do not wish to abandon vain entertainment and friends.

Answer: “The pleasures of the world discompose our souls, and unfit our bodies for the duties of meditation…. Remember this, the sweetness of religion is incomparably more than all the pleasures of sense,” wrote Bates.[98]

Obstacle 5: Adverseness of heart. Such say they don’t like to be yoked to such a difficult task. Burdened with guilt, they fear being alone with God.

Answer: “Get your conscience cleansed by the hearty application of the blood of Christ,” Manton advised, then yoke yourself to the means of grace, including meditation (Ps. 19:14).[99]

The consequences of omitting meditation are serious, Calamy warned. It leads to hardness of heart. Why do the promises and threatenings of God make so little impression on us? It’s because we fail to meditate upon them. Why are we so ungrateful to God for His blessings? Why do His providences and afflictions fail

to produce godly fruit in our lives? Why do we fail to benefit from the Word and sacraments, why are we so judgmental of others, why do we so feebly prepare for eternity? Isn't it largely due to our lack of meditation?100

We must discipline ourselves to meditate. Most Puritan pastors said that. Yet comparatively few people, even in Puritan times, saw this as their duty. "Many are troubled," wrote Baxter, "if they omit a sermon, a fast, a prayer in public or private, yet were never troubled that they have omitted meditation, perhaps all their life-time to this very day."101

Conclusion: Meditation as Self-Examination Puritan meditation was more than a particular means of grace; it was a comprehensive method for Puritan devotion—a biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical art. Its theology was Pauline, Augustinian, and Calvinistic. Its subject matter was drawn from the book of Scripture, the book of creation, and the book of conscience. As William Bridge said, "Meditation is the vehement or intense application of the soul unto some thing, whereby a man's mind doth ponder, dwell and fix upon it, for his own profit and benefit," which, in turn, leads to God's glory.102

Typically, Puritans concluded their treatises on meditation by calling readers to self-examination, which consists of the following:

Trial

• Are your meditations motivated by the exercise of "a lively faith"? Real meditation is inseparable from the exercise of faith. Do you ever meditate as Samuel Ward (1577–1640) describes: "Stir up thy soul in [meditation] to converse with Christ. Look what promises and privileges thou dost habitually believe, now actually think of them, roll them under thy tongue, chew on them till thou feel some sweetness in the palate of thy soul. View them jointly, severally: sometimes muse on one, sometimes of another more deeply. This is that which the Spouse calls walking into the Gardens and eating of the Fruits, which in plain terms, I call using of Faith, and living by Faith."[103]

• "Are these spiritual thoughts in thy heart, productive of holiness in thy life?" Remember, "To be weary of the thoughts of God is to degenerate into devils" (James 2:19).[104]

Reproof or Exhortation • To the unbeliever: When God made you a rational creature, did He intend that you should use your thoughts for selfish and sinful purposes? Why isn't God in all your thoughts? "Hast thou not a God and a Christ to think of? And is not salvation by him, and everlasting glory, worthy of your choicest thoughts? You have thoughts enough and to spare for other things —for base things, for very toys—and why not for God and the word of God?" Manton asked.[105]

• To the believer: Neglecting meditation should "strike us with fear and sorrow." How degrading it is to God when we turn our meditation from Him to sinful objects! If the farmer meditates upon his land, the physician upon his patients, the lawyer upon his cases, the storeowner upon his wares, shouldn't Christians meditate upon their God and Savior?[106]

The Puritans would say to us, "If you continue to neglect meditation, it will dampen or destroy your love for God. It will make it unpleasant to think about God. It will leave you open to sin so that you view sin as a pleasure. It will leave you vulnerable and fragile before trials and temptations of every kind. In short, it will lead to a falling away from God."[107]

"No holy duties will come to us," Ranew wrote, "we must come to them."[108] Let us heed Watson's exhortation: "If you have formerly neglected it, bewail your neglect, and now begin to make conscience of it: lock up yourselves with God (at least once a day) by holy meditation. Ascend this hill, and when you are gotten to the top of it, you shall see a fair prospect, Christ and heaven before you. Let me put you in mind of that saying of Bernard, 'O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband Christ is bashful, and will not be familiar in company, retire

thyself by meditation into the closet, or the field, and there thou shalt have Christ's embraces.'"[109]

1. Introduction to *Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 184.

2. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 14–15.

3. Few studies have been done on Puritan meditation. Louis Martz, who established the intimate connection between meditation and poetry, wrote a critical chapter on Richard Baxter's view of meditation, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 1954). U. Milo Kaufmann showed the importance of Puritan meditation in shaping Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* in his work *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 1966). Barbara Lewalski sharpened the focus on the contributions of a distinctively Protestant form of meditation in *Donne's "Anniversaries" and the Poetry of Praise, the Creation of a Symbolic Mode* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1973) and *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1979). Norman Grabo effectively challenged Martz's thesis that Calvinistic thinking prevented Protestantism from developing the art of meditation until the mid-seventeenth century in "The Art of Puritan Devotion," *Seventeenth-Century News* 26, no. 1 (1968): 8. Frank Livingstone Huntley too neatly categorized Protestant meditation as philosophically Platonic, psychologically Augustinian, and theologically Pauline and Calvinistic in contrast to Roman Catholic meditation as Aristotelian and Thomistic in *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study with the Texts of* The Art of Divine Meditations *(1606) and* Occasional Meditations *(1633)* (Binghamton, N. Y.: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1981). Simon Chan provided a fresh historical appraisal of Puritan meditation, covering a larger body of texts than those previously examined and moving beyond a literary view in "The Puritan Meditative Tradition, 1599–1691: A Study of Ascetical Piety" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1986). He argued that Puritan meditation progressively moved in a more methodical direction in the second half of the seventeenth century. A book examining the theological and practical assessment of Puritan meditation has yet to be written.

4. William Wilson, *OT Word Studies* (McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing., n.d.), 271.

5. Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 23. For similar definitions by other Puritans, see Richard Greenham, "Grave Counsels and Godly Observations," in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Jesus Christ M. Richard Greenham*, ed. H. H. (London: Felix Kingston for Robert Dexter, 1599), 37; Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption…The Ninth and Tenth Books* (London: Peter Cole, 1657), 210; Thomas White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation with Instances of the Several Kindes of Solemn Meditation* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1672), 13.

6. Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1634), 26–28.

7. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 6–10.

8. Thomas Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *The Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1874), 17:267–68.

9. Huntley, *Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 73.

10. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 14–15.

11. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 17:267. Cf. Thomas Watson: "A Gracious Heart, Like Fire, Turns All Objects into Fuel for Meditation," in *The Sermons of Thomas Watson* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 247.

12. William Spurstowe, *The Spiritual Chymist: or, Six Decads of Divine Meditations* (London: n.p., 1666); Thomas Taylor, *Meditations from the Creatures* (London: [H. Lownes] for I. Bartlet, 1629); Edward Bury, *The Husbandmans Companion: Containing One Hundred Occasional Meditations, Reflections, and Ejaculations, Especially Suited to Men of That Employment…* (London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1677); Henry Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scriptures* (London: S. G. for Allen Banks and Charles Harper, 1669).

13. Huntley, *Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 74.

14. Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*, 126. Kaufmann quotes Thomas Hooker's strong rejection of imagination: "To preserve our minds from windy and vain imaginations, is to have our understandings fully taken up with the blessed Truths of God as our daily and appointed food." Hooker, *The Application of Redemption*, 232.

15. Cited in Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*, 144–45.

16. Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*, 150–251.

17. Peter Toon, *Meditating as a Christian* (London: Collins, 1991), 175–78; *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Anthony Mottola (New York: Doubleday, 1964).

18. Huntley, *Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 44–54.

19. Cf. Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 99–100.

20. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 22–23; Greenham, "Grave Counsels and Godly Observations," in *Works*, 38.

21. White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 17–20.

22. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 17:268.

23. Thomas Gouge, *Christian Directions, Shewing How to Walk with God All the Day Long* (London: R. Ibbitson and M. Wright, 1661), 65.

24. Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (repr., Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1998), 553. Cf. White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 14.

25. Henry Scudder, *The Christian Man's Calling* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), 103–4. Cf. William Bates, "On Divine Meditation," in *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates, D.D.*, ed. W. Farmer (repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1990), 3:113–65.

26. Thomas Watson, *Gleanings from Thomas Watson* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 106.

27. Watson, *Sermons*, 238.

28. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 17:270.

29. Watson, *Sermons*, 238.

30. Henry Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk, in Holy Security and Peace*, 6th ed. (1635; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1984), 108.

31. Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 549.

32. Watson, *Sermons*, 239.

33. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 17:272.

34. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 271.

35. Watson, *Sermons*, 240.

36. James Ussher, *A Method for Meditation: or, A Manuall of Divine Duties, Fit for Every Christians Practice* (London: for Joseph Nevill, 1656), 21.

37. Johann Albrecht Bengel, *New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), 1:xxxix.

38. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 96–101.

39. Bates, "On Divine Meditation," in *Works*, 3:124–25.

40. Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 555.

41. Bates, "On Divine Meditation," in *Works*, 126–27. Thomas Watson makes the strongest case for morning meditations (*Sermons*, 250–54).

42. See [Westminster Divines], "Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day," in *Directory for the Publique Worship of God* (London: T. R. and E. M. for the Company of Stationers, 1651).

43. Gouge, *Christian Directions*, 66–67.

44. Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 560.

45. Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 561–63.

46. William Fenner, *The Use and Benefit of Divine Meditation* (London: for John Stafford, 1657), 10.

47. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 17:298.

48. Bates, “On Divine Meditation,” in *Works*, 3:125.
49. Manton, “Sermons upon Genesis 24:63,” in *Works*, 17:299.
50. Ussher, *A Method for Meditation*, 30–31; White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 29.
51. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 173.
52. Ussher, *A Method for Meditation*, 32–33.
53. Huntley, *Hall and Protestant Meditation*, 80–81.
54. Bates, “On Divine Meditation,” in *Works*, 136–39; Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 567–70.
55. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 172.
56. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 164–68.
57. George Swinnock, *The Christian Man’s Calling*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 2:417.
58. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 178–84. Cf. Gouge, *Christian Directions*, 70–73.
59. Manton, “Sermons upon Genesis 24:63,” in *Works*, 17:281.
60. Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 579–90.
61. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 24.
62. Paul Baynes, *A Help to True Happinesse* (London: R. Y[oung] for Edward Brewster, 1635).
63. Bates, “On Divine Meditation,” in *Works*, 3:145.
64. Fenner, *The Use and Benefit of Divine Meditation*, 16–23.
65. Ussher, *A Method for Meditation*, 39.
66. William Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant, the Work and Way of Meditation, God’s Return to the Soul or Nation, Together with His Preventing Mercy: In Ten Sermons*, in *The Works of the Rev. William Bridge* (1845; repr., Beaver Falls, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 3:153.
67. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 108.
68. Watson, *Sermons*, 269, 271.
69. White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 53.
70. Watson, *Sermons*, 269.
71. Greenham, “Grave Counsels and Godly Observations,” in *Works*, 41.
72. Joseph Hall, *The Art of Meditation* (Jenkintown, Pa.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), 26–27.
73. Gouge, *Christian Directions*, 70.
74. Ussher, *A Method for Meditation*, 43.
75. Hall, *The Art of Meditation*, 37–60.
76. Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold*, 409.
77. Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 702.
78. Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 95–96. For how to meditate on heaven, see White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 281–94; Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 620–52; Thomas Case, *The Select Works of Thomas Case*, 1–232 (second book).
79. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 4.
80. Ussher, *A Method for Meditation*, 49.
81. Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 549–50.
82. White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*, 88.
83. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 88–96. Cf. Manton, “Sermons upon Genesis 24:63,” in *Works*, 17:288–97.
84. Edward Reynolds, *Meditation on the Holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Last Supper*, in *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 3:1–172.
85. John Owen, *Sacramental Discourses*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 9:558–63.
86. Nathanael Ranew, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 280–321.
87. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 40–42.

88. Watson, *Sermons*, 256.

89. Bates, "On Divine Meditation," in *Works*, 3:131.

90. Fenner, *The Use and Benefit of Divine Meditation*, 3.

91. Hooker, *The Application of Redemption*, 217.

92. Bates, "On Divine Meditation," in *Works*, 3:135.

93. Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant*, in *Works*, 3:133.

94. Cf. Oliver Heywood, *The Whole Works of the Rev. Oliver Heywood*, (Idle, U.K.: by John Vint for F. Westley, et al., 1825), 2:276–81.

95. Thomas Brooks, "A Word to the Reader," in *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, 8; "Epistle Dedicatory," in *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, 291, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander Grosart (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust), *Works*, 1:8, 291.

96. Thomas Manton, *Sermons upon Psalm 119*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1874), 6:145.

97. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 17:283.

98. Bates, "On Divine Meditation," in *Works*, 3:122–23.

99. Manton, "Sermons upon Genesis 24:63," in *Works*, 17:285. Cf. Hooker, *The Application of Redemption*, 230–40.

100. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 28–40.

101. Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 549.

102. Bridge, "On Divine Meditation," in *Works*, 3:125.

103. Samuel Ward, *A Collection of Sermons and Treatises* (London, 1636), 69–70.

104. Manton, *Sermons upon Psalm 119*, in *Works*, 7:480.

105. Manton, *Sermons upon Psalm 119*, in *Works*, 6:145.

106. Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*, 58–75.

107. Edmond Smith, *A Tree by a Stream: Unlock the Secrets of Active Meditation* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1995), 36.

108. Ranew, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation*, 33.

109. Watson, *Sermons*, 241–43.

Chapter 56

The Puritans on Conscience

> *We can do nothing well without joy, and a good conscience, which is the ground of joy.*
>
> —RICHARD SIBBES[1]

Protestant theology is known for its focus on conscience. Consider Martin Luther, whose insight into justification by faith came to him while he was agonizing over matters of conscience. He was so broken by knowing his sin that he could not quiet his conscience no matter how he tried. Luther's Christianity was a religion of conscience, not only in the matter of sin and guilt, but also in the matter of Scripture and the obedience that it required.

At Worms, when Luther was asked to recant the views he had expressed in his books, he replied, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."[2] By using the word *safe,* Luther meant that going against one's conscience endangers one's very soul. So he stood before men and surrendered himself to the hands of God to show how far he was willing to go to confess what Christianity was about.

John Calvin treated conscience within the context of Christian liberty. He said conscience stands between God and us as we appear before the tribunal of God. He defined conscience as "a sense of divine justice, as an additional witness" that will not allow people "to conceal their sins or to elude accusation at the tribunal of the supreme Judge."[3]

From the time of Luther through the Puritan era, nearly all leaders of the Reformation stressed that man's conscience must correspond with the Word of God. The Word of God is given to us to instruct our consciences, and consciences are given to us so that we may live in subjection to God's Word. The Puritans focused on this relationship and fleshed it out more fully than the Reformers had done. The Puritan preacher's most momentous task was awakening and guiding the human conscience. Conscience was a tremendous

and inescapable reality to the Puritans.

Several Puritans wrote books on conscience. William Perkins (1558–1602) wrote *A Discourse of Conscience wherein Is Set Down the Nature, Properties, and Differences Thereof: as Also the Way to Get and Keep a Good Conscience*;[4] William Ames (1576–1633) wrote *Conscience, with the Power and Cases Thereof*;[5] William Fenner (1600–1640) wrote *The Souls Looking-Glasse, Lively Representing Its Estate before God: With a Treatise of Conscience; Wherein the Definitions and Distinctions Thereof Are Unfolded, and Severall Cases Resolved*;[6] and Nathanael Vincent (1638–1697) wrote *Heaven upon Earth: or, A Discourse Concerning Conscience*.[7] These books helped formulate a Puritan theology of conscience, which is critical for understanding the importance of the conscience for Puritans and the distinctive Puritan approach to counseling. In this chapter, we will first look at the Puritan view of the nature of the conscience as created by God; second, the corrupt state of the conscience due to man's sin; and third, the restoration of conscience by the Word and Spirit of Christ.

The Nature of the Conscience According to the Puritans, the conscience is a universal aspect of human nature by which God has established His authority in the soul for men to judge themselves rationally.

Everyone Has a Conscience The Puritan authors began their works on conscience by stressing, first, that Scripture, experience, and "the light of nature" affirm that every person has a conscience.[8] For example, Nathanael Vincent wrote,

> *This thing, called conscience, is in everyone;* there is no man without it. You may as well suppose a man without an understanding as without a conscience; and without a power to know anything, as without a power to reflect upon himself. Every reasonable soul, being capable both of sin and grace, is endued with a power of reflecting upon itself, that sin may be condemned and grace may be approved. All are called upon to "consider their ways" (Hag. 1:5, 7), but to take our own ways into consideration is the work of conscience; conscience therefore is in all.[9]

Vincent went on to say, "This conscience, *when awakened, will deal plainly with the greatest…. Conscience is not to be escaped;* we can no more fly from conscience than we can run away from ourselves."[10]

Fenner added, "The Lord engraved conscience in man when he created him at first. True it is, since the fall of man conscience is miserably corrupted; but man can never put it off: Conscience continueth forever in every man whether he be in earth or heaven or hell."[11] He went on to stress that conscience is

irrepressible (witness Joseph's brothers' guilt twenty years after their crime), supreme (both as a witness and a commander), and intimate (i.e., privy to and spying out everything we think, say, and do).12

Those who deny the existence of a conscience are motivated more by their sin than their conviction. Vincent wrote, "The true cause why stupid sinners say there is no such thing as conscience, is this, Conscience does accurse, and reproach, and disquiet them, and they first wishing there were no such thing, employ their corrupt reason to argue against it."13

Norman Clifford writes that for the Puritans,

> the witness of conscience in man's soul was the means by which all natural knowledge of God was sustained. The presence of conscience meant the presence of God's witness and ambassador in the soul of man ever reminding him of his responsibility towards God. This served to deprive man of every excuse for not believing in God and for not fulfilling His lawful will (Rom. 1:19, 20).14

Conscience Empowers Self-Knowledge and Self-Judgment Samuel Ward (1577–1640), following the medieval theologians Hugo of St. Victor (c. 1096–1141) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), wrote of conscience as the soul's God-given ability to reflect upon itself.15 Earlier, Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) had written, "For what is conscience, but the soul itself reflecting upon itself? It is the property of the reasonable soul and the excellency of it, that it can return upon itself."16

Most Puritan theologians, from William Perkins on, defined conscience as a rational faculty that provides moral self-knowledge and moral judgment dealing with questions authoritatively as God's voice in terms of right and wrong, duty and desert.17 In making this point, the Puritans sometimes appealed to the word *conscience* itself. They argued that conscience is derived from two Latin words: *scientia*, which means "knowledge," and *con*, a prefix implying community or joint sharing in something—in this case, knowledge shared jointly with God. *Conscientia* thus means knowledge that is shared with God, or knowledge of us that God shares with us.

So conscience expresses the moral consciousness or self-knowledge that we have, under God and in the presence of God, of having done right or wrong. Simply put, conscience is judgmental knowledge of our thoughts, words, and actions as God Himself knows us.18 Thus, knowledge and conscience inform each other. As Thomas Adams (1583–1652) wrote, "Knowledge directs conscience; conscience perfects knowledge."19

William Ames defines "conscience" at the beginning of his book on the

subject: “A man’s judgment of himself according to the judgment of God on him.”[20] Variations of this definition keep surfacing in Puritan writings. The Puritans followed Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) in viewing conscience as a part of practical reason, that is, an exercise of the mind of man passing moral judgments.[21] They did not view conscience as a faculty distinct from the ordinary exercises of reason. They would not have accepted any analysis that separated reason and conscience. That is sometimes done in later philosophy, but the Puritans did not do it.[22]

Rather, the Puritans viewed conscience as reason in action on practical moral matters—that is, reason passing judgments upon what is right and wrong. So when the Puritans call conscience “God’s deputy and vice-regent within us,” “God’s spy in our bosoms,” and “God’s sergeant he employs to arrest the sinner,” we must not dismiss these ideas as quaint fancies. They represent a serious attempt to do justice to the human and biblical conception of conscience that our experience reflects: seeing conscience as a *witness* declaring facts (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12); a *mentor* prohibiting evil and prescribing standards (Acts 24:16; Rom. 13:5); and a *judge* telling us of our ill desert (1 John 3:20–21). The New Testament confirms that definition. For example, Paul testifies in Romans 2:15: “Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.”[23]

In short, the Puritans taught that the conscience functions as a spiritual nervous system, which uses guilt to inform us that something is wrong and needs correction. Failing to heed the warnings of conscience can lead only to the hardening or searing of the conscience, which in the end will bring us to destruction. Sibbes compared the authority of the conscience to a divine court within the human soul, where it serves as witness, accuser, judge, and executioner.[24]

Conscience Reasons Syllogistically The Puritans depicted the reasoning of conscience as a syllogistic form, much as Thomas Aquinas did.[25] Syllogistic reasoning as a method dates back to Aristotle (384–322 BC), who claimed it is the only valid form of reasoning about facts or values.[26] This form of reasoning includes a major premise stating a general principle, then a minor premise stating an observation or fact, then a conclusion that results from putting these premises together.

In his treatise on conscience, Ames illustrated the reasoning of conscience with two syllogisms; the first, which condemns, and the second, which offers comfort. The major premise of the first syllogism is *He that lives in sin shall die.*

The minor premise is *I live in sin.* The conclusion is *Therefore I shall die*.[27]

Ames also offered a syllogism of conscience that arrives at a happier conclusion. The major premise is *Whoever believes in Christ shall not die but live.* The minor premise is *I believe in Christ.* If this is established as true, the believer is free to draw the conclusion *Therefore I shall not die but live*.[28] The Puritans say all the reasonings of conscience have this syllogistic form and end up either excusing or accusing us.

Perkins summarized these reasonings of conscience as follows:

> To *accuse* is an action of conscience giving judgment that this or that thing was evil done…. To *condemn* is another action of the Conscience joined with the former, whereby it giveth judgment that a man by this or that sin hath deserved death…. To *excuse*, is an action of conscience giving judgment that the thing is well done. To *absolve*, is an action of the conscience giving judgment that a man is free or clear from fault and so from punishment.[29]

How applicable is syllogistic reasoning today? Packer says,

> Syllogistic reasoning may seem a bit rationalistic to us today, but the reasonings of conscience, like most of our thinking processes, are often so compressed that we do not recognize the mechanics by which they are operating. They flash through our mind as fast as messages flash through computers. All we are consciously aware of is the conclusion. But if you examine the conclusions of conscience, you will find that the Puritan doctrine is vindicated. The conclusions of the conscience all have behind them major premises concerning general truths and minor premises concerning matters of particular fact. Check it out and see.[30]

In short, conscience is largely autonomous from our will in its tasks and reasonings. Though we may suppress or stifle conscience, it normally speaks independently of our will and sometimes even contrary to our will. It speaks up when we would really rather it keep silent. And yet when it speaks, it is strangely distinct from us. It stands over us, we feel, addressing us as if it had an absolute authority we did not give it and we cannot take from it. So, like the Puritans, we still personify conscience and speak of it today as God's spokesman in the soul. Conscience is not a mere flight of fancy; it is a necessary part of our moral nature and experience.

Conscience Represents God in Our Soul The Puritans illustrated the divinely authorized role of conscience in the soul with a number of lively pictures and personifications.

Conscience is God's *ambassador* or *deputy*. Conscience must constantly remind man of his duties as a human created in God's image. David Clarkson (1622–1686) wrote, "Conscience is God's deputy, and must in the exercise of this office confine itself to the orders and instructions of the sovereign Lord."[31] George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673) said, "Conscience is the deputy-deity in the little world, man."[32]

So, too, conscience serves as God's *preacher*. John Trapp (1601–1669) called conscience God's "domestic chaplain."[33] And William Fenner said,

> [Conscience] is a preacher also to tell us our duty both towards God and towards man: yea, it is a powerful preacher; it exhorteth, urgeth, provoketh: yea, [it is] the most powerful preacher that can be; it will cause the stoutest and stubbornest heart under heaven to quake now and then; it will never let us alone till it have brought us either to God or to the devil. Conscience is joined in commission with God's own Spirit to be an instructor unto us in the way we should walk, so that the Spirit and it are resisted and obeyed together, grieved or delighted together. We cannot sin against conscience but we sin also against God's Spirit; we cannot check our own conscience but we check and quench the Holy Spirit of God.[34]

Conscience is God's *register* or *notary*. Conscience is associated with memory. Thus Immanuel Bourne (1590–1672) said, "In the memory [conscience] is a register, to witness what is done or what is not done."[35] Fenner says conscience acts as God's "register-book that should be opened at the Day of Judgment, wherein is set down our thoughts, words and deeds."[36] This register of our internal and external activities will serve as the basis upon which we are excused or accused on judgment day.

Conscience is God's *executor of judgment*. Conscience is associated with judgment both today and in the future judgment. In a sense, conscience helps the Spirit arrest the sinner. William Gurnall (1616–1679) wrote, "Conscience is God's sergeant he employs to arrest the sinner."[37] Clifford writes, "Conscience was God's present witness or voice in man's soul possessing the power to give testimony of God's Judgment of man here and now. In this sense conscience was described as the internal executor of either God's wrath or His peace."[38] Vincent wrote,

> Here 'twill be needful to note a difference between consciences condemning a sinner now, and the Lord's condemning him hereafter: that sentence which Christ will pronounce at the last day, will be peremptory, unalterable; therefore that judgment is called *Eternal Judgment*, Heb. 6.2. There is no appeal from that Tribunal, no reversing of the sentence…. But

> when conscience does at present condemn a sinner, it does not preclude and shut up the door of hope against him; its sentence of condemnation is but conditional, in case of continuance and obstinacy in sin, but if the unbeliever will believe in Jesus, and the impenitent will mourn for their iniquities, and turn from them to God, then they shall no longer be under condemnation.[39]

Conscience is our *overseer*. Conscience governs our entire life, the Puritans said. When it functions properly, conscience controls all of our faculties. Richard Bernard (1568–1641) wrote, "Conscience meddles with our understanding, our thoughts, our memory, our wills and the affections of our hearts."[40] John Robinson (1575–1625) was grateful for this work of the conscience, saying, "And surely, a great good work of God it is that he hath created, and set such an overseer as this conscience is, in the soul of man, by which, if he do anything amiss, he is checked in secret, that so by repentance he may find mercy at God's hands."[41]

Conscience is our *mirror*. The Puritans taught that conscience serves as a looking glass or mirror so that we can determine our true spiritual state in accord with the mind of God. According to Robert Harris (1581–1658), "[Conscience] 'tis set in man to make known to man, in what terms he stands with God, thence its name; thence its name; therefore fitly termed the soul's glass, the understanding's light."[42] Thomas Adams simply said, "Conscience is to the soul as the stomach is to the body; sin doth distemper the one, as unwholesome meat or surfeits [over-eating] do the other."[43]

Normally the judgment of conscience is supreme, impartial, faithful, and private, Fenner said. He went on to say, "Ye need not go far to know what state you are in: there is that in your bosom that can decide the matter."[44] Thus, we ought to use our conscience regularly to examine ourselves, for with the Spirit's assistance, our conscience will either accuse us and call for fresh repentance before God, or excuse us, which will provide us with peace that passes understanding.

In summary, the Puritans taught that human nature universally includes a conscience, that is, the representation of the voice of God, authoritatively leading us to judge ourselves by rational deductions from our knowledge of God's will and knowledge of ourselves.

The Corruption of Conscience Conscience no longer functions rightly in man because of the fall. Daniel Webber writes that the Puritans were thorough in their understanding and diagnosis of the fallen human condition.[45] So when they dealt with the doctrine of sin, the Puritans called sin *sin,* declaring it to be moral

rebellion against God. They preached about sins of commission and sins of omission, in thought, word, and deed. Works such as Jeremiah Burroughs's (c. 1600–1646) *The Evil of Evils: The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*, stress the heinousness of sin. In sixty-seven chapters, Burroughs teaches that the least sin involves more evil than the greatest affliction; sin and God are contrary to each other; sin opposes all that is good; sin is the poison of all evils; sin bears an infinite dimension and character; and sin makes us comfortable with the devil.[46] Sin is not merely a choice; it is a condition of depravity inherited from the fall of Adam in Paradise, a depravity that makes us unfit for God, holiness, and heaven.[47]

The Puritans viewed the conscience as profoundly affected by man's fall into sin and misery. The Puritans wrote about bad, evil, or guilty consciences. Fenner said a guilty conscience is like "a hell to men here on earth."[48] It points to an eternal hell to come, where the memory of a guilty conscience will never fade.[49] "A guilty conscience is like a whirlpool, drawing in all to itself which would otherwise pass by," Thomas Fuller (1608–1661) quipped.[50] He wrote, "A wounded conscience is able to un-paradise paradise itself."[51] John Flavel (1628–1691) wrote that a guilty conscience "is the devil's anvil, on which he fabricates all those swords and spears with which the guilty sinner pierces and wounds himself."[52] And John Trapp said, "One small drop [of guilt] troubles the whole sea of outward comforts."[53]

But worse than a conscience that terrifies the soul is a conscience that pacifies a soul still under condemnation. The Puritans taught that, due to our fall in Adam, human nature is prone to be self-deceiving and to backslide.[54] Unbelievers live with an "evil conscience," either because they convince themselves they are at peace with God when they are not or because they settle for a lifestyle in which they are not at peace with God. Even believers are prone to live with a conscience that is less than "good"—that is, a conscience that is not at peace with God through the gospel and does not examine itself so as to remain alert and tender to every moral infraction. When the conscience is not good, it can also prompt actions and reasonings that are unscriptural and unreliable. Both believers and unbelievers try to talk their consciences into a false sense of peace.

The Puritans wrote a great deal about various types of evil consciences. Here is a summary of six kinds of evil consciences that they described, moving from the least to the most evil.

1. The Trembling or Doubting Conscience This type of conscience was included by the Puritans in the list of evil consciences as long as it does not drive its

owner to Jesus Christ for salvation. The trembling or troubled conscience accuses the soul of sin and threatens the soul with God's wrath and the expectation of death and judgment. The doubting soul hangs in suspense, scarcely knowing whether it is more sinful to believe or to doubt and not presume. Though this conscience is the most hopeful of evil consciences because it is awake enough to have some serious impressions of eternal truths, and therefore is most likely to be saved, it is still evil because it cannot give its owner peace and assurance until it finds rest in Christ.[55] Fenner's first solution for this type of conscience is that you should not allow it to doubt but are called to believe and embrace the offer of grace in the gospel, using the means of grace diligently and casting yourself upon the gospel grace of God, waiting upon God to make His calling and His Son's grace effectual.[56]

2. The Moralist Conscience This conscience has some good elements, for it is grounded upon God's law and thus, wrote Richard Bernard, it "produceth much good for the exercise of moral virtues in men's living together in societies, to preserve justice, equity, to do good works, and to uphold a common peace among them."[57] The moralist conscience can exercise outwardly moral virtues and good works due to the common work of the Holy Spirit. Vincent wrote,

> There is some light remaining in the conscience, and though the heart be extremely evil, willing to deceive, [and] will be deceived, yet the conscience has some kind of tenderness and faithfulness left in it, unless by long custom in sin it be made senseless and stupid. I readily yield that conscience is corrupted also in a great measure by the Fall…. But yet still 'tis a great mercy that conscience does so much as it does; the light might have been totally extinguished, and the Lord might have suffered us to have run full speed in our wicked ways to destruction without any monitor within to check or control us.[58]

Despite its admirable qualities, a moralist conscience is substantially different from the good conscience of the regenerate. The conscience of the moralist falls short in God's book of reckoning. Bernard said,

> A moralist may lift up himself, as the young rich man in the Gospel did, yet can it not give him assurance of eternal life; for first, the law cannot bind the conscience of a Christian to believe his salvation by the law, because the law is weak in this through man's faultiness, and the Gospel teaches salvation another way. Secondly, the heathen, we see, have this moral conscience, [as do] many unregenerate persons in the church. Thirdly, an excellent moralist, in his own apprehension, for the love of the world, may

> leave Christ, as the young man did, Matt. 19:22. Fourthly, because a moral righteousness cannot exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; but the righteousness, by which we must be saved, must exceed that, Matt. 5:20.[59]

The moralist conscience is not transformed by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ's blood. It is only illuminated by the light of nature, whereas the conscience of the regenerate is illuminated by the gospel and then, in the words of Ephraim Huit (c. 1608–1644), bound by "the law written anew in the mind and heart (Heb. 8:10)."[60] Thus, the conscience of the moralist never can do any real, abiding, spiritual good, for his conscience is never motivated by loving God above all and his neighbor as himself. It does not operate by saving faith and thus does not serve God's glory.[61]

3. The Scrupulous Conscience The scrupulous conscience is in many ways a counterfeit form of the good conscience, making much out of religious duties and moral trifles. It is scrupulously religious but does not look to Christ alone for salvation nor find peace in Christ. The scrupulous conscience "determines a thing to be lawful, yet scarcely to be done, lest it should be unlawful," as Samuel Annesley (c. 1620–1696) said.[62] In other words, it is so afraid of sinning that it avoids even doing what is good and upright.

Then, too, the scrupulous conscience engages in the kind of self-examination that produces aimless introspection and inner gloom. Some morbid souls practice such inward ruminations even today. That ought to be discouraged, the Puritans said, for it does no good to examine ourselves apart from Christ and the gospel.

The Puritans said self-examination, though necessary, should never be divorced from the following:

- *Jesus Christ*—for every look you take to yourself, take ten looks to Christ, for Christ alone can be the object of true faith;
- *The Word of God*—which provides the proper grounds of self-examination and marks and fruits of grace; and
- *The Holy Spirit*—who alone can shed light upon His own saving work by means of the Word.

The Puritans would agree with Calvin, who said that if you contemplate yourself apart from Christ, the Word, and the Spirit, "that is sure damnation."[63] On the other hand, if you contemplate yourself in Christ by God's Word and Spirit, much good can accrue, for self-examination can assure us that our salvation is based on the right foundation, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and

that we have a personal stake in that salvation.64

4. The Erring Conscience This conscience includes various forms of ignorance and misperception because it wrongly applies God's Word. Samuel Annesley wrote, "Conscience is sometimes deceived through ignorance of what is right, by apprehending a false rule for a true, an error for the will of God: sometimes, through ignorance of the fact, by misapplying a right rule to a wrong action. Conscience, evil informed, takes human traditions and false doctrines, proposed under the show of Divine authority to be the will of God."65

The Puritans debated much about whether an erroneous conscience forces its owner to obey error. Most Puritans agreed with Annesley, who wrote,

> The plain truth is, error cannot bind us to follow it; an erring conscience may so bind, as it may be a sin to go against it; but it can never so bind, as it may be a virtue to follow it. To follow an erring conscience is for the blind sinner to follow his blind conscience, till both fall into the ditch. The violation of conscience is always evil, and the following of an erring conscience is evil; but there is a middle way that is safe and good; namely, the informing of conscience better by God's Word, and following of it accordingly.66

As Philip Craig points out, "This dilemma underscores what Fenner has called 'the infinite necessity of knowledge' as well as the 'sacred sovereignty of conscience.'"67

5. The Drowsy Conscience Based on Romans 11:8, which speaks of God giving sinners over to "the spirit of slumber," the Puritans had numerous names for a drowsy conscience, including a sleepy, stumbling, or benumbed conscience. Annesley wrote of people with such a conscience, "*One of the worst kinds of conscience in the world, is the sleepy conscience.*—Such is the conscience of every unconverted person, that is not yet in horror. Their spirit, that is, their conscience, is asleep (Rom. 11:8); that as bodily sleep binds up all the senses and animal spirits, so this spiritual (or rather unspiritual) sleepiness binds up the soul from all sense of the evil of sin, and want of grace; and therefore, in conversion, Christ doth awaken the conscience."68

The drowsy conscience makes sinners indifferent to the reality of Scripture's truths. Such sinners live in a fog, unaware of impending death and judgment and unmoved by the horrors of hell. A drowsy conscience produces a silent conscience, making it like a "sleepy careless coachman who giveth the horses the reins and letteth them run whither they will," Fenner said.69

6. The Seared Conscience This is the worst of all consciences because it puts people almost beyond the hope of salvation. As Perkins wrote, "Now the heart of man being exceedingly obstinate and perverse, carrieth him to commit sins even against the light of nature and common sense: by practice of such sins the light of nature is extinguished: and then cometh the reprobate mind, which judges evil good, and good evil: after this follows the *seared conscience* in which there is no feeling or remorse; and after this comes an *exceeding greediness* to all manner of sin (Eph. 4:18; Rom. 1:28)."[70]

The seared conscience belongs to those whose destiny is determined by their hardness. It often belongs to people who have sinned against the Holy Spirit and are irrevocably lost already in this life. Fenner says that a seared conscience can "swallow down sin like drink and without any remorse." It is God's greatest judgment this side of hell: "By this the only means of repentance is taken away. It is a 1000 to 1 if they ever do" repent.[71]

The Restoration of Conscience In God's restoration of His image in the soul, He also restores the conscience. This takes place in awakening the conscience by preaching, informing the conscience by Scripture, healing the conscience by the gospel, and exercising the conscience in self-examination.

Conscience Must Be Awakened by Preaching We today might say that the best preachers teach doctrine most effectively, but the Puritans believed the supreme excellence of a preacher was both his ability to teach doctrine clearly and his power to apply the Word to everyday living.

One mark of a powerful preacher, according to the Puritans, was the way he would "rip up" men's consciences to show them what was at the bottom of their hearts.[72] The purpose is to see what is inside, or underneath, as you would rip up a cushion to get all the feathers out. Puritans valued preachers who would rip up the conscience, search the heart, and make Hebrews 4:12 real for their listeners: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The best preachers, the Puritans said, show us how the Word of God goes to the very core of our being.

How does a minister learn to do this? By letting the Word of God minister to the pastor in his conscience and in his life. Deep will then call to deep; if you have experienced the Word of God ripping up your conscience, you will use it to rip up the consciences of others. That is one reason the Scottish Puritan David Dickson (c. 1583–1662) told a young man being ordained that he should spend

all of his ministry studying two books: the book of Scripture and the book of his own heart. Likewise, John Owen (1616–1683) said, "If the Word does not dwell with power in us it will not pass with power from us."[73] And the biographer of Robert Bolton (1572–1631) says that he never taught a godly point without having first worked it out in his own heart.

These are all ways of saying that, for the Puritans, application begins at home. You learn how to apply the Word of God by first letting it apply to you. Then you will know how to use it to rip up the consciences of others. Application is the preacher's highway from the head to the heart. Good preaching does not stop short with the head; it runs down into the heart.

The Westminster Directory for Public Worship says application is difficult for the preacher, for it requires "much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant." Yet application is necessary so that a preacher's listeners "may feel the Word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest and give glory to God."[74]

Conscience Must Be Informed by Scripture For the Puritans, conscience is the faculty that God puts in us to be a sounding board for applying His Word to our lives. Our consciences should be weighted with the Word of God; they should be educated by what is taught in Scripture and trained to judge according to Scripture. Then the voice of conscience will be the voice of God indeed.

If conscience is not guided by Scripture, it will still function, but according to inadequate standards. It will fail to condemn when it should; it will justify things that ought not to be justified. What appears to be the voice of God will not be the voice of God. The sense of being judged by someone external to yourself will still be apparent, but the standards by which the conscience is operating will be inadequate. The falsely instructed conscience may justify what has been done, but the person may still be an unpardoned sinner in God's sight.

The Puritans believed the only cure for a falsely calibrated conscience is for the conscience to be thoroughly educated in Scripture standards. Our conscience must be controlled by God, they say. The Westminster Confession (20.2) strongly emphasizes that God alone is Lord of the conscience. One person may try to tyrannize another's conscience, but only God may absolutely control our conscience.

It is imperative that our conscience be tuned to the mind and will of God. Otherwise we cannot help but go the wrong way. If you flout conscience you err because conscience should never be resisted. If you follow an errant conscience

you again go astray because an errant conscience should not be followed. There is no way out of the situation except to get your conscience properly educated and trained.

Richard Baxter (1615–1691) explained,

> Make not your own judgments or consciences your law, or the maker of your duty; which is but the discerner of the law of God, and of the duty which he maketh you, and of your own obedience or disobedience to him. There is a dangerous error grown too common in the world, that a man is bound to do everything, which his conscience telleth him is the will of God; and that every man must obey his conscience, as if it were the lawgiver of the world; whereas, indeed, it is not ourselves, but God that is our lawgiver.[75]

Baxter said that "an erring conscience is not to be obeyed, but to be better informed."[76] Since conscience represents God's authority to us, unless a Christian informs his conscience by the Scriptures he is trapped in a moral dilemma by his erring conscience. Baxter wrote, "If you follow it you break the law of God in doing that which he forbids you; if you forsake it and go against it, you reject the authority of God, in doing what you think he forbids you."[77] Therefore we must compare the book of our conscience with the book of Scripture. Where conscience is lacking, let us copy Scripture's words into it. Where conscience differs from Scripture, let us correct the book of human conscience with the book of God.[78]

The dependence of conscience on Scripture reflects the Puritan esteem for the Bible in all things. Consider that your theological basis determines your approach to counseling. The Puritans never forgot that one's approach to every area of life must be based upon theology. William Ames said, "There is no precept of universal truth relevant to living well in domestic economy, morality, political life, or lawmaking which does not rightly pertain to theology."[79] Ken Sarles concludes, "As far as the English Puritans were concerned, every conceivable psychological need could be met and every imaginable psychological problem could be solved through a direct application of biblical truth."[80]

The Puritans considered the doctrine of conscience critical for theology, ethics, and counseling. That allowed the Puritans to cross the bridge from theology to ethics,[81] just as their theological counterparts, such as Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706) and Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), did in the Netherlands. Both wove together systematic theology with spiritual experience and Christian ethics in their massive works.[82]

The Puritan doctrine of conscience also reflected their tremendous awareness of the glory of the God revealed in Scripture. The Puritans preached the doctrine of God without equivocation. They proclaimed God's majestic being, His trinitarian personality, and His glorious attributes with reverential fear, zeal, and obsession.[83] Their counseling was rooted in a robust biblical theism, unlike modern counseling, which too often approaches God as a next-door neighbor who can adjust His attributes to our feelings, needs, and desires. Puritan counseling shows how everything in the world is based on Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God," and is designed for God's glory. The Puritans understood that the doctrines of atonement, justification, and reconciliation are meaningless apart from a true understanding of God, who condemns sin, atones for sinners, justifies them, and reconciles them to Himself. The theological basis of how we view God determines our approach in counseling. A God-centered approach to the human condition begins by informing the conscience with Scripture.

As God's representative in the soul, a good conscience nourished by Scripture works a constant awareness that we live in the presence of the God of glory. Vincent wrote, "A good conscience will make men set themselves as before God continually. 'I have lived,' says the Apostle, 'in good conscience before God' [Acts 23:1]."[84] Vincent said, "There is no attribute of God that we are less able to deny, than his omniscience, and yet how rarely are our hearts awed by it. We should watch our hearts and thoughts, and strive against the vanity, and wickedness, and impertinency of these, as those that are persuaded we are before an Heart-Searcher."[85]

Conscience Must Be Healed by the Gospel Since all men are fallen sinners, only a gospel-applied conscience can bring inner peace. The Puritans exposed sin both from the pulpit and in private to bring sinners to contrition, confession, and repentance and to drive them to Jesus Christ. In works such as Thomas Taylor's *Christ Revealed,* Thomas Goodwin's *Christ Our Mediator,* Alexander Grosse's *Happiness of Enjoying and Making a Speedy Use of Christ,* Isaac Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus,* Ralph Robinson's or Philip Henry's *Christ All in All,* John Brown's *Christ: The Way, the Truth, and the Life,* John Owen's *The Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ,* and James Durham's *Christ Crucified,* the Puritans preached the whole Christ to the whole man.

The gospel application results in a good conscience that is at peace with God and the demands of His Word. The Puritans wrote much about a good conscience. "Conscience, it is either the greatest friend or the greatest enemy in the world," Richard Sibbes said.[86] He called conscience our "best friend" and wrote, "We can do nothing well without joy, and a good conscience, which is the

ground of joy."[87]

Thomas Fuller said, "A good conscience is the best divinity."[88] Matthew Henry (1662–1714) commented, "If we take care to keep a good conscience, we may leave it to God to take care of our good name."[89] Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) observed, "A good conscience and a good name is like a gold ring set with a rich diamond";[90] and William Gurnall said, "Peace of conscience is nothing but the echo of pardoning mercy."[91]

A good conscience finds peace through the gospel and its promises. God's promises are the means by which peace, pardon, acceptance, reconciliation to God, and affection between God and a person are offered to the conscience. The conscience must believe and rest in these promises. According to the Puritans, the most blessed thing in the world is to have a good conscience through the application of biblical promises. The saddest thing in the world is not to have a good conscience. The gospel invites us to apply to ourselves the word of grace, just as we are to apply to Christ for pardon according to the word of grace. Then conscience will tell us that because we have, by grace, believed and have sought pardon in the appointed manner, we are now forgiven for Jesus' sake.

What joyous peace this produces! Joseph Hall (1574–1656) said, "Happy is that man, that can be acquitted by himself in private, by others in public, and by God in both."[92] Such a man has a relieved and pacified conscience that removes doubts and fears and promotes assurance that all is well with his soul.[93]

It is important to note that it is by the Holy Spirit that the conscience lays hold of the gospel by faith in Christ's blood, finds peace with God, and has a growing assurance of salvation. Perkins said, "The principal agent and beginner thereof is the Holy Ghost, enlightening the mind and conscience with spiritual and divine light: and the instrument in this action is the ministry of the Gospel whereby the word of life is applied in the name of God to the person of every hearer and this certainty is by little and little conceived in a form of reasoning or practical syllogism framed in the mind by the Holy Ghost."[94] Gurnall said that the conscience is like a stiff lock—even if the key of God's promise fits it perfectly, it takes the strong hand of the Holy Spirit to turn the key, unlock the conscience, and quiet and fully satisfy the soul.[95]

The Puritans often address this question: If we have found peace in Christ, what must we do to maintain that peace? Fenner said,

> First, we must labour to prevent troubles of conscience by taking heed that we do nothing contrary to conscience…. Nothing that we get in any evil way will cheer and comfort us in time of need…. Secondly, if we will maintain our peace we must labor to have our hearts grounded in the

> assurance of the love of God…. Thirdly, we must use the exercise of faith in applying the blood of Christ. We must labour to purge and cleanse our consciences with it. If we find that we have sinned we must run presently [that is, immediately] to the blood of Christ to wash away our sin. We must not let the wound fester or exulcerate [become an infected sore] but presently [that is, immediately] get it healed…. As we sin daily, so he justifieth daily, and we must daily go to him for it…. We must every day eye the brazen serpent. Justification is an ever-running fountain, and therefore we cannot look to have all the water at once…. O let us then sue out a daily pardon…. Let us not sleep one night without a new pardon. Better sleep in a house full of adders and venomous beasts than sleep in one sin. O then be sure with the day to clear the sins of the day. Then shall our conscience have true peace.[96]

A good conscience is based upon Christ, but is guarded by our obedience (1 John 2:1–2, 5). Fenner was careful to say that our obedience is not the cause of our justification before God. Christ alone is our righteousness and the ground of a peaceful conscience. But sin hinders our fellowship with Christ and invites God's fatherly discipline; obedience testifies that we are reconciled to God and pleases our Father.[97] Thus a good conscience is not just a matter of a legal status but of a living relationship with God. Fenner also wrote, "Absolute perfection in obedience is not required unto evangelical peace."[98] Instead, a good conscience arises from a life of integrity and the fear of the Lord, where we seek to obey God with sincerity, in every area of life, and with humility over our sins and dependence on Christ and His Spirit.[99]

Fenner said there is no better friend than a conscience that knows peace with God by constantly going back to the cross. He elaborated on that thought, saying,

> A quiet conscience maketh a man to taste the sweetness of things heavenly and spiritual. It makes the Word to be to him as to David, *Sweeter than honey*…. A good conscience maketh a man taste sweetness in prayer…in a Sabbath…in the sacrament…. What is the reason so few of you taste sweetness in these things? The reason is this: Because ye have not the peace of a good conscience.[100]

We must search our hearts here. Do we think of our experience in worship, prayer, the Lord's Day, or anything else that pertains to godliness as sweetness? Fenner said that people who enjoy the peace of a good conscience experience *sweetness*. What is going on if we do not experience that kind of sweetness?[101]

Fenner continued, "A good, quiet conscience maketh a man taste sweetness in

all outward things: in meat, in drink, in sleep, in the company of friends…. The healthy man only can take pleasure in recreations, walks, meets, sports and the like; they yield no comfort to those that are bedridden, or sick, or half dead. But when the conscience is at peace the soul is all in good health."[102]

The Christian is more capable of enjoying God's good gifts than any unbeliever. That is to say, the Christian's pleasures are doubled because he is a Christian. Fenner said Christians have that sweetness even in times of trouble. He wrote,

> [A good conscience] sweeteneth evils to a man, as troubles, crosses, sorrows, afflictions. If a man hath true peace in his conscience it comforteth him in them all. When things abroad do disquiet us, how comfortable it is to have something at home to cheer us? So when troubles and afflictions without [i.e., outside of us] turmoil and vex us and add sorrow to sorrow, then to have peace within, the peace of conscience to allay all and quiet all, what a happiness is this? When sickness and death cometh, what will a good conscience be worth then? Sure more than all the world besides…. The conscience [that has laid hold of pardon in Christ] is God's echo of peace to the soul. In life, in death, in judgment, it is unspeakable comfort.[103]

A person with a good conscience has an enlightened, tender, and faithful conscience, and therefore can face death with peace. At the end of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* Mr. Honest is about to cross the River Jordan. He had asked Good Conscience to meet him at the river, and Good Conscience was there to help him through the final trial of death. Likewise, it is through the gift of a good conscience that God answers Simeon's prayer in Luke 2:29, saying, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

Conscience Must Be Exercised by Self-Examination The Puritans insisted that a conscience should be exercised in the discipline of self-examination, according to the Scriptures in general and to the moral law or Ten Commandments in particular. Self-examination is a discipline, the Puritans said. It includes asking yourself questions to know whether you truly are walking in obedience to the Word of God, asking yourself how you are progressing along the road of obedience to the Ten Commandments and their summary in the two great commandments of loving God above all and your neighbor as yourself. It is asking yourself questions that help you see how you measure against the standards set in the Sermon on the Mount. Watson wrote, "Self-examination is the setting up a court in conscience and keeping a register there, that by strict

scrutiny a man may know how things stand between God and his own soul…. A good Christian begins as it were the day of judgment here in his own soul."[104]

The Puritans believed self-examination should be undertaken at least once a week on Saturday to prepare for public worship. In such self-examination, you ask where you are spiritually, where you have been last week, and what particularly needs attention in terms of repentance and reformation, as well as making new commitments, new plans, and new resolves for a closer walk with the Lord. Only after such examination will you have a good conscience for worship on Sunday. This is doubly important if you are going to the Lord's Table.[105] Keep your conscience tender by constantly measuring yourself by the Word, and as you study the Word daily, keep your conscience tender in working out how these teachings apply to you now, but also for direction on what you should become. If you would keep your conscience in quiet peace, purge your conscience daily by repentance and by faith that appropriates Christ's blood, ground your conscience in the assurance of God's love, remain constant in obeying conscience, and don't act against your conscience in any way.

Conclusion: The Courage of a Good Conscience By its very nature, conscience must be active. But a good conscience acts out of knowledge of God's Word, promoting both scriptural obedience and scriptural liberty rather than legalism or carelessness about sin.

When the Puritan Richard Rogers (1551–1618) and an Anglican were riding horses one day, the Anglican commented, "I like you and your company very well, only you are too precise." Rogers explained why. "O sir," he said, "I serve a precise God!"[106] That was a marvelous answer, for the Puritans realized that we cannot be any less precise in obedience to God's Word than God is in His commanding. Remember that story when you encounter accusations brought against the Puritans or yourself for being too attentive to the details of Christian righteousness. A good conscience raises up the fear of God, but releases from the fear of men with their criticisms and complaints against the supposed rigors of obedience.

A good conscience does not promote legalism. Rather, it finds the greatest liberty: liberty to obey God despite great opposition. In the words of Vincent,

> A good conscience steels a man's heart with courage, and makes him fearless before his enemies. Paul earnestly beheld the council. He was not afraid to face them, because his conscience was clear. Nay, we read that Felix the judge trembled, while Paul the prisoner was confident. The reason was, because the judge had a bad conscience…but the prisoner being acquitted by a good conscience, did not tremble but rejoiced at the thoughts

of judgment to come.[107]

May God grant us all the steely backbone of a good conscience before Him.

1. Richard Sibbes, *An Exposition of 2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862–1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 3:223. Parts of this chapter and the next were delivered as a paper at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in Dallas, Texas, on October 29, 2011, and printed in *The Banner of Truth*, no. 585 (June 2012): 20–25 and no. 586 (July 2012): 13–18.

2. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 185.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.19.15.

4. William Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience* (London, 1596).

5. William Ames, *Conscience, with the Power and Cases Thereof* (London, 1639).

6. William Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*… (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, for John Rothwell, 1643).

7. Nathanael Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth* (London: for Thomas Parkhurst, 1676).

8. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 5–17.

9. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 17–18.

10. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 18–21.

11. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 23.

12. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 23.

13. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 5.

14. Norman Keith Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity in English Puritanism during the Seventeenth Century: Its Origins, Development and Significance" (PhD diss., University of London, 1957), 149.

15. Samuel Ward, "Balm from Gilead to Recover Conscience," in *Sermons and Treatises* (1636; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 97. See Gary Brady, "A Study of Ideas of the Conscience in Puritan Writings, 1590–1640" (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2006), 46.

16. Sibbes, *2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:208.

17. Most Puritans taught that the seat of the conscience is rooted in the reasonable soul or the understanding, in harmony with the Dominican and Thomistic tradition; a minority placed the seat of the conscience in the will, in accord with the Franciscan tradition. A few, such as Richard Baxter, refused to take sides (*A Christian Directory, or, A Body of Practical Divinity and Cases of Conscience*, in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme [London: James Duncan, 1830], 6:96–97). Practically speaking, this variance of views made no substantial difference (Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 149–56; cf. Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity during the Seventeenth Century, with Special Reference to Jeremy Taylor* [London: S.P.C.K., 1952], 67–69).

18. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 111.

19. Cited in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006), 107.

20. Ames, *Conscience*, 1. Packer says that Ames's definition comes from Aquinas (*Quest for Godliness*, 109).

21. Vincent quoted Aquinas's definition of conscience as the application of our knowledge to our actions to testify regarding our past actions, to judge and bind regarding possible future actions. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 30. He cited Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 1, Q. 79, art. 13. William Ames had a copy of the works of Thomas Aquinas in his library. Keith L. Sprunger, "The Learned Doctor Ames" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1963), 206.

22. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 111.

23. For a succinct summary of the nature and kinds of conscience, see Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience: Tending to Resolve Doubts* (London: R. I. for

Andrew Crook, 1649), 1–22.

24. Sibbes, *2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:210.

25. Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 235–37.

26. "A syllogism is a discourse in which, certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so. I mean by the last phrase that they produce the consequence, and by this, that no further term is required from without in order to make the consequence necessary." Aristotle, *Analytica Priora*, trans. A. J. Jenkinson, 1.1, quoted by Brady, 64, and available online at http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/, accessed January 17, 2011.

27. Ames, *Conscience*, 3.

28. Ames, *Conscience*, 3.

29. William Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience: Wherein Is Set Downe the Nature, Properties, and Differences Thereof*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612), 1:535–36.

30. J. I. Packer, lecture on the Puritans, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi.

31. David Clarkson, "The Lord Rules over All," in *The Works of David Clarkson* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 2:475.

32. George Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened by the Key of Regeneration*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 5:64.

33. Cited in Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold*, 106.

34. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 33.

35. Immanuel Bourne, *The Anatomie of Conscience* (London: G. E. and M. F. for Nathaniel Butter, 1623), 9.

36. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 33.

37. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 1:522.

38. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 158.

39. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 50–51.

40. Richard Bernard, *Christian See to Thy Conscience* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1631), 57ff.

41. John Robinson, *Observations Divine and Moral* (Amsterdam, 1625), 244.

42. Robert Harris, *The Works of Robert Harris* (London: James Flesher for John Bartlet, 1654), 2:18.

43. Thomas Adams, *An Exposition upon the Second Epistle General of St. Peter*, ed. James Sherman (1839; repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 588.

44. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 34–47.

45. Daniel Webber, "The Puritan Pastor as Counsellor," in *The Office and Work of the Minister*, Westminster Conference Papers, 1986 (London: Westminster Conference, 1987), 84.

46. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Evil of Evils* (1654; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995). Cf. Ralph Venning, *The Plague of Plagues* (1669; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965); Thomas Watson, *The Mischief of Sin* (1671; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994); Samuel Bolton, *Sin: The Greatest Evil*, in *Puritans on Conversion* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 1–69.

47. The most powerful Puritan work on the dread condition of original sin is Thomas Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness before God in Respect of Sin and Punishment*, vol. 10 of *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (1865; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006). The classic doctrinal Puritan work on the subject is Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1758; repr., New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970). The best secondary source on the Edwardsean view is C. Samuel Storms, *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985). Thomas Boston's classic, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (1720; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), focuses on the four states of innocence, depravity, grace, and glory, but his section on imputed and inherited depravity is especially poignant. He details how Adam's original sin broke man's relationship with God as well as each of the Ten

Commandments.

48. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 124.

49. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 125–26.

50. Thomas Fuller, *The Holy and Profane States* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1865), 102.

51. Thomas Fuller, *The Cause and Cure of a Wounded Conscience* (London: G. D. for John Williams, 1649), 28.

52. John Flavel, *Saint Indeed: or, The Great Work of a Christian, Opened and Pressed*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 5:455.

53. John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Hugh Martin (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1868), 3:39 (on Prov. 10:22).

54. Bernard, *Christian See to Thy Conscience*, 238.

55. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 176–77.

56. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 143–44.

57. Bernard, *Christian See to Thy Conscience*, 246.

58. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 63–64.

59. Bernard, *Christian See to Thy Conscience*, 246–47.

60. Ephraim Huit, *The Anatomy of Conscience* (London: I. D. for William Sheffard, 1626), 187.

61. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 163–67.

62. Samuel Annesley, "How May We Be Universally and Exactly Conscientious?", in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689* (1661; repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 1:14.

63. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.24. Cf. David Foxgrover, "John Calvin's Understanding of Conscience" (PhD diss., Claremont, 1978); Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 59–63, 84–87.

64. Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 140–41.

65. Annesley, "How May We Be Universally and Exactly Conscientious?", in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:13.

66. Annesley, "How May We Be Universally and Exactly Conscientious?", in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:14.

67. Philip A. Craig, "William Fenner: 'The Soul's Looking Glass,'" in *The Voice of God*, Westminster Conference 2002 (London: Westminster Conference, 2003), 29.

68. Annesley, "How May We Be Universally and Exactly Conscientious?", in *Puritan Sermons*, 1:8–9.

69. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 70.

70. Perkins, *Discourse of Conscience*, in *Works*, 1:550.

71. Quoted in Craig, "William Fenner: 'The Soul's Looking Glass,'" in *The Voice of God*, 30.

72. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 48.

73. John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *The Works of John Owen* (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 16:76.

74. [Westminster Divines], *Westminster Confession of Faith* (repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003), 380.

75. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 2:336.

76. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 2:337.

77. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 2:339.

78. Swinnock, *Door of Salvation Opened*, in *Works*, 5:64.

79. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 78. Cited in Ken Sarles, "The English Puritans: A Historical Paradigm of Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*, by John F. MacArthur Jr., Wayne A. Mack, *et al.* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 25.

80. Sarles, "The English Puritans: A Historical Paradigm of Biblical Counseling," 25.

81. Coleman C. Markham, "William Perkins' Understanding of the Function of Conscience" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1967), 12, 223.

82. Petrus van Mastricht's *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, which Jonathan Edwards said was the best work of theology ever written beside the Bible, is presently being translated by Todd Rester under the

auspices of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, with Joel Beeke and Nelson Kloosterman serving as general editors (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming). Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999).

83. The classic work on God's attributes is Stephen Charnock's massive *Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God* (1682; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). See also William Bates, *The Harmony of the Divine Attributes in the Contrivance and Accomplishment of Man's Redemption* (1674; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1985).

84. Vincent, *Heaven on Earth*, 277.

85. Vincent, *Heaven on Earth*, 283.

86. Richard Sibbes, "The Demand of a Good Conscience," in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862–1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 7:490.

87. Sibbes, *2 Corinthians Chapter 1*, in *Works*, 3:219, 223.

88. Thomas Fuller, ed., *Gnomologia: Adagies and Proverbs; Wise Sayings and Witty Sayings* (London: B. Barker, 1732), 6.

89. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 3:302 (on Ps. 37:1–6).

90. Cited in Blanchard, *Complete Gathered Gold*, 109.

91. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1:534.

92. Joseph Hall, *Contemplations upon the Principal Passages of the Holy Story*, in *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, Joseph Hall*, ed. Josiah Pratt (London: C. Whittingham, 1808), 1:292.

93. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 96–97.

94. Perkins, *Discourse of Conscience*, in *Works*, 1:547; for Puritan thinking on syllogistic reasoning, see below and Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 131–42, 259–62.

95. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1:525.

96. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 134.

97. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 134–38.

98. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 139.

99. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 140–41.

100. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 111.

101. On the pervasive theme of sweetness in Calvin's theology and piety, see I. John Hesselink, "Calvin, Theologian of Sweetness," *Calvin Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (2002): 318–32.

102. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 112.

103. Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*, 112–13; see also, 129.

104. Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 30.

105. Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (1692; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 230–36.

106. "Rev. Richard Rogers," *RootsWeb.com*, http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nyterry/rogers/richard1/richard1.html, accessed June 14, 2010. See M. M. Knappen, ed., *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward* (Chicago: American Society of Church History, 1933), 34n31.

107. Vincent, *Heaven upon Earth*, 306.

Chapter 57

Puritan Casuistry

> *Isaiah 50:4, "The Lord God hath given me a tongue of the learned, that I should know how to minister a word in due time to him that is weary."… In this text, then, there is set down one principal duty of Christ's prophetical office…. There is a certain knowledge or doctrine revealed in the word of God, whereby the consciences of the weak may be rectified and pacified.*
>
> —WILLIAM PERKINS[1]

As noted in the last chapter, the Puritans gave much attention to the awakening and shaping of the human conscience. Many Puritans also wrote books on various cases of conscience, which came to be called the casuistry of conscience.[2] *Casuistry* has been defined as "a technique evolved by the Jesuits for finding excuses for not doing what you ought to do."[3] The Puritans would abhor such a definition. For them, *casuistry* was the art of moral theology applied with biblical integrity to various cases that a person is confronted with in his conscience or life. Thomas Merrill says casuistry "may best be understood as a method of blazing trails through the ethical wilderness that too often separates theory from practice, code from conduct, and religion from morality."[4] Casuistry is practical theology, training Christians to live uprightly, humbly, and gladly in the presence of God every day of their lives.

Puritan casuistry, much like Lutheran casuistry,[5] responded to a need rooted in the Protestant Reformation and has both polemical and pastoral roots. The polemical root is related to the Reformed and Puritan response to Roman Catholicism. Contrary to Catholicism, the Reformers insisted that God does not forgive sinners through priestly and sacramental intervention, but through faith in Christ alone, by means of His Word and Spirit. That conviction necessitated abandoning the penitential system the Roman Catholic Church had used for centuries to provide Europe with moral direction and discipline.[6]

This abandonment was disconcerting for many new converts to the Reformed

faith. Weekly sermons did not seem sufficient to sustain and guide their spiritual and moral compasses. To counter the tendency of some converts who embraced the doctrines of grace while rejecting scriptural norms for moral Christian living, leaders such as Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and John Calvin supplemented preaching with what became known as church discipline. Calvin said church discipline was designed to serve as "a bridle to curb and restrain the refractory" and as "a spur to the inactive." Its goal was to bar those who "lead scandalous lives" from the Lord's Supper and from good standing in the body of Christ.[7] Such discipline was not merely punitive, but part of a larger concern the Reformers had for pastoral care for the sheep of Christ. Their pastoral hearts were evidenced, for example, in Calvin's personal letters[8] or the treatise of Martin Bucer (1491–1551), *Concerning the True Care of Souls*.[9] The Puritans likewise were deeply concerned that pastors shepherd the flock of God with practical guidance and direction related to questions concerning what God expected of His covenant people.

This chapter will trace the development of Puritan casuistry chronologically from its seminal beginnings and systematic development in the hands of William Perkins (1558–1602), the father of Puritan casuistry, to its flowering in the early seventeenth century, its fullness in the 1640s through the 1670s, and then its fading at the end of the Puritan era.[10] We will conclude with lessons from the Puritans for counseling today.

The Beginnings of Puritan Casuistry The Puritans concurred with Calvin that communicant members of the church should be held accountable to biblical standards for their conduct. Since not all cases were clear, however, Puritan ministers often sought the advice of their colleagues at classis gatherings (where about a dozen ministers were often present) about individual cases. These cases became known as *cases of conscience*. Classis minutes reveal a great number of these cases, ranging from whether people may abandon their own places of worship to hear a minister preach in a neighboring church to whether a man who had admitted to lying to his friends regarding a private sin now must make a public confession for it.[11] When the classis could not come to a clear resolution on a particular case, they customarily referred such matters to Cambridge University. Norman Clifford says "this practice of referring 'weighty cases' to Cambridge undoubtedly foreshadowed the fact that this University was to produce many of the most outstanding Puritan casuists of the period."[12]

One of the most active ministers in those early meetings in Cambridge was Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594), from Dry Drayton, five miles northwest of Cambridge. He labored there for twenty-one years, establishing a reputation as a

wise spiritual physician. Thomas Fuller (1608–1661), a seventeenth-century historian, says Greenham specialized in "comforting wounded consciences," for many "who came to him with weeping eyes…went from him with cheerful souls."[13] Scholars today commonly acknowledge Greenham as a pioneer of Puritan casuistry.

Greenham wrote some of his pastoral counsel in letters, and some were recorded by students who gathered around his dinner table. These letters and notes were later published in "tabletalk" writings.[14] In these writings, we see Greenham "carefully analyzing his patient's spiritual condition and administering the appropriate remedies." The remedies were not always what the patient wanted to hear. For example, the well-known Puritan minister John Dod (c. 1549–1645), nicknamed "Decalogue Dod" for his book on the Ten Commandments, once came to Greenham with a host of troubles that weighed upon his conscience. After listening, Greenham responded, "Son, son, when affliction lies heavy, sin lies light." Later on, Dod was grateful for this response, for in hindsight he had to admit that if Greenham had pitied him, as he anticipated, more harm than good would have resulted from the counseling session.[15] Clifford writes,

> In his treatment of sin, Greenham advised confession and a thorough searching of the conscience in order to discover "some several, especial and secret sin." The reasons for this, he explains, is "to bring the parties wounded to some certain object and matter of their trouble." In the event that the penitent "cannot come to the particular sight of sin in themselves," and can only see sin generally, he thought that "it is good to use the helps of others unto whom they may offer their hearts to be gauged and searched, and their lives to be examined more deeply, by hearing the several articles of the law laid open before them; whereby they may try the whole course of their actions."[16]

Richard Rogers (1550–1618), vicar of Wethersfield and member of Braintree Classis, was also passionate about cases of conscience. He wrote *Seven Treatises* (1604) as a practical manual for Christians with various cases of conscience.[17] Rogers was motivated by both pastoral and polemical reasons. Pastorally, he wrote to offer relief to seeking and troubled souls. Polemically, he wrote to counteract the Jesuits, who were deriding the Puritans for their lack of writings to provide counsel and direction for their followers. Stephen Egerton says the Puritans keenly felt this challenge. He says Rogers was "encouraged in himself, and by others, to write these Christian directions, as a counter poison to all such enchantments of the Papists."[18]

Rogers's *Seven Treatises* exhaustively show how the Christian is to rule his life through seven means: exercising watchfulness, practicing meditation, using the Christian armor of Ephesians 6, engaging in prayer, reading Scripture and godly authors, offering thanksgiving, and practicing fasting.[19] William Haller writes, "*Seven Treatises* was the first important exposition of the code of behavior which expressed the English Calvinist, or, more broadly speaking, the Puritan conception of the spiritual and moral life. As such it inaugurated a literature the extent and influence of which in all departments of life can hardly be exaggerated."[20]

Another member of the same classis, Arthur Dent (1553–1607), rector of South Shoebury, Essex, for twenty-seven years, published *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven.* This book gave direction to struggling souls in the form of a pilgrimage dialogue. Its cast included four characters—a pastor, a God-fearing man, an ignorant man, and an unbeliever—who discuss religious matters along their journey, such as the misery of man by nature, the corruption of the world, the marks of children of God, the difficulty of entering into eternal life, the ignorance of the world, and the sweet promises of the gospel "with the abundant mercies of God to all that repent, believe, and truly turn unto Him." Individual dialogues address subjects such as regeneration, pride, adultery, covetousness, contempt of the gospel, swearing, lying, drunkenness, idleness, oppression, effects of sin, predestination, hindrances to salvation, and Christ's second coming. The book teaches much about cases of conscience relating to God, sin, and salvation.

Dent's book was one of the most popular Puritan devotional classics ever written. By 1640 it had gone through twenty-five editions and by 1860, fifty editions. Richard Baxter (1615–1691) recast the book in 1674 as *The Poor Man's Family Book*, "abandoning Dent's homely dialogue for connected prose."[21] John Bunyan (1628–1688) was also profoundly influenced by Dent's book in his early spiritual struggles.

In addition, the Puritan Henry Smith (1560–1591), who was called the "silver-tongued preacher" of his generation, used his sermons to direct, comfort, resolve, exhort, and challenge the consciences of thousands of needy persons who flocked to hear him. Smith's written sermons were so popular that by the early eighteenth century, collections of them had gone through more than eighty-five editions.[22]

These are some of the men who contributed to the early stages of the Puritan casuistry movement. Clifford summarizes the motivations of these leaders:

> In short, the origins of Puritan casuistical divinity can be traced to pressures

> both within Puritanism and without. From within, there was the need of guidance in providing for the close moral and spiritual supervision of the people under their case. From without, there was the attack of the Roman controversialists who claimed that the Puritans had no riches comparable to those of the Roman Catholic Church to offer their people. These two pressures came together to produce a tremendous outburst of literary activity. Its result was the production of an English Practical Divinity which became the envy of the Reformed churches throughout Europe.[23]

The Father of Puritan Casuistry As many people eagerly read the books of the early Puritan casuists, a need arose, according to Henry Holland in his preface to the first edition of Richard Greenham's *Works* (1595), for a more comprehensive and systematic treatment of "cases of conscience."[24] William Perkins, the renowned preacher at Great St. Andrew's Church, Cambridge, was the first to bring Puritan casuistry to "some form of method and art." Thomas Merrill notes that Perkins's casuistry is important "because it set a pattern for all later work in Protestant moral divinity."[25]

Perkins had exceptional gifts for teaching how to use self-examination and scriptural diagnosis to deal with "cases of conscience." Many people were convicted of sin and delivered from its bondage under his preaching. The prisoners of the Cambridge jail were among the first to benefit from his counseling. Samuel Clarke (1599–1683), a Puritan minister and biographer, gives a striking example of Perkins's pastoral care. He says a condemned prisoner was climbing the gallows in such fear and trepidation that Perkins cried out, "What man! What is the matter with thee? Art thou afraid of death?" The prisoner confessed that he was less afraid of death than of what would follow it. "Sayest thou so," said Perkins. "Come down again man and thou shalt see what God's grace will do to strengthen thee."

When the prisoner came down, he and Perkins knelt together, hand in hand. Perkins then offered "such an effectual prayer in confession of sins…as made the poor prisoner burst out into abundance of tears." Convinced that the prisoner was brought "low enough, even to Hell gates," Perkins presented the gospel in prayer. Clarke writes that the prisoner's eyes were opened "to see how the black lines of all his sins were crossed, and cancelled with the red lines of his crucified Savior's precious blood; so graciously applying it to his wounded conscience, as made him break out into new showers of tears for joy of the inward consolation which he found."

The prisoner rose from his knees, went cheerfully up the ladder, testified of salvation in Christ's blood, and bore his death with patience, "as if he actually

saw himself delivered from the Hell which he feared before, and heaven opened for the receiving of his soul, to the great rejoicing of the beholders."[26]

Several years before he died, Perkins preached a series of sermons on Isaiah 50:4, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." From that text, Perkins drew this doctrinal proposition: "There is a certain knowledge or doctrine revealed in the Word whereby the consciences of the weak may be rectified and pacified." He took for granted that the weary are people who lack assurance of faith and are weary with uncertainty about what to think or do in order to please God. From these sermons and others, Perkins wrote two treatises on "cases of conscience," titled *A Discourse of Conscience* (1596) and *The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience* (1606).[27]

The first treatise, much of which is theoretical in nature, describes conscience, in the words of George Mosse, as a "kind of control mechanism placed midway between God and man. It is to God that it responded; to men it provided a warning signal against wrong actions."[28] Perkins wrote this treatise largely to help believers with questions of assurance and with establishing a "good conscience." Ian Breward summarizes, "A good conscience was a jewel beyond price, because it gave men the assurance of election which enabled them to rejoice in affliction, and to be bold before God and men whatever the outward circumstances. A bad conscience, on the other hand, was an insupportable burden which brought gnawing terror about Judgment which could only be assuaged by the blood of Christ."[29]

The second treatise focuses more on Perkins's concern for the individual and social aspects of Christian morality. The goal was to provide Bible-based and Reformed guidance for areas of ethical uncertainty, called cases of conscience, and to develop what Puritans called self-judgment based on Scripture, so as to resolve typical moral dilemmas that confront Christians in all phases of their lives.

Perkins classified cases of conscience under three categories.[30] First, questions relating to the individual. These involve asking: How can I be saved? How can I be sure that I am saved? How can I recover myself when I am "distressed or fallen"? *Distressed* means going through a dry patch where I feel spiritually deserted, as if God has left me, and therefore something must be wrong. *Fallen* means I have actually backslidden and fallen into sin and know that I have. How do I get back into close communion with God again? Also, how do I deal with various afflictions and temptations, such as the temptation to blaspheme God? All these questions under Perkins's first heading relate to a personal walk with the Lord.

Second are questions about the individual's relation to God, Scripture, and worship. These include the following: Are the sixty-six books of Scripture as we have them the Word of God? How do I justify these sixty-six books as the canon? How do I assure myself that they all contain divine instruction? How do I relate to Old Testament legislation? How should we order our public worship? What sort of public worship pleases God?

Third are questions involving the individual's relation to others. These include all questions that come under the second table of the law in loving our neighbor, including developing social virtues, maintaining human relationships, and living in community.

In the last section of his treatise, Merrill notes, Perkins discussed current issues of his day, such as "the right use of money, truth and falsehood, the right use of leisure, the Christian attitude toward war, vows and promises, proper dress, the lawfulness of recreation, policy and prudence."[31] His aim is not the Roman Catholic goal of providing priests a guide on how much penance should be imposed on the guilty, but rather that clergy may have material to help them answer persons who ask, "How should I be behaving in a particular life situation?" Or, "What should I think of my spiritual condition in my present spiritual concerns and questions?"[32]

Today, we would call much of this teaching personal and social ethics, but Perkins saw it as cases of conscience. The Puritans believed that many questions are asked by anxious believers because they know that maintaining a right relationship with God depends on having the right answers to these questions and a conscience void of offense. If you give the wrong answer, your relationship with God will suffer. Knowing, believing, and resting in God's answers to soul-searching and ethical questions gives true peace of heart and mind. So you might truly say that all the matters of standards and the related questions of spirituality that you studied in modern ethics departments are, in the Puritan mind, cases of conscience.[33]

By the time of his death, Perkins had become the principle architect of the Puritan movement. His vision of further reformation for the church combined with his intellect, piety, writing, spiritual counseling, and communication skills enabled him to set the tone for seventeenth-century Puritanism. He established the characteristic Puritan accent on Reformed, experiential truth and self-examination and its polemic against Roman Catholicism and Arminianism. In the first decades after his death, Perkins's writings in England outsold those of Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), and Theodore Beza (1519–1605) combined. He "moulded the piety of a whole nation," H. C. Porter says.[34]

The Flowering of Puritan Casuistry The disciples of Perkins published numerous books on Puritan casuistry. William Gouge (1575–1653) was the author of *The Whole Armour of God* (1616), *Of Domestical Duties* (1622), and many other helpful titles. Samuel Clarke gave this assessment of Gouge's work:

> He was a sweet comforter of troubled consciences, wherein he was exceeding skilful, and dexterous as many hundreds in the city have found from time to time, being sought unto far and near by such as groaned under afflictions and temptations, many of whom, through God's blessing upon his labors, were restored to joy and comforts out of unspeakable terrors and torments of conscience.35

William Whately (1583–1639), another beneficiary of Perkins's pulpit ministry, wrote several books on practical divinity. Thomas Fuller says Whately was "very able, and very ready to confer with, and to resolve the doubts of such as came to him."36 Richard Baxter listed Whately among those who promoted "affectionate practical divinity" and stressed that those who wish to study cases of conscience should read Whately's *Ten Commandments* (1622).37

Robert Bolton (1572–1631), who first despised Perkins's preaching, but who, after his conversion, came to love it, became a highly esteemed Puritan casuist both from the pulpit and through counseling and numerous books. His biographer, Edward Bagshawe, wrote of him,

> I may truly say, many hundreds were either absolutely converted, or mightily confirmed, or singularly comforted in their grievous agonies by his ministry: for he had such an art in this kind of relieving afflicted consciences, which he acquired, partly by great pains and industry in searching into that skill, but chiefly by that manifold experience he had in himself and others, that he was sought to far and near, and divers from beyond the Seas desired his resolution in divers cases of conscience, which was the only cause that made him put forth that last learned and godly treatise of his, which he [titled], *Instructions for a right comforting of afflicted Consciences*.38

Bolton's *Instructions for Comforting Afflicted Consciences* (1626)39 is one of the best Puritan works on consoling the afflicted believer in every aspect of the inner life—mind, heart, conscience, memory, and will. Section 1 shows man's great need, based on Proverbs 18:14, to store up "heavenly comforts" in his heart. It admonishes the indifferent, the sensualist, and those who oppose faithful preaching. It goes on to describe the intolerableness of a wounded conscience. It explains why some do not always feel the sting of sin and provides twenty persuasive arguments against sin. Section 2 shows how wrong it is to comfort

those who do not sorrow over sin or who do so for wrong reasons. Bolton explains how ministers should apply comfort to such people—neither too little nor too much. He goes on to explain the right methods and ways to cure afflicted consciences. Section 3 addresses ways of comfort that arise from outside of us and from within us through the Scriptures and the marks of grace. It also tells how those marks may be identified. It then deals with maladies of the conscience and various ways to heal each one. Here Bolton especially offers help for dealing with a tormented soul. Most of that advice flows out of a lifetime of counseling troubled believers.

Bolton also published *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (1626), which he first wrote as a guide for himself.[40] He divided this work into two sections: "General Preparatives" and "Particular Directions." In the first section, Bolton considered ten ways to loosen sin's grip on the soul: abandon your loved sin, hate hypocrisy, exercise self-denial, live the life of faith, form right conceptions of Christianity, guard against worldliness, be warmed with the love of God, treasure reconciliation with God, keep your heart, and meditate on future bliss. In the second section, he described Christian duties, such as tending family, governing the tongue, and managing every action of life. J. I. Packer says of these two books by Bolton, "Richard Baxter went over all this ground a generation later in much greater detail, and with a greater power of thought, but Bolton yields nothing to Baxter in experimental warmth and depth, and sometimes surpasses him."[41]

Perkins's most famous disciple was William Ames (1576–1633), who wrote *Conscience, with the Power and Cases Thereof* (first published in Latin, 1630; in English, 1639).[42] Samuel Morison, a Harvard historian, describes this important manual of Puritan casuistry as "one of the most valuable sources of Puritan morality."[43] It went through nearly twenty printings in less than thirty years.

Ames said in the preface how he listened as a youth to Perkins expound the Puritan way of handling cases of conscience. That teaching directed the course of his life and ministry. Ames's casuistry is more integral to his theology than Perkins's. Perkins relied more on medieval case divinity, whereas Ames developed a more Word-centered case divinity, most evident in his explication of humanity's obedience to God within the framework of the Decalogue.

Ames's *Conscience, with the Power and Cases Thereof* is a commentary of sorts on Book 2 of his most famous work, *The Marrow of Theology*. Ames himself states as much: "If there are some who desire to have practical matters better explained, especially those of the latter part of this *Marrow*, we shall attempt, God willing, to satisfy them in a special treatise, which I mean to write, dealing with questions usually called 'cases of conscience.'"[44]

Conscience, a collection of five books, moves from a theoretical treatment of the nature of conscience to very practical applications. Its core content first came to light in Ames's defense of the thirty-eight theses and four corollaries to earn a doctor of theology degree at Franeker University in 1622. Eight years later, Ames published his work on moral theology. Richard Baxter, who built his own *Christian Directory* on Ames's casuistry, said Perkins did valuable service in promoting Reformed casuistry, but "Ames hath exceeded all."[45]

Following Ames's work, a book that helped popularize the Puritan understanding of conscience for the layperson was William Fenner's (1600–1640) *The Souls Looking-Glasse, Lively Representing Its Estate before God: With a Treatise of Conscience* (1643). This treatise expounds Romans 2:15, stressing that the conscience always bears witness to us, either excusing or accusing us. Fenner is particularly helpful in linking the relationship between God's moral law and the human conscience. "The bond of conscience is the law of God," he said. God's law binds our consciences to Himself and His Word even more than we are bound to governmental leaders and other kinds of human authority.[46]

Fenner distinguished between a primary and a secondary bond of conscience. The primary bond is God's special revelation because God alone has supreme authority to bind our consciences. He stressed that both the faithful preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments should powerfully bind our consciences. More than most Puritans, he particularly stressed that baptism is "a very great binder of conscience," claiming, "There is no sin that he lives in…but is sacramental perjury against the vow ye made unto God in your baptism."[47]

The secondary bond relates to providential or voluntary human relationships when a Christian is called to obey a husband, a father, a school teacher, a parent, a magistrate, or an employer. Such authorities bind our conscience only insofar as they are authorized by God and His law and cannot bind in a way contrary to the law and gospel of Christ.[48] Fenner was more reticent than John Knox (c. 1505–1572) to allow for ecclesiastical and civil tyranny. Fenner wrote of human authorities,

> We must obey them one way or the other, either actively or passively. When they command what is lawful for us to do, we must obey them by doing. When they command that which is unlawful for us to do, and threaten punishment, then we cannot actively obey them by doing because they command against God; yet we must passively obey by suffering and submitting to their penalties, because the Lord hath given them authority over us.[49]

The Fullness of Puritan Casuistry By the late 1640s, Puritan casuistry was considered such an integral part of ministry that the Westminster Assembly of Divines required a ministerial candidate to be examined in his "skill in the sense and meaning of such places of the Scripture as shall be proposed unto him in cases of conscience."[50] Though it is difficult to know how thoroughly this mandate was carried out, there are evidences that examining committees made sure that proposed ministers would be able soul-physicians.

For example, on July 6, 1657, Philip Henry (1631–1696), father of the famed Matthew Henry (1662–1714), recorded in his diary that when he was examined by the Shropshire presbytery committee for ordination, he was asked, "Suppose one should come to you and make complaint of his condition, O Sir, I am undone, 'tis to no purpose for me to wait upon the means of grace, I am a reprobate, and if a reprobate, no salvation" is possible for me. Philip Henry replied, "I would deny his minor [syllogism] and endeavor to show him, that though a man may know his own election yet he cannot [know] his reprobation." Someone then raised the objection, but "suppose he should reply, I have the mark[s] of a reprobate, much guilt, a hard heart, a seared conscience." Undeterred, Henry answered, "I would endeavor to convince him, there is nothing [that] befalls a reprobate but may befall one that is elect before conversion except the guilt of the sin against the Holy Ghost."[51]

During the Westminster Assembly, volumes of casuistry poured off the press. Many of these volumes targeted specific themes as Puritan casuistry became more specialized. Frequently they resulted in response volumes from Anglicans. For example, John Geree (c. 1601–1649), author of the famous *Character of an Old English Puritan or Nonconformist* (1646), which soon became a paradigm for the ideal Puritan, published *A Case of Conscience Resolved* in 1646, in which he asserted that the king could consent in good conscience to the abolition of episcopacy without breaking his oath. That brought a rebuttal from an Anglican and staunch Royalist, Edward Boughen (1587–c. 1660), titled *Mr. Geree's Case of Conscience Sifted* (1648), to which Geree promptly replied in *The Sifters Sieve Broken* (1648).[52] Also appearing in 1648 was the influential *Therapeutica Sacra*, written by David Dickson (c. 1583–1662), a Scots professor of divinity in Glasgow and Edinburgh who embraced Puritan theology. *Therapeutica Sacra* focused on cases of conscience concerning regeneration.[53] Clifford says the use Dickson "makes of the covenant scheme marks a significant development in the treatment of cases of conscience."[54]

One of the key Puritan casuistry writers in the 1650s was Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), rector of St. Margaret's, New Fish Street Hill, London, the first

church that burned to the ground in the Great Fire of London (1666). His works, frequently reprinted by Banner of Truth Trust, contain several volumes of cases of conscience, including *Cases Considered and Resolved* and the classic *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, both published in 1653. In an article, "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," Tim Keller provides this helpful summary of *Precious Remedies:*

> Brooks discusses twelve types of temptation, eight varieties of discouragement, eight kinds of depression, and four classes of spiritual pride! Brooks' "temptation" sections are addressed to anyone struggling with besetting patterns of sin, particularly to those fighting addictions…. The "discouragement" section applies to persons who suffer from 'burnout' as well as anxiety, grief, and disappointment…. The "depression" section largely deals with persons whose despair arises from guilt and from a "low self-image." The Puritans called this condition "accusation," in which the conscience and the devil attack the person over his failures and sins…. Finally, the section on "pride" deals with several forms of this great sin. It brings out cases of materialism, of power-lust, of intellectual arrogance, of love of ignorance and crudeness, of bitterness, and of jealousy.[55]

In 1658, Samuel Hartlib (c. 1600–1662), a key figure in the intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century, edited a small collection of Puritan letters and pamphlets titled *The Earnest Breathings of Foreign Protestants, Divines and Others: To the Ministers and Other Able Christians of These Three Nations, for a Compleat Body of Practicall Divinity, and Cases.* Though Hartlib did not profess to be a casuist, this volume gave casuistry a boost as it showed to the international Reformed community that serious efforts were being undertaken in England to produce a comprehensive body of practical divinity. Hartlib also influenced other notable divines to write on practical casuistry, including the first prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, William Twisse (1578–1646), who wrote *Doubting Conscience Resolved* (first published in English in 1652), and John Dury (1596–1680), a Scottish Calvinist minister and an intellectual of the English Civil War period, who wrote *A Case of Conscience: Whether It Be Lawful to Admit Jews into a Christian Commonwealth* (1654).[56]

Hartlib and Dury's ultimate goal in promoting casuistry was to unite the Protestant churches of Europe.[57] To that end, they also made efforts to fulfill William Ames's wish that "in every Protestant University there should be a public professor set apart to hand the matters of Practical divinity, and to make that task his whole employment."[58] To reach these goals, they involved Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656), archbishop of Armagh and vice-

chancellor of Trinity College, who in turn delegated the task to George Downame (1560–1634), bishop of Londonderry. Because of ill health, Downame was unable to make measurable progress on these goals. Though these goals were never realized, Clifford says "all was not lost, for Samuel Clarke and Richard Baxter mention the scheme and its failure as one of the main reasons why they have undertaken the task of producing their work on this subject."[59]

In 1659, Samuel Clarke, a Puritan minister and writer, produced three treatises titled *The Medulla Theologiae*, *Golden Apples*, and *Several Cases of Conscience Concerning Astrologie.* The first book was one of the largest collections of cases of conscience at that time. In his autobiography, published in 1683, Clarke says these three books represented only a fraction of a massive collection that he intended to publish, but some months later he died.[60]

The Cripplegate Morning Exercises also began in 1659. These were early morning sermons delivered by well-known Puritan preachers on various cases of conscience, with titles such as "How May We Experience in Ourselves, and Evidence to Others, That Serious Godliness Is More Than a Fancy?" and "What Are the Best Preservatives against Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow?" Hundreds of people gathered before work to hear these sermons. Later the sermons were published in four volumes (1661–1690). They have recently been republished as the first four volumes in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689*.[61]

In 1664, when Richard Baxter was in forced retirement by the Act of Uniformity, he began writing his *Christian Directory*. The book offers keen insights into the life of the believer and into practical and casuistical divinity. In this comprehensive survey, Baxter gives directions for ordering one's life before God, performing duties in family relationships, fulfilling responsibilities within the life of the church, and living uprightly with neighbors and public officials. No Puritan work on applied theology has surpassed this treatise; it is one of the most practical and helpful biblical counseling manuals ever written. Though this volume of one million words was too large to become a popular work, it towered over every other work of its kind for the remainder of the century, and in many ways, it is still very useful today.

Baxter was asked to write the book by Archbishop James Ussher.[62] He specifically targeted young ministers, fathers leading family worship, and individual Christians in his work for the following reasons:

> (1) That the younger and more unfurnished and unexperienced sort of ministers, might have a promptuary at hand, for practical resolutions and directions on the subjects that they have need to deal in…. (2) And I

> thought it not unuseful to the more judicious masters of families, who may choose and read such parcels to their families, as at any time the case requireth…. (3) And to private Christians I thought it not in vain, to have at hand so universal a directory and resolution of doubts; not expecting that they remember all, but may, on every occasion, turn to such particulars as they most need.[63]

In the 1670s, two more treatises were published: Joseph Alleine's (1634–1668) *Cases Satisfactorily Resolved* (1672) and Nathanael Vincent's (1638–1697) *Heaven upon Earth: or, A Discourse Concerning Conscience* (1676).[64]

The Fading of Puritan Casuistry Puritan casuistry faded during the last two decades of the seventeenth century. Though occasional divines such as Isaac Watts (1674–1748) and Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) continued to write on casuistry into the eighteenth century, they were the exceptions that prove the rule.[65] Interestingly, Watts, who cannot be classified as a Puritan, titled his 1731 book *An Humble Attempt toward the Revival of Practical Religion among Christians,* indicating the widespread loss of casuistical divinity.[66] Clifford attributes this loss, at least in part, to "the rise of Deism, the struggle with Socinianism and Arminianism and the attacks of Hobbes and Locke on the validity of the idea of conscience, [which] all worked together to create an intellectual and religious atmosphere that was uncongenial to [its] cultivation and further development."[67] During the Great Awakening of the early 1740s, there was a major revival of practical divinity, particularly through men such as Theodore Frelinghuysen (1691–1747) and George Whitefield (1714–1770), but that too faded away. The form and method of Puritan casuistry was never fully revived.

Having traced the development of Puritan casuistry through the Puritan era, we conclude with some applications for modern Christians, particularly those who counsel others such as pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, professional counselors, and parents.

Practical Lessons for Pastoral Counseling Today Because of extensive efforts to reprint Puritan writings over the past half century, the riches of Puritan casuistry are once again available to the Christian reader, especially those engaged in preaching, teaching, and counseling. Both our conscience and our counseling of others would benefit from reading the Puritans. Keller says the writings of the Puritans are a rich resource for biblical counseling today for six reasons:

1. The Puritans were committed to the functional authority of the Scripture.

For them God's Word was the comprehensive manual for dealing with all problems of the heart.

2. The Puritans developed a sophisticated system of diagnosing personal problems and distinguishing a variety of physical, spiritual, temperamental, and demonic causes.

3. The Puritans were remarkably balanced in their treatment because they were not invested in any personality theory other than biblical teaching about the heart.

4. The Puritans were realistic about difficulties of the Christian life, especially conflicts with indwelling sin.

5. The Puritans looked not just at behavior but at its underlying motives and desires. Man is created to worship God, they said; most problems grow out of sinful imagination or idol worship.

6. The Puritans considered the essential spiritual remedy for spiritual struggles to be belief in the gospel, in repentance for sin, and the development of proper self-understanding.[68]

This leads to some specific lessons we can learn from reading the Puritans on conscience and casuistry for counseling today. This is particularly true for ministers who are often called upon to engage in pastoral counseling.[69]

Labor to Become Competent for Soul Care Remember that every church leader should strive to be as competent as possible in diagnosing spiritual illness and prescribing what is needed for spiritual good health. The ability to diagnose and prescribe will be tested in varying degrees in every sermon that a minister preaches. It will also be tested in all the counseling that he does. John Owen (1616–1683) said counseling involves three skills and commitments: First, the minister must "be able rightly to understand the various cases that will occur"; second, he must be ready and willing to attend to the special cases brought to him; and third, he must encourage his parishioners to come to him to draw them out, to listen carefully to the difficulties expressed, and to provide appropriate biblical counsel for the healing of the conscience. He must then apply "fit medicines and remedies unto every sore distemper." Owen concluded, "In the discharge of the whole pastoral offices, there is not any thing or duty that is of more importance…than this."[70]

A physician needs to know basic physiology. He needs to know how the healthy human body functions. Similarly, a pastor needs to know how the healthy human soul functions in a right relationship with God at the level of mind and will and affections. He must also be able to recognize deficiency in

any of these areas, to diagnose any problems, and to prescribe what is needed for a cure. Peter Lewis writes,

> The Puritans were physicians of the soul, skilled enough to avoid the vagueness and subjectiveness which leaves the anguished mind clutching at uncertain straws with uncertain hope. They believed the Word of God in Scripture to be comprehensive enough to cover every basic human condition and need, and knew their Scriptures well enough to apply, with responsible authority, the available salve to the exposed sore.[71]

Focus on a Good Conscience before God God-centeredness, not self-centeredness, is the key to a healthy self-image. Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) speaks of three types of self-love: natural self-love, which measures out our duty to our neighbor; carnal self-love, which loves self more than God, and is therefore "criminal by access"; and gracious self-love, granted in regeneration, which is "when we love ourselves for higher ends than the nature of a creature… in subserviency to the glory of God."[72] May God grant us far greater measures of this third type of self-love!

The Puritan casuist was not primarily worried about a person's self-esteem. He was far more concerned about the person's relationship to the triune God: the Father who created us with dignity in His image, the Son who restores that dignity to us through redemption and adoption as His sons, and the Holy Spirit who indwells us and makes our souls and bodies His temple. That is not to say that self-esteem is not important in certain aspects of life—for example, a person must have some self-esteem and confidence to be able to do his work faithfully and well,[73] but self-esteem counsel that does not center ultimately upon the triune God and His grace would be viewed by the Puritans as seriously flawed. Apart from God's grace, we are fallen, wretched, unworthy, and hell-bound.[74]

Promote Holiness by Divine Truth, Not Human Theories Sanctification is promoted more by sound, practical counseling than by modern psychology with its personality theories. That does not mean that we have no interest in or use for the insights and methods of such specialists. In fact, there may be times that we need to defer to such specialists when occasion for their services arise. Yet, we must not do so routinely; rather, we must remember, as Keller rightly notes, "Many Christian counselors tend to mirror secular approaches that either focus their treatment largely on the feelings (such as the client-centered approach of Rogers), on the actions (such as the behaviorist approach of Skinner and his kin), or on the 'thinking' (such as the rational-emotive therapies of Ellis and Beck). But the Puritans do not fit into any of these modern categories."[75]

Instead, Puritan preachers stressed sanctification.[76] They said a believer must walk the king's highway of holiness in gratitude, service, obedience, love, and self-denial.[77] He must experientially know the continued exercise of the twin graces of faith and repentance.[78] He must learn the art of meditation, of fearing God, and of childlike prayer.[79] He must press on by God's grace, seeking to make his calling and election sure.[80] All of his relationships and activities must be sanctified and offered to God as his "reasonable service."[81]

Do Counseling First in Public Instruction, Then in Private Visitation For the Puritans, biblical counseling began in and was primarily done from the pulpit. As Ken Sarles says, "Puritan preaching constituted a form of preventative counseling, as the truths of Scripture were applied to the conscience."[82]

Today many evangelicals do not counsel from the pulpit. Pulpit and pew are both to blame. It is tough for a minister to offer counseling when he is only allowed twenty minutes to preach, but it is also difficult for the congregation to be counseled when the minister seldom deals with cases of conscience. No wonder, then, that for many Christians the psychologist's clinic has become more important for counseling than the preacher's pulpit. People are clamoring for one-on-one counseling, forgetting that God's Word, when rightly expounded, is medicinal for a whole host of spiritual diseases.

The Puritans followed up pulpit counseling with private visitation, soul-counseling, and catechizing in the home. Joseph Alleine reportedly spent several afternoons a week visiting church members.[83] Richard Baxter says many people "who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour's close disclosure, than they did from ten years' public preaching."[84] Baxter and his assistants spent two full days each week visiting parishioners in their homes. Those visits involved patiently teaching, examining, and leading families to Christ through the Scriptures.

When Baxter concluded his work at Kidderminster in Worcestershire, he said that of the approximately six hundred converts that were brought to faith under his preaching, not one (as far as he knew) had backslidden to the ways of the world. Packer concludes, "To upgrade the practice of personal catechizing from a preliminary discipline for children to a permanent ingredient in evangelism and pastoral care for all ages was Baxter's main contribution to the development of Puritan ideals for the ministry."[85]

Puritan counseling in preaching, pastoral admonition, and catechizing took time and skill.[86] The Puritans did not look for quick and easy conversions; they were committed to building up lifelong believers whose hearts, minds, wills, and affections were won to the service of Christ.[87]

Do More Than Listen; Give Specific Directions Puritan counseling was directive. The Puritans stressed the need to listen to those whom they were counseling, but then, unlike many modern psychoanalysts, to offer directives on what to do and how to do it. The archives of Puritan casuistry include a great deal of that wisdom.

The Puritans offer much teaching on what to do and how to do it as a believer. Their casuistic literature is devoted to answering a massive variety of significant questions such as how to pray, how to meditate, how to gain an awakened and assured conscience, how to behave in the family, how to be a father, how to be a mother, how to be a God-fearing child, how to think through problems in the community, and how to apply biblical directives to decision making.

How different this teaching is from much modern therapy in which a psychologist engages patients in nondirective listening. Counseling is more than listening and empathizing. Keller writes, "Most modern evangelical counselors simply lack the firmness, directness, and urgency of the Puritans. Most of us talk less about sin than did our forefathers. But, on the other hand, the Puritans amazingly were tender, encouraging, always calling the counselors to accept the grace of God, and extremely careful not to call a problem 'sin' unless it was analyzed carefully. One of their favorite texts was: 'A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax he will not quench' (Matt. 12:20)."[88]

Be a Faithful Preacher of the Word, Not Only a Prober of Feelings Ministers in particular should strive to be a faithful preacher of the Word and credible pastor-counselor. A faithful preacher of the Word does not assume that every parishioner is saved and does not shy away from preaching the fullness of God's gospel grace as well as the solemnity of God's gospel threatening. Both invitations and warnings must be preached to the full. As Philip Craig warns, "Starkly put, unless a minister zealously threatens his congregation with the wrath of God toward those who draw back and apostatize from their Christian profession, he will not enjoy a good conscience himself before God…. To use Owen's simile, the weeds will choke out the flowers and the minister will ultimately find himself the gardener of a wasteland."[89]

The Puritans believed that the credible pastor-counselor is one who listens well, who encourages a troubled person to divulge his problems, then counsels the person scripturally, practically, faithfully, and realistically on how to live. Ideally, "probing, which must be done thoroughly," should be followed by "prescribing" in a competent, biblical way. Realistically, however, the Puritans also knew that some pastors are not very gifted for counseling and no pastor is

omni-competent in this field. Had they lived in our day, there is little doubt they would recognize that every pastor will experience times when he needs to find professional Christian help for certain counseling cases, particularly those that deal with medical illnesses and prolonged depression.90 Pastors must recognize their limitations; after all, few have had any training as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or a psychoanalyst.

On the other hand, the Puritans would not support those secular psychoanalysts who encourage their clients to endlessly examine their feelings. The goal of their counseling is to repeatedly probe the past, focusing far more on human feelings than on what the Lord wants a person to do about a problem. Human feelings control the counseling session rather than what God says. Most psychology has departed far from the advice of Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) that we "must not be too curious in prying into the weakness of others."91 When that route is taken, the Puritans say a troubled person tends to become too dependent on the counselor.92 William Bridge (1600–1671) warns against this problem of relying too heavily on one source of help, saying:

> If a man be in the water and in danger of drowning, so long as he can get hold of something that will bear him up, he is not discouraged. But if he lay hold of some tuft of grass on the bank, and that breaks, he falls back and is again plunged into the water; and if he is not scared out of all thoughts, he is more discouraged than ever…. If you would not, therefore, be dejected or cast down in time of temptation, take heed that you do not lay all your strength upon one tuft of grass, this or that man's counsel, this or that particular means.93

By all means, listen well, probe deeply, but then counsel thoroughly. Provide direction and hope and prayer. Be a wise, scriptural, credible pastor.94

The goal of the care of souls is the same as theology, of which Ames wrote, "Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God…. Men live to God when they live in accord with the will of God, to the glory of God, and with God working in them."95 Thus the great means of counseling are the Word of Christ and prayer to the Father both done in the Holy Spirit. The Puritans excelled in using such means with great confidence that God will build His kingdom among men. Clifford concludes, "To those of us who come many years later to observe and to learn, the Puritan achievement in casuistic divinity stands as a monument not only to their industry and dedicated service, but also to their sensitive perception of the more immediate implications of our Lord's great desire: 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"96

1. Thomas C. Merrill, ed., *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on*

Casuistry: "A Discourse of Conscience" and "The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience" (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1966), 87–88.

2. The word "casuistry" is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable like "casual," thus *KA-zhoo-iss-tree*.

3. Elliott Rose, *Cases of Conscience: Alternatives Open to Recusants and Puritans under Elizabeth I and James I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 71.

4. Merrill, *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, x.

5. For the remarkable similarities of Puritan casuistry found in Lutheran casuistry, see Benjamin T. G. Mayes, *Counsel and Conscience: Lutheran Casuistry and Moral Reasoning after the Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

6. For Roman Catholic and Anglican casuistry and the Puritan reconstruction of both traditions, see Norman Keith Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity in English Puritanism during the Seventeenth Century: Its Origins, Development and Significance" (PhD diss., University of London, 1957), 41–98, 314–18; Ian Breward, "The Life and Thought of William Perkins" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963), 236–77. To effect this reconstruction, Clifford shows how the Puritans used the means of counseling letters, the priesthood of all believers, conventicles for spiritual fellowship and catechizing, private counseling sessions with clergy, and especially various treatises, the last of which is the major focus of this article.

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.4.12; Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 1–3.

8. Jules Bonnet, ed., *Letters of John Calvin*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858). For a sampling of Calvin's letters of pastoral care, see *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, ed. Elsie A. McKee (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 291–332.

9. Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, trans. Peter Beale (German, 1538; English trans., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

10. Secondary-source studies on Puritan casuistry have been sparse and, for the most part, inadequate. Those worthy of mention include William Whewell, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1852); H. Hensley Henson, *Studies in English Religion in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1903); Kenneth E. Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry* (1927; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of Practical Divinity," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3 (1940): 171–96; John T. McNeill, "Casuistry in the Puritan Age," *Religion in Life* 12, no. 1 (Winter, 1942–43): 76–89; H. R. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology* (London: Longman's Green, 1949); Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity during the Seventeenth Century, with Special Reference to Jeremy Taylor* (London: S. P. C. K., 1952); George L. Mosse, "Puritan Political Thought and the 'Cases of Conscience,'" *Church History* 23 (1954): 109–18; George L. Mosse, "The Assimilation of Machiavelli in English Thought: The Casuistry of William Perkins and William Ames," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1954): 315–26; George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957); Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity in English Puritanism during the Seventeenth Century"; Breward, "The Life and Thought of William Perkins"; Rose, *Cases of Conscience;* P. H. Lewis, "The Puritan Casuistry of Prayer—Some Cases of Conscience Resolved," in *The Good Fight of Faith*, Westminster Conference Papers, 1971 (London: Evangelical Press, 1972), 5–22; Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism* (1975; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2009), 63–136; Daniel Webber, "The Puritan Pastor as Counsellor," in *The Office and Work of the Minister*, Westminster Conference Papers, 1986 (London: Westminster Conference, 1987), 77–95; Timothy Keller, "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 11–44, available at http://www.ccef.org/puritan-resources-biblical-counseling (accessed June 25, 2010); Margaret Sampson, "Laxity and Liberty in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought," in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 159–84; J. I. Packer, "The Puritan Conscience," in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 107–22; Michael Schuldiner, *Gifts and Works: The*

Post-Conversion Paradigm and Spiritual Controversy in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1991); Keith Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G. E. Aylmer*, ed. John Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 29–56; Ken Sarles, "The English Puritans: A Historical Paradigm of Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*, by John F. MacArthur Jr., Wayne A. Mack, *et al.* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 21–43; Edward G. Andrew, *Conscience and Its Critics: Protestant Conscience, Enlightenment Reason, and Modern Subjectivity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 121–44; Gary Brady, "A Study of Ideas of the Conscience in Puritan Writings, 1590–1640" (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2006). Of these sources, I am most indebted to Breward's and Clifford's dissertations and Packer's article, upon which I have leaned heavily.

11. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 4–7.

12. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 7.

13. Thomas Fuller, *Church History of Britain*, ed. J. S. Brewer, 3rd ed. (1648; repr., London: William Tegg, 1845), 5:192–93.

14. Rylands English Manuscript 524, republished in Richard Greenham, *'Practical Divinity': The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham*, ed. Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1998), 129–259. (Originally published in 1599, five years after Greenham's death, in his *Works*.) Cf. Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 71.

15. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 9.

16. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 10.

17. The full title of this work by Richard Rogers is *Seven Treatises, Containing Such Direction as Is Gathered Out of Holie Scripture, Leading and Guiding to True Happiness, Both in This Life, and in the Life to Come: and May Be Called the Practise of Christianitie: Profitable for Such as Desire the Same: in Which More Particularly True Christians Learne How to Lead a Godly and Comfortable Life Every Day* (London: Felix Kyngston for Thomas Man, 1604). This book was reprinted five times in the seventeenth century, but never since. Reformation Heritage Books is presently working on publishing it.

18. Rogers, *Seven Treatises*, unpaginated preface.

19. Rogers, *Seven Treatises*, passim.

20. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 36.

21. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15:844.

22. Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 545.

23. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 16.

24. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 16–17.

25. Merrill, *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, xx.

26. Samuel Clarke, *The Marrow of Ecclesiastical History*, 3rd ed. (London: for W. B., 1675), 416–17.

27. Republished in Merrill, *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*.

28. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence*, 49.

29. Breward, "Life and Theology of Perkins," 235.

30. Merrill, *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, 101.

31. Merrill, *William Perkins, 1558–1602*, xx.

32. Cf. Ian Breward, "William Perkins and the Origins of Puritan Casuistry," in *Faith and a Good Conscience*, Puritan Conference Papers, 1962 (1963; Stoke-on-Trent, U. K.: Tentmaker, n.d.), 14–17. For the views of Perkins and Ames on liberty of conscience, see L. John Van Til, *Liberty of Conscience, The History of a Puritan Idea* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1972), 11–25, 43–51.

33. For a negative assessment of Perkins's treatises on conscience, see Rose, *Cases of Conscience*, 187–94.

34. H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 260.

35. Samuel Clarke, *A Collection of the Lives of Ten Eminent Divines* (London: for William Miller, 1662), 114.

36. Thomas Fuller, *Abel Redevivus* (1651; repr., London: William Tegg, 1867), 593.

37. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory: or A Sum of Practical Theology*, in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme (London: James Duncan, 1830), 5:587.

38. Edward Bagshawe, *The Life and Death of Mr. Bolton* (London: George Miller, 1635), 19–20.

39. Robert Bolton, *Instructions for Comforting Afflicted Consciences* (1626; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1991).

40. Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (1626; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995).

41. J. I. Packer, "Robert Bolton," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Gary Cohen (Marshallton, Del.: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 2:131.

42. For a basic introduction to Ames and his most famous work, see Joel R. Beeke and Jan Van Vliet,"*The Marrow of Theology* by William Ames (1576–1633)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 52–65.

43. Samuel Eliot Morison, "Those Misunderstood Puritans," *Revisionist History: Beyond the Gatekeepers* website, http://www.revisionisthistory.org/puritan1.html (accessed February 4, 2011).

44. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 70.

45. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 2:viii. For the content of Ames's *Conscience*, see chapter 3 above.

46. William Fenner, *The Souls Looking-Glasse*… (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, for John Rothwell, 1643), 175–206.

47. Fenner, *Souls Looking-Glasse*, 209, 210.

48. Fenner, *Souls Looking-Glasse*, 196–99.

49. Fenner, *Souls Looking-Glasse*, 200.

50. *A Directory for the Publique Worship of God* (London, 1651), 76.

51. M. H. Lee, *The Diaries and Letters of Philip Henry* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887), 36.

52. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 28.

53. David Dickson's *Therapeutica Sacra* was first published in English in 1664, and last reprinted in *Select Practical Writings of David Dickson*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Printed for the Assembly's Committee, 1845). The English subtitle was *The Method of Healing the Diseases of the Conscience Concerning Regeneration.*

54. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 27–28.

55. Keller, "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," 3.

56. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 28–29.

57. Cf. Gunnar Westin, *Negotiations about Church Unity, 1628–1634* (Uppsala, Sweden: A.-B. Lundequistska, 1932); Karl Brauer, *Die Unionstdtigkeit John Duries unter dem Protektorat Cromwells* (Marburg, 1907).

58. Samuel Hartlib, *The Earnest Breathings of Foreign Protestants, Divines, and Others* (London, 1658), unpaginated preface.

59. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 31–33.

60. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 33–34; Samuel Clarke, "Autobiography," in his *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in This Later Age* (London: for Thomas Simmons, 1683), 3–11.

61. *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981). This is a six-volume

reprint, but volume 5 is a compilation of Puritan systematic theology, and volume 6 is a polemical volume countering Roman Catholicism (see Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 637–39).

62. In the preface to *A Call to the Unconverted*, by Richard Baxter (London: R. W. for Nevil Simmons, 1658).

63. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 2:viii–ix.

64. There are scores of additional Puritan books of casuistry that we don't have space to enlarge upon here. For example, there are Thomas Fuller, *The Cause and Cure of a Wounded Conscience* (London: G. D. for John Williams, 1649); James Durham, *Heaven upon Earth in the Sure Tranquility and Quiet Composure of a Good Conscience; Sprinkled with the Blood of Jesus*, ed. John Carstairs (Edinburgh: A. Anderson, 1685).

65. See especially the application sections in Edwards's sermons.

66. Isaac Watts, *An Humble Attempt toward the Revival of Practical Religion among Christians* (London: for E. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1731).

67. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 40.

68. Keller, "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," opening summary. Concerning Keller's fifth point, it is helpful to note that some are problems caused simply by being fallen creatures in a fallen world. Baxter certainly appreciated the problems caused by natural constitution, as did Perkins and Edwards.

69. Several of these lessons are, in part, offshoots of the school of nouthetic counseling. Cf. David A. Powlison, "Competent to Counsel? The History of a Conservative Protestant Antipsychiatry Movement" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), and *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2010).

70. John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *The Works of John Owen* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965–1968), 16:86–87.

71. Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, 20.

72. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:136.

73. Cf. Arie Elshout, *Overcoming Spiritual Depression* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006).

74. Elshout, *Overcoming Spiritual Depression*, 1:143. Cf. Keller, "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," 16.

75. Keller, "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," 8.

76. The Puritan classic on sanctification is Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1692; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999). Marshall effectively grounds the doctrine of sanctification in a believer's union with Christ and underscores the necessity of practical holiness in everyday living. See also Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety* (1611; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996); Henry Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk, in Holy Security and Peace*, 6th ed. (1635; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1984); Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1739; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1986).

77. See Thomas Brooks, *The Crown and Glory of Christianity: or Holiness, the Only Way to Happiness*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, vol. 4 (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980); George Downame, *The Christian's Freedom: The Doctrine of Christian Liberty* (1633; repr., Pittsburgh, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994); Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (1645; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964); Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (1852; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969); Thomas Watson, *The Duty of Self-Denial* (1675; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 1–37.

78. See Samuel Ward, *The Life of Faith*, 3rd ed. (London: Augustine Mathews, 1622); Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (1668; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).

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87. Thomas Hooker, *The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ* (1635; repr., Worthington, Pa.: Maranatha, 1977).

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95. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 77 (1.1.1, 6).

96. Clifford, "Casuistical Divinity," 319–20.

Chapter 58

Puritan Sacrificial Zeal

> *Christian zeal [is] indeed a flame, but a sweet one; or rather it is the heat and fervor of a sweet flame. For the flame of which it is the heat, is no other than that of divine love.*
>
> —JONATHAN EDWARDS[1]

Many churches in America are looking less like armies engaged in war and more like La-Z-Boy chairs, from which drowsy Christians are saying, "Don't wake me up!" Who among us hasn't seen this decay? Who cannot see a difference between the ancient church and us? In former days, a fire burned within Christians, but our hearts seldom, if ever, burn within us. Formerly, Christians seemed driven by a holy passion, but now little seems to motivate us. Christians of old were at war with their sin and strove for holiness by heavenly strength, but we seem to tolerate sin rather easily and are satisfied to do the minimum of what God requires of us.

What has happened? God did not change; the power of salvation did not change; the call to holiness did not change; the threat of the enemy did not change. So why are so many Christians drowsy rather than being on fire for God?

The Puritan John Reynolds (1667–1727), in *A Discourse Concerning Sacred Zeal*, asked,

> How long shall we lie still under our formal complaints of the *decay* of Christian piety? How long shall we idly see the *retirement* of warm religion from the hearts and bosoms of its professors? Are we willing to yield to all the lukewarmness and degeneracy that has overspread us? [Even] the truly pious are dull and heavy in their religion, [and] march on wearily in their appointed race, as if either their Lord had lost His glory or His promise to them; or they [have lost] their faith and hope in Him…. Is it not time to proclaim among the churches, the message of the Mediator sent from

heaven to the Church of Laodicea: *Be zealous and repent*?[2]

Like the Laodicean church, too many of us have grown lukewarm. We are not zealous for the things of God. Where today do you find zeal for the honor and glory and holiness of God? Where do you see zeal to cut off the offending hand and pluck out the offending eye? Where is zeal for the advance of Christ's kingdom, which overcomes all obstacles and perseveres to the end? Our lives are not marked by zeal, nor do they reflect the sacrifices necessary to strengthen and embolden true Christian zeal.

If you have read the Puritans, you may have noticed that their sermons, prayers, and writings encourage believers to "be zealous and repent," to "put on zeal as a cloak," to be "consumed with zeal for the Lord's House and Name," and to be "zealous for good works" (Rev. 3:19; Isa. 59:17; Ps. 69:9; John 2:17; Titus 2:14). From their sermons and writings, let us take a look at, first, what zeal is; second, the characteristics of zeal; third, the means of promoting zeal; and finally, the practice of zeal applied to today.

What Is Zeal?

We all have some idea of what zeal is, for to a certain degree we are all zealots. The question is not whether we are zealous but what we are zealous for. Zeal runs in our veins *for* what we love and *against* what we hate. We so passionately love some things, such as family, careers, and houses, that we are willing to make considerable sacrifices for them. Conversely, we hate oppression, a bad political decision, or gross injustice. Zeal is a two-way street of "for and against."

But the Christian isn't simply called to generic zeal. What is missing today in churches is *godly* or *sacred* zeal. William Fenner (1600–1640) wrote, "Zeal is the fire of the soul…. Every man and woman in the world is set on fire of hell or of heaven…. Zeal is the running of the soul. If thou be not zealous for God, thou runnest away after the things of this world."[3]

John Reynolds defined this zeal as "an earnest desire and concern for all things pertaining to the glory of God and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus among men."[4] You see, zeal is not just one characteristic or attribute. Rather, as Samuel Ward (1577–1640) said, zeal is like varnish, which does not add color but gives gloss and luster to whatever it is applied to.[5] The Puritan John Evans (1680–1730) viewed zeal as a "qualification which should attend us in the exercise of grace, and in the performance of every duty."[6] Fenner wrote, "Zeal is a high strain of all the affections, whereby the heart puts forth all its affections with might."[7]

Ward wrote, "In plain English, zeal is nothing but heat…. It is a spiritual heat

wrought in the heart of man by the Holy Ghost, improving the good affections of love, joy, hope, etc., for the best service and furtherance of God's glory."[8] Think of zeal as a flame that brings a pot to a boil—it brings our affections for God's cause to a boil. It enlivens and compels, stirs and empowers, directs and governs us as it sets our affections ablaze for the glory of God and the good of His church. Think of zeal as something that involves every duty and affection in the Christian life. Iain Murray writes, "Zeal instead of being one particular grace is rather a quality which affects every part of the Christian life. The more zeal the more will be the spiritual energy of the Christian in every sense."[9]

Do you see how comprehensive zeal is? So often we mistake a moment's uprising against sin or a momentary passionate stirring of the soul as true zeal. But zeal must be the fire beneath the pot of our affections. The Christian must not be zealous in one or two things; rather, we are to be zealous in all things, in all graces, in all virtues, and against all vices and sin. Oliver Bowles (d. 1674) said zeal "is a holy ardor kindled by the Holy Spirit of God in the affections, improving a man to the utmost for God's glory, and the church's good…. *It is not so much any one affection as the intended degree of all*."[10]

This is the type of zeal that is lacking in our churches and hearts today. We may occasionally be zealous, but far too many men, women, and children do not have hearts ablaze for the glory of God. Given the lukewarm temperature of the church today, we could safely assume that most Christians have decided that holy zeal is not necessary. Are you as zealous about God's glory as you are about your reputation? Are you as zealous about communing with the Holy Trinity as you are about talking to your friends? Are you as zealous about spiritual fitness as you are about physical fitness? Christopher Love (1618–1651) said many people "pant after the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7): they are so eager in their pursuit of the world that they almost run out of breath (Ps. 59:6). By contrast, our attitude toward the things of eternity is more like Stoics without passion. We are "as hot as fire for earth and as cold as any ice for heaven," Love said. "Oh, how many pant after the earth who have no breathing after heaven!"[11] We are zealous about many things but not for the things of God.

The Characteristics of Christian Zeal Oliver Bowles exhorts us to be diligent that our zeal is the right stamp since, "as every [other] grace, so zeal may and often does have its counterfeit."[12] John Flavel (1628–1691) warns that an abundance of souls perish in the way because of false zeal.[13] Like the Pharisees, people are zealous *against* false worship but not zealous *for* true worship. False zeal is such a grievous error threatening the church that its danger cannot be underestimated.

Christ teaches us that we can know the nature of a tree by its fruit (Matt. 7:20). So let us consider some of the signs of false zeal to better grasp what true zeal is. Samuel Ward said that the many strange fires disguised under true zeal can be reduced to three sorts: counterfeit zeal, blind zeal, and turbulent zeal.

1. Counterfeit zeal looks one way while pursuing something else. It is the hypocritical zeal of Jehu who, in 2 Kings 10:16, boasts about seeing the glory of the LORD, but really has his eye on his own gain in the kingdom. It is Demetrius who cries out in praise of Diana but really cares only for her silver idols from which he makes money (Acts 19:23–28). Counterfeit zeal pretends to be pursuing God's glory while it is really pursuing a selfish end. Just as in these cases we see only the image of faith, so we merely see the show of zeal without its true essence (2 Tim. 3:5).[14]

2. Blind zeal is what Romans 10:2 describes as pretending to honor God without truly knowing Him. People with such zeal make great sacrifices, yet they fall into a pit. They expend all kinds of energy but in the wrong direction and to the wrong end. The apostle Paul was inflamed by blind zeal before the Lord converted him (Acts 22:3–4). Ward says of those aflame with such blind zeal, "The devil hath no better soldiers than these; but when their scales fall from their eyes, and they come into God's tents, God hath none like unto them."[15]

3. Turbulent zeal is bitter envy or jealousy (James 3:14). This zeal is a wildfire that transports men beyond all bounds. It is no longer a good servant but rules as an ill master.[16] Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) wrote, "There is no true zeal to God's glory but it is joined with true love to men; therefore let men that are violent, injurious, and insolent, never talk of glorifying God so long as they despise poor men."[17]

The heavenly fire of Christian zeal is so different from the strange fires of false zeal that Ward said, "The true zealot, whose fervency is in the spirit, not in show; in substance, not in circumstance; for God, not himself; guided by the word, not with humors [emotions]; tempered with charity, not with bitterness: such a man's worth cannot be set forth with the tongues of men and of angels."[18]

True zeal is the divine grace that inclines all affections for God. There are many branches upon which this root bears fruit and many marks that indicate its true nature. These include the following:

1. God-centered zeal. Because the author and object of zeal is the living God, the

zealous Christian has a fervent love for God and craves His presence. He grieves when God's name suffers injury and is angry when His honor and cause are obstructed. Titus 2:14 says that Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." William Fenner commented, "Thou cannot possibly be one of God's people, if thou be not zealous for God."[19] Zeal is inseparable from love for God because God is so glorious. Richard Baxter (1615–1691) wrote, "The nature of holy objects are such, so great and excellent, so transcendent and of unspeakable consequence, that we cannot be sincere in our estimation and seeking of them, without zeal…. To love God without zeal, is not to love him, because it is not a loving him as God."[20]

2. Biblical zeal. In contrast to the false zeal for God that Paul refers to in Romans 10:2, sacred zeal is according to knowledge, meaning it is confined by the rules of Scripture. Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) wrote, "Zeal is like a fire: in the chimney it is one of the best servants, but out of the chimney it is one of the worst masters. Zeal kept by knowledge and wisdom, in its proper place, is a choice servant to Christ and saints."[21] True zeal is grounded in the Word of God as the only rule of faith and life. The Pharisees were zealous but only of private opinions, or party factions, and for unwritten traditions. Christian zeal is ordered by knowledge according to the Word.

3. Self-reforming zeal. Thomas Brooks said zeal "spends itself and its greatest heat principally upon those things that concern a man's self."[22] Of the eight properties of zeal, Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594) began with this mark, saying, "For never can that man be zealous to others, which never knew to be zealous to himself."[23] He explained that

> true zeal casts the first stone at ourselves, and plucks the beam out of our own eyes, that we may the better draw the mote out of another's eye. And this is the condemnation of the world, that every man can pry and make a privy search into the wants of others, but they account the same wants no wants in themselves…. We call not in our consciences for those things which we dare challenge and cry out for in others.[24]

Beginning with a sincere examination of self is crucial for it prevents the damnable error of hypocrisy. Greenham said, "It has been a fearful note of hypocrites, and such as have fallen from the living God, that they have waded very deeply into other men's possessions, and gored very bloodily into the consciences of others, who never once purged their own unclean sinks at home, nor drew one drop of blood out of their own hearts."[25]

4. Active zeal. Having knowledge of God, whom we love, we are zealous in devoting ourselves to the duties required of us in the gospel. We are busy and active, continually involved in holy exploits and executions. Sin deadens the heart to religious operations, for as the apostle says, "When I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21). But, as Brooks notes, "The zealous soul is continually saying to himself, *What shall I render to the Lord?*"[26] The zealous Christian is ready to perform whatever duty God places upon him, certainly to the utmost of his strength, but even above it,[27] whereupon he trusts in the Lord to bring strength out of his weakness and a richness of grace out of his poverty (Phil. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9–10). "Christian zeal is not to be confined at home, to our own personal goodness; but has a still wider scope," Evans said. "If it is employed abroad, while our own vineyard is not kept, it is a false pretense, and justly offensive to God and man. But the due exercise of it for our own conduct being presupposed, there is a large field for its exercise."[28]

5. Consistent zeal. The bodies of cold-blooded animals take on the temperature of their environment. Warm-blooded animals have bodies that strive to maintain a steady temperature. The zealous Christian is a warm-blooded creature, resisting both the lethargy of cold heartedness and the fever of fanaticism. Unlike that blind fury that caused Nebuchadnezzar to heat a furnace seven times hotter than normal, the zealous believer is not to be hot by fits, nor start out hot only to end up cold (Gal. 3:3), but must keep a continual temperature from beginning to end (Heb. 3:14).[29] He does not yield to faintness or despondency, for though his flesh is weak and weary, his zealous spirit is still willing and active (Mark 14:38). Reynolds quipped, "It may meet with storms, and stones, and stumbling blocks in its way; but its design and temper is to hold on, and march through all to the end."[30]

William Bates (1625–1699) commented on this mark of zeal:

> There is no counsel more directive and profitable for our arriving to an excellent degree of holiness, than this: let our progress in the way of heaven be with the same zeal, as we felt in our first entrance into it, and with the same seriousness, as when we shall come to the end of it. The first and last actions of the saints, are usually the most excellent…. But alas how often are the first heats allayed, and stronger resolutions decline to remissness.[31]

6. Sweet and gentle zeal. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) said that we must learn what it means to be a bold warrior for God from the Captain of all God's armies: Jesus Christ. Christ boldly spoke against sin, hypocrisy, and false teaching. Yet,

Edwards reminded us, when Christ was surrounded by enemies like "roaring lions," He showed his strength "not in the exercise of any fiery passions; not in fierce and violence speeches," but in "patience, meekness, love, and forgiveness."[32] Edwards wrote,

> As some are mistaken concerning the nature of true boldness for Christ, so they are concerning Christian zeal. 'Tis indeed a flame, but a sweet one; or rather it is the heat and fervor of a sweet flame. For the flame of which it is the heat, is no other than that of divine love, or Christian charity; which is the sweetest and most benevolent thing that is, or can be, in the heart of man or angel.[33]

Zeal is indeed the heat of a flame, but the flame is the fire of love. Therefore we should avoid the destructive wildfire of pride, selfishness, and divisive partisanship on the one hand, and on the other hand avoid coldness, lethargy, laziness, and deadness. Let us burn with love!

And what is to be done when we see how cold we have become? Bates said, "We should with tears of confusion remember the disparity between our zealous beginnings, and slack prosecution in religion; we should blush with shame, and tremble with fear, at the strange decay of grace, and recollect ourselves, and reinforce our will to proceed with vigorous constancy."[34]

These are the ways to discern between false zeal and the holy zeal that the Holy Spirit ignites in our hearts for the things of God. We must be on guard to notice the difference. What makes a counterfeit fifty-dollar bill dangerous is its close likeness to a real fifty-dollar bill; only a trained eye can distinguish the authentic from a superior counterfeit. Likewise, counterfeit zeal closely resembles true spiritual zeal. We must have a discerning eye to determine what is false from what is real.

The Means of Christian Zeal When you look around and see few people who are zealous for the Lord, you may be tempted to dismiss the call to be zealous and settle for something less. Such a response would be grievous to us all, not only because the church is already filled with countless saints who are crawling when they could be flying, but because lukewarmness (Gal. 2:11–13) is as contagious as sacred zeal (2 Cor. 9:2).

Real zeal is not beyond the reach of any saint who sincerely asks the Lord for it and diligently gives himself to the faithful use of the means appointed by God to sustain it. It is our calling and the reason why Christ redeemed us, and it *alone* holds forth hope for the future of Christ's church (Rev. 2:4–5; 3:2–3, 15–20).

When we speak of the means to Christian zeal, we mean those things we must

do so that, by God's blessing, all our affections may be set ablaze against all things sinful and toward all things holy. However, we can do none of this in our natural self, for the flesh strives against the Spirit. True Christian zeal is opposed by the flesh, sin, and the devil. As we consider what means we may use to stir up this grace of zeal, we must be aware of our enemies. But we must also call to mind the encouraging words of John Reynolds:

> You are now demolishing the strongholds of Satan, to enlarge the kingdom of Christ. And therefore you can expect no other but the gates of Hell will exert the utmost of their power, and employ all the agents they can get upon earth, to obstruct and hinder it. But that should not slacken your zeal, but make it rather the more flagrant: 'for the God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly' (Rom. 16:20). You fight the battles of the Lord of Hosts, and therefore need not fear what men or Devils can do unto you. He has often said it, and He will make it good, that all nations shall one time or other be subdued to His Son, and be blessed in Him. Many are so already. And this seems to be the critical time to bring in many more, if not all the rest.[35]

Indeed, with such a ready harvest (Matt. 9:37–38), it is time to be zealous for God.

The first means to attain Christian zeal is *prayer*. As a *grace* of God, zeal cannot be earned or bargained for, but must be given (James 1:17); and as a grace of *God*, it must be asked for by prayer humbly offered in the name of Christ (John 16:23). Samuel Ward said, "Prayer and zeal are as water and ice, mutually producing each other."[36] Therefore we are not to wonder how so great a grace can be ours without our first having to qualify for it, or like a spiritual Samson seek to wrestle it from God's hands. Rather, we are to acquire it the same way we acquire all other graces and gifts of God, namely, by asking God to bestow it upon us for Christ's sake. For Luke 12:32 says the Father's good pleasure is to give us the kingdom, and Luke 11:13 promises that the Father will give the Holy Spirit, and therefore all His graces, to those who ask.

John Preston (1587–1628) wrote, "The love of God is peculiarly the work of the Holy Ghost…. Therefore the way to get it is earnestly to pray…. We are no more able to love the Lord than cold water is able to heat itself…so the Holy Ghost must breed that fire of love in us, it must be kindled from heaven, or else we shall never have it."[37]

The only thing that stands in the way of our receiving this grace is our failure to ask. James 4:2 says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not." And what stands in the way of our asking is unbelief, the great enemy of zeal. If we sincerely wish

to be inflamed with zeal for God, we must humble ourselves before Him, believe His Word to be truth, acknowledge our need and His bounty, confess our sin and His mercy and our unworthiness and His grace, and ask Him, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, to give us this grace to enliven us and inflame all our affections by His Holy Spirit who indwells us, that we might pursue His glory all our life.

Some will no doubt say this means zeal is too easy, while others will say it is too hard. But neither will know zeal because they refuse to take God at His word. Others, while undeserving in themselves and by nature cold in affection and dead in spirit, will have their hearts filled with grace and their affections inflamed with holy zeal, because they believed Him who spoke and humbled themselves to ask (Heb. 11:6). For Jesus says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9–10). The neglect of prayer will quickly cool our zeal.

The second means by which we maintain zeal is *the Word of God.* Ward said, "When [the fire of zeal] is once come down upon your altar, though no water can quench it, yet must it be preserved fresh by ordinary fuel, especially the priest's lips must keep fire alive. Sermons are bellows ordained for this purpose."[38] Preaching the Word is a powerful means to blow on the coals of zeal and keep them aflame because God Himself speaks in preaching. When the Word is faithfully preached, God speaks to our hearts, lighting His match and blowing upon our coals with His Spirit to make our zeal burn afresh. Likewise, the faithful reading of Scripture feeds our zeal by pouring fuel on the holy fire in our bosom. The Word feeds our passion and love for God which He graciously placed in our hearts. If we would have our zeal aroused, we must not neglect to fuel it. If we would have this seed of grace come to full fruition in every area of our lives, we must cultivate it to full bloom.

The hearing and reading of the Word must be applied through "frequent meditation" in order to arouse zeal, said Fenner, for it is while we muse that the fire is kindled within us (Ps. 39:3).[39] Meditate especially on the gospel to fuel the burning of your zeal for God. Sibbes said, "Whence comes a zeal to good works, but when we look to the grace that hath brought salvation and redemption from our sins, and to the glorious coming of Christ?… When faith looks both these ways, it is set a-fire, it makes us zealous (Heb. 9:14)."[40] Sibbes went on to say, "When they consider his wonderful love to such as they are, they are inflamed with love again; as in the gospel, the woman who had many sins forgiven her, therefore she loved much…. So it stirs us up to be at cost for Christ and for his church, at any cost, to sacrifice our Isaacs."[41]

The third means to maintain our zeal for God is *faithful attendance and fellowship in God's house*. Hebrews 10:24–25 commands us not to neglect the assembly of the saints, saying, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Fenner wrote, "The coals that lie together in the hearth, you see how they glow and are fired, while the little coals that are fallen off, and lie by, separate from their company, are black without fire. If ever thou desirest to be zealous, make much of the fellowship of the saints."[42]

Richard Baxter advised, "Live among warm and serious Christians; especially as to your intimate familiarity. There is a very great power in the zeal of one to kindle zeal in others; as there is in fire to kindle fire. Serious, hearty, diligent Christians, are excellent helps to make us serious and diligent. He that travelleth with speedy travelers, will be willing to keep pace with them."[43]

How detrimental, then, it is to neglect these means of grace! Ward warned:

> Such as read the Bible by fits upon rainy days, not eating the book with John, but tasting only with the tip of the tongue; such as meditate by snatches, never chewing the cud and digesting their meat, they may happily get a smackering for discourse and table-talk, but not enough to keep soul and life together, much less for strength and vigor. Such as forsake the best fellowship, and wax strange to the holy assemblies (as now the manner of many is), how can they but take cold? Can one coal alone keep itself glowing?[44]

How quickly will the hottest zeal cool without the use of God's appointed means!

The fourth means to stir up our zeal for God is *repentance and resistance against sin*. Our Lord Jesus joined zeal and repentance together when He said, "Be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Our zeal for God is dampened if we refuse to let go of some cherished sin despite the Spirit speaking to our conscience. A hardened heart is a heart cold toward God. If you find yourself growing cold to God, His Word, and His people, then ask yourself whether there is some disobedience in your life that you are tolerating despite the warnings of your conscience.

Paul spoke of the renewal of zeal by repentance when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:10–11, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation," and noted, "What carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal." Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) said that zeal is one of "the adjuncts or

effects of repentance" and exclaimed, "How does the penitent bestir himself in the business of salvation! How does he take the kingdom of heaven by force (Matt. 11:12)!"[45]

Fenner said that in order to inflame and maintain our zeal we must "shun the occasions of sin" and "eschew [flee] the beginnings of sin."[46] Do not toy with temptation; you are playing with a cobra. Fenner observed that "Abraham would not take so much as a thread or a shoe-latchet of the King of Sodom, when he offered him."[47]

Both the means to attain Christian zeal and to keep it aflame in the soul may seem impossible when considered from our perspective and evaluated according to our wisdom. Indeed, the promise that such means will give way to so great a grace and so glorifying a life seems to be nothing more than an idle tale. Such thinking is familiar, not only because we have entertained it ourselves, but also because of the story of Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5). When Naaman came to Elisha to be healed of leprosy, he expected the prophet to call upon the name of the Lord with some great incantation (v. 11). When Elisha's response was to send a messenger to Naaman telling him he would be cured if he washed in the Jordan River seven times, Naaman went away in a rage. What was the Jordan River compared to the Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus (v. 12)!

Naaman's faith for a cure was not in the prophet or in his God; it was wrongly placed in the means he expected the prophet to use. Once his servant pointed out the foolishness of his unwillingness to follow the prophet's simple instructions, Naaman came to himself. Verse 14 says, "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Thomas Manton (1620–1677) wisely said, "Though the means seem to have no connection with the end [or goal], yet, if God hath enjoined them for that end, we must use them. As in the instance of Naaman; God was resolved to cure him, but Naaman must take his [God's] prescribed way, though against his own fancy and conceit."[48]

The application of this account is that if we consider the means to Christian zeal in light of our own wisdom and judge them by our own standards, we will respond no less foolishly than Naaman. But if we consider them in the light of God's wisdom, everything changes. To Him, a stone is not too small to slay a giant (1 Sam. 17:40), a few loaves and fish not too few to feed thousands (Mark 6:38), and an army of three hundred not too small to slay an army of tens of thousands (Judg. 8:10). We must remember that seemingly insignificant means are at times God's appointed means and not the ideas and notions of men. And as God's ways and thoughts are far above ours (Isa. 55:8–9), so God's means to

Christian zeal will in the end prove to be far above ours, both in simplicity and efficacy.

The Practice of Christian Zeal We must pray for grace to put Christian zeal into action, whatever our calling in life may be. Let us look briefly at three callings: the ministry, the laborer, and the parent.

1. *The ministry*. If you are called to be a minister, it would be tragic for you to follow that calling without zeal! William Gurnall (1616–1679) said that ministers must have "a zealous boldness," writing, "Jeremiah tells us the word of God was as fire in his bones; it broke out of his mouth as the flame out of a furnace."[49] Reynolds wrote, "Sacred zeal will produce noble effects upon, and by the ministry of the church. It would set those of that sacred order upon most serious consideration of the world, and weight, and end, of their divine office and function. It would set them upon a diligent and watchful fulfilling of the ministry that is committed to them" (2 Tim. 4:5).[50]

The zealous minister has a tender love for souls and labors for their salvation (1 Cor. 9:22). He catechizes and instructs the ignorant (1 Tim. 4:11), rebukes and persuades the profane (Titus 1:9–13), exhorts and encourages those seeking God's grace (2 Cor. 5:20), assures those who have begun to run well (1 Tim. 4:13), establishes the wavering and doubtful (Titus 2:1), revives the fearful and despondent (1 Tim. 4:16), restores the rebellious (2 Cor. 2:6–8), comforts those who are strong and faithful with the hope of glory (1 Tim. 4:6), and zealously intercedes for the flock entrusted to him (Col. 4:12–13).[51] It is true that such things are incumbent upon the minister whether he is zealous or not, but how impossible these things would be if his heart were cold and lifeless in its calling!

2. *The laborer*. Consider the environment in which a Christian laborer works. He is constantly confronted by bad examples; within hearing of profanity, coarse joking, and blasphemy; subjected to gossip, slander, complaining, backbiting, malicious speech, and lies; subjected to office smut in which sin is glamorized, marriage vows are broken, and flirting is fun. He is exposed to immodest dress, seductive speech, and wanton eyes. He faces orders and expectations that require him to lie, cheat, steal, deceive, withhold information, and present half-truths as full truths.

The zealous laborer will be ever mindful that God is the source of his calling. Because God has placed him in the workplace, the zealous laborer will work not to be seen by men or only when his boss is looking, but rather will do all his work as unto the Lord who "hired" him (Eph. 6:5–9). His goal will be the Lord's

favor and pleasure, not only in his duties but also in the way he speaks of his work (without murmuring) and regards it. He will do his work joyfully, thankfully, and willingly, desiring that it might be a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice unto the Lord his God (Eph. 5:2). We will then be enabled to work for our superiors "with good will" (Eph. 6:7), which implies "readiness and cheerfulness," as William Gouge (1575–1653) wrote.[52] Gouge said that Christians should be "both quick and diligent" in serving those in authority over them, where quick means he does not waste time on a task but tries to get a lot done and diligent means he puts effort and care to do his job well.[53]

Fenner said that zeal leads us to spend ourselves, body and soul, for God. Zeal for God will direct and energize all our daily labors regardless of what our vocation might be. Fenner wrote, "The greatest part of the spending lieth in this, that he may walk with God in his calling. He spendeth himself in belabouring his heart to work in obedience, to follow his business with faith, to go about his earthly employments as before God, to glorify God in all his ways."[54]

The zealous laborer will also be mindful of the temptations particular to his calling. Some workers are required to travel away from home and family and spend many nights alone in hotels. Some must work closely with people of the opposite sex, whether in person or over the phone or through e-mail. Some are constantly exposed to the sins of others.

The zealous laborer will not be outwitted by Satan but will be mindful of his wiles (2 Cor. 2:11). He will consider the places and situations where Satan has most likely set his traps and will be on guard against those temptations. He will be mindful that Satan is warring against him and will not miss the least opportunity to destroy him (1 Peter 5:8). He will guard his ears against conversations that would fill his mind with evil and will think only on things that are good (Phil. 4:8). He will strive to know his own heart and the temptations to which he is prone (Ps. 139:23–24) and will therefore guard his heart above all else (Prov. 4:23). He will make a covenant with his eyes to put no wicked thing before them (Ps. 101:3; Job 31:1). He will meditate upon the things of God (Ps. 1:1–3) to ever turn his feet into the way of God's commandments (Ps. 119:59). He will store God's Word in his heart that he might not sin against Him (Ps. 119:11).[55] What great need the Christian laborer has of Christian zeal!

3. *Parents*. Of all callings, parenting is one of the most demanding. The Christian parent is called to lead little ones to God, yet he struggles with their natural rebellion against the things of God, their pride, their selfishness, their innate love and desire for sin, and the inherited corruption of their nature. Against this barrage of natural wickedness, the parent understands that he must

discipline his children and protect his children from straying into danger. How difficult this calling is!

It gets even more difficult. Not only does the parent face the sinfulness of his children, but he must also obey his calling in the face of his own sinfulness. He must expect from his children the very thing he is struggling to give himself, and he must discipline them for disobedience in the very areas in which he continues to struggle. This makes him feel like a hypocrite, nags at his conscience, and weighs heavily on him every time he has to correct his children. There is no excuse for his sin, but overlooking their sin just because he is struggling too only encourages their sin. He *must* discipline them.

Precisely because parenting is so hard, parents must constantly fan into flame the zeal of their love for their children. William Gouge wrote, "The fountain of parents' duties is love…. For great is that pain, pains [labors], cost, and care, which parents must undergo for their children. But if love be in them, no pain, pains, cost, or care, will seem too much."[56]

The zealous parent gives serious consideration to the gravity, need, and promises of his calling. The gravity of a parent's calling is inescapable, for God will hold us accountable for our children's souls. As stewards of the Lord's children, we are given the charge to bring them up according to His instruction for Him (Eph. 6:4).

The zealous parent, knowing the gravity of his calling, is constrained to personal holiness and true repentance. He pursues his own holiness to be an example and an encouragement to his children. He wants them to see Christ in him and in turn to desire "the God of their father." He wants them to see that he is different from unbelieving parents only by God's grace. He therefore puts the highest priority on his walk with Christ, seeking by God's grace that his relationship with Christ will be used by God for their salvation. He also manifests true repentance when he sins. What the parent seeks to mirror, then, is the zealous life of faith and repentance to which the Lord calls him.

The zealous parent strives to be faithful in discipline and instruction (Eph. 6:4), applying the rod of correction (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:14) as well as the loving hand of nurture and guidance (Prov. 22:6), for these are his parental duties before God and are neglected to his and his children's peril. But the zealous parent also knows that God is the only one who can crown these efforts with success and bring his children to a saving end. Therefore, the zealous parent will be more on his knees than at his rod, more in his prayer closet than at his parental lectern, and will talk to God more about his children than to his children about God. He will do so with great perseverance, not just here a little, there a little, but with faithful, regular, and earnest pleading until the Lord answers.

To the end that God may perform His saving work upon his children, the parent will make the most zealous use of the means appointed by God to bring the good news of salvation to them, namely, public and family worship. He will ensure that his children are in God's house every Lord's Day (Heb. 10:24–25), where they partake of the blessings of God upon His people. There they can enjoy the presence of the triune God among His people, witness the grace of God in them, and hear the Word of God assuring them weekly that God will save all who come to Him by Jesus Christ (Isa. 55:1–3, 6–7).

The zealous parent will also take care not to neglect regular family worship (Deut. 4:9–10; 6:6–9; Ps. 78:1–7).[57] He views consistent family worship during the week as important as weekly public worship and therefore is obligated before God to see that his children enjoy both. His daily family worship will consist of *Scripture reading*, so his children might be daily brought before the Word of God and the good news of Jesus Christ; of *prayers* with his family, so he might teach his children how to pray and encourage them to call upon the Lord who hears (Isa. 65:24); and of *singing*, so his children might learn to praise God and ever be reminded that God alone is worthy of their worship, adoration, and service.[58]

Are you, by God's grace, in whatever calling you possess, manifesting the practice of Christian zeal?

Concluding Applications Let us close with three applications: First, pray for grace to rightly understand the need for Christian zeal. Let us cast away every objection against becoming zealous for God and His glory. Let us see that zeal is essential, first, because it is God's imperative, for He commands us to be "fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11); second, because it accompanies every other Christian grace, such as zealous love and zealous hope; third, because love for the souls of others demands zeal; and finally, because genuine desires for glory demand that we "strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24) and run to obtain the high prize (1 Cor. 9:24–25).

Second, pray for grace to be motivated rightly for Christian zeal. (1) The zeal of the world for its agenda ought to motivate us to be zealous for Christ. If the world can be so zealous for causes that will lead sinners to hell, how much more ought Christians to be zealous for the gospel that can lead sinners to everlasting life? (2) The preciousness of time ought to motivate our zeal. How much time have we wasted already? Truly, now is the time when we should double our diligence and be zealous for God. (3) Titus 2:14 teaches us that Christ's redemptive purchase should motivate us, for He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people,

zealous of good works." (4) Christ's own example should motivate us. Zeal for His Father so consumed Jesus (John 2:17) that He took every opportunity in public and in private to speak of the salvation that He came to accomplish for His Father. Should we not do likewise? Peter tells us that Christ has left us an example so we might walk in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). If He is aflame with love for souls, with hatred for sin, with compassion for the hurting, with grief for the obstinate, should we not do likewise?

John Reynolds's questions are worth noting here:

> Did He descend into our mortal flesh, that we should be unconcerned whether we be translated from the world, and go to His glory, or no? Did He abase Himself, and make Himself of no reputation, that we might be made indifferent towards His name and honor? Did He employ thirty years on earth, in an unwearied zeal for His Father's glory, to excuse us from an emulous ardor [a burning desire to imitate Him] in design and love? Did He lay down His life for our salvation, that we may be unconcerned, whether we are saved or no? Did He rise from the dead, and seat Himself in heaven, to excuse us from a solicitude about affairs, that are above, where He sits at the right hand of God? Has He told us of His resolution to return, and judge the world, that we may be secure, and negligent about the issue of that decisive Day? How contradictory to all His love and work is our lukewarmness in His ways? What ingratitude to Him is contained in the bowels of it? What contempt does it pour upon His blood and grace; upon His light and revelation; as if we looked upon them all as unnecessary, impertinent things? Most justly may He say to a lukewarm church, *I will spew thee out of my mouth except thou repent*.[59]

Where then is your zeal? Is lukewarmness in your spirit threatening God's rebuke? Is your indifference about serving God now endangering your readiness to stand before the Lord on the day of judgment? Are you neutral toward the call to holiness, not caring whether you grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ or whether you take up your duties for Him?

Are you ready to explain to your Maker why you have buried your talents? Are you ready to explain why you have squandered time, mercies, privileges, and your life? If not, where is your zeal?

Finally, let us pray for grace to be humbled by our lack of zeal for Christ and His glorious kingdom. May God make us lament our prolonged lukewarmness in religion; may He humble us by showing us how helpless we are to be zealous for Him and how prone we are to embrace sloth. But may He also have mercy on us, hearing our prayers and answering our hearts' longing to be inflamed with holy

affections. May He open our ears to hear Christ's intercession for us so that we are fervent in spirit and clothed with zeal as with a cloak. And may God make this holy desire for Christian zeal come to full fruition in us, leading not only to resolutions to be zealous for God henceforth but also to pursuing endeavors in the appointed means to be zealous for our God.

Let us close with the words of Reynolds:

> O what a world of good may we all do, if we had the true zeal of God! How many occasions and opportunities are put into our hands every day (in what condition and circumstances soever we are) which, if we were acted by this principle, would render us great benefactors to mankind, by discouraging vice and impiety, and promoting virtue and goodness in the world? Could we agree in the exercise of such a beneficent principle, how happy would our [world] be? But if we must not act by that principle in concert together, yet let us act by it notwithstanding. If we must stand divided and separate still, yet let us put on zeal for God and His Kingdom among men! Let us ardently love the Lord Jesus, and the affairs of His redemption and glory! Let us be serious and diligent in all the offices of a truly sacred zeal![60]

Repent and "be zealous" (Rev. 3:19)!

1. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 352.

2. John Reynolds, *Zeal a Virtue: or, A Discourse Concerning Sacred Zeal* (London: John Clark, 1716), 1–2. This chapter is largely drawn from a recently published book, *Living Zealously* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), that I have coauthored with James La Belle. My thanks to him for allowing me to include this chapter in this book.

3. William Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections* (London: A. M. for J. Rothwell, 1650), 132–33.

4. Reynolds, *Discourse*, 18.

5. Samuel Ward, *Sermons and Treatises* (1636; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 72.

6. John Evans, "Christian Zeal," in *Practical Discourses Concerning the Christian Temper: Being Thirty Eight Sermons upon the Principal Heads of Practical Religion*, 7th ed. (London: Ware, Longman, and Johnson, 1773), 2:320.

7. Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections*, 118.

8. Ward, *Sermons*, 72.

9. Iain H. Murray, "The Puritans on Maintaining Spiritual Zeal," in *Adorning the Doctrine* (London: Westminster Conference, 1995), 75. This chapter is indebted to several insights from Murray's article.

10. Oliver Bowles, *Zeal for God's House Quickened* (London: Richard Bishop for Samuel Gellibrand, 1643), 5–6.

11. Christopher Love, *The Zealous Christian* (1653; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 15.

12. Bowles, *Zeal for God's House Quickened*, 27.

13. John Flavel, *Pneumatologia: A Treatise of the Soul of Man*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 3:214.

14. Ward, *Sermons*, 75.

15. Ward, *Sermons*, 76.

16. Ward, *Sermons*, 76.

17. Richard Sibbes, *Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (1862–1865; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 7:187.

18. Ward, *Sermons*, 77.

19. Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections*, 124.

20. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 1:383.

21. Thomas Brooks, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (1861–1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 3:54–55.

22. Brooks, *Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, in *Works*, 3:55.

23. Richard Greenham, "Of Zeale," a sermon on Rev. 3:19, in *The Works of that Reverend and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ M. Richard Greenham* (1599; facsimile repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 118.

24. Greenham, "Of Zeale," in *Works*, 118.

25. Greenham, "Of Zeale," in *Works*, 118.

26. Brooks, *Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, in *Works*, 3:58–59. Cf. 1 Kings 8:18.

27. William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (1639; facsimile repr., Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1975), 56 (3.6). In this work the pagination is irregular. Therefore we will cite it also by book and chapter number.

28. Evans, "Christian Zeal," in *Practical Discourses*, 2:330.

29. Ames, *Conscience*, 57 (3.6); Greenham, "Of Zeale," in *Works*, 116.

30. Reynolds, *Discourse*, 67.

31. William Bates, *Spiritual Perfection Unfolded and Enforced*, in *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates, D.D.*, ed. W. Farmer (repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1990), 2:524–25.

32. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works*, 2:351.

33. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works*, 2:352.

34. Bates, *Spiritual Perfection*, in *Works*, 2:525–26.

35. Reynolds, *Discourse*, 459.

36. Ward, *Sermons*, 81–82.

37. John Preston, *The Breastplate of Faith and Love* (1634; facsimile repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 2:50.

38. Ward, *Sermons*, 82.

39. Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections*, 158.

40. Richard Sibbes, "Salvation Applied," in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (1862–1865; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 5:398.

41. Sibbes, "Salvation Applied," in *Works*, 5:399.

42. Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections*, 162.

43. Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, in *Works*, 1:386.

44. Ward, *Sermons*, 83.

45. Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (1668; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 93–94.

46. Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections*, 162–63.

47. Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections*, 162.

48. Thomas Manton, *Eighteen Sermons on the Second Chapter of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1871), 3:124.

49. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (1662–1665; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 2:578.

50. Reynolds, *Discourse*, 163.

51. Reynolds, *Discourse*, 163–64.

52. William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622; facsimile repr., Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1976), 168.

53. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 620.

54. Fenner, *A Treatise of the Affections*, 126.

55. On practical godliness for the working man, see Richard Steele, *The Religious Tradesman…* (repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1989).

56. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 498. Gouge's treatise is a helpful exposition and application of Ephesians 5:22–6:9, which includes the duties of parents (6:4) among those of wives, husbands, children, servants, and masters. It has been reprinted in an accessible format as William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (Edinburgh, Ind.: Puritan Reprints, 2006).

57. Thomas Doolittle, "How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family?", in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689* (1674; repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 194–272; Matthew Henry, "A Church in the House," in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:248–67; Oliver Heywood, *A Family Altar*, in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Oliver Heywood* (Idle: John Vint, 1826), 4:283–418.

58. For further instruction on the theological foundation, duty, implementation, objections against, and motivations for family worship, see Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

59. Reynolds, *Discourse*, 209–10.

60. Reynolds, *Discourse*, 184–85.

Chapter 59

Practical Lessons from Puritan Theology Today

> *They do not love Christ who love anything more than Christ…. Miss Christ and you miss all.*
>
> —THOMAS BROOKS[1]

Reading Puritan literature has been a major spiritual boon for me for four decades.[2] When the Holy Spirit began to convict me at age fourteen of the seriousness of sin and the spirituality of the law, I searched the Scriptures and devoured Puritan literature from my father's bookcase. My mother would call upstairs each evening at 11:00 p.m., "Lights out!" After my parents' lights went out, I would turn mine back on and read until 12:30 or 1:00 a.m. I read all the Puritan titles published by Banner of Truth Trust with relish, started a church library, founded a nonprofit organization called Bible Truth Books and later, as a minister, Reformation Heritage Books. I have spent thousands of hours with Puritan writers in my life and sold tens of thousands of Puritan books over the spread of the last forty years. Why?

This book has labored to show that the Puritans were richly biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical in their theology. They sought to apply the Word to every circle of life, from private devotions to the family, from the church to national citizenship and international concerns. In this chapter, we will round off our answer to that question "why?" by considering several specific practical lessons from the Puritans.

Focus on Christ

Puritans show us how to focus on Christ. As Scripture clearly shows, evangelism must bear witness to the record that God has given of His only begotten Son (Acts 2:3; 5:42; 8:35; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 3:1). The Puritans thus taught that any preaching in which Christ does not have the preeminence is not valid

preaching. William Perkins (1558–1602) said that the heart of all preaching was to "preach one Christ by Christ to the praise of Christ."[3] According to Thomas Adams (1583–1652), "Christ is the sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost in every line, the Scriptures being but as it were the swaddling bands of the child Jesus."[4] "Think of Christ as the very substance, marrow, soul, and scope of the whole Scriptures," Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) said.[5]

Like Paul, the Puritans preached Christ crucified. J. I. Packer says, "Puritan preaching revolved around 'Christ, and him crucified'—for this is the hub of the Bible. The preachers' commission is to declare the whole counsel of God; but the cross is the center of that counsel, and the Puritans knew that the traveler through the Bible landscape misses his way as soon as he loses sight of the hill called Calvary."[6]

The Puritans were lovers of Christ and wrote much about His beauty. Note Samuel Rutherford's (1600–1661) passion for his Lord: "Put the beauty of ten thousand thousand worlds of paradises, like the Garden of Eden in one; put all trees, all flowers, all smells, all colors, all tastes, all joys, all loveliness, all sweetness in one. O what a fair and excellent thing would that be? And yet it would be less to that fair and dearest well-beloved Christ than one drop of rain to the whole seas, rivers, lakes, and foundations of ten thousand earths."[7] Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) concluded, "Heaven would be hell to me without Christ."[8]

Maintain Biblical Balance The Puritans show us how to maintain proper biblical balance in preaching. Let's examine three important ways:

• By maintaining Christianity's objective and subjective dimensions. The objective is the food for the subjective; thus the subjective is always rooted in the objective. For example, the Puritans stated that the primary ground of assurance is rooted in God's promises, but those promises must become increasingly real to the believer through the subjective evidences of grace and the Holy Spirit's internal witness. Without the Spirit's application, God's promises lead to self-deceit and carnal presumption. On the other hand, without God's promises and the Spirit's illumination, self-examination tends to introspection, bondage, and legalism. Objective and subjective Christianity must not be separated from each other.

We must seek to live in a way that reveals Christ's internal presence based on His objective work of active and passive obedience. The gospel of Christ must be proclaimed as objective truth, and it must also be applied by the Holy Spirit and inwardly appropriated by faith. The Puritans therefore rejected two kinds of

religion: one that separates subjective experience from the objective Word, thereby leading to man-centered mysticism; and one that presumes salvation on false grounds of historical or temporary faith.[9]

• By maintaining God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Nearly all of the Puritans stressed that God is fully sovereign and man is fully responsible. How that can be resolved logically is beyond our finite minds. When Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) was asked how these two grand, biblical doctrines could be reconciled, he responded like a real heir of the Puritans when he said that he did not know that friends needed reconciliation.

He went on to compare these two doctrines to the rails of a track upon which Christianity runs. Just as the rails of a train, which run parallel to each other, appear to merge in the distance, so the doctrines of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, which seem separate from each other in this life, will merge in eternity. The Puritans would wholeheartedly concur. Our task, they said, is not to force their merging in this life, but to keep them in balance and live accordingly. We must thus strive for a vibrant, experiential Christianity that does justice both to God's sovereignty and to our responsibility.

• By rejecting Arminianism and hyper-Calvinism. False converts multiply today through Arminian and decisionistic methods, which have given birth to the carnal Christian theory in order to accommodate fruitless "Christians." The Puritans combated Arminianism through their sovereign grace soteriology. John Owen's (1616–1683) *A Display of Arminianism* and his *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* powerfully underscore that man's fallen will is in bondage.

On the other hand, a growing number of Reformed conservatives today, moving beyond Calvin, are espousing the idea that God does not sincerely offer grace unconditionally to every hearer of the gospel. The result is that gospel preaching is hampered and man's responsibility is often dismissed, if not denied. Happily, we are freed from such rationalistic, hyper-Calvinistic conclusions about the doctrines of grace when we read Puritan writings such as John Bunyan's (1628–1688) *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ,* John Howe's (1630–1705) *The Redeemer's Tears Shed over Lost Souls*, or William Greenhill's (1598–1671) sermon, "What Must and Can Persons Do toward Their Own Conversion."[10] If you preach with a true Reformed balance, some of your parishioners may call you a hyper-Calvinist and others may call you an Arminian, but you will be solidly biblical.

Persevere in Catechizing The Puritans show us the importance of persevering

in catechizing family and church members and neighbors. Like the Reformers, the Puritans were catechists. They believed that pulpit messages should be reinforced by personalized ministry through *catechesis*—the instruction in the doctrines of Scripture using catechisms. Puritan catechizing was important in several ways:

• Scores of Puritans reached out to children and young people by writing catechism books that explained fundamental Christian doctrines via scripturally supported questions and answers.[11] For example, John Cotton (1585–1652) titled his catechism *Milk for Babes, Drawn Out of the Breasts of Both Testaments*.[12] Other Puritans included in the titles of their catechisms such expressions as "the main and fundamental points," "the sum of the Christian religion," the "several heads" or "first principles" of religion, and "the ABC of Christianity." Ian Green shows the high level of continuity that exists in Puritan catechism books in their recurring formulae and topics such as the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. He suggests that there was no substantial discrepancy even between the simple message of many elementary works and the more demanding content of more sophisticated catechisms.[13] At various levels in the church as well as in parishioners' homes, Puritan ministers catechized in order to explain the fundamental teachings of the Bible, help young people commit the Bible to memory, make sermons and the sacraments more understandable, prepare covenant children for confession of faith, teach them how to defend their faith against error, and to help parents teach their own children.[14]

• Catechizing was related to both sacraments. When the Westminster Larger Catechism speaks of "improving" one's baptism, it refers to a task of lifelong instruction in which catechisms such as the Shorter Catechism play an important role.[15] William Perkins said that the ignorant should memorize his catechism, *The Foundation of Christian Religion*, so they would be "fit to receive the Lord's Supper with comfort." And William Hopkinson wrote in the preface to *A Preparation into the Waie of Life*, that he labored to lead his catechumens "into the right use of the Lord's Supper, a special confirmation of God's promises in Christ."[16]

• Catechizing enhanced family worship. The more their public efforts to purify the church were crushed, the more the Puritans turned to the home as a bastion for religious instruction and influence. They wrote books on family worship and the godly order of family government. Robert Openshawe prefaced his catechism with an appeal "to those who were wont to ask how you should spend

the long winter evenings, [to] turn to singing of psalms and teaching your household and praying with them."[17] By the time of the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s, the Puritans considered a lack of family worship and catechizing to be an evidence of an unconverted life.[18]

• Catechizing was a follow-up to sermons and a way to reach neighbors with the gospel. Joseph Alleine (1634–1668) reportedly followed up his work on Sunday five days a week by catechizing church members as well as reaching out with the gospel to people he met on the streets.[19] Richard Baxter (1615–1691), whose vision for catechizing is expounded in *The Reformed Pastor*, said he came to the painful conclusion that "some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour's close disclosure, than they did from ten years' public preaching."[20] Baxter thus invited people into his home every Thursday evening to discuss and pray for blessing upon the sermons of the previous Sabbath.

• Catechizing was helpful for examining people's spiritual condition and encouraging and admonishing them to flee to Christ. Baxter and his two assistants spent two full days each week catechizing parishioners in their homes. Packer concludes: "To upgrade the practice of personal catechising from a preliminary discipline for children to a permanent ingredient in evangelism and pastoral care for all ages was Baxter's main contribution to the development of Puritan ideals for the ministry."[21] Puritan churches and schools considered catechism instruction so important that some even offered official catechists. At Cambridge University, William Perkins served as catechist at Christ's College and John Preston (1587–1628) at Emmanuel College. The Puritan ideal, according to Thomas Gataker (1574–1654), was that a school be a "little church" and its teachers "private catechists."[22]

The Puritan ministry, carried on by preaching, pastoral admonition, and catechizing, took time and skill.[23] The Puritans did not look for quick and easy conversions; they were committed to building up lifelong believers whose hearts, minds, wills, and affections were won to the service of Christ.[24]

The Puritan catechist's hard work was greatly rewarded. Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594) claimed that catechism teaching built up the Reformed church and did serious damage to Roman Catholicism.[25] The Puritans teach us that we should persevere in catechizing, even when we cannot find fruit. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccl. 11:1).

Pray without Ceasing The Puritans show us the need to be praying men of God.

They were truly “men of the closet.” In their closets—their special, private place dedicated to prayer in the bedroom, attic, or open field—they would lift up their voices and cry aloud to the God of heaven for divine benediction upon themselves, their ministries, families, churches, and nation.

Unlike many modern ministers, the quality of Puritan ministers’ spiritual life seems to have been uniformly high.[26] The Puritans were great preachers first and foremost because they were also great petitioners who wrestled with God for divine blessing upon their preaching. Richard Baxter said, “Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching; he preacheth not heartily to his people, that prayeth not earnestly for them. If we prevail not with God to give them faith and repentance, we shall never prevail with them to believe and repent.”[27] Robert Traill (1642–1716) wrote, “Some ministers of meaner [less] gifts and parts are more successful than some that are far above them in abilities; not because they preach better, so much as because they pray more. Many good sermons are lost for lack of much prayer in study.”[28]

A minister’s private prayers must season his pulpit messages. Ministers should take to heart Richard Sibbes’s (1577–1635) admonition: “A minister of Christ is often in the highest honor with men for the performance of one half of his work [preaching], while God is regarding him with displeasure for the neglect of the other half [prayer]” (cf. Acts 6:4).

Like the Puritans, jealously guard your personal devotional time. Set your priorities on spiritual, eternal realities. Be persuaded that as soon as you cease to watch and pray, you court spiritual disaster. Be painfully aware, as John Flavel (1628–1691) said, “that a man may be *objectively* a *spiritual* [man], and all the while *subjectively* a *carnal* man.”[29] Believe, as John Owen noted, that “no man preacheth that sermon well that doth not first preach it to his own heart…. If the word do not dwell with power *in* us, it will not pass with power *from* us.”[30]

Handle Trial Christianly The Puritans show us how to handle trials. Consider the Scottish brothers Ebenezer (1680–1754) and Ralph Erskine (1685–1752). In addition to the religious controversies that dampened their joy in ministry for twenty-five years, they endured much domestic grief. Ebenezer Erskine buried his first wife when she was thirty-nine; his second wife died three years before his own death. He also lost six of fifteen children. Ralph Erskine buried his first wife when she was thirty-two and lost nine of thirteen children. The three sons who reached maturity all entered the ministry, but one helped to depose his own father.

The Erskines well understood that God has “only one Son without sin but none without affliction,” as one Puritan put it. Their diaries, so typical of the

Puritans, are filled with Christ-centered submission in the midst of affliction. When his first wife was on her deathbed and he had just buried several children, Ebenezer Erskine wrote:

> I have had the rod of God laying upon my family by the great distress of a dear wife, on whom the Lord hath laid his hand, and on whom his hand doth still lie heavy. But O that I could proclaim the praises of his free grace, which has paid me a new and undeserved visit this day. He has been with me both in secret and public. I found the sweet smells of the Rose of Sharon, and my soul was refreshed with a new sight of him in the excellency of his person as Immanuel, and in the sufficiency of his everlasting righteousness. My sinking hopes are revived by the sight of him. My bonds are loosed, and my burdens of affliction made light, when he appears…. "Here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." If he call me to go down to the swellings of Jordan, why not, if it be his holy will? Only be with me, Lord, and let thy rod and staff comfort me, and then I shall not fear to go through the valley of trouble, yea, through the valley of the shadow of death.[31]

We can learn from the Puritans that we need affliction to humble us (Deut. 8:2), to teach us what sin is (Zeph. 1:12), and to bring us to God (Hos. 5:15). "Adversity is the diamond dust that heaven polishes its jewels with," wrote Robert Leighton (1611–1684).[32] View God's rod of affliction as His means to write Christ's image more fully upon you so that you may be a partaker of His righteousness and holiness (Heb. 12:10–11). Let your hardships move you to walk by faith and wean you from the world. As Thomas Watson wrote, "God would have the world hang as a loose tooth which, being easily twitched away, doth not much trouble us."[33] Strive for grace to allow affliction to elevate your soul to heaven and pave your way to glory (2 Cor. 4:7).

If you are presently undergoing profound trials, learn from the Puritans not to overestimate those trials. Read William Bridge's (1600–1671) *A Lifting Up for the Downcast,* Thomas Brooks's (1608–1680) *A Mute Christian under the Rod,* and Richard Sibbes's *A Bruised Reed.* Remember that life is short and eternity is forever. Think more of your coming crown and eternal communion with the triune God, saints, and angels than of temporal tribulations. As John Trapp (1601–1669) wrote, "He that rides to be crowned need not think much of a rainy day."[34]

You are merely a renter here; if you are a believer, a mansion awaits you in glory. Do not despair. The Shepherd's rod is held by a fatherly hand of love, not a punitive hand of judgment. Consider Christ in your afflictions—were they not

much more than yours, and was not He wholly innocent? Consider how He perseveres for you, how He prays for you, how He helps you toward the goals He has for you. In the end, your afflictions will glorify Him. As George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673) quaintly said, "A sanctified person, like a silver bell, the harder he is smitten, the better he sounds."[35]

If you are a minister, God will use your trials to make you a better preacher, too, just as He did the Puritans. George Whitefield (1714–1770) wrote:

> Ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross; the Spirit of Christ and of glory then rests upon them. It was this, no doubt, that made the Puritans…such burning and shining lights. When cast out by the black Bartholomew-act [the 1662 Act of Uniformity] and driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in an especial manner wrote and preached as men having authority. Though dead, by their writings they yet speak; a peculiar unction attends them to this very hour.[36]

That "peculiar unction" Whitefield refers to is an experimental, Christ-centered unction that derives from learning the art of contentment in the school of affliction. Under affliction, the Puritans experienced rich spiritual contentment and consolations in Christ. So must we. Read *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646). He will teach you how to turn trial into contentment. Then, the next time Satan, others, or your own conscience buffet you in the ministry, instead of complaining, carry those buffetings to Christ and ask Him to sanctify them by His Spirit so that you may model spiritual contentment for your flock.

Rebuke Pride

The Puritans show us how to handle pride. God hates pride (Prov. 6:16–17). He hates the proud with His heart, curses them with His mouth, and punishes them with His hand (Ps. 119:21; Isa. 2:12; 23:9). Pride was God's first enemy. It was the first sin in Paradise and the last we will shed in death. "Pride is the shirt of the soul, put on first and put off last," writes George Swinnock.[37]

As a sin, pride is unique. Most sins turn us away from God, but pride is a direct attack upon God. It lifts our hearts above God and against God, Henry Smith (1560–1591) said. Pride seeks to dethrone God and enthrone itself. The Puritan ministers did not consider themselves immune to this sin. Twenty years after his conversion, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) groaned about the "bottomless, infinite depths of pride" left in his heart.

Pride spoils our work. As Richard Baxter observed, "When pride has written

the sermon, it goes with us to the pulpit. It forms our tone, it animates our delivery, it takes us off from that which may be displeasing to the people. It sets us in pursuit of vain applause from our hearers. It makes men seek themselves and their own glory."[38]

Pride is complex. Jonathan Edwards said that it takes many forms and shapes and encompasses the heart like the layers of an onion—when you pull off one layer, there is another underneath.

We ministers, always in the public eye, are particularly prone to the sin of pride. As Richard Greenham warns, "The more godly a man is, and the more graces and blessings of God are upon him, the more need he hath to pray because Satan is busiest against him, and because he is readiest to be puffed up with a conceited holiness."[39]

Pride feeds off nearly anything: a fair measure of ability and wisdom, a single compliment, a season of remarkable prosperity, a call to serve God in a position of prestige—even the honor of suffering for the truth. "It is hard starving this sin, when it can live almost upon anything," writes Richard Mayo (c. 1631–1695).[40]

The Puritans said that if we think we are immune to the sin of pride, we should ask ourselves this: How dependent are we on the praise of others? Are we caring more about a reputation for godliness than about godliness itself? What do gifts and rewards from others say to us about our ministry? How do we respond to criticism?

A godly man fights against pride, whereas a worldly one feeds pride. Cotton Mather (1663–1728) confessed that when pride filled him with bitterness and confusion before the Lord, "I endeavoured to take a view of my pride as the very image of the Devil, contrary to the image and grace of Christ; as an offense against God, and grieving of His Spirit; as the most unreasonable folly and madness for one who had nothing singularly excellent and who had a nature so corrupt."[41] Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) also fought pride. In his diary entry for November 10, 1642, Shepard wrote, "I kept a private fast for light to see the full glory of the Gospel…and for the conquest of all my remaining pride of heart."[42]

Can you identify with these Puritan pastors in your struggle against pride? Do you care enough about other Christians to admonish them lovingly about this sin? When John Eliot (1604–1690), a Puritan missionary, noticed that a colleague thought of himself too highly, he said to him, "Study mortification, brother; study mortification."[43]

How do we fight against pride? Do we understand how deeply rooted it is in us—and how dangerous it is? Do we ever remonstrate ourselves like the Puritan Richard Mayo: "Should that man be proud that has sinned as thou hast sinned,

and lived as thou hast lived, and wasted so much time, and abused so much mercy, and omitted so many duties, and neglected so great means?—that hath so grieved the Spirit of God, so violated the law of God, so dishonoured the name of God? Should that man be proud, who hath such a heart as thou hast?"[44]

If you would kill worldly pride and live in godly humility, look at your Savior, whose life, Calvin says, was a series of sufferings. Nowhere is humility so cultivated than at Gethsemane and Calvary. When pride threatens you, consider the contrast between a proud person and our humble Savior. Sing with Isaac Watts (1674–1748):

> *When I survey the wondrous cross,*
> *On which the Prince of glory died;*
> *My richest gain I count but loss,*
> *And pour contempt on all my pride.*

Here are some other ways to subdue pride, learned from the Puritans and their successors: • View each day as an opportunity to forget yourself and serve others. For ministers, Abraham Booth (1734–1806) writes, "Forget not, that the whole of your work is ministerial; not legislative—that you are not a lord in the church, but a servant."[45] The act of service is innately humbling.

• Seek a deeper knowledge of God, His attributes, and His glory. Job and Isaiah teach us that nothing is as humbling as knowing God (Job 42; Isa. 6).

• Read the biographies of great saints, such as Whitefield's *Journals*, *The Life of David Brainerd*, and Spurgeon's *Early Years*. Addressing ministers, Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "If that does not bring you to earth, then I pronounce that you are just a professional and beyond hope."[46]

• Remember daily that "pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

• Pray for humility. Remember how Augustine answered the question, "What three graces does a minister need most?" by saying, "Humility. Humility. Humility."[47]

• Meditate much on the solemnity of death, the certainty of judgment day, and the vastness of eternity.

Rely on the Spirit In everything they said and did, the Puritans show us our profound need for reliance upon the Holy Spirit. They keenly felt the magnitude of conversion and their own inability to bring anyone to Christ. "God never laid it upon thee to convert those he sends thee to. No; to publish the gospel is thy duty," William Gurnall (1616–1679) said to ministers.[48] And Richard Baxter wrote, "Conversion is another kind of work than most are aware of. It is not a

small matter to bring an earthly mind to heaven and to show man the amiable excellencies of God, to be taken up in such love to him that can never be quenched; to make him flee for refuge to Christ and thankfully embrace him as the life of his soul; to have the very drift and bent of his life change so that a man renounces that which he took for his happiness, and places his happiness where he never did before."[49]

The Puritans were convinced that both preacher and listener are totally dependent on the work of the Spirit to effect regeneration and conversion when, how, and in whom He will.[50] The Spirit brings God's presence into human hearts. He persuades sinners to seek salvation, renews corrupt wills, and makes scriptural truths take root in stony hearts. Thomas Watson described it this way: "Ministers knock at the door of men's hearts, the Spirit comes with a key and opens the door."[51] And Joseph Alleine warned, "Never think you can convert yourself. If ever you would be savingly converted, you must despair of doing it in your own strength. It is a resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:1), a new creation (Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10), a work of absolute omnipotence (Eph. 1:19)."[52]

You need to be persuaded that the Spirit's regenerating action is, as John Owen wrote, "infallible, victorious, irresistible, and always efficacious"; it "removeth all obstacles, overcomes all oppositions, and infallibly produces the effect intended."[53] All modes of action that imply another doctrine are unbiblical. J. I. Packer says that "All devices for exerting psychological pressure in order to precipitate 'decisions' must be eschewed, as being in truth presumptuous attempts to intrude into the province of the Holy Ghost." Such pressures may even be harmful, he goes on to show, for while they "may produce the outward form of 'decision,' they cannot bring about regeneration and a change of heart, and when the 'decisions' wear off those who registered them will be found 'gospel-hardened' and antagonistic." Packer concludes in a Puritan vein: "Evangelism must rather be conceived as a long-term enterprise of patient teaching and instruction, in which God's servants seek simply to be faithful in delivering the gospel message and applying it to human lives, and leave it to God's Spirit to draw men to faith through this message in his own way and at his own speed."[54]

Remember, the Holy Spirit must and will bless faithful preaching both to unbelievers' conversion and to believers' growth in grace. God's Word will accomplish its purpose by His Spirit (Isa. 55:10–11; John 3:8). The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 155) says that the Spirit of God makes "especially the preaching of the word an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will;

strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation."

Conclusion: Emulate Puritan Spirituality There is so much more to learn from the Puritans—how they promoted Scripture's authority, biblical evangelism, church reform, the spirituality of the law, spiritual warfare against indwelling sin, the filial fear of God, the dreadfulness of hell and the glories of heaven—but this chapter is already sufficiently long. In a word, I advise you as I advise myself: emulate Puritan spirituality. Let us ask ourselves questions like these: Are we, like the Puritans, thirsting to glorify the triune God? Are we motivated by biblical truth and biblical fire? Do we share the Puritan view of the vital necessity of conversion and of being clothed with the righteousness of Christ? It is not enough to just read the Puritans. A stirring of interest in the Puritans is not the same thing as a revival of Puritanism. We need the inward disposition of the Puritans—the authentic, biblical, intelligent piety they showed in our hearts, lives, and churches.

Will you live godly in Christ Jesus like the Puritans? Will you go beyond studying their theology, discussing their ideas, recalling their achievements, and berating their failures? Will you practice the degree of obedience to God's Word for which they strove? Will you serve God as they served Him? Will you live with one eye on eternity as they did? "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16).

1. Thomas Brooks, cited in *The Complete Gathered Gold*, comp. John Blanchard (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 352.

2. This chapter has been condensed from Joel R. Beeke, "Learn from the Puritans," in *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Thomas K. Ascol (Cape Coral, Fla.: Founders Press, 2004), 219ff.

3. William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecying*, in *The Works of William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1609), 2:762.

4. Thomas Adams, "Meditations upon Some Part of the Creed," in *The Works of Thomas Adams* (1862; repr., Eureka, Calif.: Tanski, 1998), 3:224.

5. Isaac Ambrose, *Works of Isaac Ambrose* (London: for Thomas Tegg & Son, 1701), 201.

6. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 286.

7. Samuel Rutherford, cited in *Why Read the Puritans Today*, by Don Kistler (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 4.

8. Thomas Goodwin, cited in Kistler, *Why Read the Puritans Today*, 3.

9. Joel R. Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 125, 130, 146.

10. John Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ* (1681; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004); John Howe, *The Redeemer's Tears Wept over Lost Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); William

Greenhill, "What Must and Can Persons Do toward Their Own Conversion," in *Puritan Sermons: 1659–1689: The Morning Exercises at Cripplegate* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 1:38–50.

11. See George Edward Brown, "Catechists and Catechisms of Early New England" (DRE diss., Boston University, 1934); R.M.E. Paterson, "A Study in Catechisms of the Reformation and Post-Reformation Period" (MA thesis, Durham University, 1981); Margarita Patricia Hutchinson, "Religious Change: The Case of the English Catechism, 1560–1640" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1984); Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

12. John Cotton, *Milk for Babes, Drawn out of the Breasts of Both Testaments* (London: J. Coe for Henry Overton, 1646).

13. Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 557–70.

14. Cf. W. G. T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (1867; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 356–75.

15. The Westminster Assembly desired to establish one catechism and one confession of faith for both England and Scotland, but a spate of catechism writing continued after the Westminster standards were drafted; see J. Lewis Wilson, "Catechisms, and Their Use among the Puritans," in *One Steadfast High Intent* (London: Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, 1966), 41–42.

16. William Hopkinson, *A Preparation into the Waie of Life, with a Direction into the RIGHTE Use of the Lordes Supper* (London: Ihon Kyngston, 1583), sig. A.3.

17. Robert Openshawe, *Short Questions and Answeares* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1580), A.4.

18. Wilson, "Catechisms, and Their Use among the Puritans," 38–39.

19. C. Stanford, *Joseph Alleine: His Companions and Times* (London: Charles Stanford, 1861).

20. Richard Baxter, *Gidlas Salvianus: The Reformed Pastor: Shewing the Nature of the Pastoral Work* (1656; repr., New York: Robert Carter, 1860), 341–468.

21. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 305.

22. Thomas Gataker, *David's Instructor* (London, 1620), 18; see also B. Simon, "Leicestershire Schools 1635–40," *British Journal of Educational Studies* (Nov. 1954): 47–51.

23. Thomas Boston, *The Art of Manfishing: A Puritan's View of Evangelism* (repr., Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1998), 14–15.

24. Thomas Hooker, *The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ* (1635; repr., Worthington, Pa.: Maranatha, 1977).

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26. See Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans*, 3 vols. (1813; repr., Pittsburgh, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994); William Barker, *Puritan Profiles* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996).

27. Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 123.

28. Robert Traill, "By What Means May a Minister Best Win Souls," in *The Works of the Late Reverend Robert Traill* (1810; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 1:246.

29. John Flavel, *The Touchstone of Sincerity, or The Signs of Grace and the Symptoms of Hypocrisy*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 5:568.

30. John Owen, "The Duty of a Pastor," in *The Works of John Owen* (1850; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 9:455; *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, in *Works*, 16:76.

31. Donald Fraser, *The Life and Diary of the Reverend Ebenezer Erskine* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1831), chap. 6.

32. Robert Leighton, *The Whole Works of Robert Leighton* (Philadelphia: G. S. Appleton, 1851), quote from "Inspirational Quotes A to F," *Hope Triumphant*, http://www.hopetriumphant.com/inspirational_quotes_ a_to_f.htm (accessed February 3, 2011).

33. Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial* (Wilmington, Del.: Sovereign Grace, 1972), available from "Growing Pains: How Affliction Works for the Good of Those Who Love God," *Mr. Renaissance*, http://www.mrrena.com/misc/pains.shtml (accessed February 3, 2011).

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trapp-1 (accessed February 3, 2011).

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37. Thomas, *Puritan Quotations*, 224.

38. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 212–26.

39. Richard Greenham, *Grave Counsels and Godlie Observations*, in *The Works of Richard Greenham*, 62.

40. Cf. Richard Mayo, "What Must We Do to Prevent and Cure Spiritual Pride?", in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689*, 3:378–93.

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42. Michael McGiffert, ed., *God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 116–17.

43. Cited in Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 128.

44. Richard Mayo, "What Must We Do to Prevent and Cure Spiritual Price?", in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689*, 3:390.

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46. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 256.

47. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2006).

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50. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 296–99.

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52. Joseph Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted* (Charlestown: Samuel Etheridge, 1807), 29–30.

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AFTERWORD

Chapter 60

A Final Word

Life in Puritan England was not easy. Ten of John Owen's (1616–1683) eleven children died in infancy, and the one who survived to adulthood still died before her father. Medical care was quite primitive by today's standards; how else can one explain Richard Baxter (1615–1691) swallowing a gold bullet hoping for its "admirable effects" on his health? Much more serious, and more distinctive of that time and place were the upheavals, disruptions, destruction, and death occasioned by civil war extending over decades; the constant threat of invasion and conquest by the hostile Roman Catholic powers of Europe; the ever-present danger of fire in large cities; and the recurrent episodes of deadly plagues that haunted Europe in those times.

To be a Puritan essentially meant having to face opposition and endure various degrees of persecution for maintaining the things taught and commanded in Scripture. True, there was a brief golden era for the Puritans in the mid-seventeenth century, but by 1660 things would dramatically change, and Puritanism ended in defeat, or at least a stalemate; the Church of England reverted to historical type, and the Puritans and their offspring were exiled to the social isolation and disadvantages of nonconformity. Many of those offspring returned to the church from which their fathers and grandfathers had separated for conscience's sake and the Word of God. Though Puritanism as a historical movement ended, there are nonetheless elements of Puritanism that we really ought to recover in the church today. So this "final word" is really a reflection upon the various strengths of Puritan theologians that should characterize today's theologians and ministers in the church.

In the first place, the Puritans had an eye for the great truths of the Christian faith, which was never overwhelmed by their concern for the details and distinctions of theology or their conscientious drive to apply those truths to themselves, their churches, their communities, and their nation. They excelled both as preachers of the gospel and as pastors of the flock of God. They were not the partisans of a particular great theologian, or the masters of an esoteric

spiritual technique, or the slavish conservators of some man-made body of tradition.

Second, the Puritans were learned men, well-educated and zealous advocates of education not just for the elite but for all the people of God. Like their Reformed counterparts on the Continent, Puritan theologians had the benefit of a rigorous elementary training in grammar, rhetoric, and logic. By the time they entered university, they were expected to have a thorough command of Latin and Greek and often Hebrew as well. These skills were highly developed before they began the formal study of history, philosophy, and theology. Well-trained in basic linguistics, the Puritans were able to read the writings of the church fathers, the great medieval theologians, the Reformers, and their own contemporaries on the Continent, all in the original Greek or Latin. Their abilities as Latinists are well-attested; the use of this language manifests itself, for example, in their writings by way of the various philosophical and theological distinctions they constantly invoke and apply.

The use of distinctions characterizes the methodological approach of the Puritan theologians, something they shared with Continental Reformed theologians. It is true that method affects content, but not to the extent that some scholars have supposed. The various distinctions by Reformed theologians enabled them not only to stay clear of error, but also to affirm the truth in clear and unambiguous terms. Their theology was not only apologetic and polemical but also didactic; the great truths affirmed during the Reformation era were clarified and strengthened in post-Reformation Reformed and Puritan orthodoxy. There is no doubt that John Calvin was a theological genius, but the Reformed scholastics (e.g., Jerome Zanchius [1516–1590], Francis Turretin [1623–1687], and John Owen) had the benefit of standing on his shoulders, and the shoulders of many more highly regarded Reformed theologians before them. Thus they often were a little more precise than Calvin and his contemporaries in their theology. This, of course, is fully consistent with the Reformed maxim that the Reformed church should be always reforming.[1] One finds in Puritan works a number of distinctions that prove to be extremely useful in terms of setting forth the truth of certain doctrines.

Next, the Puritans had a profound knowledge of the Scriptures. One area where young Reformed men training for the ministry today are especially weak is knowledge of the Bible. It seems that only basic knowledge of the Bible exists in the pulpits, pews, and Christian colleges and seminaries of our nation. By contrast, the Puritans were walking Bibles. Reading their works, one must be impressed by the vast array of Scripture passages they invoke as proof texts, examples, or illustrations. To be sure, we may question some of their proof-

texting or exegesis of certain passages, but the fact remains that they achieved mastery of the contents of Scripture. Not only so, they treasured the Bible above all the writings of mere men. Thomas Goodwin's son attests to his father's learning, but more importantly his love for the Bible, especially in the latter years of his life when he

> read much, and the Authors which he most valued and studied were Augustin, Calvin, Musculus, Zanchius, Paraeus, Waleus, Gomarus, Altingius, and Amesius; among the Schoolmen Suarez and Estius. But the Scriptures were what he most studied; and as he had furnished his library with a very good collection of commentators, he made good use of them. And as the Scriptures are an inexhaustible treasure of divine knowledge, so by an eager search into them, and comparing one with another, he discovered those Truths which are not to be found in other authors.[2]

Reformed theologians today should be well read in theology from various traditions, but they must never give such reading priority over the Scriptures, which may happen a great deal more than we care to admit.

Finally, the Puritans set out to reform the church in the direction of true godliness and practical righteousness. While it is certainly true that Puritanism had a strong political agenda, Puritanism was always spiritually rooted and theologically driven. Today we lack penetrating theological writing that is at the same time profoundly devotional. In this area, the Puritans excelled. Thomas Goodwin's (1600–1680) works, *Christ Set Forth* and *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth*, both exhibit a fine combination of highly developed Protestant scholastic theology and heartwarming devotional truth that leaves his readers both greatly enlightened and overwhelmed with emotion. John Owen also excelled at bringing these two emphases together. Any of his works would do to prove this point, but *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* particularly shows how Christology must affect not only the mind but also take aim at the heart. He writes, "The design of this Discourse is no more, but that when by faith we have attained a view of the glory of Christ, in our contemplations on his person, we should not pass it over as a notion of truth which we assent unto—namely, that he is thus glorious in himself—but endeavor to affect our hearts with it, as that wherein our own principal interest doth lie; wherein it will be effectual unto the transformation of our souls into his image."[3] Another fine example from Owen is his well-known work *On Communion with God*.[4] Here we have trinitarian spirituality at its best, yet this treatise is also a classic example of the method of Protestant scholasticism. Stephen Charnock's (1628–1680) work on *The Existence and Attributes of God*

has plenty of "uses" and a strong christological focus, showing that a right understanding of the attributes of God has immense practical application to the lives of believers. Of course, Goodwin, Owen, and Charnock were not alone; they merely serve as eminent examples of what was the characteristic method and style of theological writing among the Puritans. All of this suggests that true devotion is built on good theology, and good theology should always stir up such devotion. So many modern works on theology fail at precisely this point; we have the Puritans to thank for showing us how doctrine and devotion not only are related, but also are *necessarily* related.

The Puritans combined theology with devotion—a regrettable distinction, as if theology itself were not devotional—because these men were preachers, called and set apart to the proclamation of God's Word to God's people. The vast majority of Puritan works that we read are sermons that were reworked for the press. That is to say, most Puritan works are expositions of God's written Word delivered by men who aimed at the mind, heart, and soul of their listeners, commanding faith, enjoining repentance, and lifting up Christ. John Owen's rich exposition of Romans 8:13, "Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers," was developed from a series of sermons preached on Sabbath afternoons to faculty and students of Oxford University. In our view, the very best theologians the church has produced have been pastors and preachers, and this is how it should be; after all, to borrow a phrase from Thomas Goodwin, God had but one Son, and He made Him a minister of the gospel. The church today stands in need of a new generation of able, learned ministers who know their Bibles and know their God. For this reason, it has been a privilege to write this book, for in studying the writings of the Puritans, our hearts have been stirred even as our minds have been enlightened, and we hope the same experience will be yours.

1. The motto is *Ecclesia reformata, sed simper reformanda:* "The church reformed, but ever [in need of further] reforming." Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.5.

2. Thomas Goodwin Jr., "Memoir of Dr. Thomas Goodwin," in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1861–1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 2:lxxiii–lxxiv.

3. John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855), 1:321.

4. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855).

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1. Although the following is a comprehensive list of the works referenced in this book, duplicate modern editions and reprints have been deleted; only the latest edition is included here. All duplicates from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries have been included, however.

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