

THE GOSPEL AND JUSTIFICATION

The Revd. Alan C. Clifford, BA, MLitt, (PhD, 1984)

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NOTE: The theme of the conference was 'The Gospel Today'. Other contributors spoke on 'The Gospel and Man' (The Revd R. W. Borrowes, MA); 'The Gospel and the Law' (The Revd. R. T. Beckwith, MA); 'The Gospel and Regeneration' (The Revd. B. G. Felce, MA); 'The Gospel and the Sacraments' (The Revd. E. A. Strickland, MA) and 'The Gospel and the Church – the Recovery of the Gospel' (The Revd. D. N. Samuel, MA). The conference sermon was preached by the Chairman of the PRS, The Revd. Canon T. L. Livermore, MA.

I was privileged to address the conference on 'The Gospel and Justification'. The session was very memorable for me personally. This is how my contribution was received. Indeed, the response was astonishing, as I vividly recall. Having had great liberty in giving the paper, I received an instant ovation from the audience at the close. So spontaneous, it took my breath away. It was the only one of seven sessions to get such a response. However, when the enthusiasm had died down, David Samuel strode over to me and said, "If I'd known you were going to say things like that, I wouldn't have invited you to speak." Presumably, my orthodoxy was in doubt.

New readers may now assess the content of my contribution for themselves. It might be of interest again, in view of the 2016 Conference theme 'Justification by Faith' and the approaching Quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation.

Introduction

'How then can man be justified with God?' (Job 25:4). This is the heart-cry of a man humbled in the presence of God. He is conscious of the guilt and pollution of his sin. He is distressed on account of the infinite holiness of the God with whom he has to do. He is anxious for mercy and desperate for reconciliation. For this troubled man, the remedy is at hand. 'I know that my Redeemer liveth...' (Job 19:25).

This glorious Old Testament statement points ahead to the fulness of God's gracious revelation in Christ. 'Be it known unto you therefore, men and

¹ The first revision appeared as an article in *The Evangelical Quarterly* (57.3), July 1985. Besides a few additional items and discussions, material deleted from the original paper is here restored.

brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses' (Acts 13:38,39).

Those who are unashamedly 'evangelical' identify themselves with Job's condition and the only gospel that could cure it. The language of Charles Wesley is also theirs:

How can a sinner know
His sins on earth forgiven?
How can my gracious Saviour show
My name inscribed in heaven?

We who in Christ believe
That he for us hath died,
We all his unknown peace receive,
And feel his blood applied.²

This was also the heart-beat of the first Evangelical revival - the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. After centuries of scholastic distortion, the fathers of the Reformation rediscovered God's way of salvation. Martin Luther spoke for them all when he described the doctrine of justification by faith as *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* – the article of a standing or falling church.³ Here in England, the same conviction was to be expressed in the XXXIX Articles of the Reformed English Church:

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.⁴

It is impossible fully to comprehend the doctrine of justification by faith without appreciating the wider context of doctrinal truth. *Sola fide* is, in a sense, but one chapter in the book of salvation. Thus, the true import of the chapter cannot be discerned in isolation. The full story is the sum of all the chapters. In other words, when challenged by Rome to justify their views, the reformers responded with *sola scriptura*. In denouncing the Roman doctrine of merit, they cried *sola gratia*. In short, the doctrine of justification by faith presupposes a message to be proclaimed, a gospel to be believed.

In view of these considerations, I propose to treat the subject before us by asking three questions:

- I. What is the Gospel?
- II. What is Justification?
- III. What is faith?

² *Methodist Hymn Book* (London, 1933), 377: 1,3.

³ See J. I. Packer, Introductory Essay to James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (1867, London, 1961 rep.) p. 1.

⁴ Article XI.

The first question will be considered as a prelude to the other two, and viewed very largely from the perspective of historical theology, a matter which has received considerable attention in Reformed evangelical circles of late.

I. What is the Gospel?

This is a question no Christian should find difficulty in answering. The essence of the evangel must surely be John 3:16, in which our Saviour highlights the universality of God's mercy. The Protestant Reformers were perfectly clear about the meaning of 'evangelical'. It is good news for all mankind. For Luther, John 3:16 was 'the gospel in a nutshell'. Being 'the foundation of his whole life', he murmured it three times on his deathbed.⁵ From another great New Testament text, his view of the Gospel could not be clearer:

It is certain that you are a part of the world. Do not let your heart deceive you by saying: "The Lord died for Peter and Paul; He rendered satisfaction for them, not for me." Therefore let every one who has sin be summoned here, for He has made the expiation for the sins of the whole world and bore the sins of the whole world.⁶

In step with Luther, John Calvin spoke for all the reformers in his exposition of the 'nutshell' text:

For there is calm haven where our minds can rest until we come to God's free love. The whole substance of our salvation is not to be sought anywhere else than in Christ...He was offered as our saviour...the heavenly Father does not wish the human race that He loves to perish...It follows that until Christ vouch-safes to help the lost, all are appointed to eternal destruction... For since He necessarily hates sin, how shall we be convinced that he loves us until those sins for which He is justly angry with us have been expiated? Thus before we can have any feeling of His fatherly kindness, the blood of Christ must intercede to reconcile God to us....Our firm and substantial support is to rest on the death of Christ as its only pledge.⁷

With the reformers' rediscovery of the gospel came a resurgence of preaching. To whom should they preach the good news? Again, Calvin notes the 'whosoever believeth' of John 3:16:

And he has used a general term, both to invite indiscriminately all to share in life and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the significance of the term 'world' which he had used before. For

⁵ James Atkinson, *Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 330-1.

⁶ Comment on 1 Jn. 2: 2, *The Catholic Epistles in Works of Martin Luther* (St Louis: 1963), xxx. 237.

⁷ *The Gospel According to St. John*, tr. T. H. L. Parker (Edinburgh, 1959), Vol. 1, pp. 73-74.

although there is nothing in the world deserving God's favour, He nevertheless shows He is favourable to the whole world when He calls all without exception to the faith of Christ, which is indeed an entry into life.⁸

Implicit in Calvin's exposition here is his belief that a universal atonement provides the *raison d'être* of universal gospel proclamation. Whilst Calvin was uncompromising in teaching the doctrines of election and predestination, he did not, like some of his disciples, offer violence to such 'universalist' texts as John 3:16 in the interests of some rationalistic mentality. Calvin's thoroughgoing and consistent biblicism prevented him from suppressing any truth in favour of another. As a biblical theologian *par excellence*, Calvin shares none of the inhibitions of subsequent generations of 'Calvinists'. One example will suffice to demonstrate how the reformer perceived the issues:

It is incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world...Hence, we conclude that, though reconciliation is offered to all through Him, yet the benefit is peculiar to the elect...However, while I say it is offered to all, I do not mean that this embassy, by which on Paul's testimony (2 Cor.5:18) God reconciles the world to Himself, reaches to all, but that it is not sealed indiscriminately on the hearts of all to whom it comes so as to be effectual...⁹

Elsewhere, Calvin says:

Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him.¹⁰

In short, basic to Calvin's conception of the Gospel was a dualistic theory of the Atonement espoused earlier by Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. Calvin saw no reason to reject this element in scholastic theology:

Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world but effectively only for the elect...I allow the truth of this.¹¹

The relevance of this should be obvious. What is the 'good news' a sinner must believe in order to be justified? He must, says Calvin, believe that God

⁸ Ibid., p.74.

⁹ *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, tr. J. K. S. Reid (London, 1961), pp. 148f.

¹⁰ Comment on Romans 5: 18. See also Calvin's comments on Mark 14: 24; Galatians 2: 20 and 5: 12; Col.1: 14; Hebrews 9: 27-28. See also the statements in the *Institutes* II: 13: 3 and III: 1: 1, together with his *Antidote to the Council of Trent* in *Tracts and Treatises* (CTS ed., Edinburgh, 1851), Vol. 3, pp. 93, 109. Calvin evidently expounds the atonement according to the dualistic formula espoused earlier by Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, 'sufficient for all/efficient for the elect'. See Calvin's comment on 1 John 2:2 and *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ*, ed. Nixon (Grand Rapids, 1980 rep.), p. 151.

¹¹ *Comment* on 1 John 2: 2 (Edinburgh, 1959).

loves him, that Christ died for him and that pardon is offered to him. Repentance and faith presuppose such a gospel. Notwithstanding the reality of election, a sinner must not first enquire if he is elect, and then come to Christ on that basis. Election is to be learned from believing, not *vice versa*. The warrant to believe is 'in' the gospel, and not 'in' some knowledge the sinner might have that he is elect (see 2 Peter 1:10). In Calvin's view, the death of Christ for all is the pledge of God's willingness to save all who come to Him through Christ.

Recent theological discussion within the Reformed evangelical world on this subject has been stimulated by Dr. R. T. Kendall's *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (1979). Whilst Kendall's work is not altogether as accurate or cogent as the evidence demands,¹² he has shown that significant differences do exist between the theology of Calvin and that of his disciples. What the Anglo-Saxon world has understood as Calvinism for three centuries or more is to be attributed to his successor Theodore Beza. It was Beza, and not Calvin, who insisted that the atonement is limited to the elect alone.¹³ Paul Helm's reply *Calvin and the Calvinists* (1982) says nothing to seriously counter this thesis.¹⁴ William Perkins of Cambridge was largely responsible for the appearance of 'High Calvinism' in England during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Proceeding beyond the period covered by Dr Kendall, the illustrious Dr John Owen was responsible for the classical statement of the doctrine of limited atonement in his *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648). This work determined the character of orthodox 'High' Calvinism in subsequent generations, even assisting the transition from High Calvinism to hypercalvinism proper within eighteenth century English Dissent.¹⁵

There can be no doubt that the theological 'shift' to which we have referred was responsible for a number of developments. *First*, the rise of Arminianism. Had Beza retained Calvin's original, balanced theology of grace, the Arminian reaction might have been a non-event. *Second*, Calvinism would never have lost the evangelistic character everywhere evident in Calvin's conception of the gospel. *Third*, the anxious quest for assurance which tended to dominate puritan piety might have been avoided.

¹² Kendall clearly misrepresents Calvin's views on the sufficiency/efficiency formula, as well as denying that, in Calvin's mind, Christ did pray for reprobate as well as elect persons (*Calvin and English Calvinism* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 14, 16). See Calvin on John 17: 9 and *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy*, tr. T. H. L. Parker (London, 1956), p. 143.

¹³ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 29f.

¹⁴ Helm provides a thoroughly contradictory account of Calvin's attitude vis-à-vis the extent of the atonement, op. cit., p. 18. His arguments are largely inferential or deductive, whilst he frequently flies in the face of Calvin's explicit statements, cf. p.46 with Calvin on Col. 1: 14. The controversial Heshshusius passage is more a statement about consubstantiation than the extent of the atonement (see my *Atonement and Justification: 'John Owen and John Wesley'* (University of Wales Ph.D. thesis, 1984), pp. 116f.

¹⁵ See Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 298 and 456f. See also the references to Owen in *A Defence of Some Important Doctrines of the Gospel...preached in Lime Street* (London, 1732), Vol. 1, pp. 379, 385, 431.

In other words, as David Sceats comments,¹⁶ the 'religious psychology' is notably different in puritan High Calvinism compared with the 'spiritual liberation' of the Reformation era. Indeed, original Calvinism called men to a gracious, compassionate Saviour. Sinners were not to seek a warrant for coming to Christ through knowledge of election, which Beza's theology logically demanded.

It is true, many High Calvinists were evangelistic, and thus happily inconsistent. But the gospel as presented by them often lacked the uninhibited fulness of Calvin's presentation. Dr John Owen (whose major thesis will be examined in another article)¹⁷ considered that sinners were obligated to come to Christ simply because of 'the command of God and the call of Christ'.¹⁸ In no sense can the basis of belief be 'a persuasion of the love of God and good will of Christ' to all.¹⁹ A modern exponent of Owen's position is Dr J. I. Packer. He denies that the extent of the atonement has any bearing 'on the content of the evangelistic message' since 'the object of saving faith is...not, strictly speaking, the atonement, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who made the atonement.'²⁰ This is highly debatable and very different from Calvin. Does not the Apostle speak of 'faith in his blood' (Romans 3:25)? If sinners are directed to Christ, are they not directed to a crucified Christ? Are they not called to Him whose death has relevance for them? To deny this is to employ a distinction without any difference.

It is surely worthy of our notice to see the total unanimity between Calvin's theology and that of Reformation Anglicanism. This is how that prince of preachers, Hugh Latimer, preached the gospel:

But when we are about this matter (namely election), and are troubled within ourselves whether we be elect or no: we must ever have this maxim or principal rule before our eyes, namely, that God beareth a good will toward us. But you will say, how shall I know that? Or how shall I believe that?... He hath sent the same His Son into this world, which hath suffered most painful death for us. Shall I now think that God hateth me? Or shall I doubt of His love towards me? Here you see how you shall avoid the scrupulous and most dangerous question of the predestination of God. For if thou wilt enquire of His counsels, and enter into His consistory, thy wit will deceive thee, for thou shalt not be able to search the counsels of God. But if thou begin with Christ and consider His coming into the world, and dost believe that God hath sent him for thy sake, to suffer for thee, and deliver thee from sin, death, the devil, and hell, then when thou art so armed with the knowledge of Christ, this simple question cannot hurt thee; For thou art in the book of life which is Christ Himself.²¹

¹⁶ 'Reformed Faith Then and Now' in *Word and Spirit* (Journal of the Church of England Reformed Fellowship, Spring, 1982, n.p.).

¹⁷ See 'Geneva Revisited or Calvinism Revised: the case for theological reassessment' in *Churchman*, Vol. 100. 4 (1986), pp. 323-34.

¹⁸ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London, 1959 rep.), p. 298.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

²⁰ *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (London, 1961), p. 66. See also the author's famous Introductory Essay to Owen's *Death of Death*.

²¹ Given in George Bull, *Examenae Censurae* (Oxford, 1843), pp. 339-340.

On another occasion, Latimer spoke with a liberty Dr John Owen would not approve of:

Catch thou hold of our Saviour...believe in Him, be assured in thy heart that He with His suffering took away all thy sins...²²

Latimer surely speaks for the Anglican reformers generally, as a study of the Parker Society volumes reveals. In language similar to Calvin's, that Christ is 'the pledge of the divine love', John Hooper said that Christ died as 'one that represented the person of all the sinners that ever were, be now, or shall be unto the world's end'.²³ In the *Book of Common Prayer*, Archbishop Cranmer's theology of the atonement is very evident. In the prayer of consecration from the service of Holy Communion, we are reminded that Christ made 'a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.' Elsewhere Cranmer says:

For by His own oblation He satisfied His Father for all men's sins and reconciled mankind unto His grace and favour...²⁴

In the Catechism, the catechumen learns that God the Son 'hath redeemed me and all mankind' and that God the Holy Ghost 'sanctifieth me and all the elect people of God.' This view correlates perfectly with John Bradford's. In his defence of election, Bradford argued in the same way that Calvin did with respect to the atonement, that 'Christ's death is sufficient for all, but effectual for the elect only.'²⁵ Not surprisingly, this is the theology expressed in the XXXIX Articles²⁶ and the *Books of Homilies*. The Lombardian formula is evident in *The Second Homily for Good Friday*. Expounding John 3: 16, the homily speaks of God the Father's gift of Christ:

But to whom did He give him? He gave him to the whole world; that is to say, to Adam, and all that should come after him.²⁷

However, faith alone renders *actual* an Atonement *potentially* available for all. Through such faith

We persuade ourselves, that God both hath, and will forgive our sins, that he hath accepted us again into the number of his elect people...²⁸

It is therefore the universally-sufficient Atonement that is the basis for Gospel proclamation. It is to a Christ thus given for all that sinners are to look. His all-sufficient Atonement is the warrant to believe the Gospel. Notwithstanding the Reformation commitment to predestination and elect in Article XVII, the universality of the Atonement is equally asserted in Article

²² Given in Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (London, 1965), p. 47.

²³ *Later Writings of Bishop Hooper* (Cambridge, 1852), p. 31.

²⁴ *Works*, (Cambridge, 1846), Vol. 1, p. 436.

²⁵ *Writings of John Bradford* (Cambridge, 1848; Edinburgh, 1980 rep.), p. 320.

²⁶ See Articles XXXI, and also II and XV.

²⁷ *Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 395.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

XXXI:

The offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual...

It may therefore be safely argued, that the Protestant Reformers possessed a clear, biblical grasp of the message which a sinner must believe in order to be justified before God. No finer answer can be give to the question ‘What is the Gospel?’ than that supplied by Bishop John Jewel in *The Homily on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ*:

The death of Christ is available for the redemption of all the world, for the remission of sins, and reconciliation with God the Father; but also that he hath made upon his cross a full and sufficient sacrifice for thee, a perfect cleansing of thy sins, so that thou acknowledgest no other saviour, redeemer, mediator, advocate, intercessor, but Christ only; and that thou mayest say with the apostle, that *he loved thee, and gave himself for thee*. For this is to stick fast to Christ’s promise made in his institution, to make Christ thine own, and to apply his merits unto thyself.²⁹

It is therefore abundantly clear that if the Arminian deviation proved incompatible with Reformation Anglicanism, the same must be said of High Calvinism. It is surely arguable to suggest that had English Calvinism avoided the logical excesses of Perkins and Owen, then John Wesley might not have exhibited that antagonism towards election for which he is famous. Whatever are the merits of his understanding of Article XVII, *Of Predestination and Election*, Wesley was aware that Reformation Anglicanism did not support the advocates of limited atonement. In his reply to certain criticisms by Rowland Hill, Wesley says:

I never preached against the Seventeenth Article, nor had the least thought of doing it. But did Mr. Hill never preach against the Thirty-First Article which explicitly asserts universal redemption?³⁰

It is interesting to note that neither John Wesley nor John Owen were aware of Calvin’s precise view on the atonement. Had matters been otherwise, the history of English evangelicalism might have been a different story. The errors of High Calvinism and Arminianism are equally to be regretted. In our own day, a rediscovery of the true Reformation position might prove to be a conciliatory *via media*. A corrective for modern Calvinism is long overdue. It might stimulate discussion to suggest that Luther, Calvin and the English reformers would not be embarrassed to sing with Charles Wesley:

O for a trumpet voice,
On all the world to call,
To bid their hearts rejoice
In Him who died for all;

²⁹ *Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 413 [Bishop John Jewel].

³⁰ *Works*, ed. T. Jackson (London, 1841), Vol. 10, p. 368.

For all, my Lord was crucified,
For all, for all, my Saviour died.³¹

Although divine election is the ultimate explanation for the success of the Gospel, it is irrelevant as far as the preaching of it is concerned. In his *Defense de la doctrine de Calvin* (1644) and other writings, the French Reformed divine Moïse Amyraut expounded his view that the gospel is revealed to mankind as a conditional covenant. He argued that predestination should be viewed as an *ex post facto* explanation of the application of the atonement, and not a feature of the gospel as such. In this, Amyraudus appealed to Calvin himself.³² In England, Ussher, Davenant and especially Richard Baxter became the true custodians of Reformation Calvinism.³³ Significantly, Baxter aligned himself with Calvin's views:

I know no man, since the Apostles' days, whom I value and honour more than Calvin, and whose judgement in all things, one with another, I more esteem and come nearer to.³⁴

Besides expressing his debt to Calvin, Baxter also spoke highly of the Synod of Dort (1618-19):

In the article of the extent of redemption, wherein I am most suspected and accused, I do subscribe to the Synod of Dort, without any exception, limitation, or exposition, of any word, as doubtful and obscure.³⁵

This is remarkable since the famous Synod is forever associated with the famous mnemonic 'TULIP', the 'L' standing for 'Limited Atonement'. How then is Baxter's commendation to be understood? Simply because the 'Owenite' understanding of the mnemonic does not square with the actual wording of the Canons themselves. The reason why Baxter could vouch for them is that they state the following:

The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, of infinite value and worth, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world...That, however, many who have been called by the gospel neither repent nor believe in Christ but perish in unbelief does not happen because of any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross, but through their own fault...For this was the most free counsel of God the Father, that the life-giving and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His

³¹ *Methodist Hymn Book* (London, 1933), 114: 7.

³² See Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison, 1969), pp. 158f.

³³ See Baxter's *Catholick Theologie* (London, 1675) and *Treatise on Universal Redemption* (London, 1694).

³⁴ *Saints Everlasting Rest* (London, 1650), p. 526; (London, 1658), p. 559.

³⁵ *Rich: Baxter's Confession of his Faith* (London, 1655), 25; cited in William Orme (ed), *The Practical Works of the Revd. Richard Baxter* (London, 1830), Vol. 1, p. 456.

Son should extend to all the elect.³⁶

This being Baxter's view, it is generally the case that many who shout 'TULIP' have never actually read what the Canons say. One may add that the word 'limited' is nowhere used. Furthermore, a case could be made for redefining 'L' as Limitless Atonement! The point is, of course that the Canons affirm two correlated aspects to the atonement, as Baxter himself always did. That said, when he was engaged in evangelistic preaching, he stressed the universality of the cross:

Think not to extenuate it by saying, that it was only for his elect. For it was thy sin, and the sin of all the world, that lay upon our redeemer; and his sacrifice and satisfaction is sufficient for all, and the fruits of it are offered to one as well as to another; but it is true, that it was never the intent of his mind, to pardon and save any that would not by faith and repentance be converted.³⁷

When God saith so expressly that Christ died for all [2 Cor. 5: 14-15], and tasted death for every man [Heb. 2: 9], and is the ransom for all [1 Tim. 2: 6], and the propitiation for the sins of the whole world [1 Jn. 2: 2], it besseems every Christian rather to explain in what sense Christ died for all, than flatly to deny it.³⁸

Thus we have answered the question, 'What is the Gospel?' The answer is one that J. C. Ryle later approved of. He affirmed the atonement teaching of Calvin, the Anglican reformers and John Davenant. Recognising the presence of paradox in the Bible, he had no sympathy with the 'limited atonement' dogma of Beza, Owen and others. Neither would he accept the more recent stance of J. I. Packer *et al.* Commenting on Luke 13: 31-5, he warned against being 'more systematic than Scripture'.³⁹ Indeed, he couldn't have spoken more strongly than he did in his extensive remarks on John 3: 16:

I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system.⁴⁰

II. What is Justification?

The subject of justification proved to be the focal point of theological controversy at the time of the Reformation. This is hardly surprising since a rediscovery of the gospel involved a return to those great biblical statements

³⁶ See The Canons of Dort, Arts. 3, 6, 7, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, ed. H. B. Smith and P. Schaff (London, 1877), pp. 586f.

³⁷ *A Call to the Unconverted* (London, 1658), pp. 98-100.

³⁸ *The Universal Redemption of Mankind* (London, 1694), p. 286.

³⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Luke* (London, 1872), Vol. 2, p. 141.

⁴⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John* (London, 1865), Vol. 1, p. 159.

of the gospel in Paul's letters to the Romans and the Galatians. Clearly, for the Apostle, justification was the heart of the gospel. Any misunderstanding here involved a misunderstanding of the gospel in its entirety.

What did Paul mean by justification? The term is a legal or forensic one. It refers to the acquittal of an accused person in a court of law. In Paul's mind, a sinner is charged with breaking the law of God (Romans 3: 10, 19, 23). The penalty is death (6: 24). The justice of God demands that the penalty be paid. However, God is also merciful and wishes to save the life of the accused. How then can both the justice and mercy of God be satisfied? The divine dilemma is solved through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ, who bears the penalty on behalf of the accused (3: 25; 4: 25; 5: 6-11). Justice having been done through a substitutionary atonement, God is free to offer pardon to the accused (3: 24-28), who is discharged a free man (5: 1-2; 8:1). This is what Paul meant by justification. The basis of justification cannot therefore be the law, since that only condemns. Since Christ has met the demands of the law by His death, then his vicarious sacrifice is the only basis of justification. The repentant offender then appropriates the benefits of justification by faith in Christ alone, and not by legal obedience (3:28). The proceedings of grace satisfy a holy, yet loving God, and cheers the heart of a sinful yet believing man. It is 'good news' (1: 16).

It is obvious from Paul's understanding of justification that it is something objective rather than subjective. It is a judicial declaration concerning a person's standing before God. The Greek *dikaiosis* is not therefore to be equated with the Latin *justificatio*. The Roman Catholic theologians understood the concept of justification as 'infused grace', deriving some support from the Latin word which implies a 'making righteous', rather than a 'declaring righteous'.

The chief error of Rome arises out of this misunderstanding, which was further compounded by the idea of merit. In other words, the meritorious work of Christ is supplemented by the merit of the believer's good works. To oppose this detraction from Christ's all sufficient merits, the reformers asserted that we are justified by faith alone, and not by good works. Rome accused the reformers of advocating a gospel of moral licence. If we are justified by faith alone, they said, then the greatest rascal on earth can assume he is saved. This became a very sensitive matter, since the *sola fide* principle was liable to abuse.

Besides the rejection of *sola fide* in James 2: 24, it must be said that 'faith alone' is a phrase nowhere used by the Apostle Paul. Therefore, the reformers had to explain their use of it with great care. Cranmer writes that *sola fide* is 'spoken for to take away clearly all merit of our works...' ⁴¹ In other words, 'faith only' is not a comment about the psychological constituents of a believer's experience but a statement about the merits of Christ. It is a synecdochal expression meaning 'faith in the merits of Christ only.' The mighty Luther was not entirely clear at this point. Whilst he admitted that, after justification, faith is 'not idle, but occupied and

⁴¹ *Homily on Salvation in Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 30.

exercised in working through love'⁴² yet he described as a 'wicked gloss of the schoolmen' the idea that 'faith then justifieth, when charity and good works are joined withal'.⁴³ Luther surely views 'faith only' psychologically rather than synecdochally. Calvin did not agree. He argues that 'faith cannot possibly be disjoined from pious affection'.⁴⁴ Cranmer argues likewise that saving faith 'hath charity always joined unto it...'⁴⁵ Luther's fear arose from a mistaken idea that justification and sanctification must be kept strictly separate. Calvin and the English reformers did not share this particular neurosis. 'Christ' says Calvin, 'cannot be divided into parts, so the two things, justification and sanctification, which we perceive to be united together in him, are inseparable'.⁴⁶

The *sola fide* idea, properly understood, is simply stressing the point that the merits of Christ are the sole basis of the sinner's justification before God. In this respect, even 'faith' itself does not justify says Calvin, 'by its own intrinsic virtue...properly speaking, God alone justifies'.⁴⁷ To say otherwise insists Cranmer, 'were to count ourselves to be justified by some act or virtue that is within ourselves'.⁴⁸

In an age impatient with theological technicalities, questions frequently posed are 'How does Paul's almost unique doctrine of justification relate to the rest of the New Testament teaching about salvation?' 'How, for instance, does justification relate to the less technical concept of forgiveness?' Furthermore, if justification is by faith, what significance is to be attached to repentance?' 'Notwithstanding Paul's stress on justification by faith without works, why does he insist so strongly on the need for good works? It is usually said in orthodox reformed circles that

(a) Justification is more than forgiveness, since divine acquittal is more than mere pardon. An imputation of Christ's passive *and* active righteousness is involved.

(b) Justification, unlike forgiveness, is a complete, once and for all, act of God, whereas forgiveness of sin is the Christian's daily requirement.

(c) Although repentance must accompany faith, yet justification is to be attributed to faith, not repentance.

(d) Good works are necessary evidences of a person's justification, not contributory factors in salvation.

I feel obliged to suggest that these statements are questionable half-truths, and that theological, exegetical and pastoral considerations demand that they be carefully scrutinised.

⁴² *Commentary on Galatians*, revised Philip S. Watson (London, 1953), p. 466.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴⁴ *Institutes* III: 2: 8.

⁴⁵ *Homily on Faith in Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 40.

⁴⁶ *Institutes* III: 11: 6.

⁴⁷ *Institutes* III: 11: 7.

⁴⁸ *Homily on Faith in Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 31.

It is suggested that:

- (1) A just rejection of Rome's doctrine of the merit of good works has led to an unjust discouragement of practical godliness in evangelical circles.
- (2) A failure to realise the metaphorical nature of Paul's legal terminology in Romans and Galatians has led to false theories about the believer's assurance.
- (3) A loose and worldly morality has invaded evangelical life, where complacency has replaced assurance and repentance appears quite redundant.

I wish therefore to demonstrate the following propositions:

- (1) Justification and Forgiveness are identical.
- (2) Justification is a complete, life-long continuum, not a single, instantaneous event.
- (3) Justification must involve the believer's obedience.

(1) Justification and Forgiveness are identical.

It seems very clear from Acts 13:38,39 and Romans 4:6-8 that the apostles Peter and Paul view justification and imputation simply in terms of 'forgiveness'. The relationship between them is that of legal metaphor to spiritual reality. To say otherwise, that the legal terms are 'absolute' is to imply a theological deficiency in those New Testament writings where such language is totally absent, e.g. the epistles of Peter and John, not to speak of several of Paul's letters. However, these other writings do speak of pardon or forgiveness, which is the same thing. One might argue that the epistle to the Hebrews is the doctrine of forgiveness clothed in ceremonial language, as surely as the epistle to the Romans is the same doctrine clothed in legal language. Had the Roman and Galatian letters never been written, then the Reformation might have witnessed the rediscovery of the doctrine of sanctification by faith alone. In other words, to adopt the systematic scheme that sanctification follows justification is to fail to see the equivalence of two sets of metaphorical ideas.⁴⁹ Indeed, 1 Cor. 6: 1 might suggest the scheme should be reversed! From a 'legal' perspective, justification is followed by obedience; from a ceremonial perspective, washing is followed by service. These are metaphorical expressions of the truth that forgiveness through Christ results in living for Christ (see John 8:11).

To be justified then means to be forgiven. Furthermore, to have righteousness imputed is the necessary consequence of that forgiveness. In other words, the Lord's Prayer contains the doctrine of justification quite as definitely as the Epistle to the Romans. On this point, the reformers would

⁴⁹ See J. A. T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans* (London, 1979), pp. 49-50.

seem quite unanimous. Indeed, Luther equates 'Christian righteousness' with 'the forgiveness of sins', that 'passive righteousness which is the righteousness of grace, mercy and forgiveness of sins'.⁵⁰ Calvin's comments on Acts 13:39 and Romans 4:6-8 could not be clearer. His numerous statements in the *Institutes* clearly indicate that, for Calvin, 'forgiveness of sins' and 'justification' are 'altogether the same'.⁵¹ Cranmer is of like mind:

...every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands, that is to say, the forgiveness of his sins and trespasses...as great and as godly a virtue as the lively faith is, yet it putteth us from itself, and remitteth or appointeth us unto Christ, for to have only by him remission of our sins, or justification.⁵²

Tyndale,⁵³ Latimer,⁵⁴ Hooper⁵⁵ and Jewel⁵⁶ expound the evidence similarly. In short, Paul's exposition in Romans is simply the Gospel of Forgiveness clothed in legal metaphors. The implications of this are obvious. There is no pretence involved. A theory of imputation which makes us more righteous than we really are is avoided. God knows our real state and still pardons our sin, on account of the merits of His Son. Christ's personal holiness or 'active obedience' is not imputed to us as though we need not be holy (see Hebrews 12: 14), but it is through 'a perpetual efficacy in his death', says Calvin, 'in short, perfect obedience', that 'all our iniquities are covered'.⁵⁷

There is no evidence in the writings of the early reformers of the theory that both Christ's passive *and* active righteousness, i.e. the merit of his death *and* life, are imputed to the believer in justification, as if forgiveness or pardon was somehow inadequate. True, Cranmer seems to suggest a 'double imputation' view when he says, 'Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in him. He for them paid their ransom by his death. He for them fulfilled the Law in his life'.⁵⁸ However, he does not say that Christ's 'active obedience' is imputed to the believer, as a later over-refined 'Owenite' orthodoxy did. It is simply part of the 'cause meritorious' of justification,⁵⁹ a point which is not in dispute. Cranmer obviously treats 'righteousness', 'justification', and 'forgiveness' as synonymous terms when he says that 'the forgiveness of [our] sins and trespasses' is 'our perfect and full justification'.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, ed. P. S. Watson (London, 1953), pp. 16, 21-3.

⁵¹ See *Institutes* III: 11 and the Commentaries.

⁵² *Homily of Justification (Salvation of Mankind)* in *Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), pp. 25, 32.

⁵³ *Doctrinal Treatises* (Cambridge, 1848), p. 508.

⁵⁴ *Sermons* (Cambridge, 1844), pp. 415, 528.

⁵⁵ *Early Writings* (Cambridge, 1848), pp. 49-50, 59.

⁵⁶ *Works* (Cambridge, 1848), Vol. 3, p. 66.

⁵⁷ *Institutes* III: 14: 11.

⁵⁸ *Salvation of Mankind* in *Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 28.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The 'double imputation view is probably to be attributed to Theodore Beza.⁶¹ In subsequent generations, such a view of justification was to lead to several problems, not least the question of antinomianism. Indeed, if Christ's personal, active obedience to the law is imputed to the believer, then does the believer need to concern himself with the law and the pursuit of personal holiness? Calvin clearly thought otherwise. In his view, the believer is only delivered from the curse of the law (Gal.3: 13). Christ's obedience absolves us from the penalty, and not the precept of the law.⁶² Calvin's view of justification does not therefore invite the charge of antinomianism, neither does Luther's:

What Christ has merited for us is not only *gratia*, 'grace', but also *donum*, the 'gift' of the Holy Ghost, so that we might not only have forgiveness of sin, but also cease from sinning. Whoever, then, does not cease from sinning, but continues in his former wicked life, must have another Christ from the antinomians.⁶³

It was left to Johannes Fischer or Piscator (1546-1625), the German Reformed theologian to expose the inherent contradiction in Beza's view, although his trenchant analysis failed to prevent Reformed orthodoxy embracing Beza's theory. Piscator made explicit Calvin's suggestion⁶⁴ that Christ's active obedience demonstrated his qualification to be the guiltless sin-bearer. His own obedience was relevant to himself, and only to believers indirectly. Since the law only demanded 'do or die' Christ did not produce a double righteousness for the sinner on the basis of 'do and die'. Piscator further argued that had Christ merited life for sinners by his life, then there was no need for the cross. Therefore, since the Scriptures everywhere attribute salvation to the death of Christ, the believer's righteousness before God derives from Christ's passive obedience.⁶⁵ Calvin's and Piscator's insistence that 'justification', 'forgiveness' and 'imputation of righteousness' are equivalent ideas, and that Christ's obedience in death is the basis of the sinner's justification, appears eminently Scriptural. In Romans 5: 6-21, Philippians 2: 8 and Hebrews 5: 1-9, the obedience in question is Christ's death. Consistent with this, the Apostle says that 'we are justified by his blood' (Romans 5:9) and not 'by his life and death'. It would seem that Christ's life is relevant, not directly to the believer's justification, but to his obedience and holiness. It is for *imitation* rather than *imputation* (see 1 John 2:6). It is a fact worthy of note that, generally speaking, it was the Arminian tradition that perpetuated Calvin's view of justification. Arminius himself,⁶⁶ John Goodwin the Puritan⁶⁷ and John Wesley,⁶⁸ all appeal to Calvin in their

⁶¹ See Beza, *Tractationes Theologiae* (Geneva, 1570-1582), Vol. 3, pp. 248, 256.

⁶² See Calvin on Romans 6: 15.

⁶³ Editor's Preface, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, ed. P. S. Watson (London, 1953), p. 14, n.2.

⁶⁴ See *Institutes* II: 16: 5.

⁶⁵ See Piscator's *Libri Duo de Justificatione Homini Coram Deo* (Herborn, 1618). (For translated extracts, see Arminius, *Works*, ed. Nichols (London, 1825), Vol. 1, p. 634.

⁶⁶ See *Works*, ed. Nichols (London, 1825), Vol.1, p. 636. On the passive/active righteousness debate, Arminius refused to commit himself, *ibid.*, p. 632.

⁶⁷ See *Imputatio Fidei or A Treatise of Justification* (London, 1642), pp. 49 and 119f.

⁶⁸ See *Works*, ed T. Jackson (London, 1840), Vol. 3, p. 201 (*Journal* for May 14th, 1765); Vol. 5, p. 226; Vol. 10, pp. 326 and 345.

exposition of the subject.

(2) Justification is a complete, life-long continuum, not a single, instantaneous event.

In view of the equivalence between ‘justification’ and ‘pardon’, it is arguably incorrect to suggest that justification, unlike the ‘new birth’, is a once for all ‘lightning-flash’ event in the Christian’s life. It is true that, at conversion, all sins hitherto committed are forgiven immediately. However, to say that such an instantaneous justification is a valid ticket for every sin thereafter is to ‘over do’ the legal metaphors of the Epistle to the Romans. There Paul clearly imagines a court trial. Justification of the accused relates only to crimes hitherto committed (Romans 3:25?). Any future violations of the law would demand a further trial for justification to occur. It is true, the meritorious basis of all justification is the once for all sacrifice of Christ. But to say that the sinner’s justification is complete – and that all our sins, past, present and future were all pardoned at the cross because the gracious basis of acquittal is complete – is to confuse a single cause with a multiplicity of effects. Sin is not forgiven until it is committed and repented of. Justification is never in advance. A believer’s life is a continuum of instants. At any instant, ‘I have been justified’ and ‘I am being justified’ are perfectly compatible statements. The just man is living by faith.

It is obvious from our Lord’s own teaching in Luke 18:11-14 and Matthew 12:36-37 that the proceedings of the day of judgement will terminate the justification *continuum*. This is logically related to the problematic statement in James 2:24 where justification involves a life of obedient faith. It is because of this evidence that even Protestant divines have entertained the theory of a two-fold justification, against which Dr. John Owen argued at great length. Even Owen was arguably a little confused. Just before maintaining that justification is complete at the initial moment of trust,⁶⁹ Owen insists that the ‘meritorious procuring cause’ i.e. Christ’s death, was ‘complete’.⁷⁰ Now the latter thought is surely valid, whereas the former is questionable. To solve the obvious difficulty Owen employs an Aristotelian-style definition of justification, i.e. ‘it may be considered either as to the nature and essence of it, or as unto its manifestation and declaration’.⁷¹ Then comes the paradox. Whilst Owen emphatically rejects the two-fold justification theory, he says that the manifestation (if not the essence) of justification is two-fold, i.e. initial in this life, and second and final at the day of judgement. Owen finally capitulates when he asserts that by ‘our personal obedience’ we ‘shall be declared righteous at the last day, and without it none shall be...justified’.⁷² Appealing to the essence of justification does not prevent Owen from formulating a view virtually indistinguishable from the one he is anxious to refute. It is hardly surprising if lesser mortals are confused by the exegetical data when Owen clumsily trips himself up! On this issue as well as his critique of Piscator, James

⁶⁹ *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith in Works*, ed. Goold (Edinburgh, 1851), Vol. 5, p. 144.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

Buchanan perpetuated Owen's mistake in the nineteenth century.⁷³

The theory that justification is one *continuum*, or a sequence of justifying instants, avoids the unbiblical idea of a two-fold justification - one by faith, the other by works. It might be objected, that by equating justification with forgiveness, one is admitting a theory of multiple justifications, if believers need daily forgiveness. However, the idea only appears odd until one remembers that Paul's legal exposition in Romans assumes current charges against the accused. The use of the *aorist* in Romans 5:1 simply indicates that whenever justification occurs, sins then repented of are completely forgiven. In a sense, believers 'go to court daily' for daily forgiveness, assured that the just judge is seated on a throne of grace.

Luther seems to have held such a view when he states:

For God has not yet justified us, that is, He has not made us perfectly righteous or declared our righteousness perfect, but He has made a beginning in order that He might make us perfect...Now, is [the believer] perfectly righteous? No, for he is at the same time both a sinner and a righteous man; a sinner in fact, but a righteous man by the sure imputation and promise of God that he will continue to deliver him from sin until He has completely cured him.⁷⁴

It is more than interesting to discover that Calvin does not seem ill-at-ease with the idea of an 'initial' and 'progressive' *continuum* view of justification.⁷⁵ Indeed, he is thoroughly explicit when he declares:

When Paul teaches us that God justifies men by not imputing their sins, he quotes [at Romans 4: 6-8] a passage [Psalm 32] which is daily repeated in the Church. That peace of conscience, which is disturbed on the score of works, is not a one-day phenomenon, but ought to *continue* through our whole life. It follows from this that *until our death we are justified only as we look to Christ alone* in whom God has adopted us, and now regards us as accepted.⁷⁶

Since he equates 'justification' with 'the pardon of sin', Calvin's stance on this issue is clear. As in his *Romans Commentary*, so in the *Institutes*, while expounding Paul's doctrine of justification, Calvin states that 'we must have this blessedness not once only...' ⁷⁷ Elsewhere, he argues that 'by a daily forgiveness God receives us into his favour'.⁷⁸ Calvin's exposition of 1 John 1 is especially interesting in this regard: 'daily forgiveness of sins ... alone keeps us in God's family'.⁷⁹ The kind of view being advanced here in no way

⁷³ See James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Edinburgh, 1867, rep. London, 1961), pp. 188-9, 265.

⁷⁴ *Lectures on Romans in Works* (St. Louis, 1972), Vol. 25, pp. 245, 260.

⁷⁵ See *Institutes* III: 14 (title).

⁷⁶ *Comment on Romans* 3: 21, tr. Ross Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 72 (emphases mine).

⁷⁷ *Institutes* III: 14: 11.

⁷⁸ *Comment on 2 Corinthians* 5: 20.

⁷⁹ *Comment on 1 John* 1: 7.

threatens the correctly understood conception of *sola fide*. The meritorious sufferings of the Son of God are the sole basis of the sinner's justification at every instant of his believing experience. Since Christ's perfect work is the basis of the believer's assurance also, a *continuum* view of justification will not undermine the assurance of a diligent believer. It will, however, dispel the false confidence of a merely nominal Christian.⁸⁰

(3) Justification must involve the believer's obedience.

It has often been pointed out that whereas Paul seems to attribute salvation to 'faith', our Lord seems to attribute it to 'works'. Put differently, Christ stresses 'doing' and 'working' as well as 'believing' (see Matthew 5:20; 7:21; 12:36,37; 25:31-46). Furthermore, in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, repentance is usually coupled with faith as equally necessary for salvation. There seems therefore to be a discrepancy between the emphasis on 'faith' in Paul's letters, and actual apostolic practice. The problematic statement in James 2:24, although seemingly inconsistent with Romans 3:28, does not seem out of character when compared with statements in the Gospels. Believing that one must necessarily distinguish between 'legal obedience' and 'evangelical obedience' and that the latter, unlike the former, is bound up with considerations of justification, Richard Baxter makes these pertinent points:

It seemeth strange to some, to find the whole Old Testament, and all Christ's sermons, and all the other Apostles, inculcating inherent and performed righteousness, as that which men must be judged about, to life or death, and yet to find Paul so fit pleading against Justification by Works. But if we will take the Scripture together and not by incoherent scraps, the reconciliation is evident.⁸¹

Inevitably, therefore:

Works of evangelical gratitude, love and obedience, according to the Law of Grace, subordinate to, and supposing redemption and the free gift of pardon and life to penitent believing accepters, are those that Christ and James and all Scripture make necessary to salvation; and our consent and covenant so to obey is necessary to our first or initial justification; and our actual obedience to the continuance and confirmation of it.⁸²

For those who are suspicious of Baxter's teaching on this subject, there were precedents for his emphasis. Compared with the antinomian controversies of the seventeenth century, when the very suggestion of 'good works' seemed to indicate a Rome-ward trend, the reformers appear quite untroubled. Cranmer declares that 'faith of itself is full of good works'.⁸³ He even insists that 'the works of the moral commandments of God be the very

⁸⁰ See 2 Peter 1: 10 and Calvin's comment.

⁸¹ *An End of Doctrinal Controversies* (London, 1691), p. 252.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁸³ *Homily on Good Works in Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 51.

true works of faith, which lead to the blessed life to come'.⁸⁴ Hooper declared that 'good works are...necessary for salvation'.⁸⁵ Even Calvin admits that 'good works' are 'inferior causes' of salvation, and that the Lord 'makes eternal life a consequent of works'.⁸⁶ However, the 'true cause' (by which Calvin must mean the meritorious cause) is 'the mercy of God'. Justification is ever by faith, but, says Calvin, 'We dream not of a faith which is devoid of good works, nor of a justification which can exist without them.'⁸⁷

This brings us again to James 2:21, '...by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.' It is surely fair to say that the Reformed conception of justification has always been embarrassed by this text. Luther's strong antipathy to what he called 'the epistle of straw' is well known. In the wake of naughtily adding 'allein' ['alone'] to Romans 3: 28 in his German translation of the New Testament (1522), the simplest way to avoid collision with Paul was to deny to James apostolic inspiration.⁸⁸ Various exegetical solutions have been advanced to eliminate the apparent contradiction between Paul and James. Calvin set a precedent when he said that the two apostles employ different ideas of justification. Paul is therefore concerned with the 'imputation of righteousness' whereas James is concerned with its 'manifestation'.⁸⁹ In short, James is discussing merely evidential features of justification. Cranmer also held the evidential view, although he is seemingly unconvinced by this solution. While he says 'Thy deeds and works must be an open testimonial of thy faith',⁹⁰ elsewhere he says:

St. James meant of justification in another sense,...For he spake of such a justification which is a declaration, continuation, and increase of that justification which St. Paul spake of before.⁹¹

There is arguably confusion here. If James' use of *dikaiosis* is different from Paul's, how then can it be regarded as an 'increase' of it? The judicious Hooker went so far as to suggest that James really meant 'sanctification' when he spoke of 'justification'.⁹²

The entire Puritan and Evangelical tradition was to follow Calvin's lead in the exposition of James 2:24, although Richard Baxter and the sub-tradition that followed him proved a notable exception.⁹³ That said, Baxter had a precedent in a late change of emphasis in Calvin. Only weeks before his death in 1564, the reformer wrote:

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

⁸⁵ *Later Writings* (Cambridge, 1852), p. 59.

⁸⁶ *Institutes* III: 14: 21.

⁸⁷ *Institutes* III: 16: 1.

⁸⁸ See *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, tr. Bertram Lee Woolf (London, 1956), Vol. 2, p. 306.

⁸⁹ *Institutes* III: 17: 12.

⁹⁰ *Homily on Faith in Certain Sermons of Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), p. 47.

⁹¹ *Notes on Justification in Miscellaneous Writings* (Cambridge, 1846), p. 208.

⁹² *Works*, ed. Keble (Oxford, 1836), Vol. 3, pp. 630-1.

⁹³ See G. F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge: a study in a tradition* (London, 1951) and Doddridge's comments on Romans 3: 28 and James 2: 24 in *The Family Expositor, Works* (Leeds, 1805), Vol. 8, p. 414 and Vol. 10, p. 228.

Thus it still remains true, that faith without works justifies, although this needs prudence and a sound interpretation; for this proposition, that faith without works justifies is true and yet false, according to the different senses which it bears. *The proposition, that faith without works justifies by itself, is false, because faith without works is void...faith cannot justify when it is without works, because it is dead, and a mere fiction.*⁹⁴

The usual Reformed view may be summarised thus:

1. James, unlike Paul, is not dealing with justification before God, but before men.
2. James is teaching an 'evidential' justification to clear men from hypocrisy.
3. James is saying that if faith justifies the believer, then works justify his faith.

The question which demands an answer is: does the above type of exposition satisfactorily explain the statement 'by works a man is justified? James does not say works justify a man's faith, but the man himself. Had he meant that 'by works a man is proved' then why did he not use *dokimos* instead of *dikaiosis*, as he had done in James 1:12? Furthermore, is James assuming a human 'tribunal' when he seems to assume the context of salvation: 'can [dead] faith save him?' (v.14). If Calvin's approach is correct, James should have asked 'Can faith prove him before men?' It is clearly arguable therefore, that James is using justification in precisely the same sense as Paul. It may be suggested that the clue to the solution of this age-old dilemma lies in the nature of saving faith.

III. What is Faith?

It seems to be the case that the 'works of the law' rejected by Paul in Romans 3:28 are not the 'works of faith' urged by James in James 2:14-26. Paul's denunciation of law-righteousness arguably arises because (a) any degree of obedience can never compensate for instances of disobedience; (b) it is a man's duty to obey the law, and there is nothing meritorious about doing one's duty; and (c) without regenerating grace, it is impossible for any one to obey God. On the other hand, James is urging a believer to a life of 'evangelical obedience'. It is also true that whereas James defines faith in terms of assent to truth (v.19) *plus* trust (v.23), with works being the fruit of both (v. 26), Paul's conception of faith embraces comprehensively all that James means by 'faith and works'. This vital insight was expounded by one-time Presbyterian and 'reluctant' Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson (1630-94), whose view of justifying faith seems to provide a coherent solution to the dilemma posed by Romans 3:28 and James 2:24:

⁹⁴ *Comment on Ezekiel 18: 14-17*, tr. T. Myers (CTS ed., Edinburgh, 1850), p. 238 (emphasis mine).

And this doth not contradict St. Paul, who saith, Galatians 2:16, *that a man is not justified by the works of the law: but by the faith of Jesus Christ*. For how does this, that we are justified not by the legal dispensation, but by the faith of the Gospel, which includes obedience and good works, contradict what St. James says, that we are not justified by a bare assent to the truth of the Gospel, but by obedience to the commands of it? And I do not see that upon the contrary supposition, viz. that the faith of the Gospel doth not include obedience in it, it is possible to reconcile these two apostles.⁹⁵

The Archbishop handles all the texts without suppressing, or distorting any of the data in the interests of a theological theory. He endorses Calvin's view of the equivalence of 'justification' and 'pardon' when he states that 'justification...when it applies to a sinner, it signifies nothing else but the pardon of his sin'.⁹⁶ At the same time, his overall solution is consistent with the essential genius of Reformation theology, viz, salvation through the merits of Christ alone – *solo Christo*:

So that no man hath reason to fear, that this doctrine of the necessity of obedience to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life, should be any ways prejudicial to the law of faith and the law of grace. For so long as these three things are but asserted and secured,

1st, That faith is the root and principle of obedience and a holy life, and that without it, it is impossible to please God.

2nd, That we stand continually in need of the divine grace and assistance to enable us to perform that obedience which the gospel requires of us...And

3rd, That the forgiveness of our sins, and the reward of eternal life, are founded in the free grace and mercy of God, conferring these blessings upon us, not for the merit of our obedience, but only for the merit and satisfaction of the obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer; I say, so long as we assert these three things, we give all that the gospel anywhere ascribes to faith, and the grace of God revealed in the gospel.⁹⁷

The ultimate vindication of Tillotson's position derives from an unexpected source. His tripartite conception of faith⁹⁸ developed the full implications of Calvin's brilliant exposition of Christ's offices of prophet, priest and king.⁹⁹ Calvin says that 'the office which he received from the Father consists of

⁹⁵ *Of Justifying Faith in Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 2, p. 483.

⁹⁶ *Of the Christian Faith which Sanctifies, Justifies and Saves in Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 2, 479.

⁹⁷ *The Possibility and Necessity of Gospel Obedience and its Consistence with Free Grace in Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 1, p. 508.

⁹⁸ Besides Baxter, Tillotson was probably influenced by George Bull's *Harmonia Apostolica* (1667). Bull argued that 'faith' is the sum of all that God requires of man under the Gospel, a view strongly hinted at by Cranmer (*Homilies* (Oxford, 1822), pp. 39-40) and explicitly affirmed by Coverdale (*Treatise on Death in Remains* (Cambridge, 1846), p. 93).

⁹⁹ See J. I. Packer's discussion of this in *John Calvin*, ed. G. Duffield (Abingdon, 1966), pp. 168.

three parts' and 'faith embraces Christ as he is offered by the Father'.¹⁰⁰ In short, a correlation obtains between the character of faith and the offices of Christ. Tillotson agreed with Baxter who affirmed that 'The accepting [of Christ] as our teacher, sanctifier, and king, is as much at least the condition of our justification, pardon and deliverance from hell, as is accepting of him as a justifier of us'.¹⁰¹ Both of them following Reformation precedents, Baxter (as indicated above)¹⁰² probably influenced Tillotson's *continuum* view of justification, that it covers 'our first justification upon our faith and repentance, or our continuance in this state, or our final justification by our solemn acquittal and absolution at the Great Day'.¹⁰³

In short, a life-long saving faith is more than mere trust in Christ's priestly mediation. It also assumes a daily acceptance of his prophetic teaching, and anticipates ongoing obedience to his kingly authority. If any one of these elements is absent, then justifying faith does not exist. It is therefore impossible to receive Christ as Saviour without, at the same time, acknowledging him as Lord:

So that he that believes the Lord Jesus, believes him to the great guide and teacher sent from God...This is to believe his *prophetical office*. He believes that he is the author of salvation, and hath purchased for us forgiveness of sins, ransom from hell,...and therefore that we ought to rely upon him only for salvation, to own him for our Saviour...This is to believe his *priestly office*. And lastly, he believes that the precepts of the Gospel, being delivered to us by the Son of God, ought to have the authority of laws upon us, and that we are bound to be obedient to them; ... and this is to believe the *kingly office* of Christ. And this is the sum of that which is meant by Faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, which the Apostle saith was one subject of his preaching.¹⁰⁴

One might add that a further correlation obtains between the psychology of the believer and the faith he exercises in Christ. In other words, when a sinner receives Christ, the whole man (mind, heart and will) embraces a whole Christ (prophet, priest and king) with a whole faith (assent, trust and obedience). Each constituent of faith has a corresponding office in Christ's person, which in turn is an expression of every aspect of the believer's psychology. To insist, as John Owen mistakenly did, that justifying faith only relates to Christ's priestly office,¹⁰⁵ is to receive an incomplete Christ

¹⁰⁰ *Institutes* II: 15: 1 and III: 2: 8.

¹⁰¹ *Directions to a Sound Conversion* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (Select Treatises)(Grand Rapids, 1981 rep.), p. 592. Contrary to the verdict of Dr. Packer, Baxter's much-misunderstood teaching over justification arose not from his rejection of the imputed active righteousness of Christ but his application of the term 'justification' to both pardon and holiness. His oft-misleading statements are chiefly to be attributed to terminological ambiguities. See J. I. Packer, 'The Doctrine of Justification in Development and Decline among the Puritans' in *By Schisms Rent Assunder* (Puritan Conference report, London, 1969), pp. 18-29.

¹⁰² See quote at n. 65.

¹⁰³ *Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Necessity, in order to Justification and Salvation* in *Works* (London, 1712), p. 390.

¹⁰⁴ *The Necessity of Repentance and Faith* in *Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 2, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ See Owen, *Justification by Faith* in *Works*, ed. Goold (Edinburgh, 1850-55), Vol. 5,

with an incomplete faith.

Tillotson's view of faith may thus be summed up. Faith has a triple character:

- (1) Assent to the truth of the Gospel.
- (2) Trust in the merits of Christ alone.
- (3) Obedience to Christ as Lord.

He validates his view by pointing out these very elements in Pauline usage. Paul speaks of assent to gospel truth (Romans 1: 16) and trust of the heart (Romans 10: 10), together with an obedient or working faith (Romans 1: 5; 16: 26; Galatians 5: 6). Sometimes all three are implied together (Romans 6: 17) and even treated synonymously (Romans 10: 16). For other New Testament instances of this comprehensive conception of faith, Tillotson cites Hebrews 5: 9; 2 Thessalonians 1: 8 and 1 Peter 1: 22. This vital observation duly made, Tillotson justly concludes that 'we cannot be said to be justified by faith alone, unless that faith include in it obedience'.¹⁰⁶

It now becomes clear that when James speaks of 'works', Paul is speaking of an 'obedient faith' which produces 'good works'. This would permit the following paraphrase of James 2: 24: 'By an *obedient* faith a man is justified, and not by mere assent and trust'. This might suggest that faith is seen to possess *meritorious* worth. The same might also be said of repentance. However, this is a mistake. Since man is dutifully obligated to repent and believe – otherwise unbelief cannot be regarded as sinful (see Acts 17: 30; 1 John 3: 23; 2 Thessalonians 1: 8), the performance of them cannot be regarded as meritorious, even apart from the consideration that without grace (Acts 5: 31; Ephesians 2: 8) they cannot be performed. Furthermore, what Calvin and Cranmer say of faith applies equally to Tillotson's conception of faith. By virtue of its very imperfection, it can have no intrinsic justifying virtue. However, what is true of faith as a whole applies equally to its aspects or constituents. In short, assent, trust and obedience must all be genuine and sincere, even if they are never perfect.¹⁰⁷ With regard to repentance, Tillotson's exposition suggests that it is necessarily comprehended by faith. Since faith involves assent, trust and obedience, so repentance implies a change of mind, heart and will. Put differently, repentance and faith are but negative and positive sides of the same coin – one necessarily implies the other. This is why Paul's stress on faith in his doctrine of justification is not inconsistent with his stress on repentance elsewhere (see Acts 17: 30; 20: 21; 26: 18).

p. 117 and R. L. Dabney's penetrating discussion of this issue in 'A Phase of Religious Selfishness' in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (1890, London, 1967 rep.), Vol. 1, pp. 694f.

¹⁰⁶ *Of the Christian Faith which Sanctifies, Justifies and Saves in Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 1, p. 476.

¹⁰⁷ *Christ the Author and Obedience the Condition of Salvation in Works* London, 1712), Vol. 1, p. 501.

Whilst faith is not a meritorious work, man must perform it as a subjective condition of justification. As such, Tillotson, together with Calvin,¹⁰⁸ had no inhibitions about using the language of conditionality:

Does not the Bible say, that *he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall find mercy?* [Proverbs 28: 13] And doth not this plainly imply, that repentance is a condition of pardon?...Doth it not say, that *if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you?* [Matthew 6: 15] Can any words more plainly express a condition than these do?¹⁰⁹

Neither was Tillotson under pressure from a dubious theory of imputation to deny that faith is imputed to the believer for righteousness, i.e. he is accepted before God when he believes (see Romans 4:5 and Galatians 3:6). Calvin is also most explicit on this point.¹¹⁰ Tillotson was thus careful to say that faith was only a condition in the sense of being the *causa sine qua non* of justification. As with the Reformers and the Puritans, he insisted that the atoning death of the Son of God was the sole, meritorious condition of salvation, and that, accordingly, salvation was all of grace.¹¹¹

Conclusion

Concluding historically, it might seem somewhat disconcerting to find an evangelical writer quoting the views of Archbishop Tillotson. After all, the Latitudinarian archbishop has been charged with rationalistic heterodoxy. Worse still, he and his colleagues have been blamed for creating the very conditions which necessitated the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century.¹¹² The seraphic George Whitefield got into hot water for denouncing the dead primate for 'knowing no more about Christianity than Mahomet'.¹¹³ John Wesley also criticised Tillotson's views on justification during his early 'Lutheran' phase, although his mature views approximated very closely to the archbishop's position.¹¹⁴ The facts remain that Whitefield was totally

¹⁰⁸ See *The Eternal Predestination of God* (London, 1961), pp. 105-6 and *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh, 1983 facsimile), pp. 1181-82. Kendall is incorrect to say that 'Faith for Calvin was never a 'condition' (*Calvin and English Calvinism* (Oxford, 1979), p. 210).

¹⁰⁹ *The Condition of the Gospel Covenant, and the Merit of Christ, Consistent in Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 1, p. 488.

¹¹⁰ See Calvin on Romans 4: 4-5 and Galatians 3: 6.

¹¹¹ *The Possibility and Necessity of Gospel Obedience and its Consistence with Free Grace*, in *Works* (London, 1712), Vol.1, pp. 502f.

¹¹² See Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England from Watts and Wesley to Maurice* (1690-1850), (Princeton, 1961), p. 56.

¹¹³ See Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield* (London, 1876), Vol. 1, p. 360 and Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield* (London, 1980), Vol. 2, p. 47.

¹¹⁴ See *True Christianity Defended* in *Works*, ed. T. Jackson (London, 1840), Vol. 7, p. 433. Wesley later published two of Tillotson's sermons in Vol. XLV of his *Christian Library* (Bristol, 1755). See also John C. English's valuable study 'John Wesley and the Anglican Moderates of the Seventeenth Century' in the *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. LI, No. 3 (1969), pp. 203-220.

wrong to attribute to Tillotson a 'bare historical' conception of faith, and Wesley failed initially to grasp Tillotson's arguments against a false interpretation of the *sola fide* principle. In short, Tillotson was accused of undermining the doctrines of the Reformation. Let us allow him to speak for himself:

There is a wide difference between the doctrine of the Papists about justification, and this doctrine. They say that obedience and good works are not only a condition of our justification, but a meritorious cause of it; which I abhor as much as anyone. It is the doctrine of merit that the Protestants chiefly oppose in the matter of justification.¹¹⁵

Should one be persuaded of Tillotson's 'soundness' yet doubtful still about Baxter, the archbishop's commendation of his puritan brother ought to be decisive. Two months after Baxter's death in December 1691, Tillotson wrote to Matthew Sylvester, the eventual publisher of Baxter's autobiography. Concerned to encourage and advise him, Tillotson spoke glowingly of the character, labours, books and sufferings of his friend of 40 years. He was glad to hear of Sylvester's project 'to write our Reverend & beloved Mr Baxter's life'. Among many deeply moving things, Tillotson urged Sylvester to

...clearly & briefly lay down his judgment concerning Justification (which few do clearly & fully understand) which some in the city have so opposed, & show he really magnifies Christ & faith & grace, & doth not really differ from honest true Protestants...¹¹⁶

Perhaps nothing validates Tillotson's assessment more than Baxter's late testimony in his refutation of the antinomianism of Tobias Crisp:

I abhor the opinion of any works necessary to justification or salvation, or to any common blessings in the sense of Paul; such as make the reward to be of debt, and not of grace. I think few men living, are less tempted to magnify or trust to any worth of their own, than I am. I look not for a bit of bread, or an hour's ease, or life, or the pardon, or acceptance of one duty, or of my holiest affections (so faulty are they by their great imperfection) but merely from the free grace of God, and the merits and intercession of Christ. ... The faith by which we are justified, is that true Christianity which includeth our believing consent to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; our belief of Christ, and our thankful acceptance of him to be our Teacher, Intercessor or Priest, and King, with his offered Grace; and that this acceptance is with desire, love, and hope, expressed in a holy contract or covenant. This is the soul's marriage with Christ, and allegiance to him, and it includeth the renouncing our trust in all creatures, or in any righteousness of our own, so far as they would usurp the least part of Christ's office, works, or honour. None of all this is justification by

¹¹⁵ *Of Justifying Faith in Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 2, p. 484.

¹¹⁶ N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* (Oxford, 1991), Vol. 2, pp. 328-31 (Letter 1260).

works.¹¹⁷

NOTE: for an in-depth comparative assessment of the views of John Owen, Richard Baxter, John Tillotson and John Wesley, see my *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990/2002).

Concluding theologically, an attempt has been made to analyse, discuss and evaluate the labyrinth of issues associated with the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel. On balance, it would seem that Reformed theology has not always spoken with the clarity and consistency the Scriptural data demands. In the belief that Scripture does point to a harmonious understanding of the seemingly conflicting evidence, the article has sought to clarify certain areas of understanding and to resolve long-standing problems.

The indiscriminate gospel declaration ‘Christ died for you’ is not a statement about the efficacious application of the atonement, but about the basis of benefits conditionally offered to all. In this respect, a ‘universal atonement’ means ‘something substantial is offered to all’. Calvin’s position, unlike that of his professed disciples, is not embarrassed by the criticism that if Christ is not given for all, then the unbeliever is punished for rejecting nothing. God’s sincerity in the universal offer cannot justly be called into question if there are inscrutable reasons why he permits some to reject salvation, while others are chosen to prove the efficacy of grace. God is not obliged to violate human freedom in order to demonstrate the sincerity of his offers of mercy. In short, there is an unfathomable interaction between the divine purpose and the human will in the application of salvation. In the mystery of the process, God is ever sovereign and man is ever free. The saved will give God all the glory for their salvation, and the lost will justly reproach themselves in their condemnation.¹¹⁸

With regard to justification, it is clear that faith has active as well as passive features. Whereas Paul is primarily concerned with the objective character of divine grace, James is concerned with the subjective character of the human response. That said, Paul largely assumes the very conception of faith for which James is pleading. James is not therefore arguing for a different conception of justification, but for a view of faith Paul generally takes for granted.

The Christian’s justifying righteousness is always that of pardon. The

¹¹⁷ Richard Baxter, *A Defence of Christ and Free Grace* (London, 1690), Epistle to the Reader and p. 24.

¹¹⁸ For a valuable discussion of these issues, see John Howe’s *The Reconcilableness of God’s Prescience of the Sins of Men, with the Wisdom and Sincerity of His Counsels* (1677). In a treatise *The Redeemer’s Tears Wept over Lost Souls* (1684), Howe writes ‘And therefore it is unavoidably imposed upon us, to believe that God is truly unwilling of some things, which he doth not think fit to interpose his omnipotency to hinder, and is truly willing of some things, which he doth not put forth his omnipotency to effect’ (*Works of the English Puritan Divines* (London, 1846), p. 62). See also R. L. Dabney, ‘God’s Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy’ in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (1890, London, 1967 rep.), pp. 282f.

continuum view of justification is a sounder and more coherent alternative to the idea that justification is the initial act with sanctification the subsequent process. The *continuum* view insists that there is a perpetual correlation between objective pardon and subjective renewal, at every instant of the believer's experience. The two are to be *distinguished* but never *separated*, as Calvin maintains. No one can claim Christ's work *for* them, unless they can demonstrate Christ's work *in* them.

The solution proposed above at once avoids both legalism and antinomianism. The righteousness of grace delivers the believer not from the law but from lawlessness. However, if Christ's active obedience to the law is imputed to the believer, then two things follow. *First*, the believer has a legal, rather than a *gracious* righteousness, and *second*, the law may be disregarded with impunity. However, a gracious righteousness, i.e. pardon, does not render invalid the precept of the law, but only the penalty of the law. The statement 'Christ died that I might not die eternally' makes good, gospel sense, but the statement 'Christ kept the decalogue that I might not keep it personally' is bad, antinomian nonsense. This is not to be legalistic, but to honour the God who is the author of both Law and Gospel. Indeed, legalism is properly the doctrine which teaches justification by legal obedience. However, whilst the gospel is inconsistent with legalism, it is not inconsistent with the law (Ps.119:29; 1 Cor. 9:21). It is surely for this balanced conception of the gospel Paul is arguing in both Romans and Galatians (see Romans 3:28; 6:1-7:25; 13:1-14 and Galatians 2:16-21; 3:13; 5:1-15).

Concluding practically, three brief things remain to be said. *First*, we are, of course, on the eve of the Quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation. For those who remain unconvinced – not least from an ecumenical perspective – that Tillotson has any valid voice in the entire debate about the biblical doctrine of justification, a final significant thing may be said. In concert with Calvin, Baxter and others, his stance also safeguards us from foolish and treacherous ecumenical activity. Indeed, his contribution demonstrates that embracing Rome and embracing Christ are mutually-incompatible alternatives. Indeed, has any Anglican archbishop understood and expressed this more succinctly and powerfully than John Tillotson? His perception of the Roman threat possesses no ambiguity:

They cannot come over to us, because they think they are infallible; and we cannot pass over to them, because we know that they are deceived.¹¹⁹

Recent Archbishops of Canterbury have obviously stopped thinking that Rome is deceived. They have jettisoned the biblical and protestant wisdom of their predecessor.

Second, Turning to anomalies within evangelicalism, ancient and modern holiness teaching – the idea of graduating from 'Christ my Saviour' to 'Christ my Lord', from 'carnal Christianity' to 'victorious Christianity' – finds an antidote in the teaching presented above. Our perfect redemption is yet to

¹¹⁹ *Of the Form and Power of Godliness in Works* (London, 1712), Vol. 2, p. 343.

be. That said, can a person really be a Christian if Christ is not Saviour *and* Lord from the word go?

Third, in days when Evangelicals are, in their different ways, inclined to represent Christianity as a *merely* cerebral/intellectual or *merely* emotional, or *merely* practical thing, we need a teaching to synthesise the truth of valid 'head, heart and hand' emphases. We must dispense with the refrigerated orthodoxy of some of the neo-Reformed, and the pietistic hysteria of the Charismatics, and the pharisaic activism of others. A true understanding of the Gospel, of Justification and of Faith is, I believe, the urgent need of our day and generation.

In his own inimitable way, Charles Wesley sums up all I have tried to say:

Partners of a glorious hope,
Lift your hearts and voices up,
Jointly let us rise, and sing
Christ our Prophet, Priest and King;
Monuments of Jesu's grace,
Speak we by our lives his praise;
Walk in him we have received,
Show we not in vain believed.

Plead we thus for faith alone,
Faith which by our works is shown:
God it is who justifies;
Only faith the grace applies;
Active faith that lives within,
Conquers earth, and hell, and sin,
Sanctifies, and makes us whole,
Forms the Saviour in the soul.

Let us for this faith contend,
Sure salvation is its end:
Heaven already is begun,
Everlasting life is won.
Only let us persevere,
Till we see our Lord appear,
Never from the rock remove,
Saved by faith, which works by love.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ *Methodist Hymn Book* (London, 1904), 743. 1; 742. 3-4.