A New Creation in Christ:

A Historical-Theological Investigation into Walter Marshall’s Theology of Sanctification in Union with Christ in the Context of the Seventeenth-Century Antinomian and Neonomian Controversy

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Preface

I was first introduced to Reformed soteriology when I enrolled in Westminster Theological Seminary’s ThM program in the spring of 2006. It was an intimidating experience, to say the least, but one also filled with wonder and delight. For there I learned that union with Christ was not simply one aspect of salvation but its central structure, and that to be saved was not merely to receive a benefit from Christ but to have Christ. A major part of my growth came through encountering Walter Marshall. As was often the case, a class lecture by Lane Tipton drifted toward the pastoral work of caring for souls. He suggested that we read the Marshall’s *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Tipton’s comment would have probably been forgotten—of reading the many books that Tipton recommends there is no end—except for two things. The discussion resonated deep within me. I knew I needed to keep thinking about these things for my own spiritual formation. Then, after lunch one day, I visited the campus bookstore. It was a favorite location of mine because…well…they had free coffee. I assumed that the coffee was for folks actually using the bookstore, so while enjoying my cup of joe, I perused all the books that I had neither time to read nor money to buy. And there I stumbled upon *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*.

My next memory of Marshall’s book involves sitting on my living room rug, newborn son in my arms, struggling through the Puritan pastor’s clunky prose. Although I had to wrestle with the text, the book awakened something in me. Marshall understood my experience perfectly. He understood, as Luther did, that we all have a tendency toward both legalism and licentiousness and that our default is to try to overcome one by running to the other. But Marshall—better than Luther, I believe—offered a way out. It came not through some system of theology or practice but through union with the person of Christ. None of that was I able to explain to anyone at the time—although I tried. Yet I
knew Marshall presented something I had never heard before but needed to understand. I returned to Marshall for various reasons during my first pastorate, such as to help a friend work through a struggle with pornography and to explain to a woman how to have comfort in Christ, even as she struggled against her sin. Then I moved to Central Asia, where my life took some unexpected turns. Marshall showed me how to ground my own identity in Christ.

My personal aim in undertaking this project was simple: I wanted to understand better the theology of sanctification that had helped me grow. I also hoped that this project would be useful for the church. Marshall is often quoted in discourses on sanctification. Yet very little effort has been given to understanding what his theology actually is. What did John Murray see in *Gospel Mystery* that made him say it was the most important work on sanctification ever written? I wanted to find out.

This work would not have been completed without the assistance of others. My advisors were immensely helpful. Robert Letham guided me along the way through his mastery of seventeenth-century theology. Natalie Brand’s love for the doctrine of union with Christ helped me understand its broad range of application. Overall, all the staff at the Union School of Theology was superb.

To understand Marshall’s context, I also turned locally to University of Maryland professor Sabrina Baron, who graciously allowed me to sit in on her classes and answered all my questions about the antinomians.

I approached Chad Van Dixhoorn for help understanding the Westminster Assembly. He kindly gave me hours of his time. He also introduced me to searchable text EEBO, which was a game-changer for my method of research. Chad helped me find two letters written by Marshall to Richard Cromwell.

Jonathan Master and William VanDoodewaard helped me understand the issues surrounding assurance in the seventeenth century and provided quality feedback on my arguments.

Fellow pastors Shane Walker, Steve Unthank, and Jaim Gamm all read *Gospel Mystery* with me. Shane and Steve read my manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. Grace Reeves also proofread the thesis, catching many typos. My friend Julie Winters meticulously proofread the final copy.
Pat Salzman and Bob Kelly each transcribed portions of Marshall’s handwritten letters so that I could more easily read them.

The research for this thesis was conducted at three libraries, the Library of Congress, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the McKeldin Library of the University of Maryland. The librarians at Folger always impressed me with their eagerness to help. My friend and fellow church member, Kevin Hammett, assisted me at McKeldin. His excitement about my research was always encouraging.

My church, Greenbelt Baptist, has been supportive throughout the process. Their allowance of two sabbaticals gave me opportunity to revise and complete my work. But more importantly, they provided a context for me to observe Marshall’s theology worked out practice. By God’s grace, they are being sanctified. I’m thankful to be their pastor.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife, Rebecca. Not only did she read the entire thesis twice—and some parts even more—but also through her care, love, and support, she modeled the sanctified life. Rebecca, I couldn’t have done it without you.

As I write this, that son I mentioned above is now ten, and I’m holding my newborn daughter. Three other children scurry about. Teaching them theology has been an unexpected blessing. From “theology breakfasts” together at Capitol Hill Baptist Church to conversations about sermons, learning about sanctification has been a family project. In my children’s eyes Walter Marshall stands as a seminal figure in British history; they placed him on our homeschool family timeline along with William the Conqueror and Oliver Cromwell. My children may or may not read Gospel Mystery. But I pray its truth will grip their hearts. This thesis is dedicated to them.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Nature and Scope of this Work

According to C.S. Lewis, the first order of business in understanding any work is to know what that work is.¹ This thesis is a work of historical theology, a discipline that Stuart Hall defines as, “the theology of the past [being] described and expounded in its own historical context.”² Or, as Pelikan explains: it is “the genetic study of Christian faith and doctrine.”³ The discipline of historical-theology involves looking at the theology in a period of time different from our own. It is also “genetic,” meaning that the goal is to understand how that theology is rooted in its own time and place. It aims to reconstruct a certain theology in its own context so that it can be understood on its own terms.

This means that historical theology synthesizes systematic theology and history. It employs systematics insofar as it seeks to understand theological discourse—a theological work, a catechism, a confession—and it asks theological questions: Is there logical cohesion? What is its foundation and architectonic structure (if it has one)? Is this theology something that people can live by? Does it make sense? What questions does it answer? How well does it answer them? The systematic aspect also draws lines connecting the past and present, which is helpful, as historical-theologians often study the theology of another time to gain greater insight into the present.

The discipline of this thesis is also historical. The emphasis on the systematic in no way diminishes the necessity for proper historical analysis but rather increases it, given the particular difficulty in studying the history of ideas.⁴ This field presents an

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acute danger of anachronism: the desire to apply lessons from the past to the present
temps the theologian to assume all contexts are equal. He or she could read Walter
Marshall, John Calvin, and John Murray as if all three men were participating in the same
correlation simultaneously, failing to acknowledge that key terms and concepts
underwent change over time.\(^5\) A related error occurs when the historian of ideas
(wrongly) assumes that the propositions held by historical persons were a product of their
own self-conscious epistemological reflection, having nothing to do with social and
political factors that predisposed them to those ideas.

We avoid these errors by giving proper attention to the synchronic and diachronic
contexts.\(^6\) To practice good historical-theology, we need to understand the background of
the theological idea under study (diachronic context) and the immediate context in which
it is articulated (synchronic context).\(^7\) Geoffrey Nuttall puts it this way: “The thought of
an individual may be related to that of his time…”\(^8\) This is the synchronic context. He
continues: “…the thought of a period [is related] to the mental development through the
centuries.”\(^9\) This is the diachronic context. However, we must not think of this historical
process as an obstruction to our theological goal; actually, the reverse is true. For it is
precisely in and through differing contexts—understood through proper historical study
—that the theologian discovers the deeper meaning of a theological idea, often exposing
a greater range of application. A leveling of the context would be bad history as much as
it would undermine the value of the theological investigation.

The subject of this historical-theological study is the pastor and theologian Walter
Marshall, with particular focus on his book *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. This

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\(^5\) I’m indebted to Chad Van Dixhoorn for this analogy.

\(^6\) Carl Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History*
(Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 116–117.

\(^7\) Ibid., 116–117. These terms originated in linguistic studies, but are applicable for the
study of history. In reality, neither aspect is entirely divorced from the other. One cannot understand the
present context without some sense of the historical.

\(^8\) Geoffrey F Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1992), 15

\(^9\) Ibid., 15.
thesis aims to “describe and expound” Marshall’s understanding of sanctification in union with Christ “in its own historical context.”

It must be stated at the outset that we are interested in Marshall’s theology, not his historical life. To begin with, little information is available on him. His family and congregation at Gosport remembered him for his deep love of Christ and strong spiritual life. But would history remember him? He was neither successful nor overly important in his lifetime. His appraisers noted that he was not an impressive preacher: he “had not the public oil.” His only book, The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification (hereafter, Gospel Mystery), was withheld from the public for twelve years after its author’s death. Thus, he had no theological following from his published works, as Baxter and Owen did. Marshall experienced a spiritual crisis of sorts, which is of interest to study. But compared to Luther, who wrote pages about his similar experience, we have scarcely a paragraph penned by someone with the initials N.N. Thus, historians rightly give primary attention to the lives of Owen, Goodwin, and Baxter, for they were the movers and shakers in the seventeenth-century English church.

However, in terms of the ideas that are presented in his work, Marshall contributed significantly to the fields of sanctification and union with Christ within the Reformed tradition. It’s worth noting that by “reformed tradition” I mean the line of theological development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that stood in contradistinction to Lutheran, Anabaptist, and Catholic traditions. It’s theology is expressed in documents such as the Helvetic Confessions, the Cannons of Dort, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Many within this tradition have praised the usefulness of Marshall’s work; yet few have attempted to explicate what he actually said.

10 The funeral sermon by S. Tomlyns for Marshall provides scant details of his life compared to the typical funeral address. Samuel Tomlyns, “The Faith of the Saints, as to a Future House and Happiness in the Other World Set Forth in a Sermon Preached at the Funeral of That Worthy Servant of Christ, Mr. Walter Marshal," (London, 1680).

11 Ibid., preface.

A recent tome on Puritan theology demonstrates Marshall’s relevance for the reformed tradition. Jones and Beeke call Marshall’s work “the Puritan classic on sanctification.” They say “Marshall effectively grounds the doctrine of sanctification in a believer’s union with Christ and underscores the necessity of practical holiness in everyday living.” Unfortunately, these comments are relegated to a footnote, and this is all they have to say about Marshall.

Others express similar sentiments concerning Marshall’s work. James Hervey (1714–1758), a Calvinist pastor in Weston Favell in Northamptonshire, writes,

From my own experience, it has been made one of the most useful books to my own soul. I scarce ever fail to receive spiritual consolation and strength from the perusal of it. And was I to be banished into some desolate island, possessed only of two books beside my Bible, this should be one of the two, and perhaps the first that I would choose.

In a similar vein, William Cowper (1731–1800) was immensely comforted by Marshall’s work: “I think Marshall one of the best, and most spiritual expositors of Scripture I ever read. I admire the strength of his argument, and the clearness of his reasoning, upon those parts of our most holy religion which are generally least understood (even by real Christians) as masterpieces of the kind,” wrote Cowper. Marshall’s work was also championed by the “Marrow men” in the Marrow controversy in the 18th century. More recently, John Murray praised Gospel Mystery as “the most important book on Sanctification ever written.”

A brief overview of the place of union with Christ in Reformed theology of sanctification in union with Christ will demonstrate the relevance of Marshall’s topic.

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13 Joel R Beeke and Mark Jones, A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 942 n76.


15 See Part IV of this dissertation for the Marrow men’s interaction with Marshall.
Many strands of Reformed theology look to union with Christ as the structural basis for all soteriological benefits, including sanctification.\textsuperscript{16} A number of books have been published in recent years that seek to explain the place of union with Christ in Reformed soteriology.\textsuperscript{17} Although they don’t all agree on the precise articulation of this union, they understand it as vital. As we will see, the Reformers broke from the medieval view of union with the Divine as the goal of one’s journey and instead understood union as the foundation and architectonic structure of all soteriological benefits. They saw in Scripture that election and predestination occur in Christ. Believers are seen in solidarity with Christ in his death and resurrection. Sinners come into mystical union with Christ by faith. In Christ believers receive justification \textit{and} sanctification, a point that is extremely important to navigate between legalism and licentiousness.\textsuperscript{18}

The Puritans in particular looked to union with Christ as central for their experimental Calvinism. Tudur Jones argues that for the Puritans, “both the experience and the doctrine of union with Christ were fundamental to their Christianity.” Moreover, he says, “Since they placed union with Christ at the very commencement of the Christian’s life…a fuller treatment of the theme would require close study of its implications for sanctification, morality, eschatology, ecclesiology and the life eternal.”\textsuperscript{19} This thesis is a “close study” on the theme of sanctification in the work of Marshall.

Reformed theologians derive their evidence for the primacy of union with Christ from Scripture, particularly the Pauline literature. Paul’s corpus is replete with the phrase “in Christ.”\textsuperscript{20} They look often and long at Romans 6, which speaks of being “united to

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\textsuperscript{18} More on this to come.
\textsuperscript{19} R Tudur Jones, "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety," \textit{Tyndale Bulletin} 41, no. 2 (1990), 208. See also Beeke and Jones, \textit{A Puritan Theology}, 488.
\textsuperscript{20}
Christ in the likeness of his death” (Romans 6:5). For this reason Gaffin argues, though with some caution, that Reformed theology has a particular Pauline sensitivity.\textsuperscript{21} Gaffin recognizes that when Paul explicates union with Christ, he is not simply giving data points for theological construction but is actually doing biblical and systematic theology, summing up the whole history of redemption with a focus on Christ as the head.\textsuperscript{22} Salvation in Reformed theology is not a benefit abstracted from Christ’s person. But, as John Murray explains,

> Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ. Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ.\textsuperscript{23}

In other words, Reformed theology sees union with Christ as the theological correlation between \textit{ordo salutis} and \textit{historia salutis}.\textsuperscript{24} The benefit of union with Christ that we are exploring is sanctification. Sanctification is “the act of God’s free grace” in which believers 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.”\textsuperscript{25} In addition to the progressive element of sanctification emphasized here in the catechism, Reformed theologians have generally recognized a

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\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 5–9.

\textsuperscript{24} Lane G Tipton, “Union with Christ and Justification," in \textit{Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification}, ed. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 23.

\textsuperscript{25} Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) Q 35.
positional aspect to sanctification, which the believer also obtains in union with Christ. John Murray calls this “definitive sanctification.” Reformed theologians speak of Christ being sanctified and the believer having his or her sanctification by virtue of being joined with Christ in his sanctification. The believer’s future glorification is the result of Christ’s glorification, which is realized in the believer proleptically in the form of sanctification. Marshall sums up this teaching beautifully in his statement, “Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun as glorification is sanctification perfected.” Thus, union with Christ and sanctification are important for Reformed theology, and because Marshall addresses these, it is critical that we understand him.

But there is more. Marshall wrote on sanctification and union with Christ with the particular aim of navigating believers safely around the errors of Antinomianism and Neonomianism. Reformed theology has a certain proclivity toward both of these errors. Insofar as it insists on free justification based upon the imputation of the righteousness of Christ through faith, Reformed theology opens itself to the charge of promoting licentiousness. Martyn Lloyd-Jones famously stated, “The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this [Antinomian] charge being brought against it.” But insofar as the mutuality of the covenant and the need to walk in “newness of life” are stressed, Reformed theology opens itself to the charge of promoting legalism. Yet neither one of these charges can really stand, because Reformed theology puts equal stress upon the reality of free justification and the need for holiness. The

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Pauline sensitivity that emphasizes the freeness of grace in justification from Romans 3 and 4 also insists on the necessity to “walk in newness of life” from Romans 6–8.

However, the proclivity toward both errors creates a tendency to refute one error by running toward the other. This tendency can unwittingly promote a pendulum swing between the recognition of free grace, which leaves open the charge of Antinomianism, and the insistence of the renewed life, which can lead to legalism.

Marshall was acutely aware of the pendulum swing in his own context, as we will see. The beauty of Marshall’s work is that he identifies a common source of both errors, namely, failure to ground salvation in union with Christ. By bringing the freeness of justification and the realness of personal renewal into cohesion, he also aims to refute both errors simultaneously with a robust understanding of justification and sanctification in union with Christ. If we can understand how Marshall thought and wrote about this topic, it will shed more light in this perennial issue for the Reformed tradition.

**Thesis**

Simply stated, this work is an analysis of the theology of Walter Marshall in his own historical context, in an attempt to understand how Marshall articulated his theology of sanctification in union with Christ. The goal is to demonstrate that Marshall’s emphasis on real union with Christ prevents him from being drawn into an Antinomian or Neonomian direction. With his theology of union, Marshall asserts fully the reality of free grace in justification, and at the same time steadfastly maintains the need for progressive sanctification. Marshall is not unique in this regard. His theology is representative of congregational Puritans like Owen and, for the most part, Goodwin. Marshall, however, differs with regard to the brevity of his work and the sustained focus on union with Christ for sanctification. Such brevity and focus make his work a uniquely helpful articulation of the Reformed approach to sanctification in union with Christ.

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31 Joel Beeke writes, “He repeatedly argued against Antinomianism as well as Neonomian teaching of Richard Baxter.” His argument is similar in some respects to Oliver O’Donovan’s claim that the resurrection is essential for ethics. Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), see especially pages 11–26 for a good overview.

32 The idea of “real” union is in contradistinction to Baxter’s idea of “relative” union. More on this later.
The Man Walter Marshall and His Book

Before exploring Marshall’s context, we will briefly overview the facts that are known about Marshall. The only extensive research on the historical Marshall is a 1958 ten-page article by Skevington Wood. Wood’s article is well documented and close to exhaustive. It provides a guide for this summary. The footnotes from Wood’s article have been checked as thoroughly as possible from American soil. The various prefaces to The Gospel Mystery contain biographical information. Yet these are sometimes contradictory. Other than the 1692 preface by N.N., which includes a note of verification by Marshall’s friend Thomas Woodcock, the others should not be taken as factual unless they can be collaborated with other sources.

Marshall was born 15 June 1628—the year of William Laud’s appointment as Bishop of London—in Bishop Wearmouth, Durham, the son of Walter Marshall. We know from Foster’s records of Oxford that Marshall had an elder brother, John Marshall, who was born in 1625 and died in 1670, and that his father was first a pastor in Bishop Wearmouth and then, after 1641, pastored in Winchester. From Kirby’s work on Winchester scholars and from the 1692 preface to The Gospel Mystery, we know that at age 11 Marshall was a scholar at Winchester College. Kirby and Joseph Foster record that Marshall was a scholar at New College, Oxford, and a fellow from 1650. Oxford was led, at this time, by Chancellor Oliver Cromwell, who attempted to reform the Royalist-supporting school into a producer of Puritan pastors. Marshall returned to Winchester as a fellow from 15 December 1657 until sometime in 1661.


34 Wood cites the Registers of Bishopwearmouth. Ibid., 27 n4.

35 Joseph Foster, Alumni Oronienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1500-1714: Their Parentage, Birthplace, and Year of Birth, with a Record of Their Degrees (University of Oxford: Oxford, 1888), I, 974.


After Marshall left Oxford in 1657, he remained in Hampshire for the rest of his life. Prior to the Restoration, he was a fellow at Winchester and an “eminent Presbyterian” pastoring in both Fawley and Hursley. His time at Hursley was troubled because Richard Major, his patron and Richard Cromwell’s father-in-law, “did not like sectaries.” Oliver Cromwell was concerned with his son’s spiritual state, and he relied upon Richard Major to encourage the young man in godliness. It’s not hard to imagine that Major’s interest in Marshall concerned Marshall’s ability to influence the young Cromwell. Marshall’s letters to Richard indicate that Marshall was active in the Protector’s life and that the relationship bore some fruit.

During his stay at Hursley Marshall also married Rebeka, who gave birth to two daughters. The register of Hursley records, “Rebeka the daughter of Mr. Walter Marshall, minster of Hursley, by Mrs. Rebeka Marshall his wife, was borne the Fifteenth day of Julie Ano Doni One Thousand Six Hundred Fiftie Nyne.”

The restoration of the Crown engendered a change for Marshall. Perhaps fearing his fellowship at Winchester would be lost, he resigned in 1661, and in 1662 he was ejected from his pulpit in Hursley “with nigh two thousand more Lights.” His brother, however, remained a scholar at Winchester College. A handwritten note on the copy of *The Gospel Mystery* on EEBO records that “The author was ejected at the Restoration from his living at Hursley Hampshire. He then became Pastor of a congregation at Gosport,” where he was called “a burning and shining light.” Yet it is also clear from

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38 The only reference to his time in Fawley is cited by Wood from “Triers Admission Books 1654–9” Wood, "Walter Marshall and *the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*.", 28n11.


42 Register of Hursley, cited from Wood, 20.

43 N.N., AA 2.
Mr. Williams’s catalog that he was preaching in Winchester, among other places. Marshall obtained a preaching license as a Congregationalist on 10 August 1672.  

While at Gosport, Marshall had a “disquieted spirit.” His biographer N.N. writes that it was “much exercised with troubled Thoughts, and that for many years, and had, by many mortifying methods, fought peace of conscience; but notwithstanding all, his troubles increased.” It is nearly certain that Marshall’s spiritual melancholy was occasioned by the writings of Richard Baxter. N.N. says that Marshall knew Baxter’s writings well, and given Baxter’s prominence at the time, this is not surprising. Marshall seems to indicate a past experience with Baxter’s theology when he says concerning a view held by Baxter, “For my part, I hate it with perfect hatred, and account it mine enemy, as I have found it to be.” It is most probable that Baxter’s Neonomianism was Marshall’s enemy that caused him profound spiritual distress.

Marshall sought help, or perhaps clarification, from Baxter himself. N.N. records Baxter saying that Marshall “took [his writings] too Legally.” Unfortunately, we have no record from Baxter’s end of the conversation. After visiting Baxter, Marshall sought counsel from Thomas Goodwin. Marshall cataloged to Goodwin the sins “that lay heavy on his conscience.” Goodwin reminded Marshall that he must take seriously the greatest sin of all, “unbelief in Jesus,” and that he should look to Jesus for “the full remission of sins and provision for the sanctifying nature.” After this conversation with Goodwin,

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47 N.N., Aa 2. See also David Bogue and James Bennett, History of Dissenters, from the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808, vol. 3 (London, 1810), 455.

48 N.N., Aa3.

49 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 127 (6.2.5).

50 N.N., Aa 2.

51 Ibid., Aa 3.
Marshall’s peace was restored, and Marshall set upon preaching Christ and how to attain holiness through union with him.

Walter Marshall died 1 August 1680 in the “full persuasion of the truth and in the comfort of the doctrine, which he had preached.”52 His last words were a quotation from Paul in Romans, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Before he died, Marshall named his wife, Rebeka, as the executor of his estate. He left his books to his son, Walter. He left 80 pounds to Anne, one of his daughters. His friend Samuel Tomlyns of Andover preached his funeral sermon. Tomlyns was a theologian in his own right, having published works on eschatology.53 Tomlyns wrote in the preface to his sermon that Marshall was “a faithful and laborious servant of Christ…[who] wooed for Christ in his preaching and allured you to Christ by his walking.”54

It was through Marshall’s own search for comfort that he wrote The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification. Those who knew Marshall well, like his friend Thomas Woodcock, commend his writings on the grounds that they were born out of a character that sought Christ. The subtitle of Marshall’s work, Suited Especially to the Case of Those who labor under the guilt and Power of Indwelling Sin, indicates that this work was written to someone in a situation similar to that of Marshall. In writing Gospel Mystery, Marshall aimed “save some one or another from killing themselves” and “enlarge the hearts of many by it to run with great cheerfulness, joy and thanksgiving in the ways of His commandments.”55 This was how union with Christ and free justification affected him. He endeavored to share with others the same gift that he received.


52 Ibid., Aa 3.

53 One such work is Samuel Tomlyns, The Absolute Necessity of Spiritual Husbandry, in Breaking up Our Fallow Ground. Together with a Discourse on the Terrible Coming of Christ to Execute Vengeance on All That Remain Fallow Ground, and Obey Not the Gospel (London, 1699).

54 Tomlyns, "The Faith of the Saints, as to a Future House and Happiness in the Other World Set Forth in a Sermon Preached at the Funeral of That Worthy Servant of Christ, Mr. Walter Marshal," A 4.

55 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 13 (1.2.8).
twelve years after its author’s death. If we can assume that Marshall wrote *Gospel Mystery* toward the end of his life, there’s an easy explanation as to why it was not published during his lifetime. As an ejected minister under the Act of Uniformity (1662), his access to the press would have been limited. But it turns out that 1692 was good timing for the book’s release, as the third wave of Antinomianism was instigated by the republication of Crisp’s sermons in 1690. These sermons met fierce reaction from Baxter and others.\(^56\) Robert Traill, who defends the republication of the sermons, cites Marshall’s explanation of assurance approvingly in his pamphlet aimed at countering Baxter.\(^57\) Interestingly, William Lorimer, who defends those whom Traill accuses, also appeals to Marshall’s work.\(^58\) We will explore the implications of their interaction in the conclusion.

*The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* was reprinted numerous times. In 1753 sections of the work were published under the title *Christ our True Principle of Holiness*. An assortment of abridgments were also popular. In 1884 a slight abridgment was published under the title *Sanctification; or The Highway of Holiness an abridgment of the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification, with an Introductory note by AM (Andrew Murray)*. More recently, in 2005, Bruce McRae published a modern English version titled *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification: Growing in Holiness by Living in Union with Christ*. Various prefaces note that the book suffers from a difficult style that requires “more than ordinary attention to read it with profit.”\(^59\)

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\(^{56}\) See Part III of this thesis for overview of the history of Antinomianism.

\(^{57}\) Robert Traill, *A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine Concerning Justification, and of Its Preachers and Professors, from the Unjust Charge of Antinomianism in a Letter from a Minister in the City, to a Minister in the Countrie* (London: 1692), 7.

\(^{58}\) William Lorimer, *An Apology for the Ministers Who Subscribed Only Unto the Stating of the Truths and Errors in Mr. William’s Book Shewing, That the Gospel Which They Preach, Is the Old Everlasting Gospel of Christ, and Vindicating Them from the Calumnies, Wherewith They (Especially the Younger Sort of Them) Have Been Unjustly Aspersed by the Letter from a Minister in the City, to a Minister in the Countrie* (London: 1694), 171.

All quotations in this thesis come from the 1692 edition. I also cite the section number of a PDF copy of the book that is readily available online. It is hoped that the double reference will enable readers to more easily access Marshall.

The above analysis of Marshall and his work is not exhaustive. It is possible that manuscripts of Marshall’s sermons will turn up in a church or university archive somewhere. But even if there were other works by Marshall, the reputation of the *Gospel Mystery* as “The most important work on sanctification” and “the Puritan treatise on sanctification” makes an investigation into the theology of Marshall with reference to this book a worthy endeavor on its own.

**Literature Review**

The Literature review will unfold in two parts: a general historiography, which explores how scholars have approached the topic of sanctification in Puritan literature, followed by an analysis of the secondary literature that concerns Walter Marshall.

**General Historiography**

We will begin with this observation: many of the contentious points in Puritan studies are really disagreements over how to understand the Puritans’ theology of sanctification and how conflicting elements in their theology of sanctification are to be reconciled. Modern historians discuss these areas of disagreement in categories such as covenant theology—particularly the Puritans’ (in)consistency with Calvin—(Kendall, Muller, Helm); the nature of justifying faith—especially in relationship to

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60 See, for example, www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/GospelMystery.pdf


62 Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*.


sanctification—(Packer, Boersma, and even to some degree N.T. Wright); and the reality of assurance (Beeke, Letham). While these are by no means illegitimate categories, it must be remembered that the Puritans would have understood them as pertaining to sanctification. I will attempt to prove this in chapter 3, which surveys various approaches to sanctification in English theology and connects sanctification to other theological loci.

Our present task is to investigate the major movements within Puritan studies, noting their relevance to sanctification, and then to narrow our focus to selected secondary sources that concern the antinomians and Richard Baxter. Hence, what follows is a selected re-reading of the secondary literature on the Puritans through the lens of sanctification. Our goal is to demonstrate the value of this lens for understanding Puritan theology. This will heighten the importance for understanding a work like Marshall’s, which address the topic of sanctification directly.

**Significant threads in Puritan Historiography**

The Modern era of Puritan scholarship began in the early twentieth century with the works of William Haller, A.S.P. Woodhouse, and Perry Miller. All three historical scholars saw Puritan practice, not so much their theology, as significant shaping factors for the English-speaking world, particularly America. Their work has strengths and weaknesses. For example, Miller’s *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*
explains the monumental significance of sanctification for Puritan identity.⁷¹ But Miller falls into the trap of looking to Puritan theology for “codes and carriers for other forces of interest.”⁷² Miller writes, “The ultimate reason of all things they called God, the dream of a possible harmony between man and his environment they named Eden, the actual fact of disharmony they denominated sin....”⁷³

According to Miller, the key factor for the Puritans in human flourishing was covenant. The covenant placed humanity before the face of God, and thus all human choices became significant. Moreover, each person, while doing his or her covenantal part, contributed to the “city on the hill,” a new Israel.⁷⁴ In other words, the practice of sanctification, arising out of the concept of covenant, contributed to a new way of living that transformed culture. Miller’s approach is also adopted by the moral philosopher Charles Taylor to explain the how the sacredness of the ordinary contributed to the spiritual significance of one’s secular calling. This heightened importance on the ordinary shaped the sense of the moral self in the Western tradition.⁷⁵

A renewed interest in Puritan scholarship in the 1960s brought with it a variety of concerns and perspectives. Christopher Hill writes with many of the same concerns and motivations as Miller—that is to say, secular, without much interest in Puritans for their own sake—but looks at their history through a Marxist lens. According to Hill, the English Civil war was a class conflict, and the decades before the civil war afforded a good a test case to examine what factors precipitate a revolution.⁷⁶ After the revolution failed, there began a subjective focus upon inner transformation, particularly a kind of

⁷¹ Ibid., 29,49-52, 282-288.
⁷³ Ibid., 8.
transformation that was not disruptive to society.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, through his Marxist lens, Hill sees sanctification as only incidental to the puritan program.

However, Hill’s scholarship has been overturned by the research of Patrick Collinson. In \textit{The Elizabethan Puritan Movement} (1967), he explains that the Puritans were ideologically committed not to independence as an end in itself but rather to Reformation theology. They tenaciously held themselves and their country to this standard, both theologically and ethically. War ensued only when they were unable to accomplish this through peaceful means. John Spurr aptly summarizes: “The Puritans are no longer seen as on a crash course with monarchy and episcopacy, but on a collision course with \textit{this} monarch, Charles I, and with one particular group of bishops led by Archbishop Laud.”\textsuperscript{78} The target of their stubborn resistance was Arminianism. Arminianism proposed a different approach to grace and a different principle of transformation. In contrast to Hill, Collinson sees the pursuit of personal and communal holiness as an essential part of the Puritan movement.

Nicholas Tyacke supports Collinson’s thesis in his book \textit{Anti-Calvinists: the Rise of English Arminians} (1987). His thesis is that the growth of Arminianism threatened the Calvinist consensus. Taken together, Tyacke and Collinson account for why Puritanism seemed to die down as a movement during the early Stuart period when Calvinism was “intuitively indubitable”\textsuperscript{79} but arose immediately to meet the Laudian church.

\textit{Karl Barth on the mixed value of Scholastic Orthodoxy}

We now move to those who study the Puritans with a distinctly theological goal. Any study of Puritan historiography must consider the monumental contribution of the theologian Karl Barth. Barth’s primary theological goal was to loose Christian theology—and the revelation of God in particular—from the fetters of liberal theology by locating revelation summarily in the Christ event. Acutely aware of the German Church’s failure

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 68-71.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Tyacke, 28.
\end{itemize}
to confront fascism, Barth wanted a Christian theology that called for repentance and couldn’t be coopted to serve one’s own agenda.

Seventeenth-century theologians were assets to Barth in this regard because they provided vocabulary and concepts for theological discourse that had not been tainted by liberalism. However, Barth did not appropriate their structure. According to Barth, the reformed scholastics veered off-course by employing multiple covenants to embrace all of humanity, rather than one covenant presented in Christ. Barth believed that the pactum salutis and the Covenant of Works, as events antecedent to the covenant in Christ, diluted the Christo-centric character of biblical revelation and, thereby, diminished the reality of grace. In Barth’s words, “Scripture was not understood as witness to this one event,” that event being Christ. Instead, the covenants became merely historical; that is to say, they only described God’s relationship with various groups of people, which implies, according to Barth, “the grim doctrine...that Christ did not die for all men but only for the elect.” Barth recoils at any sense in which Christ as the God-Man is seen as merely fulfilling the covenant and not also its eternal basis. He sees this as “theological historicism,” because it isolates Christ from God’s enteral plan of redemption.

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81 Ibid., 26.
83 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 4.1: 58.
84 Ibid., 57.
85 Ibid., 58.
Along these lines, Barth’s believes seventeenth-century theology also undermined sanctification, although he didn’t use that precise language. In classic dialectical fashion, Barth posits that seventeenth-century Reformed theology was both pietistic and rationalistic. To the extent that it transformed revelation into a logical system, it bred rationalism. The rationalism blunts the impact of the Christ event and builds its followers into a system instead of the Person. But insofar as this system put humanity at the logical center and transformed the kerygma of Christ into a description of those elect who enjoy a relationship with God, it led to pietism. In both cases, Barth sees the federal theology of the seventeenth century as the harbinger of the theology of the eighteenth century that reduced theology to anthropology.

Though out of chronological order, it is helpful at this point to mention Thomas Torrance. While he cannot be understood simply as a disciple of Barth, he continues in the same broad trajectory and writes out of similar concerns. In his 1996 book on Scottish theology, he sees the Westminster Confession as formulating “a more legalistic Calvinism,” lacking the “freshness” and “freedom” of that which stood before it. It has “frigid” proof texts and is dependent on the logical medieval ordo salutis. Like Barth, Torrance sees a major disjunction between early and late Reformed theologians.

R.T. Kendall: Calvin, Calvinists, and the question of assurance

R.T. Kendall presents another thesis of significant discontinuity between Calvin and the English Reformed. Kendall is significant for our purposes, as his name appears quite often in the secondary literature in discussions related to sanctification in the

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Kendall’s 1976 Oxford dissertation contends that Calvin’s unlimited atonement had secured assurance as part of the very essence of faith; but in the following generation, Beza’s supralapsarianism and limited atonement produced a legalizing trend that is realized most extensively in certain English Puritans. Kendall argues that in order for faith to contain assurance, the gospel must include the reality that Christ died equally for all. Kendall contends that Calvin’s unlimited atonement and view of assurance as part of the essence of the faith logically cohere. But limited atonement sets the believer on a trajectory of discovering inwardly if they have the marks of belonging to the covenant. In short, Kendall contends that English Reformed theology set up barriers between Christ and the sinner, and required some sense of perfecting of the flesh before one could enjoy the freedom of the Spirit.

Kendall’s thesis has been significantly challenged in the writings of many theologians and historians. The most significant is Richard Muller, in his massive four-volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. Muller and others recognize that the high scholastic period (1620–1700) does, indeed, represent a change in the presentation of theology. For example, Francis Turretin, writing for the academy in Geneva, sounds very different than Calvin, who was writing for those on the frontline of pastoral ministry. There are also differences in the way certain aspects of the theology are understood, such as the disagreement on infra- and supralapsarianism. Yet there was a remarkable consistency among the Reformed Orthodox in terms of source and authority of their theology. Muller proves that Reformed Orthodox theologians were not rationalists: “They moved from the statement of principia, through creation, fall, and

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93 Ibid., 1-2.

redemption, to the last things with an emphasis on the covenant as the historical or economical form of the divine work of salvation.”

In short, the latter Calvinists continued in the same broad trajectory of Calvin. Yet, it’s also noteworthy that Calvin was never seen to be a father of Reformed theology in the way that Luther is of Lutheranism. Thus, the subtle differences between Calvin and latter reformers should not be taken as wholesale alterations in the Reformed tradition.

There is also debate within those who see basic continuity between Calvin and the later Reformed theologians. Robert Letham, in his 1978 dissertation on saving faith and assurance, sees two broad understandings of saving faith spanning from Zwingli to the Synod of Dort. The first understands assurance as part of faith, “its essential, normative, definite component.” Letham sees this clearly in Calvin and as well as Bucer, Martyr, Bucanus, Polanus, Zachius, Olevianus, Crocius, Dering, and Greenham. There was another understanding of assurance that saw assurance as “a fruit or effect of saving faith…assurance was understood to be a consequence of faith rather than a definite component.” In this understanding, one is not assured in the direct act of faith but in a “reflexive act of faith,” which only obtains when one reflects on one’s faith and sees signs that one’s faith is legitimate. According to Letham, this view is advocated by the likes of Bullinger, Capito, Oecolampadius, Musculus, Tyndale, Hooper, Knox, Ursinus, Junius, Gomarus, Fenner, and Rollock. For our purposes, it is significant that while Letham sees the majority belonging to the first camp, there are a significant number of British theologians in the second.

Letham’s thesis is not without critics. Beeke argues that Letham exaggerated the differences between the two sides. However, the problem with Beeke’s critique is that he offers no clear standard by which to evaluate the degree of differentiation. Letham’s thesis is not that one of these streams belongs outside the Reformed tradition, but that

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95 Ibid., 4:446.
97 Ibid., 362.
98 Beeke, Quest for Full Assurance, 276–277.
there are two streams and that they are present throughout the sixteenth century. Moreover, Beeke’s attempt at consensus is strained when he explains that the bridge that unites the two streams is that “assurance may be possessed without being known.”\textsuperscript{99} According to Beeke, “…assurance belongs in essence to every believer though he may not always feel the sense of it.”\textsuperscript{100} This definition of assurance lacks consistency because the essence of assurance is precisely that it is known. Beeke seems to be confusing the doctrine of assurance with the related doctrines of security and perseverance. The disputed question in assurance is not whether the elect will be eternally saved but whether one can know that one is elect.

Jonathan Master’s recent dissertation (2012) explores the divergent views of assurance after the Westminster Assembly. Westminster’s teaching on assurance made three broad points: (1) assurance was possible, (2) one could be saved but lack assurance, and (3) assurance must be sought after.\textsuperscript{101} The agreement on these points reveals some degree of consensus, but as Master points out, much is unanswered: there are gaps. He argues “Anthony Burgess…fills in the silences of the WCF in ways that are much different from Thomas Goodwin and John Owen.”\textsuperscript{102} He also explains that Burgess tends to a kind of legalism by focusing on outward manifestations, while Owen and Goodwin focus on communion with the triune God.\textsuperscript{103}

In light of this, what do we make of Kendall’s thesis? Not only is Kendall’s thesis based on a selective reading of Calvin and the second generation of English Reformers, but he also makes sweeping assertions concerning the nature of the Reformed tradition. In reality, there was much diversity. For instance, Kendall claims that unlimited

\begin{flushright}
\hfill 100
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 67.
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\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 222.
\end{flushright}
atonement breads a view of assurance that is linked to faith, whereas limited atonement severs that connection and turns toward subjectivism (Barth, as we saw, makes a similar argument). But Richard Snoody recently argued that James Ussher held to unlimited atonement, yet he also held to a view of assurance that Kendall associated with limited atonement.\footnote{Richard Snoody, \textit{The Soteriology of James Ussher} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 215, 236-8.} Our analysis of Marshall will show a similar contradiction to Kendall. The continued debate even among those who reject Kendall’s thesis tells us that close study of Puritans’ view of assurance in connection to sanctification is warranted.

\textit{Antinomians}

Kendall’s work has important implications for our understanding of the antinomians. If the puritans deviated from Calvin, as Kendall argues, then it is logical to see the antinomians as the true heirs of Luther and Calvin, and to see reformed orthodox as those who veered off course.

This approach to the antinomians is presented by two scholars, David Como and Theodore Bozeman, in their books \textit{Blown by the Spirit} and \textit{The Precisianist Strain}, respectively. While their starting points and conclusions are not identical, both of these works make a compelling case that going back even to Tyndale and Wycliffe, there was a legalizing tendency within the Protestant strand of English theology. These scholars also see that issues of social organization and the rule of law were very much the top concern of the English as they approached religion.\footnote{Bozeman, \textit{The Precisianist Strain}, 18.} They also point out that one of the major continental influences in England, Martin Bucer, did not temper this legalism but actually encouraged it through his own distinct brand of covenant theology that emphasized a transformative aspect of justification. All of this led to an undue attention to law and order. Those responsible for this imbalance include the likes of Perkins, Ames, Greenham, and even Sibbes. Thus, Como and Bozeman argue that while the English Protestants recognized \textit{Sola Fide} in theory, it was not at the heart of English Reformational concerns in the same way that Luther used it in Germany.\footnote{Como, \textit{Blown by the Spirit}, 27–28.} To make this
argument, Como relies upon Kendall’s interpretation of “experimental Calvinism.” According to Kendall, it arose in order to provide warrant for assurance.\(^{107}\)

Although their careful attention to original sources commends their works strongly, methodological problems emerge. Como and Bozeman continually compare the Puritans to Luther, with scarcely any reference to Calvin and the Reformed tradition.\(^{108}\) They ignore the reformed tradition and pit the Puritans against Luther. This is a serious error in historical scholarship. First of all, the differences between Luther and the Puritans are not as great as they contend.\(^{109}\) Second of all, it was Geneva that became the refuge for the Marian exiles, not Wittenberg. Calvin, therefore, had much more influence on the Puritans than Luther. Thus, while indebted to Luther, most of the Puritans saw themselves standing with the Reformed tradition. As we will see in chapter 2, Luther and Calvin differed concerning their respective approaches to sanctification. Therefore, it would make sense that the reformed pastors in England did not understand the faith/works issue in the same way as the Lutherans. Because Como and Bozeman do not set Puritan theology in the Reformed context, they fail to capture the radical nature of the Antinomian proposal.

Another scholar to make use of the distinction between Calvin and English Puritans is Tim Cooper. We will explore him more in our historiography of Baxter to follow, as his work aims to understand why Baxter was so concerned to fight the Antinomians, given that they had a legitimate reformed theological heritage and were not teaching a significantly different doctrine than most other reformed pastors.\(^{110}\) But to legitimate the antinomians he had to devote attention their teaching. He argues that the antinomians build upon Luther’s view of Justification by faith. But, while Luther is able to deal productively with the tension between grace and holiness, the antinomians latch onto one aspect, namely grace, which lead to an imbalance in their presentation. He also leans

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 231.


upon Kendall’s contention that the English Puritans differed from Calvin to argue that the antinomians were undeservedly labeled the radicals of their time.\footnote{111}

Similar to Cooper, Dewey Wallace and C.F. Allison suggest this in their books *Puritans and Predestination* and *The Rise of Moralism* that the conflict between antinomians and anti-antinomians was overblown. Allison says, “the ‘Antinomians’ do not seem to have been especially shocking, and it is difficult to see why it aroused so much concern among so many divines during the century, and later.”\footnote{112} Wallace argues that the exaggerated emphasis is accounted for because both the Puritans and the Arminians found it advantageous to have a theological foe like Antinomianism to attack.\footnote{113} A charge against the Puritans was that by advocating an end to the episcopal structure, they would undermine morality: “no bishop, no king,” and no king, no rule of law. However, if the Puritans could successfully put forth an argument against Antinomians, they would demonstrate these fears as unfounded. However, those who wanted the established church and the hierarchical structure were not persuaded by this argument. For them the presence of Antinomianism was positive proof of the dangers of the Puritan movement. We see this kind of argument made at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604.

There’s one more broad approach to the antinomians. Ernest Kevan in his *The Grace of the Law* explained the Antinomian as an aberration of Reformed theology.\footnote{114} This same argument is also taken up in the recent book *Antinomianism*, by Mark Jones,\footnote{115} and in an older work, *Antinomianism in English History: With Special Reference to the Period 1640–1660*, by Gertrude Huehns.\footnote{116} These three works explicitly or implicitly reject Kendall’s thesis. They see the antinomians as the ones who veered off course.

\footnote{111}{Ibid., 28.}
\footnote{112}{Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 113.}
\footnote{113}{Allison, *The Rise of Moralism*, 172.}
\footnote{115}{Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?*, 1–19.}
\footnote{116}{Huehns, *Antinomianism in English History*.}
In summary, antinomian teaching can only be defined in light of those who opposed antinomians (the anti-antinomians) or those who the antinomians opposed. Conflicting views on their theology inevitably leads to disagreement on how to view the antinomians.

*Baxter*

We also must consider the secondary literature on Baxter. Here we will limit ourselves to three authors: Packer, Boersma, and Cooper, as they represent various approaches.

J.I. Packer’s 1954 Oxford dissertation, *Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter*, is both sympathetic and critical of Baxter. It’s sympathetic in that Packer faults Baxter’s opponents for not understanding his political method; thus, much of the criticism Baxter faced was misinformed. Yet Packer also contends that Baxter misunderstood the role of limited atonement in Owen.  

Thus, the system that Baxter presented did not really address the tensions within the Reformed tradition as he thought it did. In the end, Packer argues that Baxter’s theology is rationalistic, and that there isn’t much that separates his views from the Arminians.

Boersma offers an opposite perspective on Baxter. His 1993 dissertation from the University of Utrecht has been published under the title, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter’s doctrine of Justification in its Context of the Seventeenth Century Context of Controversy*. Boersma aptly explains Baxter’s structure around the two-fold will of God. He sees a consistency in Baxter, and he argues that it was Owen’s concept of union with Christ that was inherently contradictory.  

Baxter’s consistency with the rest of the reformed tradition is not a significant concern for Boersma. Nor does he explore the scriptural warrant for Baxter’s theology. Nevertheless, he holds up Baxter’s thought as consistent, particularly Baxter’s idea of the two-fold will of God, unlimited atonement, and the role of human merit in salvation. Conversely, Bosersma sees Owen’s view of union with Christ inconsistent.

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Tim Cooper explains Baxter’s theology in two books: *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (2001) and *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (2011). He aims to understand why Baxter—a man who was generally sympathetic to those broadly within the Protestant and even Catholic tradition—reacted so strongly, and even irrationally, against the Antinomians. He sees Baxter as a product of his turbulent and uncertain times, and he points the figure especially at Baxter’s character. His weaknesses include, “an aggressive, self-defensive and controversially inclined personality; an easy ability to give offence; and an intractable compulsion to speak the truth, with no thought to context and no place for self-doubt.” Cooper concludes that there was no protestant consensus in the in the seventeenth century. But if any had a rightful claim to the Protestant tradition, he leans toward the antinomians: Cooper writes, “Linked as it was to the roots of English Protestantism, it was a much more significant, more mainstream and more conservative part of English life than had previously been supposed.”

**Conclusion**

Our review of the secondary literature on Puritans is far from exhaustive. But we have seen that a number of the areas of interest—covenant theology, justification, and assurance—have important implications for sanctification. Unfortunately, these implications are usually not explored. Moreover, we have also seen that there’s no consensus regarding who has a rightful claim to the reformed tradition. Is it the antinomians or Baxter? Or is there a middle ground? A case could be made that more careful consideration to the theology of sanctification will help understand what the Puritans intended when they discussed assurance, the covenant, and the relationship between justification and sanctification. It, therefore, makes sense that Marshall’s *Gospel Mystery*, a work that specially addresses this theme and that has been hailed as a seminal work on the subject, ought to be carefully considered.

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120 Ibid., 197.
Secondary Literature on Marshall

The scholarly work on Marshall’s theology is sparse indeed. Cheul Hee Lee has written the most extensive study of Marshall. His 2005 Westminster Theological Seminary dissertation titled, “Sanctification by Faith: Walter Marshall’s Doctrine of Sanctification in Comparison with the Keswick View of Sanctification,” compares Marshall’s work with the Keswick convention’s teaching on sanctification. This work is in response to Keswick authors, such as W.H. Griffith Thomas, J.B. Figgis, and Stephen Barabas, who argue that Marshall’s work supports their theory of sanctification. Hee Lee demonstrates that though some similarities exist, the lack of union with Christ as a structural concept in Keswick teaching is evidence of substantial discontinuity between Marshall and the Keswick theologians. In order to prove this, Hee Lee devotes significant attention to a description of Marshall’s theology. His work is essentially a summary of Marshall’s book. This presentation is sufficient for the aim of his thesis; however, as a summary, it does not penetrate deeply enough into the structure of Marshall’s theology to make it an exhaustive treatment of Marshall’s own argument.

Another single work on Marshall’s theology is an article by John Marshall, “Walter Marshall and the Origins of Sanctification.” This work also presents a summary of Marshall’s 14 directions. Unfortunately, John Marshall fails to grasp Walter Marshall’s radical structure of union with Christ and looks at him primarily concerning his attitude toward the law.

Joel Beeke also wrote an article, “The Secret of Sanctification: Union with Christ; Walter Marshall’s Gospel Mystery of Sanctification.” This is substantially the same as his 1999 introduction to Marshall’s book (reprinted 2014). Beeke understands the radical

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124 Hee Lee, for summary see 286–291.
structure of union with Christ and explains the contours of Marshall’s theology well. He sees Marshall as expositing the positive counterpart of Calvin’s dictum 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 to us.” In other words, Beeke sees Marshall’s work as explaining and applying the benefits that the believer obtains in union with Christ, with a particular interest in holiness. Beeke rightly sees five lessons from Marshall for today. These lessons connect key ideas and doctrines: (1) union with Christ and sanctification, (2) justification and sanctification, (3) Christ and his Word, (4) the mind and soul, and (5) the sacred and the secular. Beeke’s work provides an excellent introduction to Marshall even though it is far from exhaustive.

This thesis attempts to understand Marshall in a similar vein but on a much larger scale.

Outline of Study

Our work will progress in four remaining chapters. In chapter II we will explore Marshall’s diachronic context, explaining how Protestant theology wrestled with correlating free justification and the need for a renewed life. We will look at Luther, Trent, and Calvin because they were highly influential in shaping the theological context in the seventeenth century and because they offer clear examples of theologians struggling to formulate their doctrine of Sanctification.

In chapter III we will look at Marshall’s synchronic context. Our main task is to trace the development of Antinomianism and Neonomianism. Both systems were significant factors in Marshall’s context. We will also study those who influenced them, including Perkins, the English Arminians, and Owen. We will conclude this section with several tensions that were present in English Reformed theology in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Chapter IV accounts for about half of this thesis. This is where we will explore Marshall’s theology. We will analyze Marshall’s book The Gospel Mystery rhetorically

125 Beeke, “Introduction” xvii; Calvin, Institutes, 3.1.1.
126 Beeke, Introduction, xvii–xxv.
and systematically, examining how Marshall constructed his argument and the system of theology on which his argument was based. Our goal is to reconstruct his theological system. This chapter is subdivided into chapter length sections, which include the nature of sin and depravity, union with Christ, the new nature, justification, faith, assurance, and practical sanctification.

Finally we will conclude in chapter V by showing that although Marshall is not unique in his theological construction, Marshall’s work demonstrates several factors that make it uniquely helpful in countering the twin errors of Antinomianism and Neonomianism, which are perennial dangers for Reformed churches. To bolster this conclusion, we will briefly explore how Marshall was used in the generations immediately following him.

This outline needs some justification. Why must we spend three chapters prior to exploring Marshall’s theology? The answer is twofold. First, Marshall spoke into a preexisting conversation. Without first catching up on the background of the conversation, his work simply cannot be fully understood. Second, in order to keep chapter four—a systematic analysis of Marshall’s theology of sanctification—manageable, I find it useful to explain the historical context first. I will try to make the case for a tight logical connection between Marshall’s understanding of justification, faith, assurance, and sanctification, which all occur in the context of union with Christ. If we can avoid historical background and restrict these sections to theology analysis, Marshall’s compelling logic will become more transparent.
Chapter II

Diachronic Context: the Early Reformation and Catholic Theologies of Sanctification with Special Emphasis on Their Contribution to Antinomian and Neonomian Positions

Introduction

We begin with a diachronic analysis of Marshall’s context by tracing with broad strokes the theology of sanctification in three influential theological trajectories that preceded Marshall. These trajectories stem from the differing theological paths of Luther, the Council of Trent, and Calvin. Our aim is to demonstrate tensions and gaps in their respective theologies of sanctification. This analysis will also provide background for the next chapter, which will show the acute strain on the theology of sanctification that presented itself in Marshall’s time.

In general, the Protestant Reformers in Britain after the Marian exile made a conscious decision to follow the Reformed instead of the Lutheran tradition, as is evidenced by the paucity of Luther quotations and extensive interactions with the Reformed sources.1 The Antinomians, in contrast, used Luther extensively; they saw themselves simply as faithful disciples of the German Reformer.2 Whether or not they were accurate in this assumption is debated. But the divergence between Calvin and Luther on sanctification still sheds light on the seventeenth-century English antinomian controversy. As Tim Cooper observes. “[Antinomianism] fits its development not in the extremes of fringes of European Religion, but at the center of the Protestant Reformation.”3 Thus, we need to understand Reformation theology to make sense of the antinomians. Between our study of these Reformers, we will briefly examine the Catholic

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1 For Luther’s contribution to the English Reformed see Carl Trueman, Luther’s Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
2 Beeke and Jones, A Puritan Theology; Como, Blown by the Spirit, 185. John Eaton, The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone (Lancaster, 1642), 179.
3 Tim Cooper, Fear and Polemic, 3.
teaching on sanctification as expressed in the Council of Trent in order to understand the context in which Protestant theology of sanctification was formed and the nature of the theology that Marshall so often identifies with Baxter.

While the three traditions—Luther, Calvin, and Trent—are influential, they are by no means the only significant movements in the seventeenth century. If space permitted, names such as Zwingli, Bucer, and Bullinger and documents like the Heidelberg Catechism and the Helvetic confessions could be taken into account to provide a fuller and richer background to the doctrine of sanctification that formed the context in which Marshall thought and wrote. Our rationale for selecting only a few streams of thought is that we can probe slightly beyond the surface into how each grappled with tensions regarding sanctification. The goal is not simply to state what these traditions confessed regarding sanctification but to understand the tensions in the formation of their doctrine. This will help us understand why a work like *The Gospel Mystery* was both important and a remarkable achievement.

**Martin Luther**

To understand Luther on sanctification, we must go back slightly before his time and understand what Luther perceived to be inadequate about medieval teaching on justification.

Augustine’s definition of justification had laid the foundation for discussions on this doctrine throughout the Middle Ages.\(^4\) Augustine defined the human problem in terms of the will held captive by the sinful human nature. To be Justification, then, was to be morally transformed vis-à-vis God liberating the human will from captivity for the purpose of living a life oriented to God.\(^5\) According to Augustine, justification means, “to

\(^4\) Alister E McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing 2008), 168. “The Theology of the medieval period may be regarded as thoroughly Augustinian, a series of footnotes to Augustine, in that theological speculation was essentially regarded as an attempt to define, expand, and where necessary, modify the Augustine legacy.”

be ‘made righteousness’, just as ‘he justifies the ungodly’ means ‘he makes a righteous person out of an ungodly person’? Augustine explains this process:

By the law comes the knowledge of sin; by faith comes the obtaining of grace against sin; by grace comes the health of the soul from sin’s sickness; by the healing of the soul comes freedom of choice; by freedom of choice comes the love of righteousness; by the love of righteousness comes the working of the law.

Thus Augustine’s theology firmly rejected Pelagianism, yet also differed dramatically from the later Protestant doctrine of justification. McGrath rightly says of Augustine, “a concept of ‘imputed righteousness’, in the later Protestant sense of the term, is quite redundant within Augustine’s doctrine of justification, in that humans are made righteous in justification.” From the later Reformed perspective, Augustine’s theology conflated justification and sanctification at several key points.

The transformational nature of justification implied an active concept of faith. Based on Paul’s words in Galatians 5:6, “faith working through love,” Augustine saw justification as a verdict based on the loving nature of the believer. Faith aids the person in his or her love, and in this sense it can be said that one is “justified by faith,” but faith has no unique instrumental function, as it came to have in the mature Protestant thought.

In summary, God, through an act of grace, initiated the process of justification; but humans were responsible to cooperate with that grace as they sought final justification.

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6 Augustine, De Spiritu et Littera xxvi, 45. Quoted from Alister E. McGrath, Iustitia Dei,


8 McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 47.


10 R Scott Clark, "Iustitia Imputata Christi: Alien or Proper to Luther’s Doctrine of Justification?", Concordia Theological Quarterly 70, no. 3/4 (2006), 285.
The nature of the debate on justification underwent a programmatic change in the late medieval period that directly contributed to theological tradition that Luther received. Nominalist philosophers Dun Scotus and William of Occam disagreed with the theological realism and natural theology of Thomas Aquinas, which had taught that humans could discern from the created world truth regarding God’s dealing with humanity. Opposing Thomas, these philosophers saw the world as radically contingent because they saw no direct relationship between the nature of God and creation. God was able to make many varieties of creation—or no creation at all—without necessitating a change in God’s essential nature. Theoretically, then, a different kind of creation would not necessarily prove that a different kind of God created it. This philosophical position logically discouraged drawing any conclusions concerning the nature of God from creation, and it pointed pilgrims to revelation to understand God’s dealings with humanity. Thus, late medieval nominalism placed an increased importance on revelation and a decreased importance on natural theology, particularly in connection to one’s covenantal relationship with God.\textsuperscript{11}

The most influential theologian coming out of this stream was Gabriel Biel (1420–1495).\textsuperscript{12} This German priest and theologian, who lived at the end of the medieval period, applied the nominalist philosophy of Scotus and Ockham to theology. Biel is especially important for our understanding of Marshall because of his similarity to Baxter.

As a nominalist, Biel looked to revelation, not natural theology, to determine the system for becoming acceptable to God. The revelation to which he looked was the magisterium teaching of the church. He summarized that teaching as “\textit{facere quod in se est}” (do what is within yourself).\textsuperscript{13} As a semi-Pelagian, he saw humans as capable of doing their best, and while this “best” was not worthy of a reward on the merits of its inherent qualities, it was nevertheless the standard by which God would judge humans.


\textsuperscript{12} Heiko A Oberman, \textit{The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism} (Grand Rapids, MI: Labyrinth Press, Baker Academic 1983), 18.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 132.
Nominalism allowed Biel to postulate that the standard for acceptance could be whatever God wanted it to be. According to Biel, this standard was *facere quod in se est*. Biel’s doctrine was not meant to provide absolute assurance, for one could never be sure whether or not one has done one’s best.\textsuperscript{14} But it was meant to be comforting, because if humans performed good actions within the provision that God had established, they could trust that these actions predisposed God to look favorably upon them.\textsuperscript{15}

Biel’s goal of pastoral encouragement notwithstanding, Luther found *facere quod in se est* most troubling. In the preface to the Bible, written in 1545, Luther recounted his struggle to find acceptance with God, noting especially the added strain of the New Testament standard of righteousness. Luther writes:

> Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners; and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God and said: “As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the Gospel and also by the Gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” At last by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of my words. There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith.\textsuperscript{16}

According to Luther, even if the standard of righteousness required of humans is minimal, so long as acceptance before God depends upon human performance, this

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 132.

\textsuperscript{15} Peter A Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 37.

\textsuperscript{16} Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Hilton C Oswald and Helmut T Lehmann (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1961), 34:336ff.
acceptance is still out of reach for sinners. What humans needed was “a gift of God.”\textsuperscript{17} Trueman summarizes Luther’s difficulty with \textit{facere quod in se est}: “How could one ever know that one has done what is in oneself? One could always, surely, have performed Mass with a little more devotion, or confessed just a few more sins if one had really thought hard about it.”\textsuperscript{18} The awareness of human depravity motivated Luther to seek a righteousness \textit{extra nos}. Moreover, Luther also realized that “The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.”\textsuperscript{19} Not recognizing one’s inadequacy was pride, which becomes yet another cause of condemnation.

Though Luther overturned much of late medieval theology, we would be wrong to conclude that Biel and nominalism contribute nothing to Luther’s understanding of justification. Luther never repudiated nominalist philosophy.\textsuperscript{20} He agreed with Biel that revelation, not natural theology, would be the source for determining how to find acceptance with the Holy God. However, instead of looking to the authority of the church, as Biel did, Luther looked to Scripture.\textsuperscript{21} In Scripture he found that the sole requirement was faith.

The Law and Faith

In Luther’s theology, justification by faith stood over and against earning one’s right standing before God by works of the law. Contrary to the medieval position,\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} There is debate concerning how much Luther understood of imputation and how much was developed by Melanchthon. However, Clark makes a compelling case that imputation was intrinsic to Luther’s theology of justification. Clark, "Iustitia Imputata Christi,". Trueman agrees with this, Carl Trueman, "Simul Peccator Et Justus: Martin Luther and Justification," in \textit{Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges}, ed. Bruce McCormack(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 74. McGrath is less decisive on this point, but recognizes the alien character of the righteousness by which the believer is justified. McGrath, \textit{Iustitia Dei}, 224.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Trueman, "Simul Peccator Et Justus: Martin Luther and Justification," 82.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 16. Cited in, Martin Luther, \textit{Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings}, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Alister E. McGrath, \textit{Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough} (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Trueman, "Simul Peccator Et Justus: Martin Luther and Justification," 82.
\end{itemize}
justification for Luther carried with it a passive understanding of faith. Luther no longer saw faith as one of many virtues.\textsuperscript{22} Rather, “Faith...grasps and obtains the reconciliation which Christ has wrought for us.”\textsuperscript{23} It is important to note that for Luther, faith is not equated with good works; neither does faith save on account of its role in producing good works (as Augustine taught), nor does faith save because it is a good work (as we will see in Arminian theology). Rather, faith saves because God appoints it as the only means of receiving Christ’s good works as one’s own.\textsuperscript{24} Johnson writes, “The value of faith is determined solely by its Christ-adornment, its grasping of the treasure who is Christ.”\textsuperscript{25} Because the nature of faith is to look outside oneself, this method of justification is in perfect harmony with a justification based on alien righteousness and the gospel.

In contrast to faith, the law always accuses: \textit{lex semper accusat}. This means that obedience to the law is not a proper means for seeking salvation. But that’s not to say that the law had no purpose. The law revealed to humans their inability to satisfy God’s demands, which, in turn, led them to receive their righteousness in Christ by faith. Luther writes, “God’s demands in the law function, first and foremost, by revealing human impotence.”\textsuperscript{26}

Concerning the law’s relationship with the gospel and faith, Luther states, “Here we must point out that the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises.”\textsuperscript{27} This division falls along the lines of the indicative and imperative. If the law is the imperative, and its purpose is to reveal human inability and drive humans to seek refuge \textit{extra nos}, then the gospel is the indicative of God’s gracious offer to grant refuge in Christ through the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of

\textsuperscript{22} Clark, “Iustitia Imputata Christi,” 291.
\textsuperscript{23} WA 8, 519. Cited in Mann, \textit{Shall We Sin?}, 8.
\textsuperscript{24} Luther, \textit{Luther’s Works}, 27:220.
\textsuperscript{25} Marcus Johnson, "Luther and Calvin on Union with Christ," \textit{Fides et Historia} 39, no. 2 (2007), 65.
\textsuperscript{26} Jeffrey K Mann, \textit{Shall We Sin?: Responding to the Antinomian Question in Lutheran Theology} (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 5.
\textsuperscript{27} Luther, \textit{Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings}, “Freedom of a Christian.” (1520), 600.
Christ’s righteousness. The law issues commands for the primary purpose of revealing sin; the gospel issues the proclamation of forgiveness through the merit of Christ so that one may find acceptance before the holy God.

This means that one’s relationship to the law changes decisively upon conversion. Luther writes, “It is clear, then, that a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law.” This is not absolute freedom, but freedom from the law’s condemnation to the extent that the believer lives based on faith in the gospel. But, at the same time, the believer remains a sinner who can revert to a law-based *modus operandi*, in which case, the law is still necessary to drive the believer back to beholding the gospel by faith. Eugene Klug sums up Luther’s position well when he says, “The law has a necessity, not because it reconstructs the old man or constructs the new, but because it beats down the old man’s pretensions of righteousness and does so incessantly.”

Thus, for Luther, there is no real progress in holiness in any sense that one is conscious of, but only an oscillation between “ecstasy and anxiety.” One flies from the wonders of God’s grace and forgiveness to the terrors of the law, being driven back to forgiveness and thence to the law again. Mann writes, “Even the believer needs to hear the accusing voice of the law, constantly drawing him to repentance.”

**Two kings of Righteousness**

The believer might not be conscious of his or her progressive sanctification, but Luther still believed that a Christian would become increasingly holy. He writes, “All

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31 Mann, *Shall We Sin?,* 25.
does not gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

Thus, a Christian would not become perfect in this life but she would become progressively more pure.

Where did this progressive purification come from? For Luther, the believers’ forensic righteousness had an effect upon his way of living. Luther’s theory of sanctification wrestled with the precise relationship between the forensic righteousness, which was entirely complete, and the righteousness in one’s external behavior, which was always partial and flawed. In other words, we’ve seen so far two different ways of viewing the believer: externally, as a sinner in need of the law to drive him back to Christ, and internally, as one who possess the full righteousness of Christ. How do these work together for the process of transformation?

One tool in answering this summarized in Luther’s phrase “*simul iustus et peccator*”—one is simultaneously righteous and a sinner. A short history of the development of this concept will reveal how Luther wrestled with the internal and external ways of viewing the believer. *Simul iustus et peccator* phrase was first articulated somewhat ambiguously in Luther’s Romans commentary (1515–1516) through an illustration of a sick man who is truly sick but also “Reckoned as already cured” because of the skill of the doctor. This explanation of *simul iustus et peccator* obscures the extrinsic nature of imputed righteousness and the forensic nature of justification. Luther’s understanding of *simul iustus et peccator* became more precise a few years later in his essay “Two kinds of Righteousness” (1519). Although the Latin phrase is not used, the idea is clearly present, as Luther develops two senses in which one is “righteous.” There is (1) the type of righteousness which one needs in order to stand before God. This is an “alien righteousness, that is, the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith….”

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32 LW, 32:24.
33 Luther commentary on Romans 4:7, 1515–1516.
34 Trueman, “Simul Peccator Et Justus: Martin Luther and Justification,” 79.
35 Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, “Two kinds of Righteousness” (1518), 155.
This righteousness is given to the believer in baptism, and it is an answer to her guilt, “for it is the righteousness given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam.” 36 Luther also speaks of (2) one’s proper righteousness, which is the righteousness displayed in one’s life. 37 This is the righteousness that is actually “unrighteousness” in Luther’s simul iustus et peccator. While Luther is clear that this second kind of righteousness can never justify, he is concerned that believers would progress to become more righteousness.

In this essay, Luther attempts to correlate these two senses of righteousness. Luther writes that the second type of righteousness, the “proper righteousness,” is manifested in the lives of believers as they “work with first and alien righteousness.” 38 He also writes that the alien righteousness is primary, and therefore, “it is the basis, the cause, the source of all our own actual righteousness.” 39 Trueman notes the development: “Now [as opposed to Luther’s earlier works] Luther is emphatic that transformation is no part of justification but, rather, a consequence of it.” 40

The cause-effect relationship between alien righteousness and proper righteousness is such that Luther could say “Christ daily drives out the old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected at the end through death.” 41 It appears that Luther accounts for the progressive nature of practical righteousness on the grounds that the alien/declarative righteousness is also progressive.

In The Freedom of the Christian (1520), Luther is again working with the two senses of righteousness, but he now relates these senses to union with Christ. Luther

36 Ibid., 156.
37 Ibid., 155.
38 Ibid., 157.
39 Ibid., 156.
41 Luther, Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, “Two kinds of Righteousness” (1915), 157.
begins with two propositions: (1) a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none, and (2) a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. These correlate the two senses in which a Christian is considered righteous. In the first sense, the Christian is subject to none because of the full righteousness of Christ credited as a gift. As we saw, justification changes one’s relationship with the law. The Christian is not even subject to the law of God because Christ has filled that law for the believer. The believer’s righteousness, Luther says, abides in the “inner man.” The second sense of righteousness presents itself toward others in society; it abides in the “outer man.” The gift of righteousness in the “inner man” creates an obligation in the “outer man” to love others, and this love manifests itself in faithful service. Again, we must note the connection between the forensic (“inner man”) righteousness and renovative (“outer man”) righteousness, and the priority of the forensic (inner man) to affect the renovative (outer man). 

Simul iustus et peccator is also implied in the fact that public service required of the outer man is always abounding with imperfections. One is never truly righteous in the outer man to the same degree as one is in the inner man. Nevertheless, there ought to be growth in righteousness. Trueman summarizes Luther well, “We might say that Luther regards proper righteousness as the natural outgrowth of the cognitive realization of the significance of being justified by the alien righteousness we receive in Christ.”

Sanctification in Union with Christ

In discussing how it is that the believer is righteous before God, Luther appeals to marriage and union with Christ. Luther was more comfortable describing justification in categories of marriage than a strictly forensic description. In fact, in a rare moment of dissent from his Wittenberg colleague, Melanchthon, Luther states in a handwritten

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42 Luther, Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, “Freedom of a Christian.” (1520), 597.

notation that he prefers marital metaphor for explaining justification while Melanchthon prefers legal language.  

Luther explains the believer’s righteousness on account of the mystical union with Christ:

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh, and there is between them a true marriage—indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage—it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ’s, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul’s; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride’s and bestow upon her the things that are his…Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. 

Luther’s well-written prose needs no further explanation. For our purposes we simply need to note that for Luther the believer receives the benefits of Christ in the context of a union with him.

Before elaborating on Luther’s understanding of union with Christ and its connection to sanctification, we need to consider a brief history of this doctrine. The idea

45 Luther, Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, “Freedom of a Christian.” (1520). For similar ideas in Luther, see LW, 26:132, 167-168, 31:189-90.
of union with Christ enjoys a rich theological tradition, with which Luther critically engaged.\(^{46}\) Understanding how Luther both employs and adapts aspects of this tradition will give us more insight into his theology of both justification and sanctification.\(^{47}\)

Union with Christ can be traced back to a theological motif deep in church history, namely, the intimate relationship between the human and the Divine. Beginning with Origen and developing through Athanasius and the Cappadocians, we see salvation presented as a real participation in the life of God through the work of the Spirit.\(^{48}\) According to Norman Russell, this was “one of the Church's most striking metaphors of salvation.”\(^{49}\) It was discussed with the terms “deification” and “Theosis,”\(^{50}\) both of which stressed one’s participation with God in union through spiritual union with Christ. When properly understood, Theosis is not an ontological blurring of the Creator/creature distinction but a process by which the “human becomes truly human.”\(^{51}\) Recent scholarship has stressed that the early church deliberately shunned the Hellenistic and platonic categories of ontological blended and, instead, stressed a kind of participation with God that preserved the distinction between God and humanity.\(^{52}\)

The ideal of participation was not lost on Augustine, who we can assume was aware of the *theosis* doctrine in the East. Commenting on John 15, Augustine explains Jesus’s illustration of the vine and the branches as proof for the organic unity of Christ

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\(^{46}\) Johnson, “Luther and Calvin on Union with Christ,” 61. He writes, “In Sum, Luther certainly adopted the terminology of the medieval tradition, yet he decisively reshaped the implications of the *unio mystica*.”

\(^{47}\) Johnson, “Luther and Calvin on Union with Christ,” 62.


\(^{50}\) There is considerable debate as to precisely what these terms mean. Johnson is correct when he says, “One person’s deification is another one’s theosis.” The idea that Theosis is essentially orthodox and deification is unorthodox, as Myk Habets argues, is a bit too simplistic. Myk Habets, "Theosis, Yes; Deification, No.,” in *The Spirit of Truth: Reading Scripture and Constructing Theology with the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 124–149; Johnson, *One with Christ*, 51 n 32.

\(^{51}\) Johnson, *One with Christ*, 51,

and believers: “[Christ] became man, that in Him human nature might be the vine, and we who also are men might become branches thereof.”\(^\text{53}\) And to what end did Christ take on human nature? It was to impart his divine life to his people, just as the vine imparts its life-sustaining substance to the branches.\(^\text{54}\) In his commentary on John 15, Augustine connects the vine motif to the marriage analogy in which Christ also sustains his bride by “washing her with his word.”\(^\text{55}\) Both pictures—the vine and branches and the marriage union between Christ and the church—involve spiritual vitality communicated through union, a union in which one must participate in order to benefit. Augustine explains Christ’s words in John 15—“He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing”—as contrasting the prideful self-assured person who boasts in his own righteousness with the humble believer who depends upon Christ.\(^\text{56}\) But for Augustine, God never intended this union to be private. Against the Donatists, Augustine strongly held to the visible church the corporate nature of the believer’s union with Christ.\(^\text{57}\)

In later medieval theology, pelagianism and semi-pelagianism worked their way into the union theology. As Mark Garcia explains, “...union with Christ or God was the eschatological goal of every viator. The pursuit of this goal included a life of contemplation and self-denial. Contemplation was the third stage in the process to union with Christ taught by the greatest of the medieval mystics.”\(^\text{58}\) Philipp, an apt interpreter of Thomas, defines mysticism as “a kind of knowledge of God drawn forth or produced by divinely infused light through the union of the will with God.”\(^\text{59}\) In other words, the

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\(^\text{54}\) Ibid., 298.

\(^\text{55}\) Ibid., 298.

\(^\text{56}\) Ibid., 298.

\(^\text{57}\) Stanislaus Grabowski, "St. Augustine and the Doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ," Theological Studies 7, (1946), 73.


\(^\text{59}\)
viators obtained union through ascension from the state of lower mysticism (prayerful meditation and contemplation) to the higher.\textsuperscript{60} One sought to purify oneself through love to reach a higher mysticism, in which “[t]he soul suffers in sheer receptivity and passivity the divinely infused contemplation, is transformed into spiritual marriage, and finally absorbed into God.”\textsuperscript{61}

The union motif accents a relationship of sharing and participation. But the stress fell on the experiential aspect of this union.\textsuperscript{62} Bernard makes much use of the Song of Solomon; he believes that kissing, touching, and even consummation describe how the believer is one Spirit with God.\textsuperscript{63}

How did Luther employ the tradition of union with Christ? Luther’s relationship with mysticism is not simple: as Oberman explains, “the issue of mysticism…is part and parcel of his overall understanding of the gospel.”\textsuperscript{64} Luther recast the mystics’ use of union in at least two significant ways.

First, the believer is united with the person Christ, not simply with the divine nature. This means union is always considered in light of Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and return. Whereas a theology of glory would see the viator rising in splendor and glory, and finally achieving union in some transcendent mystical, glorious experience, Luther’s view of union reflects his theology of the cross,\textsuperscript{65} in which there is no union with God outside union with the human Christ. And this union is manifested in sharing in Christ’s death.\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[60]{Philipp, Mystica theologiae divi Thomae (Barcelona, 1662). Cited from Heiko A Oberman, The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids, MI: T & T Clark, 1992), 128.}
\footnotetext[61]{Ibid., 128-129.}
\footnotetext[62]{Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology, 129.}
\footnotetext[63]{Ibid., 67.}
\footnotetext[64]{Bernard McGinn, “Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries,” Church History 56, no. 1 (1987), 8.}
\footnotetext[65]{Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology, 127.}
\footnotetext[66]{Luther, Luther’s Works, “The Heidelberg Disputation,” Theses 19 and 20, 31:52; McGrath, Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough, 148–175.}
\end{footnotes}
Second—and this point is very significant—union with Christ is not the goal, but the starting point. Luther banishes all Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism from his theology. Garcia writes, “Unlike the medieval viator who yearns for union at the end of the journey, Luther makes union a present reality and experience.”67 This is exactly what we see Luther doing in this use of the marriage analogy. Instead of stressing the intimacy of the one-spirit union as a lifelong spiritual quest, Luther’s unionem cum Christo is a finished and legal reality at the very outset, which makes further intimacy possible.

What can we say about Luther’s use of union with Christ in reference to Sanctification? It’s not altogether clear. Luther certainly believed that faith brings the believer into possession of Christ. This life of Christ has bearing on one’s life of obedience. But, at times, Luther grounds external obedience directly in forensic justification, even asserting that the forensic justification must be progressive in order to account for the progressive nature of historical obedience. Luther clearly has a theology of union. But he doesn’t usually bring his theology of union to bear upon the issue of sanctification.

McGrath provides a helpful insight. Comparing Calvin to Luther on union he says that Luther’s grasp was intuitive, where as Calvin’s was systematic.68 Cooper raises the possibility that there are “two Luthers,” that is, two elements of Luther’s theology in tension: (1) the reality that believers who are in Christ are free from the condemnation of the law and (2) the need for progressive holiness. The reformer himself possessed a remarkable ability to live with tension. But the theologians who followed him very quickly divided on which was the truth Luther.

Before our final accounting of Luther’s sanctification we will consider his reaction to the full-blown Antinomianism that arose in his tradition.

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67 Garcia, Life, 65.
68 McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 224-5.
Luther and Antinomianism

Within the ranks of Lutheranism, Johann Agricola, a trusted friend of Luther, took Luther’s teaching into a truly Antinomian direction. Luther had made some statements that could be taken as Antinomian, such as, “A Christian has no need of any work or law in order to be saved, since through faith he is free from every law and does everything out of pure liberty and freely.” However, Luther always balanced these assertions with affirmations of the law, such as in his catechism on the Ten Commandments. Agricola, in contrast, thought that to be consistent with Luther’s emphasis on salvation by faith, the law must have no role in bringing the sinner to Christ. This negation brought Agricola into conflict first with Philip Melanchthon and later with Martin Luther himself.

Melanchthon’s emphasis on the forensic nature of justification stressed the importance of the law, because it was from the law’s demands that the forensic justification rescued the troubled heart. Melanchthon stated that “where there is no fear, there is no faith.” Fear arose from liability to the law and prompted the troubled conscience to find refuge in the forensic declaration Christ’s righteousness by faith. Thus, the forensic nature of justification clearly upheld the second use of the law.

Melanchthon also understood a third use of the law; in fact, he coined this term in the 1534 edition of his Scholia. Given that the sinner is justified by faith and that the law is no longer his or her accuser, the law could be used to help define a righteous life. Here Melanchthon used the law to develop the second of Luther’s “two kinds of righteousness.”

Agricola, however, found this teaching on the law unacceptable. We must recognize that Agricola, Luther, and Melanchthon all agreed that the law would condemn, and none held that the law could, in and of itself, make someone holy. They differed, however, in that while Luther and Melanchthon saw the law’s condemnation as

69  Luther, Luther’s Works, 31:361 cited from Mann, Shall We Sin?, 20.
70  Luther’s Works, 26.6.
a prerequisite to accepting Christ’s justification, Agricola saw this condemnation as ending only in ultimate despair and thus counterproductive to faith and love. Timothy Wengert writes: “Agricola viewed the law as a dead end from which there was no escape.”\(^{73}\)

Their difference can be traced back to differing understandings of conversion. Agricola maintained that the essence of conversion, from the human perspective, was apprehending the love and grace of God. He believed that this could be achieved only with the free offer of the gospel and that the law would only obscure the graciousness of God. Moreover, Agricola taught that Luther’s and especially Melanchthon’s insistence on contrition as a step prior to faith would compromise Luther’s own teaching on salvation by faith. He writes against Melanchthon, “Without a doubt, you may understand that ‘to do poenitentia,’ ‘to be justified,’ to have a change of heart,’ is solely a work of God, not of human powers.”\(^{74}\) Therefore, Agricola saw in Melanchthon, and to some extent in Luther, a return to the medieval system of penance in which contrition played a role in earning salvation. It appears that Agricola failed to grasp that Melanchthon’s contrition functioned only as a psychological and epistemological prequel to faith, and not as a meritorious prerequisite.

**Luther’s Response**

Luther lamented that his writings were used to support the Antinomian position, but he was grateful that the conflict gave him a chance to clarify his position.\(^{75}\) He wrote a short work titled *Against the Antinomians*, published in 1539.

Luther’s response to Agricola was twofold. First, he argued that the complete abrogation of the law, which Agricola sought, was impossible given the nature of the human’s relationship with God and the created world. Luther understood the law to be a


\(^{75}\) Luther, “I am afraid that had I died at Smalkalden, I should have been proclaimed forever the Patron of those [Antinomian] Spirits, because they appeal to my Books, although they have done it behind my back, without my knowledge and against my will.” Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 47:107–119.
stable aspect of the created order and always in the human heart. One will be conscious of the law on many occasions, such as whenever one sees evidence of death. Pastors do not need to preach the law at a funeral because its presence is acutely felt in the clear evidence of death. In addition, one often finds that conformity to the moral law is more conducive to living well in the world. Thus, one’s interaction in the world is, de facto, an interaction with the law. Walther summarizes: “There will never be a time while the universe lasts when men will not feel the power of the Moral Law in their private and public lives.” Thus, it simply cannot be abrogated.

Luther also argues that the law is established in the nature of the gospel itself. Luther contends that even if one never uses the word “law,” the very nature of the gospel will communicate law. He writes, “the conscience will be terrified by the law, when it is told, that Christ was to fulfill the law for us, at so dear a rate.” He further says, “The law terrifies far more dreadful, when I am told, that Christ the Son of God must necessarily satisfy [God’s wrath] for me …for in the Son of God, I really see the wrath of God, which the law declares.” In other words, if the law could be abolished (not just in the sense of Christ having fulfilled it for believers, but in the sense of it actually becoming obsolete), then so also would the gospel and justification by faith be abrogated; for if the law does not condemn, neither can it be used as a standard to declare one just.

Conclusion

How well does Luther answer the antinomian challenge? And do implications in his theology open the door to antinomian tendencies? In spite of the fact that Luther is

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Luther writes, “The devil knows very well too that it is impossible to remove the law from the heart.” Luther’s Works, 35:168. Cited from Mann, Shall we Sin?, 25.

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Ibid., 3.

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Luther, “Against Antinomians: A Treatise against Antinomians written in an Epistolary way, by D. Martin Luther, translated out of the high Dutch original; containing the mind of Luther against Antinomians and a recantation of John Agricola Eusebius their first father.” True Covenanter, (The Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, www.truecovenanter.com Accessed Sept. 7 2016.).

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Ibid.
often accused of Antinomian leanings, there is much in Luther’s understanding of the role of faith in producing good works and in his clear refutation of Agricola to argue against this antinomian charge. He certainly intended to bring the law to bear on the moral consciences of believers. However, it is difficult to see how Luther worked out a consistent theology of sanctification.

He believed that sanctification was driven by a gift of righteousness. But precisely how the forensic benefit empowered change is difficult to understand. Why couldn’t justification be interpreted as an excuse for sin, especially given that the forensic change is only a change in one’s standing before God, not one’s nature? For those who are unable to do anything good, is the absence of condemnation alone a sufficient reason why the law can now become a freeing guide? In short, if justification is a forensic declaration only, how can good works “flow out of his justification”?

What we have in Luther are two systems that cannot really be reconciled. Luther himself was able to live with great tension without it destroying his system. But subsequent generations did not possess this same gift. This is why we see the Lutheran tradition divide not long after their founder died. Luther’s rebuke of Agricola notwithstanding, much of Luther’s theology was taken up by the later antinomians. If Luther’s theology is an oscillation between ecstasy and anxiety, the antinomians shunned the anxiety, and built upon the ecstasy.  

The Council of Trent

Introduction

The Catholic charge against the Protestants was essentially “Antinomianism!” The word is not used, but the concept is, indeed, present. Eck writes of the Protestants,

They thus argue in substance: Good works are not meritorious of grace; therefore, neither of eternal life; therefore they are nothing. If they would recognize

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Cooper, Fear and Anxiety, 20.
themselves to be sophists, mockers, deceivers, they would readily see how
sophistical this argument is. For they sin under the sway of the sophism of the
conquest by arguing from the destruction of the antecedent, to the destruction of
the consequent.\textsuperscript{82}

**Justification**

The official Catholic response to the Protestant theology concerning justification
was definitively articulated in the Council of Trent in what was a watershed moment for
Catholicism. Before Trent, various theological threads—including some that were at
points strikingly similar to the Protestant position—had been able to exist in a sea of
undifferentiated theological space.\textsuperscript{83} But the Protestants’ full frontal assault on Rome’s
soteriology forced the Church to respond with one—catholic—voice. This voice was
spoken through Trent.\textsuperscript{84}

The council’s chief target was justification. The second draft of the decree of
justification opened with these words: “At the present time there is nothing more vexing
and disturbing to the church of God than the novel, perverse, and erroneous doctrine of
some men about justification.”\textsuperscript{85} Thus, Trent’s main purpose was to respond to the
Protestant teaching on justification. The council began by answering six questions that a
commission of theologians had set before them:

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\textsuperscript{82} Eck, *Enchiridion*, 56.

\textsuperscript{83} For instance the Spanish Valdes, in his *Dialogo de doctrina Cristiana*. According to
McGrath, he develops a version of *Simul Iustus et Peccator*, which, while not identical to Luther’s, is still
much closer to the Protestant norm than to Trent. See also the Contarini-Giustniani correspondence which

\textsuperscript{84} Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine,
Volume 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1985), 275. According to Pelikan, the purpose of Trent was threefold: “(1) to meet the Protestant Reformers
on their own ground; (2) to harmonize contradictions with the patristic and medieval traditions; and (3) to
resolve the differences among the defenders of the Roman Catholic faith themselves.”

\textsuperscript{85} Cited in ibid., 280.
1. What is justification, nominally and actually, and what is to be understood when it is said, ‘humanity is justified’?

2. What are the causes of justification?

3. What is to be understood when it is said that ‘humanity is justified by faith’?

4. What role do human works and the sacraments play in justification, whether before, during, or after it?

5. What precedes, accompanies, and follows justification?

6. By what proofs is the Catholic doctrine supported?86

Woven throughout is the concern that if justification included the imputation of Christ’s righteousness obtained by faith, the door would open wide for licentiousness—hence the charge of antinomianism.

Trent sought to counter this perceived error by insisting on the medieval definition of justification, which was “to make righteous.” Thus, justification was transformative. The council explicitly defines justification as “not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just.”87 The council routinely appeals to Scripture that speaks of renewal in support of its definition of justification, using verses such as John 3:5. This Catholic definition of justification appears to be without controversy within the council itself, in the document it produced, and in the subsequent interpretation of that document. McGrath writes, “Despite this remarkable variety of definitions [of Catholic theologians who attended the council], it is clear that there existed a consensus concerning the factitive and transformational character of justification.”88


88 McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 325. Cf, Lane, Justification by Faith.
To put this position on context, it must be remembered that the reformers also believed a “factive and transformational” aspect to salvation; they just did not think that this is what the Scripture meant when it spoke of justification. They called it sanctification or regeneration. Justification was limited to the forensic declaration alone. This raises the question, could the controversy between Rome and Wittenberg be reduced to differences in the ordering and grouping of theological loci? The answer, from within the Reformed tradition, was no. Francis Turretin explains, “It is readily gathered that we have not here a mere dispute about words…but a controversy most real and indeed of the highest moment.” By combining justification and sanctification, Trent’s “justification” became something radically different than it would in splitting the categories. Although Protestants recognized the inseparability of justification and sanctification, they still considered the distinct integrity of each doctrine within its own discrete theological sphere. In other words, justification and sanctification could be distinguished. This means that the righteousness needed for justification must be obtained apart from the righteousness inherent in the believer through sanctification. This is why Luther could affirm simul iustus et peccator. Inherent righteousness, the Protestants contended, was not enough to guarantee one’s acceptance before God. (Of course, Catholicism had no interest in guaranteeing one’s acceptance before God, but more on that later.) For the Protestants, the intrinsic renewal—although entirely real—had no bearing on the legal status of the justified as it pertains to their justification. But when justification and sanctification were conflated, there was no need for a legal righteousness separate from

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90 We saw this to some extent in Luther and Melanchthon. It will be even more apparent in Calvin. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 328. McGrath writes, “For Melanchthon, the notional separation of justification and sanctification did not entail their division, as if one could be justified without subsequently being sanctified.”
91 See helpful discussion in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 18.
92 Hooker, “Now concerning the righteousnesse of sanctification, we deny it not to be inherent; wee graunt that unless we worke, we have it not: only we distinguish it a thing different in nature from the righteousnesse of justification: we are righteous the one way by the faith of Abraham; the other way, except wee doe the workes of Abraham, we are not righteous.” Richard Hooker, *A Learned Discourse of Iustification, Workes, and How the Foundation of Faith Is Overthrowne* (Oxford, 1612), 8.
inherent righteousness to meet the demands of the judicial verdict. “It was considered theologically redundant.”

**Original Sin**

The nature of human sinfulness has direct bearing on the doctrine of justification. Gaffin rightly notes that, “The Roman Catholic understanding of sin and justification stand and fall together.” The conflict between Catholic and Protestant views on justification seems to turn chiefly on whether or not it was possible for the human, with the aid of divine grace, to produce works that are acceptable to God. The council answers in the affirmative.

In solidarity with Reformation theology, the Council of Trent affirms the fall of the human race in Adam. Chapter 1 of the council teaches the universal sinfulness in Adam and chapter 2 affirms the need for Christ’s propitiation. Unbaptized adults and infants are guilty and corrupt in Adam’s sin, and they need Christ. However, the Council also maintained that free will was not destroyed. “Though free will, weakened as it was in its powers and downward bent, was by no means extinguished in them.” The council rules as anathema any view that holds, “after the sin of Adam man’s free will was lost and destroyed, or that it is a thing in name only.” The council also denies the Lutheran teaching of the sinfulness of all works done before justification. According to Trent, one’s condition prior to Christ is not that of complete darkness; nor are humans unable to cooperate with divine grace. Rather, humans are able to do things that predispose them

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93 McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 333.


95 Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 1:119, Canon 1. “If anyone says that men can be justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or though the teaching of the law, without divine grace through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.”

96 Ibid., 2:89, Session 7, chapter 1.

97 Ibid., 2:111, Council of Trent on Justification, Canon 5.

to receive the grace of justification. This includes not only faith, but also love.\textsuperscript{99} God equipped the sinner, they argued, to perform good deeds unto salvation through prevenient grace.

Rome agreed that humans are justified \textit{by faith}, but they meant a “formed faith,” that is, a faith that has demonstrated itself in a life of loving obedience. Faith was the origin of justification, not because by it one reached out to Christ and received something alien to oneself (as Luther taught), but because faith was the seed of all Christian virtue that would be possessed intrinsically.\textsuperscript{100} The depravity Trent recognized was not in \textit{toto}. The means to overcome the limited depravity was cooperation between God and man.

Having been justified, original sin is entirely removed. The council states the following:

\begin{quote}
If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted, or says that the whole of that which belongs to the essence of sins is not taken away, but says that it is only canceled or not imputed, let him be anathema. For in those who are born again God hates nothing, because there is no condemnation to those who are truly buried together with Christ by baptism unto death, who walk not according to the flesh…\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

The rationale for this complete removal explained in the last sentence of the above quote is particularly illuminating. The removal of original sin is necessary “because there is no condemnation” in the believer. This is an unmistakable reference to Romans 8:1, a passage read in Protestant theology as referring to justification in an exclusively forensic sense. Here we get something of the logic of Trent: justification is so closely tied to the renovative nature of the individual that the declaration of “no condemnation” (Rom 8:1)


\textsuperscript{100} Craig B Carpenter, “A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification,” \textit{Westminster Theological Journal} 64, no. Fall (2002), 368.

\textsuperscript{101} Schaff, \textit{The Creeds of Christendom}, 2:87. Session 5.
could only be sustained if all sin and corruption is removed.\textsuperscript{102} (It’s worth noting that the antinomians argued in a similar way, as we will see.)

**Assurance**

This theology of justification had considerable impact on the nature and possibility of assurance. By making justification identical to inherent righteousness, the sole ground of assurance must be the believer’s performance. Faith has no unique status concerning the grounds for assurance. The council makes this explicit in chapter 9, which is titled, “Against the vain confidence of the heretics.” This chapter aims to refute the Protestant position, arguing that not only is forensic justification impossible, but also it is unhelpful for maintaining the faith, insofar as it removes the believer from any necessary connection with the church and from the requirement to secure one’s salvation by works and sacraments.\textsuperscript{103} Thus lack of assurance would better situation believers to receive the grace of God because it would motivate them to work harder to form their faith into justifying love.

**Conclusion**

Trent was clear to rule as anathema any doctrine that separated the essence of the declaration of righteousness from the real nature of the justified. Its motivation in doing this seems to be to rule out any notion of justification as bare legal fiction. The fear of Antinomianism was evidently on their minds as they rejected Luther’s teaching. Catholic scholar Nelson Minnich states Trent’s motivation as follows:

Trent rejected the Lutheran teaching that justification involved only an extrinsic imputation of Christ’s merits while original sin remained. Trent insisted on an

\textsuperscript{102} According to Allison, the Catholic theologians conceded that their position is debunked if Paul is speaking in his regenerate state. Christopher F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (New York Seabury Press, 1966), 183.

\textsuperscript{103} Joel R Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1999), 15.
inner/intrinsic transformation so that the person justified is joined to Christ, is
given a share in the divine life (sanctifying grace), becomes a child of God, and is
absolved of original sin. It is removed, while concupiscence remains.\textsuperscript{104}

Minnich summarizes Trent well, clearly affirming Trent’s rejection of forensic
justification and their comingling of justification and sanctification. He also affirms
Trent’s concern that “the person justified is joined to Christ, given a share of the divine
life (sanctifying grace)…” But this raises an interesting question: what if another scheme
fully admitted to forensic justification but, at the same time, held to a renovative change
in the believer so that the believer was forensically justified and experientially sanctified?
In other words, what if transformation was tethered to justification not as part of the act
essentially, but as a necessary corollary to the act on account of a larger rubric of
salvation, namely union with Christ. It is to precisely this kind of structure that we now
turn.

\textbf{John Calvin}

\textbf{Calvin’s Context}

As a second-generation Reformer, Calvin, like Melanchthon, felt the weight of
Rome’s challenge to the Protestant articulation of the gospel. And Calvin endeavored to
respond. This section will briefly trace the development of Calvin’s response to Rome
with reference to his theology of sanctification.

\textbf{Preliminary Considerations in the Development of the Institutes}

When Calvin first began systematic articulation of Reformation theology, he
adhered to a soteriological structure similar to Luther in which justification was the
grounds for sanctification. This is evident in Calvin’s early use of 1 Cor 1:30. Calvin
writes in his 1536 edition of the \textit{Institutes}, “By Christ’s righteousness then we are made
righteous and become fullfillers of the law. This righteousness we put on as our own, and

\textsuperscript{104} Nelson Minnich, email correspondence from Nelson Minnich. Received: 20 February, 2013.
surely God accepts it as ours, reckoning us holy, pure, and innocent. This fulfilled Paul’s statement: ‘Christ was made righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for us’.

Clearly Calvin has 1 Corinthians 1:30 in mind in this section. The righteousness is properly Christ’s, but it is imputed to the believer by grace. It is significant for our purposes to note that this righteousness initiates the entire process of salvation. He goes on to explain how sanctification and redemption follow in the wake of this forensic gift:

For our merciful Lord first indeed kindly received us into grace according to his own goodness and freely-given will, forgiving and condoning our sins, which deserved wrath and eternal death. Then through the gifts of His Holy Spirit He dwells in and reigns in us and through Him the sins of the flesh are each day mortified more and more. We are indeed sanctified, that is, consecrated to the Lord in complete purity of life, our hearts formed to obedience to the law.

It seems here that the forgiveness of sins has some kind of logical or even temporal priority over the gift of the Spirit. Of first importance is that the sinners obtain a righteousness by which they can stand in God’s tribunal. Because of human sin, the only option for such righteousness is that which comes from Christ and is imputed to the believer, as if the believer actually were righteous, knowing full well that the believer is not. With this forensic verdict in place, one can then move to the reality of walking in a new life. In other words, justification is the context for sanctification. This logical order created a pedagogical approach in which justification was treated prior to sanctification, which is the order we find in the 1536 edition. It is also significant that in the first edition of the Institutes, Calvin assigned no significance to the fact that Paul attributes these gifts

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106 Ibid., 35
108 The language of “Divine tribunal” comes out most strongly in the 1539 edition; however, the idea is still present in Calvin from the outset.
—righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—to believers because of their being “in Christ Jesus” or that Christ is the substance of these gifts (“He become for us… righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”).

However, Calvin presents a different structure in the final edition of the *Institutes*. Calvin begins his 1559 work similarly to earlier editions, by explaining the law and sin. But instead of jumping directly to justification as he did in 1536, he writes an extended section on the work of Christ. Calvin explicates the application of this work in Book 3, which begins with an explanation of the way (*modus*) the work of Christ applies to the believer. He writes,

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 to us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us…all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.”

Calvin then describes how this union comes about through faith, which prompts him to take up the subject of faith in more detail, explaining how faith brings the believer into saving union with Christ, how it leads to repentance, and how it depends entirely upon the Word and the Spirit (3.1–3.10). Only after all this does Calvin explains the nature of justification (3.11–3.19). The significance of this structure is that Calvin treats sanctification before justification.  

We are not left to speculate on the reasons for this order. Calvin delayed his treatment of justification, he explains, “because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the

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110 Ibid., 3. “Although I did not regret the labor spent, I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth.”
saints, with which part of this question is concerned.” 111 In other words, Calvin explains sanctification before justification to demonstrate that the very same faith that justifies a sinner also exercises a sanctifying effect so that the sinner begins to live in a new way.

The reasons for highlighting faith’s role in sanctification are rather obvious. The Protestant church was under the sustained attack of Rome, which accused the Reformers of promoting righteousness by faith that amounted to a “legal fiction” and of holding to a theology of justification that made good works redundant. 112 Calvin defends the Protestant faith against these charges by explaining the reality of sanctification based directly on faith and union with Christ. Gaffin explains this well: “Calvin destroys Rome’s charge by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without explicit reference to its sole instrumental function in justification.” 113

To appreciate fully the significance of Calvin’s ordering of these two loci, it must be grasped that the ordering of the earlier editions of the Institutes was more typical of Reformation pedagogy we seen in Luther and Melanchthon. Indeed, Calvin’s apology for the novel order in the 1559 edition could be taken as evidence that it runs counter to his Reformation instincts. Central to Reformation teaching is that justification is a judicial verdict, based solely on forgiveness of sins and imputation of Christ’s righteousness apart from human works. This opposed the Catholic (and even Augustinian) approach that mingled renovative and forensic righteousness and resulted in a doctrine of justification in which the final judicial verdict was based on one’s own righteous life. It was natural, then, for the Reformers to set forth forensic justification at the outset of their pedagogical approach; this would insure no confusion as to the source of the righteousness by which one could stand before God’s tribunal.

The normal order of treating justification before sanctification also made sense because many held to a causal priority of justification. This, as we saw, was true of Luther, and it was true of Calvin in 1536. This approach has certain advantages. If the

111 Ibid., 3.11.1
112 McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 333.
113 Gaffin Jr, ”Justification and Union with Christ,”, 255. cf. George Hunsinger, ””A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin, Luther and Barth.” ” in Conversing with Barth, ed. Mike Higton and John C. McDowell(Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).
forensic declaration could be shown to be the basis of and the cause for inherent righteousness, then the forensic declaration must be a settled issue prior to and apart from one’s own personal righteousness. We slaw that Luther argued precisely this way in his work “Two kinds of Righteousness.” This would rule out the slightest possibility of justification based on sanctification, as medieval theology and Trent taught, and it would stress the clear distinction between justification and sanctification.

Calvin, however, reverses the pedagogical order. As Garcia shows in his careful scholarship, Calvin is markedly different than the Lutheran tradition, especially Melanchthon, concerning the pedagogical approach to justification and sanctification.114 We will now turn to the theology that undergirds this pedagogical approach.

**Nuances in Calvin’s Mature Understanding**

To understand justification and sanctification in Calvin’s thought, we must observe how he derives his teaching from Romans 6.115 Muller is right in saying that nothing influenced Calvin more than his study of Romans.116 In his commentary on this central Pauline passage, Calvin understood Paul’s question in 6:1, “Shall we continue to sin so that grace may abound?,” to be the logical response of the flesh to the theology of free justification articulated in Romans 3–5. Calvin writes, “Nothing is more natural than that the flesh should indulge itself under any excuse.”117 The significance of this must not be overlooked, for here Calvin plainly teaches that justification alone would not restrain sin. In fact, without renovative change, justification would actually increase sin. This is hypothetical of course, because justification is never alone.

Why, then, does Paul answer the question in 6:1 so firmly in the negative? Calvin attributes this not to justification but to another act of God that makes the flesh no longer the controlling reality of the believer, namely, sanctification (or, as Calvin termed it,

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“regeneration.”). Commenting on this passage in the *Institutes*, Calvin writes, “After he had discussed freely given righteousness, then, since some impious persons were inferring from it that we should live as we pleased, he adds that all those who don Christ’s righteousness are at the same time regenerated by the Spirit, and that we have a pledge of this regeneration in baptism.”\(^{118}\) In other words, one may not continue to sin because justification and sanctification are clearly inseparable. But critical for our discussion is on what grounds this is the case.

Is the answer simply that justification always brings sanctification in its wake? This cannot be Calvin’s response, for, according to Calvin, the believer obtains both Christ’s righteousness and the Spirit’s regeneration (sanctification) in union with Christ. Calvin explicates this when he first takes up the issue of justification in the *Institutes*. “By partaking in Him,” Calvin writes, “we receive a double grace.”\(^{119}\) Because the believer receives the grace of justification only by receiving Christ, and because this Christ also comes bearing the gift of sanctification, the possibility of receiving one gift without the other is firmly negated.

Calvin graphically illustrates this point even further in his Romans commentary: “They who imagine that gratuitous righteousness is given us by him, apart from newness of life, shamefully rend Christ asunder.”\(^{120}\) Calvin’s language “rend asunder” comes from his mature understanding of 1 Corinthians 1:30. To “rend Christ asunder” is to desire justification from Christ without the accompanying gift of sanctification. Because both benefits are received in union with the person of Christ, their separation would require tearing his Person to pieces. Thus, sanctification is always conjoined with justification because both gifts are derived from Christ.

Thus, we see clear theological development from Calvin’s earlier to later theological structure. In his earlier work, Calvin notes that believers receive the gifts of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption on account of justification creating the context for the other graces. Moreover, the Reformer failed to provide any sustained

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\(^{118}\) Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.15.12.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 3.11.1.

\(^{120}\) Calvin, *Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 217-218.
treatment on union with Christ. However, in his mature formulation, Calvin joined the two benefits on the grounds that believers obtain both of them in union with Christ; they must be received together in Christ or not at all. \(^{121}\) Calvin provides an apt illustration:

…as Christ cannot be torn into parts, so these two which we perceive in him together and conjointly are inseparable—namely, righteousness and sanctification. Whomever, therefore, God receives into grace he at the same time bestows the spirit of adoption, by whose power he remakes them into his own image. But if the brightness of the sun cannot be separated from its heat, shall we therefore say that the earth is warmed by its light, or lighted by its heat? Is there anything more applicable to the present matter than this comparison? The sun, by its heat, quickens and fructifies the earth, by its beams brightens and illuminates it. Here is a mutual and indivisible connection. Yet reason itself forbids us to transfer the peculiar qualities of the one to the other. \(^{122}\)

As light and heat are distinct and inseparable effects of the sun, so also are justification and sanctification distinct and inseparable benefits of union with Christ. \(^{123}\)

**Faith and Repentance**

Having looked at the theological structure of sanctification in union with Christ, we will now explain sanctification in more detail. As we saw, after Calvin begins book three by explaining the soteriological structure of union with Christ, he launches into an extended discussion on progressive holiness. His entry point into this discourse is significant: it is faith. There are several reasons for this entry point. The most important for our purposes is that the progressive element of faith explains the progressive element of sanctification.


\(^{122}\) Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.6.

Axiomatic in Calvin’s theology is that faith is the cause of repentance. He takes this to be “beyond controversy.” 124 Those who think otherwise are “moved to feel this way by an unduly slight argument.” 125 This logical priority of faith over repentance reflects the structure of Calvin’s theology of union with Christ in which union is given logical priority over both justification and sanctification. Faith must come before repentance because it is only by receiving Christ through faith that believers can live a life of continual repentance.

Calvin is clear to root the meaning of faith in the context of redemption. He begins the chapter on faith by reminding his readers of three realities: (1) that the perfection of the law demands condemnation for those who do not meet its requirements, (2) humanity’s utter failure to comply with the law, and (3) the appearance of Christ, who rescues from the curse of the law all those who embrace him by faith. 126 In other words, faith is introduced in the context of how Christ enriches “poor and needy sinners.” 127

For this reason, Calvin understands Christ’s person and work to constrain the nature and form of faith. Joel Beeke writes rightly of Calvin’s theology when he says, “This faith derives all its value from its object, Jesus Christ.” 128 This means that faith has value not when considered abstractly and independently but only when considered in the context of God’s redemptive plan, the plan in which “Christ was given to us by God’s generosity to be grasped and possessed by us in faith.” 129 In the context of the gospel, faith benefits believers by bringing them into saving union with Christ. 130

Calvin defines faith as follows: “A firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both

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124 Calvin, Institutes, 3.3.1.
125 Ibid., 3.3.1.
126 Ibid., 3.2.1.
127 Ibid., 3.1.1.
129 Calvin, Institutes, 3.11.1.
130 Beeke, Quest for Full Assurance, 275.
revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

For Calvin, faith involves knowledge of the gospel. The believer apprehends Christ, as he is “clothed in his gospel.” Indeed, the noetic aspect of faith is certainly important for faith’s function in Calvin’s theology, especially with reference to justification. This contrasts with Rome’s notion of “formed faith” in which faith comes with its accompanying virtues.

However, we would be wrong to conclude from Calvin’s definition that he sees no sense of faith as trust (fiducia) and reliance, or any working aspect to faith. A full picture of faith in the Institutes includes the idea of resting confidently in Christ. For Calvin, faith “is more of the heart than the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding.” He writes, “Moreover, we make them [the promises] ours by inwardly embracing them.” Thus, even though faith is knowledge, it is not simply one fact known among many, but knowledge of a reality that the believer rests in and trusts in. It is personal knowledge. Moreover, “Faith,” Calvin says, “can in no wise be separated from a devout disposition.” It is for this reason that Calvin sees faith as being “so little devoid of good works.” Those who use Calvin’s definition of faith, with its emphasis on the noetic, to allege inconsistency between Calvin and the later Reformed tradition would do well to note the broader section on faith (over 50 pages in the English translation) in the Institutes.

We must also understand the relationship between faith and assurance. Regarding the need for assurance, Calvin remarks,

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131 Calvin, Institutes, 3.2.7. for a discussion of faith see Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort," 1:106.

132 Calvin, Institutes, 3.2.6.

133 Richard A. Muller, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 118.


135 Calvin, Institutes., 3.2.8. see also, 3.2.14.

136 Ibid., 3.2.16.

137 Ibid., 3.2.8.
Let this truth then stand sure—that no one can be called a son of God, who does not know himself to be such...This so great an assurance, which dares to triumph over the devil, death, sin, and the gates of hell, ought to lodge deep in the hearts of the godly; for our faith is nothing, except we feel assured that Christ is ours, that the Father is in him propitious to us.\textsuperscript{138}

Calvin clearly believes that assurance must be part of faith. Because Christ’s purpose in coming to earth was to make a propitiatory sacrifice for sin and because this sacrifice enacts reconciliation with God, faith must see in the gospel promises proof of God’s disposition of grace toward the believer. Put negatively, the disposition to doubt forgiveness is not consistent with faith because the object of faith is the one whose blood is shed for the believers’ forgiveness—a forgiveness that is full and free. This means that in principle, there is no room for the “believer” who doubts the reality of his/her salvation. To doubt the reality of one’s salvation is to doubt the promise of grace, which is also to disbelieve the gospel. Calvin writes, “He alone is a true believer, who convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed father toward him...lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation.”\textsuperscript{139} It is a logical contradiction for one to trust in Christ’s sacrificial death for gratuitous forgiveness without also believing that one’s sins are covered in his death. The connection between faith and union must not be forgotten. Faith unites the believer to Christ, and this uniting role of faith—arising as it does out of the context of the redemption—is part of the content of that faith. Thus, for Calvin, assurance is always part of the nature of faith. Any sign that assurance is lacking is a sign that one’s faith is not properly in Christ.

But two qualifications are in order. First, Calvin recognized the reality of false faith. The notion that assurance was part of true faith was never intended to deny the possibility of false assurance. Some people have, Calvin wrote, a “vain confidence.”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{138} Calvin, \textit{Commentary}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 275-276.

\textsuperscript{139} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.2.16.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 3.2.12.
This false faith shows itself in a failure to live as a true child of God. Calvin’s rationale for this ungodly behavior in false converts is instructive: those who have false faith do not act as sons because they do not truly receive God’s love upon them. In Calvin’s words, they do not “reciprocate his love as sons, but behave like hirelings.”

Hirelings do not respond to God as their father precisely because they lack a familial relationship with him. The implication is that if they were truly sons, they would experience his love, and, therefore, they would also behave like his children. Responding rightly to God as his child does not create the familial bond, but it is good evidence of the bond being real.

The second qualification is that the reformer recognizes the reality of doubt in true believers. Faith can be weak yet still true and saving. Calvin admits, “Unbelief dies hard.” In everyone, Calvin says, “Faith is mixed with unbelief.” Thus, all believers experience some doubt, even if they truly believe.

With these two qualifications, we could summarize Calvin’s view of assurance as follows: nothing above and beyond faith is necessary for assurance (not a second blessing or second filling of the Spirit, etc.); however, believers doubt their salvation because their faith is weak. Therefore to grow in their assurance, they need to grow in their faith.

To say that faith includes assurance is not to say that every believer will feel secure at every moment. But it is to say nothing besides the increase of faith is necessary for true believers to gain some assurance.

Given the possibility of faith being false or weak, the goal of the spiritual life is to increase the strength and purity one’s faith. If believers could perceive the promises of God more clearly, their faith would grow, and this growth would, in turn, strengthen assurance. This is why Calvin never ceases to set forth Christ as the object of believers’ faith and why Calvin promotes the Word of God, prayer, which draw the believer toward Christ.

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141 Ibid., 3.2.12.
142 Ibid., 2.2.4.
143 Ibid., 2.2.4.
144 Lane, Justification by Faith, 40.
Now that we’ve seen the structure of faith, we can address how it relates to repentance. Repentance, for Calvin, is the actual putting to death of sin and making alive of one’s spiritual life in actual experience. “[Repentance is] a true conversion of our life to God, proceeding from a sincere and serious fear of God, and consisting in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit.”145 The two branches of true penitence are “[1] the mortification of the flesh, and [2] the vivification of the spirit.”146 This is “not accomplished in a moment, a day, or a year, but by uninterrupted, sometimes even by slow progress God abolishes the remains of carnal corruption in his elect.”147

Calvin also relates repentance to the structure of salvation. The reformer unequivocally states, “I interpret repentance as regeneration.”148 In other words, the life of regeneration/sanctification is the life of repentance.149 With this definition of repentance in mind, we can see why Calvin insists on ordering faith before repentance. The order stresses that mortification and vivification only occur for the person who is united to Christ by faith, and thereby benefits personally from Christ’s death and resurrection. To reverse the order—insisting on repentance before faith—is to call a person to put sin to death and live unto God apart from Christ. Such Pelagianism was not part of Calvin’s system.

But Calvin did not intend for the logical priority to exist only in the realm of the theoretical; he meant for it to be experienced. Calvin writes, “We mean to show that a man cannot apply himself seriously to repentance without knowing himself to belong to God.”150 As is clear in the context, faith is what allows one to know oneself as “belonging

145 Calvin, Institutes, 3.3.2.
146 Ibid., 3.3.5.
147 Ibid., 3.3.9.
149 We must remember that Calvin used the term regeneration in a way that later Reformed theology used sanctification.
150 Calvin, Institutes, 3.3.2.
to God.” As we saw this knowledge of oneself as a son is necessary to act as such. To put the matter differently, it is by faith that one knows there is in heaven “not a judge but a heavenly father.” And, therefore, by faith one acts toward God as father.

Without the promises of grace known by faith, Calvin sees that the soul has no choice but to recoil from God in rightful fear of punishment. Sinners cannot but hate the one from whom they know they will receive just wrath. Any work of repentance under the dread of punishment is “nothing but a sort of entryway of hell.” This pseudo-repentance, which Calvin calls “of the law,” leads only to death. Repentance according to the gospel, however, occurs when one is assured of God’s benevolent kindness toward one individually and moves toward God. For the believer in Christ, the awareness of sin does not promote feelings of dread, but she is “aroused and refreshed by trust in God’s mercy” and turns to the Lord in humble reliance upon his promise of grace.

**Conclusion**

Our aim in this section has been to highlight the Protestants’ struggle to affirm both the reality of grace and the need for good works in response to Catholicism. There are many similarities between Luther and Calvin. Both opposed the Roman Synergism, both affirmed the reality of union with Christ. And neither taught that progressive renewal was superfluous. However, they worked out their theologies differently. As we saw, McGrath is on the right track when he said that Luther grasped intuitively what Calvin analyzed systematically. That is, Luther’s pastoral ministry recognized a biblical balance between the reality of justification and need for progressive holiness, but is system did not. Calvin was able to codify balance in a more systematic way.

Herman Bavinck highlights the uniqueness of the Reformed approach to sanctification in contrast to Lutheranism. Bavinck explains that Luther’s focus on

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151 Ibid., 3.3.4
152 Ibid., 3.3.4
153 Ibid., 3.3.4
154 Johnson, "Luther and Calvin on Union with Christ," 62.
justification, seen through a strict law/gospel divisions, forced him to define repentance and contrition as a prelude to faith. Repentance was brought about the law only. Bavinck writes, “Two parts contrition and faith correspond...to the contrast between law and gospel.” 156 The results for sanctification were not good: “Somewhat loosely attached to these two parts, then, was a third part on ‘good works’ or the ‘new obedience’ with the comment: ‘Then must follow the good works that are the fruits of repentance.’” 157 This is not to say that Luther and his followers gave no exhortation to good works. They did. Nor is this to say that repentance for Luther is only prior to conversion. It was not. The old nature in Adam still remained and needed to be put to death. Moreover, the law even maintains a positive function in that it drives the believer back to Christ and back to the gospel again and again. But Bavinck’s point is simply that progressive renewal stands in awkward connection to Luther’s principal paradigm of justification as understood with a law/gospel hermeneutic. 158 Luther’s two-step approach terminated in justification, and, consequently, affords little explanation for how the inner-man righteousness manifests itself in the outer man.

Calvin, however, emphasized a different kind of repentance, “namely, that which proceeds from faith, is possible only in communion with Christ, continues throughout life, and consists in mortification and vivification, ‘both of which happen to us by participation in Christ.’” 159 Repentance for Calvin is an act of the believer in union with Christ. It assumes faith and the enabling power of the Spirit. On the basis of what Christ has already accomplished in his death and resurrection and what he shared with the believer vis-à-vis union, the believer, in the act of repentance, puts off the old and puts on the new. Faith and repentance become distinct and inseparable acts by the same logic that

157 Ibid., 3:526.
158 Concerning the third use of the law in Luther’s theology man presents convincing evidence that Luther approved of the law in this way, but then writes, “The third use of the law simply does not figure into this prescription [Law/gospel division] very neatly.” Mann, Shall We Sin?, 20.
159 Bavinck, Reformierte Dogmatik, 3:525–526.
justification and sanctification are distinct and inseparable realities, both being the fruit of union with Christ.

This order of faith before repentance allowed Calvin to stress the ethical function of repentance. This same ethical element would be problematic in Luther’s scheme. Because repentance was an act prior to faith and, therefore, prior to justification, any stress on the ethical aspect of repentance would undermine the gracious nature of justification. It would give way to a kind of synergism of which Melanchthon is sometimes accused. But Calvin’s structure allowed him to develop the ethical aspect of repentance without tension. Repentance was the substance of sanctification, which was a gift in union with Christ after faith. This opened the door to viewing the Christian life as a struggle and journey without—at least in principle—compromising the gracious and forensic nature of justification. Bavinck summarizes,

Faith cannot stop at forgiveness of sins but reaches out to the perfection that is in Christ, seeks to confirm itself from works as from its own fruit, girds itself with courage and power, not only to live in communion with Christ but also to fight under him as king against sin, the world, and the flesh, and to make all things serviceable to the honor of God’s name.

How this commitment to renewal was worked out in the tradition that bears Calvin’s name is the subject of our next section.

160 Ibid., 3:527.
161 Ibid., 3:528.
Chapter III:

Synchronic Context: the English Theological Landscape from Perkins to the Time of Walter Marshall

Introduction: the Goal and Nature of the Debate

We turn now to Marshall’s synchronic context. Our goal is to explain the rise of two competing theological systems known as Antinomianism and Neonomianism, which permeated Marshall’s theological context.\(^1\) Our method will be to interact with selected sources of Reformed Protestantism with reference to their theology of sanctification, and, in particular, to the role they assigned to works in salvation and their theology of union with Christ. This will inevitably draw into our discussion multiple concepts such as justification, sanctification, assurance, the extent of the atonement, and covenant theology, all of which are broad themes worthy of detailed treatment in their own right. The liability of our broad approach is that we must deal briefly, though hopefully not superficially, with these complex issues; however, this broad approach is necessary in view of the interrelated and interpenetrating nature Antinomian/Neonomian themes. The recent treatment on Puritan theology, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, illustrates this necessity. In their massive work, Jones and Beeke discuss Antinomianism and Neonomianism in nine different chapters, including the topics of worship, the relationship between the covenants, assurance, the law, and the gospel.\(^2\) Thus, we will fail to grasp the comprehensive nature of the Antinomian and Neonomian theologies if we restrict our study too narrowly to any specific theological locus.

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\(^1\) I am aware that the term “Neonomianism” was not coined until 1690, ten years after Marshall’s death. Thus, its use in this thesis to describe a theology prior to the 1690’s could be is anachronistic. However, when the term was coined, it describe Baxter’s theology as it existed largely unaltered from the 1640s, with the publication of *Aphorisms on Justification*, up through the 1690s. Therefore, while the term itself would not have been in Marshall’s context, the substance that the term denotes would have been known. Therefore, the term “Neonomian” is convenient shorthand for Baxter’s theology.

\(^2\) Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*.
Before moving forward it will be helpful to define the major theological movements we will deal with. Dewey Wallace recognizes three distinct positions that emerged as early as pre-civil war and continued through the seventeenth century. They are (1) those who went in a direction of increasing moralism: these were the Arminians, “legal teachers” as they were called, the later Neonomians, and possibly some Puritans who stressed sanctification as the principal means of assurance; (2) those who responded “with more extreme formulations of the place of grace,” i.e., the Antinomians; and (3) those who sought to retain the essence of Reformational theology.3

Successfully remaining in that third group without being swept into the other groups was difficult, indeed. There was a strong tendency to fight against one error by embracing the other, which combined with a significant degree of misunderstanding, effectively pulled the first two camps further apart.4 The more this polarizing tendency can be understood, the greater appreciation we will have for how Marshall opposed both legalism and Antinomianism by grounding sanctification in union with Christ.

It is also helpful at the outset to note that fracturing within the Reformed community was peculiarly acute in Britain. Richard Muller captures this well in his comparison between Coceius’ Summa doctrinae de foedere et testament dei (1648) and Edward Fisher’s Marrow of Modern Divinity (1645). The former was a synthesis of continental thought, whereas the latter was a demonstration of fractured English theology. Muller’s point is that the Continent did not suffer from the stress and strain between Antinomian and Neonomian positions, as did Britain. There is even the impressive work by the Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1696) to mediate the English positions.5 However, the three positions that comprise Fisher’s work—articulated by


4 See Cooper, Fear and Polemic, for a good explanation of these dynamics in seventeenth century England.

5 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). While Witsius is helpful for understanding the context of the Antinomian/Neonomian controversy, his book didn’t appear in print until sixteen years after Marshall’s death. He is primarily writing to address the third wave of Antinomians after the republication of Crisp’s sermons. This debate is more extreme than the controversy surrounding Marshall.
“antinomista,” “nomista,” and “evangelista”—were not straw men but real divergent camps.⁶

To best capture the theological context, we will proceed historically. We are interested not in simply defining the three positions but in showing how various intrinsic and extrinsic pressures were brought to bear upon the various theological systems, forcing reformulations and new syntheses to emerge.

Perkins

John Calvin was the “dominant force in theology”⁷ early in the Elizabethan church.⁸ Yet in the late 1500s his dominance in England gave way to Perkins, who emerged as the “father of Puritanism.”⁹ This Elizabethan theologian provides a fitting starting point to begin our discussion of Puritan theology.

Context

By the turn of the seventeenth century, several generations had passed since Luther awakened the church to the forensic notion of justification in Christ. There were now new problems to be tackled. Calvin and Luther, as we saw, was clear to write against libertine excess as having any legitimate connection to the doctrine of justification. But with the exception of isolated instances among liberal-minded Anabaptists, their discussion was mainly theoretical, aimed at refuting the Catholic characterization of

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⁷ Andrew Pettegree, "The Reception of Calvinism in Britain," in *Calvinus Sincioris Religionis Vindex: Calvin as the Protector of the Pure Religion*, ed. Brian Armstrong Wilhelm Neuser, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies (Kirkville, MS: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1997), 271. See also this author’s extensive analysis on the sale of Calvin’s *Institutes* compared to other Reformers.


Protestant theology as Antinomian and at Johann Agricola. However, by the seventeenth century, portions of society had taken the “libertine excess.” This led to a second stage in the development of evangelical spirituality, which was “to complete the Reformation through reforming our lives as well as our doctrines.”

Another pastoral “novelty,” as Packer calls it, was the question of unassured believers. Calvin articulated his doctrine of assurance in a context in which lack of assurance was normative because justification was always provisional prior to one’s death. Lack of assurance was not a pastoral crisis for Rome, but the normal experience of all the faithful. The “crisis” was Luther’s doctrine of assurance.

The Puritans faced a new dilemma. The Reformation posited not only that assurance was possible but also that it was normative. This created a problem for any person who was fully committed to the doctrine of justification by imputation on the basis of faith but who remained unsure whether he or she was truly justified. As Carl Trueman observes, assurance is only a pastoral concern once someone is told that they ought to have it. The Puritans were confronted “by a crop of ‘afflicted consciences,’ haunted by the fear of being found graceless and reprobate.” Here the problem was not disbelief in the gospel, as Calvin assumed lack of assurance must entail, but lack of confidence in one’s personal appropriation of the gospel. To what degree these two realities can be separated was a thorny question for Puritan pastors (And it remains to be

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10 As explained previously, the word “Antinomian” does not appear in Catholic writings, but the substance of the idea is clearly intended.


14 Trueman, Reformation, 101.

15 Trueman, Class notes; see also McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 285.

16 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 36.
a difficult question in assessing puritan theology). But at the very least, the Puritans faced
a challenge that could not be adjudicated by a creed or public profession alone.

It would, therefore, make sense that in this context we would see a disciplinary
approach emerge, which would (1) reassert the nature of godly devotion to counter
licentiousness and (2) provide a guide to distinguish true Christian experience from the
counterfeit as a help to assurance.\(^\text{17}\) Such is the theology of William Perkins.

**Perkins**

William Perkins was born in 1558, the year of Elizabeth’s coronation. Reckless
and licentious as a youth, he experienced conversion and spiritual renewal in his early
twenties, which set the trajectory for his life and ministry. Thomas Fuller suggests,
“Probably divine providence permitted him to run himself with the prodigal son out of
breath, that so he might be the better enabled experimentally to reprove others of their
vanity.”\(^\text{18}\)

The nature of this conversion helps explain the content of his preaching. Fuller
also suggests that having been saved out of licentiousness, Perkins was most in his
element when pleading with people for personal spiritual reformation.\(^\text{19}\) It is helpful to
contrast Luther and Perkins on this point. Luther, as a converted legalist, was most
comfortable confronting legalism and preaching the comfort of the gospel. But Perkins, a
reformed hedonist, preached best when calling people out of sin to live in honor of the
Savior.

The chief influencers of Perkins were Peter Ramus and Theodore Beza. These are
unlikely bedfellows given that Ramus’s teachings found no welcome in Beza’s Geneva.
Nevertheless, this synthesis wedded together scholastic and practical theology.\(^\text{20}\) The
chief aim of Perkins’s God-centered theology was to strengthen assurance in order to

\(^\text{17}\) For more on context as it relates to assurance for Perkins, see Joel Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 85–86.
promote practical piety. This is seen in Perkins’s definition of theology as “the science of living blessedly forever.”\textsuperscript{21} Yet as we will see, his theology suffered some strain.\textsuperscript{22}

Assessments of Perkins vary widely. John Fesko considers Perkins to be an example of normative seventeenth-century Reformed theology that had no central organizing principle but gave consistent priority to justification and was essentially consistent with Calvin.\textsuperscript{23} Theodore Bozeman, on the other hand, considers Perkins the chief populator of Greenham’s “Pietist turn” and responsible for the increasingly introspective and legalistic trajectory of English Puritanism.\textsuperscript{24} Jones and Beeke consider Perkins to be representative of mainstream Puritan theology.\textsuperscript{25} We will seek to explore Perkins’s theology concerning sanctification, with special attention to union with Christ. A good entry point for our study is Perkins’s understanding of assurance, which will lead us to sanctification.

Perkins on Assurance

With the goal of producing assurance, Perkins spends most of this effort helping people correlate their personal religious experience with God’s saving activity, by explicating the normative pattern of God’s work in the soul.\textsuperscript{26} He does this most clearly in his book \textit{The Golden Chaine}.\textsuperscript{27} Muller rightly explains this work as “demonstrate[ing] the possibility of assurance of election by coordinating the \textit{ordo salutis} with the inward questioning of the spiritual pilgrim and showing the order of causes, complete with doubts and temptations, which draw the believer toward his salvation.”\textsuperscript{28} Perkins’s

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  \item \textsuperscript{21} William Perkins, \textit{A Golden Chaine} (1591), A3.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Packer, \textit{Redemption and Restoration}, 352.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Fesko, “William Perkins on Union with Christ and Justification,” 22 and 33–34.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Bozeman, \textit{The Precisianist Strain}, 84.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Beeke and Jones, \textit{A Puritan Theology}.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Muller, “Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology. Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme,” 308–334.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Perkins, \textit{A Golden Chaine}.
  \item \textsuperscript{28}
\end{itemize}
theology had a two-prong goal: (1) to show the certainty of the links in the chain from election to glorification, which he did by vindicating his view of election over and against the opposing views of Lutheran, Pelagian, and semi-Pelagian,\textsuperscript{29} and (2) to describe the experiential nature of middle links (faith, sanctification, repentance, etc.).\textsuperscript{30} This promoted assurance because, as Shaw explains, “Anyone clutching the middle links—covenant of grace, justification by faith, and sanctification by the Spirit—can be assured of possessing the end links, (election and glorification).”\textsuperscript{31}

The warrant for these assumptions rested in the Reformed notion of covenant theology, which was a common theme among Puritan theologians. Thorough treatment of this subject is not within the purview of this thesis,\textsuperscript{32} but we should note that the idea of covenant as a unifying principle was present in Bullinger, and to some degree in Calvin, usually as a response to the Anabaptists.\textsuperscript{33} By the seventeenth century, the goal of covenant theology was to articulate a unified principle that accounted for both conditionality and unconditionality.\textsuperscript{34} The covenant theme developed out of recognition that the Sinai Covenant had much in common with the creation order and the moral law. It was, then, not a big step to look at the creation order in terms of a conditional covenant. Letham explains, “If the natural law of creation was one with the moral law of the

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Muller, “Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology. Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme,” 309.
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\textit{Ibid.}, 166.
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Lillback, \textit{The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology}, for discussion on Bullinger see pp. 81–109, and Calvin see 142 ff.
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Letham, ”The Foedus Operum: Some Factors Accounting for Its Development,” 462.
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Decalogue and if the latter was framed in a covenantal reference, then it should hardly be taken as a surprise if the creation order was also brought into the law-covenant mold.”

In some sense, this was similar to Luther’s recognition that grace presupposes law. But unlike in Luther’s theology, the law and gospel were not nearly as polarized. Under the single heading of the covenant, works and grace could function together in God’s overall dealings with humanity. Our present task is to understand the covenant in Perkins’ theology.

Perkins’s *The Golden Chaine* explains that the predestination activity of God issues in a monopleuric covenant between God and humanity in which the elect are guaranteed, because of God’s sovereign act of predestination, to inherit glory. But there is also a dipleuric aspect of the covenant that requires mutuality and voluntary interaction between God and man. Thus, the covenant is not simply unilateral but bilateral, which guarantees an experiential aspect to it. Perkins writes, “The seal and foundation of our salvation is this, that God accepts and knowes us for his, 2 Tim. 2:19, and that which concerns us is, that we must worship God in spirit and truth and depart from iniquitie.”

Because of the mutuality of the covenant, one could test oneself to see if one was in the covenant. Instructions for this test are provided in his work *How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God or No* (1592).

**Inconsistency in Faith and Works**

How well did Perkins achieve his goal of helping people discern their covenantal inclusion? The absolute connection between calling and glorification Perkins established

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35 Ibid. 462.
36 Perkins, “The Golden Chaine,” 27. For an explanation of this development, see Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly*. For an older but fascinating account see McGiffert, “Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism,” in *Jones and Beeke A Puritan Theology*, 125.
well. Thus, if there is any weakness, it is in how confide one could be that one possessed the so-called “middle links.”

Perkins was clear that faith is the marker for covenantal inclusion.40 “True faith” writes Perkins, “is both an unfallible assurance, and a particular assurance of the remission of sins, and of life everlasting.”41 Thus, the presence of faith should indicate covenantal inclusion. In one sense, assurance is part of the essence of faith. However, for Perkins, faith was not merely the passive reception of Christ but “[a] wonderful Grace of God by which a man doth apprehend and apply Christ and all his benefits unto himself.”42 The language of “apprehend and apply” makes faith not simply reception of a gift but a task believers must actively accomplish.

Other elements of Perkins’s doctrine of faith further weakened the connection between faith and assurance. Faith possessed five different degrees: (1) knowledge of the gospel; (2) hope of pardon, though not yet the assurance that there is actual pardon; (3) a thirsting after Christ; (4) a clinging to Christ for pardon; and (5) the persuasion that one is actually a beneficiary of the promises.43 Perkins believed that one is justified after the fourth stage;44 however, not until the fifth stage did one experience the fullness of God’s mercy in such a way that one knows one is justified.45 This level of “full assurance,” as he called it, was not entailed in initial faith but obtained only through a higher level of faith.46 This became known as reflexive faith. Only with this reflexive faith can one really have assurance.

44 Ibid., 1:229.
A critical question, then, is how do believers attain to this assurance. Perkins explains, “No Christian attains to this full assurance 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 man and has divers experiences of God’s love and favor towards him in Christ.”47 Thus a good conscience—i.e. a sanctified life—is necessary for full assurance. Perkins’s catechism teaches similarly:

Q: How may a man know that he is justified before God?
A: He need not ascend into heaven to search the secret council of God, but rather descend into his own heart to search whether he be sanctified or not (Romans 8:1; 2 John 3:9).48

In short, Perkins made sanctification the primary grounds for assurance of justification. Accurately discerning the presence of sanctification is of critical importance for Perkins because of the idea of “temporary faith.” Perkins was not the first to articulate this, as it was already present in Calvin.49 Yet he worked it out with more consistency and stronger emphasis. Following the methodology of Ramus, reprobates were divided into two categories: (1) those who received “a calling not effectual” and (2) those with “no calling.”50 Thus, Perkins has a category for some reprobate souls who, for a time at least, experienced “a yielding to God’s calling” but who were ultimately damned. This “calling non-effectual” included (1) the mind enlightened to understand the Word of God, (2) an acknowledgement of sin, (3) a feeling of God’s wrath accompanied by the awareness that one will escape such wrath if one repents, (4) a temporary faith by which one believes one is clinging to the promises of God, and finally (5) a tasting of the heavenly gifts of

48 Ibid., 1:159.
justification and sanctification and the virtues of the world to come. Yet in the end, the reprobate abandons the faith altogether.\textsuperscript{51}

The significant overlap in the experience of the elect and non-effectually called reprobate created an obvious problem for assurance. Perkins recognized this. In order to provide assurance, Perkins had to detect something in the experience of the elect that differentiated them from the non-elect who seem to travel along the same experiential road. For Perkins this was personal assurance. He writes,

I say they [=the non-effectually called reprobate] believe confusedly because he believeth that some shall be saved, but he believeth not that he himself particularly shall be saved, because he being content with a general faith doth never apply the promises of God to himself, neither do they so much as conceive any purpose, desire, or endeavor to apply the same, or any wrestling or striving against security, or carelessness of distrust.\textsuperscript{52}

Thus, for Perkins, the non-effectually called reprobate and elect shared much of the same experience regarding their response to the Word and Spirit, but the non-elect never believe with the same surety that the promises are actually for them. They would not have the same Spirit-wrought assurance that “I am a child of God.”

Difficulties begin to arise in this system. First of all, Given that the difference between those effectually called and non-effectually called lies in assurance, it would seem that Perkins had few resources to deal with the person who has strong confidence that he or she was regenerate yet fails to demonstrate convincing evidence. Perkins did not seem to have wrestled with the same question Goodwin did, namely, why the Pharisee was assured and not the publican?\textsuperscript{53}

The problem also turns up in the way Perkins gave comfort to struggling believers. To comfort the one who doubts his or her regeneration, Perkins stressed

\textsuperscript{51} Perkins, “A survey, or Table declaring the order of the causes of Salvation and Damnation, according to God’s world,” [Perkins ocular catechism] in Perkins, Works.

\textsuperscript{52} Perkins, \textit{A Golden Chaine}, 53:3.

\textsuperscript{53} Jonathan Master, “Anthony Burgess and the Westminster doctrine of Assurance,” 152.
repeatedly that “to will to be regenerate, is the effect and testimony of regeneration begun.”

However, given that the elect and reprobate did not differ in their will to believe, but only the assurance of their belief, it would seem to be insufficient grounds to comfort the person weak in faith. The non-elect, too, could also have a “will to believe.” This puts the believer in an inescapable bind.

### Tension in Perkins’s Theology of Assurance and Sanctification

We said that sanctification is necessary for assurance. This raises the question, what is necessary for sanctification? Perkins answers:

> For we must consent to the word of God, resisting all doubt and diffidence, and afterward will and experience the feeling of comfort follow. They therefore do very ill who are still in doubt of their salvation, because as yet they feel not in themselves especial motions of God’s spirit.

Echoes of Calvin can be heard here. For Perkins, the knowledge of one being a child of God was necessary for responding as such, including the responses of holiness and love. Thus, the grace of assurance was never meant merely for the comfort of believers, but for greater holiness.

The idea that assurance has a causal priority over sanctification is consistent with Calvin’s logical sequencing of faith and repentance. In *The Golden Chaine* Perkins also sees that faith and assurance as the means of sanctification. He writes, “No man can earnestly repent, except he denying himself, doe hate sin, even from his heart, and imbrace righteousness. This no man either will or can performe, but such an one, as in the sight of God regenerated and iustified, and indued with true faith.”

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It is at this point that the tension in his theology emerges most sharply, for it appears that Perkins maintains that (1) assurance of faith is dependent upon sanctification and that (2) sanctification is dependent upon faith. This tension could be stated with slight overemphasis this way: “The way to act as a child of God is to be assured that one is a child of God, but the way to be assured that one is a child of God is to act as a child of God.”

The tension in this point is not unique to Perkins, but there is a unique emphasis on this tension. This comes from Perkins’s focus on the human soul as the location of God’s salvific activity. As Beeke and Jones note, while Perkins was the same in substance as Calvin and the Reformers, “Perkins emphasized salvation more than the primacy of God and his grace….“57 That is, Perkins gave more attention to the subjective effect of salvation that the objective revelation of grace. Also, Perkins’s sustained attention to temporary faith created the need to seek greater confidence that one was a true believer.

Perkins sought to reconcile these difficulties in his ecclesiology. The assumption that there would be non-elect who infiltrated the church notwithstanding, it was the duty of those inside the church to render a charitable judgment concerning church members’ covenantal inclusion. “The ministers of God, not knowing his secret counsel, in charitie think al to be elect.”58 This charity could extend to oneself. 59 Moore writes concerning Perkins, “So all church members are to work out their own salvation in fear and trembling as Christians and not in order that they might become Christians. They work out their salvation from within the covenant, not in order to enter it.”60 Yet it is not clear how this was to be reconciled with the notion of temporary faith. How does one recognize the believing status of all church members, while also warning them that their faith may only be temporary?

57 Beeke and Jones, A Puritan Theology, 599.
60 Jonathan D Moore, English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 53.
Perkins and Union with Christ

Calvin attempted to resolve some of the tension in his doctrine of union with Christ. Will this also work for Perkins? To answer this, we must examine the role Perkins assigns to union with Christ and how it relates to his *ordo salutis*. Perkins went to great length to show how Christ is the center of this covenant. His chart published in his work *The Golden Chaine* differs from Beza’s in that Perkins’s puts Christ at the center. Muller writes, “The central issue of Perkins’ soteriology is God’s grace as it is mediated in Christ.” Perkins was aware of tendencies in supralapsarian theology to subordinate Christ to the decree: that is, if predestination occurs logically before God’s free decision to ordain the fall, then it is difficult to see how this predestination is in Christ. Perkins sought to overcome this difficulty with a robust view of the Eternal Son’s role in the *ab extra* works of God. In other words, Perkins stressed the Eternal Son as the focus of election, even though his mediatorial role as God-man was not the focus *per se*.

Perkins’s emphasis on Christology is also evident in his doctrine of union with Christ, which he develops in his later works, most notably in *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (1595) and his *Commentary on Galatians* (1604). Perkins writes, “The bond of this conjunction is one and the same Spirit descending from Christ the head to all his members creating also in them the instrument of faith whereby they apprehend Christ and make him their own.” Perkins also argues that this union is based on the hypostatic union: humanity can be joined to Christ because Christ has joined himself to human nature. Moreover, in clear connection to Calvin, Perkins argues that this union is the basis for justification. Only in Christ does righteousness belong to

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believers. He also argues, much in the vein of Calvin, that union is the basis for sanctification. Indeed, in his work *An exposition of the Symbole or Creede of the Apostles*, Perkins is roughly identical to Calvin, yet in a more scholastic style. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that Perkins does place significant emphasis on union with Christ.

However, for our purposes, we must probe further and ask, how does this theology of union relate to the strong emphasis on *ordo salutis*, especially the order of assurance and sanctification? This has been the subject of a recent work by John Fesko entitled, “William Perkins on Union with Christ and Justification.” Fesko argues that Perkins is typical of his time for not using a central organizing principle. Thus, Perkins employed both *Ordo Salutis* and union with Christ in such a way that they are not brought together under the same organizing principle, yet according to Fesko, they are ultimately consistent. Fesko believes that the emphasis on *Ordo Salutis* in *The Golden Chaine* should be understood in light of the theology of union. According to Fesko, “When Perkins discusses the *ordo salutis* he is ultimately talking about union with Christ.” But if this were true, why would there be no significant use of union with Christ in the discussions of faith, assurance, and sanctification? Moreover, why isn’t the emphasis on union with Christ incorporated into his doctrine of assurance? Perhaps in the four years between *The Golden Chaine* (1591) and *An exposition of the Symbole or Creede of the Apostles* (1595), Perkins matured in his understanding of union with Christ and would have revised his previous work.

By way of comparison, Calvin put much more emphasis on union with Christ at the point of sanctification and assurance. Letham summarizes Calvin’s theology as follows: “…the basis of assurance is in Christ, in whom we are elected and in whom all

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65 Ibid., 393.
66 Ibid., 393.
68 Ibid., 22.
69 Ibid., 30
God’s promises have their fulfillment.” This allows a strong understanding of the Trinity acting in Christ, according to Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, as the primary ground for assurance. For Calvin, sanctification is part of bolstering a believer’s assurance, yet the essence of faith itself entails some sense of assurance, even in its beginning steps, because through faith Christ is brought to the believer and the believer is brought to Christ. Union with Christ highlighted the instrumental function of faith. Faith brought one into Christ and the one in Christ could never be cast out.

Perhaps the tensions in Perkins’ theology are partially explained by his supralapsarianism. If election is determined without immediate reference to God’s decree for the fall or redemption in Christ, then salvation is, in some sense at least, abstracted from the history of redemption. To clarify, the problematic elements are not simply the assumption in supralapsarianism that election is prior to one’s belief that creates this tendency (that commitment is part of the whole Augustinian tradition), but it is the commitment to the decree of election prior to and apart from God’s decision for the fall and the mediatorial work of the God-man. In the supralapsarian system, the elect do not receive election in view of their need for redemption, nor in view of Christ being the perfect mediator. Unlike infralapsarianism, which sees all of salvation as having immediate reference to depravity and the incarnated and resurrected Mediator, the high Calvinist view has partitioned election from redemption. Perkins’s strong emphasis on the Eternal Son in election notwithstanding, his election is by definition not Christocentric: it may be “in the Son,” but it is not “in Christ.” Thus, the Christ in whom believers are elected is not Christ in the flesh, in whom the believer also has redemption, justification, and sanctification. This subordination of Christ to the decree, Letham argues, “takes the decisive moment out of time.” In other words, the weight of emphasis moves from the work of Christ in his death and resurrection in history, in which the

70 Letham, “Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort,” 1:141.
71 Ibid., 1:133.
72 Ibid., 1:286.
whole of the believer’s salvation—including election—is considered in Christ, to the electing and predestinating activity of God without consideration of history.

The removal of the decisive movement from history has significant implications for justification. The historic element of justification as a point in time is de-emphasized. The Pauline understanding of peace with God through justification (as taught in passages like Romans 5:1), which is so important to Luther and Calvin, is comparatively sparse in the work of Perkins. Ian Breward explains, “Instead of it [justification] being regarded as the description of the Christian life, justification increasingly became interpreted as some part of the eternal drama of redemption.” This criticism appears to be issued from Lutheran perspective. Calvin, as we saw, was more apt to describe the Christian life as “union with Christ.” Nevertheless, when the drama of redemption takes place in the eternal counsels, the transitional aspect of justification (the movement from wrath to grace) is diminished.

It is also worth noting that even when Perkins employs the concept of union with Christ, he views faith primarily as a result of union, not the cause of it. As quoted above, Perkins says that the union by the Spirit works in “creating also in them the instrument of faith.” Other Reformed theologians wouldn’t have denied this causative role of union because of the sense of union that occurs in election. (Marshall, as we will see, affirms this too.) But they would have also seen that the faith-wrought union occasions the transition from wrath to grace in history. In other words, they would have emphasized that salvation is by faith. Without this decisive moment occurring in time, the believer is less able to see his or her faith as having an instrumental and even causative function, and therefore, the believer views his or her faith as less of a decisive marker of covenantal inclusion. Assurance is gained by finding correspondence between the heart and life of the believer and the normative operations of the Spirit on the road to glorification. Faith becomes one of many virtues. Now, to be clear, it’s not that Perkins denies salvation by faith, or even that this faith carries some level of assurance, but the theological structure

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74 Perkins, An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles, 391.
75 Calvin, Commentary Eph 1:4.
in which union always causes faith disallows an emphasis on the instrumentality of faith at a structural level.

In summary, we have seen various tensions emerge in Perkins’s theology. Tension ought not to be surprising. Perkins applied Reformed theology in a new context and wrestled with novel issues. However, it is worth noting that though Perkins replicates older Reformed theology very closely when he is talking about union with Christ, we do not see this theology of union emerge as pastorally helpful in addressing the issues of sanctification and assurance. This leads us to the tentative conclusion that Perkins’s theology diminishes the role for union with Christ, which is related to his tension regarding faith and works in salvation. But we must not overstate our claims. Perkins was part of the Reformed tradition. He believed strongly in forensic justification and that assurance was possible. Also, like Calvin, Perkins sees faith prior to repentance, and his definition of faith is not far off the mark of Calvin’s.

The Rise of Arminianism

It is difficult to overstate the significance of Arminianism in English life, both theologically and politically. It is one of the major causes of the English Civil War, and it became a fiercely debated point in religion itself. The focus of English Arminians was distinct from their Dutch counterparts. But to understand English Arminianism, we must see it in its broader continental context.

Origins of Arminianism

Arminianism takes its name from Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), a Dutch theological professor at Leyden University. Though originally trained in Geneva under Beza, he underwent a theological transformation and came to disagree with his teacher. Arminius perceived Beza as having drifted away from Calvin’s foundation due to his emphasis on supralapsarianism. To what degree Beza differs from Calvin is a subject of considerable debate but one we will not get into here. Arminius raised questions concerning God’s decisive role in predestination and concerning the certainty that true believers could not fall away. But he primarily questioned; rarely did he supply answers. One year after

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Arminius’s death, his followers, led by Episcopius, put forth the *Arminian Articles of the Remonstrance*. These are summarized as follows:

1. God has determined to save those who have faith in Christ and persevere to the end.
2. Christ died for all people, yet no one obtains the benefits of Christ’s death without believing in him.
3. Humans have no saving grace in themselves, being in a state of rebellion against God. They are, therefore, in need of God’s grace for salvation.
4. Every good work of humans is ascribed only to the grace of God. Yet this grace can be resisted.
5. All those who are true believers have power to withstand temptation and corruption. However, whether or not they can fall away is a matter that must be examined in Scripture.\(^{77}\)

These points differ from the Reformed position by positing a strong role for the human will in salvation. Arminius and his followers saw God’s grace as non-particular, indiscriminately applied to all.\(^{78}\) Those who participate in Christ are those who God has seen will believe, and, on the basis of their foreseen faith, they were predestined to eternal life. Arminians also taught that grace could be resisted and true believers could fall out of a state of grace. A major goal both for Arminius and his followers was to remove God’s activity and intentionality as a factor in determining who is—and is not—saved. His motivation, similar to that of Baxter, as we will see, was largely that God would not be the author of evil.\(^{79}\)

\(^{77}\) Richard Muller, *God Creation, and Providence in the thought of Jacob Arminius*, 10.


Recent scholarship has stressed that Arminian theology is not simply a Reformed theology that changed one aspect, namely, predestination. Rather Arminian deviation from the Reformed tradition is traced back to its views of God and creation.\textsuperscript{80} Richard Muller demonstrated that just as Calvin’s theology cannot be reduced to a “central dogma,” neither can the anti-Calvinists’.\textsuperscript{81} It is significant that Arminiuss’s first conflict with the Genevan school concerned Christological subordination.\textsuperscript{82} Our interests in Arminius concern the implications of his theology for union with Christ and sanctification.

John Fesko points out that much of Arminius’s language for justification, sanctification, and union with Christ is ostensibly similar to that of other Reformed thinkers.\textsuperscript{83} Arminius defined union with Christ as “that conjunction, by which believers, being immediately connected, by God the Father and Jesus Christ through the Spirit of Christ…become one with him and the Father, and are made partakers of his blessings to their own.”\textsuperscript{84} The emphasis upon benefits obtained in union with Christ is identical with many in the Reformed tradition. The effect of this union is also consistent:

\begin{quote}
The Spiritual benefits, which believers enjoy…from their union with Christ through communication with his death and life, may be properly referred to that of Justification, and of sanctification, … in which God promises that he will pardon sins, and will write his laws on the hearts of believers, who have entered covenant with him.\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{80} Stanglin and McCall, \textit{Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace}, 18.
\textsuperscript{81} Muller, \textit{Arminius}, 280–281.
\textsuperscript{83} Fesko, \textit{Beyond Calvin} 274.
\textsuperscript{84} Arminius, \textit{Works}, 2:402 (Disp. Priv., 397), Taken from Fesko, \textit{Beyond Calvin}, 275.
\end{flushright}
Thus, justification and sanctification are the *duplex gratia* of salvation in union with Christ.

However, significant discontinuity with Reformed theology emerges when we consider the nature of justification and of sanctification. Justification properly speaking includes imputed righteousness, yet in a move that Fesko calls “unprecedented” in the Protestant tradition, Arminius described justification as a process that required continual imputation.\(^86\) In other words, to be justified is to be pardoned *for the moment*. This pardon has no bearing on future state. Thus, faith becomes, in some sense, meritorious because the presence of faith keeps the believer in the state of justification. The absence of faith even for a moment entails the absence of justification. Arminius infers that had King David died before he repented of his sin of adultery and murder, he would have been condemned to eternal death.\(^87\) Justification is thus a judgment that is not final until the end. Arminius writes:

> But the end and completion of justification will be near the close of life, when God will grant, to those who end their days in the faith of Christ, to find his mercy absolving them from all the sins which they had been perpetrated through the whole of their lives. The declaration and manifestation of justification will be in the future general judgment.\(^88\)

Sanctification is also significantly different. Arminius ordered repentance antecedent to faith. We must recall that for Calvin and Perkins faith was prior to repentance, and repentance was the mortification and vivification by the work of the Spirit in union with Christ. This order was established, in part, because of the reformed notion of depravity. It secured the priority of grace in that the believer could not repent apart from union with Christ. As Todd Billings aptly shows, Reformed theology has

\(^86\) Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*, 277.

\(^87\) Arminius, *Works*, 2.725 (Epistola ad Hypolytum a Collibus, 961), taken from Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*, 279.

historically understood that deadness apart from Christ is the counterpart to being alive in Christ, making union with Christ the necessary answer to total depravity.\textsuperscript{89} Arminius, however, reversed the order, putting repentance before faith. Repentance was by the aid of the Spirit,\textsuperscript{90} but this aid was not a monergistic activity of God. Rather, it was something akin to prevenient grace, which could be resisted.\textsuperscript{91} Therefore, repentance, which Arminius also understood as mortification and vivification, was conceived of apart from union with Christ. Thus, the whole of sanctification was apart from Christ.

In summary, significant synergism emerges in the work of Arminius. Justification is not the legal declaration based solely upon the righteousness of Christ, and sanctification is not entirely in Christ. Though Arminius used Reformed language in his doctrinal definitions, the outworking of those doctrines brings him closer to the medieval and Tridentine schemes in which union with Christ was the end goal after the process of justification was complete.

**English Arminianism**

While broadly similar to its Dutch counterpart, English Arminianism followed a distinct theological trajectory, which became intertwined with politics and ecclesiology. Its appeal was not its theodicy but its ability to mediate between Reformed theology and Rome. Indeed, just at the point when Arminianism received a decisive blow at the Synod of Dort (1618), it began to rise to prominence in the English court and subsequently in the English churches. It was this distinctively English brand of Arminianism against which the Antinomians, Neonomians, and Puritans reacted. As we will see, it was so prominent in England that one could not ignore it. With its promotion by Charles I and William Laud, religion rose to a state of popularity in conversations that it hadn’t seen since the time of Queen Mary.

\textsuperscript{89} Billings, \textit{Union with Christ}, 36.


\textsuperscript{91} Arminius, \textit{Works}, 2.53 (\textit{oration}, 177). Cited from Fesko, \textit{Beyond Calvin} 274.
John Owen notes, “Arminianism became backed with the powerful arguments of praise and preferment, and quickly prevailed to beat poor naked truth into a corner.”

Owen writes this in 1642 to explain the cause of the civil war. The English Puritans, including many in Parliament, viewed Arminianism as a Trojan horse, the likes of the Gunpowder Plot and the Spanish Armada, threatening to destroy the fabric of English life and society. It is no wonder that its imposition resulted in fierce reactions that led to war.

Prior to the rise of Arminianism, England was decidedly Protestant and, with few exceptions in academia, solidly Reformed. As Tyacke observes, women and servants were able to recognize true predestination doctrine. Calvinism was “intuitively indubitable.” The immensely popular Geneva Bible included a catechism that stressed predestination. It would be a mistake to think Calvinism resided only in the Puritan strain. Indeed, it was the warp and woof of most English Christians, enforced by the archbishops of Canterbury and York and supported by King James, who personally sent delegates to the Synod of Dort and printed the Canons in English. Michael Lawrence helpfully summarizes recent scholarship by Collinson, Lake, Tyacke, and Milton when he points out that the radicals of early Stuart England were not the Calvinists, or even the Puritans, but those who tried to “overthrow the Calvinist consensus and to establish a church of a different character.”

The preference for Arminianism over Calvinism that emerged in some circles had less to do with the theory of divine decrees than what was expedient for the Crown. Arminianism shortened the distance between the English church and Rome. The “high church” Arminianism, with a strong emphasis on the sacraments as efficacious acts, made

92 John Owen, A Display of Arminianism, 8.


94 Ibid., 28.

95 Ibid., 2.

church services feel more Catholic.\textsuperscript{97} In addition, the Arminians’ view of faith as meritorious in the act of justification was closer to Rome’s theology.\textsuperscript{98}

The English Arminians, beginning with Richard Thomson, argued that “the universal efficacy of baptism invalidated the idea of an absolute predestination decree.”\textsuperscript{99} Jacob Arminius spoke little of the sacraments, whereas in England the high church character and efficacy of the sacraments were the main thrust. Tyacke summarizes the character of English Arminianism as follows:

Against the incipient egalitarianism of Calvinism, Arminians stressed the hierarchical nature of both church and state in which the office not the holder was what counted. This difference of emphasis probably predisposed hereditary rulers to look benevolently on anti-Calvinists. Some such calculations may have informed the decision of Charles I to support the English Arminian movement, on becoming King in 1625. At the same time Arminians claimed to purvey a gospel of hope, in which salvation was the potential lot of everyone. But the English Arminian mode, as it emerged during the 1630s, was that of communal and ritualized worship rather than an individual response to preaching or Bible reading.\textsuperscript{100}

The implications of English Arminian theology for sanctification are relatively straightforward. The lack of original guilt and the reality of prevenient grace diminished the need for God’s sovereign grace prior to human response. If humans responded to God’s grace, they could grow in their moral efforts and advance in godliness and devotion. Thus, God’s role in sanctification was not regenerating people and making them “alive in Christ” but rather “moral suasion”; God influenced the heart to draw the sinner to repentance and faith. Cheul Hee Lee writes,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{97}Trueman, \textit{John Owen}, 27.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{98}Ibid., 27.
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\textsuperscript{99}Tyacke, \textit{Anti-Calvinists}, 36.
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\textsuperscript{100}Ibid., 246.
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The leading peculiarity of Arminianism with respect to the doctrine of sanctification lies in their teaching that God granted the moral and spiritual ability, not only to those who actually believe and are converted but also to those who are still unregenerate and unconverted. If this natural ability is rightly used in accordance with right reason, and the life of holiness is sought after in proportion to the measure of strength granted to any man, it would be sufficient to constitute moral goodness and virtue to secure a greater measure of divine grace.\footnote{Cheu Hee Lee, “Sanctification by Faith,” 35}

Arminianism turned sanctification into a moralistic endeavor in which humans were able to respond to God’s grace and earn acceptance before him. As we will see, Marshall saw this as a serious error, for it led one to transform the old man rather than seek a new nature in Christ.\footnote{Marshall, Gospel Mystery 27 (2.2.4).}

**Antinomianism**

On the side opposite of Arminianism is the theological tradition known as Antinomianism. Whereas Arminian theology held to a high view of the human volition to the point of a \textit{de facto} de-emphasis of grace and the gospel, Antinomianism emphasized grace and the gospel to the point that there was de-emphasis of the human need to walk in holiness and follow the law. We will now attempt to tell the story of Antinomian theology, with particular attention to the role of works and union with Christ.

**Historical Background**

The brand of Antinomianism that developed in England in the middle of the seventeenth century was not monolithic. There were never any explicitly “Antinomian” churches or movements. This lack of ecclesiological identity was due, in part, to the movement’s “uncompromising attitude [of] intense individualism”\footnote{But even more}
because they never intended to establish a church but to reform it. They wanted to call churches in England back to Reformational principles, especially to the freeness of the gospel revealed in Christ. Thus, Antinomianism was to Puritanism what Puritanism was to the established church. Como rightly points out that the Antinomians presented themselves as the true bearers of the Reformation heritage, and more “puritan” than the Puritans. The Antinomians, like the Puritans in general, saw themselves as Reformers within a movement.

Like the Puritans, the Antinomians met resistance at every turn. Similar to the term “Puritan,” the label “Antinomian” was seldom self-given. Collinson’s comment on the nature of Puritanism as “not a thing definable in itself, but only one half of a stressful relationship,” is perhaps more true of Antinomianism. Antinomians were given this pejorative title as they were perceived to be promoting a theology that encouraged a libertine lifestyle and failed to embrace precise obedience to God. This label was applied liberally and, as Como says, “sloppily.” Some Puritans, such as Rutherford, made no distinction whatsoever between those who leaned in that direction and those who were far more solidly espousing Antinomian theology. As a result, defining Antinomianism is difficult both historically and theologically.

Antinomian ideas began circulating in the English-speaking world in beginning of the seventeenth century, and they intensified in three distinct waves. The first is the most popular and well-studied Antinomian controversy involving Ann Hutchinson in the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1636 to 1638. The controversy surrounded the application of John Cotton’s theology. This New World debate is not in our purview.

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Ibid., 211.


Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 33

According to Como, there is “no coherent definition of antinomianism.” Ibid., 25.
because in the early seventeenth century the direction of theological influence was from the motherland to the colonies.

The second wave began in the 1640s amid the anxiety of the civil war and ended around the Restoration. Until the second wave began, Antinomianism in England was confined mostly to London, the home of various sects. But after the 1640s and especially with the victory of the New Model Army, which incubated many of the Antinomian views, Antinomians were, as Huehns emphatically stresses, “not just another sect”; they had a profound effect on English theology, culture, and politics. The Antinomians of this time include John Eaton (1575–1641), Tobias Crisp (1600–1642), and John Saltmarsh (d 1647). The other side of the “stressful relationship” included the likes of Anthony Burgess, Rutherford, the Westminster Assembly, and, of course, Richard Baxter. Although Marshall wrote after this time, it is this wave that he addressed because it initially spurred a reaction that eventually became known as Neonomianism.

The third wave came in the very late seventeenth century with the 1690 reprinting of Tobias Crisp’s sermons, Christ Alone Exalted. The aged Richard Baxter entered the debate with vigor. Marshall’s work had relevance for this third wave, as we will see. But the wave itself had no influence on Marshall because he died a decade before it began.

**Antinomian Soteriology**

The starting point in most of the Antinomian works is the free grace of Christ in justification and the necessary implications for the Christian life. They paid particular attention to Paul’s statement to the Galatians that there is “no other gospel” (Gal 1:6). John Task titles his book, *The true Gospel vindicated from the reproach of A New Gospel*. The subtitle of this work states that only the true gospel will promote “the comfort of sad souls” and the “assurance of faith.” Task’s goal was to exposit this

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110 Ibid., 69–84.


112 Ibid., 2.
“true Gospel.” In a similar vein, John Eaton leads off his *Honey-Combe* with the idea that only the true gospel will promote the authentic life in Christ, which includes holiness: “The joyfull faith which sanctifies us, and makes us to doe the duties of our vocations faithfully, and to work to the glory of God in the spiritual meaning of all God’s tenne commandments zealously.”\(^{113}\) His rationale was that since sin had utterly destroyed a person’s relationship with God, nothing other than the work of Christ could restore it.

Indeed, the doctrine of depravity is alive and well in Antinomian theology, and the Antinomians stressed that the solution to depravity was found in the Christ’s finished work, not in oneself. A clear example of this is Crisp, a former Arminian with a “self-righteousness and legal spirit,”\(^{114}\) who sought to go in the complete opposite direction toward Antinomianism. In his *Christ Alone Exalted*, he explains from Philippians 3 that building on the foundation of one’s own righteousness is building upon dung. Indeed, the Antinomians understood their cause to be one of promoting true holiness, and they thought that emphasizing free grace was the best way to do this.\(^{115}\)

Another Englishman who reacted against the majority was John Eaton, vicar of Wickham Market, Suffolk, whose book *the Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* (1642) set the trajectory for antinomian theology. He notes that it is possible for one to think that one stands upon the true gospel but be mistaken.\(^{116}\) This situation would necessitate a legalizing tendency, as one would have nothing but flesh on which to depend to obey the law. Eaton sees several unnamed Puritan pastors falling into this category, which is why he feels he must explain the beauty and glory of free justification. The Antinomians do not act surprised at the backlash against their teaching because they assume that anyone standing up for the true gospel will be attacked. They view this assault in continuity with the Apostle Paul’s conflict with the Judaizers.\(^{117}\)


\(^{115}\) Eaton, *The Honey-Combe*, 5.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 12, 44.

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 8, 44.
So far in our story, the Antinomians are basically consistent with the Reformed in content, though not always in emphasis. The precision with which Eaton and Crisp identify the efficacy of the gospel for sanctification and redemption would resonate not only with Luther but also with Calvin. Indeed, the first chapter of Eaton’s *Honey-Combe*, as well as the introduction to most Antinomian works, seems to be affirming nothing more than that “justification is the main hinge on which religion turns.”\(^{118}\) If all we had were the beginnings of the Antinomian literature, there would probably be no “stressful relationship.”

However, the Antinomians developed the implications of the free grace of Christ in directions uncharted by the Reformed and Lutheran theologies. As Eaton’s work progresses, he contends that salvation through union with Christ entails the believer’s freedom from sin, not only in the believer’s forensic standing before God, but also in the believer’s nature. This perfected state of the believer is what affords the believer immediate access to God. Eaton argues that nothing short of this kind of freedom from sin could be what Scripture considers salvation.\(^{119}\)

To make this argument, Eaton first claims that God sees believers as perfectly righteous. “When by making them perfectly holy and righteous from all spot of these and all other sins before himself, he hath utterly abolished them out of his own sight.”\(^{120}\) Eaton makes a distinction between sins being covered—in which case God knows the sins but does not count them against the believer—and sins being abolished. He says that for believers the latter condition is true: “The blood of Christ doth not only cover them, but utterly abolishes them.”\(^{121}\) Eaton also maintains that holding to this position is essential to salvation: “Whoever…have not confidence…that our sins are so taken away by the blood of Christ that God doth not see our sins in us, without doubt they are damned.”\(^{122}\) Such lack of confidence, he says, would rob the blood of Christ of its glory

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118 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.1.
120 Ibid., 48.
121 Ibid., 37.
122 Ibid., 39.
as the wedding garment of believers. Eaton was aware that even though sins are blotted out of God’s sight, they are not out of the believer’s life. Our sin, admits Eaton, “we feel daily dwelling in us.” Eaton recognizes the conundrum of humans knowing what God does not know and what this implies for God’s (lack of) omniscience. However, Eaton counters this argument with the omnipotence of God. He says that it is “absurd and foolish to think” that it would be “weakness in God not to see that which we see.” In other words, if God determined not to see sin in the believer, then the omnipotence of God requires that he not see sin in believers.

The assumption driving this conclusion is that God cannot be in a relationship with those who he sees as sinners. The Antinomians are in full agreement with the Reformers on the holiness of God, the sinfulness of humans, and the impossibility of sinners to come into the presence of God. Indeed, this seems to be their theological starting point. But, unlike Calvin and Luther, they conclude that salvation necessarily involves sinless perfection in God’s sight in every sense. This view of believers as sinless must be taken as actual.

The necessity of this logic gripped the Antinomians, as seen in the title of Nicholas Cowing’s short and penetrating work, *The saints perfect in this life or never*. As the title indicates, one cannot be saved unless there is perfection in this life. He writes

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123 Ibid., 39.
126 Ibid., 61.
127 Ibid., 61.
128 Ibid., 163.
that “There shall no more of a saint rise to immortality after death, then is perfect righteousness in this life.”\textsuperscript{129} This perfection is not demanded in history but is taken as the conclusion from salvation in Christ. As Huehns argues, the Antinomians were committed to a strong rationalism and tolerated little mystery. Cooper writes, “There was no half measures; a person was either completely holy or completely sinful.”\textsuperscript{130} Their logic was that if God has gotten rid of the believer’s sin, then it was gone indeed. There was no eschatological reality invading the present. Rather, as Denne put it, “What [Christ’s blood] did, it did it once, and what it hath not done, it will never do.”\textsuperscript{131}

Antinomians saw the work of Christ applied in the matrix of union with Christ—and this too did not escape significant alteration by the Antinomian pen. Campbell correctly notes that in contrast to the Reformers’ emphasis on the person of Christ as the basis of union, the Antinomians viewed this union as simply the human merging with the divine, diminishing the physicality of both Christ and the believer.\textsuperscript{132} In this respect, the antinomians were very much unlike Luther. William Dell, a chaplain in Cromwell’s army, explains union with Christ as “God’s nature dwelling in ours.”\textsuperscript{133} Eaton affirms the human nature of Christ, but he sees union with Christ consisting of ontological union based on the spiritual nature of both God and humanity.\textsuperscript{134} This union was “spiritual” in the sense of being mystical, not as pertaining to the third person of the Trinity. Indeed, the Antinomians removed union with Christ from the context of salvation-history and put it in a context of ontology. This union was also not “by faith,” in the sense of faith as an instrument for union; rather, like Perkins, faith was the fruit of union.\textsuperscript{135}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{129} N. Couling, \textit{The Saints Perfect in This Life or Never} (London: 1647), 16.
\bibitem{130} Cooper, \textit{Fear and Anxiety}, 23.
\bibitem{131} Hen Denne, \textit{The Man of Sin Discovered: Whom the Lord Shall Destroy with the Brightness of His Coming. The Root and Foundation of the Antichrist Laid Open in Doctrine} (London: 1645), 32.
\bibitem{132} Campbell, 72.
\bibitem{133} William Dell, \textit{Right Reformation} (London R. White, 1664) 9.
\bibitem{134} Eaton, \textit{The Honey-Combe}, 430.
\bibitem{135} Tobias Crisp, \textit{Christ Alone Exalted} (London: 1644), 597.
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To understand their doctrine of union more fully, we must grasp how the compressed salvation history affected the nature of justification. Unfortunately, most scholarship on the Antinomians has assumed a Reformational, especially Lutheran, view of justification in Antinomian theology (such as the works of Bozeman and Como); however, closer observation reveals that this was not the case. Cheul Hee Lee recognizes the antinomians’ confusion of justification and sanctification when he states that “Antinomians leave a logical implication that a believer is sinless and perfect not only in a forensic sense but in an ontological sense.”136 One could even go further and say that this was not just an implication, but an outright assertion. For Eaton, justification was not a forensic declaration of righteousness concerning the believer’s legal status but a transformative act. The Antinomians recognized no significant theological difference between guilt and sin; they “are but two words expressing the same thing.”137 Therefore, a distinction between being free from the penalty of sin (guilt) but not yet free from the presence and power of sin had no place in their theology. Eaton continually says that in justification the believer is “made righteous.”138 Justification is the act of God in which he “truly and in very realnesse makes us just and righteous.”139 He even makes something of a distinction between forensic declaration and a real change, and he calls justification the latter.140 Campbell explains rightly that for Crisp forensic justification was “make-believe,”141 which sounds surprisingly similar to Rome’s charge against Luther’s imputed righteousness as being a “legal fiction.” Crisp also says, “What is faulty is not innocent and what is innocent is not faulty,”142 which seems plainly to deny Luther’s Simul iustus et peccator. Ernest Kevan describes the Antinomian argument well: “From the forensic

136 Hee Lee, 51.
139 Ibid., 22.
140 Ibid., 65.
141 Campbell, 71.
142 Crisp, Works Sermon XI, 343, cited in Huehns, Antinomianism in English History, 66.
language of justification, they made inferences about the spiritual condition of those who are justified; from the premise of the believers’ perfect standing, they drew the conclusion of the believer’s perfect state.” The Antinomian definition of justification moves in the direction of the medieval or Roman, but it produces a radically different result.

This change had significant ramifications in their theology. Similar to what we saw with Rome, putting justification in a renovative category was not a matter of mere semantic confusion. When the “Eatonists” looked at sanctification through the lens of biblical justification, they saw the state (not merely the status) of the believer to be a settled issue with no room for human participation. In other words, just as justification in Protestant theology was looked at as a settled reality, inalterable by human effort, so also the Antinomians saw one’s total state in Christ as finished and completed. Moreover, just as the Lutherans and Reformed were prone to interpret any effort to improve one’s justification as an assault against the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ’s work, so also the Antinomians saw effort to grow in holiness as an assault against the finished work of Christ in purifying the believer.

To remove from justification its forensic nature and substitute a transformative root also engenders a change in the nature of the atonement. In Christ’s death as judgment for sin, the Antinomians insist that Christ took on not simply the legal guilt of sin but the very nature of sin; he is said to be a sinner. The lack of distinction between guilt and nature applies not only to a believer’s justification but also to Christ’s condemnation. Christ could not merely take on the guilt of sin; he had to take on the actual presence of sin. Thus, Crisp insists, “no transgressor in the world was such a one as Christ was.” And Christ was “as completely sinful as we.” In the same way that Christ is made a sinner in reality, even though he never sinned, so also is the believer made righteous in a real sense, even though he or she was never actually righteous. Crisp

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writes that believers “ceased to be a transgressor from that time [when one’s own transgressions] were laid upon him.” 146

The result of all this is that Antinomians’ theology disallowed exhortations to holiness. For example, Eaton explains 2 Corinthians 7:1, where the apostle exhorts the church to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh,” as an encouragement to reflect on the spiritual cleansing that one already has in Christ. 147 Indeed, the only kind of mortification that Eaton accepted was the mortification already accomplished by the blood of Jesus; and the believer’s “work” of mortification was to realize that it is already complete. Thus, what Calvin saw as a war that must be fought Eaton saw as having already been decided in justification. For Calvin, the accomplished aspect to sanctification, though real, never terminated in a sense of rest but always provoked the believer to war against sin. One sees this in Calvin’s explanation of Romans 6 and the beautiful exhortation, “We are not our own, let us therefore…” 148 For Eaton, however, the positional and declarative aspect of salvation, as pressed through the categories of justification, created the sense of absolute rest. Indeed, any effort to promote holiness was seen as in conflict with finished work of Christ. Thus, Eaton effectively obliterated the biblical imperative.

It must be realized that at one level, the need for holiness was never denied by the Antinomians. One could even say that the whole point of the theology is to promote it, as seen in the introduction to many Antinomian works. 149 Also, many individual Antinomians were remarkably holy, as Baxter even observed; yet, at another level, exhortation to holiness could not be mapped onto any biblical category. This failure was of significant concern to the Puritans. It endangered not only the biblical soteriology, but also the rule of law and the very fabric of society.

146 Ibid., 71.
147 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 163.
148 Calvin, Institutes, 3.7.1.
149 Cooper, Fear and Anxiety, 34.
Antinomianism and Christian Living

To complete our overview of Antinomian theology, we must briefly explore how this theology played out in the Christian life. From the nature of the state of the believer, the Antinomians drew important conclusions concerning the believer’s relationship with God. This brings us to examine their understanding of faith.

The logic behind the Antinomian understanding of the role of faith crystalizes when we remember that which they sought to react against and the resources in their disposal to do so. They were reacting to a theology of preparationism, the strong volitional element of faith in the Arminians, and a theology that put much stress on sanctification as the ground for assurance. In short, they perceived a legalizing, if not Pelagian, tendency, and they were determined to fight it. Second, their resources consisted in a rationalistic theology that saw tension between the believer’s own pursuit of holiness and the finished work of Christ. In other words, they could not maintain both the gratuitous nature of salvation and the notion that humans had even an instrumental part to play in procuring this salvation. One of these elements had to go.

That element was human responsibility. The Antinomians had the reputation for “flying for shelter to God’s decrees,” which meant that they found support for their doctrine in recognizing that salvation was an act wholly determined in the counsel of God, and therefore, the human subject became entirely passive. In this way, the issue of Antinomianism is really an issue of the relationship between divine sovereignty and the human subject. Dewey Wallace rightly defines the essence of Antinomianism as “emphasizing grace to such an extreme that nothing of ‘nature’ could be allowed to play a part in redeeming the individual.”

What exactly did it mean to “fly to God’s decrees”? First of all, the Antinomians believed strongly in the eternal covenant of redemption and the looked with suspicion

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151 Thomas Bakewell, A Faithfull Messenger Sent after the Antinomians: To Try Their Power in Their Last Place of Refuge, Who Are Fled to Gods Decrees for Shelter, as Joab Did to the Hornes of the Altar, and Say That They Will Dye There, 1 Kings 2.29.30 (London: 1644), 1. Notice also the title of the work. See also, McKelvey, 231.
152 Wallace, Puritans and Predestination, 114.
upon a later covenant of grace that would be ratified in time and would require any coordinating human action, including faith. Eaton writes, “We being no agents and doers to this business, but mere patients.” Eaton writes, “We being no agents and doers to this business, but mere patients.”153 The closest he comes attributing instrumentality to faith is when he says that Christ is put on by “understanding and joyfull faith, and right embracing the excellency of Free Iustification by Christ alone.” Here faith is part of justification, but not as an instrument.154 The Antinomians adopted this view of faith, it seems, to preserve the priority of grace and avoid attributing merit to faith. Their goal was, as McKelvey explains, “to protect the free and sovereign grace of Justification against any perceived human contribution.”155 Using Hebrews 11:1 as a proof text, Crisp writes that “Faith gives evidence to this thing, Faith makes it known.”156 But faith does not justify, because justification is already a settled issue “before he doth believe.” Faith was simply to perceive what hand always been true.”157 In concert with the supralapsarians, they too moved the decisive moment out of time of history to the eternal counsel of God.

There was a tendency among some of the Antinomians to say that the sinner must be justified in eternity. Justification in eternity is the view that “justification preceded our birth and was made in eternity because they conceive it to be an immanent and internal act of God.”160 The critics of the Antinomians saw the eternal justification as the essence of what was wrong with Antinomian theology, and they thought that by attacking eternal justification, they were attacking Antinomianism. In reality, Antinomian literature was

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153 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 25; see also Beeke and Jones, A Puritan Theology, 257; Como, Blown by the Spirit, 193.
155 Como, Blown by the Spirit, 201.
156 McKelvey, 224.
157 Crisp, Christ Alone Exalted, 85
158 Ibid., 85.
160 Turretin, Institutes, 2:683.
less explicit on the issue of justification in eternity than were some Puritans, such as Twisse and Cotton.\textsuperscript{161} This is probably due to the fact that the Antinomians were less explicit on forensic justification than many Puritans. Robert McKelvey even tries to make a case that the two cannot be linked due to many Antinomians’ not holding to the position of eternal justification and many orthodox Divines’ holding to it.\textsuperscript{162}

But whether or not they believed in eternal justification wasn’t really the crucial issue. For the Antinomians, the question is not \textit{when} a person is justified, but on what basis one is justified. Because the work of Christ is a finished act before the moment one believes, this pushed the timing of justification at least before faith.\textsuperscript{163} Como rightly notes that the purpose was to “shift responsibility for human salvation onto Christ.”\textsuperscript{164} Wallace explains Crisp’s position: “unless justification precedes faith, the latter becomes a good work earning salvation.”\textsuperscript{165}

The perfected state of the believer also had direct bearing on how one existed in this relationship with God. The human spirit, because of its perfection, needed no authoritative external guides—whether legal or ecclesiastical—in order to relate to God. Sinclair Ferguson correctly notes that the essence of Antinomianism for the Christian life meant the denial of any need for an objective standard.\textsuperscript{166} This is a good way to put it, because it was not as though the Antinomians denied the existence of external standards; they just saw no need for them or any authority in them.

It was this denial of the importance of the law from which the Antinomian theology derived its name (\textit{anti} = against; \textit{nomias} = law). Antinomians believed that the law was not necessary because the believer now relates to God in a state of perfection.

\textsuperscript{161} Beeke and Jones, \textit{A Puritan Theology}, 134.
\textsuperscript{162} McKelvey, 262.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.363.
\textsuperscript{164} Como, \textit{Blown by the Spirit}, 203.
\textsuperscript{166} Sinclair Ferguson, \textit{The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance--Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters} (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 140.
Here the Antinomians are in serious disagreement with Luther, who, though he was justification-centric as well, saw the law as an aid to the believer at least inasmuch as it pointed the believer back to his or her continual need for the gospel. Indeed, as we saw in Luther’s theology, law and grace created an oscillation between “ecstasy and anxiety.” However, like Agricola, the English Antinomians saw all things in ecstasy and thus no need for anything to help the believer outside him- or herself. One’s own spirit and conscience are all one needed. Saltmarsh writes, “Nor is the holiness and sanctification now such as is fashioned by the law or outward commandments, but by the Preaching of Faith, by which the Spirit is given, which renews and sanctifies a Believer, and makes him the very law of commandments in himself, and his heart the very two tablets of Moses.”

Indeed, Eaton speaks much of Paul’s idea of grace revealed to believers. He argues that because believers have this Spirit, believers become “presently great doctors.” There was no need to study theology extensively. Rutherford recognizes the anti-structural elements in Antinomianism. If humans have no instrumental role, “then not only the morall Law, but the very law of nature and the dictates of a natural conscience shall not of themselves oblige us.”

Crisp provides a good summary of the Antinomian approach to the law. In dealing with what appears to be Paul’s understanding of indwelling sin, Crisp writes, “There is no law against the works of a spiritual man…and therefore they are not sin…where there is no law, there is no transgression.” It was not as though the law was wholly bad or there

168 John Saltmarsh, *Free Grace: Or, the Flowings of Christ’s Blood Free to Sinners, Being an Experiment of Jesus Christ Upon One Who Hath Been in the Bondage of Troubled Conscience at Thimes, for the Space of About Twelve Years, Till Now Upon a Clearer Discovery of Jesus Christ and the Gospel* (London: 1646), 147.
was no concern for holiness, as is sometimes alleged. The law was simply unhelpful, and any conscious submission to the law competed with finished work of Christ. Saltmarsh contends that to require repentance for conversion would be to return again to the *modus operandi* of the law. In the end, Antinomian theology was unable to reconcile the priority of grace with any exhortation to holiness. For this reason, it was vigorously opposed.

**Baxter**

Emerging through the interregnum was a man whose reaction to Antinomianism left an imprint on his time. This Richard Baxter, pastor of Kidderminster, was responsible for what became known as “Neonomianism,” the recasting of justification and sanctification according to a “new law.” Many, such as Marshall, accused him of abandoning the Reformational principles and edging toward Arminianism, if not Rome. It was most certainly his interaction with Baxter that caused Marshall “profound Spiritual distress.” It could be said that Baxter motivated Marshall as Gabriel Biel did Luther. Thus, we must understand Baxter to appreciate Marshall.

Baxter grew up in a family reading Sibbes, Perkins, and other notable Puritans. This means that at the very foundation of Baxter’s world and life view was the covenant in which God’s monergistic activity issues forth a mutual pact, requiring obedience as a sign of covenantal inclusion. The godly had a duty to “work out” their salvation to make sure they were part of the covenant. This required examination and diligence, to aim at godliness. This godliness was, for Baxter, in clear contrast to the ungodliness displayed in the established church, which practiced little preaching or prayer.

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174 Allison, *The Rise of Moralism,* 154
175 N.N., “Preface.”
176 Ibid., 183.
177 Packer, *Redemption and Restoration* 188.
Baxter recounts his conversion experience as God “awaken[ing] my soul, and show[ing] me the folly of Sinning, and the misery of the Wicked, and the unexpressible Weight of things Eternal, and the necessity of resolving on a Holy Life.” Thus, his conversion, like Perkins’, was out of a life of blatant sin. However, the sin that he recounted resided in the inward affections, rather in outward behavior. Baxter battled doubts for years before he actually felt any assurance. Raised on the likes of Sibbes and Perkins, he had warmth toward the Savior and a high view of redemption. Baxter even had sympathy with some of the Antinomians’ fears that some Puritan clergy expressed their zeal for self-examination in a way that was overly legalistic. Thus, as Packer says, Baxter was a Puritan and he wrote to defend Puritan goals.

Neither Baxter’s temperament nor his convictions poised him to be a natural dissenter. He was actually a decided monarchist. Yet when pressed, Baxter always cast his lot with the Puritans. The Puritans represented, for him, the godly side of the conflict. For Baxter the civil war was clearly set in moral terms. However, unlike Owen’s interpretation in which the moral was chiefly theological—that is, the unwillingness of the Puritans to accept the Arminian theology that was thrust upon them—Baxter saw it as a clash in ethics: the godly versus the godless. With his fellow Puritan clergy, Baxter was ejected from his pulpit in 1662 for failure to subscribe to the established church. His objection to subscription was not so much to the Prayer Book itself, for he actually favored a prayer book of sorts and thought an established church would protect against various separatists, namely, the Antinomians. But subscription required an oath against the continual reformation of the church, and such an oath was something that the

177 Ibid., 11.
178 Ibid., 8–9.
179 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 352.
180 Ibid. 58.
181 Ibid., 202.
182 Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson, Meet the Puritans (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 62.
“Reformed pastor” could never make. Thus, Baxter’s goal was to defend Puritanism against the foes of his day. And chief among those foes was Antinomianism.

**Baxter’s Theology**

To understand Baxter’s antipathy toward Antinomianism and how his reaction to it altered his theological structure, we must understand the development of Baxter’s theology, particularly his interaction with high Calvinists and Arminians. Baxter was concerned to create a middle way between these two.

As noted above, Baxter breathed the air of covenant theology. Of all the Divines, it was Twisse, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, whose views of the covenant Baxter most embraced in his early years. Twisse articulated a strong supralapsarianism and taught eternal justification. His goal in theological formulation was to defeat the Arminians, who he perceived as both giving too much credit to the ability of humans and, more significantly, detracting from the glory of God by failing to affirm that God’s end goal would necessarily be realized.

Twisse was not unique in his position or motive. As we saw, Arminian theology views faith as a human work, and those within the Reformed tradition countered it with a strong view of predestination and election that rooted the source of faith in God, not man. Thus, the English Reformed theology stressed that God’s secret will was the determining act in man’s salvation. Some Puritan Divines even used the twin ideas of

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183 Ibid.64
186 Guilielmus Twissus and Guilielmus Amesius, *Vindiciae, Gratiae, Potestatis Ac Providentia Dei* (Guil. Blaev), 197. “Before faith, this righteousness of Christ was ours, inasmuch as it was performed for us by the intention of God the Father and Christ the Mediator….“ Translated by Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn*, 84.
supralapsarianism and eternal election to destroy any notion of human agency as the
decisive cause of salvation. As argued effectively by Jonathan Moore, the early
promoters of supralapsarianism and eternal election still tried to view faith as, in some
sense, instrumental, but the emphasis on predestination and election had a way of
eclipsing the instrumental role of faith. 188 Baxter eventually came to see Twisse as so
captivated with God’s will that he left very little room for concepts such as the atonement
and justification. 189 Because of a similar disregard for Arminianism and a high regard for
the likes of Twisse and Pemble, Baxter reports that at first he, too, followed the
conclusion of justification from eternity and that this brought him to the “border of
Antinomianism.” But from these views he “very narrowly escaped.” 190

His first distain for High Calvinism developed when, as a chaplain in the army, he
saw Arminianism answered by an extreme form of High Calvinist Antinomianism. 191 He
wrote that the army was “…falling in with Saltmarsh, that Christ hath repented and
believed for us, and that [there is] no more question of faith and Repentance. This
awakened me better to study these points…” 192 Saltmarsh, Packer explains, was “the
midwife which finally brought Baxter’s system to birth.” 193

Baxter objected to Antinomianism because he saw it destroying the drive for
godliness, a drive that he much-appreciated in Puritanism. He saw the essence of the error
amounting to a “short rout to assurance of salvation,” 194 which meant taking for granted
that whatever the evidence of one’s life may be, one was safe in Christ. 195 This

188 Moore, English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed
Theology, 62–68. See, for example, William Pemble, Vindiciae Fidei, or a Treatise of Iustification by
Faith, Wherein the Truth of That Point Is Fully Cleared, and Vindicated from All the Cauills of It’s
Adversaries, 2nd ed. (Oxford: 1629), 50.

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Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 195
Baxter, Aphorisms of Justification, Appendix, 163.
Ibid., 22. Emphasis original.
Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 202.
Ibid., 203.
diminished any drive for holiness, making the Reformed faith no better than the theology that he so despised in the established church. Baxter also believed that the theology of supralapsarianism and eternal justification invariably led to Antinomianism.196

Baxter reasoned that if salvation resided merely in God’s secret will—that is, if all those for whom Christ died would be saved and, in fact, were already saved—then there was no point in issuing a call to repent and believe. Faith lost its instrumental function. The gospel became not “believe and you will be saved,” but “believe that you are saved,” which logically removes belief from having any effect on salvation. It was also dangerous to sanctification because it undermined assurance. In an argument strictly similar to what we will see in Marshall,197 Baxter argued that assurance—knowing oneself as loved by God—was essential to loving God in return: “no man can soundly love Christ as Redeemer, that knows not that Christ loves him,” writes Baxter.198 Baxter saw that indiscriminate assurance would be no assurance at all.199 Human instrumentality would be necessary to assurance believers of their salvation.

In other words, Baxter saw his theological project as articulating a more balanced response to Arminian theology, specially a response that did not open the door to Antinomianism. He saw that Arminian theology was wrong insofar as it had too high a view of human ability. But he also saw that high Calvinism erred insofar as it lost human instrumentality.200 He sought a compromise that would avoid the weaknesses of both systems.

His solution, in short, was to base his understanding of salvation, particularly the atonement and election, on the universal call of the gospel. Thus, to understand the nature

197 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 22-23
198 Richard Baxter, Universal Redemption (1694), 225.
199 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 232.
200 “I avoid the Remonstrant extreme: I say not that all have sufficient means or Grace to believe, or to Salvation. And I avoid the fouler extreme, which saith that Heathens are under the meer Law of works…and have no Means appointed them, or helps afforded them toward their recovery.” Baxter, Universal Redemption, 117.
of salvation, one must not “fly to the decrees” but—you could say—“fly to the clear, public commands of Christ.” One must reason from these clear commands to a soteriological system that would support them.

Here is where Baxter’s political method becomes relevant. According to Baxter, if the central mode of relating to God is by respecting him as King, then his authority becomes paramount in terms of how humans view him. God’s people relate rightly to God by submitting to his rule. Furthermore if God is king, the clearest expression of his kingly authority is his giving of the law; for the nature of kingship is to make authoritative laws. Humans submit to his rule by obeying his law.

In other words, given the nature of God’s Kingship, Baxter reasoned that the importance of God’s laws consists in the fact that God was the one who has instituted them and that they were instituted for the purpose of creating a context for humanity to relate rightly to him. What the law happens to prescribe or preclude is incidental to the law’s function and purpose. The essential function of the law is to establish God’s authoritative rule. The importance of this emphasis cannot be overstated because it led Baxter to the conclusion that God could change his decrees without any essential change in God’s economy with this people, and this is the basis for him considering the gospel as a “new law.”

The soteriological system that emerged from this is as follows. Seeing that humans failed to live up to the covenant of works, God sent Christ to die for sin. His death was not that of substitution; he didn’t take the place of anyone. But, drawing upon Grotius’ view of the atonement, the cross demonstrated what sin deserved and that God was serious about punishing it. This demonstration of the seriousness of sin made it safe for God to forgive sin without the fear of losing a sense of justice. The terms of gospel were proclaimed as the new law issued for everyone. Submission to this law, which consisted in belief in the gospel, was the condition for a right relationship with God. Hence, there was no need for an objective standard of holiness to be met through imputation of Christ’s righteousness, precisely because the objective standard of holiness was never anything other than immediate submission to exactly what God prescribed—and what God has now prescribed was belief in the gospel. Baxter’s theology at this point is best understood as a version of theological volunteerism.
Baxter also reasoned that the only way for God’s kingship to be universal was for the call of the Gospel—Christ’s new law—to be universally applicable. And the only way to sustain this universal applicability of the gospel is by positing a hypothetical universal atonement. Baxter writes, “God doth not offer that which he cannot give (for his offer is a gift, on condition of acceptance, and we must not dare to charge God with illusory or ludicrous actions.)”

He argues in his book *Universal Redemption* that for the gospel offer to be real, all must be able to be saved. Or, to put it negatively, it must not be the case that any unbeliever has “no means appointed them, or helps afforded them towards their recovery.”

We must remember that Baxter’s starting point is that Christ is King and that his kingly decrees provide the hermeneutical guide to understanding the nature of his person and work. Also the strength of Christ’s kingship rested in the applicatory nature of the call of the Gospel; those to whom the gospel did not apply were also those for whom God was not King. As we said, rather than flying to the decrees, as the Antinomians did, Baxter was flying to the revealed acts of God as King, namely, the proclamation of the gospel to all for all to believe. He reasoned from this command to the soteriological system that he believed would protect the primacy of God’s Kingship, which he believed was a universal redemption.

**Baxter on the Atonement and Covenant**

It is helpful at this point to contrast the difference between the standard Reformed teaching and Baxter on what Christ’s death accomplished. As articulated by Perkins and the Westminster Divines, Christ’s death satisfied the penal demands for the violation of God’s law. Thus, there is one standard of holiness, which humanity failed to meet; but the penalty for this infraction was satisfied by Christ, and the righteousness Christ earned in meeting this one standard of holiness is imputed to the believer, as if it were the believer’s own righteousness. This is summarized in the Larger Catechism’s Q 31, “The covenant of grace as made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.”

201 Ibid., 104.
202 Ibid., 117.
Baxter disagreed. He thought of the human situation in terms of a debt that must be paid. Christ paid the debt for the believer, which relinquished humanity from the demand of the covenant of works, but it did not yet bring believers into the fullness of salvation. He quibbled with the Larger Catechism’s insistence that the covenant was made with Christ; he said it was, rather, a duality: a covenant made with Christ that allows God to make a covenant with humans. Baxter explains,

Man having not only broken this first covenant, but disabled himself to perform its conditions for the future, and so being out of all hope of attaining righteousness and life thereby, it pleased the Father and Mediator to prescribe unto him a new Law and tender him a new covenant, the conditions whereof should be more easy to the sinner and yet more abasing, and should more clearly manifest, and more highly honor the unconceivable love of the Father and Redeemer.⁡²⁰³

For Baxter, Christ as King issued the terms of the New Covenant, and it was up to humans to meet the demands of the covenant—if they are to be included. (We are right to see this as a denigration of the idea of union with Christ, but more on that later.) Christ’s death is necessary, to be sure, because it abolished the Old Covenant of works, which humans were unable to meet. However, the terms of the New Covenant—faith and repentance—are “in no respect…part of his satisfaction or Humiliation or Merit itself”⁡²⁰⁴; they are simply the result of Christ—as King—declaring the terms of the “new law.” These terms are more lenient than the covenant of works, for they require only sincere obedience, not perfect obedience; yet they are still terms that must be met in the same basic way as the Old Covenant.⁡²⁰⁵ Hence Baxter’s language of the “New Law.” In other

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²⁰⁵ Baxter, Aphorismes of Justification, 104; McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 287.
words, Christ’s death was not to satisfy the demands of the law but to bring humanity into a situation where obedience to the law would be easier and where this easier obedience would be sufficient.\footnote{Packer, \textit{Redemption and Restoration}, 262.}

\textbf{Baxter’s Doctrine of Justification}

Baxter’s doctrine of justification is of critical importance to understanding his overall theology. He saw himself standing in the Protestant tradition, but he felt free to criticize that tradition in places where he felt it drifted toward Antinomianism. One of these places was justification. Baxter thought Luther in error because “he sometimes let fall some words which seemed plainly to make Christ’s own personal Righteousness in itself to be every Believers own by Imputation, and our sins to be verily Christ’s own sins by Imputation.”\footnote{Baxter, “Popish bad works, called Good,” (as Pilgrimages, hurtful Austerities, &c.), 15} Calvin came off slightly better. In Baxter’s view Calvin held less strongly to imputation, yet he still faults Calvin for stating that Christ’s righteousness is the material cause of justification.\footnote{Baxter, \textit{Justifying Righteousness}, \textit{Justifying Righteousness}, 227.} Baxter considered this imputation a “fictitious imputation,” insisting instead that one is justified only by virtue of his or her personal compliance with the terms of the New Covenant, namely, “evangelical righteousness” (which we will look at in a moment). Baxter thought that the whole scheme of alien righteousness as the material cause of justification was built upon a faulty understanding of the way in which God saves sinners.\footnote{Matthew Mason, "John Owen's Doctrine of Union with Christ in Relation to His Contributions to Seventeenth Century Debates Concerning Eternal Justification " \textit{Ecclesia Reformanda} 1, no. 1 (2009), 46–69.}

Why was it faulty? First, he believed that it would require this righteousness to be legally held by believers before they believed (i.e., eternal justification), which would deny the biblical claim that one is “justified by faith.”\footnote{Baxter, \textit{Aphorismes of Justification}, i. 46} Again, Baxter’s chief concern is to preserve human instrumentality. Second, imputation would “ascribe to God a
mistaking judgement, as to esteem us to have been in Christ when we were not, and to have done and suffered in him, what we did not.”

That whole plan of imputation rests on a doctrine of union with Christ that Baxter also rejected. Related to this, Baxter believed that God could not declare anyone righteous who has not actually been righteous. We will see shortly how this radically different construction of justification is built on a different understanding of union with Christ, but for now it is sufficient to see that justification, for Baxter, was not a decisive act but consisted in stages in which someone was justified over the course of a lifetime because of his or her conformity to the new law. Packer summarizes this well: “Thus, justification appears not as a single momentary event, but as a complex, tripartite Divine act, which begins with a man’s first faith in Christ and is not completed till he has received his whole reward in the world to come.”

The first stage of justification is constitutive justification; this grants a pardon to all past sins and gives the penitent believer the right or title to eternal life in view of the believer meeting the initial requirements of the covenant of grace. Boersma rightly states, “A person is justified constitutive if he is just in relation to the law of grace.” The act of believing in Jesus and forsaking sin is in compliance with terms of the gospel, which means that it is in remaining with covenant of grace. Here there is something of a grace/works antithesis. A person is not justified by works, in the sense that one has fully kept the law of the Old Covenant, but rather one is justified “by faith,” because faith keeps the requirement of the New Covenant.

However, this constitutive justification is limited in scope. It does not include actual salvation and eternal life because, Baxter insists, that is a verdict that is given only at the end of one’s life. Rather, it grants the title and right to eternal life, insofar as the person continues to meet the conditions of the covenant. For Baxter, justification could

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211 Ibid., i. 47.

212 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 254.


214 Boersma, A Hot Pepper Corn, 90.
not possibly include a pardon for future sins, because, according to Baxter, one can fall from grace.\footnote{215} Marshall speaks of those who corrupt justification by calling it a “mere title to eternal life.”\footnote{216} He clearly had Baxter’s constitutive justification in view.

The next stage is sentential or declarative justification. This is the justification in which Christ—as the one to whom God has granted all judgments\footnote{217}—actually declares the believer just. The believer can have confidence in future justification at this point. One achieves this stage when one grows in confidence that one is living in terms of the Covenant of Grace.

The final form of justification is executive justification. One arrives at this stage only after death. This is the “actual impunity, removing of deserved punishment, and actual giving possession of Life and Salvation, which constitutive justification gave us Right to.”\footnote{218} Here the believer receives the reward promised upon meeting the conditions. It is the inevitable result of being declared righteous. This includes the full endowment of the Spirit for complete holiness and glorification.\footnote{219}

The Conditions of the Covenant: “Evangelical Righteousness”

In order to obtain this justification, one must meet the requirements of the law. For Baxter, the requirement is a life of faith, otherwise known as “evangelical righteousness.”\footnote{220} He explains that it is “an act…of the whole man…most properly called, a practical trust.”\footnote{221} Faith being described as “trust” does not mean that Baxter’s concept of faith was like that of Calvin. In contrast to Calvin, Baxter included in this act of trust

\footnote{216} Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*.
\footnote{217} Baxter and White, *Four Disputations*, 25.
\footnote{218} Baxter, *Catholic Theology*, I.i.86.
\footnote{219} Ibid., 86.
\footnote{220} Packer, *Redemption and Restoration*, 298.
not only passive reception of Christ but also the “sincere obedience,” which was needed to meet the requirement of the “new law.” Baxter writes:

I have oft proved this justifying faith to be no less than our unfeigned taking Christ for our Saviour, and becoming true Christians, according to the tenour of the baptismal covenant. As to the acts, it is formally trust—one in three; the understanding’s assenting trust, the will’s consenting trust, and the executive power’s practical, venturing obeying trust.

Here Baxter explains that “trust” includes all that accompanies it: obedience and the keeping of the covenant. Baxter elaborates on this more in his Aphorisms. His thesis sixty is that “The bare Act of believing is not the only Condition of the New Covenant; but severall other duties are also parts of that Condition.” They are,

1. Then that pardon of sin and salvation are promised upon condition of Repenting, as well as believe, is undeniable asserted from these Scriptures…
2. That praying for pardon, and forgiving others, are Conditions of Pardon is plain…
3. That Love & sincere Obedience, and Works of Love, are also parts of the condition.

This idea of faith as “obeying trust” drew criticism from others. It was not merely the emphasis on the inclusion of good works in the definition of faith that caused the backlash, but more specifically the role of faith in the economy of salvation. All but the Antinomians were saying that works are necessary, but the kind of necessity was

\[222\] Allison, The Rise of Moralism, 163.
\[224\] Baxter, Aphorismes of Justification, Thesis 60.
\[225\] Allison, The Rise of Moralism, 156.
important to distinguish. For the Reformed orthodox, faith brings about good works because of the nature and disposition of faith itself (namely, as that which clings to Christ) and because of what faith apprehends (namely, one’s union with Christ). But strictly speaking, works are not necessary for justification itself. The condition for justification was faith alone, or “by faith only,” as Anthony Lane summarizes reformation teaching.²²⁶ Baxter, however, made the working of one’s faith a clear meritorious condition for justification itself. He writes, “Faith is imputed for Righteousness…because it is an Act of Obedience to God…Faith is so reputed or imputed as it is the performance of the Conditions of the Justifying Covenant or Donation.”²²⁷ His stress here is similar to Trent: the faith that justifies is a working faith and it justifies based on the merits the faith itself and also the works it brings in its wake. As we see, Baxter is outside the reformed tradition on this matter.

Baxter’s Response to Owen on Union with Christ

One more aspect of Baxter’s theology must be touched upon so that we understand more particularly how his theology differed from Marshall’s. This aspect is union with Christ. Baxter’s understanding of union with Christ is critical for our understanding of the position that Marshall was refuting, and Baxter’s doctrine developed largely in the context of his objections to Owen. Therefore, we will look at Owen on union with Christ, and then we will see how Baxter responded. An exploration of Owen will also provide us with an example of Reformed orthodox thinking on union with Christ that made up Marshall’s intellectual context.

Owen’s Theology of Union

The beginning of Baxter’s conflict with Owen began with Owen’s publication of *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* in 1647 and Baxter’s response to it in an appendix to his *Aphorisms on Justification* in 1649. Owen responded again in 1650 in his work *Of the Death of Christ*, and Baxter responded again in 1655 with his *Confession of

²²⁶ Lane, *Justification by Faith*, 27.

Faith. Baxter also interacts with Owen on the issue of justification in *Universal Redemption*, not published until 1694 but composed at the same time as his *Aphorisms*, 1649. What comes through with even the mere reading of the titles is that the debate on justification was considered in the context of the atonement. This is because justification was considered one of the functions of Christ’s act of mediation. The full title of Owen’s original work *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* includes “*The Merit thereof [redemption] And The Satisfaction Wrought Thereby; The Immediate Effects And Fruits Thereof Assigned, With Their Extent In Respect Of Its Object.*” Justification was considered one of the central benefits that Christ, as mediator, purchased for sinners on the cross. Therefore, the nature of that which Christ purchases for believers (is justification from eternity and does it include the active obedience of Christ?), the extent of the purchase (is it universal or does it pertain to the elect only?), and how one receives the benefits (in what sense are believers united with Christ?) were all organically connected.

For Owen, the work of Christ is an organic whole because of the covenant. Christ was the mediator of this covenant, and the totality of what he accomplished was for the elect.\(^{228}\) Everything that the believer enjoys in his or her salvation is planned by the Father, purchased by Christ, and applied by the Spirit in union with Christ. This covenant was, according to Owen, unconditional, which was evidenced by the New Testament’s understanding of the covenant as a testament (*diatheke*), rather than an agreement (*suntheke*).\(^{229}\) The covenant began with the members of the Trinity, in the *pactum Solutis*, a mutual pact whereby they agreed that the Son would assume human flesh, make atonement for sins, fulfill the human part of the covenant, and then be glorified with all those for whom he died.\(^{230}\) It is only in this context of the covenant that the death of Christ has any meaning.\(^{231}\) The unconditionality of the covenant makes it “of grace”

\(^{228}\) Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Carlise, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995), 21


\(^{230}\) Ibid., XII, 500.

\(^{231}\) Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 27.
rather than “of works.” But as we will see, this did not render humanity altogether passive, for there is also a human response. Yet even this response, Owen says, is included as part of the covenant.

The covenant and union with Christ cannot be distinguished in Owen’s theology. Election occurs, says Owen, as “the immutable purpose of God, whereby in Christ Jesus, he chose unto himself whom he pleased.” The believer is also justified in Christ, sanctified in Christ, adopted in Christ, and glorified in Christ. Indeed, the whole Ordo Salutis is the working out in Christ all that is obtained for the believer in the Covenant of Grace. Ferguson writes of Owen’s theology, “The ultimate function of the covenant is to bring me into union with Jesus Christ.” We would be mistaken, however, if we took union with Christ to terminate in only positional and forensic categories. For Owen, union was the basis of communion. Allison writes, “Owen places more explicit emphasis on this union with Christ than even Downname does, and perhaps more than anyone of this period with the exception of John Donne.”

We must consider a bit more the relationship between union with Christ and sanctification. Owen writes a book-length chapter in his work Discourses on the Holy Spirit titled, “The nature of Sanctification and Gospel holiness explained.” This work covers similar ground as Marshall’s Gospel Mystery of Sanctification. Owen’s shorter definition of sanctification is “the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ.” By “universal” Owen means that the

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232 Trueman, John Owen, 78–79.
233 Owen, Works of John Owen, XXIII, 137.
234 Owen, Greater Catechism, Q. 5.
235 Owen, Works of John Owen, III, 517. “In the same instant wherein any one is united unto Christ, and by the same act whereby he is so united, he is really and habitually purified and Sanctified.”
236 Ferguson, John Owen on the Christian Life, 32.
237 See Ferguson’s excellent treatment of this topic, ibid., 34.
238 Allison, The Rise of Moralism, 175.
239 Owen, Works of John Owen, III, 386.
whole of the individual human is sanctified, not that sanctification extends to every member of the human race or that humans are able to reach a state of sinless perfection.240

Owen’s use of union with Christ in this definition is hard to miss. For Owen, sanctification into the image of God finds its redemptive terminus in the “image of Christ,” as Christ is the perfector of human nature.241 Furthermore, this work is “through Jesus Christ.”242 The same Spirit who helped Christ to live his life in perfect obedience and raised Christ from the dead is also at work in the life of the believer.

Even though a believer obtains this in Christ, he or she still bears a responsibility to act in accordance with this nature. The believer does this, in part, by attending to the means of grace that informed the believer of his or her new identity.243 Yet Owen says that we are “greatly mistaken if we suppose we have no benefit by the word beyond that which we retain in our memories.”244 In other words, God’s creative Word does not merely change the facts that we know, but creates a new reality in believer’s lives. It seems that Owen is explaining something of positional sanctification, which we saw also in Calvin. Sanctification is about more than retaining in one’s memory new facts. It’s about a change of nature. This positional reality does not erase the need for human responsibility (as the Antinomians seemed to believe), but apart from the positional reality the human responsibility would be impotent.

Baxter’s Objections

The chief difficulty for Baxter was in reconciling two of Owen’s claims: (1) that Christ’s death was for the elect and, (2) that the judicial verdict and effects of that verdict did not go into effect prior to the elect’s actual faith. Moreover, if Christ died for the elect only, then salvation must be fully purchased in his death. Baxter believed Owen’s view of

240 Ibid., III, 417.
242 Owen, Works of John Owen, III, 386.
243 Ibid., 389.
244 Ibid., III, 389.
union with Christ made his position most problematic, for the union would entail actual benefit from Christ’s death prior to faith, and this also implied that faith was no longer the instrument of justification. Baxter could not see how Christ’s death caused the immediate benefit to flow to the elect, while still affording faith any instrumental value.\textsuperscript{245}

Another problem with Owen’s teaching on union with Christ was that the righteousness became so clearly the believer’s own righteousness that Baxter thought there was no longer a need for forgiveness, mercy, and grace.\textsuperscript{246}

This interpretation of his work frustrated Owen. He faulted “Mr. B,” as Owen called him, for not recognizing the covenantal framework of union, which would have given a clear rationale for the representative nature of Christ’s role in the covenantal union with Christ.\textsuperscript{247} Moreover, Baxter viewed the covenant in which God promised to impute Christ’s righteousness as a product of God’s mercy and grace—hence the term “covenant of Grace”—such that in no sense could mercy and grace be set against imputation. But Baxter did not function according to a covenantal system; he used a political system.\textsuperscript{248} In this political there could be only a “Relative Union, he being our Head, Husband, King and we being incorporated Members, his Spouse and Subjects: and so both make one Mystical person, that is, one Corporation, Family, Common-wealth.”\textsuperscript{249}

In the end, Baxter thought that all attempts to maintain in the same covenantal act both the election and justification failed because they would inevitably eclipse the human requirement to believe. The only alternative in Baxter’s mind was to make the death of Christ universal in scope and make the justification something not wholly effective for securing a right relationship with God in itself, but a provisional declaration that created a context in which humans could continue to live within the covenant. Baxter thought this was the only way to make faith a necessary human act. However, once the act of faith is

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{245} Boersma, \textit{A Hot Pepper Corn}, 103.
\bibitem{248} Boersma, \textit{A Hot Pepper Corn}, 234.
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removed from the benefits purchased upon the cross, what is the difference between Baxter’s view of faith and that of the Arminians? Packer is right to see that, at the end of the day, Baxter’s faith differs little from that of the Arminians at significant points and that this stemmed from a faulty understanding of the covenantal framework and the rationalism of his “political method.”

Packer brilliantly summarizes Baxter as follows:

Baxter was quite wrong in treating the doctrine of limited atonement as a blind reaction against Arminianism. It was, as Owen’s book makes clear, an attempt to give its full positive content to the love of the Father and the Son. If Christ’s love is equal to all, then it is ineffective for most. Not all believe; few are saved; for many, therefore, He must have died in vain. But the love of God is not impotent; nor will Christ’s purpose in dying be thwarted. Therefore, He cannot have died to save any but those whom He saves in fact. This is a clear and positive doctrine of God’s saving love and demands consideration as such.

Conclusion

Marshall’s biographer, N.N. reports that when Marshall sought help from Baxter to understand Baxter responded that he thought Marshall read his works too “legally.” Yet it is certainly possible—indeed probably—that the Baxter had tendencies toward legalism in his theology that ran deeper than he realized. He claimed to have created system that embraced the broadest evangelical tradition. He believed that this system rescued the instrumental value of faith and made the human will significant. But the

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Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 236.
human element became so significant that it overshadowed grace. It’s not surprising that Marshall struggled to find comfort in Baxter’s system.

**Conclusion**

Our study of Marshall’s synchronic context has led us to explore several theological systems that flourished just before and during Marshall’s time. The theological systems express or react to elements of tension in the Reformed tradition. As we said, the presence of a growing tension should not be interpreted as a change in essential theological structure. Inevitably, new questions will arise that force new a synthesis to occur. Our thesis is neither that a break occurred between early and later Reformed theologians nor that they are entirely monolithic. Our aim was to engage the systems on their own terms, recognizing both lines of continuity and discontinuity.

**Tensions**

We want to conclude by enumerating several tensions in English theology. Understanding these will help us better appreciate Marshall’s theology for its ability to avoid them.

1. **The tension of how to account for the reality of sin without excusing sin**

The Catholic accusation that Reformation theology was essentially Antinomianism forced Protestants to give a serious accounting for why Antinomianism was not a legitimate option. Yet at the same time, this accounting had to make room for the Luther-like believer who was acutely sensitive to his or her remaining imperfections. In other words, theologians searched for a theological system that would provide no refuge for the one who wanted to persist in sin yet would also provide abundant refuge for the one who (like Luther) felt the assault of sin and needed a refuge from it. Though broad consensus existed on the general direction of the theological systems, tension emerged as to exactly how the goal could be accomplished. The Antinomians attempted to reconcile this issue by calling for no recognition of sin in the believer. But this provided no basis to encourage holiness. The theological systems that stressed covenant faithfulness as the
human response (those of Baxter and the Arminians and some strands of Perkins’s system) tended to offer less refuge from the dread of condemnation.

2. The tension between the objective ground of assurance in the gospel and the subjective ground of assurance in one’s changed life

Tension also emerged concerning how the believer was to find warrant for assurance in the face of a less-than-perfect life. This tension was related to the previous one because the epistemic ground of assurance arises out of one’s soteriological system. Parnham describes this connection well: “The ontological question of one’s being in the here and now and in the hereafter is complicated by an epistemological question concerning evidence and knowledge, and the ‘assurance’ that knowledge brings.” The Luther-like believer, intensely aware of his or her own imperfections, needed not only righteousness extra nos but also some grounds extra nos for knowing that righteousness had truly been imputed. That is, he or she needed an objective basis for assurance. This objective basis could not be tethered too closely to one’s subjective experience of renewal or it would falter at the slightest awareness of any sin. Yet there needed to be a way to challenge the mere professor to doubt his/her salvation because of persistent unrepentant sin. The first person needed to look less to subjective assurance and lean more on the objective gospel. The second person needed to recognize that persisting in sin is inconsistent with a profession of belief in the gospel.

What emerged, then, were two different systems of assurance for two different kinds of people. The difficulty with this situation is twofold: (1) how would one know which system should be applied in any given time? and (2) how could two systems be reconciled in a single system under a single covenant? We see this tension in Baxter’s reply to Marshall that Marshall took is writings to “legally.” We see this tension emerge in Perkins concerning the judgment of charity that one ought to give toward those who are in the church, including oneself, and the fact that he so clearly grounded assurance in sanctification. The Antinomians, in one sense, sought to build on that “judgment of

Baxter, on the other hand, sought a system that was consistent with the need for holiness in order to ground not only assurance of salvation, but also salvation itself.

3. The tension between the conditionality of faith and eternal election

If you ask the question, “What causes salvation?” there are multiple answers that can be given, without necessarily contradicting each other. For our purposes here, we will restrict our discussion to the instrumental cause, which is faith, and the instigative cause, which is election. The theologians that we surveyed attempted to differentiate election and faith in the way they effect in salvation. Election originates unconditionally in the eternal plan of God. As the instigative cause, it is responsible for everything that follows. Conversely, faith—even if it is recognized as a gift from God—involves a human component. Salvation is conditional upon this human action.

In theory, at least, there was no contradiction between election and faith, so long as each type of cause was distinguished. Faith was not meant to merit Salvation, nor to become the eternal basis of salvation, but only the means by which this salvation is received. At the same time, election was not meant to eclipse the reality of faith’s instrumental function. Election was the cause of faith, but it did not render faith superfluous.

Nevertheless, tension still emerged, especially in the realm of pastoral theology. When leading believers to greater confidence in salvation, the confidence that arises from election and the confidence that arise from faith could put believers into a bind. At times we see implications of one cause coming into conflict with the other cause. Baxter has very little role for election in his theology because he wanted to preserve the primacy of human faith. The antinomians have little place for the instrumental role of faith because they want to preserve the unconditionality of election.

Implications

These tensions, as Muller explains, were acutely felt on British soil. Herman Witsius looked across the North Sea and called the various factions “hostile standards of
Antinomians and Neonomians.” He says that the conflict exposed not only genuine differences between various theological systems but also much wrong thinking about one another’s positions.

The reason for such heated debate and misunderstanding was, in part, the interdisciplinary nature of the issue. It was both theological and pastoral. It wasn’t about the doctrine of assurance considered abstractly but about how one may be assured amidst various existential factors. It was not about right teaching on faith, but how sinners find warrant to approach Christ with confidence. And it wasn’t about the theory of sanctification, as much as how one—assaulted by the world, the flesh, and the devil—may be sanctified. This is why subscription to a document such as the WCF or the Heidelberg catechism, though useful, was insufficient for unity on this issue. Even if consensus was found in a confession (Baxter wholeheartedly affirmed the Westminster Standards), there still remained the thorny issue of implementation. It is one thing to write abstractly on issues pertaining to sanctification, but it is another thing entirely to apply these principles in the complex particulars of pastoral ministry and spiritual life. It was in this application that the “unhappy names of Antinomian and Neonomian” were usually assigned. Thus, the theology of sanctification cannot be divorced from the pastoral theology that gives expression to it. This means that any advancement in the debate between the Antinomians, Neonomians would come only through an approach that at once confessed orthodoxy and also applied it in such a way that successfully comforted the sufferer while challenging the sinner.

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253 Witsius, Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions, 7.
254 Ibid., 9.
256 Witsius, Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions, Title.
Part IV: Marshall’s Theology

“The Book you mention [The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification] lies now on my table. Marshall is an old acquaintance of mine. I think Marshall one of the best writers, and one of the most spiritual expositors of Scripture I ever read. I never met a man who understood the plan of salvation better, or was more happy in explaining it to others.”

- William Cowper

Having situated Marshall in his historical and theological context and explained his theological interlocutors, we will now explore the theological contents of Marshall’s sermon on justification, his letters to Richard Cromwell, and, most particularly, his book The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification (Gospel Mystery).

As explained in the introduction, the goal in this thesis is to understand how Marshall develops sanctification based on the believer’s union with Christ, and how this structure prevents Marshall from falling into the traps of legalism and Antinomianism. He was not alone in this regard; others, such as Owen, structured all soteriological benefits on union with Christ and did not fall into those traps either. However, Marshall differs with regard to his brevity and his sustained focus on union with Christ with reference to sanctification, affording his work remarkable pastoral usefulness.

Our goal, therefore, is to understand the nerve of Marshall’s argument, particularly the logical relationship of union with Christ to holiness and the motive and means for holiness, which this union generates. This means that we will not simply restate or summarize Marshall’s Gospel Mystery in the way Marshall presented it. Rather, we will approach the work systematically, giving greater attention to those parts that are more essential in its theological structure.

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1 Fesko, Beyond Calvin, 287.
Outline of Gospel Mystery

We will, however, begin with a brief overview of Marshall’s Gospel Mystery. His book is divided into fourteen “directions,” which are, as the book’s subtitle calls them, “practical” instructions for holiness. Each one offers a call to action for the reader. The 1692 edition lacks even a table of contents (that came in 1789) and the directions are not titled, other than short paragraphs at the start of each section summarizing their contents.

To gain an overall picture of the work, an annotated table of contents follows. The chapter lengths differ significantly. Therefore, the percentage of pages that each chapter occupies is offered to indicate the relative length of each direction.

Direction 1: Holiness as summed up in the law is necessary, but it cannot be ventured upon unless one has the appropriate means for holiness. This is an introductory chapter that sets out the purpose of the book: a manual to tell one how to be holy. (13 pages, 4%)

Direction 2: There are four endowments necessary for holiness: (1) an inclination toward holiness, (2) persuasion of reconciliation with God, (3) confidence of future happiness with God, and (4) confidence of sufficient strength to obey God. These endowments are the means of holiness which Marshall outlined in the first direction. (26 pages, 8%)

Direction 3: The necessary endowments are received out of the fullness of Christ and are immediately available to the believers through their union with Christ. This direction shows the endowments are available in Christ. (19 pages, 6%)

Direction 4: One is united to Christ through faith in the gospel. This explains how believers actually receive Christ and the endowments with him. (20 pages, 6%)
**Direction 5:** Without being in a new state in Christ, one cannot possibly practice any holiness. This chapter draws the conclusion from the previous chapters and sets up criteria by which Marshall will evaluate various approaches to holiness in the subsequent chapters. (18 pages, 5%)  

**Direction 6:** Those who try to perform sincere obedience as a condition for justification and union with Christ are seeking salvation by the law, not by faith, because apart from union with Christ there is no possibility for obeying God. Marshall is refuting the ideas of Baxter, though he does not mention Baxter by name. (33 pages, 10%)  

**Direction 7:** There is nothing one can do to prepare hearts to receive Christ. This chapter refutes the theory of preparationism. (15 pages, 4.5%)  

**Direction 8:** One must be sure to seek holiness in its proper place, that is, after union with Christ, justification, and the gift of the Spirit. This is aimed at the Antinomians, who would diminish the need for holiness or claim that effort in holiness is antithetical to the gospel. (9 pages, 3%)  

**Direction 9:** The gospel is the means by which we receive comfort, and the comfort is a prerequisite for obedience. This chapter proves what Marshall stated earlier: one must have persuasion of right standing with God before one can obey. (14 pages, 4%)  

**Direction 10:** In order to have comfort, one must have assurance. This chapter takes a balanced view of assurance, locating some sense of assurance in the essence of faith. (25 pages, 7.5%)  

**Direction 11:** One must believe in Christ now. Having explained the means of holiness, Marshall at this point endeavors to lead the reader to put into practice the means, the first step of which is immediate faith in Christ. Marshall’s tone
becomes more sermonic as he roots the gospel call in his understanding of the atonement. (37 pages, 11%)

**Direction 12:** One must make use of one’s faith to obey the law by walking **according to one’s new state in Christ.** This, Marshall says, is the principal direction. It is where Marshall finally gets to the point that he promised in chapter one, namely, practical instructions for holiness based on the gospel, faith, and union with Christ. (36 pages, 11%)

**Direction 13:** One must make use of the means of grace appointed in God’s **Word for holiness.** This, Marshall says, is essentially a continuation of the previous direction. He has an extended section on the role of the church in personal sanctification. (49 pages, 15%)

**Direction 14:** The way to holiness explained above is consistent with **Protestant theology in general.** This chapter explains how holiness interfaces with predestination and justification and how it does not have the pitfalls of other systems (Antinomian and Neonomian). (16 pages, 5%)

We can make a few observations regarding the scope and sequence of the chapters to help us understand the way Marshall makes his argument and the kind of argument it is. The overall sequence is as follows.

1. A clear aim is set forth in the beginning (dir. 1), followed by
2. a thesis according to which the aim will be realized (dir. 2–5). Then
3. the defeaters of the thesis are refuted (dir. 6–10), after which is stated
4. the realization of the aim (dir. 11–13), ending with
5. a conclusion that explains how the realization of the aim is consistent with broader theology (dir. 14).
The sequence as stated above evidences scholastic influence. Muller defines scholastic work a “technical and logical approach” designed to designate precise understandings by careful division and definition of topics. The scholastic style also included carefully refuting potential defeaters to one’s thesis. Marshall gives significant attention to definitions, i.e., his broad and narrow definition of sanctification, which are critical for his argument. But the more decisive evidence his scholastic approach is the careful refutation of his opponents. As we will see, Marshall goes to great lengths to refute Baxter.

When we reexamine the substance of Marshall’s work in light of this type of rhetoric, we see how he uses the scholastic approach for pastoral goals (Muller and others have successfully demonstrated that there is nothing contradictory in using the scholastic style for pastoral goals). In other words, Marshall is drawing upon scholastic rhetoric, even though his audience is not the academy, but average Christian. The clear aim is stated in the second sentence: “The scope of all is to teach you how you may attain to that practice and manner of life which we call holiness....” His goal is to explain not what the duties of holiness are but “how the duties of the law may be done.” In short, Marshall aims to teach his readers how to be holy—a pastoral goal. Holiness is defined as love toward God and love toward others for the sake of God.

The thesis for how the aim of holiness will be realized is stated in the second through fifth directions: the only way to holiness is to have certain endowments that one has in union with Christ. This includes justification and renovative change. A key aspects of these endowments is assurance. One cannot love God unless one knows that God is not an enemy but a reconciled friend. The sections where various defeaters are refuted (dir.

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2 Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatic, 1:34-35.
3 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 29 (2.2.5).
4 Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, 1.
5 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 1 (1.1).
6 Ibid., 1 (1.1).
7 Ibid., 1–2 (1.1).
6–10) deal broadly with Antinomianism and Neonomianism. The next section—how the aim is realized (dir. 11–13)—explores how one ought to walk according to the new nature available in Christ. Though only three chapters are devoted to the main purpose of his work, they total about one-third of the whole book. The last direction (dir. 14) shows how this method of holiness is most consistent with Reformed theology. The goal of Marshall’s work is to teach people how to be holy through the free grace in Christ, not through slavish obedience to the law.

The above analysis demonstrates how Marshall’s work is both polemical and pastoral. The pastoral nature is seen in the overall aim of the work: to comfort troubled consciences and teach people how to be holy. However, in Marshall’s time sophisticated theological arguments impeded the pursuit of holiness, as we discussed in the previous section. Thus, Marshall employs the scholastic approach to decisively refute the troubling errors.

Though Marshall’s work fits broadly in the scholastic approach, there are a few unique characteristics that help us understand Marshall’s specific purpose. Marshall has no interaction with the Church Fathers and scholastic Orthodox. In a work that is more than one-third refutation of opposing views, he never names the schools or individuals who hold the views that he is primarily interested in refuting. He simply calls them the “new divinity,” a name often used to refer to a theology one disliked. Marshall’s arguments are almost exclusively biblical and theological. As we will see, he has an acute sensitivity to Pauline theology. Alexander Whyte is right to call Marshall “the most Pauline of the divines.” By way of comparison, when Owen wanted to set forth the biblical idea of union with Christ, he went back to Augustine to show the historic nature of this teaching, which was the kind of argument that would have had sway in the academy, but Marshall, aiming to help “those who labor under the guilt and power of indwelling sin,” uses Scripture. Marshall’s work is eminently pastoral, meant to comfort

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8. Ibid., 1 (1.1).

the “crop of afflicted consciences”\textsuperscript{10} with the finished work of Christ, without tending toward Antinomianism.

\textbf{The Nature of Sin and Depravity}

To understand Marshall’s view of sanctification, we must grasp his view of sin. Sanctification in Christian theology is the restoration of the human nature from its ruin in sin, and precisely how one articulates this ruin will have direct bearing on how one understands its restoration. As we saw, the differing views regarding sanctification of Catholics and the Protestants, and Arminian and Reformed, can be traced back to differing views of sin.

Marshall’s understanding of sin is consistent with the Synod of Dort’s teaching on the effect of the fall on human nature, particularly its third main point on total inability.\textsuperscript{11} For Marshall, grasping the Pauline sense of deadness in sin is a necessary precondition to understanding sanctification as essentially the making alive of what was once dead. Marshall writes, “This doctrine of original sin, which Protestants generally profess, is a firm basis and groundwork to the assertions now to be proved, and to many other assertions in this whole discourse.”\textsuperscript{12} Thus, the doctrine of original sin undergirds Marshall’s entire work. Marshall’s articulation of depravity is set forth not primarily for the reader to understand the theory of sanctification but to help the reader undergo the practice of sanctification. Marshall believed that those who did not know their own depravity would try in vain to work out sanctification according to their sinful nature.

Marshall was acquainted with people (perhaps including himself) who were “ready even to kill their bodies with fasting and other macerations, that they may kill their sinful

\textsuperscript{10} Packer, \textit{Redemption and Restoration}, 36.

\textsuperscript{11} “Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin. Without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to Reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such Reform.” Synod of Dort, 3:3. Schaff, \textit{Creeds}, 3:522.

\textsuperscript{12} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 7 (1.2.1).
lusts,” yet they “try in vain to reform their natural state.” Marshall laments, “If they knew that this way of entrance is not only harsh and unpleasant, but altogether impossible... if they knew this, they might save themselves many a bitter agony, and a great deal of misspent burdensome labor, and employ their endeavors to enter in at the strait gate, in such a way as would be more pleasant and successful.” Marshall explains the Protestant concept of original sin so that the individual will be “brought to know the plague of his own heart.” He aims to “deliver those ignorant zealots from their fruitless tormenting labors, by bringing them to despair of attainment of holiness in a natural state, that they may seek it only in a new state by faith in Christ, where they may certainly find it.”

Marshall summarizes his teaching on total inability as follows:

We are all, by nature, void of all strength and ability to perform acceptably that holiness and righteousness which the law requires, and are dead in trespasses and sins, and children of wrath, by the sin of our first father, Adam, as the Scripture witnesses (Rom. 5:12, 15, 18, 19; Eph. 2: 1–3; Rom. 8:7, 8). ... While man continued upright, in the image of God, as he was at first created (Eccles. 7:29; Gen. 1:27), he could do the will of God sincerely, as soon as he knew it; but, when he was fallen, he was quickly afraid, because of his nakedness; but could not help it at all. 

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13 Ibid., 81-82 (5.1).
14 Ibid., 81-82 (5.1).
15 Ibid., 42 (3.1).
16 Ibid., 36 (2.4.1).
17 Ibid., 83 (5.2).
18 Ibid., 6–7 (1.2.1).
Marshall uses Old Testament imagery to reinforce this point: humans are like Samson, who could not act as he did formerly after he “sinned away his strength.” They are also as Ezekiel’s dry bones, which had no life in them apart from God’s Spirit.

The Image of God and Sin

Marshall’s understanding of total inability rests on his understanding of the fall’s corruption of the image of God, resulting in a sinful inclination. This sinful inclination is the essence of corruption: “…our impotency consists not in a mere want of executive power, but in the want of a willing mind to practice true holiness and righteousness.” The core reason why humanity can rightly be called “vipers, whores, corrupt, abominable, filthy, and continually at enmity with the law of God” is the “evil propensity of the will.” This evil inclination is immediate: “It is a fixed propensity to lust against the law without any deliberation.” Because sinfulness is rooted in the immediacy of one’s inclination to sin, one’s reason and willpower are unable to overcome it. It pervades all human thought, affections, desires, acts, and attitudes. The human predicament is not one in which people want to walk in obedience but are prevented by their corruption. Rather, their corruption is rooted in their inclination away from holiness.

Marshall wants his readers to understand a correspondence between humanity’s positive inclination toward God and holiness before the fall and their disinclination toward God and holiness in their sinful state. Prior to the fall, the image of God in Adam consisted of “an actual bent and propensity of the heart to the practice of holiness.” When Adam was “first framed in the image of God,” he had good works “engraved

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19 Ibid., 7 (1.2.1).
20 Ibid., 8–9 (1.2.3).
21 Ibid., 91 (5.2.7).
22 Ibid., 20 (2.1.3).
23 Ibid., 87 (5.2.5.3).
24 Ibid., 19 (2.1.2).
25 Ibid., 3 (1.1).
upon [him] in the first creation.” This inclination toward God is that “in which the image of God consists.” It was not that Adam existed in a state of neutrality, with the mere potential to do good, as was taught by the Arminians. Rather, he was inclined toward holiness.

This inclination was necessary for true holiness. “In the first place,” Marshall writes, “I assert that an inclination and propensity of the heart to the duties of the law is necessary to frame and enable us for the immediate practice of them.” Marshall is thinking similarly to the Synod of Dort, which also sees a connection between Adam having a “good disposition” before the fall and that disposition being “separated from the will at the fall.” Calvin, too, attests to this in his extended treatment on how uncorrupted humanity would have perfectly understood God’s revelation and responded rightly.

This inclination toward God and toward holiness before the fall—and corresponding disinclination toward God and holiness after the fall—is derived from Adam’s status as the image of God in relation to two mutually dependent realities. These are (1) Adam’s nature as holy and (2) Adam’s friendship with God. Being derived from Adam’s status as the image of God, these realities are mutually dependent: they can be distinguished but not separated. This is similar, as we will see, to the way justification and sanctification can be distinguished but not separated. Almost every time Marshall explains Adam’s endowments for holiness before the fall, he does so in reference to the image of God.

First, Adam was inclined toward God and toward holiness because of his nature as holy in the image of God. Not discounting Adam’s probationary state whereby he

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26 Ibid., 3 (1.1).
27 Ibid., 20 (2.1.3).
28 Ibid., 90 (5.2.7).
29 Ibid., 17 (2.1).
30 Canon of Dort, III. Rejection of errors ii.
31 Calvin, Institutes. Calvin makes this point throughout all of book one, but especially chapter 5, 51–69.
32 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 19 (2.1.2), 20 (2.1.2), 23 (2.2.1), 27–28 (2.2.4), 52 (3.3.3.1).
could have grown in his holy nature had he remained upright, Marshall insists that for Adam’s holiness to be authentic, it had to stem from a holy inclination derived from a holy nature. Marshall writes, “The first Adam had excellent endowments bestowed on him for a holy practice when he was first created according to the image of God.”

Marshall recognizes the commonly understood scriptural principle “like loveth like.” This means, “There must be an agreeableness in the person or thing beloved to the disposition of the lover. Love to God must flow from a clean heart (1 Tim. 1:5), a heart cleansed from evil propensities and inclinations.” A pure and holy nature longs for pure and holy things. Because Adam was “made upright according to God’s image,” he was inclined to God and to holiness. Marshall believed that one is not practicing holiness when obedience is forced or compelled out of a desire for something other than a true holy nature. Rather, “Holiness must flow from the imaginations and affections of the soul,” and therefore, holiness can be obtained only if it springs from a holy soul, which Adam had in the original creation.

Adam’s inclination toward God also stemmed from his positive relationship with God as a friend. This, too, had its root in Adam as the image of God. The probationary nature of the covenant of works also notwithstanding, Adam related to God as one confident of God’s favor, enjoying the “present possession of an earthly paradise and happy estate in it.” And Adam enjoyed this relationship with God “because he was made upright according to God’s image.” Here Marshall incorporates both Luther’s

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34 This phrase appears in Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (London: 1645), 59.
36 Ibid., 23 (2.2.1).
37 Ibid., 2 (1.1).
38 Ibid., 23 (2.2.1).
39 Ibid., 9 (1.2.4), 32–33 (2.3.2).
40 Ibid., 9 (1.2.4), 32–33 (2.3.2).
position in which Adam's good works were a non-meritorious response to God's love and a mature federal theology. He does this by recognizing that Adam had to work to obtain positive righteousness that would have resulted in a reward. But he also insists that, as the image of God, this working would have been out of confidence in God's present favor.

The Law

To understand Adam and Eve's sin, we must grasp what it was they sinned against, and this brings us to Marshall's understanding of the law. We see an important distinction between Marshall and Baxter concerning the law, which affects not only their differing views of sin but also their differing views of sanctification. In agreement with Baxter (and almost everyone except extreme Antinomians), Marshall sees the external, revealed law as the true standard of holiness that is required of every human. But unlike Baxter's “political method,” in which the law was primarily a revelation of God as the one who has the right to call people to obedience, Marshall understands the law functioning primarily as a revelation of God's holy nature.

According to Marshall, the most critical category for holiness is that which

...depends not merely on the sovereignty of the will of God, to be commanded or forbidden, or left indifferent, or changed, or abolished at His pleasure, as other works that belong either to the judicial or ceremonial law, or to the means of salvation prescribed by the gospel; but they are, in their own nature, holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12), and suitable for us to perform because of our natural relation to

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41 Martin Luther, *Luther on the Creation: A Critical and Devotional Commentary on Genesis 1-3*, trans., John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans in All Lands, 1904), 158. Luther's understanding of the Seventh Day Sabbath rest for God and man led him to conclude that humans were already in a state of complete rest. There is scarcely any room for a probation period in his thinking.


our Creator and fellow creatures; so that they have an inseparable dependence on the holiness of the will of God, and an indispensable establishment thereby.44

From this we see that Marshall understood a sense of holiness that transcended the precepts or decrees issued in God’s law. This sense of holiness is based on God’s character and revealed to humanity through creation as well as that law. Those who live according to this holiness are holy, regardless of whether or not they have heard of any laws. However, this is strictly theoretical; Marshall doesn’t actually believe that anyone in a sinful state could live holy. In short, Marshall believed there was something behind God’s law, namely, his character, which was a foundation for the law. Therefore, the law was the means of coming to know and respond rightly to God’s character.

This has important implications for the function of the law in theology. Although Marshall would affirm that law breaking is sin against God’s authority and, as such, deserves a punishment, the more fundamental factor effecting humanity’s sinful state and punishment was their sin against the holiness of God in the context of a relationship with him, a relationship in which humans owed God covenantal loyalty and faithful love. Thus, for Marshall, the law is highly relational, having to do chiefly with the terms of the covenant. Believers who submit to God’s law submit to the God whom they know and love. Unbelievers who rebel against God do so because they hate God’s nature.45 Thus, in clear contrast to Baxter’s theology, Marshall taught that God’s law cannot be abstracted from God’s person; it is not a revelation merely of his kingly authority but a revelation of God’s holy nature.

Expressing the difference between Baxter and Marshall will help clarify Marshall’s view of the law. For Baxter, the function of the law was absolute—obedience to the law was the only way that humans could be rightly related to God—and the requirements of the law were relative to God’s spoken will in whatever dispensation of God’s revelation.46 For Marshall, however, the requirements of the law were absolute—

44 Ibid., 4 (1.1).
45 Ibid., 27 (2.2.4).
46 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 262.
there was only one standard of holiness that is derived from God’s holy nature—and the function of the law was relative to the situation of God’s relationship with people. This subtle difference had profound implications for their respective theological structures.47

This established law affects people differently depending on their relationship with God. For Marshall, a decisive change happens when God’s people are no longer under the law as a “school master” but are made sons.48 “The law is not to be preached now in the same terms as Moses preached it for justification.”49 This is Marshall’s warrant for the Reformed idea of the third use of the law.50 It is the same absolute moral standard, whether it is used for condemnation or as a guide to the believer, but a change in one’s status before God issues in a change in the function of the law: it no longer condemns; it guides. Marshall writes:

But the Ten Commandments bind us still, as they were then given to a people that were at that time under the covenant of grace made with Abraham, to show them what duties are holy, just and good, well-pleasing to God, and to be a rule for their conversation. The result of all is that we must still practice moral duties as commanded by Moses, but we must not seek to be justified by our practice. If we use them as a rule of life, not as conditions of justification, they can be no ministration of death, or killing letter to us. Their perfection indeed makes them to be harder terms to procure life by, but a better rule to discover all imperfections, and to guide us to that perfection which we should aim at.51

Compared to Baxter, Marshall put less stress on the divine pronouncement and God’s role as lawgiver, and more stress on God as the covenantal Lord, revealing his

47 Kevan, The Grace of the Law, 137.
49 Ibid., 22.
51 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 109 (6.1.3).
holiness in the total environment of humanity. Marshall writes, “The law was first given to Adam in his pure natural state, to prescribe terms for his continuance in the happiness which he then enjoyed.” This means that Adam would have understood the law as that which would aid him in his relationship with God. He would have loved God and been inclined to follow him, and he would have had the necessary ability to do so. The law would not have been burdensome. Though Marshall assumes that the prohibition against the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a part of special revelation, it seems that he also recognizes collaboration between general revelation and special revelation at this point, which would have aided Adam in his obedience. Thus, the law as decree cannot be isolated from the total environment that reveals God’s character or abstracted from man’s inclination toward God as the image of God. In short, the law can be understood only in the context of the covenant. To support this, Marshall relies heavily upon Paul’s teaching in Romans 2 that the Gentiles who do not have the law revealed to them still know the essence of the law. Marshall says that humans are “under the penalty of wrath for violating what is clear by nature to all people.” Even those who have no contact with special revelation are “strongly convinced that holiness is absolutely necessary to salvation.” Moreover, “we cannot rationally doubt that moral duties of love to God and our neighbor are absolutely necessary for true religion,” writes Marshall. “The scope of the Apostle [is] to show that...Jews and Gentiles were universally condemned by the Light and Law of nature, or the Law written.” Summing this up, the law, which even the Gentiles understand, is connected with God’s holiness and revealed both inside and outside of all humanity (Romans 1:18–27). Marshall sees this as clear proof that, contrary to the view of Baxter, God’s singular nature as the King and rightful

52 Ibid., 120 (6.2.2).
53 Hee Lee, 70.
54 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 3–4 (1.1).
55 Ibid., 81 (5.1).
56 Ibid., 11 (1.2.7).
lawgiver is not the primary factor determining humanity’s relationship with God. If it were, then those who never received God’s special revelation could not be accountable for God’s commands.

Marshall’s emphasis on sin as arising out of a contradiction of God’s character also meant that for Marshall, in contrast to Baxter, natural revelation after the fall was wholly condemnatory. From Romans 1 and 2, Marshall infers that the “common light of natural reason” teaches humans (1) the just requirements of God, (2) that this justice must be met in order to “avoid his wrath and enjoy his favor,” and (3) that the only way to obey is to stir up holiness by one’s own effort. Yet (4) because of all the unbeliever’s evil conscience, any attempt at holiness always ends in failure. Our consciences testify that we have not kept the law. Thus, the light of nature reveals only condemnation. Natural revelation would have propelled Adam along in holiness prior to his fall by testifying of God’s holiness and Adam’s proper relationship to him. But now it reveals only death. God’s revelation in nature shows humanity what was lost but cannot reveal how it can be recovered. “God has set nothing but death before his eyes in case of transgression (Gen. 2:17) and, therefore, he hid himself from God when the shame of his nakedness appeared, as expecting no favor from Him.”

This covenantal understanding of the law explains why humanity’s relationship with God is entirely destroyed once the law is broken in the fall. The breaking of the law was a rebellion not only against God’s rightful rule but, more particularly, against God’s good nature, a nature that man knew not only externally but also internally, as he was made in the image of that nature. Humanity must trust in God’s good nature if any good deeds can be produced. The fall, therefore, constituted a complete rejection of God and of oneself as made in his image. Humans no longer loved God. Instead, they opposed him at

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59 Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 8 (1.2.3).

60 Ibid., 98 (6).

61 Ibid., 98 (6).

62 Ibid., 8 (1.2.3).
every point. The principle that “like loveth like” would now mean for humanity a sinful inclination and corruption in everything.

We will look at this more later, but it is helpful to point out that this is why Marshall places more importance on the gospel for salvation. Baxter’s emphasis on humanity relating to God through the law diminished the antithesis between the law and the gospel. The gospel was, in Baxter’s own words, a “new law.”63 Its terms were easier (at least according to Baxter; Marshall disagrees64), but its function was the same. For Baxter, this similarity meant that if one did not have the light of the gospel, one could still be saved by submitting to God through the light of nature.65 Baxter writes,

But when the Scripture assureth us that it is the Law of Grace, and not only that of Innocency, which all the world is governed by, and shall be judged by, and so that their Sanctification and Salvation is possible; there is so great a probability, that this Covenant, and the mercies of it, are not in vain to all of them that are under it alone, and that the thing that is possible to so many millions, doth come to pass with some, that an impartial considerer of Gods Nature and Government, may easily see what to think most probable.66

Baxter assumed that some who are sanctified through general revelation did truly love God and would be included in the company in heaven, even though they never consciously believed in Christ. The critical point here is that one could be sanctified simply through general revelation. This is in radical contrast to Marshall, who saw natural revelation as wholly condematory and, therefore, insisted that the only means of salvation and sanctification was in Christ.

63 Baxter, Aphorismes of Justification, 104.
64 Marshall, Gospel Mystery 10 (1.2.6).
65 Baxter, Reliquiæ Baxteriana, 200–201.
66 Baxter, Catholick Theology, 22.
The Spread of Sin

According to Marshall, Adam’s federal headship meant that all people fell with Adam in his sin. Marshall explains, “The first Adam was all mankind, as Jacob and Esau were two nations in the womb of Rebecca.” In addition to sharing in Adam’s guilt, those in Adam share with their forbearer a broken image of God and a disinclination toward God and holiness. This disinclination is rooted in the corruption of nature and loss of fellowship with God. The “actual bent and propensity of the heart [is] altogether evil.”

This corruption is an actual state that is passed down from generation to generation: “Our natural corruption was produced originally in the first Adam, and propagated from him to us.” For Marshall, all people are in this state, and it is called a “natural state” because it is “received by natural generation.” Marshall is clear that all those federally connected to Adam and following in his path deserve a penalty.

Marshall is also clear that the corruption of original sin causes sinful acts, not the reverse. That is, people sin because they are sinners; they are not sinners because they sin. Marshall believed that some (read Neonomians) fail to grasp this and, therefore, promote the false and damaging hope that one can change one’s nature by changing one’s actions. He writes,

They understand no more by [being in the flesh] than to be sinful, or to be addicted inordinately to please the sensitive appetite. They should observe that the Apostle speaks here [Rom 8:8] of being in the flesh as the cause of sinfulness… and whatever is the cause it is must needs be different from its effect. Sin is a poverty of the flesh, or something that dwells in the flesh (Rom 7:18), and

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67 Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 6 (1.2.1).
68 Ibid., 90 (5.2.7).
69 Ibid., 17 (2.1).
70 Ibid., 41 (3.1).
71 Ibid., 80 (5).
72 Ibid., 84 (5.2.3).
therefore it is not the flesh itself. The flesh is that which lusts against the Spirit (Gal 5:17), and therefore it is not merely sinful lusting. The true interpretation is that by flesh is meant the nature of man, as it is corrupted by the fall of Adam and propagated from him to us in that corrupt state by natural generation.\(^\text{73}\)

In other words, Marshall understands the Apostle to teach that sinful acts are caused by the sinful state inherited from Adam, making it impossible to change state by changing behavior. What humans need most, therefore, is not motivation to change one’s actions but a new state and nature, which can support new actions. This will happen only through union with Christ. This reinforces Marshall’s position that the human inability to produce any righteousness is the only sure foundation for a right understanding of sanctification.

**Life in the Sinful State**

To complete Marshall’s grim picture of depravity, we must understand what humans experience while living in a sinful state. This could be termed the existential effect of sin. Marshall rejected the Neonomian doctrine that one could change one’s state by altering one’s behavior, yet he also saw it inevitable that people would be attracted to that teaching, given the human awareness of God’s holiness and their knowledge of their own condemnation under the law. Explaining this proclivity toward Neonomianism is a key aspect of Marshall’s argument for two reasons. First, we must remember that Marshall intends *Gospel Mystery* to be a manual for holiness.\(^\text{74}\) To this end, he finds it useful to guide his readers in the psychology of their relationship with God; the more his audience can detect law-based obedience in their actions, the more they can self-consciously fight it. Second, the natural affinity toward Neonomianism explains its broad appeal. Why do so many run to a system that, in Marshall’s view, obscures God’s grace and adds obstacles to obtaining Christ? Answer: humans are attracted to a law-based

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\(^{73}\) Ibid., 84–86 (5.2.3).

\(^{74}\) Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 1 (1.1). “The scope of all is to teach you how you may attain to that practice and manner of life which we call holiness…. “
system. If Marshall can explain the attraction to Neonomianism and demonstrate how this attraction is rooted in the sinful nature, he has dwelt a serious blow to Baxter’s teaching.

Those in Adam find themselves in an inescapable bind. Marshall asks if it is even possible for someone who knows oneself to be under the wrath and curse of God “to practice the law immediately, [that is,] to love God and everything in Him, his justice, holiness and power, as well as his mercy, and to yield himself willingly to the disposal of God, though God should inflect sudden death on him?” The answer is “no” because of the absolute aversion to God that results from one’s status before Him as condemned. We must remember that natural revelation is wholly condemnatory. Without special revelation, one knows oneself to be a sinner and under the just wrath of God. Thus, the unbeliever’s interaction with natural revelation produces only “the fears of eternal damnation press[ed] hard on their consciences.”

True holiness for the unbeliever would require desiring to be close to a being who will invariably bring one to eternal, absolute ruin. In fact, “the greater God’s excellency and perfection is, the greater evil He is to us.”

Marshall continues,

The principle of self-preservation, deeply rooted in our natures, hinders us from loving that which we apprehend as our destruction. If man is an enemy to us, we can love him for the sake of our loving reconciled God, because his love will make man’s hatred work for our good, but if God himself is our enemy, for whose sake can we love him?

Love for an enemy is possible only in view of God’s favor. One draws on one’s relationship with God in order to love one’s enemy. However, if God is one’s enemy, one is forced to flee. One would “hate God and wish there were no God, no heaven, no hell,

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75 Ibid., 8 (1.2.2).
76 Ibid., 38 (2.4.2).
77 Ibid., 26 (2.2.3).
78 Ibid., 26 (2.2.3).
so that we might escape the punishment due to us.”\textsuperscript{79} This disinclination is the exact opposite of the preconditions for true holiness and must be overcome before any holiness can obtain.\textsuperscript{80}

This perpetual hiding that Marshall describes contributes to humanity’s “evil inclination,” which manifests itself in wishing that there was no God and hating him. Marshall asks, how can one sin destroy the whole image of God in the first Adam? Marshall suggests that it could be through Adam’s “guilty conscience” by which “he judged that the just God was against him and cursed him for that one sin. This would be enough to work a shameful nakedness by disorderly lusts, a turning of his love wholly from God to the creature and a desire to be hidden from the presence of God which was a total destruction of the image of God’s holiness.”\textsuperscript{81} This awareness of God’s wrath and anger creates a sense of shame and disgust with oneself.

However, according to Marshall, one cannot simply remain in hiding; one is also driven toward God as the only means for getting rid of the curse and shame. “The heathens, that knew nothing of a new state in Christ, were urged by their own consciences to practice several duties of the law, according to the knowledge they had by the light of nature (Rom 2:14, 15).”\textsuperscript{82} Many people “struggle and labor with great earnestness to subdue their inward thoughts and affections to the law of God, and to abstain, not only from some sins, but from all known sins, and to every known duty of the law.”\textsuperscript{83} They rightly believe that “holiness is absolutely necessary to salvation.”\textsuperscript{84} Thus, while one wants to run far away from God, one is also aware that the path of life would naturally run toward God. This desire for God and holiness is born out of pure necessity and is not, therefore, true holiness; it is nothing more than the desire of the creature to

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 27 (2.2.4).
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 17 (2.1).
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 27 (2.2.4).
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 80–81 (5.1).
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 81 (5.1).
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 81 (5.1).
preserve one’s life, similar to the sick person’s desire for foul-tasting medicine because it will make him healthy. In the end, these people are “fearfully swallowed up with horror of conscience.”\textsuperscript{85}

Thus, the sinner is put into a dilemma of needing that which he or she can never want. People attempt to overcome this in several ways. They count external performance as true holiness, with the result that holiness becomes superficial.\textsuperscript{86} For others, holiness becomes something one performs as “austere and unpleasant” but necessary for some greater good.\textsuperscript{87} Another tendency is for one to cast one’s own actions always in the best light and to think more highly of one’s own holiness than one ought to think. The insistence that their rags are actually righteousness is not simply the manifestation of raw pride (though it is that too) but is born out of the awareness that one needs real holiness to live. One’s awareness of the need for holiness, combined with one’s consciousness of guilt before God, drives one to all sorts of terrible actions committed against oneself and others. “It produces zeal in many austere performances, and also false religion, idolatry and the most inhumane superstitions in the world.”\textsuperscript{88}

While the Neonomians see this drive as a step on the road to true holiness, so long as the \textit{viator} can be properly educated, Marshall sees it only as wholly destructive. Similar to the Protestant charge against Trent that by denying the sinfulness of concupiscence they reduced the standard of holiness, Marshall charges Neonomian theology with being more “Antinomian” than Antinomian theology because it encourages people to call their evil actions good and lower the standard of “acceptable” righteousness.\textsuperscript{89}

But deplorable as their undermining of righteousness is, Marshall sees it is inevitable for those who lack spiritual knowledge of the gospel. He says that Neonomianism is the natural condition of people, and one encumbrance to sanctification

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 82 (5.1).
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 13 (1.2.8).
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 13 (1.2.8).
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 27 (2.2.4).
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. 116 (6.2).
is that “we must unlearn many of our former deeply-rooted notions and become fools, that we may be wise.”

Before we conclude this section, we should touch on one criticism of Marshall. Joseph Bellamy, an eighteenth-century critic of Marshall, charges him with implicit Antinomianism for his view that the carnality of the sinful mind rests exclusively in the belief that God is our enemy. Bellamy sees this as problematic because it would imply that belief in God as friend could reorient the human heart to love God without any change of nature.

Bellamy’s criticism of Marshall is based on a superficial reading of his work. It’s true that Marshall attributes sinful corruption to the belief that God is one’s enemy, but not as a sufficient or final cause. The closest Marshall comes to affirming Bellamy’s misreading of him is his statement that he has often considered how one sin caused the downfall of the entire human race and that it has something to do with Adam’s sin creating the knowledge that God is set against sinful humanity. But, even here, it is worth noting that Marshall frames his point somewhat tentatively. Moreover, even if it were true that a person’s belief that God is against him/herself were a root cause of corruption, it would still not result in a situation in which this corruption could be changed simply by believing new facts. As we already saw, the belief concerning God’s disfavor not only is based on the authority of God’s special revelation but also comes through general revelation. This state of enmity cannot be denied without denying what one already knows through experience. Therefore, the only real and lasting way to change one’s belief in God’s disfavor to favor is through a real change in the relationship with God in which one actually ceases being an object of God’s wrath and becomes a child in whom he delights. This change would include the comfort of the Spirit, regeneration, and fellowship with Christ.

In support of Marshall’s position, it is wroth reminding ourselves of Calvin’s explanation for why those who are falsely converted live contrary to God’s law: they

90 Ibid., 10 (1.2.6).
91 Joseph Bellamy, The Works of Joseph Bellamy, Dd. First Pastor of the Church in Bethlehem, Conn (Boston:: Doctrinal Track and Book Society, 1853) 612.
92 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 27 (2.2.4).
were never true recipients of God’s favor in Christ and, therefore, did not reciprocate God’s love.\(^{93}\) Thus the mere belief that God is not one’s enemy is not sufficient to lead that person into holiness; one must experience God’s love for them in Christ.

Therefore, a balanced reading of Marshall shows that corruption and original sin are as significant contributors to the depraved human nature as is one’s awareness of one’s status before God. It is both the belief that God is an enemy—a belief that all unbelievers share and are unable to totally suppress—and the corruption of nature that are the cause of the sinful nature that is expressed in behavior. This is why, as we will see, Marshall insists that justification alone is not sufficient to break the curse of sin. Humanity must be changed into a new nature vis-à-vis union with Christ.

**Union with Christ**

Marshall’s understanding of the extent and perversity of human corruption in the fall of mankind could incite us to look to Marshall’s doctrine of sanctification, so that we can understand how this corruption is cured. But such a leap would miss critical material: we must first explore the matrix in which the benefits of Christ’s holiness are communicated to believers, namely their union with Christ.

Marshall’s Treatment of Union

Much of Marshall’s treatment of union with Christ describes its use rather than its nature. This is typical of most theology of union because, as Robert Letham observes, “It is easier to discuss the relationship between union with Christ and this or that than to understand what it actually is.”\(^{94}\) Marshall, however, also describes what it is. He understands that the nature of this union cannot be separated from its use.

The most complete explanation of the nature of union is in Marshall’s third direction. The overall point of this direction is to show that the endowments necessary for the immediate practice of holiness are given as part of a holy nature “already prepared

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 3.2.12.

and brought into an existence for us in Christ.” Believers obtain this nature if—and only if—they are united to Christ. Receiving the new nature in Christ is, for Marshall, the only means of producing real righteousness.

To prove this thesis, Marshall endeavors to show that union with Christ is a real and proper union, which creates an experiential reality in the believer. This union is not simply relative, being constituted in the proper behavior one displays toward Christ (as we saw was Baxter’s position), but real, consisting in an actual bond of the Spirit between believers and Christ. Moreover, this union is experiential because through it the believer has immediate access to the fullness of Christ. Our present task is to understand the nature of union.

Marshall sees the Trinity, the hypostatic union, and believers’ union with Christ in the category of mystical unions revealed in Scripture. Only in relation to these other unions is union with Christ properly understood. Unlike Owen, who was hesitant to employ the term “mystical” to describe union with Christ, Marshall uses it often. He sees this language as Scriptural, coming from Ephesians 5:32. Marshall’s sense of “mystical” is not identical to that of the medieval mystics or British “Enthusiasts,” especially Antinomians. Rather, defining it in biblical terms, he says that this union “is above the reach of natural reason, yet is evidently discovered to those that have their understandings open to discern that supernatural revelation.” Marshall’s de-emphasis on reason strikes a similar cord as Luther and the nominalist tradition. And like Luther Marshall looked to Scripture understand God’s relationship with humanity. The Scriptures which taught union with Christ most clearly included John 6:56 and 14:20, 1 Corinthians 6:17, and Ephesians 5:30–32, which speak of union as mutual indwelling,

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97 Seven times to be precise.
98 Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 43. “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32).
99 Ibid., 47 (3.3).
sharing of the same Spirit, and joining as one flesh, respectively.\textsuperscript{100} Similar to the union between the members of the Trinity and the hypostatic union, which are beyond the believer’s epistemic reach, Christians are obliged to believe in their union with Christ on the authority of Scripture, even when the facts concerning this union do not comport with human reason. Logical questions about how those who lived before the coming of Christ could be united to Christ or how people who are locally separated from Christ could be united to Him should not trouble the believer.\textsuperscript{101} Marshall says, “the bond of union, being spiritual, does not fall at all under the judgment of sense.”\textsuperscript{102} As we will see in our conclusion, this revelational and anti-rationalistic foundation for union with Christ distinguishes Marshall from both the Antinomians and Neonomians.

History of Redemption in Christ

For Marshall, union with Christ is of immense benefit not simply because it is a union with the Divine, but also because it is union with the Perfect Man, who is fitted to be the very savior sinful men need. One could even say that the essence of Marshall’s work is an elaboration of Calvin’s insight that the benefits of Christ are given “to enrich needy sinners.”\textsuperscript{103} Marshall explains the conduit of this enriching, namely, union with Christ. He also explains its \textit{telos}, namely, sanctification/glorification with Christ. Direction 3 explores how Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and the sending of the Spirit in Christ’s name shape the nature of Christ for this union.\textsuperscript{104} Union with Christ—from election to glory—is union with the Son who became incarnate, suffered, and was resurrected for the believer.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 43 (3.2).
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 57 (3.3.3.6).
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 45 (3.2).
\textsuperscript{103} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.1.1.
\textsuperscript{104} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 51 (3.3.3).
The Person of Christ Fashioned for Union

In the first place, Christ is fashioned to be a fitting savior by his incarnation because the whole goal of union with Christ is to create a holy nature that is given to the believer. For Christ to furnish a perfect human nature, he first must be made human. Marshall says, “By his incarnation, there was a man created in a new holy frame, after the holiness of the first Adam’s frame that had been marred….” Thus, Marshall embraces the eastern formula that man cannot be made like Christ unless Christ is made like man. He sees this as a clear implication of 1 Corinthians 15:45, “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam was made a living soul’; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.”

Nevertheless, the person of Christ is not simply the uncorrupted human nature; he is God. Marshall articulates classic Chalcedonian Christology, stressing that the person of Christ is the second person of the Trinity who assumed human nature. The locus of personhood resides in the divine nature. Marshall also teaches a Reformed notion of the communication of properties in which the properties of each nature act a “by power proper” to that nature in the union of the Person. When Christ spoke, God spoke. This understanding of communication of properties is central for how Marshall understands Christ to benefit believers. In the person of Christ we find the greatest possible intimacy between God and man—far greater than Adam even experienced before his fall—without conflating their respective natures. The essence of salvation is when this same quality of fellowship with God is communicated to believers in their union with Christ. By

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105 Ibid., 51 (3.3.3.1).
107 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 52 (3.3.3.1).
108 Ibid., 52 (3.3.3.1).
109 Ibid., 52 (3.3.3.1). For the post-Reformation context of this idea, see also Muller Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, 1:252.
110 Marshall, Gospel Mystery. 52 (3.3.3.1).
possessing Christ, the believer participates in “the divine nature” according to 2 Peter 1:3–4. Thus, the person of Christ is of such indescribable benefit to believers because he is the divine nature in perfect fellowship with human nature. This is why he raises human nature to such magnificent glory.

Though essential to salvation, the hypostatic union alone does not constitute the believers’ union with Christ. This union must be purchased “through the preciousness of the blood of God, by which we are redeemed.” Only the merits of the blood will grant the believer an office so high as union with Christ. “Christ died…that we might receive [a holy nature] prepared and formed in Christ for us, by union and fellowship with him.” Marshall stresses repeatedly that Christ’s death is necessary for the union. He argues that to despair of the possibility of so noble a union is to dishonor the blood of Christ that purchased it.

Moreover, Christ’s resurrection also fits him to be a savior for sinful people: “By his resurrection, He took possession of spiritual life for us, as now fully procured for us, and made to be our right and property by the merit of his death.” The merit of his death earns Christ the right of resurrection, which he then shares with his people. Moreover, in Christ’s resurrection he is dead to sin and death and alive to God, and through union with Christ, the believer shares in these benefits of the resurrection as well. Marshall writes, “His resurrection was our resurrection to the life of holiness, as Adam’s fall was our fall into spiritual death.”

One aspect of Christ’s resurrection not to be ignored is his justification. Marshall understands Paul’s locution “justified by the Spirit” in 1 Timothy 3:16 to teach that in the

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111 Ibid., 325 (14.3.2).
112 Ibid., 45 (3.2).
113 Ibid., 50 (3.3.2).
114 Ibid., 54 (3.3.2).
115 Ibid., 54 (3.3.3.2).
116 Ibid., 45 (3.2).
117 Ibid., 54 (3.3.3.3).
resurrection Christ was Christ’s public and forensic declaration of being righteous.\textsuperscript{118} The resurrection proves Christ no longer guilty of the believer’s sins: “God accepted this price as a Satisfaction to his Justice, which he shewed in raising Christ from the dead, and so acquitting him from all our sins.”\textsuperscript{119} It is also a declaration of Christ’s status as adopted son, the righteous one who has fully obeyed his father.\textsuperscript{120}

Yet the aspect of redemptive history that most immediately explains the nature of the believer’s union is Christ’s possession of the Spirit. The Spirit is responsible for every aspect of union. The union is most fully a “Spiritual union” because Christ and believers share the same Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Thus, to have the Spirit of Christ is to be united to Christ.\textsuperscript{121} Marshall sees 1 Corinthians 6:17 as clear proof. He writes,

…though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, yet He can join our souls and our bodies to His at such a distance without substantial change of either, by the same infinite Spirit dwelling in Him and us…and He will be in us Himself by His Sprit, who is one with Him, and who can unite more closely to Christ than any material substance can do, or would can make a more close and intimate union between Christ and us.\textsuperscript{122}

And in a similar vein Marshall writes,

…the Spirit of God knits the knot of mystical marriage between Christ and us, and makes us branches of that noble vine; members of that body, joined to that excellent head; living stones of that spiritual temple, built on the precious living

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 44 (3.3.3.4).
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 44 (3.2).
corner-stone, and sure foundation; partakers of the bread and drink that come
down from heaven and give life to the world.\textsuperscript{123}

In these quotes Marshall is very similar to the likes of Calvin and Owen, who, as we saw,
speak much of the Spirit as the active agent in uniting believers to Christ.\textsuperscript{124}

The Spiritual union of Christ and believers also preserves the personal integrity of
both parties, as Marshall explains:

…it will not follow from this [Union with Christ] that a believer is one person
with Christ, and more than that Christ is one person with the Father by that great
mystical union. Neither will a believer be in this way made God, but only the
temple of God, as Christ’s body and soul is; and the Spirit’s lively instrument,
rather than the principal cause.\textsuperscript{125}

Thus, Marshall sees believers in Spiritual union with the person of Christ. Every aspect of
Christ’s nature is formed to be able to “enrich sinful men,”\textsuperscript{126} and he enriches them with
none other than his divine nature in perfect fellowship with humanity.

\textit{Eschatological Structure of Union}

Before we explain more precisely what the new nature entails for the believer, we
must explore its eschatological structure.

As we saw above, Perkins describes the believer’s experience in salvation
primarily in a linear direction: one moves sequentially from one link in the chain to the
next, coming more and more into the reality of salvation. Marshall’s approach is
different. The benefits of Christ are given to the believer as a finished reality in Christ:

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 193–194 (11).
\textsuperscript{124} Owen, \textit{Works of John Owen}, 3:60; Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.1.1.
\textsuperscript{125} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 44–45 (3.2).
\textsuperscript{126} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.1.1.
they are “treasured up in him for us.” Believers have them in Christ “or not at all.” This even includes glorification. But the framework in which believer obtains these benefits is eschatological.

This eschatological structure is most clearly seen in the organic connection between sanctification and glorification. This connection is stated explicitly in the beginning and end of Marshall’s work:

**Beginning**: “That beautiful image [=God’s image in man] is renewed on us in our new creation and sanctification by Jesus Christ, and shall be perfected in our glorification.”

**End** (in the final sentence of the book): “Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun, as glorification is sanctification perfected.”

Before we expound on this concept, it is worth noting in passing that although Marshall is unique for his how he embeds this eschatological framework in the structure of his theology, this theme is broadly consistent with the Puritan idea of heaven being experienced on Earth—which even Baxter employs. Jeremiah Burroughs uses language very similar to that of Marshall to explain why “sanctification” is left out of the “golden chain” in Romans 8. It would be redundant, he says, because, “Glorification is nothing else but the perfecting of sanctification.” John Yates, Burroughs’s editor, writes similarly in his own right. Both of these writings predate Marshall. Yet Marshall’s use

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127 Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 48 (3.3.1).
128 Ibid., 48 (3.3.1).
129 Ibid., 3–4 (1.1).
130 Ibid., 331 (14.5.7).
of this concept is unique in that the connection between glorification and sanctification is the nub of the whole argument for how to avoid Baxterian legalism and Antinomianism at the same time. For Marshall, holiness in believers is nothing more than the resurrection glory of Christ proleptically visible in their lives.\footnote{Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 330 (14.5.7).} He applies this connection again and again as he develops his doctrine of personal sanctification.

“Glorification” is that state in which believer is fully conformed into the image of Christ.\footnote{Ibid., 52 (3.3.3.1).} One obtains this glory when one is raised in a new body like Christ. Marshall is dependent on Paul’s theology on this point, citing abundantly from Colossians 3 and Galatians 2,\footnote{Ibid. (3.3.1).} and especially 1 Corinthians 15.\footnote{Ibid., 52 (3.3.3.1).} Glorification is often spoken of a future reality because only in the future is it fully realized. But believers experience resurrection in some sense insofar as they are holy: “Resurrection to the life of holiness.”\footnote{Ibid., 54 (3.3.3).}

In one sense, then, Marshall shares similar concerns with the Antinomians, who also wanted to stress the finished character of Christ’s work.\footnote{Denne, \textit{Man of Sin}, 32.} According to the Antinomians only that which is a finished reality can be considered the true work of Christ. Marshall agreed in one sense. But Marshall’s structure did not require him to view the believer to be already in his or her fullest state of perfection, because according to Marshall, the benefits of union with Christ are only partially realized.\footnote{Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 45 (3.2).} Sanctification is only begun. It’s true that sanctification and glorification are organically connected. But positing their organic connection is not the same as asserting their complete identity. The

complete identity that the Antinomians assert rules out any imperative. Marshall’s approach, in contrast, fuels the imperative.

The imperative is necessary because even though the holy nature is real, it is not perfectly realized. The believer is in Christ, but Christ does not wholly possess the believer. He is given in degrees. Marshall writes, “Neither will a believer be necessarily perfect in holiness in this way, or Christ be made a sinner. For Christ knows how to dwell in believers by certain measure and degrees, and to make us holy so far only as he dwells in them.”

Christ’s absence is not positional, for one is entirely in Christ; but Christ can be absent in one’s experience to whatever degree the believer is not considering him- or herself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, that is, where the believer is not living by faith. This accounts for the progressive nature of sanctification.

Marshall uses this partial realized eschatological framework to account for how the apostle Paul affirms that believers live in two contradictory states simultaneously. Because sanctification is only begun, the sinful nature, though killed, is not “perfectly abolished.” This is why the imperative is necessary; believers must be told to “to put the old man off and put on the new man on more and more.” Paul also sees himself as “sold under sin.” But because sanctification has truly begun, the new life in Christ is real. “Believers have, indeed, put off the old man, and put on the new, where Christ is all and in all (Colossians 3:10–11);” Paul also says that he “allowed sin not,” and “hated it.” Marshall falls in neither the antinomian trap of over-realized eschatology, which

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141 Ibid. Gospel Mystery, 45 (3.2).
142 Ibid., 238 (12.2.1).
143 Ibid., 331 (14.5.7).
144 Ibid., 238 (12.2.1).
145 Ibid., 238 (12.2.1).
146 Ibid., 238 (12.2.1).
147 Ibid., 238 (12.2.1).
148 Ibid., 238 (12.2.1).
149 Ibid., 238 (12.2.1).
denied the reality of remaining sin, nor the neonomian trap of under-realized eschatology, which denied any sense of new life prior to the actual change in behavior. This duality of the believer is similar to Luther’s *simul iustus et peccator*, but with an important difference. Whereas Luther stressed the forensic declaration (*iustus*) in the face of the imperfect life (*peccator*), Marshall, in essence, applied both *iustus* and *peccator* to the real nature of the believer: righteous with respect to the believer’s sharing in the glory of Christ, but sinful with respect to the partial realization of it.

Sanctification, however, is not the only benefit of Christ that Marshall sees fulfilled eschatologically. Marshall sees an eschatological element to justification. Though Marshall fully affirms the status of the believer as righteous through faith, he exhorts believers to “wait patiently for the full declaration of justification at the great day.” The difference between present and future justification is not a difference in degree or level of security but a difference of the sphere in which it is known. One knows the righteous verdict in this present life only by faith, but in “outward things” one is a sinner. Yet in the glorified state, the believer’s “righteousness shall appear openly,” and the believer will be rewarded according to this public display of holiness.

This eschatological structure is also evident in the way Marshall deals with suffering in his letters to Richard Cromwell. He writes,

> Question not but that the common sufferings in thy life are Christ’s sufferings… be not over much sorrowful if Christ according to the order which he hath lived, crown you first with his thorns that afterward he may crown you with his glory; but rejoice in as much as you are partaker of Christ’s suffering, that when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.

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151 Ibid., 31.
152 Ibid., 31.
153 Walter Marshall, "Whom the Lord."
In this letter, the believer’s suffering and glory are organically connected to Christ’s death and resurrection, and the reason why believers experience suffering before glory is entirely explained by the order in which Christ experienced them. Marshall’s expectation of suffering reveals that partial realization of resurrection glory will not manifest itself in increasing comfort and healing of the body in this present life, as sanctification manifests itself in progressive holiness in this life; rather the glory will manifest itself precisely through the physical sufferings, for these trials provoke the believer to long for the glory to come. Believers follow the example of their Lord, whose suffering was the means by which he entered glory. Thus, while suffering and sinning are both present realities of the old nature that will be inverted in the final glorified state, their paths toward inversion differ dramatically: while Christians normally increase in greater holiness, they often decrease in physical comfort.

Resemblances of Union

Having understood the structure of the believer’s union with Christ, we will now explore the nature of union. Twice in direction 3 Marshall lists seven resemblances or similitudes of the union. They are as follows:

- As Christ lived in our nature by depending upon the Father, so also believers live through depending upon Christ (John 6:57).

- As all people share Adam’s corruption and guilt, so also all believers share Christ’s justification and new life (Rom 5:12, 14, 16, 17).

- As the body receives nourishment and direction by the head, so believers as one body receive nourishment and direction from Christ (Col 2:19).

- As branches receive nourishment from the vine, so believers receive nourishment from Christ (John 15:4–5).

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154 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 43–44 (3.2), 50 (3.3.2).
Marshall teaches that these resemblances indicate—albeit some more clearly than others—a reality that is fully furnished in Christ and communicated in the believer by a proper union with him. This theme is so prevalent in Walter Marshall that Wakefield says, “No one warms to this theme so splendidly as Walter Marshall.” For Marshall, the creation of this union is not synergistic, in which the union creates a compound that is the old nature somewhat renewed. Rather, it is “wrought out and completed in Christ for us, and imparted to us.” Thus, one has the holy frame in Christ “or not at all.” Marshall contrasts what he considers the classic Reformed position of “Real” and “proper” union, affirmed “both by ancient fathers, and many eminent Protestant

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155 Ibid., 106 (6.1.3).
157 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 51 (3.3.2).
158 Ibid., 41 (3.1).
159 Ibid., 65–66 (4.3).
divines,”160 with the idea of a “relative”161 union, as taught by a “new model of divinity.” Though not mentioned by name, this new theology describes Baxter.162

According to Marshall, this “new divinity” taught that there was “no other union between Christ and believers that such as persons or things wholly separated may have by their mutual relations to each other.”163 This union was “relative,”164 because it consists merely in the way the two parties—God and man—have chosen to relate. There is no union other than that which is created by the believer’s proper response to Christ. Specifically, Christ’s headship is his “political headship,”165 which is realized only by the believer’s submission to Christ. And “[w]hen Christ is said to be in his people, and they in him, they [=teachers of the New Divinity] think that the proper meaning is that Christ’s law, doctrine, grace, salvation, or that godliness is in them, and embraced by them.”166 Furthermore, the idea of being in one Spirit with Christ is the agreement of the mind. Marshall suspects that recent theologians departed from the older Protestant doctrine because of that doctrine’s perceived association with “[t]he sinews of Antinomianism.”167

For Marshall, such teaching on the “relative union” was unscriptural because it did not comport with the resemblances of union, nor did it uphold the mysterious nature of union. The resemblances mentioned above “would seem rather to beguile us by obscuring the truth than instruct us by illustrating it, if there were not true [and] proper union between Christ and believers.”168 Chief among these resemblances is the Lord’s

160 Ibid., 46 (3.2).
161 Ibid., 51 (3.3.2).
162 Ibid., 47 (3.2).
163 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 45 (3.2.).
164 Ibid., 51 (3.3.2).
165 Ibid., 47 (3.2).
166 Ibid., 47 (3.2).
167 Ibid., 47 (3.2).
168 Ibid., 43 (3.2).
Supper, which is not simply a resemblance, but a seal. The union cannot be merely relative, if this union is taught (and even sealed) by the actual eating of bread and drinking of wine.\(^{169}\) As food going inside the eater creates a real union, so also there must be a real sense in which Christ dwells in believers and believers dwell in Christ. Otherwise, the Lord’s supper leads us astray. Moreover, if Paul intends to communicate only relative union in the marriage analogy in Ephesians 5, there would be no mystery involved at all.\(^{170}\)

In contrast, Marshall argues that real union ought to be regarded as a basis for all the ways believers relate to Christ. Marshall counters Baxter’s teaching on relative union in the following:

I assert that our union with Christ is the cause of our subjection to Christ as a political head in all things, and of the abiding of His law, doctrine, grace, salvation and all godliness in us, and of our agreement with Him in our minds and affections; and therefore it cannot be altogether the same thing with them. And this assertion is useful for a better understanding of the excellency of this union. It is not a privilege procured by our sincere obedience and holiness, as some may imagine, or a reward of good works, reserved for us in another world; but it is a privilege bestowed on believers in their very first entrance into a holy state, on which all ability to do good works depends, and all sincere obedience to the law follows after it, as fruit produced by it.\(^{171}\)

Marshall acknowledges the same relational aspects of union that Baxter understands as “relative union,” but Marshall sees these as products of real union, not the cause.

In summary, Marshall’s understanding of union with Christ is a bond of the Spirit between Christ and believers that grants believers access to the benefits of Christ wrought in his incarnation, death, and resurrection. The foil for Marshall is Baxter’s teaching on

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 46 (3.2).

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 46 (3.2).

\(^{171}\) Ibid., 47 (3.2).
the relative union in which the believer must first act in accordance with the terms of the union in order for the union to obtain. This is closer to the medieval or Catholic view of union in which union is the goal of the pilgrim, not the starting point. As we will see, Marshall never tires of showing how Baxter’s understanding of union is unscriptural and counterproductive to real sanctification. For Marshall, union with Christ is the nonnegotiable starting point for receiving and experiencing all of Christ’s benefits, including holiness.

**Union with Christ and the New Nature**

Having explored Marshall’s notions of depravity and of union with Christ, we will now see how, by partaking of a “new state by mystical marriage with Christ,” the believer is brought out of depravity and into a new nature.\(^\text{172}\) One receives this new nature not through any works that are done but “out of Christ’s fullness, as a thing already prepared and brought into existence for us in Christ and treasured up in him.”\(^\text{173}\) At this point, we are looking only at the new nature that is furnished for holiness and immediately available in Christ. After we have explored justification, assurance, and faith, we will examine the experiential outworking of this nature (i.e., sanctification).

A starting point for understanding the new nature is that it is a prerequisite for real holiness; it is not something wrought by holiness. Marshall writes, “Sanctification, whereby our hearts and lives are conformed to the law, is a grace of God, communicated to us by means.”\(^\text{174}\) The most critical of these “means” is the holy nature one receives through Christ.

…there is a natural being by generation before there can be a spiritual being by regeneration. Thus arises the consideration of two states or conditions of the children of men in matters that appertain to God and godliness, the one of which is vastly different from the other. Those that have the happiness of a new birth and

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\(^\text{172}\) Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 235 (12.1.5).

\(^\text{173}\) Ibid., 41 (3.1).

\(^\text{174}\) Ibid., 9 (1.3.4).
creation in Christ by faith are thereby placed in a very excellent state, consisting in the enjoyment of the righteousness of Christ for their justification and the Spirit of Christ to live by in holiness here and glory for ever, as has already appeared. Those that are not in Christ by faith cannot be in a better state than that which they received together with their nature from the first Adam.175

In addition,

Let them learn that the old and new man are two contrary states, containing in them, not only sin and holiness, but all other things that dispose and incline us to the practice of them; and that the old man must be put off, as crucified with Christ, before we can be freed from the practice of sin. And therefore we cannot lead a new life until we have first got a new state by faith in Christ.176

Marshall frames his understanding of holiness in light of the radical antithesis between being in Christ—which means sharing in his new nature—and remaining in one’s natural condition of being spiritually dead in Adam. This is the antithesis between “flesh” and “Spirit.”177 The former results in sin and death, the latter in life and holiness. This condition is prior to actual behavior. It is the condition or state that gives rise to behavior, and consequently, behavior can have no bearing upon it.

The Nature of Holiness

Before further explicating the holy nature, we must briefly explore the kind of life that a holy nature produces, for only a kind of new nature capable of producing the quality of behavior Marshall describes as real holiness can be considered a true and proper holy nature. We must understand this holiness if we are to understand the change

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175 Ibid., 79–80 (5).
176 Ibid., 86 (5.2.4).
177 Ibid., 85 (5.2.3); see also Fesko, "Sanctification and Union with Christ: A Reformed Perspective," 34.
in nature that precipitates it. It’s worth noting that Marshall himself uses this pedagogical approach. He explains the nature of holiness in the first direction in order to set the benchmark for the kind of holiness that the new nature must achieve. Indeed, one of Marshall’s chief complaints against Neonomianism is that by making holiness a necessary condition for procuring union with Christ, it lowers the standard for true holiness. The Neonomian doctrine, Marshall says, is “but a mincing of the perfection required in the law.”

For Marshall, holiness is summed up in the moral law, the Ten Commandments, and the Great Commandment, as well as other parts in Scripture. Marshall understands a third use of the law, as Calvin did; however, he spends scarcely any effort expounding on the nature of it, for he believes that it is sufficiently explained in catechisms (he is probably thinking of the Westminster Catechisms) and other works.

According to Marshall, holy acts must be born out of a desire for God and for holiness. Put negatively, it is not holiness simply to conform to an external code, nor are actions holy when produced by sheer force of will or when performed as a means to a greater end, “as a market man loves foul ways of the market, or as a sick man loves an unpleasant medicinal portion, or as a captive slave loves his hard work for fear of a great evil.” They cannot be performed “as if it were a grievous yoke and burden.” Furthermore, God may impose external constraints on the human will, thereby bringing about a change in behavior. But Marshall sees this as a change in course without a change in nature. “God can restrain the burning of the fiery furnace without quenching it, and the flowing water without changing its nature.” A clear example of this is God constraining

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178 Ibid., 125 (6.2.5).
179 Ibid., 1 (1.1).
180 Ibid. 1–2 (1.1).
181 Ibid., 18 (2.1.1).
182 Ibid., 2 (1.1).
183 Ibid., 95 (5.2.9).
Pharaoh to release God’s people, “sore against his will.”\textsuperscript{184} Another example is the first use of the law, to restrain sin.

Real holiness, however, flows from one’s heart. For an act to be holy, one must love holiness as “the market man [loves] gain, as the sick man health, as the peasant meat and drink, as the captive liberty.”\textsuperscript{185} Holiness is born out of a deep desire for God that issues forth in a deep trust in God. This is a “likening, delight[ing], longing, thirsting, sweet relishing.”\textsuperscript{186} Against the Arminians, who argue that neutrality of the will alone is a sufficient starting point on which to build positive holiness, Marshall sees the lack of desire for God as already decidedly sinful.\textsuperscript{187}

The chief aspect of holiness is love for God. Marshall explains that because God is the absolute Lord and entirely benevolent, a believer’s love for him necessarily entails a desire for God to exercise his Lordship more fully in their lives. Because God is “Lord of all,” he must be “loved as Lord of all.”\textsuperscript{188} This also means rejoicing in God’s sovereignty, his “all-seeing eye,”\textsuperscript{189} his justice, and his right to justify and condemn. The believer ought to love God for the sake of all his attributes, not wishing they were any different. Furthermore, the believer’s love for God disposes him to give himself wholly over to God, to serve Him regardless of the outcome, “whether prosperity or adversity, life or death.”\textsuperscript{190} The believer wants God’s attributes to be felt more profoundly in his or her life because the believer loves God’s full nature.\textsuperscript{191}

God’s benevolence also requires that believers recognize every good thing in life as a reflection of God’s goodness and as existing only for the God’s sake. This love for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid. 25 (2.2.3).
\item \textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 18 (2.1.1).
\item \textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 18 (2.1.1).
\item \textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 17 (2.1), 83 (5.2.1).
\item \textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 25 (2.2.3).
\item \textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 25 (2.2.3).
\item \textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 25 (2.2.3).
\item \textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 2 (1.1), 24–25 (2.2.3).
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God also rejoices in God as the foundation of all happiness. With this kind of love, the believer willingly offers his or her life up to God’s service, wanting God to do with him or her whatever God thinks is best. Believers do this willingly because they know God’s plans are good.

Locating the essence of holiness in the longing for God and holiness does not preclude reward as a legitimate motivator to holiness. Marshall enters deep theological waters when he notes that a right kind of self-love is actually part of true holiness. Marshall opposes both the Antinomians and Neonomians on this point.\(^{192}\)

As we saw in the previous sections, Baxter advocated conditional justification, which logically precluded any confidence in future glory until one produced some historical obedience. Conversely, The antinomians desired so strongly to get rid of working for a reward that they cut future glory out of the motivation entirely. If one looked toward future happiness while performing a good work, that work was no longer good.

Marshall’s position is a tertium quid. He would join the antinomians in refuting conditional justification, but Marshall faulted them for their desire to “burn up heaven… and quench hell; intimating that the true service of God must not proceed at all from hope of reward or fear of punishment, but only from love.”\(^{193}\) In other words, the future glory still enjoys a motivational role in producing good works, even though that motivation is not reward for obedience. Marshall, too, believed that love was the primary and necessary motivator for holiness, but he saw longing for future glory as a necessary part of that love. The love that God desires is not the disinterested love of the philosopher but the kind of love that wants God to be more present in one’s life.\(^{194}\) Future glory is a state in which God’s presence is most acutely felt. Marshall also recognizes that on occasion, holy acts can even lead to one’s death—the Marian persecution was not that far behind them. Marshall reasons that if all hope of future glory must be expunged in such acts of

\(^{192}\) Eaton argues that any motivation based on future glory is by definition according to the law and not the gospel. John Eaton, *The Discovery of the Most Dangerous Dead Faith* (London: 1642), 27–28.

\(^{193}\) Ibid., 31 (2.3).

\(^{194}\) Ibid., 24 (2.2.3).
holiness that lead to death, then those acts would be done without confidence that in performing them one is moving closer to God. Thus, by definition, these acts cannot be holy, for they contradict the principle that holy acts are those performed out of a sincere desire to move close to God. Therefore, acting out of desire for a greater blessing from God is not a “carnal self-love,” which is the essence of sinfulness, but a “holy self-love,” in which one is inclined to want God more than one wants anything else.

**Answering Criticism**

Marshall’s teaching on the essence of the new nature is met with criticism by Joseph Bellamy. This eighteenth-century Connecticut pastor was a student of Jonathan Edwards. He accuses Marshall of exemplifying a view that Edwards condemns, namely, that true religious affections can be born out of the desire for one’s own preservation. Edwards insists that the joy a person would experience at the prospect of going to heaven instead of hell is no evidence of true religious affection because it is born out of only self-love. Edwards writes,

…those gracious influences which the saints are subjects of…are entirely above nature, altogether of a different kind from anything that men find within themselves by nature, or only in the exercise of natural principles; and are things which no improvement of those qualifications or principles that are natural, no advancing or exalting them to higher degrees…will ever bring me to because they…differ in kind.

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195 Ibid., 31 (2.3.1).
196 Ibid., 34 (2.3.3).
200 Ibid., 132.
In contrast to Bellamy’s critique of *Gospel Mystery*, our understanding of Marshall’s work seems to perfectly cohere with Edwards’ teaching exemplified in the quote above. Marshall agrees that true religious affection consists in delighting in the very nature of God and, by implication, the nature of holiness. Marshall insists, “we must receive the love of the truth by relishing the goodness and excellency of it.” Marshall begins his work by explaining the “great dignity and excellency” of the law that the discovery of the means to obey it would have an “amiable luster.” Holiness is not a means to an end but an end itself, because to be holy is to be like God and enjoy fellowship with him. Psalm 119 is a favorite of Marshall for showing how desire for God must be part of obedience. Indeed, believers rejoice at the prospect of going to heaven not because they love themselves as an end in itself, but because they love God.

**The Holy Nature in Christ**

Having examined Marshall’s description of holiness and the nature of union with Christ, we now come to the point where we can explore in more detail the holy nature that one receives in Christ. Marshall writes that the holy nature consist in “apply[ing] Christ and his salvation to ourselves.” In Christ, a believer is a “new man.” This union with Christ not only removes the depraved state but also exalts the believer to a state “more excellent than the state of nature ever was.” Being derived from Christ, the holy nature is shaped according to the pattern in Christ, namely, his death and resurrection.

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202 Ibid., 3 (1.1).
203 Ibid., 6 (1.2).
204 Ibid., 10 (1.2.6).
205 Ibid., 315 (14).
206 Ibid., 315 (14).
207 Ibid., 88 (5.2.6).
Before one can joyfully love God and others out of a holy nature, the old sinful nature must die. As we saw in the previous section, Marshall firmly asserts that the old nature’s inclination against God is the cause of all corruption. As long as one continues in a natural state, holiness is impossible: “though you do all that lies in you to the utmost, while you are in the flesh, you can do nothing but sin.”\(^{208}\) It is also impossible for the sinful nature to be reformed or renewed. It must be destroyed. However, in bondage to sin, humans have no ability to slay this old nature on their own.

This is why union with the crucified Christ is necessary for holiness. The death of the old nature occurs through a participation in Christ’s death to sin. Romans 6 through 8 are critical for Marshall’s argument in this regard. He cites these texts more than any other passage.\(^{209}\) He singles out Romans 6 and 7 as particularly important for believers to study to learn the nature of sanctification.\(^{210}\) Concerning this death with Christ, Marshall writes,

Thus the corrupt natural estate, which is called in Scripture the old man, was crucified together with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed. And it is destroyed in us, not by any wounds that we ourselves can give to it, but by our partaking of that freedom from it, and death to it, that is already wrought out for us by the death of Christ; as is signified by our baptism, in which we are buried with Christ by the application of His death to us (Rom. 6:2–4, 10, 11).\(^{211}\)

This is a key paragraph for understanding Marshall’s theology. The phrase “not by any wounds that we ourselves can give to it” beautifully summarizes the role of union with

\(^{208}\) Ibid., 88 (5.2.5.5).
\(^{209}\) Marshall cites Romans 6 a total of 21 times and Romans 8 a total of 30 times. He also cites Galatians 5 a total of 30 times.
\(^{210}\) Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 273 (13.2.1).
\(^{211}\) Ibid., 53 (3.3.3.2).
Christ in mortification. The old nature dies in Christ’s death, and the believer shares in this death by sharing in Christ.

Life in Christ

New life comes to the believer through the resurrection life of Jesus obtained by union with Christ. As we saw previously, the resurrection for Christ is a new quality of life in which the weaknesses of the flesh are abolished. Christ receives a new life with the Father. In the resurrection state, Christ in his human nature reaches maximum fellowship with the divine nature.  

Believers receive this new life of Christ as they are united with him. Marshall recognizes symmetry in the way union with Christ causes both mortification and vivification. As the old man is dead “not by any wounds that we ourselves can give to it,” so also the believer’s resurrection life is brought about not by any power in and of him- or herself but by sharing in the resurrection of Christ. Marshall explains,

His resurrection was our resurrection to the life of holiness, as Adam’s fall was our fall into spiritual death. And we are not ourselves the first makers and formers of our new holy nature, any more than of our original corruption; but both are formed ready for us to partake of them. And, by union with Christ, we partake of that spiritual life that He took possession of for us at His resurrection, and in this way we are enabled to bring forth the fruits of it; as the Scripture shows by the similitude of a marriage union.  

This passage makes several important connections. As those in Adam receive a sinful nature that leads them to sin, those in Christ receive a new nature that leads them to holiness. In both cases the believer is shaped by something extra nos. Marshall also explicitly connects the resurrection to holiness. Resurrection is “unto holiness.” The previously explored eschatological structure of union also underscores this point;

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212 Ibid., direction 3.
213 Ibid., 54 (3.3.3).
Marshall explicitly connects sanctification to glorification: “Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun, as glorification is sanctification perfected.” Thus, the holy nature that has “begun” in the believer is nothing other than the sharing in the future glory of Christ’s resurrection. Because Christ lives “unto God” in his resurrection, the believer’s new life in Christ is similarly oriented to God. The commands, “Seek the things above” and “set your mind on the things above” (Colossians 3:1–2) now resonate with believers because, as these commands now have traction according to their new nature. The principle that “like loveth like” means that the believer will love that which is pleasing to God.

The manner in which spiritual fruit is born out of union further reveals the deep structure of Marshall’s theology. Marshall understands Romans 7:4 to teach that just as a wife brings forth the fruit of the womb through her union with her husband, so also believers bring forth fruit of holiness through their spiritual union with Christ. This means that good works produced by the believer have their origin, source, and character from Christ. Believers depend upon Christ for continual fruit. While recognizing a sense in which all people live and have their being in God by virtue of creation and providence, Marshall acknowledges a unique sense of dependency that believers have upon Christ for their good behavior: “God acts more immediately in his people who are one flesh and one Spirit with Christ.” God acts in them by the power of Christ so that “Christ is the immediate principal agent of all their good works.”

The Final Goal of New State

Finally, for Marshall, God’s goal of equipping the believer with a holy nature in Christ transcends the mere comfort of the believer and culminates in the glory of God.

214 Ibid., 331 (14.5.7).

215 “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Romans 7:4).

216 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 50 (3.3.2).

217 Ibid., 317 (14.1.2).

218 Ibid., 317 (14.1.2).
Because the sanctified nature comes from Christ, all boastings in the self are excluded and the believer boasts in Christ alone.\textsuperscript{219} The holiness that one displays in life testifies not to the ability of the believer but to the efficacy of Christ’s work. God’s plan is to exalt Christ as the source of holiness, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13) and so that the son would “have the preeminence in all (Colossians 1:17).”\textsuperscript{220}

Thus, the believers’ need of Christ for holiness is not ultimately rooted in the weakness of humanity but is God’s plan for all things to be sourced in Christ. By orienting the believer to Christ for holiness, God is restoring the believer to the proper orientation of their creation.

### Justification

We have argued that in terms of theological structure, Marshall roots the renovative aspect of sanctification directly in union with Christ. Yet we have also made many references to justification as critically important to the believer’s experience of this renewal. Our goal now is to explore the nature of justification and its relation to sanctification. This will begin a sequence of thought that will lead directly to practical sanctification.

Concerning the doctrine of justification, Marshall is very similar to Owen and the Savoy declaration. His writing about justification stands out, not for any novelty in the doctrine itself but for how he connects it to sanctification.

Marshall summarizes the role of justification in sanctification as follows: “we must be reconciled to God and justified by the remission of our sins and imputation of righteousness, before any sincere obedience to the law.”\textsuperscript{221} When we inquire into the reason for this connection, we see it is assurance. Marshall argues at length that assurance is necessary for sanctification. And what gives rise to assurance? For Marshall, it is justification.

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 316 (14.1).
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 316 (14.1).
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 22 (2.2).
Much of Marshall’s teaching on justification is contained in a sermon on Romans 3:23–26 appended to his major work. This sermon is an exposition of Paul’s text set in the context of God’s plan of redemption. In classic Puritan form, Marshall first exposit the passage and then explains its “use,” which, not surprisingly, concerns sanctification.

The Definition of Justification

In contrast to Catholic teaching, Marshall explains that the term “justification” must mean a judicial verdict. Justification means to “make just,” but not as Rome teaches, by “the infusion of grace and holiness into a person,” which conflates justification and sanctification. Rather, it means to “make just” in the sense of a judgment at a trial, a judicial sentence, “discharging of guilt, freeing from blame and accusation; approving and judging, owning and pronouncing a person to be righteous.”

We should note the absence of any transformational language in this definition. Marshall asserts, “Justification is not a real change of a sinner in himself (though a real change is annexed to it) but only a Relative change with reference to God’s judgment.”

Marshall surveys the language of justification in the Old and New Testaments to prove that the words have a forensic meaning. They describe not an act of transformation but a verdict or judgment about actions already performed. Marshall asserts that Catholic teaching of justification as infused righteousness can be sustained only with faulty exegesis.

Marshall exposits the meaning of justification in an eight-point outline amended from Aristotle’s causation scheme. He uses this scheme as a tool to explain in what sense justification depends upon the finished work of Christ. Incidentally, use of this scheme is further evidence of Muller’s contention that scholasticism was a method, not a theology. Aristotelian causation was a tool used by Catholics and Protestants alike to

223 Ibid., 4.
224 Ibid., 3.
225 Ibid., 5.
226 Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, 1:34.
distinguish their respective understandings of justification. Aristotle’s system answered the question “Why is a thing the way it is?” This is answered in terms of five causes: (1) material cause, i.e., what a thing is made of; (2) formal cause, which gives a thing its particular quality; (3) efficient cause, which (often “who”) makes a thing to be what it is; (4) the instrumental cause, which affects something to make it what it is; and (5) the final cause, the end for which a thing exists. Of the causes in this scheme, the material and instrumental are most pertinent for clarifying the Protestant notion of justification. The instrumental cause is critical because all but the Antinomians believe that justification requires the human response of faith. The sticking point for Protestants, then, was how to understand this faith as a necessary cause without it becoming meritorious and, thereby, compromising the gracious nature of the justification. The material cause concerns what establishes humans as righteous before God: is it human work? human faith? or the alien righteousness of Christ? For Marshall it is the latter. To make this point more clearly, Marshall amends Aristotle’s causation scheme slightly, adding other factors to support his conclusion that justification is a work of God’s free grace based on the finished work of Christ.

Marshall’s explanation is as follows:

1. The Persons justified – Sinners
2. The Justifier or Efficient Cause – God
3. The Impulsive Cause – Grace
4. The means effecting, or Material Cause – The Redemption of Christ
5. The Formal Cause – The Remission of Sins
6. The Instrumental Cause – Faith
7. The time of declaring – The present time
8. The End – That God may appear just

We can observe a striking logic between all of these points.

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The Persons Justified

First, the persons justified are the “ungodly,” “sinners, such who come short of the glory of God.” In other words, the justified are those who have not kept the law. Marshall sees evidence for this claim in the identical method of justification for both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had the law but failed to keep it. The Gentiles failed to live according to the “light and law of nature.” Thus, both need a method of justification apart from obedience to the law. Marshall states, “When there is equal need and worth, God might righteously justify one as well as the other.” The sinful nature of those who are justified is critical for Marshall’s argument in two ways. First, it provides warrant for the free invitation for sinners to come to Christ for justification, as he argues in direction 11. Second, it proves the gracious nature of justification: if those justified are sinners, then the ground of their justification must not be their own good works. This is Marshall’s main contention in his sermon on justification.

The Impulsive Cause

Second, the impulsive cause (also known as “procuring cause”) of justification is grace. According to Muller, the impulsive cause “moves or provides opportunity for the efficient cause.” The “impulsive cause” was not part of Aristotle’s causation nor was it commonly used among Reformed orthodox. But it wasn’t unheard of either. Burgess

229 Ibid., 5.
230 Ibid., 6.
231 Ibid., 6.
232 Ibid., 6.
233 Ibid., 7.
234 Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 62.
235 Ibid., 62.
equates it with the “efficient cause” and likewise says that it is “God’s grace.” Edward Polhill uses it similarly when answering William Sherlock.

Marshall puts forth grace as the impulsive cause of justification in contradistinction to Baxter’s position, which Marshall sees as amounting to an impulsive cause of human works. Baxter would acknowledge God’s grace as the “cause” of justification in at least two ways: (1) by grace God lowers the standard for acceptability, requiring only a mere “peppercorn,” and (2) God graciously aids the faithful in the process of earning their good works that are the basis for their justification. In other words, the gracious context allows one to do grace-empowered works. But, for Baxter, the “impulsive cause”—that which precedes and prepares the action of justification—is one’s own merit. It was one’s own merit of faith that occasioned the declaration of justification. Marshall sees Baxter’s understanding of justification akin to one being given the ability to purchase an annuity at a very low rate, which one can cash in for release from debt. While the ability to have the money may be the result of grace, the “procuring cause”—that which actually accomplishes the deed—is one’s own money.

Marshall refutes Baxter’s position by showing the radical antithesis of grace and works as the cause of justification. He writes, “Scripture teaches us that there is a perfect opposition and utter irreconcilableness between grace and works.” These are two mutually exclusive systems. Either one seeks justification on the basis of God’s grace, looking away from one’s own merit, or one seeks justification based on the work that one

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242 Ibid., 111 (6.1.4.2).
performs, trusting in that work itself. Only the former method truly justifies. Marshall writes, “We believe in Christ for Justification out of a sense of our inability to obtain justification by Works.”

He further states, “If we seek salvation by ever so easy a mild condition of works, we do in this way bring ourselves under the terms of the law, and become debtors to fulfill the whole law in perfection.” One seeks a justification procured either by one’s own work or by God’s grace, and one will, as Marshall states, “stand and fall according to these terms.”

The Material and Formal Causes

Marshall discusses the material cause and the formal cause of justification together. These causes are, respectively, the redemption of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Here Marshall upholds the standard Protestant position in justification.

There is, however, an interesting omission at this point, which seems counter to Marshall’s theology and aims. In the context of the causation scheme, Marshall fails to state unequivocally that the material cause of justification is the active obedience of Christ. He states only that it is the “forgiveness of sins.” This is similar to the Westminster Assembly’s omission, which was probably made to satisfy a minority (Twisse, Gataker, and Vines) who were reticent to affirm the active obedience of Christ because of its connection with Antinomianism. The Assembly voted to affirm the active obedience with the language of “whole obedience,” but this phrase was curiously omitted in its final edition. However, many Reformed orthodox theologians taught that the

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244 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 104 (6.1.1).

245 Ibid., 105 (6.1.2).

246 Marshall, ”The Doctrine of Justification Opened and Applied,” 5.

active obedience of Christ—the historical obedience that Christ earned through his life—was essential to the material cause of justification. This is especially true of those who were acutely concerned with the Neonomian error. Owen, in his work on justification, claims that the material cause of justification is the righteousness of Christ.248 This opinion is represented in the Savoy declaration, which states that justification is “by imputing Christ’s active obedience to the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness.”249 This notion of imputed righteousness angered Baxter not simply because he saw it as association with Antinomians (as a minority at the assembly saw it), but because Baxter believed it to be the actual substance of Antinomianism. Baxter reasoned that once the believer was justified via the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, there was no logical place for the believer’s own good works.250 Consequently, Baxter saw justification as only having to do primarily with the passive obedience of Christ and forgiveness of sins.251 The believer’s positive righteousness would be the product of his or her own righteous life.252

Marshall’s omission is interesting in light of the fact that Marshall clearly held to the imputation of Christ’s active obedience. In Marshall’s Gospel Mystery he describes justification as “remission of sins and imputation of righteousness.”253 Marshall also explicitly states that Christ “subjected himself to the law, both in active, as well as passive Obedience.”254 Moreover, Marshall wants to distance himself from Baxter more than from the Antinomians; in his context, Marshall considers Neonomianism the more

249 Savoy declaration, chapter 11.
250 Packer, Quest for Godliness, 158.
251 Baxter’s thought on this is complex; see Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 246–248.
252 Cooper, John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity, 63.
253 See for instance, Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 11 (2.2), 23 (2.2.1), and 48 (3.3.1).
serious error.\textsuperscript{255} Why, then, does he not use language that is recognized as orthodox and would put maximum distance between himself and Baxter?

While we cannot give a definitive answer for Marshall’s omission, there are a few things we can suggest. First, Marshall sees no middle ground between the sinful state and the positive righteousness of Christ. Marshall says, “In men subject to a Law, there is no middle condition between not Imputing of Sin and Imputing of Righteousness; and so these terms [“remission of sin” and “imputation of righteousness”] are used as Equivalent.”\textsuperscript{256} He does not explain his rationale, but it is probably related to his point that a person enjoys a relationships with God only when God is pleased with that person. Neutrality before God is insufficient ground to sustain a relationship with God or to respond to him in holiness.\textsuperscript{257} Thus, it is likely that Marshall assumes imputation of active obedience in the language of forgiveness of sins.

Another reason could be the proximity this “Most Pauline of the divines”\textsuperscript{258} kept to the biblical text. Marshall usually discusses justification with a view to explaining doctrine’s practical application of peace with God. This fits into his larger argument that peace with God is necessary for assurance and that assurance is necessary for sanctification. He writes, “The wrath of God is an unsupportable burden, and the foundation of all miseries, which foundation is razed, and a foundation of blessedness laid, whereby we have peace with God, and are fully reconciled to God.”\textsuperscript{259} Thus, Marshall is attracted to passages of Scripture that speak of justification with reference to the consequent peace with God, passages like Titus 2:14, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 1 Timothy 2:6, 1 Peter 2:24, and Revelation 5:9. All of these center around Christ’s death, his passive obedience.\textsuperscript{260} Marshall sees a close connection between justification and the

\begin{itemize}
\item Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 127 (6.2.5).
\item See previous discussion.
\item Whyte, 222.
\end{itemize}
atonement, particularly redemption and propitiation. This may have led him to stress the
death of Christ as satisfaction and substitution in connection with justification.

Marshall would not be alone in this connection. The Westminster Assembly
followed Walker in rejecting Gataker’s position that remission of sin is distinct from
justification. Also, in Owen’s early work, Death of Death (1647), he speaks frequently
of justification in connection with the atonement, but infrequently of the active
imputation of Christ. And we must remember that it was this early work, not his later
work on justification explicitly (1677), which provoked Baxter to respond with his
Aphorisms on Justification (1655). It’s not that Marshall and early Owen denied the
imputation of active obedience—quite the contrary—but perhaps they were led to stress
the role of passive obedience in justification because of the weight of Scripture that
connects reconciliation and justification with the death of Christ.

In whatever way we understand Marshall’s omission in his sermon on
Justification, it must be recognized that Marshall understood justification according to
standard Reformed, federal theology that stressed the active obedience of Christ. As we
saw in the previous section, Marshall taught that guilt spread to all people because all are
guilty in Adam’s sin, and those in Christ are considered righteous in him on account of
Christ’s active obedience.

Marshall’s use of this doctrine was not mere intellectual assent. This pastor
wanted his readers to feel their freedom in Christ through their justification. The
transition from wrath to grace is a transition out of despair into glory. Marshall writes,

Yea, we know further (if we know ourselves sufficiently) that our death in sin
proceeded from the guilt of the first sin of Adam, and the sentence denounced
against it (Gen. 2:17); and that it is still maintained in us by the guilt of sin and
the curse of the law; and that spiritual life will never be given us, to free us from
that dominion, except this guilt and curse be removed from us; which is done by
actual justification (Gal. 3:13, 14; Rom. 6:14). And this is sufficient to make us
despair of living to God in holiness while we apprehend ourselves to be under the

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curse and wrath of God, by reason of our transgressions and sins still lying on us (Ezek. 33:10).  

**Faith and Justification**

The final argument that Marshall uses to support his Protestant doctrine of justification is that the instrumental cause of justification is faith. We will look at the nature of faith in the following section. Here we will explore only how the instrumental function of faith impacts our understanding of justification. Marshall’s goal is to maintain an instrumental and causative role for faith while not permitting faith to function meritoriously.

Similar to the Westminster Confession, Marshall argues that faith is not meritorious. That is, faith does not produce justification as an act of righteousness. Marshall writes,

> This faith doth not justify us, as an Act of Righteousness, earning and procuring our justification by the work of it, for this would have been justification by works, as under the law, diametrically opposed to Grace, and free Gift, which excludes all consideration of any work of ours, to be our Righteousness under any denomination or diminutive terms whatever, whether you call it legal or Evangelical, though you recon it no more then the payment of a peppercorn.  

The language of a “peppercorn” is an unambiguous reference to Baxter. According to Marshall, Baxter’s justification by faith is really justification by works. Marshall explains the instrumental, non-meritorious role of faith positively in what follows:

> The condition of a free gift is only take and have. And in this sense we will readily acknowledge faith to be a condition…but if you give a peppercorn to purchase a title to it, then you spoil the freeness of the gift. The free offer of

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262 Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 24 (2.2.2).

Christ to you is sufficient to confer on you a right, yea, to make it your duty to receive Christ and His salvation as yours. And because we receive Christ by faith as a free gift, therefore we may account faith to be the instrument and, as it were, the hand by which we receive him.\textsuperscript{264}

In other words, faith does nothing to merit justification in and of itself, but faith is the instrument by which one receives that which does merit it, namely, Christ and his righteousness. Similar to Calvin,\textsuperscript{265} Marshall says that one is “justified by faith” in the same sense that one is nourished by one’s mouth or one’s thirst is quenched by the cup.\textsuperscript{266} Neither the “mouth” nor the “cup” has properties within itself to nourish or satisfy. But one can still speak of them as instruments of nourishment and satisfaction in view of their role in bearing that which does nourish and satisfy to the person. Similarly, faith justifies on account of it being the means by which the believer receives remission of sins and the imputed righteousness of Christ.\textsuperscript{267} Reformed theologians debated in what sense faith could be considered a “condition” of salvation.\textsuperscript{268} Marshall admits that the word “condition” could be used so long as it is the same condition of a free gift, which is “only take, and have.”\textsuperscript{269}

Furthermore, faith is the means of justification because by faith one actually receives Christ. In direction 4, Marshall rests his argument against every aspect of Baxter’s justification—justification on account of faith, justification as a mere right title to Christ, and justification as conditional upon sanctification—on the grounds that “[faith] is the means and instrument by which we receive Christ and His fullness actually into our hearts.”\textsuperscript{270} It seems that Marshall sees Baxter as closer to a medieval frame of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{264} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 69 (4.3.3).
  \item \textsuperscript{265} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.11.7.
  \item \textsuperscript{266} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 62 (4.2).
  \item \textsuperscript{267} Marshall, “The Doctrine of Justification Opened and Applied,” 13–14.
  \item \textsuperscript{268} Beeke and Jones, \textit{A Puritan Theology}, 305–310.
  \item \textsuperscript{269} Marshall, “The Doctrine of Justification Opened and Applied,” 69 (4.3.3).
\end{itemize}
reference in which salvation is a process. Marshall, a true Protestant, is thinking in terms of salvation as a state. To have Christ is to have his full righteousness. There is no process by which one comes into union with Christ; thus, there is no process in justification. Faith is an instrument of justification because it is an instrument by which one receives Christ. As Christ is received entirely or “not at all,” so also one is justified entirely or not at all.

Marshall refutes Baxter’s claim by showing what the Pauline antithesis between faith and works implies about the means of justification. Either one works for justification and appeals to God on the basis of one’s works or one abandons the quest for justification by the works of the law and believes on Christ, who justifies the ungodly. Marshall writes, “The one requires doing; the other, not doing, but believing for life and salvation. Their terms are different not only in degree, but in their whole nature.”

The antithesis between faith and works is built upon the antithesis between grace and works. Because salvation by grace is radically counter to works, those seeking salvation by grace need an instrument for receiving this salvation that cannot be considered a work. The only possible instrument is faith, which is not a work, but an act of resting in the work that Christ has provide. Marshall appeals to Romans 4:16: “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.” Marshall explains why faith cannot be considered a work: “And, indeed, faith is of such a humbling self-denying nature that it ascribes nothing that it receives to itself, but all to the grace of God; and therefore God saves us by faith, that all the glory may be ascribed to His free grace (Rom. 4:16).” In other words, faith is not a work, in the sense of a human action in conformity to the law. Rather, it is an act of resting and trusting in Christ because one has not fulfilled that law oneself; thus it comports perfectly with salvation as an act of grace.

It is worth noting that unlike the Antinomians, Marshall sees the antithesis of faith and works pertaining only to the method of justification. Faith and works are not antithetical in the actual life of the Christian. Thus, when James writes of “showing your

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271 Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 64 (4.3).
272 Ibid., 48 (3.3.1).
273 Ibid., 79 (4.6).
faith by your works (James 2:18),” he is telling believers to do what is necessary and natural given their union with Christ and filling by the Spirit.  

Another strategy Marshall uses to refute Baxter’s legalism is to identify Baxter with the Mosaic economy and show how this economy is abrogated in the New Covenant. According to Marshall, the law as given by Moses was not a system of pure pelagianism, but a system whereby God, out of pure grace, provided the necessary means for humans to find acceptance before him. Their coming before God could not be based on their perfect obedience; otherwise the sacrificial system would be unnecessary. Marshall writes, “Even the most legalist Pharisees would thank God for their works, as proceeding from his grace,” and they would have seen these works as the product of faith. Marshall sees much similarity between the Mosaic economy and Baxter’s theology. Marshall then argues that because the Neonomian system closely resembles the Old Covenant economy, Baxter’s theology fails to account for the radical newness of the gospel. Paul could not have considered it good news that sincere obedience, as opposed to perfect obedience, would qualify as law-keeping, for that was already in place in the old economy. Baxter’s theology is simply a re-establishing of the old. Marshall argues that if Paul’s gospel were as Baxter describes it, then in Paul’s polemics against the Judaizers, he “contended with his own shadow.”

Justification and Justice of God

Finally, Marshall recognizes that the final cause of justification is to display the justice of God. He presents this point as immensely comforting to believers. If the absolute justice of God requires his wrath to come upon all who are found guilty of sin,

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274 Ibid., 190a (10.2.7).
275 Ibid., 190a (10.2.7).
276 Ibid., 105 (6.1.2).
277 Ibid., 105 (6.1.2).
278 Ibid., 103 (6.1.1).
then it necessarily follows this same justice would absolutely prohibit God’s wrath from coming upon anyone for whom that wrath was satisfied in Christ. Marshall believed that this point would promote comfort, affording the believer free access to the Father. Marshall writes, “Justice is terrible, and seems to be against mercy, and dreadful to Natural people [i.e., unbelievers], but it is otherwise to Believers…Justice becomes our Friend, joins in with Grace, and instead of pleading against us, it’s altogether for us, and it speaks contrary to what it speaks to sinners out of Christ.”

280 It’s worth noting that this line of argument is not open to Baxter. Baxter interprets the atonement along the lines of Grotius’s Governmental theory, in which the death of Christ demonstrates God’s hatred of sin, thereby creating a context in which it is safe for God to change the terms by which he will relate to humanity, no longer requiring them to suffer his wrath for sin. For Baxter the forgiveness is not tied directly to Christ’s sacrificial death. In Baxter’s Aphorisms on Justification he anticipates the possible objection: Could God decide that he wants to change the terms yet again and no longer offer his forgiveness? Baxter argues that such act would not be fitting God. Nevertheless, it’s significant that Baxter cannot appeal to God’s justice to support his point. Marshall, however, consider Christ’s death a substitution. Thus, not only would eschatological punishment of those in Christ be unfitting for God, it would also be unjust.

Conclusion

Marshall’s understanding of justification, like the standard Protestant view, is complex, and it stands over against a much simpler legalism.

Baxter’s system certainly had a scholastic complexity to it, but in essence it was a simple system of works based on the premise “Do this and you will live.” Christ’s redemptive work abolished the old covenant of works, which gave believers the opportunity and impetus to meet the conditions of the New Covenant. Believers would be judged based on how well they lived up to this standard. The material cause of the

280 Ibid., 20.
281 Baxter, Aphorisms on Justification, 29.
282 See previous discussion on Baxter. Also Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 292–293.
justification was one’s own merit, and, therefore, the instrument by which one received it was also some sort of merit. Marshall recognizes a gravitational pull toward this system. It is endemic in creation. It is the system that natural revelation points toward. But Marshall saw it untenable insofar as humans could not keep the law—new or old. Thus a new system was required. Marshall said of this system: “We cannot learn it so easily as the duties of the law.” But such a complex system was necessary given that simple obedience to the law was no longer adequate for salvation. Recognizing the significance of human depravity, Marshall’s theology accounted for the fact that no human action could earn justification; it was therefore based on grace. And yet an attendant human response of faith is required. The complexity in his system was born out of recognizing the instrumentality of faith without compromising the gracious character of salvation.

**Faith**

For Marshall, the nature, context, and function of faith all revolve around the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Direction 11 is a call to faith in Christ, and even though it is the most sermonic of his directions, it also explains the nature of the atonement in the most detail. This is no accident. The specific character of Christ’s atonement gives rise to the specific character of faith. Faith arises out of the death and resurrection of Christ for sinners and the ensuing invitation “to believe on Christ for his salvation” with the “free promise of…salvation to all that believe on him.” This posits a close connection between faith, the work of Christ, and the Word of God. Marshall explains that God “works faith in us immediately by hearing, knowing and understanding the Word: ‘Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.’”

**The Object, Context, Nature, and Function of Faith**

Marshall spends much effort connecting the content of our faith to the proper object of our faith, namely Christ in his death and resurrection. First of all, Marshall

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283 Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 9 (1.2.6).
284 Ibid., 60 (4.1).
285 Ibid., 201 (11.1.3); here Marshall quotes Romans 10.
argues that the sufficiency of Christ’s death accents the need to cling to Christ for complete salvation. To believe in the gospel, one must be “fully persuaded of the all-sufficiency of Christ for…salvation…and that his blood cleanses from all sin.”

Regardless of the great extent of one’s sins, Christ’s death is a sufficient atonement to cover all of them. Thus, one must not count one’s “abominable wicked” life as reason not to trust in Christ, for “His infinite mercy and the infinite merits of Christ’s blood and power of the Spirit” are sufficient to save even the worst sinners. Marshall tells his readers, “You have sufficient manifestation of God’s love to your soul by the free promises of life and salvation in Christ.”

The specific nature of the atonement as that which can cover the worst sins, combined with absolute need of such salvation, shapes faith into a disposition to cling to Christ for forgiveness from all sin. The sufficiency of Christ’s death means that there’s no need to seek warrant for coming to Christ outside the objective gospel.

The term “infinite merit” quoted above in reference to the warrant for faith is worth considering in more detail. Marshall is not the first to wrestle with the connection between the extent of the atonement and the nature of faith. It was a point of controversy between the many English Reformed and the hypothetical universalists.

The chief difficulty for those who understood a definite (“limited”) atonement was finding the warrant for believing in Christ when Christ’s full mediatorial work effected only a select group of people. In other words, if Christ did not die for all people in the same sense, how can all people be called to believe on him for their salvation? This was not a problem for hypothetical universalists like Preston, who saw warrant for the universal call of the gospel in the universal extent of Christ’s death. His instruction to “tell every man without exception…Christ is dead for him” finds warrant for the universal call in

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286 Ibid., 207–208 (11.2.1.3).
287 Ibid., 210 (11.2.1.3).
288 Ibid., 224 (11.3).
289 For an explanation of this in John Preston, see Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology*, 112.
290 John Preston, *The Brest-Plate of Faith and Love. A Treatise, Wherein the Ground and Exercise of Faith and Love, as They Are Set Upon Christ Their Object, and as They Are Expressed in Good*
the universal efficacy of Christ’s work. This statement is also quoted approvingly by Edward Fisher to answer the question, “hath such a one as I any warrant to believe in Christ?”

Before we explore Marshall’s contrasting view, it is worth noting that Preston, Fisher, and Boston advocated this position to avoid a very real error: namely, that one lacks warrant to believe in the gospel until there is some sign that one is part of the elect, and therefore, the promise of the gospel should be extended only to those who displayed such signs. The rationale for this was that one could not believe in Christ until one knew that one was part of the number for whom Christ died, and one could not know that one was included without some marker of election, such as repentance. Ferguson sums up this error well in a syllogism:

**Major premise:** The saving grace of God in Christ is given to the elect alone.

**Minor premise:** The elect are known by the forsaking of sin.

**Conclusion:** Therefore forsaking sin is a prerequisite for saving grace.

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292 Edwards Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity Touching Both the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace, with Their Use and End, Both in the Time of the Old Testament, and in the Time of the New: Wherein Everyone May Cleerly See How Far Forth He Bringeth the Law into the Case of Justification, and So Deserveth the Name Legalist; and How Far Forth He Rejecteth the Law, in the Case of Sanctification, and So Deserveth the Name Antinomianist; with the Middle Path between Them Both, Which Is by Jesus Christ Leading to Eternal Life: In a Dialogue, Betwixt Evangelista, a Minister of the Gospel, Nomista, a Legalist, Antinomista, an Antinomian, and Neophytus, a Young Christian* (London: R. Leybourn, 1646), 8.

293 For an example of this teaching, see John Knox, *An Answer to a Great Number of Blasphemous Caullations Written by an Anabaptist and Adversarie to Gods Eternal Predestenation. And Confuted by John Knox, Minister of Gods Word in Scotland* (London, 1560), 102. Knox assumes that the free offer of the gospel is proclaimed to the penitent. See also Donald J. MacLean, "Knox Versus the Knoxians? Predestination in John Knox and Seventeenth-Century Federal Theology," in *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology 1560-1775*, ed. Aaron Denlinger (New York: T&T Clark, 2015), 22. Baxter picks up on this, Baxter and White, *Four Disputations*, 272. See also Obadiah Sedgwick, who argues from the same text that an emptying of oneself is necessary before one can properly believe on Christ, Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Fountain Opened, and the Water of Life Flowing Forth, for the Refreshing of the Thirsty Sinners* (London: 1657), 90–91.

294 Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 43.
Hypothetical universalism countered this legalizing trajectory, but there was a cost. If the hypothetical position is taken consistently, it undermines the warrant for trusting in Christ. For whatever “Christ is dead for him” entails, it must not include a full satisfaction for all sin because such satisfaction would include the sin of unbelief and would lead to real universalism. Thus, something other than Christ’s finished work must account for the faith of the elect, and this “something” points toward a work of believers. This is precisely the direction in which Baxter takes hypothetical universalism, and we have already seen how this leads to a kind of legalism. Recent scholarship has questioned whether or not Fisher, or even Preston, intended to communicate Amyraldianism in his locution, “Christ is dead for him.” Moore makes an impressive case that Preston did. Others, however, disagree. But even if he did not, it is still significant that the language could easily be used to support hypothetical universalism. In fact, Baxter cites Preston in support of his own teaching on universal redemption.

Marshall employs neither the language “Christ is dead for him” nor any other statement that could support hypothetical universalism. Yet he still finds warrant in the nature of the atonement for promiscuously preaching the gospel. He does this by locating warrant for sinners to come to Christ in the fact that Christ died for sinners, the likes of whom include even the worst kind of sinners, and that all who do believe in him will find complete salvation. One must believe, as Marshall says, “peremptorily”—that is, at the absolutely foundational level—that no matter how unworthy one is, one will be accepted before God because of the all-sufficiency of Christ’s death for sinners. Lack of spiritual life and sin should not disincline one to believe in Christ because these markers are

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295 Ibid., 43.
297 Ferguson, The Whole Christ, 40–44.
299 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 214 (11.2.1.5).
indicative a person who needs a total salvation, and it is precisely that kind of salvation that Christ offers to sinners.

In other words, the fact that one’s faith by which one comes to Christ is a faith purchased by his death is no reason for a man to despair of coming to Christ on the grounds that Christ might not have purchased faith for him; rather, it incites greater encouragement for him to trust in Christ on the grounds that by his infinite atonement for the elect, he can fully meet every human need for salvation, including faith. Hypothetical universalism, though it affirmed much of the same teaching of the Reformed faith broadly considered, made a substantial change. Christ’s death was satisfaction for all, but his death only made salvation possible; it did not actually save.\(^\text{300}\) Salvation was now dependent upon faith as a first-order cause, and this faith—by definition—was not a faith purchased by Christ; otherwise all would have it. The requirement of human action as a first-order cause is inconsistent with the teaching of the gospel, namely, that humans are sinners, unable to trust in Christ. Thus, Marshall argues that the doctrine of limited atonement, when rightly considered, should not create despair in one trusting in Christ. Rather, it should create despair in one’s own ability to save oneself outside of Christ and thereby encourage a person to rest in Christ all the more.\(^\text{301}\)

Marshall admits that the particularity of election and the limited nature of the atonement would be a hindrance to one’s coming to Christ, if it was the sinner who initiated the first move toward Christ.\(^\text{302}\) Hypothetically, a Pelagian/Semi-Pelagian understanding of human ability combined with limited atonement and unconditional election could create a situation in which a person attempted to come to Christ but was prevented on account of God not electing them and Christ not dying for them.\(^\text{303}\) But the initial move toward Christ is not within the sinner’s ability. Indeed, it can’t be. The corrupt human will is unable to reach out to God in faith without God’s prior work of

\(^{300}\) Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 128–129.

\(^{301}\) Ibid., 126.


\(^{303}\) Ibid., 321 (14.2.2).
granting that faith.\textsuperscript{304} In summary, Marshall argues that the sinner’s inability to move independently toward Christ corresponds well with the complete sufficiency of the atonement for those unconditionally elected.

In what we have considered so far, Marshall is not unique. Reformed theology readily taught the connection between human inability and the sovereignty of God in salvation, as is evident in consistency of the 5 main points in The Canon of Dort.\textsuperscript{305} But Marshall—as a puritan pastor concerned with the practical side of Calvinism\textsuperscript{306}—wanted to show the correspondence of these truths in the sinner’s experience of coming to Christ by faith. Put negatively, Marshall argues that those incapable of doing anything good could not respond to a gospel that made the first step of coming to Christ dependent upon an act—or even an inclination to act—that springs forth from the sinful human heart. If the sinner accepts the truth of their deadness apart from Christ, they could not also accept a gospel message that claimed it was one’s own their power to make themselves alive.

Put positively, sinners need a means of salvation in which it is clear to them that everything is provided. Marshall said at the outset of his work that the doctrine of depravity was the foundation for his entire theology of sanctification. The first step of sanctification is the sinner’s coming to Christ. Those aware of their depravity are right to ask, “Hath such a one as I any warrant to believe in Christ.”\textsuperscript{307} For Marshall the warrant is provided in the particularity of the atonement, for it assures believers that everything necessary for salvation—including faith—is met in Christ. In other words, the all-sufficiency of Christ’s death for some—as apposed to the insufficiency of Christ’s death for all—is the only basis upon which sinners can come confidently to God, because it assures them that in Christ’s death they will find everything they need for salvation.

Ferguson argues that for the \textit{Marrow of Modern Divinity} and it’s advocates, the free offer of the gospel was preached \textit{“against} the background of the emphasis on

\textsuperscript{304} Ibid., 321 (14.2.2).
\textsuperscript{305} Billings, \textit{Union with Christ}, 37-42.
\textsuperscript{306} Spurr, \textit{English Puritanism}, 43-43.
\textsuperscript{307} Fisher, \textit{The Marrow of Modern Divinity}, 120.
particular redemption or ‘limited atonement’.” Marshall seems to advocate the free offer because of the particular redemption and “limited atonement.”

The Connection between Faith and the Gospel Proclamation

For Marshall, not only is the nature of faith formed by the nature of the atonement but also the character and experience of faith are formed by the gospel proclamation. Marshall explains that it is not futile to preach this gospel to those dead in sin because the purpose of preaching is to engender the very faith by which one is united to Christ and made alive. Marshall explains,

It is no vain thing to preach the gospel to natural people, and to exhort them to true repentance and faith in Christ for their conversion and salvation. For the design of our preaching is not to bring them to holiness in their natural state, but to raise them above it, and to present them perfect in Christ in the performance of those duties (Col. 1:28). And though they cannot perform those duties by their natural strength, yet the gospel is made effectual for their conversion and salvation by the power of the Holy Ghost, which accompanies the preaching of it; to quicken those that are dead in sin, and to create them anew in Christ, by giving to them repentance to life and lively faith in Christ.

Marshall’s language here is carefully chosen. People are created anew in Christ by the gifts of faith and repentance. These gifts are given through the preaching of the gospel. One preaches the gospel to those outside of Christ because faith in Christ brings sinners in Christ. Thus, preaching affirms faith’s instrumental value. We already saw this with reference to faith as the instrumental cause of justification. But more broadly considered, faith is also the instrument of union with Christ.

308 Ferguson, The Whole Christ, 39 emphasis added.
309 Ibid., 92–93 (5.2.8); see also 206 (11.2).
Like other Puritans, Marshall holds to the Pauline idea of being “in Christ by faith.” Marshall calls faith the “uniting grace.” He explains: “The Scripture plainly ascribes this effect to faith: that by it we receive Christ, put Him on, are rooted and grounded in him.” Marshall also points to the Johannine parallel between believing Jesus and consuming Jesus (John 7:37–39). He writes, “How can it be taught more clearly that we receive Christ properly into our souls by faith, as we receive food into our bodies by eating and drinking and that Christ is as truly united to us in this way as our food when we eat or drink it?” Christ is set forth in the gospel that he may be grasped by faith.

Marshall qualifies the instrumental value by placing faith in the context of the salvation-historical acts of the Trinity. An objection can be made that, considered in itself, faith is too simple a task to be the instrument for receiving such a high office; however, it must be remembered that it is only easy for the believer in view of the great work of God. The Father who authors salvation, the Son who accomplishes it, and the Spirit who procures it have all worked together to make salvation a reality. The believer’s faith only receives and rests in the reality that has already been achieved by God. Marshall explains, “Faith does not unite us to Christ by its own virtue, but by the power of the Spirit working by it and with it.” Marshall summarizes, “They that slight the duty of believing, and account it foolishness, do in this way slight, despise and vilify the whole counsel of God revealed in Scripture.”

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311 Ibid., 80 (5).
312 Ibid., 193 (11).
313 Ibid., 67 (4.3.1).
314 Ibid., 68 (4.3.2).
315 Ibid., 74 (4.5).
316 Ibid., 77 (4.6).
317 Ibid., 196 (11.1.1).
Marshall explains the instrumentality of faith from the opposite perspective when he observes that faith is uniquely fitted for receiving Christ. Its fittedness lies precisely in the humiliation and debasement entailed in faith. In the act of believing on Christ, the soul casts aside everything that would keep one from coming to Christ, including confidence in one’s own strength, works, privileges, and pleasure outside of Christ. Because the essence of faith is clinging, trusting, and relying, and because it is done from the sense of absolute need, it is impossible to have both faith in Christ and ultimate rest in any other refuge. Marshall sees Paul’s experience recounted in Philippians 3 as normative for the believer’s experience of faith in Christ: everything is counted as rubbish that the believer might gain Christ. Marshall also points to Old Testament references that see confidence in God and in something else as mutually exclusive (Hosea 14:3, 2 Chronicles 20:12, and Psalms 51:1 and 73:28).

Not only does faith cast aside all that would rival Christ for the believer’s source of ultimate refuge but also, in so doing, faith engenders in believers a disposition of self-emptying humility. The gospel comes to the sinner declaring that he or she has no resources in him- or herself for salvation. Faith is consistent with this gospel declaration because, according to Marshall, “[Faith] ascribes nothing that it receives to itself, but all to the grace of God.” Faith involves no “bodily motions” in which the sinner could boast as actions that brought him or her into a saved state. Rather, “by [faith we] renounce all confidence in any righteous works whatever, and trust on Him that justifies the ungodly.

Nothing other than the instrument of faith for the reception of the gospel would comport with humanity’s need for a salvation extra nos. In one’s fallen state, one naturally perceives God to be one’s enemy and is driven by self-interest to run from God, yet at the same time, one realizes that one needs holiness in order to be saved. This puts

318 Ibid., 70 (4.4.1).
319 Ibid., 70 (4.4.1).
320 Ibid., 71 (4.4.1).
321 Ibid., 77 (4.6), 134 (7.1.3).
322 Ibid., 113 (6.1.4.4).
the unbeliever in an inescapable bind and further corrupts the conscience, making the unbeliever unable to do anything good. In this situation, an invitation to busy oneself with works of righteousness to earn salvation would lead to complete despair. It would be a “partition-wall which you can never climb over.” It, therefore, must be “thrown down by the knowledge of salvation by grace without any procuring condition of works.” It is by faith only.

From the perspective of human experience, faith is the means of crossing this “partition-wall.” Marshall states, “The first right holy thoughts you have of God are thoughts of his grace and mercy to your soul in Christ, which are included in the grace of faith.” Prior to faith in the gospel, unbelievers’ thoughts about God are not sound because they obscure God’s holiness in their own minds in an effort to deny their debt of righteousness before the holy God. It is, therefore, necessary that the gospel make no demand on the natural state of unbelievers to produce holiness, for that would only lead to more debt, more obscuring, and, in turn, more sin. Instead, the gospel insists that the sinner rely wholly upon Christ for reconciliation with God. Such reliance is the first move of faith, and through that move one is no longer in a position of needing to flee from God. This gratuitous offer received by faith is the only way to rescue the unbelieving mind from further futility because it alone affirms both the reality of God’s holiness and the reality of his or her own sinfulness, without leading to one’s own destruction. Thus, faith is the very first act in which the holy life is begun, and it is the foundation of all growth.

Yet this very freeness guards from entrance all who would attempt to come to God based on their own righteousness. “Faith,” Marshall writes, “…is made difficult to us by reason of the opposition that it meets with from our inward corruptions and from

323 Ibid., 213 (11.2.1.5).
324 Ibid., 119 (6.2.1).
325 Ibid., 142 (7.3).
326 Ibid., 144 (7.4).
327 Ibid., 193 (11).
Satan’s temptations.” Faith is easy in the sense that it requires no work on the part of humanity, but it is hard in the sense that it requires complete rest on God for something that humanity desperately needs and which humanity instinctively understands ought to be produced by one’s own actions. The difficulty of faith is similar the situation Moses faced when, in view of the invading Egyptian army, he was issued the command “fear not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” The burden of this command was not on account of the difficulty of “standing,” but on account of the flesh’s intense pressures to secure its own salvation. Similarly, the opposition Naaman encountered in the cure of his leprosy was not in the act of washing itself but in the humility and debasement that the act required. Natural revelation, which points to the need for holiness, and human pride conspire to incline the soul to rest in one’s own works for salvation and dissuade one from believing that a bloody sacrifice of the Son of God was necessary to secure forgiveness of sin. Thus, according to Marshall, the heathens seek salvation through burning their children, and Catholics do so through vows of chastity and multiple burdens. Though costly, these means are in one sense easier because they do not require abandoning pride or the innate desire to secure one’s own salvation. In light of these obstacles, one needs to be strengthened in one’s faith in the gospel. It is for good reason that one is encouraged to grow and press on in faith.

The Nature of Faith

Having seen how faith arises out of Christ’s work and the proclamation of the gospel, we need to now explore in more depth the nature of faith. It consists of two aspects: (1) believing the truth of the gospel, namely, believing that Jesus came and died

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328 Ibid., 197 (11.1.2).
329 Ibid., 198 (11.1.2).
330 Ibid., 198 (11.1.2).
331 Ibid., 197 (11.1.2).
332 Ibid., 197 (11.1.2).
333 Ibid., 198 (11.1.2).
on the cross for sinners, which issues a pardon for all who would believe on him, and (2) believing on Christ, that is, entrusting oneself to him as one entrusts oneself to a person. The second aspect includes “resting, relying, leaning, staying ourselves on the Lord…hoping in the Lord.” The first act is like receiving “The breast or cup, in which milk or wine are conveyed.” This is why Scripture says the preaching of the gospel “brings Christ near.” It makes Christ present and available to be grasped. The second act of believing on Christ is akin to “sucking the milk…and drinking the wine.” It is through believing on Christ that “we receive Christ and all his fullness actually into our hearts.”

Though Marshall sees distinction between these two acts, he believes that each one implies the other. Believing the truth of the gospel does not technically unite one to Christ; nevertheless, the Bible speaks of it as the instrument of salvation because it “includes and disposes the soul to the latter act, whereby Christ Himself is immediately received into the heart.” Moreover, “If they knew the name of Christ, as He is discovered in the gospel, and judged aright of the truth and excellency of it, they would not fail to put their trust in him.” By “know,” Marshall means more than awareness of the bare facts, he means intimate knowledge. One will not believe the gospel as the most excellent truth without further believing on that excellent one whom the gospel offers, namely, Christ. Therefore, any failure in the second act of believing on Christ is traced

334 Ibid., 61 (4.2).
335 Ibid., 64 (4.2).
336 Ibid., 61 (4.2).
337 Ibid., 61 (4.2).
338 Ibid., 64 (4.3).
339 Ibid., 64 (4.3).
340 Ibid., 64 (4.3).
341 Ibid., 62 (4.2).
342 Ibid., 206 (11.2.1).
343 Ibid., 62 (4.2).
back to an error in the first act, namely, believing the truth of the gospel. 343 This is why Marshall labors so strenuously for his readers to understand rightly the gospel of Christ for sinners.

Faith and Sanctification

Marshall offers two separate reasons why for faith is connected specifically to sanctification. First, the content of faith includes what is now true of the believer because of his or her union with Christ. By faith, believers embrace a new understanding of themselves: they are now dead to sin and alive to God, indwelt by the Spirit. And they are certain of happiness for all eternity. 344 It is inconceivable that those who believe such things about themselves are not, in some sense, “heartily disposed and mightily strengthened for the practice of holiness.” 345 Faith inclines the heart to obedience, and such inclination, we must remember, is the principle means of holiness.

Faith is also connected to sanctification in that the exercise of faith is an act of moving toward Christ in love. We must remember that the goal of salvation by faith is union and communion with Christ. The gospel provides no mere forgiveness of sins or removal of corrupt consciences; rather, it grants a salvation in which Christ is treasured above all else. It brings believers into a relationship with Christ in which there is no one closer than he. In both aspects of faith—(1) believing the truth of the gospel and (2) believing on Christ—some sense of desiring Christ must be present. Because the purpose of the gospel is to convey Christ, it is inconsistent for one to believe the gospel without also “relishing the goodness and excellence of it.” 346 Moreover, it is of the essence of faith not only to believe in Christ but also to “account all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and count them to be dung, that we may win Christ and be found in him, esteeming Christ to be all our salvation and happiness.” 347

343 Ibid., 206 (11.2.1).
344 Ibid., 72 (4.4.2).
345 Ibid., 73 (4.4.2).
346 Ibid., 73 (4.4.2).
347 Ibid., 62 (4.2).
Thus, faith promotes sanctification because it carries with it a love for Christ in all his holiness and a willingness to forsake all that is opposed to Christ.

Faith, therefore, is a suitable instrument not only for receiving Christ but also for the practice of every aspect of the Christian life—loving God, praising him, and serving others. Believers are able to perform sincere acts of obedience according to the strength of their faith. For this reason, Marshall considered the proclamation of Christ and call to faith as not at all tending toward Antinomianism but rather the only basis for true and lasting obedience. Thus, he labors earnestly to proclaim Christ and plead for faith in him unto this end. Marshall exhorts believers to “…endeavor diligently to perform the great work of believing on Christ in a right manner, without any delay; and then also continue and increase in your most holy faith, that so your enjoyment of Christ, union and fellowship with him and all holiness by him, may be begun, continued and increased in you.”

Assurance

Our study has demonstrated that union with Christ is critical for Marshall’s theological structure of sanctification. We will now add that concerning the practical outworking of sanctification—that is, the actually living of a holy life—assurance is a necessary corollary to union and, therefore, deserves significant attention for understanding the structure and experience of Marshall’s doctrine of sanctification. Without assurance, the practical impact of union with Christ is muted, for one would lack confidence that one benefited from this union. Marshall’s doctrine of assurance arises out of his theology of union with Christ, justification, and the atonement and is most closely connected to faith. As we saw, Marshall holds these doctrines in agreement with many of his Reformed brethren. Nevertheless, Marshall’s theology of assurance is remarkable for the directness from which it arises out of these theological loci and for the strong connection between assurance and practical sanctification.

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348 Ibid., 62 (4.2).
349 Ibid., 73 (4.4.3).
349 Ibid., 193 (11). Emphasis added.
Marshall’s uniqueness is also evident in the way he inverts the typical question related to assurance: instead of asking, “How do I get the kind of sanctification that will give me assurance?” he asks, “How do I get the kind of assurance that will give me sanctification?” Marshall admits that the first question—that puts assurance after sanctification—is legitimate, because there is a sense in which assurance flows from sanctification. But Marshall leads with the idea that a sense of assurance is grounded in faith because he sees assurance as a precondition for sanctification. By doing this, Marshall averts both prominent errors of his day: he avoids Neonomianism by stressing that assurance is possible and foundational; he also avoids Antinomianism by showing that the goal of assurance is not simply to leave people assured but to lead them into holiness.

**Historical Background to Assurance**

Our historical study has shown that Protestants contested important questions related to assurance. To understand Marshall’s context, it will behoove us to briefly review this debate. It was the Protestants’ “damnable doctrine of assurance” that was perceived by Catholic opponents as most problematic of their teaching. And it was the supposed weakening of that commitment to assurance on the part of certain theologians that motivated a contentious response labeled Antinomian.

Beeke and Jones cite two reasons why the issue of assurance—or “how one could be sure of his election”—was of prime concern for Puritan pastors and theologians. First, later generations had to clarify what Calvin meant by assurance, especially in light of those who claimed an intellectual understanding of the gospel but who lacked a life of faith that was consistent with this claim. Beeke writes, “It became pastorally essential to

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350 Ibid., 155–156 (9).
351 Council of Trent, chapter XII. “No one, moreover, so long as he is in his mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate,” Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 1:103–104.
352 Cooper, *Fear and Anxiety*, 22-30.
define the difference between saving and common grace, saving and common convictions, saving and pseudo-faith. Post-Reformation pastors were faithful to their members as they labored to lead them into a personal, assuring union with Jesus Christ.\(^{354}\)

In a similar vein, Richard Hawkes notes that Puritan homiletics consisted in a two-pronged approach: “[1] to overthrow the confidence of the ‘legalist’ who based his assurance on his own good works and [2] to demonstrate to the ‘professor’ how inadequate was his assurance which rested only on doctrine.”\(^{355}\) As we’ve observed, it was difficult to fully establish one prong without risking the other. When one convinces the “mere professors” of the inadequacy of trusting in doctrine alone, how does one avoid tending toward legalism? Also, how does one overthrow the confidence of the legalist without tending toward Antinomianism? As we will see, Marshall achieves remarkable consistency by grounding assurance in union with Christ and simultaneously attacking Neonomianism and Antinomianism.

The second consideration Beeke notes which leads to the importance of assurance is the seventeenth-century practice of rigid self-examination.\(^{356}\) The more believers became acquainted with the depth of their own depravity, the greater pressure there was for a doctrine of assurance that could both account for the need to fight sin and assure believers of a salvation based on grounds other than the believer’s own performance. This was one of the tensions we observed at the end of Part III.

Not only did the Puritans themselves debate assurance but also the historiography of the Puritan teaching on assurance is disputed.\(^{357}\) Cunningham and Kendall (and Barth in his own way) pioneered the thesis that the Puritan view of assurance represents a radical break from Calvin and the early Reformers.\(^{358}\) As we noted in the opening section,

\(^{354}\) Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 275.


\(^{356}\) Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 588.

\(^{357}\) See historiography section in Part I.

\(^{358}\) Kendall, *English Calvinism*, see p. 212 for conclusion.
this view has been seriously undermined by the work of Muller, Helm, Beeke, and Letham.

Categories for Assurance in Marshall’s Theology

Marshall describes assurance in three categories: (1) endowments, (2) comfort of the gospel, and (3) personal assurance. Each of these describes a different perspective of the broader teaching on assurance, and the connection of these categories is critical to the substance of Marshall’s theology. We will explore in broad strokes how these categories interact before explaining each of them in more detail.

The endowments occupy a central place in Marshall’s argument from the very outset. Through direction 8, Marshall explains each endowment in its theological connection to union with Christ. In directions 3 and 4 Marshall answers the question, “How does one receive the endowments?” The answer is “by trusting on Him for all His salvation, as He is freely promised to us in the gospel; and that by this faith we do as really receive Christ.” 359 Directions 5 through 8 answer objections to this teaching.

In directions 9 and 10, Marshall returns to that basic question of how one receives the necessary endowments for holiness, but now he addresses the reception of the endowments experientially. Even though the endowments are received entirely through Christ, without any admixture of human effort, the human mind and heart are actively engaged. Marshall writes, “The new nature may well be called ‘the mind’ (Rom. 7:25) because it lives and acts by minding and meditating on spiritual things.” 360 Receiving the endowments in Christ looks, from the perspective of the human mind, like receiving comfort. Marshall insists on the logical necessity—“let right reason judge”—that these endowments are bound up with comfort. 361 Much of direction 9 is devoted to the logical necessity of the gospel comforting the sinner, and how this comfort is a necessary precondition for obedience to the law. Also in direction 9, Marshall is concerned with the objective nature of the gospel as that which brings comfort. The gospel is a message of

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359 Ibid., 157 (9.1.1).
360 Ibid., 281 (13.2.3)
361 Ibid., 157 (9.1.1)
comfort to those who believe, not (contra Baxter) a message of the new law that one must obey.

But comfort of the gospel in general is not sufficient for obedience. In direction 10, Marshall addresses the thorny issue of personal assurance: “It is evident that those comforts of the gospel that are necessary to a holy practice cannot be truly received without some assurance of your interest in Christ and his salvation.” 362 Here Marshall connects the comfort of the gospel to personal assurance. Entailed in the faith by which one believes the gospel there must be a measure of assurance that one has a personal “interest in Christ and his salvation.” 363

Thus, the endowments, comfort of the gospel, and assurance of personal interest in Christ are three different categories for the broader category of assurance. The three are linked in that each is a precondition of true holiness, each is obtained in Christ, and each is experienced through faith and the gospel. Yet there are different nuances to each, which account for the dynamic perspective on assurance.

**Endowments**

As we saw, the endowments contribute directly to assurance but do not terminate in the believer’s rest in Christ; their ultimate *telos* is sanctification. Marshall’s pastoral sensitivity emerges strongly in this discussion.

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362 Ibid., 168 (10) Emphasis added.
363 Ibid., 168 (10)
Reconciliation and Justification. Marshall explains that one must be well persuaded of one’s reconciliation and justification before one can practice true holiness. This persuasion logically implies the possibility of confidence in one’s salvation. Marshall considers this to be the standard Protestant teaching. Yet, “Some late divines have thought fit to bring the doctrine of former Protestants concerning justification to their anvil, and to hammer it into another form, that it might be more free from Antinomianism and effectual to secure a holy practice.” These account “the only way to establish sincere obedience is to make it rather a condition to be performed before our actual justification and reconciliation with God.” No doubt Marshall is thinking of Baxter’s notion of justification based, at least to some extent, on works.

According to Marshall, this error destroys the possibility of holiness. For without reconciliation, one will be forced to flee from God because one sees God only as the destroyer. One needs assurance of reconciliation to God to know that one stands before him beloved in Christ. This assurance of love allows a person to respond to God in love. The Apostle John’s teaching on God’s love is instructive for Marshall. John writes, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:18–19). Marshall directly quotes or references this passage eight times throughout his work, always to explain how obedience flows out of confidence of reconciliation to God.

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364 Ibid., 21 (2.2).
365 Ibid., 22 (2.2).
366 Ibid., 22 (2.2).
367 See previous section on Baxter.
368 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 25 (2.2.3), 73 (4.4.3), 123 (6.2.4), 141 (7.3), 158 (9.1.2), 256 (12.2.6), 323 (14.2.3), 325 (14.3.2).
**Persuasion of Future Happiness.** The second endowment is the persuasion of future enjoyment and everlasting heavenly happiness.\(^{369}\) Believers must have confidence that their death will usher them into eternal happiness.

This idea, too, had its detractors: “Some account that a persuasion of our own future happiness, before we have persevered in sincere obedience, tends to licentiousness; and that the way to do good works is rather to make them a condition necessary for the procuring of this persuasion.”\(^{370}\)

Like the other errors, Marshall saw this one arising out of the fear of Antinomianism. But Marshall argues that it is precisely the assurance of future glory that gives rise to sincere obedience. He writes, “…sincere obedience cannot rationally subsist, except it be allured, encouraged and supported by this persuasion [of future happiness].”\(^{371}\)

The duty of the law is to love God with one’s whole heart. Marshall knew that this kind of radical love may lead to death. Marshall challenges Baxterian theology by essentially asking, “How can one love God with one’s whole heart, if that love risks the present state of happiness for a future state of extreme unhappiness?” Indeed, he reasons, this is impossible.

Marshall sees this logic embedded in the New Testament. The apostles did not shrink from affliction because they knew that it brought them “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).\(^{372}\) The believers allowed the plundering of goods precisely because they knew they had “better and more enduring riches in heaven” (Hebrews 10:34).\(^{373}\) Moreover, the way to keep oneself in the love of God is to look for his mercy to eternal life (Jude 21).\(^{374}\) The persuasion of future happiness fuels obedience; it does not stifle it.

\(^{369}\) Ibid., 31 (2.3).

\(^{370}\) Ibid., 31 (2.3).

\(^{371}\) Ibid., 33 (2.3.2).

\(^{372}\) Ibid., 34 (2.3.3).

\(^{373}\) Ibid., 34 (2.3.3).

\(^{374}\) Ibid., 22 (2.2).
Confidence of Sufficient Strength. One must also be persuaded of sufficient strength to be able to perform the tasks of the law. This implies some assurance of the ability to live according to God’s commands. The detractors of this were not the Neonomians but their theological cousins the Arminians, who we saw taught a synergism in which universal grace was sufficient for immediate practice of the law.

In contrast, Marshall believed that a person acquainted with his or her own depravity cannot responsibly enter into the task of good works without some confidence that he or she will have strength to obey. Marshall faulted the moralistic preachers for not grasping this point. They spent all their effort exhorting the immediate practice of the law without any thought for how one could practice it. “The enquiry of most, when they begin to have a sense of religion, is ‘What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?’ (Matt. 19:16); not, what they should be asking, ‘How shall I be enabled to do anything that is good?’”375 If people better understood their depravity, they would ask the latter question, and—assuming they understood the gospel rightly—they would find the answer in the benefits they receive in union with Christ. Marshall believes this will promote holiness. “If Christians knew their own strength better, they would enterprise greater things for the glory of God.”376 The fact that Marshall includes the believer’s confidence of his/her ability to obey under the rubric of assurance shows that Marshall is not merely interested in a salvation from future wrath, but he seeks a salvation that includes an actually life of holiness.

Comfort of the Gospel

Another dimension of the theology of assurance is the comfort of the gospel. Marshall does not have in view the subjective feelings that believers have when they believe the gospel. Rather, he means that the gospel entails the objective possibility of comfort. This differs, too, from the question of personal assurance because concerning the comfort of the gospel we are asking objectively about the nature of the gospel, “Is it a comforting message?” That is, does the gospel entail some sense of comfort? When we

375 Ibid., 6 (1.2).
376 Ibid., 255 (12.2.6).
turn next to the question of assurance we will ask, “On what basis can an individual claim that comfort to him/herself?” and, “Is assurance entailed in the nature of faith?”

Those who denied objective comfort in the gospel did so because they saw that delaying comfort until after one was practicing good works was more expedient for promoting good works. Marshall comments on this theology,

They account the only effectual way to secure the obedience we owe to the law of God is to ground all our comforts on the performance of it; and that the contrary doctrine strengthens the hands of the wicked, by prophesying peace to them, where there is no peace (Ezek. 13:16, 22), and opens the flood gates to all licentiousness. Therefore, some preachers will advise me not to be solicitous and hasty in getting comfort, but that they should rather exercise themselves diligently to the performance of their duty; and they tell them that, in so doing, their condition will be safe and happy at last, though they never enjoy any comfort of their salvation, as long as they live in this world.  

In other words, these “preachers” maintained that lack of comfort would promote greater security because the search for comfort will lead to good works, and those works were the key to entering into the state of grace. Marshall disagrees. He writes, “We must first receive the comfort of the gospel, that we may be able to sincerely perform the duties of the law.” Marshall sees comfort as necessary for holiness and leading to holiness.

Marshall qualifies this comfort in three significant ways. (1) This initial comfort is not the totality of comfort that one experiences in the Christian life: “I do not make the only place of gospel comfort to be before the duties of the law…yet some comfort God gives to his people beforehand, as advance money, to furnish them for his service, though most of the pay comes in afterwards.” (2) Nor is this comfort the full enjoyment of Christ: “Neither do I intend here any transport or ravishment of joy and delight, but only

377 Ibid., 155 (9).
378 Ibid., 154 (9).
379 Ibid., 155–156 (9).
such manner of comfort as rationally strengthens, in some measure, against the oppression of fear, grief and despair, which we are liable to reason of our natural sinfulness and mystery." Furthermore, (3) Marshall does not want to speak comfort to those who continue in sin. That is, Marshall doesn’t believe that anyone claiming to believe the gospel should necessarily be assured in their belief.

In his theological discourse, Marshall aims to take seriously these qualifications, without making sanctification the primary means of comfort. Marshall argues for the objective reality of comfort in the gospel message through a biblical-theological argument, which proceeds in three parts: (1) the nature of the gospel, (2) the nature of the law, and (3) the nature of human experience in conversion.

Marshall sees clear evidence in Scripture that the gospel brings comfort. In 2 Thessalonians 2:17, Paul explicitly says that the comfort of believers’ hearts will establish them in every good work. According to 1 John 3, it is the hope of the gospel that purifies one as God is pure. Moreover, he also points to Philippians 4:7, where Paul says that peace rules the believer’s heart through the gospel. Marshall also sees the reality of comfort in Paul’s argument in Romans 6 and 8: believers must rest in the knowledge that they are dead to sin and alive to God and members of Christ so that they can give themselves in obedience to God.

Marshall also argues for the logical and temporal priority of comfort over obedience based on the nature of the law. Here Marshall repeats the argument he made previously concerning the spiritual nature of the law, which requires one to obey out of a desire for God. Marshall writes, “Can we love God and delight in him above all else,
while we look on him as our everlasting enemy, and apprehend no love and mercy in him toward us that may render him a suitable good for us, and lovely in our eyes?” 387 The answer is clearly no. Thus, he concludes that comfort is required to obey the law.

Finally, Marshall considers the nature of conversion. He argues that because despair of one’s own ability to perform good works is part of the motivation for a person to trust in Christ, comfort must be part of the essence of the gospel; otherwise one would be left in despair. If Christ is entirely sufficient and the believer in and of him- or herself is entirely insufficient, then one should despair of one’s own condition. If this despair is not remedied in the gospel, the believer is left in the most miserable condition. Marshall encourages pastors to consider their unconverted “patients” as being “altogether without spiritual life and strength.” 388 They are “bedridden under a dead palsy.” 389 Thus, the prescription for their healing cannot be to “get up and walk,” for that is a command they cannot possibly perform. They must be healed. Their “healing” includes comfort so that they are in a position to be able to perform good works. Marshall insists that comfort must precede practice of the law “as the cause goes before the effect.” 390

Marshall concludes, “A holy life begins with comfort and is maintained by it.” 391 Given the reality of comfort as arising out of factors made necessary by the gospel, a denial of comfort is tantamount to a denial of the gospel.

**Personal Assurance**

Marshall’s concept of personal assurance answers the question, “How do I know this comfort applies to me?” Without the personal element, the comfort of the gospel would be of no effect to the believer. Marshall writes, “It is evident that those comforts of

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388 Ibid., 162 (9.1.5).
389 Ibid., 162 (9.1.5).
390 Ibid., 169 (10).
391 Ibid., 164 (9.1.5).
the gospel that are necessary to a holy practice cannot be truly received without some assurance of your interest in Christ and his salvation.”

Marshall believes that assurance is normative, and he proves this by showing that it is entailed in the nature of salvation. Salvation terminates not merely in the removal of wrath but also in the removal of the dread and fear of wrath and resting securely in God. Marshall picks up on the Psalmist’s heartfelt desire, “That I may dwell secure.” If one’s salvation does not include some sense of rest and comfort from the very outset, then the reality of the salvation falls far short of what is promised. “You make no better use of [Christ] than if he were a broken reed,” says Marshall. Marshall also echoes Calvin’s teaching that faith includes the recognition that God is of benefit to the believer. Marshall says bluntly, “If you will rest in the Lord, you must believe that He deals bountifully with you, or else, for all you know, you make your bed in hell.”

Marshall reviews the history of assurance in Protestant theology to prove that his teaching on assurance is not new. It was once taught that “faith was a persuasion or confidence of our own salvation by Christ; and that we must be sure to apply Christ and his salvation to ourselves in believing.” Marshall puts this in quotes, as it is probably his summary of Calvin’s definition of faith as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise of Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” Perkins and other early Puritans also taught the doctrine of assurance as part of the essence of faith.

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392 Ibid., 168 (10).
393 Ibid., 158 (9.1.2).
394 Ibid., 180 (10.2.1).
395 Ibid., 180 (10.2.1).
396 Calvin, Institutes, 3.2.7.
397 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 180 (10.2.1).
398 Ibid., 169 (10).
399 Institutes, 3.2.7.
Based on Marshall’s teaching on assurance and union with Christ, it appears that he understood the Reformed tradition well.

This early trajectory notwithstanding, Marshall sees that latter Protestants had abandoned this understanding of assurance and refused to defend it against the Catholics. This change is older than the “new divinity,” meaning that Marshall sees the error tracing back before Baxter. It is difficult to identify precisely the parties he has in view. We must remember Letham’s argument that there existed two different understandings of assurance tracing back to the beginning of Reformed thought. Marshall’s understanding of history would lend support for this argument, and Marshall would clearly come down on the side of those who see assurance as part of the essence of faith.

Marshall explains this erroneous doctrine of assurance accordingly:

They think because salvation is not promised to us absolutely, but on condition of believing on Christ for it, therefore we must first believe directly on Christ for our salvation and, after that, we must reflect in our minds on our faith and examine it by several marks and signs, especially by the fruit of sincere obedience, and if, upon this examination, we find out certainly that it is true saving faith, then, and not before, we may believe assuredly that we in particular shall be saved. On this account, they say that our salvation is by the direct, and our assurance by the reflex act of faith, and that many have true faith and shall be saved that never have any assurance of their salvation as long as they live in this world.

In other words, faith had two aspects according to some. Salvation was obtained in the first and assurance in the second. Advocates of this position argued that if assurance were entailed in the nature of faith, the gospel would have to include the salvation of everyone. That is, the gospel message would be: “Everyone is saved, so believe in your salvation.” But because salvation is conditioned upon belief, faith in the gospel cannot include

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Ibid., 170 (10).
knowledge of the fact that one is saved. Such a conclusion awaits one’s reflection on whether or not one has really exercised faith. Also because faith is not passive reliance, but active commitment, the evidence of faith is measured in good works. The framers of the New Divinity did not deny that one is saved upon the direct act of faith alone. They merely denied the possibility of assurance until further reflection that one’s faith is genuine. Marshall sees this as a move toward legalism because it predicates the experience of the Christian life upon the reality of good works.

How does Marshall respond? First, Marshall admits that the gospel does not contain the declaration that one is already saved. He writes, “We have no absolute promise or declaration in Scripture, that God certainly will or does give Christ and His salvation to any one of us in particular; neither do we know it to be true already in Scripture, or sense, or reason before we assure ourselves absolute of it.”

Exactly what Marshall means here is the subject of some controversy. Lachman laments that in the quote above Marshall negates his earlier commitment to assurance as part of the essence of faith. However, this appears to be a misreading. Perkins and Calvin both affirmed assurance as part of the essence of faith in some sense, yet neither taught that the essence of the gospel included the knowledge that all are saved or that any particular person would be saved. Conditionality was always present in the sense that only those who believe are saved. What Marshall means here is that assurance is not included in the direct object of saving faith because the content of the gospel never includes one’s own name as certainly included among those who are eternally saved.

However, this does not exclude assurance from the direct act of faith because faith includes believing the promise that whoever does believe the gospel will be saved. This amounts not to faith in faith but to faith in the promise. Perkins argues similarly when he says, “Although this particular expression, I am elect, is not expressly set downe in the Scriptures, yet it is inclusively comprehended in them…they which truly believe are elect, Joh. 6.35. I truly believe; for he which beleeveth doth know himself to believe: therefore I am elected.”

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403 Ibid., 168–169 (10).
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Marshall’s rationale for this means of assurance rests in his view of the uniqueness of the warrant for assurance,

This is a strange kind of assurance...We are constrained to believe other things on the clear evidence we have that they are true, and would remain true, whether we believe them or no, so that we cannot deny our assent, without rebelling against the light of our senses, reason or conscience. But here our assurance is not impressed on our thoughts by any evidence of the thing; but we must work it in ourselves by the assistance of the Spirit of God, and in this way we bring our own thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. None but God can require of us this kind of assurance, because He only calls those things that are not, as though they were. He only can give existence to things that are not, and make a thing to be true, on our belief in it, that was not true before. 406

In other words, under normal epistemic conditions one’s personal assurance of any truth is grounded, in part, upon the stability of that truth regardless of whether or not one believes it. (For example, I have warrant for believing that I am sitting in a chair precisely because if I were to—for some unknown reason—deny this fact, it would still be true. My belief has no bearing on reality.) But assurance that pertains to salvation is different because it is grounded in both the creative act of God, who makes a reality true that was previously not true—God “ calleth those things which be not as though they were ”—and the promise that he will do it if one believes. Without both the promise and the creative act of God, one could not have assurance that a reality is true that was not true moments before one actually believed it. However, if God promises to make that reality true upon faith, then it is the essence of faith to believe that the reality is true as soon as one believes, because of both the reliability of God’s promise and the ability of God’s creative action.407 Thus, the warrant for believing one is truly saved is contained not in the promise that salvation extends to a single individual but in the promise that God will

407 Ibid., 178a (10.1.4).
extend his creative activity to save everyone who believes and in the creative power of God, who is able to do it.

Marshall’s view does not turn the gospel proclamation into “you are already saved, so believe it”—as the Antinomians seemed to teach—because one’s participation in Christ hinges upon the creative act of God initiated by faith, which implies that a real change must occur and that faith performs an instrumental function. Thus, one is not saved before one believes. But the beginnings of assurance does not need to wait for further evidence that change has occurred because of the promise that if one believes, then one has truly transitioned from wrath to grace. Though Marshall does not use the language “reflexive act” approvingly, there is some sense in which the believer must reflect to gain assurance. However, the difference between Marshall and the “New Divinity” is that, for Marshall, one’s faith reflects not inwardly to examine the nature of the believing heart but outwardly to examine the creative power of God and the surety of his promise.

Even though there is continuity between Marshall and Perkins, we must not overlook an important difference. In the quote above, Perkins described faith as the fruit of election: “they which truly believe are elect.” 408 His logic is that the elect believe; therefore, if one believes, one has warrant for believing that one is elect. Nothing in Marshall contradicts this. But Marshall put emphasis in a different place, namely, in faith as instrument. If faith functioned as evidence only, then it has no special significance over other evidentiary elements, such as repentance and obedience. Hence, sanctification becomes the primary means of assurance, and the subjective begins to eclipse the objective. As we saw, Letham is right to see supralapsarianism responsible for Perkins’s position because it “takes the decisive moment out of time.” 409 But for Marshall, faith is evidence precisely because it is instrument. As an instrument, it functions in the realm of history. One is saved “by faith.” Faith is a “uniting grace.” Its presence is warrant for assurance precisely because it is the instrument by which God saves sinners. This, we could say, “puts the decisive moment back in time.” The real transition in history

between wrath and grace is upheld. Faith cannot be looked at as one piece of evidence alongside others because faith is the means of union with Christ, which brings all other evidence in its wake. Thus, for Marshall, faith includes some sense of assurance.

Marshall’s strong emphasis on the instrumentality of faith did not lead him into a Neonomian or Arminian theology. These systems, too, put the decisive moment in time. But they did so by making the human the decisive actor. If one is saved on account of one’s faith (Arminianism) or on account of one’s life of faith (Neonomianism), then salvation occurs in history only because of the human’s historical acts. But Marshall retains divine monergism in two ways. First, faith is merely the instrumental and not the material or formal cause of salvation. Marshall writes, “faith does not unite us to Christ by its own virtue, but by the power of the Spirit working by it and with it.” The salvation rests wholly upon the creative act of God and on the basis of the death and resurrection of Christ. Second, Marshall also retains the idea that God is the one who causes faith. In fact, union with Christ is, in one sense, prior to faith because Christ is the source of all salvific benefits, including faith.

It should be noted that Marshall’s position does not alleviate all tension because he has not reconciled the instrumentality of faith with the fact that faith exists only because of the creative act of God in union with Christ. Perhaps this is a tension that Marshall does not recognize. Or, more likely, Marshall recognizes this tension, but since the locus of faith and the creative act is union with Christ, “it does not fall under the judgment of sense.” Union with Christ rests upon the other unions, the Trinity and the hypostatic union, and neither of these unions (contra Socinians) is completely comprehended by humans. If Marshall accepts mystery at the very essence of union with Christ, it is not hard to imagine that mystery is also at work in the reason why faith is both instrumental for God’s creative act and a fruit of that creative act. Union with Christ

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410 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 298.
411 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 77 (4.6).
412 Ibid., 45 (3.2).
413 Ibid., 178 (10.1.4).
is shrouded in mystery. It has its starting point in the eternal decrees.\textsuperscript{414} It is achieved in the historical death and resurrection of Christ.\textsuperscript{415} Yet there is also a decisive moment in time is when a person is, by faith, united to Christ.\textsuperscript{416} Because of this instrumental function, faith carries with it assurance.

One more possible defeater to Marshall’s view of assurance is the reality of doubt in many believers. The teachers of the “New Divinity” find scriptural warrant for their teaching that lack of assurance is normative in the fact that many saints in Scripture experienced doubts. They argue that if one includes assurance as part of the definition of saving faith, then one has added to the gospel the greater burden of having to believe against all doubts that one is truly saved. This can unwittingly encourage legalism by bringing undue attention to works as a way of gaining assurance. The requirement that one must feel assured can actually raise more doubt.

Marshall’s argument against this is clear and nuanced. He recognizes the reality of doubt in believers. As a pastor, he would have seen this reality firsthand; he also experienced it himself. He does not say that the presence of doubt proves one is not a believer. Rather, he encourages believers to see how doubt and confidence are mixed in their own souls, and he explains how they can use their confidence to fight their doubt. According to Marshall, Christians doubt their salvation because even the best of them are of both flesh and spirit.\textsuperscript{417} There are echoes of Calvin’s idea that in all believers there is belief and unbelief.\textsuperscript{418} All believers have some doubts. However, even believers who have obsessive doubts demonstrate some degree confidence when they cry to the Lord for help from those doubts. “Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24) is a cry issued on the basis of some assurance.\textsuperscript{419} Marshall explains, “If at the same time he [the doubting believer] can blame

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{414} Ibid., 195 (11.1.1).
\item \textsuperscript{415} Ibid., see direction 3.
\item \textsuperscript{416} Ibid., 72 (4.4.1).
\item \textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 176 (10.1.3).
\item \textsuperscript{418} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.2.4.
\item \textsuperscript{419} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 176 (10.1.3).
\end{itemize}
his soul for doubting...these doubting are of the flesh, and of the devil.”

In other words, the believer may doubt his or her salvation, but if the believer also begs God for help, there is some sense of assurance, for otherwise on what basis would the believer claim that he or she has a right to approach God? The believer implicitly recognizes that doubt is, in some sense, unwarranted.

Thus, the flesh, by nature, doubts. But the nature of saving faith is to resist doubt. Marshall admits that as long as one grants some basis within the nature of faith to cry out against doubt, then the person who insists that doubt is normal is “in the same judgment with me.” Likely Marshall meant here to approve of the Westminster Confession of Faith’s language of assurance not being part of the essence of faith. Marshall may not enthusiastically embrace the Confession’s negation on this point. But he does not deny it either. Given what we’ve seen in Marshall’s theology, he would not dispute the Confession’s assertion that “a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of [assurance].” But he wants to stress that a lack of assurance will not positively contribute to one’s sanctification. Marshall would even agree that a believer who “neglect[s] the means of preservation and fall[s] into grievous sins” will—and even should—lose assurance. But he would also stress that nothing good concerning sanctification will happen for that person so long as he or she continues unassured. No growth in holiness is possible until some sense of assurance is gained.

Moreover, Marshall also wants to stress that the road back to assurance begins with the gospel itself. Only after grounding one’s assurance in the gospel can one then perform good works. In other words, if one doubts one’s salvation, the solution is not to throw oneself into good works in order to find a record of obedience that accords well with faith, but rather to throw oneself upon Christ, as he is revealed in the gospel of grace for sinners. Only with personal assurance of the comfort of the gospel can one obtain the endowments that are the necessary means for holiness.

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420 Ibid., 177 (10.1.3).
421 Ibid., 176 (10.1.3).
422 WCF, 18.
423 WCF, 17.
As we already noted, Marshall’s strong statements on the reality of and need for personal assurance are qualified. He recognizes that while Antinomian theology grants immediate assurance, it is problematic in that it fails to oppose the person who would use comfort not as a basis for holiness but to remain in sin. For Marshall to sustain his thesis that assurance is normative and part of the essence of faith, he must oppose the Antinomian offer of unqualified assurance without giving grounds for the Neonomian position.

Marshall accomplishes this task by adding an important clarification to his doctrine of assurance: the key question for assurance is not “[w]hether I am already in a state of grace and salvation.” The key word there is “already.” One cannot look in the face of blasphemous works and conclude that one currently rests in a state of salvation. Rather, the question of assurance is “whether God is graciously pleased now to bestow Christ and his salvation on me, though I have been until now a very wicked creature.” This question is answered in the affirmative because of the nature of Christ’s death as a sufficient pardon for the worst of sinners. One hears the echo of Sibbes: “there is more mercy in Christ than there is sinne in him.” God’s mercy and the sufficiency of Christ’s death for the worst of sinners provide warrant for assurance because by looking to Christ’s death, one may have confidence in God’s disposition to forgive. One must never fear that God might not accept oneself or that one’s sins might be too great for forgiveness. We could summarize Marshall by the following: the goal of assurance is never for a believer to affirm “in the face of my sin, I know that I have been and continue to be a child of God,” but rather, “in the face of Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice, I know that, though my sins be many, if I take hold of Christ by faith, I am welcomed as a child

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425 Ibid., 173 (10.1.2).
426 Ibid., 173 (10.1.2).
427 Richard Sibbes, *The Bowels Open, or, a Discovery of the Neere and Deere Love, Union and Communion Betwixt Christ and the Church, and Consequently Betwixt Him and Every Beleeving Soule.* (London: George Miller for George Edwards 1639), 416.
of God in Christ.” This means that one ought not to have assurance irrespective of how one has lived. Marshall states, “The assurance directed to is not a persuasion of our salvation, whatever we do, or however we live and walk.” But regardless of how one has lived and walked, if one looks to Christ, one may find immediate assurance in the gospel and fullness of Christ, which is necessary to produce good works.

Lachman summarizes Marshall well:

Thus [Marshall] defines the assurance, which is of the essence of faith, not as a persuasion that we already have already received Christ, but that God is pleased to give Christ and his salvation to us. Therefore men are not encouraged in presumption, but are encouraged to come confidently to Christ for salvation. He does not deny a well-grounded assurance by the reflex act of faith, which involves self-examination, but distinguishes between this and the assurance which is of faith. The assurance, which is by reflection, answers the question, “Wherever I am already in a state of grace and salvation? But the assurance, which inheres in saving faith, involves a persuasion that God is ready graciously to receive us in Christ, “Notwithstanding all our former wickedness.”

Conclusion

The uniqueness of Marshall’s theology of assurance lies in his commitment to confront both Antinomianism and Neonomianism at the same time. He confronts the Antinomian practice to rule every questioning of one’s salvation as illegitimate, and he challenges the neonomian on their theory that a credible record of obedience must precede all assurance. The other unique factor about Marshall is that he develops his view of assurance systematically and in the context of redemptive history before he applies it pastorally. While it seems that Marshall would agree that a singular need for believers is assurance, he did not work toward assurance in isolation from related theological loci. Unlike the system we discovered in Perkins, Marshall’s doctrine of assurance is in

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428 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 174 (10.1.2).
429 Lachman, The Marrow Controversy, 20
harmony with theology of sanctification. For Marshall, assurance is always grounded in union with Christ, justification, and a biblical notion of faith, and it is always unto sanctification.

**Practical Sanctification**

We conclude our analysis of Marshall by briefly exploring his plan for the practical outworking of sanctification. We must remember that Marshall’s aim in *Gospel Mystery* is to provide a manual for practical holiness with a particular focus on the problem of indwelling sin and the troubled conscience. This aim is finally accomplished in directions 12 and 13, which are more practically oriented and together account for one-quarter of the total work.

As important as these chapters are for the integrity of Marshall’s work, we will give comparatively less attention to them. This imbalance is justified because, in one sense, Marshall’s practical theology of sanctification is very similar to that of other English Puritans. Owen’s work *Mortification of Sin* (1656) and *Spiritual-mindedness* (1681) overlap considerably in content and even provide more detail. Also, historical-theological works by Beeke and Packer have done well explicating what this method entails. Yet the uniqueness of Marshall’s practical sanctification is how it builds on all he said about the nature of the gospel. Therefore, our primary goal in this section is to connect the theology of sanctification with its practice. We will explore the practical application under two headings: (1) The art of living within in-between the times and (2) applying the means of grace.

**The art of living within in-between the times**

Having explained the theology of the sanctified nature, Marshall endeavors to impart the skill of living within this reality. For living in a way consistent with one’s new state in Christ is not achieved all at once. Nor is it a process in which the believer is

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431 See, for example, Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, and Packer, *Quest for Godliness*. 
passive. The Christian, rather, must “strive to be a skillful expert.” The skill of living this new life is so important for Marshall that the title of his book, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, reflects this theme. Marshall explains,

> Some worldly arts are called mysteries, but above all this spiritual art of godliness is, without controversy a great mystery (1 Tim. 3:16), because the means that are to be made use of in it are deeply mysterious, as has been shown; and you are not a skillful artist till you know them and can reduce them to practice.”

Deeply mysterious truths require skills to put into practice. In the scholastic categories, theology was not exclusive *scientia* or *sapientia*, but also *ars*—an art that requires skills. Sanctification is an *ars*, in the sense that the manner of life it requires is not immediately obvious but must be learned by experience and put into practice. Marshall states at the outset of his work that holiness is achieved not by brute force but by artifice and skill.

This pastor believes that much grief would be spared if the church gave greater attention to learning how to live according to this mystery. Believers fall into either Antinomianism or Neonomianism not simply because they are poorly taught on doctrine but also because they are ignorant of how to live out correct doctrine in the midst of life. That is, they fail to make the connection between one’s new state in Christ and the behavior that it ought to induce, and they do not know how to put the behavior into practice.

Undeveloped skills in the mystery of sanctification may result in verbally affirming all that Marshall has taught concerning the doctrine of sanctification, yet in the moment of moral dilemma one may still act as if the gospel requires no striving because all is obtained in Christ. Or, conversely, one may act as if the effort one puts into

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432 Ibid., 266 (13).
433 Ibid., 231 (12).
sanctification is the direct cause of new life because working and striving are necessary. Both errors are corrected only with attention to skills for the proper use of the means of sanctification. Here Marshall is building on the rich tradition of spirituality in the church, but with a distinct gospel focus. He did not write the first eleven directions only to have his theology of sanctification reduced to moralism when he moves from the indicative to the imperative because his readers couldn’t understand how to put the indicative into practice. Additionally, these skills require not only learning but also much unlearning, as one must unlearn practices that were part of one’s old nature before one may learn new practices. Also, the learning consists not merely in incorporating new facts and principles into one’s manner of life (that is, learning to act on new information) but in adopting a new way of gathering those facts and principles. In short, sanctification requires the skill of living by a new epistemology.

The Centrality of faith

This new epistemology pivots on faith. Scripture describes the Christian life as “living by faith,” “walking by faith,” “faith working by love,” “overcoming the world by faith,” “quenching all the fiery darts of the wicked by the child of faith.” Here faith is the means by which all these acts are accomplished. Additionally, Scripture presents prerequisites for holiness, even for those who are already united to Christ, such as the act of “putting on the Lord Christ,” “being strong in the Lord and in the power of his might,” and “going in the strength of the Lord.” These descriptions of the Christian life indicate either a manner in which an act ought to be done (by faith) or a requisite act that one must do. Marshall wants his readers to take seriously this qualification so that they do not rush out into acts of obedience without the proper preparation. Marshall reasons that if holiness were simply a matter of obeying the law, then it could be accomplished with brute force. But it’s not. Holiness is achieved by living out of a new nature—and in

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436 Ibid., 10 (1.2.6), 231 (12).
437 Ibid., 232–234 (12.1.1–12.1.2).
438 Ibid., 232–234 (12.1.1–12.1.2).
439 Ibid., 1 (1.1).
particular a new nature that cannot be seen in full—a peculiar skill is required. This skill requires faith. Marshall writes,

Make diligent use of your most holy faith for the immediate performance of the duties of the law, by walking no longer according to your old natural state, or any principles or means of practice that belong unto it; but only according to that new state which you receive by faith…strive to continue and increase in such manner of practice.  

Marshall reveals much in this carefully worded sentence. The fact that “faith” must be made “use of” for the obedience tells us that Marshall sees not only a passive but also an active sense of faith. The new state is received by faith’s passive act of reliance upon Christ. But then the believer must act on this new state.

Acting based on one’s new nature in Christ is properly called an act of faith because the reality of this new state is not known “by sight” but only “by faith.” Marshall says, “As long as we live in this present world, our apprehension of Christ and His perfection in this life is only by faith.” What is known “by sight” even poses contradictions to one’s new state in Christ:

Though we are partakers of a new holy state by faith in Christ, yet our natural state remains in a measure with all its corrupt principles and properties. As long as we live in this present world, our apprehension of Christ, and his perfections, in this life, is only by faith, whereas by sense and reason, we may apprehend much in ourselves, contrary to Christ….  

Thus, the art of gospel mystery living requires some sense in which Christians must trust in the truth of their state in Christ, even when that state is contradicted by

440 Ibid., 229 (12).
441 Ibid., 236 (12.2.1).
442 Ibid., 237 (12.2.1).
empirical evidence. Earlier Marshall writes, “Even those that are in a new state in Christ, and do serve the law of God with their mind, do yet with their flesh serve the law of sin.” The reason for this contradiction is not because it is possible for believers to persist in unrepentant sin (for Marshall is clear that a believer cannot); it is rather because the new state in Christ is such a high and exalted reality that at no point in their earthly life do believers live up to it. We’ve already seen, based on Romans 6, that in Christ one is truly dead to sin and raised unto new life with God in the same manner as Christ is dead to sin and alive to God. No believer experiences the fullness of this death and resurrection on earth. Yet believers are required to believe in the fullness of this reality, if they wish to see any progression in holiness. Marshall writes,

You will be able to abstain from all fleshly and worldly lusts that wage war against the soul and hinder all godliness by an assured persuasion…that…you are crucified to the flesh and the world and quickened, raised, and seated in heavenly places together with Christ; and that you have pleasure, profits, honors in Christ, to which the best things in the world are not worthy to be compared.

The believer’s experience of new life in Christ is commensurate with his or her degree of faith. This need for faith is not a weakness in the new creature but is an integral part of God’s design. It was not God’s intention, Marshall writes, that “we should enjoy his spiritual blessings any further than we are in him, and enjoy him by faith.” This is consistent with the total aim of sanctification: not that believers may produce holiness on their own, but that their lives may be dependent upon God. This dependency is part of the very essence of all holiness.

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443 Ibid., 89 (5.2.6).
444 Ibid., 262 (12.2.7).
445 Ibid., 241 (12.2.1).
Living in one’s place in redemptive history

Part of the skill of living by faith involves recognizing how the eschatological overlap of ages creates the unique role for faith.

The antinomian trap is to see life on earth is already perfect. Believers should deny that they see sin in their lives and, therefore, insist that they are already wholly new. Likewise, though not stated exactly this way, the Neonomian understanding of relative union would imply that nothing is true “by faith” that is not already a reality “by sight.” One is only in Christ to the extent that one lives in submission to and fellowship with Christ. Both Antinomian and Neonomian theologies contain a seed of rationalism that ignores the eschatological structure of union, which Marshall sees in New Testament and especially Pauline theology.

Properly placing oneself in redemptive history allows believers to view their sin in such a way that neither affords believers an excuse to remain in it nor leads them to despair because of it. This fact is critical for the consistency of Marshall’s theology. Excuse for sin and despair were tendencies of Antinomian and Neonomian theologies, respectively. The problem with Antinomian theology (at least according to Puritans) was that their first reaction to sin was “put sin out of your mind” rather than “put sin out of your of your life,” which destroyed any need to exhort believers to holiness. The believer could choose to remain in sin without contradicting the essence of Antinomian theology. Neonomian theology, on the other hand, tended toward despair—especially for those with a sensitive conscience—because any presence of sin could be used as evidence for denying the reality of new life.

Marshall presents a genuine third way:

Thus far they are in a new state, free from guilt, pollution and punishment of sin, and so free from the wrath of God, all miseries and death itself, while they are in this world; yea, all the guilt, pollution and punishments of sin, and all evils

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448 More on this in Part V.
whatever, which they are subject to according to their natural state, do them no harm according to this new state but work for their good, and are no evils, but rather advantages to them, tending to the destruction only of the flesh, and to the perfection of the new man in Christ. Yet it holds true also that our reception and enjoyment of Christ Himself and all His perfections is but in an imperfect measure and degree, until faith be turned into heavenly vision and fruition of Christ and therefore, our old sinful state, with the evils thereof is not perfectly abolished during this life. The kingdom of heaven, or the grace of Christ within us is like leaven in meal, which does not unite itself perfectly to the meal in an instant, but by degrees until the whole be leavened (Matt. 13:33); or, like the morning light that expels darkness, shining more and more unto the perfect day (Prov. 4:18).  

Marshall would agree with the Antinomian teaching. “What Christ has not done he will never do,” in the limited sense that one’s new state in Christ is a finished reality. But, as the quote above demonstrated, Marshall would also assert that what believers experience regarding their new state in Christ is exceedingly less than what will be experienced in heaven. On a future day the reality that must be acted on by faith will be known by sight and there will be no contradiction between what one feels and what one knows to be true.

But that day has not yet come, and, therefore, the call to fight for holiness applies to those in Christ. The fact that one’s new state is a finished reality does not undermine this call for holiness, but rather intensifies it, because sinful behavior poses a painful contradiction. When believers sin, they act contrary to who they really are. This ought not to lead to despair, but encourages believers to make what is true of them in Christ also true in their practice. And their union with Christ gives them confidence that they can live in a way that is pleasing to God. In this way, the fight against sin grounds believer even

\[\text{Ibid., 242 (12.2.1).}\]
\[\text{Denne, } Man of Sin, 32.\]
deeper in their identity in Christ. This is why Marshall says that all things are advantageous for the believer. Cheul Hee Lee summarizes Marshall’s theology well:

According to Marshall, as a result of union with Christ, believers have before them a choice of walking according to either of these states with the prosperities and resources of each. Within this eschatological tension, we are commanded to practice holiness by the way of faith in Christ, which is the only effectual method of sanctification.\footnote{Hee Lee, 129.}

Although Marshall stresses the need to grow in faith, he ends direction 12 with the comfort that God helps those who are weak in faith. God is pleased with the fledging faith of new and weak believers. Marshall writes, “We are to know that though the law requires of us the utmost perfection of holiness, yet the gospel makes an allowance for our weakness.”\footnote{Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 264 (12.2.8).} Here Marshall could sound as if he is operating according to the Baxterian antithesis between the law and the Gospel in which the law requires perfect obedience and the gospel sincere obedience. However, Marshall sees Gospel/law distinction in the context of the third use of the law. Insofar as the law provides a guide for the believer, that guide is perfection. Yet the believer must also recognize that the gospel promises help for those struggling. Marshall points out that God promises to provide ways of escape so that weak believers will not have their faith tested beyond what they can handle.\footnote{Ibid., 264 (12.2.8).} As a loving, caring father, God endeavors to grow the faith of his children, not squelch it. Marshall makes much of the shepherd motif in the Psalms and Isaiah.\footnote{Ibid., 264 (12.2.8).} It is part of the believer’s faith to rest in God, who is the giver and strengthener of his children’s faith, and to know that God will grow them in their faith according to his will.
None of this is presented as an excuse for believers to remain in sin, but it is an encouragement for believers not to attempt acts of holiness for which they are not yet ready: “Overdoing,” Marshall says, “commonly proves undoing.” Here Marshall wants believers to rest upon God for that strengthening and to recognize that it will not be brought about in an instant and that God will be gracious to them as they slowly mature. The “Gospel Mystery of sanctification” is not instantaneous but gradual, and Marshall wants believers to know that God will help them along this way.

Practical Outworking of Faith

In direction 13, the longest by far, Marshall explains how to make right use of prescribed means for walking in one’s new state of faith. Here Marshall is dealing with what the Puritans called the “means of grace.” The Puritans uniformly understood that “we draw near to God by means.” These means are spiritual disciplines that God prescribes for the believer to grow in his or her faith. Marshall defines means of grace as that which is “appointed of God for beginning, maintaining and increasing this faith, and the acting and exercising it, in order to the attainment of its end.” We should note the importance of faith in this definition. The means are designed not for the production of good works directly but to strengthen the faith by which one will do good works. The means are “instruments subservient to faith.”

This definition demonstrates remarkable balance. The means of grace neither dominate in Marshall’s theology of sanctification nor are they diminished. On the one hand:

455 Ibid., 266 (12.2.8).
456 Ibid., 264 (12.2.8).
457 Direction 13 is 49 pages in the 1692 edition.
459 Beeke and Jones, A Puritan Theology, 532.
461 Ibid., 267 (13.1).
hand, Marshall understands that there is no warrant for believing that the finished work of Christ implies no means for the application of that work in daily life. Such over-realized eschatology was the staple of Antinomians, who looked at means as a way to perfect in the flesh what was already accomplished by the Spirit. On the other hand, Marshall does not believe that the means confer grace by themselves, as Marshall believes Rome teaches. Marshall wishes to avoid imitating the “Papists…by heaping together a multitude of means of holiness, which God never commanded.” They make an idol of the means and look to the means, themselves, as the proper object of faith. In contrast, Marshall argues that proper attention to means naturally flows out of the doctrine of faith. By faith one goes to the Word to find the means of strengthening one’s faith, and one takes it on faith that the means proscribed in God’s Word are effective and sufficient.

Meditating Upon the Word of God

The first means of grace is the Word of God. It not only contains direction for all means but is a means itself. The Scripture explicitly says that faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Therefore, the Word is an effectual means, even if no other means (the church, baptism, communion, etc.) were available. Marshall’s rationale for why the Word of God is a principal means congeals perfectly with Marshall’s main contention that all resources for sanctification are found in Christ: because the Word of God is primarily a revelation of Christ, the Word applies Christ to the hearts of believers. For this, Marshall leans heavily on Colossians 2:2, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are contained in Christ. Christ is also the end of the law (Romans 10:4).

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462 Ibid., 267 (13.1).
463 Ibid., 267 (13.1).
464 Ibid., 268 (13.2).
465 Ibid., 268 (13.1).
466 Ibid., 270 (13.2.1).
467 Ibid., 270 (13.2.1).
468 Ibid., 270 (13.2.1).
By reading the Word of God, one should become aware of the horrific offence of sin before the Holy God and see oneself as a sinner. But this conviction is never as an end in itself; it should lead one to learn of the salvation provided in Christ, which is the central theme in Scripture. Marshall writes, “The most effectual knowledge of your salvation is to understand these two points: [1] the desperate sinfulness and misery of your own natural condition, and [2] the alone sufficiency of the grace of God in Christ for your salvation, that you may be abased as to the flesh and exalted in Christ alone.” The Word provides both of these. To bring them to the forefront of one’s mind, one should rehearse the story of the history of redemption, remembering the two principal figures, Adam and Christ. Drawing upon Luther, Marshall urges believers to learn the difference between the law and the gospel. Marshall stresses that these activities cannot be neglected after conversion but are part of the daily exercise for every believer.

Christians should also look to the law as a guide. Antinomians are of one accord in their rejection or diminishing of the law in this regard. Yet, as Marshall points out, there is no contradiction between looking to Christ as the Savior from sin and allowing the law to be a guide to holiness, if the salvation from sin includes a disposition to avoid sin and strive unto holiness. The law points to Christ as both the standard of perfection that Christ met on the believer’s behalf and the kind of life that Christ’s Spirit inclines believers to live. Because salvation includes a new nature whereby one loves holiness, the law becomes a welcomed friend insofar as it guides believers toward that which is their goal.

Marshall also encourages Christians to meditate upon the Word of God. Marshall contrasts meditation with the mere speculative ways of knowing the Bible aimed only to

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469 Ibid., 272 (13.2.1).
470 Ibid., 272 (13.2.1).
471 Luther, Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, “Freedom of a Christian.” (1520), 600.
473 Ibid., 272 (13.2.1).
474 Ibid., 270 (13.2.1).
“talk and dispute it at the Tavern or Ale-bench.” This casual approach to Scripture sees it as something other than life-giving nutrients for the languishing soul. Marshall wants his readers to “feed and ruminate upon the Word as its spiritual food” in which the soul “digests it and turns it into nourishment, by which we are strengthened for every good work.” This is what it means to “remember God upon our beds and meditate on it in the watches of the night (Psalms 63).” Meditation is an effective means to augment the study of God’s Word, not because the practice of meditation itself achieves greater grace or the Word has a magical power, but because meditation helps to conform the mind to the reality of the new state in Christ that is manifested to believers only through the Word.

**Self-Examination**

Another means of grace is the examination of oneself to determine if one is “at present in a state of sin…or of grace and salvation.” We have already explored Marshall’s nuanced theology of assurance. We saw that assurance was part of the essence of faith, but only as a small deposit of the total assurance God intends for believers. The believer should practice self-examination to grow in assurance, and this assurance will produce greater sanctification. However, one must be careful to practice it in such a way that it does not undermine the assurance entailed in the gospel.

It is important that the self-examination begin with a right understanding of the gospel so that if a person finds him- or herself outside of Christ, that person knows how to take hold of Christ as he is freely presented in the gospel. Marshall writes, “If we be in a state of sin, we may know our sickness and come to the Great Physician while it is called today.” Many people go wrong because they think that if they determine

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475 Ibid., 273 (13.2.1).
476 Ibid., 281 (13.2.3).
477 Ibid., 281 (13.2.3).
478 Ibid., 282 (13.2.3).
479 Ibid., 274 (13.2.2).
themselves to be outside of Christ, the solution is to throw themselves into good works that they may have proper evidence of salvation.\textsuperscript{481} Marshall insists that the solution is to come to Christ. One must be convinced that there is mercy enough in Christ to save even the greatest of sinners; therefore, if one finds oneself outside of Christ, one can come to Christ for salvation. This is the only way that self-examination can be effective. Without the conviction that God will save lost sinners, one will be prone to think of one’s qualifications more highly than one ought.\textsuperscript{482} Moreover, if one does find oneself outside of Christ, there ought to be no effort spent on self-examination as to whether or not one is “good enough to trust on Christ for…salvation”\textsuperscript{483}, rather, the examination ought to be only of Christ—the all-sufficient Savior, so that we realize his salvation is great enough to embrace all who believe in him. When self-examination is used rightly, it will lead one to Christ so that one may find refuge in him.\textsuperscript{484}

Conversely, if self-examination reveals that one is in Christ, then one may have greater confidence by which to draw near to God. In order not to destroy one’s faith, however, one must remember that one is looking not for perfect faith but for any degree or measure of faith. “Your great work must be to find whether there be not some drop of saving grace in the ocean of your corruption.”\textsuperscript{485} Self-examination is intended not to detect the presence of independent holiness but rather to discern the presence of a lively faith that clings to Christ.

The goal is not to trust in one’s self-evaluation but to trust in Christ all the more. The questions one should ask are as follows:

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\textsuperscript{481} Ibid., 274 (13.2.2).
\textsuperscript{482} Ibid., 274 (13.2.2).
\textsuperscript{483} Ibid., 275 (13.2.2).
\textsuperscript{484} Ibid., 276 (13.2.2).
\textsuperscript{485} Ibid., 277 (13.2.2).
• “Am I made aware of our sinfulness and deadness and misery of my natural state, so as to despair absolutely of ever being truly righteous, holy, or happy while I remain in that state?”

• “Do I see the excellency of Christ and him as the sole sufficiency of our salvation?”

• “Do I prefer the enjoyment of him above all things and desire as my only happiness all of Christ, including whatever I may suffer for his sake?”

• “Do I desire with my heart to be delivered from the power and practice of sin and from the wrath of God and the pains of hell? Does my heart come to Christ for salvation, trusting him only and trying to trust on him confidently, notwithstanding all fears and doubts that assault me?”

The Sacraments

The sacraments are useful means of grace for promoting faith because they function both as a visible representation of the Word of God and as an impetus for self-examination. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are a “seal of the righteousness of faith.” As such, they are promises made to believers by the Word of God.

Space does not allow for a full accounting of the Reformed theology of the Lord’s Supper. But, it is worth noting that the Reformed rejected both the Roman view of transubstantiation, which identified the spiritual and physical realities, and Memorialism, which looked to the sacraments as doing nothing more than bringing to mind the reality that they express. In the Reformed view, the Lord’s Supper is offered is an act of

486 Ibid., 279 (13.2.2).
487 Ibid., 284 (13.2.4).
sealing for those who receive it by faith. Like Calvin, Marshall’s doctrine of real union flows out of his recognition of the spiritual presence of Christ in the elements.\textsuperscript{489}

Like most protestant theologians in his day, Marshall affirmed the doctrine of pedobaptism, which was built on the premise that children were part of the covenant and, therefore, ought to receive its seal and sign.\textsuperscript{490} Marshall writes that “…no doubt, Christ is thus united to many infants who have the spirit of faith and yet cannot act in faith.”\textsuperscript{491} Though truly participants in Christ, they do not experience the totality of this union: “…until they act this faith, they cannot know or enjoy their union with Christ and the comfort of it, or make use of it in acting any other duties of holiness acceptably in this life.”\textsuperscript{492}

But we are not to understand from Marshall that the sacraments operate automatically, \textit{ex opere operato}.\textsuperscript{493} They operate according to the same principle as the Word of God: they make Christ present so that he can be grasped by faith. And yet, the Word and sacraments are not identical. The Word makes known the truth of the gospel. The sacraments illustrate the internal reality that is made true upon believing the gospel truths.\textsuperscript{494}

If one exercises faith in the gospel, one’s baptism is truly baptism into Christ. The waters of baptism provide the believer with a physical sign of the reality of Christ’s death and resurrection, of which she is truly a partaker. Believers should frequently reflect upon the question posed by Paul, “Unto what were we baptized? (Acts 19:3).\textsuperscript{495} The answer to this question should remind believers that they have put on Christ, that they are his

\textsuperscript{489} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 44 (3.2).
\textsuperscript{490} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.16.6.
\textsuperscript{491} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 277 (13.2.2).
\textsuperscript{492} Ibid., 277 (13.2.2).
\textsuperscript{493} Ibid., 78 (4.6).
\textsuperscript{494} Ibid., 286 (13.2.4).
\textsuperscript{495} Ibid., 286 (13.2.4).
children by faith, that they are no longer under the former schoolmaster of the law, and that they are made one body with Christ because they partake of the same Spirit.\textsuperscript{496}

Likewise, the Lord’s Supper is “a feast to nourish our faith and to strengthen us to walk in all holiness by Christ living and working in us….”\textsuperscript{497} This holy meal assures the believers that “when we truly believe on him, he is as closely united to us by His Spirit, as the food and drink are united to the body in eating and drinking.”\textsuperscript{498} Furthermore, one should see that the chief qualification required to receive this grace is a heart disposed to need Christ, not a certain standard of holiness. Marshall fears that many put off receiving the Lord’s Supper because they do not think they are qualified; yet the Supper is designed to strengthen weak believers that they may hold on to Christ even more.\textsuperscript{499}

\textit{Prayer}

Prayer is both an act of living by faith and a means of strengthening oneself unto the life of faith. “As we act grace, so we obtain grace by it,”\textsuperscript{500} Marshall writes. The reason why prayer acts in this way is that it presupposes our relationship with God. Christ is the mediator of our prayers, and believers’ prayers are accepted because of their state in Christ. This is what it means to pray “in the name of Christ.”\textsuperscript{501} Prayer makes use of these realities, thereby strengthening the believers’ confidence in them.

Prayer is communion with the Triune God. It is an exercise of faith because it involves acting based on the new status that the believer has in Christ. Thus, if prayer is done well, everything else in the Christian life will flourish, and if there is no prayer,

\textsuperscript{496} Ibid., 286 (13.2.4).

\textsuperscript{497} Ibid., 287 (13.2.5).

\textsuperscript{498} Ibid., 287 (13.2.5).

\textsuperscript{499} Ibid., 290–292 (13.2.5). This does not contradict the possibility of church discipline. More on that later.

\textsuperscript{500} Ibid., 293 (13.2.6).

\textsuperscript{501} Ibid., 295 (13.2.6.2).
there is no spiritual life, and the other means of grace are empty shells. “Prayerless people are dead to God.”

Prayer, for Marshall, involves active striving. It means pleading with God for a vigorous love for him and a love for holiness. It includes asking God for godly sorrow, peace, joy, hope, desire, and love for God and his commandments. It means wrestling against one’s unbelief, doubt, fear, laziness, and all evil lusts and desires, coldness of affection, and everything that is contrary to a holy life. But none of the work that goes into prayer undermines the essential gracious nature of one’s relationship with God; prayer is never an act that unites one to Christ, but an act that is entirely and in every way an outflow of that union which God has already established by grace through faith. Thus, when one confesses sins, one condemns oneself “according to the flesh,” but at the same time, one reminds oneself that one is not condemned in Christ. Confession is born out of the eschatological tension of being already in Christ yet longing for the fullness of that reality.

\textit{Fellowship and Communion with the Saints}

Marshall assumes that all Christians are ordinarily part of the visible church: “Whosoever God saves should be added to some visible church and come into communion of other saints.” Churches are communities consisting of private conversation and public assemblies. Marshall assumes that humanity is ordered around communities, either of darkness or of light. Christian communities are “of light” because the Spirit of God dwells in their midst and nourishes them. Marshall sees correlation between being “in Christ” and being part of the church. Although the spheres

\textit{\textsuperscript{502}} \textit{Ibid.}, 292 (13.2.6).

\textit{\textsuperscript{503}} \textit{Ibid.}, 229-229 (13.2.6.5–13.2.6.6).

\textit{\textsuperscript{504}} \textit{Ibid.}, 299 (13.2.6.7).

\textit{\textsuperscript{505}} \textit{Ibid.}, 299 (13.2.6.7).

\textit{\textsuperscript{506}} \textit{Ibid.}, 306 (13.2.10.1).

\textit{\textsuperscript{507}} \textit{Ibid.}, 307 (13.2.10.1).
are not identical, they are ideally co-extensive. Perhaps elements of Marshall’s congregationalism are evident here.

For Marshall, the encouragement and support one receives from the local church are an aspect of the benefits obtained in union with Christ. One receives nourishing life through union with Christ by obtaining life-giving sustenance through the church, which is his body. The means of grace are all ordinarily contained in the church: the church is where the Word is preached, the sacraments are offered, and prayer is given. Unity of believers in prayer together reinforces what it means to commune with Christ as his corporate body.\(^{508}\)

Excommunication is a means of grace in the church. The one living in unrepentant sin is shown the dangers of hypocritical faith. If that person is a true believer he or she will be called back into fellowship with Christ and his church.\(^{509}\) In the church the believer also sees “the lively examples of the saints” which encourage and teach the way of holiness.\(^{510}\)

Overall, the means of grace do not take the place of Christ. Rather they strengthen the believer’s faith, in order that the believer may live out who he or she already is in Christ.

**Conclusion**

Our analysis of Marshall has not followed the course of his *Gospel Mystery*. Instead, we have explored his work systematically, following the storyline of the history of redemption. Our warrant for this approach is that it follows the deep structure of Marshall’s thought. Because our analysis has spanned over 100 pages, a brief synopsis is in order before we conclude.

We began with Marshall’s doctrine of sin and depravity, showing how the corruption and guilt of humankind results from the marring of the image of God in the fall. The corruption and guilt create a situation in which humans are unable to do

\(^{508}\) Ibid., 308 (13.2.10.1.2.2).

\(^{509}\) Ibid., 308 (13.2.10.1.2.5).

\(^{510}\) Ibid., 308 (13.2.10.1.2.6).
anything that would put them back into a right relationship with God. This ought to lead a person to despair of his or her own ability. This doctrine of depravity is the necessary foundation for Marshall’s theology of sanctification.

Our next topic was the locus of sanctification, namely, union with Christ. This is a real union, in which the believers become partakers of Christ and all his benefits. These include, broadly speaking, justification and sanctification—a new status and a new state. In his incarnation, death, life, and sending of the Spirit, Christ is fashioned to be the Savior for sinful men and women. We also saw that union is not simply one point along the ordo salutis but encompasses the entire scope of salvation. Marshall’s approach to union must be understood in an eschatological framework: the present experience of salvation has its roots in the future reality. At the beginning and end of his work, Marshall expressly states the organic connection between sanctification and glorification.

In logical progression of Marshall’s theology, when then turned to the nature of the believer’s new state in Christ. We saw that just as a sinful nature gives rise to sinful actions, a new and holy nature is necessary to give rise to holy actions. This new nature is not the result of any effort or work of the believer but is obtained only through union with Christ. In Christ, the believer is dead to sin and raised to new life. Only through the new nature can the believer act in a manner that accords with true holiness, which is to love God and want God—in all his glorious attributes—more present in one’s life. For Marshall, holiness only manifests itself in a covenantal relationship with God.

We then considered justification, that forensic benefit by which the believer is afforded a right standing with God. Justification is based on Christ’s passive and active righteousness and is afforded to the believer vis-à-vis the instrument of faith. Marshall is clear that justification is not according to works. Furthermore, faith as the instrument of justification accords perfectly with the gracious nature of the justification.

We then examined the nature of faith in more detail. Faith is a gift of God which brings the believer into union with Christ. Marshall is clear that faith is strictly instrumental. Nevertheless, there are qualities about faith that make it a fitting instrument for salvation and sanctification. Faith orients one to look away from oneself and to rely entirely on Someone Else. Faith is humbling and self-abasing. It attributes nothing to itself and everything to that which is its object, namely, Christ as he is set forth in his
gospel. In this way, faith in Christ promotes sanctification. This is a significant point for Marshall, for it demonstrates the consistence between faith and assurance and the inherent contradiction between the believer’s faith in Christ and any continuation in sin. This is the basis for his argument against both Antinomianism and Neonomianism.

Our discussion on faith naturally led us to examine assurance. Marshall opposes not only Baxter but also other unnamed divines who he believes jettisoned the older Protestant doctrine of assurance as part of the essence of faith, in favor of a new teaching that bases assurance almost exclusively on sanctification. With remarkable clarity and writing for the ordinary Christian, Marshall demonstrates that the sufficiency of Christ’s death for the elect (limited atonement) and the gift character of faith do not impede warrant for trusting in Christ but provide the only warrant possible for sinners to come to Christ.

Finally, we saw the practical outworking of Marshall’s theology in sanctification. To consistently practice one’s faith in Christ, one must understand the eschatological structure of union with Christ. Believers are wholly new because of their new state in Christ, yet this new state is only partially realized. This structure provides a theological rationale for why sin remains, without that rationale turning into an excuse to remain in sin. Marshall encourages his readers to internalize this structure for their moment-by-moment fight for holiness. This structure also gives encouragement to believers when they falter and prods them to grow in their faith that they many more clearly aim toward heaven. Finally, Marshall gives various aids to faith, which are ordinarily known as “means of grace.” These means of grace are given for the singular purpose of strengthening faith. To the extent one grows in faith, one will grow in holiness.

Our systematic ordering of Marshall’s work has attempted to capture the deep structure of his thinking. This structure highlights the centrality of union with Christ in order to answer the problem of human depravity and guilt. Union with Christ is necessary in view of Adam’s failure and the resulting guilt and depravity. The structure also shows that the new nature is the prerequisite for all holiness. Marshall stresses that in their depraved state the very first instinct of humanity is sinfully oriented. The new state in Christ answers the problem of sinful inclination by giving the believer a new nature that has a bent and inclination toward holiness. It may be surprising that we treated the new
nature prior to justification. But this order allowed us to more easily follow the logical connections between justification, faith, assurance, and practical sanctification. Marshall never separates these loci; rather, he shows how, when conceived together, they provide irrefutable warrant for the sinner to come to Christ and grow in him.
Chapter V: Conclusion

Our aim was to explain Marshall’s theology of sanctification in union with Christ in the context of the Antinomian/Neonomian controversy of the seventeenth century. We sought to prove that Marshall succinctly refutes both Antinomianism and Neonomianism by situating sanctification in the context of union with Christ. Marshall’s theology is not wholly different from all others in this regard; he is similar to many others of his time, particularly Congregationalists. But his sustained focus on sanctification in union with Christ, combined with the clarity, brevity, and applicatory nature of his writing, make his work a unique and valuable resource for the Reformed tradition. His work also draws attention to sanctification as a significant theme in Puritan literature and shows how themes such as the covenant, justification and assurance contribute to the understanding of sanctification.

In this section, we will summarize our findings to show whether or not this thesis has been proven. We will also offer a brief digest on how Marshall’s writing impacted theological controversies in the generations immediately after him.

Review

To understand Marshall’s teaching, we began in Part II with the diachronic context of the doctrine of sanctification. We saw in Luther a genuine commitment to both forensic justification and personal sanctification, but we also saw that he struggled to relate the two. Luther, more so than the tradition that bore his name, situated the benefits of salvation in union with Christ. Yet even he struggled to articulate exactly how the indicative of free justification gave way to the imperative of holiness. That he opposed Antinomianism is clear, but less clear is exactly on what basis he did so, given the centrality of justification in his system and his law/gospel hermeneutic.

The Council of Trent presented the opposite theological tendency. According to Trent, the righteousness by which the believer stood before God was grace-empowered,
faith-wrought obedience in the believer’s own life. Sanctification, therefore, gave rise to justification. For Trent, as well as the medieval tradition, union with the Divine was the end goal, after a life of historical obedience. This scheme rendered assurance both impossible and undesirable.

Though Calvin shares far more in common with Luther than Trent, his theology is a tertium quid. For Calvin, the duplex gratia of justification and regeneration obtain in union with Christ. Helm describes this as a “stroke of genius.”¹ Calvin even reverses the normal pedagogical order of justification and sanctification in the mature form of his Institutes. The significance of this move lays not the order per se but the theological rationale that made it possible. Calvin does not ground sanctification in justification as Luther did, nor does he ground justification in sanctification, as Trent did; rather, he grounds both benefits in union with Christ. Sanctification is not—at least at a structural level—built upon justification, and this allows him to explain the two graces in any order he so chooses.² As a result, Calvin can more easily correlate the call to respond to God in holiness with the freeness of the gospel, without compromising on either the forensic nature of justification or the need for walking in newness of life. From an experiential perspective, however, Calvin maintains that faith in the God who justifies is a significant factor in the motivation for sanctification. Thus, for Calvin, justification is the “main-hinge on which religion turns,”³ in the sense that knowledge of this forensic benefit is indispensable for all growth in holiness. One will not move toward God without the confidence that God is one’s benevolent Father, and one only obtains this confidence on the basis of justification.

Part III of this thesis was an analysis of Marshall’s synchronic context. We looked at Perkins, the English Arminians, the Antinomians, John Owen, and Richard Baxter. We did not posit a radical break between Calvin and the “English Calvinists”; nevertheless, we saw that later generations of Reformers codified their theology differently. This is largely due to a different context. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the

¹ Paul Helm, Calvin at the Centre (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 196.
² For a defense of this reading of Calvin, see Part II on Calvin.
³ Calvin, Institutes, 3.11.1.
“libertine excess” began to be a problem, not merely in theory but also in practice.
Moreover, a theology of full-blown Antinomianism had emerged as a popular religious
movement, which was more pervasive and sophisticated than Agricola’s challenge to
Melanchthon. Pastors also encountered a “crop of afflicted consciousnesses,” that is, 
congregants who firmly believed the Protestant doctrine of justification but doubted they
were real participants in it. This set the stage in England for an experimental Reformed
theology that endeavored to answer the practical needs and concerns of the godly and
promote holiness.

It is not surprising that tensions in these theological systems emerged. We saw in
Perkins a tension concerning the priority of assurance and sanctification. At the risk of
oversimplification, sanctification was the basis of assurance, and assurance was the basis
for sanctification. This put believers into a bind. We suggested that, perhaps, Perkins’s
supralapsarianism failed to ground salvation in union with Christ and thereby de-
emphasized the radical transition from wrath to grace in history. Ironically, a similar de-
historicizing tendency was the basis for the Antinomian rejection of faith as instrumental
in conversion.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Baxter and Owen entered the fray.
Both men were concerned that the church be founded upon Scripture and the gospel, and
both were suppressed at the Restoration. Yet their common concern and predicament
were not enough to overcome significant differences between their respective theologies.
Baxter suspected Antinomian tendencies in Owen’s teaching on the imputation of the
Christ’s righteousness in union with Christ. Similar to Trent, Baxter believed that
imputed righteousness rendered real righteousness redundant. Owen responded by
pointing out that Baxter’s political method redefined all the elements of Reformed
soteriology. The fracturing of Reformed theology in England was already evident in 1645
with the publication of Fisher’s Marrow of Modern Divinity. The strain only increased
during and after Marshall’s time with the second wave of Antinomianism in the 1690s,
which we will examine in due course.

Marshall describes his context in this fractured way. Through his own wrestling
with the doctrine of sanctification, he discovered an understanding of the gospel that was

4 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 36.
qualitatively different from those of both the Antinomians and Neonomians. Marshall attempted to set forth a theology that would challenge the Neonomian error without giving way to the Antinomian error. Put differently, he aimed to provide no rationale for why a believer could remain in sin, while at the same time to provide comfort for struggling believers, and he did so by teaching them how to draw on their resources in Christ and confidently move toward God in holiness. We saw consistency in Marshall’s argument, leading us to conclude that he achieved his aim remarkably well.

Marshall’s Unique Contribution

We noted in the outset of our project that the Reformed tradition sometimes evidences a pendulum swing between legalism and antinomianism. Often the means by which one error is refuted opens the door to the other. We sought demonstrate this swing in our survey of the diachronic and synchronic contexts. The tendency is most pronounced in the antinomian and neonomian controversy.

Marshall’s theology, however, seems resist to both errors. Rather than take refuge in one error to counter the other, Marshall counters both. With a desire to learn from Marshall, we shall ask why his work achieved this goal. Though not an exhaustive list, four aspects of Marshall’s theological method deserve highlighting: (1) Marshall is aware of the pendulum swing, (2) Marshall answers both errors with a robust doctrine of union with Christ, (3) Marshall rejects rationalism, and (4) Marshall attempts not merely to explain the nature of sanctification but also to lead his readers into the practice of it. We will explain the uniqueness of Marshall in comparison to the theological systems we have explored in chapters 2-3.

Awareness of the Pendulum Swing

Marshall was aware of the pendulum swing between the tendency toward antinomianism and the tendency toward neonomianism. Marshall saw how each error leads toward the other. As a result, he makes the brilliant move never to confront one without the other. Antinomianism, Marshall reports, was spurred on by the Neonomian
doctrine of “sincere gospel works.”  

But the counter to Antinomianism there arose a more strident Neonomianism.  

Marshall recognizes that the fear of one error leads people to take comfort in the other.

Marshall also recognizes how neonomianism leads to practical antinomianism. He writes, “…the doctrine of salvation by sincere obedience [neonomianism], that was invented against antinomianism, may well be ranked among the worst antinomian errors.”  

Marshall assumes that only through the gospel of free grace can one be in union with Christ, and only in union with Christ is real holiness possible. Therefore, if one takes away the gospel of grace—even in the name of more rigorous law keeping—the result will be increased sin. This is why Neonomianism is, at root, an Antinomian error. Thus, the premise of Marshall’s book is that the only way to be holy is through Christ. This seems to be an especially effective argument against the Neonomians. His charge to them is that their own principles do not allow for the depth and breadth of true holiness that the gospel produces. At the same time, Marshall refutes antinomianism, as the goal of his book is to explain the necessity of holiness and how that holiness is realized via union with Christ.

Marshall is not the first to recognize this pendulum swing. Luther likened the human nature to a drunken man who, after falling off his horse in one direction, gets back up only to fall off in the other direction. This was a general observation, but it could apply to ungodly approaches to holiness. Nevertheless, as we observed, Luther balanced his theology intuitively, not systematically. His system was, at times, unbalanced. As a result, much of Luther’s writing actually perpetuated the swing.

There’s little evidence that either Baxter or the Antinomians took into account the pendulum swing. Cooper is right when he attributes the pendulum swing to the fear and anxiety endemic in the seventeenth century. It appears that certain elements in both antinomian and neonomian theology were driven out of fear of the implications of their

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6 Ibid., 127 (6.2.5).
7 Ibid., 127 (6.2.5).
8 LW, 54:111.
opponents. In addition, Cooper effectively argues that it was standard practice in the seventeenth century not simply to contradict one’s opponent’s stated positions, but also to contradict the implication of those positions. It’s this reasoning that allows Baxter to label Owen an antinomian.

In the same vein, neither did Perkins consider seriously the penchant of human nature to fall of both sides of the horse. As a converted hedonist, Perkins spent is pastoral career calling for the reformation of believers’ lives. His focus on the human conscience could lead to an unbalanced focus on human action and less attention to the grace of God.

However, by recognizing the swing from legalism to licentiousness, Marshall was able to chart a course that was less liable to fall on either side. His theology is not substantially different than Perkins and he retains much of the same emphasis on Justification as Luther. Nevertheless, his two-front war on legalism and licentiousness gave substantial clarity to his theology of sanctification.

Union with Christ

But Marshall stands out not simply because he recognized the pendulum swing. He also sought to counter both errors vis-à-vis a robust doctrine of union with Christ. Broadly similar to Calvin and Owen, Marshall argues that justification only occurs in Christ, and to be in Christ for justification necessitates also being in Christ for sanctification. Calvin’s *duplex gratia* is very much a part of Marshall’s thought. Marshall is also similar to Owen’s covenantal structure. But Marshall also translates this concept into practical terms. The doctrine of union with Christ provides Marshall with two limiting concepts that counter Antinomianism and Neonomianism.

First, to counter Antinomianism, the limiting concept is an organic connection between salvation and sanctification, or we could say justification and sanctification. That believers enter into salvation by grace apart from works is affirmed. But that

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9 Cooper, *Fear and Polemic*, 4-7.

10 See chapter 3, section, “William Perkins.”

11 Owen, 5:231.
believers live out salvation apart from works is rigorously denied. Holiness is an essential part of salvation, not because it is a condition for it but because it is a part of it. Marshall explains,

We then conclude that holiness in this life is absolutely necessary to salvation, not only as a means to the end, but by a nobler kind of necessity, as part of the end itself. Though we are not saved by good works, as procuring causes, yet we are saved to good works, as fruits and effects of saving grace, which God has prepared that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). It is, indeed, one part of our salvation to be delivered from the bondage of the covenant of works; but the end of this is, not that we may have liberty to sin (which is the worst of slavery), but that we may fulfill the royal law of liberty, and that we may serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Gal. 5:13; Rom. 7:6).

This necessity of holiness in salvation is evident in the foundational structure of Marshall’s theology. Adam and Eve were created for holiness in the very core of their nature as the image of God. They lost their likeness to God in the fall, and this ushered in a multitude of sinful acts. Therefore, complete rescue from the fall (i.e., to be saved) requires a new nature in which humans are renewed in the image of God (i.e., sanctification). The believer receives this nature in Christ, in the context of an eschatological framework. The believer is fully in Christ and thereby decisively receives a new nature, but what being in Christ entails is only partially realized. The full salvation, including complete holiness, must await heaven, when the believer’s union with Christ is fully manifested.

Yet even presently, the partial realization of this union manifests itself in acts of holiness, as the believer lives according to his or her real nature by faith. This wedding of holiness and future glory in a partially realized eschatological framework prevents any sense in which salvation by grace can be pitted against the need for holiness in this present life. To reject holiness is to reject salvation. It’s a package deal.

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Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 150 (8.2).
This limiting concept clearly counters the antinomian teaching of Eaton, Crisp and Saltmarsh, who were prone to speak of justification as the totality of salvation. But we can also notice more subtle differences with other systems we’ve explored. Luther realized the organic connection between salvation and holiness to some degree, especially if his marriage illustration is taken paradigmatically. Yet, as we observed, there are tension in Luther that create space for antinomian implications from his theology. For Luther, the accent fell on the benefits of faith. Luther writes, “Now let faith come between them [Christ and the believing soul] and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ’s, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul’s.” Luther then explicates how believers receive the benefits of righteousness and eternal life from the bridegroom. For Marshall, however, the accent falls on the union with Christ that results from faith. Christ himself—who became incarnate, died, and rose again in glory—is the central benefit from this union. The believer is brought into Christ by faith. Marshall—like Calvin—recognizes that it was that Christ who “became for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.” Thus the benefits can in no wise be separated from the person. Marshall’s theology holds together justification and sanctification because the chief benefit of salvation is Christ, who by his nature brings both gifts to the believer. The framework of union with Christ allows Marshall to dwell at length on the implications of justification (which we’ll see in the next limiting concept) without falling into the trap of justification becoming the central benefit in salvation.

Marshall’s eschatological framework also prevents the piecemeal approach that could be an implication from Perkins’ Golden Chain. The piecemeal approach would separate justification and sanctification. In many ways Perkins kept the benefits and

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13 See chapter 3, “Antinomian Theology.”

14 Cooper, *Fear and Polemic*, 20-22


16 Ibid.

17 1 Corinthians 1:30.

benefactor together. In Perkins’ ocular catechism, everything flowed out of union with Christ. However, viewing justification and sanctification as discrete benefits along a temporal chain obscures their now-but-not-yet structure. It lends to the idea that one first experiences justification and then sanctification. We should recall that Perkins clearly held to a logical priority of justification over sanctification. In contrast, Marshall sees both justification and sanctification as having present and future aspects. Thus, they cannot be separated, even with respect to time.

Marshall’s other limiting concept is the fact that some sense of assurance precedes sanctification. This prohibits Neonomianism. Marshall derives this concept from the nature of real holiness. Holy acts are by definition performed out of love for God and by faith in his promises—or they are not holy. Furthermore, holiness consists in wanting God’s attributes—his mercy and grace as well as justice and righteousness—to be increasingly present in one’s life. But because humans in their natural condition know themselves to be under the wrath of God, it is simply impossible for them to move voluntarily toward God without first experiencing a change in their relationship with him, which results in not fearing his wrath. Apart from Christ, a man can no more love God than he can love his executioner. Thus, before any holiness can be displayed, believers must have confidence in God’s disposition to look upon them favorably. This confidence is obtained only through the knowledge of justification.

We stress knowledge of justification because not only do the conditions necessary for holiness include a right standing with God, but also they require an epistemological framework that allows this good standing to be known—i.e., assurance. In short, one must be persuaded of God’s good favor and be confident of heavenly reward before any holiness is possible. Here Marshall is strikingly similar to Calvin. The Genevan pastor maintains that the believer has in heaven, not a judge but a loving father. Assurance of

19 Ibid., 61.
20 See chapter 4, “Eschatological Structure of Union.”
22 Calvin, Institutes, 3.11.1.
the fatherly love allows the believer to respond to God as father. Calvin uses this argument to confront the Catholic teaching of Rome that discouraged Assurance.\textsuperscript{23}

This limiting concept is Marshall’s clearest and most consistent argument against Baxter. Marshall argues that Baxter’s doctrine of sincere obedience prior to assurance could never produce real holiness because it fails to provide any confidence in God’s favor by which a sinner could move toward God as Father. Marshall insists that Neonomianism leads to Antinomianism: Neonomianism presents no principle by which the believer can draw near to God with confidence, and, therefore, it leaves the believer without critical resources for holiness. We’ve covered this extensively in our discussion on Marshall’s view of assurance.\textsuperscript{24}

It’s also helpful to note that Marshall’s theology also appears at some variance to one closer to his camp, Anthony Burgess. Burgess’s lectures directed “especially [against] Antinomians” outline a doctrine of justification identical to Marshall’s. Also like Marshall, Burgess recognizes an inherent proclivity in all people toward both Antinomianism and legalism—so he acknowledges the pendulum swing. Yet differences in their systems emerge. In a warning against Antinomianism Burgess instructs Christians to “Follow holiness as earnestly, as if thou hadst nothing to help thee but that.”\textsuperscript{25} Marshall’s theology would seem not to endorse this kind of exhortation. Marshall would say that the moment one feels one has nothing but one’s own holiness for support, one is utterly incapable of performing any true holiness. Holiness for Marshall is the righteousness of the Redeemer worked out in the believer’s life through union and communion with Christ. Without warrant for communing with Christ, one is unable to draw near to Christ to share in his holiness. Such a consideration of oneself as Burgess advocates would be tantamount to sanctification according to the flesh and would actually promote Antinomianism. Granted, Burgess says immediately that one must also

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 3.2.15. See also, A.N.S. Lane, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Assurance,” Vox Evangelica 11 (1979), 47.
\textsuperscript{24} See chapter 4, “Categories for Assurance in Marshall’s Theology.”
\textsuperscript{25} Anthony Burgess, \textit{Vindiciae Legis or a Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians}, 2nd ed. (London: James Young for Thomas Underhill, 1647), 48.
“rely upon Christ’s merits as fully, as if thou had no holiness at all.”

Thus, Burgess does not advocate legalism consistently. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of these two instructions creates a bifurcation of the Christian life: there’s one system for promoting holiness and another system for promoting comfort.

Burgess is not alone. We’ve observed that Luther’s system also lends itself toward bifurcation. This bifurcation is also evident in Perkins to the extent that sanctification is necessary for assurance and assurance is necessary for sanctification.

Marshall, in contrast, integrates the system for confronting legalism and the system for licentiousness under the single heading of union with Christ. Marshall calls believers to seek holiness precisely through the comfort and assurance of the gospel and to recognize that in comfort and assurance one is poised for good works. Marshall’s limiting concepts discussed above—assurance before holiness and the organic connection between salvation and sanctification—prevent the kind of dialectic that is programed into Burgess’s theology or not tempered by Luther and Perkins.

Marshall’s contemporary Robert Traill agrees with our analysis. He summarizes the utility of Gospel Mystery’s singular argument against both Antinomianism and Neonomianism as follows:

I look upon it as one of the most useful Books the World hath seen for many years: Its excellency is, that it leads the serious Reader directly to Jesus Christ, and cuts the sinews, and overturns the foundation of the New Divinity, by the same argument of Gospel-Holiness, by which many attempt to overturn the Old. And as it hath already the seal of high approbation, by many judicious Ministers and Christians that have read it; so I fear not, but it will stand firm as a Rock against all Opposition, and will prove good Seed, and Food, and Light, and Life to many hereafter.

Our exploration of Marshall’s work has reached a similar conclusion.

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26 Ibid., 48.

27 Traill, A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine Concerning Justification, 35. Emphasis added.
Rejection of Rationalism

To our list of commonalities between Antinomianism and Neonomianism we could add one more item: rationalism. This rationalism emerges when we compare Marshall’s understanding of union to the Antinomian and Neonomianism versions. Marshall rejects rationalism in favor of the epistemological approach that was normative among the reformed orthodox.

As we saw, the Antinomians generally forced certain conclusions upon the believers’ relationship with God, which they drew from union with Christ. For them, the finished character of union diminished human agency, and this led to a kind of hyper-Calvinism, where the actions of God left little room for the actions of humans to have any weight. The Antinomians were known for “flying to God’s decrees.” That is, they defended their system by extrapolating implications form the eternal covenant within the Trinity.

In Richard Baxter we see rationalism run in precisely the opposite direction. The nature of the obedience that humans owe God constrained the kind of relationship that God could have with his people. More precisely, the submission to Christ demanded of all people, combined with the high significance of human action in Baxterian theology, disallows any aspect of real union prior to the kind of behavior that would engender that union in the believer’s actual history. In short, there is no union with Christ without evidence of that union in experience. This is what Packer calls the “rationalism of [Baxter’s] ‘political method.’”

Marshall’s doctrine of union with Christ stands in contrast to both Antinomianism and Neonomianism for its resistance to rationalism. We must recall that for Marshall, union with Christ “does not fall at all under the judgment of sense” because it is a spiritual union. Marshall is not arguing that reason has no role in theology. In his

\[28\] N. Couling, *The Saints Perfect in This Life or Never* (London: 1647), 16.

\[29\] Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 160. See also Part II on Baxter’s theology for more explanation.

\[30\] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 45 (3.2).
argument for the necessity of assurance, he says, “Now let right reason judge….”31

Marshall’s scholastic method makes extensive use of reason. But reason, for Marshall, is not magisterial. Scripture is the *principium cognoscendi*. Thus, Marshall begins his understanding of union with Christ by recognizing that it—like the hypostatic union and the Trinity—is “beyond our comprehension,”32 and, “We cannot frame an exact idea of the manner of any of these three unions in our imaginations.”33 Because these unions are beyond human comprehension, the human “judgment of sense” cannot be the final arbitrator concerning the truth of them. “Yet,” Marshall insists, “we have cause to believe them all, because they are clearly revealed in Scripture.”34 Marshall then proceeds to explain the Scriptural evidence for union with Christ. Thus, Marshall understands Scripture to be of greater authority than reason. This theological method prevents him from following one implication of union with Christ in such a way that it would contradict or overshadow another implication of union. Thus Marshall’s two-front war against antinomianism and neonomianism was fought with a robust theology of union with Christ and a theological method that rejected rationalism in favor of a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture.

Moreover, when Marshall looks to Scripture, he sees not merely the fact of union with Christ but the eschatological structure in which the union obtains. In particular, the eschatological structure means that the parameters of union do not fit the human conception of time. The sequencing of union seemed to be the sticking point for both the Antinomians and Baxter. The Antinomians diminished the instrumentality of faith because one is united to Christ in election and, therefore, before faith. They spoke of salvation “by Christ” but not “by faith.” Baxter, in contrast, minimized any union prior to the life of faith in order to give priority to the biblical teaching on the instrumentality of faith and obedience. But Marshall’s system is not encumbered with questions such as how the benefits of Christ are obtained for the believer before he or she exercises faith.

31 Ibid., 157 (9.1.1). Emphasis added.
32 Ibid., 43 (3.2).
33 Ibid., 43 (3.2).
34 Ibid., 43 (3.2).
For Marshall, the overarching chronological factor in union with Christ is the future reality of resurrection penetrating the present: he writes, “Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun as glorification is sanctification perfected.” The human mind is utterly at a loss for explaining the mechanics of this structure. Yet one must believe this structure because of the clear revelation in Scripture.

This has clear implications for sanctification. If union with Christ is a mystery, then everything based on union with Christ would be equally mysterious. Hence, “The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification” is a way of sanctification that submits ultimately to Scripture and not to the dictates of reason. Marshall’s system of sanctification requires that the believer submit to the Scripture’s promise “peremptorily”—that is, at the most foundational level—even when it seems contrary to the evidence of one’s reason. Thus, embedded in the structure of Marshall’s theology is a principle that resists rationalism. Rationalism undermines not only the understanding of sanctification but also the experience of it. Thus, to comprehend sanctification—and, even more, to experience it—one must believe first and foremost in the promises of God and consciously submit to the authority of Scripture.

To clarify Marshall’s position further, we should point out that his rejection of rationalism is not quite the same as the mystical approach to assurance that we see in Owen. For Owen there is a strong sense of subjective assurance vis-à-vis one’s experience of being loved by God in Christ. Marshall certainly wants to lead his readers into a subjective experience, especially in their participation in the Lord’s Supper. However, he maintains an objective anchor to assurance in the finished work of Christ. Thus, Marshall’s anti-rationalism does not lead to pure subjectivism. Rather, it grounds believers in the authority of Scripture and the objective promise. The reality that Christ died for sinners—the likes of which include even the worst of all sinners—and the promise that those who believed will be saved—that is God will create in them a new

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35 Ibid., 214 (11.2.1.5).
37 Marshall, Gospel Mystery, 260 (12.2.7).
reality—provide an objective basis for assurance and the whole experience of sanctification.

In short, Marshall rejects rationalism, and this prevents one implication of his theology from dominating everything else, as we see in antinomian and neonomianism. But Marshall also distinguishes himself from any mysticism. The objective character of the gospel is firmly maintained.

Pastoral Theology

Finally, Marshall’s work is also remarkable for the way it weaves together systematic and pastoral theology. Not only does Marshall recognize the pendulum swing of his day, nor does he simply offer a systematic formula that is theoretically resistant to such a swing, but Marshall also offers a pastoral theology that leads the reader by the hand into a proper experience.

This pastoral theology is important. At the close of Part II we observed that the Antinomian/Neonomian controversy could not be addressed without an interdisciplinary approach. It was one thing to affirm an orthodox definition of sanctification. It was quite another to apply it. As we saw, the charges of Antinomianism and Neonomianism were often made not in theological explication but in pastoral application. Marshall’s work is remarkable in that it attempts—and in my judgment succeeds—in integrating theology and application consistently. Indeed, his whole work is a manual for becoming holy; thus, it can hardly be accused of tending toward Antinomianism. And his whole work is also aimed at comforting people in the gospel so that they have a sure platform to work towards holiness, which actually mitigates the charge of Neonomianism and Antinomianism simultaneously.

A critical part of Marshall’s pastoral theology occurs in the three penultimate directions where he explains how one finds assurance and how one makes use of that assurance by seeking holiness, without falling into the antinomian or neonomian traps. These chapters make Marshall’s work difficult to classify. The first 10 directions are sustained theological discourse, in which Marshall attempts to refute Baxter’s theology of sanctification and to explicate his own system. Marshall aims at the reader’s mind; he needs his readers to understand his system if his Gospel Mystery will have any practical
impact in their lives. But this is tending toward a practical goal. Directions 11 through 13 are better classified as spiritual; here Marshall aims to instruct his readers on how to make use of the truth he explained in the systematic discourse by actually going to God through Christ. Marshall understands that believers need instruction on how to act based on the truth. Knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient.

We could liken Marshall’s work as a combination of Owen’s *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* and his work *On the Holy Spirit*, albeit much shorter. This brevity makes it much easier for the reader to grasp and apply the message. Marshall’s aim is practical. Thus, his work is different than most of the systematic works of Perkins. But he relies upon precise systematic categories and distinctions, like scholastic theologians. He is not sloppy with his categories, as some could accuse Luther, opening the door for antinomian implications. In an age of *Fear and Polemic*, a work like Marshall’s is uniquely helpful to bring clarity.

**Implications from Marshall for Puritan Studies**

We must not overstate implications from Marshall for the broader field of Puritan studies. This thesis has attempted to explain one book form one relatively obscure author, who had no literary following during his lifetime. Our aim in exploring Marshall—as was stated at the outset—was to the benefit of the Reformed theological tradition, because his work made a substantial contribution to the fields of sanctification and union with Christ. We have outlined that contribution above. Nevertheless, there are several assertions about Puritan theology that are difficult to sustain in light of Marshalls work.

First of all, Marshall’s work seems to mitigate Kendall’s juxtaposition between Calvin and English Reformed theology. If Marshall is to be included in the English Reformed tradition, we have in Marshall a “Calvinists” who argues in a very similar way as Calvin, especially regarding assurance as part of the essence of faith and the primacy of union with Christ. This is in spite of the fact that Marshall affirms limited atonement and makes use of scholastic distinctions. Kendall’s theory of the English reformed has no room for Marshall.

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38 Cooper, *Fear and Polemic*. 
The thesis of Barth and Torrance is also difficult to sustain. Barth thought that recognizing multiple covenants prior to the covenant in Christ obscured the Christocentric nature of revelation. However, Marshall makes use of the covenant of works precisely to highlight the covenant in Christ. Moreover, Marshall sees himself operating within the framework of the Westminster Confession of faith—albeit at times reluctantly—but his theology seems rather the opposite of the “frigid proof texts” that Torrance said was endemic in the theology of Westminster. Thus, Marshall poses a problem for Barth and dTorrance’s understanding of Scholastic reformed.

Marshall’s work would generally support the thesis of Tyacke and Collinson, and the assessment of the latter Puritans by John Spurr. Marshall is committed to reformation theology and defends and applies that theology. But our analysis of Marshall would challenge the notion of a strict “Calvinistic consciousness,” that Collinson advocates. Marshall sees fracturing within the reformed tradition, even before Baxter’s theology came on the scene. Marshall’s theology supports Letham’s thesis that there were two approaches to assurance from the outset of the Reformation.

But perhaps the most significant contribution of our close reading of Marshall is the discipline of understanding a seventeenth-century theologian on his own terms. Whatever implications Marshall’s theology of sanctification had for transforming moral consciousness, Marshall’s primary concern was for his readers to acquire the kind of holiness by which humans stand before God. We also see that that the themes of covenant, assurance, and justification were significant, but Marshall understood these in light of how they impacted the doctrine and experience of sanctification. Perhaps more close study of individual puritans through the lens of sanctification would shed insight into some of the debated areas of Puritan studies.

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Marshall’s Reception in the Eighteenth Century

We now want to undertake a brief survey of how Marshall’s work was used in the immediate generations after him. Although our survey is far from exhaustive, it will support our conclusions concerning the uniqueness of Marshall’s approach to sanctification.

The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification was published in early 1692, twelve years after its author’s death. Most likely even more time elapsed from when it was written until when it was available in print. Thus, a brief word about the context of the 1690’s will help us understand the book’s reception.

Theological Controversy in the 1690s

We noted above that there were two waves of Antinomianism on British soil (and one in the Colonies). The first in Britain arose prior to and throughout the English Civil War. We considered this wave above and noted its influence on Baxter, whose writings provoked Marshall to rethink the nature of sanctification.

Antinomianism diminished slightly after the Restoration. Charles II brought a common enemy to both Antinomians and Neonomians, and William and Mary introduced the Act of Toleration (1689), which dashed hopes of a statewide presbytery and made cooperation among dissenters advantageous. During that time, Baxter and five other Presbyterians colluded with six independents to form the “Happy Union of 1691,” in which they agreed to fund various ministries and help preserve the church together. But this union was exceedingly short.

The seeds of division were sown in 1690, before the union even began, when Samuel Crisp republished his father’s sermons, with the endorsement of twelve notable pastors, including one signatory of the “Happy Union,” John Howe. Baxter was enraged and responded immediately. The battle lines were thus drawn, and for the next decade a

bitter pamphlet battle ensued between those who opposed Tobias Crisp’s sermons and those who found the opposition to the sermons to be an even greater error than the sermons themselves.\textsuperscript{44}

There were some differences between this wave of Antinomianism and the previous wave in the 1640s. The Antinomianism of 1690’s was slightly less radical because it centered on the teaching of Tobias Crisp, who was more mainstream than Eaton and Saltmarsh. Parnham says that at one level, Crisp’s divergence from other Puritans was one of emphasis, choosing to dwell on the abiding sinfulness of the believer’s good works, even after conversion.\textsuperscript{45} The most controversial point of Crisp’s teaching seems to be the sense in which Christ was identified with sin. Toon notes that Crisp was prone to speak a bit too literally about the imputation of sin to Christ, calling Christ a sinner.\textsuperscript{46} Crisp found warrant for this claim in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For he has made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us.” This passage was the title for another republication of Crisp’s sermons, \textit{Christ made Sin}.\textsuperscript{47} Samuel Crisp added a lengthy preface to his father’s sermons in which he argued that his father’s doctrine of imputation was biblical.\textsuperscript{48}

When Baxter reacted against this doctrine of Christ’s sinfulness from his lectern at Pinney Hall, he did so from a decidedly Neonomian vantage point, which had little room for any theology of imputation.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, the loudest voice against the more moderate Antinomianism argued for the opposite extreme. Baxter managed to write several works

\textsuperscript{44} For explanation see Fesko, \textit{Beyond Calvin}, 342–343, and especially Peter Toon, \textit{The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765} (Spokane, WA: The Olive Tree, 1967), 49–69.

\textsuperscript{45} Parnham, "The Humbling of 'High Presumption': Tobias Crisp Dismantles the Puritan \textit{Ordo Salutis},," 57.


\textsuperscript{47} Tobias Crisp, \textit{Christ Made Sin: II Cor V. Xxi Evinc't from Scripture: Sermons of Dr. Tobias Crisp}, ed. Samuel Crisp (London: 1691).

\textsuperscript{48} Crisp, \textit{Christ Alone Exalted}, see preface.

\textsuperscript{49} Fesko, \textit{Beyond Calvin}, 342.
against this new wave of Antinomianism before he died in December 1691. Baxter was succeeded by his friend Daniel Williams, who took his place lecturing and continued to advance his Neonomian argument. Williams states, “The thing that I deny is this that Christ by His obedience made atonement or merited for us, as a proper Pecuniary Surety in the Law of Works.” In 1692 he published a book against Crisp’s “Opinions,” especially contradicting any sense in which the elect are united to Christ before they believe. Also siding with Williams and Baxter were the theologian William Lorimer and the political philosopher John Locke. Overall, the trajectory of the Neonomian doctrine was toward increasing rationalism.

Deviation from Reformed orthodoxy began to creep in on the other side as well. Isaac Chauncy, the most prolific spokesman for those who felt Baxter and William went too far in their criticism of Crisp, was closer to Crisp than moderates such as Traill. Chauncy emphasized the eternal decree of justification; he also diminished the instrumental function of faith in justification. Toon notes that in reaction to Baxter and Williams there are the seeds of Hyper-Calvinism, which he defines as “exalting the honor


54 Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, 53.


56 Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, 61.
and glory of God…at the expense of minimizing the moral and spiritual responsibilities of sinners to God.”

Packer explains this trajectory:

…the eighteenth century saw a reaction against such [rationalistic] trends [of neonomianism], a reaction which saw itself as a rediscovery of the true line of Reformed development. But, in an increasingly rationalistic age, the reaction itself was as rationalistic, within the Reformed supernaturalistic framework, as the movements away from that frame had been.

Both sides of the debate in the 1690s were prone to rationalism.

*Interaction with Marshall*

Fortunately for our project, both sides of the debate interacted with Marshall, albeit slightly. The first interaction with Marshall comes from Robert Traill in his book published the same year as *Gospel Mystery*, 1692. Traill encourages readers to look to Marshall’s clear treatment of the nature of saving faith as reliance upon Christ alone. He sees Marshall’s work as critical for his argument that assurance is part of the essence of faith.

Two years later (1694), Traill’s sparring partner, William Lorimer, attacked Traill’s use of Marshall for his doctrine of assurance, noting correctly that for Marshall, the majority of one’s assurance develops after one displays fruits of faith. Lorimer thinks that Traill has only taken the section of Marshall that supports his views, namely,

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57 Ibid., 144.
60 Lorimer, *An Apology for the Ministers Who Subscribed Only Unto the Stating of the Truths and Errors in Mr. William's Book Shewing, That the Gospel Which They Preach, Is the Old Everlasting Gospel of Christ, and Vindicating Them from the Calumnies, Wherewith They (Especially the Younger Sort of Them) Have Been Unjustly Aspersed by the Letter from a Minister in the City, to a Minister in the Countrey*, 171–174.
that assurance is part of the essence of faith: if Traill really considered Marshall’s argument as a whole, he would see that assurance could not be equated with faith.\textsuperscript{61}

As far as the substance of Lorimer’s interaction, it appears he misses the main thrust of Marshall’s argument. Lorimer is correct that Traill does not capture all the complexity of Marshall’s theology of assurance in his brief work. Marshall sees assurance in the context of union with Christ and argues extensively for the connection between assurance and sanctification. Yet Lorimer wrongly equates Marshall’s two aspects of faith—(1) believing the gospel and (2) believing on Christ—with the direct and reflective aspects of faith, respectively. It seems Lorimer uses Marshall’s two aspects of faith as support for locating assurance in the reflexive act of faith. However, Marshall insisted that the two aspects of faith are connected and that there is an element of assurance even in believing the content of the gospel (Marshall’s first aspect of faith). Marshall went to great length to show that the gospel was a message that brought comfort because it led inexorably to Christ. In fact, any failure to find security in believing on Christ (the second act of faith) is traced back to a failure in believing rightly in the gospel (the first act).\textsuperscript{62} Thus, Lorimer’s argument against Traill’s use of Marshall is unpersuasive.

Also in 1694, Henry Lukin published a lengthy sermon on John 16, in which he quotes \textit{Gospel Mystery} to show that unrepentant sin in a believer should weaken a believer’s assurance. Although assurance is part of the essence of faith, one is never justified in presuming one’s salvation in the face of continual sin.\textsuperscript{63} Lukin’s sermon is conciliatory, attempting to clarify what those in opposition to Baxter and Williams were really saying.

In short, a number of theologians who oppose Neonomianism in the 1690s draw on Marshall’s theology of assurance. However, the interaction with Marshall goes little

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 171–174.

\textsuperscript{62} Marshall, \textit{Gospel Mystery}, 206 (11.2.1).

\textsuperscript{63} H. Lukin, \textit{Remedy against Trouble in a Discourse on John Xiv, 1 : Wherein Something Is Also Briefly Attempted for Clearing the Nature of Faith, of Justification, of the Covenant of Grace, Assurance, the Witness, Seal and Earnest of the Spirit, and Preparation for Conversion, or the Necessity of Holiness} (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1694).
further than the fact that Marshall understood assurance as part of the essence of faith. While this is true, Marshall qualified this assertion to a significant degree to come under the WCF. He also labored extensively to show the purpose of assurance was to promote holiness. Moreover, unlike Chauncy, Marshall retains a strong instrumental function of faith in justification, and this was a key part of his overall argument. Marshall’s theology is, therefore, more resistant to Antinomianism than the theology of those who use him for support in the 1690s.

The Marrow Controversy

The next interaction with Marshall’s work occurs during the Scottish Marrow Controversy in the early eighteenth century. To unravel the history of the debate would require more space than can be accommodated here. Thankfully, reliable guides are available. We will simply note that the Marrow of Modern Divinity, published in 1645 in England, was a conciliatory work, attempting to steer between the errors of Antinomianism and legalism. The author, almost certainly Edward Fisher, was particularly concerned to establish the warrant for sinners to come immediately to Christ. There is much similarity between Marshall’s work and the Marrow. An important difference, however, is that the Marrow could be read as grounding the free offer of the gospel in the hypothetical universal atonement of Christ. Fisher argues that the claim that “Christ is dead for you” ought to be preached to all as the warrant for all people to trust in Christ. This phrase actually comes from John Preston and is, at some level, sympathetic to hypothetical universalism.


65 The author identifies himself only by the initials E.F. For evidence supporting Edward Fisher as the author, see VanDoodewaard, The Marrow Controversy, 14–15.

66 Whether or not the Marrow of Modern Divinity grounds assurance in the universal atonement is a matter of considerable dispute. See Lachman, The Marrow Controversy, 22–36, for an argument that the Marrow does not actually promote hypothetical universalism.

67 Fisher, Marrow, 8.

68 Preston, The Brest-Plate of Faith, 7–8.
The *Marrow of Modern Divinity* made its way in to the hands of some Scottish ministers in the early eighteenth century. At the encouragement of Thomas Boston, James Hog reprinted the book with an explanatory preface. The General Assembly, however, thought the book was dangerous and eventually prohibited its use and promotion.

To understand the Assembly’s negative reaction, it must be grasped that the Scottish Church had some legalistic tendencies. John Macleod explains that “The hyper-Calvinistic brethren held that there is no world-wide call of Christ sent out to sinners… They maintained that Christ is held forth or offered as Saviour to those only whom God effectually calls.” Earlier we examined the tendency of some, including Knox, to interpret the free invitation of Isaiah 55:1, “Come all who are thirsty,” as applying only to the elect. The rationale for this restriction was that one lacked warrant to believe in Christ’s death unless one was part of the number for whom he died, and one could only know one was part of that number if one detected some marker of election, such as repentance. Thus the assembly was predisposed to find the universal gospel offer problematic. VanDoodewaard points out that while the formal complaint against the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* was the apparent denial of definite atonement, the real reason for objecting to the book was the assembly’s desire to restrict the gospel offer. He writes,

...the Assembly’s argument on this point also reflects a tendency among ministers of the Church of Scotland to hedge or qualify the offer of the gospel. The Assembly’s commentary at best appears to imply that a free offer of a certain salvation should at most be made to those deemed to bear some mark of election or some evidence of being a recipient of particular redemption.

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71 For an example of this teaching, see Knox, *An Answer to a Great Nomer of Blasphemous Caullations Written by an Anabaptist and Aduersarie to Gods Eternal Predestenation. And Confuted by John Knox, Minister of Gods Word in Scotland*, 102.

72 VanDoodewaard, *The Marrow Controveresy*, 35.
Similar to the English debate a generation earlier, a key concern in the Marrow controversy was assurance. Those in support of the Marrow’s doctrine wished to maintain that warrant for believing the gospel resided exclusively in the gospel itself, not in anything in believers to qualify them for receiving the gospel. This naturally afforded some sense of assurance embedded in the nature of faith. One only needed to look outward to Christ for assurance, not inward for any marks of election. The so-called “Marrow men,” who supported the Marrow’s doctrine, denied strenuously that they were advocating universal atonement. However, the Assembly could not see how the free invitation for sinners to believe on Christ could avoid hypothetical universalism. James Hadow, the primary opponent of the Marrow’s doctrine, poses this question to the Marrow men:

I want to be further informed, whether you hold this absolute promise to be made to the elect only, or to all that hear the gospel? If it be made to the elect only, then it conveys a right to none else, but the elect; neither can they lay claim to it as belonging to them, while they are in an unregenerate state.

In other words, Hadow believed that universal warrant for believing on Christ necessarily implied universal substitution.

Interaction with Marshall

Similar to conflict in England thirty years earlier, Marshall was a helpful witness for those maintaining assurance as part of the essence of faith. After explaining that the

73 Lachman, The Marrow Controversy, 228–235.
74 VanDoodewaard, The Marrow Controversy, 67.
75 James Hog, A Review of a Conference Betwixt Epaphroditus and Epaphras: Wherein the Very Reverend Principal Hadow’s Sermon, Preached before the Synod of Fife, April 7th 1719, Is Fairly Enquired Into. (Edinburg: John Mosman and Company, 1719), 51. This appears a dictation of Hadow’s sermon. The author never identifies himself in this work, but it is most likely Hog. Thomas Boston lists Hog as the author in the bibliography of his autobiography, A General Account of my life (1730), 362.
Marrow clearly intends to include some measure of assurance in faith,\textsuperscript{76} Hog, the main Marrow spokesman, states, “our Reformers generally defined [faith] by assurance; and Mr. Marshall upon sanctification demonstrates very clearly, and fully, that somewhat of assurance, more or less, is an essential ingredient thereof.”\textsuperscript{77} Lachman points out that even where Marshall is not cited directly, his theology of assurance undergirds the argument made by those who defend the Marrow’s teaching.\textsuperscript{78}

Also like the controversy in England, those who opposed faith as part of assurance interacted with Marshall to show that Marshall’s doctrine of assurance was not as straightforward as their rivals claimed. Hadow argues that even though Marshall supports assurance as part of the essence of faith in some sense, Marshall explicitly denies that the object of saving faith is that one’s own sins are paid for—a point that Hog did not make but which Hadow believed his theology necessarily implied.\textsuperscript{79} Moreover, Hadow pointed out that Marshall’s theology had an important place for the instrumentality of faith in conversion and Marshall saw that assurance increases as one’s life demonstrated the fruit of conversion.\textsuperscript{80} Hadow also argued that these aspects of Marshall’s theology would undermine Hog’s overall argument.\textsuperscript{81}

Conclusion

There is much that could be said regarding these two controversies. However, our interests lie only in how they connect to Marshall’s theology. It turns out that in both conflicts a party sought to maintain assurance as part of the essence of faith, and in both

\textsuperscript{76} James Hog, \textit{An Explication of Passages Excepted against in the Marrow of Modern Divinity, Taken from the Book It Self: Contained in a Letter to a Minister of the Gospel} (Edinburgh: Robert Brown, 1719), 13.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{78} Lachman, \textit{The Marrow Controversy}, 20.

\textsuperscript{79} James Hadow, \textit{The Record of God and Duty of Faith Therin Required} (Edinburgh: 1719), 24.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{81} Lachman, \textit{The Marrow Controversy}, 223, 225.
cases this party was opposed because of suspicions of Antinomanism. But there is an important difference. In the earlier case in England, the party that wished to maintain assurance as part of faith (Traill, Crisp, et al.) openly embraced limited atonement and—assuming Toon and Packer are correct—some of their movement tended toward hyper-Calvinism. The party that opposed them (Baxter, Williams, Lorimer, et al.) openly embraced hypothetical universalism in their doctrine of the atonement. They saw limited atonement as part of the system that led directly to Antinomanism, and they saw some version of hypothetical universalism as necessary in order to oppose these Antinomian tendencies. However, in Scotland, the party that opposed assurance as part of the essence of faith did so with a goal of defending the doctrine of limited atonement. They faulted the “Marrow men” for holding to hypothetical universalism. Although this charge was to some degree unfounded, we are on solid ground to say that limited atonement factored less strongly in the theology of the Marrow men than it did for the likes of Crisp and Traill. The Marrow men chose as a central summation of their position a phrase that could be open to the charge of hypothetical universalism (“…Christ is dead for him.”). So in one case we have the party that is accused of Antinomanism supporting limited atonement, and in the other case we have the party labeled “Antinomian” on the grounds that they do not support limited atonement. At the very least, these controversies teach us that a number of theological positions can be used to support or defend both Antinomanism and legalism.

At this point it is helpful to inquire as to whether or not we can identify a common denominator in all of these positions. And if we are successful, we can see if there is any way in which this commonality can be contrasted with Marshall.

The commonality seems to be some seed of rationalism. We saw Packer’s argument above that in the controversy of the 1690s rationalism was making inroads on both sides. Certainly Baxter and Williams tended to a kind of rationalism, so much so that they were accused of Socinianism. We saw from our examination of Antinomanism that they were committed to a strict rationalism. We also saw rationalism in Hadow’s argument that universal gospel offer requires universal extent of the atonement. In other words, it appears that in a number of cases, reason is given highest authority.

82 Packer, Redemption and Restoration, 236.
In contrast, Marshall’s theology resists rationalism. We have just seen that Marshall’s commitment to mystery in his doctrine of union and the authority of Scripture stand in contrast to Baxter and the Antinomianism of the early seventeenth century. We saw that rationalism in the doctrine of union with Christ will lead to either Antinomianism or Neonomianism. Thus, there is a clear difference between Marshall, on the one hand, and Baxter, Williams, and to some extent also Crisp, on the other, regarding the place of reason in their respective theologies. But there is also a difference between Marshall and those who would be closer to him, such as Traill and, perhaps, even the Marrow men. Though they depend upon Marshall for his doctrine of assurance, they don’t engage with him concerning the broader structure of salvation, especially the eschatological structure, and their opponents are quick to highlight this. Both controversies—the third wave of Antinomianism in the 1690s and the Marrow Controversy—are characterized by preoccupation with questions related to the ordo of salvation: does faith come before repentance, and is one united to Christ before faith? Though Traill and the Marrow men depend upon Marshall, they keep this same preoccupation. (One thinks of the Auchterarder Creed, “I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ.”) They turn to Marshall because he supports the idea of assurance prior to the display of the fruit of faith. Though this is technically true, it fails to capture the deeper structure of Marshall’s theology. For Marshall, union with Christ must be first understood in an eschatological framework, where the future glory invades the present.

In the conflicts after the publication of Gospel Mystery there are interaction with Marshall. However, the structure of his theology is largely untapped. One wonders how the debate might have been different if it were.

**Conclusion**

What are the implications of this research? The aim was modest: to reconstruct Marshall’s theology of sanctification in union with Christ in his own historical context. Our research suggests that Marshall has something to contribute to the Reformed

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tradition in terms of his theology of union with Christ and sanctification. This research also confirms the work of Muller and others who argue that the Reformed Orthodox period neither repudiated nor copied earlier Reformed theology, but restated that same theology in a different context and using slightly different methods. We have seen that Marshall has no difficulty using a modified scholastic style with pastoral goals. We have also seen his remarkable similarity with Calvin. Marshall, however, was addressing new issues. Without suggesting a radical break between early and late Reformers, we are right to observe differences within his theological construction.

We hope this study encourages greater use of Marshall. A motivation for our study came from Tudur Jones’s insight that “both the experience and the doctrine of union with Christ were fundamental to [the Puritans’] Christianity.” He suggested, therefore, that “a fuller treatment of the theme would require close study of its implications for sanctification, morality, eschatology, ecclesiology and the life eternal.”

We applied this principle to Marshall. His Gospel Mystery is a (comparatively) small work by a (relatively) obscure author, yet it contains fascinating and insightful connections, a sophisticated theological framework, and a rhetorical approach that is both disarming and decisive. We can’t help but suggest that reformed theologians and pastors might find Marshall’s approach useful as they confront the perennial tendencies of legalism and licentiousness.

84 Jones, "Union with Christ," 208. See also Beeke and Jones, A Puritan Theology, 488.
Appendix A

Letter 1 “Whom the Lord”

Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every child whom he receiveth. It hath often beeene your delight to heare me speakinge of that crowne of glory in which Christ purchased for us by wearing himselfe a crowne of thorns: now be not over-much sorrowful if Christ, according to the order which he hath fixed, crowne you first with his thorns that afterwards he may crowne you with his glory; but rejoyce in as much as you are partaker of Christs sufferinges, that when his glory shall be revealed you may be glad also with exceedinge ioy. I question not but the common sufferings of Saints in this life are Christs sufferings. For in all our afflictions he is afflicted. He is not only persecuted in the saints when they suffer for the Gospel, But he is hungry, thirsty, sicke in his Saints, Math. 25:35,36. Afflictions are dispensed to us from God as a lovinge father, & therefore they are Christ's sufferings, because God is our father onely in Christ; & God afflicteth us that the flesh may be more mortified, & that we may be made partakers of God's holines in a higher degree, that we may grow in Christ, & thus all our afflictions are upon the account of Christ. Oh then despise not the chasteninge of the Lord, entertain no low thoughts of it, but account his rod verie precious and honorable, & farre more desireable than all the pleasure and honour of this world, through Christ, though in it sefle it be not ioyous but grievious. It is your desire to walke in the path that leadeth to glory, Behold you have your desire for through many tribulations you enter into the kingdome of God.

If Christ for your sake bare the crosse, is it much if you beare it for your own good? Christ bare your crosse imbittered & burdened by your sins; but you bear Christ's crosse which is made sweet and easy to you by his righteousnesse. God forbid that you should glory save in the crosse of Jesus Christ by which you are crucified to the crosses of the world by imbracinge of them cheerfully, & to the pleasures and honours of the world by settinge a low esteeme upon them, and not placinge your happinesse in them. Your crosses are all nailed to that crosse of Christ. Christ died on the crosse, and drank
up all the wormwood & gall of it that you might die to the cross. In time of persecution we are called to part with our children for Christ's sake as if we hated them, & to choose affliction; now you are called only to bear patiently such affliction as God chooseth for you, and to be content when God parteth your children from you. I pray you let patience have its perfect work and then you will have a testimony of your unfeigned submission to the Gospel. What glory is it to serve Christ in those things that are not displeasing to the flesh and contrary to our worldly interest's? But if you are enabled by faith to bear willingly things contrary to the flesh, then sure the Spirit of Christ is your comforter.

Consider how gracious God is unto you in your present condition, he seeth what strong allurements the world senteth to you to draw you to itself, & therefore he counterbalanceth those allurements with thy tribulation that they may not prevail over you. It is good for us to bear the yoke in our childhood in thy world that we may not wax wanton but rather passe the time of our pilgrimage here in fear. I trust it is your great desire to bear children for heaven, & this will be the fruit of your labour & your great joy hereafter though you enjoy them not long in this world. Blessed be the Lord who shined upon this child with the light of his countenance whilst it was with us; who gave you so much joy and comfort in it, and frequent cause of thanksgiving for it; who brought you into the country to see it in peace and to bless it in the name of the Lord before it's departure; who also gave his late Highness opportunity to see it before his death & to bless it, which he did with verie remarkable affections again, and again, even several times before he took his leave of it. Surely the child is gone to his Grandfather, & your heavenly Father is better to you than many children. For my part I condole with you as if the burden were my own, and my grief is heightened because I fear the grief of his Highness and your selfe, wherefore I pray to God earnestly for you both, that you may be strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.

To be grieved is no sin, for Christ was grieved; but it is a sin against the comforts of the Gospel to let the Spirit sink under grief & not rather to triumph over it. I have written in much haste, assuring myself that my boldness for your comfort will find pardon. God hath suddenly dictated this letter unto me, amidst my sorrows, even the God of all your consolations.
Letter 2 “Right Honourable,”

Right Honourable,

My affections have readily imbraced an invitation of my much-honoured and Dearest Lady to salute you at a distance with some consolatory lines. And in the discharge of they Chrylian office my worries shall be few as to a person par played in Spirit, and affairs; and as from a person whose sympathie with you doth admit of inlargement. Neither shall I write anything novell or strange unto you, as accounting that through the rich grace of God your greatest advantage doth now lay rather in knowing a powerful feeling—by what you do know, that is knowing more; by more drinking those waters which are already drawn out of the wells of consolation rather than in drawing more. And I shall begin the intended consolation as children do their alphabet with a cross. Take thy cross, and after the example of Moses, cast it into the bitter water of your affliction and they will be sweetened to your tast. If you can say with Paul, I am crucified with Christ you will glory in all tribulations. For thence you will learn that you are inwardly conformed to the cross by mortification of sin, so that you are outwardly conformed thereonto by worldly afflication. We are crucified to the world and the world to us by Christ. Must part with the world as well as with sin. Every loss and cross is a birth-pang to separate us from the world. How Glorious than our worldly afflictions. When Peter defied Christ to spare Him for life, Christ answered him tartly, that he favoured not things of God but of men; and truly if we should pray that we may live without crosses, our prayers were carnal; would show that we favor not the things of God but of men. For God acteth contrary to the world and maketh the blessigns to appear in the versie curse unto us.

Every affliction addeth to the perfection of your communion with Christ in His cross. We are dying throughout the whole course of our life. Cor 4,10,11. Every bearth-pang is a stepp toward the consummation of death. The stronger the bearth-pang, the
more it for-worketh a final separation. So the greater our afflictions are, the more they serve to complete our fellowship with Christ in His sufferings.

Christ offered himself to God by the eternal spirit, by God-head supported by weak humanity. But suffering you are now weak in Christ as a member of His body, but trust on him as the power of His Godhead, by Sprit, shall support you in your suffering. If God does Himself bear in you the burden wheredoth lay upon you, you have no loss. God hath the greater glory by you because His strength is made perfect in your weakness. By Christ being crucified was raised to glory so if you be truly partaker of Christ’s suffering you shall be also of his glory. Wherefore refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears for your works shall be rewarded. There is hope in your end. And I promise to you that if you serve diligently the kingdom of God, your affliction shall have a glorious end. It may be God may give you a love token by some outward deliverance to assure your perfect salvation.

Christ’s suffering was but for a short time though His whole life was a life of suffering; but behold he liveth forever; so the bime of your suffering by reproach, fears, wants, dishonor, treachery of friends will be short. Your beliefs afterall; and they shall come to pass if at the last you be found in Jesus Christ.

Christ’s cross was more painful and bitter to himself than it is to you. His cup was mingled with His fathers wrath. But yours is sugared with His love. He came down not from a wordily glory but from a heavenly glory to the cross. He was betrayed by a friend, crucified by those that pretended Godliness as the scribes and Pharisees, his old friends denied him, stood aloof from his sore. And thy Christ suffered cravings as an example of our comfort. Follow Christ in resigning up yourself to the will of your heavenly Father. Trust on Him. All things shall work for good. Stand fast in the faith, quit yourself like a man. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Peace be with you.

Your most humble Servaunt Walter Marshall.
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