

William Dell (c.1607–1669), Master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge from 1649 to 1660, was a leading radical Parliamentarian. A Bedfordshire man, Dell went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, graduating MA in 1631. He became a chaplain in the New Model Army, being a radical preacher. Following a controversial sermon to the House of Lords, Dell's 1646 sermon to Parliament – in which he attacked the Westminster Assembly, spoke up for the poor, and told the politicians to keep out of religious reform – was considered too extreme, and the House of Commons reprimanded him. Notwithstanding, in 1649 he dedicated to the House of Commons the publication of his sermon *The Way of True Peace and Unity in the Churches*, in which he argued that congregations should choose their ministers, and the State should keep out of church and theological matters. Dell, opposed to enforced uniformity in church practice, made a clear distinction between unity and uniformity, regarding the latter as an inappropriate exercise of State power in spiritual matters. This brought him into controversy with the Presbyterians. Further, for his preaching of free grace, Dell was falsely attacked – personally as a libertine, and his doctrine for antinomianism – by, among others, Samuel Rutherford in his *Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648). Rutherford was libellous: 'Come and learn at Mr Dell to keep the heart right, and violate all the ten commandments'. Even so, the Rump Parliament appointed Dell to the Mastership of Caius. Nevertheless, he was prepared to criticise those on the Parliamentarian side who had done well out of the war, and, while he supported Oliver Cromwell, he did not go along with the making of him king. He was a friend and supporter of John Bunyan, whom he invited to preach in his parish church. As for the work which now follows, John Gadsby, favourably reviewing its republication, stated: 'We have gone right through the work and have been well repaid for our labour, though we may differ on some points... Dell was, we believe, one of Cromwell's ministers, and this gives us another proof that, notwithstanding that great man's [Cromwell's] mistakes, he was one of the Lord's living family, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world' (*Christian's Monthly Record* 1892 pp304-305).

William Dell

I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me

Galatians 2:19-20

In 1652, William Dell published his *The Crucified and Quickened Christian*, being a ‘discourse on Galatians 2:19-20’. This passage, of course, is vital for the right formation of the biblical doctrine of the believer and the law. Right at the start, Dell told the reader that his purpose was to bring understanding of ‘that great mystery of Christ which was kept secret all the time of the law, [but] was clearly opened by the Father and the Spirit in the first beginning of the gospel’.

Dell divided his sermon into two. *First*, he dealt with the crucified Christian. *Second*, he moved on to the quickened Christian.

The crucified Christian

Dell enlarged upon the apostle’s words: ‘Now, says Paul... I am so far from seeking righteousness by the law, that I am wholly dead to the law; and as a dead man [I] have no more to do with the law, as that has no more to do with me. I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God (Gal. 2:19-20)’. Dell suggested two possible meanings of the words. First, he said, it might be that believers are dead to the law through the law itself:

I, says Paul, through the law, am dead to the law; that is, the law itself makes me dead to the law... And, therefore, how can the law any more give laws and commands to a dead man; indeed, to one whom itself has slain? or how can it expect obedience from such a one? And this [is the] sense Chrysostom gives of these words.

But that is not the only possibility. It might be, said Dell, that believers are dead to the law – the law of Moses – through another law, a new law, the law of Christ:

But, secondly, we conceive these words in another sense, after this manner – I through the law am dead to the law; that is, I through a new law, am dead to the old law (which was the law of the letter written on tables of stone) by a new law, which God has written on my heart and inward parts. And this is the law of grace, or the law of the Spirit of life that is in Christ Jesus, which is not a law consisting of letters, words and sentences, but it is the living word of God written in our hearts by the living Spirit of God, according to that of Paul, touching believers (2 Cor. 3:3): ‘You are the letter of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God’; and the living Spirit writes a living law. And this law makes us dead to the [old] law. And a man is never truly dead to the law of the letter, till the law of the Spirit of life be written in his heart, by the finger of God. But, when we have the law of grace, which is a living and almighty law, in our hearts, we are then safely dead to the law of the letter.

For my part, while I fully appreciate the point Dell was making in his second possibility, and agree wholeheartedly with it, going back to the text, Galatians 2:19-20, and its context, I find it a leap too far to think that Paul would use the phrase ‘the law’ throughout the passage (and, virtually, throughout the entire letter to the Galatians), and yet radically alter its meaning at this vital juncture, and for this one purpose, without making it plain by setting out a full explanation of what he was doing. According to Dell, we have to understand ‘the law’ to be ‘the law of Moses’ except when we have to read it as ‘the law of Christ’; and this without a glimmer of an explanation within the text!

I am afraid, therefore, much as I would like to accept Dell’s interpretation, and as strongly as I endorse it, it is not what the apostle is saying at this point. Paul, of course, could perfectly well have introduced ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2) here. In fact, I go so far as to say that he should and would have introduced the phrase here – if Dell had been right in his second suggestion. So, although Dell was right in the sentiment, I think he fixed it to the wrong text.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of that, on the main point, Dell was spot on: the believer is dead to the law, the law of Moses. And, of course, he has the law of the Spirit of life written in his heart, he is under the law of Christ. What are the consequences of this? Dell:

When a believer has in him the law of the Spirit, the law of the letter has no more power over him; that is, so far as he is taken up into that other law of the Spirit, but no further.¹

This sort of talk, as Dell well knew, is a red rag to the Reformed. While they argue vehemently that the believer is still under the law of Moses (having, without biblical warrant, reduced this to the ten commandments, which they call ‘the moral law’), here we have Dell claiming that ‘the law of the letter has no more power over him’ since he is dead to the law, and that he is governed by the law of Christ. A more direct clash you could not wish to see! Dell knew how the Reformed would react. He met it head on:

And there is no danger to this doctrine, that the new law makes us dead to, or delivers us from, the old, as ignorant and carnal Christians think there is – inasmuch as this new law imprints in our souls the love of righteousness, and hatred of iniquity. And he that is thus freed from the [Mosaic] law is the only man that keeps it [the law of Moses], and fulfils it, through the law of love, put into his heart by the Spirit. And this law of love does fulfil the other law, but never breaks or violates it. Wherefore, says Paul: ‘I through the law am dead to the law that I might live unto God’; that is, he that through the law of grace is freed of [from] the law of the letter, is not set free from the law that he may thereby have opportunity and liberty to live to sin and himself, but that he may thereby live unto God. And when a man is born of God, and lives the life of God from the nature of God, there is no danger at all in declaring this man to be free from the law of Moses by the law of Christ. For how otherwise should he come to know the high privilege of the gospel, and the excellent prerogative of the sons of God, and the glorious liberty and freedom into which Jesus Christ has exalted him?²

¹ I am not sure of Dell’s meaning here. If, in ‘so far as he is taken up into that other law of the Spirit...’, the ‘he’ is replaced by ‘it’, he could be saying that the law of Moses has relevance for the believer in so far as it is taken into the law of Christ – which is, of course, the biblical position. As it stands, however, Dell seems to be saying that the more the believer is governed by the law of Christ, the less power the law of Moses has over him. If so, I find it inexplicable and without scriptural support. I will return to this.

² Dell pp6-8.

In passing, do not miss the way Dell described those who want to make the law the rule of sanctification: ‘as ignorant and carnal Christians’. I will return to this, as Dell himself did.

More important, of the utmost importance, Dell was making a point of major significance. He was arguing that it is only by the law of Christ that the believer can fulfil the law of Moses – and that, by meeting the goal of the commandment, which is love. In the new covenant, the child of God is not merely free from the old law, he is under the law to Christ. And there is no danger in making such an assertion. In fact, it has to be preached, taught and believed, so that saints can fully appreciate the glorious liberty they have in Christ. The believer is under the law to Christ, not the law of Moses, and it is only because he has this new relationship that he can possibly be sanctified (Rom. 7:1-6). As I say, Dell was making a point of huge significance, showing, moreover, that he was no antinomian.

But, of course, he was flying in the face of Reformed teaching. But not only Reformed! Dell knew he faced two opponents to what he was saying. First, he knew he would offend real antinomians. He did not shirk the battle! He described them as:

They who would be dead to the law that they might live unto sin, and not unto God; who would have no law, that all things might be lawful, though ever so wicked and abominable, and ever so contrary, both to the light of grace and nature. And these are the true antinomians and libertines, who would be free from the law of Moses, they being not under the law of Christ; who would take away, and quite abolish, the law of the letter, they being not under the law of the Spirit; and so would be free from all... law, both old and new, both of Moses and Christ, that they might live as they like, and take their full swing in all their lusts.³

Dell had no time for such lawless, fleshly professors. None whatsoever! To dismiss him as an antinomian – as he was in his own day, and still is – is an utter falsehood and a travesty. Listen to him expatiating against antinomians. Pulling no punches, he advocated punishment by the magistrate for all such, if their antinomianism was open enough; that is to say, ‘when they

³ Dell p8.

transgress wickedly and presumptuously against their neighbour, and against civil society'. If, however, their antinomianism did not impinge on public society, knowing that the authorities have no ability to read the mind or heart of a man, Dell advocated that such antinomians should be left to God to deal with in his own good time: 'In other things, that are more secret and inward, or that are of their own notions and apprehensions, though concerning the things of God, they are to be left, with other unbelievers and misbelievers, to the righteous judgement of God'.

So much for the first of Dell's opponents; the antinomian Scylla. Notice what he thought of them. They are 'unbelievers and misbelievers', whatever their profession. This man an antinomian? Never!

But what of the Reformed Charybdis?

The other sort [of Dell's opponents]... are such who are so Jewish and so zealous of the honour of the law, that they will by no means endure to hear that the gospel of the Son of God comes to abolish it, or that the new law is given us to make us quite dead to the old. For they think that such a doctrine as this will open a floodgate to all manner of wickedness and licentiousness.

I said that Dell would return to his claim that those who argue that the law is the way to sanctification are 'ignorant and carnal Christians'. Note, now, his use of 'Jewish'. He was, of course, talking about advocates of Calvin's third use of the law of Moses for sanctification; in other words, the Reformed. Quite right too! Such men are legal preachers rather than gospel preachers. But Dell was not interested in name-calling. He explained what he was talking about. Those who advocate the law for sanctification actually shoot themselves in the foot, he declared. They might call such as Dell an antinomian but, in reality, they ought to be thinking about and removing the beam from their own eye:

For such men, being carnal themselves, and knowing no restraint from sin but the law of Moses, do verily think that if that curb be taken out of the jaws of men they must needs rush headlong into all manner of evil, as the horse into the battle; and this is true enough where men free themselves, or are freed by others, from the old law, before the new be written on their hearts.

I pause. Dell was preaching that sanctification comes not from the law of Moses, but the law of Christ. The Reformed are quite mistaken over this matter, thinking, as they do, that unless a man is under the law of Moses he must fall into gross sin. Of course, as Dell argued, it is useless – and worse than useless – for a man to argue that he is not under the law of Moses – unless he is fully persuaded that he is under the law of Christ! Dell had made it as plain as plain could be that this was his doctrine. But, having died to the law of Moses, he is under the law of Christ, and, having come under the law to Christ, all will be well with the believer. The Reformed just do not understand this biblical doctrine. They simply do not appreciate what the law of Christ is, nor its inherent power and grace. Thus argued Dell:

But this they understand not, that when the new law comes, it is a sufficient discharge from the old, since the law of grace within us is infinitely more powerful to keep us from sin than the law of Moses without [outside] us; and the love of righteousness, and hatred of iniquity, put into our hearts by the Spirit, is infinitely more able to make us do righteousness, and avoid sin, than any outward commands and threatenings whatsoever. And so, when the gospel prevails in truth and power, men need not fear the taking away the law [of Moses] from such men, seeing they, through the new law [the law of Christ] are dead to the old that they may live unto God... Saints, God dwelling in them, and they in God, do by this means live unto God; and God himself, who dwells in them, is the new law according to which they live, they doing all in God, and for God, and so live unto God indeed.⁴

The law of Moses will never sanctify. Only the law of Christ can produce godliness. Moreover, said Dell, the law of Moses is utterly incapable of producing holiness. It is only the gospel, the law of Christ, that can do that. In fact, as I have said, in the spirit of Romans 7:1-6, it is only because a man has died to the law of Moses that he can be united to Christ, and it is only by being united to Christ that he can possibly bear fruit to God, and so be godly. To be godly, he must be liberated from the law of Moses – as the apostle makes clear:

Do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the

⁴ Dell pp8-9.

woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband... she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter... There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 7:1-6; 8:1-4).

In short, as Dell put it:

Nothing does so truly and thoroughly restrain, hamper, mortify, crucify, kill and destroy the flesh, and all the corruptions, lusts and affections of it, as the living word and the Spirit do.⁵

Dell, fully aware of the abuse he would meet for such preaching, got his defence in early: ‘That... these things are so in truth, and that they are no fond notions, speculations and glosses of my own devising, I will yet make it more evident by some few other plain scriptures’; that is, in addition to his chosen text (Gal. 2:19-20). He quoted Romans 2:13; 6:5-6,11; 8:10,13; Galatians 5:16,24-25, arguing out the apostle’s teaching in those places, showing that it is all of a piece with the principles and deductions that he, Dell, had drawn from his chosen passage:

The presence of Christ, that is the living word of God, within us, is the killing and crucifying of the body to all sin... by the presence of the Spirit... by the baptism of the Spirit... So it is plain that the destruction of sin in our bodies, by the living word and Spirit of God, is our crucifying with Christ... The apostle would have those who are

⁵ Dell p14.

crucified with Christ to reckon themselves dead to sin... As far as the same word and Spirit of Christ prevail in us, they will make us dead to sin for the time past and present, and for the future will preserve us from sin.⁶

In other words, the law of Christ – the word and the Holy Spirit, the gospel, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, our union with Christ – is the cure for all sin; all sin, past, present and future. It cures the past – sin’s condemnation (justification). It cures the present – sin’s power (sanctification). Above all, it cures the future – sin’s presence (glorification).⁷

Let me pause. This man was no antinomian! What he was, was a true preacher of ‘the glorious gospel of the blessed God’ (1 Tim. 1:11)! How much we need preachers like Dell today! We have had more than enough of ‘recipe preachers’: ‘conform to these rules and you will be sanctified’. We, as believers, need to hear the law of Christ fully expounded and applied until it grips our minds, until it moves from our heads into our hearts, and from our hearts into our lives.

To continue: Dell came to ‘make some use of’ his doctrine. In his first ‘use’ he struck a worthy blow at what, in the following century, would come to be known as Sandemanianism. This is an error which plagues us to this day, perhaps none more so. Dell’s words ought to be weighed by all believers in this generation, seriously weighed as a matter of urgency:

First... let us know that it is not enough to salvation to believe that Jesus Christ, according to his human nature, was outwardly crucified on a cross at Jerusalem for us, except we also be crucified with him, through his living word and Spirit dwelling in us, through which we must be powerfully planted into a true likeness of his death, in such sort that we must be dead unto all sin whatsoever, even to all our own corruptions and lusts, and to all the corruptions that are in the world through lust. And we must be dead to ourselves, to our own fleshly reason, understanding, will, desires, ends, and to our own human life; we must be dead to the world, and to all that is in it, and of it, to all the pleasures, profits, and honours of it. We must thus truly be dead with

⁶ Dell pp15-16.

⁷ I have put it like this even though it is far too simplistic. In broad outline, however, it is the truth.

Christ, ere we can live with him. And with this kind of crucifying must the whole Christ be crucified, from the head to the lowest members. And thus also must we be crucified with him, if we will have any part in him; I say we must have fellowship with him in his sufferings, and be made conformable to him in his death, ere we can attain to his resurrection from the dead.⁸

That is to say, mental assent to the gospel is not enough; belief is more than head knowledge; it is a heart work; true faith is a crucifying faith; it is only those who are united to Christ in his death who can be united to him in his resurrection and life. Let me repeat myself. This thumb-nail sketch holds within it teaching that is desperately needed in our day. It sounds the death-knell to Sandemanianism – and that death-knell needs sounding! This man an antinomian? If he was, may God send us more ‘antinomian’ preachers!

The question is: How can we be crucified with Christ? Dell did not leave his readers in suspense:

Now if any desire to know how we may attain to be thus crucified with Christ, I answer that the true faith of God’s elect is the only way through which we can attain to this crucifying. For, through faith we receive the living word of God to dwell in us; and in this word we partake of the Spirit; and this word and Spirit dwelling in us, do (as has been declared) crucify us with Christ.

In other words, it is by saving faith that we can be united with Christ, and thus come under his law, being married to him, having died to our former husband, the law of the old covenant. Excellent!

Dell gave short shrift to the idea that we can have Christ as Saviour but not as Lord:

Indeed, hypocrites and carnal Christians receive and profess a word that will not crucify them with Christ, but do receive a word and doctrine that will still allow them to live their own lives, and after their own lusts. For the word they receive, is only an outward word, consisting of various questions, opinions and doctrines; and is also without the Spirit, and so it leaves them as it found them, in reference to their natures and corruptions.

⁸ Dell pp16-17.

We urgently need such discriminating preachers today! Notice how Dell would not leave men content with an outward believing; that is conformity to the gospel. Unless we have the Spirit, unless we are united with Christ, unless we are crucified with Christ, and unless we have died to the world, we have nothing, and we are nothing! How much the churches have lost, how grievously they have been diminished, because such men as William Dell have been dismissed! This is gospel preaching! May God raise up such men in our generation!

True faith, said Dell, is a spiritual faith, a crucifying faith:

But the word that faith receives, is the word of righteousness and life; a word that is always accompanied with the Spirit. And when this is engrafted into the soul, and abides in it, it presently mortifies and crucifies it, and destroys a man's self out of himself. And therefore (1 Cor. 1:18), it is called the word of the cross; and that, not only because it exposes us to afflictions in the world, but also because it, dwelling in our hearts by faith, crucifies us. And this crucifying word, in the same verse, is called, also, the power of God. For that word that crucifies our flesh, and subdues and destroys the whole strength of corruption out of us, must be such a word, as is also the power of God. And so it is not only [so] in itself, but also, because the Spirit of God dwells in it. And this word, thus apprehended, will crucify us with Christ.

Dell spelled out what he had in mind:

Now this word of faith, which is the word near us, even in our hearts, will crucify us:

1. Thoroughly: it will crucify the whole man throughout, and that according to his mind, will and affections... This will crucify us till... our outward and inward man be wholly and fully subject to the only will of God.

2. Daily and constantly: as Paul witnesses, saying: 'I die daily' (1 Cor. 15:31).⁹

Dell, knowing that the flesh shrinks from this, set out several 'encouragements':

Now, because this our crucifying with Christ is so contrary to the flesh, that the flesh is always mourning under it, and murmuring against it, therefore for our encouragement in so difficult a work as this, I shall

⁹ Dell pp17-19.

propound some choice and excellent advantages that believers have, by being truly crucified with Christ.

We now come to a rich passage, a passage in which Dell sets out the glories of the gospel. Oh, that it might be said to us present-day believers, ‘the Israel of God’: ‘On Mount Zion... the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions’ (Obad. 17)! May we more feelingly possess what we have in Christ. Listen to Dell spelling out, for believers, the glorious consequences of the gospel, the superabundant blessings of justification in Christ. Let his words melt our hearts and move us to obedience. ‘For by this means’ – that is, by our union with Christ in his crucifixion – Dell said:

1. We are freed from the law... And this, Paul does plainly teach us (Rom. 7:1)... When he is once crucified with Christ, and dead with Christ, the law has no more dominion over him. So then, as long as we live our own life, the law has power over us. But when we are dead to ourselves, through the life of Christ, we are set quite without the reach of the law. And the law has no more to do with us, the members, than with Christ, the head.
2. By being crucified with Christ, we are freed of sin. For one of the chief ends of the indwelling of the word and Spirit in believers is, to free them, and save them from sin... (Rom. 6:6,12)... And so you see, that through our being crucified with Christ, we are dead to sin also. For it is impossible that Christ and sin should live together in strength, in the same flesh, but if sin lives in our flesh, it will crucify us to Christ; and if Christ lives in our flesh, he will crucify us to sin.
3. By being crucified with Christ, we are freed from death... And so being crucified with Christ, death has no more dominion over us.
4. By being crucified with Christ, we are also freed from the power of the devil... When our flesh is united to Christ, and is crucified by the word and Spirit, then Satan comes, and has nothing in it [our flesh], as he came to Christ, and had nothing in him. The devil then can find nothing in us to do us harm, or whereby he may prevail against us, when we are truly crucified with Christ.¹⁰

How can a man know that he is truly united with Christ in his death and resurrection? that is, how can he be assured? Dell argued that ‘there are many trials of this, some of which I will name very briefly, and so conclude this matter’:

¹⁰ Dell pp19-21.

1. If you find your own heart or disposition¹¹ truly subdued and changed by another heart that is from God, and if you find your own life put to an end by another life that is from God, then are you crucified with Christ indeed.
2. If you deny yourself in all things of flesh and blood, and find a new self within you, to have power over your own self, which is daily withering and decaying at the presence of the new creature, then are you crucified through the word.
3. If you are dead to sin, even to all those corruptions and lusts which have delighted themselves in you, and you again in them, if you find yourself dead to them, and they killed in you, then are you crucified by the word.
4. If you are dead to the world, and to the things of it, which are the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, then are you crucified by the word.
5. If you do not mind [are not swayed by] the praise and applause of men on the one hand, nor their reproaches and indignities on the other hand, but are truly dead to both, then are you crucified by the word.
6. If you are deceased and departed from your own will and works, and can do, and delight to do the will and works of God, then is his law within your heart, and you are crucified by the word.
7. If you are ready prepared to bear and endure any sufferings and persecutions for Christ with patience and, over and above, with willingness and joy, and do not draw back for [because of] any evils, but stand to them and overcome them; then also are you crucified by the word; and that is, crucified with Christ.¹²

In short:

Now this our crucifying with Christ is the chief and greatest matter that we are to mind in this world; wherefore Paul says to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:2): 'I did not judge it worth the while to "know anything among you" (or to behold anything in you), "but Jesus Christ, and him crucified"'. Seeing in this present state of ours this is our chief business, to be crucified with Christ, and to be taken out of ourselves, and all our own things, till we be altogether reduced to nothing, that we may receive [perceive?] ourselves, and all things, anew in Jesus Christ. This is the chief work of God, by his word and Spirit upon the faithful here in this world... And so this also is to be the chief business of our lives, after we do believe, even to be daily crucified, and mortified, and killed by the word and Spirit of Christ, till our will be perfectly

¹¹ Dell had 'nature' – I will not repeat this every time.

¹² Dell pp25-26.

subdued to God's, and by these means we be fitted and prepared for that tribulation and cross, whatever it is, that the Lord shall please to appoint unto us either in life or in death.¹³

This man an antinomian? I ask you!

Dell, 'having [thus] spoken something of the *crucified* Christian', then moved 'to speak, in the next place, of the *quickened* Christian, from the following words: "Nevertheless I live"'.

The quickened Christian

As Dell said:

Every true believer is as much quickened with Christ, as crucified with him: 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live'... so also it is with all Christians. And therefore Paul says, out of his own experience: 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live' – as if he had said: 'I am not crucified to death, but to life; my crucifying with Christ is my quickening. For by this I am so killed, that I live the more; indeed, now only I do truly live, being formerly dead. My own proper life, in myself, was my death; but Christ's life in me is my true life. For I was dead with the worst death – namely, in trespasses and sins – but now I live in the best life, even the life of righteousness'.¹⁴

Dell argued that no man can have the one without the other – he must be crucified with Christ if he is to live with him:

Whence it is manifest, that the living word and Spirit of Christ in a Christian, do so kill the life of his flesh (which is a life of sin and sorrow, and darkness and death) that at the same time they communicate to the same man, to the same soul and body, a true and spiritual, and holy, and heavenly, and eternal life. For no man is crucified with Christ, but he also lives with him – seeing the same word that kills our life, communicates Christ's. And Christ crucifies us with himself, not that he may kill us, but that he may quicken us, and our quickening is the end of our crucifying, and our crucifying is the way to our quickening. Indeed, the killing of the flesh by the sword or famine, or the law, or any way else, is death indeed, or death unto death, but the killing of the flesh by the living word and Spirit, which is its crucifying with Christ, is death unto life.

¹³ Dell pp26-27.

¹⁴ Dell p27.

And here again we may note this also, that the true life of a Christian begins from his crucifying and dying with Christ. And also the true crucifying and dying of a Christian begins from his life in Christ. For both these inseparably go together; namely, our crucifying and our quickening with Christ. But our crucifying with Christ is named first in order, because it is first in manifestation – seeing after we believe, Christ’s death is first manifested in us, before Christ’s life – though Christ’s life be first in us in order of nature, the crucifying of our flesh, flowing from the life of his Spirit.¹⁵

In conclusion:

This, then, is the sum of this matter... A man, in union with Christ, has his own life destroyed out of him, and Christ’s own life communicated to him, so that, in the true believer, the soul and body of man live in the life of the Son of God... And thus the flesh lives a life that is not of the flesh; indeed, thus the creature lives in itself the life of God. For as that eternal life, that was with the Father, was manifested in the Son – that is, in his flesh or humanity – and all believers have seen and known it, so also that very life of the Father and the Son, is both communicated to the saints, and also manifest in them, as faith very well knows. And this is the great mystery of the gospel. Let them receive it that can receive it.¹⁶

In other words, Dell was setting out the great gospel-mystery, which – as Paul declared – is: ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27). So much so, the apostle longed earnestly that Christ might be ‘formed in’ the Galatians (Gal. 4:19). As he declared: ‘You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his. And if Christ is in you... if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you...’ (Rom. 8:9-11). No wonder, then, that Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus – indeed, for all believers, everywhere, for all time:

I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may

¹⁵ Dell pp27-28.

¹⁶ Dell pp28-29.

be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:15-21).

And all stems from these words in Christ's great high-priestly prayer: 'I in them' (John 17:23).

Dell expanded his doctrine: 'Now this new and spiritual life, which a crucified Christian partakes of, he has it: *1. In Union. 2. In Manifestation*':

1. A Christian has this life in *union*, when, through faith of the operation of God, he is really knit unto Christ, and engrafted into him, and made one with him. For before we are united to Christ, we are without life, but as soon as we are united to him, we have life from him. As John says in his letter: 'He that has the Son has life' (even that life which the Son has), and 'he that has not the Son, has not life'. Now this life and union which a Christian has through faith, is more hidden and secret, as that life is that proceeds from the first real union and compliance between the stock and scion or graft; and this is the life of justification. For as soon as ever we are, by faith, made one with God in Christ, the righteousness of God is made ours,¹⁷ truly and everlastingly; and in this we are justified, even before God.

2. A true Christian has this life of Christ, not only in union, but also in *manifestation*. For when a Christian partakes of Christ's life by faith, this life will not be idle in him (which is against the nature of all life, but especially of this) but most active and operative. And it will manifest itself especially two ways, namely, BOTH IN HOLINESS AND COMFORT.¹⁸

Do not miss Dell's order – holiness, then comfort. This was no accident. Dell deliberately chose this order, and enlarged upon it. First, he set out what he meant by holiness:

1. This life will manifest itself in holiness, in the very holiness of Christ, which is the holiness of the divine nature communicated to the human nature; the Spirit himself, which is given to a believer, as the

¹⁷ Clearly, Dell did not believe in eternal justification. His use of 'manifestation' is manifestly not of the hyper-Calvinistic variety.

¹⁸ Dell pp29-30, emphasis his.

outgoing of the life of God within him, works his own works of grace and sanctification in him, and communicates the same holiness to him, a member, as to Christ the head, though in a far different degree.

No lowering of the standard here! Indeed, how low is our standard today. What little preaching, what little understanding, is there of our union with Christ. And not only in doctrine: Dell was spot on when he asserted that those who are in Christ will, by the Holy Spirit, bear fruit to Christ, even Christ-likeness. This is what the new covenant does! And this is what only the new covenant can do! The law of Moses cannot do it. ‘The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17).

Now for the Christian’s comfort. Note how Dell stressed that this comfort comes after holiness *and from it*:

2. This life of Christ in a Christian will manifest itself in comfort as well as in holiness. And this is the life of our life, and the next and necessary result of holiness. Wherefore it is said, that the kingdom of God stands first in righteousness, and then presently in peace and joy; and the same Spirit that is given for a sanctifier, is also given for a comforter. And Paul says, Romans 8, that to be spiritually minded is not only life, but life and peace. For when a believer finds in himself a new heart or disposition through a new birth, and the law of God within his heart, and some strength to obey God, and to do his will, then he begins to find also a sweet and heavenly peace within him, and many times, joy unspeakable and glorious. And thus is a crucified Christian’s new life manifested, both in holiness, and also in spiritual peace and joy.¹⁹

Dell has surely hit the nail smack on the head: new life leads to holiness; holiness leads to comfort. This is new-covenant theology! That is, it is the theology of the New Testament. And this man is dismissed as an antinomian? In this sermon, I fail to see that he is.

Quite the opposite! The truth is, Dell could be read as saying that if a professed believer lacks holiness leading to spiritual peace and joy, then he clearly is not a true believer. Think of that! Let that sink in! What does that say about a good many of us professed believers today?

¹⁹ Dell p30.

Let me pause here.²⁰ Dell's claim, as it stands, would run contrary to various scriptures which show that it is quite possible for a genuine believer to sin, and, moreover, to pass through times of doubt. John, for example, wrote his first letter precisely to deal with such believers: as to the first, see 1 John 1:8 – 2:2; as to the second, see 1 John 5:13 (indeed, see his entire letter). So what now of Dell's claim, and the high standard which he set? I do not think that Dell *was*, in fact, setting out such a high (unbiblical standard); he was not 'breaking the bruised reed' or 'snuffing out the smouldering wick' (Matt. 12:20, NIV; Isa. 42:3). Let me explain. Do not miss Dell's inbuilt qualifying phrases: 'some strength... and many times'. There is, moreover, an important point here. I will say what I mean by way of a personal note. Having come to see something of the believer's glorious liberty and confidence, as spelled out in the pages of Scripture, I try to put it before others, both in preaching and in my books. Yet, at the same time, even as I preach and write, I have to confess my own falling short of it in practical terms and experience. But what can I do? Should I preach and write at my low level? Should I make my poor spirituality the standard that I set before myself and others? Surely not! I must proclaim Scripture – not because I have attained, but because I aspire! In any case – surely it may be taken as read – that I must not preach anything but Scripture, certainly not my level of attainment! In saying such things, I am not trying in the least to excuse my spiritual poverty. Am I not reflecting what the apostle himself felt and declared?:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14).

In short, I'm sure that Dell was right to press the biblical standard and experience upon his readers: the believer's holiness leads to his

²⁰ I am grateful to Andrew Rome for drawing my attention to the vital point in this paragraph.

comfort. In any case, my main point stands: if this is antinomianism, we sorely need more of it today!

Yet again, Dell came to application:

And now (to speak one word by way of application) let us, each one, seriously consider, whether he do indeed partake of such a life as is risen to him out of death? whether he find that he has parted with his own life, and gotten another life than his own, in his own soul and body? and whether the life of the first Adam be crucified in him, and he live the life of the second Adam? that is, not a natural, but a spiritual life; not a human, but a divine life; not an earthly, but a heavenly life; not a temporal, but an eternal life. For thus do all live that are truly crucified with Christ.

I pause. Note his use of questions – always more probing than mere statements. Note, further, that Dell allows no exception! All! ‘Thus do *all* live that are truly crucified with Christ’! Dell was unequivocal. No lowering of the standard here! A man may profess what he will, but unless he shows by his life that Christ is formed within him, his profession is worthless. And Dell said so! Moving on, he showed what was in his heart, how he thought of the sinners who heard and read him:

And I desire we all would the rather mind this, because if we part with this life ere we partake of that [union and crucifixion with Christ], the second death, which is everlasting death in sin, and the wrath of God, must needs swallow us up, and because, if we do not partake of Christ’s life here, we can never live with him in his kingdom, and also because we can never have true and immediate communion with the Father, but in the life of the eternal Son. Wherefore let all such whose hearts God has touched by his word, make it their business to seek from God in Christ another life than their own, a life infinitely better and stronger than their own, and a life which, at the will of God, will offer up their own, that we may say in our experience, as Paul in his: ‘We are crucified with Christ, yet nevertheless we live’.²¹

Is this not right? ‘Pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord’ (Heb. 12:14). Do we not need to hear such preaching as this, and plenty of it? Do not fail to see how Dell was challenging all his hearers not to rest short of a real saving interest in the

²¹ Dell pp30-31.

Redeemer. Note his clear and solemn warnings to those who have no such saving interest.

Yet more is to come. Lest anybody should get the wrong end of the stick, though holiness is the believer's duty, when all is said and done, no believer, whatever his accomplishments, has any ground for boasting:

That a believer must be so taken up into Christ by faith, that as Christ must work all in him, so he must attribute all Christ's works unto Christ, and none to himself, still saying, in the midst of the exercise of all graces and virtues: 'It is not I. It is not I that live, but Christ himself that lives in me' this life of grace, righteousness, wisdom, meekness, goodness, humility, patience, power, love, *etc.* It is not I that live in myself, but Christ that lives it [this life of grace...] in me. As [Paul] says elsewhere: 'I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God that dwells in me' [1 Cor. 15:10]. After the same manner, as every Christian must keep his rest in Christ, and must suffer Christ to work all his own works in him, so he must still attribute all Christ's works unto Christ, and be still saying: 'It is not I, but Christ in me, that has done these works, that has endured and overcome these evils'.²²

Dell then showed himself a master-theologian, getting right to the heart of the new covenant. Which is? Christ in his people; Christ is all in all to those who are in him; the law, the law of Moses, will never justify or sanctify; it is Christ, looking to Christ, that justifies a sinner; it is Christ, looking to Christ, that moves the believer to holiness of life; Christ is all. This is what new-covenant theology is all about: Christ!

Listen to Dell:

We may learn that Christ in a believer, is to him instead of all created habits of grace. Christ, who is the true God, is all in all in [to] a Christian. And so a Christian partakes of that righteousness which is Christ – of that wisdom which is Christ, of that power, truth, goodness, *etc.*, which is Christ. And Christ that dwells in believers, is truly all grace to them.²³ And herein they are like unto Christ's humanity, unto

²² Dell pp34-35.

²³ Note it well: Christ does not merely give the believer righteousness, wisdom, power, truth, goodness, and so on. Christ gives himself, and Christ himself is the believer's righteousness, wisdom, power, truth, goodness, and so on. Christ is all!

whom the fullness of the Godhead that dwelt in him was instead of all created grace. Wherefore let us know, that the created habits of grace in a Christian, which the schoolmen have invented and taught, and others have received from them, are nothing but the empty notions and vain speculation of carnal and unbelieving hearts, ignorant of the true mystery of the gospel. For Christ, that lives in a believer, is all grace to him. And thus the apostle Paul expressly teaches in 1 Corinthians 1:30, where, speaking of Christ, he says: 'He is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption'. And so a Christian has that wisdom, righteousness, *etc.*, which is Christ himself. And this grace, which is Christ himself, is infinitely more high and holy than all created habits of grace; and this is the only grace that is acceptable to God, and that makes us accepted in itself. And this is the only grace against which the gates of hell cannot prevail, and the only grace that can make us meet for the Father's kingdom. And thus you see that Christ, who lives in a believer, is all grace in him, and all sufficient grace for him.²⁴

Let me make the point again. And that point is what? Not *what*, but *who*! Christ! Here we reach the heart of the new covenant. By the Holy Spirit, Christ is formed in every believer, working all necessary grace in him to enable the believer to produce a life of Christ-likeness. More, the Spirit ensures that every believer will produce such fruit to Christ. Note the biblical emphasis in all this. All believers, every believer, each believer; no exception! The law of Christ, not Moses, is the spur for holiness, and the way to get it, and that for all believers. Christ is all! Christ is all in all for all believers. In what way?

He frees them from their evil things. And in reference to those, he lives in them as their Redeemer and Saviour. And so Christ within them abolishes the law, takes away sin, and destroys death, for none of these things can dwell in his presence, in that soul wherein he lives. For he is our new law, to make void the old. And he is our new righteousness, to take away sin; and our new life, to destroy death. And the law, sin and death, can have no place nor power, where Christ our new law, righteousness and life, dwells and lives.²⁵

²⁴ Dell pp37-38.

²⁵ Dell p38.

Once again, Dell put his finger on the spot. Christ himself is the law of Christ. Dell has certainly caught the apostle's meaning in Romans 8:1-4.

Finally:

Seeing Christ himself lives in all true believers, let us all, who profess ourselves to be such, so live, that Christ may be seen to live in us, more than ourselves – that they that have known us, may know us no more, but may know Christ in us; and that they that have communion with us, may acknowledge Christ himself speaking, working, and living his own life in us, in all self-denial, humility, holiness, love, resignation of ourselves to the will of God, and in all diligence to do the work of God, and readiness to suffer the will of God. For thus Christ lived in his own flesh, and thus also he will certainly live in ours, if he lives there at all. And when Christ lives in our flesh, as he did in his own, something of his glory will be seen upon us.²⁶

And this man is supposed to be an antinomian?

Dell concluded: 'Now from this union, which we have with the Son of God through faith, do flow many excellent advantages to believers; some of which I shall name now; as':

1. Hereby they are made the sons of God; as John says (John 1[:12]): 'As many as received him', that is, the word that was with God, and was God, and was made flesh. As many as received him by believing, 'to them he gave power to become the sons of God'...

And so through faith, we have not only the name, but also the nature of sons. For faith, uniting us to Christ,²⁷ changes us into a new disposition, and takes from us what we are in regard of sin, and makes us what Christ is in regard of righteousness; and so it makes us new in heart, mind, will, affections, ends, and in our whole conversation. For it brings God's nature into ours, and this changes our heart into its own likeness, so that whatsoever we do, or whatever our condition in the world is, we shall still carry ourselves in all things as the children of God, in some demonstration of the divine nature.

2. Through this faith in the Son of God we are made, not only sons, but 'heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ' [Rom. 8:17]...

3. This true faith, carrying us into the Son of God, and placing us in him, to abide in him, does truly carry us out of the utmost reach of all

²⁶ Dell p39.

²⁷ Once again, Dell was showing that he was no advocate of eternal justification or of actual eternal union with Christ.

evil things – out of the reach of the law, sin, death, and hell – seeing these can have no place nor presence in the Son of God. And though these evils may reach us while we dwell in ourselves, yet we are got out of their reach, so far forth, as by faith we dwell in him.²⁸

4. This right faith carries us into the Son of God, and carries us into all his perfections and excellencies, into his nature and life, and wisdom, and power, and glory, and into all the fullness of the Son of the living God. And so true faith enriches a believer in Christ, with greater treasure than the heart of a carnal Christian²⁹ can possibly give credit to. For through faith we are carried into the Son of God, to have all that he has, and he again comes and fills us with all that he is and has.

5. True faith carries us into Christ, and makes us one with him, as the author and original of all our good works. For through this, God dwells in us, and works his own works in us. And we again dwell in him, and work his own works in him. And those only are true good works, which God, that dwells in us, works in us, and which we, dwelling in God, work in him. Indeed, a believer who is one with Christ, not only does good works, but does them continually: for Christ in him is always active. And while he is in Christ,³⁰ he must be always active. And therefore, says Christ: ‘He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit’ (John 15[:5]). For, through this mutual abiding of Christ and a Christian in each other, a Christian as naturally and as necessarily does the works of God, as the fire burns, or the sun shines.³¹

In short: ‘And these are some of the advantages a Christian has, through faith in the Son of God’. But do not miss Dell’s emphasis: ‘A believer who is one with Christ, not only does good works, *but does them continually*’. No fits-and-starts believing and consequent holiness for Dell!

²⁸ I said I would return to this point. Was Dell talking about a believer’s *sense* of being in Christ? In other words, the more we realise what we are in Christ, the more we triumph?

²⁹ Including – by Dell’s terminology (see above) – the Reformed. Dell was making the excellent point that the Reformed way of sanctification, by whip and fear under the law, fails to match (indeed, it runs contrary to) the New Testament emphasis on sanctification flowing from the believer’s gratitude to God, and the joy arising to the believer through his liberty from the law through the redemption of Christ.

³⁰ Once again, was Dell talking about a believer’s *sense* of being in Christ? Once a sinner believes, he is actually in Christ and in him for ever.

³¹ Dell pp44-47.

Dell, in his parting shot, gathering all together, went for the jugular:

By all which we may perceive, that true faith is a greater matter than the most are aware of. For men usually think, that when they hear the gospel in the outward ministry, and assent to it that it is true, that this is faith, and that then they do believe; but the true faith of God's elect is a greater matter than this; for through that we are truly made one with the Son of the living God, and do abide and live in him for ever. And so this right faith is a most high and precious grace, and is the first manifestation of the Father's eternal love to the soul, and the first grace whereby we have entrance into the kingdom of God. It is the sabbath of sabbaths.³² It is the greatest and highest worship of God. It is infinite and everlasting righteousness. It is the mortification of the flesh, the quickening of the Spirit, our mighty victory over the law, sin, death, hell, the world and the devil. It is the first and last, and all in all, in the kingdom of the Son. And he that believes, as the Scriptures have said, is already truly passed from sin to righteousness, from death to life, and from Satan to God.

In short:

So that right faith is a most precious grace, and is found in very few of the common professors of the worldly church; so that Christ himself makes this question: 'The Son of man, when he comes, shall he find faith upon earth?' [Luke 18:8]. And therefore it concerns all to inquire and try: Whether we partake of this faith or not? And whether the life we live in the flesh, be in the faith of the Son of God? Otherwise we must know, that as he that believes shall be saved, so he that believes not shall be damned [Mark 16:16].³³

Reader, if this is antinomianism, then, speaking for myself, I wish to be an antinomian – in my preaching, in my writing, and, above all, in my living, day-by-day experience. May God grant that we may soon have many such 'antinomians' in the pulpits of our land. How acute is our need of them. And may all who read these words be such 'antinomians'. Let the Reformed hack and hew as they will. Dell has got to the core of the new covenant. Due allowance must be made, of course, for his 17th century style, but Dell has surely got to the heart of the gospel here. Oh for preachers of like stamp! I

³² I take this to indicate that Dell rightly understood that the new-covenant fulfilment of the sabbath is the believer's rest and delight in Christ.

³³ Dell pp47-48.

know I've said it before, but I've had more than my fill of hearing boring lectures, when I was supposed to be under the preaching of the gospel. Oh, for men like Dell to preach Christ to us, to preach us into Christ, and to preach Christ into us! Oh for the New Testament emphasis on the exuberant joy that is the lot of all believers through their liberty from the law through the redeeming work of Christ! May we know, may we love, may we feel, what it is to be united to Christ! Above all, may we live in the good of it.

I have no doubt but that this sort of preaching will prove saving for sinners and sanctifying for saints. It is the sovereign elixir for both the unconverted and the converted, God's appointed way of dealing with both. Consequently, and above all, it will glorify God – for purposing so great a salvation for us ruined, helpless and polluted sinners, for accomplishing it through the work of such a glorious Saviour, and for applying it to us so freely and graciously by the power of the sovereign Holy Spirit.