

## *What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?*

What do hyper-Calvinists understand by ‘justification by faith’?<sup>1</sup> In particular, what do they think is going on when a sinner exercises justifying faith?<sup>2</sup>

Before I answer that, let us remind ourselves of some of the ground we have covered. Let us remind ourselves of what Gill said about justification. I summarise here – the extracts may be found at the appropriate places throughout this present work. For Gill, election and justification are, for all practical purposes, one and the same. God has decreed to justify his elect, and that decree, that will, comprises the whole essence of justification. God’s will to justify his elect is their justification. So said Gill.

So what about faith? Where does faith come into the picture? Gill was both consistent and unequivocal: ‘Faith... a man is as much justified before as after it, in the account of God’.<sup>3</sup>

In short: God has decreed to justify his elect. The whole essence of their justification is in that will of God. The elect are no more justified after faith than they were before. The inevitable conclusion? Faith is strictly unnecessary! Justification is entirely a matter of God’s will.

Do I hear an objection? ‘Wait a minute! Notice Gill’s “in the account of God”’. Gill was not talking about *actual* justification. After all, we know he said this: “I have carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual”. So might one of Gill’s hyper-Calvinistic fellow-advocates argue.

Ah! But... take that last extract from Gill, and read on:

I have carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual; though for no other reason than this, lest any should imagine them as transient acts of God upon the elect, which require their

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<sup>1</sup> As I have already remarked, this biblical phrase does not appear in the Gospel Standard Articles. Quite a startling omission, one would think.

<sup>2</sup> The extracts for this chapter begin on p209.

<sup>3</sup> Gill: *Body* Vol.1 p299.

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personal and actual existence; for otherwise, as I believe, that eternal election is actual, and eternal reprobation is actual, as they are immanent acts in God; so I believe, eternal justification is actual, as it is an immanent act in God that justifies; and eternal union is actual, as it is an act of God's everlasting love to his elect, whereby he has knit and united them to himself. I go on to ask, where have I said... that a non-entity was united to an existence?... The elect of God, though they have not an... actual being from eternity, yet they have... a representative being in Christ from everlasting.<sup>4</sup>

In short, Gill might carefully avoid using the word 'actual', but as he said, he did it to avoid the objection that if actual, then the sinner had to be in existence. In short, he was digging in, and digging in hard, for eternal justification and, even though he did not use the word for the reason he gave, nevertheless '*actual justification*' is precisely what he meant: 'Eternal justification is actual, as it is an immanent act in God that justifies'. In this, he was fending off the unbiblical notion that justification is the sinner's act. Saving faith is the sinner's act, needless to say – as Gill recognised<sup>5</sup> – but justification is not. No sinner can justify himself. It is only God who can justify. In that, Gill and I are one. Nevertheless, for all his carefulness, Gill *was* talking about actual justification; God actually justifies the elect in eternity. That is what he was saying.

This is why hyper-Calvinists argue so vehemently against what the New Testament means by 'justification by faith'. They think that actual justification takes place in eternity. As a consequence, if I may paraphrase, they are convinced that we should be talking in terms of 'justification of the predestined by God's decree'. *That*, according to the hyper-Calvinist, is the real justification, actual justification: 'Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification'. So said Gill – in a sermon, please note!<sup>6</sup> In a sermon, I stress – to a mixed congregation. What conclusion did that congregation draw? What conclusion have Gill's readers drawn since? 'Justification... by... believing, is not properly [actual] justification'? No! Of course not! that is, if you are a hyper-

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<sup>4</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 pp102-103.

<sup>5</sup> Gill: *Cause* p112; *Commentary* Vol.5 p654; *Sermons* Vol.4 p185.

<sup>6</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p211.

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Calvinist. Actual justification is from eternity; it took place in eternity past. Faith has nothing to do with it.

Hyper-Calvinists are certainly consistent in this. They do not tell their hearers that until they trust Christ they are not justified. They are implacably opposed to duty faith and the free offer. They never call upon anybody to flee to the Saviour for justification. In fact, in their Articles, books and sermons, they repeatedly denounce those who do so call upon sinners. There is only one conclusion: Faith is strictly unnecessary.

No! Let me stop being mealy-mouthed about it. Faith *is* unnecessary, full stop! This is where eternal justification ends up. Crisp: 'It is not believing that justifies... Christ justifies a person before he believes; for he that believes is justified before he believes'.<sup>7</sup>

Bear in mind, reader, however many byzantine<sup>8</sup> hairs theologians and metaphysicians may split and re-split, however pedantically they may vet their terminology, and whatever steps they may take to couch their words in every subsidiary clause, both conceivable and inconceivable, what really matters is what the people in the pew *think* they are being told. Who bothers with the small print? In any case, who can understand it? Perception! That's the word! It's what the people take away with them. And if they listen to hyper-Calvinistic preachers, if they read hyper-Calvinistic books and magazines, if they visit hyper-Calvinistic websites, they will inevitably come to the conclusion that faith is not necessary in order to be justified.

Something is seriously adrift here. This cannot be right. On this argument, there is never any need for anybody to trust Christ for justification. What is more, it surely follows, nobody will be condemned for their unbelief. I cannot see how these two conclusions can be avoided.<sup>9</sup> It is entirely a question of God's decree. Let me remind you what Gill declared: 'As I believe [that is, I am convinced], that eternal election is actual, and eternal

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<sup>7</sup> Crisp Vol.1 p91.

<sup>8</sup> In the sense of 'tortuous, highly complicated', from the culture of the Byzantine Empire.

<sup>9</sup> I repeat an earlier note. Crisp and Gill never faced up to this dilemma (Daniel pp327-328).

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reprobation is actual... so I believe [I am convinced], eternal justification is actual...'.<sup>10</sup> Faith, or the lack of it, does not come into it. As a contemporary hyper-Calvinist website has it: 'We must also understand that our believing or not believing does not make us condemned or not condemned. Our believing or not believing only gives evidence of our being condemned or not condemned'.<sup>11</sup>

What! Unbelief a mere evidence? How can this be – in light of the following biblical statements?

He who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16). He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed... He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:18,36). They did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Unbelief a mere *evidence* of condemnation? Far from it! Unbelief is the *cause* of condemnation!<sup>12</sup>

But there it is. According to hyper-Calvinists, there is never any need for anybody to trust Christ for justification. Similarly, nobody will be condemned for their unbelief. Unbelief is merely an evidence, a symptom of condemnation. It has no causal effect on it. Men are condemned because God has decreed it. He must have created them for this very purpose!

This is of such paramount importance, I really must try to tease it out. If 'the *whole essence* of justification' lies in God's will to justify his elect, then 'the whole essence of *justification*' lies in God's will to *justify* his elect. Further, that must mean that the whole essence of *condemnation* lies in his will to *condemn* the reprobate. And that, in turn, can only mean that every man, woman or child – every person – at birth is either already justified or

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<sup>10</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 pp102-103.

<sup>11</sup> Taken from Jim Casey: 'Condemnation', Article 949, posted Oct. 2010 at [www.rofgrace.com/articles](http://www.rofgrace.com/articles) website.

<sup>12</sup> Unbelief is the cause of damnation, but faith is not the cause of justification – that is the sovereign grace of God in his eternal decree. Logic-mongers may scoff at the seeming inconsistency. Let them! Let God's word stand, while logic-choppers fall.

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already condemned, and has been so since from before the creation of the world. Let that sink in. From all eternity, all men are actually justified or condemned, and this by the sovereign will of God.

Now, in God's decree, the fate of all men *is* fixed; in God's decree, I say. There is no quarrel with *that*. But we are talking about things as they are in experience. We must not confuse the secret things and the revealed things of God (Deut. 29:29). The key word is 'actual'. We are concerned here with *actual* justification and *actual* condemnation. According to the hyper-Calvinist, every person, at birth, is either already actually justified or already actually condemned, and has been so since from before the creation of the world. Believing does not come into it.

In other words, we have begun to descend into that dread realm, that grim domain called 'Fatalism', and, having passed through its gloomy portals, we must inevitably drop ever lower into its darkening depths. *Que sera, sera*. Abandon hope, all who enter here! If God has decreed to justify you, and that is the whole essence of justification, all you have to do is... nothing! You are actually justified now, at this very moment! You have always been actually justified. Trust in Christ doesn't come into it. Believing has no bearing whatsoever on your actual justification. The same, of course, goes for those of you who are condemned. If God has decreed to damn you, all you have to do is wait until the day of judgement, and then you will find out what everlasting damnation really means. Your unbelieving has no bearing whatsoever on your actual condemnation. You are actually condemned at this very moment, and have been so from eternity. In short, whoever you are, at this very moment, you are actually justified or actually condemned whether or not you believe. You have nothing to do but wait – wait until it is all made clear to you, either in a manifestation now, or in God's sentence at the day of judgement.

Phew! The result of all this must be either carnal indifference or unmitigated misery.

Not only so. What an utter nonsense it is! Let me illustrate. The day of my death was fixed in eternity in the sovereign will of God. As I write, I have lived 73 years. How much longer I have to live, I cannot possibly say. But it is determined. Now, if I were a fatalist, I would make no effort to preserve my life. But I am not a fatalist.

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God gave me a mind, and he gave me opportunities. I have to use both. He expects me to use both. I am accountable to him for my using both, or not using them. In a sense, God's secret timing is none of my business. It is unknowable, and, as a result, plays no part in my attitude to my responsibility to preserve my life. I am of Oliver Cromwell's way of thinking. I have to trust in God *and keep my powder dry*.<sup>13</sup>

Surely, the same applies to the gospel. Of course it does! I have no idea whether the unconverted hearing me, or reading my books, are elect or not. Nor do they! But I must do all I can to get them to believe. And those who hear and read me must make sure that they trust the Saviour. God's secret decree in this affair is none of our business – theirs or mine.

Hyper-Calvinistic fatalism is a nonsense for a further reason. Take those who are supposed to be actually condemned at this moment. We are talking about sinners still alive on earth, are we not? Living (in a natural sense) sinners, we hope(!), are the sort of people we are addressing from the pulpit, the sort of people who are reading our books, the sort of people whom we are engaging in conversation. Very well. They are alive. Now, no sinner, while on earth, is *actually* condemned in the sense of being in hell! He is alive, on earth! This simple stark fact makes a nonsense of the thing from beginning to end. No sinner out of hell is actually condemned.

But it is *justification* I am mainly concerned with here. And as for justification, on the basis of eternal justification, where does faith come into it? As we have seen, the New Testament is for ever talking about justification by faith (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20-31; 4:1-25; 5:1; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:8-14; 5:1-5; for instance). So what is this 'justification by faith'? What do hyper-Calvinists think it is?

Let Gill set out his stall. Although he could rightly say that 'faith is the hand which receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, and righteousness, by which the soul is justified, from the God of its salvation', he immediately added: 'This blessing must exist before faith can receive it'. At first glance, this is right,

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<sup>13</sup> "'Trust in God and keep your powder dry'" is a maxim attributed to Oliver Cromwell, but which first appeared in 1834 in the poem "Oliver's Advice" by William Blacker with the words: "Put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry!" (Wikipedia).

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needless to say. If God had not decreed to justify the elect, and if Christ had not died and risen again for their justification, there would be no justification for them to receive. Yes. That much is a truism.

But what did Gill mean? Remember that he taught that the elect are actually justified in eternity. Faith does not come into it. Gill explained himself: ‘Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification, but the manifestation of it... Faith is the sense, perception and evidence of our justification’.<sup>14</sup>

This merits closer examination. It demands it – it is so utterly foreign to Scripture. That is why I chose Acts 17:11 as the epigraph for this chapter. Let me look at the words ‘manifestation’ and ‘evidence’. I will take them in reverse order.

### ***A look at ‘evidence’ in Hebrews 11:1***

The advocates of eternal justification make much of Hebrews 11:1, especially the word ‘evidence’: ‘Faith is the... *evidence* of things not seen’. In particular, they allege, a sinner does not receive his justification by faith; rather, faith gives him the proof, the evidence that he was justified in eternity. In other words, faith follows justification. Is this right?<sup>15</sup>

Not at all. This is not a proper deduction from the text. The word means ‘conviction’ (NASB), ‘conviction by demonstration’, even ‘reproof’ (2 Tim. 3:16). ‘Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see’ (NIV). Faith brings truth to us, shows it to us, convinces us of it. So, for instance, by faith we are convinced that God created the universe (Heb. 11:3). By faith we are convinced of the resurrection of the dead. By faith we are convinced of the eternal glory to come. And so on. These things are revealed in Scripture, and by faith we receive within ourselves the evidence, the power, of them. But our believing is *not* an evidence or proof of creation itself, nor our creation in particular. Rather, by faith we are convinced of the fact of creation. We believe what we cannot ‘prove’.

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<sup>14</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp199,211,213; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp63,67. See also Gill’s note in *Crisp* Vol.1 pp91-92.

<sup>15</sup> As I have noted, hyper-Calvinists also argue that unbelief is an evidence of condemnation.

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Does the same apply to justification? Well, yes and no. Let me explain. God, in his word, has revealed that in eternity he has decreed the justification of his elect, and that at the appointed time, Christ accomplished it. Reading these things in Scripture, by faith we are convinced that it is so. But our faith is not the evidence that it is so! That evidence is to be found in God's word! By faith we receive the inner conviction that it is so, we are persuaded of it.

But this is not what the hyper-Calvinist is arguing. Far from it! He makes the issue personal. He is convinced that when an unbeliever comes to faith, his faith is the evidence to him that he has been eternally justified. Indeed, this is the very thing he believes for. He believes that he might receive the manifestation, the evidence, that he has always been right with God, even from eternity.

This is quite wrong. Faith is not an evidence of our justification. Saving faith *is* an evidence of our *election*, yes (1 Thess. 1:2-10), but not of our eternal justification. It couldn't be, for, while our actual election took place in eternity, our actual justification did not. Hebrews 11:1 could only be applied to the case if the unbeliever could read in Scripture that he, by name, had been elected, God justified him in eternity, and Christ died for him. Now he may scan the Bible as often as he likes, but he will never meet with such a personal statement. Never! Therefore no unbeliever is ever called upon to believe that he is justified.

There is another possibility: perhaps, at the appointed time, God makes a direct revelation to each of the elect that they are elect and eternally justified – and they then believe that direct revelation! Oh? Would somebody show me such a person in the Bible? *This* is not 'justification by faith'!

As for the believer – the one who has trusted Christ and received his righteousness as his (the believer's) actual justification, by the Spirit he can reason out the evidence that God has laid out in his word (1 Thess. 1:2-10, for example) in order to encourage himself that God eternally loved him, decreed his entire salvation, and all was accomplished for him in and through Christ. Yes, of course! But this is very different to the hyper-Calvinistic claim that justification by faith means the unbeliever, as he believes, gets the

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personal manifestation of his interest in these eternal secrets hidden in God (Deut. 29:29).

Truth to tell, I confess that I cannot sort out the chicken and the egg here. Does the hyper-Calvinist think that the unbeliever receives the manifestation of his election and so believes? Or does he believe in order to get that manifestation?<sup>16</sup>

### ***The hyper-Calvinistic notion of ‘manifestation’***

Here we come right up, smack, against the major consequence of the hyper-Calvinistic conviction that an elect sinner is actually justified irrespective of his believing. He is so, and has been so, from eternity, by the will of God. In such a system, consistency would mean that believing can only be a bonus, not an absolute necessity.<sup>17</sup> When a sinner believes, he receives a felt sense – a manifestation – of that which was already true; namely, that he is elect and has been actually justified from eternity. But this manifestation is only the icing on the cake. Precious icing, it is true, sweet icing, but icing all the same. The sinner is elect and justified whether or not he believes, whether or not he has any ‘manifestation’. This can only mean that an elect sinner will enjoy everlasting bliss whether or not he ever comes to saving faith! Faith is not necessary. For the hyper-Calvinist, an elect sinner is everlastingly justified whether or not he believes. If he does believe, he gets the manifestation of the fact – *but that is all*. When the sinner believes, according to Gill, he receives *the manifestation, the sense, knowledge, perception or evidence that he has been justified from eternity. And this is what he believes for*. According to Gill, it is not that upon believing the sinner is justified. Rather,

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, once a sinner has believed, he can have the assurance of his eternal election. But that is not the primary motive or reason for his believing. As I have argued in previous works, the unbeliever has nothing to do with believing in or not believing in his election. His concern is with trusting Christ. And that is the one great essential. A sinner who trusts Christ will be saved. He may have doubts about his election, but he is, nevertheless, saved. A sinner may be confident that he is elect, but unless he trusts Christ he will go to hell confident that he is elect.

<sup>17</sup> As I have indicated, the Case Study will show that the quarrel between the *Gospel Standard* and Septimus Sears centred on the question of whether the elect are safe or not *before they believe*.

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upon believing, he is awakened to the fact that he is already justified, and has been so from eternity. *This* is ‘justification by faith’.

Not at all! This must not be allowed to go unchallenged! The sinner does not believe in order to receive the manifestation, the assurance, that he has the righteousness of Christ independent of his believing, and has had it from eternity past. He believes in order to receive the righteousness of Christ, full stop! *This* is ‘justification by faith’. There is a world of difference between a sinner trusting Christ for the imputation of the Redeemer’s righteousness, and a sinner coming to realise that he has never been without it.

We must get to the root of this talk of ‘manifestation’. When I said that, according to the hyper-Calvinist, being justified by faith means receiving *the manifestation, the sense, knowledge, perception or evidence* that one has been justified from eternity, there is a word which nestles at the heart of all this, unstated. I am speaking of ‘revelation’. I know it is my word, but it is fair to use it. By ‘manifestation’, hyper-Calvinists really do mean ‘revelation’. After all, revelation has the idea of ‘disclosure of something previously hidden or secret, a striking disclosure, as of something not before realised’ – the very thing hyper-Calvinists mean by ‘manifestation’.

That being the case, may I ask how it differs, in principle, from Paul’s claim: ‘The gospel... I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the *revelation* of Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 1:11-12)? Again: ‘If indeed you have heard of the grace of God which was given to me... how that by *revelation* he made known to me the mystery... You may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ... as it has now been *revealed* by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets... To me... this grace was given’ (Eph. 3:2-8; see also 2 Cor. 12:1-7; Gal. 2:2). I fail to see the essential difference. In short, when they talk about a ‘manifestation’, hyper-Calvinists are, in effect, using apostolic language in terms of *revelation*. That, in itself, rules out their claim.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In the Case Study I will show, as I have already shown in my *Septimus*, the *Gospel Standard* falsely accuses free-offer preachers of claiming apostolic powers. Another case of glasshouses and stones.

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This must be explored a little further. ‘To manifest’ is a biblical phrase, needless to say. It often appears in the New Testament as the translation of one of two Greek words, *phaneroō* and *emphanizō*. So, seeing ‘manifest’ is a perfectly good biblical word, why am I making such a song and dance about it? Because of its meanings! ‘To manifest’ takes a spectrum of biblical meaning – ‘to make visible, make clear, make known, uncover, lay bare, reveal, make actual, bring to light, expose, show’.<sup>19</sup> Great care must be shown when using such a powerful word. As a word, it carries heavy overtones.

There are two issues to consider when thinking about hyper-Calvinistic talk of ‘manifestation’. *First*, there is the nature of the action – the act of manifesting. *Secondly*, there is the nature of that which is manifested.

Take the first – the nature of the act. God does ‘manifest’; that is to say, he does reveal (Rom. 3:21, AV; 16:26; Heb. 9:8; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 3:5; for instance). But there is a ‘manifestation’ which is by teaching and instruction (John 17:6; Col. 4:4; Tit. 1:3; for instance). There is yet another ‘manifestation’ in the sense of things being made clear (2 Thess. 1:5; 1 John 2:19; 3:10). And there is also a ‘manifestation’ by the direct impulse of the Spirit (John 14:21-22; see also Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10). Which of these are hyper-Calvinists using when they talk of ‘manifestation’?

As for the second issue – the nature of what is manifested – without intending the slightest disparagement, is this something which we might call ‘ordinary’ (1 Cor. 12:7; 2 Cor. 4:2), or is it ‘extraordinary’ (Rom. 16:25-26)?

While I do not want to over-complicate, neither do I want to be simplistic. I acknowledge that, in Scripture, these various meanings, both for the act of manifesting and the thing manifested, can be highly nuanced, or can overlap a great deal. So much so, it is often impossible to be clear-cut about precisely what is involved in any particular verse. There is a manifestation which is the norm – ‘every-day’, if I may use the term. It is exceedingly special, I hasten to add, but God uses ordinary means – reading, teaching, preaching, conversation, study, meditation – to convey to the believer truth

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<sup>19</sup> See Vine pp717-719; Thayer.

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and principles already revealed in Scripture. But there is an altogether higher kind of manifestation – independent of ordinary means – by which God directly reveals new truth, new principles to his church. On this latter, I am implacable. I firmly believe that this sort of manifestation ceased with the apostles. But, as for the former, I also believe, with John Robinson, that God has yet more light to break out of his word.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these two, we know that the Spirit conveys the truth into the heart of the believer – to manifest it in and to the believer.

Now when hyper-Calvinists talk of manifestation in connection with justification, they give me the impression – to put it no higher – they give me the distinct impression that they are looking for some special experience, some sort of revelation, some direct, inward communication from God in some special or remarkable way. And they are looking for a revelation of a truth about themselves as individuals, a truth hidden in God's secret decrees, a truth not revealed before, a truth which could not be discovered by reading Scripture and applying its principles to oneself, testing oneself against it. It goes further than the inner witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10).<sup>21</sup> It is an experience in which God, as it were, opens his book of hitherto secret decrees, and allows the individual concerned to read the entry against his name. The sensible sinner is afforded special access to the secret things of God insofar as they concern his personal justification. In other words, the hyper-Calvinistic 'manifestation' is mystical; it has the sense of a direct communication of God's secret decree to the individual. As has been said, and I have already quoted, it is nothing less than 'the manifestation of an eternal secret'.<sup>22</sup> And this is what they call 'justification by faith'.

The fact is, however, there is not an atom of Scripture to suggest that this is what the Bible means by 'justification by faith'. Nor is there a single scriptural example of any sinner (sensible or not)

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<sup>20</sup> His farewell address to those boarding the *Speedwell* at Delfthaven in 1620. The last two lines of each verse of George Rawson's 'We limit not the truth of God': 'The Lord hath yet more light and truth/ To break forth from his word' (*The Baptist Hymnal 1933*, number 200).

<sup>21</sup> Which, in any event, is a witness to the believer – not the unbeliever.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Seymour in Daniel p335.

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having this ‘manifestation’ experience. There is only one word for it, therefore: wrong! It is wrong. And as such, it is highly dangerous. Even though hyper-Calvinists appear to be using a biblical word, in truth they are actually *abusing* it.

Let me illustrate what I am trying to say. Take the word ‘revelation’ in Ephesians 1:17-18, where Paul prays that believers may be given ‘the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him’, ‘the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory’. I contend that this is ‘ordinary revelation’, in a totally different league to ‘apostolic revelation’. Paul is referring to the operation of the Holy Spirit, who takes the written word, especially in reference to Christ, and makes that word, makes Christ, feelingly known to the *believer*, and does so in an increasing way. The apostle is also speaking of the inner work of the Spirit in enlightening and enlivening the believer. But this is not at all the same as ‘apostolic revelation’; that is, the unveiling of new truth, unknown before. Nor, and this is my point, is it the same as the hyper-Calvinist’s claim of a ‘manifestation’, to the sensible sinner, still an unbeliever, of God’s secret decree to justify *him* as one of the elect; more, to confirm that he was actually justified in eternity.

Again, if anybody should try to justify the hyper-Calvinistic use of ‘manifestation’ by quoting: ‘The righteousness of God without the law is manifested’ (Rom. 3:21, AV), they would soon find they had bitten off more than they could chew. First of all, notice the NKJV rightly uses ‘revealed’. Revelation is precisely what the apostle is talking about here. But, in this verse, Paul is not speaking in terms of individual experience. The context proves it. The apostle’s use of ‘but now’ proves it. Paul is speaking about the momentous change of the ages with the ending of the epoch of the law and the beginning of the epoch of the gospel. And justification, ‘the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe’ (Rom. 3:21-22), is a principal part of this epochal change, this glorious revelation, this manifestation. What Paul is speaking about was, beyond all question, a ‘revelation’! But by no stretch of the imagination are we warranted to take this kind of biblical language concerning events at the watershed of the ages, and apply it to the personal experience of ‘justification by faith’.

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The fact is, with their talk of ‘manifestation’, hyper-Calvinists seriously muddle faith and assurance. Actual justification is not a question of assurance or feeling. As we saw right at the start, actual justification is a legal declaration by God that the sinner in question is righteous. The sinner receives that justification when he looks to Christ. *This* is the justification, and *this* is the faith, we are talking about. Once the sinner has trusted Christ for his justification, he then receives the assurance of it. There is no issue, needless to say, with that! A believer, once he has been actually justified in experience, knows, feels and enjoys the assurance of his justification. He certainly does! ‘Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:1). ‘In Christ Jesus our Lord... we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in him’ (Eph. 3:11-12). ‘In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence’ (Eph. 3:12, NIV). The believer receives the inward witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10), no less. *But that assurance is not the essence of justifying faith.* I am not nit-picking.

Hyper-Calvinists, however, think that assurance *is* the issue. For them, ‘justification by faith’ is the realisation in the sinner’s conscience that he has been actually justified all along, and been so from eternity. In other words, the sinner believes in order to get the assurance of his eternal justification, not to receive the justification itself. Hyper-Calvinists will not have it that *actual* justification follows faith. Strange, then, that so many of them are prepared to sing Isaac Watts’ hymn:

*Jesus, how glorious is thy grace!  
When in thy name we trust,  
Our faith receives a righteousness  
That makes the sinner just.*<sup>23</sup>

Strange, too, that they can sing Joseph Hart’s hymn:

*The sinner that truly believes,  
And trusts in his crucified God,  
His justification receives,  
Redemption in full through his blood.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Gadsby’s Hymns* number 111.

## *What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?*

Take note of the words. The sinner's 'faith receives a righteousness that makes [him] just'; the sinner that believes, 'his justification [he] receives'. These hymn writers were talking, as they should, about the sinner's actual justification, *not* the sense or manifestation of his justification. When a sinner believes, he is justified. He receives the righteousness of Christ. And not before. He does not get the assurance that he was justified in eternity.

Let me look more closely at this hyper-Calvinistic confusion of justification, assurance and saving faith.

### ***The confusion of justification, assurance and saving faith***

Gill: 'I assert that there is no knowledge of justification, no comfort from it, nor any claim of interest in it, until a man believes'.<sup>25</sup> Excellent. But let us remind ourselves of some other words from Gill, words which we have already met:

The reason why [the elect] have faith is because they are justified.<sup>26</sup> Faith is not the cause, but the fruit and effect of justification. The reason why we are justified, is not because we have faith; but the reason why we have faith is because we are justified... Justification, which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification, but the manifestation of it... Faith is the sense, perception and evidence of our justification.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, a negative. Gill did *not* say that until a man believes, he is not actually justified. He did not say it, because he did not believe it. What he did believe was that the elect are actually justified in eternity, and this leads to faith at God's appointed time.

What can we make of Gill's link between justification, faith and comfort? He got it wrong! Note the order, for a start! A sinner does not believe because he is justified and wants to get the comfort or assurance of it. Not at all! The biblical position is that a sinner believes because he has come to know he is a sinner and needs to be saved. And underneath it all, and all unknown to him, the sinner believes because God has elected him and drawn him to Christ in

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<sup>24</sup> *Gadsby's Hymns* number 233; see also number 764.

<sup>25</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 p155; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp50,104,106.

<sup>26</sup> Gill: *Body* Vol.1 p299.

<sup>27</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp197,199,211,213; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp63,67. See also Gill's note in *Crisp* Vol.1 pp91-92.

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order that he might trust the Saviour and so be justified. Comfort and assurance follow the sinner's believing and his being justified.

For the hyper-Calvinist, however, justifying faith is not – as the Scriptures teach – a sinner coming to rest his soul upon Christ, and receiving the imputation of Christ's righteousness to make him right with God. No! It is the assurance, the confirmation, the revelation, the manifestation, conveyed to the sinner's mind and heart, that God has elected him and justified him in Christ from eternity. Ella explained: 'To Gill, faith declares to the believer that Christ has died in particular, for him'; 'that there is a justifying righteousness in Christ *for him*'.<sup>28</sup>

At first glance, this (apart from the note about faith speaking) is perfectly correct. God – not faith! – does assure the believer that he is elect, that Christ died for him, and so on – Galatians 2:20, for instance. Yes. *But there is a very serious misunderstanding or misapplication of Scripture here. We are talking about unbelievers coming to faith – not believers looking for assurance.* Assurance of personal election and particular redemption is not the unbeliever's concern – nor can he know that he is elect and that Christ died for him in particular – until he himself repents and trusts Christ for salvation.

Nevertheless, Gill thought the sinner's justification under gospel preaching to be 'the declarative sentence of it upon the conscience, by the Spirit of God, and received by faith'.<sup>29</sup> Again:

The justification here [Tit. 3:7] spoken of is a declarative one, which takes place in regeneration... Regeneration does not justify any, but makes the justified to appear to be such... and this is declared in the conscience of a sinner, by the Spirit of God, at his regeneration, when he passes from death to life; and this declaration is here intended, and which is the same [as] with justification by faith.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ella: *Gill and Justification* p109, emphasis his; Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p223.

<sup>29</sup> Ella: *Gill and Justification* p103.

<sup>30</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p671. By the way, the sensible sinner is supposed to be regenerate. So why is any sensible sinner waiting for the manifestation of his justification? According to Gill, he got it, 'declared in [his] conscience... at his regeneration'!

### *What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?*

Gill was wrong. Do not miss his substitution of ‘regeneration’ for ‘faith’. Let me repeat my earlier comments on the passage: ‘Justification follows regeneration. Justification follows faith, of course, but that is not the issue Paul is dealing with here – although, within the same breath, he moves on to it: “Those who have believed in God” (Tit. 3:8). The fact is, until he is regenerated and brought to faith in Christ, the elect sinner is unjustified. This is what Paul says’. As far as I can see, the Bible always talks about justification by faith; never by regeneration. Regeneration precedes faith, needless to say. I and the hyper-Calvinist agree about *that*. But justification is by faith, not by regeneration.

Again, notice Gill’s ‘regeneration does not justify any, but makes the justified to *appear* to be such’. Echoes of his ‘as if’ when commenting on 1 Corinthians 6:11, I think.

What is more, Gill was quite wrong to claim that justification by faith is the declaration to the sinner’s conscience that he was justified in eternity. Certainly not! Rather, when a sinner is regenerated and trusts Christ, he then is actually justified, actually accounted righteous by God. This is what ‘justification by faith’ is.

When linking faith and justification, according to Ella, Gill taught that:

Faith is... a prerequisite of justification in that it gives us a knowledge of justification and the comforts of justification... No man is evidently and declaratively justified until he believes. In other words, faith receives the blessing of justification and the enjoyment of it.<sup>31</sup>

But this is not saving faith; this is not what the New Testament means by ‘justification by faith’. I am not for a moment denying the Spirit’s bearing witness with the believer’s spirit, granting him assurance (Rom. 8:9-16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 5:10), but this is the Spirit’s witness with the spirit of one *who has already trusted the Saviour for his salvation*, and is, therefore, justified; *it is not saving faith*. But *that* – saving or justifying faith – is what we are supposed to be talking about. And as for saving faith, Paul dealt with *that* matter – the trusting of Christ – long before Romans 8:14! See Romans 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 5:1-11; 8:1. The same goes for Galatians 4:6 and 1 John 5:10. It was to believers, and only believers, that the

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<sup>31</sup> Ella: *Gill and Justification* p104.

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apostles wrote concerning the effects of saving faith, including assurance and comfort.

When a sinner trusts Christ, he does not do so in order to receive the persuasion in his conscience that he is justified. He trusts Christ in order to receive the imputed righteousness of Christ and so *be* justified. In the first instance, it is not a question of feelings. It is a matter of *fact* – God constitutes and declares the believing sinner righteous. Feelings, comfort and assurance accompany and follow, certainly, but only to the sinner after he has trusted Christ in order to be justified.

Let me stress this. I am not for a moment suggesting that feelings do not come into it. I am no Sandemanian. But feelings are not the primary issue at the point of a sinner's actual justification. Feelings accompany and follow saving faith, yes. But they are not the essence of saving faith. I have already quoted Edward Mote:

*My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

I take 'frame' here to mean 'feeling, frame of mind'; for my justification, I dare not trust the sweetest feeling. So, I am convinced, wrote the hymn writer. Hyper-Calvinists sing it.<sup>32</sup> And yet, all the time, their preachers and writers are encouraging them to wait for a manifestation! What is that – if not a feeling? Do they not seek a manifestation – and then trust in it?

The point is, Mote was catching hold of something absolutely vital. However the word is understood, it is altogether too possible to look for feelings (or something else) rather than look to Christ. This mistake is fatal. *I dare not trust* the sweetest feeling (or anything else). Note the 'dare not'. I would not be misunderstood. As I have shown, after a sinner believes and repents, upon his repentant faith, as a direct consequence of his saving faith, he is given the assurance of such things, and therefore enjoys the comfort of them. But hyper-Calvinists claim that this assurance is the

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<sup>32</sup> *Gadsby's Hymns* number 1106. If, however, such people say they are not dismissing 'feeling', but are thinking of something else, does that mean they do rely on 'feeling' after all?

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essence of saving faith, that unconverted sinners *believe for* these things. Indeed, that it is only *after* they have such assurance that they actually trust Christ. But, as Mote so rightly said, true hope comes from resting on Christ and his work, and nothing else.

To illustrate what this hyper-Calvinism leads to, consider the changes that will have to be introduced into the following:

Whoever believes in [Christ] should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life... He who believes in him is not condemned... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life (John 3:15-18,36). He who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life ... You are not willing to come to me that you may have life (John 5:24,40). Believe in the light that you may become sons of light (John 12:36). Repent... if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you (Acts 8:22). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

If the hyper-Calvinists are right, that paragraph will have to be understood as saying:

Whoever believes in [Christ] should not perish (*of which, in any case, there was never any danger, for he never was under the wrath of God*) but *come to realise that he has always had* eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should *be given the assurance that from eternity he has been delivered from perishing* but **[this vital word is now superfluous]** *having come to realise that from eternity they have had* everlasting life... He who believes in him *comes to the realisation that he has never been under condemnation...* He who believes in the Son *comes to the assurance that from eternity he has had* everlasting life... He who hears my word and believes in him who sent me *comes to realise that from eternity he has had* everlasting life... You are not willing to come to me that you may have *the assurance that from eternity you have had* life... Believe in the light that you may *come to realise that you are* sons of light... Repent... if perhaps *you may have the assurance that from eternity* the thought of your heart *has been forgiven* you... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will *come to realise that you, from all eternity, have been* saved.

Poppycock! So, although Gill could rightly say of the sinner coming to faith: 'And therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification', note

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the opening ‘and therefore’. This little phrase holds within it a qualification which ruins all. Let me quote more fully:

That faith by which a man is said to be justified, is not a mere assurance of the object, or a bare persuasion that there is a justifying righteousness in Christ; but that there is a justifying righteousness in Christ for him; *and therefore* he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification.

Note it well, reader. According to Gill, the unbeliever receives far more than the assurance that Christ can justify – he receives the assurance that Christ has justified him in particular. And this before believing! Indeed, this is Gill’s very point, is it not? It is *because* the unbeliever has received that assurance that he *then* believes! Let me return to Ella’s clarification of Gill’s view: ‘To Gill, faith declares to the believer that Christ has died in particular for him; *and therefore* he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification’.<sup>33</sup>

What a tangled skein! Let me try to unravel it. What I say about Gill applies, obviously, to Ella who quoted him and told us what Gill meant.

In the first place, while I do not want to fault a man for a word, words do matter. Taking Ella strictly at his word – and Ella, down the years, has been nothing if not precise – let me highlight an immediate confusion. Ella said that ‘to Gill, faith declares<sup>34</sup> to *the believer* that Christ has died in particular for him; and therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification’. According to Ella, therefore, Gill was talking about a believer. But I thought we were supposed to be talking about *an unconverted sinner, an unbeliever*. Gill most definitely was. What is more, if Ella *was* being precise, he claimed that Gill was arguing that faith speaks to this believer, assuring him that Christ died in particular for him, and as a result, this believer,

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<sup>33</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p223; Ella: *Gill and Justification* p109, emphasis Ella’s.

<sup>34</sup> As before, I find this a very odd way of putting it, but I let it stand. There may be more to it than meets the eye, however. Faith, as the hand that receives (Crisp Vol.1 p91; Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p996; *Sermons* Vol.4 p199), has morphed into the voice which authoritatively declares.

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now assured that Christ died for him in particular, believes and trusts Christ's righteousness for justification – 'and therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification'. In other words, the believer, *having been* persuaded that he is elect and that Christ died for him in particular, *then* trusts Christ for the righteousness required to justify him.

I am baffled. When is a believer not a believer? Is it possible for a believer to have the God-given assurance that Christ died for him – that he is elect – and yet not have trusted Christ? What is more, if he is a believer, does that not mean he must have trusted Christ? Isn't that what the Bible means by saving faith?

So let us proceed on the basis that Ella was not being meticulous. In other words, let us assume that what he *meant* to tell us was that 'to Gill, faith declares to *the unbelieving sinner* that Christ has died in particular for him; and therefore he looks unto, leans, relies and depends on, and pleads this righteousness for his justification'. That is what Gill did mean, as he himself made clear. Proceeding on this basis, then, according to Ella, Gill thought that the *unbeliever, the sinner*, having been persuaded that he is elect and that Christ died for him in particular, then trusts Christ for the righteousness required to justify him. This has the merit of being rational and pertinent. After all, we are supposed to be talking about unbelievers coming to faith. Gill certainly was.

Even so, Gill was inconsistent – or contradicted himself. If not, he certainly confused me. With his view, he should have said that the sinner comes to believe that he has been justified from eternity. But he didn't. Again, why should this sinner plead Christ's righteousness for justification when, according to Gill, he is already actually justified – in eternity? And what of the claim that once a sinner is persuaded that Christ died for him in particular, he then believes? This is unbiblical. For, as Gill rightly said elsewhere: 'The doctrine of particular redemption ascertains the salvation of some, and all that believe in Christ have reason to conclude their interest in it, every blessing of grace here, and eternal life

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hereafter';<sup>35</sup> in other words, the persuasion of particular redemption follows faith. Quite right too! This *is* biblical.

So, putting Gill's statements together, it is not just a case of chicken and egg, is it? As before, I cannot work out which is the chicken and which is the egg. Is the faith the egg or the chicken? Which came first? The faith or the justification? The believing or the assurance of election – which, for Gill, precedes the other, and which leads to the other? What *was* his view? Gill was totally out of order to say that a sinner comes to the assurance and persuasion that he is elect and Christ died for him – and *then* believes! Nobody can produce such a case in Scripture or experience. It is impossible. It is not only an impossibility – to know that we are elect before we believe – it is quite misguided to want to know it. As David Clarkson said: It is 'impertinent to trouble yourself about this'.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, it is wrong to make an unbeliever think of it. In Scripture, saving faith leads to justification which leads to assurance.

Augustus Toplady, therefore, was badly mistaken to say:

*How happy are we  
Our election who see,  
**And venture**, O Lord,  
For salvation on thee!*<sup>37</sup>

Where in Scripture, do we come across such a sinner? Rather, he should have written:

*How happy are we  
Our election who see,  
**Having ventured**, O Lord,  
For salvation on thee!*

So what did Gill make of: 'The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and upon all who believe... [God is]... the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:22,26)? What did he make of: 'Having been justified by faith' (Rom. 5:1)? What did he make of: 'We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the

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<sup>35</sup> Gill: *Cause* p172.

<sup>36</sup> Clarkson: *Of Faith* pp98,127-128. See my *Offer; Particular; Septimus*.

<sup>37</sup> *Gadsby's Hymns* number 68; *Gospel Hymns* number 454.

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Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ' (Gal. 2:15-16)? Just this:

Faith is... a<sup>38</sup> means of our knowledge, and perception of our justification by Christ's righteousness, and our enjoying the comfort of it... Faith is... a means of receiving and apprehending Christ's righteousness; the discovery of it is made to<sup>39</sup> faith; that grace [that is, faith] discerns the excellency and suitableness of it... lays hold on this...<sup>40</sup> These Jews did not believe in Christ, in order that by their believing to procure [that is, they might procure] their justification before God, and acceptance with him, but that they might receive, by faith, this blessing from the Lord in their own conscience, and enjoy the comfort of it.<sup>41</sup>

Take that last. Referring to Galatians 2:15-16, Gill: 'These Jews did not believe in Christ, in order that by their believing [they might] procure their justification before God'? Really? To my mind, *that* is precisely why they did believe! They believed in order 'to procure their justification before God, and acceptance with him'.<sup>42</sup> Let me remind you of the apostle's actual words: 'We who are Jews by nature... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ' (Gal. 2:15-16); 'that we might be' – please note – 'we have believed in Christ Jesus' in order to 'be justified by faith in Christ'.

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<sup>38</sup> I really cannot understand 'a' here, and later in the extract. Shouldn't it be 'the'?

<sup>39</sup> Do not miss the 'to'. This is a very important give-away. I think Rom. 1:17 is the only place in Scripture where it is used – and I doubt very much that Rom. 1:17 is speaking as Gill. Justification is obtained by faith; it is not revealed to faith. The former is biblical; the latter is hyper-Calvinistic.

<sup>40</sup> Notice Gill was once again contradicting himself here. To be consistent with himself, he should have said faith is the means of having a manifestation in the conscience of one's eternal justification. He did not. He rightly said that by faith a sinner lays hold of Christ's righteousness! If he had kept to that, he would never have promulgated eternal justification.

<sup>41</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 pp21-23,30,374.

<sup>42</sup> Procure, obtain, secure, get hold of, get.

Gill was making the same mistake as he did before. ‘Justification by faith’, according to Gill, means the sinner coming to the perception of his justification from eternity. Ella explained that Gill thought this to be ‘faith awakening in the believer, so that he knows he now stands guiltless before God and trusts in the Saviour who has made this possible’.<sup>43</sup> Here, once again, we have the hyper-Calvinistic view. That is, when the sinner exercises saving faith, he does so in order to come to an assurance that he is guiltless – an assurance that he has been elected and actually justified from eternity. And this, according to the hyper-Calvinist, is the essence of justifying faith. Once he has that assurance, then, and then only, does he trust in Christ. But, I say again, this is wrong, quite wrong. It is also muddled, as so often with hyper-Calvinism. According to the hyper-Calvinist, does the sinner exercise justifying faith because he *knows* he is elect? or in order to *become assured* that he is elect? Talk about carts and horses. In any case, *this is not justifying faith*.

Despite this, according to Gill, the sinner, coming to faith, receives the assurance and *comfort* of his justification. This constitutes being justified by faith. Let me return to those extracts from Gill, and emphasise the word in question. First, let Ella summarise Gill’s position: ‘Faith is... a prerequisite of justification in that it gives us a knowledge of justification and the *comforts* of justification’.<sup>44</sup> Now Gill’s actual words:

I assert that there is no knowledge of justification, no *comfort* from it, nor any claim of interest in it, until a man believes.<sup>45</sup> Faith is... a<sup>46</sup> means of our knowledge, and perception of our justification by Christ’s righteousness, and our enjoying the *comfort* of it... These Jews... [believed] in Christ... that they might receive, by faith, this blessing [of justification]... in their own conscience, and enjoy the *comfort* of it.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp104-105. Note the weakening of the biblical position with Ella’s ‘possible’. Here we have a hyper-Calvinist adopting Amyraldian views. See my *Particular*.

<sup>44</sup> Ella: *Gill and Justification* p104, emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> Gill: *Sermons* Vol.6 p155; Ella: *Gill and Justification* pp50,104,106, emphasis mine.

<sup>46</sup> As before, ‘the’ is surely better.

<sup>47</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 pp30,374, emphasis mine.

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And again:

And those that believe in Christ with the heart unto righteousness, are openly and manifestly justified in their own consciences, and can claim their interest in it, and have the *comfort* of it, as well as they were before secretly justified in the mind of God, and in their head and representative Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup>

According to Gill, ‘justification by faith’ means getting the comfort, the assurance of one’s eternal justification. Yet Paul put it precisely the other way round: ‘Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God’ (Rom. 5:1). That is: ‘Having been justified by faith’ – by experience through faith, not by God’s decree in eternity – ‘having been [actually] justified by faith, [then] we have peace with God’ (Rom. 5:1). That is, it is only *after* faith that a sinner is justified and only *then* he has peace with God; before he comes to faith, he is not justified, the wrath of God is upon him, and he has no peace with God – as we saw when looking at Ephesians 2:3. Calvin certainly knew a sinner’s comfort arises out of, and after, his justification by faith: ‘Miserable souls... are rendered quiet and tranquil, *when* [they] have obtained the righteousness by faith’.<sup>49</sup> Until they believe, sinners have no comfort and peace. The reason is plain: until they believe, they are not justified. There is no such thing as eternal justification, as defined by the hyper-Calvinist.

### ***Applying the principle across the scriptural board***

The hyper-Calvinistic principle at stake cannot be limited to justification. As we have seen, Bavinck hit the nail on the head: ‘If one speaks of justification as eternal, he should consistently also speak of creation, incarnation, sacrifice, calling and regeneration as eternal’.<sup>50</sup> That is to say, if justification is eternal, and ‘justification by faith’ means that I receive the manifestation that I was actually justified in eternity, and have been justified all along, then the same

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<sup>48</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p905, emphasis mine.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 p187, emphasis mine. The hyper-Calvinist must say that souls are rendered tranquil when they get the manifestation that they have always been justified.

<sup>50</sup> See Berkouwer p147.

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sort of thing must be said right across the board. Philip Doddridge rightly pointed out the same about ‘glorification’.<sup>51</sup>

Let’s try it. Think about pardon, the forgiveness of sins, for instance. What is exactly taking place when a sinner comes to saving faith? What is he believing for? And whom – or what – is he believing? We have to face up to these questions and come to a decision on them. Eternal consequences hang on the answers. Is there any doubt that the Bible surely teaches that it is as a sinner trusts Christ for forgiveness that he is actually forgiven? It is not that he gets a manifestation that he has been always forgiven, even from eternity past. Upon believing, we ‘receive forgiveness of sins’ (Acts 26:18). When we ‘confess our sins’, God forgives us (1 John 1:9).

Let me explore and expose the hyper-Calvinistic position on this. I begin with Gill’s comments on Acts 26:18:

Forgiveness of sins [is] an act of God’s free grace, through the blood of Christ, which was shed for it; and which free and full forgiveness is published in the gospel, that whoever believes in Christ may, by faith, receive it... It is a gift of God, which is received by the hand of faith into the conscience of the enlightened sinner; the consequences of which are peace, joy and comfort.<sup>52</sup>

While there is much that is excellent here, I note the emphasis upon ‘conscience’ and ‘comfort’. The fact is, however, as Gill himself stated, when the sinner believes, he receives forgiveness. Yes, conscience and peace and joy and comfort all come into it. But the point is, until a sinner believes he is unforgiven. It is only as he believes that he is forgiven. ‘Peace, joy and comfort’ are the consequences of forgiveness. The same goes for justification.

What of the apostle’s declaration: ‘You, being dead in your trespasses... he has made alive together with [Christ]’ (Col. 2:13)? Gill said these words:

May be interpreted of the quickening of them in justification... and that either openly, as when a sinner is convinced that he is dead in a law-sense, and faith is wrought in him to behold pardon and righteousness in Christ; upon which he prays for the one, and pleads the other...

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<sup>51</sup> Clifford p144.

<sup>52</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p996.

### *What Is the Hyper-Calvinistic View of Justifying Faith?*

I pause here. I am afraid I have to confess myself utterly at a loss as to what Gill meant by his ‘quickenings of them in justification’.<sup>53</sup> Passing over that – as I fear I must – when Gill said the sinner is enabled ‘to behold pardon and righteousness in Christ’, did he mean that the sinner beholds – sees, understands – that *he himself* is pardoned and justified? If so, why should he then pray for pardon and justification? Or did Gill mean that the sinner sees the *possibility* of pardon and justification and so prays for them?<sup>54</sup> I ask, therefore, what, precisely, *did* Gill mean? I am pretty sure he meant that when the sinner comes to realise he is actually pardoned and justified in Christ, that this encourages and confirms him to pray for pardon and plead his righteousness.

If so, for all their love of, and demand for, absolute logical consistency and water-tight argument, it is simply staggering how illogical hyper-Calvinists can be at times. Note the inbuilt hyper-Calvinistic contradiction. The sinner, coming to faith, is assured he was pardoned and justified in eternity. He then prays for pardon – supposedly, not for the sense or assurance of it, mark you – he prays for pardon. On the other hand, he pleads his righteousness in Christ. Would – could – some hyper-Calvinist sort out this view of assurance, justification and faith for me? Consistency – the Bible, indeed – demands that the sinner should pray for both – pardon and justification – and, then, having been pardoned and justified, come to realise that both were earned for him personally on the cross and decreed for him personally in eternity. According to Gill, as far as I can grasp his meaning, a pardoned and righteous (in Christ) sinner, assured of his pardon and justification, then prays for pardon, pleading the fact that he is righteous. But if he is righteous in Christ, he must already be pardoned. He can’t be the one without having the other, surely?

Nevertheless, let Gill continue:

The Spirit of God seals unto him the pardon of his sins, brings near the righteousness of Christ, and pronounces him justified by it; and [this] may well be called justification of life, for he is then alive in a law-sense, in his own comfortable view and apprehension of things.

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<sup>53</sup> Or was he, as before, conflating justification and election?

<sup>54</sup> If so, he was taking the Amyraldian (if not the Arminian) line here. See my *Particular*.

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If this is not the right exposition, said Gill, then perhaps Paul was speaking of that which was done:

Secretly in Christ, as the head and representative of his people; who when he was quickened, they were quickened with him; when he rose from the dead, they rose with him; and when he was justified, they were justified in him; and this seems to be the true sense of the passage: 'having forgiven you all trespasses'. This was a past act, being done and over; not only when a discovery of it was made, but at the death of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

Let me unpack this. Gill was saying that the sinner's coming to faith is the discovery that he is already pardoned and already justified, having been so from eternity, and on the cross and in the resurrection of Christ. This is what 'justification by faith' means. It is a 'discovery', a 'manifestation', an unveiling of an entry in God's secret book of eternal decrees, to enable this particular sinner to read the record, against his name, of the fact that, since eternity past, he has been eternally justified.

How wrong can one be? This is not the biblical position at all. Far from it. According to Scripture, when the sinner comes to faith, he looks to God in Christ. He believes, trusts Christ for pardon and justification, and – upon his believing – the sinner receives his pardon and justification. Then, and only then, can the sinner discover or realise or be assured that he is elect and was pardoned and justified by God's decree in eternity, and on the cross and in the resurrection of Christ. As Gill himself said, Paul told the jailer (Acts 16:31) 'to look unto [Christ] alone for life and salvation, to rely upon him, and trust in him; to commit himself, and the care of his immortal soul unto him, to expect peace, pardon, righteousness and eternal life from him'.<sup>56</sup> Quite. He did not tell him to believe *that he was actually pardoned in eternity*. So much for pardon. And what applies to pardon, applies to justification.

Now for the gift of the Spirit. How does the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine play out in this matter? The gift of the Spirit was decreed by God in eternity, surely? It was also merited for the elect by

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<sup>55</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p522; see also, for instance, *Commentary* Vol.5 pp597,620-621,626,645,721.

<sup>56</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p930; see also pp620,649,861.

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Christ on the cross, surely? But when do the elect *actually* receive the Spirit? Paul's rhetorical question makes it clear: 'Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' (Gal. 3:2). The elect receive the gift of the Spirit at the point of believing. In saying this, I am being deliberately 'vague'. I have no intention of exploring the impenetrable; that is to say, I am not going to try to sort out all that happens as the sovereign Spirit secretly brings a sinner from regeneration to faith.<sup>57</sup> The general point is clear. It is as the sinner believes that he receives the Spirit. Gill thought so: 'While the gospel is preaching [the Spirit] falls on them that hear it, conveys himself into their hearts and begets them again by the word of truth'.<sup>58</sup> Precisely. Before they savingly hear the gospel, the elect do not have the Spirit; but as they effectively hear the gospel, they receive the Spirit. The point is, *they do not receive the assurance that they were given the Spirit in eternity*. In fact, it surely goes without saying, they did not receive the Spirit in eternity! What applies to the gift of the Spirit in this regard, applies to justification.

The same goes for: 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:10). The elect do not produce the 'good works' until they have believed (Eph. 2:8-10), even though they were 'created in Christ' for those works, this having been decreed in eternity past. Until they believe, they cannot produce good works – even though, in eternity, God has decreed that, in time, they will.

When does a sinner become a child of God? This question, please note, is not to be confused with another: When is a sinner elected? The elect sinner is elected in eternity. My question is: When does that elect sinner become an actual child of God? We can ask other,

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<sup>57</sup> Then again, with regard to the question in hand, it does not matter precisely what is meant by the gift of the Spirit in Gal. 3:2. The believer receives the Spirit. Paul was speaking to believers about either the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, or the effects and fruits of saving faith (assurance, sealing, and so on). I think the latter. See Brown pp109-110; Dunn pp152-155.

<sup>58</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p378.

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related, questions: When does an elect sinner become a son of God? When does he receive his adoption as a son? Is he a child of God, an adopted son of God, from eternity? Was he born into this world a child, a son of God? Of course not! No! As with all men, he was born into this world in Adam, with all that that entails (John 8:31-55; Rom. 5:12-19; Eph. 2:1-3; 5:6,8). We know that God has children, sons and daughters (John 1:12-13; 13:33; 21:5; Rom. 8:14-15; 2 Cor. 6:18). And we further know that, in his decree, from eternity, he predestined his elect to be his children, adopted sons of God (John 6:37,39; 17:2,6,24; Eph. 1:3-6; Heb. 2:10,13). What is more, God not only predestined it, at God's appointed time, Christ came into the world to do all that was necessary to bring it about (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:3-7). But none of the elect are actual children of God, adopted sons of God, either from eternity or at the cross.

It is as a sinner believes that he becomes a child of God, an adopted son of God (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:26), and not before. In fact, the elect will not receive their full and final adoption until the last day (Rom. 8:23; Heb. 3:14). But, for my purposes, an elect sinner becomes a child of God, becomes an adopted son of God, upon his believing. Let me stress this. It is when he *believes* that he becomes an actual child of God, a son of God (John 1:12-13), not when he is given the revelation that he is elect and was made an actual son of God in eternity. It is not that, having been assured that he has been a son of God from eternity, he then believes, and receives the comfort of it.

Not so Gill: 'Though the elect of God... are the children of God before faith... yet no man can know his adoption, nor enjoy the comfort of it, or claim his interest in it, until he believes'.<sup>59</sup> That is, according to Gill, before they come to faith, the elect are God's *actual* children, *actually* adopted, and so on. When they come to faith, they come into the assurance and comfort of it. This, according to Gill, is what 'coming to Christ' means. Note Gill's emphasis upon 'comfort'. The sinner, according to Gill, coming to faith, receives the assurance and *comfort* of his adoption. This is a

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<sup>59</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p597.

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bad mistake. Until he believes, he is not actually a son of God at all!

The fact is, Gill was unclear on ‘the children of God’ (John 11:52): ‘By which may be meant, not only the elect of God among the Jews, who were scattered amidst the nations of the world, for whom Christ died... but rather the elect of God among the Gentiles... because they were the children of God by special adoption, in divine predestination, and in the covenant of grace; and were so considered, when given to Christ, who looked upon them as in this relation, when he assumed their nature, and died in their room and stead; and not merely because they would hereafter appear to be the children of God in regeneration, and by faith in Christ Jesus, and have the witnessings of the Spirit that they were so’.<sup>60</sup> This could be interpreted as *actual* (which is wrong) or *decreed* (which is right) children of God in eternity. Calvin was much better: ‘It is therefore by election that he *reckons* as the children of God, even before they are called, those who at length begin to be manifested by faith both to themselves and to others’.<sup>61</sup>

Scripture distinguishes between the children of God and the children of the devil, the children of the world (Matt. 13:38; Luke 16:8; John 8:31-55; Eph. 2:1-3; 5:6,8; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 John 3:8-10). This distinction, however, is not between those who were eternally decreed to be the children of God, and those who were eternally decreed to be children of the devil. As I have shown, until a sinner is converted, he is in Adam. He looks like, he acts like, he is, a child of the devil. It is only as he believes that he becomes an actual child of God. The distinction is between believers and unbelievers.

Think of repentance. Take those of whom it is said: ‘If God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will’ (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Gill was clear. God has his elect among such, and ‘though [it] is not certain [that is, we cannot know] that God will give repentance to such [that is, to any in particular]... yet as it is his will that all his chosen ones should [will] come to repentance... and

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<sup>60</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p713.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.17 p455, emphasis mine.

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seeing these things have been brought about under and by the ministry of the word, it is an encouragement to the ministers of the gospel to continue their instructions in the manner here directed'.<sup>62</sup> Excellent! As Gill here recognised, the elect before conversion, as much as the non-elect, are taken captive by Satan. At conversion, the elect escape the devil's snare, and repent. The non-elect never do. The same goes for justification. Before faith, the elect – in common with all men – are unjustified.

Take deliverance. We know that 'the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one' (1 John 5:19), 'the ruler of this world' (John 12:31) – and until they are converted, that includes the elect. Until they are converted and thus delivered 'from this present evil age' (Gal. 1:4), they are as much members of this present age, under the devil, as any reprobate. It is only at conversion that the elect are translated out of this realm of this present age. As for deliverance, so for justification.

Take 1 Peter 1:9. What is the 'end' or 'goal' of a believer's faith? Salvation. As Alexander Nisbet said: 'While [when, even as] believers do close with Christ offered in the gospel, they do thereby receive in the arms of their faith an undoubted right to, and some<sup>63</sup> begun possession of, eternal salvation, which is here called the end of their faith'.<sup>64</sup> This, of course, is the cause and source of the believer's joy spoken of in the verse – but, even so, the believer, upon his believing, receives salvation – salvation itself, not a manifestation that he always has been saved, even from eternity past. It is only as a consequence of receiving this salvation that he then receives the joy and comfort of it. But until he believes he is not saved, and has no joy or comfort. The joy and comfort come from the actual experience of salvation – not directly from God's decree to save, nor from an unbeliever's persuasion that God has decreed his salvation, and Christ has accomplished it. The same applies to justification.

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<sup>62</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p637.

<sup>63</sup> Full salvation must await the eternal state, of course.

<sup>64</sup> Nisbet p26.

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When does Christ begin to live in the elect (Gal. 2:20)? When they believe, and not before (Gal. 2:16-20). When do they pass from darkness to light, from death to life (Col. 1:13; 1 John 3:14)? When they are regenerated and brought to faith, and not before (Col. 1:4-8; 1 John 3:23 – really, the entire letter). When is a sinner free of condemnation? When he believes (John 3:18), and not before; that is, when he is ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 8:1). Moreover, it is when he believes, not when he is given the revelation, the manifestation, that he is elect and was justified in eternity.

Take Ephesians 1:3-14. The cause, the source, the origin of ‘every spiritual blessing’ the elect receive is nothing less than the love of God displayed in his electing and predestinating decree and purpose. Of the many inestimable benefits God’s decree produces for the elect, the apostle includes the following: God makes his elect holy and blameless, he adopts them as his sons, he accepts them, redeems them, forgives them, gathers them together in eternal bliss, gives them an inheritance, and seals them until the dawning of the day of everlasting blessing.<sup>65</sup> All these benefits are ‘in Christ’, ‘in the beloved’, ‘in him’. And all lead ‘to the praise of the glory’ of the triune God.

The question is, how and when, precisely, do the elect come into all these benefits? This, too, is made perfectly clear. It is through the elect being brought to ‘trust in Christ’. The point is this: The elect receive none of these blessings – redemption, forgiveness, adoption, sanctification, sealing – until they trust Christ. All these benefits were decreed for them in eternity past, yes. They were all obtained for them by Christ’s death and resurrection, yes. But the elect experience none of them, they are not actually made theirs, until they believe.

Gill himself realised it: ‘The sealing work of the Spirit... as illumination, regeneration, sanctification, *etc.*, it is what follows believing... and that none but believers in Christ enjoy the following privilege: “You were sealed with that Holy Spirit of

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<sup>65</sup> Paul, it goes without saying, does not list every blessing accomplished by Christ for the elect on the basis of God’s love in his predestinating decree. He does not include, for example, justification. No! But who would suggest that this is excluded from his triumphant catalogue?

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promise”<sup>66</sup>. Note how Gill here contradicted many other things he stated elsewhere<sup>67</sup> – as well as putting regeneration after faith. This is an utter impossibility! How can an unregenerate sinner believe? The main point stands, however; only *believers* are sealed. Until they believe, the elect, even though they are elect, are not sealed. ‘In [Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise’ (Eph. 1:13). The same goes for all the other blessings in Paul’s list.

Take the believer’s rest. Christ promised rest to all who believe (Matt. 11:28-29). It is as they believe that they ‘enter that rest’ (Heb. 4:3). *They do not receive the assurance, or make the discovery, that they were given this rest in eternity.*

Believers are told to examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5), not as to whether they have the assurance, the manifestation that they are elect and have been justified from eternity. When we believe, we receive what God has promised to his people (Gal. 3:22), not the assurance or feeling that the promise was ours from eternity. Upon believing, we get the actual fulfilment, the experience of it. The point is, until we believe, we do not actually have the promise in experience. Thus it is with justification.

Until they believe, the elect are ‘far off’. It is only ‘by grace... through faith’ that they are ‘brought near by the blood of Christ’ (Eph. 2:8-18). The elect do not become ‘a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ (Eph. 2:19-22) until they believe, even though God, in eternity, planned to dwell in his elect, and Christ earned it in his redeeming work. God does not make ‘known’ his ‘manifold wisdom’ to the elect until they believe (Eph. 3:8-12).

As for pardon, as for forgiveness, as for adoption, and so on, so for justification. All were decreed in eternity. All are experienced and made actual by faith in time.

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<sup>66</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p420.

<sup>67</sup> For a start, see various extracts throughout this present volume.

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Consider Hebrews 5:9. Gill got it the wrong way round. Having rightly spoken of the eternal (both past and future) work of salvation by Christ, he went on to say: ‘All those whom Christ saves, he brings to an obedience to himself’.<sup>68</sup> In saying this, Gill meant that all whom God has decreed to save, all for whom Christ died, God brings to obedience. This is true, I say again. I heartily endorse Gill’s assertion. *But it is not the teaching of Hebrews 5:9.* The verse states that Christ ‘became the author of salvation to all who obey him’. It does not state that ‘all, for whom Christ from eternity was the author of salvation, will obey him’. Yet again, I am not splitting hairs. Gill argued the verse back to front. This is how his system wanted it! He stressed the sovereignty of God, whereas the inspired writer stressed the sinner’s obedience. Christ is the author of salvation, but it is only those who obey Christ in saving faith who are actually saved.

And that is why the unconverted must be commanded, urged and pressed to come to Christ. Until the sinner believes, he is not reconciled. Until the sinner believes, he is not justified. The great and only business of the sinner is that he should obey Christ in the gospel. Let us never forget Christ’s plain statement: ‘He who does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16:16). And: ‘He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God’ (John 3:18). ‘He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him’ (John 3:36). The sinner must believe! The preacher must settle for nothing short of it.

And that brings us to the crux. No sinner can know, no sinner can discover, no sinner can receive a manifestation, that he is elect, justified and guiltless *before* he trusts the Saviour. No preacher can preach for sinners to have this assurance of personal election and justification, and then call them to trust in Christ. Until the sinner believes, trusts Christ, he is not justified. ‘Trust in Christ’, therefore, is the ‘one thing needful’ for every sinner! And longing for sinners to trust Christ must figure high on our agenda as believers.

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<sup>68</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p702.

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In all this, I stress, we are speaking about *sinners*; not *elect* sinners, but sinners *as* sinners. Irrespective of election, all sinners are born in Adam, and all sinners as sinners are invited and commanded to come to Christ. It is the duty of each and every sinner to repent and trust Christ.

How then shall we best address sinners in the hope of getting them to take that step and trust the Saviour? This is the nub of the matter – addresses to sinners. *This* is the objective I have been working towards right from the start. Throughout these pages, I have kept this vital end in view. I have not been arguing an obscure detail of doctrine for the sake of it. Addresses to sinners. *This* has been my *target*. Addresses to sinners. What can we say to them? What should we say to them? And how should we say it?