

Miall on Motive

Progressive sanctification. This is what this chapter is about. Or, to be more precise, the believer's motive for his progressive sanctification. We are talking about the believer's life of godliness, his growing in grace and the knowledge and likeness of Christ, being increasingly conformed to Christ (Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:14 – 2:3; 2 Pet. 3:18, for instance). This is both his privilege and his duty. Moreover, it is God's end in saving him. And all is designed for God's own glory (Rom. 8:29).¹

Taking this as a given – though there are some who deny the notion of progressive sanctification² – the question, as I say, is, what is the motive for the believer's progressive sanctification? John Calvin taught that the ten commandments (or nine or nine and a half),³ which he called 'the moral law',⁴ is the spur or whip to drive lazy asses (he was talking about believers, please note) into obedience.⁵

This is quite wrong. The believer's motive comes directly from the provisions of the new covenant. It is nothing less than the inward work of the Spirit in regeneration, giving the sinner a new heart, a new heart to love Christ and his law. In particular, the Spirit moves the believer to obedience by taking him to Christ. Indeed, this is one of the main glories of the new covenant. And what a contrast with the old covenant

¹ See my 'Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death'.

² See my *Believers*.

³ I refer to Calvin's view on the fourth commandment, for instance. See my *Sabbath Questions*.

⁴ Ignorant of its provenance most of them may be, but, following Thomas Aquinas by way of Calvin, most believers simply accept it as 'a given' that the law can be divided into three parts – the moral, the ceremonial and the civil. Almost universally accepted this tripartite division of the law may be, but it is entirely without scriptural warrant.

⁵ See my *Christ*.

this is. That covenant was marked by fear (Ex. 19:1-25). How magnificently the New Testament contrasts the two covenants, old and new, in this respect. See 2 Corinthians 3:1-18; Hebrews 12: 18-24.⁶ The motive for obedience in the new covenant is love.

Miall saw this with unclouded eye. Although he did not use my terminology, this is what he was concerned about. He saw very clearly that evangelicals too often have bought into Calvin's legal motive for obedience, and their preaching sadly reflects it. When they have adopted Calvin's system, they preach observance of regulations for external conformity through fear of punishment.⁷

But first things first. Miall started at the beginning. It is essential to recognise the difference between the two covenants, the old (or Mosaic) covenant, and the new. Many do not.

The doctrine of the covenants – let me ask you: do you ever think about it? If John Bunyan was right – and, alas, I am sure he has put his finger on the spot – many contemporary believers never think about the covenants at all. As he said:

If⁸ one should ask you what time you spend, what pains you take, to the end you may understand the nature and difference of these two covenants, would you not say, if you should speak the truth, that you did not so much as regard whether there were two or more? Would you not say: 'I did not think of covenants, or study the nature of them'?⁹

For most believers, alas, too right! And yet, as God has made so very plain in Scripture, the doctrine of the covenants is one of the most important matters the Bible deals with. God has shown us that he determined in eternity to save his elect through the redeeming work of Christ applied to them by the

⁶ True, 'our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29), but this was not written to undermine the above.

⁷ See my *Christ*.

⁸ Bunyan had 'set the case'.

⁹ John Bunyan: *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded*. See my *Bunyan*.

Spirit. Moreover, God also determined to reveal to men the glorious redemption that he – the triune God – the Father, the Son and the Spirit – planned and accomplished for his elect, and in time would apply to them. He has disclosed this glorious compact or agreement in the Godhead to us,¹⁰ doing so by means of a series of covenants,¹¹ culminating in the new covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹² And yet, despite this scriptural revelation on such a glorious matter, most believers never think about the covenants! Disgraceful! Reader, if this applies to you, put the matter right! Start – now – to think about your redemption revealed in Scripture through covenants.

In particular, there are two covenants which you need to distinguish and be very clear about. Of course, I am not leaving out of the account the Noahic, Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, but the two covenants that you must be clear on above all are the Mosaic covenant – the covenant which the Bible calls the first covenant, the old covenant – and the new covenant.¹³ In other words, we are talking about law and grace, or law and gospel.

Now for Miall. He started thus:

The work of Christ is uniformly set forth in the Scriptures as taking us [that is, believers] from under a dispensation of law, and placing us under a dispensation of love. There is a worldwide difference between the two. The one demands conformity to a command; the other solicits trust in an offer.¹⁴

¹⁰ Covenant theologians jump the rails right from the start by taking a biblical word ‘covenant’ and using it in a way the Bible never does to speak of this compact within the Godhead as a covenant. See below.

¹¹ Basically, a covenant is an arrangement devised by God, to which he gives the name ‘covenant’.

¹² See my *Redemption*.

¹³ The Abrahamic covenant contained within it elements of both the old and new covenants. The real issue here, however, is the ability to distinguish between the old and new covenants.

¹⁴ Miall pp85-86.

This needs correction. The law of Christ is more than an offer; it has commands.¹⁵

Miall continued:

The spirit of this [the former, that is the old covenant] is coercive; the spirit of that [the latter, that is the new covenant] is alluring. 'Do and live' is the injunction of the former; 'Come and live', the invitation of the latter. The characteristic of the first is light from without, converging from all quarters upon the conscience; that of the last is light kindled within, diffusing itself in every direction, and beautifying everything by his own beams. There, authority enjoins; here, goodness woos and wins. Morally, there is as great a distinction between the two economies [that is, covenants] as there is between pressure and attraction – between the uttered command of a master to his bondsman, and the expressed will of a husband to his bride. 'We are not under the law, but under grace'.¹⁶

Miall was, of course, referring, to Paul's letter to the believers at Rome:

Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace... You... have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6).

We need to take a pace back. All men are under law. The natural man is under the law of Romans 2:12-15. Israel was under the law of Moses. Believers are under the law of Christ.¹⁷ But it is vital to grasp that being under the law of Christ and being under the law of Moses are two clear, distinct things.

¹⁵ See my *Believers*.

¹⁶ Miall p86.

¹⁷ See my *Believers*.

Miall quoted Galatians, saying the passage ‘forcibly contrasts the two states’. Here is the Galatian extract in full:

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:1-7).

Miall began with the general principle:

The meaning is [that] law is for children, principles [are] for men. In our minority, the will of our parents is forced upon us by authority, and prescribed by commands. Rules fence us round on all sides; and the ground of our obligation to do this, or to abstain from that, is that we are *told* to do or to abstain. The time comes, however, when we pass from under this system of restraint. Obligation remains, indeed, but law ceases.¹⁸

Once again, this needs correction. Miall should have shown greater care. The law of Christ does contain commands; it is a real law. It is very different to the law of Moses, yes, but even so it is a real law, even more penetrating than the law of Moses.¹⁹

Miall:

Obedience to parental wishes, after this period, is expected to express not so much submission to authority as the voluntary choice of the understanding and the heart.²⁰

So much for the general. What about the specific? The natural man is under a system of law (Rom. 2:12-16; Col. 2:16-23;

¹⁸ Miall p87.

¹⁹ See my *Believers*.

²⁰ Miall p87.

Tit. 1:14), a system of external rules, which he tries to obey (or otherwise) in his own power. The believer, however, is under the law of Christ. But he has the Spirit who gives him a new heart to love and obey that law (Ezek. 11:20; 36:27), the law of Christ written in all Scripture as seen through the eyes of Christ and his apostles.

At this stage, I need to hark back to something Miall said right at the beginning of his work. As Miall put it, truth – the gospel – has power; it has power to change lives, to transform them. This is because God works through truth, the gospel, to effect change. It is inevitable. It is, in fact, a ‘law’, a principle. God has determined it should be so. Miall expressed it in the negative:

That any divine truth should come into the heart, and bring with it no law for his own reproduction and increase, contradicts all analogy, and violates the primary sense of obligation of which humanity is conscious.²¹

Let me put that in the positive. When the sinner is regenerated, the law of Christ is written on his heart – that is, he is given a love for that law – and by the Spirit he is moved and enabled to obey it. This is what the prophets predicted

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

²¹ Miall p51.

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And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 11:19-20).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek. 36:25-27).²²

Miall went on:

So in reference to our spiritual relationship, the gospel takes us from under a state of law; and, in the place of that outward restraint, we receive a living spirit [that is, the Holy Spirit – DG] to prompt us to cheerful obedience. The service of God to which we are called is the service of love. The only submission which pleases him is the submission rendered [by us] because it pleases us [to render that obedience]. If it be not an emanation from our own hearts – something done because we prefer to do it – it is not the thing which the gospel requires. That which God in Christ asks at our hands – that which he expects as the fruit of the altered relationship in which Christianity introduces us – is to give full play to our own will in the homage which we render to his throne. If we are not at his feet because we would be there – if we offer not our worship because mind, conscience and heart concur in choosing to worship him – if we run not on his errands of mercy because we delight to run, and not because we must – our response to his appeal to our sympathies is not what he intended. The obedience of the gospel is not the reluctant answer of a weaker to the summons of a stronger power, but the willing and cordial embrace by true love of true loveliness.²³

I break in to comment on this very important extract. Miall is hitting the bull's eye over and over again. The sinner, having

²² For my discourse on this passage, see my 'Regeneration'.

²³ Miall pp87-88.

been regenerated, immediately on his trusting Christ is, by faith, united to his Redeemer. As a result of his union with Christ, the believer is immediately both justified and positionally sanctified, and begins a life of progressive sanctification.²⁴ He is both a saint and is being sanctified (see Hebrews 10:10,14; 12:14, for instance). And this progressive sanctification is a life of obedience to the commands of Christ. A great mark of the new covenant is that the child of God, by the inward work of the Spirit, is moved to love and obey the written law of God, the law of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures (Ezek. 11:20; 36:27); love followed by obedience, obedience prompted by love, please note. It is the one who loves Christ that keeps his commandments (Matt. 28:18-10; John 12:47 – 16:33). Jesus makes it an absolute *sine qua non* [that is, essential] that the child of God obeys Christ's law. Let me quote the relevant scriptures in John 12:47 – 16:33. First, the one overall commandment:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (John 13:34).

This, of course, is an envelope in which are found all the other countless imperatives of the new covenant; that is, Christ's law. For a start, we have the series of commandments within Christ's own discourse:

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you... If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me... Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me... Abide in me... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in

²⁴ See my *Eternal; Fivefold; Positional*.

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you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... These things I command you, so that you will love one another (John 13:13-15; 14:15,21,24; 15:4,10-14,17).

And now, within this last great discourse, replete as it is with Christ's commandments gathered under the umbrella of his one 'new commandment', we meet the far-reaching promise of the gift and ministry of the Spirit to enable the apostles to complete the task of setting out Christ's law for all his people for all time, to the end of the age:

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you... When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me... I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away... I have said these things to you that... you may remember that I told them to you... I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:1,4,12-15).

In light of this, it comes as no surprise to read the apostles insisting on the right to issue commands in the name of Christ. And what else can this be but 'the law of Christ'?

It could not be clearer: it is both the believer's duty and privilege that he is under obligation to obey Christ, but has the assurance of the inward work of the Spirit to move and empower him to that obedience. Not, it goes without saying, that his progressive sanctification will ever be perfect in this life – hence the adjective 'progressive'. While Scripture

teaches that the believer is justified and positionally sanctified in Christ, immediately perfect at the point of faith by virtue of his union with Christ, it makes it equally explicit that he must live this out in a life of progressive sanctification, growing in grace and Christ-likeness. This is not an option; it is essential. However, he can do this only because he has died to the law and been united to Christ, being now under new ownership, with a new Lord, and married to a new husband – Christ. The believer’s progressive sanctification comes through the power of the Spirit within, the one who gives him a new heart to love and obey, with determination, the law of Christ written throughout the Scriptures. I will not argue all this here, having done so at length in several works.²⁵

On the motive for progressive sanctification, as Miall said, the believer’s motive is not mere duty. Nor is it servile. The motive is love, heartfelt love – love to God and love to neighbour. The Spirit writes the law of Christ on the believer’s heart – ‘heart’ certainly speaks of love. As Paul put it:

The one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet’, and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ (Gal. 5:13-14).

Miall continued:

The relation of Christ to his church is typified by that of marriage.²⁶

²⁵ See, in particular, my *Believers; Liberty Not Licence; Fivefold; Positional; Christ*.

²⁶ Miall p88.

Spot on! As Paul expressed it:

My brothers, you... have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:4-6).

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Miall expatiated on marriage as an illustration of the believer's relationship to Christ:

There is [an] obligation [as] binding as [a] human mind will allow – there is a subjection perfect as human nature can pay – but the obligation is moral, not legal – and the subjection is nothing unless it be rendered by choice. We are called unto liberty. The spirit breathed into us by Christianity is not a spirit of bondage.²⁷

Precisely! This is what Scripture teaches:

Jesus said... the truth will set you free... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:31-36).

All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry: 'Abba! Father!' (Rom. 8:14-15; see also Gal. 4:1-7).

The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17).

...our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus (Gal. 2:4).

²⁷ Miall p88.

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For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1).

You were called to freedom, brothers (Gal. 5:13).

Freedom! Yes indeed. Believers, being in the new covenant, are truly free, really set at liberty. But, within that liberty, they must obey the law of Christ – that law being revealed in *all* Scripture – and do so not simply as free men and women, but consciously, as slaves, willing slaves of Christ. As Gordon D.Fee encapsulated it, believers have freedom, but that freedom is not ‘freedom *from*, but freedom *to*’.²⁸ In other words, while believers can rightly glory in – exult in – their freedom from condemnation and slavery to sin, law and death, and should exult in it, they should rather glory in their freedom to serve and obey Christ, not in any legal spirit, but in love and liberty by the Spirit working within their new heart. In short, they should glory in the fact that they are free to be transformed into Christ’s likeness.

Miall:

God’s arrangements in the gospel put us upon that footing of relationship to him as that he can receive, and we may render, the homage, not of servants, but of sons. Our obedience is to be in the nature of a freewill offering, carried spontaneously to the altar by grateful affection.²⁹

Miall, quite rightly, was using old-covenant language, but using it in a new-covenant way, to speak of the priesthood of all believers.³⁰ Believers freely offer spiritual sacrifices to God out of gratitude to him for his love and grace towards them in Christ.

Miall continued:

Of our own, in this high sense, we are invited to give to him [that is, God]. The service we pay is perfect freedom – the

²⁸ Gordon D.Fee: *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1994, pp313-314.

²⁹ Miall p88.

³⁰ See my *The Priesthood*.

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spirit of it [being] adoring, heartfelt love. Why, what ingenious nature is not drawn and held fast to God by noble ties like these ten thousand times more readily and securely than by all the constraints of law! Do they not leave room for the play of every high-minded generous emotion, and give free scope to that perfect love which casts out fear?... God, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, unveils his lovely countenance. We look and live – look and love – look until all nature from within cries out: ‘Submit – obey – adore – and be blessed in the government of the only Blessed One’.³¹

Excellent! Here is the heart cry of the child of God:

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s (Ps. 103:1-5).

What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? (Ps. 116:12).

It is the believer’s sight and sense of God’s free grace to him that moves him to obey the law of Christ, not fear of punishment under the so-called moral law – as so many, following Calvin, would have it. Miall spotted the failure of the churches in Victorian Britain to realise this. We are seeing (and suffering under) much the same today.

Miall hammered home the point, arguing that the churches of his day were ‘making law instead of love the spirit of the gospel’.³² He knew he would be laughed out of court for such a seemingly ridiculous assertion. Victorian evangelicals guilty of making law the spirit of the gospel? Did they not pride themselves on their pristine Lutheran credentials as far as justification by faith alone was concerned? Did their prestigious statements and confessions of faith (stemming

³¹ Miall pp88-89.

³² Miall p156. As I have pointed out, the law of Christ is very different to the law of Moses. See my *Christ*.

from Calvin *via* the Westminster) not staunchly avow that there is no justification by the works of the law? So how could Miall have the gall to make such a sweeping accusation, one so clearly wrong? Had he not shot himself in the foot? Not a bit of it! Miall was well prepared. He readily agreed that the statements of faith were largely orthodox in the matter of justification. But, he argued:

It must be allowed that generally speaking the formal statement of Christian doctrine by, perhaps, the greater part of our religious bodies, does not bear out the allegation [which I, Miall, have in mind] – for grace as opposed to works is a standing article of faith [in their credal statements]. But here, as elsewhere, what appears in the creed is forgotten in the practice.³³

How true! How often this happens. One example must serve. I know of a Reformed Baptist church where the statement of faith (which members must abide by) is explicit on a certain practice. But a certain man asked for membership, even though he owned that he could not accept this practice. The church accepted him and, in course of time, he became an elder of the church. The mandatory church-confession and its signal lack of observance continued unaltered. This sort of thing could, I feel sure, be multiplied time without number. Integrity – or lack of it – springs to mind. The confession is venerated – as a museum piece – and promptly ignored.

Miall developed his point, doing so by moving from justification to progressive sanctification, the believer's life of holiness. This, of course, is an absolute essential.³⁴ Miall was thinking of the new-covenant motive for this progressive sanctification:

There is a spring, an elasticity, a heart³⁵ in the good conduct which it secures such as mere conformity to prescription and rule will not admit of... [Miall went on:] Christianity... is a

³³ Miall p156.

³⁴ See my 'Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death'.

³⁵ Miall had 'soul'.

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system of truth designed, not to exact obedience, but to generate, nourish and mature in us the love of obedience.³⁶

What a weighty point! Do not miss Miall's vital distinction. The gospel is 'not' 'designed... to exact obedience, but to generate, nourish and mature in us the love of obedience'. It goes without saying that Miall knew that the gospel must be obeyed. The sinner must obey the command to repent and believe; in other words, duty faith.³⁷ The saint must obey the law of Christ, as I have already shown. But, in all this, do not miss the force of Miall's 'exact'. The vital nuance is this: God, in the gospel, aims for the heart (through the mind, of course),³⁸ he wants obedience from the heart, not mere external conformity to rules. Indeed, in the new covenant, as I have shown, God gives the child of God a new heart in order to obey the law of Christ (Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:25-27).

[Christianity] therefore sets us at liberty from law... The only law under which we are placed is that which the apostle well describes as the 'the law of the spirit of life'— the law infused into the heart³⁹ of the new man through the gospel by the Spirit of God. The economy of grace... to win the man to God is its single purport.⁴⁰

Yet again, Miall was making a vital distinction. Justification is by imputed righteousness; progressive sanctification is by imparted righteousness.⁴¹

He then drove on to the root of the problem. As I have argued in several works, we, today, suffer far too much from law preaching; we must have gospel preaching! This is not an

³⁶ Miall pp157-158.

³⁷ Duty faith is the biblical doctrine that it is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility of all sinners to trust Christ, even though they have no ability to comply. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe.

³⁸ See the chapter 'Miall on Assent'.

³⁹ Miall had 'nature'.

⁴⁰ Miall p158.

⁴¹ Rome confuses the two, with dire consequences for millions. See my 'Sanctification: Jesus and the Believer'.

option, not a luxury! It is a necessity – for sinners *and for saints!* Miall:

One might almost conclude from the manner in which our churches present the message of life to dying souls, that it is but the substitution of one law for another, and then this object is mainly to enjoin behaviour, not to quicken immortal souls. The tone of the old dispensation: ‘Do this and live’ runs through their proclamation of the new one; and sons are taught to breathe the spirit, and to adopt the manners, of slaves. Their utterances of God’s truth are chiefly mandatory [I, DG, call this ‘recipe’ preaching]; their arrangements for giving it effect, [are] morally, if not physically, coercive. ‘You must do this’, ‘You must not do that’ are dealt out more frequently than the considerations which might avail to make you prefer the doing or the forbearing described. The Christian man is treated as if his life was to be a compliance, willing or unwilling, with a code of regulations. ‘Touch not – taste not – and will not’ – ‘holy days, new moons, sabbaths’ – have come down to us from apostolic times.⁴²

Let me elucidate. Miall was not saying that the apostles taught this. Paul, after all, roundly refuted the error, demanding that it be removed from among believers (Col. 2:16-23). But this was Miall’s point. This is what he was drawing attention to. The error of ‘recipe preaching’ was being promulgated in apostolic times; hence, Paul needed to make the statements he did. Can we, will we, never learn? The answer, sadly, too often is in the negative. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel had it right: ‘We learn from history that we do not learn from history’.

Miall:

The Christian man is treated as if his life was to be a compliance, willing or unwilling, with a code of regulations... What we are, as is right and proper,⁴³ is tested by what we do – but what we do is not tested by what we are.⁴⁴

⁴² Miall p159.

⁴³ Miall had ‘as is meet’.

⁴⁴ Miall pp159-160.

This is a staggering – but valid – point. Not a few believers and churches are really frightened of liberty. Fearing the scriptural doctrine of the believer’s liberty, they raise the bogey of licence or antinomianism. Of course, antinomianism proper is a dreadful doctrine and abhorrent practice, and the mantra for the believer must be ‘Liberty Not Licence’.⁴⁵ But fear of enjoying their liberty in Christ holds many believers and their churches back. Miall:

The fact is the churches, for the most part, are afraid of the freedom of the gospel. They cannot trust it. They dread licentiousness [that is, antinomianism] as its product. They scarcely admit even in theory that it is a ‘perfect law of liberty’, and they dare not openly proclaim it as such. They are scared by the spectre of a wild antinomianism, which [it goes without saying] is a gross misapplication of glorious truth. Nothing done to God is done acceptably to him, which is not done spontaneously by us. There is no religion in obedience, save as obedience expresses choice.⁴⁶

How weighty are the thoughts in that extract! The law of Christ is the law of liberty. Liberty is one of the key words in the new covenant. See John 8:32,36; Romans 8:15; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 2:4; 5:1,13. But those who (whether knowingly or unknowingly) follow Calvin on the law are, in truth, frightened by talk of liberty. Regulation, rule, enforced external codes, and the like, are the order of the day. Many call for the preaching of the so-called moral law; this, they think, will put a stop to what they dismiss and warn against; namely, ‘antinomianism’. But it will not.⁴⁷ Even so, churches persist in preaching rules because they prefer external conformity to heart obedience. Take an example: dress code. How easy it is for an elder, or, granting the term, the pastor, glancing round a congregation, to pick out the carnal from the spiritual – the former transgressing the code,

⁴⁵ See my *Liberty*.

⁴⁶ Miall p160.

⁴⁷ See my *Grace*.

the latter keeping to it. This happens! I am not constructing a straw man!

Nevertheless, the fact is, the scriptural fact is, as I have argued in several works,⁴⁸ unless we can be accused of antinomianism, we are not preaching the gospel properly. I know I am making a heavy criticism when I say that this means we do not have enough gospel preaching today. But that is what I think! We have too much legal preaching.

Nevertheless, those who argue the freeness of grace, and preach free grace, are accused of antinomianism. Paul, himself, met this very objection (Rom. 3:5-8; 6:1). D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones dealt with the point. When preaching on the passage ‘You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out “Abba, Father”’ (Rom. 8:15), Lloyd-Jones tackled the accusation head-on: ‘You are surely inciting people to sin by speaking in this way’ – that is, speaking in the very way in which he himself had been speaking. He had his reply ready:

I am quite happy about such a charge, for it is the charge that was brought against Paul... True preaching of the gospel in its fullness always exposes itself to the charge of antinomianism.⁴⁹

Miall went on to illustrate his argument, speaking of the pressure, the constraint, which is often put on believers, and the consequent lack of delight that most believers ‘enjoy’ in their spiritual experience:

There is no exuberance of life. Much is done, but not with love or enthusiasm from the heart.⁵⁰ Zeal seldom flows forth freely. We have more mechanism than power to keep it going – and indeed, much of that very mechanism is worked with a view to generate power. Active movement is maintained only by a most disproportionate amount of pressure from without. Religious enterprises do not spring

⁴⁸ See my *Four; Liberty; Bunyan; Assurance; Christ; Grace*; ‘Was Isaiah a Preparationist?’; ‘Preparationism in New England’.

⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones: *Sons* p228.

⁵⁰ Miall had ‘*con amore*’.

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up, but are got up, not without great labour... The business of the churches is carried on task-wise – their mission is prosecuted not ‘willingly’, but ‘of constraint’. The screw must be upon them [that is, the believers] perpetually... It would seem as if there was not among spiritual communities ‘a mind to the work’. They do not hasten to it, but are driven. They have no yearnings after it, no fond delight in it. They do not associate it with gladness. They do not prosecute it cheerily. ‘Must’ is their overseer, where love should lead on and superintend alone... It may consist with the notion that we are under a state of law [but] it could hardly be made compatible with the feeling that we are placed upon our honour; [and] we surely never could prevail upon ourselves to offer it [that is, our obedience] as a free-will tribute of sympathy and love.⁵¹

How well Miall has caught much of the spirit of much evangelical ‘religion’. Of course, the believer is under an obligation to obey the law of Christ, and of course, that law is written in Scripture, but he has the Spirit to move and empower him to walk in obedience. There can be no question but that the new covenant emphasis falls squarely on the heart. Love, not fear, must be the motive.

Miall has raised some very significant issues. Once again we are faced with the fact that too often we meet with a legal approach, recipe preaching, nagging for conformity to rule and regulation, walking by rote, when all the time, the real driver for believers, their real motive in the new covenant, is love. Take the nagging that goes on to try to get people to prayer meetings. Yes, we sing Isaac Watts’ hymn loudly enough, but do we mean it? Do we even think about what we have professed?

*How pleased and blest was I
To hear the people cry,
Come, let us seek our God today!
Yes, with a cheerful zeal
We haste to Zion’s hill,
And there our vows and honours pay.*

⁵¹ Miall pp160-163.

John Owen:

The law does not supply us with effectual motives and encouragements to endeavour the ruin of the dominion of sin in a way of duty; which must be done, or in the end it will prevail. [All the law can do, is to work] fear and dread... The very promise of it [‘do this and live’] becomes a matter of terror, as including the contrary sentence of death upon our failure in its commands. [Nothing but grief, sadness, discouragement is found by the law,] no life, activity, cheerfulness or courage... Hence those who engage themselves into opposition to sin, or a relinquishment of its service, merely⁵² on the motives of the law, do quickly faint and give over.

Grace, on the other hand, said Owen, is attended with power. Whereas:

Christ is not in the law; he is not proposed in it, not communicated by it, [the truth is, the gospel reveals Christ; Christ is the great deliverer]. He alone ruins the kingdom of Satan, whose power is acted in the rule of sin... The like may be spoken of the communication of the Holy Spirit... but we receive this Spirit not ‘by the works of the law’, but ‘by the hearing of faith’ (Gal. 3:2)... The law and its duties... can never destroy the dominion of sin... The internal efficient cause of this liberty... whereby the power and rule of sin is destroyed in us, is the Holy Spirit himself.⁵³

If, in saying this, Owen has not effectively destroyed the Reformed third use of the law to sanctify the believer, then words have lost all meaning.

⁵² I do not know what Owen meant, precisely, by this. The law does play a part in progressive sanctification, in that it serves as a paradigm for godly behaviour, and is part of Scripture, all of which God uses to sanctify his people (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). One of the meanings of ‘merely’ since 1601 – a significant date as far as Owen is concerned – is ‘actually’.

⁵³ John Owen: *A Treatise of the Dominion of Sin and Grace; Wherein Sin’s Reign is Discovered... How the Law Supports it; How Grace Delivers from it...*, in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol.7, edited by William H.Goold, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1965, pp542-552,554. Taken from my *Christ* p453.

Miall:

Churches should accustom themselves to consider nothing as done to God which is not done by them of their own affectionate choice. He has placed them upon that footing of relationship to himself, that whatever service they offer to him in the prosecution of his beneficent designs towards men, must be true volunteer service, presented as an expression, all unworthily as it is and must be, of heartfelt sympathy with him. They should learn to regard with feelings of humiliation and shame the doing of anything for their Master task-wise. They should habituate themselves to the idea that a grudging recognition of obligation is utterly unworthy of their own position, and a serious dishonour done to their Lord. And, as ministering the best and most powerful stimulus to cheerful activity and self-sacrifice, they may associate with their earnest study of the divine character the consideration that they are invoked by love rather than enjoined by law for whatever practical response their nature can yield. In respect of both the points just alluded to, it would be well if the pervading spirit of what is addressed to the churches, whether from the pulpit or the press, were of a more genial and persuasive⁵⁴ character. Men cannot be driven into godliness, nor into any of its manifestations – and if they could, then godliness will be little worth. Reluctant wills cannot be subdued by law, however reasonable; they can only be subdued by love. On this account the gospel was given; with this in view the gospel must be preached. Paul, ‘knowing the terror of the Lord, laboured’ all the more earnestly, not to terrify, but ‘to persuade men’. That which was a powerful motive to his benevolence, was not, however, the most influential one to [cure] their [that is, unbelievers’] unwillingness. The call of the church to the world ought to be still: ‘Come – whosoever will, let him take of the waters of life freely’. Yes! ‘Come’ best expresses the drift of the whole dispensation, whether the effort be to turn a sinner, or to draw out a saint. The tenor of all our ministrations should be such as may most fitly terminate in the exhortation: ‘Come’. The entire economy is framed upon a principle which addresses itself to immortal souls in that one word: ‘Come’. All that we feel, and all that we do, should constitute a

⁵⁴ Miall had ‘suasive’.

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response to that invitation: ‘Come’. Would that the churches thoroughly understood this! Would that they had drunk more deeply than as yet they seem to have done into the spirit of ‘the perfect law of liberty’. Till they do, their exercises will yield little gladness to themselves, will exert little power upon others, in comparison of what they might do.⁵⁵

Wow!

⁵⁵ Miall pp413-415.