

Letting William Dell Speak Today

Introduction

When re-recording my audiobook *Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated: Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton and John Saltmarsh*, I came to the closing section of the chapter dealing with William Dell. Being struck with the force of what I was reading, impressed with its relevance to the evangelical scene today, I felt I should publish a small article, hoping to reach as many people as possible with the vital material. In the six years since I published my *Four 'Antinomians'*, I have become increasingly grieved over the lack of real gospel preaching. It goes without saying that lip service is paid to the necessity of gospel preaching, book after book is written on the subject, conferences, articles and blogs call attention to it, but in my experience, we continue to be subjected to a diet of dry, boring lectures instead of preaching; we get virtual magazine articles, not infrequently read word for word to us from the pulpit, often repeated by a PowerPoint presentation, followed by duplicated notes; we are treated to legal or recipe disquisitions instead of gospel preaching; and the churches are being increasingly managed as corporate businesses with carnal programmes designed to appeal to and attract pagans into church attendance; in addition, Sandemanianism still stalks the land. A toxic mixture indeed! All this I have written on in the years following the publication of my *Four 'Antinomians'*.¹

¹ See my *Relationship Evangelism Exposed: A Blight on the Churches and the Ungodly*; *Attracting Unbelievers to Church: Points to Ponder*; 'Why Are You Following Christ?'; 'A Vital Lesson For Today'; 'Turn or Turn Up?'; 'The "O" Word'; 'The Marshmallow Gospel'; 'Cleansing the Temple Today'. *Preaching Today: Food for Action as well as Thought*; *The Secret Stifler: Incipient Sandemanianism and Preaching the Gospel to Sinners*; *The Seeking Sinner: Fact or Figment?*; *Saving Faith*.

As I say, on re-reading the closing section of the chapter in my *Four 'Antinomians'* dealing with William Dell, I saw its relevance to the above. So much so, I felt I should publish it separately in order to drive home truth which is so desperately needed today.

Briefly – for further background, see my *Four 'Antinomians'* – William Dell (c.1607–1669), Master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge from 1649 to 1660, was a leading radical Parliamentarian. He became a chaplain in the New Model Army, was a powerful preacher with the reputation of being a so-called antinomian. In 1652, he published his *The Crucified and Quickened Christian*, being a 'discourse on Galatians 2:19-20'. Dell divided his sermon into two. *First*, he dealt with the crucified Christian. *Second*, he moved on to the quickened Christian.

The relevant closing section from the chapter on Dell

Having dealt fully with his text, Dell, in his parting shot, gathering all together, went for the jugular:

By all which we may perceive, that true faith is a greater matter than the most are aware of. For men usually think, that when they hear the gospel in the outward ministry, and assent to it that it is true, that this is faith, and that then they do believe; but the true faith of God's elect is a greater matter than this; for through that we are truly made one with the Son of the living God, and do abide and live in him for ever. And so this right faith is a most high and precious grace, and is the first manifestation of the Father's eternal love to the soul, and the first grace whereby we have entrance into the kingdom of God. It is the sabbath of sabbaths.² It is the greatest and highest worship of God. It is infinite and everlasting righteousness. It is the mortification of the flesh, the quickening of the Spirit, our mighty victory over the law, sin, death, hell, the world and the devil. It is the first and last, and all in all, in the kingdom of the Son. And he that

² I take this to indicate that Dell rightly understood that the new-covenant fulfilment of the sabbath is the believer's rest and delight in Christ.

believes, as the Scriptures have said, is already truly passed from sin to righteousness, from death to life, and from Satan to God.

In short:

So that right faith is a most precious grace, and is found in very few of the common professors of the worldly church; so that Christ himself makes this question: ‘The Son of man, when he comes, shall he find faith upon earth?’ [Luke 18:8]. And therefore it concerns all to inquire and try: Whether we partake of this faith or not? And whether the life we live in the flesh, be in the faith of the Son of God? Otherwise we must know, that as he that believes shall be saved, so he that believes not shall be damned [Mark 16:16].³

Reader, if this is antinomianism, then, speaking for myself, I wish to be an antinomian – in my preaching, in my writing, and, above all, in my living, day-by-day experience. May God grant that we may soon have many such ‘antinomians’ in the pulpits of our land. How acute is our need of them! And may all who read these words be such ‘antinomians’. Let the Reformed hack and hew as they will. Dell has got to the core of the new covenant. Due allowance must be made, of course, for his 17th-century style, but Dell has surely got to the heart of the gospel here. Oh for preachers of like stamp! I know I’ve said it before, but I’ve had more than my fill of hearing boring lectures, when I was supposed to be under the preaching of the gospel. Oh, for men like Dell to preach Christ to us, to preach us into Christ, and to preach Christ into us! Oh for the New Testament emphasis on the exuberant joy that is the lot of all believers through their liberty from the law through the redeeming work of Christ! May we know, may we love, may we feel, what it is to be united to Christ! Above all, may we live in the good of it.

I have no doubt but that this sort of preaching will prove saving for sinners and sanctifying for saints. It is the sovereign elixir for both the unconverted and the converted, God’s appointed way of dealing with both. Consequently, and above all, it will glorify God – for purposing so great a salvation for us ruined, helpless and polluted sinners, for accomplishing it

³ Dell pp47-48.

through the work of such a glorious Saviour, and for applying it to us so freely and graciously by the power of the sovereign Holy Spirit.