

Introduction

In 2010, I published an expanded version of the paper I had given at the annual meeting of the Strict Baptist Historical Society, March 19th 2009, entitled *Septimus Sears: A Victorian Injustice and Its Aftermath*. As I said at the time, I hoped to produce a much fuller work on the subject. The years are passing, however, and still I am not ready to go to press with the finished manuscript – which, in any case, continues to grow. With this in mind, I have decided to proceed with the publication of what I thought would have formed an Appendix to the complete book – little did I realise how much *that* would grow!

As I have made clear in previous works, incipient hyper-Calvinism – leave alone hyper-Calvinism proper – continues to blight the standing command of Christ that we should ‘go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15). And since Christ immediately added the solemn words – ‘he who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16:16) – it is essential that we make sure it really is the *gospel*, and not a mangled version of it, that we preach! Moreover, it is essential that we do indeed *preach* it to every creature. Hyper-Calvinism ruins gospel addresses to sinners – both in *what* is said to them, and *how* it is said. And this includes the doctrine of eternal justification. Hence my book.

In October 1875, in his monthly magazine, the *Sower*, Septimus Sears published the second part of a sermon he had preached in the Strict Baptist chapel, Clifton, Bedfordshire, under the title: ‘A Safe Hand for a Sinful Soul’. This publication immediately met with a storm of protest, a storm which had long-term consequences, consequences still with us today. In his sermon, Sears, trying to help those who were lost, wandering – or complacent – in the maze produced by the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of eternal justification, told his congregation that no sinner is safe until he has trusted Christ for salvation; that is to say, until a sinner trusts Christ he is under the wrath of God. Sears, needless to say, should have gone further, and commanded, invited, urged his hearers to trust Christ at

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once. Sadly, he stopped short. Even so, for going as far as he did – telling his hearers (and readers) that, until they trusted Christ, they were not safe – he was vehemently attacked in the pages of the *Gospel Standard* and elsewhere, principally by John Gadsby. It was this attack which led to catastrophic additions to the Gospel Standard Articles of Faith in the late 1870s.

The question was this: Is it right to tell sinners who have not trusted Christ for salvation that they may consider themselves safe from the wrath of God, safe to die and enter eternity? No, said Sears. No sinner is safe until he trusts Christ. Gadsby, on the other hand, said certain sinners – sensible sinners – *are* safe, even though they have not trusted Christ.

The underlying issue was the doctrine of justification by faith. Gadsby, a determined advocate of the hyper-Calvinistic doctrine of eternal justification, argued that elect, sensible sinners are justified before faith, and therefore safe – and have been so from eternity. Indeed, they have never been under the wrath of God! Sears was convinced that until a sinner – elect or not – trusts Christ, he is anything but safe.

Although I have put it in the past tense, these issues are very much alive. For my part, I am most decidedly of Sears' opinion on this question. No sinner is safe until he has trusted Christ.

Of course, eternal justification did not start in the 1870s. But when, at that time, the Gospel Standard Articles of Faith were expanded, eternal justification played an important part in the formulation of those added Articles, and, even more important, it had a devastating effect on the way sinners are addressed with the gospel. From then on, massive limitations to such addresses became binding upon the Gospel Standard denomination, its ministers and its magazine.

In the intervening years, the doctrine and its consequences have spread even further. It is, at this very moment, being promulgated both in books and on the internet, and it may well come to play a significant role in the days to come. If so, and for a growing number, it will have a dreadful effect upon gospel addresses to sinners – with a terrifying consequence for the sinners themselves.

Let me illustrate the point. First, here is the relevant part of the Gospel Standard Articles:

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For ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them savingly to repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new-creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature-power, and, on the other, to deny the doctrine of special redemption... We believe that any such expressions as convey to the hearers the belief that they possess a certain power to flee to the Saviour, to close in with Christ, to receive Christ, while in an unregenerate state, so that unless they do thus close with Christ, *etc.*, they shall perish, are untrue, and must, therefore, be rejected.

Note the words. To tell men ‘that unless they... close with Christ... they shall perish’ is ‘untrue’. Is it? As I read my Bible – take John 3:15-18,36 as just one passage – I am convinced that until a sinner trusts Christ he is on the high road to damnation, and to tell any unbeliever that he is ‘safe’ is diabolical. I will make good my assertions.

And take these contemporary hyper-Calvinistic statements, posted on the internet in 2010. Do not miss the opening Sandemanian sentence,¹ followed by what is, as I will show, the inevitable consequence of eternal justification:

I’m not calling on you to believe in order to obtain or gain salvation. I’m calling on you to rest in the fact that Christ has redeemed and justified his elect by his perfect obedience and bloody sacrifice at Calvary as the sin-bearer. If you do rely on him and what he has accomplished, it evidences that you are one of God’s elect. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!... The main evidence of this state of lost-ness is unbelief of the gospel... The main evidence of salvation and justification is belief of the gospel... Were God’s elect ever condemned? Were God’s elect ever charged with their sin? Yes, but only as they were considered in their representative and surety, the Lord Jesus Christ.² This sentence of condemnation comes upon all men, all the sons of Adam without exception, even upon the elect of God themselves; though it is not executed upon them, but on their surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin was never charged to their persons individually apart from being considered in Christ... As we still look at condemnation, let’s look at John 3:18: ‘He that believes on him is not

¹ See the glossary. Note the call to believe (that is, assent to) facts. This is pure Sandemanianism.

² In this respect, at least, this marks a significant difference to the usual hyper-Calvinistic view.

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condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God'. 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.

I hope these extracts, as they stand, set alarm bells ringing for all who are concerned with preaching the gospel to the unconverted as freely and fully as the New Testament warrants and demands. They should do. In this book, I will say why.

Such statements are not unique. Tobias Crisp's *Christ Alone Exalted*, with John Gill's notes, for instance, has been re-published. Crisp's work had a big influence on Gill. As for Gill himself, as Curt Daniel said:

Gill is probably the best representative of the position [eternal justification] not only because he is the most influential and pre-eminent hyper-Calvinist, but also because he writes as such length in defence of it. In his works on the subject, are found all the classical arguments.³

Take Crisp. While he says much that is excellent on the law, exalting the free grace of God in Christ – see my *Christ is All* – nevertheless, he does not mince his words when setting out the doctrine of eternal justification. He is its fervent advocate.⁴

And that does not by any means exhaust the growing body of material which propagates the doctrine of eternal justification. I have written this book, therefore, to examine the doctrine as carefully as I can, to expose its unbiblical nature, and to set out its disastrous effect on preaching the gospel to sinners. I do this in two sections: Principles, followed by Extracts with Comments. Even though I cannot help feeling my work loses something by not having the extracts at the proper place, separating them from the text, I hope, makes for easier reading. Alas, to my mind, it tends to

³ Daniel p307.

⁴ I put it into the present because, as I say, Crisp's work is in print; as are Gill's works, and John Brine's *A Defence of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification*. Both Gill and Brine may be found on the internet also. In addition, there are the works of Herman Hoeksema and Herman Hanko of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

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diminish the force of what I want to say at the time of saying it. But there it is. May I ask, reader, that as you work your way through the following pages, you don't run away with the idea that I have grabbed what I assert out of thin air. Far from it. Where I have used the writings of others, I have documented my sources and given plenty of extracts; naturally enough, in section of the book with that heading! To help with this, I have noted the relevant page number for the extracts for each particular chapter. A book-mark left in that section should keep things flowing fairly smoothly.

In completing this volume, I give notice that I have not finished with the subject. In order to illustrate what I have said in this book, and to reinforce what I consider to be its vital message, I intend to produce what I will call a Case Study of that quarrel I spoke about – the 1870s attack upon the preaching of Septimus Sears – which led to eternal justification being a part of the Gospel Standard Articles of Faith.

But in this volume, as I say, I set out the main arguments hyper-Calvinists use to defend eternal justification. I then examine these arguments in the light of Scripture, and show that the doctrine is unbiblical. Finally, I look at the consequences for preaching the gospel to sinners.

Finally, I thank all who have helped me in any way in the writing of this book. I appreciate the time, effort and thought they have put into reading my work, and for all their perceptive comments, which have been stimulatingly instructive – even when I have not felt free to accept their suggestions. My friends have saved me from making more blunders than I have. Every mistake which remains is, of course, entirely my own.