

36. 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices' Banner of Truth paper-back edition. Pastors should encourage the publishers to keep these Puritan troubled souls, they are of immense value.
37. 'A Treatise of Satan's Temptations' Richard Gilpin. The third and final section is an exposition of Christ's temptation and runs to 160 pages. Revival of interest in witchcraft today makes Gilpin's section on this subject in his book apposite.
38. 'The Christian in Complete Armour' William Gurnall. Banner of Truth. This book is a photo reproduction of a former edition published in two volumes in 1864.
39. 'Works of Thomas Goodwin' Vol.3 p.236 ff
40. 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices' p.55 ff
41. 'The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul' Joseph Symonds p.379 ff
42. 'Thoughts on Religious Experience' A.A.Alexander p.36 ff Banner of Truth.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL AMONGST 'HYPER-CALVINISTS'

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There is as much variation in the understanding of the Gospel and its presentation among hyper-calvinists as among any other comparable theological tradition. Some preachers do not address the unconverted at all.¹ Others address them but in a particular way that guards the preacher from implying natural, creature ability to do spiritual acts.

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It must be observed (and the observation is probably universally true in theological traditions) that the statements of hyper-calvinists in polemical writings, fuelled by the fires of controversy, tend to be more rigid and extreme than the sermons they preach, or their more relaxed writings.²

It must also be recognised that hyper-calvinism has suffered from misrepresentation even at scholarly level.³ The continuation of its traditions in respect to addressing the unbeliever owes more to a tradition of preaching than a tradition of writing.⁴ However, for the purposes of this paper the writings of W.J.Styles,⁵ a man who had considerable influence on many Strict Baptist hyper-calvinists, and, the more widely known, John Gill⁶ will be the main sources of reference.

(i) What does the hyper-calvinist understand the sinner's duties towards God to be?

The hyper-calvinist sees the sinner's duty towards God as an unchanging, unalterable duty. It is the moral law or the ten commandments. This was the law required by God of Adam and all his progeny, and that our Lord summarised in his two commandments. This is the total natural duty of man, his complete legal requirement. No other duty is required of man by Divine law other than these laws, whether man is unfallen or fallen.⁷

As it is the moral law that defines legal duty the hyper-calvinist rejects the notion that the sinner per se is required by law, as a duty, to repent or believe the Gospel. Those who require faith and repentance as the duties of the sinner are seen as attempting to redefine the moral law. The hyper-calvinist rejects such 'duty faith' and 'duty repentance' and negatively states in his doctrinal statements that 'saving faith is not a legal duty'.⁸

It is argued that if faith is a duty then it is a work. Whereas the Scripture emphasises 'the promise comes by faith so that it may be by grace' (Rom.4:16 NIV) the duty faith idea turns faith into what a man does and it becomes a work.⁹

With this foundation the hyper-calvinist can express his conviction in the terms of the 26th Article of the Gospel Standard Societies, 'we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be

exhorted to believe in, or turn to God'.¹⁰

Those who do not accept hyper-calvinism usually challenge this position with five lines of questioning: Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should repent? Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should believe? Are not the invitations of the Gospel universal? How can sinners be condemned for unbelief if unbelief is not a sin? Why does the Holy Spirit strive with sinners if repentance and faith are not their duties?

(ii) How does the hyper-calvinist answer objections to his position?

We shall consider the five objections and the answers that are given to them by various types of hyper-calvinist.

Q1. Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should repent?

The hyper-calvinist refers to the repentance that is connected with salvation as 'spiritual repentance'. As this repentance is the result of the regenerating work of the Spirit he sees it as absurd to suggest that sinners are bound to exercise it. What the Spirit must do cannot be the natural, legal duty of unregenerate man.¹¹

In the exegesis of Scripture, therefore, a careful enquiry must be made into the nature of the repentance that is required and of who it is required. It is contended that only in those places where the regenerate are addressed is spiritual repentance required. Where the Spirit's work is revealed in soul concern encouragements to repentance are legitimate (eg. Acts 2:37-38).¹² Otherwise, they are not.

While Styles and Gill do not always agree on the exact interpretation of every passage of Scripture they have a generally similar approach to passages dealing with repentance.

Many passages which others use to command or invite sinners to repentance in relation to salvation they see as commands to a purely natural repentance - calls to leave off particular sins to avoid temporal disasters (eg. Luke 13:3; Acts 8:22; 17:30). This repentance is not Gospel related and so is not spiritual but a response to God as Creator and Law Giver rather than as Saviour.¹³

Other Scriptures are also rejected as having to do with spiritual or Gospel repentance because they are addressed to the Jews. As the Jews were a people in covenant with God, and had special responsibilities towards the Messiah, calls to them to repent were calls to the national repentance of a people in covenant with God. By no fair exegetical principle can they be viewed as unregenerate Gentiles, so verses relating to covenant Jews may not be preached and applied to unregenerate, ungodly men not in covenant. This applies to New Testament verses (eg. Matt.3:2; Acts 3:19) as well as those in the Old Testament.¹⁴

This principle has been formalised in the 34th article of the Gospel Standard churches, 'We believe that we have no Scripture warrant to take the exhortations in the Old Testament intended for the Jews in national covenant with God, and apply them in a spiritual and saving sense to unregenerate men'.¹⁰

In this way all verses relating to repentance are classified and the hyper-calvinist believes that the duty to tell the unregenerate to repent is not proven.

Q2. Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should believe?

The hyper-calvinist follows a similar procedure with the passages relating to faith. Spiritual faith, faith connected to the Gospel, is the result of the regenerating work of the Spirit and cannot therefore be a work of unregenerate man or his duty. The 33rd article of the Gospel Standard churches states, 'For ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependant upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power and on the other hand, to deny the doctrine of special redemption'.¹⁰

In dealing with those passages that relate to faith some are dismissed because of their Jewish connection. It is one thing for Jews to be called to accept their Messiah, quite another for unregenerate Gentiles to be called to receive Christ as Saviour on the basis of the same verses. Texts much loved by A.Fuller to prove duty faith (eg. John 12:36) are thus ruled out of court.¹⁵

Other Scriptures are rejected as non-salvational in content. The use of Eccles.12:1 is rejected as an abuse of a verse calling creatures to recognise creaturely responsibilities by those who use it to encourage the young to believe in the Saviour.¹⁶

Some Scriptures which are popularly used in Gospel preaching are rejected by hyper-calvinists for this purpose not because they are addressed to Jews but because they are in letters to Christian churches. Those who are exhorted to be reconciled to God (2 Cor.5:20) are not unregenerate sinners but regenerate Christians. The reconciliation called for is the acceptance by the Christian of his Gospel privileges. It has nothing to do with the unregenerate.¹⁷

Styles (but not Gill) goes to great lengths to make verses which appear to suggest a command or invitation to the unregenerate in fact commands to the regenerate. Many hyper-calvinists would no doubt reject his embarrassing use of Isa.45:22. He begins by stating that the speaker must always be God and not the preacher, so that effectual calling is in view rather than general invitation, and then interprets 'the ends of the earth' according to its 'spiritual signification' ie. those sinners who are at a conscious distance from God! The word 'conscious' is the key as that suggests the Spirit has been at work and so the invitation can stand.¹⁸

By this procedure the verses which are left are those which show 'sensible sinners', ie. sinners who have experienced the working of the Spirit, and them alone, being encouraged to believe. A sinner conscious of his need (Acts 16:30) is thus exhorted to believe (Acts 16:31).¹⁹

The hyper-calvinist believes that by his careful exegesis of Scripture in its context he has shown that duty faith is an unscriptural idea.

Q3. Are not the invitations of the Gospel universal?

Much energy has been expended by hyper-calvinists in opposing the term 'offer' in respect to Gospel invitations. Such a word is seen as implying the ability of the creature to take the Gospel or leave it, and it is seen as contrary to both the concept of limited atonement and the idea of predestination. If the elect are irreversibly chosen and Christ died only for them then to offer the non-

elect salvation through Christ is a nonsense. Joseph Hussey spends much of his tedious book repeating in one hundred and one ways the same basic objection to the word 'offer'. He argues that as Christ is to be preached he may not be offered. The idea of offering is antithetical to the idea of proclaiming.²⁰

Other hyper-calvinists are more interested in the invitations themselves and their exact wording. They reject the idea that these invitations are universal or indiscriminate. Rather, each invitation has within it the spiritual characteristics to which it is addressed. These characteristics are the marks of the regenerate. Not all men, but the thirsty, the weary and heavy laden etc. are exhorted to come.²¹ There are no invitations of the more general nature to all men to come in spiritual faith and spiritual repentance.

The Gospel Standard churches have an additional way of undercutting the passages which might present a universal Gospel offer. It must be remembered that verses to the Jewish nation are cut out under article 34 as we have seen, verses in the epistles are addressed to the regenerate in the churches, so we are only really left with verses in Acts. Article 32 reads, 'We believe that it would be unsafe, from the brief records we have of the way in which the apostles, under the immediate direction of the Lord, addressed their hearers in certain special cases and circumstances, to derive absolute and universal rules for ministerial addresses in the present day under widely different circumstances'.¹⁰ By this method the testimony of Acts to the manner of inviting sinners is removed.

The hyper-calvinist again believes that he has no solid grounds on which to invite the unregenerate to do anything. Many feel that in a mixed congregation the mixture prevents much exhortation being given at all.

Q4. How can sinners be condemned for unbelief if unbelief is not a sin?

The hyper-calvinist could not agree more! He argues that sin has to do with duty, that faith is not a duty, so unbelief is not culpable.²² As unbelief is not a sin the sinner in no way adds to his sufferings in hell by rejecting faith in Christ. He cannot be punished if faith is not his duty. He will suffer for his own

sins - the breaking of the moral law.²³

The hyper-calvinist finds the idea of condemning a man to greater punishment for failing to believe in Christ for salvation an absurdity because the unregenerate have nothing to do with the death of Christ. Christ died only for the elect - effectively and sufficiently.

He rejects the idea that there is an infinite value or sufficiency in the blood of Christ. He holds to the commercial theory of the atonement. Christ's sufferings were exactly proportionate to the number of the elect. If God had elected more sinners Christ's sufferings would have increased. If he had elected less Christ's sufferings would have decreased. The idea of telling sinners that there is a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to cover their sins if they will but believe is rejected as unscriptural in all its parts, and as useless rhetoric that will accomplish nothing for the non-elect.²⁴

Scriptures that are said to teach that unbelief earns wrath (eg. Ps.2:12; John 3:18) are dismissed as teaching no such thing. The homage required of kings (Ps.2:12) is not spiritual faith but a recognition of the supremacy of Christ over human rulers.²⁵ In John 3:18 the word 'because' is seen as not giving the reason for condemnation, but simply as a way of stating an inevitable logical conclusion. Facts are stated but no reasons are given in this verse.²⁶

The hyper-calvinist is again satisfied that his position faces no real scriptural challenge.

Q5. Why does the Holy Spirit strive with sinners if repentance and faith are not their duties?

In looking at the scriptural passages which relate to the strivings of the Spirit or our Lord, the hyper-calvinist finds no evidence of internal striving to bring the unregenerate to spiritual repentance and faith.

The strivings of the Spirit or of our Lord are related to the avoidance of physical or national disasters. The Jewish motif is very evident in the reasoning again. Jews are striven with

externally through the ministry of the Word to receive their national Messiah or face national disaster.²⁷ Our Lord's dissatisfaction in Matt.23:37 was because though he had often sought to teach them publicly (ie. gather them) they were unwilling to come.²⁸ No higher spiritual matter is involved.

Even Gentiles could be striven with through preaching to avoid physical disasters such as the Flood (Gen.6:3),²⁹ and sometimes moral repentance in the community resulted, as at Ninevah,³⁰ but striving to produce spiritual repentance which fails is inconsistent with the invincibility of the Spirit.³¹

Hyper-calvinist concern to be rid of the idea of the Spirit's striving to bring about spiritual repentance and faith is necessary because such strivings in the spiritual realm are seen as the evidence of regeneration.³² Only the regenerate elect must be allowed to have them, therefore. Wherever the Spirit is savingly at work (however feebly his work may manifest itself) there is the ground for confidence that sovereign love and redeeming grace are present.³³ If the non-elect could experience similar strivings what ground would the elect have for believing themselves regenerate?

We have seen how representative hyper-calvinists answer the objections raised against their refusal to call sinners to repentance and faith.

(iii) What are the consequences of hyper-calvinism for evangelism?

In preaching there must be a proclamation of the moral law so that sin can be clearly defined. The duties of the sinner as a creature subject to his Creator and Law-giver must be pressed home. This will create a natural piety.³⁴ This piety must be clearly distinguished from supernatural religion that is established and maintained by the Holy Spirit. It does have, however, the advantage of making the sinner religious and moral. It is in this context that, listening to the Word of God, he might find himself the subject of regeneration. Natural religious duties are not to be despised as totally valueless, even though they cannot save or induce God to give salvation.

John Gill comments on Peter's statement to Simon Magus (Acts 8:22), 'though he were in a state of nature, the Apostle exhorts him to

the duty of prayer; for prayer is a natural duty, and binding upon all men, though none but a spiritual man can perform it in a spiritual way'.³⁵

But none of this is Gospel work. It is law work. What Gospel work may be done? Gill again gives the answer, 'We are ambassadors for him; we come with full powers from him, not to propose terms of peace, to treat with men about it, to offer it to them, but to publish and proclaim it as made by him'.³⁶ He repudiates offers and terms (ie. statements such as 'if you believe then ...') and emphasises proclamation.

What God has done in Christ for his people is to be proclaimed. Regeneration and its marks are to be explained so that the 'emotions, desires and actions which reveal his gracious presence in the heart'³⁷ may be known, for from these a personal experience of regeneration has to be 'inferred'.³⁷

The preacher proclaims and explains but he does not command, exhort or invite with respect to faith or repentance or seeking the aid of God's Spirit.³⁸ Thus the first part of the 34th article of the Gospel Standard churches reads, '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, etc., 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'.¹⁰

The preacher proclaims and explains, but only God regenerates. When God does this the regenerate person becomes conscious of it by inference from the tell-tale signs,³⁷ and from the fact that the Spirit of God applies the word he hears to him in such a way that repentance and faith result.³⁹ Preachers can induce a mere human credence. Only God can produce a heaven-born faith.⁴⁰

What of the sinner? He can practice his natural duties and perform his natural religion, but for supernatural religion he must wait until the Holy Spirit is ready. He must not bemoan his long period of being unconverted for this is to question the wise timing of God.⁴¹ When the Spirit applies the word to his heart and he infers his regeneration he may proceed as God directs.⁴²

How are Christians to view their own failure as witnesses, the attitude of Christ to the progress of the Gospel, and to the prolonged refusal of sinners to come to him? Let Styles answer, 'Much that is preached for gospel in the present day asserts or implies that the Lord Jesus is continually disappointed, embarrassed and distressed at the failings of professing Christians, the slow progress His cause is making, and the prolonged refusal of sinners to give him their hearts ... These misrepresentations of the character and conduct of the enthroned Saviour are made to incite the church to earnestness and liberality, and to induce sinners to become pious. On the contrary, we believe that the existence of our Lord is one of unbroken joy and unruffled confidence, as He beholds the eternal Spirit, glorify His name by bringing all to His feet, for whom He died, in response to His intercessory prayers. Unremitting success attends His cause'.⁴³

References

1. This is not slander but a statement in a private letter from a prominent hyper-calvinist.
2. A comparison of Gill J (1971) Sovereign Grace Publishers (USA) 'The Cause of God and Truth' with Gill J (1980) Baker Book House 'Gill's Commentary' bears this out.
3. Peter Toon gives Joseph Hussey a large place in his book 'Hyper-Calvinism' (1967) The Olive Tree. His actual influence among modern hyper-calvinists is negligible and his views are rejected by prominent modern hyper-calvinists.
4. This information supplied in letter by a prominent hyper-calvinist.
5. W.J.Styles had influence among hyper-calvinists outside of the Gospel Standard churches through his book 'Manual of Faith and Practice' (1897) in which he quotes numerous hyper-calvinist authors and preachers.
6. John Gill was a prominent hyper-calvinist whose books have been mentioned and whose scholarship was revered among hyper-calvinists.
7. Styles op.cit. p.16-23

8. Styles op.cit. p.20,186,205. Most Strict Baptist Associations had these statements in their articles until very recently.
9. Styles op.cit. p.209
10. The Gospel Standard churches are a group of Strict Baptist churches who adopted developed hyper-calvinist articles nos. 32-34 in 1878. They still retain these to this day.
11. Styles op.cit. p.186
12. Styles op.cit. p.239
13. Styles op.cit. p.238-240; Gill 'Cause' p.35; Gill 'Commentary' Vol.V. p.498,939
14. Styles op.cit. p.238,239,241-247; Gill 'Cause' p.34-35
15. Styles op.cit. p.211,212,213,215,216,221,222,223,228,232,241-247
16. Styles op.cit. p.213
17. Styles op.cit. p.228-231,233; Gill 'Cause' p.44; Gill 'Commentary' Vol.VI p.310
18. Styles op.cit. p.214
19. Styles op.cit. p.225
20. Joseph Hussey's book is called 'Operations of Grace but no Offers'
21. Gill 'Cause' p.19; Gill 'Commentary' Vol V p.101, Vol VI p.1084
22. Styles op.cit. p.20,23,233-237
23. Styles op.cit. p.56
24. Styles op.cit. p.43,47-49
25. Styles op.cit. p.234
26. Styles op.cit. p.235
27. Styles op.cit. p.114-116; Gill 'Cause' p.36
28. Styles op.cit. p.113-114; Gill 'Cause' p.28-29
29. Styles op.cit. p.111-112; Gill 'Cause' p.3-4
30. Styles op.cit. p.177
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31. Styles op.cit. p.99,100,104,111-120
32. Styles op.cit. p.108-109
33. Styles op.cit. p.105
34. Styles op.cit. p.124-125
35. Gill 'Commentary' Vol V p.861 cf. Styles comment on why children should be taught to pray p.125
36. Gill 'Commentary' Vol VI p.310
37. Styles op.cit. p.167
38. Styles op.cit. p.101
39. Styles op.cit. p.131-133,195
40. Styles op.cit. p.186-208
41. Styles op.cit. p.168
42. Styles op.cit. p.167,132,133
43. Styles op.cit. p.86

Editor's Note. The writer has agreed to write a critical assessment of the 'Hyper' position in our next issue.

INTERPRETING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURE

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From the 9th to 11th March, thirty-five representatives from the constituent member churches of the BEC met in NORTHAMPTON to consider five papers dealing with issues related to the interpretation and application of scripture. The papers were distributed to conference members in advance, with a view to the maximum benefit being obtained from these days of corporate study.

Most of those attending were pastors of local churches. It may well