

Tobias Crisp was born in 1600, matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge, remained at Cambridge until he had taken his BA, after which he moved to Balliol College, Oxford, graduating MA in 1626. About this time, he married the daughter of a London merchant, an MP, and future member of the Council of State, by whom he had thirteen children. In 1627, having been a Church of England minister at Newington Butts for a few months, he settled at Brinkworth in Wiltshire, where he became a popular preacher. When he obtained the degree of DD is not known, but it was before 1642, in which year, because of royalist persecution, he retired to London. While at Brinkworth, he had been suspected of antinomianism, and as soon as his opinions became known from his preaching in London, his doctrine of free grace was bitterly attacked. So much so, towards the close of the year, he was involved in a confrontation on the subject with fifty-two opponents. Crisp died of smallpox on 27th February 1643. Robert Lancaster immediately published his discourses as *Christ Alone Exalted*. In 1690, this, with additions, was republished by one of his sons, Samuel, as Crisp's *Complete Works*. In 1755, John Gill republished the volumes, appending his own notes. And it was this last edition that was republished towards the end of the 20th century, along with another edition of selected portions. Benjamin Brook, in his *Lives of the Puritans*, describes Crisp's doctrine as 'spiritual, evangelical, and particularly suited to the case of awakened sinners, greatly promoting their peace and comfort'. Yet Crisp is, even to this day, constantly dismissed as a dangerous antinomian!

Tobias Crisp

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you

Titus 2:11-15

Tobias Crisp stands accused of being an antinomian. Indeed, he is notorious for it, being regarded as a foremost exponent of the error. What is more, in the 1640s so strong was the feeling against him for his *Christ Alone Exalted*, and because that work was having so great an influence, the Westminster Assembly considered burning it. Crisp excites strong antipathies even to this day. On the other hand, Crisp has not lacked judicious supporters who have thought highly of his character and works, and praised them.¹ But, as I say, the accusation of antinomianism has not died, even until today. Crisp himself, however, struggled to clear himself of the insult, denying ‘the foul blur of antinomianism’ with which he and his doctrine were mired. But as he said: ‘And no marvel it goes for such now; for in the apostle’s time it was accounted so... It was objected against the apostle himself as direct antinomianism’.²

Was Crisp an antinomian? No! I assert that categorically, despite the prestigious Reformed writers and publishing houses which continue to claim that he was. But I am not interested merely to clear this good man’s name. This study will be more than defensive; I intend to take the attack to the critics. I will show that

¹ Among them, William Twisse, John Howe, Elisha Cole, Benjamin Brook, John Brown of Haddington, James Hervey, Augustus Toplady, John Gill, John Rippon, William Gadsby and C.H.Spurgeon. Although Howe recommended Crisp’s book, he later admitted he had not read it, and he and six of the other original signatories publicly disclaimed support (Sell, Alan P.F.: *The Great Debate*, H.E.Walter Ltd., Worthing, 1982, pp49-50).

² Crisp Vol.1 p143. See also Crisp Vol.4 pp124-125.

not only was Crisp not an antinomian, but in those areas where he is accused of it, he was in fact a true preacher of the gospel.

I do this, first of all, because there is too little real preaching of the true gospel these days. Sadly, the recovery of the Reformed faith in the second half of the 20th century has not been matched by a recovery of the free way in which men in the past have preached the gospel. And the grievous consequences are only too evident all around us, I am afraid. For too long, we have suffered under legal preaching; we need preachers of free grace!

In addition, and in particular, I want to highlight the nature of the antinomian controversy, look at the criticisms Crisp faced on that score, and so provide further support for the main thesis of my *Christ is All* concerning the law and the believer.

Why Crisp? I take Crisp not only because he has been – and still is – accused of being a leading proponent of antinomianism, but because his writings are freely available today.³

By my support for Crisp, I do not for a moment intend to give the impression that I agree with all he said. Certainly I do not. For my reservations about him, see the Appendix.

Now to get to grips with Crisp and antinomianism. While Crisp made some alarming statements which, taken out of context, have enabled his critics to show him in a bad light, yet in many cases he was actually teaching the gospel, and doing so in a powerful, biblical way. I will bring this out under four headings.

First, sometimes Crisp was preaching to sinners and rightly showing them Christ's willingness to receive them as sinners, assuring them they need no preparation to be invited or to come to Christ. *Secondly*, sometimes Crisp was preaching for the comfort of the saints, rightly assuring them of their position in Christ, safe from Satan's power, far beyond all risk of condemnation. *Thirdly*, sometimes Crisp was rightly smiting down self-righteousness. *Fourthly*, sometimes Crisp was rightly setting out the doctrine of

³ Besides the publication by Old Paths Gospel Press to which I am referring, a selection of his sermons can be found in *The Sermons of Tobias Crisp with John Gill's Notes: Tobias Crisp Series: Issues 1 & 2*, The Christian Bookshop, Ossett, 1995, the publishers having added their own notes in places.

free justification, in order to convince sinners that no works of theirs can make them right with God. All this is pure gospel, and should be part of the aim of every gospel preacher. None of it is antinomianism, none.

1. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when he was, in fact, preaching the willingness of Christ to receive sinners as sinners; in other words, when he was refuting preparationism

Crisp was very free in offering Christ to sinners and inviting such to come to the Saviour. He ought to be commended for it, not censured! We don't have enough of such freeness in gospel preaching today! The way is free to sinners, he said:

It is a free way indeed, free for man, without any cost or charge; free, as he is a way to all sorts of men, none excepted, none prohibited; whoever will may set footing in Christ. There is nothing that can bar one person more than another from entering Christ as a way. I know, beloved, this seems harsh to the ears of some people, that there is no difference to be made among men, not only poor as well as rich, but that the wicked, as well as the godly, are admitted; that is strange. But let me tell you, Christ is a free way for a drunkard, for a whore-master, for a harlot, an enemy of Christ; I say, Christ is as free a way for such a person to enter into him, as for the most godly person in the world.

Such preaching left him open to attack. He met it head on:

But do not mistake me; I do not say, Christ is a free way to *walk* in him, and yet to *continue* in that condition; for Christ will never leave a person in such filthiness, to whom he has given leave to enter into himself: mark well what I say; but for *entrance* into him, Christ is as free a way for the vilest sinners, as for any person under heaven.⁴

In this, Crisp was right. Before I get to the main point, do not miss Crisp's proper emphasis upon the necessity of sanctification – *at the right place*. Let me spell it out: *after* a sinner has come to Christ, he will not, he dare not continue in sin; he cannot go on in ungodliness; Christ never converts a sinner without beginning to sanctify him. So declared Crisp. In this, whatever else he was, he

⁴ Crisp Vol.1 pp34-35, emphasis mine.

was not an antinomian! To accuse him of it is nothing but a downright lie!

But now for his main point. Note Crisp's emphasis upon 'entering' Christ, the invitation to come to Christ, being converted to Christ. It is in this light that Crisp's 'godly' must be seen. He was encouraging those who considered themselves the worst of sinners, telling them that they are as welcome as the most 'godly' – that is, the seemingly righteous, the religious, the respectable, the self-righteous.

The fact is, Christ came for and died for the ungodly, for sinners. Christ calls the ungodly. He himself declared: 'I did not come to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance' (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17). 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance' (Luke 5:31-32). 'The Son of Man has come to save that which was *lost*' (Matt. 18:11). 'Christ died for the *ungodly*... While we were still *sinner*s, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:6,8).

Now by 'ungodly', the New Testament means such as 'the wicked... the sexually immoral... idolaters... adulterers... male prostitutes... homosexual offenders... thieves... drunkards... slanderers... swindlers' (1 Cor. 6:9-10, NIV). *But it also includes the unbelieving respectable, self-righteous, proud, religious, and so on.*⁵ Christ came for, died for, and calls sinners as sinners – the ungodly. And Christ receives the ungodly as they are brought to repentant faith. Christ 'receives sinners' (Luke 15:2). I say it again, for preaching this as freely as he did, Crisp deserves our commendation. More, we need such preaching today. This is *gospel* preaching. Needless to say, once a sinner is saved, the question of sanctification is inevitable (2 Cor. 5:17)! But at the point of calling

⁵ Take for example the words of Christ: 'What comes out of a man is what makes him "unclean". For from within, out of men's hearts, come *evil thoughts*, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, *greed, malice*, deceit, lewdness, *envy, slander, arrogance* and *folly*. All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean"'. (Mark 7:20-23, NIV). A man may avoid all the gross outward sins, and cultivate, say, respectability, but fall foul of these inwards sins. The fact is, every man is a sinner (Rom. 3:23).

sinners to Christ, utter freeness is essential. Clearly, Crisp was a preacher who showed such freeness.

Furthermore, as Crisp went on to say, Christ does not leave sinners in their ungodly condition. ‘And such were some of you’, Paul reminded the Corinthians, ‘but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6:11). Nevertheless, sinners are washed *after* coming to Christ – *as* they come to him – *by* coming to him – not *before* they come.

How right Crisp was in this! And how this generation ought to pay attention to the good man at least in this regard! Those of us who preach need to emulate him. And those of us who hear ought to encourage and require our preachers to preach like him! We need this freeness in gospel preaching. In other words, Crisp was facing up to Reformed preparationism, and rightly denying it!

Again, take Crisp, arguing with sinners, seeking to persuade them to yield to Christ: ‘The gospel is therefore called the gospel, because it is glad tidings unto men... The poor sinner, he is a broken creature... he is a dead creature... That life now is reached out unto such a person, that is a dead person’. This is too free for some: ‘It may be you do suspect, saying within yourself, Christ is not my portion; I am not fit for Christ; I am a great sinner, I must be holy first’.

Preparationism? Crisp did not like it; he did not like it at all. And he was right! Crisp had his answer ready for the preparationists, arguing Isaiah 55:1-3. This preparationism ‘is bringing a price to Christ’. ‘I have had a law work. Therefore I am fit to come to Christ. I am prepared!’ Not so, said Crisp. It will not do! Crisp:

You must come without money, and without price: and what is this to come without money, and without price? It is nothing but to take the offer⁶ of Christ, these waters of life, to take them merely and simply as

⁶ The Christian Bookshop, Ossett, added their own note (Ossett Vol.1 n6, p48): ‘Careful reading of Tobias Crisp’s sermons will reveal that he did not offer the gospel to unregenerate persons’. Later they explained that he did offer Christ but only in the sense of inviting the awakened. This is patently false. In addition to Crisp’s words quoted in the body of the text above, consider this: ‘It is as sufficient for the satisfaction of a man, the

a gift bought, and this is sure mercy indeed: These are the sure mercies of David, when a man receives the things of Christ, only because Christ gives them; not in regard to any action of ours, as the ground of taking them... that we must bring along with us, that must concur that we may partake of this gift.⁷

Crisp knew he faced ‘cavilling’ for such preaching:

Some are offended that I should say Christ is a way even to the drunkard and to the whoremonger; and the vilest sort of persons have as good a right to Christ... as any... I know the objections of persons against what I have delivered... but observe, you shall find the whole strain of the gospel runs continually thus: ‘Christ came to save the lost’; ‘he died for the ungodly’; ‘while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’; ‘he received gifts for the rebellious, that the Lord might dwell among them’; and such like are the terms of the gospel, upon which Christ is tendered [offered] to our souls. Now, then, I say, to every afflicted soul, are you rebellious, an enemy, ungodly, an harlot, lost? Indeed, are you worse than enmity itself? if you are not worse, Christ came for you,⁸ while thus, though no better: he comes to tender himself unto you to take him, while you are thus, before you are any better... Well, but you will say, this is a way to lead men to a licentious course of life.

And so on. But he did not budge: ‘I say the contrary: it is the only way to lead men into a more enlarged way of holiness, than any way in the world’.⁹

What a statement! How true! The best way to lead men to Christ is to preach Christ and the freeness of grace. Not the law! No: the best way to produce godliness in believers is to preach Christ and the freeness of grace, not the law! How this needs to be preached today! Let the legal preachers cavil at it: ‘It will produce antinomianism; it is antinomianism!’ No! It is the gospel.

general tender of free grace and pardon of sin to all sinners, as if his name in particular were set down in that tender’ (Crisp Vol.3 p40). ‘To all sinners’ – not just the awakened! Such notes tell us as much about the publishers as they do Crisp. Crisp was right; the publishers are wrong.

⁷ Crisp Vol.1 pp37-38.

⁸ I would have preferred ‘such as you’. But, it seems to me, Crisp was addressing ‘sensible’ sinners at this point. Of course, Christ came for the sick (Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31).

⁹ Crisp Vol.1 pp43,46,47. This is the very point of my *Christ!*

Moreover, unless a man can be accused of antinomianism because he preaches like this, then he is not preaching the gospel as freely as he ought!

Arguing Isaiah 55:1, Crisp again:

God looks for nothing in the world of men; be they what they will, be they in the worst condition, no matter what it is, they are the men to whom Christ offers himself... Every one that has but a mind to come to him, every one that would take him, may have him... Though men have no hands to take Christ, yet they may receive him... God... will show pity and mercy to us, and reach out his Christ to those who have no hands to receive him, no faith to believe in him... Consider the conveyance in which he is made over to men... The terms of the conveyance... are only such as in a deed of gift, and a deed of gift universally exhibited and reached out... There is no better way to know your portion in Christ, than upon the general tender of the gospel, to conclude absolutely he is yours, and so, without any more ado, to take him, as tendered to you, on his word; and this taking of him, upon a general tender, is the greatest security in the world, that Christ is yours... Christ has reached out himself to sinners as sinners... Question it not, but believe it... He belongs to sinners as sinners; and if there be no worse than sinfulness, rebellion and enmity in you, he belongs to you, as well as any in the world¹⁰... He receives sinners as sinners.¹¹

How right Crisp was! The offer *is* general. The offer *is* free. Praise God it is so! Sinners, and only sinners, are invited to Christ. All sinners are invited and commanded to come to Christ. Sinners and only sinners come to Christ, and they come as sinners, and nothing other than sinners. But when they come as sinners, Christ then turns them all into saints. There is a vast difference between coming to Christ, and continuing in him. And Crisp was here dealing with the former, not the latter. The gospel invites sinners – not sensible sinners – it invites sinners, all sinners as sinners, to come to Christ: ‘God looks for nothing in the world of men; be they what they will, be they in the worst condition, no matter what it is, they are the men to whom Christ offers himself’. It was such free offers of Christ which got Crisp into deep trouble: ‘I know I may speak that which be offence to some, but I must speak the truth of the Lord,

¹⁰ ‘Belongs’ in the offer of the gospel, of course. Crisp was not saying that sinners are saved because they are sinners, even the worst of sinners!

¹¹ Crisp Vol.1 pp101,105.

whatever men say'. What was it his critics found so objectionable? Words such as these:

Whatever you are in this congregation, suppose a drunkard, a whore-master, a swearer, a blasphemer and persecutor, a madman in iniquity, could you but come to Jesus Christ; I say, come, only come, it is no matter though there be no alteration in the world in you, in that instant¹² when you come; I say, at that instant though you are thus [as] vile as can be imagined, come to Christ; he is untrue [a liar] if he puts you out: 'In no wise, (says he) will I cast you out'.¹³

Crisp, of course, was saying that no preparation whatsoever is needed in the sinner before an invitation may be given to such, nor is any preparation whatsoever required to make a sinner fit to come to Christ. He was right in this. And it was this that many did not like. Nevertheless he stood his ground, and rightly so: 'Must we be changed first, and then being changed, come to Christ?' he demanded.¹⁴ Of course not! In other words, Crisp was not speaking of the inevitable change of heart and life *after* coming to Christ; he was referring to the sinner *before* coming to Christ.¹⁵ As he himself had asserted: 'I do not speak this [sort of thing] to the intent that any should conceive that God leaves persons rebellious, vile and loathsome, as he finds them, when he closes with them'.¹⁶

¹² Crisp went too far at this point. The instant a sinner comes to Christ there *is* a change in his attitude; before he came he was an unrepentant unbeliever, but as he comes to Christ he turns from his sins and turns to Christ in faith. I cannot – dare not, will not – venture into a minute tracing of the exact process of regeneration, conviction, repentance and faith, but obviously there must be a change as and when a sinner comes to Christ.

¹³ Crisp Vol.2 pp17-18.

¹⁴ Crisp Vol.2 p32. See also Crisp Vol.4 pp225-232.

¹⁵ See Gill's note (Crisp Vol.2 pp17-18).

¹⁶ Crisp went on: 'But, I say, at that time, when the Lord closes with persons, he closes with them in such a state of rebellion' (Crisp Vol.2 p27). I would not use that last word 'rebellion'. In his effort to pull down preparationism, Crisp was going too far. I once met a man who, trying to magnify the grace of God, foolishly claimed God saved him *against his will*. Not so. Christ makes his people willing, submissive and obedient when he brings them to faith and repentance; this is the nature of saving faith. If Crisp had said that Christ closes with his people *as sinners*, I would have agreed wholeheartedly.

Crisp was well aware of the dangers of preparationism, and knew the target he needed to hit: ‘It is a common doctrine among the rigid troublers of the Israel of God, that men must have many legal preparations, and they must sensibly find [these preparations] wrought in themselves, before they may dare to apply Christ¹⁷ by faith for justification,¹⁸ otherwise their faith is mere presumption’.¹⁹ He illustrated the point. According to the preparationists:

Suppose a sinner has lived in all manner of licentiousness... before he may believe that Christ has justified him,²⁰ he must forsake and find... that he has forsaken all his former evil ways, and must be stricken with inward terror; and feel the pangs of the new birth, as they call it; and be, I know not how much or how long, (for their expressions intimate a strange depth) under the bondage of a kind of hellish conscience tormenting and racking them; indeed, more, they must be changed too, and find a delight in the law of the Lord, and a ready cheerfulness in obedience thereunto; and that not by a fit [whim, impulse, passing phase], but constantly, till they find all this and much more of a like nature. Their time of believing in Christ is not yet come.

What are the consequences of such an insistence upon such preparation for Christ? Just this: ‘All which, occasions so much fear, as keeps many poor souls in bondage all their lives long, suspecting still that the humiliation is not deep enough’. ‘All their lives long’, please notice. As I showed in my *Christ is All*, preparationism had a devastating, debilitating effect on men like

¹⁷ ‘Apply Christ’ and ‘apply to Christ’ are one and the same.

¹⁸ For once, Crisp got to the biblical position on justification by faith! Sinners do have to apply to Christ for justification; until they trust Christ, they are not justified. Crisp, as I have explained, mistakenly believed in eternal justification; that is, sinners apply to Christ for the sense, the manifestation, the assurance, that they have always been justified.

¹⁹ Crisp Vol.4 p226. This, to my mind, answers Gill’s vain attempt to limit the freeness of Crisp’s address to sinners in another sermon by saying they were ‘such who are deemed sensible of their rebellion and vileness’ (Crisp Vol.2 p27). Likewise, see above for comments on the publishers’ note in the Ossett edition of Crisp’s sermons (Vol.1 n6, p48). Crisp rightly offered Christ to sinner as sinners!

²⁰ Crisp believed in eternal justification. As I have already said, in this he was mistaken, but the fact is at this point he was speaking about conversion *as he saw it*.

Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards – *even for years after their conversion!* What did Crisp think of this preparationism business?

Is not this to put the cart before the horse, or rather to send the cart a going, and the horse must come after? [Is not this] to have men sanctified before they can be justified[?]²¹ If men must be thus qualified before they believe to justification, how can Christ be said to justify the ungodly? By this rule he rather justifies the godly... Is this not an adding of the works of the law to the righteousness of Christ for justification? If not, why may not a man be justified without all this addition? And if he may be justified without these works of the law, why may he not apply²² it?

Crisp knew the reply he would receive: ‘Some may say they make none of this [the] cause of justification, but [merely] preparatives to it’. He was ready: The fact is, he said:

They will not allow men to be justified without these works, and that justification belongs not to them, they may not apply it till it be thus;²³ whereas the apostle’s gospel is, we are justified by believing in Christ, for righteousness, without works... These men contradict the gospel of free justification by faith without works, while they not only require the being [existence, experience] of such works before justification, but also make them a main, and immediate ground of believing it; for they usually affirm that such who apply Christ²⁴ without such qualifications, [that] their application is groundless, and built upon sand; but being thus wrought upon and changed, the ground work is laid, they have a foundation, [they say,] and therefore they need not fear; as if any foundation or ground work for justification can be found, saving Jesus Christ himself alone.

What a perceptive man! What a mighty statement! Nothing must come between the sinner and ‘Jesus Christ himself alone’. Christ *is* all!

²¹ Nathaniel Ward warned the arch-preparationist Thomas Hooker he had gone too far: ‘You make as good Christians before men are in Christ, as ever they are after... Would I were but as good a Christian now, as you make men while they are but preparing for Christ’.

²² I would prefer ‘apply for’. Crisp’s eternal justification is prominent once again.

²³ As before, Crisp was speaking of conversion – coloured by his view of eternal justification.

²⁴ As before, ‘apply Christ’ and ‘apply to Christ’ are one and the same.

Crisp took the preparationists and their teaching to task:

He that has any ground to believe besides Christ himself, does he not make Christ imperfect, by adding some other thing to him? If they say they make not these works the ground properly, but the reason of believing, I answer that as there is no foundation, so no reason without [that is, other than, besides, in addition to] Christ of [better, for] believing. [The fact is, they argue]... that these works sincerely wrought in a person may serve as reasons that they do believe; but [this is wrong...] they cannot be reasons that they may believe.

Crisp drew attention to the outcome of the teaching he was opposing:

You will observe, where such legal observances are required to application of justification,²⁵ there is an hundred times more poring on such qualifications, than on Christ and his free grace; the thoughts, cares and passions are infinitely more racked and intense about *them*, than *him*; *their* absence, or presence, work more strongly by far on the spirit and affections, than *his* presence, or *his* absence; Christ in a manner is forgotten and neglected in comparison of *them*; almost all comfort, and all peace, stand upon *their* presence.²⁶

How relevant all this is today. Reformed teachers can be strident in their demands for a law work before coming to Christ – even before preaching Christ! They should listen to men like Crisp and not ostracise him. Sinners ought to be made to look, not to themselves in any way, but to Christ – and to do so at once and for everything.

Crisp realised the ‘old cavil’ would come: ‘Some may say, what use is there then of works?’ To this he gave the old, the biblical, answer: ‘The truth is, this gospel is the only establisher of good works’.²⁷

I must pause. What a statement! How right Crisp was. Here he is, flying directly in the face of Reformed teaching on the believer, the law and sanctification. What will make a believer holy? The law? No! Christ! For his ‘gospel is the only establisher of good

²⁵ That is, *in Crisp’s terms*, before a sinner may trust Christ. The biblical position is that the sinner’s coming to Christ is an application *for* justification, not *of* it.

²⁶ As I say, see my *Christ* for the experiences of Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards.

²⁷ Once again, my point in my *Christ*.

works'. Crisp hit the bull's-eye here! Again, I will come back to this.

Crisp had a word of advice for 'ministers of the gospel'. He warned them against:

This desperate shelf [reef] of preaching a different doctrine to the apostle's, which will swallow up all such [sinners?] mercilessly; and let us choose rather to lie under the heavy censure of men, with the apostle himself, than to lie under his curse, by giving the freeness of grace its own due dimensions, without stinting it to the pleasure of men, for fear of a licentious abuse of it. In Paul's time, men were apt to wrest and abuse free grace to libertinism, as now, yet he feared not to impart to them to the full the good pleasure of Christ for all that. Some while they are busy with the whip to keep off dogs, fetch blood at the hearts of children with their ceaseless cautions, and then rejoice to see them in their spiritual afflictions, which I think is an inhuman cruelty. Some say men grow very presumptuous by such liberty preached... I grant that we ought not to preach continuance in sin that grace may abound, which cannot be truly inferred from this doctrine; for there is a vast difference between Christ's showing grace [to sinners] in the worst condition, and an allowing of men to wallow in sin still.

Reader, do not miss the vital statements that are coming thick and fast. Note Crisp's reference to Paul. As I have shown, the apostle was accused of virtual antinomianism in his day, and men in New Testament times abused the grace of God, as Peter and Jude tell us in their letters. But none of this stopped the early believers from preaching the free offer, and the freeness of grace, without pressing the law upon sinners. Note also Crisp's point about the cruelty of Calvin's whip. See, further, how he was clear that, while no sanctification whatsoever is required in sinners before they are invited to Christ or before they come to Christ, once they have come to Christ sanctification is essential. This man an antinomian? The suggestion is ridiculous! He was, in fact, an admirable preacher of Christ and his gospel to sinners. We need more men of his calibre today!

Finally, Crisp warned all his hearers:

Beware of men that come in sheep's clothing, pretending to lay a sure foundation by laying it deep... while indeed they are ravenous wolves, tearing and racking poor souls, frightening and torturing poor consciences about the matter of justification. I speak not against the

utmost discovery [making plain] of the sinfulness of sin, to make it odious to men, but [I do speak against it] for requisites, and I know not what qualifications (besides faith in Christ alone) to justification.²⁸

This, I submit, is clear enough, and thoroughly biblical. Antinomianism it is not; pure gospel it is. And, I stress once more, we need to resist – and resist stoutly – Reformed demands for a law work before conversion. Let us be *gospel* preachers, preachers of free *grace* – not men of the law.

Crisp again: ‘But, some will say, men must be fitted for Christ, before he will ever own them’. How did Crisp reply? ‘All the fitness of persons to communicate or participate of Christ is their desperate sinfulness; I say, nothing but sinfulness is that which is the fitness that Christ looks for in men’.²⁹ In saying this, Crisp was not belittling sin or encouraging it. He was stating nothing more than Christ did, when he pointed out what ought to be the obvious; namely, that it is the sick who need a physician. As Christ went on to say, he came to be a kind physician to sinners, seeking them out (Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31). This, of course, did not make Christ a minister of sin or an encourager of it. The physician does not look for illness; he does not produce it; he looks for ill patients that he might cure them. So it is with Christ, sinners and sin.³⁰ Crisp was emphasising that it is not a *sense* of sinfulness which fits a sinner for Christ; it is the sinfulness itself. ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*’ (1 Tim. 1:15), not fit sinners, not sensible sinners, not believers. Sinners! Naturally, it is only those who feel their sinfulness who will come to Christ, but they must come as sinners. This is not splitting hairs!

Joseph Hart:

*Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, joined with power.
He is able, he is able;
He is willing; doubt no more.*

²⁸ Crisp Vol.4 pp226-228,230-232, emphasis mine.

²⁹ Crisp Vol.2 pp23-24.

³⁰ Crisp Vol.2 p24.

Tobias Crisp

*Come ye needy, come, and welcome,
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.
Without money, without money
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requires
Is to feel your need of him.
This he gives you, this he gives you,
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.*

*Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Bruised and mangled by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.
Not the righteous, not the righteous;
Sinners Jesus came to call.³¹*

Of all the many excellent things in Hart's hymn, do not miss: 'All the fitness he requires/ Is to feel your need of him'. 'Just so', say the Reformed, 'just so. And he gives it by the law'. Oh? Where did Hart say that? Hart ascribed conviction of sin – as Christ did – to Christ by his Spirit: 'This he gives you, this he gives you,/ 'Tis the Spirit's rising beam'. I see no mention of Moses or the law whatever. Forgetting Hart, where in the New Testament do we find any preaching, addressing Gentiles, using the law to prepare them for Christ? How would such a practice fit with the apostle's categorical statement in 1 Corinthians? Hear him:

Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

³¹ *Gospel Hymns* number 402.

Listen to Crisp yet once more, addressing sinners:

Oh, look upon the brazen serpent, the Lord Jesus; look not upon any other plaster but him to heal your wounded souls... Fix your eyes here, cast yourselves here, rest here, let the weight of your souls lean here... Oh, go not to Christ, as if there were not enough in him to answer your transgressions; that you must carry something else with you to him, that may be a help to your discharge.³²

Let others think and say what they will: I wish I had been hearing men of Crisp's stamp these past fifty or sixty years. More, I wish I myself had been preaching all that time as freely as he did. I ought to have been!

To sum up: Offering Christ freely to sinners as sinners, as Crisp did, assuring them that no preparation is required, telling them they may come to Christ – must come to Christ – as they are, is preaching the gospel as it ought to be preached. It most definitely is not antinomianism. Crisp, however, is not the only man to have been accused of it when in fact he was doing what every preacher ought to do; namely, offer Christ freely to sinners. Crisp, I say, preached the free offer. In so doing, some have argued he was an antinomian. They were wrong. He was not. Their comments tell us more about them than about Crisp!

What is more, please do not miss that, while speaking of the freeness of the gospel offer, Crisp was also stressing the necessity and inevitability of sanctification after the sinner has come to Christ. I cannot refrain from observing that to call this man an antinomian is either wilful character assassination or crass ignorance. It not only tells us of Crisp's gospel freeness, and his warmth in addressing sinners; it speaks volumes of the dryness and coldness of his critics.

2. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when he was, in fact, preaching that the saints will never be condemned

When Crisp said: 'Though [a believer] sins, yet he is not to be reckoned a sinner', he meant, of course that 'God reckons not his

³² Crisp Vol.4 pp39-40.

sin to be his; he reckons it Christ's... You have sinned [but] Christ takes it off [you if] you have received Christ... God reckons sin to Christ, and charges sin upon him'.³³ In other words, until a man comes to Christ he is a sinner, but after he has come to Christ he is a saint; that is to say, God sees no sin in him because, in Christ, he has no sin. Rather, he has had all his sins – past, present and future – washed away in the Redeemer's blood, and been clothed in his Saviour's perfect righteousness. This, it goes without saying, is an amazing doctrine. *But it is pure gospel!* The truth is, a believer, sadly, may still sin – grievously, indeed, he does, often – but he will never come under condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Even so, I admit Crisp's words sound alarming. Perhaps he meant them to be. Oh that we had such alarming preaching today! Our view of justification is desiccated by comparison.

We sing Horatio G.Spafford's words lustily enough; oh, that we might feel and enjoy them:

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

Crisp again: 'Though a believer, after he is a believer, sins often,³⁴ yet... God no longer stands offended and displeased with him, when he has once received Christ'. But as Crisp explained: 'I have not said, God is not offended with the sins that believers commit; but God stands not offended with the *persons* of believers, for the sins committed by them. He has [of course] that everlasting indignation against sin as ever [he had]'.³⁵

This is a vital distinction. In the believer's justification, he is absolutely sinless before God. *But not in his personal*

³³ Crisp Vol.1 p8.

³⁴ Crisp at times went further than this, too far: A believer 'can do nothing but commit sin... If he does anything that is good, it is the Spirit of God that does it, not he; therefore, he himself does nothing but sin; his soul is a mint of sin' (Crisp Vol.1 p8). 'Beloved, you must not expect to live a moment in this world, wherein some sin will not be committed by you' (Crisp Vol.3 p22). As I say, this is going too far. But, whatever he may be accused of, Crisp was not preaching sinless perfection.

³⁵ Crisp Vol.1 pp15-17, emphasis mine.

sanctification. The fact is, however, we today too often concentrate on the second of these two statements to the detriment of the first. That is why Crisp's words sound so startling to us. The question is of course: On which side does the New Testament come down? What weight is given, on the one hand, to the saint's perfection before God – as he sees him in Christ – and, on the other, to his present state of defective sanctification? It is not one or the other. It is both. Even so, there can be no doubt that the New Testament comes down heavily on the glories of the believer's justification, his liberty in Christ. And this truth about the believer's sinless state before God as he sees him in Christ is a treasure of so great a worth that the believer must never allow himself to be robbed of it. Of course in himself he is a sinner still – though Scripture never calls him such, calling him a saint.³⁶ The truth is, he really is in Christ, he is actually completely righteous in God's sight.³⁷

Here is another statement which some will find frightening; as it stands it needs correction: it is not possible, said Crisp, that sin shall hurt believers: 'For any hurt which sins shall do us, it is not possible; for Christ has made satisfaction'. And, quoting Romans 7:25, he declared: 'The apostle... thanks God... that sin could not do him, or others, any hurt'.³⁸ Whatever did Crisp mean? Was he saying that believers can sin with impunity? Was he encouraging believers to live carnally? Of course not! He was speaking of the fact that since Christ has suffered for his people, paid the price of their sins, and suffered the punishment for them, believers shall never come under condemnation; they are gloriously righteous in Christ. Once again, this high – but biblical – view of justification needs preaching today, far more often than it is. As I have said, we think too much of what we are in ourselves, and too little of what we are in Christ.

Crisp declared:

³⁶ See Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 1:1,18; Phil. 4:22; Jude 3; *etc.* Even though he uses 'am' in 1 Tim. 1:15, Paul may be talking of what he was before conversion.

³⁷ I will return to this important question when looking at the works of William Dell and John Eaton.

³⁸ Crisp Vol.1 pp166-167; Vol.3 pp113-114.

There is nothing [that] hinders the joy of God's people, but their sins; these, as they conceive, stand as a separation between God and them... but when they return to Zion, they shall rejoice in that they see that the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God has cleansed them from all sin; in that the Lamb of God has taken away all their sins, the scape-goat having carried them away into the land of forgetfulness; in that all their transgressions are blotted out as a cloud, and God will remember their sins no more; in that they are all fair, having no spot before the Lord in them... Why, then, may not a believer say as David did: 'The Lord has been very bountiful to me, that I may return to my rest'? [He can go on to say to himself:] 'God has done everything in Christ, and taken away all things that can disturb my peace and comfort'.³⁹

Startling as these words may sound to many today, Crisp was right. He was declaring the truth of the new covenant. Since God sees the believer only in and through his Son, he sees him as righteous as his Son. Always! As Paul declared: 'Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:25-27).⁴⁰

Even so, when Crisp said that 'the people of God need not be afraid of their sins', he knew he had to explain himself at once: 'Let me not be mistaken; I do not say, they must not be afraid *to* sin, but they need not be afraid *of* their sins; they that have God for their God, there is no sin that ever they commit can possibly do them any hurt'. He recognised 'some will be ready to say, this is strange'.⁴¹ Too right! And I agree with Gill: 'Such expressions should be disused'. Sin cannot hurt the believer in the sense of condemning him, true, but it damages him immensely. As Gill observed, it will 'damp his spiritual joy, break his peace... [It will] interrupt communion between God and him, dishonour Christ, grieve the Spirit, and cause him to depart for a season'.⁴² A believer's joy *is* lost by his sin – it is not simply a misconception on his part.

³⁹ Crisp Vol.1 p168. See the context (Crisp Vol.1 pp165-168).

⁴⁰ One of the main texts used by John Eaton, as we shall see.

⁴¹ Crisp Vol.3 p111, emphasis mine. See also Vol.3 pp114,135-137.

⁴² Crisp Vol.3 pp112-113. Gill wrote: 'Yet it *may* damp...'. I prefer *will*. See note below.

The fact is, Crisp was his own worst enemy. It certainly appears as though he liked to make his hearers sit up, take notice and remember what he said. After all he was a preacher, and there is need to use interesting and awakening expressions to serve as relish accompanying the meat. Preaching should never be boring, the ‘unforgivable sin’ for preachers! Don’t we know it today! But Crisp was too fond of taking risks. He was hooked on it. Take this:

Suppose a member of Christ, a freeman of his should happen to fall, not only by a failing or a slip; but also by a gross failing, a heavy failing; no, a scandalous falling into sin. Christ making a person free, disannuls, frustrates and makes void every curse and sentence that is in the law that is against such a transgressor; that this member of Christ is no more under the curse when he has transgressed, than he was before he transgressed.⁴³

This was a very unwise way of putting it. Of course, although sin can never separate a believer from Christ, it always spoils the believer’s enjoyment of the Saviour.⁴⁴ In any case, sin is sin, and the saint ought to abhor it; indeed, under the provisions of the new covenant he will abhor it; he must abhor it (Rom. 6:14,18; 7:4; Heb. 8:10; 9:16). And those of us who are preachers need to bear in mind that what people hear, and take away, can be quite different to what we actually said and intended.⁴⁵ Crisp seems to have forgotten, ignored or been unaware of this.

Nevertheless, the point is plain enough: Crisp was speaking of the curse of the law. And in this he was right. In Christ, the believer is delivered from the curse of the law. In fact, at this point Crisp

⁴³ Crisp Vol.1 pp130-131.

⁴⁴ Gill: ‘Sin often separates between God and his own people, with respect to communion, but never with respect to union to him or interest in him.. Now this does not suppose that God loves sin, nor does it give any encouragement to it; for though it cannot separate from interest in God, yet it often does from the enjoyment of him’ (Crisp Vol.1 p131). I would alter *often* into *always*. See also the note below.

⁴⁵ I was reliably informed that in a sermon I had told the congregation that it was perfectly acceptable for believers not to pray. What I *had* said was that my prayer life was a weak and pitiful affair. The ‘message’ received however was that if the preacher can pray so poorly and still go on, then so can we. We do not need to pray!

Tobias Crisp

actually adopted the Reformed position on the law: ‘I do not say the law is utterly abolished, but it is abolished in respect to the curse of it, to every person that is a freeman of Christ; so though such a man sin, the law has no more to say to him than if he had not sinned’.⁴⁶ Crisp quoted Romans 8:33-34, declaring: ‘Paul does not say that the elect never transgress; he confesses that there is transgression: but that which he triumphs in is, that though they transgress, there is nothing to be laid to their charge; no curse can come against them, nor be executed upon them; there is no clapping them in gaol for their transgression’.⁴⁷ Yes, Crisp was right in preaching that the believer is free of condemnation, but, as I say, he did not express himself with sufficient prudence. Nevertheless, this high note of the freeness and fullness of God’s grace in justification in the new covenant, this glorious redemption from all condemnation from every sin, is a note than should not be muted – as it so often is today. John Newton got it right when he spoke in unmistakable terms about his sin and the unbearable thought that God saw him as he really was. Nevertheless, as he went on to say:

*But since my Saviour stands between,
In garments dyed in blood,
'Tis he, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.*

*Thus, though a sinner, I am safe;
He pleads before the throne
His life and death in my behalf,
And calls my sins his own.*

*What wondrous love, what mysteries,
In this appointment shine!
My breaches of the law are his,
And his obedience mine.⁴⁸*

⁴⁶ Crisp was wrong on this, as are the Reformed today. The old covenant has been fulfilled and brought to an end by Christ in the new covenant.

⁴⁷ Crisp Vol.1 pp131-132.

⁴⁸ *Gospel Hymns* number 52.

Tobias Crisp

Or as S.Barnard wrote:

*No condemnation can be brought
Against the sons of God;
Christ hath for them a clothing wrought,
And washed them in his blood.*

*They righteous are in what he's done,
And evermore will be:
They stand complete in Christ the Son,
From condemnation free.⁴⁹*

And, of course, Augustus Toplady:

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring.*

*The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

*The work which his goodness began,
The arm of his strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet.*

*Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below or above,
Can make him his purpose forgo,
Or sever my soul from his love.*

*My name from the palms of his hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on his heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.*

*Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is giv'n;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heav'n.⁵⁰*

⁴⁹ *Gospel Hymns* number 472.

⁵⁰ *Gospel Hymns* number 553.

Let us not just sing it; let us feel it, let us enjoy it, and let us talk and act like it!

When Crisp told every believer that he ‘ceases to be a transgressor from the time [his transgressions] were laid upon [Christ], to the very last hour of your life’, he was making the biblical point that though the believer commits sin, Christ has borne the charge and punishment of them, and therefore there is no condemnation to the believer since he is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). ‘Reckon what sin soever you commit... you are all that he was, he is all that you were (2 Cor. 5:21)’.⁵¹ In this, Crisp was teaching that which is too infrequently taught, and even less frequently understood; namely, the union of Christ and the believer, and the inevitable consequence of it. But once again, Crisp was yielding to his love of the astonishing.

‘Suppose a believer falls into some scandalous sins, and notorious sins, it may be to commit murder and adultery together’. Will Christ ‘send him packing’? What was the point Crisp was trying to make? Was he preaching antinomianism? It sounds very much like it, but he was not. Not at all! Rather, he was preaching the glorious gospel doctrine that believers are free of condemnation, fully clothed in Christ’s spotless righteousness. He was not encouraging murder or adultery. Far from it! He was declaring the glory of the saint’s position in Christ: ‘Believers cannot commit those sins that may give just occasion of suspicion to them, that if they come to Christ he would cast them out’. Was he unwise in his expression? Yes. Very unwise. He was starting at the wrong end. If he had been dealing with a believer who was under conviction because of sin, and repentant of it, Crisp’s words would have been the right medicine. But to tell believers who had not committed adultery that Christ would receive them if they did – or to imply it – was playing with fire. And he knew it: ‘Let me not

⁵¹ See Crisp Vol.2 p77. I would add a rider to Crisp, however. The believer is in Christ, and his sins are removed, only from the time of his believing. Crisp, with his view of eternal justification, saw this in a very different way. But this does not affect the point I am making here: Crisp was not guilty of antinomianism by making such a statement. Rather, he was declaring gospel truth, but doing it in a provocative way, a too provocative way.

be mistaken in [what] I say; I know the enemies of the gospel will make an evil construction of it'.⁵² Too right! Was Crisp sailing too close to the wind? Yes! But antinomian? Of course not! As he said elsewhere: 'I am far from imagining any believer is freed from acts of sin; he is freed only from the charge of sin'.⁵³

Let me stress this. Crisp was not encouraging sin. He was encouraging the believer to maintain a proper, biblical, view and sense of what and who he is in Christ. I am afraid too many of us have lost this!

Or else reduced it! Note what Crisp said: believers should never fear that 'Christ... would cast them out'. He was right! Take these words of Christ: 'The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out' (John 6:37). This truth is commonly applied to unbelievers, assuring them that if they come to Christ, he will never drive them away (NIV). Glorious truth indeed! But we can go further, much further; indeed, we should go much further: 'The one who comes to me' – the believer – 'I will by no means cast out'. The Greek has the double negative – *ou-mē* – and is thereby much strengthened – 'not at all, never, never under any circumstances' – cast out, reject or drive away. Moreover, the context puts it beyond doubt: 'All that the Father gives me [the elect] will come to me, and the one who comes to me [the believer] I will by no means [under any circumstances] cast out'. Thus declared the Lord Jesus. And this is precisely what Crisp was teaching! So if Crisp was an antinomian...

3. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when in fact he was preaching that self-righteousness keeps a sinner from Christ

Here is another startling statement from Crisp: 'Righteousness is that which puts a man away from Christ'.⁵⁴ Whatever did he have in mind? Crisp was speaking of sinners coming to Christ. He had already made his meaning clear: 'Men think [their] righteousness brings them near to Christ'. They are wrong, of course. Quite the reverse! Such 'righteousness is that which puts a man away from

⁵² Crisp Vol.2 pp28-29. See also Crisp Vol.1 pp130-133,178-181.

⁵³ Crisp Vol.1 p10.

⁵⁴ Crisp Vol.1 p104.

Christ'. Crisp went on almost at once: 'Doing duty and service to expect acceptance with Christ, or participation in Christ, this kind of righteousness is the only separation between Christ and a people'.⁵⁵ This, reader, is not antinomianism. Indeed, it is nothing less than what Christ meant when he declared: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance' (Matt. 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32). The sinner's addiction to attempting to appease God by good works has to be broken; he has to come to Christ empty-handed and receive all from Christ without his (the sinner's) 'good' works. This is what Crisp was aiming for. As was Toplady: 'Nothing in my hand I bring'.⁵⁶ But this is one of the hardest things to get sinners to mean and to do. Of course, there is a right way of asking: 'What must I do to be saved?' (John 6:28; Acts 2:37; 16:30; 22:10), but, the fact is, sinners are ingrained workers when it comes to salvation. And it has to be broken.

Consequently, how needful is Crisp's kind of preaching today! Let me give just one example of where it is sorely needed. Not a few unbelievers attend meetings for years, yet remain in a state of unbelief. All too often they are 'confronted' – what a misuse of the English language! – smoothed down, rather, both with the preaching and, above all, an atmosphere of inclusivism, being made to feel welcome, completely at home and at ease, at all costs – and that cost, not least, being their eternal damnation. I do not see how such complacent sinners could long continue under Crisp's preaching. They would either be convicted and converted, or else they would leave in high dudgeon. Or, if they did remain unconverted, at the last day they could never accuse Crisp of pulling the wool over their eyes.

4. Crisp has been accused of antinomianism when he was, in fact, preaching that justification is all of God's free grace

When Crisp stated: 'Before a believer confesses his sin, he may be as certain of the pardon of it, as after confession',⁵⁷ he did not mean

⁵⁵ Crisp Vol.1 p104.

⁵⁶ *Gospel Hymns* number 273.

⁵⁷ Crisp Vol.2 p29.

that confession is not important, not essential. As he had previously said: 'I deny not, but acknowledge, when a believer sins, he must confess these sins'.⁵⁸ The point is, the believer must never think that the confession of his sin is the basis on which Christ forgives him, nor the cause of that forgiveness. As Crisp himself immediately added: 'What is the ground of the pardon of sin?... What is it that discharges a believer?' Is it the sinner's confession? Certainly not! 'Pardon'? 'The fountain of it is in God himself... Pardon of sin depends upon the unchangeableness of God... [and] is revealed in the word of grace'. As Crisp thundered, rhetorically: 'Is pardon... held out to sinners, as they are sinners?'.⁵⁹ Of course it is! And just as he preached the free gospel to sinners as sinners, so Crisp continued with the saints. God pardons sin for Christ's sake – whether we are talking about the sinner *before* conversion, or the saint *after* conversion. It is all of grace, grace which is absolutely and amazingly free.

In saying such things, Crisp was not preaching antinomianism. But he was not alone in being accused of it. As Michael Watts records: 'John Rogers', an Independent in Dublin in the early 1650s, 'saw the danger... [of] the legalism which threatened... converts' under an opposing system, but 'in emphasising "the sweet doctrine of free grace" which made salvation independent of any action of the believer, Rogers opened himself to the accusation of antinomianism'.⁶⁰

Reader, we desperately need preachers who will stress 'the sweet doctrine of free grace'. We need preachers who leave themselves open to the charge of antinomianism for doing it. We need it for sinners; they will be saved by no other means. We need it as believers; we will be sanctified by no other means. If we are preachers, let us preach free justification more and more, and do so in all its biblical freeness. Let us be men of the new covenant, gospel preachers! Let us not fear the harsh remarks of those who will ostracise us as antinomians for our pains. Indeed, if such

⁵⁸ Crisp Vol.2 p29.

⁵⁹ Crisp Vol.2 p30.

⁶⁰ Watts, Michael R.: *The Dissenters*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, pp98,179,183.

preaching makes us ‘vile’ in the eyes of some, then let David’s reply to Michal be our response: ‘I will be yet more vile’ (2 Sam. 6:22, AV).

But, even so, was Crisp an antinomian?

Let me get closer to the nub of the question. Crisp was certainly leaving himself open to attack, if not inviting it, when he said: ‘To be called a libertine [an antinomian] is the most glorious title under heaven’.⁶¹ However, he did not mean what it sounds like when snatched out of context. Crisp was speaking of the abusive names men are called for proclaiming the liberty believers have in Christ. For this, he declared, he was willing to suffer such attacks; he even gloried in them. As he said: ‘This... liberty [so-called antinomianism] has been given an ill name in the world... reproachful, ignominious and shameful names... [such as] libertinism’. Even so, he was determined to make his hearers understand the difference between liberty and libertinism: ‘Now because liberty and freedom are thus brought into reproach and disgrace, the true freedom, which Christ has purchased and given, requires some clearing’. It was in this context that Crisp maintained:

To be called a libertine is the most glorious title under heaven; take it for one that is truly free by Christ. To be made free by Christ, in proper construction, is no other but this, to be made a libertine by Christ; I do not say, to be made a libertine in the corrupt sense of it, but to be one in the true and proper sense of it. It is true, indeed, that Christ does not give liberty unto licentiousness of life and conversation... A licentious liberty is nothing else but this... when men turn the grace of God into wantonness, and abusing the gospel of Christ, continue in sin that grace might abound... Christ who has redeemed from sin and wrath has also redeemed from a vain conversation... All that have this freedom

⁶¹ Crisp Vol.1 p122. Spurgeon was another to be *called* an antinomian, and rejoiced in it, ‘but’, he said, ‘I should not be fond of *being* an antinomian... None shall charge us truthfully with being antinomians’ (Spurgeon, C.H.: *New Park Street Pulpit Containing Sermons Preached... During... 1856*, Vol.2, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1963, p132, emphasis mine).

purchased by Christ for them have also the power of God in them, which keeps them [so] that they break not out licentiously.⁶²

This is no lawless man speaking. The truth is, he is setting out the glory of the new covenant: Christ not only justifies, but he sanctifies; he not only delivers from condemnation, but he gives spiritual power to the believer so that he may live a godly life in obedience to his Saviour and Lord.

But, as I say, Crisp did not mind playing with fire; in fact, he seemed to like it. Yet, as Gill noted: ‘This paragraph, as well as a multitude of others, shows that [Crisp] was no friend of licentiousness, and what a madness it is to charge so worthy a person with holding licentious principles’.⁶³ I endorse this. If Crisp is to be accounted an antinomian because he gloried in the name ‘libertine’, Paul ought to be dismissed as an idiot for calling himself a fool (2 Cor. 11:17,21,23; 12:11), which label the apostle gloried in (1 Cor. 4:10).

Crisp faced up to the objection that the way he preached gospel liberty leads to immorality; in other words, that he *was* an antinomian in his doctrine: ‘Does not this take off all manner of obedience and all manner of holiness?’ He had his reply ready: It all depends on the ‘ends which they aim at in their obedience’. If the questioner is speaking of ‘justification, consolation and salvation... we have our justification, our peace, our salvation only by the righteousness Christ has done for us: but this does not take away our obedience, nor our services, in respect of those ends for which such are now required of believers’. In other words, no obedience by the sinner can earn his justification, but every justified sinner will seek to be sanctified. This is the exact opposite of antinomianism. Indeed, it is pure gospel. Crisp listed several of ‘the ends’ of obedience of which he spoke. The believer by his obedience seeks to glorify God, to show his gratitude, to be profitable to others, and so on. ‘So, then, the freemen of Christ, having him and his Spirit for their life and strength, may go

⁶² Crisp Vol.1 pp122-123.

⁶³ Crisp Vol.1 p123.

infinitely beyond the most precise legalist in the world, in more cheerful obedience than they [the legalists] can perform'.⁶⁴

In saying this, Crisp was directly challenging those who say that the law produces sanctification. In effect, he was arguing that those who are moved to holiness by the sense of Christ's free grace towards them, will show a more cheerful and willing obedience to God in his word than those who aim for holiness under the lash of Calvin's whip. Who can deny it? Is it not self-evident?

Consider this: 'I speak not against the doing of any righteousness according to the will of God revealed'. He was vehement against those who 'shall be the means to discourage people from walking in the commandments of God blameless'.⁶⁵ In light of such a statement, I ask, with Gill: 'Is this antinomianism? Or, can such a preacher be called an antinomian?'.⁶⁶

To be specific, at bottom it was Crisp's view of the law which stuck in the gullet of his critics. It is for this that he has been falsely accused. This, after all, is the red rag to the Reformed. Yet, staggering as it may sound to some, Crisp got very close indeed – far closer than I – to the Reformed on the law and sanctification. I think he was self-contradictory at times, but... well, let him speak for himself...

When referring to 'the fruits of sanctification, that are properly the righteousness of man after or according to the law', he distinguished between the man who 'walks by such a rule for his peace' and the man who 'walks by such a rule for his conversation'; that is, his way of life. He had his reason: 'Because the best sanctification... is not able to speak peace to the soul'.⁶⁷ In saying this, Crisp was arguing for his view of assurance. Since the law demands exact obedience, those who base their assurance on their sanctification inevitably find that one offence of the law robs them of their peace. Crisp thought the inner witness of the Spirit,

⁶⁴ Crisp Vol.1 pp134-135.

⁶⁵ Crisp Vol.1 p145.

⁶⁶ Crisp Vol.1 p145. I tried to emphasise this vital point in my *Christ*. 'New-covenant theology', allowing the term, exceeds Reformed covenant-theology in the standard required, the power to enable obedience, and the joy which accompanies sanctification.

⁶⁷ Crisp Vol.3 pp62-64.

and not sanctification, is the main way of assurance. And in saying this, as I have observed, I think he has a great deal in his favour.

Having already looked at this, I move on to show that Crisp was arguing that while no man can keep the law for his peace, nevertheless the believer *is* under the law for his way of life, his sanctification; in short, he was setting out Calvin's third use of the law! Inasmuch as he was supporting Calvin on the law, I disagree, of course, with Crisp; I do not think sanctification is by the law. I quote Crisp on this point merely to show that he is falsely accused of being an antinomian and denying that the law is to be kept by believers. Far from it! On the law being the rule for the believer, Crisp was an orthodox Puritan, and no antinomian.⁶⁸ Indeed, how could he be when he devoted an entire sermon to 'The Use of the Law'?

Listen to Crisp's own words once more: 'Where are good works?' he demanded. 'Must we not work? Yes', he replied, since 'you are bought with a price... therefore glorify God in your bodies and spirits: Being delivered... out of the hands of our enemies, we serve in holiness and righteousness'.⁶⁹ Again:

Thus, beloved brethren, you have heard the admirable grace of God. Oh! let there not be such a heart in any, as to turn it into wantonness! Oh! let not any one continue in sin, because so much grace has abounded; but let it 'teach you to deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live righteously and soberly in this present world'. For my own part, whatever others may think, I abhor nothing so much as a licentious undertaking to continue in any sin, because such fullness of grace has abounded... And I recommend to them (if there be any such here) the reading of the letter of Jude, where they may see the fearful wrath of God upon such persons as abuse the grace of God to sin.⁷⁰

This is not the language of an antinomian! Nor is this:

I never heard from any person of credit that there are any such monsters as these that dare make it their practice to be drunk, to break the [Lord's day], to curse and swear and live in uncleanness and all manner of vileness, because all their sins are laid upon Christ... There are many that are taxed for such... And if there are such let me deal

⁶⁸ Crisp Vol.3 p64.

⁶⁹ Crisp Vol.1 p43.

⁷⁰ Crisp Vol.3 p99.

plainly with them. For my part, I must account them the greatest monsters upon the face of the earth, the greatest enemies to the church that ever were; and, I say of such dishonourers of the church, and disturbers of the consciences of God's people, that they are carnal, sensual and devilish. They are the greatest enemies to the free grace of God, the greatest subverters of the power and purity of the gospel, and the greatest hinderers of the course of it, that are under heaven. And I dare be bold to say, open drunkards, harlots and murderers, that profess not the gospel of Jesus Christ, come infinitely short of these in abomination. None so wound the sides of Christ as he that professes the gospel, and yet lives wickedly. And if there are any such here, let me tell them their faith is no better than that of devils.⁷¹

Nor is this:

Men commonly dream of a strange kind of gospel that never came into God's mind; that seeing Christ has died, they may live as they want, fighting against God and godliness, letting themselves loose to all impiety, and yet [still] go to heaven... Some licentious ungodly wretches... reply... that Christ justifies the ungodly, and we are saved without works; but, alas! they observe not how cunningly the devil equivocates to lull them asleep in their ungodly practices... Though [it is] faith only [which] saves, yet that faith must not be alone... but must be attended with fruits, to wit, denying ungodliness; else it is so far from saving [faith] that it is but a dead faith... The person believing must deny ungodliness, though this denial works not his salvation; as the apple makes not the apple tree, but the apple tree brings forth the apple, and not the apple the tree; yet the apple tree must bear apples, or else it is no apple tree.⁷²

First class!

Preaching the same theme, Crisp spoke of 'the general rule of Christ and his apostles... that what we do, we must not only do it in the name of Christ, but also to the Lord, and for the Lord'. Quoting, first, Luke 1:74-75: 'We, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness' – he made the point: 'It is not, let us serve *ourselves* in holiness and righteousness, but let us serve *him*'. Quoting 1 Corinthians 6:20: 'You were bought at a price; therefore glorify

⁷¹ Crisp Vol.3 pp178-179.

⁷² Crisp Vol.4 pp144-146.

God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's', Crisp went on:

[Paul] does not say, being bought with a price, let us now seek our *own* good, as if we were still our own men; as if we had now liberty to trade for our own selves; you are 'not your own', and therefore not your own, because you are 'bought with a price'; therefore 'glorify God in your bodies and spirits'. It is most certainly true, that God having provided through Christ all things appertaining to life and godliness for his people, thereby calls them off from all self-ends, and by-respects in his service, to have only respect to *him* in them... It is most true, that all the righteousness of man cannot prevail with God to do us good.

'All this while I desire not to be mistaken', said Crisp, conscious of the attack he would meet for such doctrine. 'Some', he said, 'it may be, will desire to know then to what use this righteousness of ours serves, seeing it is not of power to prevail with God'. He had his answer to hand: 'Our righteousness is appointed for excellent uses, if we could be contented with those God has ordained it unto'.

And what are these 'excellent uses' which Crisp spoke of? To express our thankfulness, to serve our generation, and because it is the way God blesses us.⁷³ 'Are we saved by grace? Then may we live as we want?' he asked. 'No', he retorted. Why not? Because: 'This grace, that brings salvation, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world'. Crisp was clear: 'I speak not this to bolster any man in any manner of wickedness; for when the Lord gives faith, he will certainly change the heart, and that will work by love'.⁷⁴

As for the passage to which Crisp made reference in that last paragraph, Titus 2:11-12 – one of the vital passages of Scripture in this entire debate – he preached four sermons on it (the best part of eighty pages!), published as one work, entitled: 'Free Grace the Teacher of Good Works'.⁷⁵ A moment or two ago I quoted from it, and though I would like to do so at great length, I forbear, because I fear I might weary you, reader. Having said that, I hope you will not grow weary of such savoury gospel-statements as these:

⁷³ Crisp Vol.1 pp148-151, emphasis mine. See also Crisp Vol.2 pp31-32.

⁷⁴ Crisp Vol.2 pp109-113. See also Vol.2 pp122-123; Vol.3 p100.

⁷⁵ Crisp Vol.4 pp110-189.

The end of that free love of God, in giving salvation, or the inseparable fruit which follows from this grace [is] it teaches to deny ungodliness... Wheresoever the grace of God brings salvation, it is not bestowed in vain, but inclines the heart to new obedience, and makes him fruitful in his life, in all well-pleasingness... You must understand in what sense good works... are necessary attendants on free grace; necessary they are... consequently... They necessarily follow the free grace of Christ, in that God in Christ has engaged himself to establish and set up obedience in the heart and life of such on whom he entails salvation by grace, as appears in Isaiah 35, 40, 41 and Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 20. Now where God himself has inseparably joined salvation and a holy life, and has promised the one as well as the other, they must of necessity go together; for what God has joined together, who can separate? No man can disjoin what [God] has united.⁷⁶

For the above-mentioned reason, I also forbear to quote from Crisp's sermon 'Of Self-Denial',⁷⁷ but how a man who could preach such a sermon can be called an antinomian, I cannot fathom! As for his being 'against law', what of his afore-mentioned sermon 'The Use of the Law'?⁷⁸ Crisp preached this on Galatians 3:19. Despite his idiosyncratic interpretation of 'until the Seed should come', I refer to the sermon again because Crisp said things which any Reformed teacher of the law might well have said.⁷⁹ Indeed, he contradicted what he said elsewhere – namely, that grace is the best teacher for good works. The fact is, however, how he could be called an antinomian in light of that sermon, I know not.

To make my point, let me first set out a 17th century preacher, whose name I withhold for the moment, using the same text to set out standard Reformed teaching on the law. He spoke of the agreement of the law and the gospel; they are not contrary to each other, he claimed. The law keeps men from sin. 'The rules and precepts of the law are very subservient to Christ, as they adorn the life with a conversation seemly for a companion of Christ, who calls us not to uncleanness, but to holiness... The law, in the rules of it, maintains a part fitting our communion with Christ'. Of

⁷⁶ Crisp Vol.4 pp124-127.

⁷⁷ Crisp Vol.4 pp196-212.

⁷⁸ Crisp Vol.4 pp212-221.

⁷⁹ Indeed, he said things which I opposed in my *Christ*, things from the Reformed school!

believers, he declared: ‘The law is... a rule to order their conversation in [Christ]... In respect of the rules of righteousness, or the matter of obedience, we are under the law still; or else we are lawless, to live every man as seems good in his own eyes, which I know no true Christian dares so much as think’. ‘Christ’, he claimed, ‘has given no new law diverse from this, to order our conversation aright by’.

As I say, that was taken from a sermon of a 17th century preacher, contemporary with Crisp. Is it not standard Puritan teaching on the law? Very well. Now let me name the preacher. It was Tobias Crisp!

That is what Crisp said. Here it is again, with references: As to the agreement of the law and the gospel; they are not contrary to each other, he claimed.⁸⁰ The law keeps men from sin.⁸¹ ‘The rules and precepts of the law are very subservient to Christ, as they adorn the life with a conversation seemly for a companion of Christ, who calls us not to uncleanness, but to holiness... The law, in the rules of it, maintains a part fitting our communion with Christ’.⁸² Of believers, he declared: ‘The law is... a rule to order their conversation in [Christ]... In respect of the rules of righteousness, or the matter of obedience, we are under the law still; or else we are lawless, to live every man as seems good in his own eyes, which I know no true Christian dares so much as think’. ‘Christ’, he claimed, ‘has given no new law diverse from this, to order our conversation aright by’.⁸³

Reader, as you know, I strongly disagree with some of these points made by Crisp concerning the law, but I have quoted them as proof that, though I am convinced Crisp was at times misguided, he was not an antinomian; indeed, *he erred towards the Reformed viewpoint*. Antinomian, in the light of such sentiments, he was not. If I had not attached his name to the words, they could have been

⁸⁰ Crisp Vol.4 p215. Of course, he saw ‘the excellency of Christ’s gospel above the law’ (Crisp Vol.4 p220).

⁸¹ Crisp Vol.4 p216. But Crisp knew the law is inadequate to show the sinner his sinfulness (Crisp Vol.1 p25).

⁸² Crisp Vol.4 p217.

⁸³ Crisp Vol.4 p219.

drawn from the works of any Reformed teacher of Calvin's third use of the law! Crisp was no more an antinomian than they!

As I have shown, Crisp repeatedly felt it necessary to rebut false charges against him and his preaching. Here is one charge he called 'more strange than all the rest':

The charge is, that I should affirm that should an elect person live and die a whoremonger and an adulterer, and in all kinds of profaneness, and, though thus living and dying, shall be saved, which, how contrary it is to the whole course of my ministry, you are witness. I dare be bold to say, you all know it to be a gross, notorious and groundless slander... I said before, and so I say still, there is no elect person... shall die before he is called; that is, before the Lord gives faith to him to believe, and in some measure frame him to walk by the Spirit according to his rule; in a word, this person is changed in conversation [lifestyle]. The principle is this... 'No unclean thing shall enter the kingdom of heaven'. Every soul, therefore, being elected... shall in time be called and enabled to believe and walk as a child of light. If this is not true doctrine, then I desire that my mouth may be stopped.⁸⁴

And, may I add, if this is antinomianism, then we are living with Alice – but in a Reformed Wonderland! It's high time we came into the real world! May the Lord raise up many preachers of the ilk of Tobias Crisp!

Crisp: An evaluation

Opinions of the worth of Crisp's works vary widely. On the one hand, he is regarded as an enemy of the gospel; on the other, he has been highly regarded by highly judicious men, some even to the extent of valuing his works second only to the Bible. Jealousy – 'so many were converted by his preaching and so few by ours' – by other ministers in his time, has been suggested as the possible motive for those who abhorred his doctrine.⁸⁵

Reader, as I have explained, I have quoted at length from Crisp for two reasons. First, I wish to do what I can to rescue this good

⁸⁴ Crisp Vol.4 pp49-50.

⁸⁵ By William Twisse, prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, no less (Hill, Christopher: *The Collected Essays*, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1986, Vol.2 p149).

man from some of the abuse which has been heaped upon him; the pile is growing still. I cannot say that such criticisms are libellous, since one cannot libel the dead. But the criticisms are unjust; they are false! For those who are still not convinced, may I ask you to read Crisp for yourself before you join in the mud-slinging? Maybe there is too much truth in the suggestion that perhaps some have attacked Crisp, and dismissed him as being in error and a danger – *even though they have never read him!* Be that as it may. For you, reader, there is no excuse since his works are currently in print.

But the second reason is far more important. I believe Crisp did stand for and preach the gospel of God's grace. I think his works are aptly titled: *Christ Alone Exalted*. As such, I value his testimony as support for the claim I made throughout my *Christ is All*. In fact, if I had thought of it – and if Crisp had not used the title already – I would have been delighted to call my book: *Christ Alone Exalted*.

In short, I have tried to play a fairer light upon Crisp than is often done. While I have admitted Crisp had his faults,⁸⁶ and while I would not breathe a word in favour of real antinomianism, I have tried to show that too often genuine gospel preaching is dismissed as such. And as I judge the contemporary scene, even though I am delighted to have witnessed a recovery of the doctrines of grace this past fifty years, I am deeply saddened by the lack of real gospel preaching today. I shall not be liked for saying it, but say it I will: there is a dryness about the academic approach adopted by so many. As I have indicated, I've had more than my fill of being bored by the pulpit! Many so-called preachers are lecturers, reading virtual magazine articles. Frankly, I fear the gospel is not being preached in many pulpits. There is too little gospel, and too little preaching. Change is needed urgently; change is desperately needed. We don't need legal preachers; we must have gospel preachers.

In my opinion, Crisp can teach us a great deal about the way we should go about bringing sinners to Christ, and the way to encourage and assure doubting saints. It was this desire to teach believers into assurance which led to so much of the alleged antinomianism among the Puritans. Crisp was a man of that stamp

⁸⁶ See the Appendix.

– a caring man. He, I believe, longed to see those under his preaching receive the full benefit of the gospel. He loved sinners and he wanted them to be saved. He loved saints and he wanted them to be assured and sanctified. And he used all his powers, all his gifts, every spiritual weapon at his disposal, to truly preach the gospel and so reach his ends. It is a travesty to dismiss him as an antinomian. He is, of course, now far beyond harm from such criticism. The losers are those who are unwilling to learn from him, and – above all – the hearers who sit under such.

I think it is fitting to let Crisp have the last word. Listen to him in his sermon on 1 John 2:1-2, entitled: ‘Revelation of Grace, No Encouragement to Sin’.⁸⁷ What a title! This is what he said:

[John] would not have men mistake, as if his revealing [that is, revealing and publishing, opening, preaching, teaching and declaring the doctrine of the] pardon of sin intimated that people did not sin any more... Sin we do; but the grace of God stands in this, that when we sin, it is forgiven, and it is an act of justice for God to forgive it.⁸⁸ Beloved, I perceive the world clamours extremely against the fearful fruits (as they conceive) of such publishing grace to men. Tell men their sins are forgiven, whatever they commit, being believers, they shall do them no hurt; this is the way, say they, to bring all manner of licentiousness into the world: this opens the flood-gates for floods of sins to overflow the church. But the apostle prevents this great objection, and not only so but establishes the direct contrary to the inference men make from the free grace of God, in the words of my text. And observe it well, were it not an apostle that spoke these words, there are many zealots in the church would condemn it, not only for heresy, but for the greatest absurdity...

How true this is! Read on!

The apostle... [argues] I would have you not to sin; now, the only, and the best way, to prevail with you, is, if you commit sin, there is an advocate with the Father, that shall take care that the sin you commit shall do you no hurt: though you sin, he is become the propitiation for your sins... Now, what an absurd argument seems this, not only to the

⁸⁷ Crisp Vol.3 pp164-187.

⁸⁸ This is the point I made in my *Christ*, when looking at Gal. 4:5. Since Christ earned salvation for the elect, it is, therefore, an act of justice (as well as mercy) for God to forgive their sins.

world, but to zealous professors, to prevail with men to the forbearance of sin, to tell them beforehand, that if they sin, there is an advocate for them, and he is the propitiation for their sins? There is nothing so vilely calumniated, as publishing this free grace to men, in this way, as being the highway to break out into all manner of sin whatsoever. This, say men, is that which lets go the reins on the neck of libertinism: and makes men take liberty without control, freely to commit any sin. Whoever is of this mind, I must tell him before I go on, [he] directly crosses the wisdom of God, and gives the lie to the apostle here...

That you may see the doctrine is no fancy, nor opinion of men, but the clear truth, it appears plainly, that the apostle's business is to take men off from sinning: 'These things I write unto you that you sin not'; and then immediately follow these words: 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father'. To what purpose are these words, if not as a motive to prevail with them to the thing he persuades them unto? No, he tells us plainly, he writes [to] them on purpose that they sin not. What was it that he wrote to them before? that 'the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin'; and 'if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins'; and now 'these things I write unto you that you sin not'... Indeed, this favour revealed is the spur to cause him to comply, so the apostle says...

In short:

It is plain, therefore, that the knowing what shall become of our sins beforehand, that they shall do us no hurt, is not the opening [of] a sluice to provoke [us] to sin, but [is] a bridle to restrain [us] from it; for you find, by consulting the Scripture, that the Holy Spirit is not rare, but very plentiful, in opening this very truth; that the free grace of God, and the security of believers from sin, are therefore made manifest, that they might not sin.⁸⁹

Crisp then took some of these 'very plentiful' passages, and expounded Romans 3:24-26, Romans chapters 4 and 5 leading to Romans 6:1, Romans 11:33-34 leading to Romans 12:1, Titus 2:1-10 leading to Titus 2:12-14 and I John 3:9.⁹⁰

Why did he labour the point? Why do I? 'Because', said Crisp:

I know it sticks so in the hearts of cavillers that are ready to spit fire in the faces of those that are asserters and maintainers of the free grace of

⁸⁹ Crisp Vol.3 pp165-168.

⁹⁰ Crisp Vol.3 pp168-175.

God, and the publishers of it to his people...⁹¹ I know there are many objections raised against this truth. I shall briefly run through some of them, and if it is possible, clear it to you, and vindicate the gospel from those abominable untruths cast upon it. And that I will do the rather, because thousands turn away from the grace of God and dare not venture themselves upon it, because they fear, if they should, they should presently [soon, at once] take liberty to sin, and so fall away. Oh! how many have refused their own mercies, and have not received the gospel to this day upon such conceits [fanciful notions], that the receiving of it should make them break out unto ungodliness... that it will make them live loosely.⁹²

Crisp knew some objected to those who, they said, ‘take liberty to themselves’. He was ready with his reply:

If believers, from this grace published, take liberty, they take but what God gives them; the end of Christ’s coming, and preaching the free grace of God to men, is to proclaim liberty to the captives, which are his own people... Therefore, says Christ: ‘If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed’; that is, if the Son give you liberty, then you shall have liberty indeed. So that, if believers do take this liberty, upon this ground, they take but that which is their own, purchased for them by the blood of Christ, and given to them freely by God their Father.⁹³

Crisp faced yet another objection: ‘Some will say the preaching of the terrors of law, the wrath of God, damnation and hell-fire to men, is a safer way to take men off from sin, than to preach grace and forgiveness of sin beforehand. It is better [say they] to lay the foundation first in preaching wrath and damnation’.⁹⁴ Once again, he was ready. Do such objectors really believe that if as ‘believers... they commit such sins, they shall be damned, and so come under the wrath of God; and unless they perform such and such duties, walk thus and thus holy, they shall come under the wrath of God, or at least he will be angry⁹⁵ with them’? This, said Crisp, is to ‘abuse the Scriptures’. As he observed, if we say such a thing:

⁹¹ Not the only time he felt under such attack. See Crisp Vol.4 p226.

⁹² Crisp Vol.3 pp174-175.

⁹³ Crisp Vol.3 pp175-176.

⁹⁴ Crisp Vol.3 p181.

⁹⁵ Here again, Crisp was playing with fire. Of course, the believer will never be condemned, but he incurs God’s displeasure by his sin.

We undo all that Christ has done. We injure and wrong the believers themselves. We tell God he lies to his face. For if we tell them that unless they do these good works they shall come under the wrath of God, what is this, but to tell [them] that God lies, and to bring the faithful under a covenant of works?⁹⁶

Crisp drew his sermon to a close:

This... batters down to the ground that way of urging men to holiness which some men hold forth; that if men do not do such good works, and leave such sins, then they must come under the wrath of God; and the wrath of God is hidden all the while they do these good works, but if they fail in any of them, then the wrath of God will break out upon them; whereas they ought rather, after the example of the apostle, to excite them to these good works, because they are already freed from wrath. Certainly, this that I have delivered, proves it sufficiently, that the grace of God teaches men to do the will of God effectually; the love of God constrains the faithful, and not the fear of wrath.⁹⁷

Let me borrow Crisp's word, 'batter'. In all the above, Crisp was indeed biblically battering down the Reformed way of sanctification by whip and fear – the law.

But, said Crisp, it is true, the wrath of God must be preached to believers 'as the deserts of sin, and the means to keep from sin'. This sounds contradictory, does it not? Indeed it does! 'But now, some may say, this seems to be against and to overthrow all that you have delivered'.⁹⁸ But no, replied Crisp. The wrath of God must be preached:

So they should fear to commit sin, not for fear of coming under wrath, but out of love, because God has been so gracious to them, as to deliver them from the weight of so heavy wrath and displeasure... And so their walking with God in a holy conversation is a fruit of the mercy already shown... They serve God because they are delivered from wrath, and not because they might receive deliverance from it. It proceeds from joy... and not from fear... The wrath of God is preached to them... that they may see what they are delivered from... that they may see God's love to them... that this [the sense of deliverance] may draw them to obedience, and restrain them from sin... They... will... sing and rejoice... and triumph in him... leading a life answerable to the

⁹⁶ Crisp Vol.3 p182.

⁹⁷ Crisp Vol.3 p185.

⁹⁸ Crisp Vol.3 pp185-186.

love of God [in] bestowing such a deliverance upon [them]. And so, by this preaching of the wrath of God, as being freed from it, the more one sees what he is freed from, the more he sees what Christ has done in bearing the wrath [for and away] from him. And consequently the more he is stirred up to walk before God in more cheerful and comfortable obedience, and the more thankful he will be. And the more he sees what God has done for him, the more obedience he sees he owes to him.

Here we reach a vital difference between the new-covenant system of sanctification and the Reformed system. As I showed in my *Christ is All*, as advocates of Calvin's 'third use of the law', the Reformed think believers are lazy asses who have to be lashed by the whip of the law in order to produce sanctification; in other words, sanctification by fear – the direct opposite of the doctrine of Crisp and – above all – the doctrine of the New Testament.

In conclusion, reader, I do as Crisp and lay down this challenge:

And now, if any persons [reading this] have an evil opinion of the grace of God, as a thing of dangerous consequence, as a licentious doctrine, let them learn... to mend their minds, and correct their judgements, knowing that the Holy Spirit is of another mind: that the revealing of the grace of God is the best way to take men off from sin; so far is it from letting loose the reins to break out into all manner of sinfulness.⁹⁹

And this 'best way' is what I tried to set out in my *Christ is All*. That was what I argued for there, and it is what I argue for here. It is nothing less than the doctrine of the new covenant as set out by the apostles.

⁹⁹ Crisp Vol.3 pp186-187.