

The Benefit of Having a Worthy Opponent

How the Theology of Seventeenth-Century Puritans Can Be Complemented by the Nineteenth-Century German Thought Known as the Mercersburg Theology

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CHAPTER SEVEN (cont.)

The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification

In 1692 the English Puritan Walter Marshall issued fourteen directions regarding sanctification, the first being the following: “That we may acceptably perform the duties of holiness and righteousness required in the law, our first work is to learn the powerful and effectual means by which we may attain to so great an end.”¹ What comes to mind is Nevin’s union of will and understanding. This first direction can only be engaged because God has made the will desirous of understanding, and the will only desires to apply itself to spiritual growth because it has been afforded some limited understanding of what is to be gained by delighting in the glorious Christ.

This volume promises to teach how to be holy and godly, conforming to the Ten Commandments and all of Scripture, not just by way of outward compliance but thoroughly including holiness in thoughts and imaginations and affections of the soul, focusing chiefly on love from which all that is truly good will flow. Marshall specifies that love must include a love for everything that is in God, including His judgments, authority, decrees and holiness.² That type of love is not possible for one who is dead in trespasses and sins and therefore liable for punishment. Natural man can gain some insight into the existence of law, but possesses none regarding the performance of that law. If Adam who had much knowledge of God before the fall was unable to lead himself to recovery after it, how much less can anyone on earth today manage such a feat.³ This agrees with Nevin’s point that all life is dependent on God in that it implies even Adam was dependent on God in Eden and unable to keep himself properly.

Sanctification “is a grace of God communicated to us by means.” It accompanies justification.⁴ Marshall does not stress that it is participation in the life of Christ.

¹ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (Fig, 2013), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

The Scriptures are presented as the only revelation of the means employed by sanctification because they offer instruction in righteousness that the believer may be “thoroughly furnished for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).⁵ Marshall’s approach is not open to overt cooperation with philosophy as a tool for sanctification.

Merely becoming educated in the law will not sanctify. Regeneration must precede education in law.

Direction Two stipulates that for one who would practice the law it is required that her heart must first be so inclined.⁶ The heart will not be so inclined until it is assured of peace and reconciliation with God and of a future in heaven. This surely fixes attention on the cross, justification and the decrees of God. Further, assurance must be granted that strength will be given by God both to will and perform acceptably all required duties.

Because the pursuit of holiness is more difficult in today’s world than it was for Adam before the fall, a greater endowment of grace is required than was for the first Adam.⁷ This comes to us through the second Adam, Jesus.

Marshall argues against free will in that hearts hopelessly bent on evil are called to do right and oppose their own inclinations. The duties of the law are such that a heart that is averse or indifferent to God could not fulfill them, because the chief of all commandments is to love God with one’s whole heart, which includes loving His will and ways. “Love to God must flow from a clean heart.” The image of God in Adam indicated a bent toward holiness and not a bald ability to choose holiness. Jesus was born with a holy disposition of soul. In order to be holy, believers must be renewed into the image of God in Christ.⁸ This agrees with Nevin’s emphasis on the incarnation and the believer’s participation in the humanity of Christ. But if Nevin agrees that the heart is fully corrupt apart from gracious intervention, then it is hard to maintain his position while denying gracious decrees from God as the key to why some are converted and others are not. God takes the initiative to restore holiness by granting a new heart.

Guilt on the conscience must be removed or else it will spawn wishes that God did not exist or that He were somehow different and not as just as He is. This removal of guilt comes by way of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on the cross.⁹ According to Marshall, the first step then in bringing men to holiness is to grant knowledge of His love and how their sins were removed by Christ. Jesus knew the infinite power of His deity and that the Lord God would help Him. Likewise,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁸ Ibid., 14-16.

⁹ Ibid., 21, 23.

we are now encouraged to know that His strength is within us (Romans 6:13,14; Ephesians 6:10,11; 1 John 2:14,15). It is now possible for men once dead in sin to do the miraculous works of living a holy life, being assured by God that they have received power to do so.¹⁰

For Marshall, sanctification's goal is to prepare God's people for His service, and he touches on the significance of sacraments in that sins are washed away at baptism, and strength and nourishment are offered by remission of sins offered to participants in the Lord's Supper.¹¹ Nevin was not original among Reformed Protestants in his stressing the significance of the sacraments for sanctification.

Direction Three shows Marshall to share a more developed emphasis with Nevin on the topic of union with Christ than some other Puritan authors. It is this:

The way to get holy endowments and qualifications necessary to frame and enable us for the immediate practice of the law, is to receive them out of the fullness of Christ, by fellowship with Him; and that we may have this fellowship, we must be in Christ, and have Christ Himself in us, by a mystical union with Him.¹²

Just as justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, so sanctification comes "by such a holy frame and qualifications as are first wrought out and completed in Christ for us, and then imparted to us." Just as natural corruption originated in Adam and was transferred to all humanity, so the new nature and holiness were first produced by Christ and propagated to His own.¹³ The believer does not work with Christ to give himself a holy frame. It is received from Christ. Fellowship with Christ is facilitated by receiving "that holy frame of spirit that was originally in Him." Fellowship is multiple parties having the same thing in common. None can procure a new nature any more than she was responsible for originating sin. "The end of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection was to prepare and form a holy nature and frame for us in Himself, to be communicated to us by union and fellowship with Him."¹⁴ This statement contains a fuller representation of Scripture than if a majority of the focus were granted to the incarnation resulting in the partial eclipsing of the atonement and resurrection as seems to be the case with Nevin.

Marshall's emphasis on the incarnation is Biblical and arrives at similar conclusions as Nevin, but without the cloudiness created by Nevin's infusion of German philosophy. Marshall presents Jesus' humanity as created holy like Adam's initial state, but actually superior because in Christ man was joined in union with God. The two natures came together in one person, so the human

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹ Ibid., 24.

¹² Ibid., 32.

¹³ Ibid., 32-33.

¹⁴ Ibid., 40.

nature of Christ operated in perfect communion with God. Then Christ communicates “this excellent frame to His seed,” just as Adam communicated his nature to his posterity. By His death Christ freed Himself from the guilt of sinners that was imputed to Him. Likewise, by His death He was also freed from the weakness of human nature. In freeing Himself He prepared freedom for believers as well, providing release from guilt and corruption but also from weakness. While a person cannot do anything to destroy the body of sin, she can partake of Christ and His freedom.¹⁵

Christ is likened to a kernel of corn “dying in the earth, that it may propagate its own nature, by bringing forth much fruit.” By His resurrection Christ took possession of spiritual life for us which is a life of holiness. Both Adam’s nature and Christ’s nature “are formed ready for us to partake of them.”¹⁶ Of Christ Marshall taught,

His incarnation, death and resurrection were the cause of all holiness that ever was, or shall be given to man, from the fall of Adam, to the end of the world – and that by the mighty power of His Spirit, by which all saints which ever were, or shall be, are joined together to be members of that one mystical body of which He is the Head.¹⁷

Entering fellowship with Christ involves becoming one spirit and one flesh with Him (John 6:56; 14:20; 1 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 5:30-31). A prominent picture in Scripture of partaking of Christ is that of bread and the eater (John 6:51, 53-54). Such is demonstrated and sealed in the Lord’s Supper. Just as Nevin heavily stressed union with Christ’s humanity, Marshall speaks of the Spirit joining believers to Christ’s body and soul. Thus our flesh enlivened by the Spirit becomes His flesh, and His flesh truly ours as well.¹⁸ For all Nevin’s negative criticism of Puritans, Marshall’s work seems to be one that Nevin could have celebrated as he promoted a theology of the church being Christ’s own body in far more than a symbolic way.

Marshall was clear that what was not included in this union of Christ with believers was a human’s transformation into any type of deity, nor Christ becoming a sinner. Since the union is spiritual in nature, it is not easily comprehended by reason and sense. It is more than mere agreement in thoughts or affections.¹⁹ Union with Christ, Marshall claimed, would not result in indifference toward good and evil on the believer’s part, but will surely produce a “bent and propensity to the practice of holiness.”²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., 40-41.

¹⁶ Ibid., 42-43.

¹⁷ Ibid., 46.

¹⁸ Ibid., 34-35.

¹⁹ Ibid., 36.

²⁰ Ibid., 44.

Direction Four is as follows:

The means or instruments by which the Spirit of God accomplishes our union with Christ, and our fellowship with Him in all holiness, are the gospel, by which Christ enters into our hearts to work faith in us, and faith, by which we actually receive Christ Himself, with all His fullness, into our hearts, and this faith is a grace of the Spirit, by which we heartily believe the gospel and also believe on Christ as He is revealed and freely promised to us in this, for all His salvation.²¹

Such a clear focus on the Gospel message is somewhat muted in Nevin. In the Gospel, Marshall points out, the unsearchable riches of Christ are made known, and an invitation/command issued to believe in Christ for salvation, encouraged by the free promise of that salvation for all who believe. The Gospel is the instrument whereby believers are begotten into Christ, and Christ is formed in them. It is the means by which Christ condescends to be near His people.²² True saving faith is not just believing facts about Him, but trusting in His shed blood. It is belief in the truth of the Gospel but also believing on Christ. “We must desire earnestly that God would create in us a clean heart and right spirit, as well as hide His face from our sins.”²³ Thus faith is the “means and instrument by which we receive Christ and all His fullness actually into our hearts.”²⁴ Faith is supernaturally produced and comes to believers as union is established.²⁵ That means believers must first be passively acted upon before becoming active. They are first apprehended by Christ and then apprehend Him.²⁶ Marshall clarifies, “Christ entered first into the soul, to join Himself to it, by giving it the spirit of faith; and so the soul receives Christ and His Spirit by their own power.”²⁷ “This union is fully accomplished by Christ giving the spirit of Christ to us even before we act that faith in the reception of Him.”²⁸ Then the grace of faith inclines a person to an active receiving of Christ. It is as if the sun enlightens the eyes which can then see by its light. That union cannot be known or enjoyed until faith is enacted. Both Marshall and Nevin sought to preserve the soul’s active role, but Nevin did so to the extent of either denying totally the initial passive role or sending unclear messages that seemed to insist there could be no passive phase, all the while acknowledging in other places that there was.

Next, Direction Five states, “We cannot attain to the practice of true holiness by any of our endeavours while we continue in our natural state and are not

²¹ Ibid., 47.

²² Ibid., 48.

²³ Ibid., 49.

²⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁵ Ibid., 54.

²⁶ Ibid., 60.

²⁷ Ibid., 60-61.

²⁸ Ibid., 61.

partakers of a new state by union and fellowship with Christ through faith.”²⁹ Those in a natural state are in need of entering a spiritual state which emanates from Christ who is a life-giving Spirit.³⁰ There is no way to improve the natural state by the law. The state must be changed from sin to righteousness. In a natural state, one can be zealous in hating sin in himself as the Apostle Paul was before his conversion, with some even abusing the body in an effort to combat sin. It is impossible to love God and neighbor without receiving a new nature. The old nature cannot be improved or repaired to function in this way. Romans 8:8 indicates that those in the flesh cannot please God. Being in the flesh is the cause of sinfulness, and being in the Spirit is the cause of righteousness.³¹ To try to make the natural self produce works of love for God or holy works would be like poking a dead carcass and expecting it to respond with strength.³²

Free will is not possible in one who is in a natural state, only after the Holy Spirit begins living in and acting upon a person.³³ Later Marshall will explain, “The way by which the Spirit works faith in the elect is by stirring them up to endeavor to believe” so that they may be responsive to exhortations, commands and invitations.³⁴ Eventually the natural state must be abolished completely.

Next, direction six address those who wish to procure salvation by works with this warning:

Those that endeavor to perform sincere obedience to all the commands of Christ, as the condition by which they are to procure for themselves a right and title to salvation, and a good ground to trust on Him for the same, do seek their salvation by the works of the law, and not by the faith of Christ, as He is revealed in the gospel and they shall never be able to perform sincere and true holy obedience by all such endeavours.³⁵

All people bear enough light in their consciences to know that obedience is required for enjoying God’s favor and averting judgment. But hope is only found through union with Christ. The law is so weak through the flesh that it cannot bring a person to carry out its own righteousness (Romans 8:34).³⁶ In fact, the law is so far from healing a person’s corruption, it actually stimulates more sinful acts (Romans 7:5, 14).³⁷

²⁹ Ibid., 62.

³⁰ Ibid., 63.

³¹ Ibid., 65-66.

³² Ibid., 69.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 162.

³⁵ Ibid., 76.

³⁶ Ibid., 94.

³⁷ Ibid., 96.

Direction Seven is, “We are not to imagine that our hearts and lives must be changed from sin to holiness in any measure, before we may safely venture to trust on Christ for the sure enjoyments of Himself and His salvation.”³⁸ In other words, the Gospel does not require one to make himself holy before coming to Christ. He never required lepers to clean themselves up before touching them. Faith is precious in God’s sight because it gives glory to God alone for salvation.³⁹ Repentance is not possible without faith first.⁴⁰ True confession induced by the offer of gracious pardon is better than the forced confession of one in despair.⁴¹

Directions Eight advises, “Be sure to seek for holiness of heart and life only in its due order, where God has placed it, after union with Christ, justification and the gift of the Holy Ghost and, in that order, seek it earnestly by faith as a very necessary part of your salvation.”⁴² Such a clear logic of salvation was not presented in the selections from Nevin sampled for this present chapter. Marshall helpfully explains that these benefits have an orderly dependence. An individual must first be engrafted into Christ as a branch into a vine. Holiness is absolutely necessary in those who would be saved for it is part of the goal of salvation. Those who do not desire holiness do not heartily desire true salvation.⁴³ Marshall is similar to the later Nevin in his frequent return to organic models of understanding salvation.

Building on number eight, Direction Nine presents the truth that “We must first receive the comforts of the Gospel, that we may be able to sincerely perform the duties of the law.”⁴⁴ However, the fullest comfort comes after the performance of duty. No duty could be performed unless the subject is assured that God is no longer to be regarded as an enemy and will accept him. It is not possible to willingly sacrifice self when the threat of hell is still looming. Loving God cannot be prescribed as the cure for fearing oneself to be an object of His wrath.⁴⁵

Noting that in the works referenced in this paper Nevin did not deal with assurance as crucial to actual holiness, Direction Ten offers,

That we may be prepared by the comforts of the gospel to perform sincerely the duties of the law, we must get some assurance of our salvation in that very faith by which Christ Himself is received into our hearts. Therefore, we must endeavour to believe on Christ confidently, persuading and assuring ourselves, in the act of believing, that God freely

³⁸ Ibid., 102.

³⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 107.

⁴¹ Ibid., 113.

⁴² Ibid., 114.

⁴³ Ibid., 115, 117-118.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 121, 125-126.

gives to us an interest in Christ and His salvation, according to His gracious promise.⁴⁶

Assurance here is not just assurance of forgiveness but also of partaking of holiness and enjoying the glory of God.⁴⁷ Says Marshall, “if you will rest in the Lord, you must believe that He deals bountifully with you (Psalm 116:7), or else, for ought you know, you may make your bed in hell.”⁴⁸ True faith trusts God’s goodness in time of temptation. Saving faith contains within itself a sure persuasion of the great things for which one hopes. “God gives us sufficient ground in Scripture to come to Christ with confident faith at the very first, trusting assuredly that Christ and His salvation shall be given to us, without any failing and delay, however vile and sinful our condition has been before.”⁴⁹ Assurance of God’s love does not wholly “depend upon the certain knowledge of the sincerity of their own hearts.”⁵⁰ True faith could not flourish if the believer is not convinced that Christ is willing to be joined in union with her.⁵¹ “Many spend their time poring upon their own hearts to find out some evidence of their interest in Christ, when they should rather be employed in receiving Christ and walking in Him by confident faith.”⁵²

Direction Eleven reads,

Endeavour diligently to perform the great work of believing on Christ in a right manner, without any delay; and then also continue and increase in your most holy faith, that so your enjoyment of Christ, union and fellowship with Him, and all holiness by Him, may be begun, continued and increased in you.⁵³

“Faith in Christ is the duty with which a holy life is to begin, and by which the foundation of all other holy duties is laid in the soul.” Christ is received into the heart by faith and brings “all the endowments necessary to enable us to a holy practice.”⁵⁴

Direction Twelve encourages the reader to

Make diligent use of your most holy faith for the immediate performance of the duties of the law, by walking no longer according to your old natural state, or any principles or means of practice that belong unto it; but only

⁴⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 146.

⁵¹ Ibid., 151.

⁵² Ibid., 155.

⁵³ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

according to that new state which you receive by faith, and the principles and means of practice that properly belong thereunto; and strive to continue and increase in such manner of practice. This is the only way to attain to an acceptable performance of those holy and righteous duties; as far as it is possible in this present life.⁵⁵

Godliness is a mystery and refers to performing the law motivated by Gospel principles and means. Living by faith is actually dying to law and living to God as Christ Himself lives in the believer, demonstrating a constant reliance on His saving endowments. The flesh cannot bring about holiness by the law to whom the flesh is married, but by the Spirit only and the riches He brings from Christ. Even as we partake of Christ, the natural state remains with its corrupt principles and properties. Therefore reason and sense are often found to be contrary to Christ. By faith a perfect Christ is received, although the enjoyment of Him is imperfect still.⁵⁶

This condition renders the believer weak and unable to do anything (2 Corinthians 12:10) and at the same time strong and able to do all things (Philippians 4:13). By faith one must receive the fact that the old man is crucified, and the new man is raised with Christ and made to sit in heavenly places with Him, free from guilt, pollution, punishment and wrath. Only Christ can be relied upon to produce holiness.⁵⁷ It would be a waste of time to work hard to be made holy armed with moral law and ceremonies. Instead, a believer's life must be lived with the confidence of one who possesses all things already in Christ. "Believers should not act *for* life, but *from* life."⁵⁸ "Stir up and strengthen yourself to perform the duties of holiness by a firm persuasion of your enjoyment of Jesus Christ, and all spiritual and everlasting benefits through Him." Christ has purchased for His people life, obedience and good works.⁵⁹ Sanctification, then, is the behavior of those risen above nature into union and fellowship with Christ.⁶⁰

Next, Marshall directs the believer to "Endeavour diligently to make the right use of all means appointed in the Word of God for the obtaining and practicing holiness only in this way of believing in Christ and walking in Him, according to your new state by faith" (Direction Thirteen).⁶¹ He warns against an over-active subjectivity by cautioning against spending time deliberating whether one has faith instead of simply exercising it, trusting in Christ who justifies the ungodly. He

⁵⁵ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 189-192.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 194-195.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 201-202.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 205.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 206.

⁶¹ Ibid., 216.

did not consider specific knowledge of the time and circumstances of conversion necessary.⁶² Faith as small as a grain of mustard seed is valid.

Meditation is helpful as it directs one to feed on God's Word, impressing truth on the conscience and orienting one toward Christ, but the act itself of meditating cannot change a heart to be holy.⁶³ Baptism can serve well to promote the life of faith. It is a seal of righteousness received by faith. But baptism profits only if accompanied by obedience to the law. It must not be allowed the position of an idol which would replace Christ. Marshall denied that the act of baptism itself confers grace, for this would turn the heart to trust in baptism instead of Christ. Here is a difference between Mercersburg and Marshall, for Nevin did claim that objective grace is present in the sacrament. However, he specified that baptism is useless unless subjective faith is at some point awakened. The objective must be completed in the subjective. And while the fear is justified on Marshall's part that baptism could become an idol, that in itself is not a reason to deny the presence of objective grace which serves to strengthen one's connection to Christ, whether or not one subjectively comprehends well all that Christ is.

As much as one does understand baptism, Marshall urges occasional reflection on one's own baptism, asking Unto what was I baptized? or What is sealed in baptism? and To what did it engage me?⁶⁴ Baptism inducts one to be a disciple of Christ, engaged to hear Him and to believe Him for salvation. Similarly Nevin describes baptism as the opportunity for being implanted into Christ's life. Marshall develops his line of thought on baptism by explaining "our baptism sealed our putting on of Christ," of being adopted as God's children, of putting off the body of sin, of burial and resurrection with Christ, and of being made one body with Christ and His members.⁶⁵

The Lord's Supper, Marshall writes, "is a spiritual feast to nourish our faith and to strengthen us to walk in all holiness by Christ living and working in us."⁶⁶ Commenting further he explained,

Christ's body and blood are bread and drink, even all-sufficient food to nourish our souls to everlasting life; and that we ought to take, and eat, and drink Him by faith; and to assure us that, when we truly believe on Him, He is as really and closely united to us by His Spirit, as the food which we eat and drink is united to our bodies.⁶⁷

And,

⁶² Ibid., 223-225.

⁶³ Ibid., 227-228.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 231.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 232.

Furthermore, this sacrament does not only put us in mind of the spiritual blessings wherewith we are blessed in Christ, and our enjoyment of them by faith, but also it is a means and instrument by which God does really exhibit and give forth Christ and His salvation to true believers, and by which He does stir up and strengthen believers to receive and feed upon Christ by present actings of faith, while they partake of the outward elements.⁶⁸

Some neglect this sacrament, believing that the Word alone contains all that is needed for understanding and grasping the Gospel. “Whereas if they understood that God does really give Christ Himself to their faith . . . they would prize it as the most delicious feast” and be diligent to partake of it.⁶⁹ Here is agreement with the later Mercersburg school. Christ Himself is present in the sacrament. However, Marshall wisely warns that some will put this sacrament in the place of Christ and trust in it to do saving work, one which is “sufficient to confer grace to the soul by the very work wrought.”⁷⁰ It does not seem Marshall is denying the Lord’s Supper to be a means of grace, but is asserting that it cannot be a mechanical, magical means which is effective even if faith is absent. He concluded, “We ought warily to conceive that the true body and blood of Christ are given to us, with the bread and wine, in a spiritual mysterious manner, by the unsearchable operation of the Holy Spirit, uniting Christ and us together by faith, without any transubstantiation in the outward elements.”⁷¹

Marshall then turns to prayer as a means God has given to further sanctification. Of the noteworthy comments offered are that God hears the heart without the mouth, but never the mouth without the heart. Prayer without understanding, attention or affection is sin and hypocrisy. Here he charges Anglican prayers with praying a form without engaging the heart.⁷² One familiar with Mercersburg theology would hear Nevin charging Puritans with making war on form. Substance and form must be united, for one is empty without the other. Later it becomes clear that Marshall does not condemn all form in prayer but maintains it is unlawful to bind oneself to form when the whole Bible should be regarded as a prayer book.⁷³

Marshall defines praying in the name of Jesus as depending on His worthiness and strength. Prayer must not be allowed to degenerate into a charm to keep the devil away. Neither utilizing special places nor multiplying words makes prayer more effectual.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 233.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 235.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 237-238.

⁷³ Ibid., 242-243.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 239-240.

Singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs is another means appointed by God for growth in holiness. Music aids in retaining content. Fasting, likewise, can serve the goal of sanctification as it can aid prayer and humiliation, and as with any of these means, Marshall felt it necessary to issue caution against fasting being placed in the place of Christ who alone can make one holy.⁷⁵

Marshall discouraged making vows, for in human strength none can bring goodness to reality. This sound advice would not have supported the revivalism Nevin later confronted as it called on men and women to initiate new vows of commitment to God without reliance on the strength of God's prior commitment to work in them. This Puritan encouraged fellowship and communion with saints as necessary for spiritual maturity. All believers should be joined to a church, for "God communicates all salvation to a people ordinarily by, or in a church."⁷⁶ God has placed His Name and salvation in the church which is His Temple, and the members of the church are appointed "instruments for the conveyance of His grace."⁷⁷ The church's ministry of Word and sacrament nourishes holiness. Add to that the benefit of mutual and joint prayer, mutual admonition, instruction and consolation. Excommunication for heinous or obstinate sins until repentance is demonstrated operates "for the 'destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved' (1 Corinthians 5:5)."⁷⁸ Fellowship and godly examples encourage holiness. And always there is a danger that a trust in church privileges (similar to Jews in the Old Testament) will open the door to empty formality and licentiousness and finally the overall corruption of the church. Marshall counsels that one should follow a church only as far as it follows Christ.⁷⁹

Nevin characterized Puritans as being so individualistic that a proper emphasis on the whole church as the body of Christ was neglected. This charge could not easily be made against Marshall.

Lastly, Marshall imparts this knowledge: "That you may seek holiness and righteousness only by believing in Christ and walk in Him by faith, according to the former directions, take encouragement from the great advantages of this way and the excellent properties of it" (Direction Fourteen).⁸⁰ It is the way of abasing the flesh and exalting God alone. "Christ is the immediate principal agent of all ... good works."⁸¹ The hope of believers is to partake of the divine nature in Christ. None will have faith in God unless first granted the assurance that God has already extended His love. Sanctification is an effect of justification and flows from the same grace.⁸²

⁷⁵ Ibid., 245-246.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 247.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 247-248.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 249.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 251.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 254.

⁸¹ Ibid., 256.

⁸² Ibid., 260.

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