

Sixteen Questions
of Serious and Necessary Consequence,
Propounded unto Mr. *John Cotton* of
Boston in New-England.
Together
with his respective answer
to each Question.

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Sixteen

QUESTIONS

OF SERIOUS AND

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WITH HIS ANSWERS
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Printed according to Order

LONDON:

Printed for *E.P.* for *Edward Blackmore*, at the signe of
the Angel in Pauls Church-yard. 1644.

Dear and Reverend Sir,



EE doe humbly and earnestly desire a short and plaine Answer to those Questions under-written, and at the hand of you, those things we desire your speedy Answer unto: and though some of these wee know your judgement in, yet not for our selves onely, but for others sakes we put them all in.

Reverend and beloved Brethren,

For an Answer unto your (Interrogatories, shall I call them?) or Questions. Though I might without Sinne referre you (as our Saviour did the *High-Priest* when his Doctrine was questioned) to what I have ever taught and spoken openly to the world, as having a secret said

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nothing

nothing else, *Iohn* 18. 20, 21. Yet because you are much more deare and precious to me, than the *High-Priest* was to him; and because *Love* thinks no Evill, and *Truth* feareth not the *Light*: I have (by the helpe of Christ) sent you (according to your Desire) a plaine and short Answer to each particular: wherein if I erre, let me seen mine Error, and try if I shut mine Eyes against the Light. If in your Judgement I hold forth the Truth, then beare witness with me to the Truth, for the Honour of the Name of Christ, and for the Peace and salvation of the Churches in our Lord Jesus, your Lord and ours.

Certain

CERTAIN
Q U E S T I O N S

Propounded by sundry of the teaching Elders in the Bay, to Mr *John Cotton*,
Teacher in the Church of *Boston*.

Quest. 1



What the seale of the Spirit is?

2. Whether every Beleever be sealed with it?
3. What ground from the word of that Distinction, a Broad Seale, and the other seale, and the difference between them.
4. Whether a man may or ought to see any saving work of Christ in himself, and take Comfort from it, before he be sealed by the Spirit?
5. Whether the testimony or Seale of the Spirit be so clear, as to witnesse immediately by it selfe, without respect of any Work of Christ in a man; or so constant, that it being once obtained, a man doth never after question his Estate.
6. Whether a Christian may maintain like constant Comfort in his Soule, when he hath fallen into some grosse sin, or neglected some knowne Duty, as when he walked most closely with God.
7. Whether a weak Beleever may not warrantably apply some Promise to himself as given by God, although he doth not yet discern his interest in it by the Broad Seale of the Spirit?
8. Whether a Christian must of Necessity have his first Assurance from an absolute, and not from a Conditionall Promise?
9. What you mean by Christian Sanctification, whether immediate Acting of the Spirit, or infused Habits; if Habits infused,

whether such as contrary to corrupt Nature, and all vitious Habits: and if so, whether you must not mean the Image of God in *Adam* renewed in us, to be our Sanctification?

10. Whether this Sanctification being discerned by us, be not a true Evidence of Justification?

11. Whether Sanctification being discerned, may not be, and often is a Ground of Primitive Comfort, as it is an Evidence of our being in Christ?

12. Whether when my Sanctification lyeth prostrate, I may not prove myself in a state of Grace by my Sanctification?

13. Whether evidencing Justification by Sanctification, be a building my Justification on my Sanctification: or a going on in a Covenant of Works.

14. Whether a Christian be not further active after Regeneration, then before; if there be a difference, wherein it lyeth?

15. Whether it be not a safe way to conclude my safe Estate by my Practical Reasoning?

16. Whether a Christian may not presse the Lord for Spirituall Mercies, with Arguments drawn from the graces of Christ in himselfe.

Now follows the Answers.

Question 1.

What the Seale of the Spirit is?

Answer.

The Seale of the Spirit is taken by some good Divines to be the Sanctification of the Spirit, as that which like a Seale:

{	1. <i>Distinguisheth,</i> 2. <i>Consenteth,</i> 3. <i>Confirmeth</i>	}	the faithful:
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Others take it for the Witness of the Spirit it selfe, as it is distinguished from our Spirit, *Romans* 8:18. In which sense it is commonly used by our Brethren in the Church: Though I my selfe do generally

nerally forbear to call it by that Name, and I doe not usually call it, the *Witness of the Spirit*, least I might give offence to any, who may conceive the Seale of the Spirit to be more generall.

Question II.

Whether every Beleever be sealed with it?

Answer.

Every Beleever is not sealed with the Seale of the Spirit, if the Seale be taken for the Witnesse of the Spirit it selfe, but in the former sense, all Beleevers be sealed with it.

Question III.

What Ground from the Word of that Distinction, a Broad Seale, and the other Seale, and the difference betweene them.

Answer.

I know no such Distinction between the Broad Seale and the other Seale: Nor was that Distinction propounded by any of our Members, but by one of your selves, who expressing his Conception in that Speech, one of our Members answered him according to his meaning in his own word, if you call it so, saith he; Nevertheless thus much may truly be said: There is a difference betweene the Witnesse of the Spirit, as it regenerateth and reneweth our Spirits; and the Witnesse of the Spirit as it comforteth us with evident Assurance of our *Adoption*, *Romans 8:16*.

Question IV.

Whether a man may or ought to see any saving Worke of Christ in himself, and take Comfort from it, before he be sealed by the Spirit?

Answer.

A true Beleever may and ought to see (if it be declared to him in the use of the means) any Worke of Christ in himself that he accompanieth salvation (as *Cornelius* did) before he be sealed with the witness of the Spirit it selfe: yet full settled Comfort he cannot take, nor rest in, till it be witnessed unto him by the Spirit: for Comfort without the Word is false Comfort, and neither Word nor Spirit, doe teach us to take any Comfort so much from the Worke of Christ in us, as from the Object of it.

Question V.

Whether the testimony or Seal of the Spirit be so clear, as to witness immediately by it self, without respect of any work of Christ in a Man,

or

or so constant, that it being once obtained, a man doth never after question his Estate.

Answer.

The Testimony of the Spirit is so clear, as that it may witness immediately, though not without some worke of Christ in a man, yet without respect unto the Worke: Neverthelesse it is not so constant or permanent, at least not in all Beleevers) but that a man after he hath received it, may come in time of Temptation to question his Estate, though not so frequently nor so desperately as before.

Question VI.

Whether a Christian may maintain like constant Comfort in his Soul, when he hath fallen into some grosse Sinne, or neglected some known Duty, as when he walked most closely with God.

Answer.

A Christian man cannot find like constant Comfort maintained to his Soule, after he hath fallen into sin, whether of Commission or Omission, as when God keeps him in a close walking with him: For the Spirit of God in him being grieved, (and grieved it is by any grosse sin especially) it will not speak wonted *Peace* and *Comfort* to him. If *David* fall into such grosse Sins, as *Adultery* and *Murder*, it cannot be, but the Bones of his Comfort will be broken, *Psalm* 15:8. Neverthelesse, the assurance of a man's good Estate may be maintained to him, when the frame and Course of his Spirit is growne much degenerate, *Isaiah* 63:16.

Question VII.

Whether a weake Beleever may not warrantably apply some Promise to himselfe as given by God, although he doth not yet discern his Interest in it by the Broad Seale of the Spirit?

Answer.

A weak Beleever may warrantably apply some Promise to himself, and may have it also given him of God, even whilst he is yet waiting for it, before he can discern his interest in the Promise, by the Witnessse of the Spirit it selfe: For the Soul that waiteth for Christ, may come to see and know (by his renewed knowledge) that he doth waite; and may from thence conclude, that he on whom he waiteth, will not absent himselfe for ever.

Quest.

Question VIII.

Whether a Christian must of necessity have his first assurance from an absolute, and not from a Conditional Promise?

Answer.

A Christian man's first assurance doth arise from the Spirit of God applying God's free grace in an absolute Promise. Or if in a Conditional Promise, it is not to Workes, but to *Faith*, and to faith, not as it is a Worke, but as it revealeth the free grace of God offered, and applied in Christ Jesus.

Question IX.

What you mean by Christian Sanctification, whether immediate acting of the Spirit, or infused Habits: If habits infused, whether such as contrary to corrupt Nature, and all vitious Habits: and if so, whether you must not mean the Image of God in Adam renewed in us, to be our Sanctification?

Answer.

I mean by Christian sanctification, the fruit of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in true Beleevers, working and acting in us, both infused *Habits* and actions of *Holinesse*, contrary to all vitious *Habits* and actions of corrupt *Nature*. And yet I doe not meane, that the Image of God in *Adam* renewed in us (and no more then so) is our Sanctification: our Sanctification in Christ hath in it this more; Faith in the Righteousness of Christ, and Repentance from dead Works, (and that which is the Root of all) the indwelling Power of the Spirit, to act and keep *Holinesse* in us all, which *Adam* wanted.

Question X.

Whether this Sanctification being discerned by us, be not a true Evidence of Justification?

Answer.

If this Sanctification be evidently discerned, it is a true evidence of Justification, *a Posteriori*, as Justification is likewise a true Evidence of Sanctification, *a Priori*.

Question XI.

Whether sanctification being discerned, may not be, and often is a ground of Primitive Comfort, as it is an Evidence of our being in Christ?

Answer.

I do not believe that this Sanctification being discerned, is a ground

ground of Primitive Comfort, though when it is evidently discerned, it be an Evidence of our being in Christ. I conceive our faith depending on Christ is as soon discerned, and sooner then our Sanctification by Christ; and yet, neither will discerning of it yeeld settled Comfort to the Soule, till the Spirit of God doth witness from Christ, God's thoughts of Peace towards him.

Question XII.

Whether when my Sanctification lyeth prostrate, I may not prove myself in a state of Grace by my Sanctification?

Answer?

If my Justification lyeth prostrate, that is, altogether dark and hidden from me, I cannot prove my selfe in a state of Grace by my Sanctification: For whilst I cannot beleve that my Person is accepted in Justification, I cannot beleve that my Works are accepted of God, as any true Sanctification.

Question XIII.

Whether evidencing Iustification by Sanctification, be a building my Iustification on my Sanctification: or a going on in a Covenant of Workes.

Answer.

To evidence my Justification by my Sanctification, though it may seem at first blush a plain and evident *Phrase*, yet is it indeed ambiguous, or at least obscure: Give me leave to clear the sense of it, and then give you mine answer. To evidence my Justification by my Sanctification, is no more at first hand than to give or hold forth my sanctification for an evident Argument of my Justification: Thus far the *Phrase* is plain. But now when I give it for an evident Argument, I may give it either for an evident cause or ground of my Iustification, or for an evident Sign or Effect of it. Again, when I give it for an evident sign of Iustification, I may either give it alone for an evident sign (having nothing else to shew for my Iustification) or I may give it for a concurrent Sign, together with other Signs and Witnesses, which may make both my justification and my Sanctification evident and clear to my selfe and others. Having thus cleared the ambiguity and obscurity of the *Phrase*, I give you mine Answer distinctly in these severall *Propositions*.

Proposition



Proposition 1.

To give my Sanctification for an evident ground, or cause, or matter of my justification, is to build my justification upon my Sanctification, and to go on in a Covenant of Works.

Proposition 2.

To give my Sanctification for an evident ground or cause of my Faith, whereby I am justified, as when I do not nor dare not depend upon Christ for my *justification*, till I evidently see my *Sanctification*, this is also to build my *Iustification* on my Sanctification, and to go on in a Covenant of works. For Sanctification (or which is all one) good works are not the Cause of justifying faith, but justifying faith the Cause of them.

Proposition 3.

To give my Sanctification for an evident cause and ground of my faith (not whereby I am justified, but) whereby I believe my selfe to be justified (which they call the *Faith of Assurance*) this may be a building my Iustification on my Sanctification, or a going on in a *Covenant of Works* two ways:

1. If the Soul have no Evidence of his Dependence upon Christ for Righteousnesse, nor no Evidence of his Effectual Calling unto Christ, and unto faith in Christ (by the Fathers drawing him to come to him) but only he seeth an evident Change in himself, from a profane and civill course to a sanctified Conversation; or at least, upon that which is worse, to wit, upon that which seemeth true Christian Sanctification, which indeed is not, but a legall Reformation. For when a man hath bin humbled under the Spirit of Bondage by the Terrors of the Law, yet he may never come to feel his need of Christ, nor his own insufficiency or unworthinesse to receive him,

Though he may obtain	{	<p>1. Restraining grace to keep him from known Sinnes.</p> <p>2. Constraining (or exciting) Grace to provoke him to Duty (or else his Conscience sometimes terrified by the Law would flye in his face.</p>
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And though in this way he may find Comfort (as the Stony ground did, and Thorny Soyle much more) and so from this great Change he may build up to himself the faith or *Assurance* of his *Justification*, yet in truth, in so doing he buildeth upon such a Sanctification which is indeed a sandy Foundation.

2. To give *Sanctification* for an evident ground or Cause of faith, whereby a man beleeveth himself to be justified, may be a building of *Justification* upon a *Sanctification* in another Case: to wit, when we shall give a man no other ground or Evidence of his *Justification*, but only from the Evidence of his *Sanctification*: For the Publican did not (as the Pharisee thought himselfe did) see any evident fruits of his *Sanctification*, but was deeply affected with the sense of his Sinnes, so that he smote his Breast with the Anguish of sinne, and durst not lift up his eyes to Heaven through Confusion of face for Sinne, but only cryed out to God to be merciful unto him in this sinfull estate: and yet by our Saviours own judgement this man went home justified rather then the other (*Luke* 18.) though he saw no Evidence of his *Sanctification*, but rather Evidence of his sinfull Corruption. If any of our Brethren doubt hereof, I would pray them to call to mind what some of them that lived in *Essex* have heard our Brother *Hooker* and Mr. *Rogers* also teach soundly, and argue out of the Word; that there be saving graces which are not sanctifying, but are wrought before *Sanctification*, which yet may bear Witnessse to a safe estate (and I may adde to Fellowship with Christ, for there is no safety but in him) before the Soule can see any Evidence of his *Sanctification*.

Proposition 4.

A man may give his *Sanctification* for an evident ground or Cause of his faith whereby he is justified, and yet sometimes not build his *Iustification* upon his *Sanctification*, nor be under a *Covenant* of *Workes*, but only sometimes go aside to a *Covenant* of *Workes*: As in Case, when a man is truly justified, and seeth it not, he doth then betake him to his *Workes* for the hastning of his *Assurance*. As *Abraham* when he had long waited for the promised Seed, thought he was justified by beleeving the free Promise: yet, for the more speedy satisfying of his Faith and Hope, he turned aside to goe into *Hagar*, (who was a *Type* of the *Covenant* of *Workes*

Workes) for the hastening of his sight and fruition of the promised Seed: So there be sundry Children of *Abraham*, even of his elect Seed, that having beene driven out of their Sins by a Spirit of Bondage, and finding a need of Christ, and their own insufficiencie and unworthinesse to receive him: doe therefore seek and wait for him (by the mighty Power of God) in every Ordinance and Duty. Such men are already truly justified (though it may be as yet they doe not know so much) because this their seeking and waiting for Christ, in the Sense of their own Need & Emptiness, and unworthinesse, is a true Act of a lively justifying faith. But now if such souls, because God may tarry long, before they can see and feele Christ given to them, shall therefore seeke Christ in their owne *Workes* of *Sanctification*, and in the Promises and Blessing given to such *Workes*, and not finding such *Workes*, can find no Peace nor *Assurance*: Such Soules, though they doe not build their *Justification* upon their *Sanctification*, (for indeed they were truly justified before, while they depend on CHRIST for Righteousnesse, according to the free Promise of Grace, and so are truly under a *Covenant* of Grace) yet they goe aside to a *Covenant* of *Workes* (as unto *Hagar*) to bring forth to the sight of Christ (the seed of Promise) whom they so long waited for. The fayling of such Soules is this, that they having Christ layd in their Hearts, as the Foundation of their *Justification* (though they know not so much.) Upon this golden and precious Foundation, they build Hey and Stubble, in seeking, and setling, and grounding their faith of *Assurance* not upon Christ, nor upon the free Promise of Grace, nor upon the *Witness* of the Spirit it selfe applying the same, but upon the Holiness of their owne *Workes*. In which Case, they are often put to many sad Doubts, ever and anon renewed upon them, till the faith and confidence, which they had built upon their own *Workes*, be at length burnt up with the Fire of Temptation, and the clearer Day-light of Gods Word and Spirit. And then, though their own *Workes*, and their owne Building thereupon be burned, yet their Soules will be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus.

Proposition 5.

The Soule that hath lyen under the Terrors of the Law, and cometh afterwards to see and feele his need of Christ, and his owne strength and worth to receive him, and doth depend upon
Christ

Christ for *Righteousnesse* and *Mercy*, he may come in this Estate to see (by his renewed Knowledge) his dependence on Christ, and withal some fruits of *Sanctification* that flow there-from, as Prayer, sometimes, with unutterable Sighes and Groanes, Brokennesse of Spirit, Mourning for sight of Christ, longing desire after the sincere *Milk* of the word, love of the Ministry that wounded him, &c. And seeing God helping him here, he may thereby gather, that he that hath begun to help him, will go on to help him still. But yet to give these for certain Evidences of his *Justification*, the poor Soule dare not, though another Christian of better discerning, may justly so apply to him as good evidences of his justified estate. But neverthelesse he will still seeke and wait for further and clearer Fellowship with Christ, till the Spirit of God himself doe witness to him, the gracious thoughts of God towards him in a free Promise of Grace, before he can plead his owne good workes, (whether after Conversion or before) for good Evidences of his *Justification*. For (as it hath been observed by some of our godly learned Countrymen) the graces of Gods Spirit in our Soules, are like the Stars of the *Firmament*, which shine but with a borrowed Light from the *Sun*: If the *Sun* were hid from them, their Light would be obscure: so is the light of our graces, if the Spirit of God doe hide his light from us.

Proposition 6.

But now if the spirit of God do show abroad his Light into such a Soule, and give him a clear sight of his estate in a free Promise of grace in Christ; such a one evidently discerneth both his *Justification* and his *Sanctification*; and the one of them giving good Evidence to the other, the Blood to the Water, and the water to the Blood, and the Spirit to both, 1 *John* 5:6,8. And thus in evidencing his *Justification* by his *Sanctification*, he doth not build his *Justification* upon his *Sanctification*, nor hereby go on in a *Covenant* of workes, nor goe aside to it.

Proposition 7.

But though the Soul may gather *Knowledge* of his estate, from such Evidences of *Sanctification*; yet if he shall therefore build his justifying Faith upon such evidences, he shall againe goe aside top a *Covenant* of Workes, though his Person may be under a *Covenant* of grace; For justifying Faith cannot safely build or rest upon any ground, save only upon Christ and his *Righteousness*.

Quest.

Question XIV.

Whether a Christian be not further active after Regeneration, then before, if there be a difference, wherein it lyeth?

Answer.

A Christian is more active after *Regeneration* then before *Regeneration* we are not active at all in any spiritual Christian Action, no nor in *Proximam Potentiam*, Passive to receive helpe from God to do it, but after *Regeneration*, *Acti Agimus*. If we act and go forth in the strength of our own spiritual *Gifts*, without looking up to Christ, we fall as *Peter* did, *Matthew* 26:23.

Question XV.

Whether it be not a safe way to conclude my safe estate by my practical Reasoning?

Answer.

It is not an unsafe, but a lawfull way to conclude a man's safe Estate by way of Practicall Reasoning, so it be, the Reason be not carnal but spirituall. One Proposition being expressed in the Word, or safely deducted thence; the other being experimental observation of a good Conscience, enlightened by the Spirit of God, and looking up to Christ to clear the Conclusion from both. Neverthelesse a good Conscience will not satisfie himself in this way, till it be established by the *Witness* of the Spirit; or if it should so satisfie and rest it selfe for a Season, God will awaken it in time, to a Sense further need of Christ.

Question XVI.

Whether a Christian may not press the Lord for spirituall Mercies, with Arguments drawn from the Graces of Christ in himself?

Answer.

A Christian Soule is more usually wont to press the Lord for spiritual Mercies, by Arguments drawn from his own spirituall Miseries and Infirmities, then from the Graces of Christ in himselfe. Neverthelesse, the Saints do also make use of Arguments drawne from the Graces of Christ, when they do discern the same in themselves, but they are usually such graces whereby they goe out of themselves, and their owne *Strength* and *Worth*, (as Faith, Hope, Desire, Seeking, Waiting, &c.) or such as doe expresse their spiritual Bent and Inclination, or Affection, which they desire might

might be quickened and satisfied with their spiritual proper *Object* or *End*, but the force of their Arguments from those Graces is fetched not from the Force, or Fulness, or Power of them, but from the Weakness and Emptiness of them.

Thus have you (according to your Desire) a plain and short Answer to all your Demands, except the thirteenth; which being exposed to greatest Agitation and Exception, I have spoken the more largely and distinctly to it; that so, I might avoid carefully (as I see it needful) all Suspicion of Ambiguity and Obscurity.

Now the *God of Truth and Peace* lead us by his *Spirit of Truth* into all *Truth*, through *him*, who is made unto us of *God the Way, the Truth and the Life*. AMEN.

FINIS.