

**Several Questions
of Serious and necessary Consequence,
Propounded by the Teaching Elders,
Unto M. John Cotton
of Boston in New-England.
With His respective Answer to each Question.**

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Several

QUESTIONS

OF

Serious and necessary Consequence,

Propounded by the

Teaching Elders,

Unto M. JOHN COTTON of Boston in *New-England*.

WITH

His respective Answer to each Question.

LONDON

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I

**Certain Questions propounded by the
teaching Elders in the Bay, to Mr *John
Cotton*, Teacher in the Church of
Boston.**

Question I.

What the seal of the Spirit is?

Answer.

The Seal of the Spirit is taken by some Good Divines to be the sanctification of the Spirit, as that which like a Seal:

1. *Distinguisheth,*
2. *Consenteth,* the faithful
3. *Confirmeth*

Others take it for the Witness of the Spirit it self, 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 myself do generally forbear to call it by that name, and I do not usually call it the *Witness of the Spirit*, lest I might give offence to any, who may conceive the Seal of the Spirit to be more general.

Question II.

Whether every Believer be sealed with it?

Answer.

Every Believer is not sealed with the Seal of the Spirit, if the Seal be taken for the Witness of the Spirit it self, but in the former sense, all Believers be sealed with it.

Question III.

What ground from the word of that Distinction, a Broad Seal, and the other Seal, and the difference between them.

Answer.

I know no such Distinction between the Broad Seal and the other Seal: Nor was that Distinction propounded by any of our

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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 between the Witness of the Spirit, as it regenerateth and reneweth our spirits; and the Witness 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 work of Christ in himself, and take Comfort from it, before he be sealed by the Spirit?

Answer.

A true Believer may and ought to see (if it be declared to him in the use of the means) any work of Christ in himself that he accompanieth salvation (as *Cornelius* did) before he be sealed with the witness of the Spirit it self: 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, do teach us to take any Comfort so much from the Work 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 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 work of Christ in a man, yet without respect unto the Work: Nevertheless it is not so constant or permanent, at least not in all Believers) 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 IV.

Whether a Christian may maintain like constant Comfort in his soul, when he hath fallen into some gross sin, or neglected some known duty, as when he walked most closely with God.

Answer.

A Christian man cannot find like constant comfort maintained

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to his soul, 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 gross sin especially) it will not speak wonted *Peace* and *Comfort* to him. If *David* fall into such gross sins, as *Adultery* and *Murder*, it cannot be, but the bones of his comfort will be broken, *Psalms* 15:8. Nevertheless, the assurance of a man's good Estate may be maintained to him, when the frame and course of his spirit is grown much degenerate, *Isaiah* 63:16.

Question VII.

Whether a weak Believer 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 Seal of the Spirit?

Answer.

A weak Believer 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 witness of the Spirit it self: For the soul that waiteth for Christ, may come to see and know (by his renewed knowledge) that he doth wait; and may from thence conclude, that he on whom he waiteth, will not absent himself for ever.

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 works, but to *faith*, and to *faith*, not as it is a work, 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

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Christ dwelling in true Believers, working and acting in us, both infused *Habits* and actions of *Holiness*, contrary to all vitious *Habits* and actions of corrupt *Nature*. And yet I do not mean, 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 Holiness 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 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 yield settled comfort to the soul, 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 myself in a state of Grace by my sanctification: for whilst I cannot believe that my person is accepted in justification, I cannot believe that my works are accepted of God, as any true sanctification.

Question XIII.

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Question XIII.

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

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 justification, or for an evident sign or effect of it. Again, when I give it for an evident sign of justification, I may either give it alone for an evident sign (having nothing else to shew for my justification) 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 myself and others. Having thus cleared the ambiguity and obscurity of the *Phrase*, I give you mine Answer distinctly in these several *Propositions*.

*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 de-

pend upon Christ for my *justification*, till I evidently see my *sanctification*, this is also to build my justification 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.

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Proposition.

To give my sanctification for an evident cause and ground of my faith (not whereby I am justified, but) whereby I believe myself to be justified (which they call the *Faith of Assurance*) this may be a building my justification 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 Righteousness, 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 civil 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 legal Reformation. For when a man hath been 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 unworthiness to receive him.

Though he may obtain

1. Restraining grace to keep him from known sins.
2. Constraining (or exciting) Grace to provoke him to duty (or else his Conscience sometimes terrified by the Law would fly in his face.

And though in this way he may find comfort (as the stony ground did, and thorny soil 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 believeth 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 himself did) see any evident fruits of his *sanctification*, but was deeply affected with the sense of his sins, so that he smote his breast with the Anguish of sin, and durst not lift up his eyes to heaven through confusion of face for sin, but only cried out to God to be mer-

ciful

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ciful unto him in this sinful estate: and yet by our Saviours own judgement this man went home justified rather than the other (*Luke 18.*) though he saw no Evidence of his *sanctification*, but rather Evidence of his sinful 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 Master *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 witness to a safe estate (and I may add to Fellowship with Christ, for there is no safety but in him) before the Soul 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 *justification* upon his *sanctification*, nor be under a *Covenant of works*, but only sometimes go aside to a *Covenant of works*: As in case, when a man is truly justified, and seeth it not, he doth then betake him to his works for the hastening of his *assurance*. As *Abraham* when he had long waited for the Promised Seed, thought he was justified by believing the free Promise: yet, for the more speedy satisfying of his faith and hope, he turned aside to go into *Hagar*, (who was a *Type* of the *Covenant of works*) 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 been driven out of their Sins by a Spirit of Bondage, and finding a need of Christ, and their own insufficiency and unworthiness to receive him: do 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 do not know so much, because this their seeking and waiting for

Christ, in the sense of their own need & emptiness, and unworthiness, is a true act of a lively justifying faith. But now if such souls, because God may tarry long, before they can see and feel Christ given to them, shall therefore seek Christ in their own works of *sanctification*, and in the promises and blessing given to such works, and not finding such works, can find no Peace nor *Assurance*: such souls, though they do not build their *justification*

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upon their *sanctification*, for indeed they were truly justified before, while they depend on CHRIST for righteousness, according to the free Promise of Grace, and so are truly under a *Covenant* of Grace, yet they go aside to a *Covenant* of works as unto *Hagar*, to bring forth to the sight of Christ, the seed of Promise, whom they so long waited for. The failing of such souls is this, that they having Christ laid in their hearts, as the foundation of their *justification*, though they know not so much. Upon this golden and precious foundation, they build hay and stubble, in seeking, and settling, and grounding their faith of *assurance* not upon Christ, nor upon the free promise of grace, nor upon the *witness* of the spirit itself applying the same, but upon the holiness of their own works. 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 works, be at length burnt up with the fire of temptation, and the clearer daylight of God's Word and Spirit. And then, though their own works and their own building thereupon be burned, yet their souls will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Proposition 1.

The Soul that hath lyen under the Terrors of the Law, and cometh afterwards to see and feel his need of Christ, and his own strength and worth to receive him, and doth depend upon Christ for *righteousness* 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 sighs and groans, brokenness 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 soul dare not, though another Christian of better discerning, may justly so apply to him as good evidences of his justified estate. But nevertheless he will still seek and wait for further and clearer fellowship with Christ, till the Spirit of God himself do witness to him, the gracious thoughts of God towards him in a

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free Promise of Grace, before he can plead his own good works, (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 God's Spirit in our Souls, 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 do hide his light from us.

Proposition 6.

But now if the spirit of God do show abroad his light into such a Soul, 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* 5:9,8. 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 works, nor go 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 again go aside to a *Covenant* of works, 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*.

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, before *Regeneration* we are not active at all in any spiritual Christian Action, no nor in *Proximam Potentiam*, Passive to receive help 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.

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Answer.

It is not an unsafe, but a lawful way to conclude a man's safe estate by way of practical reasoning, so it be, the reason be not carnal but spiritual. 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. Nevertheless a good conscience will not satisfy himself in this way, till it be established by the *witness* of the Spirit; or if it should so satisfy and rest itself 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 spiritual Mercies, with Arguments drawn from the graces of Christ in himself?

Answer.

A Christian Soul is more usually wont to press the Lord for spiritual Mercies, by Arguments drawn from his own spiritual miseries and infirmities, then from the graces of Christ in himself. Nevertheless, the Saints do also make use of Arguments drawn from the graces of Christ, when they do discern the same in themselves, but they are usually such graces whereby they go out of themselves, and their own *strength* and *worth*, (as faith, hope, desire, seeking, waiting, &c.) or such as do express their spiritual bent and inclination, or affection, which they desire 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.