The Value of Marshall's *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*

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Abstract

Pastors and theologians alike have praised Walter Marshall's *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* for its value in articulating a theology of sanctification. John Murray thought it to be "the most important book on sanctification ever written," yet very little scholarly attention has been given to what Marshall actually says. This article summarizes his historical context and explains four aspects of his approach to sanctification that make his work particularly useful within the Reformed tradition.

Throughout the seventeenth century, conflict erupted in the church in England. The clash concerned how Christians understood the relationship between faith and good works—or, we could say, how they reconciled the gratuitous nature of salvation with the nonnegotiable need for holiness in those who claim to be saved. Some held tightly to the freedom of grace and interacted awkwardly with exhortations to holiness; these were labeled "antinomians" because they were perceived as going against the law. Others held tenaciously to the need for a renewed life at all costs; they were called "neonomians" out of fear that they had reduced the gospel to a mere "new law."

Unfortunately, this kind of conflict is not isolated to the seventeenth century. The clash between Isaak da Costa and Hermann Kohlbrugge, the

Lordship controversy, and the New Perspective on Paul—to name a few—show that the heirs of the Reformation have often debated the meaning of believers' good works. The emphasis on justification raises fears one has diminished sanctification, and a robust doctrine of sanctification raises the suspicion that one has abandoned the Protestant principle of *sola fide*.

One work has often been hailed as uniquely helpful for articulating a Reformed approach to sanctification: *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* by Walter Marshall. He intended this work as a theoretical and practical guide to sanctification that steers safely around the antinomian and neonomian factions of his day. Joel Beeke and Mark Jones call it "the Puritan classic on sanctification."[1]

Despite this lavish praise, very little scholarly attention has been given to understanding what Marshall actually said. Joel Beeke has contributed the most extensive exposition of Marshall in a helpful introduction to the most recent publication of *Gospel Mystery*. This work explains sanctification in light of union with Christ and briefly locates Marshall in the antinomian/neonomian context.[2] This article aims to further our understanding of Marshall by identifying four factors in his work that I believe account for its unique usefulness within the Reformation tradition. I hope that this will inspire further reflection on his work.[3]

I. *Background*

First, who was Marshall? Marshall was born in 1628, the son of a minister. Marshall's education at New College Oxford would have exposed him to Puritan theology and pastoral care.[4] He pastored in Hampshire throughout the turbulent period of the Civil War, but was ejected from his pastorate by the Act of Uniformity (1662) and spent the rest of his life shepherding independent churches.

At some point during his pastorate, he had what his biographer N. N. called a "disquieted spirit." N. N. writes that Marshall was "much exercised

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[1] Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 942, n. 76.

[2] Joel Beeke, "Introduction," in *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1954; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage, 1999), v–xxv, esp. vii–viii.

[3] For a more extensive interaction with Marshall, see T. Michael Christ, "A New Creation in Christ: A Historical-Theological Investigation into Walter Marshall's Theology of Sanctification in Union with Christ in the Context of the Seventeenth-Century Antinomian and Neonomian Controversy" (PhD diss., University of Chester, 2016), Online: https://chesterrep.openrepository.com/handle/10034/620373.

[4] Blair Worden, *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91.

with troubled Thoughts, and that for many years, and had, by many morti-fying methods, fought [for] peace of conscience; but notwithstanding all, his troubles increased."[5] It is nearly certain that Marshall's spiritual melan-choly was occasioned by the writings of Richard Baxter, the most verbose proponent of neonomianism in England in the seventeenth century. No doubt, Marshall knew Baxter's writings well.[6] Marshall also seems to hint at a troubling encounter he had with Baxterian theology when he says, concerning a view held by Baxter, "For my part, I hate it with perfect hatred, and account it mine enemy, *as I have found it to be*."[7]

Marshall sought help, or perhaps clarification, from Baxter himself. N. N. records Baxter as saying that Marshall "took [his writings] too Legally."[8] After visiting Baxter, Marshall sought counsel from Thomas Goodwin, cataloging to Goodwin the sins "that lay heavy on his conscience."[9] Goodwin reminded Marshall that he must take seriously the greatest sin of all, namely "unbelief in Jesus," and that he should look to Jesus for "the full remission of sins and provision for the sanctifying nature."[10] After his conversation with Goodwin, Marshall's peace was restored, and Marshall set about preaching Christ with a particular concern to articulate how believers ought to make use of their union with Christ to grow in holiness.

Marshall died August 1, 1680, in "full persuasion of the truth and in the comfort of the doctrine, which he had preached."[11] His last words were a quotation from Paul in Romans, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23).[12]

It was through Marshall's own search for comfort that he came to write *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Those who knew him well—such as his friend Thomas Woodcock—commend his writings because they were born

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[5] N. N., "The Preface to the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification," in Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (London: The Bible & Three Crowns, 1692), Aa 2. See also David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, from the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808* (London: Printed for the Authors and Sold by Williams and Smith, 1810), 3:455.

[6] N. N., "Preface," Aa 3.

[7] Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification: Opened in Sundry Practical Directions, Suited Especially to the Case of Those Who Labor under the Guilt and Power of Indwelling Sin, to Which Is Added a Sermon of Justification* (London: The Bible & Three Crowns, 1692), 127 (emphasis added). For the reader's convenience, in addition to citing the pagination of the 1692 edition of Marshall's work, I also give the location on an online pdf copy of Marshall's work available here: https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/GospelMystery.pdf (6.2.5).

[8] N. N., "Preface," Aa 2.

[9] Ibid., Aa 3.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

out of a character that sought Christ. The subtitle of Marshall's work, *Suited Especially to the Case of Those Who Labor under the Guilt and Power of Indwelling Sin*, indicates that he wrote for those who found themselves in a similar state as he was before his conversation with Goodwin. Moreover, Marshall explains that in writing *Gospel Mystery*, he aimed to "save some one or another from killing themselves" and to "enlarge the hearts of many by it to run with great cheerfulness, joy and thanksgiving in the ways of His commandments."[13] Thus, union with Christ and free justification motivated him to assist others. He labored to see others respond to these truths in the same enthusiastic way.

II. *Marshall's Theology*

Four aspects of Marshall's work make it a notable contribution to the theology of sanctification within the Reformed tradition. They are: (1) an awareness of the pendulum swing between legalism and licentiousness, (2) a robust doctrine of union with Christ, (3) a rejection of rationalism, and (4) a pastoral as well systematic approach.

1. *Awareness of the Pendulum Swing*

Marshall was aware of the pendulum swing between antinomianism and neonomianism. Moreover, he believed that the two errors played off each other, driving the factions further apart. The swing is perpetuated, Marshall says, by the human tendency to take refuge in one error in order to avoid the other. Antinomianism was spurred on by the neonomian doctrine of "sincere gospel works,"[14] and the teaching of some pastors that that assurance was grounded in one's works fueled the fire of antinomianism. However, then to counter antinomianism, there arose a more strident works-based neonomianism.[15] Marshall's analysis seems to concur with recent historiography. Tim Cooper has argued that Baxter was significantly motivated by fear.[16] Antinomian writers also betray a similar dread of a return to Rome (and given the inroads Arminian theology was making, these fears were not entirely unfounded). Thus, fear drove both sides further apart. To counter this, Marshall made the brilliant move of confronting both errors at the same time.

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[13] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 13 (1.2.8).
[14] Ibid., 106 (6.1.3).
[15] Ibid., 127 (6.2.5).
[16] Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemics in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 193.

2. *Union with Christ*

The way he countered both errors is also significant for Marshall's approach. He did so with a robust doctrine of union with Christ. Broadly similar to John Calvin and John Owen, Marshall argues that justification occurs only in Christ, and to be in Christ for justification necessitates also being in Christ for sanctification. Calvin's *duplex gratia* is very much a part of Marshall's thought, the latter also similar to Owen's covenantal structure.[17] However, Marshall also translates this concept into practical terms. The doctrine of union with Christ provided him with two limiting concepts that counter antinomianism and neonomianism.

First, to counter antinomianism, Marshall proposed *the organic connection between justification and sanctification*. That believers enter into salvation by grace apart from works is affirmed; but that believers live out salvation apart from works is rigorously denied. Holiness is an essential part of salvation, not because it is a condition for it but because it is a part of it:

> We then conclude that holiness in this life is absolutely necessary to salvation, not only as a means to the end, but by a nobler kind of necessity, as part of the end itself. Though we are not saved by good works, as procuring causes, yet we are saved to good works, as fruits and effects of saving grace, which God has prepared that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). It is, indeed, one part of our salvation to be delivered from the bondage of the covenant of works; but the end of this is not that we may have liberty to sin (which is the worst of slavery), but that we may fulfill the royal law of liberty, and that we may serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Gal. 5:13; Rom. 7:6).[18]

This necessity of holiness in salvation is evident in the foundational structure of Marshall's theology, which he develops out of salvation history. Adam and Eve were created for holiness in the very core of their nature as the image of God.[19] They lost their moral likeness to God in the fall, and this ushered in a multitude of sinful acts.[20] Therefore, complete rescue from the fall (i.e., salvation) requires a new nature in which humans are renewed in the image of God (i.e., sanctification).

Marshall also recognized that believers receive this nature in union with Christ[21] in the context of an eschatological framework.[22] The believer is

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[17] John Owen, "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith (1677)," in *Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 5:231.

[18] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 150 (8.2).

[19] Ibid., 20 (2.1.3).

[20] Ibid., 36 (2.4.1).

[21] Ibid., 193–94 (11).

[22] Ibid., 331 (14.5.7).

fully in Christ and thereby decisively new in Christ, but what being in Christ entails is only partially realized.[23] The full salvation, including complete holiness, must await heaven, when the believer's union with Christ is openly manifested.[24]

The partial realization of this union manifests itself even in the present in acts of holiness in this life as the believer lives according to his or her real nature by faith.[25] This wedding of holiness and future glory in a partially realized eschatological framework prevents any sense in which salvation by grace can be pitted against the need for holiness in this present life. To reject holiness is to reject salvation. It is a package deal. Borrowing language from Jeremiah Burroughs,[26] Marshall concludes his work with this line: "Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun, as glorification is sanctification perfected."[27] Clearly, sanctification and glorification are part of the same reality.

This limiting concept plainly counters the antinomian teaching of John Eaton, Tobias Crisp, and John Saltmarsh, who were prone to speak of justification as the totality of salvation.[28] But we can also notice more subtle differences with Martin Luther, who realized the organic connection between salvation and holiness to some degree, especially if his use of marriage as a metaphor for salvation is given due weight,[29] yet whose theology contains tensions from which antinomian inferences can be drawn.[30] For Luther, the accent fell on the benefits of faith: "Now let *faith* come between them [i.e., Christ and the believing soul] and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's."[31] Luther then explicates how believers receive the benefits of righteousness and eternal life from Christ, the bridegroom. But Marshall emphasizes that through union with Christ, believers actually receive the bridegroom. Christ himself—who

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[23] Ibid., 45 (3.2).

[24] Ibid., 48 (3.3.1).

[25] Ibid., 73 (4.4.2).

[26] Jeremiah Burroughs, *Christ Inviting Sinners to Come to Him for Rest* (London: Peter Cole, 1659), 281.

[27] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 331 (14.5.7).

[28] John Eaton, *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* (London: Printed by R. B. at the Charge of Robert Lancaster, 1642), 65.

[29] Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 603.

[30] Cooper, *Fear and Polemic*, 20–22.

[31] Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 603. For similar ideas in Luther, see Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 26:132, 167–68, and Martin Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses (1518)," trans. Carl W. Folkemer, in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 31:189–90.

became incarnate, died, and rose again in glory—is the central benefit of this union.[32] By faith, the believer is brought into Christ. Marshall—like Calvin—recognizes that Christ's becoming "for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption" is the substance of salvation.[33] Thus, the benefits can in no way be separated from the person.[34] Marshall's theology holds together justification and sanctification because the chief benefit of salvation is Christ, who, in his person, brings both gifts to the believer. The framework of union with Christ allows Marshall to dwell at length on the implications of justification without justification becoming the central benefit in salvation and therefore eclipsing the need for sanctification in one's life. Luther never denied this structure, but his emphasis on the benefits that the marriage with Christ brings to the believer slightly diminishes the organic connection between those benefits and the groom.

Sanctification, however, does not eclipse justification either, because Marshall's other limiting concept is that *some sense of assurance precedes sanctification*. This notion prohibits neonomianism. Marshall derives this concept from the nature of real holiness in union with Christ. Either holy acts are performed out of love for God and by faith in his promises or by definition they are not holy. Furthermore, holiness consists in desiring God's attributes—his mercy and grace as well as his justice and righteousness—to be increasingly present in one's life.[35] In other words, a central aspect of holiness is communion with God, and this communion presupposes union with Christ.

Moreover, because human beings in their fallen condition know themselves to be under the wrath of God, it is impossible for them to move voluntarily toward God without first experiencing a change that relieves them from fearing God's wrath any longer. Apart from reconciliation in Christ, a person can no more love God than a criminal can love his executioner. Thus, before believers display any holiness, they must have confidence in God's disposition to look upon them favorably. This confidence is obtained only through the knowledge of union with Christ and its accompanying justification.

We must stress *knowledge* of union and justification because the conditions necessary for holiness include not only a right standing with God, but also an epistemological framework that allows this good standing to be known—

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[32] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 43–44 (3.2), 50 (3.3.2).

[33] Ibid., 323 (14.2.4).

[34] Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 61.

[35] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 1–4 (1).

that is, assurance. In short, one must be persuaded of God's good favor and be confident of heavenly reward before any holiness is possible. At the very outset of his book, Marshall shows that holiness requires certain endowments, which include an element of assurance of present and future favor. Here Marshall is strikingly similar to Calvin, who maintains that the believer has in heaven not a judge, but a loving father,[36] and that assurance of the fatherly love is what allows the believer to respond to God in a familial way. Calvin uses this argument to confront the Roman Catholic teaching that discouraged assurance.[37]

Marshall uses this argument to confront Baxter, arguing that Baxter's doctrine of sincere obedience prior to salvation could never produce real holiness because it fails to provide any confidence in God's favor by which a sinner could move toward God as Father: "The doctrine of salvation by sincere obedience [neonomianism], that was invented against antinomianism, may well be ranked among the worst antinomian errors."[38] Marshall assumes that only through the gospel of free grace can one be in union with Christ, and only in union with Christ is real holiness possible. Therefore, if one takes away the gospel of grace—even with the aim of more rigorous law keeping—the result will be increased sin. This reality is why neonomianism is, at root, an antinomian error.

Marshall's uniqueness is also evident in the way he inverts the typical question related to assurance: instead of asking, "How do I get the kind of sanctification that will give me assurance?" he asks, "How do I get the kind of assurance that will give me sanctification?" Marshall admits that the first question—which puts assurance after sanctification—is legitimate because there is a sense in which assurance flows from sanctification,[39] but he leads with the idea that a sense of assurance is grounded in faith because he sees assurance as a precondition for sanctification. By doing this, Marshall averts both prominent errors of his day: he avoids neonomianism by stressing that assurance is possible and foundational; he also avoids antinomianism by showing that the goal of assurance is not merely to leave people assured but to lead them into holiness.

This limiting concept—*some sense of assurance precedes sanctification*—also pits Marshall against one closer to his camp, namely, Anthony Burgess.

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[36] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Thomas McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1.

[37] Ibid., 3.2.15. See also, Anthony N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 47.

[38] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 127 (6.2.5).

[39] Ibid., 155–56 (9).

Burgess's lectures, directed "especially [against] Antinomians," outline a doctrine of justification identical to Marshall's. Also, like Marshall, Burgess recognizes an inherent proclivity in all people toward both antinomianism and legalism—so he, too, acknowledges the pendulum swing. Yet differences emerge. In a warning against antinomianism, Burgess instructs Christians, "Follow holiness as earnestly, as if thou hadst nothing to help thee but that."[40] In other words, one must work for holiness as if one's work were the only basis for one's acceptance before God. Marshall, it seems, would not endorse this kind of exhortation; he would say instead that the moment one feels one has nothing but one's own holiness for support, one is utterly incapable of performing any true holiness because one has no solid basis by which one can come before God as Father. In other words, one has no union with Christ upon which one could commune with Christ, and this communion is essential for holiness. Burgess's approach would be tanta-mount to sanctification according to the flesh and would actually promote antinomianism. Granted, Burgess immediately says that one must also "rely upon Christ's merits as fully, as if thou had no holiness at all."[41] Thus, Burgess does not advocate legalism consistently. Nevertheless, Burgess bifurcates the Christian life by juxtaposing these two systems: there is one for promoting holiness and another for promoting comfort. This bifurcation will lead to tension, confusion, and despair.

Marshall, in contrast, integrates the systems for confronting legalism and licentiousness under the single heading of union with Christ, calling believers to seek holiness precisely through the comfort and assurance of the gospel and to recognize that comfort and assurance of the gospel poises one for performing good works. His limiting concepts—(1) the organic connection between salvation and sanctification and (2) assurance before holiness—prevent the kind of dialectic tension that is programmed into Burgess's theology.

3. *Rejection of Rationalism*
Marshall also saw that antinomianism and neonomianism shared an essential common feature: rationalism. Marshall rejects rationalism in favor of the epistemological approach that was normative among the Reformed orthodox.

Rationalism shows up among the antinomians in the way they forced certain conclusions upon the believers' relationship with God, which they

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[40] Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis or a Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians*, 2nd ed. (London: James Young for Thomas Underhill, 1647), 48.

[41] Ibid.

drew from the doctrine of union with Christ. For them, the finished character of union diminished human agency, and this view led to a kind of hyper-Calvinism, where the actions of God left little room for the actions of humans to have any weight.[42] The antinomians were known for "flying to God's decrees." That is, they defended their system by extrapolating specific implications form the eternal covenant within the Trinity.

Baxter's rationalism led him to the opposite conclusion. The submission to Christ demanded from all people, combined with the high significance of human action that Baxter saw in Scripture, disallowed any aspect of real union before the kind of behavior that would create that union in the believer's actual history. For Baxter, union was relative, consisting only in the comparative relationship between two parties:[43] believers do not commune with Christ because they are united; rather, they are united because they commune. Communion with Christ—epitomized in one's submission to him as Lord—constitutes union. Union was the result of the believer's response to Christ, not the cause of it. This is what James Packer calls the "rationalism of [Baxter's] 'political method.'"[44]

In contrast, Marshall's doctrine of union with Christ resisted rationalism. For Marshall, union with Christ "does not fall at all under the judgment of sense" because it is a spiritual union.[45] Marshall is not arguing that reason has no role in theology. For instance, in his argument for the necessity of assurance, he says, "Now let right reason judge ...."[46] Marshall's scholastic method makes extensive use of reason; but, for Marshall, reason was not magisterial. Scripture was the *principium cognoscendi* (principle of knowledge). Thus, Marshall began his understanding of union with Christ by recognizing that it—like the hypostatic union and the Trinity—is "beyond our comprehension" and that "we cannot frame an exact idea of the manner of any of these three unions in our imaginations."[47] Because these unions are beyond human comprehension, the human "judgment of sense" cannot be the final arbitrator concerning the truth of them. "Yet," Marshall insists,

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[42] For example, see Nicholas Couling, *The Saints Perfect in This Life or Never* (London: Printed for Giles Calvert, and Art to Be Sold at the West End of Pauls, 1647), 32.

[43] Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxter's Confutation of a Dissertation for the Justification of Infidels* (London: By R. W., 1654), 254. Cited from Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 234. See also, Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (London, 1650), 28; and Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory* (London, 1673), 818.

[44] James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 160.

[45] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 45 (3.2).

[46] Ibid., 157 (9.1.1).

[47] Ibid., 43 (3.2).

"we have cause to believe them all because they are clearly revealed in Scripture."[48] He then proceeds to explain the Scriptural evidence for union with Christ.[49] This theological method, which recognized the magisterial authority of Scripture, prevented him from following one implication of union with Christ in such a way that it would contradict or overshadow another. Thus, Marshall fought a two-front war against antinomianism and neonomianism with a robust theology of union with Christ and a theological method that rejected rationalism in favor of a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture.

Moreover, when Marshall looked to Scripture, he saw not merely the fact of union with Christ but the eschatological structure in which the union functioned. This is particularly important because, for Marshall, the eschatological structure meant that the parameters of union did not need to fit the human conception of time. For both the antinomians and Baxter, the sequencing of union relative to salvation history proved to be the sticking point. The antinomians diminished the instrumentality of faith because they saw in Scripture that one is united to Christ in election and, therefore, before faith. They were willing to speak of salvation "by Christ" but not "by faith."[50] Baxter, in contrast, minimized any union prior to the life of faith in order to give priority to the biblical teaching on the instrumentality of faith and obedience. In contrast to both, Marshall's system is not encumbered with questions such as how the benefits of Christ are obtained for the believer before he or she exercises faith. For Marshall, the overarching chronological factor concerning union with Christ is the eschatological reality of resurrection penetrating the present. As noted earlier, he concludes his work by saying, "Sanctification in Christ is glorification begun as glorification is sanctification perfected."[51] The human mind is utterly at a loss to explain the mechanics of this structure, yet one must believe this structure because of the clear evidence for it in Scripture.

Believing this structure has clear implications for the believer's experience of sanctification as well. If union with Christ is a mystery, then everything based on union with Christ would be equally mysterious, including the process of sanctification. Hence, "the gospel mystery of sanctification" is a way of sanctification that submits ultimately to Scripture and not to the dictates of reason. Marshall's system of sanctification requires that the

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 48–57 (3.3.1–3.3.3.5).

[50] Timothy Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 62.

[51] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 331 (14.5.7).

believer submit to the Scripture's promise "peremptorily"—that is, at the most foundational level—even when it seems contrary to the evidence of one's reason.[52] Thus, embedded in the structure of Marshall's theology is a principle that resists rationalism; to comprehend sanctification—and, even more, to experience it—one must first and foremost believe in the promises of God and then secondarily consciously submit to the authority of Scripture.

To clarify Marshall's position further, we should point out that his rejection of rationalism is not quite the same as the mystical approach to assurance that we see in Owen. Jonathan Master has argued that Owen relies upon a subjective sense of assurance vis-à-vis one's experience of being loved by God in Christ.[53] Marshall certainly wants to lead his readers into a subjective experience, especially in their participation in the Lord's Supper.[54] However, he maintains an objective anchor to assurance in the finished work of Christ. Thus, Marshall's antirationalism does not lead to subjectivism. Rather, it grounds believers in the authority of Scripture and the objective promise of salvation for all who trust in Christ. The reality that Christ died for sinners—the likes of which include even the worst of all sinners—and the promise that whosoever will believe will be saved provide an objective basis for assurance and the whole experience of sanctification.[55]

4. *Pastoral Theology*

Finally, Marshall's work is also remarkable for the way it weaves together systematic and pastoral theology. Not only is Marshall not content with recognizing the pendulum swing of his day and simply offering a systematic formula that is theoretically resistant to such a swing, but also he offers a pastoral theology that leads the reader by the hand into a proper experience of sanctification. His goal is to teach people how to be holy.[56]

This pastoral theology is important. The antinomian/neonomian controversy of the seventeenth century teaches us that there is a world of difference between affirming an orthodox definition of sanctification and actually applying it. The charges of antinomianism and neonomianism were often

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[52] Ibid., 214 (11.2.1.5).
[53] John Owen, "Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (1657)," in *Works of John Owen* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 2:241–42. See also Jonathan Master, *A Question of Assurance: The Doctrine of Assurance after the Westminster Confession* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 141–70.
[54] Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 260 (12.2.7).
[55] Ibid., 178 (10.1.4).
[56] Ibid., 1 (1).

made not in theological explication but in pastoral application. Marshall's work is remarkable in that it attempts—and, in my judgment, succeeds—in integrating theology and application consistently. Indeed, his whole work is a manual for becoming holy and thus can hardly be accused of tending toward antinomianism. Further, his whole work is also aimed at comforting people in the gospel so that they have a sure basis for work towards holiness, and so his approach mitigates the charges of neonomianism and antinomianism simultaneously.

A critical part of Marshall's pastoral theology appears in the last section of the body of the book, in which he gives directions for living a sanctified life by faith. He begins direction 13, the penultimate one, by stressing the centrality of faith. Holy actions are not accomplished by brute force but through the skill of living by faith.[57] He also explains faith's role in the Christian life, given the overlap of the ages.[58] Believers belong to the new age, and yet they live in the old. They must exercise faith in the future promise, even as their experiences fall short of the full glory to come. Understanding this provides believers with the ability to be concerned about their sin, but not to let their sin overwhelm them.

In direction 14, the last, Marshall explains how to strengthen one's faith by the means of grace. These "means" include prayer, Scripture reading, fellowship with other believers, and the sacraments. These practices strengthen believers in their faith, which thereby increases them in holiness.[59] Again we see remarkable balance. Marshall avoids the antinomian devaluation of the means of grace by stressing that the practices are necessary to strengthen our faith; but he also avoids a legalistic devotion to the means by emphasizing that what they promote is faith, a faith that brings believers into greater awareness of the gospel. Thus, the goal of the means of grace is to make one more aware of the gospel. More could (and should) be said about Marshall's pastoral theology. The point of interest here is that he coaches believers on how they are to practice the means of grace. In order to skirt the errors of antinomianism and neonomianism it was not enough to provide a theoretical theology of sanctification; he also needed to train believers in the proper skills of living by faith for them safely to reach their goal.

Conclusion
Having explored four aspects of Marshall's work that make it useful within the Reformed tradition, we now make some comments about how to actually

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[57] Ibid., 230–35 (12).
[58] Ibid., 244 (12.2.1).
[59] See all of direction 14, ibid., 315–32.

use Marshall's theology in the contemporary discussion on sanctification. We begin with a brief comment regarding one possible reason for conflicting articulations of sanctification in the church.

It is natural for anyone articulating a theology of sanctification to have more fear of either the antinomian or the neonomian type of error, and it is normal that this fear would make one more sensitive to any theological system that contains a trajectory in the direction of the error one fears more. Likewise, one should not be surprised if those speaking about sanctification differ with one another regarding those aspects of sanctification that they feel needs to be stressed at any given moment. (Is it the absolute need for holiness in the redeemed? Or is it the gift-character of the holiness and the instrumentality of faith?) One should note that these differences can arise even within the same tradition and that they do not necessarily indicate a radically different theological structure but can reveal a different assessment of the need of the moment. Of course, the divergent assessments of the moment's need are driven by particular theological constructs. Thus, though theological differences are not absent, they are perhaps not as great as they may at first appear.

It is of interest for understanding Marshall to note that theologians who differ on sanctification appreciate his approach, for example, Andrew Murray, John Murray, Lane Tipton, and John Fesko.[60] They articulate sanctification differently, yet they all commend Marshall. Of course, this does not necessarily commend Marshall's work. It could be that he is so ambiguous that one can read a wide range of positions into his book. However, this is unlikely, given Marshall's careful scholastic approach. It is more likely that a wide range of thinkers appreciate him because he affirms some aspect of sanctification that they appreciate and because he shuts down the possibility of an erroneous view of sanctification that these thinkers also reject.

Our analysis of Marshall suggests that he successfully prevents both antinomian and neonomian errors. He stops the pendulum from swinging by refusing to answer one error with the other, but instead, he answers both simultaneously with a robust theology of union with Christ. As a result,

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[60] Andrew Murray says, "There is but one book in the language admitted by all to be the standard one on 'sanctification.' It is the work of the Rev. Walter Marshall, published in 1692, 'The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification.'" Andrew Murray, "Introduction," in *Sanctification; or the Highway of Holiness an Abridgment of the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification, with an Introductory Note by A.M.*, ed. Andrew Murray (London: Nisbet, 1884), v. As already noted, John Murray is reported to have said of *Gospel Mystery* that it was "The most important book on sanctification ever written." John Fesko, "Sanctification and Union with Christ: A Reformed Perspective," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34.3 (2010): 117. Lane Tipton encouraged reading Walter Marshall in class.

neither side needs to worry that Marshall will lead to the error it fears. Marshall stresses the gratuitous nature of our salvation in Christ without easy-believism and emphasizes the need for holiness without abandoning grace. As we saw, grace and holiness are not competitors for Marshall, but they exist in joyful cooperation.

Thus, whatever aspect of sanctification one is predisposed to stress, one can find that aspect supported in Marshall. However, in order to remain true to Marshall's intention, we must do more than quote those sections that support our emphases. We must also recognize that whatever side of the Christian life we want to stress is tied to the other because everything is tied to union with Christ. For instance, if I am attracted to Marshall because he stresses the need to be holy, I should recognize that holiness can only happen in the context of free forgiveness in Christ. Or, if I appreciate Marshall because he stresses the reality of assurance arising directly out of faith in Christ, I should also recognize that this assurance is never an end in itself, but always the necessary context whereby I can pursue holiness and find even more assurance.

Marshall's theology is, indeed, a blessing to the church, but only if we wrestle with the deep structure of his thought, for there we will find themes in sanctification that not only comfort us but also challenge us. May we take up his work and read.