

Laurence Claxton

Laurence Clarkson (1615–1667), also called Claxton, was born in Preston in 1615. A Tailor {by occupation,} English Theologian and Reputed Heretic. Brought up as an Anglican, by 1642 he made the switch to Presbyterianism, then became an Independent. Influenced by Tobias Crisp; met Captain Paul Hobson between Oct. 1644 – April 1645, and served briefly with him as an army chaplain in Yarmouth. Started preaching around 1644 in Suffolk, and was baptized by Thomas Patient, whilst in London. In 1645, he was arrested with the Baptist, Hanserd Knollys, and charged in Suffolk with dipping. Subsequently under the influence of William Erbury, Clarkson became a Seeker. In 1648-49 he was called as a preacher to Col. Philip Twisleton's New Model Army foot regiment. Whilst in route with soldiers from Lincs to London he fell in with Ranters, and soon thereafter gave up his army preaching. Remained with the Ranters for much of the 1650's, preaching & writing. By 1660 he joined the Muggletonians, followers of John Reeve and Lodowicke Muggleton. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." {John 15:6} As gathered and scattered by the slight of religious men, some of which, it is to be feared, were those of "corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth," his writings embody the sentiments of one that was "carried about with every wind of doctrine." His writings, though for the most part muddied with vain imaginations; yet in this treatise; {Clear Confutation of all Arminians, 1659;} we find an exceptional exposition of Christ Exalting Truth. From the HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH BAPTISTS, by Joseph Ivimey, {1814} in Volume 2, we read this concerning Clarkson: "There was a zealous Baptist minister named Laurance Clarkson in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, in the year 1644. He had been recently baptized, and is an instance of a Baptist minister retracting his sentiments, and again returning to the profession of Paedobaptism! The Committee of Suffolk sent him to prison for daring to immerse persons professing faith in Christ. After six months he petitioned for his liberty, on account of having retracted his sentiments, and promising not "to dip or teach the same." The Committee required him to sign the following recantation which was entered in due form in their books. "This day Laurance Clarkson, formerly committed for an Anabaptist, and for dipping, doth now before this committee disclaim his errors. And whereas formerly he said he durst not leave his dipping if he might gain all the committee's estates by so doing, now he saith that he by the Holy Scriptures is convinced, that his said opinions were erroneous, and that he will not, and dare not practice it again, if he could gain all the committee's estates by doing it. And that he makes this recantation not for fear, or to gain his liberty, but merely out of a sense of his errors, wherein he will endeavor to reform others." LAURANCE CLARKSON. {July 15, 1645} From this time Mr. Clarkson was separated from the Baptists as an unworthy member. In his own vindication he published a pamphlet entitled, "The Pilgrimage of Saints, by Church cast out, in Christ found, seeking Truth." In this he endeavored to acquit himself by observing, "That he did not assert the baptism of believers by immersion to be an error, but only intended it was erroneously practiced, there being now no true churches, nor true administrators of the ordinance." From this account it appears that the Paedobaptists had not much cause for boasting of their convert; nor the Baptists for regret in losing such a quondam brother from their communion. If Edwards and Bailie are to be believed, Mr.

Clarkson was both a "Seeker," and an Antinomian; but our readers must be again cautioned that both these bitter Presbyterian writers, blackened the characters of all who opposed the impositions and uniformity of a national church."

Royal Prerogative Power of God

"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" {Rom.9:21} Notwithstanding this Scripture is clear for the Royal Prerogative Power of God as it lieth in the connection thereof, as also the chapter is full of the same matter, confirming that God must needs do with his creature what he pleaseth, otherwise to what end should he have created any living being in his presence, if the creature had power in itself to be saved or damned at his own will and pleasure, surely then were it a madness in any creature to fear damnation, or be troubled at anything he doeth, and that because it lieth not in the power of God that formed thee, but in thyself. Oh herein lay my sorrow, to consider that most part of the world are plunged into this chaos of eternal darkness, to believe without any true and heavenly testimony, that God should not have the power of a mortal king, when you see it daily in the rulers of this world, who will put to death, and preserve alive whom they please, and yet Christ Jesus the Creator of heaven and earth must by his creature be put to death, yea judged a Tyrant by the seed of the serpent, for saying, "I will have mercy on whom I will, and whom I will I harden," {Rom.9:18,} which is no less than if he had said, "whom I will damn, I will, and whom I will save, I will, what is that to any man? Shalt thou that was formed by me, say unto me, why dost thou deal so hardly with me?" I say man must have power to put Christ to death, not only in his own person, but in his word and people, and none shall say against it; when as if God doth but write a word, that he hath all power in heaven and earth, man grumbles that he should assume a power to damn, when you see that one creature is lord over another, to devour its inferior, as a great dog worries a little dog, and great fishes swallows up the little ones, and so great men murder poor men, and yet God must have no power over his creature, but only a name of a god, but no power as a God, unless it be to pardon and forgive all the bloodshed that hath been acted by the seed of reason against the Seed of Faith. I say this cursed brood will allow God this prerogative, to feed them with riches and pleasures of this world, to oppress and tyrannize over the poor seed of faith, and when death comes, they would have God ask them whether it be their will to be damned, or no; that privilege Christ could not have of his creature, to know of the Jews whether the sentence of his death might lie at his own disposing or no; this privilege that God could not have of man, man would have of God; but know this, O wretched rebellious creature, that thou shalt find in thy soul, with that blasphemous devil largely, whosoever thou art that lives and dies in disbelief of thine, that thou shalt be eternally damned, and yet not know who it was, though thou canst not to believe what now I write, yet thou shalt find with a witness the truth of thy eternal misery, in that I fear that thou art fitted for destruction. Now the main ground of all this floweth from thy ignorance, not knowing what God and his nature is. Thy knowledge in these things would yield a submission to the Royal Prerogative Power of God, and not stand caviling whether God had a power to damn as well as to save. For this is truth, that if God can damn none, then he can save none; but be not doubting, but believe, that if he hath power to save, he hath power to damn, otherwise all power was not given Christ in earth, as well as in heaven. If you will believe Scripture, you shall find that God doth damn as well as save, if ever thou art brought to truly know Him as he is God. "Hath not the potter power over the clay." {Rom.9:21} What say you? Hath not a living man power over a dead lump of clay? Can you deny it? No surely, it is consented to by all, that man hath this power, but it is much questioned whether God hath this power as the potter

hath, and that because one they see, and the other they cannot; the one is evil, the other is good; for what is the thoughts of reason, think you? It is a tyrannical act in God to make a vessel for damnation. Now thou proud reason, devil, what wouldest thou have God to do? Thou wouldest have all been made vessels of salvation, and what then, shall not all be saved? For surely as the vessel is made, so it shall continue, for though a glorious vessel in the using of it may gather dust and filth, according as it is used, and so become as a vessel dishonorable, in respect of that corruption it is clothed withal, but when the vessel is washed, then it looks as glorious as before; but that vessel that was made deformed, notwithstanding all washing, it will look deformed still; and therefore if all souls had been made vessels of salvation, notwithstanding in their lifetime they may gather corruption by sins and iniquities, yet all this while they are vessels of honor, as in relation to their Eternal Surety, or that seed of faith in them; for all the time that Paul was clothed with a corrupted persecuting spirit, he was a vessel of honor as in the account of God. Now you that are not appointed for destruction, may undoubtably believe that there is a secret knowledge in the breast of the Lord Christ, who are the vessels of mercy, and who are the vessels of reason, in this infinite wisdom hath appointed the means when, in which way this vessel of mercy shall come to the knowledge of this glorious Person, as my soul can witness, which on the contrary the seed of fleshly and religious reason shall never come to the understanding of this Royal Prerogative Power of God, but shall weary out themselves with fasting, weeping, and prayer; and yet come short of the knowledge of the true God. "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." {Mt.13:15} You seed of reason, that say it is in your own power, why do you not hear? Why do you not see? Why do you not understand? Christ the eternal God is preached to all, you have as much privilege to hear as another, and yet you understand not what you hear; you think that you are righteous, you judge yourselves wise; yea so wise, that none understands more, nor so much as you, and why do you not understand that Christ is God, as those simple hearted ignorant fools so detested by you? Can you tell me what is the ground why you do not hear? Are you wiser than your fathers the Jews, the seed of Abraham? If you were wiser, as you are not, as they could not, no more can you, as in them you may read your own destiny. "Why do ye not understand my speech; even because ye cannot hear my word." {Jn.8:43} You talk of God being your Father. "If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God." Ye are witness to yourselves what seed you are, the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, but not according to Grace, for Abraham saw me not, but believed, and you see me, yet I am he that speak unto you, and yet you believe not. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do;" "and because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." The god of this world hath blinded your eyes, lest you should see the rise of your misery, or the way to eternal life. "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." {Jn.8:47} What say you Millenarians; what say you Quakers; and what sayest thou, Richard Coppin; {Arminian Universalist;} with all other of this cursed opinion. Do ye not believe the words of Christ the eternal God? Do you not read that all is not of God, therefore of the devil, so you will not come to Christ that you might have life? And why will they not come? Because they do not believe that Christ was the Son of God, and why do you not believe? Because your light of reason hath blinded the light of faith; and why is your faith blinded; but because you are of your father the devil. Now herein appears your madness, that God hath this Prerogative Power. Therefore hear the words of Christ by his prophets, saying, "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou; or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, what begetteth thou; or to the woman, what hast thou brought forth?" {Is.45:9,10} O woe unto you Richard Coppin, and the rest of the same faith with thee, that thinketh that there is unrighteousness in God, because he hath ordained

some to condemnation, and therefore that they may have no hard thoughts of God, they will not believe that ever God did purposely create a man to damn him, for what saith this thievish brood, as they cannot stand with Divine Justice, because their unjust heart saith so, when it is written in Jude that there are creatures of old ordained to condemnation; and others that are appointed to wrath. {Jude 4} "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation;" {I Thes.5:9;} from the Lord Jesus Christ; against all the seed of reason I affirm, if Christ, by his own Divine Power had not created a seed to be damned, as well as a seed to be saved; then, I demand of thee, why dost the Scripture all along speak of two seeds, as Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Peter and Judas, Salvation and Damnation, Faith and Reason; the one for heaven, and the other for hell. Abraham was grieved that there should be any difference between Ishmael and Isaac, they being both of his own begetting, so both of his own flesh; notwithstanding there was a promise to Isaac according to the spirit or seed of faith, wherein it is written; "and Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!" Yet, the Lord's answer was, "as for Ishmael, I have heard thee; Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation;" but Abraham knew this, "my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." {Gen.17:18-21} Now that all you that have ears to hear may understand, that the Promise and Covenant of Eternal Life was invested upon Isaac and his Seed; {"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy Seed, which is Christ, Gal.3:16;} although Ishmael was his eldest son; but now you may plead the difference of these seeds did only consist as one was of his servant, and the other of his wife; so one a Gentile bondwoman, and the other a Jewish freewoman, and so they are two as in relation to the flesh and not the spirit; but then what will you do with Esau and Jacob, they were one flesh by father and mother; yea both in one womb, and Esau was the elder, yet they were two nations, and two manner of people, "and the elder shall serve the younger." For it was revealed unto Rebecca, that God hated Esau and loved Jacob. Now was not this eternal love, and eternal hatred, from whence Esau was eternally damned, and Jacob eternally saved, though not revealed to either of them? For if Esau had known what I now write, he might have had more ground than any of you to upbraid God with cruelty, that before he was capable to think, much more to act any evil, he should be damned. I say, here was matter of enough for Esau to have hard thoughts of God, and to reply, and to say, "why should I not be saved as well as my brother Jacob; what evil have I done more than he; I was begotten by a faithful man, and born of a faithful woman; nay, and was the first born from the same womb as my brother Jacob was, so that what justice can be in this God to damn me and save him?" Truly from the spirit of all-knowing faith, {I Jn.2:20,} against, yea against all the seed of reason that is in either angel or man I affirm, that if Esau had known what I now write, and should have replied against God as aforesaid, that this, or to this effect had been the answer of God: "Esau, thou sayest that I have not done thee justice, thou canst not tell whether I have or no, for thou knowest not that thou wast dead, neither dost thou understand that of that dead lump I have made thee this living form. Canst thou deliver thyself; and may not I do with thee as thou hast done with thy fellow creatures in the day of thy power? May not I by my power keep thee under eternal death to all eternity, therefore in that I have given thee life out of death, I will make thee death out of life, for this purpose have I raised thee, that I might show my power in thee, otherwise where had my Royal Prerogative Power been known?" If the Lord had not brought forth another seed, and given it a great power to encounter with Him, the God of all power; I say, if God did not by his word speaking bring forth another seed contrary to his own, and so another wisdom and power continually to war and oppose him in his Word and people, he had not been known to have been a God commanding all power in heaven and earth whatsoever, neither had there been any mention in the Scripture of two, nor no need of any creation at all, so no necessity of such titles as devil, hell, or damnation. But this as by

experience I know now that there is two; so I know it was resolved in the spiritual breast of the Lord Jesus Christ, that from the beginning there should be two, and for this very end and purpose. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world;" {Jn.18:37;} to raise my own seed, to live in eternal glory with me, and to keep the contrary seed under a living death to eternal misery. Surely; if salvation were at my disposing, I should not have either secret or public fears of being eternally damned; for if so, I would take my pleasure to satisfy my lust, and please my mind in all that my heart delights in, so long as I have health I would not cease to do anything unjust, that thereby I might grow rich, famous, and honorable in this world; for what matter though these be the fruits of damnation; yet it lieth in my power whether I will be damned or not, and therefore when I think that death is at hand, then I will leave off all that is evil, make compensation and begin to seek the Lord. Ah pitiful soul; what filthy cogitations lodgeth in thy heart, that thou hast a power, and it lieth in thy power whether thou wilt be damned or no. "If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least," {Lk.12:26,} much less save or damn thy own soul; thou shalt to thy cost know, that "it is not of him that willetteth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy;" for as it is written, I "will have mercy," on whom I will have mercy, and whom I will, I will harden; {Rom.9:16-18;} with many such places, and yet what a noise mortality makes that salvation and damnation is not from God. Whatever you, the seed of reason, believe, or from the imagination of your own darkened heart suppose; yet this I assuredly know, whether you believe Scripture or no, or whether you own what I write now or no, it matters not; yet from Christ Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life, I declare unto you, that whosoever cannot believe, that the salvation and damnation of all souls floweth from the Royal Prerogative Power of God, without any relation to either good or evil done by thee, let me tell thee, that thou art a thief; yea a spiritual thief, for thou hast in thy thoughts robbed Christ of his Glory, which he hath so often said he will not give to another; no, not to man or angel, and yet thou pitiful poor mortal soul, thou who dost reply against God, in that thou wouldest not have such a thought of God, that he should create a soul to damn it, and so you become a rebellious traitor, in that thou wilt assume damnation into thine own power, as aforesaid, and upon this account stand guilty before the Divine Justice of God, shut up in darkness of unbelief until the Day of Resurrection; at which day thou shall be raised all reason, and no faith. These thy thoughts, words, and actions shall be the dreadful accusing Fiery Law that shall never quench, no never, never end! For this ye faithful of the Lord may be confident, as by the eye of faith I see perfected in my soul, that so long as a subject stands questioning with a king then in being, of his prerogative power, that king at last will demand his head from his shoulders, then how much more may thou expect that dares attempt to call God to an account as touching his Royal, Eternal, Prerogative Power; that hath all power in heaven and earth, to do with his creature what he will? Who shall question Him, or by a Law try Him for injustice, when he made heaven and earth, with all creatures in them, and gave a Law for man to be obedient unto him? I wonder that man should not tremble at any such thoughts of God? Therefore this know, that soul that cannot believe this, and so yield to the Royal Prerogative Power of God in this shall be eternally damned by this. All Scriptures that are seemingly against this, you do not understand concerning this, as now by the spirit of faith shall be infallibly interpreted, for the confirmation of this point in hand, as you have it written. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." {Tit.2:4} "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" {Ez.33:11} Now, here seems to be a flat contradiction to all that I have written in the preceding matter, therefore I shall reveal what death this is the Lord hath no pleasure in, and what not, that so you may not, as your forefathers have done, count the ways of the Lord unequal for lack of understanding herein, as those who worship at the shrine of freewill have to their own destruction made the Royal Prerogative Power of God of none effect. Concerning this it is written; "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I

have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." {Deut.30:19} Now ye rebels, what say you; have you not your desire? That before you have so much caviled about your Law, which if you keep you shall live by it, but if you break it, you shall be destroyed; as observe, "if ye be willing and obedient you shall live;" that is, you shall eat the good of the land, but "if you refuse and rebel, you shall die;" that is, you shall be destroyed by the sword; as touching this death the Lord hath no pleasure, but that all the house of Israel should keep his Law and be saved, and if they were destroyed they might blame themselves, for they had a Law according to their own desire, which they did promise to keep. "Speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and obey it;" {Deut.5:27;} but they were as "a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD;" {Is.30:9;} which if they had performed they had not died; and if possible they might live and not die, he caused the Law to be daily read unto them, and to exhort them again and again, that they might not forget, but walk in obedience thereunto. Now whereas it is written; "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked," was as I told you, "the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls;" {Hab.3:17;} "therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof." {Zep.1:13} {See also Leviticus 26:1-33 &c.} This is the death and destruction that Christ Jesus hath no pleasure in; as it is written, "and when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." {Lk.19:41,42} These, with many such like places, do all threaten an external death, as unto the death of their bodies, their goods, and their cattle, the Lord hath no pleasure; but as from this death he would have all men to be preserved; which if they had observed his statutes and ordinances, it had been well with them, but as they did not, he will wipe them off the face of the earth, and therefore attend and give ear thou caviling rebellious spirit unto the words of Isaiah the Prophet against the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, saying, "Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry;" for they "call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight;" and who "justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!" {Is.5:1-23} Now what could the Lord do less then to send them to captivity, and utterly destroy them root and branch; which if they had kept his Law, he had continued his mercy, "for as I live I have no pleasure in selling them into the hands of the heathen." Therefore Richard Coppin and the rest of you Free-willers; what advantage can you reap from this? Or wherein can you find that the eternal death of all souls is not reserved in the spiritual breast of the Lord Jesus Christ, though you say it lieth in your power to commit evil or no? Yet let me tell you, very few of you can so far keep the Law, so as to preserve yourselves from prison, but for all your power of freedom in the flesh, you are now and then curbed by a power of flesh; but however you may now and then escape this, yet mind what I say, for you can no ways free or deliver yourselves from Divine Justice, though you shall never know how, nor which way it comes; no, not any of you that shall be damned, shall but only understand that your

destruction is of yourselves, though I know the actual cause of your damnation is from the Royal Prerogative Power of God, as is confirmed; "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." {Is.6:10} So likewise; "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded; according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day." {Rom.11:7,8} "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith; or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it; as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood." {Is.10:15} So as Isaiah said to your fathers, so I say unto you, as if it lay in your power to damn or save your souls, you boast yourselves against Christ Jesus the Lord of Glory. Therefore cease their pen against them, and write against thyself, you being all non-commissioned, so not sent to preach, therefore ought not to judge one another, you being carnal, and not spiritual, reason, and not faith, cannot judge with righteous judgment, for that alone belongs to the household of faith, the spiritual revelation thereof judging all things, yet cannot be judged of any; {I Cor.2:15;} and therefore mind what I say unto thee, even the same that I have said concerning the Quakers, that though thou canst not now believe it, yet when it is too late thou shalt find the truth of what I now write unto thee. So to conclude, take notice when I say unto thee, and all of the same faith with thee, that so many of you that live and die in that belief of thine, will both soul and body perish to all eternity. Laurence Claxton {A Clear Confutation of all Arminians – called Free-Willers – that deny God's Prerogative Power in Matter of Damnation & Salvation, 1659}