

JUSTIFICATION

Report of the Committee to Study
the Doctrine of Justification

Commended for Study
by the Seventy-third General Assembly
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The Committee on Christian Education
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
Willow Grove, Pennsylvania

2007

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Prefatory Statement to the Report on Justification Adopted by the Committee on Christian Education on Behalf of the Seventy-third General Assembly

In response to an overture from the Presbytery of the Midwest, the Seventy-first General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church adopted the following statement:

Declaration on Justification

The 71st (2004) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (i) declares its continued commitment to the teaching of the Word of God, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms with regard to the doctrine of justification by faith alone; (ii) reaffirms that faith, which is a gift of God, is the sole instrument of justification; and (iii) reaffirms the following beliefs:

- a. “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone” (WSC 33).
- b. “Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God” (WCF 11.1).
- c. “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love” (WCF 11.2).
- d. “Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of

all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners" (WCF 11.3).

- e. "At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment" (WLC 90).
- f. "Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness" (WLC 73).
- g. "Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection" (WLC 77).

By action of the Seventy-first General Assembly, this declaration was sent to all ministers and sessions of the church, to all churches with which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is in ecclesiastical relationship, and to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council and the International

Conference of Reformed Churches. It was also posted on the OPC website (www.opc.org) and published in *New Horizons* (vol. 25, no. 8, August–September 2004).

In response to the same overture, the General Assembly also elected a committee (of the seven members and two alternates elected, six men were able to serve: Messrs. David M. VanDrunen [Chairman], L. Anthony Curto, Sidney D. Dyer, John V. Fesko [Secretary], Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., and Alan D. Strange [Vice-Chairman]), and assigned it the following mandate:

To critique the teachings of the “New Perspective on Paul,” “Federal Vision,” and other like teachings concerning the doctrine of justification and other related doctrines, as they are related to the Word of God and our subordinate standards, with a view to giving a clear statement to the presbyteries, sessions, and seminaries, and report back to the Seventy-second General Assembly.

According to its mandate, the committee reported to the Seventy-second General Assembly concerning its progress. That Assembly, at the committee’s request, extended its mandate for another year so that it could prepare a full report for the Seventy-third General Assembly.

Having received the report, the Seventy-third General Assembly instructed the Stated Clerk to send this report to the presbyteries, particularly to their candidates and credentials committees, and to all sessions and ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, commending the report to them for study. The Assembly also requested the Stated Clerk to mail copies of this report to those churches with whom the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has ecclesiastical fellowship or a corresponding relationship. Further, the Assembly requested the Committee on Christian Education (1) to distribute this report to seminaries with which it has contact; (2) to post this report on our denominational website for easy access by interested parties; and (3) to consider publishing it separately for distribution; thereby commending the report for study.

In commending the report for study, the Assembly approved the content and reasoning of the report. The Assembly did not take any action to endorse every word of the document or to make the report itself a part of our constitution (which would have to be approved by the general assembly and presbyteries in the manner provided in the Form of Government for the amendment of the constitution); nor was the document written with that purpose in mind. It should be noted that the general assembly is not invested with

power, by virtue of its own authority, to make pronouncements which bind the conscience of members of the church. Yet the deliverances of the general assembly, if declarative of the Word of God, are to be received with deference and submission, not only because of their fidelity to the Word of God, but also because of the nature of the general assembly as the supreme judicatory of the church (Form of Government 15.8).

In the preface to the report, the committee defended its dependency upon the primary and secondary standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in writing the report. The committee stated:

In presenting this report, the committee does not condemn all of the views of those mentioned herein, but it does agree that aberrant views on justification have been promulgated from within these circles. Therefore the committee has sought to reaffirm the church's commitment to the teaching of Scripture and the Westminster Standards on justification and to identify and critique contemporary claims to the contrary from those holding these aberrant views.

In the interests of maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the report is commended to you for study. The report is reprinted here as it appeared in the Minutes of the Seventy-third (2006) General Assembly, with slight corrections. These include several minor last-minute changes in the text, which were in the version of the report presented to the Assembly, but which were inadvertently not incorporated in the text printed in the Minutes. A few stylistic changes, along with grammatical corrections and improved footnote citations, have also been made.

Preface

With this report, the Committee on the Doctrine of Justification presents to the 73rd General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church the result of two years of study of the matters entrusted to it. We pray that our work may be helpful for the church and serve to equip and embolden her for the proclamation and defense of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of the challenges to that gospel in the present day.

The 71st General Assembly erected this committee “to critique the teachings of the ‘New Perspective on Paul,’ ‘Federal Vision,’ and other like teachings concerning the doctrine of justification and other related doctrines, as they are related to the Word of God and our subordinate standards, with a view to giving a clear statement to the presbyteries, sessions, and seminaries, and report back to the 72nd GA....” The 71st General Assembly elected seven men to serve on the committee and also elected two alternates. Before the committee’s first working meeting, two of the men elected were compelled to resign for personal reasons, and one of the two alternates reluctantly was not able to join the committee. Hence, the committee has consisted of six men through the duration of its work: Messrs. Anthony Curto, Sidney Dyer, John Fesko (Secretary), Richard Gaffin, Jr., Alan Strange (Vice-Chairman), and David VanDrunen (Chairman).

According to its mandate, the committee reported to the 72nd General Assembly concerning its progress. That Assembly, at the committee’s request, extended its mandate for another year so that it could prepare a full report for the 73rd General Assembly. Accordingly, the committee had two more working meetings in the past year, in August 2005 and January 2006, both in Woodstock, Ga.

During the past two years, the members of the committee, by God’s grace, were able to establish a productive working relationship and have produced this consensus report. In accordance with its mandate, the committee has approached its task as one of critique. The 71st General Assembly indicated its view that the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) and Federal Vision (FV) movements, whatever helpful things they may teach on certain matters, have expressed views on justification that are in conflict with Scripture and the confessional standards of the OPC. In presenting this report, the commit-

tee does not condemn all of the views of those mentioned herein, but it does agree that aberrant views on justification have been promulgated from within these circles. Therefore, the committee has sought to reaffirm the church's commitment to the teaching of Scripture and the Westminster Standards on justification and to identify and critique contemporary claims to the contrary from those holding these aberrant views.

A noteworthy feature of current theological debates, including those on justification, is the dynamic of the Internet. The Internet has produced the opportunity both to disseminate rapidly one's opinions and to obtain information quickly that was undreamed of until very recent years. While the Internet presents exciting opportunities for communicating the gospel and Reformed theology more generally, it also presents dangers and temptations. One temptation is to post opinions without due reflection and without proper accountability to others. While the ordinary process of publication requires material to be read and critiqued by others before going into print, Internet posting allows material to be circulated without going through these ordinary channels. This increases the danger that material is promulgated in an irresponsible manner, as authors promote their opinions promiscuously without being properly accountable to others and before receiving valuable feedback, as wisdom, humility, and love require. In this environment of Internet posting, likewise, readers are less able to judge the competency and qualifications of those who circulate material. It is important to note this for our report, since many debates in Reformed circles about justification are taking place in cyberspace.

To accomplish its task, the committee presents this report in four main sections. First is a survey of the biblical and confessional teaching on justification and closely related matters. Second is an overview of discussions about the doctrine of justification as they are taking place in the contemporary ecumenical scene. Third is a survey and critique of the views on justification as expressed in the NPP. Finally, the fourth section surveys and critiques the views on justification advocated among proponents of the FV. In addition to this full report, the committee also presents to the General Assembly a concise summary of it. This summary is certainly not intended as a substitute for the full report, but the committee believes that this sort of brief account of its study and critique may be useful for many in the church. As a final matter, this report also presents a number of recommendations intended to aid the various assemblies of the OPC in dealing practically with the contemporary debates over justification.

I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This section of the report consists of a confessional and biblical exposition of the doctrine of justification. Though the committee's task is specifically to critique certain movements that have challenged this doctrine of late, we judge that a positive setting forth of the doctrine as taught in Scripture and summarized in the Westminster Standards is an appropriate prelude to the rest of this report. By means of this section, the committee hopes to remind the church what exactly the biblical and confessional doctrine of justification is, offer encouragement to the church that the doctrine of justification taught in the Westminster Standards is indeed the doctrine taught in Scripture, and provide a helpful background for the more specific critiques of the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision that follow in subsequent sections.

There is perhaps no better definition of the doctrine of justification, concise yet comprehensive, than that which the OPC confesses in the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) 70:

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.

In this definition, all the major elements of the biblical, Reformed doctrine are set forth. Justification is a forensic, judicial act of pardoning, accepting, and accounting, not a transformative work by which a sinner is made subjectively holy through an infusion of grace. According to this definition, justification is a blessing granted to sinners, those who have fallen short of God's righteous requirements and stand condemned before him. In response to our sin, God, by his free grace, does two things for our justification: he pardons all our sins and accepts and accounts us righteous in his sight. God not only wipes away the guilt of sinners, but also credits righteousness to them. In justification, God declares that we are innocent of ever sinning against him and credits us with keeping his law perfectly. The ground for this great work,

WLC 70 goes on to explain, is nothing that is wrought within us or done by us. Instead, its ground is the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, imputed to us. In other words, Christ's perfect obedience to God's law is credited to us, so that we stand before God as if we ourselves had kept that law perfectly. And Christ's perfect sacrifice of atonement is imputed to us, so that we stand before God as if we had atoned for our lawbreaking. Finally, WLC 70 teaches that justification is received by faith alone. Not any work of obedience, but faith that receives and rests upon Christ, is the only instrument of justification.

In the subsections that follow, these and related issues are unpacked along confessional and biblical lines. Special attention is given to those areas in which significant controversies have arisen in recent years.

A. The Nature of Justification

1. The Forensic Character of Justification

Two primary characteristics of justification seem particularly pertinent to mention: its *forensic* nature and its *definitive* nature. The forensic character of justification was an important issue at the time of the Protestant Reformation. The medieval church in the West did not deny that there was a forensic aspect to justification. However, it placed the forensic declaration of righteousness at the end of a long process of moral renovation, upon which that declaration was based. Both the process of moral renovation and the subsequent forensic declaration were included in the concept of justification. The theologians of the Reformation, capitalizing on the Renaissance's recovery of the study of Scripture in its original languages, recognized that the New Testament's *δικαίουν* meant "to declare righteous." They affirmed that justification, according to biblical teaching, is not a process of moral transformation culminating in a forensic declaration, but is a forensic act, excluding any prior moral renovation as its basis.

The exposition of justification in the Westminster Standards reflects this view of justification's forensic nature in a variety of ways. For example, the catechisms speak of justification as an "act of God's free grace," rather than as a "work of God's grace," which describes effectual calling and sanctification. By the terminology of "act," in distinction from the terminology of "work," the catechisms indicate a declarative, external divine blessing, not a renovative, internal divine blessing. In addition, the catechisms use foren-

sic terms rather than transformative terms to describe justification (such as *pardon*, *accept*, *account*, and *impute*) and explicitly deny that justification involves moral transformation (“not for anything wrought in them, or done by them”).¹ Furthermore, the Standards speak of Christ’s atoning work, the basis of justification, in forensic terms. Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 11.3 says that Christ “did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father’s justice in their behalf” in order that in justification “both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified.”²

While perhaps not the focal point of recent criticisms of the doctrine of justification, some NPP and FV advocates have propounded weakened understandings of justification’s forensic nature. James Dunn claims that the crucial Pauline phrase, “the righteousness of God,” should not be understood in the Greek, judicial sense, but rather in the Hebrew, relational sense; i.e., not as an ideal against which action is measured, but as faithfulness in relationship. Furthermore, while not explicitly denying the forensic character of justification itself, he plays down the traditional Protestant/Roman Catholic debate and affirms that justification involves moral transformation by means of a living relationship with the covenant God.³ While N. T. Wright affirms the forensic character of the idea of “righteousness,” he also speaks of its significance in terms of “metaphor.”⁴ From the FV side, Peter Leithart also deals with the forensic aspect as a metaphor, in fact, as one metaphor among many that constitute the broader biblical doctrine of justification.⁵

While the forensic nature of justification is indeed analogical (God’s ar-

¹ WLC 70; WSC 33. Compare WLC 67, 75; WSC 31, 35. In regard to the terminology of “act,” it is worth noting that WLC 74 and WSC 34 also describe adoption as an act, since the decree of adoption itself is a forensic declaration of sonship. At the same time, the Standards, in some of their descriptions of adoption, also speak of experiential, subjective blessings that accompany this forensic act (see WLC 74; WSC 34; WCF 12).

² See also WLC 71.

³ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 341, 344.

⁴ See N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 97.

⁵ Peter J. Leithart, “‘Judge Me, O God’: Biblical Perspectives on Justification,” in *The Federal Vision*, ed. Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, LA: Athanasius, 2004), 203–35.

chetyal judicial action is not identical to human, ectypal judicial action), it is not metaphorical. Justification is a forensic act, not merely *similar to* a forensic act. The context of Paul's discussions of justification confirms the forensic meaning of justification, which the terminology of *δικαιουν* itself suggests. For example, the legal setting of the words of Rom 3:19–20 is unmistakable: “Now we know that whatever *the law* says it speaks to those who are *under the law*, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be *held accountable* [υποδικος] to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight.” Paul also routinely makes a direct contrast between “justify/justification” and the forensic terms “condemn/condemnation” (κατακρινειν/κατακριμα). For example, Paul writes: “The judgment ... brought *condemnation*, but the free gift ... brought *justification*” (Rom 5:16); and, “Who shall bring any charge [εγκαλεω —itself a forensic term] against God's elect? It is God who *justifies*. Who is to *condemn*?” (Rom 8:33–34a).

A number of OT references, which are important background for these NT affirmations, speak of justification in the judicial context and/or contrast it directly with condemnation. Many such OT references are also significant in that God or human judges justify the righteous and not the guilty, which would not make sense if interpreted in transformative terms. Justifying the guilty is a noble act, taken in a transformative sense; it is reprehensible when taken in a forensic sense. Among relevant examples are Exod 23:7 (“I will not acquit [justify] the wicked”), Deut 25:1 (judges should be “acquitting [justifying] the innocent and condemning the guilty”), and Prov 17:15 (“He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD”). All of these verses use the term קָדַשׁ in the hiphil and are translated by *δικαιουν* in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.⁶

Δικαιουν does carry something other than a strictly forensic meaning at times. Even when it does, however, its meaning is not one of moral transformation. For example, the demonstrative use of the term is the declaration of something to be what it really is (not the transforming of one thing into something else). This is evident in Christ's words: “Wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matt 11:19; see also Luke 7:35). As seen above, however, Paul uses

⁶ In regard to the use of the hiphil, Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor explain that it “can denote the causing of an event in which a person or object is esteemed or declared through a judicial sentence or some kind of recognition to be in a state” (see *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 439).

δικαιου in explicitly forensic contexts in his discussions of justification itself.

2. The Definitive Character of Justification

The other crucial characteristic of justification noted above is its *definitive* nature. In other words, justification is a once-for-all accomplished, completed, and perfect act. Though justification may be made manifest to the world on the last day in a way in which it is not manifest in this life, the justifying verdict rendered here and now to the one who believes is complete and definitive. Hence, WCF 11.4 explains that the time of justification is when “the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.” This brings believers into “the state of justification,” as WCF 11.5 continues, from which state “they can never fall.” WLC 77 states decisively that justification “doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation.”

Some NPP advocates articulate a very different understanding. Dunn, for example, explicitly denies the “once-for-all” character of justification and states instead that it is “the initial acceptance by God into restored relationship.”⁷ Wright compares and contrasts “present” with “future justification,” which in fact have different bases: “Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly ... on the basis of the entire life.”⁸ Scripture, however, affirms the definitive, once-for-all character of justification. This is evident, for example, in the first half of Rom 5, where Paul emphasizes the pastoral importance of this truth. He writes: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God” (5:1), and later, “Since, therefore, we have *now* [νυν] been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (5:9). In both instances, Paul’s use of the aorist tense suggests a once-for-all completed act, and the contexts confirm this interpretation. In 5:1, the accomplishment of justification means that the believer has peace with God—there is nothing uncertain or incomplete about the believer’s standing before him. In 5:9, the accomplishment of justification renders an absolute certainty that the believer will escape God’s wrath on the last day. The one who is justified

⁷ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 386.

⁸ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 129. See also N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, in NIB, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 440.

need never fear condemnation again: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” (Rom 8:33–34a). Justification is neither the beginning of a process nor something awaiting a future fulfillment on a different basis, but is a present certainty that forms the bedrock of believers’ spiritual peace and assurance.⁹ Contra Wright, there is one justification, not two, and on the last day Christians will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom only on the ground of Christ’s righteousness, not their own works.

B. Perfect Obedience to the Law

I. Introduction

The question of what the law of God requires—particularly, whether or not the law demands perfect obedience—is of critical importance to the doctrine of justification.¹⁰ The biblical, Reformed doctrine of justification presumes as background that God does indeed require perfect obedience to his law from each human being. In the covenant of works, God held out the promise of life on the condition that Adam, acting on behalf of the human race, perfectly obey his demand for obedience. Adam failed in this task, though he had the ability to fulfill it, and consequently sin has rendered everyone descending from him by ordinary generation entirely unable to meet the law’s perfect standard. Nevertheless, God’s demands have not slackened. He still requires perfect obedience from those who would enjoy eschatological life. Thus, as the doctrine of justification teaches, all people on their own stand condemned before God and need a Savior who will meet this requirement for them. Where the law’s requirement of perfect obedience is questioned, the traditional doctrine of justification is necessarily also thrown into dispute.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some contemporary critics of the Re-

⁹ Those texts where the present tense of *δικαιουν* appears cannot properly be used to deny that justification is a once-for-all act. For example, in Rom 3:24 it is used in a distributive sense and in Rom 3:28 it is used in a gnomic sense. As P. R. Williams explains, the gnomic present “does not say that something *is* happening but that something *does* happen.” See *Grammar Notes on the Noun and the Verb and Certain Other Items*, rev. ed. (Tacoma, WA: Northwest Baptist Seminary, 1988), 27.

¹⁰ On this point, see Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 283.

formed doctrine of justification have rejected the idea that the law demands perfect obedience. A. Andrew Das notes: “So does Paul see doing the law as possible or impossible? This question has become the dividing line in Pauline scholarship on the law. The debate rages between those who think that Paul’s understanding of the law has absolutely nothing to do with the need to obey the law perfectly and those who still think that it does.”¹¹ In his path-breaking work, which in some sense launched the NPP, E. P. Sanders specifically addresses the question of the law and perfect obedience. At one point in his discussion, Sanders claims: “The passages which assert that one who transgresses one commandment loses his place in the covenant or his share in the world to come do not mean that the Rabbis required legal perfection. There is no hint in Rabbinic literature of a view such as that of Paul in Gal. 3.10 or of IV Ezra, that one must achieve legal perfection.”¹² Why was this the case? Sanders points his readers to several elements built into the Mosaic law itself that made provision for its transgression. For example, in noting that the “question of perfect obedience to the law hardly arises in the Tannaitic literature,” Sanders points to the law’s requirement of repentance. According to the Tannaitic authors, repentance wipes out sins and thus God does not deal with the repentant according to a strict reckoning of justice.¹³ Sanders also notes that the rabbis recognized the law’s provisions for atonement, which shows that they did not conceive of the law as requiring perfect obedience. Even a person who commits grievous sin can be called ‘righteous’ if he makes atonement. Sanders comments: “The *righteous are those who obey the Torah and atone for transgression*. Many have inferred from this a strict system of works-righteousness—those who obey the law are saved—but this would not be an accurate interpretation of the Rabbinic view.”¹⁴

Dunn has picked up on these claims of Sanders in his exposition of Paul’s epistles. Though Sanders himself contrasts Paul’s understanding of perfect obedience in Gal 3:10 with the view of contemporary Judaism,¹⁵ Dunn thinks Paul followed Judaism’s position. Dunn rejects the view that Gal 3:10

¹¹ A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 6.

¹² E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 137.

¹³ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 175–76.

¹⁴ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 204.

¹⁵ Though compare Sanders’s later comments on Gal 3:10 in *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 20–22.

includes an implied premise and thus teaches that the law requires perfect obedience (an exegetical issue that is addressed below). He writes: “There is no evidence that the law was understood to require ‘perfection’ in that sense. The obedience it did call for was within the terms of the covenant, including the provision of atonement by covenant law. That obedience was considered practicable. And both Saul the Pharisee and Paul the apostle agreed.”¹⁶

Despite such claims, Scripture does indeed teach that God requires perfect obedience to his law. The following subsections discuss various threads of biblical and confessional teaching on this point.

2. The Character of God’s Justice

The character of God’s justice is important background to any discussion of the demands of his law. While biblical statements about divine justice may not settle definitively every question about the law’s demand for perfect obedience, such statements at least set defined parameters for discussion of the issue. In back of this matter is the fact that justification must provide “a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God’s justice” (WLC 71).

Some of the earliest revelation in redemptive history wrestles with the question of divine justice. Abraham, conversing with God before the destruction of Sodom, appeals to God that he not put the righteous to death with the wicked so that the righteous fare as the wicked do. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” God, remarkably, allows Abraham to engage in such dialogue with him, and his answer indicates that he accepts the premises upon which Abraham reasons (Gen 18:25–26). A fundamental principle is asserted: God does not confuse the wicked and the righteous in his judgment and always does what is just. In the Mosaic law, God declares his inability to render a verdict that is not based strictly on the works of the accused: “I will not acquit [justify] the wicked” (Exod 23:7). His impartiality in judgment is unimpeachable: “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe” (Deut 10:17). This means that Israel’s judges, imaging the divine justice, are neither to take bribes (Exod 23:8) nor favor rich or poor in their judgments (Exod 23:3, 6). The OT renders a variety of additional testimony to the purity of God’s justice. Prov 17:15 affirms that “he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the

¹⁶ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 361.

LORD,” and Nah 1:3 adds that “the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.”

Among the pertinent facets of this revelation is that passages such as Exod 23:7 and Prov 17:15 use the language of justification to describe God’s judicial action. Justification is a forensic act, something accomplished בָּרִיב— in a lawsuit (Exod 23:6). The full NT revelation of God’s soteriological justification of believers in Christ is grounded in this OT revelation. The God who justifies is an uncompromisingly just judge, and the biblical doctrine of justification, though not limited to this truth, must assert nothing less than this, lest God’s own character be maligned.

3. The Adamic Covenant of Works

The Reformed doctrine of justification rests upon a proper understanding of the covenant made at creation with Adam as a covenant of works. The doctrine of the covenant of works (or, covenant of life) is taught at various places in the Westminster Standards (WCF 7.2; 19.1; WLC 20; Westminster Shorter Catechism [WSC] 12). WCF 7.2 states concisely: “The first covenant made with man was a *covenant of works*, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (emphasis added). God held out the same hope of everlasting life to the first man in the covenant of works that he now holds out to believers in the covenant of grace. In the covenant of works, however, the promise of life was conditioned upon the “perfect and personal obedience” of Adam. From the beginning, therefore, God demanded perfect obedience to his law and made eternal life conditioned upon it. Despite this clear teaching in the Westminster Standards, some recent Reformed theologians have leveled critiques against the doctrine of the covenant of works, though still remaining orthodox on justification itself.¹⁷ A number of advocates of the FV have taken this

¹⁷ For example, John Murray (1898–1975) expressed his difficulties with the covenant of works in “The Adamic Administration,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Select Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 47–59. Murray’s critique centered on his conviction that “covenant” is always redemptive, and hence inapplicable in the prelapsarian context, and that the presence of grace in God’s dealings with Adam makes the terminology of “works” misleading. Murray, however, did affirm the necessity of Adam’s perfect obedience and the promise of eschatological life if he did obey. Murray’s contemporary, Anthony Hoekema (1913–88), followed the general lines of Murray’s critique, though he was less sure than Murray whether Adam’s obedience would have led to eschatological life. Yet he also asserted that “we must indeed maintain the doctrinal truths that lie behind the concept of the

critique in a more radical direction, however, and have in fact based their critiques of the Reformed doctrine of justification on their rejection of the covenant of works.¹⁸

FV advocates are correct at least to this extent: the doctrines of the covenant of works and justification are intimately related, and theological coherence does suggest that rejection of one leads to rejection of the other. If one denies that God required perfect obedience from Adam as the basis for his attaining eternal life, then there is no reason why Christ must provide perfect obedience as the basis for our attainment of eternal life. If Adam, as a human being, was unable to earn or merit eschatological life by his perfect obedience, then Christ, as a human being, is unable to earn or merit eschatological life by his perfect obedience. “Since the works principle is thus foundational to the gospel, the repudiation of that principle ... stands condemned as subversive of that gospel.”¹⁹ Or, as seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) put it,

Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will very readily deny that Christ by His active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect. This is to be observed with several parties who, because they err concerning the covenant of grace, also deny the covenant of works. Conversely, whoever denies the cov-

covenant of works” (see Hoekema’s *Created in God’s Image* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 118–21). A different sort of critique was offered by Herman Hoeksema (1886–1965) in *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1966), 214–26.

¹⁸ For example, see Rich Lusk, “A Response to ‘The Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision, August 11–13, 2003*, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 121–26; and James B. Jordan, “Merit versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do for Us?” in *Federal Vision*, 151–200. See also P. Andrew Sandlin, “Covenant in Redemptive History: ‘Gospel and Law’ or ‘Trust and Obey,’” in *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. P. Andrew Sandlin (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media, 2004), 67–71; and Norman Shepherd, “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 11/2 (2002): 88.

¹⁹ Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age, 2000), 109.

enant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well.²⁰

The issue of merit is addressed below. Here, we may note that the history recounted in Gen 1–3 itself, though narrated concisely, teaches that God placed Adam under law, with the requirement that it be obeyed perfectly, such that one violation would forfeit the hope of life. In the first description of man in Scripture, Gen 1:26–28, God gives commands to his image-bearers. The echo of law is already present here, and God’s further communication to Adam in Gen 2:16–17 more explicitly displays that God and Adam were in a legal relationship. In other words, God placed Adam under law such that if Adam perfectly obeyed, God would grant him the (implied) promise of eschatological life. The command of 2:17 is legal in nature. The very way in which God addresses Adam in 2:17—*לֹא תֹאכַל*—“you shall not eat”—is a legal expression; God speaks in the same way when issuing the commands of the Decalogue in Exod 20: *לֹא תִרְצַח* etc.²¹ To downplay or even eliminate the “forensic” element of the Adamic covenant because of perceived “filial” elements of Adam’s relationship to God, as some FV proponents do,²² is to create a dichotomy that does not exist in the biblical text. God is both Father and Judge (WCF 11.3 speaks of the “Father’s justice”), and neither one of these truths should be used to cancel out the other. Finally, a single violation of this command would and did bring the condemnation of death, demonstrating

²⁰ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 4 vols., trans. Bartel Elshout (Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 1.355. Another Reformed theologian, Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706), writing shortly after Brakel, made a similar point: “To very many heads of the Christian religion, e.g. the propagation of original corruption, the satisfaction of Christ, and his subjection to divine law ... we can scarcely give suitable satisfaction, if the covenant of works be denied” (quoted in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, rev. and ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson [London: Wakeman Trust, n.d.], 290).

²¹ This point is noted in J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Genesis 1–3 in the Light of Christ and Eschatology* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, forthcoming). The language of 2:16 is more difficult to discern. Though the collocation that is used here, *וַיִּצְוֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים*, is not the ordinary way in which law is issued (which takes the form *וַיִּצְוֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים*), the legal overtones of the collocation are still evident, as discussed in detail in Bryan D. Estelle, “The Covenant of Works in Moses and Paul,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 89–135.

²² E.g., see Lusk, “A Response,” 121–22; and Jordan, “Merit versus Maturity,” 155–58.

the truth stated in Jas 2:10: “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” Necessarily, then, God’s original requirement was nothing less than perfect obedience.

4. The Postlapsarian Demand for Perfect Obedience

After the fall into sin, God’s requirement for perfect obedience to his law did not waver. WLC 99 comments, in regard to the Decalogue, “That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.” As noted above, some contemporary critics of the doctrine of justification have claimed that first-century Jewish theology did not view the Mosaic law as requiring perfect obedience. Whatever the weight such an assertion would have, if proven true, many competent scholars from a variety of theological perspectives have argued that though Sanders and others have corrected some misleading caricatures of first-century Judaism, Sanders’s portrayal of it is not completely accurate. In particular, there were Jewish authors of that day who wrestled with the demands of perfect obedience. If Paul did in fact teach that the law requires perfect obedience, he was not the only Jew of his day to think so.²³ But whatever the opinion of the rabbis, Scripture itself offers considerable testimony on the law’s continuing demand for perfection.

The focus in this section is upon the teaching of Paul. As noted above, Pauline scholars are waging many skirmishes over this question. The question, though sparked in recent decades by Sanders and NPP scholarship, is really not new. More than a century ago, Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), interacting with the critical scholarship of his own day, defended the conception that Paul indeed taught, based upon the just nature of God himself, that the law must be perfectly obeyed and thus that the scheme of redemption must make provision for it.²⁴ Several Pauline texts speak directly to this issue, in

²³ Among Reformed critics of Sanders’s understanding of Judaism on related matters, see Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), chap. 4; and Estelle, “The Covenant of Works.” A thorough treatment appears in Das, *Paul*, chap. 1 and pp. 143–44. Also see Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 40–42.

²⁴ See Geerhardus Vos, “The Alleged Legalism in Paul’s Doctrine of Justification,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed.

particular Gal 3:10 and Gal 5:1–4, and, in the view of many Reformed interpreters, Rom 2:6–8, 12–13.²⁵ Though there are many current exegetical debates concerning these passages that this report does not have the space to explore, a few words about Gal 3:10 and 5:1–6 may be helpful.

In Gal 3:10, Paul writes: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’” One initial question that this verse raises is the meaning of the phrase “works of the law.” Though their views on this issue have changed somewhat over the years, NPP advocates typically understand the phrase to refer ultimately not to God’s legal requirements generally, but to the Mosaic law, especially to rules concerning the Sabbath, circumcision, or dietary restrictions that served as “boundary markers” to set apart Jew from Gentile. According to NPP analysis, Paul condemned those who relied upon the “works of the law” not because people were seeking to be saved by their good works, but because they were misusing these aspects of the law by making them tools to exclude Gentiles from the covenant community.²⁶

There are numerous difficulties with this NPP claim, and many scholars, from a variety of theological perspectives, have argued that “works of

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 383–99. Among especially pertinent claims are the following: “In this whole chapter [Gal 3] the representation is, throughout, that the law method of justification is ineffective because it curses instead of blessing.... But it is plain that judgments of this class imply nothing derogatory to the law method of securing eternal life in the abstract. The disability under which the legal system labors is not inherent in the system itself, but arises wholly from the fact that men attempt to put it in operation in a state of sin” (388). “In the entire range of his polemic against the Jewish legalism, therefore, Paul has asserted nothing which can in the least prejudice his right to uphold the forensic principle of the divine righteousness in its twofold function of rewarding obedience and punishing disobedience, as a supreme and inalienable attribute of the divine nature, something which God cannot deny without denying Himself” (392).

²⁵ One passage not dealt with here, but which has been proffered as a counterexample, is Phil 3:1–11. Some have argued, in a line of reasoning that seems to stretch back to Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215, that Paul’s claim to have been “blameless” as to the righteousness of the law indicates that he did not see the law as demanding perfect obedience. Helpful refutation of this claim is found in Das, *Paul*, 217–20; and Waters, *Justification*, 184–85.

²⁶ E.g., see Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 354–59.

the law” in Paul cannot be taken as technical terminology for a misunderstanding of the law as Jewish boundary markers.²⁷ Among the difficulties are that Paul regularly uses “works of the law” and “law” interchangeably, that Paul often contrasts faith and grace with “works of the law” just as he contrasts them with “works,” and that Paul uses “works of the law” in contexts that refer to Gentile as well as Jewish dis/obedience. The helpful and readily available critiques of the NPP’s position make a detailed defense of them here unnecessary. In what follows, therefore, “works of the law” is taken to refer more generally to what the law as a whole requires, not to an ethnocentric abuse of the law.

In the verses immediately preceding Gal 3:10, Paul has argued that all who have faith are children of Abraham and that the Scriptures had foretold that God would justify the nations by faith. After asserting the good news of blessing for all who share the faith of Abraham in v. 9, Paul turns to a darker side of the truth: the curse upon all who are of the works of the law.²⁸ Here in v. 10 Paul clearly advances and even defends the broader argument that he is making—he begins with γὰρ, “for.” In other words, the blessing of justification comes by faith because those who are of the works of the law are under a curse. He illustrates this by quoting Deut 27:26 to the effect that a curse comes upon everyone who does not do all the things written in the law. He then immediately goes on to add that no one is justified before God by the law (v. 11). Therefore, the point of the broader section of the present report seems to be made quite clearly in 3:10: the law requires perfect obedience, such that anyone who fails on even one matter is cursed. Paul, in fact, follows the LXX of Deut 27:26 in mentioning the need to keep *all* the commands of the law, a word not found in the Hebrew text. Had Paul been unconcerned about holistic obedience to the law (as Sanders has claimed²⁹), he had every opportunity to eliminate reference to it. Instead, he emphasized the requirement for such obedience.

²⁷ For example, see Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 314–15; Waters, *Justification*, 158–70, esp. 160–61; Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine*, 42–44; Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), chap. 4; Das, *Paul*, 156–58, 188–90, 207, 237–38.

²⁸ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 361–62, rejects a traditional understanding of Gal 3:10 in part due to his understanding of “works of the law” as Jewish boundary markers, an issue addressed above and not to be readdressed here.

²⁹ Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 20–22.

Several exegetical controversies cloud this apparently straightforward teaching, however, and a couple of them can be considered briefly. First, traditional readings of Gal 3:10 ordinarily understand that the verse contains an unstated but implied premise. In order for Paul's logic to hold, he must be assuming that all who are of the works of the law do not and cannot keep the law perfectly. Hence Paul's train of thought runs: everyone who does not do all that is written in the law is cursed (established from Deut 27:26); everyone fails to do all that is written in the law (the implied premise); therefore, everyone who is of the works of the law is in fact under a curse (affirmed in 3:10a). According to this interpretation, there is nothing inherently wrong with being of the works of the law nor is there any absolute impossibility of being justified by them. Instead, obeying the works of the law would be a valid way of being justified (see Gal 3:12), were it not for the crucial fact of human sin, which prevents justification by law.

A number of scholars writing recently, in order to debunk traditional readings, have searched for alternatives to finding an implied premise in 3:10. Other scholars have noted, however, that use of implied premises was a common rhetorical technique in Paul's day and that Paul himself utilizes the technique elsewhere. Das has helpfully argued for the inadequacy of alternatives to the implied premise view and, along the same lines, Guy Waters's conclusion is that omitting the implied premise from 3:10 makes "nonsense of the passage."³⁰ To put it in the language of the Westminster Standards, seeing an implied premise is a "good and necessary consequence" of the passage as it stands.

Another exegetical challenge to traditional readings of Gal 3:10 may be considered briefly. This objection, posed by Wright and others, states that Paul was not concerned with individual obedience to the law in his quotation of Deut 27:26, but with national Israel corporately. The larger context of the Deuteronomy passage does not confirm such a one-sided interpretation. Though concerns about corporate Israel are certainly present in this part of Deuteronomy, the sins of individuals are just as clearly evident. Deut 27:26, in fact, concludes a series of curse utterances that concern the sins of individuals, such as theft, sexual immorality, murder, and bribery.³¹ Also of relevance may be the way that Paul adjusts his quotation of Lev 18:5 two verses later, in Gal 3:12. Lev 18:5 in the LXX reads: α ποιησας ανθρωπος ζησεται εν

³⁰ Waters, *Justification*, 168; see also Das, *Paul*, chap. 6.

³¹ Also see discussion in Das, *Paul*, 153.

αυτοῖς. Paul’s words in Gal 3:12 read slightly differently: ο ποιησας αυτα ζησεται εν αυτοις. Paul has added an article (in the *singular*) to the adverbial participle ποιησας and thereby changed it into a substantive. Clearly the individual must perform the law’s demands. Not (merely) the corporate but the individual is in Paul’s mind.

In short, the traditional view that Paul affirms the law’s requirement of perfect obedience in Gal 3:10 is based on firm exegesis. With good reason does Gal 3:10 stand as a proof text for the affirmation in WCF 7.2 that God required of Adam (and through him, all people) “perfect and personal obedience.”³²

Paul also teaches the requirement of perfect obedience in Gal 5:1–4, particularly v. 3: “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.” In v. 1, Paul’s focus is upon returning (“again”) to life under the law. From the standpoint of new covenant freedom in Christ, however, returning to the old covenant law is of no basic difference from a return to paganism, both of which Paul characterizes as the “elementary principles of the world” (4:3, 9).³³

³² See *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms: The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as Adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), 30.

³³ In Gal 4, Paul emphasizes the freedom that believers enjoy in Christ. As he comes to chap. 5, Paul warns his readers of the danger of giving up this freedom and submitting again to a yoke of bondage (5:1). When Paul raises the issue of a yoke of slavery here, it is already a developed theme in Galatians. Both Jew and Gentile found themselves in the state of bondage before knowing Christ—the Jew in his existence under the Mosaic law and the Gentile in his pagan lifestyle. Though this association of life under the law and life under paganism, insofar as they exhibit a similar bondage, may be surprising, Paul nevertheless makes it. In both 4:3 and 4:9, Paul refers to bondage as being under the στοιχεια, the elements, and this applies to both Jews and Gentiles. The reference in 4:3, given the context of the end of chap. 3 and the beginning of chap. 4, seems to refer to those who used to be under the Mosaic law, yet now have attained the adoption through the coming of “the faith” and the Messiah. (The apostle Peter had also referred to the Mosaic law as an unbearable yoke in Acts 15:10.) Here, Paul says that such Jews under the law are held in bondage to the elements “of the world.” In 4:9, Paul’s focus seems to shift to Gentiles, for those formerly in slavery did not know God and were enslaved to what by nature are not gods (4:8), which surely does not describe Israel under the old covenant. Yet 4:10 speaks of the observing of days, months, times, and years, which could (but not necessarily) refer to Jewish practice. However these verses are interpreted precisely, they indicate that Paul saw a certain

What would be the consequences of making such a return? The following verses indicate that it would entail seeking justification by law rather than by grace (5:4). And this, in turn, means that one becomes obligated, a debtor (οφειλετης) to *do* (ποιησαι) the *whole* (ολον) law.³⁴ A return to bondage, to the elementary principles of the world, means that one must seek justification by law, which is a bondage to perform perfect obedience. As seen above, Paul has already established such a quest as impossible for sinful man, but this is the requirement of the law nonetheless. Paul presents this as being the only alternative to being justified by faith in Christ.

5. Merit and Perfect Obedience

Another aspect of the Reformed doctrine, and a subject of current controversy, is that this perfect obedience to the law, if and when rendered, is meritorious of the reward promised by God.³⁵ In other words, perfect obedience to the law is the true basis or ground for receiving life; perfect obedience earns the reward as a matter of justice. It must be granted that “merit” is a potentially slippery term. It may carry certain connotations that tend, understandably, to be uncomfortable to Reformed ears. John Calvin (1509–64) rued the fact that the term had entered theological vocabulary—yet he himself used the term in his teaching on justification.³⁶ Many Reformed orthodox theologians, however, spoke of merit without any indication of discomfort. The Heidelberg Catechism affirms the meritorious character of Christ’s work.³⁷ The Westminster Standards also adopt this terminology. WLC 55 be-

similarity between life in paganism and life under the Mosaic law (despite many obvious and important differences).

³⁴ For helpful defense of the idea that Paul is referring here to obedience to all of the individual commands of the law, see Waters, *Justification*, 168.

³⁵ Objections to the idea of merit from some associated with and influencing the FV may be found, for example, in Lusk, “A Response”; Jordan, “Merit versus Maturity”; Sandlin, “Covenant in Redemptive History”; Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 25–26; idem, “Justification by Works in Reformed Theology,” in *Backbone of the Bible*, 111–18.

³⁶ Calvin expresses his wariness about the term “merit” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.15.2; see also 2.17.1. He uses the term positively in his exposition of Christ’s work in, e.g., 2.17.3–5.

³⁷ See Q&A 21: “... not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting

gins: “Christ maketh intercession, by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth ...” Merit, therefore, is an orthodox and confessional idea.

A couple of qualifications and cautions seem appropriate when discussing the importance of the concept of merit for the doctrine of justification. First, the Reformed doctrine of justification does not in any sense affirm that a *sinner’s* (inevitably imperfect) good works can merit eternal life. While Reformed doctrine teaches that Adam, in his originally perfect state, and Jesus Christ as the Second Adam were able to merit life by their perfect obedience, there is no possibility of a sanctified Christian’s good works meriting salvation in any sense. The Reformation adamantly insisted on this point over against the teaching of much of medieval theology.

Second, Reformed doctrine does not affirm the idea of merit in any absolute or abstract sense. Perfect human obedience does not render God a debtor to man such that the Creator-creature distinction is destroyed. Some recent critics have spoken as if the concept of merit necessarily carries along with it these connotations,³⁸ but this is not the case. Even medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) recognized that theologians should not use “merit” in this absolute or abstract sense.³⁹

In the Westminster Standards, the context in which one could speak of merit without these connotations was that of *the covenant*. WCF 7.1 explains: “The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.” The relationship between God and Adam should be considered, not ontologically or abstractly, but covenantally. Reformed theologians have been helpful in making these important distinctions. Fran-

righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”

³⁸ For example, see Lusk, “A Response,” 121–22.

³⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae 114, where Aquinas explains that man can do meritorious work, though only on the presupposition of a divine ordination. Lusk, “A Response,” 121–22, claims that strict merit exists only between equals and appeals to Aquinas in support of this point, though he does not indicate what text from Aquinas he has in mind. Aquinas expresses important nuances on the subject that Lusk does not.

cis Turretin (1623–87), for example, affirms that the perfect obedience of Adam would have been meritorious of the reward of life. But he explains that this merit “must not be understood properly and rigorously.” Adam would have received this reward “not by condignity of work and from its intrinsic value,” but instead “from the pact [i.e., covenant] and the liberal promise of God (according to which man had the right of demanding the reward to which God had of his own accord bound himself).”⁴⁰ In other words, Adam’s obedience would have truly earned the reward of life, according to the terms of the covenant, as a matter of *justice*. A robust affirmation of God’s justice in administering the covenant with Adam does not detract from the Creator-creature distinction.⁴¹

One question that sometimes emerges in connection with this topic is the relationship of merit and grace. Some recent critics have repudiated the idea of merit because they believe that even a perfectly obedient human being could receive eternal life from God only by grace and through faith.⁴² This is a subject that requires careful handling. Semantic disputes ought not cloud the underlying substantive issues, as they sometimes seem to do. Many Reformed theologians have affirmed that if Adam had been perfectly obedient in the covenant of works, he would have received his reward both by merit (because his works would be the basis) and by grace (because God was not absolutely obligated to enter into such a covenantal arrangement in the first place).⁴³

Certainly, “grace” could be defined in such a way as to indicate the

⁴⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–1997), 1.578; see also 2.712.

⁴¹ Over against the claims of Lusk, for example, in “A Response,” 121–22.

⁴² For example, Lusk, “A Response,” 125, writes specifically in regard to the Adamic covenant: “If Adam had obeyed, that obedience would have been rooted in faith, rather than antithetical to faith. Proponents of a covenant of works usually set the way of works in sharp antithesis to the way of faith. But for Adam, *faith* in the Creator God would have given rise to a life of sustained *obedience*.”

⁴³ For an example of this approach, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 570. Bavinck is concerned here to repudiate suggestions that man can assert rights before God apart from the idea that God himself gives such rights. This concern, certainly legitimate and important, leads Bavinck to conclude that all relationships of man with God must be gracious and therefore covenantal. Other relevant comments appear in his consideration of God’s righteousness in his treatment of theology proper (*Dog-*

goodness of God's condescending to enter into covenant with man. Likewise, "faith" could be defined in terms of the trust that Adam and Eve had before the Fall in God and his word. If "grace" and "faith" are defined in such a way, then they are compatible with the Reformed idea of merit. God had to condescend by way of covenant if man's obedience was to be reckoned meritorious (indeed, if Adam was to have any sort of relationship with God), and Adam's obedience would hardly be genuine apart from trust in God. In this sense, Adam's reward might be said to come both by law and works as well as by grace and faith.

Nevertheless, in the light of biblical and confessional language, of the nature of current controversies, and of the need for theological precision on important points of doctrine, if one uses "grace" and "faith" in this way it must be done with care and not confused with their clear Pauline usage. When Paul speaks in the context of *justification*, that is, the irrevocable declaration that one is righteous before God, he invariably establishes the starkest imaginable *contrast* between law and works, on the one hand, and grace and faith, on the other (though this is not true when he speaks about *sanctification*, in which law and works, and grace and faith, are perfectly complementary, since the good works of the law flow out of the faith that comes by grace). In other words, when Paul poses the question of justification, there are two alternatives, and they are mutually exclusive. Either one is declared righteous before God by works of the law, or one is declared righteous before God by grace through faith. The relevance of this for the present question should be clear. In the Pauline sense, if Adam before the Fall was to be declared irrevocably righteous before God on the basis of his obedience to the law, then he would not have been declared such by grace through faith.

A number of passages could illustrate Paul's posing this stark contrast between law/works and grace/faith in the context of justification. In Rom 3:21–22, Paul reintroduces (from 1:17) the righteousness of God that is *by faith*, and this righteousness, he says, is *apart from law*. Paul repeats this contrast of faith and law in 3:28, where he speaks of being justified *by faith*, and this *apart from works of the law*. Rom 4 continues this antithesis in perhaps

matics, 2.226–28). In all of this, one may note (contrary to the impression given in Lusk, "A Response," 125–26) that Bavinck defended the doctrine of the covenant of works and distinguished it clearly from the covenant of grace (*Dogmatics*, 2.563–90 generally). Bavinck states: "The doctrine of the covenant of works is based on Scripture and is eminently valuable" (*Dogmatics*, 2.568).

the most concentrated way anywhere in Scripture. In the context of justification established at the end of chapter 3 and 4:2, Paul starkly contrasts works as meritorious reward with faith as believing or trusting in 4:4–5. He writes that *to the one who works*, the reward is not reckoned *according to grace* (4:4). But, Paul continues, *to the one who does not work*, but *believes*, his faith is reckoned unto righteousness (4:5). That this faith is believing or trusting (and not some notion of faithfulness that becomes virtually indistinguishable from “working”) is evident from the description of Abraham’s faith in 4:20–21: it did not doubt the promise of God, but was fully convinced.⁴⁴ Furthermore, 4:13 states that the promise did not come to Abraham *through law* but *through the righteousness of faith*. Paul explains that this is so because *faith* would be voided and the promise destroyed if the inheritance was *from law* (4:14). These affirmations lead Paul to make the remarkable claim that the inheritance is by faith *in order that* it might be according to grace (4:16). In other words, justification comes to Christians by faith *and not by the law* in order to protect justification’s gracious character. Law and grace are incompatible in the context of justification.⁴⁵

Paul continues to make such bold contrasts later in Romans. For exam-

⁴⁴ One may note that Dunn, though obviously not sympathetic to the overall analysis offered here, accepts that this is the understanding of faith used by Paul in these verses (see James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, vol. 38a, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1988], 204). Of course, the idea of “faithfulness” is within the semantic range of πιστις, and this seems to be the use in a passage such as Rom 3:3. The point here is that “faithfulness” is not in view when Paul is drawing the antitheses under discussion in the present context.

⁴⁵ A representative NPP understanding of Rom 4 is offered by Dunn, who denies that the language of working/reckoning/reward is a description of the Judaism of Paul’s day and argues that Paul ties faith and grace together as he does because of Jewish perversion of the law in a nationalistic direction (see *Romans 1–8*, 204, 216). Critics of the NPP have presented a number of points in response to such claims. For example, Paul overturns the Jewish view of Abraham as a model of faithful obedience (see, e.g., Das, *Paul*, 205–6; and Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 195), jarringly reckoning Abraham among the ungodly (4:5). He also overturns the common Jewish synergistic linking of faith and works (see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 264); Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 306–7, 310). Against Dunn’s insistence that ethnocentrism is the focus (see *Romans 1–8*, 200), Thomas R. Schreiner offers several helpful observations in *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 217–19; on this point, see also Waters, *Justification*, 161–62; and Das, *Paul*, 206.

ple, 6:14–15 asserts that Christians are not *under law* but *under grace*. These are the great alternatives, not a matter of both-and. Later, in the important verses 9:30–32 and 10:5–6, Paul returns to his antitheses: between the righteousness of *faith* and the *law* of righteousness unto *law* (9:30–31); between *from faith* and *from works* (9:32); and between the righteousness of the *law* and the righteousness of *faith* (10:5–6).⁴⁶

Such contrasts are hardly unique to Romans. Several places in Galatians set up virtually identical antitheses. In Gal 2:16, for example, Paul states that a person is justified from/by *faith* and not from *works of the law*, not once but three times—the “triple antithesis,” in Dunn’s words.⁴⁷ Similar are several statements in Gal 3. By the *law* no one is justified because the righteous will live by *faith* (3:11), and the *law* is not of *faith* (3:12).⁴⁸ In Gal 5:4, Paul explains that those who seek to be justified by *law* have fallen away from *grace*. The implication of this verse is striking for the present topic: if seeking justification by law nullifies grace, then there is no such thing as gracious fulfillment of the demand for perfect obedience enunciated in the previous verse, 5:3.

Though Romans and Galatians have particular relevance for this report, other Pauline statements to similar effect need not be overlooked. Phil 3:9, for example, contrasts having one’s own righteousness, which is from the *law*, with that which is through *faith* in Christ. In Eph 2:8–9, Paul states that we have been saved by *grace*, through *faith*, not of *works*. Paul also explains in Titus 3:5–7 that God has saved us, not from *works that we have done in righteousness*, but according to his *mercy*, and thus we might be justified by that *grace*. Finally, 2 Tim 1:9 teaches that God has saved us, not according to

⁴⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 644, comments: “Central to the Reformers’ teaching about salvation was their distinction between ‘law’ and ‘gospel.’... This theological ‘law’/‘gospel’ antithesis is at the heart of this paragraph [10:5–13].” Das, *Paul*, 238–40, also has helpful comments on this antithesis. Waters, *Justification*, 165; Moo, *Romans*, 646–47; and Schreiner, *Romans*, 552–54, answer Wright’s claim that there is no contrast between 10:5 and 10:6. On the forensic context of this passage see Moo, *Romans*, 618–19, 621.

⁴⁷ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 381.

⁴⁸ On these verses, Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 304–5, comments: “But whereas in other passages it was regarded as self-evident that the law was to be done or kept, that it was not to be transgressed, here the axiom is made the basis for a fundamental claim about the nature of the law: *since* the basic principle of the law is that it requires deeds, it ‘does not rest on faith.’ Faith and deeds (or faith and the law) are seen—in this context at least—as exclusive alternatives.”

works, but according to his own purpose and *grace*.⁴⁹

There is overwhelming evidence, therefore, that Paul, when addressing the question of justification, the irrevocable declaration of righteousness before God, understood law and works to stand in a relationship of stark contrast and antithesis with faith and grace. Paul speaks in such a way, not on occasion or in passing, but repeatedly and consistently.⁵⁰ For him, the choice was faith *or* works, grace *or* law—to be justified by faith *and* works, grace *and* law, was inconceivable. Which was the case for Adam before the Fall? Adam was never instructed to look in faith by grace to a mediator. This is the great and essential contrast between the irrevocable declaration of righteousness held out for Adam in the covenant of works and our justification—the irrevocable declaration of righteousness—granted to us in the covenant of grace. Gen 2 points to no other basis for the promised life than Adam’s own conduct. His obedience, in this very important sense, would have been meritorious, according to the standards of God’s justice. As noted above, one could define “grace” and “faith” in such a way that is consonant with this. But in doing so, in order to avoid confusion and error, one would have to make clear that such language is being used in a way different from Paul.

C. The Inability of Sinners to Be Justified by Works

The sinfulness of the human race is not a topic that has received particular attention in the current justification controversies. Nevertheless, the importance of this subject should not be neglected. An underappreciation for the dire character of human sin seems to lie behind many recent attempts to

⁴⁹ Waters notes that Dunn has conceded that these last three references in fact express the traditional Protestant view of works. For those of us who accept Pauline authorship of these epistles, these references surely ought to strengthen the interpretation of the other verses discussed here. But even on Dunn’s position that Paul was not the author, the NPP view on works is surely not bolstered by the idea that the first generation of Paulinists—those who knew his thought best—adopted a view similar to that of the Reformation (see Waters, *Justification*, 167; and also Das, *Paul*, 271–72), in regard to Eph 2.

⁵⁰ Rom 3:27, which refers to the *νομος* of faith, is a possible exception to the Pauline antithesis between law and faith. Translating *νομος* as “principle” is a legitimate possibility and seems an attractive option, given the context; see Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 322–25, for a defense of this view. Das, *Paul*, 192–200, argues for taking *νομος* as “law,” though he does so as a critic of the NPP.

make believers' good works, in some sense, the basis of justification. Recognizing the utter helplessness of the human race in its sin highlights the need for a Savior who accomplishes the work of salvation in its entirety, to which nothing of our own can be added.

Perfect obedience to the law and meriting life thereby, though possible for Adam before the Fall, is impossible for sinners after it. The WCF teaches clearly that our first parents fell into sin (6.1) and that consequently they "became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body" (6.2). Due to Adam's federal headship over his posterity, not only is the guilt of his sin imputed to all people, but our first parents' corrupted nature is also "conveyed to all their posterity," Christ excepted (6.3). WCF 6.4 goes on to explain: "From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions." And despite the blessed reality of sanctification in the believer, "this corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated" (6.5). In a later chapter, the WCF explains the consequences of these truths for those who seek to be right with God: "They who, in their obedience, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do" (16.4). Hence, "we cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God" (16.5). Rather, sin has left us condemned. Every sin brings "guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal" (6.6).

Scripture teaches these truths in many places. In the days before the Flood, "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). Paul affirms that all people by nature are "dead in the trespasses and sins" and hence "children of wrath" (Eph 2:1–3). Though Christ has delivered believers even in this life from their death in sin, Scripture teaches that no one can say honestly that he is without sin (1 John 1:8) and instructs Christians to ask for forgiveness as part of the ongoing pattern of prayer (Matt 6:12). Perhaps nowhere does Scripture describe the depth of human sin more vividly than in Rom 3:10–18, where Paul strings together a series of OT verses that demonstrate his conclusion that "none is righteous, no, not one." Significantly, Paul's concern in this passage is justification. He proceeds immediately to explain that human sin eliminates any possibility that a person

might be justified in the way that Adam could have been justified before the Fall, by perfect obedience to the law: “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:19–20).

D. The Perfect Obedience of Christ

i. Introduction

The previous sections have discussed matters that, were they to stand alone, would be entirely bad news. God demands perfect obedience to his law, yet no person is able to render such obedience due to innate moral corruption. The good news of the gospel, however, announces that God, in Christ, has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the incarnate God-man, has both borne the curse of our sin and perfectly obeyed the requirements of the law. These two truths correspond to the traditional theological language of Christ’s “passive” and “active” obedience.

In Gal 4:4 Paul writes that Christ was “born under the law.” This statement indicates, with marvelous brevity, what Christ’s redemptive work entailed. To say that Christ was born “under the law” is striking, for being “under the law” is precisely the state from which we have been redeemed and to which Paul warns that we must never return (Gal 4:21; Rom 6:14–15). In what condition does that put Christ? First, it puts Christ under the curse of the law, culminating in his crucifixion. Being under the law entails a curse for Christ because he stood in the place of sinful people, whose failure to obey all the law brought that curse (Gal 3:10, 13). In addition, however, being “under the law” means that in order to live one must *do the law* (Gal 3:12); it means that one is justified according to the obligation to *perform the entire law* (Gal 5:3–4). To be justified and live, then, Christ had to render positive obedience to the law’s demands. The fact that he was justified and lives in everlasting glory indicates that Christ in fact did obey the law perfectly. And this he did for our redemption (Gal 4:5).

The relationship between Christ’s active and passive obedience should not be misunderstood. Christ’s life was not divided into a period of active obedience followed by a period of passive obedience. Rather, Christ positively obeyed the precepts of the law from the beginning of his life to its very

end, and he endured the curse of the law from beginning to end.⁵¹ Furthermore, the terms “active” and “passive” should not be taken as antonyms, as if Christ was “passive” in being inactive, in simply letting events happen to him. On the contrary, Christ was “active” even in his going down to death (John 10:18). “Passive” is to be taken in the sense of the Latin *passus*, from which our English word is derived: Christ’s passive obedience is his *suffering* obedience.⁵²

Many recent attempts to revise the doctrine of justification have challenged these truths. FV proponents have typically reaffirmed the doctrine of Christ’s passive obedience, his bearing the punishment for human sin.⁵³

⁵¹ J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937) provides extremely helpful discussion of this point in *God Transcendent and Other Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 174–75. At one point he writes: “Do you not see, then, what the true state of the case is? Christ’s active obedience and His passive obedience are not two divisions of His work, some of the events of His earthly life being His active obedience and other events of His life being His passive obedience; but every event of His life was both active obedience and passive obedience. Every event of His life was a part of His payment of the penalty of sin, and every event of His life was a part of that glorious keeping of the law of God by which He earned for His people the reward of eternal life. The two aspects of His work, in other words, are inextricably intertwined. Neither was performed apart from the other. Together they constitute the wonderful, full salvation which was wrought for us by Christ our Redeemer.”

⁵² On this point, note the comments of John Murray in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 26–27: “The term ‘passive obedience’ does not mean that in anything Christ did he was passive, the involuntary victim of obedience imposed upon him. It is obvious that any such conception would contradict the very notion of *obedience*. And it must be jealously maintained that even in his sufferings and death our Lord was not the passive recipient of that to which he was subjected. In his sufferings he was supremely active, and death itself did not befall him as it befalls other men.... The word ‘passive,’ then, should not be interpreted to mean pure passivity in anything that came within the scope of his obedience. The sufferings he endured, sufferings which reached their climax in his death upon the accursed tree, were an integral part of his obedience and were endured in pursuance of the task given him to accomplish.” Louis Berkhof (1873–1957), *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 381, adds: “Christ as Mediator also entered the penal relation to the law, in order to pay the penalty in our stead. His passive obedience consisted in His paying the penalty of sin by His sufferings and death, and thus discharging the debt of all His people.”

⁵³ For example, influencing the FV in this regard, see Norman Shepherd, “Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology,” in *Backbone of the Bible*, 87–89.

Some advocates of the NPP, however, have been less than clear in their affirmation even of this point.⁵⁴ What is certain is that most people associated with the FV and the NPP seem to share a common antipathy toward the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. Among NPP writers, for example, N. T. Wright has made his objections clear.⁵⁵ And some within FV and other Reformed circles, such as Rich Lusk, James Jordan, Norman Shepherd, and Andrew Sandlin, have critiqued this doctrine.⁵⁶ These writers affirm active obedience only in the sense that Christ's sinless adherence to the law qualifies him to be the spotless sacrifice for sin.

In the light of such contemporary challenges, the church must reaffirm its commitment to both the passive and the active obedience of Christ, who was made under the law for our salvation. His bearing the curse of the law truly satisfied divine justice as a punishment for our sin, and his obeying the requirements of the law truly merited our acceptance before God. "This office [of mediator and surety] the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it... The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven" (WCF 8.4–5). Reformed theologians and confessional standards from Calvin to the present day have professed this doctrine as central to the gospel.⁵⁷ The following sections sum-

⁵⁴ For discussion of this point in regard to Wright, see Waters, *Justification*, 141–42.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Wright, *What Saint Paul*, chap. 6.

⁵⁶ See Lusk, "A Response," 139–43; Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity," 194–95; Shepherd, "Justification by Faith," 85–89; Sandlin, "Covenant in Redemptive History," 69–70. Shepherd also makes the untenable claim that Calvin, Caspar Olevianus (1536–87), and the Heidelberg Catechism did not teach the active obedience of Christ (see "Justification by Works," 103–20). As for Calvin, see the references in the next footnote. As for Olevianus and the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 60 speaks of believers being righteous in Christ as God "grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart."

⁵⁷ For just a few examples, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.17.5; 3.11.2; Turretin, *Institutes*, 2.445, 647; Herman Witsius (1636–1708), *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1990), 1.190–91; Charles Hodge (1797–1878), *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2.517; 3.142, 164; Vos, "The Alleged

marize the biblical teaching on this crucial issue.

2. The Passive Obedience of Christ

Scripture teaches as a general matter that Christ came to render obedience to the will of his Father, for which task he was sent. The gospel of John perhaps emphasizes this more than anywhere else. Christ speaks of being given a commandment(s) by his Father (10:18; 12:49; 14:31; 15:10). He finished the work that the Father entrusted to him (17:4). Central to this task entrusted to Christ was his suffering the curse of sin and going down to death for the forgiveness of his people. Reformed theology has rightly spoken of this aspect of Christ's work as his passive *obedience*. Scripture speaks in many places of Christ's suffering as the fulfillment of his Father's will (e.g., Isa 53:10; Heb 10:5–10).

Scripture offers abundant testimony of this aspect of Christ's work. The OT sacrificial system typologically pointed to the one final offering that Christ would make. For example, the law prescribes for the Israelite: "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev 1:4). Leviticus repeatedly declares forgiven the one on whose behalf the sacrifices are made (4:20, 26, 31, 35; 6:7 [MT 5:26]). Since the blood of goats and bulls could never truly take away sin (Heb 10:4), however, God provided one final and perfect sacrifice, which the OT sacrifices anticipated. Christ was "offered once to bear the sins of many" (Heb 9:28) and "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (Heb 10:12). Thus the apostle Peter can proclaim: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet 2:24). Paul adds: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). All of this announces the fulfillment of the beautiful and haunting words of the prophecy of Christ's work in Isa 53:4–6: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon

Legalism," 398; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 380, 523; Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2.212–15, 218; idem, *Redemption*, 156–58; idem, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 70; idem, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 1.199–206. For a survey of the history of Reformed teaching on the subject, see R. Scott Clark, "Do This and Live: Christ's Active Obedience as the Ground of Justification," in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, 229–65.

him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

While the treatment of Christ’s active obedience in the next section is more comprehensive than that of his passive obedience as discussed in this section, this in no way implies that his active obedience is more important than his passive obedience. Rather, in the current controversies, fewer parties dispute the significance of his passive obedience, while his active obedience is under greater attack. Thus, the doctrine of active obedience warrants closer scrutiny.

3. The Active Obedience of Christ

Before looking directly at biblical teaching on the active obedience of Christ, it may be helpful to note that it does not appear in a vacuum. From the beginning, as discussed in section B.4, God has required of all human beings perfect obedience to his law. Adam did not fulfill this demand on behalf of his posterity, and of course no one since is able to fulfill it on his own. Yet God has continued to remind his people of this demand and thereby to indicate that he will not simply overlook it. Conscientious readers of Scripture would naturally *expect* their Messiah to satisfy this requirement on their behalf. Thus, when Jesus says that he must “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15), and when Paul announces that Christ was born “under the law” to redeem us (Gal 4:4–5), it is very difficult to imagine that only passive obedience is in mind or active obedience simply in the sense of qualifying Christ to be an acceptable sacrifice. This theological background, which shows the *necessity* of Christ’s active obedience if we are to be saved, should be kept in mind.

In addition to such general theological concerns, more specific exegetical considerations also demonstrate the truth and importance of Christ’s active obedience. One important example is Paul’s teaching on the “righteousness of God.” One of the elements of the NPP’s critique of traditional interpretations of Paul is that the important Pauline phrase “the righteousness of God” refers to God’s covenant faithfulness. NPP proponents have also argued that “righteousness,” when applied to human beings, indicates their covenant status.⁵⁸ The idea of “righteousness” is inevitably crucial for an understanding of justification. Not only does justification itself refer to a declaration of

⁵⁸ See citations and discussion above.

righteousness, but Paul also identifies the righteousness of God as the answer to the human plight caused by inability to be justified by works of the law. Much traditional Reformed exposition of Paul and the doctrine of justification has seen a vital connection between the righteousness of God that justifies and the righteousness that is imputed to believers for their justification. More specifically, Reformed theologians have associated the “righteousness of God” with the obedience of Christ that is imputed to Christians and upon which the justifying verdict is rendered. The typical NPP understanding breaks this connection. For Wright, for example, the righteousness of God is not the sort of thing that can be imputed to another, because the righteousness of the judge is a very different thing from the righteousness of a plaintiff or defendant.⁵⁹

Paul’s use of “righteousness” language is a large question and the subject of much recent scholarly debate. Though this report cannot provide a comprehensive treatment of this topic, it does seek to remind the church of the solid exegetical ground upon which traditional Reformed understanding of the “righteousness of God” rests.

Noteworthy, in the first place, is that a number of competent scholars have provided rigorous critiques of the NPP view of the “righteousness of God.” No full-blown critique here is therefore necessary, but a few points can be mentioned. Stephen Westerholm critiques the NPP view in the midst of his own constructive description of Paul’s use of “righteousness” language.⁶⁰ Mark Seifrid offers his critique through a study of the use of “righteousness” terminology in the OT and early Judaism.⁶¹ One of the important conclusions emerging from Seifrid’s study is that the NPP’s understanding of the righteousness of God is greatly oversimplified. Among his findings are the following points: First, “righteousness” in the OT is both retributive/punitive and saving; though the latter is four times more common, Paul’s use of “right-

⁵⁹ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 97–98.

⁶⁰ Westerholm, *Perspectives*, chap. 15.

⁶¹ Mark A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 415–42. On Paul’s use of righteousness language, see Mark A. Seifrid, “Paul’s Use of Righteousness Language against Its Hellenistic Background,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 39–74.

teousness” in justification must have a retributive aspect. Second, the concept of a standard or norm is generally associated with the רָצוּ word group. Third, “righteousness” language in the OT is seldom used in covenantal contexts; instead it has to do first of all with God’s ordering of creation.⁶² Fourth and finally, following upon the previous point, when Paul evokes associations from the Psalms and Isaiah in Rom 1:17, the context is creational: God’s acts of justification are not merely “salvation” (and not merely for Israel), but the establishment of justice in the world he made and governs.

What does it mean to be declared “righteous,” that is, justified? Is the Christian’s righteousness simply a matter of his covenant status, as suggested by NPP proponents? Paul’s use of “righteousness” language is not consistent with this claim, as is evident straightaway upon Paul’s introduction of the righteousness theme in Romans. Immediately after announcing that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (1:16–17), Paul writes that “the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon all the ungodliness and *unrighteousness* [$\alpha\delta\iota\kappa\iota\alpha\nu$] of men who suppress the truth in *unrighteousness* [$\alpha\delta\iota\kappa\iota\alpha$].” Paul, therefore, speaks of unrighteousness in moral terms, indicating that righteousness has to do with moral activity and not just covenant status.⁶³ Furthermore, when Paul speaks about the righteousness that does *not* justify, he speaks in moral terms and not in terms of being in or out of the covenant. For example, in Titus, Paul says that we are justified by grace (3:7), “not from works in *righteousness* [$\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\sigma\upsilon\eta$] that we have *done*” (3:5). Likewise, what does not justify is “their own righteousness” ($\tau\eta\nu\ \iota\delta\iota\alpha\nu\ \delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\sigma\upsilon\eta\nu$) (Rom 10:3) or “my own righteousness” ($\epsilon\mu\eta\nu\ \delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\sigma\upsilon\eta\nu$) (Phil 3:9). In context, this personal kind of righteousness is one that is pursued zealously, by doing (Rom 9:31; 10:2, 5), by zealous efforts according to the law (Phil 3:5–6). Again, the verdict that “there is no one *righteous* [$\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\varsigma$], not even one” (Rom 3:10), is demonstrated by people’s immoral behavior (3:11–18) and ends with the verdict that no flesh shall be justified ($\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omega\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$) by works of the law (3:20).

The Pauline answer to the plight that no one is righteous and there-

⁶² Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 286–96, makes a similar point. While this dissociation of covenant and righteousness rests upon interesting observations and is effective for critiquing the NPP, one should be wary about too strict a dissociation between these two concepts—at the very least since the creation order itself is covenantal in nature.

⁶³ See pertinent comments by Waters, *Justification*, 137, which touch upon inconsistencies in Wright’s presentation at this point.

fore that one's own righteousness cannot justify is the *righteousness of God* (δικαιοσύνη θεου). This is evident in most of the passages referenced in the preceding paragraph. The great contrast with the unrighteousness of men (Rom 1:18) is the gospel's revelation of the *righteousness of God*, such that the righteous will live by faith (1:16–17). The radical transition from Rom 3:20 to 3:21 is similar: no one is righteous and hence no flesh shall be justified by works of the law (3:10, 20). “But now apart from law the *righteousness of God* [δικαιοσύνη θεου] has been manifested, testified to by the law and the prophets, the *righteousness of God* [δικαιοσύνη θεου] through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:21–22). Likewise in Rom 10:3, those seeking to establish their own righteousness were those who did not submit to the *righteousness of God*, of which they were ignorant. Phil 3:9 also makes such a contrast. Paul no longer wishes to have his own righteousness, but *the righteousness from God* (την εκ θεου δικαιοσυνην). Finally, a passage not mentioned in the previous paragraph, but also speaking of the righteousness of God in the context of justification, is 2 Cor 5:21 (see 5:19 for the clear reference to God's justifying act).

Paul is clear, then, that the righteousness of God is the answer to our inability to be justified by our own righteousness. Nearly all of the passages cited above explicitly associate this righteousness of God with justification by grace through faith. Thus, if our problem is lack of righteousness, understood in moral terms, then the righteousness of God must provide the solution. More specifically, however, what is this righteousness of God and how does it provide for our lack of righteousness in justification? Two passages just mentioned, Phil 3:9 and 2 Cor 5:21, speak very significantly of the righteousness of God for our justification coming to us “in Christ.” The righteousness of God provides for our lack of righteousness only through Christ and his work. Christ mediates and communicates the righteousness of God.

Paul fills in the picture in Rom 5:16–19. Here he speaks specifically of our righteousness as the obedience of Christ, the Second Adam. That Paul's concern in this passage is with justification and the covenant of works is clear. In 5:16, he states that the gift brought δικαιομα, justification, in contrast to κατακριμα, condemnation. The references to Adam, transgression, the disobedience of the one, and death draw readers' minds to the creation covenant. 5:17 begins with γαρ, “for.” Thus, v. 17 explains what the justification mentioned in 5:16 entails. Paul says that those who reign in life through Christ are those who receive the gift of δικαιοσυνη, righteousness,—hence, justification consists in receiving righteousness, as a gift. A number of commentators understand this righteousness as a reference to the Christian's

status as righteous.⁶⁴ As considered above, however, our predicament in regard to righteousness concerns our moral uprightness, not our status *per se*. Paul speaks not of a gift of *justification*, which might indeed refer to a gift of the status of being righteous. He speaks instead of a gift of righteousness, a provision of the moral rectitude that we lack in ourselves. Given all that Paul says elsewhere, this gift of righteousness must be the righteousness of God in Christ, somehow bestowed upon us.⁶⁵

Rom 5:18–19 confirms this interpretation. In 5:18, Paul says that justification of life comes through “one act of righteousness” (εἰς ἓν δικαιοσύματος).⁶⁶ This “one act of righteousness,” then, apparently defines what the “gift of righteousness” in 5:17 is—and this makes perfect sense in light of the idea of righteousness as moral rectitude.⁶⁷ Paul then becomes most specific in 5:19: the righteous act that we receive as a gift of righteousness is none other than “the obedience of the one.” The many are constituted⁶⁸ righteous through the obedience of Christ. Hence, in summary, Paul asserts that a gift brings justification (5:16), this gift is a gift of righteousness (5:17), this gift of righteousness focuses upon one righteous act (5:18), and this righteous act is the obedience of the one man, Jesus Christ (5:19).

⁶⁴ E.g., see Moo, *Romans*, 339; Schreiner, *Romans*, 286; and Morris, *Romans*, 237.

⁶⁵ This is the view defended by Murray, *Romans*, 1.198.

⁶⁶ This phrase presents two difficult issues of translation. First, on the definition of δικαιοσύματος as “act of righteousness,” rather than “justification,” as in 5:16, see Murray, *Romans*, 200–1. Morris, *Romans*, 239, takes the opposite view. Second, assuming the definition of “act of righteousness,” whether the translation should read “one act of righteousness” or “the act of righteousness of the one” is grammatically ambiguous. The latter translation would seem to be supported by the widely accepted idea that 5:18 finishes the comparison begun in 5:12 but suspended through vv. 13–17; the emphasis in 5:12 is on the one man who sinned, rather than on the oneness of the sin. If this translation is adopted, the objection to taking this verse in support of the doctrine of active obedience, considered in the next section, is certainly weakened. Even following the former translation (as is done here, for the sake of argument), however, active obedience is taught in this text.

⁶⁷ This claim is in contrast to a number of commentators who do not associate the gift of righteousness with the one righteous act (e.g., see Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 283), though he does not explain his reasons for this conclusion.

⁶⁸ On the forensic meaning of this term, see, e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 345. Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2.214–15, speaks of this in terms of union with Christ and therefore as richer than imputation, but also demands that the term be taken as strictly forensic. Schreiner (*Romans*, 288) does not so limit it.

The more likely reading of 5:18 contrasts the “one sin” that brings condemnation with the “one righteous act” that brings justification. Objectors claim that reference to “one” act seems odd if Paul was intending to point to Christ’s active obedience, and therefore they believe that the scope is limited to the crucifixion, that is, his passive obedience.⁶⁹ The objectors’ own interpretation of Rom 5:18 has very serious weaknesses, however. First, the crucifixion itself was not really *one* act of Christ. Insofar as Christ submitted himself to this fate and interacted with his Father and those around him, the crucifixion was a series of actions rather than a single act. Second, even on the assumption that the crucifixion was a single act, Christ’s passive obedience cannot be equated with the crucifixion. His passive obedience was no more a single act than his active obedience was, since he suffered throughout his life and thereby learned obedience in order to become a perfect high priest (e.g., Heb 2:10, 17–18; 5:7–10). Therefore, even if Rom 5:18 refers only to passive obedience (as the objectors wish to understand it), it must refer to much more than the crucifixion. Third, it is unwarranted to understand the crucifixion only in terms of passive obedience. Christ’s going to the cross was a supreme act of love toward God and neighbor, and therefore was an aspect of his *active* obedience as well, the positive fulfilling of the law of God.

In light of these considerations, there must have been some reason for Paul’s emphasis on the oneness of Christ’s righteous action other than the isolation of a single discrete event. Much more plausible is that Rom 5:18 refers to the whole course of Christ’s obedience. As Murray suggests, Paul speaks of the one act as a reference to the whole of Christ’s obedience in its “compact unity.”⁷⁰ An initial consideration in support of this interpretation is the analogy between Adam and Christ. In 5:18, this analogy is obvious and cannot be denied, as is the case in 5:15–19 more generally. What significance does this have for understanding the reference to Christ’s obedience? Dunn argues that interpreting Christ’s one act as comprehensive breaks the com-

⁶⁹ Dunn (*Romans* 1–8, 283–84) is clear on this point; Moo (*Romans*, 344) and Schreiner (*Romans*, 287–88) agree tentatively. Wright, though rejecting the idea of active obedience, takes a somewhat broader view of Paul’s reference than simply the crucifixion (see *Romans*, 529). Both Wright and Dunn say that Paul “almost certainly” does not speak of active obedience in this passage. Norman Shepherd, without any qualifications, restricts the reference in 5:18–19 to Christ’s “sacrifice of atonement” (see “Justification by Faith,” 88–89).

⁷⁰ Murray, *Romans*, 1.200–2.

parison to Adam,⁷¹ but the opposite in fact seems the case. Paul, of course, establishes both similarity and dissimilarity between Adam and Christ in these verses. While the similarity lies in the mode of representation by which Adam and Christ, by disobedience and obedience, have brought condemnation/death and justification/life to the many, dissimilarity lies in the fact that Christ gained for us “much more” (5:17) than Adam lost. God required of Adam a perfect obedience, tested over time, not only the original righteousness and moral guiltlessness in which he was created. Adam was born righteous and continued in that state for a time, but God required a course of obedience to his law, the passing of a probationary test, for Adam to attain to a state of irreversible judicial approbation and eschatological life. If Christ indeed came as the Second Adam, to succeed where Adam failed, and brought in much more than Adam lost, then simply seeing passive obedience in 5:18 and surrounding verses seems radically insufficient. Christ’s passive obedience brings forgiveness, resulting in a condition of moral guiltlessness. But that was not enough for justification resulting in eschatological life. In context, the “righteous act” of Christ surely cannot be dissociated from the tested righteous obedience that God required of Adam in the garden.⁷²

Other considerations also support Murray’s suggestion that Paul refers to Christ’s entire obedience in its “compact unity” in Rom 5:18. For example, if Paul did have Christ’s death particularly in mind in 5:18, this hardly constitutes reason to eliminate his prior course of obedience. Christ’s death may well have been at the forefront of Paul’s thoughts. Paul and many other biblical writers speak of the cross as *the* great act of Christ’s earthly ministry on our behalf, and the immediately preceding context provides an example of this (Rom 5:8, 10). However, the importance of the crucifixion can only be understood in the light of a number of other passages—Pauline and otherwise—that describe the cross as the *climax* of a course of obedience extending throughout his entire earthly life.

The Gospels present such a picture of the relation of Christ’s death with his previous ministry. Luke 9:51, for example, speaks of Christ fixing his face

⁷¹ Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 283–84.

⁷² This point needs to be affirmed against Robert Gundry’s claim, in regard to Rom 5:12–19, of “the absence of any contextual indication that Christ’s obedience included a previous life of obedience to the law” (see Robert H. Gundry, “The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbards and Daniel J. Treier [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 32).

to go to Jerusalem (surely an allusion to Isa 50:7). Little more than one-third of the way through this gospel, Luke begins to portray specifically the death of Christ as the goal toward which his long course of obedience was pointing, in the face of great temptation to divert from it. Christ's crucifixion was not an isolated act, but the climax of the whole.

Paul's own testimony on this point is perhaps best seen in Phil 2:8. Here Paul writes that Christ became obedient *μεχρι θανατου* —“unto death.” As argued immediately below, 2:8–9 teaches that Christ's exaltation was the reward of his obedience, and here we may simply note that the text does not allow this obedience to be identified with or isolated in the crucifixion. Instead, as an obedience *unto* death, the crucifixion must be seen as the end or climax of a longer course of obedience. Where did this obedience begin? Whether the first action of Christ referred to in 2:7 (“he emptied himself”) refers to his incarnation or death,⁷³ the other two actions described here surely refer to the incarnation. Christ's obedience, then, began at the very inception of his human existence and his death brought it to its dramatic completion.⁷⁴

More generally, Phil 2:5–11 offers helpful confirmation of the idea at work throughout this section, namely, that Christ offered a true human obedience that was accepted by the Father and deserved an eschatological reward. Verses 7–8 meditate upon Christ's obedience in his emptying himself, taking the form of a servant, being found in appearance as a man, and humbling himself. These verses climax with the affirmation that Christ became *obedient* (*υπηκουος*) “unto death, even the death of the cross.” Verses 9–11 proceed to reflect upon the Son's exaltation following his obedience. God exalted him and gave him the name above every name in order that every knee might bow before him and every tongue confess Christ as Lord. Crucial for the present discussion is that Paul describes Christ's exaltation as the consequence of his obedience and his obedience as the cause of his exaltation. Paul does this by connecting the conclusion of his description of Christ's obedience in 2:8 and the beginning of his description of Christ's exaltation with the strong causal

⁷³ On this point, see Robert B. Strimple, “Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1979): 247–68.

⁷⁴ Moo (*Romans*, 344) and Schreiner (*Romans*, 278–88) also cite Phil 2:8 as a parallel to Rom 5:18. They refer to the former to argue that Paul had Christ's death principally in mind in the latter, but they do not seem to appreciate the context into which Paul places Christ's death in Phil 2. Gundry (“The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness,” 26, 31–32), takes a view similar to that of Moo and Schreiner, but specifically to refute the idea of active obedience.

conjunction $\delta\iota\omicron$: Christ “was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; *therefore* God exalted him.” The exaltation is the consequence of the obedience; the obedience earns the reward.⁷⁵ Hence the initial act of Christ’s exaltation, his resurrection, is described as his justification (1 Tim 3:16; compare Rom 1:4); it was a justification not by grace through faith, but of works.

At least two FV proponents have argued that this passage actually rules out the notion of merit in regard to Christ’s obedience, because in 2:9 Paul uses the word $\epsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\mu\omicron$, which etymologically derives from the word for “grace,” $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma$, to describe God’s giving the name above every name to Christ. This indicates, they claim, that the Father exalted the Son not meritoriously but graciously.⁷⁶ This argument as it stands fails, however. One reason it fails is its fallacious reasoning that etymological derivation determines the meaning of a word apart from context.⁷⁷ The context of Phil 2:5–11 shows that merit cannot be eliminated from Paul’s teaching here. The context, as Vos puts it, is one of “work rendered and value received.”⁷⁸ The Father exalted the Son because the Son perfectly fulfilled his course of obedience. The Son obeyed; *therefore* the Father exalted him. Vos, who sees a reference to “grace” here, cuts through possible confusion: “ $\epsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\mu\omicron$ means that God bestowed it as a gracious gift, not, of course, in the specific sense of the word ‘grace,’ implying that there was any unworthiness in Christ which God had to overlook, but in the more general sense implying that this was an act in which the graciousness, the kindness of God manifested itself.”⁷⁹ Vos writes this only after hav-

⁷⁵ For further discussion of this passage in the context of similar issues, see David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark, “The Covenant before the Covenants,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, 167–96.

⁷⁶ Lusk, “A Response,” 137–38; Jordan, “Merit versus Maturity,” 193.

⁷⁷ This is what D. A. Carson terms the “root fallacy”: “One of the most enduring of errors, the root fallacy presupposes that every word actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. In this view, meaning is determined by etymology; that is, by the root or roots of a word” (see *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 26–32).

⁷⁸ Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 275. The full sentence reads: “Hence in Phil. ii.9 the gracious bestowal of the name above every name upon the Saviour is placed by Paul without the slightest hesitation on the footing of work rendered and value received: ‘*Wherefore* also God highly exalted Him and gave unto Him the name which is above every name.’” Vos further elaborates his point in footnote 13, page 275.

⁷⁹ Vos, “The Alleged Legalism,” 398–99.

ing established the “objective causal connection expressed in ... Philippians 2:9,” which illustrates the fact that “Christ by His perfect obedience was just before God, and on the ground of His being just received eternal life.”⁸⁰

To conclude this section on active obedience, it is worth recalling that God repeatedly affirms that he desires obedience, not sacrifice—understood comparatively, in relation to each other. Sacrifice is necessary, but God desires much more: he desires obedience. Robert L. Dabney (1820–98) comments: “Pardon would release from the punishment of its breach, but would not entitle to the reward of its performance.” He analogizes to a servant who fails to perform a duty for which a reward is promised and then, being punished, demands the reward because he was punished. “Common sense would pronounce it absurd,” Dabney concludes.⁸¹ Reformed theology has rightly believed that Scripture too pronounces it absurd. Christ, as the Second Adam, and therefore as a true human being, fulfills for his people the general human requirement for this perfect obedience. He has left us not in a state of moral guiltlessness and untested and unconfirmed righteousness like Adam before the Fall, nor does he give us simply that with which God is unsatisfied (sacrifice), but provides that true obedience to God’s will, that love of God and neighbor in summary of the law, which found its greatest evidence and climax in his going down to death.

Thus, various streams of biblical teaching come together in the doctrine of active obedience. Paul associates the obedience of Christ with the righteousness of God that justifies. A true human obedience is rendered by the one called the Second Adam, satisfying the requirement of obedience discussed at length above. Yet this obedience is also the righteousness of God, being offered by the God-man. God’s righteousness in general undoubtedly conveys more than simply Christ’s obedience during his earthly ministry. In the context of justification, however, that divine righteousness is expressed in the obedience of Christ, and this is the righteousness granted us as a gift that constitutes us righteous. The reductionism of the NPP is to be avoided. The righteousness of God and the righteousness of man come together at last in the work of Christ, and thus in him we find our righteousness (see also Jer 23:6).

⁸⁰ Vos, “The Alleged Legalism,” 398.

⁸¹ Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1871; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 624–25.

E. The Imputation of Christ's Obedience to Believers

If Christ endured the curse of the law so that our sins might be forgiven (passive obedience) and performed the requirements of the law so that God's demand for perfect obedience might be satisfied (active obedience), then the benefits of this objective work must also be applied to us in the act of justification itself. According to the Reformed tradition, our sins become Christ's and the righteousness of Christ becomes ours by means of *imputation*. That is, our sins are judicially reckoned or credited to Christ (whereby he does not become inherently sinful), and his righteousness is judicially reckoned or credited to us (whereby we do not become inherently righteous). In back of this lies the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's first sin to his posterity.

The doctrine of imputation is expressed a number of times in the Westminster Standards. For example, WCF 11.1 explains that God freely justifies believers "not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them." The WLC uses similar language in speaking of believers being justified "only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them" (70) and of God "imputing his righteousness to them" (71). WSC 33 likewise affirms that justification is "only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us." This judicial imputation accomplished in justification answers the judicial imputation of Adam's first sin: "They [our first parents] being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed ..." (WCF 6.3).

The idea of imputation comes directly from Scripture. The imputation of Adam's first sin is foundational background to the doctrine of justification. A number of Reformed theologians, drawing from Rom 5:12–19 especially, have competently defended the doctrine that Adam's sin is imputed directly or immediately (that is, without the mediation of inherited depravity) to his descendants.⁸² Thus, no detailed argument for the doctrine is of-

⁸² Among the more noteworthy defenses of the doctrine, particularly in light of the contexts in which they wrote, are Turretin, *Institutes*, 1.613–29, and Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2.192–205. More recently, Murray offers an extended defense of the position in *Imputation*.

ferred here. Given that human condemnation rests upon the imputation of Adam's first sin and one's own individual sins, Scripture describes the two aspects of justification (the forgiveness of sins and the accounting of believers as righteous) in terms of imputation. First, Paul speaks of forgiveness as the nonimputation of sins. In Rom 4:8, quoting Ps 32:2, Paul calls blessed the man to whom the Lord does not impute (λογισται) sin. The entire quotation from Ps 32 in Rom 4:7–8 displays that nonimputation and forgiveness are identical: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count [impute] his sin.” 2 Cor 5:19 is similar. Paul describes God's reconciling the world to himself in Christ as his “not counting [imputing, λογιζομενος] their trespasses against them.”

Scripture also treats the second aspect of justification, God's accepting believers as righteous, in terms of imputation. This is implied, though not said explicitly, in 2 Cor 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Paul mentions imputation specifically two verses earlier, in 5:19, as considered in the preceding paragraph (“not counting [imputing] their trespasses against them”). Thus, the concept of imputation is present in the immediate context. In addition, 5:21 speaks of God making Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us. Christ must have been “made sin” by imputation, given a broader biblical and theological understanding of the nature of Christ's expiatory sacrifice and the fact that Christ, the lamb of God without blemish (1 Pet 1:19), never became inherently sinful. Since the second half of 5:21 overtly parallels the first half, if Christ's being made sin is by imputation, then our “becoming the righteousness of God” must also be by imputation.

Paul also speaks of the imputation of righteousness in explicit terms. Rom 4:6 teaches that God *imputes righteousness* apart from works. Paul repeats this language in 4:11: “so that righteousness would be counted [imputed] to them.” Given the structure of 4:5–6, the statement that God “counts [imputes] righteousness apart from works” seems equivalent to the statement in 4:5 that God “justifies the ungodly.” In other words, to impute righteousness apart from works is precisely what justification of the ungodly is.⁸³ What is this righteousness that is imputed to believers for their justification? Reading Rom 4 and 5 together answers this question. Rom 4 explains that righteous-

⁸³ On the interesting and significant parallel statements in the text, see D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” in *Justification: What's at Stake*, 63.

ness is imputed in justification, but does not specifically tell us whose. Rom 5 tells us that Christ's righteous obedience becomes ours in justification, but does not specifically tell us how. Read together, the ground and the means are linked: in justification, righteousness is imputed (Rom 4), specifically, the righteousness of Christ (Rom 5).

These truths are not metaphorical or peripheral, as some NPP proponents claim.⁸⁴ Such claims fail to appreciate just how important a role imputation plays in Rom 4. It is more than a metaphor; it is God's way of justifying the ungodly (4:5), precisely the thing he said he would not do (Exod 23:7)! God will not declare righteous one who is not truly righteous in some genuine sense. Hence, if an imputation of righteousness does not underlie the justification of those who are ungodly in themselves, God is unjust (compare Rom 3:25–26). Furthermore, Paul's reference to the imputation of righteousness in Rom 4:6, 11 cannot be taken as mere statement of the fact that justification occurs, rather than as a statement about how justification occurs.⁸⁵ The theo-

⁸⁴ Wright refers to imputation in Rom 4 as a "bookkeeping metaphor" that is a side-light in Paul's discussion and should not be made the dominant theme, as has been common in Reformation-inspired interpretation (Wright, *Romans*, 491). Dunn expresses perhaps analogous sentiments in regard to the "gift of righteousness" in 5:17. He says that this idea is significant and "not merely a rhetorically stretched usage," but also argues that it should not be made determinative: the gift is the status of one acceptable to God, not an object received as if it becomes one's own property (Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 281–82).

⁸⁵ This is the claim of Michael F. Bird, "Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004): 266. Bird argues for the idea of "incorporated" righteousness over imputed righteousness, though he does not deny the idea of imputation of Christ's righteousness altogether. He makes the undeveloped claim that talk of imputed righteousness is acceptable within the discourse of systematic theology, but "in more finely nuanced discussions of the topic" he believes that we should use language that "more readily comports with Paul's concept of justification" (275). He states earlier that Paul addresses the topic of how we are justified, and answers that it is by union with Christ. He also states here, however, that Paul does not address the question of how union with Christ justifies, but that systematic theology may then legitimately answer that it is by imputation (see 261, n. 44). In this latter claim, it seems that systematic theology is engaging in the more "finely nuanced" discussion. Though Bird claims Carson as inspiration for his thoughts on these matters (see *ibid.*), the treatment of issues of biblical versus theological language in the context of justification seems much more carefully handled by Carson in "The Vindication of Imputation," 47–50.

logical shock that 4:5 provides to careful readers (i.e., that God will justify the ungodly, what Exod 23:7 says he will not do) makes the “how” question inevitable. And 4:6 answers that question exactly: by the imputation of righteousness, God may justify the ungodly.

Other objections to the interpretation of Rom 4 offered here revolve around certain contextual difficulties concerning the imputation of righteousness. The chief difficulty is that righteousness is not the only thing that Paul says is imputed; he also says that God imputes *faith* (4:5, 9).⁸⁶ Defenders of the imputation of active obedience cannot deny that there are difficult exegetical issues here. Nevertheless, defenders of the doctrine have countered the objectors’ contentions on a number of points. Murray dealt with the issue in an appendix to his Romans commentary, and though not offering a definitive explanation to all of Paul’s language, effectively argued that taking faith itself as that which is imputed violates the context.⁸⁷ In a recent essay, D. A. Carson provides a very thorough and helpful treatment of Rom 4 on the question of imputation of active obedience.⁸⁸

A few points of response may be summarized, all of which Carson deals with in much greater detail. First, Paul clearly establishes the stark difference between merited and unmerited imputation in 4:4–5. Indisputably, Paul speaks of the Christian’s justification by faith as an unmerited imputation, such that justification is of the *ungodly*. To interpret Paul as turning around and in the very same verses affirming that a person’s own faith is the righteousness by which he is justified is strikingly untenable. Second, to see faith as playing an instrumental role in these verses is precisely where the context points us. Both the end of Rom 3 and the end of Rom 4 speak of faith as the instrument of justification, even using expressions such as “from” (ἐκ) and

⁸⁶ For example, the variation of Paul’s language is part of what drives Bird to conclude that Paul is not interested in the mechanism of justification in this chapter (“Incorporated Righteousness,” 264–66). Robert Gundry (“The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” 19–25) also emphasizes this difficulty in his polemic against the imputation of *active* obedience (he affirms the imputation of passive obedience). Gundry concludes that faith cannot be understood as instrumental (as is common among those seeing imputed active obedience here), but that the imputing of faith and the imputing of righteousness are the same thing: “The conclusion to draw is that God counts both faith and righteousness because he counts them as identical to each other” (25).

⁸⁷ Murray, *Romans*, I.353–55.

⁸⁸ Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” 46–78.

“through” (διὰ) faith. Third, λογίζομαι carries a wide range of meanings, and the variations of expression at the beginning of Rom 4 hardly need to be taken as identical.

F. By Faith Alone

Another key aspect of the biblical, Reformed doctrine of justification is that it is by faith alone. That is, faith, in distinction from “works,” is the only instrument of justification, the only means by which sinners obtain this blessing. This truth is well grounded in Scripture and expressed in the Westminster Standards and in Reformed theology more generally. Nevertheless, proponents of both the NPP and the FV have challenged various aspects of this doctrine too. Therefore, the biblical and confessional character of both the role of faith as the alone instrument of justification and the specific nature of saving faith must be reaffirmed.

I. The Alone Instrument of Justification

First to consider is faith’s role as the only instrument of justification. The Westminster Standards teach this idea in several places. WCF 11.2 states: “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification.” The WLC explains that justification is “received by faith alone” (70; see also WSC 33), and that God requires “nothing of them for their justification but faith” (71). Furthermore, WLC 73 says: “Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.”

As is evident in WLC 73, the affirmation that faith is instrumental is the denial that faith is the basis or ground of justification. Our faith is not the basis upon which we are justified, but the means by which we are justified. Scripture uses a variety of expressions to teach this instrumental character of faith. For example, Paul speaks of the righteousness (of God) that is *through* faith (διὰ πίστεως) in Rom 3:22 and Phil 3:9. In Phil 3:9, he also uses the apparently equivalent statement that the righteousness of God is *by* faith (ἐπιτηπίστει). A third expression that Paul uses, in Rom 5:1, is that justification comes *from* faith (ἐκ πίστεως). The Epistle to the Hebrews 11:7 communicates faith’s instrumental character with yet another expression: Noah was an heir

of the righteousness *according to faith* (κατα πιστιν).

In nearly all of the biblical passages cited in the previous paragraph, faith is distinguished from works. This is one of the important ways in which Scripture teaches that faith *alone* is the instrument of justification. Justification comes by faith, not by works; hence, justification is by faith alone. Section I.B.5 above of this report documented the copious examples in the Pauline literature in which faith, as the instrument of justification, is sharply contrasted with “works,” “the law,” or “works of the law.” The passages cited above include Rom 3:21–22; 3:28; 4:4–5; 4:13–14; 9:30–32; 10:5–6; Gal 2:16; 3:11–12; Phil 3:9; and Eph 2:8–9.

2. The Nature of Saving Faith

In order for this sharp contrast between faith and works to make sense, however, the precise nature of this saving, justifying faith must be understood. The confession that justification is by faith alone, apart from works of the law, demands conceptual clarity on what it is that makes faith unique, in distinction from everything that might be classified as works or obedience to the law. Faith as the alone instrument of justification is rightly understood only when this clarity is attained.

To begin, Reformed theology has often identified three aspects of true saving faith: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*, perhaps best translated by the words *knowledge*, *assent*, and *trust*. Though knowledge of the object of faith and assent to the truth of this knowledge is necessary, they are by no means sufficient. The intellectual element of faith must be accompanied by trust. Furthermore, the particular object of saving faith is Christ, the Redeemer and Mediator of the covenant of grace. Though trust in God and his word was required before the Fall, saving, justifying faith is *soteriological* (that is, pertaining to salvation) and hence possible only after the Fall. As trust in Christ the Mediator, saving faith is “extraspersive” in nature; in other words, it looks outside of itself and rests upon the work of another. This is the unique office of faith and explains why it must not be confused with “works” more generally. Though faith is an act of obedience in the sense that God does command us to believe in his Son, faith is different from every other act of obedience, from “works,” in that faith is the only virtue that grasps and receives the merits of another, namely, Christ. Faith is different from faithfulness (though the same Greek word, πιστις, can indicate either one). For this reason, we understand that God did not arbitrarily select faith as the established instrument of

justification, but that faith is the entirely appropriate, and only, instrument of justification. Good works flow from faith as its fruits, as is considered in more detail below; however, faith and good works must be distinguished and never confused.

Again, the Westminster Standards articulate these ideas quite clearly. WLC 72, for example, speaks of the necessity of both intellectual assent and trust for true faith: the sinner “not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness.” The WCF likewise speaks of the believer’s faith as a “receiving and resting on him [Christ] and his righteousness” (11.1, 2), and WLC 73 and WSC 33 and 86 use similar language. In addition, WCF 14.2 describes the “principal acts of saving faith” to be the “accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.” Finally, WLC 73 carefully distinguishes justifying faith from good works by calling good works the “fruits” of faith, rather than an aspect of faith itself: “Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.”

Some writers associated with the FV have expressed views of faith different from this historic Reformed teaching, as expressed in the Westminster Standards. Though not ordinarily challenging the terminology of “justification by faith alone,” they have changed the definition of faith and have therefore changed the meaning of “faith alone.” Specifically, these writers make faith into a broad category that includes good works or acts of obedience more generally, rather than upholding the confessional distinction between faith, on the one hand, and works as the fruits of faith, on the other hand.⁸⁹ Their

⁸⁹ The relationship between faith and works is a recurring ambiguity throughout Shepherd’s writings. At times he appears to uphold a distinction between them, yet at other times to make other acts of obedience simply a part of what faith itself is, encompassed under the broader category of faithfulness. He is ambiguous in his repeated use of the phrase “a living, active, obedient faith” and variations of this phrase. For example, he writes: “Faith looks away from personal merit to the promises of God. Repentance and obedience flow from faith as the *fullness* of faith. This is faithfulness, and faithfulness is perseverance in faith. A living, active, and abiding faith is the way in which the believer enters into eternal life” (*Call of Grace*, 50, emphasis added). The use of “fullness” here is unclear at best. It easily suggests, which the context does

concern to avoid antinomianism and the separation of faith from works is valid, but their failure to make a clear distinction between faith and works is a serious error. Furthermore, it seems doubtful that any significant Reformed theologian has ever actually denied that works must invariably flow forth as the fruit of faith.

In light of recent developments, the biblical support for the Reformed view of the nature of saving faith may be recounted briefly. First, that saving faith requires more than simply a general trust in God and his word (often called *fides generalis*), but also a particular trust in Christ and his redeeming work (often called *fides specialis*), is evident in Scripture. The various authors of the NT consistently point us to Christ as the object of faith. John tells us that “whoever believes in him” (God’s only Son) will not perish or be condemned, but receive eternal life (John 3:16, 18). Luke records the words of Peter that “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43), and Peter comments in his own epistle that though we do not see him now, we “believe in him” (1 Pet 1:8). Paul, of course, concurs as he announces the righ-

not exclude, that, just as it “looks away” to God’s promises, faith lacks integrity or wholeness, or is incomplete, unless it includes, in addition, repentance and obedience. Our concern here is not to isolate faith from repentance and good works. Rather, we are concerned not to obscure the extraspective, fiducial nature of the faith, never alone, that alone justifies. Similarly ambiguous is the statement: “Gospel proclamation calls us to a living faith, that is, to a penitent and obedient faith” (“Justification by Works,” 101). This leaves the impression, in its context, that repentance and obedience are what make faith living. Undeniably, “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:26), but from that (and other like biblical passages) it does not follow that works give life to faith or constitute the vitality of faith. When our Confession (14.2) details what saving faith does, in distinction from its “principal acts” of “accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life,” it hardly means to say that the vitality of these principal acts resides in the manifold obedience done “by this faith.” Rather, such good works flow from faith as “the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith” (16.2). Elsewhere, Shepherd expresses his concern that this metaphor is subject to being misunderstood and rejects the analogy that faith is to good works as an apple tree to the apples it bears. “An apple tree without apples is still an apple tree, but faith without its fruits and evidences is neither true nor lively” (“Justification by Faith Alone,” 82). True, “faith without its fruits and evidences is neither true nor lively.” But the analogy is quite apt. The tree has its vitality *distinct* from the apples that grow on it, and without that vitality there would be no apples; the apples do not constitute the vitality of the tree. Good works are certainly integral to the life lived by faith, but they are not integral to faith itself.

teousness of God that comes “through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:22).

Scripture also testifies to the truth of the Reformed teaching that this saving faith in Christ is characterized not merely by intellectual assent, but especially by trust. One of Paul’s favorite OT verses for explaining the doctrine of justification, Hab 2:4, carries strong connotations of trust in its context. When the Lord proclaims that “the righteous shall live by his faith,” he contrasts the believer’s posture with that of the Chaldeans, who are puffed up (2:4), proud (1:8), and full of scoffing (1:10), whose own might is their god (1:11). While the Chaldeans are self-sufficient, the true Israelites must trust in God—even when every earthly indication suggests that all is lost (see 3:17–18).⁹⁰ Hence, Hab 2:4 becomes the perfect verse for Paul to quote in contrast to Lev 18:5 (“if a person does them [God’s statutes and rules], he shall live by them”) in a passage such as Gal 3:11–12. Not by one’s own works, but by trust in another, can the sinner attain life. This element of trust is evident in many other places in which Paul speaks of faith. One clear example is Rom 4:20–21, where he speaks about Abraham: “No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”⁹¹ Once again we can see the uniqueness of faith over against “works” and perceive why Paul can draw such a strong contrast between them.

Since faith is this extraspective trust in Christ, in distinction from “works,” it is also the entirely appropriate instrument of justification. By looking away from itself and resting upon another, faith is the suitable correlate of a justification that comes by divine grace rather than human effort. Paul stresses this point on a number of occasions. Rom 4:16 provides a helpful example. After making one of his frequent contrasts between inheriting the promise of God by faith and inheriting it by law in 4:13–15, Paul writes: “That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring.” If the promise comes by obedience to the law, it is not gracious; as Paul has explained several verses earlier: “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due” (4:4). Likewise, he says later in Romans: “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works;

⁹⁰ See the comments of B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) on this point in “Faith,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968), 430–31.

⁹¹ As noted above, even Dunn admits that this is the way in which Paul understands πιστις here; see *Romans* 1–8, 204.

otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (11:5–6). God makes justification rest upon faith *in order that* (ὡς) the promise may be according to grace (4:16). Faith, not works, is receptive of the gift that grace is. Paul drives home the same point in Gal 5:4–5. After warning his readers that putting oneself under the law means an obligation to perform the entire law (5:3), he writes: “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.” Justification by works, then, is not gracious. If God is to give justification to his people as a free gift, faith alone is the proper instrument for receiving it.

G. Justification and Sanctification⁹²

A final matter to address in this section of the report is the relationship of justification and sanctification. In contrast to Roman Catholic theology, which makes sanctification an aspect of justification, Reformed theology has taught that justification and sanctification must be clearly distinguished. While justification is the judicial act of pardoning sin and reckoning believers as righteous, sanctification refers to the work of God by which he inwardly renews believers and makes them subjectively holy. But while Reformed theology has adamantly protected this distinction between these two blessings, it has also insisted that justification and sanctification are inseparable. A person cannot have one blessing without the other.⁹³ In response to perennial suspicion that the Reformed doctrine of justification makes Chris-

⁹² It is important to note here, and to keep in mind throughout the discussion that follows, that the term “sanctification” here is being used in its traditional Reformed sense of a progressive, inward work of God’s Spirit making believers holy. This is the meaning used in the Westminster Standards: “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness” (WSC 35). Some recent Reformed theologians have also spoken of a “definitive sanctification,” indicating, with an appeal, e.g., to Rom 6:1–7:6, the believer’s once-for-all deliverance from being under the enslaving dominion of sin to being under the lordship of Christ and enslaved to righteousness; see John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” in *Collected Writings*, 2.277–93; and idem, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (1957; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 202–28. This idea is not directly under discussion here.

⁹³ To illustrate this, A. A. Hodge (1823–86) states: “You can no more separate justification and sanctification than you can separate the circulation of the blood from the

tians antinomian or indifferent to holy living, Scripture and the Westminster Standards make clear that justification and sanctification are distinct yet inseparable. Justification is not sanctification, yet sanctification always follows justification; faith always has its fruits.

1. The Distinction between Justification and Sanctification

The various definitions of justification and sanctification offered in the Westminster Standards make the distinction between them evident. WLC 77, however, specifically describes how they differ: “Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.”

2. The Inseparability of Justification and Sanctification

This quotation of WLC 77, though focusing upon the differences between justification and sanctification, also states that these blessings are “inseparably joined.” Gainsayers have constantly attempted to show the incompatibility of the biblical doctrine of justification with a genuine interest in the moral life. The apostle Paul already confronted and answered such objections. Immediately after laying out the doctrine of justification in Rom 3–5, Paul faces his detractors: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (6:1). Shortly thereafter, Paul asks a similar question: “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15). In Galatians, one can again hear the challenge of the gainsayer in the background: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” (5:13). Does justification, with the grace and freedom that it bestows, make one indifferent to, or even encourage one to despise, the concern for holiness? Paul’s answer is “By no

inhalation of the air. Breathing and circulation are two different things, but you can not have one without the other; they go together, and they constitute one life. So you have justification and sanctification; they go together, and they constitute one life” (see *Evangelical Theology* [London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1890], 310–11).

means!”⁹⁴ (Rom 6:2, 15).

Part of the reason why this is true is rooted in the doctrine of union with Christ. Before the WLC and WSC address the saving blessings of effectual calling, justification, adoption, and sanctification, they affirm the union with Christ true of all believers (WLC 66; WSC 30). WLC 66 states: “The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God’s grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.” Union with Christ underlies justification and sanctification and the other saving blessings, as WLC 69 goes on to explain: “The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him.”

Scripture teaches this doctrine that we are justified and sanctified in union with Christ and that, correspondingly, justification and sanctification manifest that union. We are “justified in Christ” (Gal 2:17). In regard to sanctification, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Significantly, both of these passages just quoted fall in contexts in which Paul answers objections that his doctrines of justification and sanctification are incompatible. Justification and sanctification flow out of the same union with Christ. The one who is united with Christ must enjoy both justification and sanctification.

In addition to the doctrine of union with Christ, the idea of the *ordo salutis* makes clear that justification is prior to sanctification. This is not priority in the sense that one is somehow more important than the other. Neither is it a temporal priority, strictly speaking, for there is no such thing as a justified person who is not also being sanctified. But while justification is the necessary prerequisite of the process of sanctification, that process is not the necessary prerequisite of justification. It is true to say that one must be justified in order to be sanctified; but it is untrue to say that one must be sanctified in order to be justified. Justification and sanctification bear a relationship to

⁹⁴ Paul’s phrase, μή γένοιτο, “strongly deprecates something suggested by a previous question or assertion” and “expresses the apostle’s abhorrence of an inference which he fears may be (falsely) drawn from his argument” (see Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3d ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976], 79).

each other that cannot be reversed.

Minimally, Scripture teaches that sanctification is not incompatible with a justification that comes by grace alone through faith alone. Paul, for example, after acknowledging the objection to his doctrine of justification in Rom 6:1, goes on to explain (6:2–7:6) that in fact those who by faith in Christ are united to him in his death and resurrection and so are no longer slaves to sin now live in newness of life, offering up their bodies as instruments of righteousness. Paul is clear that the grace of God in Christ that justifies also sanctifies and does not nullify sanctification, as the Reformed tradition has consistently affirmed.

Beyond this minimal perspective, however, Scripture and the Reformed tradition have made a stronger affirmation. It is not simply that justification is compatible with sanctification, but also that justification is *necessary* for sanctification. Reformed theologians have expressed this conviction in various ways. Calvin, for instance, when explaining why justification, “the principal ground on which religion must be supported,” must be given such great care and attention, writes: “Unless you understand first of all what your position is before God, and what the judgment which he passes upon you, you have no foundation on which your salvation can be laid, or on which piety towards God can be reared.”⁹⁵ Turretin comments: “Justification stands related to sanctification as the means to the end.”⁹⁶

These claims rest upon solid biblical and theological considerations. Christ’s words in Luke 7:47, in regard to the sinful woman who anointed him at a Pharisee’s home, are on point: “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” The fact that this woman loved much was the proof that her many sins had been forgiven. If her love was possible apart from the forgiveness that comes in justification, then Christ’s appeal to this evidence loses its force. Without the experience of forgiveness, there is no love; where there is love, one can be sure that there has been forgiveness. Perhaps Paul’s most powerful statement of this necessity of justification for sanctification is Gal 5:13: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Both Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin perceived the profundity of what Paul writes here, connecting Christian liberty, and thus justification, with

⁹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.1.

⁹⁶ Turretin, *Institutes*, 2.693.

sanctification.⁹⁷ Earlier in Galatians, Paul has argued that it is only through justification by faith in Christ that one receives freedom—and thus Calvin rightfully calls the doctrine of Christian liberty “a proper appendix to Justification.”⁹⁸ Following Paul’s lead, Calvin reflects upon why the Christian’s freedom, far from discouraging good works, in fact enables them. He writes: “Being constantly in terror so long as they are under the dominion of the law, they are never disposed promptly to obey God, unless they have previously obtained this liberty”; and later: “How can unhappy souls set themselves with alacrity to a work from which they cannot hope to gain anything in return but cursing? On the other hand, if freed from this severe exaction, or rather from the whole rigour of the law, they hear themselves invited by God with paternal lenity, they will cheerfully and alertly obey the call, and follow his guidance.”⁹⁹ For Calvin, no one can hope to begin pursuit of the good works that God requires, nor in the way he requires, apart from the peace of conscience gained only in justification.

Also relevant to note is the relationship between faith and works. As discussed above, faith is unique and thus distinct from works. But the Westminster Standards also teach that good works are never absent where faith is present. Though WLC 73 wishes to emphasize that faith justifies as an instrument and not in any other way, it does speak of “those other graces which do always accompany it” and “of good works that are the fruits of it.” Likewise, WCF 16.2 states: “Good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.” According to the Standards, therefore, good works must always accompany faith. Good works are the fruit and evidence of faith (though faith is not the fruit and evidence of good works).

Paul affirms these truths in passages such as Gal 5:6, where he speaks of “faith working through love.” Likewise, James emphasizes that any genuine faith will be accompanied by works: “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17). James also connects faith and works a few verses later, while giving faith the causal priority: “You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works” (2:22). In this context, James shows that Abraham’s justification by faith (2:23; Gen 15:6) issued

⁹⁷ See, for example, Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 333–77; Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.1–5.

⁹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.1.

⁹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.4–5.

forth in good works, illustrated by his obedience in offering up Isaac many years later (2:21–22; Gen 22). In this connection, we may note that there is no dispute in doctrine between Paul and James on justification. Though there have been differences among Reformed theologians on the particular exegetical details of Jas 2, many of them have effectively demonstrated the doctrinal concurrence of these two apostles. Any apparent disagreements between them (arising particularly from James' statement that justification is "not by faith alone" in 2:24) are the result not of contradictory theologies, but of their intent to address different issues within the church and their different uses of the term "faith." As J. Gresham Machen succinctly commented, "The faith that James is condemning is not the faith that Paul is commending."¹⁰⁰ Even mainstream biblical scholars, with no particular interest in defending the overarching doctrinal unity of Scripture, have recognized this point.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 238–39.

¹⁰¹ For example, Luke Timothy Johnson writes of Paul and James: "Despite the remarkable points of resemblance, they appear not to be talking to each other by way of instruction or correction. Rather, they seem to be addressing concerns specific to each author." See *The Letter of James*, AB, vol. 37a (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 64.

II

JUSTIFICATION IN THE ECUMENICAL CONTEXT

As the OPC and other Reformed churches confess this biblical doctrine of justification and address the challenges to it presented by the NPP and the FV, they would do well to remember the broader context in which the doctrine of justification is discussed in the present day. Perhaps most noteworthy on this score are recent Roman Catholic efforts to enter into discussion with Protestants on this issue and the resulting statements that these discussions have produced. Such statements have been general and ambiguous enough to permit both Roman Catholic and Protestant representatives to endorse them, yet have not clearly embraced Reformational teaching nor forsaken traditional Roman Catholic teaching. Such statements, along with other events, have left many in the present day with the impression that a great degree of unity exists among Roman Catholics and Protestants on the doctrine of justification. Yet the Roman church has never revoked the teaching of the Council of Trent, which anathematized the Reformation's justification doctrines. Such a misleading situation may tempt Reformed people into complacency about the need to defend the doctrine of justification today or to be unduly attracted to attempts to transcend or go beyond historic Rome-Reformation debates, as the NPP, for example, purports to do. In light of this, the present section offers a brief survey of probably the two most important ecumenical statements on justification in recent years, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and the Gift of Salvation.

A. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) was signed on Reformation Day 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (an organization consisting of many, though not all, Lutheran denominations worldwide). The JDDJ presents itself as the culmination of many past discussions and statements produced by Lutherans and Roman Catholics (§§ 3, 6), and thus, with its strong claims about unity among the parties on the doctrine of justifica-

tion, it represents a remarkable ecumenical event. This declaration purports to summarize the results of these Lutheran–Roman Catholic discussions and also to show that Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches are able to articulate a common understanding of justification, such that whatever differences remain are no longer to provoke doctrinal condemnation (§§ 3–4, 13, 41). There is “a consensus in the basic truths; the differing explications in particular statements are compatible with it” (§ 14; see also § 40). The JDDJ acknowledges that Roman Catholics and Lutherans have condemned each other in the past, and at one point even comments on the “seriousness” of these condemnations (§ 42). But the declaration emphasizes developments and new insights that call for divisive questions to be reexamined in the present day (§ 7).

As the JDDJ describes the doctrine of justification, it often affirms positions that are consistent *per se* with the doctrines of the Reformation. For example, members of the OPC would warmly embrace the following affirmations: “Christ himself is our righteousness,” and we are saved by grace alone, “in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part” (§ 15). “Whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it” (§ 25). “We confess together that good works ... follow justification and are its fruits” (§ 37). Elsewhere, however, it commends views that either conflict with Reformation teaching or at least omit key aspects of it. For example, in what is apparently a general definition of justification, the JDDJ omits any reference to the imputed righteousness of Christ and includes reference to sanctification (liberation from the power of sin): “Justification is the forgiveness of sins ... liberation from the dominating power of sin and death ... and from the curse of the law.... It is acceptance into communion with God” (§ 11). This apparent confusion and mixing of the doctrines of justification and sanctification continues to be problematic in subsequent sections (for example, see §§ 22, 26, and 27). These are a few examples of why the Lutheran signers of the JDDJ must be suspected of compromising their fidelity to the teaching of the Reformation.

B. The Gift of Salvation

The second important ecumenical statement of recent years to mention here is the Gift of Salvation (GS).¹⁰² GS may be even more pertinent to the

¹⁰² See *First Things* 79 (January 1998): 20–23.

OPC than the JDDJ, given its North American context and the fact that some of its “evangelical” signatories have been well-respected names in many Reformed circles. GS appeared in late 1997, signed by a group of Roman Catholics and evangelicals, many of whom had previously adopted *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* in 1994.¹⁰³ This 1994 document joined Roman Catholics and evangelicals as allies in the contemporary culture wars, called one another brothers and sisters in Christ, and embraced cooperation in evangelism—all of this despite important remaining differences between them. GS addressed one of these areas of historic difference: salvation in general and justification in particular. The signers of this document say they are able “to express a common faith in Christ and so to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ” and “together bear witness to the gift of salvation” despite “some persistent and serious differences.”

Like the JDDJ, GS often sounds orthodox from a Reformation perspective. At the same time, many of these statements are general or ambiguous enough that a Roman Catholic can affirm them as well without sacrificing his allegiance to Trent and traditional Roman doctrine. For example, when GS says that “justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God’s gift,” it is not clear whether this eliminates merit that, according to Roman doctrine, one attains after initial justification and before final justification.¹⁰⁴ Also, when GS asserts that “in justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so,” it is unclear whether the righteousness of Christ referred to here means the imputed obedience of Christ as the sole ground of justification. Traditional Roman doctrine can use similar language while meaning something very different by it; for example, it affirms “Christ’s righteousness,” but as an infused rather than imputed righteousness.¹⁰⁵

Later in the document, GS describes faith and claims that “what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by

¹⁰³ See *First Things* 43 (May 1994): 15–22.

¹⁰⁴ For Roman Catholic teaching on this point, see, for example, *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), § 2010.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter VII of the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent, in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1941), 33–34; *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), 251–52.

justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).” Despite this assertion, GS fails to speak of the extraspective character of faith, probably the aspect of faith that most distinguishes traditional Reformation and Roman understandings of it. A final example is the affirmation of GS that sanctification “is not fully accomplished at the beginning of our life in Christ, but is progressively furthered as we struggle, with God’s grace and help, against adversity and temptation,” which is certainly consistent with Reformed doctrine *per se*, but is no less consistent with historic Roman doctrine. The key element distinguishing Reformation and Roman teaching on this point—whether this progressive sanctification is part of justification itself or a distinct yet inseparable blessing—is never addressed.

Perhaps most revealing of the hollowness of GS’s claims to express a united doctrine of salvation is its conclusion. It acknowledges remaining differences among the participants and includes among these differences the matter of “imputed and transformative righteousness” and “the assertion that while justification is by faith alone, the faith that receives salvation is never alone.” Such issues are not peripheral, but stand at the very center of the Reformed doctrine of justification. If these issues remain unsettled, then there is no sense in which adherents to traditional Protestant doctrine can claim agreement with Rome on justification and related matters.

A number of other people and movements could be identified as important for the contemporary ecumenical context of justification debates.¹⁰⁶ Among these are George Lindbeck’s influential ideas on the cultural and linguistic contexts of the development of doctrine,¹⁰⁷ the proposal of Thomas Oden that finds a consensus teaching on the doctrine of justification across various eras and confessions in church history,¹⁰⁸ and the “Finnish” inter-

¹⁰⁶ The other people and movements mentioned here are addressed in David VanDrunen, “Where We Are: Justification under Fire in the Contemporary Scene,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, 25–57. A fuller exposition of the JDDJ and GS than that found in the present section also appears in this essay.

¹⁰⁷ Most importantly, see George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). For some examples of the influence of Lindbeck’s ideas, see Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); and Avery Dulles, “Two Languages of Salvation: The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration,” *First Things* 98 (December 1999): 25–30.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas C. Oden, *The Justification Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

pretation of Martin Luther developed by Tuomo Mannermaa and his associates.¹⁰⁹ Your study committee draws attention to such people and movements so that we, as confessionally Reformed Christians, do not conduct our discussions on justification in an isolated way, ignorant of the wider theological context or of the assaults on the historic Reformation doctrine in the broader world.

¹⁰⁹ For a very sympathetic account of this school of thought from observers and proponents, see *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For a Reformed evaluation of aspects of this school, see Carl R. Trueman, “Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 231–44.

III

THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

A. Introduction

One of the tasks assigned to our committee is critiquing the New Perspective on Paul (NPP). To accomplish this assignment, we must first briefly survey the history that leads up to the development of the NPP. Throughout the history of the study of the NT, theologians have faced challenging questions, especially concerning the interpretation of the Pauline corpus. The difficulty in interpreting the apostle Paul's writings at points is certainly not new; the apostle Peter himself comments about Paul's letters: "There are some things in them that are hard to understand" (2 Pet 3:16b). Our own confessional standards likewise admit that "all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all" (WCF 1.7). In the history of the interpretation of Paul, we certainly see the ebb and flow of the tide of various quests to uncover aspects of Paul's thought: the question of the place of divine grace in the application of redemption, as in the patristic period (AD 100–600), in the debates between Augustine (354–430) and Pelagius (d. ca. 410), and in the debates over justification by faith during the Reformation (1517–65); the disputes surrounding the proper method for the interpretation of Scripture in the Middle Ages (600–1300), resulting in the solidification of the *quadriga* (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses) evident in the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas (1225–74); or the question of the center of Paul's theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the writings of F. C. Baur (1792–1860) and Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965).¹¹⁰ It is especially the

¹¹⁰ See Augustine, *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Fathers of the Church, vol. 86, ed. Thomas P. Halton et al., trans. John A. Mourant and William J. Collinge (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1992); Pelagius, *Pelagius's Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, ed. and trans. Theodore de Bruyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); B. B. Warfield, "Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy," in *The Works of B. B. Warfield*, vol. 4, ed. Ethelbert D. Warfield et al. (1930; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 289–412; W. S. Babcock, "Augustine and Paul: The Case of Romans 9," *Studia Patristica* 16/2 (1985): 474–79; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the*

milieu of the nineteenth and twentieth century that provides the backdrop for the development of the NPP.¹¹¹

B. The Development of the NPP

1. Krister Stendahl: the Introspective Conscience of the West

Krister Stendahl delivered a lecture to the American Psychological Association in 1961, where he apparently first complained that the interpretation of Paul in the twentieth century had been unduly influenced by the interpretive legacy of Martin Luther (1483–1546): “The Reformers’ interpretation of Paul rests on an analogism when Pauline statements about Faith and Works, Law and Gospel, Jews and Gentiles are read in the framework of late medieval piety. The law, the Torah, with its specific requirements of circumcision and food restrictions becomes a general principle of ‘legalism’ in religious matters.”¹¹² Stendahl’s overall criticism was that NT scholars had read Paul in terms of the individual’s struggle with sin, as Luther had supposedly read him in the sixteenth century.¹¹³ According to Stendahl, Luther read the anachronistic medieval question of merit back into Paul’s epistles to Rome and Galatia, rather than read him in his first-century context. Stendahl’s criticism did not go unheard.

Galatians, trans. F. R. Larcher (Albany: Magi, 1966); E. Rogers, “Paul as Professor of Theology: The Image of the Apostle in St Thomas’ Theology,” *The Thomist* 38 (1977): 584–605; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, vols. 20–21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1ff., 725ff.; Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.1–97; F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (1845; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003); Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (1931; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

¹¹¹ For the history of the interpretation of Paul in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters* (London: A. and C. Black, 1912); E. Earle Ellis, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (1963; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

¹¹² Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215; also idem, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 85–86.

¹¹³ Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 82.

2. E. P. Sanders: Covenantal Nomism

E. P. Sanders, in his watershed work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, set out to destroy the general Christian view of Judaism as a religion of legalism, or works-righteousness. Sanders wrote to refute the common opinion that Jews were interested in earning their salvation through their obedience to the law. Sanders researched the literature of Second Temple Judaism and concluded that it was a religion of grace. Sanders coined the term *covenantal nomism* to describe first-century Judaism: “The view that one’s place in God’s plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.”¹¹⁴

Regarding the specific nature of the law and its function within Judaism, Sanders identifies eight characteristics:

- (1) God has chosen Israel and
- (2) given the law. The law implies
- (3) God’s promise to maintain the election and
- (4) the requirement to obey.
- (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression.
- (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in
- (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship.
- (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God’s mercy belong to the group which will be saved.¹¹⁵

We may summarize Sanders’s understanding of first-century Judaism as entry into the covenant by God’s grace, or election, and maintaining one’s place in the covenant by obedience and making use of the means of atonement. Sanders’s thesis is that Judaism is based upon election and covenant, in other words, the grace of God. In the minds of many NT scholars, Sanders’s re-evaluation of Judaism was the needed illumination of Paul’s context to evaluate better the historical-contextual setting of his epistles. Sanders’s work sets the stage for the work of N. T. Wright.

¹¹⁴ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 75.

¹¹⁵ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 422.

3. N. T. Wright: the Apostle of History

Shortly after the work of Stendahl and Sanders, N. T. Wright joined the chorus of those objecting to a Lutheranized Paul. Wright argued that Lutheran interpreters such as Gerhard Ebeling had to divorce the doctrine of justification from history in order to preserve the Lutheran distinctives of a theology of the Word and the *theologia crucis*, the theology of the cross.¹¹⁶ Additionally, Wright also argued that “the tradition of Pauline interpretation has manufactured a false Paul by manufacturing a false Judaism for him to oppose.” Again, like Stendahl, Wright argues that the portrait of the Jews as legalistic was first manufactured in the sixteenth century by Luther in his battle against Rome.¹¹⁷ Wright therefore concludes: “We have, in short, as a result of a projection of reformation and modern ideas into the world of Paul, an apostle of faith, or at least of imagination, who reveals more about his inventors than about the Paul of history.”¹¹⁸ Wright goes on to argue that “the categories with which we are to understand Paul, and for that matter the whole New Testament, are not the thin, tired and anachronistic ones of Lutheran polemic. They are the ones given to us by the Paul of history himself.”¹¹⁹ Wright was not alone in his observations, as another key player would soon join the chorus of dissent.

4. James D. G. Dunn: the “New Perspective”

James Dunn, drawing upon Stendahl’s groundbreaking essay, believes, like Wright before him, that Paul has been read in terms of Luther’s battle with Roman Catholicism. In the light of Sanders’s work, particularly his research in the Second Temple literature, interpreters finally could “see Paul properly within his own context, to hear Paul in terms of his own time, to let Paul be himself.”¹²⁰ Dunn in fact coins the term “the new perspective on Paul.”

¹¹⁶ N. T. Wright, “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 73; cf. Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 34–36, 54–56.

¹¹⁷ Wright, “Paul of History,” 78–79.

¹¹⁸ Wright, “Paul of History,” 81.

¹¹⁹ Wright, “Paul of History,” 87.

¹²⁰ James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 65 (1983): 95–122; idem, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and*

5. Summary

Thus far we may summarize the NPP as a rejection of the traditional, orthodox Protestant interpretation of Paul because that interpretation is supposedly based upon Luther's. Rather than read Paul through the lens of Luther, we must instead reread Paul in the light of his historical context, namely the literature of Second Temple Judaism. In reading Paul in this new light, or from this new perspective, we are supposed to obtain a better understanding of Paul's epistles and, of course, a better understanding of the doctrines contained therein, especially the doctrine of justification. At this point, we may move forward and set the course for our critique of the NPP, specifically as it relates to the doctrine of justification.

C. Major Elements of Consideration

Before we proceed with our critique, it is of cardinal importance that we recognize the variegated character of the NPP. The NPP is an academic movement that contains, like any movement in biblical studies, a spectrum of viewpoints.¹²¹ Therefore, one must be cautious in critiquing the NPP as it relates to justification. The NPP is not a unified, homogenous group. Nevertheless, one may proceed by identifying the key issues that have been raised in an influential way by specific authors who have been associated with the NPP and seeing how those issues bear upon the doctrine of justification. The key issues we will investigate are, first, prolegomena, in particular how those associated with the NPP view the doctrine of Scripture and principles of hermeneutics. Second, we will treat matters of definition, namely, the terms *righteousness*, *works of the law*, and *justification*. Third, we will examine what effects these definitions have upon the doctrine of justification. Fourth, we will then critique the NPP understanding of justification as it has been specifically defined. One last matter should also be noted, namely, at certain points our critique will largely, though not exclusively, focus upon the writings of N. T. Wright, since his views in particular have had an impact in the Reformed and broader evangelical communities and on the interpretation of the doc-

Galatians (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 185–86.

¹²¹ Cf., e.g., Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 46, 49; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 335; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 13, n. 39.

trine of justification by some within these communities.¹²²

i. Prolegomena

The first element of our critique involves an exploration of the prolegomena, or presuppositions, that those associated with the NPP bring to the table. This is an important aspect of any theological discussion, including one concerning the doctrine of justification. While we cannot explore every aspect of the prolegomena of those associated with the NPP, it is important that we take special note of their doctrine of Scripture. It is particularly two elements of the doctrine of Scripture that we wish to explore: the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

a. The Inspiration of Scripture

One of the key emphases of those associated with the NPP is the desire to explore the NT within its first-century historical context, especially against the backdrop of the literature of Second Temple Judaism: rabbinic sources, the writings of the Apocrypha, Josephus, and Qumran. N. T. Wright, for example, states, “We are therefore studying human history, in the recognition that the actors in the drama, and hence in a sense the drama itself, can only fully be understood when we learn to see the world through their eyes.”¹²³ Wright argues that if we are dealing with the Scriptures as history, then one can begin to understand the NT by entering the world of the first century by exploring the various competing worldviews of the time: those of the Essenes, who believed they were participating in a secret new covenant; of Josephus, who believed that Israel’s God was going over to the Romans; of Jesus, who

¹²² See, e.g., Rich Lusk, “A Response to ‘The Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision, August 11–13, 2003*, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 135–36; Ralph Smith, *Eternal Covenant* (Moscow: Canon, 2003), 64, nn. 6–7; Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow: Canon, 2003), 29, n. 11; 52, n. 11; Douglas Wilson, *“Reformed” Is Not Enough: Rediscovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow: Canon, 2002), 204; James R. Daniel Kirk, “Review: N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65/2 (2003): 367–68; Craig B. Carpenter, “A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64/2 (2002): 378, n. 45, 384.

¹²³ Wright, *People of God*, 118.

told a story about a vineyard; and of the early Christians, who told the story of the kingdom of God and its inauguration through Jesus.¹²⁴ Wright's investigative method, then, is to explore and seek to understand the NT Scriptures as a historical phenomenon. Wright contends that one can then verify the veracity and validity of the NT through a hypothesis-verification method:

History, then, is real knowledge, of a particular sort. It is arrived at, like all knowledge, by the spiral of epistemology, in which the story-telling human community launches enquiries, forms provisional judgments about which stories are likely to be successful in answering those enquiries, and then tests these judgments by further interaction with data.¹²⁵

We must ask, however, can the NT be explored merely as a historical phenomenon? Is it merely one document among the many writings of the first century?

We should first recognize that Wright's view of the NT is a definite improvement over the views of Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), who tried to demythologize the NT, or the history of religions school, represented by F. C. Baur and D. F. Strauss (1808–74), who denied the miraculous because of a bias against the supernatural.¹²⁶ It is essential that any investigator take seriously the historicity and historical context of the NT. At the same time, an absolutely fundamental presupposition is accounting for the inspiration of the NT Scriptures by the Holy Spirit.¹²⁷ It seems that Wright's view of Scripture in this regard is no more of an improvement than the quest for the historical Jesus. In fact, in Wright's *New Testament and the People of God*, where he sets forth his prolegomena, there is not a word about the work of the Holy Spirit, either in the inspiration of the NT or in the Spirit's work in removing the no-

¹²⁴ Wright, *People of God*, 41.

¹²⁵ Wright, *People of God*, 109.

¹²⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation," in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 1–45; F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ* (1873–75; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003); David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (1856; New York: Continuum, 1998).

¹²⁷ So Herman N. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1988), 43.

etic affects of sin to enable the interpreter to comprehend the Scriptures (e.g., 1 Cor 2:14–16; 2 Cor 2:12–17).¹²⁸

Some might counter that Wright does affirm the inspiration of Scripture, as he has devoted one of his most recent books to the subject of the authority of Scripture.¹²⁹ Wright, however, dodges the issue of inspiration:

‘Inspiration’ is a shorthand way of talking about the belief that by his Spirit God guided the very different writers and editors, so that the books they produced were the books God intended his people to have. This is not the subject of the present book, but we should note that some kind of divine inspiration of scripture was taken for granted in most of the ancient Israelite scriptures themselves, as well as in the beliefs of the early Christians.¹³⁰

It is odd that in a book devoted to the authority of Scripture there is no treatment of its inspiration. Note, for example, that in Wright’s book on the authority of the Bible there is not one reference to 2 Tim 3:16–17.

By contrast, B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) saw the inspiration of Scripture inextricably intertwined with its authority and therefore devoted nearly fifty pages to defending the foundational importance of 2 Tim 3:16–17.¹³¹ We see this same point of emphasis in our own doctrinal standards: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is

¹²⁸ There is only one place in his writings that we have found where Wright acknowledges the need for the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s theological epistemology: “The Spirit broods over us as we read this book, to straighten out our bent thinking; the world-views that have got twisted so that they are like the world’s world-views” (N. T. Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?” The Laing Lecture 1989 and the Griffith Thomas Lecture 1989, 18; cf. idem, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?” *Vox Evangelica* 21 [1991]: 7–32). There are two points to make regarding this quote: (1) Wright makes no mention of this important theological point in his prolegomena in *The New Testament and the People of God*, so whether it is an oversight or a change in his view is not known; and (2) if Wright still holds this view, it does not materially manifest itself in his prolegomena.

¹²⁹ N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2005).

¹³⁰ Wright, *Last Word*, 37.

¹³¹ See B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 245–99.

truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (WCF 1.4, citing 2 Pet 1:19–20; 2 Tim 3:16; 1 John 5:9; 1 Thess 2:13; Rev 1:1–2).¹³² Furthermore, Wright repeats his commitment to his Spirit-less historical investigation of the Scriptures, emphasizing his commitment to critical realism.¹³³ Wright’s failure to account for the inspired nature of the Scriptures leads him into two errors that color his explanation of Paul’s doctrine of justification.

b. The Authority of Scripture

The first error is in giving too much interpretive weight to the writings of first-century Judaism. This interpretive method surfaces in discussions determining what Paul means by the terms *righteousness* and *works of the law*. At key points, Wright appeals, not to the self-interpreting Scriptures, but to the literature of Second Temple Judaism to interpret the NT (cf. WCF 1.3–7). The apostle Paul, by way of contrast, arguably never appeals to the literature of Second Temple Judaism, but to the OT exclusively.¹³⁴ The second error is that he appeals to a truncated Pauline corpus in explaining Paul’s doctrine of justification. In Wright’s *What Saint Paul Really Said*, for example, he restricts his treatment of Paul to the so-called undisputed Pauline epistles: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Philipppians.¹³⁵

Moreover, when Wright treats important subjects, such as the interpretation of the phrase “works of the law,” he relies upon and agrees with

¹³² It should be noted that the proof texts are the same for both the original and OPC versions; see *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms: The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as Adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005); *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646; Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995).

¹³³ Wright, *Last Word*, 100, 111.

¹³⁴ See J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* (1925; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 180; E. Earle Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (1957; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 10–37.

¹³⁵ N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 8. Wright still continues this pattern of using only the so-called undisputed epistles of Paul in his latest book on the apostle (see N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 19).

the conclusions of James Dunn.¹³⁶ Yet Dunn bases his interpretation of the contested phrase upon the letters of Paul other than Ephesians and the Pastorals, whose authorship he believes to be post-Pauline.¹³⁷ However, there are a number of passages in Ephesians and the Pastorals that are important to Paul's understanding of the works of the law and justification (e.g., Eph 2:8–9; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5). Even if Wright affirms the Pauline authorship of all of the epistles that bear the apostle's name, to restrict investigation to the so-called undisputed epistles allows the unchecked presuppositions of the historical-critical school into the equation and fails to account for the testimony and authority of the Holy Spirit in these matters.

c. Summary

One must keep these presuppositional issues in mind as we investigate and critique the NPP and its understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification. When one associated with the NPP states, "Paul writes," it does not necessarily mean the same thing as when the historic Reformed tradition makes the same statement. Often one associated with the NPP appeals only to some of Paul's writings, which affects the resulting portrait of Paul's doctrine of justification. Keeping prolegomena, particularly the doctrine of Scripture, in mind, then, we may proceed to our examination of matters of definition.

2. Key Definitions

There are certainly many terms that should be investigated in any examination of the doctrine of justification, but there are three specific terms that are key in the current debates: *righteousness*, *works of the law*, and *justification*. These three terms are important, especially given the paradigm-shifting nature of the NPP. One must recognize that definitions of the most basic concepts of the traditional Protestant understanding of justification are not the same as those offered by the NPP.

¹³⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, NIB, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 461, n. 97; cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC, vol. 38a (Dallas: Word, 1988), 153–60.

¹³⁷ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 13, n. 39. One should note, though, that Wright does affirm the Pauline authorship of Ephesians (see N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection and the Son of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 236).

a. Righteousness

As one can imagine, the term “righteousness” and its definition must feature in any discussion of justification (see above I.D.3). The issue of the definition of this key term surfaces prominently in the question of the proper interpretation of Rom 1:17a: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed.” Historically, interpreters such as Luther and John Calvin have understood Paul’s reference to God’s righteousness to be one involving imputed righteousness.¹³⁸ In recent years, however, this understanding has been challenged. For example, Ernst Käsemann (1906–98) argued that the righteousness of God denoted not imputed righteousness but God’s saving power and active faithfulness to his creation.¹³⁹ One may describe this explanation, in distinction from the traditional Reformed understanding, as a reference to an activity of God, not something that he gives to the believer. It is in the vein of this shift that proponents of the NPP argue that the righteousness of God denotes his active faithfulness to his covenant promises. Righteousness, then, is God’s covenant faithfulness.¹⁴⁰

Wright, for example, explains Rom 1:17 in this regard when he writes, “The gospel, [Paul] says, reveals or unveils God’s own righteousness, his covenant faithfulness, which operates through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for the benefit of all those who in turn are faithful.”¹⁴¹ If righteousness, then, denotes God’s covenant faithfulness, what about the term when it is connected to the believer? When we consider the term “righteousness” and what it denotes in relation to the believer, along with some shades of difference, we see some essential unity of opinion on the subject. To be righteous is not so much a moral or judicial quality as a relational one; it means that one is in covenant with God.¹⁴² While there may be slight differences among those

¹³⁸ John Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians*, CNTC, vol. 8, ed. David W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 27–28; Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, Luther’s Works, vol. 25, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 9.

¹³⁹ Ernst Käsemann, “The Righteousness of God in Paul,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 58 (1961): 367–78; also idem, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1969), 168–82.

¹⁴⁰ Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 40–41.

¹⁴¹ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 109.

¹⁴² Sanders argues that the term in its first-century Jewish context did not denote moral perfection. Rather, it was simply a designation for those who were part of

associated with the NPP, generally speaking “righteousness” denotes either God’s covenant faithfulness (Rom 1:17) or one’s covenant membership demonstrated by reciprocating faithfulness (Rom 4:3).

b. Works of the Law

What about the second key term, namely, “works of the law”? In recent years much debate has swirled about the meaning of this term. What does Paul mean when he writes that, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight” (Rom 3:20a)? Historically, Reformed interpreters have understood the phrase “works of the law” to refer to the Jewish attempt to merit one’s justification. In other words, its referent is legalistic, in the sense of using the law to obtain salvation.¹⁴³ This traditional interpretation, however, runs counter to the recent claims of Sanders, who argues that Judaism was not a religion of works-righteousness. Sanders argues, for example:

The frequent Christian charge against Judaism, it must be recalled, is not that some individual Jews misunderstood, misapplied and abused their religion, but that *Judaism necessarily tends* towards petty legalism, self-serving and self-deceiving casuistry, and a mixture of arrogance and a lack of confidence in God. But the surviving Jewish literature is as free of these characteristics as any I have ever read. By consistently maintaining the basic framework of *covenantal nomism*, the gift and demand of God were kept in a healthy relationship with each other, the minutiae of the law were observed on the basis of the large principles of religion and because of commitment to God, and humility before God who chose and

the covenant, and did not denote that a person was totally innocent of wrongdoing (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 204–5). Similarly, Dunn states that “to be ‘righteous’ is to be not so much acceptable to God as accepted by God—righteousness as the status which God accorded to his covenant people and in which he sustained them” (*Romans* 1–8, 203). Wright likewise states that when Paul writes, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3), “Its overall meaning must then be something like: ‘God counted Abraham’s faith as constituting covenant membership’” (Wright, *Romans*, 491; idem, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 148).

¹⁴³ Calvin, *Romans*, 69–70; also Charles Hodge, *Romans* (1835; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 81.

would ultimately redeem Israel was encouraged.¹⁴⁴

Given Sanders's research, most advocates of the NPP rule out the possibility that the works of the law refer to legalism. They rule out this possibility on the grounds that: (1) the common Israelite was already a member of the covenant and had no need to establish his salvation; and (2) membership in the covenant presupposes God's gracious election. To what, then, do works of the law refer?

According to Dunn and Wright, "works of the law" is a phrase that refers to the Jewish national boundary markers, those things that distinguish Jew from Gentile: circumcision, dietary food laws, and Sabbath observance. Dunn, for example, relying upon Sanders's covenantal nomism, argues that, in Rom 3:20,

... "works of the law" are nowhere understood here, either by his Jewish interlocutors or by Paul himself, as works which *earn* God's favor, as merit-amassing observances. They are rather seen as *badges*: they are simply what membership of the covenant people involves, what mark out the Jews as God's people; given by God for precisely that reason, they serve to demonstrate covenant status.¹⁴⁵

Dunn bases these conclusions on a host of scriptural and Second Temple citations (Lev 11:1–23; Deut 14:3–21; 1 Macc 1:62–63; Dan 1:8–16; Tob 1:10–13; Jdt 10:5; 12:1–20; Gen 2:3; Deut 5:12–15; Exod 20:8–11; Isa 56:6–8). Dunn is insistent that the traditional Reformational exegesis, begun by Luther and repeated, at least as he sees it, by heirs of the Reformation down to Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), that equates works of the law with good works in general is incorrect.¹⁴⁶ One should note, though, that Dunn has recently modified his position on this point. More will be said about this modification below. Though there are undoubtedly some differences between Dunn and Wright, the latter is in essential agreement with the conclusions of the former concerning the interpretation of the "works of the law."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 427.

¹⁴⁵ Dunn, "New Perspective," 194.

¹⁴⁶ Dunn, "New Perspective," 194, n. 34. Dunn cites the following, among others, as examples of incorrect exegesis on this point: Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951–55), 1.254; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (1966; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 139.

¹⁴⁷ See Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 146–47, 151; idem, *What Saint Paul*, 120–21;

c. Justification

Needless to say, those associated with the NPP do not define the term “justification” as it has been traditionally understood. The Westminster divines, for example, define justification as “an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone” (WSC 33). By contrast, Wright would argue that this definition has more in common with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dogmatics than it does with Paul’s teaching seen within the historical setting in first-century Palestine. Wright, for example, states that justification

in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God’s eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people. In Sanders’ terms, it was not so much about ‘getting in’, or indeed about ‘staying in’, as about ‘how you could tell who was in’. In standard Christian theological language, it wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.¹⁴⁸

Additionally, Wright contends that justification in the first century was primarily about Israel’s vindication before the Gentile nations. God had called Israel to be his special covenant people, yet in the first century the Jews were under the thumb of Rome. Israel was, according to Wright, in exile, even though they were dwelling in the land of promise. When and how, then, would God vindicate, or justify, his covenant people? When would he justify them before the nations, indicating that Israel was “in the right”?¹⁴⁹ When defining justification, then, one must keep this first-century context in the forefront, according to those associated with the NPP.

d. Summary

We have briefly surveyed the three key Pauline terms from the point of view of the NPP: righteousness, works of the law, and justification. Given these NPP-influenced definitions, it is already evident that Paul’s doctrine of

idem, *Romans*, 461, n. 97; cf. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 153–60.

¹⁴⁸ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 119.

¹⁴⁹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 203.

justification takes on an entirely different shape from the classical Protestant view set forth in its confessions. Let us proceed to examine how these NPP-influenced definitions shape the understanding of the doctrine of justification for those associated with the NPP.

3. Paul's Doctrine of Justification and the NPP

At this point in our survey, we will focus largely, though not exclusively, upon the formulations of N. T. Wright. While others associated with the NPP draw similar conclusions on justification, at the same time no NPP author has been as widely influential as Wright within the Reformed community. When Wright expounds Paul's doctrine of justification, he identifies three categories that one must consider: covenant, lawcourt, and eschatology. First, Wright argues that one must not read Paul's teaching on justification in terms of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century covenant theology, but in terms of first-century Judaism and the covenant promises God made to Abraham. Second, one must understand that justification is lawcourt language. When God made his covenant promise to Abraham, it was God's way of correcting the sin of Adam and putting the world to rights. In God's lawcourt, his people will be vindicated before the world and shown to be "in the right." Third, Paul speaks of justification in terms of eschatology. Justification is not part of some abstract system of doctrine by which people are saved, but is rooted in the decisive action of God in Jesus Christ, whereby he rescues the cosmos from sin through the Holy Spirit, bringing all things under the authority of Jesus.¹⁵⁰ From these broad contours, one can see Wright's understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification emerge.

Justification is not about the imputation of God's righteousness to the believer. Rather, justification is the vindication of the covenant people of God before the world. Justification is about demonstrating that the people of God are "in the right" before the unbelieving world, those who refused to place their faith in Jesus Christ and oppressed the people of God. Wright substantiates his understanding of justification by summarizing the overall first-century context in which one finds the NT's message of justification:

- a. The creator god [*sic*] calls Israel to be his people;
- b. Israel, currently in 'exile', is to be redeemed, precisely because she is the covenant people of this god [*sic*];

¹⁵⁰ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 117–18.

- c. Present loyalty to the covenant is the sign of future redemption;
- d. Loyalty to this covenant is being tested at this moment of crisis;
- e. At this moment, what counts as loyalty, and hence what marks out those who will be saved/vindicated/raised to life is [faith in Jesus Christ].¹⁵¹

In the light of this first-century context, then, Wright explains that the problem in Galatia was not that some were trying to merit their salvation.

Jews, the covenant people of God, were perplexed as to how one could be justified, or vindicated before the world, on the basis of faith alone, apart from the attendant badges of covenant membership, circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath.¹⁵² According to Wright, Paul's desire in his epistles to Rome and Galatia is to explain that one will be declared righteous, or a member of the covenant and vindicated before the world, not because he possesses the badges of the Torah, but because he has the sign of the new covenant, faith in Christ. Though not agreeing with Wright on every point, Dunn explains the nature of justification on this understanding in its first-century historical context:

God justifies (accepts) people through faith and not by virtue of works of the law. He was not hitting at people who thought they could earn God's goodwill by their achievements, or merit God's final acquittal on the basis of all their good deeds. That theological insight is true and of lasting importance. But it is not quite what Paul was saying. Paul's point was rather that God accepts Gentiles in the same way that he accepts any person—by grace through faith, through their openness to receive what God wishes to give them. That is to say, God accepts Gentiles as Gentiles, without requiring them to take on a Jewish life-style or change their nationality or race.¹⁵³

It appears that for Wright and Dunn, justification is not about soteriology, but ecclesiology: justification by faith is not about how one gets saved, but rather how one can identify a member of the covenant people of God.¹⁵⁴ This

¹⁵¹ Wright, *People of God*, 335.

¹⁵² Wright, *People of God*, 241.

¹⁵³ James D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 27–28.

¹⁵⁴ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 119.

brings us to another aspect that one must take into account in this understanding of justification: present and final justification.

Wright argues that there is a twofold division of justification: (1) present justification—the vindication that the covenant people possess in the present, which is based on their faith in Jesus, understood as faithful submission to his saving lordship, and indicates who will be vindicated on the final day; and (2) final or future justification—the actual declaration of being “in the right” before the world on the day of judgment.¹⁵⁵ One should note, however, that for Wright the ground of justification becomes clear in the progress from present to final justification. Commenting on Rom 8:3–4, Wright argues that, “What is spoken of here is the future verdict, that of the last day, the ‘day’ Paul described in 2.1–16. That verdict will correspond to the present one, and will follow from (though not, in that sense, be earned or merited by), the Spirit-led life of which Paul now speaks.”¹⁵⁶

Summary: When we summarize Paul’s doctrine of justification as it comes from the pen of Wright, and similarly from Dunn, we must recognize that it rotates upon the axis of ecclesiology. Justification is the declaration of who belongs to the covenant people of God in the present, those who are righteous or members of the covenant, who are marked out by faith, not works of the law like circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath. It is also the anticipation in the present of what will happen in the future at the final day. Present justification is on the basis of faith, understood as faithful obedience, which anticipates future justification on the basis of the Spirit-produced works of the believer. One can also see from this summary how the definitions of the three terms of *works of the law*, *righteousness*, and *justification* affect one’s understanding of the doctrine of justification. In our critique of the NPP, then, we will begin with matters of definition.

D. Critique of the NPP on Matters of Definition

1. Righteousness

We begin first with the NPP’s understanding of the term “righteousness.” There are some contexts where the definition of the term is genuinely a challenging exegetical question, such as the perennial question of the ob-

¹⁵⁵ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 131–32.

¹⁵⁶ Wright, *Romans*, 580.

jective versus the subjective genitive in Rom 1:17a, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed.” This is not to say, however, that there is not a majority view within the Reformed community regarding the interpretation of Rom 1:17a.¹⁵⁷ One might be able to interpret Rom 1:17a as God’s covenant faithfulness without necessarily affecting his understanding of justification. Arguing that Rom 1:17a refers to God’s covenant faithfulness, however, raises questions regarding God’s righteousness towards those who are outside the covenant. In other words, is not God righteous towards unbelievers as well as those within the covenant? There is also the recent research of Mark Seifrid, which challenges the coordination of the ideas of covenant and righteousness, as Dunn and Wright attempt to do.¹⁵⁸ In other words, righteousness is a term that encompasses God’s activity beyond the covenants with his people. There are elements of Seifrid’s argument that fail to account for the covenant of works, or creation covenant, though his overall argument raises an important question, namely: is God righteous towards those who are outside the covenant? Where the question of the definition of righteousness becomes more acute, however, is in the matter of righteousness as it is applied to the

¹⁵⁷ Historically the majority of historic Protestant and Reformed interpreters on the question of Rom 1:17a have sided with the objective genitive, or more specifically the genitive of source—the righteousness is that which God imputes to the believer rather than a quality or attribute of God (K. L. Onesti and M. T. Brauch, “Righteousness, Righteousness of God,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 833). See, e.g., Calvin, *Romans*, 27–28; Luther, *Romans*, 9; Theodore Haak, ed., *The Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible: Ordered and Appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618 and published by Authority, 1637* (London, 1657), *ad loc.*; Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Commentary on Romans* (London, 1558), *ad loc.*; John Downname, *Annotations upon All the Books of the Old and New Testaments* (London, 1657), *ad loc.*; Philip Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 70. Rom 1:17a as an objective genitive goes as far back as St. Chrysostom, whom Vermigli, for example, cites (see John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, NPNF, vol. II, ed. Philip Schaff [1889; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 349). At the same time, however, the Westminster divines in their *Annotations* acknowledge that sometimes the phrase “righteousness of God” “is the accomplishment of all his promises; for so is the righteousness of God sometimes taken for his faithfulness and mercy (Rom 3:26).”

¹⁵⁸ Mark A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2 vols., ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001–4), 1.415–42. Hereafter cited as JVN.

individual. In other words, can righteousness be defined as covenant membership?

We may begin by observing that there is no lexical evidence in either the OT or NT to support the claim that righteousness means “covenant membership.”¹⁵⁹ Wright, however, has publicly stated that he questions the methodologies of lexicographers and that the absence of lexical support for his definition of righteousness is not an obstacle. Seifrid has nevertheless demonstrated from the literature of the Second Temple that the claim that “righteousness” is a term that refers to covenant membership cannot be supported (see, e.g., Sir 9:16; 34:18–19; 35:5–6; *Pss. Sol.* 2:34–35; 3:1–12; Wis 2:12–24; 3:1–19; Tob 4:17).¹⁶⁰ Additionally, Wright’s argument does not withstand close scrutiny in a brief reconnaissance of a few scriptural texts.

For example, when Abraham negotiates with God to spare Sodom, he tries to convince God to spare the city on the pretense that there might be fifty righteous men within its confines. Abraham contrasts the righteous with the wicked (Gen 18:24–25). Yet, at this point in redemptive history, the only ones in covenant with God are Abraham and his household (Gen 15), so the righteous supposedly dwelling in Sodom could not be members of the covenant, as Wright contends. Just as in the flood judgment, righteous Noah was spared while the wicked were swept away in judgment (Gen 6:9, 12–13). Righteousness, therefore, cannot mean covenant membership. We see righteousness substantively defined, for example, in the prophets:

If a man is righteous and does what is just and right—if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread

¹⁵⁹ See Francis Brown et al., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1907; Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 841–42; R. Laird Harris et al., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 751–55; G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 12, trans. Douglas W. Scott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 239–64; Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 196–97; H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 429; Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 192–210.

¹⁶⁰ Seifrid, “Righteousness Language,” 439–40; see also idem, “Paul’s Use of Righteousness Language against Its Hellenistic Background,” in *JVN*, 2.65, n. 90.

to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully—he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek 18:5–9)¹⁶¹

In fact, this quotation from Ezekiel demonstrates that righteousness is not covenant membership but rather adherence or conformity to an ethical standard. It is this OT background and understanding of righteousness that informs the use of the term in the NT. This is what makes Paul’s statements regarding Abraham so stunning, namely, Abraham is counted righteous by faith, not on the basis of his moral conduct (Rom 4:3). Hence, righteousness, while often within a covenant context, is not to be identified with either God’s covenant faithfulness or reciprocating covenant fidelity. The NPP-influenced definition of righteousness is exegetically unsustainable.

2. Works of the Law

When it comes to the definition of the phrase “works of the law,” proponents of the NPP such as Dunn initially defined the term too narrowly. It is exegetically indefensible to maintain that “works of the law” refers only to circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance. While “works of the law” certainly include these three things, they are not restricted to them. This conclusion is evident, for example, when Paul explains that, “All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’” (Gal 3:10; cf. Deut 27:26). Nevertheless, Wright contends that Paul’s quotation of Deut 27:26 refers not to the sin of individuals, but to the pattern of national sin, exile, and restoration: “What is envisaged, is not so much the question of what happens *when this or that individual sins*, but the question of what happens when *the nation as a whole fails to keep the Torah as a whole*.”¹⁶²

Yet, one must ask, if Wright is correct, why does Paul not bring forth examples of Israel’s national sin in his argument in Galatians? Instead, Paul brings forth the example of Abraham and Sarah, who try to lay hold of the

¹⁶¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 52; see also Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 564–77.

¹⁶² Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 146.

promises of the covenant by their sinful efforts (Gal 4:22–31). Moreover, the very context of Deut 27:26 itself tells us that the people were “to keep all his commandments” (Deut 26:18; 27:1), meaning the whole body of laws in Deut 12–26.¹⁶³ A. Andrew Das notes in this regard that, “When Paul uses the phrase ‘works of the law’ in Gal 3:10 and cites Deuteronomy 27:26 (in a composite quote drawing on other statements in Deut 27–30), the Deuteronomy context indicates that Paul has in mind the law in its *entirety*, including actions done in private.”¹⁶⁴ This conclusion has also recently drawn support from one of the chief scholars associated with the NPP.

Dunn originally pioneered much of the exegetical ground work for the case on the ethnocentric understanding of the phrase “works of the law.”¹⁶⁵ In response to criticisms of his initial arguments, Dunn has conceded that “‘the works of the law,’ does, of course, refer to all or whatever the law requires, covenantal nomism as a whole.”¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, despite this concession, he does not appear to have modified his argument that the works of the law primarily deal with boundary-marker issues. The works of the law are far more than national boundary markers, though they do serve a boundary marking function (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:27–30). It was Israel, however, that sought to establish its own righteousness before God by works (Rom 9:30–10:3). The expression, therefore, refers to deeds done in obedience to the law of Moses, which would include not only circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance, but also abstaining from murder, adultery, theft, and idolatry. The works of the law, consequently, refer both to ethnic and ethical distinctives.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ See J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, AOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 388, 394; Duane L. Christiansen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34.12*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 653, 663; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 248.

¹⁶⁴ A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 158.

¹⁶⁵ See James D. G. Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Gal 3.10–14),” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 523–42; idem, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law*, 215–36, esp. 216–17.

¹⁶⁶ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 358; cf. Peter T. O’Brien, “Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?” in *JVN*, 2.278. By contrast, Wright still appears to maintain Dunn’s original position (see Wright, *Last Word*, 54–55).

¹⁶⁷ O’Brien, “Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?” 279; also see Douglas J. Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 73–100.

One can substantiate this conclusion, for example, by a perusal of the Apocrypha, the uninspired Jewish intertestamental historical books, and its insistence upon the importance of the entirety of the law and not just its ethnic-boundary functions. One finds the following examples, where almsgiving delivers from darkness (Tob 4:6–10), or judgment, the sexually pure eunuch is shown favor (Wis 3:14), one can atone for sins by honoring one's parents (Sir 3:3–4), laying up treasures according to the law can deliver one from disaster (Sir 29:11–12), and Abraham's observance of the law was the *quid pro quo* for God's covenant with him (Sir 44:20–21):

To all those who practice righteousness give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness. (Tob 4:6–10)

Blessed also is the eunuch whose hands have done no lawless deed, and who has not devised wicked things against the Lord; for special favor will be shown him for his faithfulness, and a place of great delight in the temple of the Lord. (Wis 3:14)

Those who honor their father atone for sins, and those who respect their mother are like those who lay up treasure. (Sir 3:3–4)

Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from every disaster. (Sir 29:11–12)

He kept the law of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with him; he certified the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he proved faithful. Therefore the Lord assured him with an oath that the nations would be blessed through his offspring; that he would make him as numerous as the dust of the earth, and exalt his offspring like the stars, and give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. (Sir 44:20–21)

There are other such examples that demonstrate that observance of the law clearly went beyond boundary-marker functions (1 Esdr 8:7; 2 Esdr 8:29–34; Tob 1:3; Sir 3:14, 30; 14:20–15:1; 15:15–17; 19:20–21; 28:7; 29:1, 9, 11–12; 33:23–24; 1 Macc 1:43–64; 2:21; 13:48; 14:14–15; 2 Macc 12:39–45).

Given this evidence, one must conclude that when Paul uses the phrase “works of the law,” he has in mind the attempt to create one’s own righteousness by obedience to the law, not its supposed boundary-marker function.¹⁶⁸ In other words, contrary to the protestations of Sanders, Dunn, Wright, et al., legalism was present in first-century Judaism, and it was an issue Paul confronted on numerous occasions (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:10; Eph 2:8–10; Titus 3:5).¹⁶⁹ In fact, an examination of certain Second Temple materials will easily demonstrate the presence of legalism as it pertains to one’s justification (1 Macc 2:52; Sir 44:19–21; *Jub.* 16:28; 24:10–11; 4QMMT). The author of *Jubilees*, for example, states that “Abraham was perfect in all of his actions with the LORD and was pleasing through righteousness all the days of his life” (*Jub.* 23:10). Paul, however, says that Abraham was “ungodly” (Rom 4:3–5). Similarly, one finds in the Qumran interpretation of Hab 2:4, “The righteous shall live by his faith,” that “this concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness” (1QpHab 8:1–3).¹⁷⁰ This interpretation runs contrary to Paul’s, who emphasizes faith alone to the exclusion of the observance of the law or suffering in justification (Rom 1:17; 3:20–22).

3. Justification

Those associated with the NPP define the NT teaching on justification primarily in terms of Israel’s vindication before the Gentile nations. Foundational to this understanding of justification is one’s understanding of first-century Judaism and, more importantly, whether Jesus, Paul, and the other

¹⁶⁸ For further argumentation, see J. V. Fesko, “N. T. Wright and the Works of the Law,” *Faith and Mission* 22/1 (2004): 64–83.

¹⁶⁹ See S. J. Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3.21–4.25,” in JVN, 2.147–84; idem, *Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 37–194; Moisés Silva, “Faith versus Works of Law in Galatians,” in JVN, 2.217–48.

¹⁷⁰ Translation from Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (1962; New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

authors of the NT understand justification in this manner. First, there has been a significant question raised regarding the uniform picture of the first-century Jewish worldview as Wright describes it.¹⁷¹ Specifically, is his thesis of Israel in exile and that Jesus brings it to an end one that can withstand scrutiny? There is evidence from first-century literature, for example, that points to the idea that many Jews believed that the return from exile was already in progress long before the advent of Christ (Bar 4:36; 5:5–9). The book of Judith also speaks about the end of exile:

As long as they did not sin against their God they prospered, for the God who hates iniquity is with them. But when they departed from the way he had prescribed for them, they were utterly defeated in many battles and were led away captive to a foreign land. The temple of their God was razed to the ground, and their towns were occupied by their enemies. But now they have returned to their God, and have come back from the places where they were scattered, and have occupied Jerusalem, where their sanctuary is, and have settled in the hill country, because it was uninhabited. (Jdt 5:17–19; also see 4:1–5)

Based upon this and other evidence, Seifrid concludes that, “It is not at all clear, therefore, that there was a widespread sense among Jews of Paul’s day that Israel remained in exile in the way that this theory demands.” Moreover, when one surveys Paul’s statements about his preconversion life (Phil 3:4–

¹⁷¹ See, e.g., Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 21–25; idem, “Unrighteous by Faith: Apostolic Proclamation in Rom 1:18–3:20,” in JVN, 2.119, n. 33, 2.123; Craig A. Evans, “Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. Carey C. Newman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 77–100; Richard B. Hays, “Adam, Israel, Christ: The Question of Covenant in the Theology of Romans: A Response to Leander E. Keck and N. T. Wright,” in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3, *Romans*, ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 68–86; Douglas J. Moo, “Israel and the Law in Rom 5–11: Interaction with the New Perspective,” in JVN, 2.201–5; Peter T. O’Brien, “Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?” 285–86; Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 137–38; Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgment and Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12–20; Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 136–41.

6), he mentions nothing that leads us to believe that he was part of a nation suffering in exile and looking for vindication before the Gentile nations.¹⁷²

One must also challenge the notion that justification is the eschatological definition of who belongs to the covenant people. As we have seen, Wright contends that justification is not so much about soteriology as it is about ecclesiology, not so much about salvation as about the church. Yet, one has to force Wright's understanding of justification upon the standard passages of Scripture to which one might appeal to define justification. First, when Paul states that "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3), Wright argues that "righteousness" means covenant membership.¹⁷³ As we have seen above, however, defining righteousness as covenant membership is exegetically indefensible. Wright similarly contends that when Abraham believed God, his faith was a badge of his covenant membership.¹⁷⁴ While members of the covenant certainly possess faith in Christ, Paul does not attribute to faith the role of a sign of covenant membership. The new covenant boundary marker is not faith, as Wright contends, but baptism, which has replaced circumcision (Col 2:11–12).¹⁷⁵

Second, God's people have *always* possessed faith, regardless of the covenant signs of circumcision or baptism, as Rom 4:11 and Heb 11 make abundantly clear. Wright's attempts, therefore, to read Rom 4:1–8 in terms of ecclesiology rather than soteriology, that is, that righteousness is covenant membership rather than the imputed obedience of Christ, as it has traditionally been read, fail on at least these two fronts. Justification is about soteriology, as our confessional standards have defined it (WCF 11.1; WLC 70–73; WSC 33). Justification is "an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone" (WSC 33). We will explore the nature of the doctrine of justification in greater detail below.

4. Summary

With these matters of definition established, namely *righteousness*,

¹⁷² Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 23–25.

¹⁷³ Wright, *Romans*, 490–91.

¹⁷⁴ Wright, *Romans*, 492.

¹⁷⁵ See J. V. Fesko, "N. T. Wright and the Sign of the Covenant," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 25 (2005): 30–39.

works of the law, and *justification*, we may move forward to critique the NPP's understanding of justification proper. We are beginning to see that the doctrine of justification largely, though not exclusively, hinges upon the proper definition of these key terms. If righteousness is covenant membership, and works of the law are its old badges of membership for the people of God, then the NPP is correct—justification is about the definition of who belongs to the people of God. If, however, righteousness is adherence to a moral standard, and works of the law are the attempt by Jew or Gentile to adhere to that moral standard, that is, the law, by obedience, then justification is about soteriology. We have seen enough exegetical reasons to reject the NPP's understanding of its key definitions, which will have an impact upon the tenability of its doctrine of justification. Let us, nevertheless, move forward so we may critique its understanding of the doctrine of justification.

E. Critique of the NPP and Its Understanding of Paul's Doctrine of Justification

In our initial survey of the NPP's understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification, we focused largely, though not exclusively, upon N. T. Wright. Wright, as we saw, identifies three major categories that he sees connected with justification in Paul: covenant, lawcourt, and eschatology. Moreover, we also saw that Wright divides justification into present and future categories. We should first survey the three categories that Wright proposes.

I. Covenant

Wright is correct to state that justification for Paul is covenantal. He is incorrect, however, in his understanding of the substance of the covenant. Wright insists that one must understand by the category of covenant not the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century covenant theology, but the worldview of first-century Judaism.¹⁷⁶ In other words, Israel was looking for the fulfillment of the covenant promises that God made to Abraham. God had called Israel through the call to Abraham; they were to be his covenant people, rule

¹⁷⁶ See Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 17. One wonders how Wright can so easily sweep away classic Reformed covenant theology when he has admitted his own ignorance on the subject (see Wright, *Fresh Perspective*, 13). How can one categorically dismiss what one has not read?

the nations, and put the world to rights.¹⁷⁷ One surely does not want to deny the vital role that Abraham plays in redemptive history; Paul calls the people of God “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7).

Yet, one must ask whether Paul, for example, couches the doctrine of justification covenantally, as Wright argues. Does Paul articulate the doctrine of justification in the context of the so-called covenantal understanding of first-century Judaism, or is there a broader covenantal context? The answer, of course, is that Paul sees justification in a broader covenantal context. The covenant does not simply extend to Abraham, nor does Paul fix the reader’s gaze upon issues that center upon Israel’s relationship to first-century history. Rather, most comprehensively Paul fixes the reader’s gaze upon the covenant-historical realities of God’s dealings with mankind, not just Israel, in the first and last Adams, dealings that the Westminster divines have called the covenants of works and grace.

Paul’s outlook is much broader than first-century Israel, which is manifest in the evidence that Paul marshals to make his case. J. Gresham Machen observes, for example, “It is significant that when, after the conversion, Paul seeks testimonies to the universal sinfulness of man, he looks not to contemporary Judaism, but to the Old Testament. At this point, as elsewhere, Paulinism is based not upon later developments but upon the religion of the Prophets and the Psalms.”¹⁷⁸ It is fair to say that Paul cites the OT exclusively and nowhere cites the literature of first-century Judaism.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, as is evident from Paul’s repeated appeals to the first and second Adams (Rom 5:12–19; 1 Cor 15:22, 45), Paul does not see any first-century enemy, such as the Roman Empire, as the great threat, but instead the enemies are Satan, sin, and death (Gen 3:15; cf. Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 15:54–58). It was the first Adam who brought the world under the dominion of Satan, sin, and death, and it is the second Adam who brings people out from under the dominion of this unholy triumvirate and into the kingdom of God (Col 1:13–14).

Historically, within the Reformed tradition these biblical categories have been placed under the theological constructs of the covenant of works, the failed work of the first Adam, and the covenant of grace, and the faithful work of the second Adam (WCF 7; WLC 20, 30–35; WSC 12, 20). Therefore,

¹⁷⁷ Wright, *People of God*, 335.

¹⁷⁸ Machen, *Origin of Paul’s Religion*, 180.

¹⁷⁹ Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 10–37; see also Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 17.

we can formally agree with Wright that justification is covenantal. We must, however, disagree with him materially because the NT sees justification in terms of the broken covenant of works and the work of Christ through the covenant of grace. We can agree with Earle Ellis on the question of whether Paul was interested in first-century questions: “If he was a ‘child of his times,’ they were for Paul the times of the Messiah, His Cross, and resurrection, and His revelation of the true meaning of Scripture. Paul was a disciple of Christ not of Gamaliel.”¹⁸⁰

2. Lawcourt

In Wright’s understanding of justification, he correctly argues that justification is forensic or lawcourt language. Again, we are in formal agreement with such an assessment, but must register significant material disagreement. There are two elements that feature in Wright’s understanding of the lawcourt: (1) its orientation, and (2) its nature. Wright argues, for example, that in first-century Judaism “God himself was seen as the judge; evildoers (i.e. the Gentiles, and renegade Jews) would finally be judged and punished; God’s faithful people (i.e. Israel, or at least the true Israelites) would be vindicated.”¹⁸¹ With this understanding of the Jewish lawcourt, Wright also rejects the idea of the imputation of righteousness in justification. Wright states concerning the defendant and the plaintiff,

Within the technical language of the law court, ‘righteous’ means, for these two persons, the *status they have when the court finds in their favor*. Nothing more, nothing less. . . . If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.¹⁸²

These two assertions concerning the direction of the lawcourt and the rejec-

¹⁸⁰ Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 83.

¹⁸¹ Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 118; also idem, “Justification,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 359.

¹⁸² Wright, *What Saint Paul*, 98.

tion of imputation are fundamentally at odds with the historical Reformed understanding of this aspect of justification.

First, one must seriously question the idea that justification is about the vindication of the people of God before the world. The NT does not represent the lawcourt facing the world, but rather Paul's concern is seeking justification before the tribunal of God: "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20; cf. Gal 3:11). According to Paul, the one who has been justified has peace with God: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). The element of vindication before the world is also based on the specious claims that first-century Judaism considered itself in exile, an idea lacking sufficient evidence that has been criticized from multiple corners of the NT guild.

Second, regarding Wright's rejection of imputation, based on the Jewish lawcourt model, one should again question this assertion. Seifrid explains:

At this point Wright is led astray by his model of the 'Jewish law court,' which he seems to have created without much attention to the relevant biblical texts. When Paul echoes Psalm 98:1–3 in his announcement of the revelation of God's righteousness in Rom 1:17, he takes up the biblical tradition which expressed Israel's hope for the establishment of God's justice. By its very nature such justice is a gift to the world. Wright's abstract model of the 'court' likewise overlooks Christ's cross and resurrection which, according to Paul, constitutes the justifying event—the 'law-court' so to speak—announced in his gospel.¹⁸³

Along these lines, if Wright is correct in his assertion that righteousness is something that cannot be transferred, then what does Paul mean when he writes that those who are justified "receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17; cf. Eph 2:8)? Paul, contrary to Wright, thinks that righteousness is something that can be passed across the courtroom.

Some might counter that Wright's rejection of imputation is not solely based upon his abstract model of the lawcourt, but ultimately upon his understanding of key biblical texts, such as 2 Cor 5:21. While Wright has put forth exegetical support for his rejection of imputation, it is less than con-

¹⁸³ Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language," 66–67.

vincing. Wright's definition of the term *righteousness*, for example, colors his rather idiosyncratic exegesis of 2 Cor 5:21.¹⁸⁴ He argues that when Paul writes, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God," the phrase, "become the righteousness of God," means "become the covenant faithfulness of God."¹⁸⁵ If Wright's definition of righteousness as covenant faithfulness is in error, which we have demonstrated above that it is, then his interpretation of 2 Cor 5:21 falls.¹⁸⁶

Concerning Rom 5:12–19, the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of imputation, Wright argues that "Paul's parallel between Adam and Christ, emphasizes the primal sin as somehow involving all subsequent humanity (it is not necessary, to hold this view, to espouse along with it any particular theory of

¹⁸⁴ For more responsible exegesis of 2 Cor 5:21, see C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1973), 179; M. D. Hooker, "Interchange in Christ," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971): 349; Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 455–56, n. 207; G. K. Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Cor 5–7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Cor 6.14–7.1," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 559–60; similarly, Seyoon Kim, "2 Cor 5:11–21 and the Origins of Paul's Conception of Reconciliation," *Novum Testamentum* 39 (1997): 376, 380, 383.

¹⁸⁵ N. T. Wright, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God: 2 Cor 5:21," in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 2, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, ed. David M. Hay (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 200–8.

¹⁸⁶ The Reformed tradition has hinged its understanding of justification upon the doctrine of imputation. See, e.g., John Calvin, *2 Corinthians and Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, CNTC, trans. T. A. Smail, ed. David W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 81–82. In the commentary produced by the Synod of Dort we read: "For him that knew no sin [that is, who was free from all sin, 1 Pet 2.22] has he made sin for us [that is, a sacrifice for sin as Lev 7.2. Or sin by imputing our sins; as he is also said to have been made a curse Gal 3.13] that we might become righteousness of God [that is, righteousness before God. Or that the righteousness of God might be imputed to us, Rom 4.4–5] in him. [namely, Christ, in respect that we are in him, and his righteousness is imputed unto us, Rom 8.1]" (*Annotations, ad loc.*). Likewise, the commentary produced by the Westminster assembly states, "That is, a sacrifice for sin, or he has imputed the sins of the world to Christ (who was most righteous and innocent himself) and has put upon him all the punishment and malediction due to us. That all the faithful may be reputed before God as holy and perfect as righteousness itself, by virtue of Christ's righteousness, which is given to them by God, and only is able to stand in his judgment.... In Christ, in regard that we are in him, and that his righteousness is imputed to us. *Non nostra, nec in nobis Ita Hieronym*" (*Annotations, ad loc.*).

the mode by which sin is then transmitted).”¹⁸⁷ Yet, one must ask, why then does Paul set up the parallel between Adam and Christ if he is not interested in the manner of the transmission of sin? How can Paul say that when Adam sinned, all sinned? There is little trouble in understanding how Adam is subject to death: he sinned. But why does death spread to mankind? Paul answers quite succinctly, “Because all sinned.” Paul with unmistakable clarity asserts that the universal reign of death rests upon the sin of the one man Adam. This is evident in v. 12 when we compare “sin came into the world through one man,” and what v. 18 calls “one trespass,” and v. 19 calls, “one man’s disobedience.”¹⁸⁸ Contra Wright, there is no question that Paul has in mind the primal sin of Adam, distinct from the sins of mankind. Rather, as in 2 Cor 5:21, Paul sets up a parallel, this time between the sin of Adam and the obedience of Christ: “The parallel to the imputation of Adam’s sin is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Or to use Paul’s own terms, being ‘constituted sinners’ through the disobedience of Adam is parallel to being ‘constituted righteous’ through the obedience of Christ.”¹⁸⁹

In Wright’s attempts to reject this understanding of imputation in Paul, he seems to have created two major problems. First, if Wright argues that Paul does not have the manner of the transmission of sin in view, then Wright does not merely deny that Paul teaches the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer, but also that he teaches the imputation of Adam’s sin to all of mankind. Second, Wright rejects the idea of imputation because it does not fit the model of the Jewish lawcourt—the judge does not communicate or impart anything to the plaintiff or defendant. Yet, this understanding fails to see the grandeur of justification and more broadly our redemption as taught by Paul. Yes, the lawcourt is certainly in view when one considers his doctrine of justification, but Wright’s argumentation proves too much. Wright objects to imputation on the grounds that such conduct is uncharacteristic of the judge in the lawcourt. On these grounds we would also have to deny that Paul teaches that the atonement is penal-substitutionary in nature, because what judge ever sends his own son to die in the place of the defendant? Wright gives his model of the lawcourt greater weight than the actual statements of

¹⁸⁷ Wright, *Romans*, 526; cf. Cornelius P. Venema, “N. T. Wright on Romans 5:12–21 and Justification,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 16 (2005): 29–81.

¹⁸⁸ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 19–20.

¹⁸⁹ Murray, *Imputation*, 76.

Scripture. How so?

In what lawcourt, Jewish or not, is the judge both “just and the justifier” as it concerns sinners who place their faith in Christ (Rom 3:26)? Yes, justification is a lawcourt concept, but the tribunal is unlike any other lawcourt in the cosmos—it is the place where the Father sends his Son to die in the place of the one who rightly stands condemned. In all of Wright’s efforts to deny imputation in Paul, he seems to miss these important themes, namely the discontinuities between the earthly and heavenly lawcourts, and so misunderstands the heart of Paul’s gospel. Moreover, he commits a fundamental theological error in reversing the roles of archetypal and ectypal theology.¹⁹⁰ All earthly courts are analogous to the one true heavenly court. The ectype, the copy or analogy, does not inform the archetype, or pattern, but reflects it. What about the last category, namely eschatology and justification?

3. Eschatology

Wright has correctly argued that justification is eschatological, in that it is the fulfillment of the long-awaited covenant promises to Abraham and the covenant people of God. Where Wright goes astray, however, is in tying justification to the eschatological definition of who belongs to the covenant people of God.¹⁹¹ Eschatology, however, is not simply about defining who belongs to the people of God, or the church, ecclesiology. There is no church apart from the application of Christ’s saving work. Or, there is no ecclesiology apart from the work of the last, or eschatological, Adam. This is evident, for example, in the two-age structure of redemptive history characterized by the two Adams. Paul dwells upon this point when he writes, “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45).¹⁹² Concerning this verse Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) observes:

¹⁹⁰ For the history of this long-standing theological principle in Reformed theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 225–37; Willem J. Van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 319–36. Calvin, though not in form, uses this concept, see *Institutes*, 1.10.2; see also Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 16–18.

¹⁹¹ Wright, “Justification,” 359.

¹⁹² Modified ESV.

Most significant of all, however, is the designation of Christ as the ‘eschatos Adam’ vs. 45, where ‘last’ is entirely steeped in eschatological meaning, for this ‘last Adam’ is the fountain-head of the resurrection, vs. 22, 23, a ‘quickening Spirit,’ ‘of heaven’ and ‘heavenly,’ vs. 47–49, all this referring to the final celestial state and the conditions pertaining thereto, such as the peculiar kind of (bodily) image to be borne by believers after their resurrection.¹⁹³

Christ, therefore, is the fountainhead of the eschatological age.

Where the connection between eschatology and justification clearly emerges is with the resurrection of Christ, in that all soteric experience derives from solidarity in Christ’s resurrection and involves existence in the new creation age, inaugurated by his resurrection. This is no more evident than when Paul writes that Christ “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). The believer’s justification flows from Christ’s resurrection, which is an eschatological event, as Christ is the firstfruits of the great resurrection harvest (1 Cor 15:20–28; cf. Dan 12:1–2).¹⁹⁴ Concerning Rom 4:25, though, Wright still tries to force his justification–ecclesiology connection upon the text. Wright states, “If faithful Jesus is demonstrated to be Messiah by the resurrection, the resurrection also declares in principle that all those who belong to Jesus, all those who respond in faith to God’s faithfulness revealed in him, are themselves part of the true covenant family promised to Abraham.”¹⁹⁵ Yet, Paul does not make the same connection as Wright. Paul explicitly makes the resurrection–soteriology connection: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). Therefore, to Paul’s way of thinking, as long as Christ remains dead, Satan and sin are triumphant, or, more broadly, the dominion of the old aeon remains unbroken.

So, yes, justification is eschatological, but not in the way that Wright explains. It is not an eschatological definition of the people of God, but the inbreaking of the eschatological age, the outpouring of the power of the age to come, the Holy Spirit, manifest in the resurrection of Christ, bringing about the victory over sin and death, ensuring the justification of the people of God. Christ has been raised, and therefore his people are no longer in their sin,

¹⁹³ Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 10.

¹⁹⁴ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 151.

¹⁹⁵ Wright, *Romans*, 504.

because God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of his Son on their behalf.

4. Present and Future Justification

There is the last issue that we must explore, namely the question of present and future justification. As we saw above, one of the features of Wright's understanding of justification is that he divides it into present and future categories. Once again, commenting on Rom 8:3–4, Wright argues: "What is spoken of here is the future verdict, that of the last day, the 'day' Paul described in 2:1–16. That verdict will correspond to the present one, and will follow from (though not, in that sense, be earned or merited by), the Spirit-led life of which Paul now speaks."¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere he writes: "The whole point about 'justification by faith' is that it is something which happens *in the present time* (Rom 3:26) as a proper anticipation of the eventual judgment which will be announced, on the basis of the whole life led, in the future (Rom 2:1–16)."¹⁹⁷

Wright believes, then, that present justification is a declaration in view of one's obedient submission to Jesus as Lord, whereas his future justification is the declaration on the final day which is based upon the Spirit-led life of the believer. Wright argues, therefore, that the ground of one's present justification is faith in Christ, whereas the ground of one's future justification is the believer's Spirit-produced works. If anyone is in doubt that this is Wright's view, his own words clearly demonstrate it. Writing on Paul's ground of hope at the final judgment, Wright states:

This is why, when Paul looks ahead to the future and asks, as well one might, what god [*sic*] will say on the last day, he holds up as his joy and crown, not the merits and death of Jesus, but the churches he has planted who remain faithful to the gospel. The path from initial faith to final resurrection (and resurrection we must remind ourselves, constitutes rescue, that is salvation, from death itself) lies through holy and faithful Spirit-led service, including suffering.¹⁹⁸

Wright's view seems to have more in common with the Qumran commentary on Hab 2:4 than Paul (cf. 1QpHab 8:1–3; Rom 1:17; 3:28). Dunn holds

¹⁹⁶ Wright, *Romans*, 580.

¹⁹⁷ Wright, *Fresh Perspective*, 57.

¹⁹⁸ Wright, *Fresh Perspective*, 148.

to a similar view regarding present and future justification.¹⁹⁹ This construction, however, goes against the very principles that Paul sets out regarding the ground of justification and the place of works.

The Scriptures do not speak of two justifications. For example, Paul writes that “we have now been justified by his blood” (Rom 5:9a). Paul’s use of an aorist participle δικαιωθευτες and the adverb νυν indicate that justification is an accomplished reality.²⁰⁰ Nowhere does Paul state that there is a second justification to follow. The absence of a second justification is evident when Paul goes on to state that, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10). Douglas Moo points out the parallel between vv. 9 and 10:²⁰¹

verse 9

We have now been justified
by his blood, much more

shall we be saved by him
from the wrath of God.

verse 10

If while we were enemies we were
reconciled to God by the death of
his Son, much more, now that we
are reconciled,

shall we be saved by his life.

This parallel reveals that justification is a present reality pronounced over the sinner who believes in Christ. The “now” adds the fine distinction of the continuing “just” status of those who are acquitted. Now in vv. 9–10 there is a future element of which Paul speaks, but he does not use the term “justified” but rather the phrase, “shall we be saved.”

Paul’s use of the future passive verb σωθησομεθα reveals that there is a future aspect of our redemption, or our salvation, not that there is a future or second justification.²⁰² As Joseph Fitzmeyer observes, “A favor still greater than justification itself will be manifested to the Christian in the eschatological salvation that is to come.” He goes on to state that, “Justification is subordinated to salvation, and the latter is regarded as something begun but still to

¹⁹⁹ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 104–5; idem, *Theology of Paul*, 467, 488.

²⁰⁰ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 262–63.

²⁰¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 309.

²⁰² Moo, *Romans*, 310–11.

be consummated or brought to its full expression (10:9, 13; 11:14, 26); yet that consummation is guaranteed.”²⁰³ Clearly we see from Rom 5:9–10 that there is one justification and it is grounded upon the work of Christ. That there is one justification has been upheld by the historic Reformed witness, which is manifest in the creeds of the Reformed church.²⁰⁴

Our doctrinal standards do not speak of a second justification, but rather in terms of an open acknowledgement and acquittal on the day of judgment: “What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment? A. At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and *acquitted*” (WLC 90, emphasis added; cf. WSC 38). Note how John Flavel (c. 1630–91) explains WSC 38 and how justification relates to the final judgment: “How does Christ’s acquittance now, differ from that at judgment? A. They differ in respect to publicness; this is secret in the believer’s bosom, and that open before men and angels.”²⁰⁵ So, it is fair to say that the Reformed church has recognized that our future salvation will include the declaration at the resurrection and final judgment that openly confirms our justification, in distinction from its secret reality in the present. But the Reformed church does not affirm that there are two separate justifications.²⁰⁶

The Reformed church has historically rejected notions of a second justification, not only because the idea is unscriptural, but in contrast to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification: Rome teaches that the first justification is by faith in Christ and is conferred in baptism *ex opere operato*, the second justification is based upon the believer’s sanctification.²⁰⁷ This teaching is reflected in the decrees of the Council of Trent: “Having, therefore, been thus justified ... they, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further

²⁰³ Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 400.

²⁰⁴ See, e.g., the Belgic Confession, § 23; Heidelberg Catechism 1, 37, 38, 56, 59, 61; Second Helvetic Confession, § 15; Canons of Dort, § 2, art. 3, rej. 4; WCF 11; WSC 33; WLC 69–71.

²⁰⁵ John Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism*, in *The Works of John Flavel*, 6 vols. (1820; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 6.214.

²⁰⁶ See John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Gould (1850–53; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965–68), 5.159–60.

²⁰⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 1994), 482, § 1192.

justified.”²⁰⁸ In other words, the second justification is the declaration that a person is actually righteous, based upon one’s faith cooperating with good works. Against this backdrop, we can see why the Reformed church has rejected the idea of two justifications.

In view of these considerations, we may conclude that Wright’s NPP understanding of future justification is antithetical to Scripture and at odds with the historic witness of the Reformed community. In fact, regarding future justification, Wright’s view has more in common with the Roman Catholic view than it does with the historic Reformed view because his view of future justification is based upon the Spirit-produced works of the believer.

5. Summary

We have seen that Wright is correct to say that justification is covenantal, forensic, and eschatological. Though he is formally correct with the use of these categories, he is materially incorrect. Justification is covenantal, not in the sense of first-century Judaism, but in terms of the fulfillment of the first gospel promise (Gen 3:15) and the broken covenant of works. Justification is forensic, but judgment is oriented towards the throne of God, not the world. And justification is eschatological, not as the ecclesiological definition of the people of God, but rather as the inbreaking of the eschaton with the salvation of God’s people. Lastly, the Scriptures neither speak of a second justification in the future nor place the ground of justification in the believer’s Spirit-produced works, but in the finished work of Christ alone.

F. Concluding Observations

In our critique of the NPP, one should come to the same conclusion that Alister McGrath has reached: “If Sanders or Wright is correct, Martin Luther is wrong.”²⁰⁹ The truth of McGrath’s statement has been demonstrated in this survey. While one may appreciate aspects of the NPP, there are certain elements that are incompatible with the system of doctrine contained in the Scriptures. One might argue, for example, that Reformed interpreters have sometimes relied upon a caricature of the Judaism of Paul’s day rather than a

²⁰⁸ Council of Trent, Session 6, Chapter 10, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 2.99.

²⁰⁹ Alister E. McGrath, “Reality, Symbol and History: Theological Reflections on N. T. Wright’s Portrayal of Jesus,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, ed. Newman, 169.

careful analysis of primary sources, and in this respect appreciate the NPP. To say, however, that righteousness is covenant membership and that the works of the law Paul opposes for justification are ethnic or national markers, conclusions that Sanders, Dunn, and Wright hold in one form or another, has the effect of locating the doctrine of justification within an entirely different matrix from that in which it has been traditionally understood. McGrath is therefore accurate: if Sanders or Wright is correct, then Luther, Calvin, and the historic Reformed understanding of the doctrine of justification is incorrect.

This general conclusion means that the following points are out of accord with Scripture and our doctrinal standards:

1. “Righteousness” defined as covenant membership rather than moral equity, or adherence to a moral standard.
2. “Works of the law” for justification understood as boundary markers identifying Israel as God’s covenant people.
3. Justification only as vindication.
4. A second or future justification that has a different ground from one’s justification by faith.
5. Shifting the ground of justification from the finished work of Christ to the Spirit-produced works of the believer.
6. Denial of the imputation of the active and/or passive obedience of Christ.
7. Compromising the self-authenticating and self-interpreting nature of the Scriptures by giving the literature of Second Temple Judaism undue interpretive weight.

G. Suggested Reading

Officers, sessions, and presbyteries of the OPC should be familiar, therefore, with the exegetical, historical, and theological issues at stake surrounding the NPP. The bibliography on NPP and the doctrine of justification is legion, nevertheless the following resources are noteworthy and should be carefully studied:

Carson, D. A., Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, editors. *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. Volume 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

This is an important volume and engages the NPP on an academic level. Knowledge of the biblical languages, Greek and Hebrew, is necessary. This volume has key exegetical, historical, and historical-theological information that makes it a must-read.

Waters, Guy Prentiss. *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul: A Review and Response*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004.

This is a mid-level introduction and analysis of the NPP. There are helpful chapters on the history of the development of the NPP and analysis of key figures in the current debate. It is written on a semi-academic level and is more accessible for the layman.

Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

This is a revised version of Westerholm's *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). Though Westerholm writes from a Lutheran perspective, his work is an excellent scholarly survey of the key players, issues, and biblical texts. Knowledge of the biblical languages is necessary.

Wright, N. T., *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

In any debate, it is important to hear both sides. In this regard, Wright's volume is key reading for the officer who wants to hear one associated with the NPP apply aspects of the NPP to Paul's doctrine of justification.

_____. *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

This is one of Wright's most recently published books, in which he expands material he originally developed in *What Saint Paul Really Said*. It is a broad survey of Paul's theology in its first-century setting. This book also is a precursor to Wright's fourth installment in his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series. This book is written at a mid-scholarly level, though the layman should be able to access the materials therein, as the book is based upon several public lecture series Wright delivered on Paul's theology, including the 2005 Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference.

IV

THE FEDERAL VISION

A. Introduction

Among the tasks assigned to this Committee by the 71st (2004) General Assembly was a mandate to “critique the teachings of the ... ‘Federal Vision’ and other like teachings concerning the doctrine of justification and other related doctrines.” While what follows does interact with the Federal Vision (FV) as it relates to the doctrine of justification, this part of the report also seeks to engage the FV across the broader range of its teachings, inasmuch as its doctrine of justification cannot be fairly abstracted from its wider approach and concerns. This part of our report then begins with sections detailing the rise of the FV, the background to it, and something of its positive and negative contributions before proceeding to deal with its theology, including its soteriology and doctrine of justification. It should be noted that this section of the report relies on the earlier exegetical argumentation of our report, cross-referenced at appropriate points. Insofar as we have already treated the relevant portions of Scripture, we will focus primarily on the Westminster Standards, to which many FV proponents subscribe. First of all, however, it may prove useful in these initial sections to set forth the major players, to locate the FV historically, and to give some general assessment before treating the substance of the teachings of the FV.

B. The Rise of the Federal Vision

The Rev. Steve Wilkins, pastor of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Monroe, Louisiana, at the annual pastor’s conference held in his church in January 2002, invited several men to join him in articulating what he and they had begun to call “the Federal Vision.”²¹⁰ Given the location of

²¹⁰ Perhaps it is helpful here to note that “federal” is employed in this respect to indicate “covenantal.” The word “federal” derives from the Latin *foedus*, which means “covenant” (cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986], 119–20). It has most commonly been used in this ad-

the conference, others began to refer to what supporters called the “Federal Vision” as the “Auburn Avenue Theology.” The men invited to make presentations on the FV, along with Pastor Wilkins of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (AAPC), were the Rev. Steve Schlissel, pastor of Messiah’s Congregation in New York City; the Rev. Norman Shepherd, a retired CRC pastor and former professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (1964–1982); and the Rev. Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. Mr. Shepherd was unable to attend the meeting, and the Rev. John Barach, former pastor of Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Grand Prairie, Alberta, agreed to take his place. The project that these men (and others thereafter) undertook at that conference and in succeeding conferences and publications involved, as they saw it, a revitalization and development of the doctrine of the covenant and of the church.²¹¹

No small dispute erupted in the wake of this conference.²¹² These men who had spoken at Auburn Avenue soon found themselves at the center of controversy in the rather small world of confessional Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Events that unfolded in the aftermath of the 2002 AAPC Conference made it clear that the FV was not monolithic and that not all who espoused it agreed on all points. Nonetheless, FV proponents agreed

jectival form to refer to the covenantal position of Adam and Christ as being that of *federal* headship.

²¹¹ It is the case that the men invited to the 2002 AAPC Pastors’ Conference, together with some associated and allied with them, as well as others not necessarily connected to these men, had been writing and speaking along these lines for some time. It is outside the scope of this report to document this, other than to point to the kind of materials giving further background cited by, e.g., Guy Waters in his work on the FV, *Covenant Theology Improved? Assessing the Federal Vision* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, forthcoming). The following footnote will indicate why the lectures given in January 2002 in Monroe at AAPC (recordings available at www.auburnavenue.org) created the kind of uproar that they did.

²¹² Following on the previous footnote, much of the controversy that ensued in the wake of the 2002 AAPC Conference was due in no small measure to the condemnation in June 2002 of the AAPC teachings by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (RPCUS), a small Presbyterian denomination of less than a dozen churches. Many of these materials from the RPCUS point of view are available on their website (www.rpcus.com), and one of their ministers, John Otis, has written a book-length critique, even as others from an FV stance are available on the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church website (www.auburnavenue.org), both having links to other relevant sites.

on enough points to raise concerns among many who regarded themselves as more confessional churchmen, seeing FV supporters as innovative and promoting novelty at best. The expression of this concern among those who question the trajectory of the FV ranges from relatively mild disapprobation to outright declarations of heresy.

The errors most often alleged by the growing body of FV opponents include, but are not limited to, the FV's positions on the following: denial of the covenant of works, blurring of the law/gospel distinction, denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in justification, failure to affirm the definitive nature of justification in this life, tendency to merge faith and faithfulness as instrumental in justification, rejection of the visible/invisible church distinction, sacramentalism approaching an *ex opere operato* position, and mono-covenantalism that not only tends to identify covenant and election but sees only one covenant in God and between God and man. It has been noted by more than a few that there is a particular irony in denominating this position "the Federal Vision," when, in fact, some of what the promoters of the FV seek to forward is at odds with classic federal theology as expressed in the Reformed confessions, particularly the Westminster Standards.

Given the outcry raised against the FV, Pastor Wilkins called Pastors Barach, Schlissel, and Wilson together again to join him in responding to opponents of the FV. Rev. Wilkins also invited some fellow Reformed churchmen who had expressed reservations about the FV to engage in personal dialog with those who supported it. Thus, Dr. Joseph Pipa, president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; the Rev. Carl Robbins, pastor of Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Greenville, South Carolina; Dr. Morton Smith, professor and/or president in several Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries and former stated clerk of the PCA; and the Rev. R. C. Sproul, Jr., editor of *Tabletalk* and director of the Highlands Study Center, all came to Monroe in January 2003 to interact with and respond to the tenets set forth by the men articulating the FV. By and large, the proponents of the FV reiterated what they had said in 2002, as Schlissel wryly noted in reflecting on what he had said a year earlier: "I agree with me."²¹³ The opponents of the FV engaged in a critique that, on the whole, seemed to have little significant impact on the positions articulated by the FV men.

Dr. E. Calvin Beisner, professor at Knox Theological Seminary (KTS), recounts, in the volume cited below, that he and others who have good

²¹³ AAPC 2003, recording of Schlissel's talk, "What Does the Lord Require?"

friends on both sides of the FV debate have been distressed over not so much the debate itself but the tone of the debate, particularly the high temperature of much of the rhetoric in the debate.²¹⁴ An anonymous wealthy donor, desiring a more dispassionate and tempered discussion of the issues, provided an opportunity for both sides to dialog in an atmosphere conducive to gracious relaxation and bonhomie. Thus all the speakers of the January 2003 AAPC Conference in Monroe came to Florida in August 2003 to seek to iron out their differences, not before an ecclesiastical audience, but in private. Joining the original speakers and respondents in Florida and representing the FV were Dr. Peter Leithart, pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Moscow, Idaho, and teacher at New St. Andrews College; the Rev. Rich Lusk, assistant pastor of AAPC; and the Rev. Tom Trouwborst, pastor of Calvary OPC in Schenectady, New York, serving as a substitute for James Jordan, director of Biblical Horizons. Weighing in on the side of those opposed to the FV were, in addition to the three earlier opponents (Sproul was unable to make this meeting), the Rev. Christopher A. Hutchinson, associate pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Statesboro, Georgia; Dr. George Knight III, adjunct professor of New Testament at GPTS; and the Rev. Richard Phillips, pastor of First Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Coral Springs/Margate, Florida.

At about the same time in Southern California (August 8–9, 2003), there was a symposium held under the auspices of the Southern California Center for Christian Study (SCCCS) that also sought to address many of the same questions put forward by the FV. Most of the speakers at this conference on “Contemporary Perspectives on Covenant Theology” shared at least some of the same convictions as the proponents of the FV. The speakers at this conference were Randy Booth, Jeffrey D. Neill, P. Andrew Sandlin, Norman Shepherd, Jeffrey J. Ventrella, and Roger Wagner. Particularly noteworthy at this conference were the two contributions by Professor Shepherd: “Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology” and “Justification by Works in Reformed Theology.” In the first address, Shepherd argues that justification involves simply the remission of sin and that the faith that justifies not only issues forth in repentance and other fruits but entails such in the very act of faith itself. In the second address, Shepherd asserts that the Heidelberg Catechism

²¹⁴ E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision, August 11–13, 2003* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004). This volume (hereafter cited as *Knox Colloquium*) is key in understanding both the pros and cons of the FV.

and Ursinus, along with the pre-seventeenth-century Reformed tradition, do not teach the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in our justification. Furthermore, Shepherd argues, those who teach that Christ's active obedience is imputed in justification manifest that they have not completely escaped Rome's works/merit paradigm, against which Shepherd argues for a faith/grace paradigm.²¹⁵

Subsequent to the Knox Colloquium and the SCCCS symposium, Athanasius Press, a press local to AAPC, published the volume entitled *The Federal Vision*.²¹⁶ All the proponents of the FV who were involved in the Knox Colloquium are published here with the exception of Tom Trouwborst. In addition to essays by the proponents of the FV involved in the Knox Colloquium, *The Federal Vision* also has essays by James Jordan (identified above) and the Rev. Mark Horne, who is identified as to current service simply as "a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America." In *The Federal Vision*, the four who originally spoke at the AAPC 2002 conference are joined by their colleagues in further defining and defending the FV.

While the lectures and essays subsequent to the AAPC 2002 conference have manifested on the part of some of the FV defenders some thoughtful interaction with the criticisms leveled by those concerned about the FV, in the main those who hold to the FV have proceeded undeterred in their continuing to develop the FV. There has been, and continues to be, much debate and discussion in a variety of settings, not only in print and on the Internet, but by actions like the statement adopted by the Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA) condemning tenets of the FV, Wilkins's Louisiana Presbytery (PCA) giving him qualified approbation, and the response to that by many on the anti-FV side from the Knox Colloquium. Perhaps the most fruitful interaction between an FV proponent and his critics has occurred on the part of Douglas Wilson, who, in being examined by his judicatory (at his request), affirmed the covenant of works, with some qualifications, as well as the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in our justification.²¹⁷ Developments continue apace, and it must be noted that this analysis takes account of matters as they

²¹⁵ P. Andrew Sandlin, ed., *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2004).

²¹⁶ Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, eds., *The Federal Vision* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2004).

²¹⁷ All of these interactions are available in some form, either recorded, print, or both, commonly on the respective websites of the particular organizations.

stand at the end of 2005.

C. The Background to the Federal Vision

The views of the FV proponents have not sprung full-blown, as Athena from the head of Zeus, but have been in development for some time and involve issues about which the church has conversed down through the centuries. The historic roots of this controversy, one might argue, extend back even to the apostolic and ancient church. Though it is true, for instance, that the bi-covenantalism (covenant of works and covenant of grace) and tri-covenantalism (covenant of redemption, additionally) of classic federal theology were not developed until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many of the concerns addressed by the development of the covenant of works were present not only in Augustine's fourfold state of man (fifth century), but also hinted at in the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius, *et al.* (second–fourth centuries). Obviously, supporters of classic federal theology would also maintain that federal theology finds its true genesis in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (and also, as some have noted, the intertestamental literature, cf. Sir 17:1, 11–12). So the FV supporters need to be cognizant that if they wish, e.g., to contend against a “judicial” theology, they do so, not only against those who would affirm the covenant of works, but also against Augustine; as well, to a lesser degree, against Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, and a host of others in the ancient and medieval church (A.D. 100–1500), and also pre-temple destruction rabbis. What was developed in federal theology was not a novelty of the seventeenth century, but was always present in at least seed form in historical theology, being rooted in the Scriptures.²¹⁸

Additionally, a number of scholars have also recognized that many of the tenets of federal theology may be found in incipient form in Zwingli, Bullinger, and even Calvin. This is important to note because some of the FV men claim to be returning to the nascent federalism of Bullinger and Calvin, as if these Reformers were at odds with or significantly differed from the “scholastic” federal theology that developed in the seventeenth century. Both

²¹⁸ For some of the background, see the articles on “Covenant” and “Federal Theology” in John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (1867–87; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981). See also Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), I.442–45.

those who would oppose Bullinger to Beza and Calvin to the Calvinists of the next century have been ably refuted by more recent studies. While there were certainly some different emphases, it is unwise and unwarranted to pit Calvin against the Westminster Confession, as has Perry Miller and a host of earlier scholars, though the tide now runs distinctly in the opposite direction.²¹⁹

We must recognize that FV promoters are not alone among Reformed theologians, particularly of more recent times, in finding fault with classic federal theology. In the last century especially, Karl Barth and his many followers regarded classic federal theology as scholastic, rationalistic, and speculative. One may also cite several leading confessional Reformed theologians, such as Herman Hoeksema,²²⁰ Klaas Schilder,²²¹ and John Murray,²²² who were critical of federal theology at certain points. Hoeksema rejected the covenant of works, but, unlike the FV partisans, also rejected any conditionality in the covenant of grace. Hoeksema tended to read the covenant through election. Schilder, on the other hand, while taking a cautious approach to the covenant of works (sharply rejecting any notion of condign merit for prelapsarian Adam, for instance), emphasized the conditionality of the covenant and tended to view election from the perspective of the covenant. At about the same time in mid-century, Murray argued for a recasting of covenant theology, seeing the covenant as purely an expression of God's unmerited favor to fallen man and thus not inaugurated until the postlapsarian situation. If Hoeksema emphasized *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption, the eternal intra-Trinitarian) above all, and Schilder, *historia salutis* (redemptive history), perhaps Murray's genius, however he might have erred in terms of

²¹⁹ Richard Muller, "Reformed Confessions and Catechisms," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 466–85.

²²⁰ Herman Hoeksema's *The Covenant: God's Tabernacle with Men* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1973) serves as a concise statement of his conception of covenant.

²²¹ Schilder's position may be gathered from a speech that he gave in the Netherlands in 1944, "The Main Points of the Doctrine of the Covenant" (private reprint, Canada, 1992) and from a work on the liberation of the Gereformeerde Kerken from the Synodical Churches (J. Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant* [Launceston: The Publication Organization of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, 1985]).

²²² Murray's position on the covenant is set forth in *The Covenant of Grace* (London: Tyndale Press, 1954); idem, "The Adamic Administration," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Select Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 47–59.

classic federalism, was not to jettison one of these in favor of the others, but to hold to the eternal, redemptive-historical, and existential aspects of the salvation that is ours and that is all of grace.

Of the FV men, Barach, while pointing to more recent Reformed theologians, claims some affinities with Schilder,²²³ while others, like Jordan, claim to be, in some fashion, carrying on Murray's recasting of covenant theology.²²⁴ Hoeksema is lauded by FV supporters for rejecting the covenant of works,²²⁵ but his decretal theology, like the experimental Calvinism of so many of the Reformed and Puritan traditions, is quite out of step with the program of the FV. As a side note, one might add that many of the FV men also seem to be reacting against certain Reformed theologians as if these theologians represented most of those who hold to the classic federal theology as expressed in the Westminster Standards. Meredith Kline's view, for instance, that one ought not to speak of grace at all in the prelapsarian context, arguing that grace should be defined exclusively as demerited favor and thus applicable only in a fallen context (whether as common or special grace), is not the view of mainstream federal theology.²²⁶ Francis Turretin better captures the mainstream position in his asserting that one may rightly speak of grace in the prelapsarian state and that there was a disproportion between Adam's obedience and the reward that would have followed, there thus being more than strict justice in view during the prelapsarian administration of the covenant of works.²²⁷ It is worth noting that while many Kline detractors regard him as viewing Adam capable of condign merit, Kline himself believes that before the Fall Adam would have achieved merit within the context of the covenant.

²²³ John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in *Federal Vision*, 15.

²²⁴ James Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do for Us?" in *Federal Vision*, 151–55.

²²⁵ P. Andrew Sandlin, "Covenant in Redemptive History: 'Gospel and Law' or 'Trust and Obey,'" in *Backbone of the Bible*, 68. Sandlin cites in support Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing, 1966), 214–26, and also Ralph Smith, *Eternal Covenant* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2003), 61–83, discussed further below.

²²⁶ Kline's view is ably set forth by a supporter and is fairly contrasted with Murray's (particularly in the latter's scrupling at the covenant of works while affirming Adamic federal headship) in Jeong Koo Jeon's *Covenant Theology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999).

²²⁷ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–97), 1:574–78.

Similar to the tendency of FV men to paint Kline as *the* representative of classic federal theology, FV promoters attack the view that faith consists of “assent alone” and seem to think that many hold to such a view, when, in fact, Gordon Clark himself, as a modern proponent of the view that faith is intellectual assent to a proposition, lamented that most Reformed regarded faith as involving not only *notitia* and *assensus* but also *fiducia*.²²⁸

In addition to the influence of Schilder, Murray, and others of a more biblical and confessional bent, some of the men who support the FV have also been influenced by the New Perspective on Paul. Rich Lusk and Mark Horne are quite open about this, though in his contribution in *The Federal Vision*, Horne’s debt to the NPP is not so obvious.

D. General Positive and Negative Contributions of the Federal Vision

Given these roots and influences, it must be said that the FV has raised legitimate concerns. Being afflicted as we are, particularly in this land, with such a low view of the church, the proponents of the FV strike significant chords in being supportive of an ecclesiology that has a high view of the means of grace and of the visible church. The FV promoters eschew a view of the church that would stress the invisible at the expense of the visible and that would exalt the individual and the subjective above the corporate and the objective. They are undoubtedly not wrong when they observe that much of the church is afflicted with a low view of the means of grace (preaching and sacraments, especially), of the obligation to live holy lives, and of the inseparability of justification and sanctification.

Much of the critique in which the FV engages, however, seems either to apply more broadly to evangelicalism or to tiny pockets within Reformed churches. While it is true that “easy-believism” has been a problem within American evangelicalism, it has not been the same kind of problem within Reformed communions. It has been rightly observed that if Reformed churches have a tendency to err in a certain way, it is in the direction of nominalism, not antinomianism. To be sure, older hyper-Calvinism tended toward an antinomian position, but few would hold to such today. FV proponents seem concerned as well about the kind of morbid introspection that one found among some of the Puritans and other experimental Calvinists and some of

²²⁸ Gordon H. Clark, *What Is Saving Faith?* (reprint, Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2004), 82–88.

their contemporary descendants, who excessively emphasize *ordo salutis* (the order of salvation, the application of Christ's work to the individual believer) and who require either a narrative of grace or something like it for communicant membership in the church. But few today are guilty of such morbid introspection. Few also, as noted above, follow Gordon Clark in his insistence that faith consists of intellectual assent alone. While the FV proponents do raise concerns that affect the church more widely, some of their weapons seem to be wielded against positions that few hold, and in their making of and attacking straw men, they tend to overargue their case, stressing the objective, e.g., at the expense of the subjective, and thus tending toward a formalism that would not prove beneficial for the life of the church (tending, as Charles Hodge noted in another controversy, to reject rationalism only to embrace ritualism).²²⁹ Rather than heading in that direction, we need a full-orbed ecclesiology that teaches us to hunger for the means of grace, that fully employs them, and that then waits on the Lord in his blessing of them.

As noted earlier, FV proponents do not agree on all points, and the project is not monolithic. Many of them, for instance, affirm baptismal regeneration in some form,²³⁰ while others demur and do not adopt such terminology.²³¹ The question remains, then, as to how one is to come to grips with what the FV as a whole teaches. While someone evaluating the FV might choose to deal with what the various parties personally hold, this would fly in the face of what the FV men themselves are professing to do: provide a coherent approach to the Bible from a consistently covenantal perspective. The project is thus to be evaluated not on the basis of what this or that proponent of FV might forward, but on what FV in its integrity seeks to set forth. It is the proponents of FV, in other words, who must differentiate among themselves. It is incumbent on the parties participating in this movement to do so and not the outside observers of the project. The remainder of this critique, then, will proceed topically to treat the FV, mentioning the various proponents as we

²²⁹ See Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 38–55.

²³⁰ Cf. in *Knox Colloquium*: Douglas Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards," 233–44; Richard D. Phillips, "A Response to 'Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards,'" 245–53; Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 254–69; and Rich Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historical Trends and Current Controversies," in *Federal Vision*, 71–125.

²³¹ Tom Trouwborst, "A Response to 'The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration,'" in *Knox Colloquium*, 187–205.

go along, but focusing not on the men who hold the views, but on the views themselves. And perhaps the easiest and clearest way to organize this treatment is by examining the various loci of systematic theology, with a particular concern as to how they relate to the doctrine of justification.

E. Prolegomena and Doctrine of Scripture

Since prolegomena and the doctrine of Scripture concern the very method of doing theology, they by necessity affect every point of doctrine, including justification. In terms of prolegomena and the doctrine of Scripture, we already encounter problems with the FV. In the introduction to *The Federal Vision*, Wilkins argues that many confessionalists have allowed their “theological formulations to have supremacy over the Scriptures.”²³² If, in fact, such hyperconfessionalism is the real problem of those who disagree with the FV, then it is the opponents of the FV and not the supporters who are the troublers of Israel. The real problem here, however, is not whether some office-bearers are hyperconfessionalists (some are), but whether those who are confessional are confessional for the right reasons, viz., they believe that the confessions accurately reflect what the Scriptures teach. Thus, this assertion of Wilkins and others like it beg the question as to who is correctly interpreting Scripture.

Those who hold to the confessions, if they hold to them correctly, do not hold to them because the confessions are traditional, historic, etc., but because the church’s secondary standards faithfully set forth what the Scriptures teach. Wilkins’s assertion that “we have allowed our theological system to become a filter *through which* we read the Word of God”²³³ is, at best, naïve: everyone reads the Word of God through the filter of his theological system, while at the same time professing to draw and develop his system from the Word of God. The claim at this level, as made by Wilkins, sounds something like that of the nineteenth-century American Restorationist Alexander Campbell, who claimed not to be *interpreting* the Word (which is all the confessions are, the church’s interpretation of the Bible on certain agreed-upon matters) but merely *believing* the Word, as if he could somehow directly intuit it better than the church had before him. We know of no one who properly subscribes to the Standards who regards them as infallible. Only the

²³² Steve Wilkins, “Introduction,” in *Federal Vision*, 12.

²³³ Wilkins, “Introduction,” 11.

Word is infallible, and if we come to believe by the illumination of the same Holy Spirit who inspired the apostles and prophets that our confessions are wrong, then we had better change them to express what it is that we now believe the Bible to teach.

Another issue related to prolegomena is the antipathy to systematizing on the part of some FV advocates. An example of this antipathy is seen in the conviction of Schlissel that the way to deal with covenant and election appears to be to “keep it simple” and to look at everything through the lens of the covenant, acting for all practical purposes as if election need not materially concern us.²³⁴ The point that needs to be made here is that FV proponents frequently charge their opponents with rationalism, inasmuch as some FV opponents tend to read covenant through election or history through the lens of the decrees. But, we must ask, who is the real rationalist in this case: the FV supporter who, on the one hand, wants to read election through the covenant and see the covenant apostate as one who was truly regenerated but who does not persevere, or the traditional Reformed understanding, on the other hand, which, in being more nuanced, is not rationalistic but seeking to be faithful to the whole counsel of God? Yet, even as the open theist charges orthodoxy with rationalism when it is the open theist who lops off part of the Scripture to accommodate his humanized view of God, so many FV promoters charge the Reformed tradition with rationalism when it is they who do not deal with all of the Scripture. It is not rationalism to seek to make full sense of what the Scriptures as a whole teach, in the process of which theologians may and must formulate doctrine by way of “good and necessary consequence,” as the Westminster Confession of Faith affirms.²³⁵ Because there is an apparent tension between covenant and election, e.g., does not mean that one should be jettisoned in favor of the other. It has, rather, always been the mark of orthodoxy (witness the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries) to refuse to remove doctrinal conundrums by ignoring some aspect of revelation. Those who do not seek systematically to correlate bibli-

²³⁴ Steve Schlissel, “Keeping It Simple,” *Christian Renewal Forum on the Covenant*, supplement to *Christian Renewal*, May 28, 2001.

²³⁵ Peter Leithart also seems reluctant to systematize; see his *Against Christianity* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 43–68. Leithart, Schlissel, and others often note that Scripture is a story and not a set of propositions. While that is quite true, it does not mean that one may not extrapolate propositional truth from it (if it does, then we must jettison confessions altogether).

cal revelation in its entirety may ultimately end up overstressing some aspect and land in error or heresy.

A few apologetical considerations are in order in our consideration of prolegomena, particularly as they relate to the claim of FV advocates to be following Cornelius Van Til in their anti-systematizing biases. Most, if not all, of the FV proponents would claim either to be followers of the apologetical methodology of Van Til or would otherwise not see themselves as contradicting him.²³⁶ The FV does, in fact, misrepresent Van Til at several points, and it is a mistake to assume the FV's misguided claim that their approach in regard to Scripture and confession is properly Van Tilian.²³⁷ It is not Van Tilian simply to charge that classic federalists read the Scriptures through a theological grid, as if anyone can read the Scriptures without a theological grid. Van Til believed that the Word should mold that grid, and he believed that the Reformed faith had allowed the Word to do just that and had faithfully reflected that in the Reformed confessions.²³⁸ Van Til's genius involved not only his refusal to reject revelation in favor of an Enlightenment concept

²³⁶ See, e.g., Peter J. Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Recasting of Reformed Theology," in *Knox Colloquium*, 64.

²³⁷ See Steve M. Schlissel, "A New Way of Seeing?" 18–39, and E. Calvin Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," 319–24, both in *Knox Colloquium*, for an approach to Van Til that appears to regard him as both anti-systematic and anti-logical.

²³⁸ Beisner, e.g., seems to fault Van Til for the "Federal Visionists tend[ing] to object to their statements being subjected to logical critique (testing for consistency) and logical inferences (leading to conclusions that they do not wish to embrace)." He continues: "I suspect that this objection to logical systematization—and to its use as a critical tool to test for falsehood by uncovering logical inconsistency—rests, for at least some of them, on their embrace of Cornelius Van Til's epistemology and apologetic, an important element of which is reticence as to (or perhaps even hostility to) the use of logic in theology" ("Concluding Comments," 319–20). While it is quite true that Van Til was opposed to all forms of rationalism, including that of Gordon Clark, and insisted that we affirm things in Scripture that might seem rationally contradictory (as have, say, the first four councils of the Christian Church in the fourth and fifth centuries to the heretics then and to liberals later), he did nothing like reject the use of reason or logic, but understood it to be inescapable. Van Til, believing in God's incomprehensibility, did not render God unknowable; nor did he deny the law of noncontradiction. He did believe that the law of noncontradiction was not something that could account for itself, however, being reliant instead on the ontological Trinity and the self-attesting Christ of Scriptures. Van Til believed in a ministerial, but not magisterial, use of reason. So Beisner is incorrect in attributing the anti-systematiza-

of reason, but also a refusal to give way to irrationalism. In his defense of the Synod of Dort, for instance, one can see that Van Til stood with the Reformers in refusing to give way either to hyper-Calvinism or Arminianism, bowing instead to God's teaching in his Word.²³⁹

There are those who would reduce Van Til to mere perspectivalism and thus make him sound more like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Paul Ricoeur, Richard Rorty, or even Thomas Kuhn, simply because Van Til and any number of post-structuralists, deconstructionists, and postmodern linguistic types all believe that we have a worldview through which we interpret all that we encounter.²⁴⁰ Van Til is not anti-systematic, and those of any stripe who think that they have him on their side in this are misguided.²⁴¹ The same is true of those who attribute the impulse to systemization to the Greeks, arguing that there is a dichotomy between Greek and Hebrew thought.²⁴² Not only has this old liberal canard been debunked by James Barr and others, but the use to which it has been put historically has not been in the service of orthodoxy. This impulse to systematization is wrongly assessed if it is thought only to characterize the Greeks or a Hellenized approach. The desire to make sense of things—to relate the one and the many—is a human one, a universal desire that reflects that man is made in the image of God, a God who is not the author of disorder or confusion.

F. Theology Proper

In terms of the doctrine of God, FV supporters also present some challenges relevant to this report. This is the case in particular because some FV

tion impulses of a Schlüssel to Van Til.

²³⁹ Cornelius Van Til, "The Significance of Dort for Today," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, ed. P. Y. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 181–96.

²⁴⁰ Perhaps Michael Horton enjoys one of the best grasps on how the insights of Van Til, while making him relevant to postmodernism, do not render his project post-modern. See *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005). For a brief summary of what Horton is doing in his engagement of modernism and postmodernism, see "Meeting a Stranger: A Covenantal Epistemology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 337–55.

²⁴¹ Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (1949; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1978), 5–20.

²⁴² Schlüssel, "A New Way of Seeing?" 19–24.

advocates relate their covenant theology to the doctrine of God in a distinctive way. This is important for purposes of this report, then, because one's conception of covenant is crucial for the doctrine of justification. Steve Wilkins, following Ralph Smith in his work *Eternal Covenant*, defines covenant as *relationship* and thus finds covenant to be eternal, since God is eternally three persons with each person in a "holy, undivided fellowship" with the others.²⁴³ We do not deny that the three persons of the Holy Trinity enjoy mutual interpenetration, as expressed in the doctrine of *circumincession*, being in eternal fellowship with each other in a divine communion of persons in which the act of one is, in certain senses, the act of all. This is standard Trinitarian theology. But to assert that this given relationship among the persons of the Holy Trinity entails covenant, as Wilkins argues, means, it would seem, that covenant is essential to God.

But there is no indication in any of this, as Pipa notes, that Smith or Wilkins distinguishes between the immanent works of God (*opera Dei ad intra*) and the outworking of the decrees (*opera Dei ad extra*) or that it has occurred to them seriously to ask what this does to God's freedom in regard to covenant: is God utterly free, even in choosing how to relate to himself (a radical nominalism), or is there no freedom for him, even in his choosing how he relates to his creation (a radical essentialism)?²⁴⁴ Quite ironic in all this as well is the paucity of any scriptural support for the claim that, because God is truly three persons "in community," this necessarily entails that covenant is what describes and defines this relationship. FV proponents continually claim that they are being biblical over against their opponents who are being theological, scholastic, and rationalistic. It is right, then, that those who question the FV demand exegesis that would support the FV position on covenant, which is one of the pillars of their project of reading everything through their understanding of covenant.

In terms of the persons of the Holy Trinity, there is no relationship to be entered into (which is what covenant has always signified); the relationship simply is: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are in an eternal relationship with each other, and why covenant, without biblical proof, is the proper way of describing this relationship is murky at best. Occam's razor would suggest that, absent Scripture, to adduce covenant to describe

²⁴³ Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in *Federal Vision*, 49.

²⁴⁴ Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., "A Response to 'Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,'" in *Knox Colloquium*, 271.

the essential intra-Trinitarian relationship violates the law of parsimony by needlessly complicating matters: what warrant do we have to denominate the mysterious relationship between the persons of the Trinity as “covenant”? For a movement that professes to eschew theological speculation and scholasticism, as does the FV, such an assertion seems quite speculative and rationalistic and without biblical foundation. We do, however, have no problem seeing that there is in God an archetype of covenant (e.g., the covenant of redemption) that finds its ectypes in the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, inasmuch as creation is analogical.

While we do not dispute that we find covenant in God, we see no biblical evidence offered to see covenant as the proper category for understanding God in his relationship to himself. Wilkins builds off of Smith, who cites Abraham Kuyper and Hoeksema as architects of this mono-covenantalism; but the FV takes mono-covenantalism in a decidedly different direction from Kuyper and Hoeksema, arguing that this one covenant is conditional, over against Hoeksema, in particular, who would deny any conditionality whatsoever. And what does it mean if the covenant is conditional in God himself? Is the relationship among the persons of the Trinity thus rendered conditional? This mono- or hyper-covenantalism seems unwarranted, fraught with difficulties, and altogether lacking in demonstration sufficient to overturn our historic categories, which, going back to the early church and the four councils, seem much more biblically sound.

Wilkins also makes clear what the link is between the covenant in God and the covenant into which we are brought: “The covenant into which we are brought is this very same covenant that has always existed within the Godhead from eternity.”²⁴⁵ This means, as the FV proponents routinely claim, that there is no covenant of works made by God with Adam in his estate of innocence. But it also means that, properly speaking and in any historic sense, there is no covenant of grace either. There is but one covenant, originally in God, into which Adam as God’s son was invited to live and charged to be covenantally faithful; Adam, however, failed, and Christ came to do what Adam did not do, was covenantally faithful, paid for our sin, and, sins having been remitted, has put us back into a place where we are called to be, and given grace to be, covenantally faithful. This is the FV in a nutshell. But it is not the position of classic federal theology, which, in teaching the existence of the covenants of works and grace as established in history, lays a crucial founda-

²⁴⁵ Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” in *Federal Vision*, 51.

tion for understanding the biblical doctrine of justification.²⁴⁶

G. Anthropology

What is wrong with the approach of the FV, in summary, is that it flattens out God's covenantal dealings with man. God has dealt with his people according to different covenantal arrangements before and after the Fall, and the doctrine of justification rests upon a clear distinction between these two arrangements. God did not have to create man, but, according to his own good pleasure, he voluntarily condescended, created man in his image, and entered into a meaningful covenantal relationship with him, a relationship that reflected the full range of God's attributes, his justice as well as his love, kindness, and goodness. For man to enjoy and to continue to enjoy access to such a God, he had to be perfect. And he was perfect. Adam did not maintain this state of perfection, but disobeyed God, who had given him only one negative prohibition, and by that probation tested to see whether he would continue to walk in righteousness or whether he would disobey the one who loved him so. This estate is variously styled, called by some (as in WCF 7.1–2) a "covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." Clearly, man was created in such a state (Eccl 7:29) and failed to continue in that state. This is the first giving of the law (WCF 19.1; cf. above I.B.3), requiring "personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience." Not only do some FV proponents deny that God made a covenant of works with Adam, regarding such a covenant as legal, servile, etc., in opposition to whatever arrangement prevailed in the prelapsarian state that was supposedly more reflective of sonship, but some FV supporters deny that the rule of life (the law) given to Adam required perfect obedience. Lusk writes: "The law did not require perfect obedience. It was designed for sinners, not unfallen creatures."²⁴⁷ But the law was designed for man as an unfallen creature, not as a sinner, and it required full obedience (WCF 19.1–2). Lusk cannot escape the weight of this by alleging that he has reference to fallen yet regenerate man and the way that God accepts the less than perfect obedience of his adopted children (cf. WCF 16.2–6). More on

²⁴⁶ See, e.g., Morton H. Smith, "The Biblical Plan of Salvation with Reference to the Covenant of Works, Imputation, and Justification by Faith," in *Knox Colloquium*, 96–117.

²⁴⁷ Rich Lusk, "A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in *Knox Colloquium*, 128.

this, below, when we examine justification.

FV supporters frequently argue that a false dichotomy has been posited between law and gospel.²⁴⁸ To be sure, a wrong view of law and gospel has at times come to the fore and, one might argue, come to predominate in our current antinomian culture. This view runs along the lines of “Law is all about rules and duties, while gospel is about freedom and grace,” with the underlying assumption being that rules are bad, being restrictive, and that freedom from rules is thus good. Such an assumption is not one to which man in his prelapsarian state would have subscribed, but is rather a concomitant of the Fall. Rules are seen as bad only in a fallen world, and only in a fallen world is a premium placed on freedom from rules. The rules, the law of God, were to Adam before the Fall, and become such again to renewed man, “sweeter than the honeycomb.” Freedom has become, according to man in his unregenerate state, an end in itself, rather than the means to a higher end. True freedom, however, is freedom from sin, from lawlessness, and is instead freedom to serve, freedom not to sin, as Adam had before the Fall. Given this false dichotomy, law and gospel are pitted against one another as if they were absolutely antithetical when, in fact, gospel was introduced after the violation of the law, both for the justification of the ungodly and for the transformation of the lawbreaker into one who is a law keeper (sanctification).

Man was, in other words, created in law. Being in God’s image, man was created in law, possessing true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). In violating the law, he forfeited all the blessings and became liable to all the curses. Since the Fall did not change man’s essential nature—the Fall being ethical, not ontological—this legal nature, a human nature made in law to keep law, remains. Whatever else man having a legal nature might mean (cf. Rom 2:14–15), it clearly means that the works principle, reflecting the covenant of works in which man was created, is built in as part of the very fabric of his being. That man has such a built-in legal nature was, of course, no problem before the Fall, when he enjoyed not only the natural ability to keep the law, to please God, but moral ability as well. It is natural to man as man to want to work to please God. This is the way that God made Adam: he made Adam as his son wanting to please his father. There has never been any tension between the legal and the relational in this respect, as we see, not only in the relationship between the doctrines of justification and

²⁴⁸ Sandlin, “Covenant in Redemptive History,” 63–84; Steve Schlissel, “Justification and the Gentiles,” in *Federal Vision*, 237–61.

adoption, but also in the legal declaration that forms the basis of the doctrine of adoption itself, the doctrine of adoption strikingly bringing together the judicial/legal/forensic and the relational. It was because we were legitimate offspring before the Fall that there was a proper father/son relationship; after the Fall, however, we have become illegitimate (disinherited) by virtue of sin. It is natural, then, for man to want to work to please God, though after the Fall this is no longer possible without regeneration, man being afflicted as he is with moral inability as a result of original sin, which includes the corruption of our whole nature.

H. Christology and the Accomplishment of Redemption

The law must be properly defined as the perfect requirement for holiness that flows out of the character of a perfectly holy God. That we cannot meet its demands in our postlapsarian state only highlights the need for one, even our Lord Jesus Christ, who will keep the law perfectly for us (active obedience) and pay the penalty for Adam's and our having violated it (passive obedience). To deny the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in our justification, as some FV proponents and others do, means that we have no law keeping reckoned as our own to accompany the remission of sin (our children in failing to obey when told to clean their rooms both are punished for the failure and still required thereafter to do what they failed to do—clean their rooms).²⁴⁹ Looking forward for just a moment to the application of Christ's work, God does not merely remit our sin in justification, but declares us to be righteous—not as a judge who expels the technically not guilty but loathsome accused from his courtroom, but as a Father who receives us as cleansed by Christ's death and made righteous by Christ's obedience. For us to be lovely in God's sight, we need something more than the simple remission of sin.²⁵⁰

FV advocates argue that even as Adam before the Fall did not work to merit life, but rather simply trusted his Father, so Christ as last Adam does not work to merit life for us, but simply trusts and obeys his Father, as Adam

²⁴⁹ For example, Lusk, "A Response," 139–40; Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity," 194–95; Sandlin, "Covenant in Redemptive History," 69–70; Norman Shepherd, "Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology," in *Backbone of the Bible*, 87–89.

²⁵⁰ For a fuller treatment of the FV denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in our justification, see the section below on "Imputation," under the heading "The Holy Spirit and the Application of Redemption."

did not.²⁵¹ Adam trusted the Father before the Fall, to be sure, but Adam's trust was not the *fiducia* that is the completing element of saving faith. Adam before the Fall did not exercise saving faith because he did not need to be saved. Saving faith looks away from itself entirely, resting and trusting wholly in the work of another. Christ, too, trusted his Father, and that perfectly. But he, like Adam before the Fall, did not have saving faith; he did not, as one does in saving faith, look to another to do what he could not do himself. Rather, Christ could do, and did do, what Adam was to do, but failed to do. Christ did not, in other words, trust in another to perform the necessary saving work, but he himself performed that work, not for himself, but for us, so that we might look to him and exercise saving faith in him. This distinction is not sufficiently observed and maintained by the FV.

Norman Shepherd, whose views are akin to the FV in this regard, writes that Christ had a "living, active, obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross," and concludes that "this faith was credited to him for righteousness." While it is true that Christ trusted his Father, it was not the trust that Christians exercise as a part of saving faith, the trust in another to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Insofar as one might properly speak of Jesus having faith, such an assertion would mean that he trusted his heavenly Father to provide good gifts and looked to the Father for the sustenance that he needed in his human nature. It never means that Jesus trusted, nor needed to trust, as do sinners, for salvation, or that his faith was credited to him as righteousness.²⁵²

What marked Christ's work, then, was that active and passive obedience which might become the object of our faith and hope, not primarily his giving us an example of faith. Christ furnished us with an example of faith and obedience, to be sure, but more importantly and foundationally, he furnished us with that which is unique: his person and work whereby we are brought from death in sin to life in him. It has historically been the mark of a declining faith to focus more on how Christ is exemplary than on how he is unique. Our faith in him is based on who he uniquely is and what he uniquely did. Once we grasp the uniqueness of Christ in his person and work—or better, are grasped by it—then and only then are we bidden to follow his example, out of gratitude, by his grace. We trust Christ and him alone because of what

²⁵¹ Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity," 192–95.

²⁵² Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 19.

he and he alone did for us, not because he was the example without parallel.

Some of the proponents of the FV view Christ's perfect keeping of the law solely as that which qualified him to be our atoning sacrifice.²⁵³ It is quite true that if Christ had sinned he would not have been qualified to atone for our sins. The contention, however, that Christ's perfect law keeping was for him and him alone misses the point that his life was as much for us as was his death. Christ neither lived nor died for himself, but lived and died for us. Lusk asserts that Jesus' law keeping as a "Beloved Son" was in no sense meritorious, because "the gospels make it clear that Jesus never had to earn the favor of God."²⁵⁴ It is quite true that Jesus never had to earn God's favor for himself, but he had to earn it for us who had demerited God's favor by Adam's original sin, to which has been added all of our own actual sins.

Lusk argues further that if Christ in his active obedience is understood to do what Adam failed to do in the covenant of works—i.e., successfully pass the probation that would result in God glorifying humanity—such a view undercuts Christ's sonship. Why it is the case that, inherently, a legal relationship undermines a filial relationship is nowhere demonstrated and everywhere asserted. Lusk, in fact, describes the notion of Christ fulfilling the covenant of redemption by keeping the covenant of works, so that he can save us in the covenant of grace, as akin to Pelagianism, conceiving the historic Reformed view just described in this fashion: "In Genesis 1–2, God constructed Pelagian machinery for man to earn his way to blessing. Adam rendered himself incapable of operating that machinery when he sinned. But now God sends his Son into the world as One who can work the machinery flawlessly. In other words, Jesus is the successful Pelagian, the One Guy in the history of the world who succeeded in pulling off the works righteous plan."²⁵⁵

Lusk's quarrel here is not with Pelagianism, but with classic Augustinianism. It was Augustine who taught that man before the Fall was able to sin and able not to sin. Pelagius's error was that he taught that man after the Fall continued to possess the ability not to sin and that Adam's fall, while a bad example, did not plunge the race into sin. Augustine, on the other hand, taught that only a work of saving grace could enable fallen man, who had been rendered not able not to sin, to regain his ability not to sin (and that imperfectly until glorification). The fourfold state of man—as created, as fallen, as

²⁵³ Lusk, "A Response," 139–40.

²⁵⁴ Lusk, "A Response," 137.

²⁵⁵ Lusk, "A Response," 137.

redeemed, as glorified—is common among the Reformed and is part of our confession (WCF 9.2–5). It is little short of bizarre to seek to turn the tables in this fashion and to accuse an Augustinianism that affirms Adam’s ability before the Fall, but not ours as fallen and unredeemed, as being Pelagian. If it is not Pelagianism to teach that Adam before the Fall enjoyed moral and natural ability to keep the law, even less is it Pelagianism to teach that the Redeemer, God and man in one person, had full ability in his own proper person perfectly to keep the law for us and to please his Father for us (hence the purpose of the Incarnation; to please God for us who had failed to do so in Adam and our own lives).

Another question associated with the person and work of Christ is that of the necessity for the Incarnation. Jordan argues that the Incarnation is necessary apart from the Fall.²⁵⁶ He contends that the “Son would have come into the world to bring humanity to glory” (186), apart from sin and the Fall. By such an assertion, Jordan rejects the notion that a successful probation on Adam’s part would have brought humanity to glory. He gives no clear exegetical warrant for this conclusion, nor for the conclusion that the Incarnation was necessary for the defeat of Satan, particularly given that neither Satan nor his angels are to be redeemed. Why an Incarnation is needed to defeat Satan is never made clear, and the real purpose, then, of the Incarnation—to do what Adam and we did not do by perfect law keeping, and to undo what we did by propitiation and expiation, and thus reconcile God to us—seems missed or distinctly downplayed.

The FV failure to see a proper law/gospel distinction, as we have argued, is that its proponents fail to see that law is native to everyone created in the image of God. This has marked consequences not only for anthropology but also for Christology and soteriology. Created as we were in covenant with God and being marked in the core of our being with that relationship, we are at heart legal. This legal nature of man is reflected in every religion in the world, all of which can be reduced to ethics and the concern of what we must do to be in harmony with whatever ultimate reality there is. Christianity is at its heart different. It is not about what we must do. It is about what God has done for us in Christ, and this is the gospel. Christianity is about the person and work of Christ, about the one who is fully God and fully man, and by whose active and passive obedience we are saved. This is to say that while the law is, in its works, written on every heart, the gospel, the good news that God

²⁵⁶ Jordan, “Merit versus Maturity,” 182–88.

in Christ has done for us what we could never do for ourselves, is extrinsic to us. The gospel is an announcement of good news outside of us that there is now therefore no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Schlissel says that the question is not “What must I do to be saved?” but “What does God require?”²⁵⁷ What does God require? Perfect obedience. But I am a sinner. What must I do to be saved? The question “What must I do to be saved?” is the natural gospel follow-up to anyone who understands the answer to “What does God require?” given that we are afflicted as we are with moral inability and must therefore “be saved.”

I. The Holy Spirit and the Application of Redemption

Moving to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we see that the FV has problems with justification itself, some of them along the lines of the NPP: justification is a matter of covenant identification and, in the new covenant Paul is concerned with Gentile inclusion and that they need not become Jews to be in the covenant in the new era.²⁵⁸

Perhaps it will be helpful at this juncture, in terms of the Committee’s primary task, to refocus on the significance of the Protestant doctrine of justification. The doctrine of justification by faith alone has, since the time of the Reformation, been considered to be at the heart of evangelical soteriology. Luther referred to it as “the article upon which the church stands or falls,”²⁵⁹ and Calvin said that it was “the main hinge on which religion turns.”²⁶⁰ Any recasting of this doctrine, then, from the form developed by the Protestant Reformers and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century creeds that the Reformation spawned must be viewed warily, given the great care and precision that went into the careful crafting of this doctrine. The doctrine was particularly defined over against late medieval theology, in which it was popularly taught that “God will not deny his grace to him who does his best.”²⁶¹ When

²⁵⁷ Schlissel, “Justification and the Gentiles,” 239.

²⁵⁸ Schlissel, “Justification and the Gentiles,” 237–61.

²⁵⁹ See Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1.180, n. 3, 239, for a discussion of this phrase in Luther and Lutheranism.

²⁶⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, vols. 20–21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1.

²⁶¹ See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 1.83–91, for a helpful treatment of the axiom “*Facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*.” See also Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medi-*

Rome enunciated its doctrine of justification at the Council of Trent, further Protestant definition was seen to be necessary to serve as an antidote to Tridentine teaching.²⁶² And that further definition is developed particularly in the Westminster Standards, which, it should be noted, reflect a commitment, not only to refute Trent, but also to refute the antinomianism that the divines perceived as threatening the church in the 1640s.²⁶³ Thus, Westminster produced a remarkably balanced statement on justification that argued against the works-righteousness of Rome on the one hand and the antinomianism of hyper-Calvinism on the other hand.²⁶⁴

In addressing justification more directly now, we will examine FV differences with the classic Reformed formulation of the doctrine. In so doing, it may be helpful to focus on several of the parts that constitute the doctrine of justification—righteousness, imputation, the nature of justification and Gentile inclusion, the nature and definition of faith, and assurance and per-

eval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism (1983; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 131–45, in which he sets forth that the doctrine of the *facere quod in se est* is part of the “proper disposition for justification.” It was this notion of “doing one’s best” or “doing what one could” that drove Martin Luther to discover that the righteousness that God required could not come from “doing one’s best,” but was freely given as a gift, received by faith alone.

²⁶² *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 671–81. Trent produced sixteen chapters and thirty-three canons on justification at Session Six of its meeting (1547). Before this, no ecumenical council had authoritatively defined the doctrine of justification. This is significant to note, because it means that the Reformers defined justification as they did in the absence of a full and clear conciliar definition, with Trent coming in response to the Reformers, as part of the Counter-Reformation. Trent’s teaching remains, to this day, the definitive teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on justification, essentially untouched by the two subsequent councils of the Roman Catholic Church, Vatican I (1869–1870) and Vatican II (1962–1965).

²⁶³ Certainly the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and a host of other Reformed Confessions and Creeds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries addressed Rome’s false teaching about justification. One might argue, however, that the Westminster Standards (WCF, WLC, WSC, and other ecclesiastical documents), composed as they were over the course of several years in the mid-1640s, represent the “high-water mark” of Reformed confessionalism.

²⁶⁴ For a discussion of the role that antinomianism played in Westminster’s careful formulation of the doctrine of justification, see Chad. B. Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004), chap. 5.

severance—and by such a survey see the ways in which some of the supporters of the FV tend to depart from the federal theology of the Westminster Standards.

I. Righteousness

As noted in the previous section of this report critiquing the NPP (see above III.D) and in the “General Introduction” (see above I.D.3), the concept of *righteousness* is key to the doctrine of justification. How one defines righteousness is clearly important for Westminster’s doctrine of justification: “Those whom God effectually called, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them ... but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith” (WCF 11.1). Westminster teaches that the righteousness that is imputed to us for our justification consists of “the obedience and satisfaction of Christ”: this is what constitutes “his righteousness” that we receive by faith. This righteousness has also earlier, at WCF 8.5, been described, in slightly more expansive phraseology, as “his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself.” It is this “perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself” by which he has “fully satisfied the justice of his Father” (WCF 8.5). Westminster, then, sees the establishment of righteousness as that by which justice is satisfied. Adam, before the Fall, would have been confirmed in such righteousness, had he continued in “perfect and personal obedience” (WCF 7.2). Given the first Adam’s Fall, it is the second Adam, Christ, who must establish righteousness by undoing what the first Adam did (by dying for our sins) and by doing what the first Adam failed to do (by perfectly obeying God’s law for us). Thus, for Westminster, righteousness entails the satisfaction of justice by the perfect fulfillment of the law. We have argued this above and briefly reiterate it here.²⁶⁵

Some FV proponents define righteousness differently from the Westminster Standards, as seen below. Righteousness, as it pertains to God, according to the FV, is not simply the satisfaction of his justice, but rather is his covenantal faithfulness, his loyalty to his covenant people. Leithart approves of this shift in emphasis, noting, if the view that “‘righteousness’ (Heb. *zed-
eq* or *zedaqah*; Gk. *dikaio^sune*) is a covenant term, describing loyalty within

²⁶⁵ See sections B (“Perfect Obedience to the Law”) and D (“The Perfect Obedience of Christ”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

a covenanted relationship ..., then ‘righteousness’ and ‘justification’ have a much wider scope of application than the strictly judicial, but pertain to a whole range of covenant-relational settings.”²⁶⁶ Leithart acknowledges that Mark A. Seifrid has recently argued against this covenantal view, rightly noting that God’s covenantal faithfulness to Israel is “only one manifestation of the saving righteousness which he exercises as ruler of all.”²⁶⁷ Seifrid’s work clearly does not convince Leithart, however, who insists on conceiving of righteousness as much in relational terms as forensically. It should be noted that Leithart does not deny the forensic aspect of justification, but sees that aspect as one of many.²⁶⁸ Thus, his position departs from that of the Westminster Standards, which views justification in exclusively forensic terms.²⁶⁹

Even as righteousness means that God is covenantally faithful to his people, in the conception of some FV thinkers, so covenantal faithfulness is also what defines righteousness for man. From creation, God manifested this covenantal faithfulness to Adam and called on him to walk in covenantal faithfulness. Given this schema, one might think, then, that since God is perfect, covenantal faithfulness entails perfection. In other words, it has been commonly assumed that the law, as the standard revealing God’s perfect character, demands perfection, and it is such perfection that is foundational to righteousness.²⁷⁰ Not so, asserts Rich Lusk, who sees the law not as the eternal, righteous standard of God, but as a purely postlapsarian phenomenon: “The law did not require perfect obedience. It was designed for sinners, not unfallen creatures. Thus the basic requirement of the law was covenant loyalty and trust, not sinless perfection.”²⁷¹ (It is worth revisiting aspects of

²⁶⁶ Peter J. Leithart, “‘Judge Me, O God’: Biblical Perspectives on Justification,” in *Federal Vision*, 209.

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Leithart, “Biblical Perspectives on Justification,” 209.

²⁶⁸ Leithart, “Biblical Perspectives on Justification,” 211ff.

²⁶⁹ See section A.1 (“The Forensic Character of Justification”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

²⁷⁰ See section B.2 (“The Character of God’s Justice”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

²⁷¹ Lusk, “A Response,” 128. This assertion flies in the face of a number of statements in the Westminster Standards, not the least among them being WLC 99, which, in its rules to be observed for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments, lists this first: “That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.”

Lusk’s position, already examined above under the rubric of anthropology, in this context.) One wonders if this means that had Adam maintained covenant loyalty and trust, though not sinless perfection (whatever that means and however it might have been done), he would not have fallen.

According to the WCF, “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience” (19.1).²⁷² Clearly, this is an attestation, contra Lusk, that the law did require sinless perfection. If one demurs that the law that Lusk has in view is that given at Sinai and not that law that God gave to Adam in Eden, the WCF, at 19.2, links the law that God gave to Adam in paradise with the “perfect rule of righteousness” that was “delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables.” The law is an integral whole—that given in Eden being of a piece with that delivered at Sinai—and the WCF is very clear that it demanded perfection of Adam and has always demanded such of his progeny. It is this perfection, our Confession is quite clear, that is constitutive of righteousness in God and man.²⁷³

God is righteous because he always acts in accord with his own perfect law. Man was righteous when he walked in such perfection in his estate of innocence (WCF 4.2) and is now by trusting in Christ alone.²⁷⁴ If such perfection did not unflinchingly characterize God and would always be required of man, the justification of the ungodly would pose no challenge (God could simply do it out of thin air; he could forgive because he is God and chooses

Such was the requirement before the Fall, and it continues to be the requirement after the Fall, contra Lusk. See also section B.4 (“The Postlapsarian Demand for Perfect Obedience”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

²⁷² See section B.3 (“The Adamic Covenant of Works”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

²⁷³ See section B.5 (“Merit and Perfect Obedience”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

²⁷⁴ Heidelberg Catechism 60 is quite clear in answering the question, “How are you righteous before God? A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, though my conscience accuse me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I has never committed any sin and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me [a strikingly clear affirmation of the imputation of Christ’s active obedience]; if only I accept such a benefit with a believing heart.”

to do so). There would be, in other words, no necessity for God to be just and justifier (Rom 3–4). But there is, and it is clear in Scripture that if God justifies the ungodly he must do so in a way consistent with his own righteousness (Rom 5).

Given Leithart’s definition of the righteousness of God as covenantal-relational loyalty and Lusk’s definition of man’s righteousness as “covenant loyalty and trust, not sinless perfection,” many questions come to mind. Is righteousness an essential property of God, so that he would still be righteous whether or not he determined to create and whether or not he determined to save some of those whom he created? While God’s covenant faithfulness to his people may, arguably, be a demonstration of his righteousness, is it the most basic component of righteousness, more so than moral, legal perfection? Why should the definition of righteousness be so limited? Is not God demonstrating righteousness in the condemnation of the reprobate and not simply in the salvation of the elect? To define righteousness as thinly as do some FV proponents—in relational terms—cannot be sustained by our Standards and leaves a host of important questions unanswered by the FV project that are answered within and by the Reformed tradition.

If the assertion is made, as it sometimes is, that the relational is as important, if not more so, than the forensic, then the FV constructs but a mere a straw man, certainly in a church that adheres to the WCF. The relational is not dispensed with at the expense of the forensic in our Standards. Rather, the relational and the forensic are inseparable; the latter (justification) is an aspect of, or manifestation of, the former (union with Christ, WLC 69)—a commonplace observation among the Reformed. If some of the adherents of the Westminster Standards ignore the relational and stress only the forensic, the cure for such imbalance or neglect is pastoral and not theological. Here is a major problem with the whole FV program: its proponents routinely seek a theological fix for problems that ought to be addressed pastorally. FV proponents see many genuine problems among God’s people. It seems to be thought that the problems must reflect shortcomings in Reformed theology, when in fact they reflect shortcomings in Reformed practice. There’s nothing wrong with our theology, except that we fail to live up to it: our Standards are not deficient; rather, our deportment is, and we fail to be who we truly are in Christ. The solution to lives that are not what they should be is not theological re-formulation, as FV proponents would claim, but faithful living within an already well-developed theological system that is the best expression of Scripture that we have, by God’s guidance and grace, developed thus far.

2. Imputation

The Westminster Confession teaches that God is righteous, requires us to be righteous, condemns fallen Adam and his offspring for unrighteousness, establishes righteousness by Christ's work, and regards us as righteous because of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Imputation addresses the theological problem of how the righteousness earned by Christ for us becomes ours.²⁷⁵ It is important at this point to note that Christ does merit and earn righteousness for us (cf. WLC 55), a point that is denied by several FV men who argue that Christ did not need to earn his Father's favor,²⁷⁶ a point more fully developed above under Christology. Since Adam and we with him have demerited God's favor by our sin, we need Christ acting for us to merit his favor.²⁷⁷

Our Confession teaches clearly that, in justification, the righteousness that Christ merited for us becomes ours through imputation. WCF 11.1 employs the explicit language of "imputation," but also uses it interchangeably with "accounting and accepting": "He also freely justifieth ... by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous ..., by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them." A number of proof texts are given here, most notably from Rom 4:5–8, 2 Cor 5:19, 21, and Rom 5:17–19. It is made clear in this first section of WCF 11 that righteousness in justification is imputed, not infused, and that what is imputed is Christ's obedience and satisfaction, not "faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness."

The concept of imputation is also addressed in WCF 11.3, supported by some of the same proof texts (immediately above): "Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners." This is another way of saying that the sins of the elect were imputed to Christ

²⁷⁵ See section E ("The Imputation of Christ's Obedience to Believers") in chapter I ("General Introduction").

²⁷⁶ Lusk, "A Response," 137–38; Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity," 192–95.

²⁷⁷ See section D ("The Perfect Obedience of Christ") in chapter I ("General Introduction").

and that Christ's righteousness was imputed to the elect, the guilt of our first parents' first sin being imputed to all mankind descending from them by ordinary generation (WCF 6:3). This is the threefold imputation taught by our Standards and classic Reformed theology. As noted in the "General Introduction," the imputation of Christ's active obedience in justification, as a part of this threefold imputation, is a key component of the classic Reformed understanding of imputation.

The imputation of the active obedience of Christ to us for our justification is denied, however, by teaching associated with or influencing the FV. Shepherd, for example, teaches that only the passive obedience of Christ is in view and is imputed in justification, and that the active obedience of Christ is not imputed to us for our justification. He claims support for this view in both the Heidelberg Catechism and its primary author, Zacharias Ursinus.²⁷⁸ In fact, the Heidelberg Catechism, as well as the Belgic Confession, clearly affirms the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in justification.²⁷⁹ For our purposes here, however, it is the Westminster Standards that are our confessional concern. Regarding the Standards, Shepherd alleges that "even the Westminster Confession as late as 1647 was written as a compromise document to accommodate the views of three prominent members of the Westminster Assembly (William Twisse [Prolocutor of the Assembly], Thomas Gataker, and Richard Vines) who did not subscribe to the imputation of active obedience."²⁸⁰

This assertion that the Westminster Assembly "accommodated the views" of those who "did not subscribe to the imputation of active obedience" is an unsurprising claim, based particularly on earlier works.²⁸¹ William

²⁷⁸ Norman Shepherd, "Justification by Works in Reformed Theology," in *Backbone of the Bible*, 103–11.

²⁷⁹ The imputation of the active obedience of Christ in our justification is, if anything, arguably clearer at points in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession than in the Westminster Standards. See HC 59–64 as well as BC 22 and 23. Note especially BC 22, which says: "Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works which he has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness."

²⁸⁰ Shepherd, "Justification by Works," 115.

²⁸¹ Most notably, Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1883), 149–56, together with Alexander F. Mitchell and John Struthers, eds., *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), lxxv–lxxvii. Some historians have seen the actions of the Westminster Assembly as at least allowing for the denial

Barker, for instance, has argued that certain “figures ... succeeded in getting the term ‘whole obedience’ removed from the phrase ‘imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them’ in Chapter 11 of the Westminster Confession,” all sides agreeing that “whole obedience” in that context meant both the active and passive obedience of Christ.²⁸² Barker’s account, however, conflates two entirely separate events. The debate over “whole obedience” in 1643 was decided in favor of adding “whole obedience” as part of a revision of article 11 (on justification) in the Thirty-Nine Articles.²⁸³ The debate over chapter 11 of the WCF took place three years later, perhaps without some of the earlier disputants, and apparently did not revisit all the earlier debates about active obedience.²⁸⁴

Perhaps a brief excursus on the justification debates in the Westminster Assembly of Divines is in order at this point. The original debate, in September 1643, in which Twisse was the prolocutor and Vines and Gataker, among others, argued, heatedly at times, over whether the active obedience of Christ, as well as the passive, was imputed to us in our justification, focused on whether the word “whole” should be added to modify “obedience” in the ar-

of the imputation of the active obedience in justification (see William Barker, *Puritan Profiles* [Fearn, UK: Mentor, 1996], 176).

²⁸² Barker, *Puritan Profiles*, 176.

²⁸³ The Westminster Assembly of Divines, it should be remembered, first met on July 6, 1643, called by the English Parliament to revise the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. The Assembly began immediate work on the articles and by October 1643 had worked on fifteen of the thirty-nine articles, including article 11 on justification. With the ratification of the Solemn League and Covenant between England and Scotland, however, work in October 1643 was suspended on the articles of religion, and the work of the Assembly was redirected to the preparation of common forms for the government, discipline, and worship of the church, together with a completely new confession that would be thereafter known as the Westminster Confession of Faith (*Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993], 862–65).

²⁸⁴ Twisse, having been ill and having missed many sessions, died between Session 676 (July 17, 1646) and Session 677 (July 22, 1646). It was in Session 678, on July 23, 1646, that “report was made by Mr. Arrowsmith ‘of Justification and Adoption.’ The Report was debated, and upon debate agreed to; and it is as followeth [in our current WCF, chapters 11–12]” (Mitchell and Struthers, *Minutes*, 258–59). Thus, Twisse was not present at the debate, and it is unclear what role Gataker played, whose health “after the first two years of the Assembly ... forced him to curtail his activities” (Barker, *Puritan Profiles*, 159).

title defining justification.²⁸⁵ Several eminent divines, most notably Gataker, believed that the addition of the word “whole” would require the affirmation of the imputation of Christ’s active obedience in justification, an affirmation that, for various and differing reasons, several of the divines were unwilling to make. The reasons that Gataker and a handful of other divines opposed “whole” modifying “obedience,” while fascinating and worthy of examination in their own right, are not germane to our task here. What is important to note is that proponents of adding the word “whole” recognized that opponents of adding it opposed it as they did because they opposed affirming that Christ’s active obedience is imputed to us in our justification. When the vote finally came on September 11, 1643, after days of intensive debate, the revised article, *with the addition of “whole,”* was adopted with only three or four dissenting.²⁸⁶ This means that the divines, when the active obedience of Christ was being hotly debated, adopted a phrase that all concerned agreed was a positive affirmation of the active obedience of Christ being imputed in justification. It is crucial to recognize that the only time, as far as we know, that there was a debate in the Westminster Assembly of Divines directly focused on the question of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in justification, the Assembly determined positively to affirm the active obedience by the addition of the word “whole” to the revision of article 11 of the

²⁸⁵ The original article 11 was as follows: “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort; as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.” The proposed revision that occasioned all the debate about the addition of the word “whole” to modify “obedience” was as follows: “We are justified, that is, we are accounted righteous before God, and have remission of sins, not for nor by our own works or deservings, but freely by his grace, only for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’s sake, his whole obedience and satisfaction being by God imputed unto us, and Christ with his righteousness, being apprehended and rested on by faith only, is an wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort: notwithstanding God doth not forgive them that are impenitent, and go on still in their trespasses.” (The original and revised texts are given in Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation,” 270 and 320, respectively.)

²⁸⁶ Van Dixhoorn’s entire chapter 5 in “Reforming the Reformation,” together with his publishing (as part of the seven volumes of his dissertation) of the hitherto unpublished Assembly Minutes relevant to the September 1643 justification debate, is indispensable for this matter. See in re: the Assembly Minutes for this (Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation,” 320).

Thirty-Nine Articles.²⁸⁷

One might rightly wonder what happened to the debate over requiring an affirmation of the active obedience of Christ as being imputed in justification because, as far as the Assembly's records are concerned, the dispute drops out of view. Does this mean that the Assembly did require the affirmation of the active obedience of Christ and then reversed that position, that what the Assembly required in 1643 it dropped as a requirement in 1646? If so, what would account for this?²⁸⁸ There is a good deal of speculation as to

²⁸⁷ The other citations in the Assembly Minutes, which include every reference at the Westminster Assembly to the doctrine of justification, are located in Van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation," 324, nn. 234–235, which read as follows: "2 Dec. 1645; 23 July 1646; and 4 Feb. 1647 (Minutes 3:113r, 281v or 166v, 303v or 195v). For the debates on the text of the chapters, see 3, 8–11, 16 Dec 1645; for the scriptures see, 10, 11 Feb. 1647 (Minutes 3:113r–115r, 123v–124r)." There is no record for any of these dates, when checked in the Minutes concerning the Confession of Faith and catechisms, of any debate on justification, not to mention active obedience, comparable to that held in September 1643, when the Assembly voted to affirm active obedience by retaining the language of "whole obedience."

²⁸⁸ It is Mitchell's opinion that, though "far the major part [of the Westminster Assembly] voted for the affirmative, that Christ's *whole* obedience was imputed to the believer," Daniel Featley, a major advocate for affirming the whole obedience, yielded to the dissenters because the question of active obedience was new and not disputed in previous centuries; "probably," Mitchell continues, "it was on this account [of several factors, including the newer nature of the question] that when the Assembly came to treat of the subject of Justification in their Confession of Faith [in chapter 11] they left out the word *whole* to which Gataker and his friends had most persistently objected," so that the dissenters were content to accept chapter 11 as less rigid than the earlier revised article 11. Mitchell cites Simeon Ashe's funeral sermon for Gataker as maintaining that "Gataker and his friends agreed to drop further controversy on the question," once the point had been conceded (*Westminster Assembly*, 155–56). Van Dixhoorn ("Reforming the Reformation," 324–330) tends also to read all the evidence, on balance, as indicating that the Assembly ultimately adopted a consensual position (that would accommodate those scrupling at affirming active obedience), though he cites possibly counter-indicatory evidence as well, such as how Ashe's funeral sermon for Gataker is to be interpreted: "Other comment on the conclusion of the debate is provided by Simeon Ashe, where he cites Gataker's silence at the end of the debate as an example of his peace-loving spirit" (329). Ashe also brings up Gataker's "resolutions" not to publish his discourses on Rom 3:28, "that he might not publicly discover his dissent from the Votes of that Reverend Assembly." The clear implication is that the Assembly codified a doctrine of justification with which Gataker could not agree. Unfortunately Ashe and Gataker do not say if he is referring to Gataker's silent

why the Assembly appeared not to press the issue in 1646 and did not include the word “whole” before “obedience” in 11.1. But it must be remembered that, in 1643, the revised article 11 had to carry the burden of everything that was then proposed to be said about the doctrine of justification.²⁸⁹ In 1646, the divines were afforded far greater luxury than when they were restricted to revising the Thirty-Nine Articles. They enjoyed the entirety of not only chapter 11 in the newly minted Confession, but significant room in the catechisms to express more fully their doctrine of justification.²⁹⁰ It is the contention of this Committee that the Confession and catechisms, taken together as a whole, positively teach the active obedience of Christ.²⁹¹ Any argument that

opposition to votes on the eleventh article (which would tell us nothing new) or votes on the eleventh chapter of the Confession, which would suggest that Gataker understood the Assembly’s final text, even with its increased ambiguity, to be teaching a view opposite to his own. Gataker’s own comment on the matter is also ambiguous: he states that Twisse and “one of the Independent partie” agreed with his views, but the majority of the Assembly did not.

²⁸⁹ “Some divines, even some advocates of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, felt the language of whole obedience was itself ambiguous. Featley initially urged that the Assembly use the language of the imputation of the ‘perfect satisfaction and righteousnesse of Christ’” (Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation,” 328). The language of WCF 8:5 and 11:1–3 is in these very terms, 11:3 speaking even more fully about a “proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father’s justice in their behalf” and distinguishing between Christ’s “obedience and satisfaction,” with the word “both.” It is hard to see how this is any less than Featley, one of the stalwart defenders of active obedience, would have wanted.

²⁹⁰ Van Dixhoorn has noted that “perhaps the strongest evidence of favour of reading the Assembly’s *Confession* in a consensual fashion, is the fact that when the Independents revised and then reissued the Assembly’s *Confession of faith* in 1658, they inserted the language of the ‘active and passive obedience’ of Christ into their version of the *Confession*” (330). For the full text of the 1658 Savoy Declaration, see Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3.104–35. The addition made to the Savoy Declaration in its chapter 11 is arguably stronger than what was adopted by the Westminster Assembly. There is, however, no clear evidence that Savoy’s addition was anything other than a clarification of what Westminster intended. That this addition represents a significant one to Westminster must not be simply assumed, but needs to be demonstrated from primary sources. It is noteworthy that Philip Schaff did not regard Savoy’s addition to WCF 11 as one worth mentioning in the changes that Savoy made to the WCF (Philip Schaff, *The Creeeds of Christendom* [1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 3.718).

²⁹¹ See sections B and D in chapter I (“General Introduction”), particularly D.3, “The

the Westminster Assembly of Divines cast its teaching on justification to allow room for those who would deny the imputation of Christ's active obedience is, at best, speculative, and does not comport, we would contend, with the tenor of the Standards as a whole or the church's understanding of its Standards in subsequent years.

It is the case that what is at issue here is not only the original intent of the Westminster divines, but also the *animus imponentis* of the church. While it may properly be argued that the doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in justification was a newer concept in the 1640s, particularly as to explicit development of the doctrine, such is no longer true. Since the time of the Assembly, the leading theologians of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches have developed the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active obedience, and this has shaped the way that the church has read the Westminster Standards. Thus the *animus* of the church, shaped by Turretin, Hodge, etc., has come decidedly to embrace active obedience and to read the Confession as explicitly affirming such.²⁹²

Rich Lusk writes, in marked contrast to the Westminster Confession, "This justification requires no transfer or imputation of anything. It does not force us to reify 'righteousness' into something that can be shuffled around in heavenly accounting books. Rather, because I am in the Righteous One and the Vindicated One, I am righteous and vindicated. My in-Christ-ness makes imputation redundant. I do not need the moral content of his life of righteousness transferred to me; what I need is a share in the forensic verdict passed over him at the resurrection. Union with Christ is therefore the key."²⁹³ The WCF certainly recognizes the significance of union with Christ, both explicitly (cf. WLC 66 and 69) and also under various rubrics (cf. WCF 25.1; 28.1; 29.1). But neither our Standards, nor a host of Reformed theologians who also clearly affirm the importance of union with Christ, have taught that such union swallows up every other theological consideration and solves every theological problem. We need to be reckoned or accounted (λογιζομαι) as righteous in God's sight, and imputation is the way that we as

Active Obedience of Christ."

²⁹² See the discussions on original intent and *animus imponentis* in the "Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation," *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly* (2004), 257–66, applying to this doctrine what was there applied to creation views.

²⁹³ Lusk, "A Response," 142.

a confessional church understand the Scriptures to speak of that transfer of righteousness (cf. WLC 71).

3. The Meaning of Justification and Gentile Inclusion

To this point we have seen something of the importance of understanding righteousness and its imputation to us if we are properly to understand what we as a church believe about justification. Perhaps it would be most helpful at this point to focus on what Westminster teaches justification to be over against FV promoters who teach that justification is primarily about the inclusion of the Gentiles (cf. WLC 70). Schlissel sees Paul's teaching about justification in that light, writing approvingly of an author, "As noted by another, 'For Paul, justification tells us how God accepts Gentiles.' ... Justification for him [Paul] had less to do with a guilty conscience than with the new age inaugurated with Jesus."²⁹⁴ But justification, according to our Standards, has everything to do with a guilty conscience, both for the Jews under the old covenant and the Jews and Gentiles under the new, all of whom are sinners needing to be declared righteous in the sight of a holy God.²⁹⁵

That the new covenant means at least that Gentiles can now come in as could Jews of old, and that without the requirements of the ceremonial law, is inarguable, according to our Confession (WCF 7.6). The real question is the meaning and significance of the justification of any sinner, Jew or Gentile. To reduce this vital doctrine to Gentile inclusion is to impoverish the richness of justification in both testaments.

Schlissel argues further, "It is not grace that is new in the New Testament. It is not faith that is new in the New Testament. It is not justification that is new in the New Testament. What is new is that Gentiles are fully incorporated into Israel by faith alone."²⁹⁶ What confessionalists have asserted that grace, faith, and justification are not found in the Old Testament? Our Confession clearly teaches that, though the covenant of grace "was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel," that "there are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations" (WCF 7.5–6). And with spe-

²⁹⁴ Schlissel, "Justification and the Gentiles," 242.

²⁹⁵ See section C ("The Inability of Sinners to Be Justified by Works") in chapter I ("General Introduction").

²⁹⁶ Schlissel, "Justification and the Gentiles," 243.

cific regard to this question as it involves justification, the Confession teaches that “the justification of believers under the old testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the new testament” (II.6).

Thus, Schlissel’s affirmation that faith, grace, and justification are not new in the New Testament are points taught by the Confession and not in contention among those who are confessional. What is in contention is what it means that God justifies the ungodly in either testament, whether Jew or Gentile. If justification is not about a guilty conscience in both testaments, what is it about? Schlissel asserts that “the inclusion of the Gentiles is not an, ‘oh yeah, that’s also important’ issue. It is THE issue occupying administrative center stage in the New Testament Scriptures.”²⁹⁷ This begs the question, however, of the way in which any sinner is made right with a holy God, i.e., entirely by grace. Both testaments, to be sure, teach salvation by grace alone through faith alone: the New Testament, though, teaches this with an explicitness that is not possible for the Old Testament, inasmuch as the New explicates the person and work of Christ in fulfillment. To teach that the New Testament is about Gentile inclusion more than the fulfillment of the glorious gospel of grace is quite misguided.

WCF 7.6 makes it clear that “under the gospel [as opposed to the time when the covenant of grace was administered “in the time of the law,” WCF 7.5] ... Christ, the substance, ... is held forth [in the fewer, simpler, “less outward glory” means of grace] in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy.” To be sure, Christ is held forth under the gospel “to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles.” But clearly the difference is not only extensive (all nations), but intensive (more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy), for all in a way that the Jews of the old covenant never experienced. For further confessional contrast than simply Gentile inclusion, see also WCF 20.1, which enumerates a number of blessings common to believers under the gospel and the law (to use its terms), noting the greater blessing under the gospel: “But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.”

Additionally, since it also falls properly under our consideration of the

²⁹⁷ Schlissel, “A New Way of Seeing?” 35.

question of imputation, it is important to note that a definition of justification, like that of Norman Shepherd, is deficient and one-sided. In defining justification, the Reformed churches include the imputation of Christ's active obedience, as well as his passive obedience (the forgiveness of sins). Shepherd, however, denies the imputation of active obedience and asserts repeatedly only that "Justification is the forgiveness of sins."²⁹⁸ In contrast, the Reformers and the confessions of the Reformation seem zealous to affirm the imputation of active obedience.

The Westminster Standards make it clear that the concern of justification is the forensic: a holy and righteous God, who is of purer eyes than to look upon sin, declaring sinners to be righteous in his eyes on the basis of Christ's righteousness imputed to them (their sins having been imputed to Christ) and received by faith alone (cf. WLC 70–73). This is what justification has meant in both testaments, with Old Testament believers experiencing this in shadowy form and New Testament believers enjoying the full revelation of such in the person and work of Christ. The Reformers were concerned that this be understood, over against medieval misunderstanding, that failed clearly to distinguish between justification and sanctification and that codified this confusion at Trent in its teaching about justification. This is why Leithart is misguided when he writes, "The Protestant doctrine has been too rigid separating justification and sanctification."²⁹⁹ Classic Protestantism, especially the Reformed tradition, has not separated them, if by that one means rent them asunder so that one could be justified without subsequently being sanctified. But Protestantism has distinguished them, and if there is anything for which Protestantism may be faulted, it is not its careful distinction of justification and sanctification. Rather, this is its genius and its glory (cf. WLC 77 on the distinctions between justification and sanctification).³⁰⁰

4. The Nature and Definition of Faith

We have seen that justification involves the imputation of Christ's righteousness, received by faith alone. How one defines faith and what it means

²⁹⁸ Shepherd, "Justification by Faith," 87. Shepherd does affirm the imputation of passive obedience in "Justification by Works," 111, though it does not have a prominent place in his own definition of justification.

²⁹⁹ Leithart, "Biblical Perspectives on Justification," 211.

³⁰⁰ See section G ("Justification and Sanctification") in chapter I ("General Introduction").

to affirm that faith alone is the instrument of our justification was of the utmost importance to the Reformers (cf. WLC 72–73). It is the case, as can be seen below, that some FV proponents clearly depart from the Reformed tradition in its understanding of the nature and definition of faith. FV promoters tend to merge faith (our resting and trusting in Christ) and faithfulness (our obedient response to the gospel that entails good works). To do this leads to the confusion of justification and sanctification. Faith, as it pertains to justification, as to its saving office, is extraspective, looking away from all that we are and do and have to Christ and him alone. This faith is indeed never alone, being ever accompanied with all other saving graces (WCF 11.2; 14.2). But it must be distinguished from those other graces, so that it is clear that our reliance for pardon and being declared righteous is on nothing other than the blood and righteousness of Christ, i.e., his obedience and sacrifice (WLC 73).

In speaking of justifying faith, Norman Shepherd, like some FV proponents, stresses its active character, that “justifying faith is not only a penitent faith but also an obedient faith,” and that faith “entails ... obedience to God’s Word.”³⁰¹ Scripture does describe justifying faith as “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). But, as noted previously, the faith that justifies, while always accompanied by other graces (including good works), does not justify because of any of these things “which do always accompany it, ... but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness” (WLC 73). This biblical emphasis on faith justifying, not because of all that accompanies it, but only as the instrument by which we receive and apply Christ and his righteousness, is an emphasis missing in Shepherd’s work. Rather, he so emphasizes that justifying faith includes the accompanying graces of which the Catechism speaks (including the believer’s good works), that he is unclear that and how faith is the sole instrument in justification to the exclusion of all that accompanies it.

To assert, as does our Confession (WCF 11.2), that “faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification,” is to distinguish such faith from all that accompanies it. There would be no point of arguing that “faith ... is the alone instrument of justification” if the act of saving faith itself was to be identified with obedience and good works.³⁰² One often hears and reads “trust and obey” used by FV

³⁰¹ Shepherd, “Justification by Faith,” 91–92.

³⁰² See section F.1 (“The Alone Instrument of Justification”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

proponents as if they were indistinguishable.³⁰³ Reformed theology affirms that all who trust will obey, but stresses both the priority and the exclusive instrumentality of faith, because it is our believing (“receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness”) that effectuates our justification, and not the obedience and good works that flow from such. Our works play no role whatsoever in our justification, although they are evidences of it.³⁰⁴

Schlissel criticizes a nineteenth-century Lutheran theologian who wrote that “to equate faith with obedience ... is to confuse and mix law and gospel. If faith is turned into obedience, then the gospel has been turned into a new law ... and Christ has become a new Moses.” Schlissel exclaims, “Of course Christ has become a new Moses! That is rather the point of the New Testament.”³⁰⁵ Given that justification in Schlissel’s schema is reduced to Gentile inclusion, this means that what Moses brought to the Israelites, Christ now brings to the nations. One would wonder whether Schlissel understands either. He claims that salvation has always been by faithful obedience, whereas the historic Reformed claim is that salvation, after Adam’s fall, is by Christ’s faithful obedience which we receive by faith alone and to which we add nothing.³⁰⁶

The historic Reformed faith, in fact, as embodied in the Westminster Standards, has never taught that the most significant divide is between the Old and New Testaments, but between the pre-Fall and post-Fall worlds. And here is where the real divide comes in between the Westminster position and that of the FV: some of the proponents of the FV flatten out the differences between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds and argue that the “faithfulness—or, faith-filled obedience—[that] was the basic requirement for Adam” is still the same for us: “After the fall, of course, the same posture of faith is required.... [F]aith is still faith.”³⁰⁷ While it is quite proper to argue within confessional orthodoxy that God was kind and benevolent in his dealing with Adam before the Fall, what God required of Adam for him

³⁰³ See, e.g., Sandlin, “Covenant in Redemptive History,” 63–84, for his contention that since there is no law/gospel antithesis of any kind, the dynamic of the pre- and post-Fall divine-human relationship is, and always has been, “trust and obey.”

³⁰⁴ See section C (“The Inability of Sinners to Be Justified by Works”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

³⁰⁵ Schlissel, “A New Way of Seeing?” 23.

³⁰⁶ See sections F.1 (“The Alone Instrument of Justification”) and F.2 (“The Nature of Saving Faith”) in chapter I (“General Introduction”).

³⁰⁷ Lusk, “A Response,” 124–25.

to inherit eternal life and to enter eschatological glory was indeed, as Lusk argues, “obedience,” even faith-filled obedience if by that is meant simply an obedience arising out of trusting. What is now required by faith is something quite different. Faith after the Fall involves the recognition that one cannot obey of one’s own power and must rest and trust in another to do for him what he could never do for himself.

5. Assurance and Perseverance

Historic Reformed theology has understood its doctrine of justification to entail a blessed sense of assurance on the part of believers and to guarantee their perseverance to the end. If faith is reconceived as faithfulness, or is thought to include such in its basic definition, as it is for many who promote the FV, then assurance, as conceived in the Scriptures and Westminster Standards, must also be recast. It is interesting that so many of the men who promote the FV do so explicitly with the expressed intention of addressing the problem of assurance.³⁰⁸ The contention of these FV writers is that many Reformed and Presbyterian church members suffer from a lack of assurance that stems from morbidly introspective self-examination. The reason, say the FV men, that some Christians engage routinely in such unproductive self-examination is that their view of the faith is overly subjective. The cure for such spiritual navel-gazing, according to FV partisans, is a healthy dose of covenantal objectivism, in which baptism is said to regenerate, the Lord’s Supper is to be given to all the baptized (apart from profession of faith), and election is to be read through the covenant so as to avoid pesky dithering about whether one is or is not elect. If such covenantal objectivism could be properly understood and embraced, so goes the FV thinking, one would be pointed away from oneself to all the glorious objective truths and by such encouraged and assured.

Steve Wilkins seeks to ground assurance in the objective signs and seals of the covenant (baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the new covenant), but in so doing undermines the possibility of assurance on the basis of which the Standards ground assurance. Wilkins taught at the 2003 Auburn Avenue Pastors’ Conference that “when we say ... ‘look to your baptism,’ we’re talk-

³⁰⁸ Articles by Barach (“Covenant and Election,” 15–47), Wilkins (“Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” 47–70), and Lusk (“Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 71–126) in *Federal Vision* all deal with assurance in various respects.

ing about looking to Christ in the covenant, and realizing what you can know for certain. You cannot know if you were ever sincere. You cannot know if you really meant it when you asked Jesus into your heart and threw the pine cone into the fire. You can't know those. Those questions are unanswerable. Were you really given a new heart? Well, you can't answer that question. God knows. You don't know. What you can know is that you have been baptized and you have the Lord's Supper."³⁰⁹ If by "you can't answer the question" and "you don't know," Wilkins means that we cannot chronologically pinpoint regeneration or even often the initial act of faith, then there are no objections. But what he seems to mean is that you cannot know whether these things have happened to you (subjectively), but can only look to the objective realities of the sacraments. Our Confession says quite clearly (WCF 18.1–2) that you can know that you have "inward evidence" of faith, which, taken together with the Word and the Spirit, constitute "infallible assurance."

To be sure, excessive introspection is unhealthy, if that is what Wilkins seeks to warn against, and one ought (as Horatius Bonar is said to have urged) to take ten looks at Christ for every look at oneself. But FV objectivism notwithstanding, unless it is conceived that the sacraments are saving apart from faith (and not a single FV proponent believes that), assurance will always be a problem when faith is redefined as faithfulness/obedience, because every honest, sensitive soul will have questions about whether one has been obedient enough. Looking at one's own faithfulness (and wondering about one's future faithfulness) is not calculated to increase assurance.

According to the Westminster Confession, faith rests upon Christ and his work in justification, particularly the righteousness of Christ. And, to go back further in the "golden chain," those who exercise saving faith are those who have been elected to such unconditionally (WCF 3.5–6). Since the elect are, in time, effectually called and regenerated, they are also justified, with faith, not faithfulness, as the alone instrument. Thus, assurance that one is, and will continue to be, justified and adopted as God's child, is available to all believers; indeed, "a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of [assurance]; yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto" (WCF 18.3). And such assurance is said to be "infallible," founded on the Scripture, the "inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises

³⁰⁹ Recorded lecture from 2003 AAPC.

are made,” and the testimony of the Spirit witnessing with our spirits (WCF 18.2).

And assurance is tied in with justification, because, as demonstrated above, justification is definitive. We do indeed await open acknowledgment and acquittal at the last day (WLC 90), but we are as justified now as we ever will be. We are assured now that we “can never fall from the state of justification” (WCF 11.5) and justification doth “free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation” (WLC 77; note that believers are secure here and now, in this life).

The covenantal objectivism and high ecclesiology of the FV is unable to yield the promised assurance because faithfulness/perseverance is uncertain and thus apostasy threatens us all.³¹⁰ Perhaps it will suffice for now to note that the interpretive method of the FV often seems revealed in discussions of perseverance and covenant apostasy. The FV claims in its covenant approach to have cut the Gordian knot of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility by emphasizing our covenant faithfulness and not concerning ourselves with God’s part, i.e., election, vis-à-vis Deut 29:29. But one may not permit covenant to swallow up election any more than one may allow election to nullify covenant. Both must be held in biblical tension. Favoring one over the other is rationalism, no matter how much those who do may eschew such an assertion.

J. Ecclesiology

Underlying all the preceding theological positions of the FV that we have herein examined is a doctrine of the church in which ecclesiology threatens to swallow soteriology and a vibrant sacramentalism threatens to turn into sacerdotalism. Foundational to FV ecclesiology is a tendency in the FV to deny the inner/outer aspects of the covenant along with the visible/invisible aspects of the church.³¹¹ These tendencies will need to be addressed elsewhere (and are more fully treated, e.g., in the forthcoming analysis of the FV by Guy Waters), especially since ecclesiology has assumed the all-consuming role

³¹⁰ See Wilson, “Sacramental Efficacy,” 224–32; Rich Lusk, “New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4–8 as Test Case,” in *Federal Vision*, 271–99.

³¹¹ See especially in *Knox Colloquium*: Barach, “Covenant and Election,” 149–56; Wilson, “Sacramental Efficacy,” 233–44; Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” 254–69; and Douglas Wilson, “The Church: Visible or Invisible?” in *Federal Vision*, 263–69.

that it has for many in the FV. To be sure, much FV ecclesiological and sacramental theorizing goes beyond what we are able to consider: the impact of FV ecclesiology on its doctrine of justification. While the committee may differ with various strands of FV ecclesiology on this or that point, what is relevant in this critique is how FV ecclesiology affects the FV doctrine of justification. Given that focus, we now turn to examine some FV teaching on the sacraments and their efficacy, seeking to gauge its impact on the doctrine of justification.

Wilson, for instance, writes on the sacraments:

Raise your hand if you knew that the Westminster Confession of Faith taught baptismal regeneration.... Baptism means that the one baptized has a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, the one baptized has been grafted into Christ, he has the sign and seal of regeneration, forgiveness of sins and the obligation to walk in newness of life.³¹²

Wilson's language of "baptismal regeneration" is, at best, confusing, since the Reformed have not historically used this language to refer to baptism.³¹³ One may have a high view of baptism and its efficacy without believing that the outward act of baptism itself is to be described as regenerative.³¹⁴ No small part of Wilson's problem here, we observe, lies perhaps in what he

³¹² Douglas Wilson, *"Reformed" Is Not Enough: Rediscovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow: Canon, 2002), 103–4.

³¹³ In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 1994), baptism is defined as "'the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit,' for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one 'can enter the kingdom of God,'" (§ 1215). This catechism, as well as a host of other Roman Catholic theological works, explains how the washing of baptism removes the stain of original sin and confers the grace of initial justification (§§ 1266 and 1992). While sin after baptism tends to destroy or diminish the grace conferred in baptism, subsequent engagement of the entire sacerdotal system of Rome furnishes one with the "sanctification of the whole human being" that is necessary for final justification and admittance to heavenly glory (see, e.g., §§ 1446 and 1995). To speak, as does Wilson, of baptismal regeneration is to depart from the Reformed way of treating baptism and to place oneself in the uncomfortable position of using terminology fraught with a host of undesirable consequences.

³¹⁴ For such a high view, in which the sealing aspect of baptism is strongly affirmed, see Alan D. Strange, "Baptism as a Seal," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 21/7 (July–August 2000): 3–4.

fails to say. In Wilson's writing about sacramental efficacy one does not find a reference to WCF 14.1 on saving faith. WCF 14.1 teaches that "the grace of faith" that enables the elect to believe "is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word"; and that this grace of faith "is increased and strengthened" by the Word, sacraments and prayer (emphasis added). The Word brings about faith, and faith is then increased by the Word, sacraments, and prayer. This is the order set forth in our Standards. WLC 155 and WSC 89 support this contention, asserting that the Spirit of God makes the reading and especially the preaching of the Word "an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners." Nowhere does the Confession or the catechisms ascribe this work of convincing and converting sinners to the sacraments. It is "especially the preaching" of the Word that produces, by the Spirit's ministration, saving faith. Anytime saving faith is in view, or at stake, so is the doctrine of justification, inasmuch as faith is a gift of God whereby he enables us to apprehend him. Thus, we would maintain that there is a distinction between the ministry of the Word and the administration of the sacraments that many of the FV promoters seem to be missing.³¹⁵

Furthermore, Wilson tends to stress that the sacraments are efficacious regardless of the recipient's subjective condition, which is not what the WCF teaches. Time and again, the Confession ties the efficacy of the sacraments to being in the covenant of grace (WLC 162) or to being those who by faith receive them (WSC 91). Wilson does mention the need for evangelical faith in the use of the sacraments, but blunts or negates this assertion by his insistence on what he calls the objectivity of the sacraments. In Wilson's teaching, the sacraments constitute one as a real branch of Christ. It might prove

³¹⁵ Protestantism has historically enjoyed a high view of preaching. Many have in recent years powerfully argued for the recovery of a high view of the sacraments, like the view that Calvin held. It would be deadly for the church, however, if in recovering a high view of the sacraments she loses a high view of preaching, particularly the centrality of preaching. It is the case that our Standards have a high view of the sacraments, but they see them as distinctly accompanying the ministry of the Word, which is primary. See Cornelis P. Venema, "The Doctrine of Preaching according to the Reformed Confessions," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 135–83, and Alan D. Strange, "Comments on the Centrality of Preaching in the Westminster Standards," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 185–238, for a discussion of the historic Reformed commitment to a high view of preaching. See Alan D. Strange, "Sacraments, the Spirit, and Human Inability," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 12 (2001): 223–46, for a high view of the sacraments that does not entail the kind of errors that either Rome, on the one hand, or the FV, on the other, makes.

to be a fruitless branch, but it is a real branch nonetheless: “A true son is brought into the covenant and is nourished there. A false son is brought into the covenant and by his unbelief incurs the chastisements of that covenant. Objectively, both the true and the false son are brought into the *same* relationship.”³¹⁶ In this way, the sacraments work in all, according to Wilson. But WCF 27.3 envisions them as working in “worthy receivers,” correlative with WCF 28.6, which notes that baptism is efficacious “to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto,” i.e., the elect. Wilson, however, sees both true and false sons brought into the *same* relationship. Again this follows because of Wilson’s tendency to reject the Confession’s teaching on the visible/invisible distinction of the church and the internal/external standing of the individuals in the covenant.

Lusk, too, manifests confusion in relating preaching to the sacraments and in understanding the role of faith in receiving the grace offered in the sacraments.³¹⁷ In an internet article, “Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace: A Few Proposals,” Lusk argues that preaching makes one desire what God offers them in the sacraments.³¹⁸ In Proposal 4, he comments on Peter’s sermon in Acts 2. He offers these thoughts tentatively:

At this point, the word has done its work. The hearers have been aroused and convicted, but, apparently they still aren’t saved. Preaching alone is insufficient to make them participants in Christ’s work of redemption. Thus Peter tells them what they must do. They must respond to the preached word with repentance and be baptized to enter into the way of salvation. Baptism, not preaching per se, is linked with forgiveness and the reception of the Spirit. Clearly, Peter believes God will give them something in baptism that they have not received through preaching alone. Baptism will consummate the process of regeneration begun by the Word preached.

³¹⁶ Wilson, “*Reformed*” *Is Not Enough*, 96; cf. Wilson, “The Church: Visible or Invisible?” 268.

³¹⁷ A helpful recent analysis of Lusk’s problematic doctrine of baptism and sacramentology may be found in William B. Evans, “‘Really Exhibited and Conferred ... in His Appointed Time’: Baptism and the New Reformed Sacramentalism,” *Presbyterian* 31/2 (Fall 2005): 72–88.

³¹⁸ See http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/some_proposals_about_the_means_of_grace.htm.

In the next proposal, Lusk asserts, “Preaching communicates truth, the sacraments communicate life.” Lusk wants to put the sacraments into the role of converting ordinances. On Lusk’s construction, as presented here, faith comes by hearing and the sacraments, not by hearing alone. At least one could assume that hearing the Word preached is not sufficient for conversion, but requires baptism to complete what was begun in the preaching of the Word, with the sacrament assuming the decisive place in conversion.

Lusk, seeking to secure a central place for baptism in conferring the grace of salvation, writes, “Sacraments are not merely signs: they are signs cojoined with the gracious work of Christ and the Spirit.” By this he means:

Baptism is a work of both water and the Spirit (cf. John 3:5). Water alone is not baptism, it is an empty symbol. Nor is the work of the Spirit apart from the means of water a baptism. The sacrament includes both. Baptism is more than just a sign; it is also the grace signified.

In support of this understanding, he quotes WCF 27.2–3, from which he concludes that, “The sacrament is constituted by both the material sign and Christ with his new covenant benefits. The two are so closely related that we may collapse them together in our sacramental language. The claim ‘Baptism saves’ really means, ‘Christ saves through baptism.’” He further states, “The Westminster Standards teach that in baptism, the thing signified which is nothing less than union with Christ, regeneration, and forgiveness—is truly sealed (WCF 28.1), conferred (WCF 28.5), applied (WSC 92), and communicated (WSC 88). Baptism is an ‘effectual means of salvation’ (WSC 91).” Lusk asserts that to believe otherwise is subconfessional because baptism is a saving ordinance.³¹⁹

After giving us examples of those who fall prey to this revivalism and Enlightenment understanding, he calls us to reconsider our view of signs. In looking at the signs in Exodus and John, “we find that signs are powerful, transformative, saving actions of God.” On this basis, we may think of the sacraments mechanically, but because there is “a sacramental union of the creaturely element and the active presence of Christ, Christ has joined himself to these elements, even as deity joined itself to humanity in the incarnation.”

Recognizing that what he has said previously might open him to the

³¹⁹ Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 98.

charge of sacerdotalism, Lusk now wants to say that, “We must combine the waters of baptism with living faith.”³²⁰ He wants to assure us that baptism does not “automatically guarantee” final salvation. There is a subjective response required on the part of the recipient. Baptism’s “efficacy is inherent and objective, yet conditional.” Even though this has been said, Lusk asserts that the sacrament still has an objective efficacy. It still accomplishes something:

By contrast, at the same time, the reformed confessions do bind us to believe in a certain limited version of *ex opere operato*: everyone baptized, no matter their subjective heart condition, is joined to the “visible church” at the time of their baptism—automatically and without exception, right then and there, you might say (cf. WCF 28:1).

This is claiming quite a lot for baptism.³²¹ Recall that Lusk, with other FV proponents, says that there is ultimately only one aspect to the church. Though he adduces the language of “visible church” here, putting it in quotes—is he implying by such that he means the “so-called” visible church?—he does not otherwise agree that there is, properly, an invisible/visible distinction. What

³²⁰ Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 103–7.

³²¹ Both Lusk and Wilson claim that their view of baptism is merely that of the Westminster Standards and that the problem they seek to address is that Presbyterians have departed from Westminster’s high view and have embraced a subconfessional view. The Directory for the Publick Worship of God, adopted by the Westminster Assembly of Divines in 1645 as a part of its work, sheds significant light on this matter. Reading the Directory together with the Confession points us in a rather different direction from that urged by Lusk and Wilson. Both the word of instruction at baptism and the prayer following baptism make it clear that the divines embraced neither a baptismal regeneration view nor an *ex opere operato* view (limited or otherwise). The prayer following baptism is particularly noteworthy, beseeching the Lord that if the infant should live “and attain the years of discretion, that the Lord would so teach him by his word and Spirit, and make his baptism effectual to him” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* [Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995], 382–84): the whole tenor of the baptismal service runs along this line, i.e., beseeching the Lord by his Spirit to effectuate in the baptized that which was signified in their baptism, not seeing the sign and its efficacy so inextricably linked as to render such a prayer superfluous. Had the divines had such a view as that for which Wilson and Lusk contend, one would expect the prayer following baptism to be more purely one of thanks to God for what he has by baptism done to and in the child rather than involving, as it does in the Directory, an earnest pleading that God would do for and in the child that which baptism represents.

Lusk is saying is that no matter what the subjective responses of baptized individuals are, they are joined to the body of Christ. “Baptism doesn’t cease to be a real means of real grace just because the one baptized doesn’t exercise faith.” He goes on to write, “It is always a blessing to receive God’s heavenly rain (cf. Heb 6:7–8). But if the one baptized rejects what God offers and gives in baptism—namely, Christ Himself—then those waters of life become waters of drowning and judgment.” But is it a real means of *grace* if what is conveyed is judgment and not grace? Since when do means of grace that are truly “means of grace to me” convey judgment?

The question of paedobaptism and faith also presents no problem for Lusk, at this point, because he maintains in his book on paedofaith that the norm for covenant children is that God gives them faith in the womb.³²² This is, of course, a conception of faith from which *notitia* (the intellectual content of faith) has been evacuated. In turning faith into either faithfulness or a feeling of trust/dependence, the FV, at such points, sounds more like Rome, on the one hand, and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), on the other hand, than it does Geneva or Westminster. Paedofaith, on this construction, bears little resemblance to the biblical and confessional conception of saving faith.

Lusk also seeks to answer the question, “What is the relationship of paedobaptism to conversion?”³²³ In answering this question, Lusk sets forth what he calls the organic model of viewing covenant children. From the moment of conception, covenant children have a promise from God to be inheritors of his covenantal blessings. Lusk says they are betrothed to the Lord. They are then married fully to God at their baptism.

God is already in the process of drawing the child to Himself from the moment of conception. The examples of David (Psalm 22: 9–10) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:41) show God’s *in utero*, pre-sacramental work. But the work isn’t complete until the child receives the sign of initiation. The child remains in a liminal transitional state until then. The threshold into union with Christ, new life in the Spirit, and covenant membership in the family of God is actually crossed when the child is baptized.³²⁴

³²² Rich Lusk, *Paedofaith: A Primer on Infant Salvation and a Handbook for Covenant Parents* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2005), 5–6.

³²³ Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 107–13.

³²⁴ Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 108–9.

This notion that the child does not enjoy covenant membership until baptism contradicts WLC 166, which reverses that order, arguing that “infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.” We do not baptize our children, in other words, so that they may be in the covenant.³²⁵ We baptize our children because they already are “in that respect within the covenant.”

Aside from this point, however, Lusk maintains that this organic model (that children have union with Christ, new life in the Spirit, etc.) should be the controlling presupposition in our dealing with covenant children. There is no need to speak to covenant children about conversion because they (all who are baptized) are already in a saving union with Christ. Lusk further writes,

A baptized person is a Christian until and unless he apostatizes. Let us learn to treat our baptized children as the Christians that they are. This is what it means to receive little ones in Jesus’ name (Luke 18:16). Counting and treating our baptized children as Christians is not a matter of pretending or presuming. It is more than a judgment of charity.³²⁶

In baptism they were incorporated into Christ’s body, inducted into the royal priesthood of the church, and initiated into the new creation.³²⁷

How are we to view our children? The same as we would view any and all members of Christ’s body: “We are not to try to convert our baptized children, as though their spiritual experience had to fit the revivalistic paradigms, rather, we teach them to persevere in the faith and grace that they have already received in baptism.” For Lusk, since baptism is a converting ordinance, there is no necessity to look for fruits of regeneration in a baptized child because we know they are converted. This is not a pretension or presumption, it is

³²⁵ Here again, the baptismal service in the Directory for the Publick Worship of God is instructive: it is not baptism that makes our children Christian or federally holy, but rather, by virtue of their having at least one Christian parent, “they are Christians, and federally holy *before* baptism, and therefore are they baptized” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 383 [emphasis added]).

³²⁶ Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 112.

³²⁷ Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 113.

real, it is true. God normally gives faith to covenant children at conception; therefore, after baptism we are to help them persevere in the redeemed life and encourage them in all the means of grace (paedocommunion). Given all that baptism gives them, it is little wonder that we should give them, at the earliest ages, communion. Paedofaith qualifies for paedobaptism and paedocommunion.

Perhaps it would be helpful, then, to enumerate some of these rather serious problems that we discover in Lusk's teaching on baptism:

1. Lusk's view of the sacrament as being a converting ordinance is not the teaching of the Westminster Standards (WCF 14.1; 10.1, 3; WLC 67; WSC 31).
2. Lusk's view that preaching alone is insufficient to make the hearers participate in Christ's work of redemption is not the teaching of the Westminster Standards (WLC 155; WSC 89).
3. Lusk's view of the sacramental union of the creaturely elements and the active presence of Christ, even as deity joined itself to humanity in the incarnation, is not the teaching of the Westminster Standards (WCF 2; WLC 163).
4. Lusk's view of a limited version of *ex opere operato* with regard to the sacraments is not the teaching of the Westminster Standards (WCF 27.13; 28.6; WLC 161; WSC 91).
5. Lusk's view that paedofaith is the norm for covenant children is not the teaching of the Westminster Standards (WCF 28.6; 14.1; WLC 67, 68; WSC 31).

We have taken one of the more moderate FV men (Wilson) and one of the more radical FV men (Lusk) and examined them in ecclesiology, particularly the sacraments, and have found them downplaying the need for faith, or the intellectual content of faith, or some such thing, so that they may stress the objectivity of the sacraments, the covenant, the church, etc. But we must subjectively exercise faith to enjoy God's justifying and sanctifying acts in which he both forensically declares and transformatively works. This faith is a gift of God, worked particularly by the preaching of the Word. It is our concern that in the attempt to recover a high view of the sacraments, the FV runs in the opposite direction and downplays the preaching of the Word as the primary developer of saving faith. And the nature of saving faith is and always will be crucial for a right understanding of the doctrine of justification.

K. Eschatology

Finally, in terms of eschatology, these men are largely, if not entirely, postmillennial, and this comes into play even in the view they have of this controversy. They expect, it seems, the church to come to some different understandings about many of these issues than she has thus far (a not uncommon version of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, “the reformed church is always to be reformed”). This means, for some, that there is a provisional aspect, not merely to our confessional formulations, but even to their substance, and that further historical development necessitates the modification of the way we conceive covenant, righteousness, merit, etc., all which impacts our formulation of justification. Some FV advocates believe that there is an ecumenical imperative that should militate against what they judge to be excessive precision in our theological formulation. This ecumenical impulse often manifests itself in the conviction that the church ought to seek to achieve broad agreement, even across confessional lines, without insisting upon all the substance of the Reformed confessions. It is often observed that the world is in such a bad state that the church can ill afford theological niceties and must compose her theological differences so that a hostile world may be met by a unified ecclesial front. The FV proponents think that too much is being made of the present controversy over the FV and that, given the poor state of the church (and society as a whole), it behooves us who otherwise have so much in common not to attack each other over minor differences; rather, we should seek to work together more and work harder to overcome these differences.³²⁸ There is much wisdom in this, if indeed we are talking about minor matters. But we do not consider the matters discussed in this report to be minor.

L. Concluding Remarks

The Federal Vision must be assessed as a whole package, and if some of its advocates object that they do not believe this or that aspect that others who are part of the project affirm, it is incumbent on them to differentiate themselves. One ought not to complain too loudly about being subjected to criticism when one is engaging in vigorous questioning of much of what

³²⁸ See P. Andrew Sandlin, “Introduction,” in *Backbone of the Bible*, 1–22; Jeffery J. Ventrella, “Sects in the City (of God),” in *Backbone of the Bible*, 63–84; Schlissel, “A New Way of Seeing?” 18–39; Schlissel, “Justification and the Gentiles,” 237–61.

has come to be regarded as the heart of the Reformed faith. All of us need to conduct ourselves with charity, wisdom, and maturity in this situation. Our prayer is that this report will contribute to clarifying the issues raised by the FV controversy and to their resolution.

M. Suggested Reading

Officers, sessions, and presbyteries of the OPC should be familiar with the exegetical, historical-theological, and theological issues at stake surrounding the claims of the FV. The following books are offered as suggested reading for those who desire to read primary sources involved in this debate and some of the preliminary critique of the movement.

Beisner, E. Calvin, ed. *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision, August 11–13, 2003*. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004.

This includes a number of essays by both proponents and critiques of the FV exploring various aspects of the debate.

Sandlin, P. Andrew, ed. *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective*. Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2004.

This contains a series of essays originally presented at the August 2003 SCCCS meeting by speakers generally sympathetic to the FV. Most of these essays consider topics relevant to this report.

Waters, Guy Prentiss. *Covenant Theology Improved? Assessing the Federal Vision*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, forthcoming.

This is a full-scale critique of the FV which delves into the relevant primary sources from a confessionally Reformed perspective.

Wilkins, Steve, and Duane Garner. *The Federal Vision*. Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2004.

This is a book of essays from proponents of the FV written in the wake of the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference.

V

SUMMARIES

A. General Summary

There is perhaps no better confessional summary of the biblical, Reformed doctrine of justification than that found in WLC 70:

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.

In this statement, one can see all of the major aspects of the doctrine, which the following paragraphs summarize.

First, the *nature of justification* may be described as both *forensic* and *definitive*. Justification is forensic in that it is a judicial declaration of God, proclaiming a person righteous in his sight, rather than a transformative, renovative work by which a person is made subjectively holy. The Greek word used in the NT to describe justification (*δικαίωσις*) is ordinarily forensic in meaning and is clearly forensic in the contexts in which Paul expounds the doctrine of justification (e.g., in Rom 3:19–20; 5:16; 8:33–34; for OT background, cf., e.g., Exod 23:6–7; Deut 25:1; Prov 17:15; compare also the judicial language in WCF 11.3; WLC 67, 70, 75; WSC 31, 33, 34). Justification is definitive in the sense that it is a once-for-all accomplished, completed, and perfect act in this life, upon a person's coming to faith. Justification by faith puts one at peace with God and secures his final destiny for eternal life (e.g., see Rom 5:1, 9; WCF 11.4–5; WLC 77).

Very important background to this doctrine of justification is that God requires perfect obedience to his will, measured by the standard of his law, and that all of us, as fallen sinners, are unable to meet this requirement and thus stand condemned apart from Christ. God is a just God. As the just judge of the whole earth, he cannot but condemn the sinner and acquit the righteous (e.g., Exod 23:7; Deut 10:17; Prov 17:15; Nah 1:3). In creation God entered a

covenant of works with Adam, in which he promised eschatological life upon perfect obedience and death upon disobedience (see Gen 2:16–17; WCF 7.2; 19.1; WLC 20; WSC 12). In accord with his justice, God condemned Adam and his posterity when he fell, and he continues to demand perfect obedience from all people after the Fall (e.g., Gal 3:10; 5:3; WLC 99). We rejoice that God is merciful as well as just, but his merciful justification of sinners cannot be other than a just act (WLC 71). It is for this very reason that sinners, judged upon the basis of their own works, can never be justified by our holy and righteous God (e.g., Rom 3:19–20; WCF 16.4–6).

In his justice and mercy, God has provided justification for sinners by sending his Son to satisfy the just demands of the law and by imputing the benefits of his work to believers. Sinners are justified by the righteousness of Christ, that is, by his *passive and active obedience*. Christ's passive obedience refers to his suffering obedience, his bearing the penalty of the curse of the law throughout his life and especially in his crucifixion. By this work, our sins are forgiven (e.g., see Isa 53:4–6, 10; Heb 10:5–10; 1 Pet 2:24). Christ's active obedience refers to his keeping the commands of the law throughout his life. By this work, we are reckoned to have kept the law perfectly, as originally demanded of Adam in the covenant of works (e.g., Rom 5:15–19). In this great work, the demands of God's justice are satisfied and the glorious riches of his grace are displayed. The Westminster Standards in numerous places speak of this twofold obedience as the ground of our justification (e.g., WCF 8.4–5).

This righteousness of Christ, his passive and active obedience, must be applied to believers if it is to be of benefit to them. The application of this benefit of Christ comes through union with Christ, by means of *imputation*; that is, when sinners are united to Christ by faith, Christ's righteousness is judicially reckoned or credited to sinners, so that their sins may be forgiven and the perfect obedience of Christ accounted as their own (e.g., see Ps 32:2; Rom 4:5–11, 22–24; 2 Cor 5:19, 21; Phil 3:8–9; WCF 11.1; WLC 69–71; WSC 31–33).

This imputation of the righteousness of Christ is received by the sinner by faith, and by faith alone. Scripture sets forth faith as that by which a sinner is justified in numerous places, and often does so in sharp contrast to the other alternative, that is, justification by works (e.g., Rom 3:21–22; 3:28; 4:4–5, 13–14; 9:30–32; 10:5–6; Gal 2:16; 3:11–12; Phil 3:9; Eph 2:8–9). For this reason, the Westminster Standards properly speak of faith as the “alone instrument” of justification (e.g., WCF 11.2; WLC 70, 71, 73; WSC 33). This truth is properly understood when the nature of saving faith is appreciated: it is unique and distinct from “works,” in that faith is an extraspective trust

that looks outside of one's self and rests only upon the perfect work of another, namely, Jesus Christ (e.g., Hab 2:4; John 3:16, 18; Acts 10:43; Rom 3:22; 4:20–21; 1 Pet 1:8; WCF 11.1–2; 14.2; WLC 72–73; WSC 33, 86). As such, faith expresses the gracious character of salvation and thus is indeed the appropriate instrument of justification (e.g., Rom 4:16; 11:5–6).

Finally, the doctrine of justification is properly understood when justification is seen as both absolutely distinct as well as inseparable from sanctification, that work of God by which sinners are inwardly renewed in holiness. Never is God's forensic work of justification to be confused with his transformative work of sanctification, yet never does God fail to sanctify those whom he has justified (e.g., Rom 6:1–2, 15; Gal 2:17; 5:13; WLC 77).

B. The New Perspective on Paul

Difficulty has surrounded the interpretation of Paul throughout the history of the church, which was acknowledged by the apostle Peter (2 Pet 3:16) and evidenced in the debates between Augustine and Pelagius, the use of the *quadrige*, the debates over justification in the Reformation, and the question of the center of Paul's theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is especially against the backdrop of the NT scholarship of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that one sees the development of the NPP.

1. Development of the NPP

There are four major figures that play a significant role in the development of the NPP: Krister Stendahl and his essay, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," E. P. Sanders and his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, N. T. Wright and his essay, "The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith," and James D. G. Dunn and his essay, "The New Perspective on Paul." These individuals played important roles in the development of the NPP and represent its concerns in one way or another. However, for those interested in how the NPP bears upon the Reformed community, the writings of N. T. Wright must be explored more thoroughly, as it is his writings that have been most influential.

2. Major Elements of Consideration

Under the major elements of consideration, there are three key issues that require exposition: prolegomena, key definitions, and how those key definitions impact the NPP doctrine of justification.

a. Prolegomena

Seldom do participants in this debate take note of the presuppositions that those associated with the NPP bring to the table. Dunn, for example, believes that Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles were not written by Paul. While Wright affirms the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, he nonetheless bases his argumentation and interpretation of Paul's theology primarily upon the so-called undisputed Pauline letters like Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. When one associated with the NPP writes, "Paul says," it might not mean the same thing for one who holds to the Pauline authorship of all the NT epistles that bear the apostle's name, since appeal is being made to a truncated Pauline corpus. Moreover, Wright approaches the study of the NT largely as a historical phenomenon and makes no mention of the inspiration of the Scriptures or the work of the Holy Spirit in comprehending the Scriptures in his prolegomena, outlined in his *New Testament and the People of God*.

b. Key Definitions according to the NPP

Righteousness—defined not as moral equity, or adhering to a moral standard, but as covenant membership. The term, as it is applied to God, is defined as covenant faithfulness.

Works of the law—not the moralist's ladder, by which one tries to earn or merit God's favor, but rather markers that separate Jew from Gentile, especially circumcision, dietary food laws, and the Sabbath. The works of the law are ethnic boundary markers.

Justification—the forensic declaration that one is already "in," or a member of, the covenant. Moreover, in terms of its first-century context, justification is about the vindication of God's people, that act by which God declares his people to be "in the right," over against the Gentile nations and radical sectarian Jewish groups.

3. The Doctrine of Justification according to the NPP

Justification is both the declaration of who is a member of the covenant as well as God's vindication of his people before the world. In Israel's past, loyalty to and membership in the covenant was demonstrated by the works of the law; that is, the law functioning as badges of covenant membership,

especially circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. With Christ's advent, God has replaced such badges of covenant membership with faith in Christ. Hence, those who look to Christ in faith are declared to be members of the covenant and vindicated in the present, which anticipates a future justification based upon the believer's Spirit-produced works.

4. Critique of the NPP on Matters of Definition

a. Righteousness

The term *righteousness* cannot mean "covenant membership," as various theologians associated with the NPP maintain. Such a definition is untenable in the face of texts such as Gen 18:24–25, where Abraham negotiates the deliverance of Sodom and Gomorrah on the premise that there might be fifty righteous men within its confines. Given that God was only in covenant with Abraham, it is impossible here to define righteousness as covenant membership. Clearly, righteousness is moral equity. When one considers the term *righteousness* as it is applied to God, it cannot universally mean his covenant faithfulness. What, for example, of God's righteousness toward those who are outside the covenant? Is God righteous in his dealings with unbelievers? The Scriptures affirm that God is righteous with both those inside and those outside the covenant. To understand righteousness as covenant membership and God's covenant faithfulness is exegetically indefensible.

b. Works of the law

It has proven exegetically unsustainable to define the "works of the law" as only referring to circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. This definition has now been modified by Dunn, for example, to include the entire law functioning as a boundary marker, though Dunn has left his overall understanding of justification unchanged. When Paul quotes Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10, the reference cannot be only to boundary markers, but to the entire law, which is evident from the broader context of Deut 27–30. Moreover, to argue that there was an absence of legalism in first-century Judaism ignores indisputable primary source evidence to the contrary.

c. Justification

Faith is not the new boundary marker that replaces circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. Rather, faith has always been necessary for salvation

on the part of God's people (Heb 11). Baptism is the new boundary marker (Col 2:11–12).

5. Critique of the NPP and Its Doctrine of Justification

We focus on Wright's understanding of justification, as his view has been particularly influential within Reformed circles. He argues that justification is covenantal, forensic, and eschatological. Wright also maintains that there is a present and a future justification.

a. Covenantal

Wright is correct to say that justification is covenantal, though he understands "covenant" in terms of first-century Judaism. Paul's understanding of covenant, however, is much broader than the first century, evidenced by the absence of any citation of first-century literature in his writings. Rather, justification is covenantal in terms of the broken covenant of works and the covenant of grace, or, as Paul explains it, the first and second Adams.

b. Forensic

First, Wright is correct to argue that justification is forensic, though his understanding hinges upon a declaration before the world of who is in the covenant and therefore "in the right." In other words, justification is a forensic declaration of vindication before the world. Paul, however, does not place the lawcourt before the world, but before the presence of God. Second, Wright rejects the doctrine of imputation on the basis of his understanding of the Jewish lawcourt. The judge does not transfer anything to the one who stands accused. Wright, however, imposes his understanding of the Jewish lawcourt upon the Scriptures. Wright misunderstands the heart of the gospel by imposing an earthly, human court and its proceedings upon the heavenly court. What judge, for example, sends his own son to die in the place of the accused?

c. Eschatological

Wright is also correct to state that justification is eschatological, but is wrong to say that justification is the eschatological definition of the people of God. Justification does not deal with ecclesiology exclusively, as Wright

maintains. Rather, justification deals with soteriology, which is eschatological. The connection between eschatology and soteriology is evident in Rom 4:25, where Paul links justification to the eschatological event of the resurrection of Christ.

6. Present and Future Justification

Wright clearly affirms that there is a present justification, which one receives by looking to Christ in faith, understood as faithful submission to his lordship, and a future justification, based upon one's Spirit-produced works. The Reformed church has historically rejected such a construction because of its similarity to the Roman Catholic understanding of justification, where one is declared righteous on the basis of his sanctification. Historically, when Reformed theologians have spoken, they have done so, not in terms of a future justification, but in terms of an *open* acknowledgement and acquittal on the day of judgment (cf. LC 90; SC 38). In other words, our justification occurs in *secret* now, but that same justification will be *open* or *public* on the day of judgment.

7. Conclusion

The general conclusions of this critique mean that the following points are out of accord with Scripture and our Standards:

1. "Righteousness" defined as covenant membership rather than moral equity or adherence to a moral standard.
2. "Works of the law" for justification understood as boundary markers identifying Israel as God's covenant people.
3. Justification only as vindication.
4. A second or future justification that has a different ground from one's justification by faith.
5. Shifting the ground of justification from the finished work of Christ to the Spirit-produced works of the believer.
6. Denial of the imputation of the active and/or passive obedience of Christ.
7. Compromising the self-authenticating and self-interpreting nature of the Scriptures by giving the literature of Second Temple Judaism undue interpretive weight.

C. The Federal Vision

The movement that has come to be called the Federal Vision (FV), while having roots in the more distant past, has particularly emerged in more recent years through a series of addresses given in 2002 and 2003 in conferences at Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (Monroe, Louisiana) and in the aftermath of those conferences. Though a number of men have come to be identified as FV advocates, it is the Auburn Avenue speakers, together with those who have published essays in *Backbone of the Bible* and *The Federal Vision*, whom we have identified as those chiefly representing the FV and whose works we address herein.

To be sure, the movement is not monolithic, and every view critiqued may not properly be attributed to every FV follower. The committee, however, believes that it remains incumbent on us to seek, as we have been charged, to understand the FV in its integrity and to treat the project with a coherency and clarity that we pray will edify the church. We are particularly charged with critiquing the FV as it engages the doctrine of justification. We do so, not simply by focusing on the FV doctrines of salvation and the Holy Spirit, to which areas the doctrine of justification most narrowly belongs, but by looking more broadly at the FV, seeing how it treats a number of issues across the range of theology. We believe that such an approach as we have taken is warranted because the doctrine of justification, rightly understood, brings into focus a host of considerations in the whole field of theology: from prolegomena to the doctrines of God, man, Christ, and the church, as well as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

It may also be noted that in the section of this report critiquing the FV, we engage in minimal scriptural exegesis and reflection. While we do have some direct scriptural citation and engagement in the FV section, most of our biblical/exegetical argumentation is contained in the “General Introduction” and need not be repeated here. A further reason that direct biblical exegesis need not be repeated here is that there is a good deal of indirect scriptural engagement through confessional citation and explication. It is the case that most, if not all, of the men cited in the FV part of the report subscribe to the Westminster Standards or to the Three Forms of Unity; frequent appeal is thus made to these Reformed confessions and catechisms (primarily the Westminster Standards) because they contain the church’s agreed-upon doctrine in the matters under consideration. Thus, it is particularly important in dealing with the FV that we do so from a confessional stance, not only because of the

OPC's confessional commitment, but also because of the confessional subscription of most, and perhaps all, of those who promote the FV.

It should be understood that few FV promoters, so it seems, have undertaken their project with the purpose of revising the Protestant/Reformed doctrine of justification. Rather, the FV involves, as its proponents see it, a revitalization and development of the doctrine of the covenant and of the church. Much of their focus has been, and continues to be, in these two areas, which impacts their theology proper, anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology. Thus, our survey of FV teaching in all these areas of theology is always with a view to its impact on the doctrine of justification. The committee points out that, in regard to the doctrine of justification more narrowly considered, FV problems include a failure to affirm the imputation of Christ's active obedience along with a redefinition of faith that merges Christ's trust in the Father with our faith in the work of Christ and that also includes good works in the very definition of faith itself. Some may wonder why we did not focus our critique solely on these "justification issues" and allied matters (like the definition of righteousness or the law/gospel distinction). The answer is that the integral connection of justification to the whole of the theological enterprise compelled us to make the kind of analysis that we have. Any errors in the doctrine of justification may be likened to the loose thread that, when pulled, unravels the sweater. We cannot, in other words, examine the doctrine of justification without engaging a host of others throughout the whole system of doctrine.

Rather than taking further space in this summary to explain at any length the difficulties that we believe the FV to have, perhaps it would be better simply to enumerate the ways in which we believe that the FV is misguided. All of these points are developed within the body of our report. The committee believes that the following points that are held by one or more advocates of the FV are out of accord with Scripture and our doctrinal standards:

1. Pitting Scripture and Confession against each other.
2. Regarding the enterprise of systematic theology as inherently rationalistic.
3. A mono-covenantalism that sees one covenant, originating in the intra-Trinitarian fellowship, into which man is invited, thus flattening the concept of covenant and denying the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

4. Election as primarily corporate and eclipsed by covenant.
5. Seeing covenant as only conditional.
6. A denial of the covenant of works and of the fact that Adam was in a relationship with God that was legal as well as filial.
7. A denial of a covenant of grace distinct from the covenant of works.
8. A denial that the law given in Eden is the same as that more fully published at Mt. Sinai and that it requires perfect obedience.
9. Viewing righteousness as relational, not moral.
10. A failure to make clear the difference between our faith and Christ's.
11. A denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in our justification.
12. Defining justification exclusively as the forgiveness of sins.
13. The reduction of justification to Gentile inclusion.
14. Including works (by use of "faithfulness," "obedience," etc.) in the very definition of faith.
15. Failing to affirm an infallible perseverance and the indefectibility of grace.
16. Teaching baptismal regeneration.
17. Denying the validity of the concept of the invisible church.
18. An overly objectified sacramental efficacy that downplays the need for faith and that tends toward an *ex opere operato* view of the sacraments.
19. Teaching paedocommunion.
20. Ecclesiology that eclipses and swallows up soteriology.

VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the submission of the critique in this report, as mandated by the General Assembly, the committee also offers the following recommendations in order to promote the purity, peace, and unity of the church concerning the doctrine of justification.

Recommendation 1. That the General Assembly recommend that presbyteries include the following topics in the examination of candidates, with a view to ensuring each candidate's fidelity to biblical and confessional teaching on justification and his ability to articulate that teaching:

1. The self-authenticating and self-interpreting nature of the Scriptures
2. The covenant of works
3. The covenant of grace
4. The definition of righteousness
5. The definition of the works of the law
6. The nature of union with Christ
7. The definition of faith
8. The difference between faith and works
9. The definition of justification
10. The instrument of justification
11. The ground of justification
12. The imputed active and passive obedience of Christ
13. The distinction between justification and sanctification
14. The nature of the sacraments as signs and seals of the covenant

Recommendation 2. That the General Assembly recommend that presbyteries, sessions, and pastors be proactive in addressing teachings of the New Perspective on Paul and of the Federal Vision and other like teachings that compromise the purity of the gospel.

Recommendation 3. That the General Assembly:

- a. Distribute this report to the presbyteries, particularly to their candidates and credentials committees, and to all sessions of the OPC, commending the report to them for study.
- b. Request the Committee on Christian Education: (1) to distribute this report to seminaries with which it has contact; (2) to post this report on our denominational web site for easy access by interested parties; and (3) to consider publishing it separately for distribution.
- c. Request the Stated Clerk to mail copies of this report to those churches with whom the OPC has fraternal relations.