CHRIST CHURCH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 2005
JUSTIFICATION: THE GREAT DELIVERANCE

Note: *These are my revised and "final" lecture notes. The notes do not match the precise content of the lectures themselves but serve to supplement the lectures. Audio recordings are available from Canon Press.*

Justification Conference Lecture #1

Mt. 19:16-30 - The Rich Young Rebel (Or, Why "Follow Me" Is Not an Invitation to a Guilt Trip)

The Gospel in the Gospels

The story of the rich young ruler (ryr) has been subjected to a wide variety of theological interpretations. A common approach in Reformed and especially Lutheran circles is what I will call the Law/Gospel reading. On this reading, the passage is "law," not "gospel." In this interpretive framework, Law = strict demand and Gospel = unconditional promise. Jesus is using the law as a hypothetical covenant of works to show the man that if he wants to earn salvation, he'll have to be sinlessly perfect. The law is used to create a sense of guilt and helplessness.

There is a measure of truth in the Law/Gospel reading. The story *does* expose the man's sin and inability. Jesus *does* aim at conviction of sin. The demands God places upon us continually drive us to the cross for forgiveness for ways in which we fall short. This is a major theme in Matthew's gospel.

That being said, the Law/Gospel approach still distorts the meaning of the story. After all, Matthew's also narrative puts a heavy weight on following Jesus and on discipleship, and these things are not antithetical to the gospel itself. Indeed, they are intrinsic to the gospel message. The gospel includes a new way of life because it presents Jesus as the root of a new humanity. Whereas the Law/Gospel approach separates the gospel from ethics, Matthew puts the gospel and obedient living in the closest possible relation.

Consider how Matthew's gospel begins: Jesus' ministry opens with a call to live out a life of radical discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount. Consider how this gospel ends: in the Great Commission, Jesus tells the apostles they are to go into all nations making disciples, teaching them to obey all his commands. The purpose of teaching the commands is not to create a sense of guilt, because the use of the law comes *after* the nations have been converted to Jesus and baptized. The commands give shape to a life of discipleship and covenant loyalty.

A Law/Gospel reading says the demands are given mainly to condemn us, to make us feel guilty. It treats the law not a covenantal gift but as a covenant of works demanding meritorious perfection. But more fundamentally, this story is actually about following Jesus in the way of salvation. The climax of the story comes when Jesus calls the man to follow him. This is not an impossible call. It's not a hypothetical call. In fact, it's a call that is ultimately part of the goods news because it's a call to enter the new world Jesus is inaugurating. It's about kingdom life. It's about faith and repentance. It's about the grace of God.

All this raises a broader issue – really the meta-question: *Is the gospel found in the gospels – and if so, where?* After all, Jesus doesn't really use the terms or categories we find in Paul. Did Jesus preach the gospel? Did he preach gospel to the rich young ruler? What is the gospel, anyway?

Before getting into the story itself, this is a question that we must briefly address. The gospel is found in the gospels in two basic, inseparable ways: in the *life of Jesus* and the *teaching of Jesus.* This first of those should give us no trouble. The gospels record the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That basic storyline is the gospel. Paul says as much at the beginning of 1 Cor. 15. To put it bluntly, the gospels *are* the gospel. They don't merely contain gospel here and there; the story they tell is what we should mean by the term "gospel." They are theo-passion narratives – the passion of God in human form. The suffering of God in Jesus for us and for our salvation is simply the gospel.

The teaching of Jesus is where we run into trouble. But Matthew has provided us with the interpretive key we need in 4:23: Jesus went around preaching the *gospel* of the kingdom. In the discourses in Matthew's gospel, we get insight into the content of that preaching. Matthew 4:23 is basically an intro to the Sermon on the Mount. Rather than starting with a definition of the gospel derived from elsewhere, and then trying to fit Jesus' teaching into that, we need to *start* with the understanding that Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom and let that fact color the way we understand his preaching. So I will contend that Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom to the ryr. Jesus not only gave him good news; Jesus gave the best possible news for someone in his particular circumstances. The preaching of Jesus shows us the depth and breadth of the gospel. It reveals both the free grace and rigorous demands of the gospel. This isn't "glospel" (turning the gospel into a new law); rather it is simply saying that the gospel is bigger and broader than we imagine (including not only forgiveness but also transformation).

The gospel is stated right at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says he came to *fulfill* the law and the prophets. In other words, he is the one through whom God is fulfilling all his promises. He is the revelation of the righteousness of God. God keeps his covenant by sending Jesus to establish the kingdom. In other words, the gospel is all about eschatology. It's all about fulfillment. Take your biblical theologian of choice – Vos, Ridderbos, Wright, etc. – they all agree: *the gospel is eschatology*. It's the *new thing* God has done in history. God is creating a new humanity in Christ in which his purposes for the creation come to full realization. And so flowing out of the gospel – the death and resurrection of Christ -- is a new way of life. And that new way of life is described and defined for us in the teaching of Jesus. It's the way of life set forth in the beatitudes and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. It's the new way of life that Jesus called people to embrace. And it's that new way of life Jesus presented to the ryr when he said "follow me."

This is NOT to say that that this new way of life earns something, that it merits blessing. But the call of discipleship is good news because it leads us home, so to speak – it puts us on the road back to the Father and on the course that leads to final salvation. It is the WAY of salvation. It is the way to a restored humanity, to becoming what we were made to become. That's the gospel. The way of discipleship is not a new law; indeed it shows the inadequacy of the old law (the Torah). The way of following Jesus as his disciple is not at odds with the gospel because being a disciple of Jesus means union and communion with him by faith. When Jesus says "follow me" he is offering an invitation to live under his gracious reign, in his glorious kingdom. This is the gospel Jesus preached to the ryr.

Let's look more closely at this story. I will argue that it is not a Law/Gospel passage. Instead it is what evangelicals would call a "cost of discipleship" text, or what N. T. Wright would identify as a "new way of being Israel" narrative. Properly understood, these things are part of the gospel message itself.

The Encounter: The Initial Question and Answer

My focus is on Matthew, but I'll use the other synoptics as well. The composite description of this man as

rich, young, and a member of the ruling class, is built from the three gospel accounts.

He asks, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Some have tried to criticize this question, as though it presupposed legalism on his part. After all, he does say he wants to *do* something to gain eternal life. But note a couple of things here.

First, he calls eternal life an “inheritance” in Luke’s account. We should take this as a good sign. He doesn’t ask about how to *earn* the life of the age to come; he asks about the way to *inherit* it. Inheritances are commonly understood to be gifts. We should not assume this man is of the same spirit as the Pharisees. We should not pre-judge this man, but allow the encounter to unfold on its own terms. Jesus deals with the ryr quite differently than he deals with the Pharisees in the gospel of Matthew and elsewhere. He doesn’t blast the man for insincerity or hypocrisy right off the bat. In fact, Jesus loves the man (Mk. 10:21). We should probably give him the benefit of the doubt as long as we can.

Second, this is really the same question that everyone else in the Bible *under conviction* ends up asking. They put it more or less just this same way. For example, in Acts 2, the people are cut to the heart by Peter's preaching and so they cry out and they ask Peter, “What shall we do?” Another example is the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, who asks Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So, this is not a bad question.

Further, his question is very similar to WSC 85: “What does God require of us that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?” (And, actually, Jesus answer has some affinities with the catechism, when it’s all said and done!)

What does Jesus do with the question? Jesus is not one to give a straight answer. He says, “Why do you call me good? Only God is good.” There has been a lot of speculation as to just what kind of relationship Jesus is implying here between himself and God. Is he in some way suggesting his deity? Quite likely. The language of “oneness” recalls the Hebrew *shema* in Deut. 6. The *shema* provides a gracious, covenantal context for the commands. Jesus is connecting his identity with the one true God who has made himself known to Israel.

But there is something else to notice here: Jesus focuses attention on the good because he wants to make a point not only about his identity but about the ryr’s identity. Where is goodness located? In man or in God? Jesus clearly says it's found in God alone. By implication we can say this means that man is *not good*. All men, after all, are sinners. “There is no one good, no not one,” as Paul says in Romans 3. So if this man is going to do a good thing, that goodness will have its source in God. This points us to God's absolute graciousness in saving his people. There is no goodness apart from God. Our goodness is dependent and derivative. Already, we’re getting overtones of the gospel of grace here. Of course, one could also say this is law in a sense: Jesus has already cut from under the man any pretensions to his own autonomous goodness and show that he is a sinner.

Jesus then gives his initial answer. He says, “Keep the commandments.” In other words, “Do Torah.” This is the logic: God is good and so, of course, his commandments are good. His law shows us the good way (cf. Micah 6:8).

The Role of the Law

Why does Jesus appeal to the law?

Note that here Jesus does not go out of his way to correct Jewish misunderstandings and misapplications of

the law as he does in the Sermon on the Mount. Nor does he explicitly eschatologize the law's requirements as he does there, by drawing out the law's fullest and deepest meaning. But those things will still come through as the story unfolds.

Jesus' appeal to the law is not a complete answer – the man himself will recognize that. But it is a partial answer. It's starting point. Jesus is picking up with this man where he is, as a member of the covenant people under the Torah. Obedience to the law was the way Israel maintained covenant life in the old creation phase of history (Lev. 18:5; Ps. 19, 71).

If this passage is read like the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is outlining what a life of covenant faithfulness looks like. This raises an important issue: All through Scripture we find that while good works do not save, good works are nevertheless *necessary* as the *way* of salvation, as the *path* that we must *walk* leading into eternal life. We need to stop here and dwell on this point, because it's so important. I will rely on several Reformed stalwarts to argue the case.

First, John Ball, a Puritan theologian in England in the 17th century, commenting on this very passage in Matthew's gospel: "The commandments of God are laid before believers not as the cause for obtaining eternal life, but as ***the way*** to walk in unto eternal life, assured unto us by the free promise and gift of God . . . . Our Savior Christ said to the young man in the gospel [Matthew 19], 'If you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments.' This is the rule of obedience according to which people in the covenant ought to walk, building their works of righteousness upon faith as the foundation. And obedience issuing from true faith is the way into eternal bliss." Why did Jesus appeal to the law in response to a question about eternal life? Because law-obedience is how people on the path to eternal life walk. This is how they live. It's as though the commandments are stepping stones on the path to glory.

John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.14.21 makes the same point: He says the Lord embraces our works as "inferior causes" of salvation. How can this be so? "Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it according to his ordinary dispensation by means of good works." Ordinarily, good works are a means to the end of salvation, not because works earn anything or merit anything, but because those that God forgives he also renews.

Calvin then shows how our works can withstand God's judgment: "God examines our works according to his tenderness, not his supreme right. Therefore, he accepts them as if they were perfectly pure and for this reason, although unmerited, they are rewarded with infinite benefits, both of the present life and also of the life to come. For I do not accept the distinction made by learned and otherwise Godly men that good works deserve the graces that are conferred upon us in this life while everlasting salvation is the reward of faith alone." In other words, God rewards our good works with eternal life, because God examines our works not according to the strictest standard of absolute righteousness, but rather the same way that a human father might examine the art work of his young son or daughter.

Francis Turretin, perhaps the greatest of the Reformed scholastic theologians, wrote in his *Institutes*: "Good works are required as the means and way for possessing salvation. Although works may be said to contribute nothing to the acquisition of salvation, still they should be considered necessary to the obtainment of it so that no one can be saved without them." Turretin is saying that good works are necessary as a means to the end of salvation. He goes on to say, "Good works are to eternal life what sowing is to reaping."

Speaking directly of our passage, Turretin says: "When Christ enjoins upon the young man the duty of following him (Mt. 19:23), he does not give a counsel, but a command to all in common because no one

can have a hope of salvation unless he follows Christ (2 Pet. 2:21), although from a particular cause it is peculiarly adapted to him."

So while Jesus is not giving a complete answer at this point, he's not giving the wrong answer either. There is no salvation apart from a life of faithful obedience. No doubt, our works flow from God's grace (goodness), which is why at the last day, we will say about ourselves, "We are simply unprofitable slaves." But because we have really been obedient, Jesus will say to us "Well done, good and faithful servants." That's the relationship that we've got to keep in view here.

Remember, Jesus is addressing this man as a covenant member. When he speaks of keeping the commands, he's not abstracting those commands from their wider context. The commands in context were not given to simply induce guilt. They were given to people God had already claimed as his own and redeemed (Ex. 20:1ff).

Further Questioning: What Does the Young Man Still Lack?

The young man is not really satisfied with Jesus' answer. He asks, "Which ones?"

Again, some have tried to criticize this man at this point, but I'm not sure he's going wrong. There are hundreds of commands in the Torah; he wants to know where he should focus his attention. Jesus himself was known to talk about the first greatest and second greatest commandments, that is, to systematically arrange the commandments and prioritize within Torah.

Jesus picks out commands from the second half of the Decalogue (6, 7, 8, 9, 5), plus a summary command to love neighbor. Ultimately, Jesus unpacks the meaning of law in terms of loving relationships. This is consistent with his teaching elsewhere in the gospels.

But still, the man is not satisfied. He's done all these things, he says. It's certainly possible he is naïve and self-deceived – in light of the way the story ends, that assessment becomes very plausible. But most, if not all Jews, knew that they were sinners if measured in an absolute sense. It's possible that the man here is simply claiming covenant fidelity as he understands it. Basically what he's saying is, "I've been loyal to the Torah. I was brought up in Torah, I was brought up as a covenant keeper. This is the way in which I've walked from my earliest days." There are certainly other places in Scripture where this kind of thing is said in a context where it is clearly legitimate (Ps.7, 17, 18; Lk. 1:6, etc.).

Actually, the young man seems to stumble onto a profound theological insight when he says, in effect, "Even though I've kept the law, I still lack something." In fact, he's making here the same point that the apostle Paul makes in Galatians 3 and elsewhere in his writings, namely, that law observance alone is not enough to bring about the life of the new age. Living by Torah can't bring in the new creation because, as Paul says in Galatians 3, the Torah belongs to the old age (cf. Leviticus 18:5, which indicates Israel could maintain life in the land by obeying, but does not suggest they could "earn" the life of heaven or the age to come).

This man realizes the commandments of Moses are not a bridge that he could walk over into the new kingdom. As we find throughout the rest of the NT, only the death and resurrection of Jesus could bring about the turning of the ages and inaugurate the kingdom.

[Note: A helpful exercise is look for correspondences between the gospels and Paul's writings. Too often in the Reformed church, we have over-privileged Paul and neglected the gospels. We have assumed that Paul

and the gospel writers have very little overlap in their agenda and concerns. This is not true. While the gospels do not use Paul's sophisticated theological vocabulary, there are all kinds of interconnections. Paul's theology is nothing more or less than outworking of the gospel events. Thus, even on issues like the role of the law and eschatology, we should look for links. Paul's epistles and the gospels are mutually interpretive.]

"Follow Me"

The man asks his question again. Now Jesus gives the full answer: "Sell. Give. Follow."

Here we are back on the familiar terrain of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is deepening, transforming, radicalizing, and eschatologizing the demands of the Mosaic law. But he is also moving beyond the Mosaic law altogether. It is not enough to follow Moses; if this man wants to enter the age the come, he must follow Jesus. Thus, Jesus is relativizing the law of Moses in light of the coming kingdom. As Wright says, Jesus is summoning the man to be a part of a new Israel, no longer defined by Torah, but by allegiance to Jesus himself. Jesus is the new Moses, forming a new Israel.

Several things need to be unpacked here. First, we need to ask what does Jesus mean when he says "If you want to be perfect . . . " This term also shows up in Matthew 5:48 where Jesus says, "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect" -- by showing kindness to the evil and the ungrateful. When Jesus says "be perfect," he could mean something like this: "If you want to be complete, give to the poor and the needy, just like the Father in heaven does."

But there's something more going on that we need to take note of here. We need to dwell on this word "perfect" a little bit more. The Greek term here is the word *telos*. It refers to the end or the goal or what brings something to its realization or to completeness or to maturity or to fulfillment. This is a theology of maturation at work.

This must be what Jesus is getting at because it seems to match up well with the man's question. He's asked the question about eschatological life. He's asked about the life of the age to come. He knows that Torah can't give that kind of life, so now Jesus gives him commandments that go beyond Torah. In a sense, we could say Jesus is giving this man an eschatological ethic, a way of life for the new age, for the newly inaugurated kingdom. No longer is Israel called to follow Moses for one greater than Moses is here. Jesus gave the man a messianic Torah, or what Paul called "the law of Christ."

The key is to note that Jesus is talking about *maturity* to a *young* man! These same themes revolve around Paul's discussion of the law and the new covenant in Galatians 3-4. This youth represents the old covenant, just as Paul likens old covenant Israel to an underage child. In the new covenant, in the resurrected Christ, the people of God come of age, no longer under the supervision of the tutor of the Torah. We are redeemed from Torah and enter into our majority. We are perfect/mature.

To further fill out the redemptive-historical typology of the story, we can suggest these connections:

The young man = old covenant Israel under Torah
Riches = covenant blessing God bestowed on Israel (Gen. 12, Dt. 28)
The poor = the Gentile nations
Sell all = bless the nations, minister to the Gentiles sacrificially (Gen. 12)
Follow me = Enter the kingdom by walking with Jesus in faith and repentance

Israel was to share her blessings with the nations (Dt. 4, Isa. 2, Jonah, etc.). She was to be the beachhead of God's mission to the world. But like this young man, she kept her treasures to herself and thus could not enter Christ's kingdom.

That's what this discussion is about in Mt. 19:16ff – the movement from youth to perfection/maturity. For Israel, the way to move out of the law era into the kingdom era is by following Jesus. He will lead the way. This is not salvation by works in some hypothetical sense. This is about the very real covenant-historical transition taking place. Frank Thielman (p. 59) writes: "If this man follows Jesus, he must walk with him so far down the pathway marked out by the Mosaic law that he arrives at the law's ultimate goal." The goal of course, is Christ himself (Rom. 10). The "work" God requires is now reconfigured into trusting Jesus (cf. Jn. 6:26-29).

One other interesting note about this story: In all three synoptic gospels it occurs in close connection with the story of Jesus blessing the little children and calling them prototypical covenant members. There is a gospel paradox here: In order for this young man to enter the maturity of the kingdom, he will have to become like a little child. Little children enter the world with nothing and this man will only enter the kingdom when he becomes childlike in his possession-lessness. The way to become mature is by becoming childlike and the way to childlikeness is maturity.

The Issue: Idolatry

This man has fully realized the promised covenantal blessings of Deut. 28. Now Jesus calls upon him to give those blessings up! This is essentially asking the man to give up all his privileges and status connected with the Mosaic covenant. It is very telling that at the end of the narrative, Jesus speaks not only of giving up family, but also lands. This is more than a challenge to give up ancestral lands. It is a call to abandon the promised land as God's special dwelling place. Moses has discouraged selling family land because it was allotted as a permanent inheritance in the families of Israel; now Jesus calls of the man to forsake that covenanted blessing. (In this light, giving up houses might even be stretched to include giving up God's house, the temple in Jerusalem, since it is about to become obsolete in terms of the progress of redemptive-history.)

Jesus is confronting this man with a very stark choice. Will he serve mammon or will he serve Jesus? The issue here is ultimately idolatry. Who will he love more? God or money? Does he have his possessions or do his possessions have him? It's all about the cost of discipleship. Is he willing to smash his idols for Jesus' sake?

Perhaps this is why the 10th commandment was not mentioned earlier. Jesus was using "Thou shalt not covet" as his ace in the hole to expose the man's covetous heart. And, of course, covetousness is idolatry. By saying *follow me*, Jesus is not only calling the man out of the old age and into the new; he's calling the man away from idolatry and into a life of true service and love. The call is both eschatological and ethical.

[Note: How should we understand this command to give all to the poor? Was this part of a crisis time ethic? Was it a timeless moral command? Was it a unique demand for this one individual? First, we must keep in mind that this is a special case because it's a special moment in history. Jesus is headed to Jerusalem. This is crisis time, the grand climax of Israel's history, and so special rules go into effect (cf. Lk. 9, where Jesus puts typical burial customs on hold because of the urgency of his mission). Thus we can say, those who want to be a part of Jesus' kingdom movement *at that particular moment in history* did have to drop everything and follow him to Jerusalem. But in more ordinary times, following Jesus doesn't necessarily look like that. And

that's why we have to be careful. We have to read everything in its context. We can't just project these commands into timeless, moral rules. They're situation specific. They're contextualized.

That being said, we should acknowledge that sometimes God gives particular people special callings (e.g., eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven in Mt. 19:12). But even if we aren't called to literally sell all our possessions for the sake of the poor, we do face the same *radical demand* Jesus placed on this man. We too must destroy the idols in our lives that stand between us and following Jesus. Whatever blocks that path must be done away with. This is why the Bible's attitude towards wealth is so varied (e.g., 1 Tim. 6) – it all depends on the state of the wealthy person's heart. Some people can serve God alone while possessing a great deal of mammon; others cannot. The key is to see that Jesus transforms wealth. It is now servant rather than master. It is to be used fundamentally as an instrument of the kingdom, not for selfish, self-centered, status-achieving ends. If we're not willing to use our riches (in every sense – not just wealth, but time, talents, etc.) in service of God's kingdom, when need and opportunity arise, then in fact our riches will keep us out of the kingdom. We must be generous if we want to receive God's generosity.]

Jesus' Commentary

The young man chooses riches over Jesus, immaturity over perfection, old covenant over new covenant, etc. He goes away sad. Afterwards, Jesus explains what has just happened for the benefit of his disciples.

He says to them it's very hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. We might think here again of the Sermon on the Mount. The gate into the kingdom is narrow, and the way is hard. It's hard to squeeze in if you're trying to take all your possessions with you. If you're following Jesus, it's easier if you travel light. But if you let go of your possessions and seek first the kingdom of God, then riches will be added back into your life (Mt. 6). But you will possess them in a new kind of way. The kingdom will transform the way you use your possessions. But it's clear, if you put your possessions and your riches ahead of the kingdom, you won't be able to pass through the gate into the kingdom.

Jesus then uses a very humorous metaphor. He says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. But what Jesus is doing is painting a very ridiculous picture so that we will see the foolishness of choosing wealth over the kingdom of God. In fact, he wants us to see that there must be a choice, that we must choose between these two potential masters -- mammon or God. Which will you follow? Will you follow mammon and the false promises that it holds out to you? Or will you follow Jesus and cling to him and his promises? THE ISSUE HERE IS FAITH!!! Don't let the humor of the image that Jesus gives cause you to miss the point. Only faith can squeeze into the kingdom.

But in calling the man away from service to mammon, Jesus is in effect also (paradoxically) calling him away from the law. The issue here is not just Jesus vs. mammon. It is also Jesus vs. Moses. For the man to give up his money and follow Jesus will also mean abandoning the status and prestige he had within the Mosaic system as it was then functioning. In other words, this is proleptic of the same issues that will plague many of Paul's congregations, where he too has to force the choice between Jesus and Torah (Gal. 2, Phil. 3). Paul continually argues that perseverance in Christ (rather than Torah) is the path to final salvation.

This is the point: When God saves you, he topples your idols. When God saves you, he casts down every high thing that you've set your affections on. He gives you a new master, a new first love: himself. This rich, young man couldn't be enter the way of Jesus because he wanted one foot in God's kingdom and one foot in his own little kingdom (wealth + status). But you've got to have *both feet* in God's kingdom in order to follow after Jesus. And that's really what this comes down to: following hard after Jesus. That's the call to

this man, the call that he rejected. The way of salvation is the way of discipleship. You can't have salvation apart from following Jesus.

Problems with the Law/Gospel Reading

Jesus is not giving the man a hypothetical test here. "Follow me" is not an invitation to take a guilt trip. It's a gospel invitation to travel in the way of salvation. It's an invitation to enter the kingdom.

Sometimes the passage is read in a Law/Gospel paradigm so that the use of the commandments and the call to sell all and follow is a way of making the man see he cannot save himself. But Jesus never tempted this man to be his own messiah; Jesus called upon him to follow himself as the true messiah, the one who alone is good.

The Law/Gospel reading disregards the way that this same language is employed elsewhere in Scripture. There's no question that Jesus does show his idolatry. There's no question the man was naïve about the state of his heart and his ability to obey. Conviction of sin is a part of Jesus' strategy. But if I was pressed to describe his religious condition, I would not say that he comes to Jesus having already apostatized. Rather, I would say he actually apostatized when he went away sad. In this way, we see a further link between this young man and at least a subset of old covenant Israel: many in Israel were apparently walking in faith until God set before them a crucified Messiah and a new covenant that included Gentiles as full kingdom members. At that point they stumbled over the stumbling stone (Rom. 10-11). (However, there is a possibility this man later repented, just as Paul said Israel would turn back to the Lord and be grafted back into the covenant in Rom. 11.)

The problem is that the Law/Gospel reading makes it impossible to get the whole point of the story, and I think we see that in the conclusion. Look at what Peter says in verse 27: "Lord, we've left all to follow you." In other words, Peter says, *we've done exactly what you've just asked this rich, young man to do.*

If it was supposed to be a covenant of works, Peter and the others fulfilled it! But it wasn't. It was a call to discipleship, and Peter and the others responded to the gracious invitation. They did leave everything behind under the impression that a life of poverty would somehow *earn* the kingdom or salvation; they left all because they believed following Jesus was the *way* into the new creation life the Hebrew Scriptures had trained them to expect.

In verse 28, Jesus agrees with Peter's claim. But then he immediately reminds where following him leads, and in doing so, he drives out any sense of self-pity that the disciples might have. He doesn't want the disciples to think of themselves as mercenaries for the kingdom. Jesus says, "Yes, you've sacrificed everything for me, but don't you start to feel sorry for yourselves. Greater rewards are coming." People who live by faith don't talk a lot about the sacrifices they're making because they're so overwhelmed by the promise of reward. Jesus essentially says, "You're not really a spiritual martyr or a moral hero. Yes, you've left all to follow me, but you're going to receive back a *staggering* reward." Jesus makes promises that challenge both pride and self-pity in the hearts of his followers.

Mike Horton, *Christ the Lord*, p. 45f, a proponent of the Law/Gospel reading, says that Jesus is using the law as "mirror" to reveal sin: "This is the only interpretation of what our Lord is doing in this passage that is consistent with the whole teaching of the NT concerning the use of the law. . . . [The law is used to] challenge his pretensions of law-keeping." The demands of Jesus are not about discipleship but condemnation.

Horton's claim is simply not true – or at least not the whole truth. Jesus uses the law – especially in its mature, eschatologized form -- to lay out the path into the kingdom of heaven. He makes clear that *following him* in obedience is the *path* of life. It is not a hypothetical covenant of works. Jesus does not tell the man to sell everything to simply make the man feel guilty; nor is he offering the man salvation if he can "earn" it by doing this good work. Rather, Jesus is showing the man the radical way of life his kingdom requires. Yes, it is all of grace – following Jesus is the way into the mercy and love of God. It is the way into the blessings of the cross and the new age. But it is also a costly path. It forces us to rethink what it means to put God (Jesus) and the kingdom first.

Horton asks, "What is if the ruler had sold everything?" On Horton's reading, Jesus would have to come up with a yet harder test to finally break the man's will. But that's not what Jesus did with the disciples who had already left everything to follow him!! For Jesus, if the man had sold all, he would have been accepted as a disciple, along with the others. It would have been viewed as a sign of faith and repentance.

[Note: There is another alternative. The man could have sold everything as an act of pride rather than faith. In this case, he would have become a hypocrite rather than a disciple. We know from the rest of the gospels and Acts how Jesus would have handled him had that been the case (cf. Mt. 23, Acts 5). We should also remember that Judas was among the disciples who left everything to follow Jesus.]

Plus, the Law/Gospel reading opposes grace and works in a way that the passage does not. Suppose the man said, "Lord, I can't sell my possessions and give them to the poor. I love them too much. I know I'm a sinner. Can't you just save me by grace, so I don't have to part with my stuff? I really like my things." I cannot imagine Jesus being pleased with that response! You cannot have Jesus and your idols. You cannot serve two gods. Unless we're going to adopt an antinomian theology, the Law/Gospel reading doesn't really help blunt the hard edge of this passage as a "cost of discipleship" text. At the end of the day, if the ryr wants to be saved, he still has to sell all and follow. The Law/Gospel reading is dangerous because it tempts us to eviscerate the demands of discipleship from the gospel. In a way, it "Americanizes" the calling of Jesus – anytime Jesus confronts us with hard demands in the gospels, we can squirm out of them by calling them "law." We can allow them to convict us, but we don't have to obey them (because, after all, no one can fulfill a perfect standard).

Further, the Law/Gospel reading makes all obedience suspect – after all, if you attempt to follow and obey Jesus, how do you know you aren't trying to earn your own salvation? But that doesn't square with the way Jesus commends obedience elsewhere, e.g., Zaccheus in Lk. 18, the rich man and Lazarus story in Lk.16, the final judgment scene in Mt. 25, etc. The Law/Gospel interpretation completely disengages the gospel from ethics and discipleship (which is why William Borden Evans, and others, have linked the Law/Gospel hermeneutic with the rise of dispensationalism and no-lordship theology).

The Law/Gospel approach can easily end up legitimating the view of "old perspective" Pharisees by confusing *effort* to obey with the attempt to *earn* something – as if earning something is our only possible motivation for obeying. Instead, we must learn to view obedience as shot through with faith and love, as a way into deeper communion with God (Jn. 14-17). Obedience is perichoretic. ("Perichoresis" was the term the early Greek speaking Christians used to describe, first, the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit, and second, to describe the mutual indwelling of God and his people. Literally, it means something like "to dance around." Faith-filled obedience is perichoretic in that it is the means by which we dance with the Triune God. As we obey, out of love and fidelity, we are drawn into an ever closer bond with the God who created us and has redeemed us. Obedience is the pathway into the heart of God. If you want to know God

more deeply, obey him. This is why Augustine said, "Love God and do what you want." Love inevitably generates loyalty. When Luther was asked, "Does you gospel of grace mean I can live any way I want?" the Reformed replied, "Yes. Now: What do you want to do?" If we love God, we will obey him. Obedience is simply the expression of love. It is not a legalistic effort to earn anything. In this light, obedience clearly becomes "gospel" rather than "law." If obedience is dancing with the Trinity, what could be more free or joyous?)

The Law/Gospel paradigm views covenants as either wholly gracious, and thus unconditional, or legal, and thus determined by meritorious conditions. But biblical covenants – including the covenantal offer of salvation Jesus made to the ryr – hold together both grace and demand. Promise and obligation are always coordinated within the gospel call.

To paraphrase Scot McKnight, Jesus must not be made subservient to a particular brand of Reformed theology. Reformed theology answers to Jesus, not Jesus to it. Jesus did not entice covenant members into earning salvation in order to make a hypothetical point; he talked about what covenant members are obliged to do if they wish to be found faithful at the last day.

The call of Jesus is not to embrace a thin ideology of justification by faith, but to respond to a thick call to discipleship. We are called to actually *follow him* by faith – which includes the gift of justification, but also a transformed, eschatologized way of life. Jesus was not merely calling the man to assent to the fact of his sin or the fact that salvation is by grace. Indeed, Jesus invites the man to completely reorient his whole life around God's eschatological purposes for humanity and creation.

Jesus called the ryr out of the immaturity of the old covenant and away from his idolatry into kingdom living. Jesus makes a similar call to us today. The way to become fully mature, fully realized humans is by following him (Eph. 4). Idolatry is dehumanizing; following Jesus is re-humanizing.

The call "Follow me" transforms the law of Moses into the law of Christ because following Jesus will lead to Jerusalem and the cross, where the curse of the law will be meted out and the purpose of the law fulfilled. "Follow me" eschatologizes the demands of the law. Keeping the commandments takes on new meaning when set in the context of following Jesus.

[Addendum: After my lecture, Doug Wilson suggested that the ryr is actually John Mark. This is a traditional interpretation. While it is somewhat speculative, there are several corroborating lines of evidence. For one thing, Mark's own account is the most intensely personalized, calling attention to the fact that Jesus loved the man. We also know Mark was young and a member of the ruling class. Also, from Acts 13:4-12 and 15:36ff, it appears that Mark abandoned the apostolic mission to return home to Jerusalem when the Gentiles started to come in (specifically after Sergius Paulus heard the gospel and repented). This would fit with the typological interpretation of the story I have offered above. Paul did not want to take Mark precisely because his ministry was aimed at the Gentiles and Mark could not be trusted to embrace Gentile converts. Of course, later on, Mark and Paul were reconciled (see, e.g., Philemon).]

Justification Conference Lecture #2

Did Jesus Earn Our Salvation? Merit, Imputation, and the Resurrection of Christ

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In one of Rudyard Kipling's finest poems (*If*), he describes manhood in these terms: "If you can trust yourself while all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too . . . [then] you'll be a man, my son!" In that spirit, I want to take up a few criticisms that have been offered of my published/internet work. I'm quite confident in my position, but I'm not above second guessing myself either. I want to make allowances for the doubts others have raised and deal with them appropriately. Theology is always a project, not a finished product; we are to be always growing and learning new things, never sitting pat with the answers we have, as though we possessed the last word.

Is There a Merit Theology in the Bible?

First, we must analyze the concept of merit itself. Not all definitions of merit are automatically objectionable. In some theological systems, merit is treated as a covenantal and filial category, and thus may not fall prey to the full critique I'll be offering. Some theologians have eschewed merit for rather odd reasons. For example, Anselm denied the obedience of Christ was meritorious because he was a divine person. Other theologians have completely refined the notion of merit to the point where it means nothing more or less than "covenant faithfulness" (see the work Ralph Smith, especially his critique of Meredith Kline).

On the other hand, the lack of any widespread agreement on just what merit is (among both Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians) should give us pause. At the very, least it means that if we choose to (generally) abandon merit terminology, we are not abandoning a reformed-catholic consensus at anything more than a formal level.

The type of merit theology I want to critique is one that shows up in some versions of Reformed theology. In rough form, it goes something like this: God put Adam in the Garden, under a probationary test. If he rendered perfect and perpetual obedience, that obedience would have eventually merited glorification, according to the legal terms of the covenant of works. God would have owed Adam eschatological blessing as a matter of right, on the ground of Adam's obedience. Adam failed, but in due time, God sent Jesus as the second Adam to fulfill the covenant of works (the "law") in our place. Jesus merited reward and salvation. This merit ("righteousness") is imputed to us when we trust in him.

This picture, with countless permutations and variations, is a valid way of expressing many gospel truths. But I do not think it is the *purest* way to express the biblical picture. There are many objections that could be raised against the way merit functions in this scheme (e.g. the possibility of any "strict" merit in light of Rom. 11:35; the exegetical problem of finding the concept of merit in Gen. 1-2; a flawed understanding of the meaning of the terms "grace" and "righteousness;" etc.). I want focus on a few problems with merit theology that I think are often overlooked.

Merit and Covenant Personalism

Following Cornelius Van Til, I think we must press for a fully "personalist" theology. But merit has a

tendency to insert an impersonal layer between us and God. In that sense, merit is linked with "contract" rather than the biblical category of "covenant" -- and not surprisingly, many Reformed theologians who advocate merit go out of their way to define the covenant in purely (or primarily) contractual terms.

Merit theology shifts the focal point of the gospel away from personalism, or inter-personal relations, to an impersonal commodity: Instead of coming to restore us to communion with God (including forsenic right-standing/rectification as an aspect of that communion, of course), Jesus came to acquire merit for us. Jesus becomes a means to an end. He attains merit which them acts as redemptive leverage on our behalf with the Father.

Borrowing an (admittedly incomplete) illustration may help to prove the point: Suppose a boy works sweeping floors for a shopkeeper to earn $5. Then the same boy sweeps out the garage at home so he can play catch with Dad.

In the first case, the boy did the work not for the sake of the shopkeeper but for the impersonal benefit of 5 bucks. The benefit was fully separable from the boy's boss. He "merited" the $5 (or the $5 is the "merit" he acquired), but he and the shopkeeper could hate one another's guts and he'd still get his money. It's about a contract, and could easily be construed at a fairly impersonal level.

In the second case, the boy does the work not for the sake of "merit" but for the sake of entering into deeper fellowship and communion with his dad. To say he was attempting to "earn" his father's fellowship would insult them both. (Of course, his father would say he's "worthy" of it, but worth is not identical to merit since it conceives of the relationship in a different way. In this picture, obedience is perichoretic. The boy does not obey in order to earn right-standing with his father, but because obedience is the pathway into deeper fellowship with the one he loves. Obedience aims at fellowship, not merit.)

This is way too compressed to prove my point . . . . but the bottom line is that we're better off sticking to more biblical, personalized expressions. The Bible gives me more than enough categories and motifs to use (e.g., alienation/reconciliation); there is no need to drag impersonal merit into it to supplement the Bible's root metaphors and terms.

The Bible does not present Jesus as doing his work in order to acquire something (the $5 in the above illustration) that he can then pass along to us. Jesus did not do his work to acquire merits; rather he used the riches he already possessed to buy/purchase/ransom/redeem his people through his death.

Do economic terms like "ransom" and redeem" suggest an underlying merit theology? No, because such terms should be read not in terms of a merit framework imported from outside the Bible, but from within the Bible's own theological structure. For example, the "ransom" motif in the NT (e.g., Mk. 10:45) grows out of the sacrificial system (e.g., Lev. 27, though there persons are ransomed from God, not sin/death, in order to switch out what belongs unreservedly to the tabernacle) and the *goel* (kinsman-redeemer) institution. Jesus ransoms us by destroying the devil (Heb. 2:14-18) the same way God ransomed Israel by destroying Pharaoh (Isa. 43:3). "Ransoming" has to do with liberation, vengeance, and vindication. In the same way, "redemption" has to do with freeing salves, which takes us back to the exodus narrative. And so on.

Expressions and metaphors like these have economic overtones, to be sure, but they are fundamentally covenantal and personal. The fact that we are purchased with the *blood* of a *person* should indicate the limitations of pressing the economic motif (1 Pt. 1). We must learn to read the Bible in terms of itself – or

to put it another way, we must learn to read it on its own terms.

"Alien Righteousness" and Other Unidentified Theological Objects

A further issue with the merit scheme is that it portrays Jesus as acquiring some benefit (merit or righteousness) that is somehow separable from his person. But there are no benefits apart from union with the Benefactor. Whatever we receive from Jesus is received only in union with him.

Martin Luther often defined "imputation" in terms of a marriage relationship, in which goods are shared and possessed jointly. He explained the exchange of the gospel in relationally intrinsic terms: "If Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his." Faith "unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom." The righteousness of Christ by which we are justified is simply the presence of Christ himself dwelling within us:

> Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ . . . Where the confidence of the heart is present, therefore, there Christ is present, in that very cloud and faith. This is the formal righteousness on account of which a man is justified . . . Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.

John Calvin also rooted justification and imputation in union with Christ. We receive Christ's benefits only as he dwells in us and we dwell in him:

> We must now see in what way we become possessed of the blessings which God has bestowed on his only-begotten Son, not for private use, but to enrich the poor and needy. And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us. To communicate to us the blessings which he received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell in us. Accordingly, he is called our Head, and the first-born among many brethren, while, on the other hand, we are said to be ingrafted into him and clothed with him, all which he possesses being, as I have said, nothing to us until we become one with him . . .
>
> Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our heart—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—-in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him (*Institutes* 3.1.1, 3.11.10).

Jonathan Edwards argues the same point:

> What is real in the union between Christ and his people, is the foundation of what is legal; that is, it is something that is really in them and between them, uniting [them], that is the ground of the suitableness of their being accounted as one by the Judge. . . . because Christ and they are so united that they may be well looked upon [as] one (M 568).
>
> The whole mystical Christ shall be rewarded for this, which is the same thing as the having Christ's

righteousness imputed to them (M 502).

According to Edwards, faith justifies precisely because it is the act of union with Christ.

More recently, Richard Gaffin has called into question the wisdom of the "alien righteousness" formula. While the early Reformers did at times use the "alien righteousness" metaphor, they did so in a guarded way. Calvin, in particular, was always quick to run back to union with Christ. He insisted that Christ's work was of no value to us unless we are joined to him. While the "alien righteousness" motif was helpful from one vantage point, in safeguarding the priority of Christ's work in history outside of us to accomplish redemption, in another sense in was a real liability, because once Christ was abstracted from his people in an "alien" way, the various facets of his saving work could not be held together. Gaffin explains:

> [P]rominent in Protestant, especially Lutheran development of the doctrine of justification is the notion of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as an "alien" righteousness; the righteousness that justifies apart from us, it is not our own but Christ's, not of our doing but his. At issue here is the concern, not only understandable but necessary, not to confuse Christ's righteousness, as the sole ground for justification, with anything that takes place within the sinner, the concern not to obscure that justifying righteousness is perfect and complete, apart from anything the believer does, in what Christ has done, once for all, in his finished work. In that sense, to speak of "alien righteousness" is surely defensible.
>
> At the same time, we should recognize, a definite liability attaches to this expression. "Alien" suggests what is remote, at a distance; it can easily leave the impression of an isolated imputative act, without a clear relationship to Christ and the other aspects of salvation. In this regard, I have the impression that some Reformed thinking on justification centers on a line, focused on the individual sinner, that moves from my eternal election to its realization and documentation in history by my faith, produced by regeneration, that receives justification. On this view Christ and his work are surely essential but recede into the background, along with other aspects of salvation.

In other words, justification should be formulated in terms of union with Christ. Christ's righteousness is not "alien" to me *because it really belongs to me*. It has become mine because I have been incorporated into Christ himself. Apart from union with Christ, God's act of declaring sinners "righteous" would have to be regarded as a "cold piece of business" at best, and a "legal fiction" at worst. Union with Christ was and is the necessary presupposition to the Protestant doctrine of justification by an imputed righteousness. Or, to put it another way, imputation is simply a corollary of, or aspect of, union with Christ.

"Alien righteousness" is a terribly inadequate way of expressing this truth. For example, when a man and woman come together in marriage, it simply does not do justice to the nature of the marriage relationship if the man continues to treat his assets as "alien" to his new wife. No, in the very act of marrying this woman he has pledged to share all that he has with her. Nothing is alien; all is jointly possessed. In the same way, Christ shares his status as the resurrected and vindicated one with us. We are married into all he possesses.

Anthony Hoekema made this point by suggesting that apart from union with Christ, his transfer of benefits to us could be more like alimony payments than a marriage relationship. But within the context of union with Christ, imputation becomes redundant in certain respects. There is no need to transfer assets from Christ's account to mine; rather Christ has made his account a joint account, with his bride's name on it. The biblical emphasis is on incorporation, not imputation.

To put this another way, instead of thinking of Christ transferring his righteousness to many individual accounts in order to justify sinners, we should think of ourselves as being transferred from Adam's account and family (in whom we are condemned) to Christ's account and family (in whom we are acquitted). The individualistic-imputation model makes it virtually impossible to connect justification with the church, the means of grace, and so forth. The union with Christ model includes these things. If I am only justified as I joined to Christ, I am only justified as I am joined to other Christians (the justified people) as well. It is impossible to think of justification in individualistic terms. The sacraments make this clear. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper include the promise of forgiveness, and both also form the church into the body of Christ. Justification and community are coordinated in union with Christ.

Imputation, Infusion, and Incorporation: *Imputed Active Obedience* or *Shared Resurrection Verdict*?

The merit system described above required Adam to offer to offer meritorious obedience. Because he failed, Jesus has to offer meritorious obedience in his place. As the scheme is usually conceived, Jesus satisfies the requirements of the merit system by his active obedience to the law, which is then imputed to us (that is, transferred from his "account" to ours).

This is awkward: In a way, I'm arguing against something I believe in – in a roundabout kind of way. I do believe the obedience and righteousness of Christ become ours – after all, if our salvation is found in union with Christ, we are united to him in every facet of his life's work. We can even speak of his righteousness/law-keeping as being "imputed" if we wish. But I do not think this is the most Pauline or biblical way to express the truth (and thus I appreciate the fact that when Wright is asked about the imputation of Christ's active obedience, he turns to Romans 6, rather than Romans 4, to give his nuanced and qualified answer). For the sake of exegetical and theological purity, we can make some refinements and reformulations. Instead of framing the issue as one of imputation vs. infusion, we should focus on incorporation.

This is a case of misused prooftexts. The passages typically appealed to prove this doctrine of imputed active obedience do not actually teach it, at least not in any straightforward way. Even some proponents of the doctrine admit that it is not an explicit teaching in the NT, and functions at the theological rather than the exegetical level (e.g., D. A. Carson). The doctrine of the imputed meritorious law-obedience of Christ is created mainly to solve a problem of our own making, namely Adam's need to merit life in the garden under the covenant of works. Without the meritorious covenant of works, the doctrine falls to the ground, and we are freed to read Paul's imputation texts in a more natural way.

For example, in Romans 4, "impute" probably has the sense of "count" or "regard" rather than "transfer" (cf. 3:28, 4:8, 6:11) and in any case, it speaks of *faith* being imputed, not Christ's active obedience. Going back to Paul's theme text, Gen. 15:6, it is clearly Abraham's response of faith that God regarded or reckoned or accounted as righteousness. It is simply not exegetically defensible to say that the writer of Genesis was using theological shorthand for the active obedience of Christ. Such an idea – as even John Murray admitted – is simply not tenable. To be reckoned righteous by faith in this context means all that we want it to mean: it includes the forgiveness of sins, forensic right-standing, vindication, and covenant membership. But the phrase itself does not tell us the mechanism God uses to set us in the right. In fact, that would remain a revealed-but-veiled mystery until the cross of Christ (Rom. 3:21ff). When Paul explains *how* faith makes us righteous, he uses union with Christ, not imputation or infusion categories.

Further, in Romans 4, Paul's interest is in Abraham's faith and fatherhood, not Christ's active obedience as such. The latter simply has no place in the argument Paul is developing, which concerns the nature of

Abraham's family. Romans 4:1 is the key verse. It is best translated, "What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?" Abraham is the father of circumcised and uncircumcised believers. This twofold fatherhood corresponds to the two stages of his life (before his circumcision, as a Gentile, and after his circumcision in Gen. 17; cf. 4:9-25). Paul's polemic is against Jewish self-righteousness and exclusivism: Abraham was justified as an ungodly man, meaning as someone who was not Torah observant/circumcised. In 4:4-5, Paul's point is not merely that God justifies sinners (which was an old truth), but that he justifies Gentiles (which was an old, but forgotten, and therefore new, truth). Paul's driving emphasis is that through Christ's death and resurrection, the promised family of Abraham (Gen. 12) has now come into existence. There is now a single Jew/Gentile family in which the members are marked out by Abrahamic faith. Of course Abrahamic faith is resurrection faith (Sara's womb, Isaac); those who share in Abraham's faith trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 4:22-25).

We know from Heb. 11 and Gen. 12-14 that Abraham was a renewed and repentant – and therefore a justified -- person before Gen. 15:6, so Gen. 15:6 is not his initial justification. If anything, it is a fresh application of an earlier justification (Gen. 12, Heb. 11). There may be strategic reasons why the author has chosen to emphasize his justification at this point in the narrative. Even if Abraham has already been walking as a justified person for some time, Gen. 15:6 may properly be used as a paradigm for initial justification.

Whatever the case, Paul is clearly illustrating that justification in it's beginning and continuance is a matter of God's grace. The ongoing need for mercy is seen in Paul's use of Abraham and the complementary illustration he provides, namely, David. Using Psalm 32 as his platform, Paul shows that even David, God's typological son and representative king, was blessed not because of his own efforts or ethnicity, but because of God's mercy (4:6-8). However, this mercy is not described in terms of the imputation of Christ's active obedience (rooted in Christ's law keeping), but in terms of the non-imputation of David's own sin (rooted in Christ's cross). In other words, God did not hold David to account for his sin. Again we see that God reckons faith as righteousness, meaning that he regards the believer as [a] forgiven; and [b] a member of the covenant family. In Christ, by faith, we are continually forgiven and accepted.

As Romans 4 builds to a climax, Paul finally crowns his argument by grounding Abraham's justification – and therefore the creation of his promised, worldwide faith-family (4:11-12) – in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul clinches his case by pointing *away from the law* (which can only intensify sin into transgression and bring wrath; cf. 4:13-15) and by pointing *to the death and resurrection of Christ* (4:22-25). Those who believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead are regarded by him as righteous. The active obedience is not in view; the focus is on the cross and the resurrection.

To summarize this point: in Paul's theological vocabulary, *logizomai* does not seem to refer to an extrinsic transfer of something from person A to person B. Rather, it has to do with how God regards or considers you in relationship to himself. God can count/impute your own faith as righteousness, as he did Abraham (no doubt, because of the object of the faith, which is ultimately God himself, identified by his act of raising Jesus from the dead; cf. Rom. 4:22-25). God can refuse to count/impute your sins against you (no doubt, because of the cross; cf. Rom. 4:6-8, 22-25). In Rom. 5:12ff, we learn that Paul's theology of "imputing" or "regarding" is grounded in covenant union: God ultimately regards us according to the covenant head we are united to – either Adam or Christ. This is simply the way the language works. It has nothing to do with an imaginary imputation/infusion debate going on the pages of the NT. Imputation (with attendant legal and commercial metaphors) as developed by the Reformed scholastics served a useful purpose in anti-Roman Catholic polemics to stress that the ground of our acceptance with God is found solely in what Christ did for us, but it should not be shoehorned into the exegesis of NT texts. The key is incorporation, not

imputation or infusion.

The Reformed scholastic tradition needs refinement in its use of imputation language, but the basic point of the Reformed tradition stands unassailable: By faith, God reckons us as righteous, and he does so because faith unites us to Christ. The virtue of faith is found in its object. Justifying faith is directed to the God who handed Jesus over for our transgressions and raised him up for (his own and) our justification (Rom. 4:22-25). When we believe into Christ Jesus, his resurrection status becomes ours. (It is worth noting that Rom. 4:22-25 does not make mention of the active obedience of Christ to Torah as part of his work, nor as part of the object of our faith. While Jesus did keep Torah perfectly and fully, and this "chapter" in his life story becomes part of our life stories when we trust in him, nevertheless, it would largely undo Paul's argument if he brought in Jesus' Torah keeping as part of the ground of our justification at this point in the argument. The essence of his point in Rom. 4 is that justification is available to those who are *not* of or under the Torah. It is available to "ungodly" Gentiles.)

If we want to speak of justification as a transaction or transfer, we should put it this way: God does not justify me by transferring Christ's righteousness to my account, but by transferring *me* from Adam to Christ. Under my new covenant head, God regards me as righteous because he is righteous. His status is shared with me (and all his people). In Paul's argumentation, *logizomai* functions more as covenantal term than an economic or bookkeeping metaphor.

Sometimes, the "clothing" metaphor in Scripture is appealed to in order to establish imputation. But in the key text (Gal. 3:27), it is Christ himself, not his obedience/righteousness that is our clothing. In that sense, it would make more sense to say Christ himself is imputed to us (and it should be evident, then, that imputation is just another way of describing union). Besides, in Gal. 3:27, the point is that Christ is our priestly vestment; his active obedience is not in view, so much as his priesthood (cf. priestly investiture in Lev. 8). Other clothing texts also fail to make the point: In Genesis 3, clothing covers shame and points to atonement, not active obedience. In Ruth 3, shared clothing indicates a marriage covenant. In Isaiah 59, God clothes himself with the breastplate of justice, but surely no imputation (in the sense of transfer) is involved. And so on.

Finally, there is *nothing* in the Levitical sacrificial system that would correspond to the imputation of the active obedience. In the Levitical offerings, the worshipper would incorporate himself in the unblemished animal by pressing his hands onto the animal. Thus, he would be united to the animal as it underwent the death-resurrection-ascension pattern. The blood of the animal would be sprinkled on objects representing the worshipper/community, but this has to do with forgiveness and purification, not the imputation of active righteousness as such. *Nothing* in the ritual symbolizes a transfer of the animal's unblemished state to the worshipper. This is not to say that the NT cannot teach the doctrine, but the Levitical framework should be kept in mind when claims about the importance of the active obedience doctrine are made. In the Levitical system, the animal's symbolic purity is a necessary precondition to it being offered acceptably. But the fundamental theme is the worshipper's union with the offering in its death and glorification.

What do we put in place of the imputation of Christ's active obedience? Union with the resurrected Christ. Jonathan Edwards (building upon Calvin and anticipating Gaffin) explains:

> So Christ, our second surety (in whose justification all who believe in him, and whose surety he is, are virtually justified), was not justified until he had done the work the father had appointed him, and kept the Father's commandments through all trials; and then in his resurrection was justified. [After citing 1 Pt. 3:18 and 1 Tim. 3:16, he says:] But God, when he justified him in raising him from the

> dead, did not only release him from his humiliation for sin, and acquit him from any further suffering or abasement for it, but admitted him to that eternal and immortal life, and to the beginning of that exaltation that was the reward of what he had done. And indeed the justification of the believer is not other than his being admitted to communion in, or participation of the justification of this head and surety of all believers.

Nevin makes the same point. He argues for the centrality of the resurrection. Even the benefits we receive from Christ's death flow to us through his resurrected life. A dead Christ cannot justify (cf. 1 Cor. 15); thus, everything hinges on the fact and meaning of the resurrection.

> Could the sacrifice of Calvary be of any avail to take away sins, if the victim there slain had not been raised again for our justification, and were not *now* seated at the right hand of God as our Advocate and Intercessor? Would the atonement of a *dead* Christ be of more worth than the blood of bulls and goats, to purge the conscience from dead works and give it free access to God? . . .

We receive what Christ has to offer not by means of a mechanical, outward transfer but by a living union with the Savior, illustrated by the likes of marriage, a vine and its branches, and a body and its members.

> What Christ does or has done, must ever be conditioned certainly by what he is; and it is hard to see how the force of his righteousness forensically taken can ever be impaired, by its being allowed to be in truth a part of himself and in union always with his own life.

In other words, Christ's righteousness becomes ours not by legal transfer, but by covenantal union. This union includes a legal/forensic component, but much else besides. Nevin's corporate, union-with-Christ view allowed him to integrate the church and sacraments into his version of the *ordo salutis*, something other Reformed theologians in the scholastic period were not able to do. In this way, Nevin was in a position to be more faithful to the Calvinian legacy. Nevin understood that if there is no justification apart from union with Christ, there is no justification apart from Christ's body (the church).

Nevin was not offering an alternative of his own, so much as he was suggesting a return to Calvin's more organic and covenantal approach. Justification grounded in union with Christ achieves everything that the doctrine of imputation is designed to do. It stays true to the biblical shape of the gospel.

Against scholastic formulations, it makes better exegetical sense to say that we are justified in virtue of our participation in Christ's justification. We are integrated into his resurrection status. This is how it works: The Son identified himself with us, foundationally in his incarnation, and then officially in his baptism. As our substitute and representative, he died on the cross for us and as us, bearing the curse of the law. The Father then justified the Son in the resurrection (1 Tim. 3:16). We are united to Christ by faith alone, and in union with him, share in that justifying verdict (Rom. 4:25). The resurrection life of Christ is the ultimate source and ground of our justification.

Why is the resurrection so important, sp central? By focusing on the resurrection, as the NT does (e.g., gospel narratives, 1 Cor 15, etc.), we are able to hold together the forensic and transformational aspects of salvation since the resurrection is both a forensic and transformational event. This is superior to scholastic federalism's uneasy, dualistic compound of legal and spiritual unions. The resurrection unifies our salvation in Christ.

Union with Christ and Justification

Many theologians have rightly understood union with Christ at the center of Paul's soteriology. Our justification inheres in Christ's person as the crucified and risen (justified) God-man. Of course, all the other blessings of salvation reside in him as well. All salvation – including justification – is participatory. All our faith, obedience, perseverance, and so on, are located *in Christ*. These benefits are ours only as (and as long as) we abide in Christ.

Furthermore, union with Christ plugs us into the broader history of redemption. By virtue of our union with Christ, we are grafted into the whole story of Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1ff). Union with Christ redefines us by giving us a new story and making us a part of a new family. Thus, union with Christ has a practical payoff in terms of how we live our day-to-day lives. Lutherans tend to define sanctification as a matter of "getting used to your justification." Calvinists tend to view sanctification as a matter of obeying the law in its third use. But a union with Christ model gives the Christian life a different shape altogether. When Paul is explaining why baptized Christians (a redundant phrase, I know) cannot go on is sin, he appeals neither to justification as such (though note 6:7) nor to the law (though note 8:1-4 and 13:8-10). Instead, he appeals to our union with the crucified and risen Christ (6:1ff). In him, we have died to sin and been raised to new life. In light of union with Christ, Paul's lays the groundwork for a life obedience and holiness. He says we are to *impute* or *reckon* ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. In other words, he says, "Be who you are! You are in Christ – live like it!"

Union with Christ is a helpful organizing theme for biblical theology and practical piety because it so all-encompassing. Union with Christ was absolutely central in Calvin's soteriology, and in more recent times, many Reformed theologians have recovered its importance. However, its significance has never been fully eclipsed in the Reformed stream. For example, Edwards wrote:

> The Scripture is very plain and evident in this, that those that are in Christ are actually in a state of salvation, and are justified, sanctified, accepted of Christ, and shall be saved . . . But those that are not in Christ, and are not united to him, can have no degree of communion with him. For there is no communion without union. The members can have no communion with the head or participation of its life and health unless they are united to it . . .

At least some versions of what became known as federal theology argued for an extrinsic doctrine of imputation as the basis of our justification. Such stress was put on Christ's "alien" work outside of us that the doctrine of union with Christ was stressed and even fragmented. The John Nevin/Charles Hodge debate is a good illustration. Nevin, following Calvin, grounded justification in organic union with Christ. We share Christ's forensic status precisely because we participate in his life. In fact, Nevin defined "Christianity" simply as participation in the life of Christ.

> For Christianity . . . is in a deep sense identical with the life of Christ itself. It is not the words he spoke, nor the works he wrought, as something sundered from his own person but the living fountain of all these introduced into the world in the mystery from which his person springs. He is the Word itself made flesh; grace and truth enshrined in living *shekinah*; the life of God disclosed, to the fullest possible extent of revelation, in the very bosom of man's life.

The new humanity is comprehended in Christ's person. Nevin grounded every facet of Christian life and experience in vital union with Christ. Nevin did not oppose imputation as such, but he did criticize "extrinsic" notions of imputation that were insufficiently rooted in our living union with Christ and which severed the fruit of Christ's work from the person of Christ himself. He wrote,

> [The value of Christ's work] is all lodged in the life [of Christ], by the power of which alone this work has been accomplished, and in the presence of which only it can have either reality or stability. The imagination that the merits of Christ's life may be sundered from his life, and conveyed over to his people under this abstract form, on the ground of a merely outward legal constitution, is unscriptural and contrary to all reason at the same time . . .
>
> In the very act of our justification, by which the righteousness of Christ is accounted to be ours, it becomes ours in fact by our actual insertion into Christ himself. He is joined to us mystically by the power of the Holy Ghost, and becomes in this way the principle of a new creation within us, which from the very start includes in itself potentially, all that belongs to it already in his own person . . .

This view of justification counters the "legal fiction" charge:

> The judgment of God must ever be according to truth. He cannot reckon to anyone an attribute or quality, which does not belong to him in fact. He cannot declare him to be in a relation or state, which is not actually his own, but the position merely of another . . .

Thus, Nevin virtually equated justification and imputation with the mystical union itself. He argued for what has sometimes been called "mediate" imputation. Justification "carries with it the power of a new life" because it is grounded in union with Christ's own life. Nevin's view inevitably put greater emphasis on the incarnation and the church. If justification is rooted in the life of Christ, it cannot be experienced outside of Christ's body. Union with Christ is inevitably corporate.

> As the bearer of a fallen humanity he must descend with it to the lowest depths of sorrow and pain, in order that he might triumph with it again in the power of his own imperishable life. In all this, he acted for himself and yet for the race he represented at the same time. For it was no external relation simply, that he sustained to this last. He was himself the race. Humanity dwelt in his person as the Second Adam, under a higher form than ever it carried in the first.

Hodge, meanwhile, talked about union with Christ quite a bit, but when the chips were down, he really bifurcated union with Christ into "legal" and "spiritual." Of course, this raised an inevitable question: What is the relationship of these two unions? What holds together justification and new life in the Spirit? The objective and the subjective? The legal and the transformational? Our salvation comes to look increasingly like an amalgam of two unnecessarily related benefits. Justification and sanctification cannot be related and coordinated together in union with Christ because there are distinct "types" of union with Christ. Justification cannot be meaningfully integrated into the life of faith because the legal/forensic and the vital have no point of contact.

Nevin accused Hodge of turning the incarnation, the work of Christ, the church, and the means of grace into "a sort of outward mechanical apparatus." William Borden Evans (364) points out that whereas for Calvin, "as long as Christ remains outside of us . . . all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us," for Hodge it is precisely Christ outside of us that justifies. In other words, Hodge's (extreme, but quite representative) federalism effectively *reverses* Calvin's point! For Hodge, "it is only as Christ remains outside [of us] that what he has suffered for the race can avail for salvation." When Hodge was confronted with the Mercersberg criticism that his teaching made justification over into an outward and extrinsic transaction, he simply replied, "What is urged as an objection to the doctrine is true." In other words, Hodge believed that integrating justification into vital

union confuses (or mixes) justification and sanctification. (Unfortunately, this involved Hodge in a deep contradiction. On the one hand, he wanted a doctrine of justification purified of all subjectivity. On the other hand, he also argued that justification is by faith, and faith depends on regeneration, which is also the origin point of sanctification and occurs only in vital union with Christ.)

Justification is best understood in terms of comprehensive union with Christ: God decreed our justification when he chose us in Christ, from before the foundation of the world. Our justification was accomplished and declared in history in the resurrection of Christ. We actually come to share in Christ's justification when the Spirit works faith in us, uniting us to Christ. And our justification is consummated and concluded at the final judgment, when our whole lives in Christ receive God's righteous verdict. Justification for the Christian must be viewed in terms of ongoing participation in the life of the justified Christ, through faith and the work of the Spirit. In this sense, we can follow Calvin and speak of our *continual reception* of justification as we abide in Christ. Justification is not a stand-alone doctrine, but an aspect of our union with Christ.

All of this allows us to better understand the true purpose of Christ's active obedience and pre-death ministry. Jesus did not merely live 30 or so years of punctilious obedience to the law of Moses. His life transcends that. He came to fulfill the redemptive plan of God. Instead of focusing on his law obedience, we get more theological, exegetical, and pastoral mileage out of viewing his life ministry in recapitulatory terms. His early life and earthly ministry should be understood in new Adam, new Israel, and ultimately, new creation, categories.

The Father, the Servant-Son, and Merit

We are now prepared to return to our earlier discussion of merit.

Did Jesus *merit* his reward from the Father? Did Jesus merit, or earn, our salvation? Certainly, we must affirm the *infinite worth* of the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:12). If this is what merit means, there is no objection to it (other than possible terminological confusion). But this is not, strictly speaking, a merit theology, because Scripture also speaks of Jesus' exaltation as an *inheritance* and a *gift.*

Philippians 2:9 is the key text. I want to rely almost entirely on the work of Moises Silva at this point. I think his comments on the passage get to the heart of the matter. This is how Silva translates the text (emphasis mine):

> *For this very reason* God has exalted Him above all things by *granting to Him as a gift* the name that is above every name, so that the whole universe may bow in adoration before the name of Jesus—indeed, so that every tongue may confess that Jesus Christ is the divine Lord, for the glory of God the Father.

Silva then provides the exegesis (quoted here with Greek omitted):

> The second part of the Christ-hymn contrasts with the first not only conceptually (exaltation opposed to humiliation), but in other respects as well. To begin with, in this second part we are not faced with numerous lexical and exegetical problems such as encountered in vv. 6-8. Indeed, most commentators are able to deal with vv. 9-11 in about half the space they required for the first section. (Yet, as we shall see, these verses raise two or three questions that have major doctrinal implications.) Moreover, the structure of vv. 9-11 is not characterized by the large number of

parallel and contrasting items that have been recognized in vv. 6-8.

Verses 9-11 constitute one sentence, composed of (1) two closely related main verbs (*hyperypsosen,* "exalted"; *echarisato,* "granted"), of which God, not Jesus, is the subject; and (2) a purpose clause (introduced with "in order that") also consisting of two verbs . . . (*kampse*, "bow"; *exomologesetai*, "confess"). This sentence is introduced in v. 9 with the inferential conjunction (*dio*, "therefore," reinforced with kai, "also" . . .), and commentators have debated the precise relationship between the two parts of the hymn.

On the surface, it would appear that God is spoken of as rewarding Jesus with "the Name which is above every name" because of His faithful obedience (so Meyer, Eadie, et al.). Partly because of certain abuses of this idea, Calvin reacted strongly against it. In recent times it has been opposed by Barth and others; Collange, for example, appeals to the very *echarisato* as indicating "pure grace" or "the gracious sovereign act of God," in contrast to the idea of recompense. Hwth. speaks of "natural or logical outcome," an inflexible law of God's kingdom," namely, "that in the divine order of things self-humbling leads inevitably to exaltation."

One must question, however, whether it is useful to oppose these various aspects to one another. The "inflexible law" of which Hwth. speaks is hardly an impersonal rule; when Jesus taught that "whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:12), He was not speaking of an automatic sequence of events but of a deliberate act on God's part, as we also have here in Philippians. God's act does not entail submission to some higher, arbitrary law. In other words, to speak of a logical consequence does not exclude the question of whether or not a personal reward is in view.

Moreover, is it necessary to deny the notion of reward if we wish to do justice to the gracious element of God's act? The question, though quickly dismissed in some Protestant circles as reflecting a medieval aberration, is a highly complicated one that does not admit of brief and definitive answers. On the one hand, if we emphasize the reward/merit element in a passage that presents Christ as our example, we may appear to undermine the doctrine of salvation by grace (as though people a*chieve* their final salvation as Christ achieved His Messianic exaltation). On the other hand, if we emphasize the element of grace in a passage where Christ's vicarious obedience is in view, we appear to undermine a correlative soteriological principle, namely, that Christ's meritorious work as the last Adam fully satisfied the claims of divine law and justice (Rom. 5:18-19).

It may help us to see our way out of this dilemma if we consider, first, that the Christ-hymn, though it certainly describes Christ's sacrificial work, does not have as its primary object setting forth the vicarious character of His obedience. In other words, we need not fear that an emphasis on the gracious character of God's act in exalting Jesus subverts the principle of Christ's meritorious obedience on behalf of His people. Second, the Christ-hymn implies a correspondence between Christ's experience and the believer's sanctification leading to glorification, not between Christ's exaltation and the sinner's justification. Surely, believers are exhorted to persevere in their Christian race so that they may receive the prize (Phil. 3:13-14), but we need not for that reason fear that the notion of reward conflicts with Paul's doctrine of justification (Rom. 4:5, "to the one who does not work . . . ")

Gnilka then is quite correct in pointing out both that we cannot exclude the notion of reward from this passage and at the same time that we must restrict its application in view of Jesus' uniqueness (though Gnilka's own qualifications are debatable). Similarly, Martin clarified the issue by accepting

in this context the concept of reward while rejecting that of merit:

> It is not so much the thought that because He rendered this obedience He was glorified as that, having accomplished the mission He came into the world to fulfill, God interposed and reversed the seeming finality of death in raising Him to the place of dignity. The obedience of Christ did not force the hand of God, as a doctrine of merit implies. The action of God is but the other side of that obedience, and a vindication of all that the obedience involved.

I would generally endorse the reading of the passage offered by Silva, especially the conclusion given by Martin. The Father does indeed reward the Son for his fulfillment of the plan of salvation. But that reward need not take the shape of merit. The Son doesn't force the Father's hand. He doesn't bribe the Father, as in pagan religions. The reward comes by way of his suffering obedience because that was the Father's vocation for him. But the relationship is not based on merit but rather familial love. The reward is personal and covenantal, not impersonal and contractual. Thus, the Father graciously bestowed exaltation on the Son as a reward for his suffering obedience.

Frank Thielman echoes the same truth in his comments on Phil. 2:9:

> Why then did God exalt Jesus and grant him the name above every name? At first glance God seems to have done this as payment for Christ's obedience. Christ was "obedient unto death – even death on a cross," Paul says, "and therefore God exalted him to the highest place and granted to him the name above every name" (pers. trans.). The key to understanding this sentence, however, lies in noticing that God takes the initiative. Jesus does not force God's hand, nor is the exaltation and granting of the name a payment for deeds performed. Instead God initiated the exaltation of Jesus and "freely gave" ("*eucharisato*") to him the most superior of names.

Silva, Martin, and Thielman are writing from within the Reformed tradition, and yet they do not insist on the absolute grace/merit antithesis that some Reformed theologians set up. They give no indication that the passage points to Jesus as fulfilling a meritorious covenant of works. Silva toys with the category of merit, but does not use merit to cancel out the grace language of the passage. This is consistent with biblical language. Jesus is worthy of his reward (Rev. 5), yet is called a gift (Phi. 2) and an inheritance (Ps. 2).

Finally, N. T. Wright calls into question the notion of earning as a way of viewing the Son's relationship to his Father:

> Thus Paul never says that Christ obeyed the law: he is no legalist needing to earn anything, and even to say that he 'earns' righteousness for his people still falls short of the truth because it has not removed; but merely adjusted, the irrelevant and misleading idea of 'earning' itself. Christ is obedient to God's whole saving plan, of which the law is only a small part.

The biblical emphasis is not on what Jesus earns via his law keeping, but on how he uses what he already possesses in service of his people. This brings us to our next topic: the role of law in relation to Jesus' work.

Merit and the Role of the Law in Redemptive History

What is the biblical solution to our lawbreaking? What role does the law play in the redemption of sinners? When Paul answers this question, he *never* points to the law keeping or active obedience of Jesus. Instead he *always* points to his death and resurrection. His law keeping plays a vital theological role. But the function of

the law (Torah) was never to bring eschatological life, even if kept perfectly. Only the death and resurrection of Jesus could usher in the new age. The righteousness of Jesus is his resurrected/glorified status he now shares with his people. The good works of Jesus could not undo our bad works. The good works of Jesus could not tear the heavenly curtain and regain access to God's heavenly sanctuary. The good works of Jesus could not undo the curse of the law. (My thoughts on this point have been refined by an article by Daniel Kirk, publication forthcoming.)

Whatever "life" the Torah promised (e.g., Lev. 18:5, Ps. 71:3, Rom. 7:10) was still within the horizon of the old creation (except for typologically). Even though Jesus perfectly kept the law, in the end, the law brought him curse rather than blessing (Gal. 3). This is not because Jesus' obedience was actually deficient or defective in some way; rather, it's because *this is what the law was designed to do*. It was never intended to be an instrument through which eschatological life could come to realization; it was always intended to focus the problem of the curse (sin and death) on Israel, so that ultimately it could be dealt with by Israel's messianic representative. The problem with the "imputation of active obedience" formula is that it lodges justification and life in Jesus' law keeping, which is precisely where those things are *not* found. Instead, justification and life are found in his death and resurrection. The active obedience formula inadvertently de-eschatologizes the gospel. At most, perfect Torah keeping would get us back to the point of "original righteousness," but it would fall short of eschatological righteousness.

While God's intentions in giving Torah are complex and multi-faceted, and therefore cannot be reduced to just one purpose, we can say that Torah was *not* given with the aim of bringing in eschatological new creation life. Torah points beyond itself to something greater. The prophets add their witness to this point as well (e.g., Isa. 65-66). Torah may be a crucial chapter in the story of Israel but it was never designed to be the means by which and through which the Abrahamic promises would come to realization (Gal. 3:15ff). If anything, Torah prevented the promised blessings from coming to fruition by [1] keeping the people at a distance from God through the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle/temple curtains, and the ineffectiveness of animal sacrifices; and [2] keeping Jewish believers and Gentile believers separated from one another by the "diving wall" of Torah's boundary markers.

Consider some texts:

Rom. 3:20-26, esp. v20. The law makes sin known, but the answer is found in the blood of Christ – that is, his propitiatory death.

Rom. 4:25 make the death and resurrection the ground of our forgiveness and justification.

Rom. 5:9-10 lodge justification, salvation, and reconciliation in his bloody death and (resurrection) life.

Rom. 5:21-21 focus on his one act of obedience, countering Adam's one act of disobedience. That one act is his sacrificial death on the tree of the cross. The law belongs on the Adamic divide of history. In other words, the Mosaic phase of history was simply a subset with the Adamic phase of history. It belongs to the old creation, and thus is co-opted by sin and death

Rom. 8:1-4 point to the Father sending Jesus and the Spirit to do what the law could not do. The inability of the law is met and overcome by Christ and the Spirit. The law is weak and cannot serve as the instrument of salvation. The Father sent the Son as a sin offering to do what the law could not accomplish. The law of the Spirit is essentially the law of Christ – the law for a new era in redemptive history. In the sphere of the Spirit, the law is no longer an instrument of death. But the way *into* the sphere of the Spirit is not law

keeping per se, but the death and resurrection of Christ. Now the deepest, eschatological/typological intention of the law is fulfilled in us as we walk in faithful obedience.

Rom. 8:34, 10:6-10, and 14:9 focus on his death and resurrection. The active obedience is implicit at the presuppositional level, but Paul *always* looks to the cross and the empty tomb as the ground of our salvation. Surely, this is no accident.

1 Cor. 15:1-11 summarize the gospel in terms of fulfillment of the old covenant Scriptures. No mention is made of Jesus keeping the law for his people. Instead, Paul sees the death of Jesus and his resurrection on the third day as decisive. Jesus does not overcome the law by keeping it, but by dying and rising again (15:54-57).

Gal. 2:11-21, esp. v19-21. The focus is on our dying and rising in him. Justification is not by law keeping but by his faithful death on the cross. Paul explicitly repudiates the imputation of active obedience formula in 2:21: If righteousness could come through the law, Christ died in vain.Christ saved us through his death and resurrection, not through the law. To return to the law is to undo the work of Christ (2:18). If law keeping could bring salvation, the cross was unnecessary; to go back to the law after the cross event is to seek to dismantle what Jesus' death accomplished.

Gal. 3:10-14 is a dense passage. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the perfect law keeper was still cursed by the law rather than blessed. But this was necessary for our salvation. The law's function is not to bring life but to work death. Jesus took the curse of the law for us. The resurrection then reversed the curse of condemnation and death. Thus, the resurrection is Christ's own vindication against the death sentence of the law, and our justification found in his resurrection.

Gal. 4:4-5 view Torah as a reigning power from which we must be redeemed, rather than an instrument of redemption itself. The emphasis in Galatians is not on Jesus' obedience to the law, but his bearing the curse of the law on the cross. The law is a tool in the hands of sin and death. It is part of the *stoichea.*

Phil. 2:8 focuses on his death on the cross. To be sure, on the cross, he offers himself, and his whole life of obedience. But it is the cross itself that is the focal point. No mention is made of the law, but rather of the Father's vocation for the Son to die and the Son's willingness to play the part. Jesus is not justified by works of the law but the Father's gift of resurrection.

Phil. 3:1-11 are very significant. Paul eschews law-righteousness, and claims instead the righteousness of God in Christ. This creates the sharpest possible contrast between law righteousness and God's righteousness. It is precisely this disjunction of law righteousness from God's righteousness that made Paul's gospel so controversial to the Jews. Specifically, Paul says his future hope is not grounded in Jesus' law keeping, but in his resurrection. Paul's law-based identity is worthless ("dung") compared to the identity he finds in the crucified and risen Christ.

1 Thess. 5:10 does not appeal to his law keeping but to his death.

Hebrews 10:10 emphasizes Jesus' obedience to God's will in dying on the cross. While Hebrews views Jesus' whole life as one of suffering and maturing, the power to save is placed in his death and subsequent intercession rather than obedience to the law.

The same point is made in the gospels:

Mt. 3:15 says Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness. His baptism fulfills righteousness because it is his entrance into the priesthood. What his baptism begins is completed at his death. Thus, the cross itself is called a baptism.

Mt. 5:17-20 says Jesus came to fulfill the law. This points to more than mere obedience. He came to bring the law – with all its types and shadows, prophecies and promises – to eschatological realization. He is the goal to which the law was pointing. But if anything, this reveals that the ministry of Jesus transcends the law.

Lk. 24:26, 46 summarize the OT witness to Christ by focusing on his death/sufferings and resurrection/glory. No mention is made of the active obedience. The entire OT testimony to Christ is fulfilled in the cross and the empty tomb.

John Calvin aptly summarizes:

> Now Christ here places first in order his death and resurrection, and afterwards the fruit which we derive from both. For whence come repentance and forgiveness of sins, but because our old man is crucified with Christ, and by this grace we may rise to newness of life; and because our sins have been expiated by the sacrifice of his death, our pollution has been washed away by his blood, and we have obtained righteousness through his resurrection? He teaches therefore, that in his death and resurrection we ought to seek the cause and grounds of our salvation; because hence arise reconciliation to God, and regeneration to a new and spiritual life.

Elsewhere he writes:

> As the assurance of salvation lies on two foundations, that is, when we understand that life has been obtained for us, and death has been conquered for us, he teaches us that faith through the word of the gospel is sustained by both these: for Christ, by dying, destroyed death, and by rising again, he obtained life in his own power.

Calvin's twin foundations of the death and resurrection (rather than the active obedience and death) match the biblical teaching exactly. This is where our salvation and assurance must rest.

None of this denies that Jesus' active obedience is of salvific significance. But it does not play the role that some Reformed theologians have given to it. All Jesus' pre-cross obedience could do is get us back to Adam's immature, probationary state in the garden ("original righteousness" as opposed to "eschatological/mature righteousness). His obedience to the law could not create eschatological life and glory. These come via his death and resurrection.

Interestingly, while Paul's doctrine of union with Christ is unfolded in terms of our union with Christ in several specific acts of Christ, such as his death and resurrection (Rom. 6; Col. 3), and his ascension and session (Eph. 2), we are *never* said to be united to Christ in his Torah keeping. There must be a rationale for this omission. It must be that Torah-obedience (in its old covenant, pre-resurrection form) is not the kind of righteousness that will avail in God's law court at the last day as the ground of justification.

Objections and Summation

This section should make it evident my problems with the imputation of the active obedience are "soft."

They are ultimately a matter of emphasis and formulation, not substance. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for reworking things in subtle ways to get back to Paul's points of emphasis.

Objection #1: "What about 2 Cor. 5:21?" I do not fully agree with N. T. Wright's exegesis of this passage, but he does offer some important insights. His suggestion that God made Christ to be a "sin offering" for us seems exactly right. It situates the work of Christ within its native habitat of biblical theology. Further, Paul says that we *become* the righteousness of God – not that we *receive* (by imputation) the righteousness of Jesus. In other words, he seems to say that the new covenant community itself (cf. the "new covenant" theme in 2 Cor. 3 and the "new creation in Christ" theme in 5:17) is the embodiment of God's covenant faithfulness (that is, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham). Paul is pointing to the Jew-Gentile church as the fulfillment of God's covenant plan. This fits with his emphasis on the covenant community in this whole section of 2 Cor.

Objection #2: "What about the *pistis christou* passages? If these are read as references to Christ's own faith/faithfulness (per Richard Hays' convincing arguments), aren't we back in 'active obedience' categories? Isn't Christ's faithfulness just another way of talking about his obedience?" This objection has force. Paul does speak of Christ's own faith (e.g., Rom. 3:22, 25; Gal. 2:16; etc.). Jesus lived a life of perfect faithfulness, and by virtue of our union with him, we are swept up into this life of perfect covenant fidelity. However, when Paul unpacks what Jesus' faithfulness consists in, he always points to his obedience in dying on the cross (e.g., Rom. 3:25; Rom. 5:12-21; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 2:8). Besides, we're never told his pre-cross faithfulness as such is imputed to us or that justification is based in part on his pre-cross faithfulness. All that may be consistent with Paul's teaching – it may even be an implication of his teaching – but it isn't Paul's standard way of explicating the gospel.

Objection #3: "If Christ's active obedience is not imputed to us, why did Jesus live on earth for 30+ years? It seems needless. Why not simply have him slaughtered as a baby by Herod?" This requires a twofold response: [1] Part of the value of Christ's death, as John Owen pointed out, is found in its *voluntary* nature. No one took Jesus' life from him apart from his consent (Jn. 10). He willingly laid his life down of his own accord. Had he been killed as a baby, or hit by a speeding bus (ok, camel!), his death would not have the same meaning. His death would not have been the revelation of self-giving love, as the climax of Israel's history. His life leading up to the cross is full of significance. [2] His life serves to fulfill all previous history and bring it to maturation. His earthly ministry sums up the whole old creation and paves the way for the inauguration of the new creation in and through his death and resurrection. In his pre-cross life, he prepares humanity to enter maturity in his resurrection. To be more specific, the gospels are written to show that Jesus fulfills and recapitulates Adamic and Israelite history. As we read the gospels, we rarely find the gospel writers even hinting at how some work of Jesus fulfills a precept of Moses (the active obedience model). But we do find the gospels showing how Jesus brings to realization the typology of the old covenant story. The gospels are clearly designed to show Jesus fulfilling a long-running narrative, which comes to a climax in his death and resurrection. For example, Matthew's gospel shows Jesus recapitulating and fulfilling Israel's Mosaic period (e.g., exodus flight into/out of Egypt, his baptism = Red Sea crossing, temptations in wilderness for a block of 40 time units, Sermon on Mount = giving of Decalogue at Sinai, feeding multitudes = manna from heaven, etc.). Luke's gospel is written to reveal Jesus as a new Adam, Savior of the nations. And so on. The law, of course is a part of this recapitulatory fulfillment but not the main focus. For example, this explains why the gospels writers are so much more interested in Jesus' miracles than in his obedience to particular commands of Torah. The latter is presupposed at every point, but the former is really the main issue: the miracles reveal the nature of the kingdom by showing Jesus restoring humanity and fulfilling old creation patterns. Ultimately, the gospels are not written to reveal Jesus operating some mechanism of justification through his law keeping, but to manifest and reveal how Jesus brings the whole

multi-layered story of Israel and Adam to cosmic fulfillment. To use Jim Jordan's paradigm the gospels reveal how Jesus brings humanity to maturity, rather than how he acquires merit for us.

Objection #4: "If Jesus is the Torah Incarnate, why shouldn't we regard his work as obedience to Torah? And if we get what he did, don't we get this Torah keeping?" This is exactly right; he is the Word made flesh and the Wisdom of God in human form. Both "Word" and "Wisdom" link back to Torah. But we should not confuse what the Torah (law) can do with what Torah Incarnate can do (cf. Rom. 8:1-4). As the Word incarnated in human form, he does precisely what Torah could *not* do. Moreover, we are nowhere told that his Torah observance is the *ground* of our justification. Instead, we are consistently told that he brings in life and righteousness by dying and rising again. In him, the entire law died and is resurrected. This new Torah is the law of the new covenant, which Paul sometimes refers to as the law of Christ. The old law itself contained death and resurrection patterns in morality/ethical principles (e.g., sacrificial living), rituals (e.g., Num. 19), and stories (e.g., Isaac, Joseph). Jesus fulfills those types in his death and resurrection, as he transforms the law. In union with him, we share in that fulfillment. But in Paul's categories, justification is located in the death and resurrection aspects of his fulfillment of Torah, not in his pre-cross active obedience (or active faithfulness) to Torah.

Summary: If there are problems with our confessional/dogmatic definitions of justification, they are:

[1] Overemphasis on imputation of Christ's active obedience to the law rather than the resurrection verdict of vindication he shares with his people. In some cases, our confessional documents (especially the later, more scholastic ones) make no mention whatsoever of the role Christ's resurrection plays in our justification! But surely we cannot be justified by a dead Christ. The resurrection needs to be given its due. Much of the theological work that popularized Reformed theology has ascribed to the active obedience would be better performed by the resurrection. Too often, we have reduced the function of the resurrection to proof or evidence that Jesus' work on the cross was accepted, or that he was really divine. But the resurrection is not mere evidence of something else. It is itself the great saving event. The apostles do not argue *to* the resurrection as a conclusion in a chain of reasoning; rather, they argue *from* the resurrection to the fact of justification for the people of God and the inauguration of the new creation.

[2] While not necessarily in the confessions, some argue from the confessions for a system of merit (a "covenant of works") abstracted from the covenantal (and specifically Levitical/sacrificial) framework of the OT. Merit is a category we would do well to jettison, in favor of more explicitly biblical and relational categories and concepts. Instead of pointing to Jesus as the one who earns God's favor by his active obedience under a covenant of works, we should situate his ministry within the biblical narrative, fulfilling the typologies of Adam and Israel throughout his life, thus transforming the old creation into the new by means of his death and resurrection.

Justification Conference Lecture #3

Feeling God's Pleasure: Living in a State of Justification

This is basically my "odds and ends" lecture. In light of historic and current discussions, these are aspects of the doctrine of justification that need special attention. In many places in this lecture I am either building on older Reformed insights that have been largely lost today, or I am pointing to areas where the Reformed doctrine of justification needs to integrate neglected biblical themes.

What does it mean to live as justified person? What does the doctrine of justification mean to the church?

1. Justification and Assurance

The truth of justification is a source of sweet assurance for God's people. This assurance of justification (or acceptance with God) was at the center of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic system of indulgences and penances (like all religious hucksterism today!) could only prey upon people who were filled with fear and doubt. The antidote was a powerful and solid assurance of right-standing with God in Christ. The connection between a free and gracious justification and an assurance of one's standing with God is well known, and is rightly emphasized as one of the greatest gains of Protestantism. But there are several other aspects of the justification/assurance nexus that are neglected.

First, if justification is a verdict declared by God, how does ever into my personal experience? How do I encounter the justifying verdict in any objective way (since God does not normally speak from heaven in an audible voice)? Does justification have any bearing on my identity? Or does the verdict remain hovering "over my head" so to speak?

The Reformers were ready with an answer to this question about the link between justification and experience. They insisted that one of the main problems with late medieval piety was its tendency to look for Christ most everywhere except for those precise places where he promised to make himself available. The medieval church had buried Christ under a plethora of man-made rituals and practices (e.g., Marian devotion, penance, relics, icons, pilgrimages, indulgences, etc.). The Reformers recovered the centrality of Christ by recovering the efficacy of the Word and sacrament in all their elegant simplicity. (A modern illustration of this displacement of word and sacrament is seen in Mel Gibson's movie *Signs*. In the movie, the priest gives up his calling after he loses his wife because he has lost all faith. Word and sacrament are insufficient to assure him that God still loves and cares for him in the midst of hardship. Only when his wife's last words turn out to provide a clue to defeat invading aliens does he regain his faith! The aliens are effectively a means of grace to him. When people turn away from the word and sacraments are their means of relating to God, they turn to almost anything as a substitute.)

The Reformers (the best of them, anyway) argued that in and through Word and sacrament Christ publicly, personally, and corporately applies himself and his finished work to us. These are the means by which Christ gives himself to us and makes himself known to us. In particular, this meant that the fact of one's justification was not just a private truth, known in a purely introspective and subjective way. Rather, Word and sacrament formed the arena in which one may come to know personal justification in a tangible and objective way.

Calvin said that the words of absolution are to be received as if spoken from heaven itself. Calvin viewed absolution in the strongest of terms – it was a real transaction of divine forgiveness, and should produce assurance in the hearts of those who receive the declaration in faith. The Reformers were not content to leave the declaration in the privacy of the confessional booth; they brought it out into the public space of gathered worship. Here is a smattering of quotations on pastoral absolution, drawn from Calvin's writings:

- "We now see the reason why Christ employs such magnificent terms, to commend and adorn that ministry which he bestows and enjoins on the Apostles [and their successors, pastors]. It is, that believers may be *fully convinced*, that what they hear concerning the forgiveness of sins is ratified, *and may not less highly value the reconciliation which is offered by the voice of men, than if God himself stretched out his hand from heaven*. And the church daily receives the most abundant benefit from this doctrine, when it perceives that *her pastors are divinely ordained to be sureties for eternal salvation*, and that *it must not go to a distance to seek the forgiveness of sins, which is committed to their trust*."
- "[The forgiveness of sins] *is dispensed to us through the ministers and pastors of the church*, either by the preaching of the Gospel [including the declaration of absolution] or by the administration of the sacraments; and herein chiefly stands the power of the keys, which the Lord has gifted to the society of believers. Accordingly, *let each one of us count it his own duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it*."
- "When Christ enjoins the Apostles to 'forgive sins,' he does not convey to them what is peculiar to himself. It belongs to him to forgive sins. This honor, so far as it belongs peculiarly to himself, he does not surrender to the Apostles, but enjoins them, in his Name, to declare the forgiveness of sins, that *through their instrumentality he may reconcile men to God*. In short, properly speaking, it is he alone who forgives sins through his apostles and ministers."
- "The entire power [of the keys] rests in the fact that, through those whom the Lord had ordained, *the grace of the Gospel is publicly and privately sealed* in the hearts of believers."

Pastorally, it is important for us to train our people to learn to conform their self-images to what God says about them. For a person to say, "I'm not sure that I'm really forgiven" after hearing absolution proclaimed is an act of unbelief. It is talking back to Jesus. It is saying "No" to God's "Yes." What ultimately defines us is not our fluctuating experience, but God's declaration. God is greater than our experiences, greater than our doubts, greater than our hearts, greater than our accusers. We are what God says we are, not what we may think we are. Any gap between what God says about us in his word and what we say about ourselves in our hearts is due to our unbelief. Receive God's word of absolution and be assured!

Calvin also said that we should regard our baptism as the time and place at which all our sins are forgiven. Baptism was understood as a work of God in which he declares us to be righteous and makes us a part of his family. Baptism was important to assurance because it personalized the generalized word of absolution. Baptism made the gospel into something *for me.* It served as an objective application of Christ and his benefits to the believer. Because baptism included a promise of remission, it gave faith a firm handle. The baptized could say in faith, "I know my sins have been forgiven by the blood of Christ. Just as surely as I have been washed with water, so I have been cleansed from guilt."

This high view of baptism was not a hangover from the medieval church. Just the opposite, in fact. The late medieval church had downgraded baptism by focusing instead on the sacrament of penance. Further, so much emphasis was put on various subjective conditions that had to be met in order to receive sacramental grace, it was virtually impossible to receive any benefit from the sacrament with certainty.

The Reformers countered these problems by recovering a proper view of sacramental efficacy and by

focusing on faith as the *sole* inner disposition which could receive the promised blessings. Further, they restored the people to the table. The Lord's Supper was basically off-limits to the laity prior to the Reformation. By giving the baptized a place at the table once again, the Reformers reclaimed yet another tangible, personalized form of assurance. By partaking of the bread and wine in faith, worshippers could know that what Jesus had done on the cross was done for them and for their salvation.

Second, there was the issue of justification related to perseverance. How does my assurance of present justification relate to the demand of perseverance? While the Reformers argued that simple believers could find a solid basis for assurance in the means of grace, they did not open the door to an antinomian salvation. Justification could not be severed from other aspects of God's saving work. While the verdict of justification was grounded solely in Christ's death and resurrection, we only share in Christ's status if we are *in him*. Thus, at least some Reformed theologians insisted that our ongoing share in justification is dependent on persevering *in Christ*. God brings the verdict of the future into the present in part on the supposition that we will persevere. Thus, Jonathan Edwards: "Even after conversion, the sentence of justification remains still to be passed, and the man remains in a state of probation for heaven [until his faith produces fruits of obedience.]" He wrote that when God justifies us, he "has respect to perseverance, as being virtually contained in that first act of faith." Edwards insisted that faith was the sole instrument of justification, but did not hesitate to speak of multiple "conditions" of justification, including obedience, good works, love, holiness, and lifelong perseverance. Edwards viewed justification as forensic, but also continual.

N. T. Wright's words are also helpful, connecting justification, assurance, and persevering holiness:

> The positive result of justification is that we live for God because Christ has died for us. Good works, as the Reformers never tired of saying, are done not to earn salvation but out of gratitude for it: not out of fear lest we should be lost after all but out of joy that we are saved after all. Sanctification is the completion, not of justification, but of regeneration: holiness is the continuation and bringing to perfection (in the resurrection of believers) of the good work which God has begun by the new birth. Justification is a different kind of event altogether: regeneration and sanctification are acts of grace to change the heart and life, whereas justification is the declaration, anticipating the verdict of the last day, that the believer is in the right. Justification results in holiness because it presupposes the new birth. It is therefore also the basis of Christian assurance, the certain hope of eternal life. Assurance is not an extra blessing over and above justification, but simply the outworking of justification itself, the realization that the Spirit who inspired faith and now inspires love will continue until, in the resurrection, he has produced the full harvest of which he himself is presently the first fruits.
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> Justification thus results in holiness and hope. And this proves already that the doctrine is neither immoral, nor incoherent, nor scandalous. It points back to the cross of Christ, forward to the resurrection of the Christian. It is not a fiction, a pretence or a process: it is God's righteous declaration in the present that the person who believes in the risen Lord Jesus Christ is a member of the covenant family, whose sins have been dealt with on the cross and who is therefore assured of eternal life.

2. Justification Now and Not Yet

God accepts us as we are – that's initial justification -- but he does not let us stay that way, if we are to be justified at the last day. At the last day, God will only forensically justify the obedient. The life of the justified must be a life of living, persevering faith. This brings us to our next point.

Justification partakes of the same already/not yet structure as the rest of our salvation. This does not compromise the forensic, punctiliar nature of justification as a declaratory event. But it is to say that we enter God's law court, so speak, more than once (cf. the life of Abraham; Heb. 11, Gen. 15, Jas. 2; Abraham was justified from Gen. 12:1 onwards, but obviously there are multiple "justification events" in his life).

Justification in the present and at the last day have the *same grounding:* the death and resurrection of Christ. In that sense, there are not two distinct justifications, one on the basis of faith, the other on the basis of works. Rather there is *one justification* in *two phases*. The initial phase is by faith alone because faith alone unites us to Christ. The final phase may also be to said to be by faith alone because [a] faith remains the only instrument of union with Christ in whom our justification consists; and [b] insofar as works are judged, they are viewed as the outworking of faith, not as something additional to or separable from faith.

[Note: Given the importance ascribed to union with Christ as the source and essence of salvation, it may be best to reformulate *sola fide* in terms of union with Christ. Thus, we would say we are united to Christ by faith alone. This fits with NT language about faith, since the texts usually could be read as saying that we believe *into* Christ Jesus. In addition, this would free us up to speak more biblically about justification's relationship to faith *and* works. For example, depending on the context and purpose, the Bible can ascribe justification to any variety of means. Paul says we are justified by faith in Rom. 3:28, but in 2:13 he ascribes justification to doing the law. Jesus said we will be justified by our words (Mt. 12). Psalm 106 says Phineas was justified by works – specifically the good work of impaling Israelite idolaters! James says Abraham was justified by works – specifically the good work of child sacrifice! He says Rahab was justified her good deed – justification by deception! We need to carve out space in out theological language for speaking about justification in these ways.]

[Note: Some Reformed theologians have tried to argue that the final judgment is not related to justification. It is a vindication, but not a justification, properly speaking. This simply will not work. Vindication is an aspect of justification in the OT background. Further, explicit justification language is used in reference to the future, e.g., Rom. 2, Gal. 5:6. Finally, many theologians have pointed out the link between resurrection and justification. Resurrection unto eternal life just is the shape that final justification takes, following the pattern of Christ himself (1 Tim. 3).]

This double justification was typologically shadowed in various ways in the old covenant, especially third and seventh day justification/restoration events (e.g., Num. 19). However, it is also fair to say that the NT divides a unitary Jewish eschatological expectation (the great assize of the last day when Israel would be resurrected and vindicated, and the pagan nations condemned) into "already" and "not yet." Thus, Wright is "justified" in saying that God did for Jesus in the middle of history (the third day) what Jews were expecting him to do for all of Israel at the end of history (the seventh day).

The Bible uses the language of judgment/justification according to works to describe the final phase of justification. We should not shy away from the language lest we pretend to "wiser" or more "pastorally sensitive" than the Holy Spirit himself. The doctrine of final justification according to works should have a sobering and purifying effect (1 Jn. 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:10ff; WCF 33), to be sure, but it need not undermine a properly grounded assurance. Everyone will be judged at the last day according to works. We do not get to avoid such a judgment by becoming Christians, as if it were a hangover from the covenant of works or the law.

Future justification has received inadequate attention in Reformed theology. Texts such as Mt. 25, Rom. 2, 2 Cor. 5, Gal 5-6, and Jas. 2 are still open to a wide variety of readings. Let's briefly consider some of these.

The main point, as will be seen, is that whatever precise language we choose to use, Scripture and the best of the Reformed tradition are unequivocal in asserting that good works are a necessary pre-condition for final justification/salvation.

In Mt. 25, the sheep and the goats are divided according to works of mercy. Yet final salvation is clearly viewed as a gift because it is called an *inheritance*. Moreover, the sheep are not even aware of having done the good works for Jesus that they are commended for. But the passage is also clear that good works serve as the *criterion* of the final judgment. This fits with other final judgment passages in the gospel (e.g., Jn. 5:28-29). Final judgment/justification is according to works, though with the implicit understanding that those works are done by grace through faith. Thus a judgment according to works is really a judgment according to faith. Yet we can also say that at the last day we are justified on the "basis" of works because the judgment is according to the evidence of our lives (that is to say, God will judge us on the basis of the evidence). (I realize that "basis" is often taken to mean "ground" but that is not my meaning here. I am using "basis" in non-technical sense, as N. T. Wright does when he speaks this way. The ground of our justification is always and only the death and resurrection of Christ. Our final acquittal is found in Christ's resurrection righteousness.)

Rom. 2 is important. Theologians often ask about resolving the tension between Romans and James, but the same tension is found even within Romans itself. How does Rom. 2 square with Rom. 3-4? The key is to see Rom. 2 as dealing with eschatological justification, whereas in Rom. 3-4, Paul deals with initial justification. Rom. 2 is not hypothetical. Paul is making a case against unfaithful Judaism, and points to Gentiles (whether considered as old covenant God-fearers or new covenant Christians) in whom the true purpose of the Torah is realized even though they do not possess Torah by nature. This class of Gentiles serves to shame and rebuke Israel. If the passage is only hypothetical, Paul's argument is drained of its force. Besides he says doers of the law *will* be justified – not that they *would* be justified if they actually existed. Elsewhere, Scripture recognizes the existence of people who are regarded as having kept the law. These are the people we should plug into the argument of Rom. 2 if we want concrete illustrations.

Paul speaks of Gentiles who will receive eternal life because they have sought after glory, honor, and immortality. Seeking in this context no more implies earning than in Heb. 11, where diligently seeking God is a matter of faith and includes the pursuit of reward (eternal life/glory/honor). This need not be read in terms of a merit theology. Nor is Paul lodging eternal life in the law in Rom. 2, since the rest of his epistle explicitly excludes using the law as an instrument of bringing life.

What does Paul mean when he speaks of the doers of the law being justified? He goes on to speak of the law written on their hearts, which is not a reference to natural law, but to the new covenant (Jer. 31). In other words, these are *Gentile* believers who are already enjoying *Israel's* promised privileges. Paul, in effect, has stated his conclusion before laying out all the premises of the argument. In the rest of the letter, Paul will transform what it means to be a doer of the law. Ultimately, such doing springs from faith in Christ and the work of the Spirit (e.g., Rom. 3:27, 31; 8:1-4; 10:4). Thus, in light of the way Paul unfolds his total argument, he is situating the doing of the law that leads to final justification within the context of his union-with-Christ theology. In that sense, even when Paul says the doers of the law will be justified, he really means those with a living, working, law-doing *faith* will be justified. This passage may complexify our understanding of *sola fide*, but it does not negate it. (See Simon Gathercole's excellent exegesis, as well as N. T. Wright's article in the book on Paul and the law edited by James Dunn.)

Jas. 2 views works as the demonstration or proof of faith. But the passage *also* views faith and works *combining together* to secure the righteous verdict (2:22, 24). But because works spring from true faith, we

can say that James' "justification by faith + works" formula really resolves into justification by a *living* faith. James is most concerned with the *quality* of justifying faith. A faith that does not demonstrate itself in works will end in condemnation (along with the demons), not justification.

It is impossible to read this passage in entirely demonstrative terms. The text is demonstrative with respect to faith (cf. 2:18), but instrumental with regard to justification. In the passage, *faith* is what needs to be demonstrated, not *justification*. Justification is what happens when you demonstrate your faith in works. Justification is not the demonstration as such, but what demonstrable and demonstrated faith receives. In other words, James is still dealing with justification in a forensic (Pauline), not demonstrative sense. This is seen by inserting "demonstrate" for James' justification terminology. James is concerned with the justification of *persons* (like Abraham and Rahab), not simply with the justification (demonstration) of faith as a personal attribute or with the justification (demonstration) of one's covenant status as a justified (forensically, soteriologically) believer.

Besides, how would *faith* demonstrate justification anyway? Again, *faith is what needs to be demonstrated*. The works that demonstrate faith combine with faith in bringing about the favorable verdict of justification. Only those who exhibit and prove their faith by obedience are justified at the last day, and that obedience is so closely and organically intertwined with faith itself, that James has no qualms about a "faith + works" formula. At the last day, God will declare the righteous to be righteous (cf. 1 Jn. 3:7). James argues that only a demonstrated faith attains justification, so much so that that which demonstrates faith (obedience) is brought within the sphere of the verdict itself.

Thus, Gathercole argues convincingly that works are not merely evidential in this passage since James uses the same instrumental language for works as for faith. Gathercole concludes: "James does describe works as the means to eschatological justification . . . [We must see] James as in some continuity with his Jewish background on the issue. Thus works have a genuine instrumental role in eschatological justification for the believers James is addressing."

James has in view not justification in the eyes of men, but the court of God (cf. Jesus' harsh words to the Pharisees about seeking praise and justification in the eyes of men). When Abraham offered up Isaac, the only one watching was God himself. In the narrative of Genesis, Abraham's obedience receives the approbation of God, not human observers.

A key to reading Jas. 2:14ff is linking it with 2:13. 2:13 is the presupposition of the discussion that follows. James ultimately has in view eschatological justification/judgment. References to salvation in James are eschatological as well. The eschatological nature of justification in Jas. 2 is seen most clearly perhaps in 2:23. Abraham's later justification by works was the *fulfillment* of his earlier justification by faith alone (Gen. 15:6). The later justification event brought the earlier justification even to completion, consummation, and perfection. Thus, James is not dealing with the respective roles of faith and works in *initial* justification, but in justification at the last day. This links Jas. 2 with Rom. 2, rather than Rom. 3-4. There is no need to rob James to pay Paul. They are both concerned with those who are mere hearers of the word, rather than doers (cf. Rom. 2 and Jas. 1-2). They are both concerned with antinomian assent. For James, as for Paul, faith and obedience are distinguishable, but also virtually interchangeable. They are so closely related, we can say that in some sense, faith is obedience and obedience is faith. Obedience is simply what faith does. Obedience is the outside of an inner disposition to trust.

We are still left with a question: How can our imperfect works be met with God's favorable verdict at the last day? God will judge the merciful according to mercy. For James the faithful simply are the merciful.

Those who practice mercy will be shown mercy at the last day. We will be judged as we have treated others (cf. Mt. 7). (I take this up further in the next section.)

Finally (to round out the discussion), I should note that James does in fact affirm *sola fide*, even in the context of asserting that we are not justified by faith alone! Consider the fact that James uses Gen. 15:6 – the same text from which Paul constructs his doctrine of justification.

Rom. 8:1-4 has important but usually overlooked implications for future justification. Paul begins with an assertion of present justification: there is (presently) no condemnation for those who are in Christ. But then he goes on to give the reason: There is no condemnation because the Spirit has liberated us from us the law of sin and death so that we can fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. Present justification is inseparably connected to a new life of obedience (which leads to final justification). Thus, present justification gives the basis and sets the stage for final justification. Final justification is not a different justification altogether, but the final stage or phase in the justification we have already received. Because those who are presently justified have been delivered from the domain of sin (see also Rom. 6:7), their present justification is inseparable from a life of obedience, which in turn becomes an aspect of the final verdict.

As Gathercole points out, the place of works in final justification have not received adequate attention. But the key points outlined here are at least consistent with what we find in the Westminster Standards. WCF 33 states that at the last judgment men will "receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil." Now, we also know that the righteous will receive "open acquittal" (WLC 90) at that time. In other words, final justification (=open acquittal) is "according to works." "According to" is biblical language, of course (2 Cor. 5, etc.). God judges us "according to" the evidence and pattern of our lives. Those who have *done good* will be rewarded with eternal life. Good works are crowned with eternal joy in God's presence.

Also, see Regensberg, Sadler, Yinger, Snodgrass, Garlington, etc. Many theologians have wrestled helpfully with the judgment according to works passages. In particular, we should take a closer look at Regensberg's double justification model, building on precedents in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and other Reformers. Reformed and evangelical Roman Catholic theologians briefly reached agreement on the doctrine of justification by viewing justification in two phases (an initial justification by faith alone, and a second justification of works).

Calvin taught a form of double justification. First our persons are justified by faith alone. Second, because of our faith and forgiveness, our works are justified before God as well:

> In this way we can admit not only that there is a partial righteousness in works (as our adversaries maintain) but that they are approved by God as if they were absolutely perfect. If we remember on what foundation this is rested, every difficulty will be solved. The first time when a work begins to be acceptable is when it is received with pardon. And whence pardon, but just because God looks upon us and all that belongs to us as in Christ? Therefore, as we ourselves when ingrafted into Christ appear righteous before God, because our iniquities are covered with his innocence; so our works are, and are deemed righteous, because every thing otherwise defective in them being buried by the purity of Christ is not imputed. Thus we may justly say, that not only ourselves, but our works also, are justified by faith alone. Now, if that righteousness of works, whatever it be, depends on faith and free justification, and is produced by it, it ought to be included under it and, so to speak, made subordinate to it, as the effect to its cause; so far is it from being entitled to be set up to impair or

> destroy the doctrine of justification. Thus Paul, to prove that our blessedness depends not on our works, but on the mercy of God, makes special use of the words of David, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered;" "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Should any one here obtrude the numberless passages in which blessedness seems to be attributed to works, as, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord;" "He that has mercy on the poor, happy is he;" "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly," and ""hat endureth temptation;" "Blessed are they that keep judgment," that are "pure in heart," "meek," "merciful," &c., they cannot make out that Paul's doctrine is not true. For seeing that the qualities thus extolled never all so exist in man as to obtain for him the approbation of God, it follows, that man is always miserable until he is exempted from misery by the pardon of his sins. Since, then, all the kinds of blessedness extolled in the Scripture are vain so that man derives no benefit from them until he obtains blessedness by the forgiveness of sins, a forgiveness which makes way for them, it follows that this is not only the chief and highest, but the only blessedness, unless you are prepared to maintain that it is impaired by things which owe their entire existence to it. There is much less to trouble us in the name of righteous which is usually given to believers. I admit that they are so called from the holiness of their lives, but as they rather exert themselves in the study of righteousness than fulfill righteousness itself, any degree of it which they possess must yield to justification by faith, to which it is owing that it is what it is.

In other words, the free forgiveness of justification provides a foundation for God to accept our works with favor. Calvin was emphatic that justifying faith must be a working faith. In the circle of faith and grace, our works can then have value before God. Thus, Calvin either accepted or rejected the *sola fide* formula depending on whether or not the faith is in view is with works or without them. He argued that we are only justified by a faith with works:

> For this proposition that faith without works justifies is true, yet false . . . [T]rue, yet false. . . according to the different senses which it bears. The proposition that faith without works justifies by itself is false. Because faith without works is void. But if the clause, "without works," is joined with the word, "justifies," the proposition will be true. Therefore faith cannot justify when it is without works because it is dead and a mere fiction. Thus faith can be no more separated from works than the sun from its heat. Yet faith justifies without works because works form no reason for our justification. But faith alone reconciles us to God and causes him to love us, not in ourselves, but in his only begotten Son.

Thus, we see that works are necessary. Returning to the Westminster standards, in WCF 33.2 we find that the "righteous" shall enter into eternal life at the last day. The Confession cites Mt. 25:31ff, Rom. 2:6, and Mt. 25:21 as prooftexts. This is clearly not simply an imputed righteousness, but an actual righteousness. Imputed righteousness alone is insufficient according to the standards (cf. Heb. 12:14; WSC 85).

Note that the final justification is *not* about a change in status (cf. Gen. 15:6; 1 Jn. 1:9-10). We are already acquitted and righteous; but these facts are openly acknowledged and consummated before the whole world at the last day, and our righteousness (status + character) is rewarded with eternal life.

Also noteworthy on the role of works is WLC 32, which is probably the strongest possible affirmation of works in the whole document. In regard to the covenant of grace it uses the term "condition" with regard to faith, then unpacks faith's accompanying graces, summarized as "holy obedience." This obedience is "*evidence* of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God." But it ALSO speaks of this holy obedience as "*the way* which he hath appointed them to salvation." That term "way" is especially critical in the current

controversy, since some theologians are routinely criticized for speaking of faith and obedience as the "way" of salvation. The "way" to final glorification/eschatological salvation is faith and holy obedience. In other words, works are more than mere evidence of salvation, they are the path to salvation. Obedience is not a sidebar to salvation, but its essence. This must be so because salvation is about the restoration of human life, and restored life is obedient life. A salvation that does result in obedience in community is no salvation at all because sin is still the dominant master.

Wright explains:

> The work of the Spirit also solves the problem of the correspondence between the present verdict and that to be given on the last day. In Romans 5-8 Paul argues that all Israel's privileges have now been transferred, via the Messiah, to the worldwide people of God, the true family of Abraham. As God's true people, they are therefore assured of eternal life. Chapters 5-8 are one long argument for assurance, based on the new covenant blessings of forgiveness and the Spirit. The same Spirit who inspired justifying faith is at work in believers to do 'what the law could not do' (8:3)—to complete, in other words, the renewal of the covenant. He will give life in place of death (8: 1-11), holiness in place of sin (8: 12-13), sonship in place of slavery (8:14-17), the new creation in place of the old, and therefore hope in the midst of sufferings (8:18-27). Chapter 8 thus rounds off the train of thought that began in 2:1-16, and proves that the present verdict of 'righteous' will indeed be reaffirmed on the last day. Christians are those who 'by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality' (they *seek* for it, even now they do not *earn* it), those to whom God 'will give eternal life'. The last paragraph of chapter 8 looks on once more to the future judgement day, when
>
> *this shall be all my plea; Jesus hath lived, hath died for me*
>
> and, says Paul, has been raised from the dead and even now intercedes on behalf of his people.

As Garlington has argued, the bridge between initial justification by faith alone and final justification according to works is "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1, 16). This is a distinctively eschatological category: Faith's obedience replaces Torah's obedience. Thus, Paul desires to redirect "zeal" away from Torah and towards Christ. In Christ, our faith and obedience are so tightly intertwined, it impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins. Indeed, many passages interchange the terminology of faith and obedience. Faith and obedience together form the appropriate response to God's gracious covenant initiative; thus, depending on one's point of view, we can say we are accounted righteous (covenant keepers) by faith (Gen. 15:6) or by works/zeal (Ps. 106:31). Further, justification is tied into perseverance – perseverance in Christ (rather than Torah!) by faith. If salvation is a "fire insurance" policy, we have to keep paying the premiums in the form of faith-filled good works, or our policy will be cancelled. At the last day, it is the righteous who will be declared righteous (Jn. 5:28-29; cf. 1 Jn. 3:7).

3. Justification, Good Works, and God's Pleasure

We need to explore more fully how God can take pleasure in our faithful, but imperfect obedience. How can our good works really be considered *good* when they are laced with sin? How can they meet with favor at the bar of God's judgment? How can we be justified according to works? How can our works be good enough to justify?

Judgment according to deeds is a doctrine with Jewish roots, but Paul is not simply repeating the standard Jewish theology of his day. For Paul, the whole notion of final judgment according to works is grounded in

the covenant relationship. Covenant fidelity is what will be tested. More than that, for Paul, the Jewish doctrine has undergone christological and pneumatological reshaping and transformation. The works God is looking for are the works we were created in Christ to do (Eph. 2). They are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5-6). Paul's teaching on the final judgment does not depart from his wider theology of God's grace and forgiveness. Nor does he tack a legalistic doctrine onto his theology of grace. Final judgment according to works is simply Paul's way of describing the final goal towards which God's grace is driving us. It is part of the gospel (Rom. 2:16). At the last day, Christ will accept, rather than condemn, the work of his own Spirit within us. We will the verdict we have sown – the verdict of justification if we have sown in the Spirit, and condemnation if we have sown to the flesh (Gal. 6).

In 2 Cor. 5, Paul says we make it our aim to *please God*. Is such a thing possible? Can God be pleased with us? Specifically, Paul has in view finding God's pleasure at the last day, in the eschatological judgment. But he also speaks of pleasing God in the present. Does this make any sense? And how does it relate to justification?

First, we are helped if we situate our understanding of justification within the larger story of our salvation. That story has a beginning, middle, and end. At the beginning of our salvation story, God accepts us by sheer faith, apart from any works. It's "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." In the middle of the story, we continually receive God's forgiveness through confession and absolution. Yet, God also begins to inspect our works, and evaluates us accordingly (e.g., 1 Cor. 11). These are not separate justifications, but as Turretin said, our once and for all justification "applied to particular everyday sins" (16.9.12). At the last day, God will judge us again. At the end of the story he will expect us to have matured, to have a harvest of ripened fruit to present to him. In Christ, we offer him our works, to be inspected, evaluated, and rewarded. We will *not* appear before him empty-handed.

Justification is an undivided, once-and-for-all act that is re-applied to us in various ways at various times, coming to consummation at the last day. Essentially, Paul calls us to live the earlier portion of the story in light of the end; that is, to live the present in light of the future. Just as initial justification is the verdict of the future brought into the present, so the life of the Christian is future resurrection-life brought into the present. For Paul, eschatology shapes ethics. Thus, there is to be no tension between present justification by faith alone and future justification according to deeds. Obedience is simply what faith does in public, day to day life. It is not tacked onto faith, but grows organically out of faith. Both faith and obedience are future oriented.

Thus, final judgment according to deeds is not legalistic. Good works contribute nothing meritorious to our salvation, though we must also insist that there is no final salvation without good works. Good works are necessary not because they add to the work of Christ on the cross, but because they flow out of it. All those united to the crucified and resurrected Christ die to sin and begin growing up towards his mature, resurrection stature. Thus, good works are just the essence of what it means to live by faith. Faith over time extends into faithfulness. No claim to have faith will hold up at the last day in God's law court unless backed up with a life of obedience. God will judge on the basis of the evidence, and the evidence he is looking for is faith-filled obedience.

When the Bible speaks of judgment according to deeds, it is obviously not talking about deeds as discrete entities, but as our pattern of life. God judges us not by a series of snapshots, but a running "video" of our lives. Throughout the Bible we're confronted with two alternative paths: the way of obedience leading to life, and the way of disobedience leading to death. The way of obedience leads to final justification. Disobedience leads to condemnation. We will reap the verdict we have sown.

Finally, then, why does Paul speak of pleasing God in light of the final judgment (2 Cor. 5)? Why does he say that the final judgment is part of his gospel? How is it good news to know that we will be judged according to works (Rom 2)?

We need to learn to evaluate ourselves according to biblical standards. The Bible refers to sinful but faithful men as righteous and blameless (e.g., David, Job, Elizabeth and Zacharias, etc.). The Bible uses these terms in a realistic way. God does not expect "perfect works" in the middle of the story. God calls our partially good works "good" and we should learn to do the same. We may say we are "unprofitable servants," but God says, "Well done!" Reformed theology is pretty good at training us to say the former about ourselves, but not very good at getting us to hear the latter.

There is no dichotomy between God as Father and God as Judge. Our Father is our judge and he judges us in accordance with fatherly mercy. More than that, Christ who died for us is our judge! He has already stood trial in our place. Our works will be evaluated through the lens of his shed blood and resurrection. He will not condemn the work of his own Spirit in us.

This is seen clearly in Rom. 2. Paul's language in 2:6 echoes Ps. 62:12: "For you render to each one according to his work." But the rest of the verse provides the context for such a judgment: "Also, to you, O Lord, belongs mercy." Indeed the whole Psalm is a call to trust in God and wait for the appearance of his eschatological salvation. It is an appeal to the Lord's covenant love as the basis for our hope. This is the backdrop for Paul's discussion of final judgment according to deeds. Eternal life is rendered to works because God examines us according to a merciful tenderness. Final vindication is based solely on the work of Christ for us, but also takes into consideration his work in us by his Spirit because these are inseparable aspects of salvation.

All this means that the presently justified really can please God in the here and now, and can expect to meet his pleasure at the last day. We should feel the smile of the Father beaming down upon us as we strive to live faithfully in Christ. God uses a different set of scales to weigh our work (Ruth 2, Heb. 6) – it's not a matter of "absolute" justice, but "fatherly" justice (or "in Christ" justice). He repay us according to our obedience. (Obviously, this a covenantal, familial justice at work.)

Good works are necessary for right-standing and glorification at the last day. While faith is the sole *instrument* of justification (in that it unites us to Christ), it is not the only *condition*. The obedient, and them alone, will be justified at the final judgment. But these works are not only a condition of our final vindication; they are also a gift of grace in the present. The merciful Father will judge us in love and kindness. When the Lord repays us according to our deeds, he is not doing so according to a strict covenant of works scheme, but according to the covenant of grace. For believers, final judgment is enfolded within the security of the covenant relationship.

Again, Wright's words are insightful and encouraging:

> Many young people in the modern western world find out, or at least believe it to be, very difficult to please their parents. Whatever we do, just doesn't quite reach the high standard expected. Many continue through their whole adult life, even after their parents have died, still trying somehow to please them or at least appease them. Some people find the idea of pleasing God almost laughable. It seems quite impossible that God, being all knowing and all wise, can actually be pleased with them. You have to be an absolutely superb person on all fronts, they think, to please God. The chances are

> that God would look down on their best efforts and say, 'Well, it's only 9 out of 10. I'm afraid that's not good enough.' Clearly Paul does not look at the matter like that at all. For Paul, God is pleased when he sees his image being reproduced in his human creatures by the spirit. The slightest steps they take toward him, the slightest movements of faith and hope, and particularly of love, give God enormous delight. However difficult we may find this to believe, not least because of our own upbringing in some cases, it is a truth that Paul repeats quite often. We who are in Christ, what we do in the spirit, is pleasing to God. God delights in us and, like a parent, he is thrilled when we his children take even the first small baby steps towards the full Christian adulthood he has in store for us.

Calvin speaks in the same vein:

> Children, who are treated by their parents in a more liberal manner, hesitate not to present to them their imperfect and, in some respects, faulty works, in confidence that their obedience will be accepted by them, though they have not performed all that they wished. Such children ought we to be, feeling a certain confidence that our services, however small, rude and imperfect, will be approved by our most indulgent father . . . .
>
> The answer is easy, namely, that as in the covenant of adoption there is included the free pardon of sins, upon which depends the imputation of righteousness, God bestows a recompense upon the works of his people, although, in point of justice, it is not due to them. What God promises in the law to those who perfectly obey it, true believers obtain by his gracious liberality and fatherly goodness, inasmuch as he accepts for perfect righteousness their holy desires and earnest endeavors to obey.

While judgment is a forensic category, in the Bible, the forensic is tied into, not separated from, the familial (e.g., the *goel* is both a kinsman and a judge who executes his sentence; cf. 1 Pt. 1:17, which describes our Father as an impartial judge). The Father promises gracious recompense for our faithfulness and obedience.

Knowing we will be judged mercifully should not make us slack in doing good works or striving for perfection. Our Father is easy to please, but hard to satisfy. He often counts the desire for the deed, and the will for the work. But his graciousness is never an excuse for laxity on our part. Let us make it our aim to please him in every way.

4. Justification and Community

When we see that our justification is rooted in union with Christ, we see that it is not merely an individualistic transaction. We are justified only as we become a part of the people of God, his covenant family. Paul inextricably links justification with the larger issue of the identity of the people of God (Rom. 4, Gal. 3). While Wright's definition of justification is problematic at points, he is correct to connect justification with covenant membership. This means justification is no private event; it is inescapably public and communal. There is no ordinary possibility of justification outside of the visible church (cf. WCF 25).

Paul uses the doctrine of present justification to shape the corporate life of the church in passages like Rom. 14-15. If we have been accepted by God because of faith, we must accept one another in faith as well. How can we reject someone God has accepted – as if we could have standards, or be more holy, than God himself?! The gospel unites different groups in Christ (Jew/Gentile, strong/weak, etc.) because our common bond in Christ vastly outweighs whatever other differences we might have in background, culture, etc. The church's oneness is a function of and embodiment of the doctrine of justification (Gal. 2). Justification is not a doctrine to be mentally grasped, but a teaching to be incarnated. As God makes one faith-family out of

all the families of the earth, he demonstrates his righteousness, fulfilling the covenant promises made to Abraham.

If present justification *builds* community, the hope of future judgment/justification helps *sustain* it. The doctrine of future judgment is useful in shaping the communal character and witness of God's people. This is true in at least a couple of ways. First, we are able to forgive one another in the body because we know a day is coming when the mercy we show to others will be shown to us. The way we judge others now is the way God will judge us in the future. Second, we know that a day is coming when all wrongs will be righted and those who have suffered faithfully will be vindicated. The hope of future judgment does not make the church a violent community (as some allege), but instead frees us to leave vengeance in God's hands. We do not have to constantly protect ourselves or rectify every situation in which we are wronged; God himself will rectify all things at the last day, and will amply reward those who have suffered faithfully for the sake of the gospel. In this way, future justification makes it possible for Christians to live at peace with both insiders and outsiders in the present.

This is probably also the place to say a few words about "works of the law." This phrase must be distinguished from the good works Paul commends. Broadly construed, the phrase "works of the law" denotes "living Jewishly." In other words, it refers to Torah's way of life. Paul's fundamental problem with works of the law is eschatological: works of the law no longer serve as valid markers for the family of Abraham. Now that family is marked out by faith in Jesus and the fruit of the Spirit. "Works of the law" represent an eschatologically out-dated way of life.

This is not to say that "works of the law" can be reduced to a few boundary markers or covenant badges, though these are the things singled out precisely because they became acid tests of covenant loyalty in the second temple period (e.g., Acts 15; Gal. 4). "Works of the law" refers to the whole of Torah. The whole Torah is Israel's boundary marker – or "wall of separation" to use more Pauline language. But note, Paul is considering "works of the law" as works done in Jewish unbelief, that is, works done apart from faith in Jesus as promised Messiah. "Works of the law" fall short of what God expects and requires because such works are not eschatologically directed towards the law's end, which is found in Christ (Jn. 8, Rom. 10). Thus Paul can say that Israel is using the law to establish her own righteousness rather than entering into God's eschatological righteousness (Rom. 9-10; Phil. 3). By clinging to Torah rather than Christ, Israel made an idol out of Torah (whether we consider that idol as the mere possession of Torah or its actual performance). Israel's basic flaw is reliance on Torah rather than Christ. Thus she misses the righteousness of God. Her very attempts to keep the law outside of Christ flagrantly break the law in its truest intention (Mt. 5:17-20; Rom. 10:4)

While we need to deal with Paul's argument on its own terms in light of first century concerns, it is not hard to see how it applies more generally to all legalistic approaches to God. If faithless works of Torah could not justify, no other human works or system of morality can justify either. In this sense, reading "works of the law" as "Torah's lifestyle" (or even "Torah's culture") does not undo the way the Reformers made use of Paul in their polemic against Rome. If Jewish works cannot justify, medieval Roman works cannot either. While we need to be wary of finding a polemic against legalism hiding in every passage (there are other things to deal with after all!), Paul most certainly does include such a polemic.

Paul calls special attention to the way Jewish legalism (and therefore every other form of legalism) is antithetical to community. Works apart from faith in Christ are inevitably works of the flesh and destroy community (Gal. 5). But justification by faith provides a basis for an accepting, welcoming community, and for works that are not done out of self-serving pride, but service-oriented love and faith.

5. Justification and Life's Puzzles

Justification by faith helps us to live faithfully and joyfully even in light of life's mysteries.

One of the touchstone verses the NT uses to build up its doctrine of justification is Hab. 2:4. In its original context, the prophet Habakkuk is miffed, first by wickedness in Israel, and second by the fact that God will use an even more wicked nation to cast Israel into exile. In light of the coming disaster, the Lord says, "The just shall live by his faith." This verse loaded with ambiguities. Is righteousness a reference to status or character or both? Is the faith in view that of the believer? Or does the righteous man live because of God's faithfulness to the covenant? What is the life promised? Is it survival through the exile, into a new exodus? Or does it stretch beyond that to ultimately include eschatological life?

Hab. 2:4 becomes one of the central verses in the book's theodicy. God's ways are mysterious but the just/faithful cling to God's covenant even in the most trying times. Those who faithfully endure the darkness of exile will be vindicated in the end. While we cannot overlook the meaning of Hab. 2:4 in its original context, within the horizon of the old creation, it also points ahead typologically to new creation realities.

Romans 1 and Hebrews 10 both make use of Hab. 2:4. In Rom. 1, it is used programmatically, and gives the whole book a "theodicy" flavoring. Romans is a new covenant Habakkuk. Just as Habakkuk defends God's covenant fidelity to Israel in the face of exile and catastrophe, so Romans upholds God's fidelity in the face of the cross and Israel's unbelief. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel of a crucified God because it is precisely in the cross that God has kept the covenant and fulfilled his promises. Just as Habakkuk's hope rebounded through exile as he looked to a new exodus, so Paul's hope rebounds through the cross and the casting off of Israel. Resurrection is always God's final word, trumping even death itself.

To be justified is to live in the faith that God is faithful, even when his promises seem to go unfulfilled. God's righteousness will come through in the end and those who have waited in faith and hope will not be disappointed. Paul justifies God's dealings with Israel and the whole creation by focusing history on Christ's death and resurrection.

Heb. 10 uses Hab. 2 to address the problem of suffering in the new covenant messianic community. How can the Hebrew Christians be the people of the new exodus if they are suffering at the hands of their unbelieving countrymen? How can they endure God's apparent eschatological delay? Again, the answer comes: The just ones shall live by faith. Those who will be justified at the last day will be those who have persevered in spite of trial and in spite of God's apparent slowness in keeping his word. If the Hebrew Christians will stand fast and cling to Christ, they will come of the other side of their trials (their "exile") with greater glory (a new "exodus").

In this sense, we can also say that Ecclesiastes is the book of justification by faith. Ecclesiastes describes what it means to live as a justified person. Even though life is misty, vaporous, and full of puzzles, we can live with joy and confidence. We know that God has accepted us and accepts our works. Whatever disappointments or frustrations characterize our lives, confidence in our standing with God, now and in the future, enables us to persevere in doing what is right. When things go wrong . . . we cling to our righteous God anyway. We cannot see the future, so we learn to walk by faith in the present, knowing that we are secure before God's judgment seat (Rom. 8:31ff). Life under the sun may be full of pain and frustration and disappointment, but we are now seated with Christ in the heavenlies, above the sun (Eph. 2; Col. 3). From our heavenly vantage point, we can see that there is no reason to despair. Our present and future are secure in Christ.

6. Justification and Justice/Mercy: The Politics of Justification

We need to "put the justice back into justification." That is, we need to understand the "politics" of justification. The biblical doctrine of justification should transform the way we live in church and society. Unfortunately, the church has for too long only related the doctrine of justification to individuals. We have ignored the broader framework in which the doctrine functions – namely, the story of Israel, and even the entire *historia salutis.* Justification is an intrinsically social doctrine.

In American evangelicalism, social action and cultural transformation have been tragically divorced from the concerns of soteriology, Christology, and especially ecclesiology. This has had devastating consequences. Because justification intersects with all these domains of theology, it is important in developing a biblical worldview and agenda for culture building and shaping.

Ultimately, justification has to do not merely with the right-wising of sinners, but with the rectification of all of creation. Peter Leithart has demonstrated convincingly that justification's forensic verdict includes a deliverance aspect (the book of Judges, Ps. 7, Acts 13, Rom. 6, etc.). Justifying justice is restorational. But this is true not just for individual believers; it is true of the whole cosmos (Rom. 8).

This is where the Reformation comes round the Augustinian circle. While Augustine did not fully grasp the importance of the Hebraic law court for understanding Paul's doctrine of justification, he did understand that God's righteousness ultimately guaranteed a renewed cosmos. Justification is not a private event; it has political and creational implications. When God judges/justifies, he puts things right. McGrath explains:

> Augustine's political theology (i.e., his theology of *iustitia*, applied to the community) is of considerable inherent interest, and is also closely associated with his doctrine of justification . . . It is only within the city of God that the true divine justice, effected through justification, may be found . . . The idea of *iustitia* involved can approach that of a physical ordering of all things and is also reflected in a right ordering of human affairs, and of man's relationship to his environment. For Augustine, *iustitia* is practically synonymous with the right ordering of human affairs in accordance with the will of God . . . *iustitia* is essentially the ordering of the world according to the order of being, itself as expression of the divine will . . .
>
> The student of Augustine's doctrine of justification can only admire the astonishing comprehensiveness of its scope . . . Augustine's discussion of *iustitia*, effected only through man's justification, demonstrates how the doctrine of justification encompasses the whole of Christian existence from the first moment of faith, through the increase in righteousness before God and man, to the final perfection of that righteousness in the eschatological city. Justification is about 'being made just' -- and Augustine's understanding of *iustitia* is so broad that this could be defined as 'being made to live as God intends man to live, in every aspect of his existence,' including his relationship with God, with his fellow men, and the relationship of his higher and lower self (on the neo-Platonic anthropological model favoured by Augustine). That *iustitia* possesses legal and moral overtones will thus be evident -- but this must not be permitted to obscure its fundamental *theological* orientation. By justification, Augustine comes very close to understanding the restoration of the entire universe to its original order, established at creation . . .

Living as a justified person means living in such a way that you help bring God's justice more and more to bear upon the fallen world order (cf. Mt. 25). It means you live as an agent of rectification in the world,

making this world more and more what God designed it to be. It means you embody the saving mercy and justice of God in your relationships, and public and private endeavors. It means you embody a "politics" of justification, working for the liberation of the whole creation from the principalities and powers, those corporate idols that plague and enslave fallen societies. This is why Christianity is, as C. S. Lewis said, the only fighting religion we've got. You cannot believe in justification, in the dynamic restorative righteousness of God, without simultaneously working to see his justice established in the world. Every time we act in faith, hope, and love to fight poverty, sickness, oppression, and wickedness, we are manifesting God's justifying righteousness in the world. We are bringing the Isaiahanic vision to pass (cf. the theme God's righteousness in Isa. 40-66). You cannot believe in God's righteousness and simultaneously be an escapist. God's righteousness compels us to deal with slums, deformed babies, cancer, crooked politicians, soaring divorce rates, racism, divided churches, poverty, unjust wars, tyranny, etc. in a way that right-wises these situations as much as we can, in anticipation of God's final right-wising at the end of history. Because God will set everything right at the last day, we seek to set things right as much as possible in the present. As Paul says in Gal. 5, we through the Spirit wait eagerly for the hope of justification by faith . . . [which] faith works through love.