A REPLY TO "THE OPC JUSTIFICATION REPORT" ON THE MERIT OF CHRIST

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I am the pastor of a candidate church in the CREC (Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches) in Birmingham, AL. The CREC is a young Reformed denomination, composed mostly of independent evangelical churches that have moved in a Reformed direction and have now banded together in presbyterial fashion. The CREC is seeking to be a truly "reformed catholic" group of churches, incorporating congregations (and confessions) that identify with both the Continental/Dutch Reformed and the British/American Presbyterian streams.

In this way, the CREC has something in common with the OPC in her early days. While the OPC has never had the confessional plurality that the CREC enjoys, the OPC has been greatly enriched since its founding in the 1930s by theologians and pastors who brought Dutch Reformed ideas and influences into an American Presbyterian context (e.g., Gerhardus Vos, Cornelius Van Til). The CREC, as a denominational Johnny-come-lately, is deeply grateful for the work of the OPC in preserving and developing the Reformed faith on American soil. At the 2005 CREC council (general assembly) meeting last October, the CREC adopted a resolution to give thanks for the OPC on June 11, 2006, as part of commemorating the 70th anniversary of the OPC's founding:

> In celebration and grateful acknowledgment of the seventieth anniversary of the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church [OPC] at its First General Assembly in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on 11-14 June 1936, first General Council meeting of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches hereby resolves:
> 1. that 11 June 2006 shall be proclaimed a day of celebration and prayer in our various churches;
> 2. that we thank God for the OPC's seventy years of confessional adherence to the Reformed faith, and for that body's steady witness of the Gospel against unbiblical pietism and liberalism;
> 3. that we thank God for the many faithful teachers and pastors of that body from whom we in the CREC have learned so much; and that we petition God for his continued protection and blessing upon our brethren in the OPC—for their continued peace, reformation, and faithfulness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for generations to come.

My church gave thanks for the OPC in our public worship last Sunday, in accordance with this resolution. Thus, it is with great pain that I have to pick up this task today of writing another in a series of replies to the OPC Study

Committee's recent Report on justification. Unfortunately, the Report does not uphold the level of scholarship and reformed catholicity that have characterized the OPC in other times and situations. My hope and prayer is that the OPC will keep an open mind about the current issues being brought to the fore by the so-called "Federal Vision" (FV) controversy, and will not make uninformed, ill considered judgments.

In this response to the Report, I want focus my attention on the issue of Christ's merit, especially as it relates to Philippians 2:9. I made a brief, passing reference to Philippians 2:9 in my colloquium essay, "Reworking the Covenant of Works: A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" found in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons,* edited by E. C. Beisner, on page 137-138. (I will usually refer to this article as my "colloquium essay" for convenience.) Here is that quotation, in its wider context:

> In the covenant construction advocated by Dr. Smith, the *foedus operum* is rendered inoperative by Adam's fall. So the focus shifts to God's Plan B, the *foedus gratia*. The covenant of grace is simply the covenant of works fulfilled by a sinless substitute provided by God himself.
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> While there is much to appreciate about the symmetry of such a covenantal scheme, it seems fraught with biblical difficulties. First, we have already seen how such a program of works righteousness undercuts the filial nature of covenant sonship. It ends up looking something like this: In Genesis 1-2, God constructed Pelagian machinery for man to earn his way to blessing. Adam rendered himself incapable of operating that machinery when he sinned. But now God sends his Son into the world as One who can work the machinery flawlessly. In other words, Jesus is the successful Pelagian, the One Guy in the history of the world who succeeded in pulling off the works righteousness plan. Jesus covered our demerits by dying on the cross and provides all the merits we need by keeping the legal terms of the covenant of works perfectly. Those merits are then imputed to us by faith alone. Kline states it bluntly, once again making everything hinge on the concept of merit: "Moreover, the parallel which Scripture tells us exists between the two Adams would require the conclusion that if the first Adam could not earn anything, neither could the second. But, if the obedience of Jesus has no meritorious value, the foundation of the gospel is gone." Such is the view of bi-covenantal federalism.
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> Again, there is much here to appreciate and with which to agree. We certainly agree with covenant of works proponents on the unique sinlessness of Jesus. He was the spotless Passover Lamb of God. We do not question that he was a substitute for sinners in all that he did. We do not deny the infinite value of his obedience to the Father's vocation for him or his vicarious death on the cross under God's wrath. We agree that he played the role assigned to Adam and to Israel to perfection…
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> But there are still problems….
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> Is this really the way the beloved Son related to his Father during his ministry? As an employee earning wages? As a hired gun fulfilling the terms of a contract? Certainly this is not the picture we get from the gospel accounts. But this is the picture the

> covenant of works construction seems to paint since it reduces everything to a matter of merit and strict justice.
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> The gospels make it clear that Jesus *never* had to earn the favor of God. He was never a "Dutiful Employee" but *always* a "Beloved Son." He had the Father's favor in his youth (Lk. 2:40, 52). He had it at the beginning of his ministry, at his baptism, prior to any public service (Mt. 3:17). He had it through his temptation in the wilderness, as he resisted seizing kingly authority prematurely as Adam did in the Garden (Mt. 4:11). Most importantly, after the cross, just when we might have expected to hear that the Father *justly* rewarded him for his *meritorious* suffering with a name above every name, Paul writes the Father *graced* him with such a name as a gift (Phil. 2:9). Even his exaltation was of grace, not of merit! It was not like an "Employee of the month" award; it was more akin to a Royal Father giving his Princely Son a share in his kingly *inheritance*. Jesus moved from glory to glory, but also from grace to grace…
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> This is not to say that the grace Jesus received is identical to the grace sinners receive in and through him. Obviously, that isn't the case. Nor is it to say that Jesus' covenant faithfulness works in the same way and at the same level as ours. That isn't the case either. But this does show us that systematic constructions that forbid application of the term "grace" to the sinless Mediator simply aren't conforming to Scriptural thought patterns. The biblical vocabulary should be allowed to force us to rethink our notion of grace, rather than our pre-fabricated theological grids being allowed to foist themselves onto Scripture.

I admit to some overblown rhetoric and unfortunate caricaturing in this passage. I wish now I had been more careful – more precise – in my description of the particular "strict merit" version of covenant theology I was critiquing here. I took the position to an extreme for the sake of bringing to the fore certain problems and issues I wanted to address. Obviously not all covenant of works proponents cast their theology in this form. Further, my assessment of Klinean merit may not be totally fair to Meredith Kline himself (though I do not doubt it applies to some of his followers).[1] However, the overall gist of this section still makes a valid point that needs to be considered.

The Report picks up on this section of my paper in at least two places, in order to build its critique of the "FV." I would like to demonstrate that in each case the Report has misused my work, and failed to deal with the basic issues in question. In some ways, the Report and I are far closer than the Report acknowledges. In other areas, there are some gaps, though they may be due to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Whatever the case, in this essay, I will seek to clarify the issues, and show where the Report's view agrees and where it disagrees with my

[1] Kline's view of covenant and merit deserve a discussion of their own and cannot be summarized here. The basic issue is that while Kline wants to deny the presence of grace in the pre-fall situation, he also wants to avoid the problems of strict merit. Some helpful thoughts are found in Peter Wallace's essay, Covenant and Inheritance," available at http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/inheritance.htm.

position. There are true disagreements here, but there is also more commonality than the Report recognizes.

In discussing the "active obedience" of Christ, the Report draws Philippians 2 into play (lines 796ff):

> At least two FV proponents [James Jordan, myself] have argued that this passage actually rules out the notion of merit in regard to Christ's obedience, because in 2:9 Paul uses the word *echarisato*, which etymologically derives from the word for "grace," *charis*, to describe God's giving the name above every name to Christ. This indicates, they claim, that the Father exalted the Son not meritoriously but graciously. This argument as it stands fails, however. One reason it fails is its fallacious reasoning that etymological derivation determines the meaning of a word apart from context. The context of Phil 2:5-11 shows that merit cannot be eliminated from Paul's teaching here. The context, as Vos puts it, is one of "work rendered and value received." The Father exalted the Son because the Son perfectly fulfilled his course of obedience. The Son obeyed, *therefore* the Father exalted him. Vos, who sees a reference to "grace" here, cuts through possible confusion: "*Echarisato* means that God bestowed it as a gracious gift, not, of course, in the specific sense of the word 'grace,' implying that there was any unworthiness in Christ which God had to overlook, but in the more general sense implying that this was an act in which the graciousness, the kindness of God manifested itself." Vos writes this only after having established the "objective causal connection expressed in…Philippians 2:9" which illustrates the fact that "Christ by His perfect obedience was just before God, and on the ground of His being just received eternal life."

There is much in this paragraph I can agree with, but I think it also misses some vital elements in the discussion. But before moving into the specifics of that, I need to note that I have explained my views on these topics more fully elsewhere. In my audio lectures (available from Canon Press) and lecture notes from the 2005 Christ Church Ministerial Conference (available here: http://www.trinity-pres.net/audio/christchurchjustification.pdf), I expounded more fully on the merit of Christ in general and the meaning of Philippians 2:9 in particular. An excerpt will help give a broader context for interaction with the Report:

> We are now prepared to return to our earlier discussion of merit.
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> 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.*
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> 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.
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> 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.
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> 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."
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> 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.
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> 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).
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> 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 . . . ")
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> 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:
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> > 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" ("*echarisato*") 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 it is called a gift (Phil. 2) and an inheritance (Ps. 2).
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> Finally, N. T. Wright calls into question the notion of earning as a way of viewing the Son's relationship to his Father:
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> > 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.
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> 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.[2]

Now we can analyze more carefully the claims of the Report and see how they measure up to my actual views. The Report says that I use Philippians 2:9 to rule "out the notion of merit in regard to Christ's obedience." It is true that I argue against a meritorious reading of Philippians 2:9 in my colloquium essay and elsewhere. But do the Report and I mean the same thing by "merit"? In other words, are we affirming and denying the same thing? It is hard to say for sure because "merit" is a notoriously slippery term, as the Report itself acknowledges (line 421). The Report does not define just what it means when it insists on merit as a theological category. Thus we might agree, or not, depending on how things are worked out.

What is "merit" in this discussion? Is it condign or congruent merit? Is merit defined by the covenant promise or by strict justice abstracted from the covenant? Are there any biblical synonyms for the term "merit"? Is the merit of Christ identical to the merit Adam could have acquired had he obeyed in the garden (given a certain "covenant of works" construction)? Is merit compatible with or antithetical to grace? How does merit relate to the Creator/creature distinction? Is merit, as I have argued elsewhere, "simply another way of talking about Christ's work of propitiation and resurrection for our salvation,…another way of talking about Christ's faithfulness and vindication in the fulfillment of his vocation" ("Reworking the Covenant of Works: A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" page 145)? How does merit relate to concepts such as earning, debt, and bribery? And if we insist on an "earning" model, what does that say about the relationship of the Father to the Son? Does merit mean the Son "forced

[2] See especially Lecture #2.

the Father's hand" as Silva and Thielman suggest above? Does it mean that the Son was alienated from the Father until he acquired sufficient merit for reconciliation? How does the accumulation of merit work? Is merit akin to the proverbial "brownie points" system? And if not, why not? Is merit quantitative (e.g., the treasury of merit notion)? Should we speak of "merit" or "merits"? Is merit a personal or impersonal concept? Is Christ's merit separable from his person, so that it can be transferred from him to his people? Does merit only operate in the face of demerit? Or is it a discrete category of its own? Is all obedience meritorious? How is "righteousness related to merit? Is being righteous before God a matter of having adequate merit? Did Adam start with this merit, and if not why not? How do death and resurrection relate to merit? How does merit relate to the biblical concept of justice? Is fulfilling a covenantal condition meritorious? If a benefit is merited, does the one who attained the merit have to say "thank you" when the merited benefit is received? Can a merited benefit be demanded as a right, or is it still in some way a gift? How does merit relate to inheritance? Does the possibility of merit rely on some kind of equality (or inequality) between the two parties involved? How does merit relate to boasting? To pride? Does the one meriting reward have an obligation to humility? To gratitude? If completely obedient servants are still "unprofitable" (cf. Lk. 17:10) and sons receive inheritances from their fathers rather than paychecks, what kind of relationship can employ a concept of merit? How does merit relate to our concept of contract, and how does contract relate to covenant? Is merit an end itself or a means to some greater end? Does "qualified merit" really make sense? Or is merit the kind of concept that dies the death of even one qualification? What does "merit" mean in popular discourse and thought? How does this meaning relate to specialized theological definitions of the term? Have we considered how merit theology entered Christian discourse in the first place? And how it has functioned in various historical contexts?

Apart from answers to these questions, it is very hard to know whether or not my views really stand in tension with those of the Report.[3] It is hard to know if they are affirming what I reject. For my part, I have freely admitted that my concerns with merit are in no way intended to detract from the absolute and infinite worth of Christ's work: "We do not deny the infinite value of his obedience to the Father's vocation for him or his vicarious death on the cross under God's wrath." (colloquium essay, page 137). The person and work of the Son of God are of unlimited value. As Gregory of Nazianzus said, even a few drops of his blood are sufficient to renew the whole world. His death and

[3] I admit that I have no where answered all these questions. A definitive biblical-theological and historical-theological analysis of "merit" remains to be written. My fullest discussion of merit is probably Lecture #2 from the 2005 Christ Church Ministerial Conference, already linked above. See especially the section on "Merit and Covenant Personalism." That lecture compares the concept of strict merit to a number of different biblical metaphors.

resurrection are of infinite worth. If some are wont to take that worth as "merit," so be it.

My arguments over "merit" cannot be reduced to logomachies. I have no desire to fight over the word itself. If the church as a whole can agree on what "merit" means, and then insists on its usage, I would be willing to comply. I do not object to the usage of merit in the WCF or Christian hymnody and liturgy because I think it can be taken as simply another way of describing Christ's finished work. The WCF does not enter into a philosophical, theological, or exegetical analysis of what "merit" means. It does not commit us to this or that system of merit theology, beyond affirming the infinite worth of Christ's person and work. I have made it clear that I do not object to all proposed definitions of the term merit:

> That being said, one thing I've learned from this sordid affair now known as the "Auburn Avenue controversy" is that there are almost as many definitions of "merit" as there are theologians who want to talk about it. Reformed theologians have no agreed upon "merit theology." In editing my essay for the colloquium, I actually cut out a rather large discussion I had written on problems with the condign/congruent merit distinction because I did not think it would be germane. In interacting with other Reformed theologians over the issue of merit in the aftermath of the colloquium, I have found a wide variety of views on merit, some of which I could easily live with (I don't just want to fight over words, after all)… Cal Beisner, in his assessment of the controversy at the conclusion of the colloquium book, acknowledges (with me) that strict merit is not possible, even for Christ. But then he creates a category called "covenantal merit" which he defines as "fulfilling a condition the Creator condescends to establish" (page 325). This definition is so broad it's virtually inescapable; on this meaning, *everyone* believes in merit (except perhaps universalists). But at the same time this condition-fulfilling can only be called "merit" in the most improper sense, as Francis Turretin acknowledged (see *Institutes* 17.5.5). Why bother with such a confusing, qualified use of the term "merit"? Why insist on an extra-biblical term, used "improperly" at that?...
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> Merit," as a category, can be rescued, no doubt, but the project doesn't seem to be worth the effort. I agree with Peter Wallace's wise assessment, "Whether you wish to use the language of merit depends entirely on which of its many definitions you choose" (from "Covenant and Inheritance"). But given the inherent problems, I think it best we wipe the slate clean.[4]
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> Obviously, merit could be defined in such a way that it would not be so problematic (and Horton notes my use of terms like "deserve" and "worth," which are "merit" terms in his

[4] From "Rome Won't Have Me," http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/rome_wont_have_me.htm. Note that on Beisner's definition of covenantal merit, even faith is meritorious because faith fulfills a covenant condition. Beisner would object to calling faith a form of merit, but it is a logical implication of his position. The Peter Wallace essay referred to is available at http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/inheritance.htm.

theological vocabulary). But the term "merit" has so much unsavory baggage, I see no reason to continue using it. The Bible makes do without it, so we can as well.

It should also be noted that critics of the "Federal Vision" are not all aligned in their use of merit anyway. It's not as though the "Federal Vision" is bucking a well established, monolithic consensus in the Reformed community. Horton wants to assign both condign and congruent merit to Christ (page 25). Cal Beisner is considerably closer to Calvin in only attributing "covenantal" (or congruent) merit to Christ (pages 324-25 in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*; private correspondence). But, again, a good deal of the discussion over merit is haggling over what terms to use. I have yet to hear a good argument for the retention of "merit" in our theological vocabulary. It obscures and confuses more than it clarifies. Use of the term certainly cannot be made a test of orthodoxy or even of being Reformed. As I noted in my colloquium essay, the meaning of "merit" is often so watered down and qualified (e.g., the notion of "covenantal merit") that one wonders why the term is so dogmatically defended, apart from a blind traditionalism (page 120).

My reasons for rejecting merit are simple: I do not believe human works can have any causal role in our salvation. Works cannot earn or achieve salvation in any form or fashion. Works cannot serve as the basis or ground of our justification in any way whatsoever. By taking merit out of the picture, the temptation to legalism and self-righteousness is cut off (at least in principle). No merit means no boasting. No merit means everything we get is a gift of unearned, underserved grace. No merit means salvation is a matter pure divine monergism. Period. Scholastic theologians are attracted to merit because it helps create a tidy logical "system" of salvation, but I think it is fully possible to exegete the relevant texts of Scripture without appeal to the extra-biblical category of merit…[5]

I made it quite clear in my colloquium essay that the version of merit I have set in my sights is "strict" merit (though many of my concerns bleed over to "merit" terminology in general). Page 120 made that evident:

[T]he notion of merit itself has some incoherencies. The term is not found in the Bible, but is the concept? What exactly is merit, anyway? Is it a matter of strict justice or of arbitrary justice? Is it abstract or covenantal? Many covenant of works advocates seem to water down the whole notion of "merit" till one wonders why the term is held so dear. Strict merit runs head-on into a host of biblical prooftexts (e.g., Lk. 17:10; Rom. 11:35). God is not served by human hands as if he had need of us (Acts 17:25). Moreover, several of the arguments against meritorious works in WCF 16.5 are rooted in the Creator/creature distinction, not in man's fallenness. So the WCF does not unequivocally affirm that Adam could merit life and blessing from God; in fact, the Confession leaves that question open for further debate and discussion.

[A footnote adds:] The force of these prooftexts is often overlooked by advocates of a meritorious covenant. Rom. 11:35 indicates nothing a creature can do can make God his debtor. Paul's rationale is based not on man's fallenness (though that undoubtedly comes into the picture; cf. Rom. 11:32); rather, it is based on the Creator/creature

[5] From "Blurring the Federal Vision," http://www.auburnavenue.org/articles/Blurring_the_Federal_Vision.htm. See also (again) Lecture #2, from the 2005 Christ Church Ministerial Conference. I pointed out a Calvinian concept of merit I could live with in the colloquium essay, pages 144-145.

distinction. Likewise, Lk. 17:10 suggests that even if the "covenant of works" or law is fully kept, there is no *strict* claim on God's blessing. In the ultimate sense, a creature can never exceed his duty. Supererogation is impossible.

[Another footnote adds:] It seems to me the Westminster Standards do not teach a strictly meritorious covenant of works in any sense. The Confession speaks of God's "voluntary condescension" in entering into covenant with Adam and affirms that Adam could only have obeyed as God enabled him to do so (cf. WCF 7.1, 19. 1).

Most Reformed theologians today seem to agree that "hard" merit is impossible. But if that is the case, why do some in the Reformed church insist on anachronistic, medieval terminology? I, for one, would be happy to see the church move beyond using the label "merit," and opt for less ambiguous theological terminology.[6] All parties should be willing to admit that the whole notion of merit has done quite a bit of harm in the church.[7] We are not discussing

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[6] The point is not just that "merit" is not a biblical term, though that is significant. Obviously, we all use extra-biblical terms in explicating the teaching of the Bible. We also often use biblical terms in ways that are not identical to their biblical usage. My point about "merit" is broader. The term itself does not necessarily communicate what many of those using it intend to mean. Also, advocates of merit terminology and theology often have a hard time linking up merit with exegesis. What biblical texts require "merit" in order to be understood? How does "merit" cash out in terms of biblical exegesis? Many proponents of "merit" theology all too easily gloss words like "obedience" and "righteousness" (e.g., in Rom. 5:12ff) as "merit" without argument. But this is not a legitimate move. "Obedience" and "righteousness" are not synonyms for merit.

[7] Calvin explains:

I must first make these prefatory remarks concerning the term "merit": whoever first applied it to men's works over against God's judgment provided very badly for sincere faith. Of course, I would like to avoid verbal battles, but I wish that Christian writers had always exercised such restraint as not to take it into their heads needlessly to use such terms foreign to Scripture that would produce great offense and very little fruit. Why, I ask, was there need to drag in the term "merit" when the value of good works could without offense have been meaningfully explained by another term? How much offense this term contains is clear from the great damage it has done to the world. Surely, as it is a most prideful term, it can do nothing but obscure God's favor and imbue men with perverse haughtiness.

I admit that the ancient writers of the church commonly used it, and would that they had not given posterity occasion for error by their misuse of one little word (Institutes 3.15.2).

Jim Jordan underscores the same point:

"Merit" is an unhappy term. Once a non-Biblical term gets into theological discourse, theologians work over its definition to try and get it to square with Biblical teaching. Sometimes a new term is most felicitous, such as the term "trinity," which is really just a synonym for "God." The term "merit," however, is much more problematic [e.g., it is not a mere synonym for "obedience" or "righteousness"]. What are "merits"? Are they "brownie points" that we present to God as a bribe? Surely not. When a sophisticated Reformed theologian refines the term "merit" thoroughly enough, it comes out meaning

a theologically innocent term. Nor has the usage of merit gone unchallenged. (I have discussed the history and background to this in a variety of other places, and will not repeat that material in full here.)

"Merit" has a checkered past in Reformed theology. At the time of the Reformation, Calvin said he wished that merit had never been introduced into the church's vocabulary. He called merit a "dangerous" word. While he continued to speak of merit with regard to Christ, he did so reluctantly and in a way that did not oppose merit to grace (or favor) in absolute terms. His concept of merit was "soft" – indeed, very soft. Calvin, unlike Trent, never spoke of a "meritorious cause" of salvation (though he did speak of other types of causes). This omission in Calvin's theology is incredibly significant. Likewise, while Francis Turretin continued to employ a merit theology of sorts, he said that the term can only be used without rigor, in an "improper" way. He all but admitted that merit terminology is non-essential to a classic, Protestant explication of the gospel. Other theologians, including several from the Dutch tradition, have expressed discomfort with merit as a theological category. In questioning the usefulness of "merit" terminology, I am not opposing a monolithic tradition, whether inside or outside the Reformed church. Many others have noted the unsavory baggage that the label "merit" brings with it.

To summarize, my concerns about merit theology are fourfold:

[a] The notion of merit itself is exegetically tenuous. It is not a biblical concept, and there is no biblical term that is closely synonymous with "merit." It is very difficult to derive a notion of "hard" merit from the key texts of Scripture (e.g., Gen. 1-2). If Turretin is right that the only valid use of "merit" is improper, why continue to insist on the improper use of a term as a test of orthodoxy – especially when there are more biblically pure ways of speaking? Why replace the language and concepts of Scripture with an extra-biblical category that has a track record of causing theological and pastoral headaches? Why require the use of a term that can only be used in an "improper" (and therefore confusing) way? Why not clarify and biblicize our discourse on this point?

[b] Most people naturally associate "merit" with what is earned and therefore deserved as a matter of strict justice. The qualifications placed on merit by theologians like Calvin, Turretin, and the Report usually get lost. In the popular mind, merit is a concept that simply cannot be qualified. Is qualified merit still "merit" in any useful sense? Or would it be clearer to articulate the same truth in

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"sustained faithfulness." I suggest we throw out the confusing word "merit" and speak only of faithfulness. It would greatly simplify and Biblicize our theological discourse" (from "Observations on the Covenant of Works Doctrine," available at http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/bh/bh052.htm).

another way? Pastorally, do we not create more problems than we solve by using merit in a way that necessarily leads to misunderstanding? If even Reformed theologians cannot agree amongst themselves on the meaning of the term, how can we press its usage so strongly?

[c] Another concern is what the term "merit" suggests about the nature of the Father/Son relationship. If Jesus' sonship is the primary category through which we should view his work (whether we are regarding him as a new Adam, a new Israel, or the eternal Son made flesh), then merit becomes problematic. While fathers and sons have a relationship that includes legal aspects (and thus, the filial and the forensic cannot be set in opposition), the relationship can only be regarded as meritorious in an extremely loose and improper sense. Inheritances are not merited in any kind of strict way. They are promised gifts bestowed on worthy children. The language of merit, applied to the ministry of Christ, implies that the Father and Son were not really working together in the plan of redemption.[8] The loving Son is seeking to persuade the begrudging Father to be gracious. The Father has to be leveraged into being loving. Merit conditions God into showing mercy. This view of the Father/Son relationship simply cannot be squared with what the Bible actually says about the Father's sending of the Son or the Son's ministry. Before Jesus had done anything to merit God's favor on our behalf, God already loved the world enough to send his Son (Jn. 3:16). The Son lived in continual dependence on his Father (Jn. 5:30). The Father crowned his work with a promised inheritance (Ps. 2:7). Those admissions have to qualify all notions of merit. In the popular mind (which all pastors must consider), merit can often be associated with the notion of bribing, or demanding. Merit all too easily gives the impression that Son had to overcome the Father's reluctance, or start from a position of alienation and earn his way into fellowship with the Father. None of those meanings are theologically applicable, though.[9]

[d] If Christ's obedience is viewed as meritorious, we can all too easily slip into viewing our own obedience as meritorious as well. Once merit is put at the core of a system, it is hard to keep it in bounds, as my colloquium essay showed.[10] If Jesus related to his Father in a relationship of merit, rather than love and grace,

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[8] I realize that this may not *always* be an implication of merit theology, depending on merit is formulated. Some "softer" forms of merit emphasize that Christ merited nothing for himself; rather "merit" designates what Jesus accomplished for his people in rescuing them from a state of unrighteousness and condemnation. This is fine at the conceptual level, though I still would openly question why the term "merit" is used here when other, more biblical precise terms are available. Also, it needs to be made clear at all times that the Father's love for the world precedes any meritorious action on the part of Jesus on our behalf. Whatever merit is, it is not a precondition of God's mercy and love towards sinners.

[9] See my colloquium article, page145, for proof that this was Calvin's view as well.

[10] Specifically, my concern is with the fact that Dr. Morton Smith claimed that our eternal rewards are "merited." See page 146.

we can easily slide into viewing our relationship with the Father in the same fashion. This can happen in several ways. For example, if Jesus humbled himself, and that humbling *earned* exaltation, then if we humble ourselves, is the reward also a matter of merit, even by analogy (cf. 1 Pt. 5:6)? Some of the very passages that supposedly present Jesus as striving to earn merits from his Father are *also* passages that present Jesus as an example for us to emulate (cf. Phil 2:9 + 2:5). Obviously, Jesus is much more than an example for us to follow, but given that the whole obedience/exaltation pattern of his ministry is presented as a paradigm for the Christian life, we need to think twice about the pastoral implications of dragging merit into the picture.[11]

Turning to a closer examination of Philippians 2:9, we find many of these issues at work. Why and how does the Father reward the Son with a name above every name? The Report insists that the language of "grace" in the text does not cancel out the "therefore." The "therefore" is there in order to indicate that the reward is earned. It is a matter of merit, of just deserts. But this merit is not incompatible with the description of his reward as a gift.

I have already expressed my openness to this way of framing the matter. Again, in the conference lecture notes above, I said, "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)." This was just reaffirming and expanding what I argued for in more compact form in the colloquium article. So already it seems that the Report is missing something vital in the "FV" position. I am willing to shoulder some of the blame for that misunderstanding because the colloquium essay did not frame everything in the clearest possible terms. But I think it is also fair to say that the Report has not handled my written materials very carefully.

The Report says the "FV" argument that the Father graciously gave the Son a name above every name, "as it stands fails, however. One reason it fails is its fallacious reasoning that etymological derivation determines the meaning of a word apart from context." In a footnote, the Report seeks to clarify the precise nature of the fallacy: "This is what D. A. Carson terms the 'root fallacy:' 'One of the most enduring of errors, the root fallacy presupposes that every word

[11] The Christian life is a Christ-shaped life – that is to say, it follows the death/resurrection pattern (e.g., Lk. 9:23; Rom. 6:1ff; etc.). Yet we must not collapse the difference between Christ's life and ours. There is an analogy, not an identity. Christ's life of faith, his death, and his resurrection have an utterly unique, non-repeatable, and foundational role to play. See my colloquium essay, page 138, lines 663-664. However, building on Christ's foundation, we are not only to trust him, but to imitate him. Jesus shows us what the life of faith looks like in perfection and maturity (cf. Heb. 11:1-12:4).

actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. In this view, meaning is determined by etymology; that is, by the root or roots of a word' (see *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 26-32)."

But where is the evidence that this fallacy has been committed? I am quite happy to allow context rather than etymology determine the meaning of the key term (*echarisato*) in question. The fact that Paul is talking about Jesus, the eternal and sinless Son of God made flesh, rather than sinful sons of Adam, decisively determines and delimits what "grace" can mean in context.[12] I did not cite *any* etymological evidence, or make *any* etymological argument in my essay. Indeed, the whole discussion of Philippians 2:9 in the colloquium essay took up all of one sentence – hardly enough space to develop an etymological point. If anything, my appeal was already more to context than etymology. My conference lecture notes, quoted above, relying on the likes of Silva and Theilman, prove as much. If I was arguing that the term "grace" in Philippians 2:9 carried the full Pauline sense that it has in the context of describing our redemption from sin, then the fallacy charge would likely apply. But that was never my method. Indeed, the colloquium essay specifically pointed out the favor of God shown to Christ in his exaltation must be distinguished from the favor of God that rescues sinners from their plight (page 138: "This is not to say that the grace Jesus received is identical to the grace sinners receive in and through him. Obviously that isn't the case."). In context, the term means just what Silva takes it to mean (as quoted above):

> *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.

Even Geerhardus Vos, whom the Report cites favorably, takes the term to mean "grace" in context. Surely Vos is not guilty of an etymological fallacy. The Report failed to give the full quote, but this is Vos's explanation of Paul's use of *echarisato*:

> The Greek original for "gave," *echarisato*, should not be overlooked in this passage. The name which Jesus had rightfully earned *yet* was bestowed upon Him by manner of grace. Even when God enters into the recompense-relationship with man, He does so in

[12] Even if the immediate context did not help us in unpacking the meaning of *echarisato* in Philippians 2:9, we are still not relegated to mere etymology. After all, we have the wider context of the whole Bible, which clearly shows us that Christ's reward was a gift or inheritance (e.g., Ps. 2:7). We have other texts which specifically apply the language of grace to Jesus (Lk. 2:40, 52). The Report leaves me wondering what they would say about the Bible's inheritance theme. As on so many issues, the Report leaves more questions unanswered than answered – and they are usually just the questions the so-called "FV" brings to the foreground of theological discussion.

> virtue of an unmerited act of favor, granting something that He was in no wise bound to give.[13]

Whatever "merit" might be implied by the logical placement of the "therefore" in the sentence structure of 2:9 is enveloped by the gracious kindness and covenant promise of God. "Merit" is correlated with an "an unmerited act of favor." Thus, Vos seeks to do justice to *both* the grace aspect *and* the justice aspect of the text. Grace and justice are equally ultimate in the passage because they are equally ultimate in the character of God. Vos aims at striking the proper balance. This was my desire as well. Indeed, my position is structurally *identical* to that of Vos, which is turn is structurally isomorphic with Philippians 2:9.[14] Vos says the shape of Philippians 2:9 is one of

> work rendered and value received … *Echarisato* means that God bestowed it as a gracious gift, not, of course, in the specific sense of the word 'grace,' implying that there was any unworthiness in Christ which God had to overlook, but in the more general sense implying that this was an act in which the graciousness, the kindness of God manifested itself.

Value and kindness are both present in the text. Vos describes an "objective causal connection expressed in…Philippians 2:9" which illustrates the fact that "Christ by His perfect obedience was just before God, and on the ground of His being just received eternal life." But this "just causality" cannot be severed from the Father's promised graciousness, displayed in his raising and exalting Christ; it is not a mechanistic or impersonal causality. The Father graciously shares his throne with the glorified God-man, whose perfect work fulfilled the Father's loving plan of redemption.

Vos's view holds together both the Father's kindness in exalting the Son and the infinite worth of the Son's work. Compare that to my own statements. I emphasize the value of the Son's work, and the Father's reflexive action in exalting him: "We do not deny the infinite value of his obedience to the Father's vocation for him… He was raised up *on the basis of* his flawless obedience to the Father. Death could not hold him because he was a righteous man" ("Reworking the Covenant of Works: A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,' 137, 142). At the same time, I combine that truth with the theme of the Father's covenant favor towards his obedient Son:

> Paul writes the Father *graced* him with such a name as a gift (Phil. 2:9). Even his exaltation was of grace, not of merit!...This is not to say that the grace Jesus received is identical to the grace sinners receive in and through him. Obviously, that isn't the case. Nor is it to say that Jesus' covenant faithfulness works in the same way and at the same level as ours. That isn't the case either…This view of [God's] righteousness [as covenant faithfulness] has to color our discussion of Christ's "merits." Christ "deserved" to be rewarded after he suffered and died, not because of some abstract justice (or "merit"), but because the Father had freely promised him such (cf. Isa. 53:10-11; Phil. 2:9)

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[13] Taken from Vos's *Pauline Eschatology*, page 275.

[14] Back of both of our views stands Calvin himself. See my colloquium essay, page 144-5.

("Reworking the Covenant of Works: A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" pages 137f, 147).

So both sides of Philippians 2:9 are true: the reward is granted according to *both* the value of the Son's work *and* the Father's covenant kindness. Jesus was exalted because he fulfilled the mission he was given (Jn. 17:4; Phil. 2:5-11); in accord with the Father's gracious promises, he was raised up and exalted to the Father's right hand (Ps. 16:8-11; Isa. 53:10-12). The notions of "grace" and "worth" are mutually qualifying.[15] (I use the term "worth" here since, again, in the popular mind at least, "merit" and "grace" are antonyms.) Justice and grace are equally ultimate, both flowing out of the very heart of God himself. Jesus was exalted in view of both the work he performed and the kind promise of the Father. If we ask, "Why has Jesus been given a name above every name?" the complete answer is two-fold: [a] He fulfilled the work the Father gave him to do; *therefore*, he has been highly exalted; yet [b] such exaltation is the *gracious gift* of the Father, as the Father deigns to share his glory with the God-man, his Son-in-the-flesh. The covenantal administration reveals God's attributes and character in a comprehensive way (though God admittedly remains incomprehensible to us, and part of that mystery is the way in which his different facets blend together).

Further, Vos and I both read *echarisato* as a reference to "grace," and yet we both qualify that by pointing out that this form of grace must be carefully

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[15] Pastor Peter Wallace comes to just this conclusion in his essay, "Covenant and Inheritance, " available at http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/inheritance.htm. I would strongly endorse the overall thrust of this essay, while quibbling with some terminological details here and there. Wallace ties together a "soft" version of merit with Christ's covenantal inheritance:

> Even the language of the covenant of works is appropriate, because the Son must do what he sees his Father doing. But the reward for his obedience is not a wage, but an inheritance. In that limited sense it is correct to say that Adam would have merited eternal life-in the same way that a son merits his inheritance. He does indeed deserve it. He is worthy of it-because he is the son of his father. In the same way, Christ merited eternal life for us-not as a wage that he earned, but as an inheritance that he has deserved by virtue of his faithful obedience to his Father.
>
> Whether you wish to use the language of merit depends entirely on which of its many definitions you choose. Indeed, Turretin admits that if you define merit in the patristic sense as "a work imputable to praise," then we can all admit that not only Christ's works, but even our own works are meritorious, because, as Augustine put it, "he crowns his own gifts." But Turretin calls this the broad and improper sense of merit. He insists that the proper definition of merit must remain within the realm of strict justice, and therefore he declares that "Adam himself, if he had persevered, would not have merited life in strict justice, although (through a certain condescension) God promised him by a covenant life under the condition of perfect obedience (which is called meritorious from that covenant in a broader sense...)."

distinguished from the grace that God extends to sinners in Christ.[16] Unfortunately, it appears that on this issue, the Report has driven a wedge between the view it advocates and the so-called "FV." In reality their respective views are extremely similar. The Report, Vos, and the "FV" all have much in common with regard to the way they treat Philippians 2:9.[17]

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[16] I have already addressed all of these concerns in my reply to Michael Horton ("Blurring the Federal Vision," http://www.auburnavenue.org/articles/Blurring_the_Federal_Vision.htm):

> Horton unfortunately lets his scholasticism get in the way of exegesis when he deals with my reading of Phil. 2:5-11. On pages 24-5, he says I contradict myself because in one place I say that Christ "deserved" exaltation, by virtue of his perfect obedience, while in another place I attribute it to the Father's grace and promise. But this is precisely the structure of Phil. 2:9: Paul says, "Therefore [on the basis of Christ's obedience unto death] God has also highly exalted him and *graced* [literal translation] him with a name above every name." Apparently, Paul was not aware of an antithesis between grace and deserts in the case of Christ. If I have contradicted myself, so has the apostle. Calvin himself says, "[I]t is absurd to set Christ's merit against God's mercy . . . Christ's merit depends upon God's grace alone" (2.17.1), contra Horton's appeal to Rom. 11:6. John Ball, a noted Puritan divine, also mixed grace and justice. In his *Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, he writes,
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> > The Covenant [with Adam] is of God, and that of his free grace and love: for although in some Covenant the good covenanted be promised in justice, and given in justice for our works: yet it was of grace that God was pleased to bind himself to his creature, and above the desert of the creature: and though the reward be of justice, it is also of favour. For after perfect obedience, performed according to the will of God, it had been no injustice in God, as he made the creature of nothing, so to have brought him unto nothing: it was then of grace that he was pleased to make that promise, and of the same grace his happiness should have been continued.
>
> Sinclair Ferguson, summarizing John Owen's view of the Adamic covenant, gives the same view: "[E]ven if a man were to keep the covenant of works, he would acquire no merit. Eternal life by the covenant of works would not give a man ground for boasting, since that life would be his because of God's promise, not because of his merit" (*John Owen on the Christian Life*, 23). Ferguson goes on to point out that this understanding of grace woven into the original creation covenant actually softens many of the criticisms brought against classic bi-covenantal federalism (by, e.g., T. F. Torrance). I entirely agree.

[17] While I did not cite Vos in the colloquium essay footnotes, his discussion was certainly in the back of my mind as I wrote the essay. Consider again some of his lines considered side by side with mine:

- Vos: "*Echarisato* means that God bestowed it as a gracious gift, not, of course, in the specific sense of the word 'grace,' implying that there was any unworthiness in Christ which God had to overlook, but in the more general sense implying that this was an act in which the graciousness, the kindness of God manifested itself." Me: "This is not to say that the grace Jesus received is identical to the grace sinners receive in and through him. Obviously, that isn't the case."
- Vos: "[The pattern is one of] work rendered and value received." Me: "He was raised up *on the basis of* his flawless obedience to the Father."

Why then does the Report pit Vos against the "FV"? Gaffes like this one call into question the trustworthiness of the Report. Do the critics really understand the "FV" position? Have they created straw men in order to make their work of critique easier? Have they done justice to the

Later, the Report brings up my analogy (quotes above; taken from the colloquium essay, page 137) that views Jesus as the "successful Pelagian" in fulfilling a meritorious covenant of works. The Report takes offense at this analogy between a meritorious covenant of works and Pelagianism. It would be very odd if the Report actually intended to defend a Pelagian-style meritorious covenant of works, given that that would be quite incompatible with other claims of the Report. So it is hard for me to see why the Report counters my analogy as it does (lines 2471ff):

> Lusk, in fact, describes the notion of Christ in the fulfilling the covenant of redemption by keeping the covenant of works so that he can save us in the covenant of grace as akin to Pelagianism, conceiving the historic Reformed view just described in this fashion…
>
> Lusk's quarrel here is not with Pelagianism but with classic Augustinianism. It was Augustine who taught that man before the Fall was able to sin and able not to sin. Pelagius's error was that he taught that man after the Fall continued to possess the ability not to sin and that Adam's fall, while a bad example, did not plunge the race into sin. Augustine, on the other hand, taught that only a work of saving grace could enable fallen man, who had been rendered not able not to sin, to regain his ability not to sin (and that imperfectly until glorification). The four-fold state of man—as created, as fallen, as redeemed, as glorified—is common among the Reformed and is part of our confession (WCF 9.2-5). It is little short of bizarre to seek to turn the tables in this fashion and to accuse an Augustinianism that affirms Adam's ability before the Fall, but not ours as fallen and unredeemed, with being Pelagian. If it is not Pelagianism to teach that Adam before the Fall enjoyed moral and natural ability to keep the law, even less is it Pelagianism to teach that the Redeemer, God and man in one person, had full ability in his own proper person perfectly to keep the law for us and to please his Father for us (hence the purpose of the Incarnation; to please God for us who had failed to do so in Adam and our own lives).

There is no delicate way to put this: The Report has completely missed the point. To wit: The Report has confused the issue of *moral ability* with the issue of *merit*. The Report is comparing apples to oranges. The argument of the Report here gets no traction; there is simply no point of contact between what I wrote and the way the Report replies. I am not even sure how to respond, because the claims of the Report on this issue are so far removed from anything that has been said. For the record, I affirm the Augustinian/Reformed model of the fourfold-state of man. I have never called that into question. But saying that Adam had the *ability* to obey is not (as we have already seen) the same as saying he could *merit* glorification (using merit in its strict, proper sense). Augustine himself made that point! The fourfold-state model does not entail the view that unfallen Adam and Jesus were supposed to live as Pelagians.

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nuances of the "FV" position? I would suggest the authors of the Report need to go back to the drawing board and take a closer look at the "FV" materials.

The Report's argument seems to imply that where there is *ability* to obey, there is the possibility of *merit*. In other words, obedience is always meritorious. If you are able to obey, you are able to achieve merit before God. But if this is so, the Report's authors have run into a serious dilemma: Given that redeemed man has been restored to the ability to obey in principle (according to the Augustinian scheme), this would mean that Christian obedience is meritorious. But surely this is a conclusion the Report would want to reject! The ability/merit complex simply does not withstand scrutiny.

The Report says, "If it is not Pelagianism to teach that Adam before the Fall enjoyed moral and natural ability to keep the law, even less is it Pelagianism to teach that the Redeemer, God and man in one person, had full ability in his own proper person perfectly to keep the law for us and to please his Father for us (hence the purpose of the Incarnation; to please God for us who had failed to do so in Adam and our own lives)." But I did not say the analogy with Pelagianism lies in Adam's, or Christ's ability to keep the law. The contact point with Pelagianism lies in the system that has been set up: In both Pelagianism and the meritorious covenant of works, the key principle is man earns God's favor by doing good works. Again, this is how I put it (emphasis added): "In Genesis 1-2, God constructed Pelagian machinery for man to *earn* his way to blessing. Adam rendered himself incapable of operating that machinery when he sinned. But now God sends his Son into the world as One who can work the machinery flawlessly. In other words, Jesus is the successful Pelagian, the One Guy in the history of the world who succeeded in pulling off the *works righteousness plan*."

As my analogy made clear, the reason I invoked Pelagius was to make a point about the way *some* advocates of the covenant of works understand that covenant. They believe that Adam was able to merit salvation/glorification. He was to do in the garden what Pelagius said we are all to do: earn God's favor through good works. Had he obeyed, he could have demanded glorification as an intrinsic right. He would not have had to say, "Thank you," to God for enabling his obedience. He would not have been an "unprofitable servant," simply doing his duty. Rather, he would have been an employee, now demanding his paycheck. That's what Pelagianism means. But this is *not* the "covenant of works" as taught by the Westminster standards. The Westminster standards know nothing of a meritorious system in the Garden of Eden.

Further, I was suggesting that the gospels do not present Jesus as fulfilling a Pelagian program. If the original covenant was not a meritorious covenant, strictly speaking, then the covenant Jesus fulfilled on our behalf was not Pelagian. Jesus did not need to supply us with strict merit that Adam's fall rendered him and his posterity incapable of achieving, because God never required strict merit from humanity anyway. Jesus did not live as a Pelagian,

working to earn God's favor; rather he lived faithfully as God's Son, fulfilling the vocation of those fallen sons, Adam and Israel. Jesus did not earn God's love for us; it was God's love that sent Jesus in the first place.

To lay this out more fully: In my colloquium article, I suggested that treating the "covenant of works" as a Pelagian system of self-salvation through strict merit is not a fully biblical way of viewing the relationship between the Father and Jesus. Jesus does not live as a Pelagian earning salvation for himself and/or his people in the gospels. He lives in full dependence on his Father (Jn. 5:30). Even on the cross, he offers himself up not in his own strength, but "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14).None of this detracts from the infinite worth of the Son's person and work (Rev. 5:12), as noted above in our discussion of Philippians 2:9, but the issue I was addressing was the nature of the Father/Son relationship as revealed in the life of the historical Jesus. The only time the Father turns away from him is on the cross, when he takes the curse of death for our sins (Ps. 22:1). But even then his cry is not one that points to self-salvation; rather, he cries out for his Father to rescue him from the pit, which he does on the third day (e.g., Ps. 22:20-21).[18] From birth through his death, Jesus lives as the consummate man of faith always trusting his Father's promises.[19]

Thus, I have no quarrel at all with the classic Augustinian model. I was actually *rejecting* the Pelagian model as a paradigm for understanding the work of unfallen Adam and Christ in order to *affirm* the Augustinian. But note that Augustine only used "merit" in the most improper of sense. He said that when God rewards our works, he is only crowning his own gifts; it is not a merited payment in any strict sense. My criticism of a particular form of covenant theology is not applicable to the view of the Report, assuming that the Report does not conceive of God's relationship with Adam or Christ in Pelagian terms (e.g., pure merit/earning). My point was that a strict covenant of works program inescapably endorses a kind of Pelagianism, for it means that Adam was called to a Pelagian form of self-salvation (he was to earn his glorification).

Because the Report's argument confuses merit and ability, it does not touch on the real issue here. With the Report I affirm that Adam was able to obey before the fall (WCF 19.1; cf. colloquium essay, page 120n10, 121ff). But this ability to obey was a gift, and therefore not potentially meritorious, strictly speaking. Jesus

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[18] Note that I assume Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross invokes the whole of Psalm 22, as a lens for understanding what is going on as the Son dies. See also Psalm 16:8-11, quoted by Peter and applied christologically in Acts 2. The text indicates a divine promise to raise up the true Davidic King.

[19] Barb Harvey has provided helpful thoughts on this whole issue, in response to the Report, with special regard to the views of Norman Shepherd: http://www.upsaid.com/scarecrow/index.php?action=viewcom&id=644.

as the New and Last Adam, conceived by and filled with the Holy Spirit, and fully loved and equipped by Father for his mission, also had ability to obey.[20] But as the life of Jesus unfolds for us in the gospel accounts, we find that Jesus lives as the true man of faith, relying on God at every point to sustain his life of obedience. No, this does not mean that his faith is identical to ours (cf. colloquium essay, page 138). But it is analogous to ours. Where there is faith, there is no boasting, and where there is no boasting, there is no merit.[21]

Now we turn to the Report's discussion of the covenant of works in relation to merit. At least in some places, the Report qualifies and nuances its view of merit in considerable ways. In the case of the covenant with Adam, the Report does not pit merit against grace. We have already seen in our discussion of Philippians 2:9 that the Report follows Vos in viewing Christ's "merit" as compatible with "grace" as well. Indeed, it may appear that the Report and the "FV" share a great deal of common ground on this question, despite some obvious confusion. The

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[20] This does not deny Jesus' ability to obey "in his own proper person," as the Report puts it. But the person of Jesus, as the Word incarnate, is inseparable from the persons of the Father and Spirit. "All of God does all that God does," as the saying goes. Peter Wallace includes some helpful thoughts on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus (from "Covenant and Inheritance, http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/inheritance.htm):

> As the second and last Adam, Jesus receives the gift of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. The Father gives his Son the gift that Adam did not have, so that Jesus will succeed where Adam failed. Whatever you say about the parallel between Adam and Christ, you cannot say that Christ succeeds *under the same conditions* as Adam. Adam was not given the Holy Spirit. There is an unequal parallelism between Adam and Christ. The gift of the Holy Spirit empowers Christ to fulfill his mission. If you are operating on the assumption that Adam and Christ are on an equal footing, then this gives Jesus an unfair advantage over Adam (and you could even ask, what had Jesus done to deserve this gift?).
>
> But if you are operating on a Trinitarian basis, it makes perfect sense. The eternal relationship between Father and Son is bound together by the Holy Spirit. Therefore no historical covenantal relationship can truly reflect the Father and the Son without the coming of the Holy Spirit. But Christ is not merely the last and second Adam. As our survey of Old Testament covenant-makings demonstrates, he is also the seed of Abraham, the true Israel, and the son of David. Therefore the gift of the Holy Spirit is the sign that Jesus is indeed the eschatological Son of God, in whom the Trinitarian nature of the covenant comes to its full and final expression.

Jesus carries out the Father's mission in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[21] To recap this important point: In my colloquium essay, I objected to versions of the covenant of works that put unfallen Adam and Jesus in the place of a Pelagian, attempting to earn God's favor. If the Report agrees that Adam was to live as a Pelagian, then it is committed to the very notion of strict merit it elsewhere rejects. If it says Adam was not a Pelagian, because while he had the ability to obey that obedience did not entail any strict merit, then it has no argument against my use of the analogy. The qualifications the Report puts on its understanding of "merit" make me think the Report actually agrees with me that there is no "Pelagian principle" in the Bible.

Report links merit to perfect obedience, but even then brings in significant qualifications. Some the Report's qualifications echo my own:

> Reformed doctrine does not affirm the idea of merit in any absolute or abstract sense. Perfect human obedience does not render God a debtor to man such that the Creator-creature distinction is destroyed. Some recent critics have spoken as if the concept of merit necessarily carries along with it these connotations, but this is not the case. Even medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) recognized that theologians should not use "merit" in this absolute or abstract sense.
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> In the Westminster Standards, the context in which one could speak of merit without these connotations was that of *the covenant*. WCF 7.1 explains: "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant." The relationship between God and Adam should be considered not ontologically or abstractly, but covenantally. Reformed theologians have been helpful in making these important distinctions. Francis Turretin (1623-87), for example, affirms that the perfect obedience of Adam would have been meritorious of the reward of life. But he explains that this merit "must not be understood properly and rigorously." Adam would have received this reward "not by condignity of work and from its intrinsic value," but instead "from the pact [i.e., covenant] and the liberal promise of God (according to which man had the right of demanding the reward to which God had of his own accord bound himself)…." In other words, Adam's obedience would have truly earned the reward of life, according to the terms of the covenant, as a matter of *justice*. A robust affirmation of God's justice in administering the covenant with Adam does not detract from the Creator-creature distinction.
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> One question that sometimes emerges in connection with this topic is the relationship of merit and grace. Some recent critics have repudiated the idea of merit because they believe that even a perfectly obedient human being could receive eternal life from God only by grace and through faith. This is a subject that requires careful handling. Semantic disputes ought not cloud the underlying substantive issues, as they sometimes seem to do. Many Reformed theologians have affirmed that if Adam had been perfectly obedient in the covenant of works, he would have received his reward both by merit (because his works would be the basis) and by grace (because God was not absolutely obligated to enter into such a covenantal arrangement in the first place).
>
> Certainly, "grace" could be defined in such a way as to indicate the goodness of God's condescending to enter into covenant with man. Likewise, "faith" could be defined in terms of the trust that Adam and Eve had before the Fall in God and his word. If "grace" and "faith" are defined in such a way, then they are compatible with the Reformed idea of merit. God had to condescend by way of covenant if man's obedience was to be reckoned meritorious (indeed, if Adam was to have any sort of relationship with God), and Adam's obedience would hardly be genuine apart from trust in God. In this sense, Adam's reward might be said to come both by law and works as well as by grace and faith.
>
> Nevertheless, in the light of biblical and confessional language, of the nature of current controversies, and of the need for theological precision on important points of doctrine, if one uses "grace" and "faith" in this way it must be done with care and not confused with

> their clear Pauline usage. When Paul speaks in the context of *justification*, that is, the irrevocable declaration that one is righteous before God, he invariably establishes the starkest imaginable *contrast* between law and works, on the one hand, and grace and faith, on the other. (Though this is not true when he speaks about *sanctification*, in which law and works, and grace and faith, are perfectly complementary, since the good works of the law flow out of the faith that comes by grace). In other words, when Paul poses the question of justification there are two alternatives, and they are mutually exclusive. Either one is declared righteous before God by works of the law, or one is declared righteous before God by grace through faith. The relevance of this for the present question should be clear. In the Pauline sense, if Adam before the fall was to be declared irrevocably righteous before God on the basis of his obedience to the law, then he would not have been declared such by grace through faith.

Four thoughts stand out in this lengthy quotation. Most, if not all, "FV" folks would have only mild disagreements with this section of the Report. Thus three of my four points will emphasize convergence between the Report and the "FV":

[a] The Report and the "FV" agree on the main question, namely, there is no possibility of strict or absolute merit. God's justice is covenantal; thus, merit is a matter of promissory right, not intrinsic right. "Merited" rewards are only "earned" in terms of covenantal promise; what we call "merit" has value only because God regards it as such. But this value is not arbitrary or capricious because the covenant itself is grounded in God's character. When we remember that even if Adam had obeyed, it would have only been because God endued him with such power (WCF 19.1), we see how tenuous the whole notion of merit becomes. The only question that divides the Report from the "FV" on this point is whether or not it is pastorally wise and expedient to speak of "merit" when we really mean a reward bestowed in accord with covenantal justice.[22]

[b] The Report and the "FV" agree that merit (or covenant justice) and grace are compatible, not antithetical. In other words, God's justice and favor are both operative in all covenantal administrations. We have already seen this in our previous discussion (and it is an inescapable theological conclusion once we closely examine the literary and theological structure of Philippians 2:5-11). This rules out the more extreme forms of the covenant of works, which view the relationship as exclusively merit-based. It is important to keep in mind that the Westminster Standards nowhere require us to treat Adam's obedience as meritorious; indeed to insist that Adam's obedience would have been

[22] While "covenantal merit" solves some problems, it creates a new set of issues. I am curious if the authors of the Report would say that, in terms of the new covenant, faith is meritorious. After all, faith fulfills the condition of the new covenant, just as Adam's obedience would have fulfilled the original covenant.

meritorious is to go beyond confessional requirements. The Confession is silent about Adamic merit.[23]

[c] The Report and the "FV" agree that terms such as "faith" and "grace" can be used analogically, and thus have applicability to unfallen Adam, Christ, and Christians. Furthermore, the Report asserts that merit does not preclude the operation of faith in a covenantal administration. Again, this is a point of agreement. But the Report, like "FV" theologians, insists that if we use terms such as "grace" and "faith" in a pre-fall context, we must use precision and care to distinguish that usage from the way they function in the new covenant. My colloquium essay, page 125, clearly distinguishes the pre-fall role, nature, and content of faith in the garden from the qualities of saving faith as exercised by redeemed sinners. The kind of covenant of works construction I was quarrelling with in that essay was obviously one that excluded faith and grace from the pre-fall situation, so my issues are not with the covenant of works as articulated by the Report. No "FV" theologian would deny that the shape of faith changes in different historical epochs, or that Christ's faith has all kinds of discontinuities with our faith. These are givens.

[d] The only area where the "FV" might diverge from this section of the Report is the Report's claim that "if Adam had been perfectly obedient in the covenant of works, he would have received his reward…by merit (because his works would be the basis)." This might be true in one sense: Adam's obedience would unquestionably be the means and way by which he would travel into eschatological glory, the promised reward. But what does it mean to call the obedience of Adam the *ground* or *basis* of the reward? After all, Adam's ability to obey was itself a gift of divine grace (WCF 19.1). If Adam had obeyed, he would not have claimed the promised reward as a matter of strict justice, but as pactional justice; as Turretin insisted, it would not have been a matter of intrinsic right, but promised gift, bestowed in accord with the necessary condition. Thus, at bottom, the ground of Adam's inheritance would still be the divine kindness

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[23] It will not work to simply project the Confession's reference to Christ's merit back into the Adamic situation. If anything, the fact that the Confession uses the language of merit to describe the value of Christ's work, while not using the same terminology to describe Adam's (possible, theoretical) obedience is very likely intended to draw our significance to the uniqueness of Christ's work. Consider Tim Gallant's suggestion in "Monocovenantalism? Multiple covenants, no Adamic merit," available at http://www.biblicalstudiescenter.org/covenant/monocovenantalism.htm:

> A further reason why we ought to adopt a simple demerit>merit scheme, rather than a (merit)>demerit>merit scheme is this: Christ is the God-man. Adam was not. While the creature is always at the disposal of the Creator; Christ freely came to win redemption for us of His own will and power. Thus the difference in nature between Adam and Christ is sufficient reason to suggest that while the former could never have merited anything, the latter could.

which endowed him with the gifts that made his obedience possible. This is important because it seems that if the Report is correct to ground Adam's reward in his own works, strictly speaking, Adam would not have had to thank and glorify God for his exaltation. In other words, in the very act of being promoted to a higher state of glory, Adam could abandon the very essence of what it means to live as God's image bearer (cf. Rom. 1:18ff, where thanking are glorifying God are considered the essence of true humanness). He could openly forsake what it means to be truly human even as he entered into humanity's purposed destiny.[24] The solution of Tim Gallant is much better. Gallant does not use the term "merit" to describe Adam's obedience for reasons that become clear as his argument unfolds, and he shows why it is mistaken to call Adam's obedience the "ground" or "basis" of his promised inheritance:

> It must first be made clear that I do not deny that perfect obedience was a condition of the Adamic covenant. This, however, must be clarified. It is possible to think of this condition in two distinct ways.
>
> First, such perfect obedience may be identified as a *causative* condition. This is the case under the meritorious construction of the covenant of works: precisely because and on the basis of his perfect obedience, Adam would have merited eternal life (or however the sundry proponents describe the reward). On this view, Adam's perfect obedience functions identically as Christ's perfect obedience which He rendered for us. Christ merited the reward that Adam was supposed to merit. This parallelism is drawn from Romans 5, where Adam's offense is contrasted to Christ's righteous act.
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> But there is another sort of condition. Perfect obedience may simply be identified as a *necessary* condition of the Adamic covenant. On this view, Adam would not have gained the promised blessing apart from perfect obedience - but that perfect obedience would not have been the ground of the inheritance. (Note: by this it is clear that I do not see Adam's perfect obedience as non-meritorious merely in the sense that there is disproportionality between the work and the reward. To the contrary, the perfect obedience is simply not the ground of the reward at all.)
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> We already are familiar with such categories under the covenant of grace. As Protestants, we believe that salvation is upon the ground of Christ's perfect obedience (causative condition). Yet we also maintain different sorts of conditionality with reference to ourselves. For example, faith is the instrumental condition whereby that salvation is applied to us. And further, holiness is a necessary condition of ultimate salvation ("without holiness no man shall see the Lord," Heb 12.14).

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[24] Why does the Report assume that Adam's glorification (had he obeyed) *must* have had a meritorious cause? Remember, as Anthony Lane has pointed out, Calvin never spoke of a meritorious cause of salvation, even as he discussed other types of soteric causality. Why assume that merit must be part of the system? It is true to say that the covenantal arrangement must be grounded in the whole being and character of God, and thus must include both love and justice. But we have already seen that strict merit is not necessarily a corollary of justice. Justice is contextualized by the relationship of sonship.

There is a further biblical analogy which can be drawn. As we know, Israel was called to live under the law (Torah). It was not optional; he who rejected the law was cut off from God's people. Yet, as Paul makes very clear, the inheritance given to Christ was never promised to come on the basis of (or even under the terms of) the law (Gal 3.15-18). Thus, while holding fast to the law was the way which Israel needed to walk in, it was not the ground of the promised inheritance. Glorification is not promised to works. Torah was thus simply the *modus vivendi* (determined way of life) under which Israel needed to live. Given the accepted biblical analogy between the Adamic and Mosaic covenants, we can say something similar with regard to the former as well. Perfect obedience under the administration in which he lived was the necessary way of life for Adam - but it was not the ground for receiving his inheritance.

In truth, the fall is not primarily about Adam's defection from "perfect obedience" as much as it is about a departure from faith. Although we have acknowledged that perfect obedience was necessary, the Genesis text simply does not draw attention to the issue; the only obedience-issue that is highlighted has to do with the forbidden tree. And that tree was not primarily about present responsibilities of perfect obedience; it was about the temporary abeyance of future glory. The tree is above all a test of faith.

The problem in Genesis 3 is not that Adam and Eve desired to know good and evil - as the biblical language elsewhere indicates, such knowledge is a function of maturity, and is indeed properly desirable. Adam and Eve recognized that although their situation was good, it was not yet "complete"; there was more to come. Another way of saying this is that eschatology is built into original creation; there is an implicit promise of future glorification from the beginning…

Likewise, while the goal of gaining knowledge of good and evil was not an evil goal, eating of the tree while unauthorized to do so was an attempt to inherit the promise through the flesh; awaiting God's own time required casting oneself upon God in faith that He is good and wise, and would give what is good in His own time and His own way.

That legitimate recognition of greater glory to be had is precisely why the Satanic temptation resonated with Adam and Eve. The fundamental problem is that they failed to trust God's own goodness and faithfulness. They sought glorification through their own activity, rather than trusting in God Himself to give them that which they lacked…

What all of this underscores is that perfect obedience, while necessary, was not the means by which Adam and Eve would have been glorified. Certainly, the Genesis text never presents the situation in that light, and it would seem that biblical commentary on the event in later Scripture does not present it so either. Once more: glorification is not promised to works.[25]

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[25] From Gallant's "Monocovenantalism? Multiple covenants, no Adamic merit," available at http://www.biblicalstudiescenter.org/covenant/monocovenantalism.htm. Gallant's discussion of the merit of Christ is instructive as well. He shows a way to affirm Christ's merit without reference to Adamic merit: the merit of Christ's obedience arises precisely in face of Adam's *demerit*. He explains:

The challenge which immediately arises against this view is that if Christ's work is meritorious in the sense that His perfect obedience is the ground of our eternal reward, then perfect obedience must have been the causative ground of Adam's reward as well. Again, from Romans 5: it is asserted that if Adam's offense stands in contrastive parallel, this must mean that Adam was called to the same meritorious work that Christ was called to.

My response, however, is that strictly speaking, the parallel is not between Adam's theoretical merit and the merit of Christ, but rather between Adam's real demerit and the merit of Christ. This difference is significant.

We must not forget what Reformed theology recognized from the first: namely, that Adam was created in true righteousness and holiness. In connection with both Adam and Christ, we must therefore distinguish between two things: the righteousness of original purity, and the glorification of which Adam fell short when he sinned.

When we construe the Adamic covenant apart from a meritorious scheme whereby Adam would have been justified on the basis of his perfect works, we have still left room for a scheme of demerit. Think of a son who is promised an inheritance when he arrives at maturity. He cannot earn that inheritance. It is something that is freely promised and given to him by his father. Thus there is no merit involved. However, this does not preclude the possibility of demerit - a fundamental betrayal of loyalty to his father, such that his father disinherits him. Thus the son's loyalty to his father is a necessary condition to his reception of the inheritance. He will not inherit on the basis of that loyalty, but he will not inherit without that loyalty either.

So it was with Adam. He could not have merited the eschatological blessing (for convenience, let us call this "glorification"). But he was given one sacramental test of loyalty: do not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eating of that tree would constitute a fundamental breach of loyalty against God - in short, apostasy. In this way, with his transgression, Adam lost not only the inheritance that he would have ultimately received (glorification), he lost what he already had (original righteousness; i.e. a received standing of sonship to God).

Thus, when we come to the work of Christ, we need to consider these two distinct issues, both of which of necessity find their definitive solution accomplished in the one Christ-event. Christ's life, death and resurrection win for us not merely Adam's original righteousness, but our glorification. By the nature of the case, these two issues had to be brought together in our Deliverer. Why? One reason is this: Adam had lost not merely his judicial standing; he had corrupted himself, and the only way to lift man finally and completely out of corruption is through glorification.

Second, and perhaps more fundamentally: the self-giving to death is the climactic transition with reference to both issues before us. Christ's death is propitiatory, and thus solves the problem of wrath related to judicial standing. But the Righteous One cannot be left there at death, either. He is raised because of our justification (Rom 4.25); God must vindicate Him. This is where glorification meets justification. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was the tree of death. By partaking of the tree while it was forbidden, that death was a judgment upon man's sin. But in Christ's case, He partakes of the tree out of

All that is to say that while perfect obedience was necessary on Adam's part, it would never have been the ground of his exaltation in any strict sense. In every age of history, perfect obedience is a necessary condition to salvation/glorification, but the ground of that salvation/glorification is the divine promise. It would be interesting to see the authors of the Report interact with these arguments.

So what have we found in this essay? The Report and the "FV" are very close in terms of their understanding of the covenant of works. The Report has tended to overlook these affinities, but they are indeed present. Of course, there are some substantial areas of difference as well (e.g., whether Adam's obedience could have served as the meritorious *ground* of his exaltation). There are also some differences in preferred terminology (e.g., "covenant of works," "merit"). But there is also broad and deep commonality (e.g., presence of faith and grace in the pre-fall covenant administration; the function of "therefore" and *echarisato* in Philippians, 2:9; etc.). This commonality is obscured by the way the Report frames the issues. In some cases, the Report assumes that the "FV" is teaching something it does not. In other cases, the Report simply does not engage the conversation with the "FV" over the core issues.

In light of these broad areas of agreement, it would be a shame for the OPC to put its imprimatur on a document that causes unnecessary division and conflict in the church. Joel Garver addressed this issue in a recent blog post:

> Part of the question, I guess, is whether or not the church will be able exercise its proper roles (discernment, doctrine, mission, etc.) in a positive way when matters are highly politicized, mistrust is left unchecked, factions are permitted to thrive, and so on. The danger is for congregations and denominations to become inwardly focused, for broader catholicity to be neglected, for miscommunication to become codified as truth, for boundaries to be drawn in ways that exclude more than is necessary, and, in the midst of all of this, the church and particular leaders to send the wrong message to the world, to lose the trust of their own people, and to undermine their own moral authority.[26]

> command, as His "one act of obedience" (Rom 5.18-19). And thus the death cannot ultimately be judgment for Him; it must result in glorification.
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> Seen in this light, then, there is no difficulty whatsoever in simultaneously denying that Adam could ever have merited anything, while maintaining that Christ did indeed merit life on our behalf. For Christ's merit does not come in place of Adam's (potential) merit, but in place of his demerit. (Christ's glorification is also "for us," but by the nature of the case, it is not meritorious, since after all it is not His work, but is given to Him.)

[26] See Garver's website at http://www.lasalle.edu/~garver/web2printer4.php?img=0&lnk=0&page=http://sacradoctrina.blogspot.com/2006/06/thoughts-on-presbyterians-together.html. Of course, Garver was not talking about the OPC Report itself, but current Presbyterian controversies more generally. Nevertheless, his words are apropos in the case of the Report in my opinion.

This is exactly correct. Given the confusion evident in the Report, it would be a shame for the Report to be used in a way that would harden and concretize misunderstandings, erroneous interpretations, and divisions within the church. The peace and purity of the church would be better served by further discussion and co-laboring in the Scriptures to better to understand the issues before sharp lines are drawn. Everyone admits these are some of the most difficult and mysterious issues in all of theology; surely they are worthy of a better discussion than we have given them so far.