

History of the Reformation

Present Day Threats to the Gospel

- Five Threats to the Gospel
 1. The New Perspective on Paul
 2. Federal Vision
 - Auburn Avenue Theology
 3. The Word of Faith Movement
 - The Health and Wealth Gospel
 4. Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT)
 5. Messianic Judaism
 - 6.
- New Perspective on Paul
 - The New Perspective on Paul (NPP) is a way of understanding Paul and the Judaism of his day differently from the way the Reformers did, and, in so doing, it changes the definition of justification by faith.
 - The classic definition of justification
 - “an act of God’s free grace wherein he pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.”
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)
- NPP Teachings
 1. The Judaism of Paul’s day was not a religion of works-righteousness that taught salvation by merit.
 - Judaism was a religion of grace, just like Christianity
 2. Paul’s argument with the Judaizers in Galatians was not about a “works-righteousness” view of salvation against the Christian view of salvation by grace.
 3. Paul’s concern was for the status of the Gentiles in the church.
 - This was his primary concern in the language of justification
 4. Justification is concerned with who is part of the covenant community rather than how a person stands before God
- Three Main Teachers of NPP
 1. **E. P. Sanders**, retired 2005 from Duke University, wrote *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977, which purported to show that the Judaism of Paul’s time (called **Second Temple Judaism**) was a religion of grace, not works, and Paul did not understand this and is sometimes incoherent.
 2. **James D. G. Dunn** of Durham University, England, coined the term, “the New Perspective,” and incorporated into his commentary on Romans that Augustine and Luther had misread Paul. He agreed with Sanders on Judaism.
 - Augustine and Luther saw that Paul was combatting works righteousness, offering grace instead and combatting enemies parallel to their own
 - Augustine – Pelagius
 - Luther – RCC
 - “we have the same kind of enemies”
 3. **N. T. Wright**, now retired Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, is a prolific writer. His book, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, denies the definition of justification alone.
 - “Justification has to do with how you know you’re a member of God’s people.”
 - Justification = included in God’s covenant with His people
 - Imputation is a “pious fiction” and is not to be found in Scripture;
 - the righteousness of Christ is non-transferable. *No one receives the righteousness of Christ.*
 - Instead, righteousness for Paul means “covenant membership.”
 - When God declares us to be “righteous,” Wright means that we are regarded as part of the people of God.
 - To be sure, Wright believes in a bodily resurrected, living, reigning Lord
 - But he errs on Justification

- 5 Main Points of NPP
 1. The Reformed tradition of interpreting Paul is wrong.
 - The opposition between salvation by God’s action or by human action is not what Paul intended.
 2. Judaism did not teach that obedience to the law is the way of salvation.
 - What about “by works of the Law shall no man be justified”?
 - Gal 2:16, 3:11, Rom 3:20
 - Instead it taught that Israel was elected by God, in the covenant from birth, circumcized
 - Law observance was not a means of getting in the covenant, but of staying in.
 3. As a minority group, the Jews were concerned to keep their cultural identity separate from the Gentile world.
 - They did this through circumcision, dietary laws, observance of the Sabbath, and avoidance of idolatry. Dunn says these things are what Paul means by “works of the law.”
 - They are identity markers to show who is in the covenant, but Paul is arguing that Gentiles are declared to be in the covenant by faith in Christ, apart from doing these things.
 4. What Paul is criticizing is Jewish exclusivity; he asserts a broad salvation that includes Gentiles. Faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah is the new identity marker.
 5. Biblical interpreters (Reformers) misread the Bible by imposing on text their own beliefs or historical situations. There is need for exegesis without presuppositions.
- Social Concerns of Proponents
 - The consequences of the Reformation position
 - Overemphasis on the sin of the individual, the wrath of God, etc.
 - Dr. Ligon Duncan (currently Chancellor of RTS) – “the minute you say that justification is not about your relationship with God, its about relationship with the covenant community, you’ve already diminished sin. Unavoidable and necessarily you’ve diminished the issue of sin, and justification as the means of relief of the condemnation of sin”
 - Anti-Semitism
 - NPP – If we can honor the Judaism of Paul’s day, we will be able to lower the hostility toward Jews of today
 - Ecumenism
 - NPP can be a vehicle of bringing together Roman Catholics and Protestants around the central dividing issue
 - Social dimension of Paul’s teaching
 - After all, we’re all one in Christ
- Problems with NPP
 - It doesn’t represent Judaism accurately.
 - While there were Jewish scholars which did emphasize grace, there were many more who did emphasize salvation by works
 - Parable of Pharisee and Publican
 - Definition of justification is wrong.
 - Wright’s definition of justification (*dikaiosis, dikaiou*) is unique to him and found in no Greek lexicon
 - The gospel is more than “Jesus is Lord and Messiah. The atoning work of the cross is important.
 - While Protestants agree with Catholics on the 1st ecumenical councils, those creeds don’t tell you how to be saved
 - “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3)
 - NPP – no need for Christ’s vicarious, atonement which is a propitiation for sins, a penal substitution involving the imputation of my guilt to Christ

- Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue Theology
 - In January 2002, Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, a PCA in Monroe, Louisiana, hosted a pastors' conference titled *The Federal Vision: An Examination of Reformed Covenantalism*.
 - The speakers were Douglas Wilson, John Barach, Steve Wilkins, and Steve Schlissel
 - In June, the RPCUS issued a public call for repentance by the four speakers for sacerdotalism and the redefinition of doctrines.
 - Sacerdotalism – idea that sacraments work objectively. The sacrament has a power in itself (Baptism forgives sins, Communion bestows grace (*ex opera operando*)). The priest dispenses an objective power/effect.
 - Federal Vision Roots
 - The movement has its roots in the teaching of Norman Shepherd at Westminster Seminary in 1974. He was dismissed in 1981.
 - He defined justifying faith as “faith and works,” first of all, then changed it to “faithfulness.”
 - He taught that in baptism, the infant not only enters the covenant, he is really united to Christ.
 - That child can “lose his salvation”, for, remaining in Christ depends on faithfulness
 - Federal (Covenantal) Vision appears to be “Covenant Theology on steroids”
 - Just as in the nation of Israel, individual covenant members can sin and be lost, so
 - In the visible church actual covenant members can be saved or lost
- Federal Vision Teachings
 1. In baptism, every person receives all the benefits of Christ (election, union with Christ, justification, adoption) so as to be regarded as a Christian.
 2. The covenant is regarded as “objective,” like a marriage covenant, and those in it are regarded as elect because they are in union with the Elect One.
 3. All covenant children may receive the Lord’s Supper (e.g. paedocommunion)
 4. These baptized people need to persevere in faithfulness in order to secure final election.
 5. The covenant is regarded as gracious, yet one has to co-operate with grace and do one’s part.
 6. If the Christian perseveres, he will receive the final phase of justification at the last day.
 7. Union with Christ in his resurrected life is how we are justified, rather than having his righteousness imputed to us.
 8. Most Reformed churches—the PCA, the OPC, and the RPCUS—have rejected the Federal Vision and declined association with them. See handout from the PCA study.
 9. Douglas Wilson has organized an association of FV pastors called the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches. (CREC)
- Similarities of NPP and FV
 1. Points of agreement (per Doug Wilson)
 - Justification by faith was present in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.
 - Faith and works are not opposed to one another in the Bible. Faith was always present, even in the Old Testament. The Jews were not trying to earn anything by works.
 - Law and grace are *not* opposed to one another, or that the Old Testament was mostly law and the New Testament was mostly grace.
 2. Points of disagreement
 - Paul's primary focus was *not* individual salvation, but corporate salvation.
 - Judaism was not a religion based on salvation by works or merit.
 - Judaism satisfied Paul's burden of guilt; rather than what the Old Perspective thought, that Judaism could not ease Paul's conscience.
- Word-Faith Teachings
 1. “**Revelation knowledge**” reveals the reality of the spiritual realm, the “real world.”
 2. “Salvation is knowledge,” which connects the movement to 1st century Gnosticism.

3. Man is sovereign, a “little god,” because he partakes of the divine nature. He can control his circumstances by knowledge, the force of faith, visualization, and confessing verbally.
 4. God and the universe are both governed by spiritual law.
 5. Faith is a spiritual force to control and direct metaphysical laws.
 - Health and wealth are God’s plan for you
 6. Jesus took on the nature of Satan in his death and was the first man to be born again.
- Evangelicals and Catholics Together
 - In March 1994, a group of 20 leading Evangelicals and 20 leading Roman Catholics produced a document called *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in The Third Millennium*.
 - The two main instigators were
 - Richard John Neuhaus, a former Lutheran pastor who is now a Roman Catholic priest, and
 - Charles (Chuck) Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship and the husband of a Roman Catholic.
 - Noteworthy Issues
 1. It had well-known Evangelical signers, including Bill Bright, Pat Robertson, and (to the surprise of many) J.I. Packer.
 2. The motivation was to put forth a united front on moral issues within the broad culture of secularism and atheism.
 3. They said that Evangelicals and Catholics are one in Christ and regarded each other as Christians.
 4. They affirmed together “We are justified by grace through faith because of Christ.” They said that “living faith is active in love,” a Catholic code phrase for works-righteousness.
 5. They argued against either of the two groups proselytizing from the other group, discouraging the evangelization of Catholics.
 6. Other documents have been signed and issued under ECT
 - November, 1997: *The Gift of Salvation*
 - September, 2002: *Your Word is Truth*
 - March, 2003: *The Communion of Saints*
 - March, 2005: *The Call to Holiness*
 7. For the past decade, theologians (on both sides) continue to dialogue with each other while standing against the tide of secular humanism/atheism of our day
 - However it is clear that the doctrinal presuppositions, spiritual assumptions, and overall theological frameworks preclude ever really “coming together”
 - Messianic Judaism
 - A movement within Judaism in which Jesus is recognized as Yeshua Ha Mashiach within the parameters of Jewish community and tradition.
 - A movement appealing to those who wish to maintain Jewish traditions developed over 1,000’s of years
 - Synagogues
 - Torah centered worship and traditions
 - Ceremonies, festivals, feast days
 - Paul – “I am a son of a Pharisee”, “I am a Jew”, “a Hebrew of the Hebrews”
 - Problem – “I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua my Lord”
 - Problem – by focusing on the observance of the Old Covenant Law, Torah becomes central, rather than the Son of God
 - Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law
 - We are no longer under law but under Grace

- While Jesus was the Messiah, He was more than a Rabbi who satisfied Torah
 - Jesus was the Lawgiver
 - “we are a letter of Christ, . . ., not written by the Spirit, not on tablets of stone but on the heart” 2 Cor 3:3
- Though Paul was free to “shave his head to satisfy a vow”
 - The message of his teaching was the gospel
 - “preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ”
- Summary
 - We must handle the Gospel of Jesus Christ with care
 - Jesus came into the world to save sinners (not communities)
 - We are saved (justified) by grace (alone) through faith (alone) in Christ (alone)
 - We are justified by faith and then exhorted to do good works
 - We are saved through the Gospel
 - We continue to live by the Gospel
 - We will be saved by the Gospel
 - Good works are essential in the lives of believers
 - We are predestined to do good works (Eph 1:4)
 - We were created for good works which God prepared beforehand (Eph 2:10)
 - Christ died that we might be zealous for good works (Tit 2:4)
 - Good works give evidence that our faith is saving faith (1 Cor 13:1-3, James 2:18)
 - We will be judged by our works (2 Cor 5:10)
 - **But we must never suggest that we are saved/justified by anything other than the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, where He pays the penalty for my sins and credits His righteousness to me.**