

The Auburn Avenue Theology: A Biblical Critique

[Brian Schwertley](#)

Chapter 1: Rejection of Justification by Faith Alone

Introduction

In the conservative Reformed world there has been a controversy raging since 2002 due to the introduction of a new theological paradigm called the “Auburn Avenue theology,” the “federal vision,” the “Monroe doctrine,” or, “the objectivity of the covenant.”¹ On one side of the debate are people who argue that this new teaching is a breath of fresh air, a clarifying and reforming doctrine, another legitimate stream of Reformed covenantal thought. On the other side are an increasing number of pastors, elders and scholars who are warning people that this new doctrine is dangerous and heretical. In the middle is a large group of people who are not sure what they think because: a) they have not had time to study the issues; b) the new teachings are

¹ Although the exact origins of the doctrines peculiar to the Auburn Avenue system are not known, the theological influences behind their thoughts are not hard to ascertain. The similarities with the “covenant nomism” of Norman Shepherd are unmistakable. It has also much in common with “The New Perspective on Paul.” Whether or not Shepherd borrowed heavily from the neo-legalism of the “New Perspective” writers or came up with his heretical views independently, this author is unaware. It is very likely, however, that Shepherd borrowed heavily from the “New Perspective” academics. There also appears to be an influence from the “dark side” of the Christian reconstruction movement. Writers such as James Jordan are dedicated to medieval, high-church concepts of ecclesiology, the sacraments and worship. The Auburn Avenue theologians’ unique view of the ontological trinity as covenant relationship, the almost Romanist concept of the church, the view of the sacraments not as means of grace but as automatic conveyers of grace, etc., has Jordan’s ink prints all over it. People who are not directly responsible for the new heresy but who, because of gross deficiencies in their own teachings, nevertheless contributed to its easy assimilation, are Greg Bahnsen and R. J. Rushdoony. Both men were wrong on the covenant of works and both were sloppy at times on justification. Bahnsen made statements on justification and faith that mirror Shepherd, his professor at Westminster. (Greg Bahnsen explicitly endorsed Norman Shepherd on audio lecture tape GB#178, 1986 and GB#449b, 1986. You can also read of his endorsement of Shepherd’s view in Randy Booth’s article “Caution and Respect in Controversy.” R. J. Rushdoony supported Shepherd’s view of justification by publishing Joseph Braswell’s essay, “Lord of Life: The Confession of Lordship and Saving Faith” in the 1990-1991 edition of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, vol. 13, no 1.) Many of the men promoting this heresy were notable theologians (e.g., Andrew Sandlin, Randy Booth, James Jordan, Steve Wilkins, Steve Schlissel, Roger Wagner, etc.). This present writer personally believes, however, that both Bahnsen and Rushdoony would oppose the conclusions of this new theology. Both Rushdoony and Bahnsen strongly rejected the interpretive maximalism, creative exegesis and speculative theology of James Jordan. The bottom line is that the Auburn Avenue theology is just another theological fad invented by modernists and embraced by men who are not satisfied with the simplicity of the gospel and pure biblical worship. E. P. Sanders and James D. G. Dunn are both modernists who accept critical, skeptical (i.e., *unbelieving*) views of New Testament authorship. They both engage in creative, sloppy exegesis of important passages; impose their paradigm on clear passages that explicitly contradict their viewpoint; and ignore historical and biblical evidence that refutes their presuppositions. N. T. Wright is much more evangelical in his approach to Scripture. However, his central presupposition or point of departure in theology and exegesis involves the heretical “covenant nomism” of E. P. Sanders. Norman Shepherd and the Auburn Avenue theologians have abandoned historic Protestantism and Reformed orthodoxy for heretical concepts developed by Christian liberals.

difficult to understand; c) the people who are advocating these new doctrines are popular Reformed writers and speakers known for being defenders of orthodoxy in the past; d) the terminology used in the new theology is often ambiguous and confusing. This essay is directed to the large group of people in the middle who might say, “What’s the big deal, can’t we all just get along?”

The purpose of this study will be to examine the very heart of Christianity, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as it relates to the Auburn Avenue teaching. The question that we want to answer is: Does the new Monroe doctrine contradict the reformation teaching of *sole fide* or justification by faith alone? If they have adopted a new method of justification, what is it and how do they arrive at their new teaching? How can we defend the reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone against this new doctrine? What are the ramifications or the applications? Where does it lead? These questions are very important because this new teaching is spreading in a number of “conservative” Reformed and Presbyterian denominations (e.g., the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America) and will cause great harm to the church if not stopped.

The Auburn Avenue doctrine of justification is a radical departure from Protestantism, all the Reformed symbols, the teaching of all the Reformers and all of the notable Reformed theologians. According to the Monroe doctrine, people are saved by a faith/works combination. They would argue that works or merit play no role whatsoever as the ground of justification but their definition of faith is inclusive of works (e.g., faith equals faithful obedience, covenant faithfulness, and the works of faith). As we examine how they arrive at their doctrine of justification, their teaching on this topic will come into focus. To people who are untrained in theology or hermeneutics their teachings are very confusing and easily misunderstood.

The Theological Path to Heresy

The theological path to a new Romanizing doctrine of justification by the Auburn Avenue theologians is as follows:

(1) The proponents of the Monroe doctrine begin their journey with a subtle redefinition of the word “covenant.” Rather than properly describing the covenant as an *agreement* that leads to a relationship, the Monroe theologians redefine covenant as a *relationship* itself.² How do the Auburn Avenue theologians arrive at this novel definition of the covenant? Do they carefully exegete a number of passages of Scripture which deal specifically with covenant or covenanting? No. They offer no proof texts, specific sections of Scripture or even logical deductions from the Bible but hang everything on a totally speculative theory regarding the relationship between the persons of the godhead in the ontological trinity. They cite what they call the “Rahner rule” (from theologian Karl Rahner) which is: “The economic Trinity reveals the ontological Trinity.”³ This redefinition of covenant probably originated with James Jordan’s *The Law of the Covenant*

² For example, in his lecture “What Does God Require?” Steve Schlissel says, “A covenant is a relationship.” Also, Doug Wilson writes, “A covenant is a relationship between two parties...a relation between persons” (*Credenda/Agenda*, Vol. 15, No. 1).

³ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Danceel (New York: Crossroad, [1970] 1997) as quoted by Richard Phillips, *Covenant Confusion: Seminar Address for the Philadelphia Conference on Reformation Theology* (March-April 2004). Rahner is popular with Auburn Avenue theologians (e.g., Ralph Smith, *Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology* [2003]).

published in 1984.⁴ Although it is certainly true that we can learn things about God from His work in redemptive history (Jehovah is faithful, loving, hates sin, etc.) and there are even certain actions of the economic trinity that reflect to a degree the ontological trinity (e.g., The Son is eternally begotten of the Father/The Father sends the Son into the world. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son/The Holy Spirit is poured out upon the church from the exalted Christ in heaven), these connections between the being of God, the Trinity and God's work in history are based on a careful exegesis of Scripture, not speculation. It is one thing to learn about the inter-trinitarian relations by examining passages that deal specifically with this topic and quite another to form a doctrine about the inter-trinitarian relations based on a loose analogy with historical events that Scripture does not apply to the ontological trinity. James Jordan and his followers have a historical pattern of finding some grandiose, overarching principle from a very creative-speculative interpretation of Scripture and then using that principle as a springboard for new ways of defining worship and theology.⁵

Does the Bible teach that covenant is a relationship? No, it does not. According to Scripture a covenant is an *agreement* between two or more parties that *establishes* some type of relationship. There are political covenants or treaties where nations bind themselves together. There are marriage covenants where a husband and wife agree (i.e., promise) to unite for life. There are business transactions where various parties agree to mutually binding conditions. All covenants presuppose an *agreement* with certain promises, stipulations, responsibilities and sanctions. The important thing to note at this point is that a covenant is not a relationship but is a means by which parties enter into a relationship. "The result of a covenant commitment is the establishment of a relationship 'in conjunction with,' or 'between' people."⁶ The *Shorter*

⁴ Jordan writes, "The inter-personal relationships among the Persons of the Trinity constitute a covenantal bond which involves Persons and a structure....The covenant is a personal-structural bond which joins the three Persons of God in a community of life, and in which man was created to participate." (James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21-23* [Tyler, TX: Institute For Christian Economics, 1984], 4-5)

⁵ Jordan's fertile imagination and love of human tradition in worship can be observed in his *Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1986). He writes, "Biblical teaching as a whole is quite favorable to Christmas as an annual ecclesiastical festival.... As I study Scripture, I find that Lutheran and Anglican churches are more biblical in their worship [than Baptist and Reformed], despite some problems" (210). "What I am saying is that the custom [of crossing oneself] is not unscriptural, and that the conservative church at large should give it some thought" (212). "This [the Scripture reading and sermon] is all designed to lead us to the second act of the sacrifice: the Offertory. The Offertory is not a 'collection,' but the act of self-immolation....Thus, the offering plates are brought down front to the minister, who holds them up before God ('heave offering') and gives them to Him" (27). "The whole-personal priesthood of all believers means not only congregational participation (which requires prayer books), but also holistic 'doing.' It means singing, falling down, kneeling, dancing, clapping, processions, and so forth" (32). "By requiring knowledge before communion, the church cut its children off from the Table.... If we are to have reformation, we must reject this residuum of Gnosticism and return to an understanding that the act of the eucharist precedes the interpretation of it" (38). Jordan argues from "large, over-arching principles of worship" (209) and thus often engages in speculative, creative application. If one disagrees with Jordan's "high church" views he is arbitrarily labeled (with absolutely no proof whatsoever) as Neo-platonic, Nestorian, Gnostic, Nominalistic, Stoic, etc.

⁶ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 6. "The closeness of relationship between oath and covenant emphasizes that a covenant in its essence is a bond. By the covenant, persons become committed to one another.... An interpersonal commitment which may be guaranteed has come into effect by way of the covenantal bond" (ibid, 7). Richard D. Phillips has written an excellent biblical analysis of the Auburn Avenue's peculiar understanding of the trinity and covenant. He writes, "Apart from its intended recasting of covenant theology, Smith's [Ralph Smith has written two books on the trinity for Canon Press, the publishing arm of Doug Wilson's church] teaching does grave damage to the doctrine of the Trinity. Smith, following James Jordan, argues that the form of unity within the Trinity is covenant. This is a serious departure from

Catechism says that God did enter into a covenant of grace to bring the elect “into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer” (Q. 20). John Murray succinctly sets forth the historic Reformed definition of covenant. He writes,

From the beginning and throughout the development of covenant theology, covenant has been defined as a contract, or compact, or agreement between parties. From the earliest Reformed treatise on the subject, that of Henry Bullinger (*De Testamento seu Dei Unico et Aeterno Brevis Expositi*, 1534), through the classic period of formulation, and continuing to recent times this concept has exercised a great influence upon the exposition of God’s covenant relations with men. Hence, in the words of Zachary Ursinus, God’s covenant is a “mutual promise and agreement, between God and men, in which God gives assurance to men that he will be merciful to them.... And, on the other side, men bind themselves to God in this covenant that they will exercise repentance and faith...and render such obedience as will be acceptable to him” (Eng. Tr., G. W. Williard, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Grand Rapids, 1954, 97). And Charles Hodge, three centuries later, insisted that since covenant “when used of transactions between man and man means a mutual compact” we must give it the same sense “when used of transactions between God and man.” (*Systematic Theology*, II, 354)⁷

The Auburn Avenue theologian’s definition of covenant as relationship and not as a verbal and/or written agreement is important to note because their new definition serves as a philosophical platform to deny and redefine other very important doctrines. For example, they reject the covenant of works with Adam because Adam was already in relationship, a relationship of grace. Therefore, they argue that the covenant of grace applies to Adam before the fall. (This view will receive further analysis below.) They argue that baptism brings everyone into relationship with God. Therefore, everyone baptized is saved and the crucial issue for justification will be the maintenance of this relationship by faithfulness to the covenant.

(2) The next crucial step in the Auburn Avenue theologians’ redefinition and rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith alone is their rejection of the covenant of works. The covenant of works is defined by the Westminster Confession as follows: “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (7:2). According to confessional Reformed thought, if Adam had obeyed the covenant of works, he would have (according to the

orthodox Trinitarian theology, falling into a tacit tri-theism. Instead of the classic view that the Trinity is three persons united in one being, this view argues that the Trinity is three divine persons united by a social bond. Smith presents his final conclusion in strikingly tri-theistic terms: ‘God is three persons united in covenantal love.’”

“As Smith proceeds from this thesis, he seems to be aware of the tri-theistic leanings of his argument. Thus he tires to temper it by advancing perichoresis, that is, mutual indwelling, as the basis of Trinitarian union—in which case there is no need for covenant as the basis of union. Later still, he tries to distinguish covenantal union from ontological union, noting vaguely that ‘in God covenant and ontology intersect or share common ground.’ But the damage is done: if the three divine persons of the Trinity have an ontological union of essence—one based on a shared being and mutual indwelling—then it is hard to see how one being is joined together by covenant, unless we totally redefine the meaning of the word *covenant*, which is the whole point of Smith’s exercise.”

“The only way for Smith to sustain any idea of an inner-Trinitarian covenant is simply to assume a different definition for covenant. Indeed, here is the function of Smith’s argument, to redefine covenant so that it no longer is understood to mean a pact or agreement but simply as a form of relationship and life. Covenant is no longer the way God brings us into a saving relationship, but it is that to which God saves us, defined vaguely as a union in love” (*Covenant Confusion*, 2004).

⁷ John Murray, “Covenant Theology” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:216-217.

gracious promises set before him by God) merited or earned the title to eternal life. Adam had to *do something* to attain glorified life. He had to *perfectly obey* God for a fixed period of probation.

A proper understanding of the covenant of works is very important in Reformed theology because it informs us about what is necessary for the salvation of the elect after the fall of Adam. The first Adam failed to attain glorified life because he did *not* perfectly and perpetually obey God. But, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the head of the covenant of grace, not only eliminated the guilt and liability of punishment that we all deserve for sin by His sacrificial death; but, He also perfectly and perpetually obeyed God. What Adam (and each of us) miserably failed to do, Christ did as our substitute. Therefore, when we believe in Jesus, our sins are imputed to Him on the cross and His perfect obedience is imputed to us. Our Lord does not merely forgive sins but also merits our glorification. We receive our justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law (see Ac. 13:39; Rom. 3:20-24, 28; 4:3-8; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9). What Adam was required to do, Jesus did. Therefore, the good works that we do are *fruits* of faith that have nothing to do with our justification before God. Everyone who is truly saved will do good works and persevere in faithfulness. The imperfect, partial, sin-tainted works that we do, however, are non-meritorious and have absolutely nothing to do with our justification. When Reformed theologians look at the ways that God has promised glorified eternal life before the fall (with the first Adam) and after the fall (with the second Adam) they see two different ways to attain glorified life, two different covenant heads and two different covenants. The Westminster Standards are based on a *bi-covenantal* view of history.

The Auburn Avenue theologians strongly reject the bi-covenantal teaching of the Westminster Standards and replace it with a mono-covenantal view. Their unique mono-covenantal scheme completely distorts their understanding of how justification is attained. On the basis of their view of covenant as relationship they argue that “God demanded nothing from Adam he had not freely given to him.”⁸ The Auburn Avenue apologist Lusk writes, “The meritorious covenant of works, then, has things backwards, by suggesting that God’s favor could only come at the end, after Adam had done work for God.”⁹ The Auburn Avenue reasoning goes something like this: Since covenant is relationship and since Adam was created with a relationship with God already, God would have no reason whatsoever to establish a covenant of

⁸ Rich Lusk, “A Response to ‘The Biblical Plan of Salvation’” in E. Calvin Beisner, *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 124. The Auburn Avenue apologist Rich Lusk writes, “Because the Triune God already existed as a covenant family from all eternity, God had no *need* to create Adam. The work of creation was free—and in that sense completely gracious. For a creature *to be* is *to be gifted*. Life was not a reward Adam had to earn; it was a free blessing from the outset. In his creation and sustenance, he was absolutely dependent. The doctrine of creation itself makes any strict merit impossible since it implies that God initiates, maintains, and controls everything. In the most ultimate sense, grace was not added after the fall; it was always already there.”

“In fact, if we understand that the Triune God himself is the archetype of the covenant, we see that Adam must have existed in loving fellowship with his Creator from the beginning. The Trinity, not Ancient Near Eastern suzerain treaties, must define our view of the covenant. Several theologians have recently argued that Father, Son, and Spirit are related covenantally not just in the economy of creation and redemption, but ontologically and eternally as well. But if this original covenant was a non-meritorious relation of love and favor, the first manifestation of that covenant in the creation must have been as well. *The covenant within the Trinity is the model for extra-Trinitarian covenants. Or, better, the covenant with creation is God’s way of bringing man into the covenantal fellowship and life of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The creation covenant is just the loving outreach and overflow of the inter-Trinitarian covenant.*” (emphasis added; Ibid, 122)

⁹ Ibid, 123.

works with Adam; therefore, (according to the mono-covenantal scheme) the big issue for Adam before the fall was not obedience to a covenant of works but rather perseverance in faithful obedience to his estate at creation. This concept of persevering in faithful obedience will shift the biblical emphasis on the doctrine of justification from a one time, never-to-be-repeated, judicial act of God that takes place the moment a person believes, to a declaration of God that occurs on the final day.¹⁰ God will, they say, acknowledge that a person has successfully persevered in the covenant. (This unbiblical emphasis on the declaration of salvation on the final day is also intimately related to their sacramentalism and ecclesiology. If everyone who is baptized and becomes a member of the church is truly united to Christ, saved, sanctified, regenerated and justified, yet people who do not persevere in faithful obedience can go to hell, then, obviously the only justification that *really matters* occurs after death when apostasy is no longer possible).

Already (even with this one argument) we can observe a serious problem, a logical inconsistency, with the Auburn Avenue rejection of the covenant of works. On the one hand we are told that the covenant of works cannot be true because Adam was in relationship with Jehovah and already had His favor. Thus, they claim the bi-covenantal view “has things backwards.” But, while the Monroe doctrine holds this view, it also acknowledges that Adam did *not* have everything. He did not have “eschatological” or glorified life. Lusk writes, “[F]or Adam, *faith* in the Creator God would have given rise to a life of sustained *obedience*. Adam had to trust and obey, for there was no other way to enter eschatological life.”¹¹

Reformed theologians have never denied that God’s creation of man was gracious. They have never denied that Adam was God’s son (Lk. 3:38) or that Adam and God had a real relationship. They even acknowledge that the covenant of works was gracious and that man could never put God in his debt. The covenant was clearly a “voluntary condescension on God’s part” (*Confession of Faith*, 7:1). But, everyone on both sides of the debate freely admits that Adam did not have “eschatological” or glorified life. The question then becomes why? The orthodox Reformed position has a very simple explanation of why by pointing to the obvious teaching of Genesis 2 and 3 that God by direct revelation made an agreement or covenant with Adam that had a stipulation, a promised curse for violating the covenant and implied blessings. By rejecting the obvious, the Auburn theologians must argue that simultaneously Adam “had everything” but didn’t have everything—which is irrationalism and therefore in error.

(3) The Auburn Avenue theologians’ failure to acknowledge the pre-fall covenant of works enables them to impose Adam’s pre-fall method of attaining “eschatological life” on all subsequent covenants. Like Adam, they tell us, we are in a relationship with God and just like Adam we must persevere in obedience if we are to attain “eschatological life” or “final justification.” The Auburn Avenue system shifts the biblical doctrine of salvation from a trusting in and relying upon Jesus Christ alone and what He accomplished in our place (His sacrificial death and perfect sinless life) to a persevering in the covenant. The Monroe doctrine ultimately bases salvation on faith in Christ *and* our own works that flow from faith. Just like Adam we are saved by faith plus obedience.

¹⁰ There is a strong similarity between the Auburn Avenue theology and the teachings of the “New Perspective on Paul” (NPP) movement. A leader of the NPP, N. T. Wright “believes that justification is God’s declaration that a person is part of His covenant people and that this is primarily tied in with the ultimate eschatological vindication of the people of God at the consummation of the age. Calvin, on the other hand believes that justification is the actual imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer through faith.” (J. V. Fesko, “The New Perspective on Paul: Calvin and N. T. Wright,” Internet article at PCANEWS.com)

¹¹ Lusk, 125.

By rejecting the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works and replacing it with a pre-fall covenant of grace that has the same requirements as the covenant of works (they simply leave out the word merit, but Adam must *obey to receive* glorified life), the Auburn Avenue theology denies the radical difference by which life is obtained before and after the fall. They would certainly acknowledge that faith in Christ is needed to receive pardon for sin; but, the obtaining of “eschatological life” is still left in the sinner’s own hands. Before the fall, men are saved (i.e., they obtain “eschatological life”) by believing and doing; and after the fall men are saved by believing and doing. The covenant of grace and the covenant of works are merged and thus salvation by faith in Christ alone apart from the works of the law is explicitly denied.

(4) The Auburn Avenue imposition of Adam’s pre-fall method of attaining “eschatological life” on all subsequent covenants forces them to radically redefine the meaning of faith in order to *appear* as orthodox Protestants. If our own personal obedience has nothing to do with merit (that is, it doesn’t earn or deserve anything) then why is it necessary to attain final justification? And, how can obedience be defined so as to avoid the idea of boasting for personal achievement?

The Auburn Avenue theologians attempt to resolve such questions by merging faith and obedience into “faithful obedience.” We are told that faith and obedience are virtually the same thing (i.e., a “single total response” which leads to justification). The biblical distinction between faith and the fruits of faith that has been the Protestant position for almost five hundred years is cast aside. Faith, repentance and good works are all collapsed into “faith as covenantal response.” The Auburn Avenue redefinition of faith is based on the heretical teaching of Norman Shepherd. Note that, like a papist, Shepherd places repentance and obedience before justification:

The works to be distinguished from faith in the Pauline passages are not good works, but works of the flesh, works that are done to provide a meritorious ground of justification (“Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” Tape 37: “Paul’s Positive Estimate of Good Works,” *cf.* Tape 20). Faith must not be abstracted from good works. *Since faith, repentance, and good works are intertwined as covenantal response, and since good works are necessary to justification, the “ordo salutis” would better be: regeneration, faith/repentance/new obedience, justification* (“The Relation of Good Works to Justification,” p. 22). But it is better still, as Mr. Shepherd sees it, to set aside the puzzle of an individual *ordo salutis* and affirm the corporate and covenantal concept of our total response to grace (“Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” Tape 3: “Covenant and the Application of Redemption—Concept of the *Ordo Salutis*, Oriented to the Model of Adult Conversion,” *cf.* Tape 4.).¹²

The Auburn Avenue theologians argue that personal obedience (works, law-keeping) is the way that we stay in the covenant and is absolutely necessary for final justification. Shepherd says, “The Pauline affirmation in Romans 2:13, ‘the doers of the Law will be justified,’ is not to be understood hypothetically in the sense that there are not persons who fall into that class, but in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified.”¹³ The Monroe doctrine

¹² “Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd: Approved by the Executive Committee of the Board, February 26, 1982.” (Emphasis Added.)

¹³ Norman Shepherd, “Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works,” presented to the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, November 18, 1978. Thesis 20. O. Palmer Robertson’s explanation of Shepherd’s view is very helpful. He writes, “In his view, ‘the command to believe, the command to repent and be baptized, and the command to follow Christ doing as he commanded are not ultimately different answers’ to the question concerning how a man is to be justified. For although Paul told the

also follows Shepherd by teaching that James 2:21ff. is truly asserting a faith/works combination in justification (see the section on James below). This is basically the same interpretation as the Roman Catholic Church. The standard Protestant interpretation is that good works *demonstrate* the presence or reality of genuine saving faith.

The Auburn Avenue theology (in a manner very similar to Roman Catholicism) makes the human will the most important element in justification. Because the careful distinctions that the Bible makes between faith, repentance, good works, obedience to the law, justification, sanctification and perseverance are all blurred or denied by collapsing everything under the category of covenant faithfulness, justification is ultimately defined as a covenant process rather than a judicial act of God. Like Romanism and Arminianism, salvation is a joint effort (synergism) between God and man. People who are “saved” (i.e., regenerated, forgiven, sanctified, justified and baptized with the Spirit) are lost (i.e., damned to hell forever) if they do not maintain covenant faithfulness (i.e., obedient faith, good works or obedience to the law). The Auburn Avenue theology is a denial of the gospel of God. It is “another gospel.”

(5) The Auburn Avenue theologians’ new definition of faith as inclusive of works or law-keeping (“faithful obedience,” “covenant faithfulness,” “active faith,” “faith working in love,” etc.) contradicts all of the passages in Scripture which teach that we are saved by faith *apart* from the works of the law. Note the following passages:

By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things which *you could not be justified by the law of Moses* (Ac. 13:39).

Therefore *by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified* in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now *the righteousness of God apart from the law* is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:20-24).

Therefore we conclude that *a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law*” (Rom. 3:28).

For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” *Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness*, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom *God imputes righteousness apart from works*: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin” (Rom. 4:3-8).

Philippian jailer that he must believe to be saved, he just as well could have told him to rise up and follow Christ. For ‘to ask for obedience is not fundamentally different thing than to ask for faith, though faith and obedience may be distinguished as descriptive of a single total response from different perspectives’ (October 1976 paper, 51)... Mr. Shepherd by his formulations had merged faith and obedience as a ‘single total response’ which brings justification. According to his view, faith is united with works as a single response to the Gospel call for justification. As a consequence, justification is by faith and works, or by faith/works, or by the works of faith. Or, justification is by ‘obedient faith,’ which could be interchanged with ‘faithful obedience.’” (*The Current Justification Controversy* [Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2033], 24).

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be *justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified* (Gal. 2:16).

But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and *count them as rubbish*, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, *not having my own righteousness, which is from the law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, *the righteousness which is from God by faith*” (Phil. 3:8-9).

By grace you have been saved through faith, and that *not of yourselves*; it is the gift of God, *not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Eph. 2:8-9).

How do the Auburn Avenue teachers circumvent such clear, unambiguous passages? They do so by disregarding all Protestant scholarship on justification done during the last 487 years (i.e., all the conservative systematic theologies, all the sermons on this topic, all the commentaries, all the books and essays on justification, all the Reformed creeds and confessions, all the debates with Rome, etc.) and replacing it with the novel theories of the “New Perspective on Paul” movement (the “New Perspective” movement began in 1977 with the publication of E.P. Sanders’ book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*). According to this “New Perspective,” Luther and all those who followed his teaching on justification had a complete misunderstanding of Paul’s intent in books like Galatians and Romans. The issue (according to the “New Perspective”) was not individual justification but the corporate inclusion of the Gentiles in the church. James Dunn (an advocate of the New Perspective on Paul) writes,

The doctrine of justification by faith came to expression in these key letters of Paul (Galatians and Romans) as his attempt to prove that God’s covenant blessings were for Gentiles as well as Jews, that God was ready to accept Gentiles as Gentiles, without requiring them first to become Jews. The Christian doctrine of justification by faith begins as Paul’s protest not as an individual sinner against a Jewish legalism, but as Paul’s protest on behalf of Gentiles against Jewish exclusivism.... Justification by faith is Paul’s fundamental objection to the idea that God has limited his saving goodness to a particular people.¹⁴

In his refutation of the Reformed doctrine of salvation, the Auburn Avenue apologist Rich Lusk sets forth all the major ideas of the “New Perspective on Paul” movement. He writes,

Luther took Paul’s critique of the law in an abstract sense, as though the apostle was concerned with a generic moralism, rather than a specifically Jewish, redemptive-historical issue. Luther assumed Paul’s Judaizing opponents were basically medieval merit mongers. Thus, Luther developed his infamous law/grace antithesis.... Paul’s anti-Judaic polemic thus cannot be equated with the Reformers anti-Romish polemic. No doubt at certain points the Reformers succumbed to eisegetically reading their debates with Rome back into Paul’s debates with the Judaizers. While there are analogies, there are also important differences. The Reformers were concerned with matters of individual soteriology and assurance.... Paul’s concerns included those things but were much broader. He was concerned to show that the great redemptive historical transition had taken place and the Judaic, typological, childhood phase of redemptive history had given way to the worldwide, fulfillment, mature phase. He was

¹⁴ James D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1993] 1994), 25, 28.

concerned with the new identity and configuration of the people of God. In Christ, all things were new; old things—including the good, but temporary Torah—were passing away....

By refusing to acknowledge that the Torah had passed away in the death of Christ, the Judaizers were perverting its true intent. They were insisting that the *new* people of God continue to mark themselves out in the *old* way, namely, by the now defunct badges of Torah. It's clear these are the items under discussion in Galatians—circumcision, dietary laws, calendrical observances, and so forth. There is no evidence the Judaizers were suggesting that circumcision or other marks of Jewishness were good works individuals could do to earn or merit status before God; rather they were suggesting submission to the old covenant identity badges as the way of entrance into the true people of God, the promised family of Abraham.¹⁵

In other words, Lusk and the Auburn Avenue proponents claim that when we see the passages of Scripture which say that we are not justified by the works of the law, we must view them as broad exhortations about Jewish identity markers—the various ceremonial laws. They have nothing to do with legalism in the sense of an individual trying to contribute to his salvation by obeying the moral law. This new view of Paul is crucial to the Auburn Avenue theology for it is used by the Monroe teachers to take passages which deal with individual soteriology and place them in the spheres of ecclesiology and sociology. Consequently, they can now freely teach a system of justification by faith and works. The Monroe teaching contradicts the Reformed faith at several key points in major/essential areas of doctrine.

The heretical nature of the Auburn Avenue paradigm raises two questions: a) Why do these men continue to pretend to be Reformed or even Protestant? b) Why are the advocates of this damnable heresy tolerated by “conservative” Bible-believing Presbyterian and Reformed denominations?¹⁶

(6) A crucial aspect of the Auburn Avenue theological system that needs to be mentioned is their view of the efficacy of baptism. They teach that baptism is always efficacious; that every baptized person is loved, effectually called, and has a genuine interior work of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism in every case is said to truly unite a person to Christ because by baptism a person has membership in Jesus' body—the church—the elect of God. The Auburn Avenue theologians insist that they reject *ex opere operato*; that is, the idea that the baptismal water works automatically like a magic elixir. Their sacramentalism is rooted in their ecclesiology; they totally reject the distinction between the visible and invisible church. Therefore, to be in the church is to be truly united to Christ and saved. Leithart, an Auburn Avenue apologist, writes, “Entry into the church is always a soteriological fact for the person who enters. . . . If baptism initiates into the church, the question about baptismal efficacy is not what power is in the water, but what the church is—what is this community into which baptism inducts me? . . . If the church is the family of God the Father, baptism, by inducting people in to the church, makes them children of their heavenly Father. If the church is the body of Christ, then baptism makes the baptized a member of the body and a branch of the vine. If the church is the temple of the Spirit, then baptism makes the baptized a pillar or stone of that temple and himself a temple indwelt by the Spirit.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Lusk, 130, 132, 133.

¹⁶ These questions are answered to a degree in the Appendix of this book, *Christ's Warning against False Teachers*.

¹⁷ Peter J. Leithart, “Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Re-casting of Reformed Theology” in E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 69, 70, 71. (A study of Peter J. Leithart's writings reveals that he has incorporated many of the views and the interpretive technique of James Jordan.)

How does this bizarre, neo-medieval, sacerdotal concept of baptism affect the doctrine of justification? If everyone is justified by water baptism¹⁸ because by baptism they enter the covenant community and have a real saving union with Christ, then the essence of salvation is *not* to lay hold of what Jesus accomplished by faith, but rather is the maintaining of what one has already received in baptism. Further, if (as the Auburn Avenue theologians insist) a person can lose their salvation if they are not faithful to the covenant, then justification cannot be a one time, past tense, permanent declaration of God that a person is righteous based on the merits of Christ. Justification must be a *process*¹⁹ and/or it must be a *goal*²⁰ for which one strives. This explains why, in their system, faith is not an *alone instrument* which grasps Christ; but rather, faith is “faithful obedience.” One can only be truly or eschatologically justified if he maintains his covenant membership acquired at baptism by persevering in faithfulness to the very end. This persevering in “covenant faithfulness” is only achieved by God’s grace, of course.

The Auburn Avenue theologians’ understanding of baptism and their rejection of the Reformed distinction between the visible and invisible church causes them to reject or ignore the past tense, one-time only, permanent nature of justification. For them, justification is a life-long struggle to persevere in covenantal obedience. Final justification, or the justification that really counts for eternity, is *future*. Also, it causes them to deny the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Apostasy is not viewed as the result of false faith (people who were never saved to begin with; see 1 Jn. 2:19; Mt. 7:23) but is the result of a failure to obey on the part of real, justified, regenerate believers. This view leaves the Auburn Avenue theologians with only two unbiblical options theologically: They can argue that God has two types of union with Christ and two types of grace—one that is efficacious unto salvation and one that is ineffective. Or, they can argue that man’s ability in addition to (or in cooperation with) grace is what keeps him in the covenant. With the first alternative, God’s love and promises are fraudulent and defective. With the second alternative, man essentially saves himself in a semi-Pelagian manner. The Auburn theologians’ attempt to reform the Reformation has not benefited the church at all because it is an explicit rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like Romanism before it, it greatly confuses justification with sanctification and does not adequately distinguish between justification and salvation in the broadest sense of the term.

Having briefly considered the theological steps the Auburn Avenue teachers make in their denial of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, we will presently turn our attention to a

¹⁸ The Auburn Avenue theologian Steve Wilkins writes, “By our baptism we have been reborn in this sense—having died with Christ, we have been raised with Him ...because by baptism—the Spirit joins us to Christ. Since He is the elect one, and the church is the elect people, we are joined to His body, we therefore are elect. Since He is the justified one, we are justified in Him” (“The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant,” Lecture at The 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor’s Conference). Note that Wilkins says that baptism results in justification.

¹⁹ Note how, according to Norman Shepherd, believers maintain their justification by doing good works. He writes, “Because faith which is not obedient faith is dead faith and because repentance is necessary for the pardon of sin included in justification, and because abiding in Christ by keeping his commandments ...are all necessary for continuing in the state of justification, good works, works done from true faith, according to the law of God ...are nevertheless necessary for salvation from eternal condemnation and therefore for justification” (Thirty-Four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance and Good Works, Thesis 23 [Presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, November 18, 1978]).

²⁰ According to Norman Shepherd, justification occurs at the end of one’s life. It is based in part on man’s personal obedience. He writes, “There are those who do repent. When they repent they cease being evildoers.... They begin to fulfill the law through love.... They become faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ ...by way of repentance men become doers of the law who *will be justified* and enter into eternal life” (“The Grace of Justification,” Taped Lecture from Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Feb. 8, 1979).

defense of the two chief doctrines around which this debate revolves: the covenant of works and justification by faith alone. Are the arguments proposed against the covenant of works weighty, or are they flimsy creations out of the minds of men? Are the Monroe theologians' reinterpretations of the classic justification passages plausible? This essay will prove that the Auburn Avenue teachers' understanding of Paul's condemnation of works is wrong, while the traditional Protestant view is correct. If it can be demonstrated that Paul's concept of works involved more than corporate Jewish identity markers (the ceremonial laws), then the whole Auburn Avenue theological system falls to the ground as just another heretical invention of man.

The Covenant of Works

Is the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works²¹ (and the bi-covenantal system that rests in part upon it) a clever invention of Reformed theologians? The Auburn Avenue theologians believe that such is indeed the case. But, as we examine the main arguments by these men against the covenant of works and their own mono-covenantal alternative we will see: *ad hominem* arguments that are unfair and silly; misrepresentations of the true position; unsupportable assertions; and fatal logical inconsistencies within their own position. Their main arguments against the covenant of works are as follows.

(1) It is argued that since Adam was in relationship with God and was a covenant creature, under the lordship of his covenant King, "the covenant is not something added to the created order; it was already there."²² Lusk writes,

Life was not a reward Adam had to earn; it was a free blessing from the outset.... This initial spiritual life was not an attainment or reward. Rather, God granted Adam communion with Himself before he had done anything good to "deserve" it.... Adam was not created in a neutral position with regard to the favor of God. He began his life within the circle of God's covenantal blessing, as Genesis 1:26-28 declares. God's first word to Adam was not one of command but of blessing. Obviously, then, that initial favor was not something Adam had to earn or merit by strict justice; it was a free gift. The meritorious covenant of works, then, has

²¹ The covenant of works is defined above under number (2). Johannes G. Vos reminds us why an understanding of the covenant with Adam is so crucial. He writes, "Why is this doctrine of the covenant of works very important to us as Christians? Because it is parallel to the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Just as the first Adam brought sin and death, so Christ, the second Adam, brings us righteousness and eternal life. Adam was our representative in the covenant of works; Jesus Christ is our representative in the covenant of grace. Those who reject the doctrine of the covenant of works have no right to claim the blessings of the covenant of grace, for the two are parallel, and stand or fall together, as is proved by Romans 5" (*The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002], 51-52). A. A. Hodge defines the confessional position as follows: "The Calvinistic view, therefore, is, that God having determined to save the elect out of the mass of the race fallen in Adam, appointed his Son to become incarnate in our nature; and as the Christ, or God-man Mediator, he appointed him to be the second Adam and representative head of redeemed humanity; and as such entered into a covenant with him and with his seed in him. In this covenant the Mediator assumes in behalf of his elect seed the broken conditions of the old covenant of works precisely as Adam left them. Adam had failed to obey, and therefore forfeited life; he had sinned, and therefore incurred the endless penalty of death. Christ therefore suffered the penalty, and extinguished in behalf of all whom he represented the claims of the old covenant; and at the same time he rendered a perfect vicarious obedience, which was the very condition upon which eternal life had been originally offered. All this Christ does as a principal party with God to the covenant, in acting as the representative of his own people" (*The Confession of Faith* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1869) 1961], 125).

²² Lusk, 121.

things backwards, by suggesting that God's favor could only come at the end, after Adam had done work for God.²³

While it is true that Adam had God's favor and that there was a loving relationship between God and Adam, the whole debate centers upon what Adam *did not have*. Adam had life but he did not have *glorified life*. Once we go beyond Genesis chapter one and read chapters two and three we see that by direct revelation God added something that was not known to Adam by general revelation and that Adam, even with all his wonderful blessings, did not yet have glorified life. Turretin writes,

By his own right, God could indeed have prescribed obedience to man (created by him) without any promise of reward. But in order to temper that supreme dominion with his goodness, he added a covenant consisting in the promise of a reward and the stipulation of obedience. As he wished to assert more strongly in his own right over man, so he demonstrated the highest benignity in this—that he (himself in need of nothing) willed to a nearer communion with him (and more powerfully allure by that bond of love and mutual obligation), the creature (already subject to him by right of creation and owing him all things from natural obligation) by entering into a covenant with him, so that man now excited by the promise of God can certainly expect happiness, not from his mere philanthropy (*philanthropia*) alone, but also from a covenant (on account of his truthfulness and fidelity).²⁴

The Auburn Avenue theology says that the covenant of works cannot be true because Adam was in relationship with Jehovah and already had God's blessing. But the Monroe teachers admit that Adam did not have everything. He did not have "eschatological" or glorified life. Lusk writes, "[F]or Adam, faith in the Creator God would have given rise to a life of sustained *obedience*. Adam had to trust and obey, for there was no other way to enter eschatological life."²⁵ The admission that Adam did not have everything; that he did not have glorification; that he needed to do something before he could receive it, destroys the Auburn Avenue argument in a number of ways.

a) One cannot argue (as the Monroe theologians do) that the covenant is just the way things were by virtue of creation apart from direct revelation with promises and stipulations because, if Adam already had everything (i.e., glorified life), then disobedience as well as curses or added blessings for obedience would be unnecessary and impossible. (An aspect of glorification is that men lose all possibility of committing sin and falling.)

b) Even if one ignores the direct revelation made with Adam and argues that "a life of sustained obedience" was required for eschatological life, one has unwittingly adopted a covenant of works system. Although the Auburn theologians eschew the word "merit" and strongly argue against the idea that Adam could earn anything, they still turn right around and admit that Adam had to do something to attain "eschatological life." The fact that Adam had to do something (he had to obey perfectly and perpetually) to receive eschatological life is proof of a covenant of works. The only possible way for the Auburn Avenue teachers to avoid this obvious conclusion is to redefine faith as being the same as obedience or law-keeping. This

²³ Ibid, 122-123. Lusk engages in classic straw-man argumentation. Reformed theologians have never argued that Adam deserved to be created, or did not have favor with God. The central issue is: What did God require of Adam to gain glorified life? What did Adam have to do to be placed in a position by God where falling into sin was no longer possible and Adam and his posterity would have glorified eternal life?

²⁴ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 1:574.

²⁵ Lusk, 125.

semantic word game enables them simultaneously to hold that Adam was under a covenant of grace; but, he had to achieve eschatological life through *personal obedience* (i.e., law-keeping). If faith and obedience are the same thing as the Auburn Avenue teachers assert then a covenant of works is impossible. Further, if they were consistent in their use of terminology, they would have no objection to the idea of a covenant of works because obedience and faith are the same thing. Therefore, the covenant of works is actually a covenant of faith.

c) The idea of merit in the attainment of eternal, glorified or eschatological life is inescapable in the framework devised by the Auburn heretics. This point becomes clear if we replace the word “merit” (which has negative connotations because of its abuse by Rome) with the requirement of an active obedience. Both sides of the debate acknowledge that obedience to God’s moral law is necessary to attain glorified life. Both the Auburn Avenue writers and orthodox Reformed writers acknowledge that Adam had to be obedient in order to be granted “eschatological life.” But, there are two differences between Reformed theologians and the Auburn Avenue apologists on this point. First, Reformed theologians recognize that God set forth this covenant by special revelation in propositional form directly to Adam while the Monroe teachers assume that is just the way things were in nature before the fall. Second, Reformed theologians and the Westminster Standards teach that after the fall the obedience for justification (or even final justification) is found only in Jesus Christ and is imputed to sinners the moment they believe in Him, while the Auburn Avenue theologians teach that the obedience necessary for justification must be the personal obedience of the believing sinner. The question is never obedience verses no obedience but who provides the obedience necessary for glorified life: Jesus Christ or believers themselves? With Luther, Calvin, Knox and the whole Protestant Reformation we heartily proclaim that Christ provides the righteousness we need. Like Socinians, neo-nominans, Pelagians, and Roman Catholics, the Auburn Avenue theologians place the necessary obedience on the shoulders of men whose every work is tainted with sin (Isa. 64:6).

(2) The Auburn Avenue theologians argue against the covenant of works on the basis that the idea of earning something—or merit—implies that Adam was nothing more than a slave or an employee rather than a son loved by His heavenly Father. Lusk writes, “The covenant of works model verges on reducing the covenant to a contract, making Adam into an employee who had to earn the wages of eternal life.”²⁶ This argument is disproved by the following considerations.

a) The Monroe teachers are guilty of imposing their own concept of fairness on what God can or cannot do. If God wants to make a covenant with Adam promising him a reward for a perfect and perpetual obedience, then, is that not God’s right? Does the fact that Adam already existed in fellowship with God preclude Him from offering even greater blessings for obedience? No, of course not! The Auburn Avenue objections are childish and silly. If an earthly father promises his son a new bike if he gets an A in geometry, then does that promise make that son a slave or employee? No, it doesn’t. Then why should God’s promise to Adam be viewed with suspicion and denied to fit someone’s preconceptions? The Bible clearly teaches that God sovereignly bound Himself to Adam with promises and stipulations. If Adam received the promised reward, it was not because he, in and of himself, placed God in his debt or because his time card was full; rather, it was because God made a promise of a certain reward to Adam if he fulfilled the condition of the promise and God always keeps His word.

²⁶ Lusk, 123.

b) As noted earlier, the Auburn theologians hold to their own concept of a covenant of works and merit but simply use different terminology. They believe that works are necessary if we are to receive justification and glorified life. But, instead of the perfect and perpetual obedience required of Adam that only Christ (the second Adam) achieved they arbitrarily argue that the partial, incomplete obedience of the believing sinner is acceptable for justification before God.²⁷

Once again we must point out that any system that introduces obedience as a requirement for justification cannot avoid some concept of merit. The covenant of works does have the concept of merit, but it is not merit in the sense that our own works have intrinsic value before God and thus force God's favor, but merit in the sense that God will honor a perfect and perpetual obedience because He has promised to do so. God has obligated Himself in the covenant of works to reward a perfect and perpetual obedience with glorified life. Christ is the only person who ever lived that perfectly and perpetually obeyed God. Thus, according to the terms of the covenant of works, Jesus merited glorified life for His people. On the basis of Christ's righteousness, believing sinners are justified. They are not merely forgiven by the Savior's blood but *declared righteous* on the basis of the imputation of our Lord's righteousness to their account. The Auburn Avenue theologians leave us with half a gospel. Even worse, their system is essentially teaching that Jesus' forgiveness *plus our own righteousness* equals justification and glorified life.

Because the concept of merit is inescapable (the important thing is to define merit biblically and lay hold of the merits of Christ by faith) the Auburn Avenue theology adheres to a concept of merit but gives it a different label. They call it "value." Lusk writes, "[I]n Christ, our faith-wrought good works have *value* before God, but not *merit*. This is why we can insist that every biblical covenant requires works, and yet no covenant is a covenant of works as such. The covenant includes non-meritorious conditions and requires the obedience of faith, but never calls for us to earn anything."²⁸ Let's attempt to analyze this scholarly sounding gibberish. They say God's plan of salvation requires that we have our own faith-wrought good works. These works have value (a synonym for merit²⁹). In fact (according to the Monroe doctrine) if we do not do these faith-wrought good works we cannot be justified or declared righteous before God. But, these works which are absolutely necessary for justification are not a covenant of works and have no merit (i.e., value). The Auburn Avenue's mind-bending logic raises a few obvious questions. If we cannot be justified apart from our own good works and these good works have value (another word for merit) before God, then do they not earn or contribute something to our justification? If we contribute to our justification then is not justification a synergistic effort between Jesus and the believing sinner? Once we abandon the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone) we must also logically abandon the doctrine of *solo Christo*. Nothing needs to be

²⁷ Lusk writes, "...the law did not require perfect obedience. It was designed for sinners, not unfallen creatures. Thus, the basic requirement of the law was covenant loyalty and trust, not sinless perfection. ...Moses was right: this law was not too hard to keep, for it was a law of faith (Deuteronomy 30:11; cf. Romans 10:1-12" (128). Although the law may be easy for Lusk to keep, Paul says, "There is none righteous, no, not one. ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:3, 23). David says, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand" (Ps. 130:3)? "Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous" (Ps. 143:2).

²⁸ Ibid, 146.

²⁹ See *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* (New York: Collins World, 1978), 1127.

added to what Jesus has already done. “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness is the alone instrument of justification” (*Confession of Faith*, 11:2).

Could Satan want anything more out of a new heresy? It is a theological system which repeatedly and emphatically cries out against merit and works in salvation yet which is through and through a system based on merit—the *personal* righteousness of the believer. It is a system which replaces the imputed righteousness of Christ with “covenant faithfulness,”³⁰ “the works of faith,” “faithful obedience” and “faith-wrought good works.”

(3) The Auburn Avenue theologians argue that the creation of Adam and his estate in the garden were gracious. Therefore, even before the fall, Adam existed in a relationship, or covenant of grace, with God; not under a covenant of works. There is no question about God being favorable or gracious to Adam before the fall. The created universe, the beautiful garden, Adam’s own life, his lovely wife and the sweet fellowship with Jehovah were all gifts from God. Further, the glorious reward that God offered Adam for a perfect and perpetual obedience was way beyond what Adam deserved for obedience, for by virtue of his creation by God Adam already owed God obedience. Although all these things are true they do not disprove the covenant of works at all. Note the following reasons.

a) As noted earlier, the fact that God was in a relationship with Adam and treated him with love and kindness does not at all preclude Him from making a covenant with Adam. The narrative in Genesis contains all the elements of a covenant: the essential parties (God and man), the prescription of a law, the promise of reward and the threat of punishment. This teaching of Scripture is supported by other passages, such as Hosea 6:7, which says the Israelites “like Adam have transgressed the covenant” (NASB).³¹ Even the Auburn Avenue theologians admit that Adam did not have glorified or “eschatological” life, that something needed to be done (a perpetual and perfect obedience) to receive this life.

b) The Auburn Avenue theologians fail to recognize the major difference between pre-fall grace as love, kindness and favor to a perfect, sinless, righteous being and post-fall saving grace which is unmerited favor to wicked sinners who are God’s enemies, who are under the just sentence of death and deserve to go to hell. The Monroe doctrine causes great confusion by obscuring the radical difference between the covenant with Adam and the covenant of grace. Adam did not need a surety, a mediator or a covenant head to live perfectly and die in his place. Adam did not have any guilt and he did not have a sinful nature. Adam did not need the special

³⁰ While the Auburn theologians give lip service to the concept of forensic justification, their system of salvation essentially denies it. Note how Lusk subtly redefines righteousness. He writes, “...there is quite a bit of confusion over the meaning of the term righteousness as it is used in Scripture. Hebraic righteousness, as the concept is found in the OT and employed in the NT, does not match up with our modern notions of abstract justice. Righteousness, biblically defined, is simply covenant faithfulness” (Lusk, 147). The problem with this statement is that the biblical term used to speak of justification, *dikaioo*, always means *to declare righteous* and never means to make righteous (see Lk. 7:29; 10:29; 16:15; Mt. 11:19; Rom. 3:4). When speaking of the justification of believing sinners it never refers to their own subjective good works or “covenant faithfulness.” Further, when speaking of justification the Bible speaks of the imputation of righteousness and never the personal righteousness (e.g., “covenant faithfulness”) of the Christian (see Rom. 4:12, 22-24). Also, since the Bible describes justification as something achieved in an instant of time, it should never be associated with a process such as covenant faithfulness or covenantal perseverance (see Jn. 5:24; Lk. 18:14; 23:43; Rom. 5:1).

³¹ The Hebrew word for Adam can be translated as “man” instead of the proper noun “Adam.” Such a translation, however, has the prophet saying “you are covenant breakers just like other men who also are covenant breakers.” Such a statement is obvious and doesn’t really say much. Adam’s transgression on the other hand was noteworthy in that: a) he had a loving relationship with God; b) God had treated Adam with love and kindness; and, c) like Israel Adam sinned against explicit direct revelation.

assistance of the Holy Spirit to lead a holy life before the fall. Adam as a holy, righteous being had the ability to obey the covenant of works. As a holy, righteous creature he should have obeyed it. But, unlike Adam before the fall, we are fallen, guilty, polluted, depraved and totally unable to do anything in and of ourselves that pleases God or meets the requirement (both externally and internally with perfect motives) of God's holy law.

The obscuring and blending of the pre-fall and post-fall covenants into one covenant (mono-covenantalism) forces the Auburn theologians to change the covenant of grace into a new, watered-down covenant of works: the perfect and perpetual obedience required of Adam is replaced with a partial, imperfect, general obedience ("covenant faithfulness"). The special grace that is directed only to the elect and actually results in salvation is replaced with a general grace directed to everyone baptized irrespective of faith but only those who persevere in faithfulness (a partial, imperfect, general obedience) will be glorified. The Auburn Avenue system is denial of the gospel because, "God, the just Judge (*dikaiokriten*), cannot pronounce anyone just and give him a right to life except on the ground of some perfect righteousness which has a necessary connection with life."³² A perfect righteousness can only be found in Jesus whose very name is "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 33:16).

How do the Auburn Avenue theologians respond to the charge that they are teaching a new system of justification by faith and works (i.e., personal obedience, covenant faithfulness, perseverance, the works of faith, an obedient faith, a working faith, etc.)? First, they insist that they reject a works/merit paradigm. Lusk writes, "'Opponents of Shepherd thought his insistence on the fruit of the Spirit as a requirement for eschatological justification was legalistic. But when one considers that Shepherd has totally purged his theological program of merit—and therefore of even the *possibility* of legalism—it becomes obvious how absurd this kind of objection is. Shepherd's insistence on a working, loving, obedient faith for salvation has to be seen in the light of the demands of *covenant life*, not a potentially meritorious program of works righteousness."³³ The problem with this statement is that it is not factual and is totally arbitrary. The truth is *not* that Shepherd and his followers have rejected merit. They most certainly have not. They have simply renamed it "covenant faithfulness," or "perseverance in the covenant." Lusk writes, "The

³² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:637. The Auburn Avenue theologians would do well to study the biblical teaching of Martin Luther. Luther understood that our faith must look away from ourselves to a perfect righteousness outside of ourselves because we are sinners. He writes, "The saints are intrinsically always sinners, therefore they are always extrinsically justified; but the hypocrites are intrinsically always righteous, therefore they are extrinsically always sinners. . . . Hence, we are extrinsically righteous in so far as we are righteous not in and from ourselves and not in virtue of our works but only by God's regarding us so. For inasmuch as the saints are always aware of their sin and implore God for the merciful gift of his righteousness, they are for this very reason also always reckoned righteous by God. Therefore they are before themselves and in truth unrighteous, but before God they are righteous because he reckons them so on account of this confession of their sin; they are sinners in fact, but by virtue of the reckoning of the merciful God they are righteous" (Lectures on Romans, 124-125 as quoted by Samuel E. Waldron, "The Meaning of Sola Fide for Luther" in *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* [Palmdale, CA: January 2004] Vol. 1, No. 1, 100).

The moment that justifying faith is divided between Christ and our own covenantal obedience, is the same moment that salvation by Christ alone is also divided. If a person divides saving faith by directing it to both Christ and our own good works or covenantal obedience, then the biblical doctrine of justification is destroyed. One cannot assert *Christ alone* without also teaching *faith alone*. One cannot mix the perfect righteousness of Christ with our own sin-tainted works without denying the gospel. The Auburn Avenue theologians may object by arguing that Jesus enables us to be covenantally faithful by His Spirit. While that teaching is true it: a) still cannot circumvent the need for a perfect righteousness; such righteousness must be objective and can only be found in Christ; and b) is no different from Romanism when applied to justification and not sanctification.

³³ Lusk, 145.

covenant includes non-meritorious conditions and requires the obedience of faith [to receive eschatological justification], but never calls for us to earn anything.”³⁴ In other words, the covenant requires personal obedience to be justified. But, this personal obedience doesn’t earn anything and has no merit *because Lusk says so*. The assertions of Shepherd and his followers on merit are like the statements of a man who cheats on his wife yet claims he is totally innocent because he doesn’t believe in adultery. If works do not have merit, why are they necessary to remain justified? The Auburn Avenue theology is similar to Romanism which says that faith justifies as it is informed and animated by love.

Second, like the papists they confound justification and sanctification. Reformed theologians have never denied the need for covenant faithfulness, good works and a lifestyle of obedience in the walk of believers. The man who is justified by Christ is also sanctified by Him. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification, yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love” (11:2). We are justified by faith alone, apart from our good works or covenant faithfulness. But by virtue of our union with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection, the power of sin is broken in our lives and we are faithful to Christ in our walk. There is no such thing as a man who is justified that is not also sanctified. What separates Shepherd and his followers from orthodox Protestantism is: they say works are necessary as a *condition* of justification while the Reformed symbols say that good works are the *fruit* of salvation. Paul says “we are...created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10). This difference may seem minor; but, it is the difference between Romanism and Protestantism, heaven and hell, heresy and orthodoxy. (This topic will be considered in much more detail below in our consideration of the book of James.)

Justification by Faith or Faithful Obedience

Now that we have some understanding regarding the Auburn Avenue rejection of the covenant of works and how “mono-covenantalism” perverts the doctrine of salvation, let us turn our attention to their reinterpretation of the passages that teach we are saved by faith apart from any works of the law. Is Paul, as the “New Perspective” asserts, merely concerned about “Jewish identity markers” (i.e., the ceremonial laws that separate Jews from Gentiles), or is he concerned primarily with Jewish concepts of works salvation (i.e., legalism)? An examination of the relevant passages will demonstrate that the Auburn Avenue teaching or the “New Perspective on Paul” is totally untenable. Note the following reasons.

(1) In Romans 2:17-25, where Paul is setting forth the necessity of Christ before the Jews, his main point is that while the Jews were proud of the moral law and taught it to others they were unable to keep it themselves. The apostle’s point is unnecessary if the Jews did not regard the law as a means of salvation. “The Jews entirely mistook the object of the law, Rom. v. 20, Gal. iii. 19, which shut up all under sin, Gal. iii. 22, by cursing every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.”³⁵ Verse 25 in particular reveals that the legalism of the Judaizers condemned in Galatians was a common teaching in the Jewish community.

³⁴ Ibid, 146.

³⁵ Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1874] 1958), 101.

(2) In Romans 3:9, 10, 23 Paul universally indicts both Jews and Gentiles as law-breakers and guilty before God: “we have previously charged both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin. As it is written there is none righteous, no, not one...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Obviously, Paul’s statement in verse 20, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin,” applies to the moral law, for the apostle was discussing the situation for both Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles had no obligation to obey the ceremonial ordinances. Murray writes,

This verse gives the reason why every mouth is stopped and the whole world is condemned, to wit, that “from the works of the law no flesh will be justified” before God. This does not overthrow the principle stated in 2:13 that “the doers of the law will be justified.” This holds true as a principle of equity but, existentially, it never comes into operation in the human race for the reason that there are no doers of the law, no doing of the law that will ground or elicit justification—“there is none righteous, no, not one” (vs. 10). For this reason that there is actually no justification by the works of the law the function of the law is to convince of sin (vs. 20b). The law does not perform this necessary and contributory service in connection with justification; it imparts the knowledge of sin and enables us to perceive that from the works of the law no flesh will be justified and therefore every mouth is stopped and the whole world rests under God’s judgment.³⁶

(3) The Auburn Avenue theology is contradicted by Paul’s exclusion of boasting. The apostles say that all boasting is excluded by the law of faith (Rom. 3:27-28). What this means is that we have nothing to brag about because we receive Christ and His redemption by faith. Are we to believe that Paul only had ceremonial “identity markers” in mind when he wrote this passage? The Pharisees were just as guilty of placing their trust in and boasting about their moral achievements as they were about ceremonial identity markers. When our Lord wanted to expose the self-righteous legalism of the Pharisees He emphasized their boasting about their obedience to the moral law:

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Lk. 18:9-14)

Note how Jesus (like Paul after Him) contrasts two radically different views of biblical religion. The Pharisee boasts about his covenantal faithfulness; about his own subjective righteousness; about his faithfulness to God’s law. The tax collector, on the other hand, understands that his works merit nothing, that he is a sinner and thus casts himself entirely upon God’s mercy. He understands that he must receive *everything* from God.

Note also that Christ is discussing two religious Jews who were at the Temple praying. These men were both covenantal sons, not slaves. This means that Jesus condemns a reliance on covenantal faithfulness or keeping the moral law as a means of approaching God in the same

³⁶John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:107.

manner as Paul, His beloved disciple. Any attempt to circumvent the import of this passage by looking to the “identity markers” theory is refuted in two ways: First, the Pharisee relied on the *moral law* for righteousness or individual salvation; he refers to violations of the ten commandments not the ceremonial laws. Second, both men were Jews. Attitudes regarding the status of the Gentiles have nothing to do with this parable. Once again, we see that the faith that justifies is a self-renouncing faith that looks to the righteousness of another. The faith/works antithesis in the sphere of justification that was and is one of the pillars of Lutheranism and the Reformed faith must be maintained. It is thoroughly biblical.

(4) The “identity markers” theory is refuted by Paul’s example of Abraham in Romans 4:1-5. “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (vs. 2-5). Abraham was justified by faith apart from works before Israel existed, before the ceremonial law was given and before Abraham was circumcised! Therefore, the term “works” must refer to any kind of self-effort, legalism or law-keeping for salvation. The traditional interpretation which places an antithesis between faith and works in laying hold of salvation stands.

(5) The Auburn Avenue theology is completely rejected by Paul in Romans 5:1-2. In chapter 5 the apostle begins to examine justification from another perspective. After looking at the manner or nature of justification in 3:21-4:25 the apostle will discuss some of the blessed consequences of justification. As he turns to another topic that is based upon and connected to justification (note the word “therefore” in verse 1) he makes a statement about justification that destroys the “New Perspective” and Auburn Avenue concepts of a future justification based on covenant faithfulness.³⁷ The apostle writes “Therefore, having been justified [aorist passive], we have peace [present active] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” The apostle’s use of the aorist passive to describe justification indicates that: a) Justification is objective to us. God declares us righteous in the heavenly court. b) Justification is a once and for all act by God. It is not something that can be lost or repeated. c) For Christians justification has already occurred at a point in time in the past when they believed. It is not a future event. d) Justification is appropriated by the instrumental means of faith, not through the water of baptism. Note also that justification results in a continued state of peace with God. Justification does not make reconciliation with God possible, it achieves reconciliation. “That is what he is anxious to teach us, that our salvation—if we really see and believe this doctrine of justification by faith,

³⁷ Another passage which disproves the Auburn Avenue paradigm is John 5:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” There are a number of things in this passage that merit our attention. First, this statement opens with the formula “Truly, truly, I say unto you” which our Lord used to indicate His unique authority as Jehovah, as the theanthropic mediator. What Jesus is about to say must be received as divine truth, the spoken words of God Himself. Second, believing in Christ immediately results in a person possessing eternal life. There is no place in the Savior’s teaching for covenantal nomism or good works that lead to “final justification.” “The promise becomes immediately effective; the hearer-believer *has* eternal live *now*. He has the judgment behind him, not before him, since judgment is for unbelief (3:18, 36)” (George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999], 76). Third, the verb tense in 24b (the perfect active indicative [“has passed,” *metabebeken*] of *metabaino*) is significant. It means that a person who believes in Jesus has passed from one state (that of spiritual death) into another (eternal life); and that person *remains* in that new state of spiritual life that continues into eternal blessedness. This teaching is identical to Romans 5:1-2.

and if we thus rest our faith upon Christ—that our ultimate complete salvation is certain, is guaranteed, is absolute. He states it immediately in the first two verses.”³⁸

The Auburn Avenue theologians repeatedly accuse their opponents of not permitting passages to speak for themselves, of allowing a theological system to shade the exegesis of Scripture. But, when we study the biblical teaching on justification using the standard historical-grammatical interpretation of the Bible, we see that it is the Auburn Avenue theologians who are forcing passages into their doctrinal grid.³⁹

(6) The Auburn Avenue doctrine contradicts Paul’s own conversion experience described in Romans 7:7-11. This passage of Scripture indicates that, as a Pharisee, Paul believed that keeping the law was something achievable by man. The Pharisees externalized the law to make it easier to obey. When Paul says, “I was alive apart from the law” (v. 9) he obviously does not mean that he was like a Gentile totally without law, but that he did not yet have a true understanding of the internal aspect of law-keeping. Paul was self-deceived, self-righteous and complacent. But when the commandment “Thou shalt not covet” (v. 7, KJV) was applied to his consciousness by the Holy Spirit, his self-righteousness and self-assurance came to an end. The tenth commandment internalizes the law by forbidding inward, illicit lusts and thoughts. (Interestingly, in His preaching to the Jews our Lord emphasized the internal aspect of obedience in contrast to outward acts [e.g. Mt. 5:21-29]. Jesus pressed the most difficult aspect of the law upon His self-righteous audience so they would understand the impossibility of perfect obedience and flee to the Savior.)

Thus Paul said, “And the commandment, which was unto life, I found to bring death” (v. 10). Although the law held out the promise of life to those who could perfectly obey it, and Paul, a self-righteous Pharisee, believed he was on the path to eternal life, it rather was found to bring death. Paul, the good Pharisee, expected life but instead found condemnation for the law was never intended as a ground or instrument of justification. “Sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me” (Rom. 7:11). Sin deceived Paul. All of Paul’s hopes and dreams of self-righteousness were dashed on the rocks of sin and inner corruption. What Paul the Pharisee wanted the law to do, it could not do. Not because the law was defective, or because the law was evil, but because the law (in the post fall world) was not designed by God to secure our salvation. “Such is the experience of every believer, in the ordinary progress of his inward life. He first turns to the law, to his own self righteousness and strength, but he soon finds that all the law can do is only to aggravate his guilt and misery.”⁴⁰ God uses the law to plow the furrows of man’s heart. Once he knows his guilt, once he knows that he cannot obey the law, he is brought to despair and, then, he runs to the cross of Christ. The awful burden of guilt is washed away by Christ’s blood and is replaced with His perfect righteousness.

³⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5, Assurance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1971] 1972), 3-4.

³⁹ Note how James D. G. Dunn, a leader of the “New Perspective on Paul” movement (Dunn has strongly influenced Shepherd and his disciples), attempts to circumvent the clear meaning of Romans 5:1. He writes, “Too much weight should not be put on the aorist tense at the beginning of Rom. 5:1—‘Having been justified from faith....’ For that simply emphasizes the beginning of the salvation process. As the whole conception of God’s righteousness has indicated, *justification is not a once-for-all act of God*. It is rather the initial acceptance by God into restored relationship. But thereafter the relationship could not be sustained without God continuing to exercise his justifying righteousness with a view to the final act of judgment and acquittal” (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 467, emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1835]), 225.

How, we ask, can the apostle's description of his own experience be harmonized with the Auburn Avenue doctrine that faith and obedience are the same thing, that keeping the law is easy and achievable, that obedience to the law is a co-instrument of final justification? Paul would have nothing to do with such teachings. The apostle had to become dead to the law (as a means of justification), that he might live unto God (Gal. 2:19).

(7) The "New Perspective" and Auburn Avenue doctrine is refuted by Paul in Romans 9:30-32 and 10:3-5:

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For if Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "*The man who does those things shall live by them.*"

According to "covenantal nomism" the problem with the Jews was not that they were seeking salvation in self-righteousness ("seeking to establish their own righteousness," v. 3) but that they were excluding the Gentiles by holding to a monopoly of covenant righteousness. They claim that the great error of the Jews was not in their seeking a *subjective righteousness* through covenant loyalty and law-keeping, but their error was Jewish adherence to a national covenantal monopoly. Therefore (according to the "New Perspective") "the end of the law" (v. 4) refers to the end of Israel's special separate status among the nations.

The "New Perspective" interpretation is absurd and should be rejected for a number of reasons. First, the parallel between the Gentiles obtaining righteousness and the Jews not obtaining righteousness in verses 30-31 makes no sense whatsoever if one holds to the "New Perspective." The word righteousness in the case of Gentiles refers to justification. The Gentiles received justification by faith. "[T]he righteousness which Christ has provided unto our justification is one that meets all the requirements of God's law in its sanctions and demands."⁴¹ If verse 30 refers to obtaining salvation then obviously verse 31 does also. Paul is not addressing covenantal exclusivity but two different methods of salvation: one of faith and the other of works. Second, "their own righteousness" is being contrasted with "God's righteousness" in verse 3. The "New Perspective" theory destroys Paul's antithesis between a God-righteousness and a human righteousness—an objective, perfect righteousness and a subjective, defective righteousness. "The basic error of Israel was misconception respecting the righteousness unto justification."⁴² Stott writes,

All human beings, who know that God is righteous and they are not (since "there is no-one righteous, not even one," 3:10), naturally look around for a righteousness which might fit them to stand in God's presence. There are only two possible options before us. The first is to attempt to build or establish our own righteousness, by our good works and religious observances. But this is doomed to failure, since in God's sight even "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." The other way is to submit to God's righteousness by receiving it from him as

⁴¹ Ibid, 2:49.

⁴² Ibid, 2:48.

a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ. In verses 5-6 Paul calls the first *the righteousness that is by the law* and the second *the righteousness that is by faith*.⁴³

Third, Paul's discussion of "the end of the law" in verse 4 clearly refers (in both the narrow and broader context) to the end of the law as a means of salvation. The novel idea that it means the end of Israel's covenantal monopoly or Jewish identity markers has to be read into the text. It simply isn't there. The Jews were ignorant of God's righteousness and thus sought to establish their own righteousness by works. They rejected the righteousness provided by God in Christ which is received by faith and sought to achieve their own righteousness by keeping the law. Not just the ceremonial law (the identity markers) but the whole law.

(8) The "New Perspective" and Auburn Avenue theology is also refuted by the manner in which Paul deals with ceremonial law or "Jewish identity markers" in Romans 14. This portion of Scripture is important in the debate with the New Perspective on Paul because a) here is a passage where there is no doubt that Paul is addressing problems caused in a church because of ceremonial ordinances or "Jewish identity markers;" and b) in this chapter Paul (unlike the earlier chapters which deal with justification) the apostle does not consider "Jewish identity markers" a threat to the gospel at all. This observation can only be explained if the earlier chapters have *nothing* to do with "Jewish identity markers" or corporate covenantal exclusivity. Therefore, the chapters that deal with justification are refuting the heretical Jewish concept of salvation by law-keeping or works righteousness. The Protestant and Reformed understanding of Romans and Galatians stands.

Note how Paul addresses the use of certain ceremonial laws by Jewish believers in a mixed assembly. (Keep in mind that Romans was written in AD 57 or 58 after the epistle to the Galatians, AD 53-56). In the Roman church there were Jewish Christians who "regarded the holy day of the ceremonial economy having abiding sanctity."⁴⁴ The apostle is definitely "referring to the ceremonial holy days of the Levitical institution."⁴⁵ Does the apostle accuse these Jewish believers of preaching another gospel? Does he tell them they are obligated to keep the whole Mosaic law? No. He does neither. He allows for diversity in the church over the issue of Jewish holy days because a) no works-righteousness was attributed to these practices; and b) the first generation of believers lived in unique historical circumstances (i.e., Jewish believers were already accustomed to keeping certain holy days of the Mosaic economy). Paul tells each side (the strong and the weak) to co-exist in peace and unity. Each side must not force their views on the other side or berate their brothers. When heresy or ideas of works-righteousness are *not* involved in the keeping of certain "Jewish identity markers," Paul does not accuse people of heresy, act with an extreme note of urgency, express astonishment, or proclaim anathemas

⁴³ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 281.

⁴⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 2:177-178.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Murray's comments are helpful. He writes, "This polemic severity we do not find in the section with which we are now concerned in Romans. Here there is a tenderness and tolerance that reflect a radically different attitude. "But him that is weak in faith receive ye" (14:1). "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind" (14:5). Why this difference? The reason is clear. In Galatians Paul is dealing with the Judaizers who were perverting the gospel at its centre. They were the propagandists of a legalism which maintained that the observance of days and seasons was necessary to justification and acceptance with God. This meant a turning back again 'to the weak and beggarly rudiments' (Gal. 4:9); it was 'a different gospel which is not another', and worthy of the apostle's anathemas (*cf.* Gal. 1:8, 9). In Romans 14 there is no evidence that those esteeming one day above another were involved in any respect in this fatal error. They were not propagandists for a ceremonialism that was aimed at the heart of the gospel. Hence Paul's tolerance and restraint" (Ibid, 2:272-273).

against false teachers. If (as the “New Perspective” and Auburn Avenue theologians assert) the early chapters of Romans and the book of Galatians are merely dealing with “Jewish exclusivism” or “identity markers,” then how can they account for the radical difference in Paul’s attitude between those sections of Scripture and this one? They can’t explain it.

(9) Paul’s epistle to the Galatians is especially relevant to the Auburn Avenue theology due to the fact that Paul is rebuking the Galatian Judaizers precisely because they believe that justification by faith in Christ needs supplementation by adding works of the law to it. “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh” (Gal. 3:3)? In the Auburn system the works of the law (i.e., faithful obedience, covenant faithfulness, personal righteousness, covenantal perseverance) are necessary for Christians to *stay justified*. But, we ask, if Paul strongly condemns the Galatians for denying the aloneness of faith (i.e., in complete separation from works) in appropriating Christ and His merits, then would he not also certainly anathematize the Auburn scheme as well? If one believes this author is exaggerating the similarity between the Auburn Avenue theology and the Galatian heresy, carefully read the following quotes from Norman Shepherd (the Auburn Avenue theology comes more from Shepherd than any other theologian). Note how Shepherd repeatedly says that we are justified by Christ and our own “personal godliness,” “good works,” and “new obedience.” Shepherd writes, “The exclusive ground of the justification of the believer in the state of justification is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but his [i.e., a believer’s] obedience, which is simply the perseverance of the saints in the way of truth and righteousness, is necessary to his continuing in a state of justification (Heb. 3:6, 14). . . .”⁴⁶ “The personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Heb. 12:14). . . .”⁴⁷ “Good works done from true faith, according to the law of God . . . are nevertheless necessary for salvation from eternal condemnation and therefore for justification (Rom. 6:16, 22: Gal. 6:7-9)”⁴⁸ “. . . faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified (compare Luke 8:21; James 1:22-25)”⁴⁹ “. . . By way of repentance men become doers of the law who will be justified and enter into eternal life (Rom. 2:7).”⁵⁰ In an article “The Covenant Context of Evangelism,” Shepherd writes, “It is both striking and significant that the Great Commission is not given in either *Matthew* or *Luke* in terms of calling upon men to believe. Faith is not mentioned specifically, but only by implication. What is explicitly asserted is the call to repentance and good works. When the call to faith is isolated from the call to obedience, as it frequently is, the effect is to make good works the supplement to salvation or simply the evidence of salvation.”⁵¹ Although Shepherd insists that the “exclusive ground” of justification is the righteousness of Christ, he also repeatedly states that our own good works are necessary for justification. Apparently, Shepherd believes that adding our own good works to faith in Christ in justification is okay as long as we say that Jesus is the ultimate ground of justification (i.e., Christ enables us to be faithful) and that our good works are non-meritorious. The problem for Shepherd is that Paul’s doctrine of *faith alone* explicitly contradicts and condemns any human contribution to justification whatsoever. Shepherd’s declaration that such contributory works are

⁴⁶ Norman Shepherd, “Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works,” presented to the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, November 18, 1978. Thesis 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Thesis 22.

⁴⁸ Ibid, Thesis 23.

⁴⁹ Ibid, Thesis 20.

⁵⁰ Norman Shepherd, “The Grace of Justification,” February 8, 1979, 10.

⁵¹ Norman Shepherd, *The New Testament Student and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 74.

non-meritorious is arbitrary, illogical and unscriptural. His contradictory statements, however, are useful in giving his heretical followers plausible deniability.

Perhaps the reason Shepherd does not see the obvious contradictions within his system, is his clever redefinition of faith as obedient faith, faithfulness or penitent faith.⁵² Shepherd broadens the definition of justifying faith to include all the *fruits* of faith. All the graces that normally accompany saving faith (repentance, sanctification, obedience, perseverance) are collapsed into one category. Thus, the biblical definition of faith as instrumental, as sharply distinguished from obedience to the law, as something that looks away from oneself and rests wholly upon Christ is abandoned for a faith plus works combination. If Shepherd was willing to say that true saving faith *leads to* an obedient life, or is *always accompanied by* faithfulness or *results in* good works which are *evidence* of a true living faith, then he would be in line with the Reformed symbols and there would be no controversy.⁵³ But, his insistence on a faith/works combination in justification is unconfessional, Romanizing, heretical, and deadly. Shepherd and his followers are wolves in sheep's clothing and therefore must be defrocked and excommunicated for the safety of the sheep and the preservation of the Reformation against Romanism.

(10) A passage of Scripture which explicitly refutes the "Jewish identity markers" theory is Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'" Here Paul follows the Septuagint rendering of Deuteronomy 27:36 with some slight changes. Instead of the Septuagint's "all the words of this law" (M.T. also has "this law"),⁵⁴ Paul writes "everything that is written in *the Book of the law*." The apostle is emphasizing that *every law in the whole written Torah* in all of its details (i.e., every jot and tittle) must be perfectly obeyed to avoid being under the curse of the law. "This is the sword of

⁵² David Van Druenen writes, "In his more recent work, Shepherd continues to speak of obedience and good works as part of faith itself. For example, he writes, 'Faith is required, but faith looks away from personal merit to the promises of God. Repentance and obedience flow from faith as the fullness of faith. This is faithfulness, and faithfulness is perseverance in faith. A living, active, and abiding faith is the way in which the believer enters into eternal life.' Following the train of thought here is not easy but the logic seems to be something like this: 'repentance and obedience' constitute the 'fullness of faith;' the 'fullness of faith' is 'faithfulness;' 'faithfulness' is 'perseverance in faith'—all four of these terms or phrases are evidently identical. What then is the significance that Shepherd, in the very next sentence and without a hitch, again refers somewhat climactically to the saving necessity of a 'living, active, and abiding faith?' The obvious implication is that this 'living, active, and abiding faith' is what is meant by the 'fullness of faith,' which in turn implies that faithfulness, perseverance, and repentance and obedience, then, the very things that Reformed theology has so carefully distinguished from faith, become aspects of faith in the end" ("Justification by Faith in the Theology of Norman Shepherd" in *The New Southern Presbyterian Review*, Fall 2002, 1:2, 80).

⁵³ The *Westminster Confession* says that God accepts "their person as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone" (11:1). "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification" (11:2). The *Shorter Catechism* reads: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone" (33). The *Larger Catechism* says that sinners are justified, "not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone" (70); "imputing His righteousness to them, and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith, which also is His gift . . ." (71). The *Belgic Confession* says that "God imputes righteousness to him without works ...without ...any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone" (art. 23). See the *Second Helvetic Confession* 15:2, 3, 4 and the *Canons of Dort*, Head 2, Rejection 4.

⁵⁴ See Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 141; and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 158.

Damocles which hangs over the head of all workers with law.”⁵⁵ Further, Deuteronomy 27 itself completely ignores the ceremonial law and focuses upon violations of the ten commandments (idolatry, v. 15; dishonoring parents, v. 16; theft, v. 17; adultery, v. 20; murder, v. 25) and specific applications of the ten commandments (injustice, v. 19; cruelty, v. 18; bestiality, v. 21; incest, vs. 22, 23; unlawful violence, v. 24). Paul, writing under divine inspiration, makes it crystal clear that his phrase “the works of the law” refers to the whole law of God whether ceremonial (i.e., “the identity markers”) or moral (the ten commandments and moral case laws).

This section of Scripture refutes the Auburn Avenue theology in the following ways. First, as noted, the expression “the works of the law” refers to the whole law of God not the ceremonial laws alone. Secondly, the apostle’s use of Deuteronomy 27:36 disproves the Shepherd/Monroe interpretation of Romans 2:14b, “the doers of the law will be justified.” Paul’s point is not that a general obedience (i.e., “covenant faithfulness”) to the law will result in final justification; but rather, that any commitment to the law as a means or instrument of justification involves the necessity of a perfect obedience to *the whole law in exhaustive detail*. The Auburn theologians teach that the law is easy to keep because God does not expect a complete and perfect obedience to all of its precepts. Paul says the exact opposite. Everyone who relies on the law as a means or even partial means of justification is under the law’s curse. Hendriksen writes,

Now what was really the purpose of God’s law? God gave his law in order that man, by nature a child of wrath, and thus lying under the curse (Gal. 3:13), as definitely declared in Deut. 27:26; John 3:36; Eph. 3:2, might be reminded not only of his unchanged obligation to live in perfect harmony with this law (Lev. 19:2), but also of *his total inability to fulfill this obligation* (Rom. 7:24). Thus this law would serve as a custodian to conduct the sinner to Christ (Gal. 3:24; cf. Rom. 7:25), in order that, having been saved by grace, he might, in principle, live the life of gratitude. That life is one of freedom in harmony with God’s law (Gal. 5:13, 14). However, the Judaizers were perverting this true purpose of the law. They were relying on law-works *as a means of salvation*. On that basis they would fail forever, and Deut. 27:26, when interpreted in that framework, pronounced God’s heavy and unmitigated curse upon them; yes, *curse*, not blessing. The law condemns, works wrath (Rom. 4:15; 5:16, 18).⁵⁶

(11) Paul’s condemnation of the Judaizers in Galatians 4:21-31 implies much more than a mere hanging on to Jewish identity markers or exclusivity. Paul uses the symbol of two mothers to represent two different systems of doctrine. Hagar the slave woman and the Jerusalem which

⁵⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, [1937] 1961), 141.

⁵⁶ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967, 68), 1:126-127. Ernest DeWitt Burton writes, “The unexpressed premise of the argument, necessary to make this passage [Gal. 3:10b] prove the preceding proposition, is that no one does, in fact, continue in all the things that are written in the book of the law to do them” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980], 464). John Eadie writes, “They are under the penalty, according to the apostle’s proof, not merely because they have broken, but because they are breaking, the law. Their obedience is neither complete nor uniform. They are under the curse, and the law cannot deliver them; for the function of law is to arraign, convict, and punish. By it is ‘the knowledge of sin,’ it shows their conduct to be out of harmony with its requirements, and thus by its demonstration all the world becomes guilty before God” (*A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1869) 1979], 241). Huebner writes, “If we will be saved by the law, we must do all, and must be able to say, that we have never neglected any thing commanded, nor done any thing forbidden. In brief, the matter stands thus: if we will merit salvation, amazingly little will come of it, for our virtue is piece-work; against one or two legal performances God can oppose ten transgressions” (as quoted in Otto Schmoller, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960], 73).

now is, corresponds *not* to the Mosaic law as it was intended by God; which pointed to Jesus Christ and not to a system of works salvation; but, to the slavish doctrine and worship that the Old Covenant religion had degenerated into under the Pharisees. Although the ceremonial ordinances were weak and beggarly elements for an immature church, the faithful saints of the Old Covenant were not spiritual Ishmaelites who were slaves under bondage. “This is a heavy reproach against the Jews, whose real mother was not Sarah, but the spurious Jerusalem, twin sister of Hagar; who were therefore slaves born a slave, though they haughtily boasted that they were the sons of Abraham.”⁵⁷ The Jews placed themselves under the yoke of bondage because they believed that strict obedience to the ceremonial regulations and moral laws, as well as their own man-made laws, could bring them into the kingdom of heaven. Paul says they were damnable heretics who were dead wrong. If the Jewish identity markers theory were true then Paul was engaging in incredible overkill in his statements.

(12) A section of Scripture that is especially fatal to the Auburn Avenue doctrine is Galatians 5:1-4, where Paul warns believers not to be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. The apostle says that the man who becomes circumcised is a debtor to keep the whole law. Is Paul saying that anyone who becomes circumcised cannot be saved without exception? No. We know that that cannot be the apostle’s meaning for late in his ministry he circumcised Timothy (Ac. 16:3) to make it easier to minister in Jewish communities. Clearly then, the apostle’s argument is not against a love of Jewish identity markers or even exclusivity as bad as that may be (1 Cor. 3:3ff.). The thing that stirred up Paul and caused him to use such strong language was the doctrine behind circumcision. Although the false teachers acknowledged Christ, they in addition taught the necessity of circumcision as a commitment to follow the law as another mode of justification. The Judaizers were teaching another gospel. They required obedience to the law in addition to faith in Christ. Paul responded to this doctrine by pointing out that if you depend on the law in addition to Christ, then you must perfectly and perpetually obey the whole law (ceremonial and moral) in exhaustive detail. In other words, if people look to anything besides Jesus for salvation they have no hope of ever being saved. John Stott writes,

The slogan of the false teacher was: “unless you are circumcised and keep the law, you cannot be saved” (*cf.* Acts 15:1, 5). They were thus declaring that faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation. Circumcision and law-obedience must be added to it. This was tantamount to saying that Moses must be allowed to finish what Christ had begun.

See how Paul describes their position in these verses. They are those who “receive circumcision” (verses 2, 3), who are therefore “bound to keep the whole law” (verse 3), since this is what their circumcision commits them to, and who are seeking to “be justified by the law” (verse 4).

What does Paul say to them? He does not mince his words. On the contrary, he makes a most solemn assertion, beginning *Now I, Paul, say to you* (verse 2). He warns them in three sentences of the serious results of their receiving circumcision; *Christ will be of no advantage to you* (verse 2), *you are severed from Christ and you have fallen away from grace* (verse 4). More simply, to add circumcision is to lose Christ, to seek to be justified by the law is to fall from grace. You cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to receive Christ, thereby acknowledging that you cannot save yourself, and then receive circumcision, thereby claiming that you can. You have got to choose between a religion of law and a religion of grace, between Christ and circumcision. You cannot add circumcision (or anything else, for that matter) to Christ as

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 140.

necessary to salvation, because Christ is sufficient for salvation in Himself. If you add anything to Christ, you lose Christ. Salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone.⁵⁸

Paul's argumentation is the reason why the new Auburn Avenue theology must be opposed with every fiber of our being. While the Shepherdites loudly proclaim their loyalty to Christ, their love of the Reformed faith, their acceptance of forensic justification, and their commitment to the Westminster Standards, they turn right around and throw it all away by adding obedience (covenant faithfulness, good works, covenantal perseverance, etc.) to Christ for justification.

(13) Perhaps the most explicit refutation of the "New Perspective" and Auburn Avenue doctrine is found in Philippians 3:7-9. "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, *not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. . . .*" After Paul warns believers of the Judaizers in verse 2, he enumerates his personal achievements as a Pharisaical Jew. He discusses his impeccable Jewish upbringing, his noble lineage and his religious zeal as a Pharisee (vs. 5-6). He wants the Philippians to know two things about himself. First, he knows about the Judaizers' doctrine as one who was an expert in that kind of teaching. Second, he wants to establish the fact that if any one had reason to boast about their heritage and personal achievements he was second to none. But after setting forth his "religious achievements," his "good works" as a Pharisee, he acknowledges that all his personal achievements are worthless. In fact, he regards all his good works and law-keeping as worthless trash that he may own Christ and His righteousness (vs. 7-11).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ John R. W. Stott, *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians* (London: InterVarsity, 1968), 133-134.

⁵⁹ Perhaps the best explanation as to why personal law-keeping or covenant faithfulness can have nothing to do with our justification comes from the pen of Thomas Boston. He writes, "1. Thy obedience must be perfect, in respect of the principle of it; that is, thy soul, the principle of action, must be perfectly pure, and altogether without sin. For the law requires all moral perfection; not only actual, but habitual: and so condemns original sin; impurity of nature as well as of actions. Now, if thou canst bring this to pass, thou shalt be able to answer that question of Solomon's, so as never one of Adam's posterity could yet answer it, 'Who can say, I have made my heart clean?' Prov. xx. 9. But if thou canst not, the very want of this perfection is sin, and so lays thee open to the curse, and cuts thee off from life. Yea, it makes all thine actions, even thy best actions, sinful: 'For who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' Job xiv. 4. And dost thou think by sin, to help thyself out of sin and misery? 2. Thy obedience must also be perfect in parts. It must be as broad as the whole law of God: if thou lackest one thing thou art undone; for the law denounces the curse on him that continues not in every thing written therein, Gal 3:10. Thou must give internal and external obedience to the whole law; keep all the commands in heart and life. If thou breakest any one of them, that will ensure thy ruin. A vain thought, or idle word, will still shut thee up under the curse. 3. It must be perfect in respect of degrees; as was the obedience of Adam, while he stood in his innocence. This the law requires, and will accept of no less, Matt. Xxii. 37, 'thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' If one degree of that love, required by the law, be wanting; if each part of thy obedience be not brought up to the greatest height commanded; that want is a breach of the law, and so leaves thee still under the curse. A man may bring as many buckets of water to a house that is on fire, as he is able to carry; and yet it may be consumed, and will be so, if he bring not as many as will quench the fire. Even so, although thou shouldst do what thou art able, in keeping the commands, if thou fail in the least degree of obedience, which the law enjoins, thou art certainly ruined for ever; unless thou take hold of Christ, renouncing all thy righteousness, as filthy rags. See Rom. x. 5; Gal. iii. 10. *Lastly*, It must be perpetual, as the man Christ's obedience was, who always did the things which pleased the Father; for the tenor of the law is, "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the law, to do them." Hence, though Adam's obedience was, for awhile, absolutely perfect; yet because at length he tripped in one point, viz. in eating the forbidden fruit, he fell under the curse of the law. "If a man were to live a dutiful subject to

Philippians chapter 3 raises some important questions. Is Paul merely concerned “with the new identity and configuration of the people of God” as Rich Lusk and the New Perspective theologians believe? Is the apostle only dealing with broad sociological, ecclesiastical, redemptive-historical issues as the Auburn Avenue teachers seem to think? No—Paul sweeps aside all such speculative nonsense. The apostle is dealing with *individual soteriology*. He is talking about himself. There is absolutely nothing to indicate that Paul in this context was concerned about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church. He is discussing two very different ways to achieve salvation. He compares two kinds of righteousness.⁶⁰ There is the attempt at personal righteousness—“my own righteousness, which is of the law” (v. 9)—and there is the righteousness which is obtained from God by faith (v. 9). The problem with the Jews in Paul’s day was that they were merit mongers who sought justification by law. Luther, Calvin and the Reformed creeds are correct, while the New Perspective movement, Shepherd and his followers are wrong.⁶¹

The apostle makes it very clear that the righteousness of the law (i.e., all of our own efforts to achieve or contribute to salvation by keeping the law) must be given up and renounced if we are to obtain the righteousness of faith. Further, he says that the righteousness that we need for justification comes from outside ourselves. It comes forth from God. What all of this means is that if anyone ascribes our justification partly to Christ and partly to man, or if anyone mixes faith and our own good works together to achieve salvation or final justification, they destroy the gospel. Regarding the righteousness that we need for justification, Muller writes,

God is the origin and source of it, while faith is the means or way or instrument by which it is appropriated. True righteousness is not worked by law or the observance of law, but is granted by God as a gift of grace and is accepted and personally appropriated by faith.

Nobody can, therefore, rely on a righteousness *from man* (based on law, acquired by virtue of his own conformity to the law), but only on a righteousness *from God*, appropriated through

his prince, till the close of his days, and then conspire against him, he must die for his treason. Even so, though thou shouldst all the time of thy life, live in perfect obedience to the law of God, and yet at the hour of death only entertain a vain thought, or pronounce an idle word, that idle word, or vain thought, would blot out all thy former righteousness, and ruin thee; namely, in this way in which thou art seeking to recover thyself.

“Now such is the obedience which thou must perform, if thou wouldst recover thyself in the way of the law” (*Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.], 120-121).

⁶⁰ Philippians 3:9 is so clear in its rejection of the whole “New Perspective” paradigm, how can N. T. Wright and his comrades possibly explain it? They cannot fit this passage into their system. Therefore, they must arbitrarily redefine it. Note how Wright interprets Philippians 3:9. He writes, “Paul is saying, in effect, ‘I, though possessing covenant membership according to the flesh, did not regard that covenant membership as something to exploit. I emptied myself, sharing the death of the Messiah, wherefore God has given me membership that really counts in which I to share the glory of Christ’” (*What Paul Really Said* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 124). Wright translates the word “righteous” (*dikaiosune*) as “covenant membership” even though *not one lexicon* exists in the whole world (whether dealing with classical or koine Greek) that has “covenant membership” as a possible meaning of *dikaiosune*. Wright so strongly rejects the biblical doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ that he must arbitrarily impose his own meaning on passages which speak of it. Wright is wrong, dead wrong.

⁶¹ . . . if the complex of other graces really is part of the means of justification, then the evangelist in proclaiming the gospel must demand that these graces be present in the one coming to God for justification. Shepherd might as well say that God only saves people who are already good (While he would never actually say that, his theology requires it). I am very glad that when I was in my sin without Christ that I was not exposed to such a parody of the gospel” (David H. Linden, with Robert L. Reymond, “Norman Shepherd’s ‘Faith Alone’” in Mark D. Anthony, Sr. ed., *The New Southern Presbyterian Review* [Cumming, GA: Chalcedon Presbyterian Church, Fall 2002], 64-65).

faith. Man can offer nothing acceptable *to God*, but all good things are granted him *by God* and are accepted through faith.⁶²

Calvin writes,

He says, that believers have no righteousness of their own. Now, it cannot be denied, that if there were any righteousness of works, it might with propriety be said to be ours. Hence he leaves no room whatever for the righteousness of works. Why he calls it the righteousness of the law, he shews in Romans x. 5; because this is the sentence of the law, *He that doeth these things shall live in them*. The law, therefore, pronounces the man to be righteous through works. Nor is there any ground for the cavil of Papists, that all this must be restricted to ceremonies. For in the first place, it is a contemptible frivolity to affirm that Paul was righteous only through ceremonies; and *secondly*, he in this way draws a contrast between those two kinds of righteousness—the one being of man, the other, from God. He intimates, accordingly, that the one is the reward of works, while the other is a free gift from God. He thus, in a general way, places man's merit in opposition to Christ's grace; for while the law brings works, faith presents man before God as naked, that he may be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.⁶³

Paul teaches that only faith in Christ obtains the perfect righteousness we need for salvation because faith rests on and receives another—Christ and His righteousness. Saving faith is self-renouncing because it looks away from ourselves and our own works and obtains everything in Jesus. Therefore, faith, as it relates to our justification before God, must stand alone. If the faith that justifies is not held in a strict isolation from our own works then it is not a self-renouncing faith. This means that our good works which come after faith must always be viewed as fruits of faith, as demonstrative of saving faith. Shepherd and his followers' fatal error is their subtle denial of faith alone for a faith-works combination.

(14) The idea that “covenantal faithfulness” is necessary for final justification is refuted by our Lord in Luke 17:10. “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’” The point Jesus makes is that even if we could do everything required of us we could not gain anything before God. “However much our faith is increased and is able to do and actually does in the Lord's work, let no false claims of merit enter our minds.”⁶⁴

⁶² Jac. C. Muller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 114-15.

⁶³ John Calvin, *Commentary of Paul to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 97-98. Auburn Avenue advocate Steve Schlissel repeatedly attacks Martin Luther's concept of *sola fide* (e.g., “Covenant Hearing,” Tape 1) in favor of the Romanizing concept of “What does the Lord require?” (i.e., our own personal obedience or covenantal faithfulness). As we analyze the doctrine of Schlissel and his cohorts we must keep in mind that John Calvin agreed with Luther on *sola fide* one hundred percent. Calvin writes, “Now the reader sees how fairly the Sophists today cavil against our doctrine, when we say that man is justified by faith because it recurs so often in Scripture. But since the word ‘alone’ is nowhere expressed, they do not allow this addition to be made. Is it so? But what will they reply to these words of Paul where he contends that righteousness cannot be of faith unless it be free? How will a free gift agree with works?...Does not he who takes everything from works firmly enough ascribe everything to faith alone. What I pray, do these expressions mean: ‘His righteousness has been manifested apart from the law’; and, ‘man is feely justified’; and, ‘Apart from the works of the law’?” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], III, 6:19).

⁶⁴ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg [1946] 1961), 872. Horatius Bonar in his sermon, “Christ our High Priest, Bearing the Iniquity of our Holy Things,” points out why even our best works, our acts of direct devotion to God are tainted with sin and thus cannot have anything to do with our justification before God. He writes, “But, then, in the very act of offering these sacrifices there was sin. When the sinner brought the lamb or the goat to the altar, there was sin committed in the very act of bringing it. There was, for

The Auburn Avenue theologians will no doubt strenuously object to the use of this verse against them by saying, “We reject merit. We do not believe that merit plays any role whatsoever in a person’s justification.” The problem with this objection is that they contradict it by their insistence that saving faith and works are the same thing; that men can only be justified if they persevere in the covenant. In other words, something we do must be added to Christ in order to be saved. When the Auburn Avenue apologist Rich Lusk substitutes the word “value” for merit, speaks of “non-meritorious conditions” and speaks of the requirement of “the obedience of faith” (i.e., good works)⁶⁵ he (like Shepherd before him) is equivocating. If you have to do good works to receive final justification then good works are meritorious (i.e., they cause God to react in a

instance, the imperfect conviction of the sin confessed—the want of a deep sense of the holiness of that God against whom the transgression had been committed, and of the purity of that law which had been broken. There was the coldness, the irreverence, the deadness, the wandering, the many impure motives that mingled with the act of service. There was the defective realization of Divine things—the want of due solemnity—perhaps, too, the grudging of the animal offered up. These, and many similar shortcomings and sins in the way of bringing the sacrifice, could not fail to make the Israelite feel that iniquity was spread over all his holy things, and must be removed before they could be accepted. The thought, too, that God saw in him far deeper sin than he himself understood or imagined, must have led him to ask, how the sin of his holy things was to be forgiven? If, indeed, when he came to the altar of God he could have come with a perfect heart, without a wandering thought or impure desire, then he might be content with the sacrifice itself which he presented. But when he was conscious that in every part of his holy service he was sinning still, the anxious inquiry could but be prompted, ‘How are the sins of my holy things to be put away?’” (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, n.d., 3). Bonar goes on to point men to Jesus Christ who alone had “all the perfection of creature holiness and all the perfection of divine holiness” (Bonar, 14). The Auburn Avenue theology does not understand the sinfulness of sin. That we must regard all of our own good works as filthy rags if we are to lay hold of Christ and possess His righteousness.

⁶⁵ Lusk, 146. If one is tempted to think that the opponents of the Auburn Avenue doctrine are over-reacting, then consider the following quote from Steve Schlissel. Schlissel quotes a Lutheran theologian who completely misrepresents historic Calvinism. Schlissel quotes him because *he agrees* with what he says. Armand J. Boehme writes, “The ‘bilateral nature’ of the covenant means that man is compacted into a covenant of mutual obligations, and is therefore accorded a decisive role in securing its promises. Man is required to fulfill what is due and to request thereupon his due.... No matter how irresistible grace may be envisaged, God still depends here upon a condition wrought within man, in order to bestow His blessings.... If sanctification and justification are not clearly distinguished, if obedience is put in the same place as faith, then the law has replaced the gospel and justification has been supplanted as the central doctrine of Christianity. This turns Christianity into a congregation of obeyers rather than a congregation of believers, and Christ has become a new Moses” (“Justification by Grace through Faith: Do Wittenberg and Geneva See Eye to Eye?” *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology*, xi:4, Reformation Edition 2002: Wittenberg & Geneva, as quoted in Steve Schlissel, “A New Way of Seeing?” in E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros & Cons*, 23). Calvin writes, “With regard to the Ten Commandments we ought likewise to heed Paul’s warning: “Christ is the end of the law unto salvation to every believer” [Rom. 10:4p.]. Another: Christ is the Spirit [II Cor. 3:17] who quickens the letter that of itself is death-dealing [II Cor. 3:6]. By the former statement he means that righteousness is taught in vain by the commandments until Christ confers it by free imputation and by the Spirit of regeneration. For this reason, Paul justly calls Christ the fulfillment or end of the law. For it would be of no value to know what God demands of us if Christ did not succor those laboring and oppressed under its intolerable yoke and burden. Elsewhere he teaches that ‘the law was put forward because of transgressions’ [Gal. 3:19]; that is, in order to humble men, having convinced them of their own condemnation.... At this point the feebleness of the law shows itself. Because observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life, and fall back into the mere curse. I am telling not only what happens but what must happen. For since the teaching of the law is far above human capacity, a man may indeed view from afar above human capacity, a man may indeed view from afar the proffered promises, yet he cannot derive any benefit from them. Therefore this thing alone remains: that from the goodness of the promises he should the better judge his own misery, while with the hope of salvation cut off he thinks himself threatened with certain death.... We have said that the observance of the law is impossible” (John T. McNeill, ed. Ford Lewis Battles, trans. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960], 1:351-353). Both Calvin and Luther believed that personal obedience has nothing to do with our justification.

manner whereby He can declare the sinner righteous based on Christ's death *and* the believer's own *personal righteousness*).

The Auburn Avenue idea that our own inherent righteousness affects the outcome of our justification is further rendered absurd and preposterous by the fact that we are still sinners and everything we do is tainted with sin and far from perfect. "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Ps. 130:3). "Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous" (Ps. 143:2; cf. Rom. 7:15 ff.; Phil. 3:8-9). Good works do not and cannot cause or contribute to justification but rather flow from it. Nevin writes, "We must be saved by His free, sovereign grace and mercy. This is especially true of us who have never done all, or half, or a hundredth part of the things that were commanded us. We are not only unprofitable, but we are provoking and guilty servants. Had we not the God of all patience for our master, we should have been dismissed long ago from His service."⁶⁶ In God's kingdom we must all aim to do His will promptly and sincerely. However, we must never expect our pitiful, sin-tainted efforts to aid us in our final justification. Such an idea is unscriptural, arrogant and foolish. Our faith must rest solely upon Christ and His accomplishments. A faith that is divided between Jesus and our own efforts (covenant faithfulness) cannot stand.

(15) The Auburn Avenue theologians contradict the biblical doctrine of justification because they substitute an imperfect partial obedience for the perfect obedience required by Scripture. The Monroe teachers insist again and again that they do not believe in merit, that man cannot do anything to earn a title to eternal life. But, they also teach that if men do not continue in covenantal faithfulness, they will not receive final justification.⁶⁷ They teach that we must do something besides believe in Christ to be justified. We must do righteousness and be faithful in our actions. Therefore, in spite of their repeated denials of the need for merit, they in fact do hold to a form of merit. As noted earlier, the concept of merit and salvation is inescapable. Even though Adam's creation and estate was gracious, nevertheless, he had to do something to obtain glorified life. He had to render a perfect and perpetual obedience. If he sinned even once, he (apart from a special mediator who obeyed in his place) could not attain glorification (i.e., eternal life without the possibility of falling). The Auburn Avenue theologians must agree that Adam had to render a perfect and perpetual obedience to obtain "eschatological life"; otherwise, they would have to argue that God would accept a partial obedience on the part of Adam; that Adam could sin once in a while yet still attain glorified life. Such thinking, of course, is absurd.

⁶⁶ Alfred Nevin, *Popular Commentary on the Gospel to Luke* (Philadelphia, PA: William Flint, 1868), 594.

⁶⁷ "Faithfulness is required of us as covenant people; it is not required for justification. It is sad to see a theologian with Shepherd's gifts mired in this quicksand. The more he defends this position the more he sinks. The answer is simple: we should take all our obedience and good works and flee from them to Christ alone *for all hope of justification*. Let us have no eye on our moral improvement whatsoever, for when the eye is fixed only on Christ, it is then that we believe in Him and repent. God will justify every such sinner for Christ's sake. Whether we realize it or not, He will then begin the vast sanctifying improvements that continue all of this life. Shepherd has a *different gospel*. His covenantal moralism excludes him from the pale of reformed orthodoxy and from the pale of sound evangelicalism as well. His doctrine is heresy" (David H. Linden, with Robert L. Reymond, "Norman Shepherd's 'Faith Alone'" in Mark D. Anthony, Sr. Ed., *The New Southern Presbyterian Review* [Cumming, GA: Chalcedon Presbyterian Church, Fall 2002], 73).

While the Auburn Avenue theologians openly admit that Adam had to obey perfectly,⁶⁸ they also teach that in a post-fall world we attain “eschatological life” in exactly the same manner as Adam, which is covenant faithfulness or faithful obedience.⁶⁹ The only difference now is that the object of faith is different and we need our sins pardoned by Jesus. The requirement of a perfect and perpetual obedience on the part of Adam coupled with the Monroe teachers’ concept of mono-covenantalism raises some interesting questions. If God required a perfect and perpetual obedience on the part of Adam (i.e. covenant faithfulness), why does God accept an imperfect and partial obedience for glorified life now (i.e., the post-fall world)? One could argue that because of the pardon we receive from Jesus’ blood, a perfect and perpetual obedience is no longer necessary. This argument has two serious problems. First, even though Adam had no sin or guilt before the fall, he still needed to render a perfect and perpetual obedience in order to obtain glorified life. A simple pardon would leave us without sin, but would not be enough to obtain glorified life. We must keep in mind that Jesus does not take us back to where Adam was before the fall, He takes us to where Adam would have been had he been perfectly obedient and received glorified life. Second, forgiveness and justification are not the same thing. “The former is necessary to the latter, but the latter means ‘to declare righteous,’ something that happens as we stand before the bar of God’s perfect justice. We must therefore have a perfect righteousness before God, and it comes as his gift through Jesus Christ as he imputes his righteousness achieved under the covenant of works to us via the covenant of grace (2 Cor. 5:21).”⁷⁰ Gordon Clark writes,

It has been necessary to insist that justification is a judicial act of acquittal, for only so can salvation be by grace. However, the ordinary idea of acquittal does not exhaust the Biblical concept of justification. Section I also says that God pardons the sins of those who are justified and accepts their persons as righteous. Perhaps the idea of pardon needs no explanation, for its meaning is easily understood; but the idea of acceptance needs to be distinguished from both pardon and acquittal. The governor of a state may pardon a convicted official without restoring him to favor and to his previous office. Appointments to office, if honest, would depend on the future conduct of the pardoned man. But it is otherwise with Biblical justification; for if favor with God depended on our future conduct, eventual salvation would be based on our works—clearly contrary to Scripture—and we could never have an assurance of success. When our position depends on Christ’s merits instead of our own, we need have no fear.⁷¹

The fact that Adam before the fall needed a perfect and perpetual obedience to obtain glorified life coupled with biblical meaning of “to justify” leaves one with only two options regarding the attainment of glorified life in the New Covenant era. a) One can argue that a

⁶⁸ Lusk writes, “We have already seen that *had Adam obeyed perfectly*, God would have eventually given him the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree would have represented the bestowal of kingly office and glory upon Adam. It would have meant a promotion from earthly dominion to heavenly . . .” (“A Response to ‘The Biblical Plan of Salvation’” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons*, 139; emphasis added).

⁶⁹ Lusk writes, “We know that faithfulness—or, faith filled obedience—was the basic requirement for Adam ...the stance of faith [Lusk defines faith as “faithfulness—or, faith filled obedience”] as the basic requirement remains unchanged from one phase of history [i.e. before the fall] to the next [i.e. after the fall]...” (“A Response to ‘The Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” 124-25).

⁷⁰ Richard D. Phillips, “Covenant Confusion,” Seminar Address for the Philadelphia Conference on Reformation Theology, Phoenix/Indianapolis/Philadelphia, March-April 2004.

⁷¹ Gordon Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe? The Westminster Confession Yesterday and Today* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), 124-25.

perfect and perpetual obedience is still necessary; and, that perfect and perpetual obedience has been rendered by a substitute—the Lord Jesus Christ. This teaching is the position of the Westminster Standards and Reformed Christianity. What we could not do because of our sins and sinful depravity Jesus did in our place. He obeyed the requirement of a perfect and perpetual righteousness and this righteousness is imputed to our account when we believe in Him. We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. b) The only other option is that the requirement for a perfect and perpetual obedience has been suspended and substituted with an imperfect partial obedience. This teaching is either explicitly or implicitly held by classical Arminians (the concept of evangelical obedience),⁷² neo-nomians⁷³ (the standard of God’s law has been lowered in the New Covenant era so that we can render an easier general obedience), dispensationalism (the whole Old Testament law has been abrogated) and mono-covenantalism or the Auburn Avenue heresy (God requires covenant faithfulness to be justified; however, this covenant faithfulness is imperfect and partial). Lusk writes, “Israel, like Adam receives life from God and then is commanded to obey on the basis of this grace (Exodus) . . . the law did not require perfect obedience. It was designed for sinners, not unfallen creatures. Thus, the basic requirement of the law was covenant loyalty and trust, not sinless perfection. . . . Moses was right: this law was not too hard to keep, for it was a law of faith (Deuteronomy 30:11ff; cf. Romans 10:1-12).”⁷⁴

⁷² Gordon Clark writes, “The Arminians, even though they were born Protestants, broke away from the Lutheran and Calvinistic teaching and took one or more steps backward toward Rome. They held that the demands of the law were lowered to the level of ‘evangelical obedience’ and on the basis of this quite human obedience, we are justified. But in addition to running counter to the previous references which exclude works, this impinges on the holiness of God by picturing him as satisfied with less than perfection. The Scripture does not teach that God lowers his requirements. On the contrary, God requires and supplies complete sinlessness. Christ not only bore our penalty on the cross, but in his life he perfectly obeyed his Father. It is the personal righteousness of Christ’s sinless obedience that is put to our account, on the basis of which we are declared not guilty. Read the same references again. Cf. also Tit. 3:57; Eph. 1:7; I Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:0; and even Jer. 23:6, for remember, the Gospel is in the Old Testament and with it justification by faith” (*What Do Presbyterians Believe?*, 124).

Robert Trail writes, “They hold, ‘That Christ died to merit this of the Father, viz. that we might be justified upon easier terms under the gospel, than those of the law of innocency. Instead of justification by perfect obedience, we are now to be justified by our own evangelical righteousness, made up of faith, repentance and sincere obedience” (“A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine of Justification from the Unjust Charge of Antinomianism” in *The Works of Robert Trail* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1810) 1975], 1:258).

⁷³ . . . Baxter accepted that the righteousness of Christ was imputed to the believer, he did not regard it as the ground of justification. It merely secured a modification of the terms of the divine covenant, so that whereas in the past God required perfect obedience now he requires only evangelical obedience (faith and repentance): ‘The Day of Judgement is not to try and judge Jesus Christ or his merits, but us: He will judge us himself by his new Law or Covenant, the sum of which is, Except ye repent, ye shall all perish: and, He that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be condemned’ (31). All the Scottish treatments are profoundly critical. Baxterism, they said, was nothing but the old Socinianism; it turned the covenant of grace into a new covenant of works; it proposed something in ourselves (a personal righteousness) as the ground of justification; it meant that we are justified by an imperfect righteousness; it overturned the imputation of Christ’s righteousness; it confused what is required for salvation with what is required merely for justification; and it placed the sinner in a hopeless position: ‘Thus this poor convinced sinner, pursued by justice for a broken law, is called to lean his whole weight of acceptance with God, and found all his hope of pardon and justification, upon his own faith, or gospel righteousness, as the only righteousness wherewith he is to be covered and the only righteousness which is to be imputed to him’ (Brown, 332)” (D. Macloed, “Justification” in org. ed., Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 449-450). There are striking similarities between the Auburn Avenue theology, Arminianism and Baxterism. As noted above, merit in justification is inescapable. The question is: whose merit, Christ’s or sinful man’s?

⁷⁴ Lusk, 127-28.

The Auburn Avenue theologians must explain why a perfect and perpetual obedience is no longer necessary. The Auburn Avenue teachers have invented a mono-covenantal system that suffers from a serious internal contradiction. On the one hand, everyone from pre-fall Adam to the present is under a covenant of grace where final justification and eschatological life depends on faithful obedience. But on the other hand, we have two very different covenants. With one a perfect and perpetual obedience is required and with the other only a general obedience mingled with sin is acceptable.

The only manner in which we can avoid such blatant internal contradictions is to return to Reformed orthodoxy. To argue that in the law God does not require a perfect obedience is absurd. Are we to believe that the command not to commit adultery allows for adultery once in a while? God expects and demands sinless perfection from every one of His rational creatures. “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). As long as we understand that faith and obedience are *not* the same thing; that our obedience has absolutely nothing to do with our “final justification;” that people who are cast aside on the final day never had saving faith and were never justified to begin with; that for God’s people the moral law is a rule for sanctification, not a partial means of justification; that our only hope in life and in death is the sacrificial death of Christ and the imputation of His righteousness, then we could avoid such unbiblical and irrational thinking. As soon as the Auburn theologians adopt a mono-covenantal scheme and redefine faith as “faithful obedience” and make our “faithfulness” a co-instrument of justification, they of necessity must make the law of God “not too hard to keep.” The Pharisees did much the same thing by externalizing the law. Their concept of faith plus works made them lower the bar so that they could earn salvation. Also, if the law (as Lusk asserts) was “not too hard to keep,” why does Paul rebuke the Judaizers by telling them “don’t you understand that if you require circumcision to be saved then you must also keep the whole law” (see Gal. 5:3)? Why then did Paul (as soon as he truly understood the internal nature of the law) express despair and hopelessness and say that the law killed him (see Rom. 7:9)? Did the apostle not understand that the law was easy to keep and was an integral aspect of achieving final justification? Why does Paul, in Romans 1:18 to 3:20, spend so much time establishing the fact “that all, both Jews and Gentiles, are guilty before God, are utterly destitute of the good which would make them well pleasing unto God, and are therefore the subjects of his wrath”?⁷⁵ Mono-covenantalism is a brother to Arminianism and is a new type of Romanism.

(16) The Auburn Avenue doctrine is disproved by the nature of saving faith. Once we understand what faith is and why it alone can be the instrumental means of appropriating Christ, the neo-legalistic Monroe teaching is completely disproved. One of the foundational doctrines of the Auburn Avenue paradigm is the idea that faith and obedience are the same thing. But an examination of saving faith shows that this assertion is absurd. Saving faith involves knowledge, assent and trust. Faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8) that does not have an independent function or even the slightest power to save. Faith is not some kind of spiritual achievement. Saving faith is purely and solely *instrumental*. A faith that keeps a record of human achievement or which depends on self-effort is *not* solely instrumental. True faith is disinterested in itself and looks only to Christ. Genuine faith recognizes that our contribution amounts to precisely zero. Therefore, in apostolic preaching if a person wants to be saved he must “believe” (e.g., Mk. 1:15; Lk. 8:12; Jn. 1:7, 12; ac. 8:37; 13:39; 16:31, etc.) or “call upon the name of the Lord” (Ac. 9:14, 21). He must regard all his own “moral” achievements and “good works” as filthy rags that he

⁷⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:34-35.

may be reckoned as righteous in Christ (Phil. 3:7-9). “Our faith and piety are not share-holders in grace; indeed, our faith, by its very nature, excludes itself from the administration of salvation.”⁷⁶

The biblical definition of saving faith raises an obvious question. If faith and obedience are the same thing, then how is our obedience *instrumental*? How can good deeds lay hold of Christ? Such a thought is absurd. By their very nature as a subjective doing, the works of the law can only demonstrate that true faith exists. They cannot grasp the Savior. That is why Paul connects all systems that are based upon or mixed with the works of the law as guilty of violating the debt principle (see Rom. 4:4). Because good works are not instrumental, if they are necessary for salvation, they by their very nature would place God in debt or some type of obligation. Obviously, then, the old fashioned Protestant doctrine, that good works are the fruit of faith and have no role whatsoever in our justification, stands. John Murray writes,

There are apparent reasons why justification is by faith and by faith alone. First, it is altogether consonant with the fact that it is by grace. “Therefore it is of faith, in order that it might be according to grace” (Rom. 4:16). Faith and grace are wholly complementary. Second, faith is entirely congruous with the fact that the ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ. The specific quality of faith is that it receives and rests upon another, in this case Christ and his righteousness. No other grace, however important it may be in connection with salvation as a whole, has this as its specific and distinguishing quality. We are justified therefore by faith. Third, justification by faith and faith alone exemplifies the freeness and richness of the gospel of grace. If we were to be justified by works, in any degree or to any extent, then there would be no gospel at all. For what works of righteousness can a condemned, guilty and depraved sinner offer to God? That we are justified by faith advertises the grand article of the gospel of grace that we are not justified by works of law. Faith stands in antithesis to works; there can be no amalgam of these two (*cf.* Gal. 5:4). That we are justified by faith is what engenders hope in a convicted sinner’s heart. He knows he has nothing to offer. And this truth assures him that he needs nothing to offer, yea, it assures him that it is an abomination to God to presume to offer. We are justified by faith and therefore simply by entrustment of ourselves, in all our dismal hopelessness, to the Saviour whose righteousness is undefiled and undefilable. Justification by faith alone lies at the heart of the gospel and it is the article that makes the lame man leap as an hart and the tongue of the dumb sing. Justification is that by which grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life; it is for the believer alone and it is for the believer by faith alone. It is the righteousness of God from faith to faith (Rom. 1:17; *cf.* 3:22).⁷⁷

(17) Another area that sets the Auburn Avenue theologians apart from historic Protestantism is their essentially Roman Catholic understanding of James 2:24, “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”⁷⁸ According to the Auburn Avenue teachers the

⁷⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 88. Reformed Orthodoxy has always fought against Arminianism, neo-nomianism and all other forms of neo-legalism which makes faith, the works of faith, or evangelical obedience a condition of justification. The Auburn Avenue theologians need to explain how faithful obedience as a *condition* of final justification can be harmonized with faith as the *alone instrument* which lays hold of Christ. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America need to explain why ministers and elders in their denominations can openly deny justification by faith alone and yet not be defrocked and disciplined by their respective presbyteries.

⁷⁷ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 130-31.

⁷⁸ Lusk writes, “I do not think he has substantiated his claim that James 2 uses ‘justification’ in a demonstrative rather than a declarative sense” (“Response to Smith,” 146). Lusk is following Shepherd in his Romanist understanding of James. O. Palmer Robertson writes, “On a slightly different form he was asserting his view that works as well as faith justify. Mr. Shepherd cited as Biblical support for his view the statement of James that a man is justified by works as well as by faith (James 2:24). In his interpretation, James was speaking of essentially the

common Protestant understanding of this passage is a perversion of the plain meaning of the text. While Protestant commentators have always held that James 2 is discussing works as demonstrative of true faith, Roman Catholics and the Auburn Avenue theologians teach that the good works of believers are necessary to be declared righteous or justified before God. For these men faith and works are the same thing⁷⁹ and thus the works of the law are co-instruments in justification. Schlissel even mocks the Protestant view and *falsely* accuses it of adhering to faith as a mere assent to propositions. (All Reformed theologians [with the exception of Gordon Clark who was more of a Christian philosopher and apologist] explicitly recognize that saving faith is not a bare assent but also involves trust.) Schlissel writes,

He may also, in insisting upon one aspect of Scripture truth, miss the fact that he has abstracted it from the body of revelation. In doing so he may actually alter the character of a truth so as to better fit his *system* than to fit an actual epistolary argument. We recognize this when feminists do it to Galatians 3:28; we tend to look past it when claimants to *sola fide* do it to the character of “faith,” forcing saving faith into the mold of mere assent rather than seeing it in Scriptural relief as a holistic, living response to the Word and will of God. Ironically, the very faith which the Scripture describes as “dead” and of like character with the “faith” of devils, is imagined to be one that unites a poor sinner to the Almighty. Biblical faith, alive in every direction, is reduced to “voluntary assent to understood propositions. . . .” Whereas the Bible reveals to us a comprehensive salvation and calling, proof-texters have bequeathed to us a religion that saves by lining up your assent with *the* Set of propositions. . . . This version of Christian salvation is worse than nothing. The God of the Bible sends His only begotten, his dearly beloved Son, so that man can give Him a causal nod and *in this way* get all He’s got to give? This is defended as if it were not merely something, but everything! How cometh good men to believe this?⁸⁰

As we examine James 2 (read verses 14-26) we will see that orthodox Protestant understanding of this passage is the correct interpretation. Both Roman Catholics and the Auburn Avenue theologians have twisted the meaning of this epistle in order to support their heretical understanding of works. The key to understanding James’ teaching regarding faith and works is to carefully note the context and general thrust of this section as a whole. If one takes a phrase or verse out of its context, one can make James contradict Paul. Paul says “a man is justified by

same justification as Paul, and so could be cited as proof that justification was ‘by works’” (*The Current Justification Controversy*, 18).

⁷⁹ Doug Wilson writes, “But it may still be argued that we ought not to say things like “faith is obedience” without qualification because people will grossly misunderstand” (“Union with Christ: An Overview of the Federal Vision” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros & Cons* [Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004]).

⁸⁰ Steven M. Schlissel, “A New Way of Seeing?” in *Debating the Federal Vision*, 22, 24. Schlissel engages in the fallacy of black and white. He speaks as if the only alternative to “easy believism” or antinomianism is the Auburn Avenue paradigm. This misrepresentation of the Reformed faith was a common tactic used by Papists in Calvin’s day. The Reformed faith demands holiness. However, it carefully distinguishes between justification and sanctification. Schlissel and his cohorts do not. Further, he completely misrepresents Luther and orthodox Lutheranism. The *Formula of Concord* (1576 [1584]) reads: “We believe, teach, and confess that, although antecedent contrition and subsequent new obedience do not appertain to the article of justification before God, yet we are not to imagine any such justifying faith as can exist and abide with a purpose of evil, to wit: of sinning and acting contrary to conscience. But after that man is justified by faith, then that true and living faith works by love (Gal. v. 6), and good works always follow justifying faith, and are most certainly found together with it, provided only it be a true and living faith” (Article III, “Of the Righteousness of Faith Before God,” Affirmative VIII, in Philip Schaff ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1931) 1981], 3:118).

faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28; cf. 4:5-8; Gal. 2:16; 3:10-13; 5:2-4). James says “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24). Since both Paul and James wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, their teaching on faith and works cannot contradict one another. The Auburn Avenue theologians do not believe that these passages contradict each other because they have bought into the “New Perspective” teaching that Paul’s repeated warnings against being justified by law-keeping really only apply to the ceremonial law—the Jewish “identity markers.” All of the passages which teach that we are justified by faith alone apart from the works of the law, they say, are not concerned with individual justification but the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church. Paul (according to the Auburn Avenue paradigm) just wanted to make sure Jews and Gentiles were getting along. We have already demonstrated that such a view of the “faith alone” passages is untenable. The New Perspective teaching is complete rubbish. The solution to the *apparent* contradiction is not to pervert completely the clear teaching of Paul so that we can adopt a Romanist interpretation of James. Such heretical subterfuge is unnecessary because a careful reading of Paul and James shows that each author was considering justification from two completely different perspectives.⁸¹

The apostle Paul in Romans and Galatians explains *how* men are justified before God. Paul discusses the ground of a person’s justification—the sinless life and sacrificial death of Christ and how Christ’s perfect righteousness is imputed or credited to a believer. When Paul discusses faith in this context, he describes faith as an instrument which lays hold of what Christ has accomplished. Paul is explaining salvation by grace through faith. James does not concern himself with the ground of justification, but with easy-believism, or antinomianism. He answers the question “How does a person know if his faith is genuine or real?” Buchanan writes, “The two Apostles were combating two opposite errors, and sought to check two opposite tendencies. Paul contended against Legalism, and the self-righteous tendency which leads men to ‘go about to establish their own righteousness’ [Rom. 10:13], and to seek Justification by the works of the Law. James contends against Libertinism, or the Anti-nomian tendency which leads men to pervert the Gospel itself, and to ‘turn the grace of God into licentiousness’ [Jude 4].”⁸²

James is showing the church that the existence of true faith is demonstrated by a person’s outward behavior or works. The contrast he discusses is between a true and living faith and a false, merely historical, dead faith. “The distinction is manifestly between *theoretic belief* unaccompanied by the practice of good works and a *vital faith* abounding in good works. Works are the outward sign and pledge, the demonstration of faith within. The man dramatically introduced in the text has faith (v. 19), but his faith is theoretic belief.”⁸³ It is a mere intellectual assent to certain propositions without trust. A man says that he believes something to be true, but never acts upon it. He says he believes in Christ, yet does not obey His commandments; he never lifts a finger in service to God’s people. Thus, for James the issue is not faith plus works equals salvation; but rather, faith without works is not even a real faith at all, but a mere hypocritical

⁸¹ It is somewhat ironic that various Auburn Avenue teachers are fond of mocking people for adhering to the standard Protestant interpretation of James, of accusing such people of forcing James into their system, of allowing systematic theology to dictate their exegesis and so on; because it is the Auburn interpretation that ignores what James is doing and forces James into their faith-works scheme of justification. They must do this because James, just as much as Paul, rejects their system. If, as James teaches, good works are the evidence or fruit of justifying faith, then we must make a distinction between: faith and works, trust and obedience, gospel and law, justification and sanctification. While it is true that these things always accompany each other in the person who is saved, they clearly are not the same thing.

⁸² James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1867] 1977), 249.

⁸³ J. P. Lange and J. J. Van Oosterzee, *The Epistle General of James* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 82.

profession. It is dead, a corpse, or non-existent. Men are saved solely through faith in Christ; but that faith must be a genuine faith; a faith that expresses itself outwardly in works of the Spirit. “There is no inconsistency here with the doctrine of justification by grace, for this, as Cranfield observes, is ‘but a salutary reminder that the absence of compassions for one’s fellow men is conclusive proof that one’s professed faith is counterfeit, while mercy shown—may be an evidence of a genuine faith.’”⁸⁴ Thomas Manton writes,

The orthodox, though they differ somewhat in words and phrases, yet they agree in the same common sense, in reconciling James and Paul. Thus, which some say Paul disputeth how we are justified, and James how we shall evidence ourselves to be justified; the one taketh justification for acquittance from sin, the other for acquittance from hypocrisy; the one for the imputation of righteousness, the other for the declaration of righteousness. Or as others, Paul speaketh of the office of faith, James the quality of faith; Paul pleaded for saving faith, James pleadeth against naked assent; the one speaketh of the justifying of the person, the other of the faith,&c.⁸⁵

There are a number of indicators within this section of James which support the classical Protestant interpretation. First, the opening sentence introducing the theme of this whole section tells us very clearly that the topic under discussion is how to identify true faith. For the sake of argument James pictures an imaginary individual who is totally devoid of good works; who will not even lend a hand to naked, starving, destitute Christians but *who says he has faith*. This person has a heart of stone and has nothing to do with merciful deeds of charity, yet *claims* to have faith. This hypothetical solution raises the question that is answered in the rest of the chapter: “Can faith save him?” To paraphrase, “Can that type of faith save him? A profession entirely devoid of works?” or “Can a faith like this save him?” This is the second question of verse 14. Rhetorically framed, it implies that the faith of verse 14 is useless for salvation. “James is not saying that faith (alone) cannot save (see 1:21; 2:24). The *pistis* [faith] of 14b refers to the ‘worthless’ faith of 14a. . . .”⁸⁶ James, from the start of his discussion, emphasizes that he is rebuking a *claim* to faith, a *profession* of faith but not a real saving faith.

The person that James has in mind is not a self-conscious hypocrite or a wolf in sheep’s clothing, but an outward professor who is living in self-deception. He considers himself a Christian and intellectually assents to the general teaching of Scripture, but by his outward behavior shows that he does not have saving faith. If one proceeds on the false assumption that James is criticizing true saving faith, then the passage not only blatantly contradicts the teaching of Christ and Paul, but also is self-contradictory, for a faith cannot be genuine and worthless at the same time. Works do not and cannot transform a dead faith into a living faith. But they can *demonstrate* the existence of true faith. Ironically, the Roman Catholic *Jerome Biblical Commentary* concurs, “What was true in the case of Abraham is true universally by works and faith alone: As is clear from the context, this does not mean that genuine faith is insufficient for justification, but that faith unaccompanied by works is not genuine. There is thus no basic disagreement of James with Paul, for whom faith ‘works through love’ (Gal. 5:6).”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ James B. Adamson, *James: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 288.

⁸⁵ Thomas Manton, *A Commentary on James* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962 [1693]), 264.

⁸⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *James* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1988), 81

⁸⁷ Thomas W. Leahy, “The Epistle of James” in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 2:373.

Second, the false, non-saving type of faith is described as the same faith possessed by demons. “You believe that there is one God; you do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (Jas. 2:19). The demons know and accept the fact that there is one God, but they do not trust in God for salvation. Their belief does not lead to commitment and obedience, but only fear. Likewise, many people have an intellectual understanding of the gospel, but they do not really trust in Christ. Calvin writes, “From this one sentence it appears evident that the whole dispute is not about faith, but of the common knowledge of God, which can no more connect man with God, than the sight of the sun carry him up to heaven; but it is certain that by faith we come nigh to God. Besides, it would be ridiculous were anyone to say that the devils have [real] faith; and James prefers them in this respect to hypocrites.”⁸⁸ Thomas Manton writes, “Bare assent to the articles of religion doth not infer true faith. . . . Well, then do not mistake a naked illumination, or some general acknowledgement of the articles of religion for faith. A man may be right in opinion and judgement, but of vile affections; and a carnal Christian is in as great danger as a pagan, or idolater, or heretic; for though his judgement be sound, yet his manners are heterodox and heretical. True believing is not an act of the understanding only, but a work of ‘all the heart’ Acts viii. 37.”⁸⁹

Third, James says that good works prove the reality of genuine faith. “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (2:18). How does a professing Christian give empirical evidence that he has real faith and is not a hypocrite? By his life, by the good works that he performs! Although it is true that the Bible teaches that good works do not contribute one iota to a Christian’s salvation, it also teaches that good works *always* accompany salvation. “James refuses to accept a division between faith and works. True faith cannot exist separately from works, and works acceptable in the sight of God cannot be performed without true faith.”⁹⁰

The Bible teaches that a person who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and united with Christ in His death and resurrection will produce good works. In other words, justification always leads to sanctification. “It is of utmost importance that while, on the one hand, *justification* and *sanctification* must be distinguished the one from the other, on the other hand, the one must never be separated from the other.”⁹¹ If justification and sanctification are confounded, then one has fallen into the trap of legalism or salvation by faith plus human merit. If justification and sanctification are separated one from another, then one has succumbed to libertinism or antinomianism. A person is saved solely by the merits of Jesus Christ; but, when a person is saved he is also sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Biblical Protestants have never affirmed that people can be saved by giving an intellectual assent to the gospel while refusing to repent of their sins.⁹² Repentance is non-meritorious, but it always accompanies saving faith. Bible-

⁸⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 22:312-313.

⁸⁹ Thomas Manton, *James* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962 [1693]), 240.

⁹⁰ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 91.

⁹¹ J. P. Lange and J. J. Van Oosterzee, *The Epistle General of James*, 88.

⁹² What is somewhat perplexing regarding the whole Auburn Avenue doctrine is that it seeks to address a major problem in Reformed theology that does *not* exist. The general thrust behind much of their argumentation is the idea that *sola fide* is mere assent and an easy-believism. They teach that people need to understand that *real* Christians can apostatize and go to hell; that one’s own covenant faithfulness does make a big difference on the day of judgment; that faith and obedience are the same thing, etc. Does the Reformed faith teach an easy-believism? Does it cause people to live in habitual immorality while they think they are saved and everything is okay? No! The Reformed churches have taken the lead in condemning easy-believism and the carnal Christian heresy. This point is true of all the older theologians (e.g., John Owen, Walter Marshall, James Fraser, Charles Hodge, etc.) as well as

believing Protestants look to good works done in Christ's name as evidence that a person is truly saved. This is the teaching of James—that true faith shows itself in works. Remember, James is not expounding the *ground* on which believers are justified, but is considering the *demonstration* of true faith. Combating the same error that James did, Tertullian wrote: “Some persons imagine that they have God if they receive Him in their heart and mind and do little for Him in act; and that therefore they may commit sin, without doing violence to faith and fear; or in other words that they may commit adulteries, and yet be chaste, and may poison their parents, and yet be pious! At the same rate they who commit sin and yet are godly, may also be cast into hell and yet be pardoned! But such minds as these are offshoots from the root of hypocrisy and sworn friends of the evil one.”⁹³

The teaching of James that genuine faith always leads to good works or that the sincerity of one's faith in Christ can be observed in a person's deeds is a common teaching in the New Testament. Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt. 7:16-21). Paul wrote, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! . . . But now having been set

modern authors (e.g. Arthur Pink, L. Berkhof, John Murray, Jay Adams). In the recent “lordship” controversy, Calvinistic writers (e.g., Walter Chantry, John MacArthur, Sam Waldron, Ernest Reisinger) took the lead in opposing the easy-believism of dispensational fundamentalism and semi-dispensational evangelicalism.

The Reformed position is that saving faith is always accompanied by all the other saving graces. The faith which justifies the sinner is never alone. It is not a bare “intellectual assent.” Some of the reasons why believers must be holy are as follows. a) God is holy and thus commands us to be holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). b) Christians believe in and rest upon the whole Christ who is both Savior and Lord (Rom. 14:7-6; Ac. 16:31; 2 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 10:9). c) The Bible contains many imperatives that require obedience in God's people (Ex. 24:7; Gen. 17:1; Lev. 11:44; Rom. 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:9; 1 Cor. 7:19; 1Tim. 4:8; Eph. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:19, 21; Heb. 12:14, etc). d) The Bible clearly requires repentance (Lk. 3:7-9; Lk. 24:47; 13:5; Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:14, 15; Ac. 17:30). Repentance is a change of mind, a turning away from sin unto God that leads to a change of behavior. e) The Bible teaches that believers were bought with a price—the precious blood of Jesus. Therefore, they belong to Him. They are slaves of Christ whose lives are totally dedicated to serving and exalting Him (Rom. 6:16; 14:8; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet.2:15-16). f) The Scriptures teach that professing believers who habitually engage in wicked behavior are *not* Christians (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-11; 1 Jn. 2:3-4; 3:4,6,9; Jas. 2:20; Mt. 7:21). g) The Bible teaches that everyone who is justified is also regenerated and sanctified (Rom. 6:1-18). Jesus saves from both the guilt and power of sin. Union with the Savior in his death and resurrection is not only the foundation of justification but also of sanctification as well. h) The necessity and reality of sanctification is clearly exhibited in the covenant of grace (Jer. 31:33). The salvation achieved by Jesus Christ is comprehensive. While Reformed authors have taught the necessity of holiness, they also (unlike the Auburn Avenue theologians) have very carefully distinguished between justification by faith alone and all the other aspects of salvation in the broad sense that accompany justification. If this distinction is not carefully made, then we are no better than Romanists or Judaizers.

Ironically, the sacramentalism of the Auburn system often results in antinomianism. This point is true because of a) how the Monroe teachers define a Christian; b) the manner in which church members are urged to focus on the ritual of baptism instead of Christ. Doug Wilson writes, “A theological liberal in a mainstream denomination should be considered covenantally a Christian, even though he denies the virgin birth, the substitutionary death of Christ, the resurrection, and the final judgment” (“Judas was a Bishop,” *Credenda Agenda*, 13:2 [2002], 12). According to Wilson, a person who is a damnable heretic, an anti-Christ, a God hater, who is guilty of an habitual sin of the flesh (Gal. 5:20) is a Christian because he was baptized. Perhaps the theological liberal is a carnal Christian. Ritualism in every form, whether medieval or modern, is the great enemy of holiness. Beware of false prophets whose doctrine will devour your soul!

⁹³Tertullian as quoted in J. P. Lange and J. J. Van Oosterzee, *The Epistle of James*, 89.

free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (Rom. 6:1, 2, 15, 22). “There is now no condemnation to those who are in Jesus Christ, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. . . . For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:1, 13-14). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-25). Peter wrote, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6-7). John wrote, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 1:6-7; 2:4-6). Many more passages could be quoted. The point has been established that the teaching of James is not unique. Faith without works is a mere assertion. Faith without works is fruitless, worthless, and dead.

Fourth, that the entire pericope revolves around the question of a genuine faith versus a spurious faith and not works as an additional element necessary for justification is proven by James’ repeated statement that “faith without works is dead” (2:17, 20, 26). If James were teaching that works must be added to faith for justification, then he could not logically say that faith without works is dead. Does dead faith, or nonexistent faith, plus works equal salvation? The type of faith that James repeatedly condemns is not Christian faith at all, but only lip service. “What we have in this comparison is not a contrast of faith over against works. The point is that faith *by itself* is dead, much the same as the body without the spirit is dead. The readers of the epistle know that they ought not to touch a dead body but to avoid it whenever possible. By implication they need to avoid faith that is dead because it is like a corpse.”⁹⁴ Good works do not make an insincere faith sincere. Works do not make a hypocritical profession genuine. If James were discussing what is needed in addition to *genuine faith* for a person to be saved, then Romanists could claim this passage as a proof text. But obviously he does not. Thomas Manton writes, “*So faith without works.*—The Papists understand true justifying faith, for they suppose it may be without works; but dead faith cannot be true faith, as a carcass is not a true man, and a true faith, cannot be without works, Gal.v.6. We must understand then, an external profession of belief, which, because of some resemblance with what is true, is called faith is *dead*; that is, false or useless to all ends and purposes of faith.”⁹⁵ “He does not deny that faith saves, claiming that it is not sufficient and must be completed by works. The faith which he contests is *dead* faith, and of such he asks, Can *that* faith save him?”⁹⁶

Having considered the teaching of this section of Scripture as a whole and having noted the purpose of this pericope, we then can understand the statement that Abraham was justified by works (v. 21). James does not speak of justification in the same sense as Paul, namely the acquittal or declaration that takes place in the heavenly court the moment a person believes in

⁹⁴ Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, 101.

⁹⁵ Thomas Manton, *James*, 269-70.

⁹⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 137.

Christ, but of the justification of Abraham's faith. James refers to Genesis 22:1, in which we are told that God tested Abraham. What was the purpose of this test? The test was devised to demonstrate the sincerity of the saving faith that Abraham already had. "[W]hen he offered Isaac, his faith was justified to be true and right, for that command was for the trial of it; therefore upon his obedience God did two things—renewed the promise of Christ to him, Gen. xxii.16, 17, and gave him a testimony and declaration of his sincerity, ver. 12 'Now I know that thou fearest God,' saith Christ to him, who is there called the Angel of the Lord."⁹⁷ A. R. Fausset concurs, "The offering of Isaac (v. 21) formed no *ground* of his justification; for *he was justified previously* on his simple *believing* in the promise of spiritual heirs, numerous as the stars (Gen. xv.6). That justification was *showed* by his offering Isaac forty years after. That work of faith *demonstrated*, but did not contribute to his justification. The tree *shows* its life by its fruits, but was alive before either fruits or leaves appeared."⁹⁸

This interpretation is supported by the two verses that follow (vs. 22, 23). James says that "by works faith is made perfect" (v. 22). This statement does not mean that works "perfect" a defective faith, for a defective faith cannot save. Neither does it mean that works perfect a weak and feeble faith, for Christ said that the feeblest of faiths can move mountains (cf. Mt. 17:20). "The meaning is not that works supply anything defective in the grace of faith itself, but that they reveal it in its fullness of wealth and beauty, as by the leaves and fruit a tree is made perfect."⁹⁹ Matthew Poole writes, "Faith is made perfect by works declaratively, inasmuch as works evidence and manifest the perfection and strength of faith. Faith is the cause, and works are the effects; but the cause is not perfected by the effect, only its perfection is demonstrated by it, as good fruit doth not make a tree good, but show that it is so. See II Cor. xii.9."¹⁰⁰

In verse 23, James says that Abraham's obedience fulfilled Genesis 15:6. This means that Abraham's act of obedience confirmed the fact that his faith was genuine. His saving faith was objectively manifested by his work. In Genesis 15:4-5 Abraham is promised an heir that will come from his own body and is promised descendants as numerous as the stars. In verse 6 it says, "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." How did Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac fulfill or confirm verse 6? In Genesis 15:4-5 Abraham is given a promise by Jehovah. In Genesis 22:3 that same promise is put to the supreme test. Abraham is told by God to sacrifice his one and only son. Hebrews 11:19 says that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son because he believed that God was able to raise him from the dead. The faith that Abraham had for a period of forty years was most clearly manifested by his

⁹⁷ Thomas Manton, *James*, 245.

⁹⁸ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3:588.

⁹⁹ Robert Johnson, *James*, 201.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1963 [1685]), 3:887. Some commentators say that faith produces good works, which also in turn stimulates faith. By this they do not mean that works add anything of their own to faith by that faith in action (like a muscle that exercises) maintains its own natural vigor. Stier writes, "James by no means affirms that works give life to, produce or create faith; for faith comes by the power of the word [applied to the Holy Spirit], entering into and received by us and nothing else. But faith grows complete in works, that is the same as Paul's saying or rather the Lord's saying to Paul, that the strength of God may be completed in weakness (2 Cor. xii.9). The strength of faith, indwelling from the beginning and already received along with the first seizing of grace, becomes fully proved, verified, and its operation completed. Thus our calling and election are made sure in the diligence of living and doing (2 Pet.i.10). Thus Abraham's first call was made sure in his last works and the word concerning justification by (out of) faith already before accorded to him, was lawfully and actually confirmed as a truth." (Rudolph Stier, *The Epistle of St. James* [Minneapolis, MN: Kluckslock, (1871) 1982], 356-57)

offering up Isaac. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called’” (Heb. 11:17-18). “By that action he declared he had a true justifying faith, and therefore the Lord saith after this trial, ‘Now I know that thou fearest me,’ Gen. xxii.12.”¹⁰¹ “‘Now I know;’ cf. 18:21, where likewise the mention of God knowing is used more in the sense of confirming his knowledge.”¹⁰² Berkouwer writes, “The statement of Genesis 15:6 is seen as fulfilled, completed, incarnated in the concrete reality of Abraham’s faith was at first imperfect, incomplete, and then, gradually, was perfected in concrete existence. In the command given to Abraham lies the touchstone of his faith, and in his obedience Abraham’s faith was revealed as real in the reality of life. ‘If when the test came, the faith had not been matched by works, then it would have been proved to be an incomplete faith. The works showed that the faith had always been of the right kind and so “completed it.”’ This is what James wants to say in his entire discourse on the relation between faith and works. And if he is thus understood it is hard to see how anyone can seriously put a cleavage between him and Paul.”¹⁰³

A brief examination of James’ perspective on faith and works has shown that James and Paul are in complete harmony. They both teach that faith in Christ alone justifies; but, they also teach that a genuine, sincere, real, saving faith is never alone. It is always accompanied by good works. Not good works done to achieve salvation, but works that naturally flow from a regenerated heart. Those who are justified love Jesus Christ and love the brethren. They live to serve the Lord and His people. Martin Luther understood the nature of saving faith. He wrote, “Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises; it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them. He who does not these works is a faithless man. He gropes and looks about after faith and good works, and knows neither what faith is nor what good works are, though he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.”¹⁰⁴

(18) The Auburn Avenue theology is also refuted by the Bible’s own teaching on our judgment according to works. According to the Monroe doctrine, justification is a process that begins in baptism when we enter the covenant and is maintained by faithful obedience. At the final judgment our faithfulness to the covenant is evaluated and covenant loyalty is rewarded with final justification. Auburn Avenue apologists argue for their view by appealing to passages such as Psalm 7:8 where the psalmist prays for God to judge him according to his righteousness (David, who had acted righteously and was being persecuted and falsely accused, is praying for vindication against his enemies); and, passages such as 2 Timothy 4:7-8 where Paul says he has “fought the good fight . . . finished the race . . . kept the faith.” The apostle says “there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” Note that Lusk associates these passages with final justification. He writes,

Paul was not saying he had earned the crown. He was not suggesting he had merited final justification apart from grace. But he was assured of his final vindication before the

¹⁰¹ Thomas Manton, *James*, 256.

¹⁰² Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 2:110.

¹⁰³ G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, 136. Berkouwer quotes J. H. Ropes, “The Epistle of St. James,” in *The International Critical Commentary* (1916), 220.

¹⁰⁴ Martin Luther, a new translation by J. Theodore Mueller, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kreigel, 1976), xvii.

Judge's bar. He was sure of his covenant standing and could claim covenant loyalty on his part without becoming arrogant.

So pleading for God to bestow promised blessings on the basis of (non-meritorious) covenant allegiance is not problematic. If our theology doesn't allow to us to pray and speak as Jesus, the psalmist, and Paul prayed and spoke, our theology needs further reformation according to Scripture.¹⁰⁵

The Auburn Avenue theologians' use of the judgment according to works passages raises a question that is important in the debate over justification: Do these passages teach the Auburn doctrine of a final justification based on covenant faithfulness? The answer to this question is absolutely not! Although the Bible does teach that all men will be judged according to their works done in the flesh (e.g., Ps. 62:12; Eccl. 12:13-14; Mt. 12:36-37; 16:27; 25:31-46; Jn. 5:29; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 23-24; Rev. 20:11-15), it also clearly teaches that the works that believers do have absolutely nothing to do with justification. The clearest, most detailed passage regarding the judgment of a Christian's works is found in 1 Corinthians 3:

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (vs. 11-15).

The apostle is discussing Christian works which do not endure the judgment. Paul uses the analogy of two types of materials to describe the quality and enduring nature of a Christian's work done for Christ. There are imperishable materials ("gold, silver, and costly stones") which endure and survive the judgment and there are perishable materials ("wood, hay and stubble") which do not endure. They are all burned up. But note that even if a Christian's work is completely consumed on the day of judgment, that person is still saved. What this means is that a believer's works have nothing to do with salvation. Remember, *works are built on the completed foundation: Jesus Christ and His perfect, accomplished redemption.*

Paul's warning is directed primarily to ministers of the gospel (note vs. 5-10). The apostle speaks of a real reward for enduring work. But what distinguishes work that endures from work that does not endure? Paul likely refers to work that is based on human wisdom rather than God's word as work that is burned up. "It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, 'pop' psychology, managerial techniques, relational 'good feelings,'"¹⁰⁶ entertainment, charismania, church growth gimmicks, and so on. Many people who have been seduced by the world's wisdom, however, are genuine believers. But on the day of judgment their work will be exposed for what it really is: merely human, vain, and useless. Their work does not endure for it was worthless; yet they are saved.

Paul teaches that when Christians go before the judgment seat of Christ there is no possibility of going to hell; there is only the possibility of one's works being destroyed. Judgment according to works for the believer does not indicate an alternative way of salvation

¹⁰⁵ Lusk, 138.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 145.

beside justification by faith alone. It completely refutes the idea that one's own works or covenant faithfulness have a role to play in "final justification." Paul's aim in the passages which speak of judgment according to works is to spur Christians to a greater *sanctification*; to a greater diligence in serving Christ. The same God who justifies the ungodly also sets the judgment seat of Christ before believers as a motivation for obedience. Paul's teaching is very different than the Auburn Avenue doctrine that real Christians can lose their justification if they don't maintain "faithful obedience" or "covenant faithfulness."¹⁰⁷ Once again Lusk maintains that the covenant faithfulness necessary for final justification is "non-meritorious." But, if a Christian's personal obedience or lack thereof determines the final outcome on the day of judgment, then salvation is dependent at least in part on works and a works salvation involves merit.

But doesn't Jesus say that all professing Christians who practice lawlessness will be cast into hell on the day of judgment (Mt. 7:22-23)? Indeed He does. But, they are cast into hell because they *never* had saving faith. They were never savingly united to Christ. The Savior says to them, "I never knew you." That is, "I never ever had any kind of saving relationship with you whatsoever." The Bible repudiates the Auburn Avenue innovations at every fundamental point.¹⁰⁸

(19) The Auburn Avenue doctrine has much more in common with Roman Catholicism than it does with the Reformed faith. Let us examine and review some of the similarities.

a) Both systems make justification ultimately depend on the increase and maintenance of the subjective, habitual righteousness of the believing sinner.¹⁰⁹ The Auburn Avenue theologians give lip service to forensic justification. But their doctrine of faithful obedience or covenantal perseverance as it relates to final justification renders forensic justification irrelevant and impotent. If we reject the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, replace it with forgiveness only and then make man's personal obedience and continued effort to be faithful to the covenant

¹⁰⁷ "Indeed, a 'vindication' of the status of the believer shall occur at the last judgment. He shall be 'openly acknowledged, and acquitted in the day of judgment' (*Shorter Catechism* Q.38). But in that vindication, good works arising from repentance shall function only as fruit and evidence of the unshakeable status of justification which had been realized at the moment of believing" (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy*, 22). Regarding the nature of this vindication, see Brian M. Schwertley, *The Final Judgment*.

¹⁰⁸ Some people may appeal to the description of the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 as evidence of a final justification based on covenant faithfulness or personal obedience. Such a view is contrary to Scripture for a number of reasons. First, the description of the Son of Man coming to judge the nations follows two parables that deal with the necessity of readiness and faithfulness. These parables do *not* teach that there is a direct connection between our covenantal obedience and justification. They rather contrast hypocrites who were never saved to begin with (i.e., false professors) with genuine believers. The bridegroom tells the foolish virgins, "I do not know you" (Mt. 25:12). The unprofitable servant is described as "him who does not have" (Mt. 25:29). Second, if Jesus is teaching that people who are generous and open-handed will be justified then He is asserting salvation by works; then, people who go to heaven have a reason to boast throughout all eternity; then, Christ and Paul adhere to two contradictory positions on salvation. Third, our Lord is teaching that fruit reveals the root (cf. Mt. 7:16-23); that those people who minister to poor, persecuted Christians out of a love of Jesus *demonstrate* that they are the subjects of divine grace which sets them apart from unregenerate hypocrites. Fourth, the Bible never teaches that we are justified because we are personally righteous. It is one thing to say that people are justified because of covenantal faithfulness or good works and quite another to say that people who have been regenerated, justified and sanctified are those who enter into eternal life. The first position makes personal righteousness a co-ground or co-instrument of justification which is heretical, while the second merely asserts the biblical truth that everyone justified is also sanctified and glorified.

¹⁰⁹ According to papalism: "Justification means that man himself is made just—made pleasing to God in his own person.... A devout Catholic may say: 'Righteousness by faith means that I cannot save myself, but by faith I can receive God's transforming grace. His grace can change my heart, and by his grace in my heart I can be acceptable in His sight....' The focal point of Catholic theology is God's work of grace *within* human experience" (Robert D. Brinsmead, "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement," in *Present Truth*, 1972, 19).

the co-ground or partial instrument of final justification, we clearly have a synergistic system of salvation by faith and works.

b) Both systems confound justification with sanctification. Justification is forensic, an instantaneous declaration of God that occurs the moment a sinner believes. It is not repeatable and cannot be lost. Sanctification is a process that takes place over our whole lives. It is subjective, imperfect and not completed until death. Justification deals with the guilt of sin and the merits needed for eternal life, while sanctification deals with the pollution of sin. Sanctification proves that a person has already been justified and does not contribute one iota to a person's salvation.

c) Both systems avoid the charge that they teach salvation by works by saying that the works necessary are not works of the flesh but works from the Spirit. The Council of Trent affirmed: "If anyone saith, that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature, or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ: let him be anathema" (sixth session, canon 1).¹¹⁰ "God works in the sinful soul to will and to do, and by making it inherently just justifies it. And all this is accomplished through the merits and meditation of Jesus Christ; so that, in justification *there is a combination of the objective work of Christ with the subjective character of the believer.*"¹¹¹

Norman Shepherd argues that the problem with the Galatians was not that they were adding works to Christ but that they were adding works of the flesh. In the Auburn Avenue paradigm, works are necessary and must be added to the work of Christ. However, these works must never be considered meritorious for these works are the result of God's grace. They are merely conditions of the covenant. Paul condemns both systems and their subtle reasoning in passages such as Galatians 3:3. The Judaizers were doing something very similar to Romanism and the Auburn Avenue theology. They were looking to the law to complete what Christ and the Spirit started.

d) Both systems define justifying faith as something much broader than an instrument which lays hold of Christ. The Auburn Avenue teachers say that faith and obedience are the same thing, that faith includes our own good works and these good works (covenantal perseverance) must continue for justification to occur. R. Scott Clark writes,

Those who are creating a new "Reformed" doctrine of justification have gone back, whether they know it or not, to the old medieval doctrine of "faith formed by love." The medievals and Trent agreed that we are justified by faith, but when they said "faith" they did not mean it as we do, but rather they meant it as a synecdoche for the three virtues, faith, hope and love. Thus when they said "faith" they actually meant holiness or sanctification.

The medieval church taught that God could not declare a man to be just unless he was actually, personally, morally just. In this view we are said to be justified because we are sanctified by the infusion of grace received in the sacraments. They spoke of "initial justification" received in baptism and "final justification" received after purgatory. This doctrine of progressive justification meant that no one could be certain of his justification, because he was never fully sanctified. In fact, it was considered sinful arrogance to claim to know, apart from special revelation, that one was indeed right with God.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 2:110.

¹¹¹ John Gerstner, "The Nature of Justifying Faith," in Don Kistler, ed., *Justification by Faith Alone* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 109.

¹¹² R. Scott Clark, "The Danger of a Falling Church," in *The Outlook 50* (July/August 2001), 22.

Stefan Lindblad’s comments on the nature of a faith that justifies are excellent. He writes, “Justifying faith is inseparable from the other graces of salvation, and yet faith is the alone instrument of justification. There is no other way, no other instrument whereby a sinner receives Christ for justification. Repentance does not justify. Our good works do not justify. Our obedience does not justify. . . . God declares a sinner righteous by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. The church must gain a renewed appreciation and affection for this truth. For here is the heart of the gospel. If we lose it, or worse, renounce it, then we will bring ruin to our churches and destruction to our own souls.”¹¹³

A parallel comparison between the Auburn Avenue theology and biblical Protestantism will help us understand how radical and heretical the Monroe doctrine really is.

Roman Catholicism/Auburn Doctrine	Biblical View (Protestantism)
<p><i>Justification comes at the end of a very long process.</i> For Romanists, God accepts men after they become personally holy and (in most cases) are further purified in purgatory. For the Auburn Avenue theologians (as well as Shepherd and the New Perspective writers) justification comes after a period of covenantal faithfulness. Both systems require personal obedience for justification.¹¹⁴</p>	<p><i>Justification occurs in an instant of time</i> the moment a sinner lays hold of Christ by faith. It is an instantaneous act of God. It is whole, never repeated, eternal and perfect, not piecemeal or gradual. (Jn. 5:25; Lk. 18:13, 14; 23:43; Rom. 3:22-28; 4:5-8; 5:1, 9)</p>
<p><i>Faith and works are the basis for justification.</i> Romanists teach that men are saved by faith and the good works that flow from faith. The Auburn Avenue theologians teach that men are ultimately justified by faith and faithfulness to the covenant; by belief and personal obedience; by trust and perseverance in personal righteousness.</p>	<p><i>Faith in Christ alone apart from anything we do is the basis for justification.</i> “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9; see Ac. 13:39; Rom. 3:20-24, 28; 4:3-8; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:8-9; etc).</p>
<p><i>Justification is a cooperative effort between God and man (synergism).</i> Romanists teach that church members must cooperate with inward grace until justification is achieved. The Auburn Avenue theologians teach that</p>	<p><i>Sinners are saved solely because of what God has done in Christ.</i> “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).</p>

¹¹³Stefan T. Linblad, “Justifying Faith and the Application of Salvation” in *The Banner of Truth*, issue 479-480, Aug.-Sep. 2003, 20.

^{114c}In Shepherd’s scheme a person’s justification is going to take time. He never indicates that it will take time for God because he does call it correctly a forensic act. (When we say forensic, we indicate that God as judge makes a judicial decision.) If God is making a judicial statement about our conduct before His all-seeing eye, we will never be justified ever! But if that verdict is based on someone else’s perfect righteousness, justification needs no time for us to catch up with covenant faithfulness. However, if we insist on including some of our holiness, then it will need time to develop and show itself as the real thing. Shepherd’s idea of justification takes time” (David H. Linden, with Robert L. Reymond, “Norman Shepherd’s ‘Faith Alone’” in Mark D. Anthony, Sr. ed., *The New Southern Presbyterian Review* [Cumming, GA: Chalcedon Presbyterian Church, Fall 2002], 73).

men must be faithful to the covenant to keep their justification on the last day.	
<p><i>The ground of justification is the death of Christ and good works.</i> Romanism combines the merits of Christ with inward holiness or justification and sanctification for justification. The Auburn Avenue theologians combine the death of Christ which brings the pardon of sins with the covenant faithfulness of church members. This covenant faithfulness brings final justification on the last day.</p>	<p><i>The ground of justification is the sacrificial death of Christ and His perfect righteousness.</i> Jesus’ merits or perfect works are imputed to the believing sinner. “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness....God imputes righteousness apart from works (Rom. 4:3-6).¹¹⁵</p>
<p>According to the Auburn paradigm, our obedience in the covenant serves the exact same purpose as Adam’s obedience before the fall. In other words, without our own personal obedience to the covenant we cannot obtain “eschatological life” (i.e., we will not achieve salvation). Thus, according to the Auburn teaching, Christ’s own perfect and personal obedience was a) to ensure His sacrifice would be acceptable; and b) to set an <i>example</i> of covenantal obedience. Jesus does not perfectly obey the law or fulfill the covenant of works in our place but merely sets the example for faithfulness. The manner in which the Auburn Avenue theologians reject the covenant of works causes them also to destroy the covenant of grace. Mono-covenantalism turns all redemptive history</p>	<p>According to Reformed Protestantism, Jesus as the second Adam and the head of the covenant perfectly fulfills all of the terms of the covenant in our place. Christ satisfied the justice of His Father by His death; fulfilled the covenant of works and perfectly obeyed God’s law in exhaustive detail. Therefore, He not only pardoned our sins but also by His perfect and perpetual obedience merited eternal life (or “eschatological life” as Lusk puts it). The Son of God does not leave us where Adam was in the garden before the fall but secures for us glorification. The good works and obedience of believers are the fruit of saving faith. They always accompany justification but never contribute to it (see Jn. 17; Gal. 4:4; Rom. 5:15-19).</p>

¹¹⁵ Charles Hodge writes, “*To whom God imputeth righteousness without works*, that is, whom God regards and treats as righteous, although he is not in himself righteous. The meaning of this clause cannot be mistaken. ‘to impute sin,’ is to lay sin to the charge of any one, and to treat him accordingly, as is universally admitted; so ‘to impute righteousness,’ is to set righteousness to one’s account, and to treat him accordingly. This righteousness does not, of course, belong antecedently [i.e., going before in time] to those to whom it is imputed. For they are ungodly, and destitute of works. Here then is an imputation to men of what does not belong to them, and to which they have in themselves no claim. To impute righteousness is the apostle’s definition of the term to *justify*. It is not making men inherently righteous, or morally pure, but it is regarding and treating them as just. This is done, not on the ground of personal character or works, but on the ground of the righteousness of Christ. As this is dealing with men, not according to merit, but in a gracious manner, the passage cited from Ps. xxxii. 1,2, is precisely in point: ‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.’ That is, blessed is the man who, although a sinner, is regarded and treated as righteous” (*Romans* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1835) 1989], 115).

into a covenant of works.	
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Summary and Conclusion

An examination of the Auburn Avenue’s doctrine of justification has revealed a radical departure from the Protestant Reformation. The following chart sets forth some of the main differences between the Auburn Avenue theology and the Reformed faith.

The Auburn Avenue Doctrine	The Reformed Faith
Covenant is relationship which is rooted in the relationship between the persons of the ontological trinity.	Covenant is an agreement. The covenant of grace is rooted in the covenant of redemption (<i>pactum salutis</i>).
Before the fall Adam was under a covenant of grace.	Before the fall Adam was under a covenant of works.
After the fall God requires a <i>partial</i> obedience to His law in order to be justified. This <i>partial</i> obedience is fulfilled by faithful Christians and results in final justification.	After the fall God requires a perfect and perpetual obedience to His law in thought, word and deed in order to be justified. This perfect and perpetual obedience is fulfilled by Jesus Christ and is imputed to believing sinners.
Jesus’ sinless life is <i>only</i> an example of faithfulness for His people to follow.	Our Lord’s sinless life is not only an example but is also a fulfillment of the covenant of works that is necessary if a believing sinner is to be declared righteous before God.
Christians are justified by faith and faithfulness (i.e., perseverance in personal obedience).	Christians are justified by faith alone apart from the works of the law.
Faith and obedience are necessary to obtain final justification. Faith is introspective. It is divided between Christ and the believer’s faithfulness. Obedience is a co-instrument of justification.	Faith is the sole instrument which lays hold of Christ and His accomplished redemption. Faith is extraspective. Obedience is a fruit of justification.
Faith and obedience are the same thing. Faith is complex and includes the fruits of faith.	Obedience flows from true faith and is distinguishable from it. Faith is simple.
Good works or covenantal faithfulness has an important role to play in a believer’s final justification.	The good works of believers are tainted with sin, are non-meritorious and only demonstrate the reality of saving faith.
Paul’s condemnation of the works of the law in relation to justification concerns only the ceremonial laws or Jewish identity markers which exclude Gentiles from the covenant.	Paul’s condemnation of the works of the law in relation to justification refers to the whole law: ceremonial and moral. The traditional Protestant law/gospel antithesis stands.
Justification refers only to the pardon of	Justification involves the imputation of the

sins and not the imputation of Jesus' active [or preceptive] obedience. Pardon is supplemented by covenant faithfulness which results in final justification.	believing sinner's guilt and liability of punishment to Christ on the cross and our Lord's perfect righteousness to the believer. The good works or covenant faithfulness of the Christian has nothing to do with justification.
If a person does not continue in obedience the justification received when baptized is removed and the apostate person loses his salvation.	Because a Christian's justification is achieved solely by Christ it can never be lost. People who apostatize never had saving faith and were never justified to begin with (1 Jn. 2:19; Mt. 7:23).
Sanctification if faithfully continued leads to final justification. The process which leads to justification is synergistic.	The moment a person is justified, the life-long process of sanctification begins. The justification of sinners is monergistic.
The covenant of grace includes conditions. One condition is faithful obedience or good works. The personal righteousness, obedience or good works of believers has salvific "value" (i.e., merit) before God.	The covenant of grace has only one condition which is faith. This faith is a gift. It is instrumental and non-meritorious. It merely grasps the person and work of Christ.
Since faith and obedience are the same thing and we receive glorified life in the same manner as Adam before the fall, the covenant of grace is a watered down covenant of works (i.e., a partial obedience is now required for final justification).	The covenant of grace is radically different from the covenant of works because Christ the second Adam fulfills the terms of the covenant in our place. People who are under the guilt and power of sin cannot achieve or even contribute to their own justification.

Why don't more people see that Shepherd and his followers have abandoned the gospel of Christ for another gospel? One reason is that the Auburn Avenue theologians have not made themselves clear in the presentation of their system. Their writings abound with contradictions, ambiguities, equivocations, double talk and completely new uses for old terminology. On one page there will be a strong commitment to the Standards and even a statement which in isolation is totally biblical. Then, on the next page or even the next paragraph, there will be a statement that is diametrically opposed to Scripture and the Confession. Although these men make many good statements, the errors they teach are so serious and heretical that Bible-believing Reformed churches have no choice—they must anathematize them and their doctrine. If a denomination or a church cannot defend the doctrine of justification, which is a central pillar of Christianity and is absolutely essential to salvation, then that denomination is virtually worthless. It is on an express path to total apostasy. Why? Because "the whole evangelical doctrine of salvation stands or falls with the doctrine of justification, as being the inmost core of the doctrine of redemption. . . . If it be obscured, adulterated or overturned, it is impossible for purity of doctrine to be retained in other loci or for the true Church to exist."¹¹⁶ May God protect us from human wisdom; enable us to uphold the truth of the gospel against error and strengthen us to reach out to the lost with the

¹¹⁶ Leiden Synopsis (xxxiii, i) and Walarius p. 746 in Heinrich Heppe, Ernst Bizer, ed., *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1950] 1978), 543.

plain, old Protestant doctrine that we are justified by Christ's righteousness apprehended by faith alone. Amen.¹¹⁷

Chapter 2: Other Romanizing Doctrines of the New Auburn Theology

At the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference four speakers—John Barach, Doug Wilson, Steve Schlissel and Steve Wilkins—articulated what they themselves called a new paradigm in theology. These men set forth this new paradigm as an answer to problems they perceived within Reformed theology as well as the inadequate manner in which they believe Reformed interpreters and theologians have dealt with “problem” passages in Scripture. The main theme of the conference centered on a new way to view the covenant which they referred to as “the objectivity of the covenant.” In their lectures numerous traditional, confessional

¹¹⁷ The Auburn Avenue theological system with its blatant internal contradictions, new and confusing use of terms, ambiguous statements, frequent use of equivocation, hostility to systematic theology, creative methods of exegesis and theologizing reminds us of the techniques of Dr. John Henry Newman (a nineteenth century minister in the Church of England who converted to Roman Catholicism and became a priest) whose *Lectures on Justification* (second edition, 1840) baffled his critics with contradictory and confusing statements. James Buchanan describes the difficulties that Newman's system presented to orthodox scholars. He writes, “Many other points in the theory of Dr. Newman might have claimed our attention, but those which have been specified are sufficient to illustrate its general character. The difficulty which one feels in dealing with it, arises not so much from the strength of his arguments, as from the subtle and intricate terms in which they are expressed,—from the frequent occurrence of paradoxical, or contradictory, statements,—and what Lord Jeffrey called a sort of ‘wriggling lubricity,’ which makes them elude our grasp, the more firmly we attempt to hold them. ‘The *least* evil of Mr. Newman's system,’ says Mr. Faber, ‘is, that it is a tissue of contradictions and inconsistencies;’ and he specifies some of them, such as the following: ‘We are justified by faith; we are justified by obedience; we are justified by baptism; we are justified conjointly by the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Our Justification precedes our faith, and our faith precedes our Justification. The word Justification cannot bear two meanings, yet it clearly does bear two meanings, to wit, the *accounting* righteous, and the *making* righteous. There is but one act of Justification, nevertheless there are ten thousand Justifications.’ But these are not its *worst* features; it is an elaborate attempt to overthrow the Protestant doctrine of Justification, and to undermine the only ground of a sinner's acceptance with God. As such it has been characterized in strong terms by Mr. Bennett, when he says that, since the Council of Trent, ‘perhaps there never has been a book published, at least among Protestants, more full of insidious, but determined, opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ as our righteousness. Contradiction, obscurity, mystification, ...monkish gloom, and schismatic profession of dissent from Protestants and from Romanists,—all are brought into the field, to bear against the only righteousness in which a sinner can stand before God’” (*The Doctrine of Justification*, [Grand Rapids: Baker (1867) 1977], 215-16). Buchanan quotes from Stanley Faber, (*Primitive Doctrine of Justification as Revealed in Scripture, in Opposition to the Council of Trent, and Mr. Newman's Lectures* [1840], 363).

Reformed doctrines were rejected and replaced by the novel ideas of the speakers. Some of the standard Reformed doctrines that were rejected or redefined were the following: the covenant of works, the distinction between the visible and invisible church, the nature of baptism (especially relating to efficacy), the doctrine of perseverance (we are repeatedly told that real believers can fall away), the doctrine of the atonement (the speakers repeatedly separate the ground of salvation from its application in an Arminian manner), justification (sometimes faith is defined in a Romish manner as an obedient or working faith [the Norman Shepherd heresy], at other times perseverance is defined in a manner that makes it either a partial ground of salvation or co-instrument in justification), and assurance (the main answer to problems of assurance [we are told] is baptismal regeneration: “Look to your baptism because you were really saved and united to Christ in your baptism”).

Because the new paradigm set forth by the Auburn “theologians” is a radical departure from the Reformed faith and is heretical in many areas, we will briefly examine some of the most perverse areas of their teaching. One area that will receive a great deal of attention is the Reformed doctrine of the atonement. The Auburn teaching is a repudiation of the classic Reformed formulation of this doctrine. It is our hope and prayer that this brief analysis of their perverse doctrines will inoculate Reformed believers against the Romanizing paradigm of the Auburn four.¹¹⁸

The Church in its Two-fold Character as Visible and Invisible

Several false doctrines of the Auburn speakers are related to their rejection of the two-fold distinction of the church as visible and invisible. They must reject the two-fold character of the church because they teach that everyone baptized is regenerated, truly united to Christ and forgiven. The standard Reformed view, that there are people in the church who are never regenerated and never have true saving faith, must be set aside to uphold the Auburn definition of baptism and their doctrine of the objectivity of the covenant. As we defend the traditional Reformed understanding of this doctrine we will interact to some degree with Doug Wilson’s false caricature of the orthodox view.

Before we begin an analysis of the two-fold character of the church it is important to note that some very important doctrines are based on logical inference from Scripture (e.g., the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, the Trinity, infant baptism, etc.). This observation is necessary because opponents of the doctrine of the two-fold character of the church will often point out that the terms “visible” and “invisible” are not found in the Bible and thus are an artificial construct of the Protestant Reformers. It is often then asserted that the Bible only speaks of the church as visible, local and particular. While the choice of the terms “visible” and

¹¹⁸Keep in mind that when we discuss the Auburn paradigm we are analyzing the views of the four different pastors. This approach carries several implications. a) The views of each one may not totally reflect the views of the other speakers. b) Some speakers may be more guarded or careful in their statements than others. c) Some speakers are more organized and systematic than others. Having said this, a careful reading of the separate lectures reveals a very strong similarity of thought on the part of each speaker. Further, this author is unaware of any of the separate speakers repudiating any of the comments made by the other speakers. In fact, Doug Wilson endorses a lecture by John Barach that contains serious theological perversions. It is very likely that these speakers were chosen for the pastor’s conference precisely because they all had adopted similar theological views. Also, it is noteworthy that the same speakers came together for the Auburn Pastor’s Conference in 2003 to clarify their positions. At the 2003 conference they did not repudiate any of their false doctrines but rather arrogantly defended their Romanizing innovations.

“invisible” may be confusing to some, the two-fold distinction they represent is taught in God’s word and is vital for understanding Christ’s church. Indeed, without this distinction, many teachings of the Bible appear contradictory and incomprehensible. Therefore, as we compare Scripture to Scripture and analyze the nature of the church in relation to other doctrines that help define the church, we will see that the Reformed teaching regarding the two-fold nature of the church is necessary logically, theologically and exegetically. One can replace the terms “visible” and “invisible”; however, the ideas they represent cannot be replaced without disastrous theological consequences.

The best and most succinct statement of the church as invisible and visible is found in the Westminster Standards. Chapter 25, “Of the Church,” states: “The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that fills all in all. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” (sections 1, 2).

Before we proceed with more detailed considerations regarding the two-fold aspect of the church, some common misconceptions regarding this teaching need to be addressed. One common misconception of the church as visible and invisible is that this doctrine teaches that there are two separate churches. For example, Doug Wilson says, “But we also know from our Bibles that there is only one church, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. So we’ve got two churches with two different rosters of names. . . . Now if you’ve got two churches existing at the same time with different names on their membership rolls, the question that comes up, and it may not come up consciously, but the question is: which one is the real church?” (Doug Wilson, *Visible and Invisible Church Revisited*, tape 2). This false caricature of the Reformed doctrine of the church as visible and invisible ignores the fact that Reformed theologians emphasize that this distinction does *not* mean that God has two separate churches.¹¹⁹ Indeed, they assert that Jehovah has founded one church, that Jesus has only *one* bride, people, church, or body. Our Lord does not have two churches but only one. The terms “invisible” and “visible” are used to describe two distinct aspects of the one church; or, to put it another way, the church is considered from two different perspectives. These different aspects or perspectives will be considered in a moment.

Another false conception of the visible-invisible distinction is that they represent two completely separate categories. Note the false caricature of the two-fold distinction by Doug Wilson. He says, “When we say visible and invisible, we divide into categories, visible is down here [i.e., on earth] and invisible is an ethereal church in the heavenlies [i.e., in heaven]. We create an ontological [i.e., self-contained or totally separate] division between visible down here and invisible in heaven” (*Visible and Invisible Church Revisited*, Tape 2). Wilson goes on to accuse the confessional view of the two-fold aspect of the church as being Hellenistic (i.e., based

¹¹⁹Reformed theologians who emphasize or teach this point are: Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Edmonton, AB, Can.: Still Waters Revival Books, n. d., [1845]), 261. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1969 [1869]), 1:29. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 3:8ff. A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1958 [1869]), 310ff. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 565-566. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 187-189. Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 665ff.

on a Greek philosophical mind-set), Platonic (i.e., that which is of the earth is separate and inferior to that which is heavenly and spiritual), and Gnostic. In context it appears that Wilson is accusing the classic Protestant position of being against history, against the church working in time and on earth for godly dominion. Aside from the fact that Wilson is using the word “Gnostic” improperly the idea that the Reformers, Puritans and early Presbyterians were Gnostic or against progressive sanctification is completely untrue.

The confessional position of the church as invisible and visible is not that there are two separate air-tight categories with one group on heaven and another on earth. On the contrary, there is a great overlap between both categories. All *genuine* believers are members of the invisible church whether they are living in heaven or on earth, whether they are alive or dead (i.e., have died physically). Not all professing Christians, however, who are members of the visible church, are members of the invisible church. Some people who make a profession of faith and are baptized are hypocrites. Such people do not really believe in Christ (thus are never truly united to Him by faith) and are not part of the invisible church. This reality will receive further elucidation below.

The term “invisible” as defined by the Reformed symbols and theologians does not mean that some Christians are invisible like ghosts floating around in the spirit realm. It refers to the fact that the invisible church cannot be fully discovered, distinguished or discerned by the eyes of men, by empirical means. There are a number of reasons why this statement cannot be denied. a) No one has the ability to look into the human heart and see if a person is truly united to Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. That reality is the reason that, historically, Presbyterian churches have admitted members upon a credible profession of faith. b) The inward, effectual calling of the Spirit and the application of redemption to the human soul are all spiritual, unseen events. Further, the Holy Spirit gives genuine saving faith only to the elect. The counterfeit faith of unregenerate professors of religion often is indiscernible to mere mortals. We can only perceive outward signs, statements and actions. No person has the ability to determine or observe the whole body of God’s elect irrespective of time (i.e., throughout human history prior to the last judgment) or place (i.e., there are many real believers in the world of which we are not aware). Williamson writes, “It is invisible *to us* because it has extension in both time and space. It reaches from one end of the earth to the other, and from the beginning to the end of the age. *But it is invisible only to us. It is not invisible to God.* He who infallibly discerns the hearts of men, knows them that are his. ‘The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: the Lord knoweth them that are his’ (II Tim. 2:19).”¹²⁰ Jesus prayed for the invisible church—the elect present and not yet born in John 17. “Christ is speaking of a *special* company which had been given to Him. The reference, then, is to the sovereign election of God, whereby He chose a definite number to be His ‘peculiar people’—His in a peculiar or special way. These are *eternally* His: ‘chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4); and by the immutability of His purpose of grace (Rom. 11:29), they are *always* His.”¹²¹

The visible church is designated “visible” because it is discernable by the senses, by empirical means. It consists of everyone who *professes* the true religion along with their children. Because men do not have the ability to see into the minds of men and read the human heart, anyone who professes Jesus Christ in credible manner (i.e., he has a knowledge of the gospel, he is orthodox in doctrine, he professes faith in Christ and repentance toward God, he is not as far as anyone is aware committing habitual or scandalous sins) is allowed to join the

¹²⁰ G. I. Williamson, *The Confession of Faith*, 187; emphasis added.

¹²¹ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975 [1945]), 3:11.

church along with his children. In the visible church there are genuine believers who are truly united to Christ and false professors or hypocrites who only taste of heavenly gifts but do not really partake of the Savior. Their relationship to Him is only outward. “On this account the church is compared to a *floor*, in which there is not only wheat but also chaff (Matt. iii. 12); to a *field*, where tares as well as good seed are sown (Matt. xiii. 24, 25); to a *net*, which gathers bad fish together with the good (ver. 47); to a *great house*, in which are vessels of every kind some to honour and some to dishonor,—2 Tim. ii. 20.”¹²² People who are members of the visible church yet who never *truly* believe in Christ receive the outward privileges of membership (fellowship, the word, the sacraments and the guidance of church government), but are never regenerated, saved, forgiven, united to Christ and spiritually sanctified. The blood of Jesus never washes away their sins.

The visible church is set apart from the world by profession as well as its external government, discipline, and ordinances (e.g., the preached word and the sacraments). The members of the visible church have obeyed the outward call of the gospel, professing Christ, submitting to baptism and placing themselves under the preaching and authority of the local church. All such persons who obey the outward call of the gospel place themselves in covenant with God. They have separated themselves from the world and at least *outwardly* enjoy the privileges of being members of the visible church (e.g., the teaching of the word, godly guidance, the fellowship of the saints, etc.). While in a certain sense those who outwardly profess the truth participate in an *external covenant* with real responsibilities and privileges, it does not mean and theologically cannot mean that they truly participate in the saving merits of Christ. Such persons (for a time) are *in* the covenant but are never genuinely *of* the covenant. They participate in the covenant externally as professors of the true religion, but they never participate in the covenant of grace which flows from the eternal covenant of redemption. The Auburn “theologians” speak of the objectivity or reality of the covenant in radically different terms than Reformed theologians. Apparently, the Auburn speakers do not recognize the reality of the covenant if salvation or forgiveness by the blood of Christ is not involved. This view is related to their doctrine of baptismal regeneration and their idea that real believers can apostatize (these views are dealt with below.).

It needs to be recognized that although God deals with the visible church as one church, as one people of God, the external administration of the church with the preaching of the word, the ordinances and discipline in the present and in the long run (e.g., after the final judgment, in the eternal state) only truly benefit the invisible church or the elect. While outward professors receive *temporary benefits* resulting from intellectual insights from the word, pressure to conform to God’s law, the outward influence from a society of family-oriented, ethical people, etc., they receive greater damnation on the day of judgment for spurning the great light to which they were exposed under continual gospel preaching. The Auburn teaching that everyone baptized who is in the (visible) church is loved, saved, forgiven and has the Holy Spirit¹²³, even

¹²²Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, 263.

¹²³ “How could you know you are in Him? God gave you the seal and sign of baptism. He gave you that rite that brought you into Christ and you can look and you can trust that God’s promises are objective” (John Barach, *Covenant and Election*, tape 6). ” . . . [S]ome persons, not destined for final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real blessings, *purchased for them by Christ’s cross and applied to them by the Holy Spirit* through Word and Sacrament....Saul received the *same* initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance.... In one sense, all those in the covenant are ‘saved.’ They have been delivered out of the world and brought into the glorious

if he or she later rejects Jesus and goes to hell, is unbiblical and exegetically and theologically impossible (as we shall see in a moment).

Before we turn our attention to the Auburn perversion of the doctrine of the atonement, let us examine a few passages of Scripture that strongly support the traditional view of the church as visible and invisible. These passages disprove the Auburn teaching that everyone baptized is truly united to Christ and thus receives the “full benefits of salvation.” Indeed, these passages are incomprehensible apart from the confessional teaching regarding the two-fold aspect of the church.

The first such passage is 1 John 2:19-20: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” In this passage John discusses certain persons who at one time had professed apostolic doctrine and were members of the church. According to the Auburn paradigm these people were truly united to Christ; their sins were forgiven and they were just as much true members of the church as anyone. As baptized members of the church (we are told) these people were the elect of God.¹²⁴ But in truth, these people apostatized; that is, they abandoned the form of sound doctrine taught to them by the apostles and their associates and adopted a form of Gnosticism. As a result they left the church, probably to associate with like-minded heretical anti-christs.

Note the Spirit-inspired analysis of the apostle John regarding this all too common situation. John says, “They were not of us.” That is, they were never genuine members of the church. While it is true that they were baptized and professed the true religion, they were never united to Christ or saved. They were chaff on the same floor as wheat (Mt. 3:12), or tares among the wheat (Mt. 13:24-25). They were members of the visible church but never of the invisible church. In this context John uses the term “us” (*emon*) in the sense of true Christians. The apostle makes two observations, both of which totally contradict the Auburn teaching.¹²⁵ First, he says that true Christians or members of the invisible church cannot apostatize: “for if they were of us [i.e., true believers], they would have continued with us.” The fact that these professing Christians departed from the church is empirical proof that they were never *true* Christians. “They went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” “The meaning here is that secession proves a want of fundamental union from the rest.”¹²⁶ Second, John says that true believers have received the Holy Spirit from Christ which secures them against apostasy or desertion: “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” True

new creation of Christ, but not all will persevere in that ‘salvation’” (*Summary Statement of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church’s Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation*, emphasis added).

¹²⁴Traditionally, the Reformed have said, we have to view our children as presumptively elect or presumptively regenerate. And therefore, Christian, if we are willing to take the Scriptures at face value, there is no presumption necessary. Just take the Bible. And this is true, of course, because by the baptism, by baptism the Spirit joins us to Christ since he is the elect one and the Church is the elect people, we are joined to his body. We therefore are elect. Since he is the justified one, we are justified in him. Since he is the beloved one, we are beloved in him.” (Steve Wilkins, *Half-Way Covenant*, tape 11).

¹²⁵For example, John Barach says, “Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union then with Christ and with the triune God. The Bible doesn’t know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant—really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks about the reality, efficacy, of baptism. Every baptized person is in Christ and therefore shares in His new life.... We need to say [to every baptized person] Jesus died for you personally and we mean it, to them, head for head, every one of them” (*Covenant and History*, tape 3).

¹²⁶ Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1886]), 58.

believers or members of the invisible church cannot fall away because they are baptized with the Holy Spirit and thus permanently abide *in* Christ (see 1 Jn. 2:27; 5:4). Our Lord concurs, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (Jn. 10:27-28).

1 Jn. 2:19-20 thus teaches: (1) the church is composed of true and false believers; and (2) the doctrine of perseverance. True Christians are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and can never apostatize while those who are *not* baptized in the Spirit and not united to the Savior can. “Their presence in the visible church was temporary, for they failed in their perseverance. If they had been members of the invisible church, they would have remained with the body of believers”¹²⁷

A second passage is Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I *never* knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” After warning His disciples of the danger of false prophets, our Lord warns them of the consequences of a false profession of religion. He describes people who profess Christ; who acknowledged His Lordship; who are even engaged in some type of Christian service; yet who never had a saving relationship to Jesus. These people were obviously members of the visible church. But, they were never truly united to the Lord or saved; they were never members of the invisible church.

This section of Scripture contradicts Arminianism, which teaches that, if people accept Jesus as Savior, they are truly saved but can later reject the faith and fall away. It also explicitly contradicts the Auburn teaching that people who profess Christ and are baptized are really united to Him, loved by Him and forgiven by Him even if they are not among the elect (individually) and thus eventually fall away.¹²⁸ Note, Jesus says to all false professors of religion on the day of judgment, “I *never* knew you.” Since God is omniscient, the word “knew” in this context does not refer to a mere intellectual knowledge (e.g., in John’s gospel see: 1:47, 49; 2:24, 25; 21:17). Rather the term “knew” in this passage is used in the Hebraic sense of love, acknowledgment, friendship, intimate fellowship. Our Lord says that everyone in the visible church who is not really saved (i.e., they do not have true saving faith and the works that demonstrate the reality of that faith.) never, ever (i.e., not even for a single moment) had a relationship or vital union with Him. There is no other way that the Savior’s words can be interpreted without doing violence to the text of Scripture. Although Jesus’ words are in complete harmony with the classic Protestant distinction between the visible and invisible church, they cannot be harmonized with the new Auburn theological innovations. The Auburn “theologians” must either abandon their position or assert that the Bible can teach doctrines that totally contradict one another.

A third passage is Romans 9:6: “But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.” In the epistle to the Romans, Paul explicitly recognized the two-fold aspect of the church when he explains why the majority of the old covenant people of God did not embrace their Messiah.

In order properly to understand Romans 9:6, we briefly need to consider the context. In Romans chapter 8 Paul elaborates on the major theme that all those who are in Christ shall never

¹²⁷Simon J. Kistemaker, *James and I-III John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 277.

¹²⁸“Baptism means that the one baptized has a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, the one baptized has been grafted into Christ, he has the sign and seal of regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and the obligation to walk in newness of life” (Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough* [Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002], 103).

be condemned. Believers are delivered from the law by Jesus' death. They are freed from the pollution of sin by the indwelling power of the Spirit. The Spirit's power also guarantees a believer's resurrection and glorification. Christians have their assurance rooted in their union with Christ. There also is the comfort of the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Toward the end of the chapter the safety and assurance of believers is founded upon God's electing love from eternity. Here the apostle discusses the unbreakable chain of the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) and the fact that "if God is for us, who can be against us?"

In chapter 9, as Paul turns his attention to the design of God in reference to Jews and Gentiles, he needs to answer the question: "What about Israel?" If election and perseverance are rooted in the eternal-unchanging love of God, how can the mass apostasy of the Jewish people be explained? They were God's people, the church, who received the word, the promises, the sacraments and ordinances. Does not God's rejection of the Jewish nation contradict the promises to Abraham and the perseverance promised in chapter 8? No, absolutely not! The apostle explains that it is to *true* Israel (i.e., the elect or the invisible church) that the promises are made. It is to these people only that God's eternal electing love is directed. There is national election—the nation of Israel or the visible church—and within Israel, the visible church, there is true Israel—the invisible church. The Jews who did not reject the Messiah are "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5).

According to the Auburn theological scheme every one who is baptized is truly united to Christ, loved by Him and has his sins forgiven. The people who are united to Christ, who are forgiven by Jesus' blood, can (we are told) really fall away and be lost. The major deciding issue regarding salvation in their system is whether or not a baptized person perseveres in the covenant.¹²⁹ Note that the apostle Paul completely rejects the Auburn paradigm.

For Paul, there is true Israel (the elect, the invisible church, the remnant) within national Israel (the visible church). In other words the elect or the invisible church is hidden in the visible church. Further, when describing why the church is composed of true Israel (i.e., real believers) and false Israel (i.e., hypocrites) the apostle turns our attention to the doctrine of election. If the Auburn theology were scriptural we would expect Paul to discuss how God was in intimate union with all circumcised Jews, that God really loved them all, but that many simply did not persevere. Instead, Paul discusses the twin brothers Jacob and Esau. These twins were conceived at the same moment and were born only minutes apart. Both were covenant children born of the patriarch Isaac. Both received circumcision and were part of the visible church—the covenant people of God. Since Esau was circumcised does Paul argue that he was loved and forgiven by God? No. God hated Esau before he was even born (Rom. 9:11-13). Although Esau was a circumcised member of the visible church, he was never united to Christ, loved by God or forgiven. Instead, he was a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction (Rom. 9:22). Esau's circumcision was never efficacious because he was never regenerated and given the gift of saving faith. As Paul says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15).

¹²⁹ . . . [S]ome persons, not destined for final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real blessings, *purchased for them by Christ's cross* and *applied to them by the Holy Spirit* through Word and Sacrament.... Saul received the *same* initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance.... In one sense, all those in the covenant are 'saved.' They have been delivered out of the world and brought into the glorious *new creation of Christ*, but not all will persevere in that 'salvation'" (*Summary Statement of the Auburn Ave. Presbyterian Church's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation*, emphasis added).

Yet another section of Scripture which totally disproves the Auburn paradigm is 2 Peter 2. This chapter describes men who at one time were baptized, members in good standing and who had even become teachers. According to the Auburn “theologians” these men who were baptized were loved by Christ, their sins were forgiven and they even had received an interior special work of grace by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁰ Peter, however, does not say that they were loved or forgiven but that they for a time “escaped the pollutions of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20). That is, they had an external reformation of behavior based on an intellectual knowledge of the word. Peter makes it crystal clear that these men were *not* united to Christ, regenerated, forgiven or saved because he says their natures were *never, ever* truly changed. He says, “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:22). A dog and a pig act according to their own nature. One can wash a pig and make it clean, but a pig is a pig. It will return to wallowing in the mud—in disgusting filth—because that is what pigs do. The apostle is saying that people who apostatize, who return to their former lifestyle, *never* had an interior work of the Holy Spirit. They were never regenerated and united to Christ. *Their natures were never changed.* The apostle apparently hadn’t listened to Steve Wilkins and his comrades and learned that baptism is always efficacious. The apostle is, in fact, teaching that if we could look at the hearts of those who apostatized, “we would discover that at no time were they ever activated by a true love of God. They were all this while goats, and not sheep, ravening wolves, and not gentle lambs.”¹³¹ In other words the visible church contains not only real believers but also unsaved hypocrites.

The Auburn Paradigm Destroys the Biblical Doctrine of the Atonement

A doctrine that suffers great abuse in the Auburn system is the doctrine of the atonement. The Auburn speakers’ adoption of baptismal regeneration and the idea that people who are really united to Christ and forgiven by His blood can apostatize and go to hell, cannot be harmonized with the Reformed understanding of Christ’s atoning work. Note for example, the theologically perverse statement from the session of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (September, 2002). It reads: “By baptism one is joined to Christ’s body, united to Him covenantally, and *given all the blessings and benefits of His work* (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff.; WSC #94). This does not, however, grant to the baptized final salvation; rather, it obligates him to fulfill the terms of the covenant. . . . In some sense, they [those ‘united to Him in the church by baptism’] were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ’s blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit” (emphasis added).

This statement is a denial of the Reformed understanding of the atonement. What is it regarding the Reformed doctrine of Jesus’ death that sets it apart from Arminianism, semi-Pelagianism and Romanism? There are a number of important differences.

First, note that our Lord’s death was limited or definite. This does not mean limited in its power to save but rather in its extent. Christ died only for the elect. His saving merits do not

¹³⁰“The Bible teaches us that baptism unites us [Wilkins believes that baptism is efficacious to everyone baptized] to Christ and by his, and to his body the power of the spirit. By one spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we’ve all been made to drink of one Spirit. Paul says that at baptism you are clothed with Christ Jesus. For as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union. The clothes make the man. With our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings. Union with Christ is union with the church, his body” (Steve Wilkins, *Half Way Covenant*, tape 11).

¹³¹Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979 [1932]), 192.

benefit the non-elect in any direct way whatsoever. (There are indirect benefits such as the improvement of society. However, these temporary blessings bring greater condemnation to the non-elect on the day of judgment.) Note that already the Auburn theology is outside the pale of Reformed confessional orthodoxy because it applies “all the blessings and benefits” of Jesus’ work directly to people who are non-elect and destined for hell.

Secondly, Reformed theologians have always acknowledged that Christ’s redemptive work not only removes the guilt and penalty of sin (expiation), eliminates God’s wrath (propitiation), and restores fellowship with God (reconciliation) but also merits the *application* of redemption to the sinner as well (regeneration, sanctification and glorification). Christ purchased all the spiritual graces for His people. God “has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3). Our Lord’s perfect redemption is the fountain out of which flows regeneration, faith, repentance and sanctification. Union with Christ in His life, death and resurrection guarantees that the elect sinner will be regenerated, sanctified and glorified. “When Christ lived, died, was buried, arose, ascended, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, we are told that the ones for whom He did these things are to be viewed as being in such a life union with Him as their covenant head and representative that it is said that they lived, died, were buried, arose, ascended and sat down at the Father’s side ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Eph. 2:5-6).”¹³² Christ saves His people from the guilt (justification) as well as the power of sin (sanctification). Everyone united to Christ will receive the gifts of faith (Eph. 2:8) and repentance (Ac. 5:31; 11:18). There is nothing esoteric regarding this teaching; it is standard Reformed confessional orthodoxy.

The Reformed doctrine of the atonement, however, possesses a number of exegetical, theological and logical problems for the Auburn paradigm. For example, the Auburn “theologians” say that everyone who is baptized is united to Christ and “given all the blessings and benefits of His work.” But such people (we are told) even though they are united to Christ and receive “all the blessings” including “new life by the Spirit” and forgiveness of sins, can go to hell if they do not fulfill the terms of the covenant. This assertion raises a few obvious questions. Does not union with Christ in His life, death and resurrection inexorably lead to a person’s justification, sanctification and glorification? Doesn’t Paul teach in Romans 6 that everyone united to Christ *is* sanctified? In other words, our Lord’s work does not make sanctification a possibility but a reality for every Christian. Can a person who is sanctified in Christ (i.e., not merely externally set apart but made holy) apostatize and go to hell? No. He is sealed by the Holy Spirit and preserved by His power (Phil. 1:6; 2:13). Doesn’t the apostle Paul teach that *everyone* united to Christ will receive a glorified body in the resurrection that is designed to dwell in the presence of God forever? Yes, he certainly does (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 45-58; Rom. 8:23, 29).

The Auburn “theologians” also need to explain the role of regeneration in their system. The Bible explicitly teaches that everyone united to Christ is regenerated (Eph. 2:5). Regeneration is the beginning, the starting point, the fountain of all the saving graces which are subjectively applied to the sinner. Being born again *invariably* will lead to a person becoming a spiritual person (Jn. 3:6). Regeneration will without fail lead to conversion. Regeneration always leads to saving faith, repentance and sanctification (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 4:6; Ac. 5:21; 11:18; 16:13-14; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9). Regeneration is also connected in Scripture to perseverance, for John says that a person who is born again cannot habitually continue in sin (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; cf. 5:4).

¹³²Robert Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub. 1989), 64.

The Bible says that everyone who is born again cannot be harmed by the second death (Rev. 20:6).

These teachings raise even more questions for the Auburn “theologians.” Are the people who (according to their system) are united to Christ yet apostatize and go to hell regenerated? If they are regenerated, then how can they apostatize when the Bible emphatically declares that the regenerate can never reject the faith or go to hell? If they are *not* regenerated then: (1) How can they be said to be united to Christ (i.e., not merely united externally to the church but united mystically with the Savior)? (2) How can they believe in Jesus when they are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), hate the truth and Christ (Jn. 3:19-21), dwell in darkness (Jn. 1:4-5), have an uncircumcised heart of stone (Ezek 11:19; 36:26), cannot repent (Jer. 13:23), cannot comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14) and are slaves to Satan (Ac. 26:17-18)? Obviously people who are not regenerated cannot exercise saving faith. Therefore, if they do make a profession of faith and are baptized, they are unsaved hypocrites. They are white-washed tombs (Mt. 23:27) whose covenant father is not God but Satan (Jn. 8:44). Further, are not regeneration, saving faith, perseverance and glorification the “blessings and benefits” of our Lord’s work? How then can a person be united to Christ and receive “all the benefits” of Jesus’ work and yet not believe, persevere and be glorified? Such thinking is blatantly self-contradicting and absurd. (Keep in mind that this irrational theological nonsense is found in a carefully crafted statement from a church session written to clarify their doctrine, to make sure people consider them to be orthodox.)

Moreover, Paul presents the elements or order of salvation as an unbreakable chain that cannot be separated by any created thing (Rom. 8:30-39). The three actions of Romans 8:30 (called, justified and glorified) which inevitably flow from God’s eternal counsel cannot be torn apart. “The future glorification of the believer is designated by the aorist, as his justification, calling, predestination, and election and have been; because all these divine acts are eternal, and therefore simultaneous for the divine mind. All are equally certain.”¹³³ “Election does not carry man half way only; it carries him all the way. It does not merely bring him to conversion; it brings him to perfection.”¹³⁴

The Auburn “theologians” cannot simply ignore the explicit teaching of Paul by claiming that election is a mystery or by saying that the apostle is describing salvation from God’s viewpoint. Paul is discussing how God’s electing love works itself out in history; or, how God’s foreknowledge causes specific people to be effectually called, justified and glorified. There is absolutely no room in Paul’s thought for the idea that people who are loved by Christ, united to Him and forgiven can apostatize and go to hell. The Auburn “theologians” must either accept the Reformed concept of the visible and invisible church or they must create out of thin air a category of people who are simultaneously saved, loved and forgiven and yet unsaved, hated and damned.

If those who eventually fall away do not have the gift of faith (as the Auburn Avenue session asserts) then how do they appropriate Christ and receive the forgiveness of sins? One must either assert (as in Arminianism and semi-Pelagianism) that some people have genuine faith and are truly saved yet can lose saving faith; or, one must hold to the position that false faith can be an instrumental means of laying hold of the Savior. People either believe and are saved, or they do not really believe and are not saved. The Auburn “theologians” must explain how people who are non-elect, who do not have the gift of faith, are “saved,” “redeemed,”

¹³³William G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1879]), 266.

¹³⁴John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism* (Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1984 [1890]), 78.

“united to Christ,” and really forgiven by Jesus’ blood.¹³⁵ Their false understanding of baptism and the church has led them to develop a whole new category of people that are temporarily saved (by “saved” they do not merely mean an outward reformation of life but real forgiveness). These are people who are unregenerate, without saving faith, non-elect, and without perseverance yet who, according to the Auburn “theologians,” are united to Christ and partakers of His blood. While the Auburn “theologians” can declare their loyalty to the Reformed faith and the five points of Calvinism all they want, their system is a *radical departure* from the Reformed faith.

Another aspect of Jesus’ atoning work that reveals the absurdity of the Auburn theology is our Lord’s work as a priest. Christ’s bloody death and His high priestly work go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. Therefore, the Auburn theological assertion that there are people who are united to Christ, loved by Him, who are saved and have their sins removed, yet who can apostatize and go to hell, is theologically impossible. Why? Because our Lord intercedes for everyone for whom He died and His intercession is efficacious. It cannot fail. “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1). “He continues forever [and] has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24-25). “This special intercession of the Lord Jesus is one grand secret of the believer’s safety. He is daily watched, and thought for, and provided for with unfailing care, by One whose eye never slumbers and never sleeps. Jesus is ‘able to save them to the uttermost those who come unto Him, because he every liveth to make intercession for them’ (Heb. vii. 25). They never perish, because He never ceases to pray for them, and His prayer must prevail. *They stand and persevere to the end, not because of their own strength and goodness, but because Jesus intercedes for them.* When Judas fell never to rise again, while Peter fell, but repented, and was restored, the reason of the difference lay under those words of Christ to Peter, ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not’ (Luke xxxii. 32)”¹³⁶

According to the Auburn theology, people who are baptized and united to Christ are forgiven and loved by Him even though they are not elect and fall away. But (we ask) if these people are cleansed by Jesus’ blood and loved by Him, *why* doesn’t our Lord intercede for them? If He loves them, *why* doesn’t He pray for them? If he loves them, *why* does He sit by and watch them go to hell? Whatever, then, the Auburn “theologians” say regarding Christ’s love toward those who apostatize, who do not have the “additional gift of perseverance,” “it is a love which does not secure their salvation: it is not a saving love. It is not equal to the love which mother cherishes for her child. She would save him if she could. This reputed divine love may be called a special love, but it is not the love for his saints which the Scriptures assign to God. The idea of

¹³⁵Steve Wilkins says, “If we do not persevere, we lose the blessings that were given to us in God’s covenant. Thus, when one breaks the covenant, it can be truly said, he has turned away from grace and forfeited life, forgiveness, and salvation.... *the apostate lose the forgiveness that was theirs really and truly in the covenant...*they are viewed as being in possession of this great salvation but of allowing it to ‘slip away’ ...they may enjoy for a season many of the blessings of the covenant, including *the forgiveness of sins*, adoption, possession of the kingdom, sanctification, etc., and yet apostatize and fall short of the grace of God ...That which makes apostasy so horrible is that these blessings actually belonged to the apostates.... They lose something they actually possessed.... The distinction of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ union are invented and not in the text [Jn. 15:1-8]” (*The Covenant and Apostasy*, Tape 1). John Barach says, “Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union with Christ and with the triune God.... We need to say to everyone, to say [to every baptized person] Jesus died for you personally and we mean it, to them, head for head, every one of them” (*Covenant and History*, tape 3).

¹³⁶J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (England, James Clark, 1976), 3:205. Emphasis added.

it was not born of inspiration: God never claimed such love as his own.”¹³⁷ The fact that some people in the visible church do not have genuine faith and thus fall away is not a problem for orthodox Calvinists. The Auburn “theologians,” however, must assert that Jesus simultaneously loves and doesn’t love the same people. They place a gross disharmony between Jesus’ sacrifice and His work of intercession.

Once again the Auburn “theologians” divide the atonement into various pieces and then arbitrarily apply some of the pieces to their new category of the semi-saved Christian. In Reformed confessional Christianity the atonement is a seamless garment. Christ and His work are not and cannot be divided.

Another feature of the Auburn theology that perverts the doctrine of the atonement is the idea that non-elect people who are baptized are said to have their sins forgiven even though they do not persevere and thus go to hell. This assertion needs to be explained. When it is asserted that their sins are forgiven or eliminated by Jesus’ blood, does this mean that all of their sins are forgiven? If all of their sins are forgiven then why do they go to hell? Does God require that the same sins be punished twice, once in the Savior and then again in those who do not persevere? No. God is perfectly righteous, just and holy. Then perhaps the Auburn “theologians” are teaching that our Lord washes away some sins by His blood yet leaves others behind. The problem with this view is that: (1) Scripture teaches that Christ removes *all* the guilt and penalty of sin by His blood; and, (2) a person who had some sins removed, while other still remains, is not saved but damned, for he still has the guilt of some sins to answer for. Perhaps the Auburn “theologians” are teaching that a person has his sins washed away at baptism and thus for a time is completely forgiven, but once he apostatizes the efficacy of Jesus’ blood is removed and new sins are charged to his account. The problem with this view is two-fold. (1) As noted earlier, it divides the expiatory, propitiatory aspect of our Lord’s work from its application. Christ’s redemptive work *merits* every aspect of salvation in its fullest sense. The Savior’s redemptive work cannot be divided as if it were a pie. (2) It is an implicit denial of the biblical doctrine of justification. For a person to have his sins removed he must be justified (that is declared righteous in the heavenly court by God the Father based on the merits of Jesus Christ). Justification is a one-time, non-repeatable event. A person who is justified has the guilt and penalty of all his sins (past, present and *future*) imputed to Christ on the cross. The Lord’s perfect righteousness is then imputed to the believing sinner. How (we ask) can someone who has all the guilt and penalty of his sins removed, who is clothed with the righteousness of the Son of God, go to hell? Can a person be justified one moment and not the next? Can a person be justified, then fall away, then be justified again? The Auburn theology in many respects has more in common with Arminianism than historic Calvinism.

Further, if one holds to the Auburn understanding of baptism and union with Christ, then why not return to the common fourth-century practice of postponing baptism until one is on his deathbed? This would greatly lessen the possibility of losing one’s salvation. Or better yet, get baptized, and immediately become a missionary in western Pakistan. The end may come painfully, but it is much better than living with the real possibility that some damnable sins will be placed on one’s account later in life.

Is it not becoming clear that the Auburn “theologians” attempt to mix the corrupt oil of medieval theology (e.g., baptismal regeneration) with the pure water of the gospel does not and cannot work? Given the popularity of the Auburn speakers and the wide dissemination of their false doctrines, it is not enough for these men to backtrack a little and proclaim their faithfulness

¹³⁷John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 69.

to the five points of Calvinism. They must publicly repent of their heretical teachings and ask forgiveness for corrupting the body of Christ with theological poison.¹³⁸

The Auburnites' view of the work of the Holy Spirit in professing Christians who do not persevere and thus go to hell also contradicts the biblical doctrine of atonement. The Reformed view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the elect is that His power to save is invincible. The grace of God is irresistible, effectual, unconquerable and certain. The Holy Spirit regenerates a person's heart, effectively applies God's word to the mind (1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18), actively draws the regenerated person toward the truth (Jn. 6:44), and preserves the regenerated sinner until the great day (Phil. 1:6; 2:13). The Holy Spirit's work in regenerating, effectually calling, and preserving believers is founded upon the objective work of Christ. Redemption is applied only to the elect. Because the Auburn "theologians" have a unique view of the sacraments and the covenant, they must compromise the effectual and certain nature of the Spirit's work.

Furthermore, another doctrine related to the atonement that is destroyed by the Auburn paradigm is definitive sanctification. According to the apostle, what is the foundation of a believer's personal godliness and perseverance in holiness? Is it his intrinsic ability to keep the covenant? Is it the water of baptism? No. It is by virtue of a believer's intimate union with Christ in His death and resurrection that the Christian has been delivered from the power of sin. For Paul, all the imperatives relating to a Christian's progressive sanctification are grounded upon definitive sanctification which is the direct result of union with Christ. In the most detailed and systematic discussion of sanctification in the New Testament (Romans 6:1-7:6), Paul teaches that Jesus' death is the reason that Christians have died to the reigning, enslaving, defiling power of sin. His resurrection is the reason that Christians have and live in newness of life.

Definitive sanctification refers to the once and for all defeat of the power of sin and the simultaneous renovation of the sinner that occurs at the inception of the Christian life. The Bible emphasizes that Christ and His redemptive work are the ultimate source of a believer's sanctification. The ethical imperatives in the epistles arise out of and are rooted in the gracious indicatives of the gospel. Salvation includes both our regeneration and sanctification. "They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection" (*Confession of Faith*, 25:1; see *Shorter Catechism* #35). That believers are sanctified "through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection" is taught throughout Scripture (read Jn. 17:17; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; 6:11; Eph. 2:1-7; 5:25-27; Tit. 2:13-14; Heb. 13:12, etc.). The "graces" of regeneration and sanctification are not ultimately the product of the human will; neither are they arbitrarily bestowed by the Father. They are the inevitable result of union with Christ.

For Paul, the decisive events which determine the Christian life all occurred in the past in redemptive history. There is a covenantal and vital union between Christ and His people which

¹³⁸Note Doug Wilson's ringing endorsement of the doctrine of perseverance: "In one exegetical debate between an average Arminian, who has checked out the Scripture and the average Calvinist, who has checked out his system, the average Arminian is going eat that Calvinist's lunch when it comes to the perseverance of the saints. Now perseverance, this is difficult because the perseverance of the saints is the one point of Calvinism that is popular. All right, all the rest we hate the more, yes, we hate them. Perseverance, you mean I can't lose my salvation once I get saved? I can't lose it? Who? Well, but that is the most popular tenet of Calvinism and when you are looking at the Scripture as they present themselves to us *in the light of our system*, it is the least defensible" (*Visible and Invisible Church Revisited*, tape 2). Well, Mr. Wilson, since you regard this precious Reformed doctrine as having little or no support, let us refresh your memory. Sit down and read the following passages: Ps. 37:28; 121:3, 7-8; Jer. 32:40; Mt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22; Jn. 6:39; 10:27-29; 17:11; Rom. 14:4; 16:25; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 5:28; Phil. 1:6; 1 Th. 5:23-24; 2 Th. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; Jude 1, 24, etc.

determines the elect's death to sin and life of holiness. Christ's redemptive work not only removes the guilt and penalty of sin but also merits and guarantees the application of Christ's work to His people. Thus our Lord is the "author," "captain," or "pioneer" of salvation in the most comprehensive sense of the term (cf. Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Ferguson writes, "Jesus is the 'author' of our sanctification, in the sense that he creates it for us, but he is also its 'pioneer' because he does so out of his own incarnate life, death and resurrection. He is the 'pioneer' of our salvation, because . . . he has endured the cross, despising its shame and the opposition of sinners, and is now seated at God's right hand. He is the first and only fully sanctified person. He has climbed God's holy hill with clean hands and a pure heart (Ps. 24:3-6). It is as the 'Lead Climber' that he gives the sanctification he has won to others (Acts 5:31)."¹³⁹ Jesus is "the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15), "[a]nd He is the Lord of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

Why is it necessary to bring up the topics of union with Christ as it relates to definitive sanctification and the believer's ability to be progressively sanctified over time and persevere? It is necessary because the Auburn "theologians" repeatedly speak of people who are truly united to Christ but who are not definitively sanctified, who do not persevere in holiness. The Bible teaches that those united to Christ are redeemed in the fullest sense of the term. Murray writes, "Union with Christ is a very inclusive subject. It embraces the wide span of salvation from its ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect. It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and in its application. Union with Christ binds all together and insures that to all for whom Christ has purchased redemption he effectively applies and communicates the same"¹⁴⁰ The Bible does not teach two forms of union with Christ, one for the elect and one for the non-elect. The Auburn "theologians" must either redefine union with Christ in an unbiblical manner; or argue that the merits of Christ's death and resurrection do not have the power to save; or they must place the ultimate deciding factor in the salvation of sinners in man, not God (which is the Romanist-Arminian position); or they must abandon their own position as unscriptural and illogical.

The Auburn Theology and Baptismal Regeneration

One of the main reasons that the Auburn theology must hold that the blood of Christ only *temporarily* saves most "Christians," that Jesus' atonement is simultaneously efficacious and non-efficacious for most professing believers, is their bizarre understanding of baptism. Note the following quotes:

How could you know you are in Him? God gave you the seal and sign of baptism. He gave you that rite that brought you into Christ and you can look and you can trust that God's promises are objective.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹Sinclair B. Ferguson, "The Reformed View" in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1988), 49.

¹⁴⁰John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 165.

¹⁴¹John Barach, *Covenant and Election*, tape 6. Note what Doug Wilson says regarding John Barach's lecture: "Theologically I think I want to amen everything that John said in his talk about election and covenant and the reality of it, how that works" (Doug Wilson, *The Curses of the New Covenant*, tape 7). Barach rejects the distinction between the visible and invisible church to the extent that he asserts that Ephesians 1 (the classic passage regarding God's predestination of the elect) applies specifically to what orthodox theologians identify as the visible church.

The Bible doesn't know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant and really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks about reality, the efficacy of baptism.¹⁴²

Raise your right hand if you knew that the Westminster Confession taught baptismal regeneration. . . . Baptism means that the one baptized has a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, the one baptized has been grafted into Christ, he has the sign and seal of regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and the obligation to walk in newness of life.¹⁴³

Traditionally, the Reformed have said, we have to view our children as presumptively elect or presumptively regenerate, and therefore, Christian, if we are willing to take the Scriptures as face value, there is no presumption necessary. Just take the Bible. And this is true, of course, because by the baptism, by baptism the Spirit joins us to Christ since he is the elect one and the Church is the elect people, we are joined to his body. We therefore are elect. Since he is the justified one, we are justified in him. Since he is the beloved one, we are beloved in him.¹⁴⁴

The Bible teaches us that baptism unites us [Wilkins believes that baptism is efficacious to everyone baptized] to Christ and by his, and to his body the power of the Spirit. By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we've all been made to drink of one Spirit. Paul says that at baptism you are clothed with Christ Jesus. For as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union. The clothes make the man. With our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings. Union with Christ is union with the church, his body.¹⁴⁵

. . . [S]ome persons, not destined for final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real blessings, *purchased for them by Christ's cross and applied to them by the Holy Spirit* through Word and Sacrament. . . . Saul received the *same* initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance. . . . In one sense, all those in the covenant are "saved." They have been delivered out of the world and brought into the glorious *new creation of Christ*, but not all will persevere in that "salvation."¹⁴⁶

Although the Auburn "theologians" assert in their lectures that they reject the Roman Catholic view of baptism, that the water of baptism works automatically (i.e., *ex opere operato*), nevertheless they adhere to some form of baptismal regeneration. Their view of baptism, coupled

Note how Barach speaks of the visible church as though non-elect tares simply don't exist. "What does it mean, though, to be a church member? What does it mean to be one of God's covenant people? It means that you have been brought into relationship with God, you are in fellowship with the triune God, brought into his family life to share with him in his love. God has brought you into the people on whom he has set his love, and therefore you personally are the object of God's love. You are among the people he has saved, the people he has exodused and the people he has committed to saving" (*Covenant and Election*, tape 6). Note Wilson's absurd comments: "I want to begin by saying that when we first start talking about the objectivity of the covenant and it starts to sink in what we are saying. You mean that you are saying that lesbian Eskimo bishop lady is a Christian? She is not a Buddhist, she is not a Muslim, yes, in the New Testament sense, she is a New Testament Christian" (Doug Wilson, *The Curses of the New Covenant*, tape 7).

¹⁴² John Barach, *Covenant History*, tape 3.

¹⁴³ Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), 103.

¹⁴⁴ Steve Wilkins, *Half Way Covenant*, tape 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. In the same lecture Steve Wilkins refers to the modern Presbyterian view of infant baptism as "nothing more than a wet infant dedication service." He also accuses the great southern Presbyterian theologians Thornwell and Dabney of holding the same view. Given the fact that Wilkins holds to a Lutheran, high-church Episcopalian view of baptism (i.e., baptismal regeneration), his criticisms should be taken with a large grain of salt.

¹⁴⁶ *Summary Statement of the Auburn Ave. Presbyterian Church's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation*, emphasis added.

with their rejection of the distinction between the visible and invisible church, forces them to adopt positions regarding regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness and the love of Christ that have much more in common with Arminianism than historic Reformed teaching. The Arminian system, however, while unscriptural, is much more logical and coherent than the Auburn paradigm. The Auburn theology weds together doctrines and ideas that are completely incompatible and contradictory.¹⁴⁷

The Auburn speakers, as we have seen in the above quotes, teach that baptism is always efficacious and insist that the Westminster Standards also teach baptismal regeneration. For example Wilson writes, “Raise your right hand if you know that the Westminster Confession taught baptismal regeneration. . . .”¹⁴⁸ Baptismal regeneration is one of the pillars of the whole Auburn system. The Auburn assertions raise an important question. Do the Westminster Standards teach baptismal regeneration? Have all Reformed theologians misunderstood the Standards for 350 years? No, not at all! The Auburn speakers completely misrepresent the teaching of the Confession and are teaching an unbiblical view of baptism. When the Confession of Faith discusses baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace and all the benefits of the covenant, it is not teaching baptismal regeneration or the idea that baptism is always efficacious.

Further, the Confession explicitly teaches that the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment it is administered. Mr. Wilson is taking WCF 28:1 out of context. For, in a subsequent section, the Confession says that “grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, *that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated* (28:5, emphasis added). The Confession cites Acts 8:13, 23 which refer to Simon Magus who was lawfully baptized yet who remained “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (Acts 8:23). Earlier in verse 21 Peter tells Simon Magnus in explicit language that he is not saved. The Confession also says, “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, *to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto*, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time” (28:6, emphasis added). Baptism is only efficacious for those to whom grace belongs, according to God’s counsel or decree. What this

¹⁴⁷Sometimes they attempt to eliminate serious problems in their system by redefining or recasting certain doctrines. Note for example Doug Wilson’s rejection of the invisible-visible church distinction in history in favor of the concepts: the *historic* and *eschatological* church. Once one adopts the position that everyone baptized is regenerated and truly united to Christ, then obviously the invisible-visible distinction in history must be set aside. Wilson still needs to explain (given his definition of baptism and the covenant) why the historic church and eschatological church are not identical. According to the Auburn system the answer is that some who are baptized, united to Christ, and receive “the full blessings of salvation,” do not persevere. This answer raises the question: “Why don’t they persevere?” The Reformed answer is that they were not elect and therefore Christ did not die for them and the Holy Spirit did not apply Jesus’ saving work unto them. The Auburn paradigm asserts that these people were regenerate, “saved” and really forgiven by Jesus’ blood but because they did not persevere in faithfulness to the covenant they were cut off. The Auburn paradigm has two separate categories of salvation. There are people who are halfway saved (the temporarily regenerate) and then those who are the eschatological elect who are saved totally. Although the Auburn “theologians” loudly proclaim their loyalty to the Protestant doctrine of justification and the Reformed doctrines of grace, their system logically places the *ground* of salvation in both the work of Christ *and* continued faithfulness to the covenant. The only logical manner by which they can avoid this accusation is to go back to the Calvinistic position that people who do not persevere were never really saved in the first place. Keep in mind that while the Bible does teach that people who do not persevere will go to hell; it also explicitly teaches that such people were never saved and loved by Jesus in the first place (see the sections above that discuss 1 Jn. 2:19-20; Mt. 7:24-25 as well as Heb. 6:4ff. below).

¹⁴⁸Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough*, 103.

means is that the benefits of the covenant of grace are *only* efficaciously conferred by the Holy Spirit *to the elect*.

The Westminster Standards (which are the pinnacle of Reformed Confessional theology) emphatically reject the Auburn doctrine that baptism is always efficacious and that everyone baptized is truly united to Christ and receives all the benefits of redemption. The Auburn doctrines have more in common with Romanism, Lutheranism and Anglicanism than historic, confessional Reformed thought. Theirs is a dangerous doctrine that has no warrant from Scripture or precedent in Reformed theology.

The absurdity of the Auburn theology is demonstrated by what baptism signifies and seals. Note the following. (1) Baptism, like circumcision, is “a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:11). (2) Baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezek. 36:35). “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). “He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). (3) Baptism is a sign and seal of the remission of sins (Mk. 1:4; Ac. 2:38). (4) It also symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:26, 33; Ac. 1:5; 2:2, 17; 11:15-16) and spiritual purification (Ezek. 36:25; Jn. 3:6) that leads to a true inner and progressive sanctification (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; Mt. 7:18). (5) Baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ and all the saving benefits that flow from that union (Col. 2:11-14)—regeneration, forgiveness of sins, sanctification (Rom. 6:4-18), physical resurrection, and glorification (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 26, 42-55).

Given the Reformed teaching regarding what baptism signifies and seals, if baptism were truly efficacious in all cases, then everyone baptized would without question go to heaven. If people who are baptized are sealed by the Holy Spirit and receive all the benefits of redemption, then of necessity they are guaranteed an eternal inheritance. They *cannot* lose their salvation. Paul writes, “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:13-14). In Ephesians 4:30 the apostle says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Gordon Clark writes, “He seals us ‘to the day of redemption.’ *Until* or *for* the day of redemption. Here we have the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This or that man in the pew may or may not have been sealed; but, if he has been, he will not be finally lost. Regeneration is a once-for-all act. We are not saved at breakfast, lost at noon, and born again in the evening. The redemption of the body from the grave, and redemption from sin will always affect us in our present life.”¹⁴⁹

The Auburn doctrine of baptism once again places their teaching in an irresolvable dilemma. Logically, their position leaves them with three possible alternatives, each of which is unscriptural. (1) That everyone baptized will certainly go to heaven. (2) That the recipients do not really receive all the things signified by baptism. This view divides the work of Christ into pieces like Arminianism, contradicts the biblical doctrine of baptism, and contradicts their own statements that those baptized receive everything signified but they can lose their salvation if they do not persevere with true saving faith and the works of faith. This position explicitly denies the true meaning and efficacy of baptism because the Bible teaches that those who truly receive the merits of Christ’s death, who are sealed by the Holy Spirit, cannot apostatize and go to hell. The Auburn “theologians” are in the precarious position of having either to deny the meaning of baptism and the doctrine of perseverance (which contrary to Mr. Wilson’s comments is clearly

¹⁴⁹Gordon Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985), 162.

taught in Scripture and easy to prove), or hold together teachings which are blatantly contradictory. (3) Further, if salvation is truly lost, they must either hold to the position that people are saved for a time *without saving faith* which is a gift of God merited by Christ, or they must hold to an Arminian view of faith which is self-generated and liable to fail at any moment. The first position explicitly denies the biblical doctrine of salvation¹⁵⁰, while the second makes faith a work or partial ground of salvation and thus also is a denial of salvation by grace alone.¹⁵¹

Regarding the efficacy of baptism, the Reformed position has always been that it is made efficacious by the Holy Spirit and that only true believers (the elect) receive the full benefits of baptism. Elect infants who are regenerated at baptism will obviously never know a time when they did not believe in and love Jesus. Sometimes the infants of believers are regenerated at a later time. No person, however (except the extraordinary case of elect infants who die in

¹⁵⁰Steve Schlissel says, “The keeping of the commands of God identified as putting trust in God is contrasted with forgetting God and disobeying God. To be in the gospel is to be in the law, the law of God. The question has always been what does the Lord require? We have changed the question since Luther’s day. Perhaps imperceptible to some, but quite drastically if you look at it. The question is commonly, what must I do to be saved? But that’s the wrong question! The question is what does the Lord require? If we don’t retool our churches, to turn around from the ‘What must I do to be saved?’ to ‘What does the Lord require?’ we are going to die. Because in answering one, what must I do to be saved, you move in the idea of *sola, sola, sola*, and then you have the *sola fide* and if you are only saved by faith apart from any activity or any response to God’s word and then what kind of faith is that?” (*Covenant Hearing*, Tape 1).

According to Schlissel we should never ask the question “What must I do to be saved?” Such a question does not fit into Schlissel’s view of salvation which is a combination of faith and law keeping. Was *sola fide* a great mistake on the part of Luther, Calvin, Knox and the whole Protestant Reformation? No, not at all! After Paul and Silas were miraculously set free from prison by God the Philippian jailer asked: “What must I do to be saved?” According to Schlissel we would expect Paul to rebuke the jailer for asking the wrong question. Apparently Paul should have said: “Get baptized, enter the covenant and keep living in obedience to the law and then you (if you persevere) will be saved.” Paul instead answers in the fashion of Luther or Calvin. He says “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Ac. 16:31; cf. 2:21; 4:12; 11:12). Paul taught that the moment a person believes in Jesus he or she is saved, that is, justified by faith (*sola fide*) apart from the works of the law (see Rom. 3:20-22, 27-28). Is the Reformed doctrine of *sola fide* anti-law (or antinomian) as Schlissel implies? Did the Reformers teach that people are saved by a faith that stands alone as Schlissel implies? No. Schlissel either completely misunderstands the reformed teaching or purposely sets up a straw man. The Reformation doctrine is that a person is saved by faith alone apart from the works of the law. But once a person is saved (i.e., justified) he is sanctified or progressively made holy by the Holy Spirit as a result of his union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-18). The keeping of the law is done out of gratitude for our salvation and does not contribute one iota to it. Schlissel apparently defines antinomianism as a refusal to make law-keeping an instrument of justification along with faith. Apparently Schlissel and his comrades have failed to distinguish between salvation in the narrow sense (justification) and salvation in the broad sense (justification, sanctification, and sometimes even glorification). When Paul tells believers to work out their *salvation* with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) he is definitely referring to sanctification, for he completes the verse by saying “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (v. 13). Anyone who confounds justification and sanctification, as Schlissel does, has placed himself squarely in the Romanist camp on this matter. Beware of the leaven of Norman Shepherd. His doctrine of salvation is theological poison.

¹⁵¹Having read the lectures from the Auburn Avenue conference, the type of answer we would expect to receive after pointing out the illogical absurdities of their system is: “Well, you are obviously influenced by Greek and Enlightenment thinking. What you need to do is return to a Hebraistic mindset.” The problem with such a response is that their system is not really rooted in a Hebrew worldview. It rather has much more in common with the Barthian concept of dialectical tension and paradox. This present author is not aware of any place in the Old Testament in which we are encouraged to adhere to two contradictory, self-refuting ideas at the same time. It is very arrogant for such young and inexperienced theologians to assert that they have discovered something new and improved; that all the Reformed divines and theologians of the last four hundred years were grossly mistaken in their concepts of the church, the covenant, baptism, justification, and perseverance.

infancy), can receive the full benefits of the covenant apart from saving faith. Sadly, sometimes the children of believers who are baptized are never regenerated and never receive the gift of saving faith. Such persons were members of the visible church with certain rights and privileges. However, their baptism was never made efficacious. Their baptism will only bring upon them greater condemnation. Paul says that circumcision, to the unbelieving Jew, was uncircumcision (Rom. 2:25). Our Lord says that the circumcised Jews of His day were the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 3:9). Jesus told the circumcised Pharisees that their covenantal father was the devil (Jn. 8:44). “[F]or the efficacy of a sacrament faith is required, devotion and an internal motion of the mind, both because the Scriptures expressly assert it (Mk. 16:16; 1 Cor. 11:27; Ac. 2:38) and because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), and because the promise (which is continued in the sacrament) and faith are correlated. . . .”¹⁵² Hodge’s comparison of baptism and the word as means of grace is very helpful. He writes,

Baptism, however, is not only a sign and seal; it is also a means of grace, because in it the blessings which it signifies are conveyed, and the promises of which it is the seal, are assured or fulfilled to those who are baptized, provided they believe. The Word of God is declared to be the wisdom and power of God to salvation; it is the means used by the Holy Spirit in conferring on men the benefits of redemption. Of course all who merely hear or read the Word of God are not saved; neither do all who receive the baptism of water experience the baptism of the Holy Ghost; but this is not inconsistent with the Word’s being the means of salvation, or with baptism’s being the washing of regeneration. Our Lord says we are sanctified by the truth. Paul says we put on Christ in baptism (Gal. iii. 27). When a man receives the Gospel with a true faith, he receives the blessings which the Gospel promises; when he receives baptism in the exercise of faith, he receives the benefits of which baptism is the sign and seal. Unless the recipient of this sacrament be insincere, baptism is an act of faith, it is an act which and by which he receives and appropriates the offered benefits of the redemption of Christ. And, therefore, to baptism may be properly attributed all that in the Scriptures is attributed to faith. Baptism washes away sin (Acts xxii. 16); it unites to Christ and makes us the sons of God (Gal. iii. 26, 27); we are therein buried with Christ (Rom. vi. 3); it is (according to one interpretation of Titus iii. 5) the washing of regeneration. But all this is said on the assumption that it is what it purports to be, an act of faith.¹⁵³

The only argument to which the Auburn “theologians” can appeal to circumvent the standard Reformed position on the efficacy of baptism and faith is to assert that what Reformed theologians have always referred to as a temporary, non-genuine, non-saving faith is actually a real saving faith that can be lost. Such a view, however, is exegetically and theologically impossible because true saving faith is a gift that is founded on the merits of Christ. As such it cannot be temporary. To assert that it involves separating the foundation of salvation (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) from its application by the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁴ That separation is precisely what Arminians do.

¹⁵²Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 3:365.

¹⁵³Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:589.

¹⁵⁴Although the Auburn lectures are almost completely devoid of biblical exegesis, a passage that is used to support their understanding of baptism is 1 Peter 3:21. It reads, “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ....” What is particularly interesting about this passage is that it is an excellent proof text *against* baptismal regeneration and the Auburn view of baptism. Verse 21 comes immediately after a discussion of Noah and his family who were saved through water. Peter says that baptism is an antitype or counterpart to Noah’s

The Auburn Paradigm's Rejection of Historic Calvinism

The Auburn theology with its rejection of the two-fold distinction of the church; baptismal regeneration; unique understanding of the covenant idea that people who were truly saved and forgiven can fall away; is primarily based on two types of passages. There are passages which supposedly teach that genuine Christians can fall away and go to hell and there are those which are said to teach that people who apostatize were at one time truly united to Christ. Given the foundational nature of these sorts of passages for the Auburn system we will examine some of their primary proof texts in order to prove that their interpretation of these passages is illegitimate and contrary to the analogy of Scripture.

The first group of passages that need to be explained are those which warn professing Christians of the danger of falling away. Are there not many warnings in Scripture against apostasy and unbelief? Further, are there not many examples of "believers" who apostatized (e.g., King Saul, Judas Iscariot, Hymenaeus Alexander, Philetus and Demas)? It cannot be denied that the Bible contains many admonitions to persevere and warnings against apostasy (e.g., Jn. 8:31; 15:6, 7:10; Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 2:1-3; 3:14). The Bible talks about: the need to continue in God's goodness (Rom. 11:21-22) and endure (2 Tim. 2:12); those who endure for only a while (Mt. 13:21); some who depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1) and have strayed concerning the truth (1 Tim. 2:17). Some of the strongest warnings against apostasy are found in the book of Hebrews (3:16; 4:6; 6:4-6; 10:26-30). Peter speaks of apostates who had escaped the pollution of the world for a season (1 Pet. 2:20-22). The author of Hebrews says that apostates had once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, and even were partakers of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4ff.). The Auburn "theologians," like Arminians, quote from among these and say that we have to take these passages at face value. When we do, they assert, it is obvious that believers can, have and do fall from salvation. Wilson even likens the traditional Reformed view to a giant "beware of cliff" sign in the middle of Kansas.¹⁵⁵

Another group of passages that need to be considered is those which speak of the union of God's people with Christ. There is the discourse of the vine and vinedressers in John 15:1-8ff., as well as the illustration of the olive tree in Romans 11:17-25. These passages (we are told)

deliverance through water. The apostle then inserts a parenthetical statement to make sure that his comment about baptism saving us is not misconstrued. To paraphrase, he says, "Look I don't want you to get the impression that being sprinkled with water saves you because physical water can only remove dirt from you skin. What I am really talking about is baptism in the Spirit and regeneration which takes place within man and that leads to a clean conscience before God. Spirit baptism is rooted in your union with Christ in His resurrection." The absurdity of the baptismal regeneration view is further demonstrated by the obvious fact that the antitype to physical water is not physical water but that which the water represents—the spiritual cleansing and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Jay Adams writes, "Spirit **baptism** puts a person 'into Christ' (1 Cor. 12:12). The argument in Romans 6 helps clarify Peter's use (1 Peter seems in many ways to parallel Romans). Paul says there that we were 'baptized into Christ Jesus' (vs. 3). That is, we were 'baptized into every aspect of His life.' He argues if we have the whole, then we have the parts; if we are in *Christ*, then we are in His circumcision, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and seating at God's right hand. His point in Romans 6 is that we must live a new life. If we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death and resurrection to a new life. In Colossians 2:11, 12, Paul can also say that we have been circumcised with Christ by virtue of our Spirit baptism into Him. And, in Ephesians 2:6 (see also Col. 3:1), He considers us in the heavens seated at God's right hand in Him" (*Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* [Greenville, SC: A Press, 1978], 116). If (as the Auburn view apparently asserts) the ritual of baptism itself actually brings one into a true union with Christ then every single person who was ever lawfully baptized would go to heaven because (as Dr. Adams just noted) union with Christ gives the believing sinner salvation in the fullest sense possible.

¹⁵⁵Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough*, 132. Actually, there are dangerous cliffs in Kansas (e.g., Castle Rock).

can only be interpreted as teaching that people who did not persevere and thus were cut off by God were really united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and forgiven. Steve Wilkins writes, “Calvinists have not dealt faithfully with this text. . . . The distinction of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ union are invented and not in the text. Both kinds of branches are truly and vitally joined on the vine. Both can and should be fruitful.”¹⁵⁶

A number of important issues must be considered as we examine the Auburnites’ unique understanding of union with Christ and the ability of true believers to apostatize.

(1) There is the issue of biblical hermeneutics. The Auburn paradigm violates standard Protestant principles of interpretation. One of these principles is that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. The Bible cannot teach that real believers can never totally fall away and also teach that real genuine Christians can apostatize. When we assert that the Auburn system on this point is contradictory, it needs to be pointed out that the Auburn speakers have attempted to harmonize their system with Calvinism. On the one hand, they repeatedly assert in their lectures that real Christians who are forgiven can and do apostatize. Yet on the other hand, those Christians who happen to be elect are given the extra gift of perseverance and thus cannot fall away and go to hell. Note the radical difference between the Auburn theology and classic Calvinism. The orthodox Calvinist would say that people who fall away were never truly saved (i.e., forgiven by Christ’s blood) and baptized in the Holy Spirit. The orthodox Calvinist says this because: a) he uses the clearer portions of Scripture to interpret the less clear (this point is considered below); and, b) he wants to maintain the integrity of the doctrine of the atonement. The Bible teaches repeatedly and clearly that the efficacy of our Lord’s work cannot be separated from its application. The Auburn “theologians” have invented a new category of Christian who is truly redeemed but only for a season. This saved, loved, forgiven believer is not elect and thus does not receive the gift of perseverance. As we noted earlier in our discussion of the atonement, the idea that Jesus loves the non-elect, washes away their sins by His blood and gives them the Holy Spirit, is blatantly unscriptural and illogical.

Another principle of interpretation that the Auburn “theologians” violate is that the clearer portions of Scripture are to be used to interpret the less clear. What is a believer supposed to do when there are dozens of passages that teach that Christians cannot apostatize, yet there are many warnings against falling away and examples of professing Christians who have apostatized in Scripture? The orthodox Calvinist does two things. First, he looks to clearer portions of Scripture that are related to the topic in question in order to harmonize what many consider to be an *apparent* contradiction in the Bible. There are several passages in Scripture which indicate that people that fall away were never really saved (i.e., justified, cleansed by Jesus’ blood) to begin with. Since we have already dealt with many of these passages we will keep our comments brief. In Matthew 7:23 we learn that on the day of judgment Jesus tells hypocritical false professors of Christianity, “I never knew you.” That is, “I never had a saving, loving relationship, or interest in you whatsoever.” In 1 John 2:19-20 the apostle says plainly that people who apostatize were never “of us.” They were never genuine believers. They never really belonged to Christ or the invisible church. When the author of Hebrews discussed the issue of apostasy he made it abundantly clear that apostasy is a manifestation of *unbelief* (Heb. 3:19). The Jews who were disobedient in the wilderness and thus could not enter the promised land (Heb. 4:6) never were united to Christ by faith or justified. Further, there are many passages which indicate that apostates were never regenerated or born again (Ac. 7:51; 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27; 4:13).

¹⁵⁶ *The Covenant and Apostasy*, tape 1.

Secondly, the orthodox Calvinist examines his interpretation in the light of theology or the overall teaching of the Bible as a whole (the analogy of Scripture). Obviously, if an interpretation contradicts several well-established doctrines, such as election, the atonement, regeneration, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, then it needs to be rejected.

The Auburn paradigm (primarily because of an unbiblical view of John 15 and Romans 11) completely ignores the Bible's own explanation of why apostasy takes place. Apostasy is the manifestation of unbelief. It demonstrates that some people in the visible church were *never* regenerated, united to Christ, baptized in the Spirit, justified or *internally* sanctified. Further, the Auburn system violates several important doctrines, especially the doctrine of atonement. While it is true that physical separation and temporary deliverance are sometimes equated in Scripture with being bought or saved,¹⁵⁷ it is *never* the case that Jesus' blood removes a person's sins who

¹⁵⁷The most common proof text for such a view is 2 Peter 2:1, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." The Auburn paradigm (or Arminian view of such passages) should be rejected for a number of reasons. First, one needs to understand that Peter is *not* speaking about Christ in this passage, but God the Father. The word that Peter used for Lord (*despoten*) in this passage, when used of a person in the Godhead, is always used to describe God the Father, and is never used to describe Christ. For example, Jude 4 says, "The only Lord (*despoten*) God and our Lord (*kurion*) Jesus Christ." Other instances are Luke 2:29, Acts 4:24, 2 Timothy 2:21, and Revelation 6:10. The Holy Spirit for some reason uses a different word to describe the Father's lordship from that of Jesus Christ. This, of course, is not meant to detract in any way from Christ's glory and power. Gill writes, "The word *despotes* is properly expressive only of that power which masters have over their servants; whereas the word *kurios*, which is used whenever Christ is called Lord, signifies that dominion and authority which princes have over their subjects" (John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1978 (1735)], 61).

The reason that it is significant that Peter is speaking about the Father rather than specifically about Christ is that the word "bought," in this context, cannot refer to the blood of Christ. This makes sense in light of the fact that the Bible teaches that those redeemed by Christ cannot fall away and be forever lost (e.g., Jn. 10:29; Rom. 8:29-39; Eph. 1:11, 14). What this purchase refers to is a *temporal* deliverance. Peter is using an expression which harkens back to Israel's deliverance from Egypt. "Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?" (Dt. 32:6). There can be no question that Peter had Israel's deliverance and experience in the wilderness in mind (cf. 2 Pet. 2:12-13; Dt. 32:5). Note the comparison between the people's corruption and their blemish. Gill writes, "Peter makes use of this phrase much in the same manner as Moses had done before him, to aggravate the ingratitude and impiety of these false teachers among the Jews; that they should deny, if not in words, at least in works, that mighty Jehovah, who had of old redeemed their fathers out of Egypt, with a stretched-out arm, and, in successive ages, had distinguished them with particular favours; being ungodly men, turning the grace, the doctrine of the grace of God into lasciviousness" (Ibid).

The history of Israel shows that many of the Israelites denied the Lord that bought them, and thus perished in the wilderness. But we know from subsequent revelation that the Israelites who perished in the wilderness were never truly saved in the spiritual sense, but only received a temporary physical deliverance. When the author of Hebrews describes the Israelites who perished in the wilderness he says, "They have not known My ways.... We see that they could not enter in because of *unbelief*" (Heb. 3:10, 19). Therefore, there is no reason (in 2 Pet. 2:1) to conclude that Peter refers to people who had genuine saving faith in Christ and who were actually purchased with His blood. In fact, there is every reason to conclude that Peter is discussing those who never had true faith; who only received temporary outward benefits. As the apostle John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 Jn. 2:19).

Another strong reason to reject the interpretation which says that Christ shed His blood for people who go to hell is that it would totally contradict Scripture. Scripture consistently affirms that Christ died for: "His people" (Mt. 1:21); His "sheep" (Jn. 10:11, 14-16); "the church" (Eph. 5:25); "the elect" (Rom. 8:31-33); "us"—that is, believers (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24; Heb. 1:3; 9:12; 10:14; 1 Jn. 1:7; 4:9-10); "the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16); the "many" (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 10:45; Heb. 9:28). The Bible emphatically declares that all those for whom Christ died will definitely be saved

is going to go to hell. It is *never* the case that our Lord's sinless life is imputed to an apostate child of the devil.

(2) The Auburn paradigm is founded upon unbiblical presuppositions and sloppy exegesis. Numerous mistaken ideas reoccur in the conference lectures.

For example, there does not appear to be any recognition of a difference between genuine and false faith. For example, Wilkins appeals to passages which speak of those who "believe for a while" (Lk. 8:13) as evidence for his unique view of the covenant. The Auburn theology fails to recognize that Scripture itself sometimes speaks of belief in a non-saving sense (i.e., as a false or spurious faith). An obvious example is John 2:23-24: "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." Hutchinson writes, "It is most unusual for some natural men to be so far affected with Christ and his working as to be convinced in their judgment of some excellency in him, and be drawn to profess some sort of embracing of him, and yet they remain still in nature and unconverted; for 'many believed in his name,' or professed to do so, who yet were unsound, as the sequel cleareth."¹⁵⁸

As another example, there is little or no recognition of the distinction between common-external operations of the Holy Spirit and indwelling saving workings (e.g., see point number 10 in the AAPC's position statement on the covenant, etc.). This lack of recognition of the distinction between the Spirit's work in the elect and upon the non-elect not only contradicts Scripture, but cannot be harmonized with historic Reformed theology. For instance, in the book of Acts, Stephen rebukes the circumcised Jews of his day, saying: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you" (Ac. 7:51). Stephen tells circumcised Jews who were in the covenant: "You are unregenerate and thus you reject the truth and resist the Holy Spirit." Yes, but doesn't it say they "resist the Holy Spirit"? Indeed, it does. But, how does Stephen define their resistance to the Holy Spirit's work? He says they persecuted the prophets and murdered the Messiah (Ac. 7:52). Then he points out they received the law but they didn't keep it (Ac. 7:53). They did not believe in or obey the divinely inspired Scriptures. That is, they resisted the outward call of the gospel. They resisted an external work of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who refuses to repent and believe resists the Spirit. The Jews were especially guilty and worthy of judgment because they promised God that they would adhere to the terms of the Sinai covenant (Ex. 19:8).

We ask the Auburn "theologians": If the Spirit's work is the same in the elect and non-elect, then how can you define regeneration and effectual calling in a manner that does not contradict Reformed theology? Regeneration and effectual calling are works of the Spirit that man cannot overpower or render null and void. The Auburn paradigm must either define these theological terms in an Arminian fashion or it must admit that the Holy Spirit does not work upon the elect and the non-elect in the same way. The classic Reformed view is expressed in an excellent manner by James Bannerman. He writes, "The members of the Church invisible are joined in an inward relationship to Christ, in consequence of having listened to His inward call by the Spirit, and being vitally united to Him through faith. The members of the Church visible are joined in an outward connection with Christ, in consequence of having obeyed His outward

(Jn. 6:39; Mt. 1:21; 18:11; Lk. 19:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-5). Furthermore, it is irrational to assert that Christ removed the guilt and penalty due for sin for a particular person who will also have to pay the penalty for his own sins in hell. That would be a great injustice.

¹⁵⁸George Hutcheson, *John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1841, 1657]), 39.

call by the Word, and being now made partakers by Him in the external privileges and ordinance of a church state.”¹⁵⁹ Bannerman’s statement says nothing new, and probably will not tickle any of the ears of those who seek to be profound and innovative. It does however have the advantage of being biblical and logical.

As a third example, there is the acceptance of the Arminian idea that commands or admonitions presuppose ability. Doug Wilson writes, “But the Reformed have their own set of problems here. One such problem is to assume that all such warnings are hypothetical. In other words, God warns His elect away from something that cannot happen to them—something like erecting a giant ‘BEWARE OF THE CLIFF’ sign in the middle of Kansas. The fundamental problem with treating passages as hypothetical is that the *reality* of the warning is often assumed in the warning. Demas really did fall away. Unbelieving Jews were really cut out of the olive tree and the Gentiles were warned that the same thing could happen to them. Judas fell away. These are not hypothetical warnings.”¹⁶⁰ If Wilson is speaking of corporate election or the visible church then obviously such warnings are not hypothetical. Professing Christians do fall away, apostatize and go to hell. If Wilson is talking about individual election (which is likely, given the fact that he is critiquing the Reformed position) then we ask Mr. Wilson how is it possible for a member of the elect to fall away? Wilson apparently believes that the warnings against apostasy presuppose that the elect (individually) can apostatize.

Although Wilson’s view appears logical and is common among evangelical Arminians, it is neither necessary nor scriptural. The fact that Christians are frequently warned against apostasy does not necessarily mean that the elect can really fall away. Frequently in Scripture God commands people to do things which they cannot possibly do. Jesus commanded His disciples to be perfect (Mt. 5:48), yet the apostle John says that no Christian can achieve perfection in this life (1 Jn. 1:8). Our Lord often commanded people to do things that apart from God’s miraculous power they were totally unable to accomplish. For example, He told the man with the withered hand to “stretch out your hand” (Mk. 3:5). Lazarus who was a dead rotting corpse was commanded to “come forth” (Jn. 11:43). People who are dead in trespasses and sins and totally unable to respond to the gospel are repeatedly ordered to repent and believe. The fact that they are unable does not alter their obligation one iota. The fact that the elect cannot fall away and apostatize does not lessen the importance or obligation of God’s commands to persevere. Remember, in the process of progressive sanctification, God works through means or secondary causes. The warnings and threats found in the New Testament are used by the Holy Spirit to motivate us unto greater diligence, watchfulness, effort, and faithfulness toward God.

The Auburn paradigm assumes (in a manner virtually identical to Arminianism) that if genuine believers cannot fall away, then they will not take the warnings against apostasy seriously. This assumption must be rejected for at least two reasons. First, all admonitions and commands of God are to be heeded regardless of ability or disability. Second, God works through secondary means to bring about progressive sanctification. The elect persevere precisely because they don’t take their walk with Christ or holiness for granted. The real believer rests upon God’s precious promises regarding his own preservation; yet at the same time is never passive but strives after holiness as if his perseverance depended upon it. Murray’s comments are very helpful. He writes,

¹⁵⁹James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Faith, 1960 [1869]), 1:31.

¹⁶⁰Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), 132.

[I]t is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is *always respective* of the life of holiness and fidelity. And so it is never proper to think of a believer irrespective of the fruits of faith and holiness. To say that a believer is secure whatever may be the extent of his addiction to sin in his subsequent life is to abstract faith in Christ from its very definition and it ministers to that abuse which turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. The doctrine of perseverance is the doctrine that believers *persevere*; it cannot be too strongly stressed that it is the *perseverance* of the saints. And that means that the saints, those united to Christ by the effectual call of the Father and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will persevere until the end. If they persevere, they endure, they continue. It is not at all that they will be saved irrespective of their perseverance or their continuance, but that they will assuredly persevere. Consequently, the security that is theirs is inseparable from their perseverance. Is this not what Jesus said? "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."¹⁶¹

Thirdly, any professing Christian who backslides or who habitually practices sin *ought* to lose his assurance and *should* tremble before the passages which warn of apostasy. The many passages of Scripture which discuss self examination (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 11:22; Heb. 3:12, 4:11), how to have assurance (1 Jn. 1:6-7,9; 2:19-24; 3:6-10; etc.) and the dire consequences of apostasy (Rom. 11:20 ff.; Jn. 15:6; Heb. 3:19, 4:1 ff., 6:1-11, 2 Pet. 2:1 ff.) are there precisely because Christians do backslide, because professors of Christ do apostatize. There is no need to pervert the doctrines of election, perseverance or the nature of the covenant to explain such passages. Calvinist theologians have successfully dealt with such objections for centuries.

(3) The passages which speak of apostasy do *not* teach that the elect or genuine believers can forever fall away and go to hell. A favorite passage of Wilson's and all those who want to prove the apostasy of genuine believers is Hebrews 6:4-6, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." Although this is a difficult passage, a brief consideration of it within its context will demonstrate that it does not support the Auburn paradigm. The author of the book of Hebrews was dealing with Jews who joined the Christian assembly for a time and then returned to Pharisaical Judaism. They are said to "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame" (6:6). These Jews, by going back to the Pharisaical religion, totally repudiated Jesus Christ. They joined forces with the religious leaders responsible for the frame-up, torture and execution of Christ. Note that the author of Hebrews does not refer to the apostates as "us" or even as "you" but as "those." Note also that as soon as this section dealing with the apostates ends, the writers sets up a contrast between the real and the counterfeit, "But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation" (v. 9).¹⁶² "They are in the following verses compared to the ground on which the rain often falls,

¹⁶¹John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 155-156.

¹⁶²John Brown wrote of verse 9 and following: "The general meaning of this paragraph, all the parts of which are closely connected together plainly is: 'The reason why I have made these awful statements about apostates, is not that I consider you whom I am addressing as apostates; for your conduct proves that this is not your character, and the promise of God secures that their doom shall not be yours; but that you may be stirred up to preserving steadiness in the faith, and hope, and obedience of the truth, by a constant continuance in which alone you can, like those who have gone before you, obtain, in all their perfection, the promised blessings of the Christian salvation.' The reason why the Apostle had stated so particularly the aggravated guilt and all but hopeless condition of

and beareth nothing but thorns and briers. But this is not with true believers. For faith itself is an herb peculiar to the enclosed garden of Christ, and meet for him by whom we are dressed.”¹⁶³

But what about the terms used to describe those who fell away? Don't they indicate a real interior gracious operation of the Spirit in the non-elect? No, they most certainly do not. When the author says that these apostates “were once enlightened” (v. 4) he simply means that they had been instructed in gospel doctrine. Similarly, Peter had said of apostates that they had a “knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 2:20). These people had an *intellectual* understanding of the gospel. They also “tasted of the heavenly gift.” The word taste is used metaphorically in the sense of sampled. They gave Christianity a try. They never really “consumed” Jesus by faith or internally received Him. They had a mere superficial interest in Him as does a person who experiments in the latest fashion or fad. Owen writes, “It is as if he had said, ‘I speak not of those who have received and digested the spiritual food of their souls, and turned it into spiritual nourishment; but of such as have so far tasted of it, as they ought to have desired it as “sincere milk, to have grown thereby.”’ But they had received such an experiment of its divine truth and power, as that it had various effects upon them.”¹⁶⁴ The Jewish apostates demonstrated their lack of saving interest in the Savior when they went back to Pharisaical Judaism.

The statement that is supposed to be the most perplexing for Calvinists is in verse 4 where the author of Hebrews says, “... and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.” Doesn't this passage indicate that people in whom the Spirit dwells can apostatize? No, it doesn't. Aside from the fact that Scripture teaches that those regenerated, baptized in and sealed by the Spirit can never fall away or curse the Savior (Phil. 1:6; 1 Th. 5:23-24; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:3; etc.). The word translated “partakers” indicates they shared or benefited from the functioning of spiritual gifts in the church. “It is one thing for a man to have a share in and benefit by the gifts of the church, another to be personally himself endowed with them.”¹⁶⁵ Pink writes, “It should be pointed out that the Greek word for ‘partakers’ here is a different one from that used in Col. 1:12 and 2 Peter 1:4, where real Christians are in view. The word here means ‘companions,’ referring to what is external rather than internal. . . . These apostates had never been ‘born of the Spirit’ (John 3:6), still less were their bodies His ‘temples’ (1 Cor. 6:19).”¹⁶⁶

There is no exegetical reason in Hebrews 6 (or any other passage of Scripture) for us to reject orthodox Calvinism in favor of the Auburn paradigm.

(4) The Auburn paradigm rests in large part on an unscriptural understanding of John 15:1-8: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be

apostates, was not that he considered the Hebrew Christians whom he was addressing as in a state of apostasy. No, he was persuaded better of them—‘things accompanying salvation’” (*Hebrews* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1862) 1983], 306).

¹⁶³John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1855]), 5:85.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.* 5:82.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.* 5:81.

¹⁶⁶Arthur Pink, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981 [1954]), 291.

done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

This portion of Scripture is appealed to many times in the Auburn lectures as proof of their new paradigm, that genuine believers who are truly and vitally united to Christ can be cut off the vine or separated from Jesus and perish in hell. We are told that this parable teaches that people who are truly saved, who are receiving sap from the trunk (i.e., who are receiving the Holy Spirit’s vivifying and sanctifying power), can forever fall away if they do not persevere in keeping the covenant. We are also told that Calvinists have been dishonest with their exegesis of this passage and have simply refused to accept the obvious import of our Lord’s words; that real Christians can apostatize and go to hell. This passage holds a special place in the Auburn system because they teach that everyone who is baptized is regenerated, united to Christ and sanctified internally by the Holy Spirit. After we set forth the standard Calvinistic interpretation of this passage, we will explain why the Auburn view must be rejected.

The allegory of the vine and the branches is a continuation of teaching designed by our Lord to prepare the disciples for His departure. In this section of Scripture, Jesus stresses the need for mutual love (13:31 ff.) and the love between Himself, the Father and His people (14:20-24). Chapter 15 comes in between two very important discussions of the coming of the Holy Spirit (14:26; 16:7-15). Christ is leaving the disciples physically, but He is coming to help His people and live in them by sending His Holy Spirit. He will not leave them alone. He will never forsake His sheep.

The central feature of John 15:1-10 regards the importance of abiding in Christ (the word “abide” occurs ten times in verses 4-10). The importance of abiding in the Savior relates to four main areas. First, genuine Christians have a true, real, spiritual union with Jesus that they are obligated to nurture by faith, the means of grace and personal holiness. As believers we are to recognize our union with the Savior and live in terms of that union (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:1-18; 2 Cor. 12:10). “Their root is Christ, and all that there is in the root is for the benefit of the branches. Because He lives, they shall live also.”¹⁶⁷

Secondly, the believer is completely dependent upon Jesus as a branch is dependent upon the main stem for life, nourishment and growth. All the saving graces flow from a believer’s union with Christ. In other words, “without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). “[A]ll life and strength proceeds from himself alone. Hence it follows, that the nature of man is unfruitful and destitute of everything good; because no man has the nature of a *vine*, till he be implanted in him. But this is given to the elect alone by special grace.”¹⁶⁸

Thirdly, the union of believers with Christ produces good fruit. Union with the Savior results in a change in man’s heart (regeneration or initial sanctification) as well as justification and the gifts of faith and repentance. A person united to Christ has a new disposition, new desires, new motives. His works flow from faith in God’s word. They are practiced with a sincere desire to glorify God. Further, the Father is portrayed as active in the sanctification of Christians. “He prunes and purifies them in affliction and trouble, in order to make them more fruitful in holiness.”¹⁶⁹

Fourthly, those who do not abide in Christ, who do not produce fruit, are taken away (v. 2) or cast out, thrown into the fire and burned (v. 6). The common Calvinistic view is that those who do not produce fruit and thus are burned, are people who are baptized, make a profession of

¹⁶⁷J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1976 [1873]), 3:106.

¹⁶⁸John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 2:107.

¹⁶⁹J. C. Ryle, 3:112.

faith, join the visible church and thus covenantally, in an *external manner only*, are united to Christ. Such people, however, are not vitally or spiritually united to Jesus. Ryle writes, “There are myriads of professing Christians in every Church whose union with Christ is only outward and formal. Some of them are joined to Christ by baptism and Church-membership. Some of them go even further than this, and are regular communicants and loud talkers about religion. But they all lack the one thing needful. Notwithstanding services, and sermons, and sacraments, they have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ, and Christ in them. Their union with Him is only nominal, and not real. They have ‘a name to live,’ but in the sight of God they are dead.”¹⁷⁰

This is the position that has ruffled the feathers of the Auburn speakers. They mock this interpretation as a clear case of reading one’s own theological system into the text instead of allowing the text to speak for itself. In response to the Monroe four and in defense of the standard Calvinistic interpretation the following points need to be considered.

(1) This portion of Scripture is an allegory, *not* a straightforward didactic passage. Therefore, one should not use this section of the Bible to overturn the numerous clear portions of God’s word that define the atonement, union with Christ, sanctification and perseverance. “These verses, we must carefully remember, contain a parable. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule which applies to all Christ’s parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. The mistakes into which Christians have fallen by neglecting this rule, are neither few nor small.”¹⁷¹

That a literal detailed theological system should not be based on this allegory apart from the analogy of Scripture is evident from the following. First, the part of the allegory which speaks of the Father removing every unfruitful branch sounds as if every unfruitful branch is removed from the church in history. The truth of the matter is that most hypocrites are never discovered, dealt with or excommunicated at all. They are not dealt with nor exposed until the day of judgment. Secondly, the passage says the Father is the “husbandman” who takes away the unfruitful branches and burns them. If (as many believe) this statement is a reference to the judgment of unregenerate sinners, then there is another problem, for God’s word says, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (Jn 5:22). If the details of the allegory are not meant to be taken literally, then obviously it is ludicrous to use this section of Scripture as a primary support for a whole new paradigm in theology.

(2) It is exegetically and theologically irresponsible to interpret John 15:1-10 in a manner that contradicts many clear teachings of Scripture including the explicit teaching of John’s gospel itself (e.g., Jn. 10:26-30; 17:11; 6:37-39). While the Auburn “theologians” arrogantly mock the Puritan understanding of the text, they are in the embarrassing position of simultaneously holding to mutually-exclusive doctrines. One should never interpret Scripture in a manner that makes one part blatantly contradict another.

The Auburn interpretation is not substantially different than the standard Arminian interpretation. The only difference between the Arminian and the Auburn view is the Monroe Four’s arbitrary idea that *some but not all genuine* believers receive an additional gift of perseverance. The Auburn “theologians” either need to abandon the idea that real believers can fall away and go to hell; or, they must abandon perseverance and Calvinism. The Auburn “theologians” would rather hold to a blatant contradiction than abandon baptismal regeneration

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 3:106-107.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 3:105.

and their perversion of the covenant. Ryle's warning fits the Auburn perversion of John 15 perfectly. "The sentence [in v. 2] is the favorite weapon of all Arminians, of all who maintain an inseparable connection between grace and baptism [sound familiar?], and all who deny the perseverance of the saints."¹⁷²

(3) Within the allegory of the vine and the branches there is recognition on the part of Christ that true Christians are clean. In other words Jesus understood and taught that not all branches or *professing* Christians are regenerated, justified and made holy. To the eleven disciples He said, "You are clean because of the word of God that I have spoken to you (v. 3)." Christ in a former chapter, had told his disciples, that they were *clean, but not all*, because the betrayer was among them' [cf. Jn. 13:10-11].¹⁷³ Now that Judas had removed himself, our Lord could tell the eleven apostles what sort of branches they were. They were not fruitless branches but clean ones. The eleven are "assured that they are fruitful branches, really and internally grafted in Christ; and so were they regenerated, justified, and sanctified in part."¹⁷⁴ "In ver. 3 Jesus declares to the disciples that He ranks them in the second class of branches, and no longer in the first."¹⁷⁵

(4) In a similar allegory where our Lord discusses good and bad fruit, Jesus makes it very clear that the people who bear bad fruit never were regenerated, saved or forgiven. People bear bad fruit because they are bad. "You will know them [false prophets] by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt. 7:16-19). Spurgeon writes, "Every man produces according to his nature; he cannot do otherwise. *Good tree, good fruit; corrupt tree, evil fruit.* There is no possibility of the effect being higher and better than the cause. The truly good does not bring forth evil; it would be contrary to nature. The radically bad never rises to produce good, though it may seem to do so. Therefore the one and the other may be known by the special fruit of each."¹⁷⁶ What this means is that those who are said to be connected to the vine yet produce bad fruit cannot possibly be united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and regenerated or made holy. If a person was united to Christ and His merits in this sense, then he could not produce bad fruit. Therefore, some professing Christians are united to Jesus in an external sense by baptism, profession of faith, and church membership, yet they are not internally united by the Holy Spirit (the mystical union). The merits of Christ do not remove the guilt or the power of their sins.

(5) Ironically a favorite Auburn proof text (Rom. 11:15-22) actually disproves their concept of membership in the covenant and union with Christ. In this section of Scripture the apostle uses an illustration regarding an olive tree and its branches. In this illustration Paul continues his explanation of what went wrong with the Jews and warns Gentile believers not to be prideful in the church. There are several things to note in this section of Scripture. First, the root of the olive tree is Abraham and the patriarchs. Not only was the Abrahamic covenant established with the sign and seal of circumcision, but Abraham is the father of all who believe whether Jews or Gentiles. Secondly, there is only one church or one people of God. There is only one olive tree. Many Jews were broken off of the tree because of unbelief, while many Gentiles

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, 3:111.

¹⁷³John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1809]), 2:66.

¹⁷⁴George Hutcheson, *The Gospel of John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1657]), 315.

¹⁷⁵Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978 [1886]), 854.

¹⁷⁶Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1987), 82.

were grafted into the tree because of their profession of faith in Christ. Thirdly, the fact that one is in the tree or the visible church gives no occasion for boasting, because faith removes all grounds for boasting. The people who have been grafted into the tree stand by faith not human works or merit. The people who have been removed from the tree were removed because they did not believe. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith” (Rom 3:27). Fourthly, believers are exhorted to continue in God’s goodness. They are to continue in the faith. Murray writes, “There is no such thing as continuance in the favour of God in spite of apostasy; God’s saving embrace and endurance are correlative. In another connection Paul enunciates the same kind of condition. We are reconciled to God and assured of being presented holy and unreprouvable only if we ‘continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel’ (Col. 1:23; cf. Heb. 3:6, 14).”¹⁷⁷

According to the Auburn paradigm everyone who is baptized is regenerated, truly united to Christ (i.e., not merely united in an external manner to the visible church), forgiven, loved by God in a saving manner, and so forth. Paul, however, held to an entirely different viewpoint. Note that people are cut off from the tree because of unbelief. This means that the apostle held precisely to the opinion that there are people in the visible church who are not regenerate, saved or forgiven at all. Israel (or the old covenant expression of the visible church) contained believers and unbelievers—Jacob and Esau, the elect and non-elect. Among the mass of Israelites there was a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 9:27ff., 11:5). There was Israel and true Israel (Rom. 9:6). The olive tree contained unbelieving, non-regenerate branches. Yes, they were truly part of the tree or the visible expression of the kingdom. However, they were never savingly united to Christ. To assert that they were truly and spiritually united to Jesus is to read more into the passage than it can possibly bear. Once again the Auburn “theologians” are going beyond the simple point of Paul’s illustration because of their perverted view of baptism and the covenant. Boice writes, “The most common of all errors in studying parables or illustrations . . . is to press them beyond the simple, single point of the illustration. Sometimes people do that by overly stressing the illustration’s details. At other times they treat the stories too literally.”¹⁷⁸

One can only argue against the traditional Reformed view of the olive tree by asserting that people can be regenerated and possess true saving faith (and thus be justified in God’s sight) one moment and then be unregenerate and damned the next. Further, the context indicates that many Israelites were not elect individually or united to Christ and thus were hated, hardened and rejected by God (Rom. 9:13 ff.). This position of Scripture is incomprehensible and contradictory to Paul’s own teaching in the book of Romans, if we adhere to the Auburn doctrine. But doesn’t Paul assume that real believers can fall away? No, not at all! Hodge writes,

There is nothing in the language inconsistent with the doctrine of the final perseverance of believers, even supposing the passage to refer to individuals; for it is very common to speak thus hypothetically, and say that an event cannot or will not come to pass, unless the requisite means are employed, when the occurrence of the event had been rendered certain by the previous purpose and promise of God; see Acts xxvii. 31. The foundation of all such statements is the simple truth, that He who purposes the end, purposes also the means; and he brings about the end by securing the use of the means. And when rational agents are concerned, he secures the use of the means by rational considerations presented to their minds, and rendered effectual by his grace, when the end contemplated is good. This passage, however, has no legitimate bearing on this subject. Paul is not speaking of the connection of individual believers with

¹⁷⁷John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:88.

¹⁷⁸James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 3:1344.

Christ, which he had abundantly taught in chapter viii. and elsewhere, to be indissoluble, but of the relation of communities to the church and its various privileges. There is no promise or covenant on the part of God, securing to the Gentiles the enjoyment of these blessings through all generations, any more than there was any such promise to protect the Jews from the consequences of their unbelief. The continuance of these favours depends the conduct of each successive generation. Paul therefore says to the Gentile, that he must continue in the divine favour, “otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”¹⁷⁹

Once again, we see no need whatsoever of abandoning traditional Reformed theology with its concept of the visible and invisible church in favor of incomprehensible, illogical and unbiblical nonsense.

The Issue of Assurance

An analysis of the Auburn paradigm would not be complete without a discussion of assurance.¹⁸⁰ The reason the doctrine of assurance is important is because the new Auburn theology alleges to be the answer to desperate assurance problems in the Reformed community. These problems relating to assurance supposedly flow from a faulty view of baptism and the covenant.

What are these terrible problems relating to assurance? What is their root cause? The Auburn lectures discuss three main problem areas. First, there is a discussion of the New England Puritans’ attempt to have a regenerate church membership and the disastrous consequences of such an attempt (e.g., the half-way covenant, Unitarianism, etc.). Secondly, certain small Reformed denominations from a Dutch background are mentioned which have a serious problem of assurance among the congregants (e.g., in a Netherlands Reformed Church, out of a congregation with 700 church members, perhaps only about 30 people on average will partake of communion). Thirdly, modern conservative Presbyterians are accused of inciting a crisis and spiritually starving their covenant children because they don’t accept or believe in baptismal regeneration and thus expect a conversion experience in their children before they become communicant members. (This accusation is related to the acceptance by the Auburn “theologians” [except perhaps Schlissel] of the false, Romanizing doctrine of paedocommunion.)

Before we examine the unbiblical and irrational proposals of the Auburn “theologians” to the supposed crises in modern Reformed thought regarding assurance, we must point out the utter irrelevance of the examples set forth by these men to the situation of modern conservative Presbyterianism. In other words, the big “crises” add up to nothing more than a straw man. This point is easily established by briefly examining their examples.

It is true that the New England Puritans attempted for a time to have a regenerate church membership. People were required to keep spiritual diaries and jump through many burdensome hoops before they could become communicant members. It is also true that such practices

¹⁷⁹Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1835]), 370.

¹⁸⁰“The true church is the church in history, the gathering or throng of all professing households assembled in the covenant around the word in Christ’s sacraments whether they understand that or not. Okay, they are not saved by works, they are not saved by passing a test. They are saved because of their connection to Christ and if they have that connection to Christ they’re saved. And if that connection with Christ is severed and he is the one who severs it...” (Doug Wilson, *The Curses of the Covenant*, tape 7).

contributed to the destruction of biblical Christianity in New England.¹⁸¹ Such practices, however, are explicitly rejected by the Westminster Standards and were *never* a problem among conservative Presbyterians. Confessional Presbyterian churches do not attempt to read the heart and determine if a person is truly regenerate or not. Rather, they ask for a credible profession of faith (25:2). While there may be a “Reformed” Baptist church here and there that has a similar problem, the peculiarities of the New England Puritans (who were Congregationalists) have *absolutely nothing* to do with conservative Presbyterianism.

Also, it is true that some small, strict, Reformed denominations with a Dutch background do indeed have a problem in their congregations with assurance that causes many believers to wrongly avoid the Lord’s supper. Such a problem, however, (once again) has nothing to do with modern conservative Presbyterian churches. Perhaps the reason that Presbyterians have not encountered the problems of some of the small, strict, experimental Dutch Reformed groups is that the Westminster Standards deal with this very issue in such a clear biblical manner (e.g., see the answer to question 172 in the Larger Catechism).

What about the accusation that modern Presbyterians are no different than Baptists because they expect a conversion experience before their covenant children are admitted to communicant membership? While there may be a Presbyterian church here and there (of which this author is unaware) that has been influenced by evangelicalism with these procedures, such a practice is clearly unconfessional. The Confession requires a credible *profession* of faith, not a conversion experience. The reason for this requirement is obvious. Many or most covenant children cannot discern a time when they did not believe in and love Jesus Christ. If there are conservative Presbyterian churches that require some type of conversion experience for communicant membership, then they need to repent and return to confessional orthodoxy. This author (who has been a member in PCA, OPC, RPCUS and RPCNA churches) is unaware of any requirement for a conversion experience in conservative Presbyterian denominations.

Having established that there is no crisis in conservative Presbyterian theology with regard to assurance, let us turn our attention to the bizarre Auburn remedy for the non-existent problem. The answer to the “problem,” we are told, is a new paradigm which sets forth the objectivity of the covenant. Reformed people need to understand that baptism really saves. That is, people who are baptized are regenerated, united to Christ, forgiven, loved by Christ, and are elect. Christians (we are told) should not doubt or lack assurance because we can look to our baptism and the objectivity of the covenant. Since baptism is efficacious, and we really are partakers of the covenant of grace, assurance is ours. There is no need to worry whether or not we are truly regenerate or not. If the Auburn “theologians” stopped at this point, then there could be no question that assurance belonged to everyone baptized because everyone baptized is really saved and united to Christ. The problem with the Auburn view at this point is that it teaches both sacramentalism and universalism (if consistent) with regard to all those baptized.

The Auburn “theologians,” however, do not stop here but go on to discuss the sad fact that real Christians who are truly united to Christ can fall away, apostatize and go to hell. There

¹⁸¹The New England experience seems to have been somewhat unique even among Puritans. Edmund S. Morgan states: “I know of no instance in which a Puritan minister, before the founding of New England, actually did attempt to test the faith of communicants” (Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963], 76). The attempt to have a regenerate church membership, rather than being an established and widespread practice, seems to have begun in New England and spread back to England. “My contention is that the practice came, not from Plymouth to Massachusetts as initially supposed, nor from England or Holland as presently assumed, but that it originated in Massachusetts among the nonseparating Puritans there and spread from Massachusetts to Plymouth, Connecticut, New Haven, and back to England” (Ibid, 65).

are people (we are told) who are saved but who do not receive the gift of perseverance. What is the problem with this view? Aside from the fact it totally contradicts the doctrine of the atonement (as noted above), it also destroys the Auburn solution to the “problem” of assurance.

How does it destroy assurance? First, the idea that real Christians can fall away explicitly contradicts their own idea that baptism is always efficacious. The Auburn “theologians” must either return to the traditional Reformed view that baptism is only efficacious in the elect (i.e., those for whom Christ died, who receive the gift of faith and repentance) or they must admit that baptism is not really efficacious after all. The confessional view (that the non-elect are baptized and become members of the visible church but are not regenerated or united to Christ by the Holy Spirit) cannot be avoided without holding to absurd contradictions. The idea that we must look to our baptism for assurance, when baptism guarantees nothing (if we do not receive the additional gift of perseverance), is ludicrous. How (we ask) does a denial of the Reformed understanding of election and perseverance strengthen assurance? How does a real union with Christ that does not actually save in all cases strengthen our assurance? Why should we look to our baptism for assurance when most people who are baptized apostatize and go to hell?

Secondly, the Auburn teaching that only people in the church *who receive the additional gift of perseverance* are truly saved and go to heaven, renders all their talk about the objectivity of the covenant and assurance superfluous. To tell people not to worry about assurance because their baptism really unites them to Christ and saves them; but then to qualify such a promise with the statement: “well, you might be eternally saved *only* if you receive the additional gift of perseverance,” is not reassuring at all. Further, how are a series of irrational, contradictory teachings supposed to eliminate a crisis related to assurance? The idea that baptism is efficacious in all cases, yet many baptized people apostatize and go to hell, is not reassuring. The doctrine that everyone baptized is united to Jesus and is forgiven by His precious blood, yet many or most baptized forgiven people go to hell, is not reassuring at all. A baptism that is both efficacious and non-efficacious is not a solid foundation for assurance. An atonement that only temporarily forgives, that doesn’t get the job done for most baptized people, is not reassuring. The idea that many or most people in the church who are united to Christ have the ability successfully to resist the saving power of the Holy Spirit and thus end up in the lake of fire is not comforting. If salvation is dependent upon our own ability to persevere (because the Spirit’s application of redemption to those united to Christ is truly resistible), then folks, it’s nail-biting time. The Auburnite attempts to solve a non-existent problem have resulted in one of the most unbiblical, irrational and absurd theological systems to come out of the Reformed camp in decades.¹⁸² What they have accomplished for Reformed theology is akin to what the Three Stooges have accomplished for plumbing or baking. The Auburn “theologians” have proclaimed a new, improved theology, a reforming paradigm, yet what they offer is a crossbreed of an old defective sacramentalism, aspects of Arminianism and a Romanizing concept of salvation. What is particularly dangerous about their system is: a) these men claim to be faithful to the Reformed system of doctrine; b) their heretical teachings are mixed with orthodox Reformed doctrines; c) many people in Reformed churches do not have the theological training to readily identify perversions of apostolic doctrine. We can only hope and pray that the small, conservative

¹⁸²Note, that the first epistle of John, which has as one of its central themes a believer’s assurance of salvation (e.g., 1 Jn. 5:13, “that you may know that you have eternal life”) does not mention water baptism or baptismal regeneration even once. The apostle is apparently unaware that the way to deal with problems of assurance is to point believers to their regeneration at baptism and the objectivity of the covenant.

Presbyterian denominations will have the courage to discipline anyone who spreads these Romanizing doctrines in their churches.

Summary and Conclusion

A brief examination of many of the peculiarities of the Auburn system reveals a new paradigm in theology that is a radical, heretical departure from the Reformed faith. By way of summary, note the following departures from Reformed orthodoxy.

(1) The Auburn system perverts the doctrine of the atonement by rendering the blood of Christ non-efficacious in most cases and by separating the foundation or ground of salvation (the active and passive obedience of Jesus) from its application. Further, a number of statements at the Auburn conference can only be interpreted as a denial of justification alone. The attempt of the Auburn speakers to wed sacramentalism, medieval concepts of mother church, and Arminian-style concepts of perseverance to the Reformed doctrine of atonement, has resulted in a mass of contradictions and great confusion.

(2) The Auburn speakers repeatedly violate standard orthodox principles of biblical interpretation. Parabolic or allegorical sections of Scripture are used to overturn many explicit, didactic passages in the Bible. Further, the idea that our exegesis needs to be directed to some extent by systematic theology and simple principles of logic is rejected in favor of adhering to blatantly contradictory positions. To assert that orthodox Reformed pastors are rationalists, Gnostics or guilty of “orthodusty” because they refuse to make Scripture contradict itself is *ad hominum* rhetoric.

(3) The Auburn paradigm destroys the biblical understanding of assurance by placing man’s hope in a baptism that “regenerates” but does not really save anyone unless he receives the additional gift of perseverance. People are simultaneously taught that everyone baptized is elect and truly united to Christ, but most people baptized go to hell because they do not receive the additional gift of perseverance. Anyone with a little common sense is left wondering if they have the added gift of perseverance. The Auburn system leaves people with a far greater anxiety than any overemphasis of the Puritans. Further, the dozens of passages which teach the perseverance of the saints and thus strengthen our faith in Christ’s saving power are rejected in favor of an Arminian type of interpretation.

(4) The Auburn “theologians” adhere to a non-Reformed (i.e., Lutheran–high church Episcopalian style) understanding of baptism. These men would say that they totally reject an *ex opere operato* understanding of the sacraments. Nevertheless, their position places them squarely in the Romish camp because they repeatedly assert that baptism is efficacious apart from faith. The Auburn system asserts that the sign of baptism and the reality it symbolizes are always coterminous. However, since many or most baptized people will end up in hell, one could say that for the Monroe Four, baptism is simultaneously efficacious and non-efficacious in most cases. This assertion (of course) is utter nonsense. But when developing a new paradigm in theology, little things like logic, coherence, and systematic theology should not intrude on such superior intellectual pursuits!

(5) The Auburn theology rejects the orthodox distinction between the visible and invisible church in favor of the idea that everyone baptized is saved, forgiven, elect, and united to Christ; but many of the loved, forgiven saints end up in the pit of hell because they are not given the gift of perseverance. This position contradicts Scripture which repeatedly teaches that people who apostatize were never really saved (Mt. 7:23; 1 Jn. 2:19; 2 Pet. 2:22), that God hates

and hardens the non-elect who are in the visible church (Rom. 9:11-13, 18ff.; 11:5), that God has a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 9:17ff.). Indeed, the biblical doctrine of the church is incomprehensible without such a distinction. Bannerman's comments on the invisible church reveal the fidelity of the standard Reformed view. He writes,

The church invisible stands, with respect to its members, in an inward and spiritual relationship to Christ, whereas the Church visible stands to Him in an outward relationship only. In so far as the Church invisible is concerned, the truth of this statement will be readily admitted by all. There can be no difference of opinion on the point. The proper party with whom the covenant of grace is made, and to whom its promises and privileges belong, is the invisible Church of real believers. It is this Church for which Christ died. It is this Church that is espoused to Him as the Bride. It is the members of this Church that are each and all savingly united to Him as their Head. The bond of communion between them and the Saviour is an invisible and spiritual one, securing to all of them the enjoyment of saving blessings here, and the promise of everlasting redemption hereafter. None but Romanists deny or ignore this.¹⁸³

(6) The Auburn paradigm makes continued faithfulness to the covenant an instrument of justification along with faith. According to the Auburn theology, everyone in the visible church (our term, not theirs) who is baptized in the name of the triune God is saved (i.e., united to Christ, forgiven, receives the Holy Spirit, etc.). But only those Christians who continue in faithfulness actually go to heaven. The rest apostatize and go to hell. Therefore, according to the Auburn paradigm, the main issue in laying hold of the merits of Jesus is *not* faith but continued faithfulness to the conditions of the covenant. (Keep in mind that Wilkins speaks of the passages which discuss a mere temporary, historical, non-genuine, non-saving faith as signifying real genuine saving faith. He does this to support his contention that genuine Christians can fall away and go to hell.) The Auburn speakers' adoption of a Romanist interpretation of James; their rejection of the traditional view of perseverance; their doctrine of baptismal regeneration coupled with their Shepherdite perversion of justification, has left them with a Romanist-style doctrine of salvation.

The Bible does teach that only those who persevere will go to heaven. However, it also teaches that faith is the sole instrument of our justification; that good works are *evidence* of saving faith and that everyone for whom Jesus died will persevere because progressive sanctification and perseverance are inseparable from our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Perseverance is applied by the Holy Spirit to believers on account of the merits of the Savior. Once a person believes, he is really saved (i.e., he is justified and has eternal life); such a person will persevere because of what our Lord accomplished. He cannot fall away. People who fall away were never justified to begin with. For the Auburn "theologians" the main issue is not false versus genuine faith but rather who continues to live in faithfulness to the covenant. Like Romanism, the Auburn teaching confounds justification with sanctification and makes man's activity the ultimate deciding factor in salvation. *The orthodox doctrine is that we are not justified because we persevere. We persevere because we are justified, because the merits of Christ are ours.* Christ is the author and finisher of our faith. R. Scott Clark writes, "To add an element to *sola fide* is self-detracting. Faith is *simple*, it is pure, it is alone, because it looks only to Christ who is our only righteousness. To add obedience to faith as an instrument is to corrupt it by changing the instrument and its object. If there are two parts, faith and works,

¹⁸³James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1960 [1869]), 1:29-30.

then there are two objects Christ and my own obedience. This seemingly minor modification is fatal to our entire faith.”¹⁸⁴

Reformed believers need to be made aware that the Auburn paradigm is a radical departure from the Reformed faith. It is not a refining of Reformed doctrine but rather a rejection of confessional orthodoxy in favor of sacramentalist, Arminian and Romanizing concepts. It is heretical because it strikes at the very heart of Reformed theology—the doctrines of the atonement and justification by faith alone. May God protect his precious church from this vile theological poison.¹⁸⁵

Chapter 3: A Defense of the “Active Obedience” of Jesus Christ in the Justification of Sinners

Introduction

One of the doctrinal distinctives of the Auburn Avenue theology is a repudiation of the Reformed teaching that the “active” or “preceptive” obedience of Jesus is necessary for the justification of sinners.¹⁸⁶ This rejection likely originated in the mind of Norman Shepherd who explicitly rejects double imputation (i.e., the teaching that not only are a believer’s sins imputed to Christ on the cross but also the Savior’s perfect righteousness [His perfect obedience to the law of God] is imputed or credited to the believer).¹⁸⁷ Shepherd argues that the Lord only achieves a pardon (the forgiveness of sins) for Christians and that the idea of the imputation of an active obedience was a later addition to Reformed theology. He even disparagingly refers to the Reformed teaching that a perfect positive righteousness is necessary for justification as the works/merit paradigm. Given the fact that the denial of the “active” or “preceptive” obedience of

¹⁸⁴R. Scott Clark, *The Danger of a Falling Church*, internet article originally published in *The Outlook* 50 (July/August 2001): 21-2.

¹⁸⁵ This chapter was written in late 2002, early 2003, in response to the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastors Conference. It was originally published in *The New Southern Presbyterian Review*, Summer 2004.

¹⁸⁶ For example, see Rich Lusk, “A Response to ‘The Biblical Plan of Salvation’” in E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2003), 140-41.

¹⁸⁷ In a recent lecture (Summer 2003) at the Christian Worldview Conference sponsored by The Southern California Center for Christian Studies, Norman Shepherd argued that the standard Reformed distinction between the active and passive obedience of Jesus and the necessity of the imputation of our Lord’s perfect law-keeping (i.e., His merits) were unscriptural and were a later addition to Reformed theology. In his lecture he repeatedly referred to the standard Reformed interpretation as the works/merit paradigm. He also very selectively quoted Reformed authors and theologians to give the very false impression that these men did not also teach the necessity of Christ’s bloody sacrifice (His vicarious atonement) in the justification of sinners. In order fairly to represent the position that he was attempting to refute, Professor Shepherd should have noted that in virtually all Reformed theological works that discuss the “passive” and “active” obedience of Christ, the sacrifice of our Lord is emphasized alongside “active” obedience. In other words, sinners are justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ which includes His atonement which eliminates the guilt and penalty of sin (expiation) as well as Jesus’ whole life of perfect law-keeping. The standard Reformed position is that our Lord satisfies the demands of the law both as to precept and penalty. Shepherd’s lecture gives the false impression that Reformed theologians ignore the sacrifice of our Lord in their definitions of justification. In his lecture Shepherd grossly misinterprets the teaching of the Westminster Standards on the righteousness of Christ and wrongly argues that the idea of the imputation of Jesus’ active obedience came long after the first generation of the Reformers.

Christ plays an important role in the Auburn Avenue system (it logically flows from their rejection of the covenant of works and their concept of “covenant faithfulness” on *the part of the believer* for final justification.); and, the fact that the “active obedience” of Jesus is a crucial aspect of Reformed theology, a brief defense of this doctrine is in order.

As we study this doctrine we need to keep in mind that the Bible rarely makes clear cut distinctions between the Savior’s obedience in fulfilling the law as precept (active obedience) and penalty (passive obedience). God’s word simply speaks of the obedience of Christ. Although the Bible certainly emphasizes our Lord’s suffering and death, His whole life of obedience and suffering was vicarious. The entire obedience of the Messiah (which includes His preceptive and penal obedience) is the basis or ground of justification. The New Testament can speak of Christians being justified by His blood or death (Rom. 3:25; 5:9) as well as His life or obedience (Rom. 5:10, 19). All the various expressions found in Scripture: “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9); “the righteousness of One” (Rom. 5:18); “the righteousness of Christ” (cf. Rom. 10:4); “the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:11, 13; 9:30; 10:6; cf. Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:9); “the obedience of One” (Rom. 5:19); the “righteousness” God imputes apart from works” (Rom. 4:6), “are all employed with reference to the SAME RIGHTEOUSNESS,—that there is one righteousness, in which they all find their common centre, as so many distinct rays converging towards the same focus, while each retains its distinctive meaning,—and that there is no other righteousness to which they can all be applied, or in which they can find their adequate explanation.”¹⁸⁸

Does the fact that the Bible does not always make clear-cut distinctions regarding the righteousness of Christ mean that no distinctions can or ought to be made by theologians or that the Son’s preceptive obedience has no role in justification? No, absolutely not! The important role that the Savior’s preceptive obedience has in the salvation of sinners is easy to deduce from Scripture and must never be overlooked. “The distinction becomes important only when it is denied that his moral obedience is any part of the righteousness for which the believer is justified, or that his whole work in making satisfaction consisted in expiation or bearing the penalty of the law. This is contrary to Scripture, and vitiates the doctrine of justification as presented in the Bible.”¹⁸⁹

Biblical Argumentation

There are many reasons why the active or preceptive obedience of Christ must be accepted as a crucial aspect of justification.

(1) A biblical understanding of man’s responsibility under God’s law proves the necessity not only of pardon, but also of an obedience fulfilled or an active righteousness. Why is this assertion true? Because the law requires two things of a sinner. First, the penalty for sin must be paid in full. The penalty for disobedience to the law is death (Gen. 2:17; 3:3; Rom. 6:23), the curse of the law (Gal 3:10; Dt. 27:26), separation from God (Gen. 3:23; Rev. 6:15) and God’s displeasure and wrath (Rom. 1:18; 2:8). Before anyone can go to heaven the guilt of sin and sin’s curse or penalty must be removed.

Secondly, the law also requires a perfect obedience. If a person has the guilt of sin removed that person has been delivered from hell. However, if he is to enter heaven; if he is to

¹⁸⁸ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 [1887]), 315.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:150.

have the reward that the law promises for perfect obedience, then he needs the righteousness or perfect law-keeping of another (i.e., a substitute). Shedd writes,

When a criminal has suffered the penalty affixed to his crime, he has done a part, but not *all* that the law requires of him. He still owes a perfect obedience to the law, in *addition* to the endurance of the penalty. The law does not say to the transgressor: “If you will suffer the penalty, you need not render the obedience.” But it says, “You must both suffer the penalty and render the obedience.” Sin is under a *double* obligation; holiness is under only a *single* one. A guilty man owes both penalty and obedience; a holy angel owes only obedience.

Consequently, the justification of a *sinner* must not only deliver him from the penalty due to disobedience, but provide for him an equivalent to personal obedience. Whoever justifies the *ungodly* must lay a ground both for his delivery from hell, and his entrance into heaven.¹⁹⁰

The doctrine that a perfect obedience or a positive righteousness is necessary is easily deduced from Scripture. Note the following observations.

The moral law of God is based on God’s own nature and character (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16). Therefore, the law of God (i.e., the moral law) can never be abrogated, set aside, annulled or circumvented as an eternal, unchangeable *obligation* upon all men. Jehovah would have to deny Himself in order to set aside the obligation of the moral law on the rational beings that He created. God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Therefore, the moral law as a rule of obedience will always be in force and enforced by the LORD. What does this eternal, unchangeable law require? A perfect, perpetual obedience on the part of man in thought, word, and deed! The law prohibits any sin; it requires sinless perfection. How does this truth relate to the doctrine of justification? It means that God must justify sinners in a manner that is consistent with His own nature. In order for sinners to be justified, the curse of the law (e.g., the guilt and liability to punishment) must be removed; but, God’s requirement of obedience which is founded upon His nature must also be fulfilled. If Jehovah simply eliminated the penalty without the fulfillment of the positive obligation then He would be setting aside a crucial aspect of His own moral law. Such a thought is a theological impossibility. The biblical doctrine of justification upholds God’s righteousness and His holy law in every possible manner.

To the Auburn Avenue theologians we ask the following question. If God could set aside the obligation of obedience to the law (as if the moral law were positivistic or arbitrary) in the gospel era so that a partial obedience (i.e., an obedience mixed with sin and filth) was acceptable to enter heaven, then why demand a sacrifice of infinite value to eliminate the guilt and penalty for sin? *If the moral law can be relaxed with regard to obligation, then why can it not be relaxed with regard to its curse also?* If God can relax, abrogate or modify the positive requirement of the law, then could He not also relax or modify the negative aspect of the law – i.e., the curse of the law? It is totally arbitrary and inconsistent for the Auburn Avenue teachers to proclaim a relaxation of the law for a perfect and perpetual obedience while teaching the absolute necessity of blood atonement to eliminate the curse from the same law. If obligation is removed, then how can a curse remain upon those who have broken the very same law? Clearly, then, we need both a perfect fulfillment of the obligation as well as an elimination of the curse. Further, the New Testament says that Jesus did not come to set aside or relax the law but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17). “This is, to yield full perfect obedience unto the commands of the law, whereby they are

¹⁹⁰ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son’s, 1889), 2:539-540.

absolutely fulfilled.”¹⁹¹ “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31).

(2) There are specific New Testament passages which speak of the relation of perfect obedience to justification. For example: Paul says that “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom. 2:13). Why does the apostle say this? Is he teaching that sinful men have the ability perfectly to obey God’s law?¹⁹² No. For, in many places, he says that not one person can or has kept the law. All men are sinners (Rom. 3:23). No one is righteous; no, not one (Rom. 3:11). No one can be saved by attempting to forge their own righteousness (Rom. 3:20-21, 27-28; 4:2-5; Gal. 2:16, 21, 3:11). Is Paul teaching that personal law-keeping, covenant faithfulness, good works and repentance are needed in addition to faith *before* a person is finally and permanently justified? No. Definitely not! For Paul says that God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). Even the best works of believers are tainted with sin and fall far short of the perfect obedience that God requires (Isa. 64:6; Lk. 17:10; Gal. 5:17).

In this passage (Rom. 2:13 and the next two chapters) the apostle dispenses with two common Jewish errors. First, he deals with the Jewish notion that hearing or simply possessing the law (i.e., being the privileged covenant community chosen by God) entitles one to eternal life. He does this by pointing out the biblical principle that if a person did perfectly obey God’s law in thought, word and deed, he would be declared righteous by God. In other words the idea that membership in the covenant community is enough for salvation is completely wrong. But why does Paul refute this idea in terms of a perfect obedience to the law? Why not simply point the unbelieving Jews immediately to the Messiah? Because the apostle first wants to establish with overwhelming proof that the Jews cannot keep the law and need to embrace the Savior. The common doctrine of the Pharisees in Paul’s day was that a perfect obedience to the law was achievable and that many Pharisees and their followers were living a life of complete obedience. We must keep in mind that the sect of the Pharisees would have agreed with the principal that the doers of the law will be justified.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ John Owen, “The Obedience Required by God” in *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965), 5:273.

¹⁹² Norman Shepherd perverts the meaning of Romans 2:13 in order to fit this passage into his justification by the instrument of faith and works paradigm. He writes, “The Pauline affirmation in *Romans* 2:13, ‘The doers of the Law will be justified,’ is ...to be understood ...in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified” (Thesis 20 from *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works* [1978]). This interpretation raises a number of important questions. First, how does a partial obedience to the law, justify? If (as God’s word says) even one sin merits the eternal death penalty, a keeping of the law that is not absolutely perfect in every way cannot play a role in a sinner’s justification. Second, if a believer’s own righteousness contributes even a little bit to his own justification does not that person have a reason to boast before God? Third, if Christ’s righteousness is infinite in value and totally adequate to justify a believing sinner, then why are the imperfect, sin-stained works of believers needed? Shepherd’s view of justification destroys the biblical doctrine of Christ’s righteousness as the ground of justification. Fourth, if a person’s works are instrumental in a person’s justification then must we not discard the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone? Fifth, if faithfulness contributes to or is an instrument of justification in any way, then is not our only hope divided between Christ’s work and our own righteousness? Will this new doctrine not lead to a complete destruction of assurance? Sixth, how can Shepherd’s interpretation be harmonized with the central thrust of Romans 2 and 3 which is to prove that no person can be justified by works, that all men are guilty, that no one does good and, thus, our only hope is the righteousness of Christ? Seventh, how can Shepherd harmonize his view with the many passages which teach that the only instrument that lays hold of Christ’s perfect work is faith? Eighth, if Shepherd is saying that once a person is justified by faith he immediately begins a life long process of sanctification whereby he is subjectively made more and more holy, then why does he not say so? Shepherd’s doctrine of justification is heretical and dangerous.

¹⁹³ “In H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament ans Talmud and Midrasch* p. 118 we read: ‘That man possesses the ability to fulfill the commandments of God perfectly was so firmly believed by the rabbis

But after stating the biblical principle about the doers of the law, what does the apostle then proceed to do? He completely destroys all the Jewish hopes of salvation by law-keeping. Paul writes, “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentles because of you’” (Rom. 2:24). “What then? Are we [the Jews] better than they [the Gentles]? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks: that they are all under sin” (Rom. 3:9). If “all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22), and “none are righteous no not one” (Rom. 3:10) and “all the world is guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19), then where can this perfect law-keeping that results in a declaration of righteousness by God be found? The guilty sinner must look to and depend solely on Christ’s perfect righteousness. Jesus came “to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15) for us. “God declares us righteous because we *are* legally righteous by virtue of the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness to our account.”¹⁹⁴

The climax of Paul’s argument found in Romans 3:20 proves conclusively that the apostle was not merely refuting Jewish self-confidence (e.g., “We are saved because we are the children of Abraham” [see Mt. 3:9]), but also every attempt at self salvation (i.e., salvation by keeping the law or through human merit). “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

Does the fact that no man can obey the law and achieve a perfect righteousness overturn Paul’s statement of the biblical principle that a perfect perpetual obedience to the law would indeed result in a declaration of righteousness? No, certainly not. All the attempts to avoid the plain meaning of Paul’s statement or circumvent his teaching are very weak and easily refuted. Note the following examples.

a) One argument is that once a person sins the obligation of a perfect obedience is annulled. This idea is absurd for it would mean that men can exempt themselves from the government of God by committing sin. Further, if sin exempted one from the obligation, then, would it not also exempt one from the curse and judgment. This theory would amount to salvation through wickedness.

b) Another idea is that the obligation to a perfect obedience has been abrogated in the gospel era. This view suffers from the same objection made above. That is, if the obligation to obedience is no longer binding, then why is the curse for disobedience not also abrogated?

that they spoke in all seriousness of people who had kept the whole Law from A to Z. It is necessary only to refer to Paul’s affirmation in Phil. 3:6, “as to the righteousness under the Law, blameless” (as quoted in William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 366, footnote 45).

“We read the following from the apocrypha: ‘If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose. Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given’ (Sir. 15, 14-17, NRSV; Vg. 14-18). To this passage Calvin responds: ‘Granted that man received at this creation the capacity to obtain life or death. What if we reply on the other side that he has lost his capacity? Surely it is not my intention to contradict Solomon who declares “that God made man upright, but he has sought out many devices for himself.” But because man, in his degeneration, caused the shipwreck both of himself and of all his possessions, whatever is attributed to the original creation does not necessarily apply forthwith to his corrupt and degenerate nature. Therefore I am answering not only my opponents but also Ecclesiasticus himself, whoever he may be; If you wish to teach man to seek in himself the capacity to acquire salvation, we do not esteem your authority so highly that it may in the slightest degree raise any prejudice against the undoubted Word of God.’ (*Institutes*, 2, 5, 18, p.338) Calvin rejects this passage from the apocrypha not only because Ecclesiasticus, Sirach, is not canonical but also because it contradicts the witness of Scripture, such as Romans 3. What is interesting is that this passage from the apocrypha goes untreated by the advocates of the new perspective, yet it does not pass by the attention of either Pelgaius or Erasmus” (J. V. Fesko, “Justification, The New Perspective on Paul: Calvin and N. T. Wright” in PCANews.com).

¹⁹⁴ Robert Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub., 1989), 178.

Further, as noted, the obligation of the moral law is founded upon God's nature and character. Therefore, the obligation cannot be set aside as with positivistic law.

c) A very small minority of commentators and some modern "Reformed" theologians and writers (e.g., Norman Shepard, Steve Schlissel, Andrew Sandlin) argue that Romans 2:13 is not a *hypothetical statement* about a perfect obedience leading to a declaration of righteousness. (We say hypothetical because Paul makes it very clear that no one can perfectly obey the law or be declared righteous on the basis of *personal* obedience. The apostle is setting forth the theoretical principle that if a perfect obedience was achieved a declaration of righteousness would follow). Various men argue either that Paul is mentioning the necessity of good works (i.e., sanctification) in association with a final declaration of righteousness on the day of judgment; or, that saving faith is an obedient/repentant faith (e.g., Norman Shepard); or, that covenant faithfulness or obedience is an integral aspect or instrument of justification. There are numerous reasons for rejecting such interpretations.

First, it would be confusing and out of character for Paul in the middle of a detailed argument as to why all men are guilty and inexcusable before God (because all whether Jew or Gentile have broken the law) to have a parenthetical comment about obedient faith, faithful obedience or even the need for sanctification. It would especially be confusing to Jews who believed that *personal* obedience was necessary for justification.

Secondly, it would disturb the whole train of Paul's thought in this section which is to demonstrate that no man can gain salvation through morality or good works. The apostle's climax is that by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in the sight of God (Rom. 3:20). No person whether Jew or Gentile will be justified by observing the law.

Thirdly, it would connect a partial, imperfect and sin-mingled obedience directly with justification. The law demands a perfect, perpetual obedience, not a defective obedience. "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in *all* things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). The idea espoused by Shepherdites that the problem with the Jews was simply that they weren't righteous enough or covenantally faithful enough to achieve final justification is false and completely ignores the whole thrust of Paul's argument.¹⁹⁵ "The reason why no man can be justified by the law, is because no man can yield perfect obedience thereunto; for by perfect obedience the law will justify, Rom. ii:13, x 5."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Part of Norman Shepherd's heretical understanding of justification can be traced to his rejection of the confessional doctrine of the covenant of works. He completely rejects the idea that if Adam had perfectly obeyed God's command then a time would come when he would be rewarded with eternal life in its most comprehensive sense (i.e., Adam would have lost the ability to sin and would have had free access to the tree of life). Because Shepherd defines faith as "faithful obedience" and gives a believer's good works a role to play in a believer's justification (i.e., works are viewed as a co-instrument of justification alongside of faith, so that gospel and law are blurred together.), the active or preceptive obedience of Christ is rejected in his theology. If (as Shepherd teaches) a person's own good works play a crucial role in his justification, why is the perfect active righteousness of Jesus needed? Shepherd uses the phrase "the righteousness of Jesus Christ" in his articles and lectures. However, for him this phrase refers *only* to our Lord's sacrificial death or passive obedience. Note how Shepherd acknowledges Christ's righteousness (i.e., Jesus sacrificial death, his penal suffering), but then substitutes the believer's own obedience for the active obedience of our Lord. In his *Thirty-four Theses* [1978] he writes, "The exclusive ground of the justification of the believer in the state of justification is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but his [i.e., a believer's] obedience, which is simply the perseverance of the saints in the way of truth and righteousness, is necessary to his continuing in a state of justification" (*Hebrews* 3:6, 14). (Thesis 21) In its essence Shepherd's doctrine of justification has much more in common with classical Arminianism and even Romanism than it does with confessional Reformed thought. His perverted doctrine of the covenant in Eden goes hand in hand with his rejection of justification by faith alone and the need of an *active vicarious righteousness*.

¹⁹⁶ John Owen, 5:284.

Fourth, when discussing justification the Bible *excludes* all the works of believers after conversion including faithful obedience or covenant faithfulness (see Gal. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 3:9; Eph. 2:9-10, etc.); *excludes* all reasons for boasting (see Rom. 4:2; 3:27; Eph. 2:9; 1 Cor. 1:29-30); and, repeatedly attributes our justification solely to the righteousness of Christ alone (see Ac. 13:38; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 5:1, etc.).¹⁹⁷

(3) The necessity of the active or preceptive obedience of Christ is set forth in the New Testament contrast between Adam and Christ. The first Adam was the federal head of the human race and what he did in the garden had consequences for all mankind. Before the fall when Adam was innocent (i.e., he did not have the guilt or penalty of sin), he did not yet have eternal life. God required Adam to obey His command not to eat of the tree of good and evil for a period of time, before he would be permitted to eat from the tree of life. If Adam had rendered a perfect obedience, God would have rewarded him with glorification (i.e., all possibility of falling or committing sin would have been forever removed; Adam and his posterity would have been blessed with eternal life with God forever). Reformed theologians refer to God's arrangement with Adam as the covenant of works.¹⁹⁸ Adam, however, failed this test. He sinned against God, died spiritually and was cast out of the garden. Because of the disobedience of Adam all men are guilty in him and constituted sinners.

¹⁹⁷ Another objection to the standard Protestant interpretation of this passage comes from the New Perspective on Paul movement. This movement is refuted in detail in other sections of this book.

¹⁹⁸ Louis Berkhof notes some of the elements of this covenant. He writes, "(1) Adam was constituted the representative head of the human race, so that he could act for all his descendants. (2) He was temporarily put on probation, in order to determine whether he would willingly subject his will to the will of God. (3) He was given the promise of eternal life in the way of obedience, and thus by the gracious disposition of God acquired certain conditional rights. This covenant enabled Adam to obtain eternal life for himself and for his descendants in the way of obedience." (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939], 215) Regarding the parallel between the first and second Adam, Berkhof adds: "The parallel which Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Rom. 5:12-21, in connection with the doctrine of justification, can only be explained on the assumption that Adam, like Christ, was the head of a covenant. According to Paul the essential element in justification consists in this, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, without any personal work on our part to merit it. And he regards this as a perfect parallel to the manner in which the guilt of Adam is imputed to us. This naturally leads to the conclusion that Adam also stood in covenant relationship to his descendants." (Ibid, 214) Thomas Boston writes, "So all men were bound in the covenant of works to yield perfect obedience; but having failed, Christ substituted himself in the room of those chosen from among them to everlasting life, and gave complete obedience to the law in their name and place; on that account they are accepted and adjudged to eternal life, and that agreeably to the law, which has got all its demands of them in their Surety. But the rest being still under the law, must perish." (*Commentary on the Shorter Catechism* [Edmonton, AB: Canada, 1993 (1853)], 1:592) Interestingly, those "Reformed" pastors who are perverting the doctrine of justification also reject the classical Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works.

To all of those men who reject the covenant of works with sophisticated arguments we ask the following questions: Would Adam have received glorification on the basis of his own obedience or upon the obedience of another? Would Adam have received glorification by a simple faith in the person and work of another *apart* from his own doing or *apart* from the works of the law (Rom 3:20; 4:4-8; Eph. 2:8-9) or did Adam need to do something in order to receive glorification? The answer to these questions is obvious. The Christian must look to the person and work of Christ (His doing and dying) while Adam had to do something himself. While God's creation of Adam was gracious; the reward offered to Adam was incredibly generous and Adam's obedience obviously required faith or belief in God and His spoken Word, nevertheless *Adam had to do something to achieve glorification*. His obedience would have been the basis of the reward. Christians are not saved because of what we do (i.e., our obedience to the law) but because of what Jesus has done. His work was substitutionary or vicarious. If one argues that everything is under the covenant of grace and there is no covenant of works, then *logically* one must make human effort whether law-keeping, covenant faithfulness, good works or perseverance a basis or co-instrument of justification. Perhaps this explains why the advocates of the Auburn theology repeatedly say that the law and the gospel are virtually the same thing.

Christ, the second Adam was born of a woman; and was placed under the law in order to render a perfect obedience to the law, to provide a perfect righteousness for His people. Where the first Adam failed the second Adam succeeded. Jesus honored the law by rendering a perfect obedience unto it.

When Jesus came to be baptized by John and the baptizer, understanding who the Lord was, said: “I need to be baptized by You, and are you coming to me”? Christ responded by saying, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15). As our head and representative our Lord placed Himself under the law to perfectly fulfill the law’s demands. As the federal head of the elect Jesus’ whole life was vicarious.¹⁹⁹ One must not separate the life of obedience from the sacrifice of the cross. Both are necessary for a complete and perfect redemption.

The contrast between Adam and Jesus is also noted in the Gospel temptation narratives (Mk. 1:12-13; Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13). “The temptation in which the Son of Man conquered is the counterpart of the temptation in which man first fell. As the descendent and representative of a fallen race, it is His mission to vanquish in the sphere in which they had been vanquished.”²⁰⁰ The contrasts between the first and second Adam are striking and unmistakable. The first Adam was tempted in paradise while the second was in a harsh wilderness with wild beasts (Mk. 1:13). The first Adam had abundant food while the second had fasted forty days and was in a weakened condition. Christ rendered his obedience in a fallen world. He obeyed God in a state of humiliation, weakness and suffering. Obviously these narratives want us to recognize the perfect obedience of Jesus—the second Adam—in contrast to the failure of the first Adam. “Jesus as his people’s Representative, has vicariously rendered the obedience which Adam, as mankind’s representative failed to render.”²⁰¹

The contrast between Adam and Christ and the proof that an active righteousness is needed for justification is set forth by Paul in Romans 5:18-19. “Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (KJV). These two verses serve as climax and

¹⁹⁹John Owen demonstrates that our Lord’s obedience was not for Himself but for us. He writes “...the human nature of Christ, by virtue of its union with the person of the Son of God, had a right unto, and might have immediately been admitted into, the highest glory whereof it was capable, without any antecedent obedience unto the law. And this is apparent from hence, in that, from the first instant of that union, the whole person of Christ, with our nature existing therein, was the object of all divine worship from angels and men; wherein consists the highest exaltation of that nature.

“It is true, there was a *peculiar* glory that he was actually to be made partaker of, with respect unto his antecedent obedience and suffering, Phil. ii. 8, 9. The actual possession of this glory was, in the ordination of God, to be consequential unto his obeying and suffering, not for himself, but for us. But as unto the right and capacity of the human nature in itself, all the glory whereof it was capable was due unto it from the instant of its union; for it was therein exalted above the condition that any creature is capable of by mere creation. And it is but a Socinian fiction, that the first foundation of the divine glory of Christ was laid in his obedience, which was only the way of his actual possession of that part of his glory which consists in his mediatory power and authority over all. The real foundation of the whole was laid in the union of his person; whence he prays that the Father would glorify him (as unto manifestation) with that glory which he had with him before the world was.

“I will grant that the Lord Christ was ‘viator’ whilst he was in this world, and not absolutely ‘possessor;’ yet I say withal, he was so, not that any such condition was necessary unto him for himself, but he took it upon him by especial dispensation for us. And, therefore, the obedience he performed in that condition was for us, and not for himself” (*Works*, 5:259).

²⁰⁰ Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982 [1915]), 35-36.

²⁰¹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 235.

concluding summary to a whole section (Romans 5:12-20) dealing with the covenant headship of the first and second Adam and the covenantal consequences of the one's disobedience versus the others obedience.

As there are two opinions as to what is the ground of a sinner's justification before God, there are two basic interpretations of this passage among Protestants. Some interpreters note that the phrase "the righteousness of one" can be translated "one righteous act" and thus conclude that Paul is only referring to Jesus' death on the cross. This interpretation could be used to support the common evangelical notion that justification only consists of pardon and does not involve a perfect fulfillment of the law or the covenant of works. The common Reformed interpretation of this passage is that the righteousness of Christ encompasses the whole life of the Savior: His perfect obedience to the law and His death on the cross. There are many reasons why our Lord's righteousness includes His perfect law-keeping.

First, it better maintains the parallelism between the first and second Adam. The first Adam was guilty of disobedience or an actual transgression of God's law. It was the breaking of God's law that brought sin and death to the human race. Over against this disobedience is set forth the obedience or righteousness of the second Adam. Since Adam was guilty of an actual transgression of God's law, Christ's righteousness must involve an active obedience to the law; otherwise the apostle's antithesis doesn't make sense. A. A. Hodge writes, "The condition of the covenant of works was perfect obedience. This covenant having failed in the hands of the first Adam must be fulfilled in the hands of the second Adam, since in the covenant of grace Christ assumed all of the undischarged obligations of his people under the covenant of works. His suffering discharges the penalty, but only his active obedience fulfills the condition."²⁰²

Second, it comports better with the meaning of righteous (*dikaiomatos*). When the Bible speaks of righteousness as it relates to obedience (*hupakoēs*) it refers to the obedience of a statute, requirement, ordinance or legal claim. While Christ's obedience to the Father in going to the cross is certainly righteous, it is also quite natural to view this term as a reference to all of the Savior's vicarious righteous conduct. Further, "to declare righteous is another thing than a mere declaration of exemption from penalty, even as righteousness is another state, than that of mere exemption from suffering."²⁰³ John Dick adds, "Righteousness supposes that the whole law has been fulfilled; innocence imports only that it has not been transgressed. . . . In the case of a sinner, therefore, the imputation of righteousness is pre-supposed as the ground of his justification, which, consequently, implies something more than simple remission. . . . If he [i.e., the sinner] cannot himself fulfill the law, another, taking his place, and coming under his obligations, may fulfill it in his name; and the obedience of this surety may be placed to his account."²⁰⁴ This is precisely what Christ does for His people. He provides a perfect righteousness for the elect so that *judicially* the believing sinner is positionally just as righteous as Jesus in God's sight.

Third, it comports with the biblical teaching that Christ's whole life of obedience and suffering were vicarious and were part of His finished work. William S. Plumer writes,

All Christ did and all he bore was for our salvation. He suffered in obeying. He obeyed in suffering. No fair criticism can ever shew that *righteousness* in this verse or *obedience* in v. 19 means simply his sufferings, much less his obedience in the mere act of dying. His

²⁰² A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972 [1860]), 500.

²⁰³ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985 [1871]), 624.

²⁰⁴ John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1864), 2:190.

circumcision and baptism were as much in fulfillment of all righteousness as his death. His perfect love to God and his equal love to man, evinced in every way, were essential to his righteousness. There is a sense in which Christ's righteousness is one. It is a seamless robe. There is no rent in it. It is undivided. It cannot be divided. But this is a very different thing from saying that Christ wrought out his righteousness the last few hours of his life. The parallel between Adam and Christ is not intended to be preserved in the shortness of the time in which, or the ease with which ruin and recovery were wrought. No? Destruction is easy. Recovery is difficult. It is so in every thing. A rash act of one may destroy a thousand lives, but all the power of men and angels cannot restore one life. A child may in a few hours burn down a city, which ten thousand men could not build in a year. In a moment Adam brought down ruin. It required the *righteousness* and *obedience* of the life of Christ and his agony in the garden and on the cross to bring us to God. Yea, to the same end he ever liveth to make intercession for us. "The truth is, the work of Christ is just the whole of his humiliation, with all that he did and all he suffered in the nature which he humbled himself to assume. That on account of which God exalted and glorified Christ, is that on account of which he justifies and glorifies sinners."²⁰⁵

One cannot divide the life of Christ into separate *unrelated* segments. His whole life contained humiliation and suffering. Obviously, the Savior's suffering and humiliation was not for Himself but for His people. Further, he exercised the highest active obedience in His suffering at Golgotha. All His obedience was mixed with suffering and was a part of His vicarious work. To argue that His death was vicarious but that His obedience was only for Himself is arbitrary and irrational. Our Lord was born without original sin and was both God and man in *one person*. He most certainly did not need to merit anything for Himself. All that he did, therefore, was as the federal head of the elect. His obedience was the obedience of the mediator of the covenant. To argue that Jesus obeyed the law only for Himself is an implicit denial of the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ (which of course immediately rendered the Savior's human nature fit for heaven) and the covenant headship of the second Adam. Dabney's comments on this topic are helpful. He writes,

...Christ's sufferings contained an active obedience; and it is this which made them a righteousness: for mere pain, irrespective of the motive of voluntary endurance, is not meritorious. And Christ's obedience to precepts was accompanied with endurance.... In many places Christ's bearing the preceptive law is clearly implied to be for our redemption. See for instance, Gal. 4:4. By what fair interpretation can it be shown that the law under which He was made, to redeem us, included nothing but the penal threatenings? "To redeem us who were under the law." Were we under no part of it but the threats? See, also, Rom. 5:18, 19.... Rom. 8:3, 4. What the law failed to do, through our moral impotency, that Christ has done for us. What was that? Rather our obedience than our suffering.²⁰⁶

John Owen writes, "And if *the actual sin of Adam* be imputed unto us all, who derive our nature from him, unto condemnation, though he sinned not in our circumstances and relations, is it strange that the actual obedience of Christ should be imputed unto them who derive a spiritual nature from him, unto the justification of life? Besides, both the satisfaction and obedience of Christ, as relating unto his person, were, in some sense, *infinite*, – that is, of an infinite value, –

²⁰⁵ William S. Plumer, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970 [1870]), 246-247.

²⁰⁶ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 626.

and so cannot be considered in parts, as though one part of it were imputed unto one, and another unto another, but the whole is imputed unto every one that doth believe....”²⁰⁷

That the obedience of Christ must not be viewed in a simplistic or narrow manner is also taught by John Murray. He writes,

The *obedience* is that by which he is furnished so as to fulfill these roles, to conduct to salvation and to bestow it. In other words, the obedience is the accomplishment that procures salvation and ensures its bestowal. No consideration could more definitely institute the place that obedience occupies in the securing and imparting of salvation in its *all-embracing connotation*. In other passages the obedience of Christ is set forth as the basis or medium of more specific elements in salvation. In Paul’s statement ‘By the obedience of the one shall many be constituted righteous’ (Rom. 5:19), the obedience of Christ is brought into relation to justification as its basis or ground. In Hebrews 10:10 the obedience is viewed as that by which we are sanctified, and this sanctifying is probably conceived rather as the purification from sin derived from Christ’s expiatory offering. But in Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8, 9, it is salvation inclusively considered that is derived from the obedience of Christ. *So we must say that the obedience of Christ is that which procured salvation in broadest compass*. Salvation must never be conceived of in design, accomplishment, or actual possession, apart from Christ as the Savior. And salvation is secured by the obedience of Christ, because it was by obedience that Jesus as God-man was constituted the all-sufficient and perfect Savior.²⁰⁸

If, as Murray notes (and all Reformed theologians recognize), our Lord’s *active obedience*, suffering and resurrection are the cause of a believer’s sanctification (this doctrine being explicitly set forth by Paul in Romans 6), then why and how can Jesus’ whole work not be foundational to a believing sinner’s justification?

Some will object to the Reformed conception of our Lord’s obedience (e.g., Norman Shepherd). They will point out that the earliest Reformed symbols do not make explicit distinctions between the penal and preceptive obedience of Christ. While the earliest Reformed statements of faith are not explicit on this matter, this observation does not necessarily mean that the early Reformed theologians rejected the necessity of our Lord’s preceptive obedience or active righteousness in justification. The early symbols reflect the fact that the Scripture itself rarely makes distinctions between the active and passive obedience of Christ. The Bible usually just speaks of Jesus’ obedience or righteousness. Further, the fact that salvation is so often ascribed to the cross, blood or death of Christ does not negate the role of Christ’s obedience and resurrection in salvation. We know this is true because: a) God’s word often speaks of our Lord’s death as the principal cause of our whole salvation; which, indeed, it certainly is; and b), other portions of Scripture ascribe salvation to the resurrection of our Lord (I Pet. 1:3; 3:21) and His obedience (Rom. 5:10, 19). Passages which speak solely of being redeemed by Jesus’ death need to be considered within the whole context of Scripture.

Although the early Reformed symbols are not explicit on this issue, there is irrefutable evidence that these Reformed bodies would have fully accepted the later more refined and explicit Reformed theological statements on justification. For example, John Calvin (writing before the formulation of the Heidelberg [1563] and Belgic confessions [1561]) recognized the

²⁰⁷ John Owen, “The Imputation of Christ’s Obedience” in *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965 [1850]), 5:270.

²⁰⁸ John Murray, “The Obedience of Christ” in *Collected Writings* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:156-157.

active or preceptive obedience of Christ. Calvin speaks of the “character” and “purity” of Christ imputed to a believing sinner’s account; he writes,

What is placing our righteousness in the obedience of Christ, but asserting that we are accounted righteous only because His obedience is accepted for us as if it were our own? Wherefore Ambrose appears to me to have very beautifully exemplified this righteousness in the benediction of Jacob: that as he, who had on his own account no claim to the privileges of primogeniture, being concealed in his brother’s habit, and invested with his garment, which diffused a most excellent odor, insinuated himself into the favor of his father, that he might receive the benediction to his own advantage, under the character of another; so we shelter ourselves under the precious purity of Christ.²⁰⁹

In his commentary on Corinthians, Calvin writes, “...he says that he is made unto us righteousness, by which he means that we are on his account acceptable to God, inasmuch as he expiated our sins by his death, *and his obedience is imputed to us for righteousness*. For as the righteousness of faith consists in remission of sins and a gracious acceptance, we obtain *both* through Christ.”²¹⁰ Calvin’s statement is a clear acceptance of the doctrine of double imputation. The believing sinner’s guilt and liability to punishment is imputed to Jesus on the cross—expiation. Thus, the sinner is pardoned. Also, the righteousness of Christ—His obedience—is imputed to the believer. Therefore, the sinner is regarded as righteous (i.e., perfectly and

²⁰⁹John Calvin as quoted in Arthur Pink, *Election and Justification* (New Ipswich, NJ: Pitcham Pub.), 197. The misrepresentation of Calvin’s position on justification by Norman Shepherd is not new. The eminent scholar William Cunningham was familiar with other similar misrepresentations going back to the seventeenth century. Cunningham’s explanation as to why Calvin was so easily misrepresented is helpful and applies to Norman Shepherd and his followers. He writes, “It may be proper, however, before leaving this topic, to advert to a misrepresentation that has been often given of the views of the Reformers, and especially of Calvin, upon this particular point [i.e., the imputed righteousness of Christ]. When Protestant divines began, in the seventeenth century, to corrupt the scriptural doctrine of justification, and to deviate from the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Reformation, they thought it of importance to show that justification meant merely the remission or forgiveness of sin, or guilt, to the exclusion of, or without comprehending, what is usually called the acceptance of men’s person, or their positive admission into God’s favor,—or their receiving from God, not only the pardon of their sins, or immunity from punishment, but *also a right or title to heaven and eternal life*. And in support of this view, these men appealed to the authority of the Reformers, and especially of Calvin. Now it is quite true, that Calvin has asserted again and again that justification comprehends only, or consists in, the remission or forgiveness of sin or guilt. But I have no doubt that a careful and deliberate examination of all that Calvin has written upon this point, will fully establish these two positions,—first, that when Calvin asserted that justification consisted only in the remission of sin, he meant this simply as a denial of the Popish doctrine, that it is not only the remission of sin, but also the sanctification or renovation of the inner man,—this being the main and, indeed, the only error upon the point which he was called upon formally to oppose; and, secondly, that Calvin has at least as frequently and as explicitly described justification as comprehending, not only remission of sin in the strict and literal sense, but *also positive acceptance or admission into the enjoyment of God’s favour,—‘gratuita Dei acceptio,’* as he often calls it,—including the whole of the change effected upon men’s state or legal condition in God’s sight, as distinguished from the change effected upon their character. This is one of the numerous instances, constantly occurring, that illustrate how unfair it is to adduce the authority of eminent writers on disputed questions which had never really been presented to them,—which they had never entertained or decided; and how necessary it often is, in order to forming a correct estimate of some particular statements of an author, to examine with care and deliberation all that he has written upon the subject to which they refer, and also to be intelligently acquainted with the way and manner in which the whole subject was discussed *on both sides*” (*Historical Theology* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1862) 1960] 2:14-15, emphasis added).

²¹⁰John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 1:93.

perpetually obedient to the covenant of works and the law of God) because of our Lord's vicarious obedience. We are saved solely by the merits of the Savior.

It is also noteworthy that early Reformed theologians heartily agreed with the Lutheran statement on justification which clearly recognizes the negative and positive aspects of justification. The Formula of Concord (1576) reads:

That righteousness which is imputed to faith, or to believers, of mere grace, is the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ, by which He satisfied the law for us, and expiated our sins. For since Christ was not only man, but truly God and man in one undivided person, He was no more subject to the law He was to suffering and death (if his person, merely, be taken into account), because He was the Lord of the law. Hence, not only that obedience to God his Father which He exhibited in his passion and death, but also that obedience which He exhibited in voluntarily subjecting Himself to the law and fulfilling it for our sakes, is imputed to us for righteousness, so that God on account of the total obedience which Christ accomplished (*praestitit*) for our sake before his heavenly Father, both in acting and in suffering, in life and in death, may remit our sins to us, regard us as good and righteous, and give us eternal salvation.²¹¹

The idea (recently espoused in a lecture by Norman Shepherd) that the imputation of the active obedience of Christ was a later unbiblical innovation among Reformed theologians is simply untrue. One must never confuse theological development and clarification with human invention and declension.

(4) The doctrine of the preceptive obedience of Christ is taught by Paul in other passages. In Galatians 4:4-5 the apostle writes, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." When Paul speaks of the human race being "under the law" or of Jesus being "born under the law," can this phrase refer *only* to being under the curse of the law? No, definitely not! Being under law in this context refers not simply to the law's penalty but also to the personal obligation to obey the law. Our Lord was born both to obey and to endure the penalty. Lenski writes, "...Paul says that the Son bought us by this active obedience. It was thus just as much substitutionary as his passive obedience. In fact, the two cannot be separated. Even in death the Son gave himself (active) and so was slain (passive). The two were indissolubly united during all of his life. We should never stress the one against the other because the passive obedience is more frequently mentioned in Scripture than the active."²¹²

That Paul has more in mind than simply eliminating the curse of the law, is evident from the immediate context which speaks of a believer's adoption ("that we might receive the adoption as sons," v. 5). Jesus was "born under the law" not only that the elect might be delivered from the consequences of sin but also that they may receive the greatest reward possible. They are made members of God's own family. With the imputation of Christ's righteousness, they are given a new legal status and receive the reward that can only be founded

²¹¹ As quoted in Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:149. See *The Formula of Concord*, "Of the Righteousness of Faith Before God," Article III, "Statement of the Controversy" and "Affirmative" I, II ("For he bestows and imputes to us the righteousness of the obedience of Christ; for the sake of that righteousness we are received by God into favor and accounted righteous"), III and VII, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes* [Grand Rapids: Baker (1931) 1983], 3:114-118).

²¹² R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. 1961 [1937]), 203.

upon the merits of God's Son. They are taken far beyond what Adam had in the garden because they are clothed with the righteousness of the Mediator. What a comprehensive and amazing salvation! Our Lord takes us light years beyond a simple pardon. "Christ achieved the purpose of redeeming those under law by bearing the full obligation of the law in life as well as the curse of the law in death (3:13)."²¹³ John Owen writes,

It is excepted, with more colour of sobriety, that he was made under the law only as to the curse of it. But it is plain in the text that Christ was made under the law as we are under it. He was "made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." And if he was not made so as we are, there is no consequence from his being made under it unto our redemption from it. But we were so under the law, as not only to be obnoxious unto the curse, but so as to be obliged unto all the obedience that it required; as hath been proved. And if the Lord Christ hath redeemed us only from the curse of it by undergoing it, leaving us in ourselves to answer its obligation unto obedience, we are not freed nor delivered. And the expression of "under the law" doth in the first place, and properly, signify being under the obligation of it unto obedience, and consequentially only with a respect unto the curse. Gal. iv. 21, "Tell me, ye that desire to be "under the law." They did not desire to be under the curse of the law, but only its obligation unto obedience; which, in all usage of speech, is the first proper sense of that expression. Wherefore, the Lord Christ being made under the law for us, he yielded perfect obedience unto it for us; which is therefore imputed unto us. For that what he did was done for us, depends solely on imputation."²¹⁴

Another passage which teaches the necessity of Christ's righteousness is 1 Corinthians 1:30: "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.'" Union with Christ means that all that Jesus accomplished is ours. Salvation in the most comprehensive sense has been accomplished in history through Christ Jesus. His obedience is our obedience. His death is our death. His resurrection is our resurrection. If we are united to Christ, He is not only our justification; but, also our sanctification, and even our final redemption. We cannot receive only parts of the Savior. He is a whole Mediator, a complete and perfect Redeemer. His work is a seamless garment. And if we are truly united to Him, all of His benefits are ours. Even though Christians are still sinners (and even "ungodly," see Rom. 4:5) they are regarded by God as perfectly righteous because in Christ they are accounted or reckoned as righteous. Charles Hodge writes, "He is our righteousness, because by his obedience and death he has fully satisfied the demands of justice, so that we are 'the righteousness of God in him,' 2 Cor. 5, 21. When we stand before the judgment-seat of God, Christ is our righteousness. He answers for us; he presents his own infinite merit as the all-sufficient reason for our justification. Rom. 3, 21. 22. 5, 19. Phil. 3, 9."²¹⁵ A. A. Hodge writes, "He makes the righteousness of Christ ours (that is, the legal right to reward, by the gracious covenant conditioned on righteousness), and then treats us as persons legally invested with those rights... 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth' – Rom. X. 4; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. V. 21; Phil. 111:9."²¹⁶ Jesus, indeed, is "the LORD our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6).

²¹³ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 182.

²¹⁴ John Owen, *Works*, 5:272-273.

²¹⁵ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 27.

²¹⁶ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 501.

In Philippians 3:8-9 Paul contrasts two kinds of righteousness. He writes, “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.” There is self-righteousness which is based on human attempts to obey the law and thus build a tower of merit to heaven. There also is the righteousness which is found solely in Jesus Christ. Paul acknowledges that the sum of all human attainments that are intended to establish a claim upon God are nothing more than filthy rags. Once the apostle understood what his so called good works were in the eyes of God, he counted them as dung and placed his trust in the Mediator. If a person wants to be right with God he must be found in Christ and must lay hold of the Lord’s righteousness. In Adam and because of our own sins we are unfaithful, guilty and damned. But in Christ we obtain His faithfulness. His perfect obedience to the law and his propitiatory sufferings and death become ours. They are appropriated by the instrumental means of faith. The parallel between human attempts at merit, at righteousness by keeping the law and the merits of Christ or His perfect righteousness clearly involves Jesus’ own faithfulness, moral perfections or law-keeping as well as His sufferings. Robert Johnstone’s comments on this passage are most helpful. He writes,

The claim of the divine law is, that man should render to God perfect obedience, or suffer death as the penalty of disobedience. Our whole race has sinned, and thus become liable to the penalty. But the Son of God, freely given by His Father, freely giving Himself, has assumed our nature, and as our Substitute—accepted as such by His Father, who in the scheme of redemption sustains the majesty of the Godhead—has fulfilled all the law’s requirements,—living a true human life of holy obedience, as we were bound to do, an dying the death of pain and shame which we deserve to suffer. To all who believe the gospel, and are thus led to place their confidence in Christ, God, of His infinite mercy, imputes this perfect righteousness of the Savior—reckons it as theirs—treats them as if they had themselves been righteous, like their Representative. This is the great doctrine of justification by faith. You see how humbling it is to man. The faith through which we obtain justification involves an acknowledgement of the reality and exceeding evil of our sin, and of our own utter helplessness. We come to God confessing that the robe of our personal character is but ‘filthy rags,’ in which we dare not stand in His sight; and we receive from Him the ample, stainless, fragrant robe of the Redeemer’s righteousness.²¹⁷

(5) Zechariah 3:3-4 teaches the necessity of both elements of justification. Note that God removes the filthy garments (the negative aspect) and then provides new garments (the positive aspect). “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, ‘Take away the filthy garments from him.’ And to him He said, ‘See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.’” In this fourth vision of Zechariah we encounter Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD (the second person of the trinity) in the throne room of heaven. Satan is standing at Joshua’s right hand to oppose him. Joshua and Israel (the people he represents) have a serious problem. They have been restored to the promised land, but they are still guilty and stained before God because of their iniquity. Their sin is represented by the filthy garment on Joshua. (The word translated “filthy” is very strong and was used to designate human

²¹⁷ Robert Johnstone, *Lectures on the Book of Philippians* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1977 [1875]), 246.

excrement.) God shows His amazing love and mercy for His people by rebuking Satan (v.2), removing the guilt of their sins, and then clothing them with righteousness. Leupold writes, “Verse 2 had indicated God’s readiness to show mercy unto Joshua and thus unto the people. Verse 4 now shows God actually bestowing this mercy. The act that follows is symbolical of the forgiveness of sins. As completely as a man whose filthy garments disfigure him is cleansed by their removal, so completely does God’s pardon remove the guilt of sin. As the bestowing of garments of beauty makes a man presentable, so does the garment of imputed righteousness make him worthy to appear before God and man, only, however, by virtue of the “rich apparel” that God has granted him.”²¹⁸ John Owen’s comments on this passage and justification are noteworthy. He writes,

It hath been generally granted that we have here a representative of the justification of a sinner before God. And the taking away of filthy garments is expounded by the passing away of iniquity. When a man’s filthy garments are taken away, he is no more defiled with them; but he is not thereby clothed. This is an additional grace and favour thereunto,—namely, to be clothed with change of garments. And what this raiment is, is declared, Isa. lxi. 10, “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness;” which the apostle alludes unto. Phil iii. 9. Wherefore these things are distinct,—namely, the taking away of the filthy garments, and the clothing of us with change of raiment; or, the pardon of sin, and the robe of righteousness. By the one are we freed from condemnation; by the other have we right unto salvation. And the same is in like manner represented, Ezek. xvi. 6-12.²¹⁹

Christ achieved it all. He not only pardons our sins but also clothes us with His righteousness. All the undeserved benefits we receive: justification, adoption, the reward of glorification and heaven are due to Jesus’ obedience. If we take our eyes off of the Lord’s person and work and instead focus our attention on our own partial, imperfect obedience then we will sink into hopelessness and despair. Let us count our own works as rubbish and cast our crowns at the pierced feet of the Savior.

Conclusion

The Protestant Reformation has spoken with one voice on the doctrine of justification. The Reformers, whether Lutheran or Calvinistic, whether in the British Isles or on the Continent, were united on this all-important doctrine. While minor differences can be found on certain peripheral points and differences can be found on the exegesis of a few difficult portions of Scripture, all parties were united in their belief in justification by faith alone *apart* from the works of the law. The early creedal statements of the Lutherans as well as all the Reformed creedal statements from both the first and second Reformation periods testify to the unity of Protestants regarding the righteousness of Christ and justification. Although it is true that the later Reformed theologians are more detailed and specific on certain aspects of justification, their writings are in perfect agreement with all the earlier creedal statements and Reformed theologians. It is very important that as Reformed believers we recognize that justification is not an unresolved doctrine of the church. Perhaps no other doctrine has received as much attention, analysis, debate and reflection as justification. This historical reality probably accounts for the

²¹⁸ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971 [1956]), 70.

²¹⁹ John Owen, *Works*, 5:268.

fact that the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide* has not changed or been improved upon for over 450 years. It is a settled doctrine just like the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ.

The fact that the orthodox understanding of justification is in complete accord with Scripture and has already been biblically dealt with by Christ's church does not mean that it has not been attacked from a variety of sources (e.g., the Roman Catholic counter-reformation, Socinianism, Arminianism, neo-nominianism, the "New Perspective on Paul" school of thought, Norman Shepherd and his step children: the Auburn Four, etc.). Sadly, today the attacks on the doctrine are coming from men within the pale of the conservative Reformed tradition. These men have been spreading Romanizing germs throughout the body of Christ.

Given the current attacks on justification by faith alone we must stand up, proclaim and defend the imputed righteousness of Christ with every fiber of our being. For, if this precious doctrine is lost, *all is lost*. If the Reformed churches adopt the new perversions regarding justification and the covenant, they will usher in an age of declension and darkness. May God enable us by His grace to defend our covenanted Reformation. Help us, O LORD to trust in Christ's righteousness alone. The more we behold the righteousness of your dear Son, the more our hearts adore You. Preserve us, LORD, that we may wipe the pierced feet of Your Son with tears of gratitude and joy.

Appendix: Christ's Warning Concerning False Teachers

Introduction

At the present time a number of "conservative" Reformed denominations are drifting theologically toward a dark and uncertain future. The decline is not primarily due to syncretism with culture or blatant ethical violations but rather is rooted in theological subversion from within. This subversion is coming from pastors, writers, popular speakers, seminary professors, and publishers all of whom claim to adhere to the Reformed faith. This situation makes our topic very relevant: Christ's warning against false teachers. This warning is found in Matthew 16:6: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.'" If we are to avoid making a shipwreck of the faith we must carefully heed this solemn warning from the lips of our Lord. As we study this warning we will consider: a) the context and preliminary comments; b) the dangers of false teaching; c) the nature and manner of doctrinal subversion and d) ways to stop doctrinal subversion. May God protect us from the leaven of false doctrine and help us to warn others regarding false teachings in religion.

Context and Preliminary Comments

There are a number of things that we need to discuss before we consider the command itself.

First, our Lord's warning came after a confrontation with His chief enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 16:1-4). Interestingly, the warning was not immediate but occurred after the disciples had gone to the other side of Galilee (Mt. 16:5). This delay indicates that our Lord's warning was the result of contemplating what had occurred earlier in the day. Our Lord's emphatic statement was premeditated. It shows a very strong pastoral concern for the

disciples. The disciples were concerned about how to get their next meal while the Lord of glory is contemplating the doctrinal integrity of the teachers in His church. Our Lord's concern stands in sharp contrast to the lack of concern for doctrinal integrity that exists in many churches today. In modern evangelical churches the primary concern is on having a wonderful experience or on making worship relevant to our post-modern culture.

Secondly, our Lord's warning is directed to the twelve apostles. It is not directed to backsliders, new believers, unreliable professors or ungodly persons but to the cream of the crop. The twelve apostles had forsaken all to follow Jesus. These were men who were dedicated to the Savior; who had been under His personal care and training for quite some time. These were men who had absolutely no sympathy for the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. There is no indication whatsoever that the disciples were being influenced by any false teachers. Yet, it is the apostles who receive this strong warning.

The fact that our Lord's admonition is directed to the apostles tells us that no one should consider himself to be immune to the influence of false doctrine. There is never a time in our walk with Christ when we can let down our guard. There is not one person who can claim a level of knowledge, sanctification or theological maturity that protects him from the doctrinal assaults of Satan. Even the most godly and knowledgeable believers are able to err in doctrine. In fact, the more we understand about God, Christ, faith and life, the more we realize how feeble our knowledge really is. Therefore, regarding doctrinal matters we must be very humble. We must be very prayerful and careful regarding the doctrinal achievements on which we stand. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). And it is often pride and arrogance regarding one's own knowledge, abilities and genius that has caused many a theologian and pastor to be seduced by Satan.

It is not an accident of history that many dangerous heresies originated with pastors or teachers who were the brightest, most creative minds in seminaries or colleges. Indeed, the greatest heresies that have caused severe havoc in Christ's church have all come from respected ministers of the gospel; from men notable for their teaching ability or intellectual skills.

We can see the need for humility and watchfulness just by recalling the notable shipwrecks of the faith in our own day. A number of Reformed families, pastors and teachers (e.g., Scott Hahn, Franky Schaeffer, Gerry Metatics) have succumbed to the leaven of Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church. When we hear of people who were thoroughly Reformed in doctrine embracing soul-damning heresies we scratch our heads and wonder how? How could people depart from the purity of doctrine and worship of the Reformed faith and embrace works salvation and rank idolatry? The sad reality is that such departures happen more often than we think. Being Reformed or Presbyterian does not make a person immune to doctrinal apostasy. The fact that Jesus saw the need to warn His closest disciples coupled with the reality that doctrinal departures are common in our own day ought to humble and sober us. Let us not trust in our own hearts, or doctrinal attainments, or theological superiority to sloppy modern evangelicalism, for Reformed people can and do embrace false doctrines. If Jesus' warning applies to the apostles, the leaders of the church, then it certainly applies to us.

The Dangers of False Teaching

Having noted the context and audience let us examine Christ's exhortation to His disciples. Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Mt. 16:6). In verse 12, the leaven is identified as the teaching of Pharisees and Sadducees. Of all the

things that could have threatened the apostles, such as political and religious persecution or threats to life and limb, our Lord concerns Himself with doctrine. Why is the Savior so troubled about doctrine? Such a concern is certainly not in vogue today. The attitude among most contemporary evangelicals is that doctrine is not practical. Doctrine doesn't grow the church. Doctrine doesn't meet people's needs; it doesn't feed the hungry or clothe the poor. Today we are even told that doctrine is bad because it divides rather than unites professing Christians. Also, we are told that in a post-modern culture people are not accustomed to words or doctrines but rather respond to visual images and experiences. Thus, to meet people where they are, teaching, preaching and doctrine must be placed on the back burner and replaced with drama, music, film, art and dance.

While most of modern Christendom has rejected the importance of doctrine and the centrality of preaching in public worship, correct doctrine was an obsession for both Christ and the apostles (cf. Ac. 20:28-31; Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; Tit. 1:9; Mt. 1:9; Mt. 5:21-48; 7:15-27; 2 Jn. 9-11). There are many reasons why our Lord regarded doctrine so highly. a) Correct doctrine is foundational to biblical Christianity. The system of doctrine taught by Scripture defines God, Christ, salvation, ethics, sin and *everything* a person needs for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Without correct doctrine the object of our faith is false and all is lost. b) Correct doctrine is crucial because false and man-made doctrine drives out, replaces and nullifies true teaching (Mt. 15:1-9; Col. 2:8, 20-23). The apostles had the responsibility to lay the foundation of the church by organizing congregations and by delivering their inspired teachings and writings. If the shepherds became corrupted, so would their followers. Therefore, we can understand Jesus' very strong concern with purity of doctrine. We hope and pray that some day many of the modern evangelical churches will share that concern.

Now that we understand the importance of biblical doctrine we need to ask the question: Why does our Lord single out the Pharisees and Sadducees? One reason is that these groups were the two dominant religious parties in Israel. The Pharisees were very popular with the people, while the Sadducees held sway in the aristocracy. Another reason for the warning is that in God's providence these two groups are representative of the two main heretical tendencies that are found throughout history.

The Pharisees' doctrine was dangerous because they founded their authority upon oral law or human traditions and as a result were legalistic, self-righteous and formalistic. The Pharisees believed that in addition to the written law there was also an authoritative oral law passed down through history by various leaders, prophets and rabbis. While they formally accepted the authority of the Old Testament, their traditions in practice were more important than the Bible because they were used to interpret the Scriptures. As a result they held to a number of heresies.

They believed in salvation by law-keeping. Consequently, they denied salvation by grace through faith alone. They, in practice, denied the doctrine of original sin and depravity. The Pharisees also redefined the law, externalizing it so that (in their mind) an outward, formal obedience to the law could be achieved. They "fenced" the law with all sorts of silly man-made rules and regulations so that sanctification consisted in ritual observances instead of learning and obeying the law itself. In the New Testament there are many references to the absurd detailed legalism of the Pharisees: the tithing of herbs (Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42); the wearing of tassels and phylacteries (Mt. 23:5); the obsession with ritual purity (e.g., Mk. 7:1ff.); frequent fasting (Mt. 9:14); and, silly and arbitrary rules surrounding oaths (Mt. 23:5). As Jesus said they strain out a gnat and swallow a camel (Mt. 23:24). The Pharisees took pride in their Jewish heritage and

greatly over-emphasized their privileged status as Jews (Rom. 2:17ff.) at the expense of the necessity of saving faith and conversion. Their religion was very external; good works were placed on display to be seen and praised by men (Mt. 6:1-6, 16; 23:5). Their religious leaders loved pomp, status and power (Mt. 23:6).

Yet for all their talk of the law; love of ceremonies and religiosity, the Pharisees are strongly condemned by Christ. By their traditions they nullified God's law (Mt. 15:3ff; Mk. 7:8-9). The Pharisees and their followers will not enter the kingdom of God (Mt. 23:13). They are blind leaders of the blind (Mt. 15:14), hypocrites (Mk. 7:6), whose hearts are far from God (Mt. 15:8). They are full of inner corruption (Mt. 23:27ff) and are guilty of persecuting the true people of God (Mt. 23:34-35). Thus, they are designated as "the synagogue of Satan" by Jesus (Rev. 2:9). Our Lord had a good reason to say the apostles, "Look out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

The Sadducees' doctrine was also dangerous because of their willingness to subject the Bible to finite reason, pragmatism and skepticism. While the Pharisees added to God's word, the Sadducees detracted from it. They were the modernists of their day. The Sadducees did not place the Old Testament historical and prophetic books on the same level with the five books of Moses. They did not believe in the resurrection of the body, in the existence of angelic beings, or even that man had a soul or spirit (Ac. 23:8). The Sadducees attempted to sway people to their own position by using clever arguments that made a mockery of the Scriptures. When they tried such skeptical reasoning upon our Lord concerning the resurrection (Mt. 22:23-33; Mk. 12:18-27; Lk. 20:27-28), Christ rebuked them saying that they did not know the power of God or the Scriptures. He even quoted the Pentateuch (Ex. 3:6) which they accepted as authoritative to prove the resurrection. The Sadducees were worldly, political pragmatists. Because they rejected the after-life and the rewards or penalties of a final judgment, they had no problem making compromises politically, ethically or pragmatically to keep their present power, pleasure and prestige. John the Baptist calls the Sadducees "a brood of vipers" (Mt. 3:7). While the Sadducees had some strong disagreements with the Pharisees, both groups found a common enemy in Christ and the disciples (Ac. 4:1ff). Of all men who subtract from the Scriptures and who are skeptics, rationalists and pragmatists, our Lord says, "Look out and beware of their teaching."

The infinite wisdom and omniscience of Jesus is displayed in how suitable the Savior's words are as a beacon of warning to God's people throughout all church history. When we examine the history of the church we see these two great corrupting influences at work over and over again. The names of the parties may change and the theological peripheral details may be different, yet the underlying philosophy of corruption is the same.

The general philosophical principles of Phariseeism—a love of human tradition, a secondary yet superior source of authority in an oral tradition, a zealotry for the traditions of the fathers, a large body of authoritative man-made rules and a system of salvation rooted in human merit—are all crucial elements of the Roman Catholic Church. In the papal church the religion of Christ and the apostles has been swallowed up by ritualism, pomp and ceremony. The Word of God is overshadowed by a mountain of human inventions: the priesthood, the mass, the confessional, indulgences, worship of Mary and the saints, etc. The necessity of conversion has been replaced with baptismal regeneration and salvation by works. True spiritual worship has been replaced by outward man-made rituals—candles, surpluses, the crucifix, statues, holy water, the altar, and the sign of the cross—none of which is authorized by the Bible.

The mantle of the Pharisees, with their love of human traditions, their love of outward rituals and the rejection of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, has sadly fallen upon a

good portion of professing Christendom today: not only the Roman Catholic Church but also all the Eastern Orthodox churches, high church Episcopalians, Coptic, Ethiopian and Latin rite congregations. In some areas these communions have surpassed the Pharisees by their rank idolatry and elaborate priestly garments and rituals.

Given the history of the Christian church, Jesus' warning is just as relevant and important today as it was nearly two thousand years ago. Because of our sinful natures there has been many a professing Christian who has been drawn to tradition, ceremonies, rituals, human merit and the outward shell of a religion. A religion that on the outside is like a white-washed tomb but inside is rotten, corrupt and dead. They hold to a form of religion but deny its power. They profess Jesus with their lips but their hearts are far from Him.

The need to "look out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" is a very important warning today for the Reformed community. There are ordained pastors who claim to be Reformed that are spreading Romanizing germs throughout the world. There are those who have rejected the attainments of the Reformation concerning hermeneutics and thus advocate "interpretive maximalism." This "new" hermeneutic is used to circumvent the authority of Scripture (i.e., divine warrant) by giving the interpreter great flexibility in deriving principles of worship and ceremony from the Bible that are *not really there*. A number of ancient fathers and medieval theologians did much the same by their spiritualizing or allegorizing of the text of Scripture. The problem with interpretive maximalism and its ancient counterpart is that the historical-grammatical meaning of the text is set aside and replaced by the presuppositions and artistic impressions of the interpreter. A method of interpretation that is so subjective and flexible tells us more about the interpreter than it does about the text of Scripture itself. With this fluid, subjective methodology, James Jordan, David Chilton, Peter Leithart and their followers are pointing people to Rome, Canterbury and Constantinople while others such as John Frame are pointing people toward Las Vegas and Hollywood.

There are many pastors and popular speakers within the Reformed community that have openly rejected *sola Scriptura* or the regulative principle in matters related to worship (e.g., John Frame, Douglas Wilson, Steve Schlissel, Steve Wilkins, James Jordan, etc.). Once the authority of Scripture is set aside in the area of worship, the leaven of human tradition enters in and fills the void. Thus, in Reformed churches today there is a return to the corruptions of Rome (e.g., the liturgical calendar, robes and vestments, candles, sacramentalism, intricate liturgies and so on). James Jordan even argues for the sign of the cross and the use of cathedrals. There are men who are so in love with popish trash they argue that "Reformed is not enough." They say that we must not be limited by the Reformed symbols but rather go back to classical Christianity (i.e., the corrupt medieval sacramental paradigm).

Have such men been recognized as distributors of the leaven of the Pharisees, as mediums for the germs of Rome? No! They are as popular as ever. In fact, few men in the Reformed community have been willing to fight against this dangerous leaven. Sadly, those who have protested this heresy have suffered great abuse themselves. Tragically, as men strike at the very heart of the Reformed faith, pastors, elders, seminary professors and congregants declare: "I see no danger. I hear nothing contrary to sound doctrine. Quit making a mountain out of a molehill. These are good Reformed men of God." This flight from reality, rejection of the obvious and false application of Christian charity reveals that the leaven has subtly and silently been spreading among the Reformed churches for years. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so (Jer. 5:30-31).

One can even find the Pharisaical leaven of human merit as a co-instrument of justification in the Reformed community today. There is the rising popularity of the Romanizing germs of Norman Shepherd who rejects the imputed righteousness of Christ and replaces it with the works of faith, faithful obedience or covenantal perseverance. Has this heretic been excommunicated for sowing the seeds of Phariseism and Romanism in the body of Christ? No! He is more popular as a speaker than ever. His Romanizing doctrines were published by a Reformed publishing house (Presbyterian and Reformed) and endorsed by Reformed seminary professors (e.g., Richard Gaffin, Jr., Joel Nederhood). His views are being advocated by some of the most popular “Reformed” conference speakers in the country (e.g., Steve Schlissel, Andrew Sandlin, etc.). Once again men who want to eradicate this Pharisaical leaven are told: “Don’t be so harsh and unloving. This new paradigm is not dangerous or heretical. This new teaching is a breath of fresh air.” To this all-too-common kind of remark we ask: “Are we supposed to sit on our hands and do nothing while the gospel is redefined in a Romanizing manner? Are we to sit idly by when the followers of Jordan and Shepherd are being lead directly into the apostate and heretical Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox communions?” No! We cannot remain silent. We must beware of false prophets (Mt. 7:15). We must try the spirits to see whether they are of God (1 Jn. 4:1). We must sound the same trumpet that Christ sounded: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” If we warn the church in the same manner as the Great Shepherd, when whole families who are under the sway of these corrupting teachers join the Roman Catholic Church or the Greek Orthodox Church, their blood will not be on our heads.

Church history is also full of examples of the relevancy of our Lord’s warning regarding the leaven of the Sadducees. Throughout history the church has had to deal with religious teachers who were skeptics and rationalists; who in some manner denied the authority of Scripture (e.g., Gnosticism, Marcionism, Arianism, Pelagianism, Socinianism, Unitarianism, Deism, Modernism). Since the 1870s modernism has virtually destroyed the Christian witness of all the old mainline Protestant denominations. All the central tenets of the faith (e.g., the plenary inspiration of the Bible, the vicarious atonement, the resurrection, the doctrine of hell, the necessity of conversion, the virgin birth, miracles, the moral law, etc.) have been rejected, redefined or watered down in order to fit in with an unbelieving secular humanistic worldview. These infidels wear the mantle of the Sadducees with pride.

Is such leaven still a danger among Reformed churches today? Yes, it certainly is! The Christian Reformed Church of North America has largely apostatized in only the last thirty years. Almost everyone who has attended a conservative Reformed seminary knows at least a few students who started out thoroughly orthodox but at some time were seduced by the lies of such writers as Karl Barth. Doctrines that were immediately rejected only a generation ago such as process theology and annihilationism are growing in popularity in neo-evangelical circles. Crucial doctrines such as six-day creationism are commonly denied today in so-called conservative Presbyterian seminaries (e.g., Westminster Seminary near Philadelphia). Some seminaries that were once strongly committed to biblical inerrancy have denied the plenary inspiration of Scripture (e.g., Fuller Seminary). The leaven of the Sadducees is as much a threat to Bible-believing Christians today as it ever was. “Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”

The Nature and Manner of Doctrinal Subversion

When Jesus warned the apostles regarding the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, he used the word “leaven.” Why did our Lord say “leaven” when the word “doctrine” would have been much easier for the disciples to understand? Christ used the word “leaven” for a particular reason. He wanted His people to understand why false doctrine is so dangerous. He does this by comparing false teaching to leaven.

What is it about leaven or yeast that makes it the appropriate word to describe what false doctrine can do to the church? Leaven does two things that make it the perfect choice to describe how false teaching operates. First, leaven works insidiously. Its influence on the lump of dough is subtle. It works quietly as it penetrates the whole loaf. Secondly, leaven’s nature is to grow and spread. Once it is introduced into the lump of dough, if left alone, it will change the character of the whole lump. These aspects of leaven as descriptions of how false doctrine operates are true in individuals and especially in corporate bodies such as individual churches or denominations.

Many of us have known men who have apostatized doctrinally. What usually occurs in such situations is that a person is introduced to false doctrine and some point of that false system will be accepted. It can be anything from a Romanizing concept of justification to a sacramental view of baptism to some aspect of full preterism. What occurs after a false doctrine is firmly planted in a person’s mind is that it slowly, imperceptibly penetrates that person’s entire theological outlook and worldview. The man who has accepted some aspect of full preterism in the long run ends up denying several crucial Christian doctrines such as the resurrection of the body, the rapture, the final judgment and the second bodily coming of Christ. These doctrines are not openly denied but are denied through heretical redefinition. A person may adopt baptismal regeneration. After a time such a person often will end up adopting several interrelated heretical views. As a result crucial doctrines such as election, regeneration, the atonement, conversion and perseverance are heretically redefined. False doctrine works like leaven penetrating and perverting a person’s entire theological system. Then tragically, we may discover that an acquaintance or close friend has converted to Romanism or has simply stopped attending church. Beloved, be on guard: “Look out and beware.”

Throughout history the truth and urgency of our Lord’s warning is observable in how false doctrine has worked as leaven in churches. There are several important things to note regarding this topic.

First, the leaven almost always comes from teachers within the church. The Pharisees and Sadducees were leaders among the covenant people. Historically, the men who have done the most damage to Christ’s church have not been wicked political rulers but rather pastors, seminary professors and Christian scholars. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mt. 7:15). Paul warned the Corinthians of such men when he wrote: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And do not marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:13-14).

The most effective way to leaven the church is to use men who are respected religious leaders. Historically the men who have been used by the devil to corrupt the church have often been very articulate, intelligent and morally upright (at least outwardly). False doctrine has not come from dullards but from shining intellects, from men who are very popular and “pious.” In recent years, Satan has used men that have been well known for teaching solid, orthodox

doctrine for many years. Thus, when these men introduce subtle but dangerous heresies, their views are readily accepted by many. And when these men are challenged by orthodox teachers, many come to their defense, saying, "How could pastor so and so be teaching false doctrine when we know he has championed the Reformed faith for years? How dare you accuse our dear brother of heresy!" This tactic has been very effective. It has resulted in the orthodox party (who are simply defending the Reformed faith) being accused of being unloving, obsessed, obnoxious and deluded.

Secondly, the men who have introduced false doctrines have done so in a subtle, insidious manner. They do not openly proclaim that their new doctrine is unorthodox or unconfessional. They do not admit that their teaching is a radical departure from the truth. They do not voluntarily resign their position as pastor-teacher or elder but rather maintain their positions of authority in order to leaven the church. Their books, tracts and lectures are written in a way to disarm people's suspicions and give their supporters enough quotes to throw off guard the people who see something is wrong. Those who spread false teaching almost never show their true colors unless they have already gained a large following and sense victory or unless they know that church authorities do not have the guts to discipline heterodox ministers.

How do the false teachers work subtly or insidiously on the flock? They do a number of deceitful things.

(1) They often will proclaim their complete faithfulness to the church's standards. One author who has done much to destroy biblical worship in Presbyterian churches begins his book by proclaiming his hearty acceptance of the Westminster Standards and the regulative principle of worship. Then he almost immediately sets forth several arguments against the regulative principle. The men who are spreading the Auburn Avenue theology and the so-called objectivity of the covenant will say that they adhere to the five points of Calvinism and believe that those who are elect cannot fall away. However, they also teach that people who have been regenerated, who have had their sins washed away by Jesus' blood and are truly united to the Savior, can apostatize and go to hell. These men can be selectively quoted to appear completely orthodox or quoted to appear heretical. Heresy is hidden between statements of true doctrine. No Presbyterian session would invite a Roman Catholic priest to speak on justification. However, they very well may ignorantly invite someone like Norman Shepherd or Steve Schlissel. "Look out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

(2) False teachers use stealth, ambiguity and deceit in setting forth their new theories. They hide behind equivocations and redefinitions of old theological terms. Modernists, for example, would proclaim belief in the resurrection of Christ. They simply redefine the resurrection in a non-miraculous, secular humanistic manner. Norman Shepherd will insist that he completely rejects any role for works or human merit in salvation. But, he defines faith as "faithful obedience," which is just a subtle way of saying that faith and good works are co-instruments in a person's justification. A sloppy, difficult, ambiguous and even contradictory use of language gives false teachers plausible deniability. If they are called on the carpet, they can always plead innocence based on a misunderstanding of their use of terms.

(3) False teachers will often argue that they are not denying anything essential to the faith but are merely clarifying peripheral, unsettled matters of the faith. They will argue that there is a sense in which their teaching is a new paradigm or a new perspective; however, it certainly does not rise to the level of heresy. This tactic worked for Pelagius when he appeared before a synod in Palestine (AD 415). Pelagius was very evasive at this synod; he gave very ambiguous answers as a deliberate tactic and was even willing to condemn the teachings of his disciple Celestius as

foolishness even though their doctrines were identical. Augustine said of this synod: “It was not heresy, that was there acquitted, but the man who denied the heresy.”²²⁰ When the new “paradigm” of the Auburn Avenue theology came upon the scene, some of its advocates said that it was taking Reformed churches back to the original intent of the Westminster Standards, which have been perverted over time by a Greek mindset. Then, we were told that there were some differences with the Standards, but they were of no consequence. Then, we were told that “Reformed is not enough”—that is, we need to fine tune and improve the Standards. The tactics of equivocation, of emphasizing points of agreement, of speaking out of both sides of one’s mouth, or emphasizing that nothing of consequence is being changed, are all means by which the false teacher clothes himself with sheepskin. Tragically, many people who are untrained in theology and even a few who are knowledgeable are deceived by such tactics.

(4) False teachers speak the language of love, peace, cooperation and the need for Christian unity. They label those who oppose this teaching as unloving and unkind, as disturbers of the peace of the church, as men who twist things all out of proportion. They will argue that there is a world of sin, evil and poverty out there and that Christians fighting against other Christians is counterproductive and foolish. In order to fight the real enemies of the church (we are told) we must be tolerant of minor, inconsequential, difficult doctrines.

This tactic was very effective in the modernist takeover of the mainline denominations in the early part of the twentieth century. The modernists argued that fighting over doctrine slowed the missionary endeavors of the church and was a bad witness to the world. The modernist pleas were very effective in lulling the vast majority of people in the pews who were doctrinally conservative into doing nothing or even siding with the liberals. The liberals were successful in labeling men who were fighting for the truth of the gospel as unloving, fanatical, angry, deluded men. Men who were conservative such as Dr. Charles Erdman at Princeton Seminary sided with the modernists against Dr. J. Gresham Machen because he believed that Machen was the one who was guilty of harming the denomination (the P.C.U.S.A.). After the liberals neutralized the moderates, gained a lot of adherents and got the votes they needed on seminary boards and ecclesiastical courts, they revealed their true colors by persecuting orthodox, confessional men of God.

The men of the modern Auburn Avenue heresy and their defenders have used similar tactics. They argue that we should not fight against one another when the real enemy is secular humanism and its fruits in society; that it is uncharitable to accuse other ministers of heresy when they are simply clarifying and advancing certain doctrines; that these men have been outstanding defenders of Christianity for years; that attacking their teachings is hurting the body of Christ and is a bad witness to the world. These false teachers are very clever. They want their teachings to leaven the church quietly and insidiously. They do not want anyone to raise suspicions or expose their teachings for what they are. These men and their apologists have been very effective at raising a smoke screen to obscure their real intentions. Beloved, “take heed and beware.” The man who converts to Roman Catholicism, leaves the Reformed church and worships the virgin Mary is not the greatest threat. It is the men who depart from the faith, yet who hide their intentions and remain in the church, who are dangerous. Their doctrine works like yeast in the body corrupting this man here, that family there, this elder over here and that seminary student over there. It is our biblical duty to refute those who contradict (Titus 1:9); to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3); to exhort men to teach no other doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3) than the one received from Christ and the apostles.

²²⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989 [1910]) 3:796.

Leaven has a natural tendency to leaven the whole loaf. The historical pattern is quite clear. False teaching moves from bad to worse and false teaching if left unchecked eventually penetrates the whole body. The corrupt Pharisaical church in Jesus' day did not arise overnight. The process of apostasy took centuries; false teachers brought in their human innovations slowly. A human tradition was added here and a ritual was added there until the true religion was obscured under a large edifice of human theological ideas, rules and regulations. Some of these human traditions can be seen in the Babylonian Talmud which consists of thirty-four large volumes of fine print. The Pharisees did not purposely set out to destroy biblical religion. They simply wanted to improve upon it and protect it with their own ideas. They did not ask the people to abandon the Old Testament or their cherished doctrines. They just wanted the people to accept a few "minor improvements" to fence the law, to make religion better. Their perversion of the church was slow, virtually imperceptible and progressive, until eventually it permeated the whole lump.

The corruption of the Roman Catholic Church occurred in a similar manner. Small changes were made in the government, worship and doctrine of the church. These little additions were often done for pragmatic yet sincere reasons. Each generation, however, inherits these human traditions, attributes an added sanctity to the practices which are now quite old, and adds some new innovations of its own. If we isolate each addition or change, it may seem minor. It may not look like a big threat to the church at all. But, if we examine how little changes add up over time and accumulate, we can observe how minor, almost imperceptible, changes eventually have disastrous consequences for the church. There is a progressive growth of corruption until the whole lump is leavened. (For example, the full-blown doctrine of the supremacy of the papacy developed over a period of one thousand years). The people are often taken in by the fact that changes are so minor. But, as each change is accepted and becomes an indispensable tradition that people are used to, expect and love, the more difficult it becomes to return the church to its biblical foundation (i.e., doctrine and practice based on Scripture alone). Therefore, when someone bids the church to accept a "minor" addition to Scripture or some new doctrine, we must not be careless or apathetic. We must understand the nature of leaven. We must understand that even small additions will have disastrous consequences. Because leaven spreads its effect so slowly and imperceptibly, people are often not even aware of what is happening to their church: that the rope of *sola Scriptura* has been cut and the church has begun to drift from its biblical moorings. Thus, once again, we must note the importance of Christ's warning: "Watch out and beware." Small changes and additions to what God has authorized in His word have a cumulative effect that is deadly. They lead to apostasy and judgment.

The leaven of the Sadducees works like the leaven of the Pharisees but to a different end. Full blown modernism did not arise overnight. The "mainline" denominations took almost two generations to become apostate. The leaven of the Sadducees has small beginnings. In modern times it usually begins with new theories regarding the early chapters of Genesis. A literal Adam and Eve are replaced with poetic metaphor. The six days are said to be billions of years. Evolutionary theories are accepted. People are told that Christianity needs to be harmonized with the findings of modern science. Then scientific theories are applied to textual research. Then miracles are denied and all is lost: the virgin birth, vicarious atonement, the resurrection, etc. Biblical Christianity degenerates to the point where churches are the enemies of every major teaching in the Bible. We must be on guard against even small changes or accommodations to so-called science. We must guard the integrity of the doctrine of Scripture with every fiber of our being. J. C. Ryle writes,

Beware of the very small beginnings of false doctrine. Every heresy began at one time with some little departure from the truth. There is only a little seed of error needed to create a great tree. It is the little stones that make up the mighty building. It was the little timbers that made the great ark that carried Noah and his family over a deluged world. It is the little leaven that leavens the whole lump. It is the little flaw in one link of the chain cable that wrecks the gallant ship, and drowns the crew. It is the omission or addition of one little item in the doctor's prescription that spoils the whole medicine, and turns it into poison. We do not tolerate quietly a little dishonesty, or a little cheating, or a little lying. Just so, let us never allow a little false doctrine to ruin us, by thinking it is but a "little one," and can do no harm. The Galatians seemed to be doing nothing very dangerous when they "observed days and months, and times and years." Yet St. Paul says, "I am afraid of you." (Gal. iv. 10, 11)²²¹

We must be aware of even small additions or detractions from God's word. The church must guard itself against every deviation from the truth. False doctrines have a tendency to progress from bad to worse, from a small departure to an apostate system.

Ways to Avoid Doctrinal Subversion

Jesus' warning was given to the apostles and inscripturated so that His church throughout history would have an understanding of the dangers of false teaching. There are a number of things that we need to consider in order to protect ourselves from theological subversion.

First, believers have a responsibility to study the Scriptures. This involves not only a careful daily, Bible reading program but also the diligent use of study aids. Christians should learn the science of hermeneutics or biblical interpretation. False teachers take advantage of professing Christians' lack of Bible knowledge and a lack of understanding on how to interpret "difficult" passages. Cults, for example, are notorious for taking passages out of context and ignoring the analogy of Scripture. Many heresies have arisen because one or two passages are interpreted in a manner that contradicts many clearer passages. To protect God's people from false teachers, Isaiah declared: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (8:20). Every teaching or opinion is to be judged by Scripture. Thus, our Lord rebuked the false teaching of the Sadducees saying, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures . . ." (Mt. 22:29). Paul commended the Bereans because they did not accept Paul's new doctrine simply because he said it was true, but rather "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Ac. 17:11).

Secondly, believers must stand upon the theological achievements of their spiritual forefathers. Throughout the history of the church, battles have raged over many important doctrines. These battles have produced corporate sanctification, a more careful exegesis of biblical passages, and a clarification of many doctrinal issues. It is our responsibility to learn systematic theology to inoculate ourselves from false teachings. A multiplication of cults and heresies always accompanies times of theological ignorance. Anyone familiar with the history of the church knows that many of the same heresies appear (with minor variations) over and over again to threaten the church. People who do not have a grasp of theology are the most vulnerable to attack. Thus Paul compares new believers to babies because they do not yet possess the spiritual discernment necessary to steer a path through false doctrine and subtle temptations.

²²¹ J. C. Ryle, *Home Truths* (Conrad, MT.: Triangle Press, no date [c. 1857]), 3:119.

Because our time is one of great theological ignorance it is also one of declension in which heresy is spreading rapidly.

We must take full advantage of the many wonderful doctrinal books and creeds that have been produced by the Calvinistic wing of the Reformation. Every family should own a copy of the Westminster Standards, the Three Forms of Unity, and the determinations of the first six ecumenical councils of the church.

Thirdly, Christians must place themselves in a church that is *truly* Reformed with regard to its leadership as well as its confession. If a believer is to grow into maturity he must sit under exegetical, theological, applicatory preaching. Paul says that God has appointed some men as pastor-teachers in the church to equip and edify the body of Christ so “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting....” (Eph. 4:14).

The importance and centrality of preaching has been largely lost in our day of church growth gimmicks, rock and roll worship, drama, and story-telling comedian pastors. All of these things may make the “worship” service a lot of fun. But, they do not bring the spiritual maturity that people need to stand up to subtle heresies. Evangelical churches are entering a new dark age of ignorance and superstition because their concept of Christianity rotates around having an experience instead of learning about faith and life through diligent, doctrinal teaching and study.

Fourthly, there must be a restoration of biblical church discipline in “conservative” Reformed denominations to protect the flock from all false prophets and doctrinal deviants. There are a number of things that need to be done in this regard.

(1) Presbyterian churches must return to a strict subscription to the Westminster Standards. In “conservative” Presbyterian denominations, pastors and elders are required to take an ordination vow stating that they “sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith...as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.”²²² The purpose of strict confessionalism is threefold. a) It is necessary to hold onto the corporate doctrinal attainments of the past (e.g., the Trinity, the two natures of Christ in one person, the atonement, justification by faith alone, the new birth, etc.). b) It is a public confession of who we are, of what we believe as Reformed Presbyterians. It is an organized summary of the doctrines which we believe are fundamental principles of Christianity. It is the system of doctrine by which we unite in church fellowship. c) It is a doctrinal statement carefully constructed to *exclude* men with certain theological views from the church (e.g., modernism, Sabellianism, Nestorianism, Arianism, theistic evolution, day-age theories, non-sabbatarianism, will-worship, etc.).

Today there is such a loose practice of subscription among most Presbyterian and Reformed churches that pastors and elders are permitted openly to hold non-confessional, heretical opinions on crucial doctrines. For example, instead of creationism, a variety of deviant positions (e.g., day-age, theistic evolution, framework hypothesis) is tolerated. Regarding justification, heretical views are being promulgated (e.g., the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is denied, neo-legalism or the Norman Shepherd heresy is accepted; covenant faithfulness as co-instrument of justification is permitted). In terms of the atonement, false theories (e.g., Arminianism, the Auburn Avenue heresy) are being taught. With regard to the sufficiency of Scripture, another standard is accepted: the regulative principle of worship is

²²² This is the ordination vow of the P.C.U.S.A. in the nineteenth century. It is identical or virtually identical to the vows made in conservative Presbyterian denominations today. For example, vow 2 in the Orthodox Presbyterian *Book of Church Order* (1995) reads: “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechism of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?” (p. 62).

widely rejected in “Reformed” denominations today; and even the acceptance of so-called modern Charismatic prophecy. False views of the sacraments (e.g., baptismal regeneration, sacramentalism, paedocommunion) are practiced. Fundamental doctrines, such as the covenant of works, the distinction between the visible and invisible church, perseverance, union with Christ, and personal regeneration, are denied. Sabbatarianism is ridiculed. And the plain teaching of the second commandment is perverted, so that, for example, pictures of Jesus are used to instruct children. There are so many examples of pastors and elders who are teaching and practicing things contrary to the Westminster Standards, that one could reasonably conclude that a number of these “conservative” Presbyterian denominations are already on the path toward apostasy. It is a sad and tragic time when presbyteries and general assemblies allow pastors and elders to subvert and overthrow the very doctrines they have sworn to uphold.

Why is this travesty of justice allowed to occur? There are several reasons. a) Some men have an unbiblical, humanistic, permissive concept of love. b) Some men do not think doctrine is very important. c) Some men are “go along to get along” cowards. d) And some denominations develop “good old boy” networks of bureaucrats who historically have been incompetent theologically and pragmatic socially. It is time for Presbyterian denominations to stop ordaining and allowing into the ministry liars and theological perverts. If a man has an exception to a minor, non-essential point in the Confession (e.g., the Pope or the papacy being the man of sin in 2 Th. 2:3ff.) then he must plainly state his exception to the Standards and have that exception recorded by Presbytery.

(2) Presbyterian churches must bring ecclesiastic sanctions against those who teach false doctrines and damnable heresies. This point is the logical corollary to the previous consideration. The procedures that lead to sanctions must be biblical, diligent, swift and consistent. A confessional standard that is not backed up by sanctions is over the long run worthless. A modern loose subscription inevitably leads to church courts that are arbitrary and inconsistent in their application of discipline. In other words, judicial decisions end up being based more on the make-up of a commission than on Scriptural or confessional principles. *Sola Scriptura* is replaced with human wisdom, tradition and pragmatism.²²³

(3) Presbyterian churches must speak out publicly and write position papers against all false doctrines that are making inroads in the Reformed community. In our day when theological wolves wander among the flock, many pastors and elders do absolutely nothing to stop them. Even worse, many leaders in various churches are defending the wolves while condemning the shepherds who have sounded a warning against them. Ministers and church governors have a responsibility to nip heresy in the bud. It is unbiblical and foolish to wait until heretical views have a strong foothold in the church before taking action. There is no doctrinal or ethical

²²³ In his analysis of the conflicts between modernism and orthodox Christianity in the P.C.U.S.A., Gary North notes that *neutrality* with regard to any standard is impossible. He writes, “In 1901, the leaders on all three sides of the Presbyterian conflict had verbally and publicly professed faith in that historic Confessional position, despite the fact that none of them fully believed it. Having sworn a public oath to defend a standard they did not fully believe the officers of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., had little incentive to use the denomination’s courts to impose the oath’s mandatory negative sanctions. *But without negative sanctions there can be no organization.* Some negative sanctions would eventually be imposed. These sanctions would be imposed in terms of a standard other than the Westminster Confession of Faith and its two catechisms. The institutional question became: *By what other standard?* The quest for this rival standard was the fundamental theme of the final three phases of the Presbyterian conflict, 1901-1936” (*Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996], 9).

neutrality. Error must be fought against and stopped or else it will spread like a deadly cancer through the body.

Fifthly, heads of households must train and catechize their children so that they will be able to discern between good and evil; between good doctrines and bad.²²⁴ When prelatival apologists were sent by the Church of England throughout the countryside of Scotland in the seventeenth century to turn the Presbyterians into good Episcopalians, the prelates were amazed at the biblical and theological knowledge of these rather poor Scottish peasants. In town after town, the prelates were soundly refuted and turned away by simple folk who had a solid grasp of Reformed theology. Sadly, today we have a different situation—popular “Reformed” speakers advocate doctrines that are blatantly unscriptural and irrational and unlearned churchgoers accept them willingly.

If heads of households build up a good Reformed library; study; learn as they ought and then teach their children the truth, the false prophets among us would not even receive a hearing. They would be fired and sent packing to Rome or Constantinople where they belong.

We live in a time of great declension for many Presbyterian and Reformed churches, a time of toleration for error and syncretism with the surrounding culture. Therefore, we must carefully note and heed the many warnings and imperatives regarding purity of doctrine and false teachers in Scripture (e.g., “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned and avoid them” [Rom. 16:17]; “charge some that they teach no other doctrine” [1 Tim. 1:3]; “guard what was committed to your trust” [1 Tim. 6:20]; “hold fast the pattern of sound words” [2 Tim. 1:13]; “shun idle and profane babblings” [2 Tim. 2:16]; “exhort and convince those who contradict” [Tit. 1:9]; “beware of false prophets” [Mt. 7:15], etc.). This point is especially important because there are neo-legalists among us who occupy positions of influence, who subvert whole households and churches with carefully crafted heretical doctrines, with simultaneous affirmations of Reformed truth and dangerous heresies.

It is time for every Reformed believer, every pastor, elder and deacon, to take a stand for the gospel and fight for the truth. Does not Paul refer to the church as “the pillar and ground of the truth”²²⁵ (1 Tim. 3:15)? Doesn’t this mean that the church has a responsibility to believe,

²²⁴ Since the nineteenth century the responsibility of fathers or covenant heads to lead the family theologically has increasingly been replaced by church programs (Sunday school, youth groups, vacation Bible schools, etc.). Fathers have a responsibility to know and understand Reformed theology in order to lead, teach, nurture and protect their families from theological perversions and heretics. Today, however, many men have only a little theological knowledge; many men do not have the needed theological sophistication to protect their families from subtle and dangerous heresies. (For example, the Auburn Avenue theological perversions have spread rapidly in some Reformed circles even though this system is a radical departure from Reformed orthodoxy). Reformed denominations must train fathers to be the spiritual leaders they ought to be so that doctrinal deviants will immediately face an army of opposition and be forced from their pulpits. (When the P.C.U.S.A. became apostate in the 1920s and abused the great reformer, J. Gresham Machen, only a tiny handful of people obeyed Scripture and separated from apostasy.) Heads of households must be expected to study their Bibles and theological materials in order to protect the future. One cannot expect to adequately learn theology simply by attending church. One must study to show himself approved (2 Tim. 2:15).

²²⁵ When Paul speaks of the church as the “ground” (KJV, NKJV), “support” (NASB), “foundation” (NIV, Phillips), “basement” (Fairbairn) or “bulwark” (RSV, NEB) of the truth, he is not saying that the church invents or determines the truth (e.g., Romanism). That position is absurd and impossible since the foundation of all truth is in the ontological triune God of Scripture. Rather, he is saying that the church has a responsibility to believe, teach, uphold and obey what God has revealed unto it. Calvin writes, “The reason why the Church is called the ‘pillar of truth’ is that she defends and spreads it by her agency. God does not himself come down from heaven to us, nor does he daily send angels to make known his truth; but he employs pastors, whom he has appointed for that purpose. To express it in a more holy manner is not the Church the mother of all believers? Does she not regenerate them by the

teach, propagate, uphold and obey what God has revealed (the Bible and the whole truth of Christianity including the whole body of inspired precepts and doctrines). The church has a responsibility to keep as a sacred treasure biblical doctrine. She must not modify, ignore, corrupt, add to or detract from the authoritative, unchanging doctrine of Scripture. “The grand test is, does she hold by the truth of God? Is she in her belief and practice a witness for this? Or does she gainsay and pervert it?”²²⁶ One of the church’s most important responsibilities in upholding the truth is warning people regarding false teachers and deviant doctrines. We must continually be on guard against the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees. May God enable us to faithfully carry the banner of truth in order to preserve our precious covenanted reformation unto future generations. Amen.

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word of God, educate and nourish them through their whole life, strengthen, and bring them at length to absolute perfection? For the same reason, also, she is called ‘the pillar of truth;’ because the office of administering doctrine, which God hath placed in her hands, is the only instrument of preserving the truth, that it may not perish from the remembrance of men.

“Consequently this commendation relates to the ministry of the word; for if that be removed, the truth of God will fall to the ground. Not that it is less strong, if it be not supported by the shoulders of me, as the same Papists idly talk; for it is shocking blasphemy to say, the word of God is uncertain, till it obtain from men what may be called a borrowed certainty. Paul simply means what he states elsewhere in other words, that since our ‘faith is by hearing,’ there will be no faith, unless there be preaching. (Rom. X. 17) Accordingly in reference to men, the Church maintains the truth, because by preaching the Church proclaims it, because she keeps it pure and entire, because she transmits it to posterity. And if the instruction of the gospel be not proclaimed, it there be no godly ministers who, by their preaching, rescue truth from darkness and forgetfulness, instantly falsehoods, errors, impostures, superstitions, and every kind of corruption, will reign. In short, silence in the Church is the banishment and crushing of the truth” (*Commentaries on the Epistle to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 90-91).

²²⁶ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956 [1874]), 157.

