

The Auburn Avenue Theology: A Biblical Critique

Chapter 1: Rejection of Justification by Faith Alone

[Brian Schwertley](#)

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 difficult to understand; c) the people who are advocating these new doctrines are popular

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.

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* published in 1984.⁴ Although it is certainly true that we can learn things about God from His

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]).

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

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*

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 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.'"

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 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.

“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 perichoreisis, 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.

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 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

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.

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.

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

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.

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 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

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).

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).

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).

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 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

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.

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

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

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.)

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

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 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

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).

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

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.

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?

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 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

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

²⁵ Lusk, 125.

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.

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

²⁶ Lusk, 123.

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 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

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.

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 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.

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.

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 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

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.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 146.

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.

(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

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

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 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

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

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, 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

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 life *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.

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

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.

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).

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.

(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 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

⁴¹ Ibid, 2:49.

⁴² Ibid, 2:48.

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

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 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

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).

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

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.

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 a while, 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; 1 Tim. 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.	
---------------------------	--

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

Copyright © Brian Schwertley, 2005

[HOME PAGE](#)

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).