

Fathers and Brethren,

1 A year ago the Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley (hereafter MVP) appointed an ad hoc committee  
2 charged with facilitating the presbytery's study of the issues surrounding the distinct but related  
3 phenomena of the so-called "New Perspectives on Paul" (NPP) (including the theology of N.T. Wright,  
4 hereafter NTW); the so-called "Auburn Avenue theology" (hereafter AAT, which is sometimes referred  
5 to as the "Federal Vision," hereafter FV, or AAT/FV) and the theology of Norman Shepherd (hereafter  
6 NS). The committee began its work well aware of the uniquenesses of and differences between these  
7 various theological projects, but also realizing that they all share a certain similar attraction to a distinct  
8 theological sub-culture within various Reformed denominations (PCA, OPC, CRC, URCNA, etc). Our  
9 study committee's appreciation of the distinctness of these theological blueprints is reflected in the  
10 provision of four separate summary outlines (and one critical overview) of these multifarious views.

11 The need for such a study has become increasingly obvious. In the PCA, at least two presbyteries  
12 have refused to transfer PCA ministers sympathetic to the AAT/FV into their presbyteries. Recently,  
13 Evangel Presbytery's Credentials Committee rejected for transfer into their bounds a PCA minister in  
14 good standing, who embraces the AAT/FV, finding his views to be outside the pale of acceptable  
15 doctrinal diversity. The minister and the calling church have now left the PCA for the CRE (the  
16 fellowship of churches associated with Doug Wilson of Moscow, Idaho). Several PCA presbyteries have  
17 established their own study committees on the NPP, the theology of NS, and the AAT/FV (among them,  
18 Western Carolina, Blue Ridge and Missouri). One Reformed denomination (the RPC[GA]) and one  
19 PCA presbytery (Central Carolina) have now sent communications asking for Louisiana Presbytery to  
20 conduct a theological investigation of the AAT/FV within its own bounds. The OPC has also established  
21 a study committee. Meanwhile, numerous books and articles are appearing on these subjects, and  
22 conferences, seminars and lectures (pro and con) are proliferating (the PCA's Stated Clerk has recently  
23 sponsored a lecture for all the Clerks of the PCA presbyteries, and our denominational seminary,  
24 Covenant, has also held a series of talks). One PCA session and congregation has promoted through its  
25 pastors' conference the teachings of NS and NTW as helpful to an ongoing intramural Reformed  
26 dialogue and discussion on covenant and justification. Members transferring from AAT/FV-friendly  
27 churches have attempted to force the sessions of the churches to which they have relocated to allow for  
28 their practice of AAT/FV distinctives relating to child communion and membership (and in one case  
29 have pursued a judicial appeal all the way through presbytery to the SJC). There have been some  
30 reported cases of PCA TEs being pressured from their calls through theological opposition by AAT/FV  
31 sympathetic sessions or TEs. Additionally, leading pastor-theologians in the Reformed and evangelical  
32 world have raised concerns over the unbiblical and anti-confessional views of the NPP, NTW, NS and  
33 the AAT/FV theologies. Sinclair Ferguson, Al Mohler, Doug Kelly, Don Carson, Rick Phillips, John  
34 Piper, R.C. Sproul, Cal Beisner, Frank Barker and more have publicly indicated their disapproval of the  
35 theological program of some or all of these various figures and groups. Yet, a not insignificant number  
36 of PCA teaching elders shows significant sympathy with these theological tendencies about which our  
37 most trusted churchmen and scholars have expressed distress.

38 Hence, the presbytery's committee sponsored more than thirty hours of lecture and discussion on  
39 the assigned subjects, and held a face to face meeting with representatives of the Auburn Avenue  
40 Presbyterian Church of Monroe, Louisiana. The committee has also provided the presbytery with three  
41 sets of audio recordings pertaining to the theology of the NPP, the theology of NS, and the theology of  
42 the FV (AAT). One book has already been published as a result of the committee's labors, Guy Waters'  
43 *Justification and the New Perspectives* (P&R, 2004) and another is on the way, Guy Waters' *Covenant*  
44 *Theology Improved?* (P&R, 2005) (this volume deals with the AAT/FV). Dr. Waters' work has been

45 widely lauded as a definitive Reformed treatment of the NPP and no doubt so also will his work of the  
46 AAT/FV.

47 The presbytery's committee presented a preliminary informational report to MVP in November  
48 of 2004. This report contained the following: a synoptic presentation of the views of the NPP (and  
49 especially the teaching of NTW), of NS, and of the AAT/FV. At that time, the committee indicated to  
50 presbytery that it would move adoption of a final report in February, 2005. The summary statements in  
51 this report are improved and corrected versions of that preliminary information.

52 Since the time of the preliminary informational report, the Session of the Auburn Avenue  
53 Presbyterian Church (hereafter AAPC) has issued a response charging our committee with  
54 misrepresenting their positions (this has been distributed via email to the presbyteries of the PCA – it is  
55 included in this report as an exhibit). Having met face to face with three representatives of the AAPC,  
56 the MVP committee unanimously agreed that the committee's representations of the AAPC session's  
57 original Summary Statement and of the AAT/FV in its *Précis on the Federal Vision (AAT/FV)* and in its  
58 *Critical Overview of the AAPC Summary Statement* are both accurate and helpful, and MVP as a  
59 presbytery concurs. The AAPC Session's response asserted three things globally – that the MVP  
60 preliminary informational report: (1) "frequently assumes a monolithic and univocal 'Reformed  
61 Tradition'" and "overlooks the various shades of diversity within historic Reformed theology (including  
62 the Westminsterian tradition);" (2) "assumes that there is a well-defined movement labeled the 'Federal  
63 Vision' and fails to take into account the "differences that exist between the positions held by the  
64 individuals involved;" and (3) shows "no appreciation of the nuances or qualifications or specified  
65 terminology that has been utilized by the 'Federal Vision' men" and does not engage "with the wide  
66 array of exegetical, theological, and historical arguments set forth by the men associated with the  
67 'Federal Vision.'"

68 In discussion with the representatives of AAPC, our committee denied the validity of each of  
69 these concerns. First, it was pointed out that the committee was well aware of the diversity of the  
70 Reformed tradition (one of the MVP committee members has published scholarly work on that very  
71 subject). The issue at stake, however, is not whether there is diversity in the Reformed tradition, but  
72 whether the AAT is within the bounds of acceptable diversity. Furthermore, it should be noted that we  
73 do not subscribe to the "Reformed tradition," generically, as PCA elders, rather, we subscribe  
74 specifically to the *Confession of Faith*.

75 Second, the committee indicated that it is well aware of the amorphous character of what is being  
76 called the AAT/FV. Nevertheless, there are discernable common emphases and there is a generally  
77 shared desire among FV proponents to stress what they call the objectivity of the covenant, a shared  
78 desire to improve upon the classical formulations of Reformed covenant theology, and a consequent  
79 willingness to reformulate historic Reformed teaching on election, covenant, justification, perseverance,  
80 ecclesiology, and more. Whether one calls this a movement or not is immaterial. It is clear from the  
81 above that something identifiable exists, and one of the key goals of the committee was to make it more  
82 discernable.

83 Third, the committee, having studied thousands of pages of material from FV proponents, is  
84 keenly aware of the nuances, qualifications, and terminological distinctions deployed by advocates of  
85 the FV. Nevertheless, the committee sought to highlight the main commonalities and tendencies in this  
86 theological approach, as well as some of the more striking aberrations being propounded by key  
87 exponents of the FV. As to the charge of not engaging with the FV's exegetical, theological and  
88 historical arguments, the committee's purview did not entail the provision of a definitive exegetical,  
89 historical and theological rebuttal, but rather it set out to provide an (1) accurate and useful description  
90 of the FV position, and (2) a juxtaposition of specific FV views with the confessional position. That  
91 having been said, even the limited review, description and critique provided by the committee is  
92 sufficient to indicate the FV's divergence from confessional theology and biblical teaching.

93 The MVP committee had initially thought of not footnoting the FV summary statement, in order

94 to avoid having to name names and involving personalities (hoping that a more detached and  
95 anonymous account of the FV theology would help keep the temperature of subsequent discussion  
96 down). However, when the charges of misrepresentation were spread abroad, the committee determined  
97 to provide full public documentation of its descriptions in order to vindicate the accuracy of the report,  
98 as well as to be maximally helpful to other church bodies wrestling with these issues.

99 MVP is well aware that assessments of the theology of the NPP, NTW, NS, and the AAT/FV are  
100 not uniform from within the larger Reformed community. Some examples of this may be helpful. For  
101 instance, out of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, Old Testament professor Doug Green has  
102 rendered a generally positive verdict regarding the work of NTW, while Systematic Theology professor  
103 Dick Gaffin has registered a decidedly negative assessment of the NPP, and NTW in particular.  
104 Additionally, Covenant Seminary, the denominational seminary of the PCA, has produced a mild, if  
105 limited critique. Members of the Reformed Theological Seminary faculty (in Jackson, Charlotte,  
106 Orlando and Atlanta) have also written negative criticisms of the NPP and NTW.

107 Meanwhile, when Westminster Seminary in California, the RCUS and the RPCUS recently  
108 condemned the teachings of NS and the AAT/FV, respected Professor John Frame (of RTS Orlando)  
109 called into question the conclusion of their appraisal, in his foreword to a book that contains chapters by  
110 NS and advocates of the AAT/FV. Nevertheless, Frame (who has consistently defended NS's orthodoxy  
111 even though he does not personally adhere to many of NS's opinions and formulations relating to  
112 justification) has himself conceded that: "Shepherd has taken positions contrary to some elements of the  
113 Reformed tradition."

114 Furthermore, many advocates of the AAT (within and without the PCA) have asserted that their  
115 own views are an acceptable part of the Reformed tradition, consistent with the *Westminster Confession*,  
116 and a biblical improvement upon traditional formulations, while at the same time their critics (again,  
117 within and without the PCA) have called those views into question, argued that they are anti-  
118 confessional and even labeled their teaching as "heresy." AAT proponents have called for dialogue and  
119 discussion, viewing these matters as an intramural debate, while many in the PCA want to see decisive  
120 judicial action to exclude their distinctive teachings.

121 What are we to say and do in the face of such a confusion of responses? Well, first of all, we  
122 should note that our word is not intended to be the final word on the matter. As other presbyteries, the  
123 General Assembly and other denominations continue their work on these issues, no doubt many things  
124 will be clarified and put out of question. We welcome that, and trust that our own small and initial  
125 contribution to the discussion will help the brethren. However, we do believe that we have made a good  
126 and helpful start of the work.

127 Second, we continue to esteem and love our brothers, whether they view the theologies of the  
128 NPP, NTW, NS and the AAT/FV as benign and useful, or have been influenced by their teachings. Our  
129 committee genuinely appreciated the demeanor and candor of PCA TE Steve Wilkins and RE Dale  
130 Peacock in particular as they dialogued with them. There are many in our midst with deep love for and  
131 fraternal bonds with ministers and elders associated with the FV and these other theological tendencies.  
132 Our greatest concerns lie not with the character and intentions of the proponents of these new views, but  
133 with their theological formulations and their serious pastoral and theological consequences.

134 We agree with the insightful observations and questions that Jonathan Edwards once made and  
135 raised, at the end of his own great messages on justification: "How far a wonderful and mysterious  
136 agency of God's Spirit may so influence some men's hearts, that their practice in this regard may be  
137 contrary to their own principles, so that they shall not trust in their own righteousness, though they  
138 profess that men are justified by their own righteousness—or how far they may believe the doctrine of  
139 justification by men's own righteousness in general, and yet not believe it in a particular application of it  
140 to themselves—or how far that error which they may have been led into by education, or cunning  
141 sophistry of others, may yet be indeed contrary to the prevailing disposition of their hearts, and contrary  
142 to their practice—or how far some may seem to maintain a doctrine contrary to this gospel-doctrine of

143 justification, that really do not, but only express themselves differently from others; or seem to oppose it  
144 through their misunderstanding of our expressions, or we of theirs, when indeed our real sentiments are  
145 the same in the main—or may seem to differ more than they do, by using terms that are without a  
146 precisely fixed and determinate meaning—or to be wide in their sentiments from this doctrine, for want  
147 of a distinct understanding of it; whose hearts, at the same time, entirely agree with it, and if once it was  
148 clearly explained to their understandings, would immediately close with it, and embrace it:—how far  
149 these things may be, I will not determine; but am fully persuaded that great allowances are to be made  
150 on these and such like accounts, in innumerable instances; though it is manifest, from what has been  
151 said, that the teaching and propagating [of] contrary doctrines and schemes, is of a pernicious and fatal  
152 tendency."

153 But third, we do believe that many of the positions being advocated by proponents of the NPP,  
154 NTW, NS, and AAT/FV are confused and confusing, are unbiblical, are contra-confessional, and are (as  
155 Edwards put it) "of a pernicious and fatal tendency." As such, we are ready to declare some of these  
156 distinctive teachings to be outside the bounds of acceptable diversity in this presbytery, and we trust  
157 also, in the PCA. Among these are their specific departures from our *Confession's* presentation of the  
158 Bible's teaching on election, covenant membership, individual regeneration, *sola fide*, justification,  
159 imputation, and perseverance. We believe our *Confession* to be more faithful to the Scriptures than are  
160 these new formulations.

161 With regard to these new formulations, we find (1) views that assert that "final justification" is a  
162 matter of performance not possession, and therefore based in some sense intrinsically rather than being  
163 wholly extrinsic; (2) views that assert that new discoveries regarding "Second Temple Judaism" require  
164 us to reject or radically modify the Reformers' and our *Confession's* understanding of the Pauline  
165 Gospel; (3) views that reject or radically modify the *Confession's* presentation of the Bible's teaching on  
166 imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers (including the imputation of Christ's active and passive  
167 obedience); (4) views which confuse infused and imputed righteousness, or which do not recognize the  
168 legitimacy of the important biblical and confessional distinction between faith as "the alone instrument  
169 of justification" and yet a faith which is "not alone in the person justified"; (5) views which reject the  
170 traditional bi-covenantal theology of the *Westminster Confession* (that is, views which do not merely  
171 take issue with the terminology but reject the essence of the bi-covenantal, covenant of works/covenant  
172 of grace framework of God's dealings with humanity); (6) views that undermine the forensic aspect of  
173 justification by appeal to the "relational elements" or which suggest that justification is primarily a  
174 matter of ecclesiology and less so soteriology; (7) views that categorically reject "merit" in relation to  
175 the atoning work of Christ; (8) views which deny or undercut the biblical and theological legitimacy of  
176 the distinctions between true/nominal believers, the invisible/visible church, and the outward/inward  
177 aspects of the covenant of grace); (9) views that relate water baptism to regeneration in such a way as to  
178 suggest that water baptism (rather than that which it signifies) unites us to Christ; (10) views that  
179 suggest that justification in the NT always contemplates faith and the works of faith, or that deny that  
180 faith is uniquely receptive in the act of justification; (11) views that understand a believer's "final  
181 justification" to be a justifying verdict that embraces the believer's covenantal obedience [and not a  
182 merely public declaration of the justification declared at the outset of the believer's Christian  
183 experience]; (12) views that entail multiple instruments in justification (whether the terminology of  
184 'instrument' is used or not); (13) views which posit the false antithesis of reading Scripture through the  
185 "lens of the covenant" rather than the "lens of the decree;" (14) views which cannot sustain the  
186 difference between the saving and common operations of the Spirit; (15) views of sacramental efficacy  
187 that speak of the salvific effects of baptism and the Lord's supper, but fail to maintain adequately the  
188 crucial distinction between the sign and the thing signified; (16) views that suggest that water baptism  
189 conveys all the benefits of union with Christ, except for the "gift of perseverance" and final salvation;  
190 (17) views which undermine the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin or which call into question the  
191 doctrine of individual regeneration; – all of these and more, we find to be out of the bounds of

192 acceptable diversity in this presbytery and in the PCA. As such they should not be taught or  
193 countenanced as part of the public teaching of the church.

194 We are not asserting that any one person or group holds to all of these things, but those who do  
195 hold to any of these views, and are desirous of laboring within our bounds, should expect a thorough  
196 examination by the MVP credentials committee – because any one of these issues is serious in and of  
197 itself. Hence, those open to or embracing of any of these positions should know that MVP will be  
198 careful to ascertain the nature and relation of their view(s) to the public theology of the church – that is,  
199 that which the church believes to be Scripture's teaching, as summarized in the *Confession of Faith*.

200 Fathers and brethren, we trust that our concerns in this whole matter are Gospel concerns. We  
201 believe that the clarity of the Gospel, the freeness of grace and justification, and the assurance of the  
202 believer are all undermined by the formulations of the NPP, NTW, NS and AAT/FV theologies. No  
203 greater tragedy could befall the PCA today than to compromise the lucidity of her preaching of the  
204 glorious Gospel of grace, yet that is, we fear, precisely what we are facing. To that end, we here pledge  
205 again our commitment to the faith once delivered. By God's grace, it is our prayer that we would not  
206 preach a different Gospel, which is really not another and contrary to that which we have received, but  
207 rather that we would boldly proclaim that one true Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation to  
208 everyone who believes.

Your brethren and servants,

The Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley  
Unanimously adopted, February 1, 2005

## A Précis of The New Perspective(s) on Paul (NPP)

- 1 • The NPP represents a paradigm shift in the study of the letters of Paul. It calls into question the  
2 conclusions of the Protestant Reformation regarding Paul's doctrine of redemption and its  
3 application to the believer. It also questions whether Paul was primarily concerned with the  
4 question 'how can I be saved?'<sup>1</sup>
- 5 • The NPP has its origins in the academic historical-critical tradition and began, as a movement, in  
6 the 1960s. Three of its chief proponents are E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N.T. Wright.<sup>2</sup>  
7 Although its roots and many of its proponents are hostile to evangelical Christianity, it has been  
8 mediated of late into the evangelical church.<sup>3</sup>
- 9 • The NPP argues that what distinguishes Paul from his Jewish contemporaries is his core  
10 conviction that Jesus is the Messiah for Jews *and* Gentiles, who are now admitted into the people  
11 of God on the same terms.<sup>4</sup> Paul did not disagree that Judaism could function soteriologically on  
12 its own terms.<sup>5</sup> Paul's differences with the common Judaism of his day (sometimes called  
13 "covenantal nomism"), rather, are christological and ecclesiological.<sup>6</sup>
- 14 • NPP proponents generally argue that neither Judaism nor Paul had a doctrine of original sin and,  
15 therefore, of human inability. Paul and Judaism would have been agreed, it is argued, that the  
16 Law did *not* require perfect obedience.<sup>7</sup>
- 17 • Paul's arguments against the Law, specifically the "works of the Law" in the realm of  
18 justification, therefore do *not* stem from Paul's objections to man's attempts to try to obey the  
19 Law in order to be justified.<sup>8</sup> Paul's objection to the "works of the Law" is *either* a generic  
20 argument against Judaism ("it is not Law but faith that counts") *or* an argument against an  
21 exclusive first century Jewish mindset that looked to the Law, especially to circumcision, the  
22 Sabbath, and dietary laws, as badges of covenant membership.<sup>9</sup>
- 23 • NPP explanations of Paul's understanding of the death of Christ differ. For Sanders, Christ died  
24 in order to allow the believer to make a break from the power of sin. Sin as guilt is not a genuine  
25 concern for Paul.<sup>10</sup> For Dunn, Christ died sacrificially. Paul represents his death this way  
26 metaphorically. This metaphor, however, is "outdated."<sup>11</sup> For Wright, Christ's death is both  
27 expiatory and propitiatory. Wright, however, concentrates upon Christ's death as victory over the  
28 powers of sin and death.<sup>12</sup>
- 29 • NPP proponents deny not only Adamic imputation but also the imputation of Christ's  
30 righteousness to the believer.<sup>13</sup> Wright's denial of this imputation in particular renders his  
31 understanding of Christ's death as expiatory and propitiatory untethered to Christian experience.
- 32 • Justification, to Sanders, is a "transfer" term (how one *gets in* the covenant). This grace is not  
33 essentially forensic but transformative (obviating the need for imputation). It does not differ  
34 materially from the grace of sanctification.<sup>14</sup> To Dunn and Wright, however, justification is  
35 forensic in nature.<sup>15</sup> Dunn and Wright nevertheless understand justification to be a  
36 "maintenance" term (how one *stays in* the covenant). The subjects of justification are  
37 covenantally faithful believers. The declaration of justification is that covenant members are  
38 affirmed to be *already in* the people of God.<sup>16</sup> The ground of justification is the believer's  
39 faith(fulness) as a covenant member.<sup>17</sup> For Dunn, the believer is so justified many times between  
40 his conversion and the Day of Judgment.<sup>18</sup> For Wright, future justification (justification at the  
41 last day) has preeminence.<sup>19</sup> This declaration will be on the basis of "performance" and not  
42 "possession."<sup>20</sup> Present justification is a verdict made in advance of future justification.<sup>21</sup> Present  
43 justification contemplates the believer's faith as a badge of covenant membership.<sup>22</sup>
- 44 • Wright places great emphasis upon assent to a few cardinal doctrinal affirmations; obedience to  
45 Christ as Lord; and reception of baptism as marks of the Christian life.<sup>23</sup> He assigns greater  
46 efficacy to the sacrament than the Reformed Confessions do.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Krister Stendahl, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp.78-96; "Paul Among Jews and Gentiles," in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays*, pp.1-77; N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 60, 113.

<sup>2</sup> Representative publications (in addition to those cited in the previous note) include E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1983): 95-122; repr. in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried, rev. and enl. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 299-308; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8, 9-16* (Word Biblical Commentary 38A-38B; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988); James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Black's New Testament Commentary; London: A. C. Black / Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991); James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); N.T. Wright, "Romans," in *New Interpreter's Bible: Acts-First Corinthians*, vol. 10 (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> For the antecedents to the NPP, see Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: P&R, 2004), 1-22. Wright is the most widely recognized scholar who is both sympathetic to the New Perspective and who has gained the hearing of many English-speaking evangelicals.

<sup>4</sup> Stendahl, "Paul Among Jews and Gentiles," 7-22; Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 441-442; Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," esp. 306-307.

<sup>5</sup> Which is to say, Paul did not fault Judaism as a religion of merit wherein adherents were expected to observe an unfulfillable standard, viz. perfect obedience to the whole of the law. See, for example, Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 21-26; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 161-162; Dunn, *Galatians*, 171-172, 266-267; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 441-442; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 345-353; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 32-35.

<sup>7</sup> For the law not requiring perfect obedience, see Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 21-26; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 161-162; Dunn, *Galatians*, 171-172, 266-267; for Dunn's denial of original sin, see *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 97. Sanders has argued that Paul's "plight" arguments (including such passages as Rom 1:18-3:20 and Rom 7:7-25) are both derivative and self-contradictory, on which see Waters, *Justification*, 64-72. Wright, treating Rom 5:12-21, largely sidesteps questions of imputation, "Romans and the Theology of Paul, in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3 (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1991), 46; see also Wright's comments in his "Romans," *ad loc.*

<sup>8</sup> For Sanders, see the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 76-85; For Dunn, see the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 105-106; For Wright, see "Romans," 649, 654.

<sup>9</sup> For the former, see Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 46; for the latter, see Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 358, and Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 120-133, and "Romans," 649, 654.

<sup>10</sup> See the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 86-87.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 115-116. Dunn speaks of sacrifice as an "outdated metaphor" at *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 233.

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 139-142.

<sup>13</sup> For Sanders, see the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 86-87; For Dunn, see the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 106-109; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 72-76.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Dunn, *Galatians*, 134; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 190; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 125, "Romans," 468, 468n.106.

<sup>17</sup> This is evident, for example, from both Dunn and Wright's exegesis of Rom 2:13. See Dunn, *Romans*, 1:97-98; Wright, "Romans," 440, cf. 519, 580.

<sup>18</sup> Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 386.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 118-119; "Romans," 468.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, "Romans," 440.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 118-119; "Romans," 468.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Wright, "Romans," 482.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 116-117.

<sup>24</sup> For Wright's comments on baptism, see "Romans," 533-535, 548.

## A Précis of the Theology of N.T. Wright (NTW)

- 1 • NTW is an academic and ecclesiastical participant in what has come to be known as the New  
2 Perspectives on Paul (NPP).<sup>1</sup> The NPP argues that the Reformation and its heirs have  
3 misunderstood the difference between Paul and ancient Judaism. Paul did not object to ancient  
4 Judaism because he regarded it to be a religion of works, that is, a religion whereby one was  
5 expected to gain acceptance with God on the basis of deeds performed in keeping with the  
6 Mosaic Law.<sup>2</sup> Paul objected to ancient Judaism because of his core conviction that Jesus is the  
7 Messiah for Jews *and* Gentiles, who are now admitted into the people of God on the same  
8 terms.<sup>3</sup>
- 9 • Unlike other proponents of the NPP, NTW has gained particular credibility within the  
10 evangelical church for, among other things, his high view of the historicity of the Gospel records,  
11 his supernaturalism, and his concern to bridge the academy and the church.<sup>4</sup> NTW has gained  
12 particular credibility among some within the Reformed church because of his insistence upon the  
13 Lordship of Christ as the center of Paul's gospel and upon a very strong relationship of continuity  
14 among the Old Testament, ancient Judaism, and Paul.<sup>5</sup>
- 15 • NTW has self-consciously adopted the project of critical realism (which he sees as transcending  
16 what he regards to be Enlightenment and fundamentalist epistemologies).<sup>6</sup> His doctrine of  
17 revelation ascribes priority to story or narrative at the expense of doctrinal formulation and  
18 linear, logical reasoning.<sup>7</sup>
- 19 • For NTW, the NT writers have reconfigured a basic Israelite story around Jesus: Jesus is the  
20 proposed solution to the abiding problem of Israel's exile.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, one should see the  
21 early Christian movement as another species of Judaism (although distinct from other  
22 expressions of Judaism).<sup>9</sup>
- 23 • The "righteousness of God" refers to God's faithfulness to his covenant promises.<sup>10</sup> The  
24 "righteousness" of the law refers to a truncated covenant status focused on zeal, flesh, and  
25 ethnocentric exclusivity.<sup>11</sup>
- 26 • NTW sees present justification as God's declaration that one is already in the people of God.<sup>12</sup> It  
27 is a doctrine touching ecclesiology not soteriology.<sup>13</sup> Present justification is declared on the basis  
28 of future justification, which shall be grounded upon the believer's faithful obedience to the  
29 covenant.<sup>14</sup>
- 30 • NTW sees faith in present justification as that which evidences one to be a true member of the  
31 people of God.<sup>15</sup> In this context, it is counter to works of the law, which, NTW sees preeminently  
32 as circumcision, Sabbath, food laws.<sup>16</sup> With respect to future justification, Wright will argue that  
33 faith and faithfulness are to be understood synonymously.<sup>17</sup>
- 34 • Concerning the death of Christ and justification, Wright knowingly and explicitly repudiates the  
35 traditional doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as a un-Pauline concept.<sup>18</sup> Wright  
36 is fairly silent on the mechanism that links Christ's death and the believer's justification, other  
37 than that there *is* a connection that the apostle has forged between them.<sup>19</sup> Concerning the death  
38 of Christ more generally considered, Wright concedes that we may speak of Christ's death as  
39 atoning and propitiatory.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of expressing the mechanism whereby Christ's  
40 death is applied to the believer, Wright is vague.<sup>21</sup> Where Christ's death *does* connect with the  
41 believer's experience it is as it defeats the powers of sin and death.<sup>22</sup>
- 42 • For believers today, being a Christian entails: (1) assent to four propositions (the death,  
43 resurrection, Messiahship, Lordship of Christ);<sup>23</sup> (2) submission to baptism, which Wright  
44 perceives to be far more realistic in Paul than the Westminster Standards have taken it;<sup>24</sup> and (3)  
45 participation in the inclusive life of the community, which participation is conceived largely in  
46 terms of social activism and ecumenism.<sup>25</sup>



---

<sup>1</sup> The term "New Perspective on Paul" was coined by a recognized NPP proponent, James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1983): 95-122. Others have preferred to use the phrase "The New Perspectives on Paul," cf. N.T. Wright, "The New Perspectives on Paul," unpublished lecture delivered at the Tenth Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 25-28 August 2003. This movement has arisen within the academic historical critical discussion of Pauline thought. Its proximate origins lie in the writings of Krister Stendahl and E. P. Sanders.

<sup>2</sup> This conviction is evident throughout the scholarship of Stendahl, Sanders, and Dunn. For examples of Wright's objections to traditional understandings of Judaism, see *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 32, 129, and "Romans," in *New Interpreter's Bible: Acts-First Corinthians*, vol 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 655.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, "Romans," 655; *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 458.

<sup>4</sup> For examples of each of these, see Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) and, most recently, his *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> On the lordship of Christ as central to Paul's gospel, see *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 60. On Wright's strong sense of continuity among the Old Testament, ancient Judaism, and the New Testament, see especially Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God*.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 29-144.

<sup>7</sup> On which, see Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004), 120-121.

<sup>8</sup> See, among many places, Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 79.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 369-370.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 96; Wright, "Romans," 400. For further discussion, see Waters, *Justification*, 124-127.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 124. For further discussion, see Waters, *Justification*, 136-137.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, "Romans," 468.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 120, 122, 125.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, "Romans," 468.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 125.

<sup>16</sup> That is to say, the "works" that publicly distinguished Jew from Gentile, "Romans," 649. Wright acknowledges his debt to Dunn on precisely this point, "Romans," 461.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, "Romans," 420. See the discussion at Waters, *Justification*, 132-133, 137-139.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98, 123, 104-105.

<sup>19</sup> As, for example, Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 129.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, "Romans," 474, 476.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Wright, "Romans," 579, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 106 *et passim*.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 47, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> Wright, "Romans," 533, 534, 535, 548.

<sup>25</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 158-159.

## A Précis of the Theology of Norman Shepherd (NS)

- 1 • Norman Shepherd (NS) served as professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological  
2 Seminary (Philadelphia) from 1963 to 1982. He was removed by action of the Seminary's Board  
3 following a six-year long controversy that focused primarily upon NS' doctrine of justification,  
4 and secondarily upon his doctrines of the covenant, election and reprobation, and baptism.  
5 Neither the Seminary nor Philadelphia Presbytery (OPC) in which he then held his ministerial  
6 credentials ever censured NS. <sup>1</sup> In the last five years, the theology of NS has experienced a  
7 renaissance of interest within the Reformed community. NS' hearing comes in part from his  
8 claim to represent pure Reformed covenant theology unadulterated by American  
9 evangelicalism.<sup>2</sup>
- 10 • It is important to remember that NS consistently misrepresents what the Reformed have taught  
11 about covenant, election, and justification. It is against these straw men that NS advocates his  
12 distinctive theological formulations.<sup>3</sup>
- 13 • NS argues that Protestants have not consistently purged the concept of merit from the covenant.<sup>4</sup>  
14 He believes that the Reformed have historically argued for the covenant of works as an  
15 arrangement of strict merit (they have not), and consequently rejects the traditional Reformed  
16 doctrine of the covenant of works.<sup>5</sup> The Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace therefore  
17 does not republish a covenant of works.<sup>6</sup> NS also appears to question the imputation of Christ's  
18 righteousness to the believer (involving as it does merit [Christ's] within a covenantal  
19 framework).<sup>7</sup> He generally prefers to speak of Christ as an example of covenantal faithfulness to  
20 the believer.<sup>8</sup>
- 21 • NS claims that the Reformed have too often understood the covenant through the eyes of  
22 election. This, he argues, results in a model that is wrongly centered on election and  
23 regeneration. We need, rather, to understand election through the eyes of the covenant. This  
24 drives NS to formulate a doctrine of covenantal election (and reprobation). In actuality  
25 covenantal election is conditional election: one's election is a function of one's (dis)obedience to  
26 the terms of the covenant.<sup>9</sup> NS does not, however, deny decretal election. He says, rather, that, as  
27 creatures, we can only understand election covenantally.<sup>10</sup>
- 28 • NS practically denies the distinction between the visible and invisible church. He appears to  
29 prefer the categories covenant-keeper and covenant-breaker.<sup>11</sup> He leaves, however, many  
30 questions unanswered, e.g. "what constitutes covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking?"
- 31 • NS claims that, covenantally, baptism and not regeneration should mark the transition from death  
32 to life.<sup>12</sup> His formulations concerning baptism approach baptismal regeneration.<sup>13</sup>
- 33 • NS equates the terms justification and salvation – terms that Reformed theologians have  
34 understood to be overlapping but not identical.<sup>14</sup> This permits NS to affirm of justification what  
35 Scripture and theologians have affirmed of salvation (a process for which repentance, obedience,  
36 diligent attendance upon the means of grace are necessary).<sup>15</sup>
- 37 • NS argues that justification contemplates faith not simply in its receptive capacity but also in its  
38 obediential capacity. In this sense (counter to Rom 4:5) he argues that the act of justification  
39 contemplates the believer's grace-wrought fruit of faith.<sup>16</sup>
- 40 • NS understands justification to be a process and not a definitive act at the outset of the believer's  
41 experience. "The state of justification, adoption, and sanctification runs parallel to the exercise of  
42 faith, repentance, and obedience."<sup>17</sup> NS denies that good works simply evidence one's  
43 justification. He argues that good works and repentance are necessary for justification. He speaks  
44 of justification, then, by using the language of infused (not exclusively imputed) grace.<sup>18</sup>
- 45 • NS questions the propriety of the Reformed *ordo salutis*, claiming Charles Hodge's *ordo*, as  
46 found in Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, to be "baptistic."<sup>19</sup> He prefers a covenantal *ordo* that does  
47 not distinguish the various graces of redemption.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the controversy concerning Norman Shepherd at Westminster Seminary, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi, Tenn.: The Trinity Foundation, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> For which see Norman Shepherd, "The Covenant Context for Evangelism," pp. 51-75 in ed. John H. Skilton, *The New Testament Student and Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1976). This article has been modestly revised and edited for inclusion in Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> One such straw man is what NS terms "regeneration-evangelism," discussed at "Covenant Context" and *The Call of Grace*. "Regeneration-evangelism" is a regenerational model against which NS portrays his own views of covenant and election. NS has failed, in print, to provide evidence that this particular regenerational model has been sanctioned or approved by any Reformed confession or tradition. Another straw man is evident in Shepherd's discussions of justification. NS appears to frame his doctrine of justification in response to certain antinomian abuses of the doctrine (cf. "Justification by Faith Alone," *Reformation and Revival Journal* 11/2 (2000), 75). NS gives the mistaken impression that his doctrine is the only viable alternative to an antinomian understanding of justification.

<sup>4</sup> *The Call of Grace*, 39, 61-62.

<sup>5</sup> Shepherd questions the legitimacy of the covenant of works at *The Call of Grace*, 27. NS equates the term "works" with "merit" (as at *The Call of Grace*, 25-26). This extends his strictures against "merit" to "works" in the first covenant. Of the first covenant, he claims that "since life is promised as a gift and not as something to be achieved or merited by the performance of good works, it is to be received by faith. The specific command not to eat of this tree is a test of his faith. God does not ask Adam to DO something in order to earn, merit, or achieve eternal life, but NOT to do something. Obedience to this command is a pure act of faith." (Norman Shepherd as cited at Rowland Ward, *God & Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant* [Wantirna, Australia: New Melbourne Press, 2003], 188). NS also defines the covenant of works indistinguishably from the way in which he has defined the covenant of grace (Norman Shepherd as cited at Ward, *God & Adam*, 188).

<sup>6</sup> *The Call of Grace*, 25, 26. NS is interacting with Charles Hodge on this point, but perhaps reads the views of Meredith Kline into Hodge's account of the Mosaic economy's residual aspects of the covenant of works. The precise relation of the Mosaic economy to the Covenant of Works, and to the rest of the Covenant of Grace is one of the more complex issues in the development of covenant theology in the Reformed tradition.

<sup>7</sup> Specifically NS has rejected the imputation of Christ's active obedience to the believer, "Justification by Works in Reformed Theology," in *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective* (ed. P. Andrew Sandlin; Nacogdoches, Tex.: Covenant Media Foundation, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *The Call of Grace*, 51, 19, 20, 48.

<sup>9</sup> NS argues that the Old Testament speaks of Israel as alternatively elect and reprobate, "Reprobation in Covenant Perspective," 8f. This pattern is paradigmatic for the individual believer. He may be alternatively (covenantally) elect and reprobate, *ibid.* One's status as elect or reprobate is a function of his perseverance in obedience to the stipulations of the covenant.

<sup>10</sup> "Covenant Context," 60-61.

<sup>11</sup> Such a conclusion follows from NS' denial of the "inward" branch / "outward" branch distinction as a legitimate explanation of John 15:1-8, "Covenant Context," 65.

<sup>12</sup> *The Call of Grace*, 94. NS' comments here constitute a revision of his comments at "Covenant Context," 66.

<sup>13</sup> "The Resurrections of Revelation 20," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974): 34-43. In addition to the comments cited in the previous note, see NS' comments at *The Call of Grace*, 100-102.

<sup>14</sup> "Relation of Good Works to Justification in the Westminster Standards," 26, 2.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, NS' understanding of Westminster Shorter Catechism 85 in relation to the doctrine of justification, "Relation of Good Works," 15. Compare his summary statement at "Relation of Good Works," 24. NS elsewhere speaks of repentance as "indispensable for" and "necessary for" justification, "Relation of Good Works," 13, 23-24.

<sup>16</sup> NS does not understand the phrase "faith alone" to carry only the sense of receptivity, "Response To A Special Report of the Faculty to the Board on the Discussion of Faith and Justification," 9. He stresses that the obedience yielded by faith, provided that it not be intended as the ground or cause of one's justification (this would be to make it a "work of the law") is nevertheless gracious and may be properly contemplated in the grace of justification, "The Relation of Good Works," 34, 35.

<sup>17</sup> "Relation of Good Works," 50. Cf. "Relation of Good Works," 24, and "Thirty Four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works Presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," Theses 21, 23.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to the literature cited in the notes above, see "Relation of Good Works," 24, 23.

<sup>19</sup> "Relation of Good Works," 49.

<sup>20</sup> "Response To A Special Report," 9.

## A Précis of the Federal Vision (AAT/FV)

- 1 • The FV (sometimes termed the Auburn Avenue Theology (AAT)) is a term descriptive of a  
2 system of theology that has been current since at least January, 2002.<sup>1</sup> Its proponents are active  
3 within a number of Reformed denominations. Proponents have propagated their views through  
4 pastors' conferences, self-published books, and the Internet – a vibrant support network for this  
5 theology. When we speak of "FV proponents" below, we are referring to the system that emerges  
6 from a compiled study of all proponents' writings.<sup>2</sup>
- 7 • Proponents of the FV identify themselves as Reformed. Most appeal to the writings of the  
8 sixteenth century Reformers in support of their views.<sup>3</sup> Many regard the Reformed thought of the  
9 British Puritan and American Presbyterian traditions to have capitulated to the Enlightenment,  
10 what is termed Revivalism, and what is termed baptistic theology.<sup>4</sup>
- 11 • FV proponents define the covenant as an objective relationship that is independent of the  
12 covenant member's subjective considerations of the strength or nature of his membership.<sup>5</sup>
- 13 • FV proponents also define the covenant as essentially a vital relationship between God and the  
14 covenant member.<sup>6</sup> Downplayed are the legal and forensic dimensions of the covenant.<sup>7</sup>  
15 Membership within the covenant is conceived in an undifferentiated manner: the distinction  
16 between a non-communicant and a communicant member of the church is either downplayed or  
17 eliminated.<sup>8</sup>
- 18 • FV proponents argue that this doctrine of the covenant requires reformulation of the doctrine of  
19 the Trinity.<sup>9</sup> The divine unity is framed in terms of covenantal relationship among the three  
20 persons.<sup>10</sup>
- 21 • FV proponents deny the traditional doctrine of the covenant of works.<sup>11</sup> One proponent has even  
22 called into question the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity.<sup>12</sup>
- 23 • FV proponents deny the imputation of Christ's active (and perhaps passive) obedience to the  
24 believer for justification.<sup>13</sup> The "righteousness" of the believer in justification is sometimes said  
25 to be the believer's covenantal faithfulness.<sup>14</sup> Justification is defined in terms of a process not a  
26 definite act; and good works are said to be necessary to justification, particularly to the believer's  
27 "final justification" at the Day of Judgment.<sup>15</sup> One proponent has argued for not fewer than three  
28 instruments of justification: faith, covenantal faithfulness, and baptism.<sup>16</sup>
- 29 • Following Norman Shepherd, FV proponents argue that election must be understood in terms of  
30 the covenant, not *vice versa*.<sup>17</sup> The result is formulations of election that render one's election a  
31 process and a function of one's covenantal obedience.<sup>18</sup> Coupled with this is a denial of the  
32 traditional doctrine of the visible and invisible church<sup>19</sup> and a practical denial of the distinction  
33 between common and saving operations of the Spirit as distinguishing the sincere believer from  
34 the hypocrite.<sup>20</sup> One proponent has even called into question the doctrine of individual  
35 regeneration.<sup>21</sup>
- 36 • FV proponents point to objective grounds for one's assurance while practically denying  
37 subjective grounds for one's assurance. For assurance, the believer is directed away from  
38 discerning the inward and spiritual graces unique to the regenerate person, and is directed  
39 towards his water baptism.<sup>22</sup>
- 40 • FV explanations of apostasy suggest that a believer may genuinely possess Christ's redemptive  
41 benefits and yet lose them.<sup>23</sup>
- 42 • FV proponents understand the doctrine of the sacramental union to mean that the sign and the  
43 thing signified invariably accompany one another.<sup>24</sup> "Salvific" or "covenantal" efficacy is  
44 affirmed, therefore, of every recipient of the sacrament.<sup>25</sup> All the blessings and benefits of  
45 Christ's work are sometimes said to be conferred upon the recipient in baptism.<sup>26</sup> Baptism is

46 assigned a place in the doctrine of the Christian life that denigrates the place of preaching as the  
47 instrument of conversion.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This was the date of the Auburn Ave. Presbyterian Church Pastors' Conference (AAPCPC) that occasioned an ongoing and vigorous public discussion of such doctrines as election, covenant, the church, and the sacraments. The FV predates, of course, this 2002 conference. See, for example, Steve Schlissel, "More Than Before: The Necessity of Covenant Consciousness" (October 2001); Steve Wilkins, "The Covenant and Apostasy" (I and II), lectures delivered at the 2001 AAPCPC.

<sup>2</sup> We are not, of course, claiming that every view represented in this précis has been advanced by every individual sympathetic to the FV. This document is concerned to treat the FV as a theological system, and that system is not necessarily to be identified with the sum total of any single individual's theological statements.

Two comments are in order regarding the documented references that follow in this précis. First, they are representative. We have not intended them to be exhaustive. Second, we have supplied many of the brief quotations below as statements that encapsulate complex or extensive arguments that FV proponents have advanced.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of this approach include Rich Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition: Past, Present, and Future;" Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies," in *The Federal Vision* (Monroe, La.: Athanasius, 2004), 71-125; Mark Horne, "Samuel Miller, Baptism, & Covenant Theology;" John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in *The Federal Vision*, 15-44; Ralph Smith, "Interpreting the Covenant of Works;" Smith, "The Covenant of Works: A Litmus Test for Reformed Theology?;" S. Joel Garver, "The Early Scots Reformed On Baptism."

<sup>4</sup> Examples of these approaches include Douglas Wilson, "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002), 9, 183-189; Steve Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant" 2002 AAPCPC Lecture; Rich Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies;" Steve Schlissel, "An Open Letter To A Morbid Introspectionist" (4 August 2000); Peter J. Leithart, "Revivalism and American Protestantism," in *The Reconstruction of the Church* (ed. James B. Jordan; Tyler, Tex.: Geneva, 1985), 46-84.

<sup>5</sup> "And a covenant is also objective, like your marriage. It's there whether the members of the covenant feel it's there, or they believe it's there, whether they even believe in the covenant or not," John Barach, "Covenant and History," 2002 AAPCPC Sermon; Wilson has expounded what he means by covenantal objectivity throughout "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough*, subtitled, "Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant." For example, concerning the sacrament of water baptism and covenantal membership, Wilson states, "We have noted repeatedly that baptism in water is objective, and it establishes an objective covenant relationship with the Lord of the covenant, Jesus Christ," "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough*, 99; Wilkins has claimed that "If [one] has been baptized, he is in covenant with God" (Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology* [ed. E. Calvin Beisner; Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004], 267). He further argues, "According to the Scriptures to be in covenant with God is to really and truly be swept up into the glorious communion and fellowship of the Triune God, and to be part of His family. Being in covenant involves then a concrete, substantial reality, and thus the Apostles could declare the blessings of salvation that are true of everyone who is a member of Christ, and declare them to be true without qualification, even though they didn't know the decrees," "Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC Lecture.

<sup>6</sup> "[C]ovenant isn't a thing. Covenant isn't a thing that you can analyze – covenant is a relationship. It is a personal, ordered and formally binding relationship. It's personal; it's not just a legal relationship. Some people present the covenant as if it were something somewhat cold and impersonal, like a business contract," John Barach, "Covenant and History" (2002 AAPCPC Sermon); "The covenant is a relationship between persons. That relationship has conditions, stipulations, and promises. Put another way, there is no such thing as a personless or abstract covenant. Put yet another way, a covenant does not consist of a list of names, but is rather a relation between persons (whose names can certainly be formed into a list)," Douglas Wilson, "The Objectivity of the Covenant," *Credenda Agenda* 15/1, p.4; Wilkins has categorically defined covenant as "a real relationship, consisting of real communion with the Triune God through union with Christ" (Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," *The Federal Vision*, 58); "[T]he covenant is a personal-structural bond which joins the three persons of God in a community of life, and in which man was created to participate," James Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), 4, cited approvingly at Ralph Smith, *The Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003), 51-52, and Ralph Smith, "Trinity and the Covenant," Chapter Two.

<sup>7</sup> FV proponents may counter that they do not deny the legal and forensic dimensions of the covenant. We fully grant the point. This, however, is not at issue. We are claiming that the manner in which FV proponents formulate both the relational and the legal dimensions of the covenant results in the downplaying of the latter. In other words, FV formulations of the covenant are biblically imbalanced at the expense of the legal and forensic.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkins, speaking of John 15:1-8, rejects the "distinction of 'external' and 'internal' union" that is commonplace among traditional Reformed interpreters. Rather, "all the branches are truly and vitally joined to the vine," "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," *The Federal Vision*, 63. John Barach: "As in the old covenant, so in the new covenant. There is an objective covenant made of believers and their children. Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union, then, with

---

Christ and with the triune God. The Bible doesn't know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant, really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks about the reality, the efficacy of baptism. Every baptized person is truly a member of God's covenant," "Covenant and History." Peter Leithart's defense of paedocommunion hinges on setting aside this distinction: "The real question before us is this: Does baptism initiate the baptized to the Lord's table, so that all who are baptized have a right to the meal? Paedocommunion advocates, for all their differences, will answer in the affirmative. Nothing more than the rite of water baptism is required for access to the Lord's table," "A Response to '1 Corinthians 11:17-34: The Lord's Supper'" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, 298.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkins indicates a connection between his conception of the covenant and his conception of the Trinity when he argues, "the covenant into which we are brought is this very same covenant that has always existed within the Godhead from eternity," "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 257. Peter Leithart and Ralph Smith have argued in similar veins. See Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Re-casting of Reformed Theology," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, 58-71; Ralph Smith, *Eternal Covenant: How The Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> We are not claiming that FV proponents expressly deny that the divine unity is ontological. We are simply observing both a tendency to question certain traditional formulations concerning the divine unity and predilection to express this unity in non-ontological and relational terms. See for example, Peter Leithart's discomfort with the phrase "nature of God," "Trinitarian Anthropology," 65. Wilkins speaks of the "covenantal unity" of Father and Son, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 49-50, and of God as "a Triune Being who exists in a unity of love," *Ibid.*, 51. Ralph Smith has argued that the traditional language of "essence" and "substance" – as it is employed in "traditional Reformed theology" – is unwholesomely indebted to Aristotle, *Paradox and Truth: Rethinking Van Til On The Trinity* (2d ed.; Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002), 84.

<sup>11</sup> This rejection of the traditional doctrine takes various forms. At least one proponent outrightly rejects the covenant of works. Ralph Smith has extensively written against the covenant of works as a biblical doctrine, *Eternal Covenant*. James Jordan, after problematizing the traditional doctrine [terming a conventional expression of it "Pelagian," "Merit Versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do For Us?," in *The Federal Vision*, 153], proposes an alternative way of construing the "Adamic covenant," viz. "what Adam was supposed to provide, and what Jesus provided for us, is maturity," *Ibid.*, 155. Others have followed Jordan in reconceiving the covenant of works along such lines. See Ralph Smith, *Eternal Covenant*, 80-81; Rich Lusk, "A Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, 124; John Barach, "Covenant and History." Such other writers as Joel Garver and Douglas Wilson have expressed patent discomfort with the terminology of "works" in connection with the first covenant, see Garver, "The Covenant of Works In the Reformed Tradition;" Wilson, "A Collection of Short Credo: On Justification" *Credenda Agenda* 15/5, p.22.

<sup>12</sup> While Peter Leithart has made recent statements that appear favorable towards Adamic imputation (see "Imputation of Sin, Rom 5:13," 23 May 2004), he has also recently set forth arguments that undermine the traditional Reformed view of Adamic imputation. (1) Leithart denies that Rom 5:12-14 teaches the traditional doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity ("Imputation of Sin," 04 July 2004); (2) Leithart claims that Paul's use of "imputation" in these verses "doesn't appear to mean precisely what it means in traditional Reformed theology" (*ibid.*); (3) These verses teach that "Adam's sin is 'imputed' in the sense that it renders him liable to the curse of death; and because of Adam's position as the head of the human race, others suffer the consequences of his sin as well" (*ibid.*); Leithart asks "how is it just for people between Adam and Moses to suffer the curse of death *if they are not held guilty of Adam's sin?*" (*ibid.*, emphasis not original); (4) Leithart claims that the traditional doctrine of imputation is a "good and necessary consequence of Paul's argument rather than explicit teaching" (*ibid.*). But Leithart's preferred method of explaining not only Rom 5:12-14 but also the relationship of Adam to his posterity in general undercuts this claim: "But it may also be that this [i.e. Leithart's question (above)] can be explained simply in terms of Adam's position as the first man and as a covenant representative. For instance, Abel was not allowed to return to the garden, but this was not because he was directly held guilty of Adam's sin. Perhaps it was simply because his father had made a terrible error and God cast him out of the garden, and that God determined that no one would return until a perfect sacrifice had been offered, until 'dying you shall die' had been carried out on an innocent substitute. (Abel was still born in sin, since was born under the curse and born to parents who were alienated from God)," *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Rich Lusk, "A Response," 140. Ralph Smith claims that it is "not 'merit' that is imputed to us, but a righteous status before God," *Eternal Covenant*, 83. While Mark Horne believes that he is not denying the traditional doctrine of imputation, it is clear that his positive definitions of the righteousness imputed to the believer are moving in a different track – the track of reception of status (See Mark Horne, "God's Righteousness and Our Justification;" "Some Thoughts on Wright, Righteousness, and Covenant Status;" and "Righteousness from God").

<sup>14</sup> "Justification," too, is intimately connected with the covenant. In Greek, the word 'justify' is related to the word normally translated into English as 'righteous,' and throughout Scripture, 'righteousness' and related words refer to correct behavior within some kind of covenant relationship. Righteousness is conformity to the demands of a covenant...The gospel of Christ is a revelation of God's righteousness because, in Christ, God has fulfilled all the promises made and sworn to Abraham, and thereby has shown that He does what He is obligated to do by His covenant with Israel. In this context [i.e. Galatians 2], to

---

'justify' someone is to count him as righteous, that is, as a covenant-keeper," Peter Leithart, *Blessed Are The Hungry: Meditations On The Lord's Supper* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003), 143-144.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Leithart has argued that "justification and *definitive* sanctification are not merely simultaneous, nor merely twin effects of the single event of union with Christ (though I believe that is the case). Rather they are the same act. God's declaration that we are justified *takes the form of* deliverance from sin, death, and Satan. God declares us righteous by delivering us from all our enemies," "Judge Me, O God: Biblical Perspectives on Justification." To define justification in this way is, despite Leithart's protests to the contrary, to define justification in decidedly non-forensic, transformational categories.

Steve Schlissel has argued concerning Rom 3:28 that the "deeds of the law" are "something uniquely *Jewish*" and "not ... something uniquely *convicting*," for "Paul *never* sets faith against obedience." The contrast in view in these verses, Schlissel reiterates, is not "faith versus obedience," "Justification," 258, 260. Further, "the presuppositions undergirding Paul's statement [at Rom 2:13] include the facts that the law is 'obeyable,' that truly responding to the Law (the Word) in faith does justify, and that such justification *is not an exclusively Jewish possession*," "Justification," 260.

Rich Lusk says of James 2 that this passage "cannot be referring to a *demonstration* of justification ... Rather, James has in view the same kind of justification as Paul – forensic, soteric justification. Good works justify *persons* in James 2, not *faith* or one's *status* as a justified sinner ... [James] says their persons will *not* be justified by faith alone, but *also* by good works of obedience they have done. The use of the preposition "by" is important since it indicates a sort of dual instrumentality in justification. In other words, in some sense, James is speaking of a justification in which faith and works *combine together* to justify. Future justification is according to one's life pattern. No one dares claim these works to be meritorious, but they are necessary ...," "Future Justification To The Doers of the Law."

<sup>16</sup> See Rich Lusk in the preceding note arguing for "a sort of dual instrumentality in justification," *viz.* of faith and "good works of obedience." Rich Lusk has also argued that we may speak of "baptism's instrumentality in justification;" and that "baptism is the instrument through which Christ is applied to us unto justification," that is, "faith is the instrument of justification on our end, while baptism is the instrument on God's side. God offers Christ and applies Christ to us through the instrument of baptism," "Faith, Baptism, and Justification."

<sup>17</sup> See John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in *The Federal Vision*, 15-47; Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs (Version 6.4);" Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation."

<sup>18</sup> Many FV proponents argue that biblical statements concerning Old Testament corporate or national election are determinative of our understanding of individual election. See here John Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002); Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs;" Mark Horne, "Election: Corporate & Individual." Lusk, following Norman Shepherd (cf. Shepherd, "Reprobation in Covenant Perspective"), observes that "corporate election may not issue forth in final salvation, as the nation of Israel shows (cf. Dt. 7; Rom 9-11)." Consequently, "apostasy is a real possibility for all covenant members, and is to be warned against," "Covenant and Election FAQs." The Summary Statement of AAPC claims "all covenant members are invited to attain to a full and robust confidence that they are God's eternally elect ones. Starting with their baptisms, they have every reason to believe God loves them and desires their eternal salvation. Baptism marks them out as God's elect people, a status they maintain so long as they persevere in faithfulness."

<sup>19</sup> See here Douglas Wilson, "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited," AAPCPC 2002 Lecture; "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough*, 69-78; "The Visible/Invisible Church Distinction," AAPCPC 2003 Lecture; "The Church: Visible or Invisible," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, 263-269. Wilson believes that his categories (historical and eschatological) preserve the best of the visible / invisible distinction with out the latter's liabilities. But Wilson's distinction functionally neglects that which the doctrine of the invisible church is concerned to guard – the existence of a body of sincere believers who are discernible to God and to themselves by certain infallible marks (marks that hypocrites do not and cannot possess), cf. WLC 61-68. Wilson says rather that "the Bible teaches clearly that in the historical Church there are fruitless branches (but real branches nonetheless) which will not be there in the eschatological Church," "The Church: Visible or Invisible," 268. The practical distinction, then, between the sincere believer and the hypocrite is not ontological but historical in nature.

Other proponents' discussions of the way in which covenant members are to be addressed by ministers effectively nullify the distinction between the invisible church and visible church. While the existence of a body of decretally elect within the covenant community is granted, FV understandings of "covenantal election" apply universally language reserved for the invisible church to each member of the visible church, and that while rejecting such traditionally theological explanations as the judgment of charity. See John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, 149-156; Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation."

<sup>20</sup> See AAPC Summary Statement §10 and Endnote 1. See also Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs," and "New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4-8 as Test Case" in *The Federal Vision*, 271-299. Douglas Wilson acknowledges the legitimacy of theoretically distinguishing the apostate from the believer who perseveres in terms of the former's regeneracy and the latter's regeneration. But Wilson effectively nullifies this distinction when he speaks of the apostate as having been in a more than outward – a vital – relationship with Christ. "The cut-away branch has no fruit (which is why it was cut away) – but it has had sap (which is why it had to be cut away)," "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough*, 132 (cf. "The Objectivity of the Covenant" *Credenda Agenda* 15/1, p.5; "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited," 2003 AAPCPC Lecture). He further states that

---

"someone can be on the tree right next to you and he is as much on the tree as you are, he's as much a partaker of Christ as you are, he is as much a member of Christ as you are and he is cut away and you are not and you stand by faith, so don't be haughty but fear," "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited."

<sup>21</sup>"The Bible does not teach that some people receive incorruptible new hearts, i.e., that some people are as individuals 'regenerated.'" "My thesis is that there is no such thing as 'regeneration' in the sense in which Reformed theology since Dort has spoken of it. The Bible says nothing about a permanent change in the hearts of those elected to heaven." "My position: everyone who is baptized has been given the same thing. No one has been given a permanently changed 'regenerated heart,'" James Jordan, Thoughts on Sovereign Grace and Regeneration: Some Tentative Explorations, *Occasional Paper No. 32* (Niceville, Fla.: Biblical Horizons, 2003), 1, 7, 7, as quoted by Carl D. Robbins, "The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, 164.

<sup>22</sup>Frequently polemicized is a doctrine of assurance wherein the inwardly wrought saving graces of the Holy Spirit constitute a ground of the believer's assurance of grace and salvation. See Steve Schlissel, "Covenant Hearing" 2002 AAPCPC Lecture; Mark Horne, citing John Barach, at Mark Horne, "Whose Legalism? Which Works-Righteousness? The 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference and the Assurance of Grace;" Steve Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant" (II) 2001 AAPCPC Lecture.

FV proponents generally direct believers towards their water baptisms for assurance. Steve Wilkins, for instance, has argued that "all the things that you and I are rightly concerned about, externalism, presumption, things we see all around us, the covenant prevents that when it's preached in its fullness. We belong to Christ. Baptism is the infallible sign and seal of this, and now we must learn to live faithfully and never depart from him ... [I]n regard to our assurance, we are pointed away from ourselves, and what we think we perceive to be true of us inwardly, which no one can know. And pointed to Christ, the only ground of your assurance..." "Covenant and Baptism."

Steve Schlissel claims that we must "accept God's testimony in baptism." Citing Eph 4:1, Schlissel argues that "such a calling is objective and rests upon every baptized person. When we bring our children to the font for baptism to receive the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is because the children are under a calling from God that is as real as death, as real as a heart, as real as blood, and we teach them to grow up and live in terms of that calling and to seek to honor God in it." The alternative to this, Schlissel states, is what he terms the "assurance problem," viz. "we begin our enterprise in Christ with doubt. We never get a footing from which to grow and develop in the consciousness of who we are in Christ. How many times does God have to tell us how much we mean to Him and how much He loves us? We spurn His love and despise his overtures. We don't believe. We teach our children to doubt. We teach our congregations to doubt," "Covenant Hearing."

Barach claims "you don't need a special, dramatic, revivalistic conversion to let you know that you are elect. You had the special experience that God gives you. It was called baptism," John Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002), as quoted by E. Calvin Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, 311. See particularly John Barach, "Baptism and Election" (21 August 2002).

Douglas Wilson recognizes that there are subjective grounds for assurance, but calls for the need for what he terms "objective assurance," which, he argues, is "found in real faith responding to an objective gospel," not by "peer[ing] into the secret counsels of God, or into the murky recesses of one's own heart." The question that Wilson poses is "the gospel is preached, the water was applied, the Table is now set. Do you believe? The question is a simple one," "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough*, 130. Elsewhere, Wilson has framed the relationship between these objective and subjective grounds for assurance antithetically. Speaking of what he terms "morbid introspectionism," he turns his attention to more generally to inward marks of assurance: ""When you, if you want to search inward, if you want to look inward on any given day, you can always find more than enough to hang you. There is no assurance looking inward, assurance always comes from looking out, look out to God, look out to his promises, look to Christ on the cross, look at what God has said, you look away, you don't look in," "The Curses of the New Covenant" 2002 AAPCPC Lecture.

<sup>23</sup>See our précis treating the Summary Statement of the AAPC for the way in which the recipient of baptism is said to come into possession of "all the blessings and benefits of [Christ's] work." The Summary Statement also claims that baptism does not guarantee "final salvation," and that apostasy is a genuine possibility for such a person. Wilkins has stated that "all in covenant are given all that is true of Christ," citing "the forgiveness of sins, adoption, possession of the kingdom, [and] sanctification" as that which the apostate forfeits, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 60, 62. It is furthermore, Wilkins, continues "not accurate to say that they only 'appeared' to have these things but did not actually have them ... *The apostate doesn't forfeit 'apparent blessings' that were never his in reality, but real blessings that were his in covenant with God,*" "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 62. Wilson, as we have observed above, speaks of the apostate as having partaken (in company with non-apostates) of the "sap" of Christ. This language can only mean that what is lost in apostasy is far more than outward privilege and opportunity.

<sup>24</sup>While Peter Leithart has problematized the doctrine of the sacramental union ("Starting Before The Beginning" *Credenda Agenda* 14/6), he nevertheless affirms "it is evident that the NT teaches that baptism is a saving ordinance, that it brings the baptized into union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Nearly every passage on baptism in the NT treats it as an ordinance that gives grace..." ("Infant Baptism" 06 August 2004). He is equally insistent that, in most instances, "baptism" in



---

the NT texts refers to the rite of water baptism," *ibid.* Leithart also says "if the Spirit has promised that He will be present and active at the water of baptism, then we can be certain that He, the Spirit of truth, will be there. And there is indeed a promise of the Spirit's presence with the water: Peter promised on Pentecost that those who were baptized would receive the Spirit (Acts 2:38); Paul says that we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13); by God's grace He saved us by the "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). As G. R. Beasley-Murray puts it, for the New Testament 'baptism is the supreme moment of the impartation of the Spirit and of the work of the Spirit in the believer,'" "Baptism and the Spirit" *Biblical Horizons* 85 (May 1996).

Recall the Summary Statement of the AAPC, referenced above. In addressing the question of the relationship between sign and thing signified, Rich Lusk argues that there is "a basic, fundamental unity" between the two, and claims that the signs are "signs *conjoined* with the gracious work of Christ and the Spirit," a state of affairs he terms "sacramental causality," which is, in fact, "instrumental efficacy." "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 97, 98. Consequently, "insofar as baptism is a sacramental act/event, every baptism includes the outward sign and the thing signified," "Do I Believe In Baptismal Regeneration?" Steve Wilkins claims that "at baptism you are clothed with Christ ... Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union," and "with our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings," "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC Lecture.

<sup>25</sup> Rich Lusk claims that "there is no such thing as a baptism that does not confer grace, just as there is no such thing as a salvific 'spiritual baptism' that takes place apart from the physical sign of water," "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 98 (Lusk, we may note, with some other FV proponents frequently equivocates the term "grace"). Wilson has stated "baptism is covenantally efficacious. It brings every person baptized into an objective and living covenant relationship with Christ, whether the baptized person is elect or reprobate," "Credos: On Baptism §6." Wilkins has argued that, with the proper qualifications, it is appropriate to use the phrase "baptismal regeneration:" "[R]eading the Bible this way and in this sense we can speak of baptismal regeneration in this sense, not in the sense that there is some mystical power in the water of baptism that automatically transforms men if the water has been sufficiently sanctified. But, nor is it saying that God is bound to the water of baptism, that God, somehow, his blessing is always bound to that and can't come apart from that. What we, what I mean by this is we can speak of it in the sense that by the blessing of the spirit, baptism unites us to Christ and his church and thus in him gives us new life. [He cites Rom 6:11, 2 Cor 5:17] By our baptism we have been reborn, in this sense, having died with Christ, we have been raised with him," "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant." Joel Garver states "we do not baptize because the one to be baptized is *already* regenerate. Rather we baptize in order that the one who is baptized be made regenerate. By baptism the Spirit regenerates since baptism turns us away from the old Adam and inserts us into the covenant, identifying us with Christ – the One born from above, raised from death, renewed in the Spirit, in whom is new creation – and identifying us with his covenant people – the new-creation people, born from above on Pentecost," "A Brief Catechesis on Covenant and Baptism."

<sup>26</sup> Summary Statement of the AAPC §7. Wilkins claims "when you've been baptized and put on Christ, at baptism *all the promises and blessings of the covenant* are delivered over to you, and God calls you then to *embrace them by faith and persevere* in the grace of God that has been given to you," "Covenant and Baptism" 2003 AAPCPC Lecture.

<sup>27</sup> FV proponents tend to place a much higher premium on the sacrament of baptism and its office in the application of redemption than have traditional Presbyterians. Wilson claims that "in the ordinary course of life, [baptism and salvation] *are* linked, and we are to speak of them as though they are," "*Reformed*" *Is Not Enough*, 87. For Lusk, "preaching makes us desire what God offers in the sacraments," "Some Thoughts On the Means of Grace: A Few Proposals." Speaking of the hearers of Peter's sermon in Acts 2: "clearly, Peter believes God will give them something in baptism that they have not received through preaching alone. Baptism will consummate the process of regeneration begun by the Word preached," *ibid.* Speaking of the conversion of Saul in Acts 9: "confrontation with the Word of Christ *began* his conversion process, but it was not *complete* until he received the sacrament of initiation," *ibid.* Further, "preaching communicates truth, the sacraments communicate life," *ibid.* Wilkins, we have seen, points to baptism as (marking) the transition from death to life. Mark Horne has called for a "model for conversion" that is rooted in baptism and discipleship rather than in evangelistically minded preaching, "Baptism, Evangelism, & The Quest For A Converting Ordinance."

## A Critical Overview of the AAPC Summary Statement

- 1 • This document employs Norman Shepherd's doctrine of covenantal election: election is to be  
2 understood through the lens of the covenant, not through the lens of the decree (§3).<sup>1</sup>
- 3 • As a result of this "covenantal" perspective on election, the document operates with only one  
4 kind of covenantal membership (§3).<sup>2</sup> It practically denies both the distinction between a non-  
5 communicant and communicant membership and the distinction between the visible and  
6 invisible church. One who has been "baptized" is termed a "Christian" "because he is a member  
7 of the household of faith and the body of Christ" (§10, cf. §5).
- 8 • "By baptism one is joined to Christ's body, united to Him covenantally, and given all the  
9 blessings and benefits of His work." (§7). We may note that the union in view is qualified  
10 ("covenantally"). It is difficult, however, to qualify the statement "given all the blessings and  
11 benefits of His work" in a covenantal or non-decretal sense. The statement affirms, then, a form  
12 of baptismal regeneration.
- 13 • How may we speak of baptized Christians (so defined)? The document, speaking of Saul, argues  
14 that "the Biblical narrative ... appears to draw no distinction between Saul's initial experience of  
15 the Spirit and the experience of those who obtained final salvation" (§10). "The Bible does not  
16 explain the distinction between the nature of the work of the Spirit in the reprobate and the  
17 nature of His work in the elect, and even uses the same language for both." (ibid). Rather, Saul  
18 and David "received the same initial covenantal grace" but not "the gift of perseverance" (ibid.).<sup>3</sup>  
19 The document practically (perhaps theoretically) denies the distinction between saving and  
20 common operations of the Spirit, affirming that to distinguish the two is "a task beyond our  
21 competence" (Endnote 1). We speak rather of the undifferentiated grace of God.
- 22 • What do apostates possess and what do they lose? The document affirms that apostates "for a  
23 season, enjoy real blessings, purchased for them by Christ's cross and applied to them by the  
24 Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament" (§8). "In some sense, they were really joined to the  
25 elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy  
26 Spirit" (Summary). Presumably these blessings are conferred in baptism. We may speak of these  
27 persons as having been "saved" in that "they have been delivered out of the world and brought  
28 into the glorious new creation of Christ," and yet "not all will persevere in that 'salvation.'" (ibid.).  
29 These affirmations are vague and apt to confuse. It is not at all clear what the apostate has  
30 possessed and what he has lost.
- 31 • What distinguishes non-apostates from apostates? Persons apostatize because, though united to  
32 Christ, "they did not persevere in fruit-bearing (John 15)" (§11). Those who are non-apostates  
33 "keep the terms of the covenant: repent of their sins, believ[e] in Christ, obey His Word, and  
34 persever[e] in this faithfulness to the end of their days" (§5). "Only those who continue to  
35 persevere in loyalty to the covenant and the Lord of the covenant inherit final salvation. Those  
36 who fall away lose the temporary covenantal blessings they had enjoyed" (Summary). The  
37 practical distinction between non-apostate and apostate, then, is temporal – the former perseveres  
38 and the latter does not. The believer therefore has no means of attaining an "infallible" assurance  
39 in the manner set forth in WCF 18.2.
- 40 • How can a baptized person fall away? The statement denies that baptism "grant[s] to the baptised  
41 final salvation" (§7). Baptism also does not guarantee what is termed the gift of perseverance  
42 (§5, 10, Summary). Apparently perseverance and final salvation are not understood to be among  
43 "all the blessings and benefits" of Christ's work (cf. §7).<sup>4</sup> This, however, runs counter to biblical  
44 teaching (cf. John 10:27-28, WCF 17.1).

---

<sup>1</sup> "Salvation, therefore, may be viewed from two basic perspectives, the decretal/eternal and the covenantal/historical. The Bible ordinarily (though not always) views election through the lens of the covenant" (§3). The document itself, of course, does not theoretically deny decretal election. The document, however, distinguishes what is termed covenantal election from conventional (decretal) election. For a recent statement of Shepherd's reflections on covenant and election, see Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2000), 73-91.

<sup>2</sup> "Following the Biblical teaching, it seems that we must view fellow church members as elect and regenerate and, at the same time, hold before them the dangers of falling away. This does not contradict the decretal/eternal perspective, because our knowledge of God's decree is only creaturely. We can never, in this life, know with absolute certainty who are elect unto final salvation. For this reason, we have to make judgments and declarations in terms of what has been revealed, namely, the covenant (Dt. 29:29)" (§3).

<sup>3</sup> For the term "gift of perseverance:" "This perseverance is a gift of God and not a result of the "willing" or the "running" of the people of God." (§5); "Saul received the same initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance" (§10); "In some sense, they were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit. God, however, withholds from them the gift of perseverance, and all is lost. They break the gracious new covenant they entered into at baptism" (Summary).

<sup>4</sup> "By baptism one is joined to Christ's body, united to Him covenantally, and given all the blessings and benefits of His work (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff; WSC #94)" (§7).

**Exhibit A:**  
**Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA) Reply to the Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA)**  
**"New Perspectives" Study Committee Report:**

1 The Mississippi Valley Presbytery (MVP) of the PCA formed a Study Committee in 2003 to examine  
2 perceived threats to Reformed orthodoxy that are gaining momentum in evangelical circles. Specifically,  
3 the committee was charged to study "the teachings of Norman Shepherd, N.T. Wright, and the related  
4 systems known variously as the New Perspective on Paul, which redefines Paul's teaching on  
5 justification, and the Federal Vision, which redefines the traditional Reformed interpretation of the  
6 covenant concept."

7 On November 2, 2004, the study committee presented its report to MVP and that document has now  
8 been made public on the website of First Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Jackson, Mississippi. See  
9 <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/apologetics/MVP%20Report%202004.htm>. The document has not  
10 yet been adopted in any official way, but is slated for action at the February 2005 meeting of MVP.

11 The purpose of this brief response is not to offer some kind of "counter-report" to the work of the MVP  
12 Study Committee. Rather, the point is to demonstrate that the Committee has not accurately described  
13 the position of the Session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church at numerous points. It appears to us  
14 that the Committee, rather than addressing what we actually believe, has merely addressed what it thinks  
15 we believe. Therefore, it would be a mistake for Presbytery to adopt the report as it presently stands.

16 This response is not intended to be comprehensive. We will focus on the portion of the document  
17 addressing the so-called "Federal Vision" and our own views. We will leave those portions of the report  
18 not pertaining to us to others for appropriate responses where necessary. Some preliminary  
19 remarks appear appropriate:

20 1. The Study Committee frequently assumes a monolithic and univocal "Reformed Tradition," as though  
21 Reformed theology were all of one texture and hue. But, at least in some cases, this overlooks the  
22 various shades of diversity within historic Reformed theology (including the Westminsterian tradition).  
23 Reformed orthodoxy has historically embraced a surprisingly wide field of views on various issues. It is  
24 a more like a box than a pinpoint, and we impoverish ourselves if we do not engage the breadth of our  
25 own tradition.

26 2. The "report" assumes that there is a well-defined movement labeled the "Federal Vision." This is  
27 highly debatable. The men who have been linked in various ways to the "Federal Vision" (which was  
28 originally just the title for Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church's annual Pastors Conference in 2002)  
29 have a number of important differences amongst themselves. There is no organized movement, formal  
30 or informal. Though there are some commonly held perspectives, there are quite a few differences when  
31 it comes to specifics and therefore there is no consistent system of theology which can be labeled  
32 "Federal Vision" theology. The differences that exist between the positions held by the individuals  
33 involved must be identified if any meaningful critique is to be offered.

34 3. There seems to be no appreciation of the nuances or qualifications or specified terminology that has  
35 been utilized by the "Federal Vision" men. Neither does there seem to be any serious engagement with  
36 the wide array of exegetical, theological, and historical arguments set forth by the men associated with  
37 the "Federal Vision." Acknowledgment of these matters is essential, however, if there is to be anything  
38 approaching an accurate critique.

39 Consequently, we find in the "report" that the Committee has zealously critiqued positions that we do  
40 not hold. Indeed, we question whether any of the men addressed would recognize their teachings as  
41 accurately described. The "report" evidences serious misreadings and misinterpretations of our

42 statements (and those of others) and, as a result, is a misrepresentation of our views. A few specifics will  
43 reveal some of the theological problems of the Committee's report:

44 1. The report states, "FV proponents define the covenant as an objective relationship that is independent  
45 of the covenant member's subjective considerations of the strength or nature of his membership" We  
46 have never made man's subjective response to the covenant unimportant. Again and again, we and FV  
47 writers have stressed that covenant membership is no automatic guarantee of salvation. We have sought  
48 to be sensitive to the dangers of formalism and subjectivism as well as antinomianism and legalism.

49 2. The report states that we have "downplayed . . . the legal and forensic dimensions of the covenant." In  
50 fact, we have maintained the legal and forensic nature of justification at every point and have never  
51 denied it.

52 3. The report states without identification that "One proponent has denied the imputation of Adam's sin  
53 to his posterity." We have no idea who has done this, but we are confident neither we nor anyone we  
54 know of commonly associated with the "Federal Vision" has ever done this. We do not deny the  
55 imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity.

56 4. The report states that "FV proponents deny the imputation of Christ's active (and perhaps passive)  
57 obedience to the believer for justification. The 'righteousness' of the believer in justification is  
58 sometimes said to be the believer's covenantal faithfulness. Justification is defined in terms of a process  
59 not a definite act; and good works are said to be necessary to justification, particularly to the believer's  
60 'final justification' at the Day of Judgment. One proponent has argued for not fewer than three  
61 instruments of justification: faith, covenantal faithfulness, and baptism." This statement displays a  
62 serious misunderstanding of what has been said by "FV proponents." These men do vary on how they  
63 formulate imputation, but no one denies it altogether. At most imputation is seen by some as coming in  
64 conjunction with union with Christ. Some FV writers have stressed the role of Christ's resurrection in  
65 our justification (Rom. 4:25), but even then, place is given to Christ's active obedience and imputed  
66 righteousness. We do not consider justification as a process, but as an act of God.

67 5. The report states that "The result is formulations of election that render one's election a process and a  
68 function of one's covenantal obedience . . . . One proponent has even denied the doctrine of individual  
69 regeneration." This is, at best, a terrible misinterpretation. We are unable to conceive of how election  
70 could possibly be a process. No one that we know has rejected his full, complete, and hearty belief in  
71 God's sovereignty and soteriological monergism.

72 6. The report states that "FV proponents point to objective grounds for one's assurance while practically  
73 denying subjective grounds for one's assurance. For assurance, the believer is directed away from  
74 discerning the inward and spiritual graces unique to the regenerate person, and is directed towards his  
75 water baptism." Actually, we have argued that assurance has both objective and subjective components  
76 and that such assurance can be "infallible." FV writers appear entirely at home in the teaching of the  
77 Westminster Confession on assurance. We are as well.

78 7. The report states that "FV explanations of apostasy suggest that a believer may genuinely possess  
79 Christ's redemptive benefits and yet lose them." This completely ignores all the nuances and  
80 qualifications we have sought to make in our teaching on apostasy. Whatever future apostates receive in  
81 the covenant is fully commensurate with their membership in the visible church, which is the kingdom  
82 of Christ, and the house and family of God (WCF 25.2) – nothing more, nothing less. FV advocates have  
83 strongly affirmed the distinctions made in WCF 10.3, and so do we.

84 8. The report states that "FV proponents understand the doctrine of the sacramental union to mean that  
85 the sign and the thing signified invariably accompany one another. Baptismal efficacy is affirmed,  
86 therefore, of every recipient of the sacrament. All the blessings and benefits of Christ's work are

87 sometimes said to be conferred upon the recipient in baptism. Baptism is assigned a place in the doctrine  
88 of the Christian life that denigrates the place of preaching as the instrument of conversion." This badly  
89 twists what we and the FV proponents have said about the objectivity and conditionality of sacramental  
90 efficacy. A sacrament by definition includes the sign and thing signified. But just because the thing  
91 signified is offered in the sign does not necessarily mean it is received. We have repeatedly and in  
92 various ways stressed that faith is absolutely necessary if the sacraments are to be effectual to eternal  
93 salvation and frankly, are at a loss as to why this is not noted. The way the document assumes that  
94 preaching and baptism are competing "instruments" of conversion is overtly rejected by the us, the FV  
95 proponents and by the parallelism found in WSC questions 89 and 91. Both preaching and the  
96 sacraments are made "efficacious means of salvation" by the Spirit.

97 9. The report states that "[The FV] operates with only one kind of covenantal membership. It practically  
98 denies both the distinction between a non-communicant and communicant membership and the  
99 distinction between the visible and invisible church." This is simply to say, most (though not all) FV  
100 advocates are paedocommunionists. But the study report doesn't actually address paedocommunion. The  
101 question we would ask is, "Where are we told to distinguish communing from non-communing members  
102 of the body?" If anything, both the Old and the New Testaments forbid dividing the church that way (see  
103 1 Corinthians 11). Moreover, at least some versions of the visible/invisible church distinction have been  
104 roundly criticized and reformulated by the likes of John Murray and Klaas Schilder. The FV is hardly  
105 novel at this point. It is still well within the parameters of historic Reformed ecclesiology.

106 10. The report states that "[The FV] affirms, then, a form of baptismal regeneration." This is correct, but  
107 the question remains, what exactly do we mean by this? Many of our Reformers also used "baptismal  
108 regeneration" language (Calvin, Bucer, Burgess, etc.). The bare use of such a phrase is not sufficient to  
109 prove heterodoxy. The various forms of "baptismal regeneration" must be distinguished. We have  
110 striven to qualify what we mean by the phrase (i.e., the work of the Spirit at baptism, transferring the  
111 baptized from union with Adam into union with Christ). Our position actually has a long Reformed  
112 pedigree.

113 We find ourselves left with no alternative but to plead with the members of the Study Committee and  
114 Mississippi Valley Presbytery to reconsider the statements and accusations in this report. Taken as a  
115 whole, the report as it presently stands is altogether inadequate as a fair and faithful representation and  
116 evaluation of our position. It is filled with misstatements, misinterpretations and misreadings. We have  
117 many times expressed our willingness for brothers to study and interact with our teachings and continue  
118 to be open to such critique and discussion. This requires, however, that our brothers be willing to deal  
119 with our actual teachings and not those they merely suspect us to hold.

120 It is our hope that before Mississippi Valley Presbytery acts on the study report, it will request that the  
121 Committee engage in further study and dialogue. The peace and purity of the church demand as much.

122 Adopted December 5, 2004, by the Session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church

---

M. Dale Peacock, Stated Clerk

**Exhibit B:**  
**Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation**

1 1. Salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not of works. It is founded upon the  
2 obedience, death, and resurrection of the faithful Second Adam, Jesus Christ. Justification is by faith  
3 alone. This faith is always accompanied by all other saving graces and virtues (WCF 11.2). Justifying  
4 faith, therefore, is never vain but one that works by love (Gal. 5:6).

5  
6 2. From before the foundation of the world, God has sovereignly chosen a multitude no man can number  
7 for salvation. The basis of His election was solely His grace and mercy and nothing in the creature. The  
8 number of the elect can neither increase nor diminish. All who were chosen by God from the beginning  
9 will be surely saved eternally. Not one will be lost.

10  
11 3. The covenant is the means by which God administers His salvation in space and time, the historical  
12 outworking of His eternal plan. Salvation, therefore, may be viewed from two basic perspectives, the  
13 decretal/eternal and the covenantal/historical. The Bible *ordinarily* (though not always) views election  
14 through the lens of the covenant. This is why covenant members are addressed consistently as God's  
15 elect, even though some of those covenant members may apostatize, proving themselves to be non-elect  
16 in the decretal/eternal sense. We cannot separate covenant and election, but, to do full justice to the  
17 Biblical teaching, we must distinguish them. Following the Biblical model, it seems that we must view  
18 fellow church members as elect and regenerate and, at the same time, hold before them the dangers of  
19 falling away. This does not contradict the decretal/eternal perspective, because our knowledge of God's  
20 decree is only creaturely. We can never, in this life, know with absolute certainty who are elect unto  
21 final salvation. For this reason, we have to make judgments and declarations in terms of what has been  
22 revealed, namely, the covenant (Dt. 29:29). The covenant is the visible, historical context in which the  
23 eternal decree of election comes to eventual fruition.

24  
25 4. This covenant is made with believers and their children. It is publicly manifested in the Church, the  
26 body of Christ which we formally enter by means of baptism. The Church is not merely a human  
27 community, and the Church's enactments of the means of grace are not merely human works. They are  
28 God's works *through* His ordained ministers. The Church herself *is* God's new creation, the city He  
29 promised to build for Abraham. The Church is not merely a means to salvation, a stepping-stone to a  
30 more ultimate goal. Rather, the Church herself *is* God's salvation (WCF 25.1,2), the partially-realized  
31 goal in history that will be brought to final fulfillment at the last day. When someone is united to the  
32 Church by baptism, he is incorporated into Christ and into His body; he becomes bone of Christ's bone  
33 and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30). Until and unless that person breaks covenant, he **is** reckoned among  
34 God's elect and regenerate saints.

35  
36 5. Those who are members of the Church by virtue of their baptism (WCF 28.1) are bound to live  
37 faithfully, keeping the terms of the covenant: repenting of their sins, believing in Christ, obeying His  
38 Word, and persevering in this faithfulness to the end of their days. This perseverance is a gift of God and  
39 not a result of the "willing" or the "running" of the people of God.

40  
41 6. God uses means by which His Spirit works salvation in the hearts of His elect: the preaching of the  
42 Word, the faithful administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the  
43 communion of the saints (WSC #85,88,91). These means have been entrusted to the Church (WCF  
44 25.3). By these, through the blessing of the Spirit, the Church becomes the "mother of all believers"  
45 (Gal. 4:26). Apart from the Church and its ministry of these means of grace, there is *ordinarily* no  
46 salvation (WCF 25.2).

47  
48 7. By baptism one is joined to Christ's body, united to Him covenantally, and given all the blessings and  
49 benefits of His work (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff; WSC #94). This does not, however, grant to the baptised  
50 final salvation; rather, it obligates him to fulfill the terms of the covenant (embracing these blessings by  
51 faith, repenting of sins, and persevering in faithful obedience to God). One can only fulfill the terms of  
52 the covenant by faith, not by works. And even this faith is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast.  
53  
54 8. God has decreed from the foundation of the world all that comes to pass, including who would be  
55 saved and lost for all eternity. Included in His decree, however, is that some persons, not destined for  
56 final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real  
57 blessings, purchased for them by Christ's cross and applied to them by the Holy Spirit through Word  
58 and Sacrament.  
59  
60 9. Salvation depends upon being united to Christ. Clearly, those who are eternally saved are those who  
61 continue to abide in Him by the grace of God. There are those, however, who are joined to Him as  
62 branches in the vine, but who because of unbelief are barren and fruitless and consequently are cut off  
63 from the vine and from salvation. Jesus says these "believe for a while" but do not bear fruit unto  
64 salvation. Why God would do this is a mystery, but the teaching of Scripture is clear: some whom He  
65 adopts into covenant relation, He later hardens (Rom. 9:4, 18, 11:1ff). In such instances God has not  
66 changed His decree regarding such people; to the contrary, He carries out His sovereign purposes in and  
67 through their unbelief and rebellion. Those elect unto eternal salvation are always distinguished by their  
68 perseverance in faith and obedience by the grace of God.  
69  
70 10. Once baptized, an individual may be truly called a "Christian" because he is a member of the  
71 household of faith and the body of Christ (I Cor. 12). However, not all who are "Christians" in this sense  
72 will persevere to the end. Some will fall from grace and be lost. The Bible does not explain the  
73 distinction between the nature of the work of the Spirit in the reprobate and the nature of His work in the  
74 elect, and even uses the same language for both. For example, the same language that describes the  
75 Spirit coming upon Saul (1 Sam. 10:6) is used when the Spirit comes upon David (1 Sam. 16:13),  
76 Gideon (Jdg. 6:34), Jephthah (Jdg. 11:29), and Samson (Jdg. 14:6, 9; 15:14). Yet in four of these five  
77 cases (David, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson), the man in question was clearly given persevering faith  
78 and brought to final salvation by the Spirit's work (cf. Heb. 11:32). The Biblical narrative, however,  
79 appears to draw no distinction between Saul's initial experience of the Spirit and the experience of those  
80 who obtained final salvation. While God, no doubt, predestined Saul's apostasy (since He foreordains all  
81 that comes to pass), God was not the author of Saul's apostasy (cf. WCF 3.1). Saul received the same  
82 initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did  
83 not receive the gift of perseverance. At the same time, his failure to persevere was due to his own  
84 rebellion. Herein lies the great mystery of God's sovereignty and human responsibility (cf. WCF 3.1, 8).  
85 [1]  
86  
87 11. None of those elect unto final salvation can lose that salvation, however much he may backslide  
88 (John 10; WCF 17). God preserves all His elect in covenant faithfulness. The Biblical language  
89 regarding salvation, however, is more complicated. In one sense, all those in the covenant are "saved."  
90 They have been delivered out of the world and brought into the glorious new creation of Christ, but not  
91 all will persevere in that "salvation." [2] Jesus spoke of those in the new covenant who would be united  
92 to Him, but then cut off because they did not persevere in fruit-bearing (John 15). If Jesus Himself is  
93 salvation, are we not forced to conclude that being cut off from Him means being cut off from the source  
94 of salvation and from salvation itself?  
95



96 12. It appears that the Bible speaks of salvation, more often than not, in relational and covenantal  
97 categories, rather than in metaphysical ones. "Salvation" is not a thing we possess that can be lost and  
98 found, like car keys. It is a matter of being rightly related to God through Christ. But relationships are  
99 not static, unchanging entities. They are fluid and dynamic. Our salvation covenant with the Lord is like  
100 a marriage. If we persevere in loyalty to Christ, we will live with Him happily ever after. If we break the  
101 marriage covenant, He will divorce us. It may not be wise to call this "losing one's salvation," but it  
102 seems contrary to Scripture to say that *nothing at all* is lost. To draw such a conclusion appears to deny  
103 the reality of the covenant and the blessedness that is said to belong even to those who ultimately prove  
104 themselves reprobate (Heb. 10:26ff).

105  
106 13. With this understanding, the "five points of Calvinism" are still preserved, but they have been  
107 enriched by a nuanced covenant theology following the tradition and teaching of Augustine and Calvin.  
108 By framing the issues as we have, we are able to preserve God's sovereignty in salvation and hold  
109 covenant breakers accountable for their apostasy. Additionally, this view seems to do full justice to the  
110 Scripture's teaching on the nature of the Church and efficacy of the sacraments, as well as the  
111 genuineness of the covenantal promises and threats. In our formulation of how we understand the  
112 application of God's sovereign and covenantal grace, we lose nothing and yet, gain much in our  
113 understanding of how the sovereign God applies His salvation in history.

114

115

116

## 117 **Endnotes**

118

119 1. It would appear that we must be willing to speak of the *undifferentiated grace of God* (or the generic,  
120 unspecified grace of God). In their reading of Heb. 6:4-5, some theologians try to draw subtle  
121 distinctions to make highly refined psychological differences between blessings that do not secure  
122 eternal salvation and *true regeneration*, which does. For at least two reasons, it is highly unlikely the  
123 writer had such distinctions in mind. First, it is by no means certain that those who have received the  
124 blessings listed in 6:4-5 will fall away. The writer merely holds it out as a possibility, a danger of which  
125 they must beware. In fact, he expects these people to persevere (6:9). If, however, the blessings  
126 catalogued imply something less than regeneration, and these people might persevere after all, we are  
127 put in the awkward position of saying that non-regenerate persons persevered to the end (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1)!  
128 Second, the illustration immediately following the warning in 6:7-8 indicates these people have received  
129 some kind of new life. Otherwise, the plant metaphor makes no sense. The question raised does not  
130 concern the nature of the grace received in the past (i.e., *real* regeneration vs. *merely common* operations  
131 of the Spirit), but whether or not the one who has received this grace will persevere. Thus, the solution  
132 to Heb. 6 is not developing two psychologies of conversion, one for the "truly regenerate" and one for  
133 the future apostate, and then introspecting to see which kind of grace one has received. This is a task  
134 beyond our competence. The solution is to turn from ourselves and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the  
135 Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1ff).

136

137 2. Jude (5) speaks of the Israelites as having been "saved" and then destroyed, because they did not  
138 persevere. The preface to the Ten Commandments addresses Israel as God's redeemed people. However,  
139 many of those who were "redeemed" did not continue trusting their Deliverer and perished. 2 Peter 2  
140 speaks of a similar class of people. Redeemed by Christ, they then deny Him and are destroyed. It is not  
141 sufficient to say, "Those are cases drawn from Old Testament types. Those were pictures of salvation,  
142 not the real thing. Salvation in the new covenant cannot be lost." The problem with such an objection is  
143 that it draws a contrast precisely where the New Testament writers draw a parallel. Paul, Peter, Jude, and  
144 the writer to the Hebrews all use these Old Testament stories to warn new covenant believers, lest they

145 too fall from grace. Paul specifically says the record of the Israelites who failed to persevere and were  
146 destroyed was "written for our admonition" in the new covenant era (I Cor. 10:11).

147  
148 **Summary:** God, in eternity past, elected in Christ a great multitude to salvation. This election was  
149 wholly gracious and unconditional, having its source only in the free mercy and good pleasure of God.  
150 Those the Father elected to eternal salvation, He sent his Son to die for. His atoning work is fully  
151 sufficient for their salvation and completely accomplished their redemption. The Holy Spirit works in  
152 these same chosen ones to apply Christ's saving work to them and to keep them faithful to Christ their  
153 whole lives. Because of the hardness of their hearts in sin, this work of grace must be, ultimately,  
154 irresistible. No elect person can be lost, and no non-elect person can attain eternal salvation.

155  
156 God's eternal decree to gather His elect into a people for His name is worked out in history. One's  
157 election becomes manifest in the administration of Word and Sacrament as one responds to the preached  
158 gospel and enters the Church in baptism. Christ is present in His Church by His Spirit, to see to it that all  
159 His elect ones are brought to faith in Him.

160  
161 However, God mysteriously has chosen to draw many into the covenant community who are not elect in  
162 the ultimate sense and who are not destined to receive final salvation. These non-elect covenant  
163 members are truly brought to Christ, united to Him in the Church by baptism and receive various  
164 gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. Corporately, they are part of the chosen, redeemed, Spirit-indwelt  
165 people. Sooner or later, however, in the wise counsel of God, these fail to bear fruit and fall away. In  
166 some sense, they were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, really  
167 recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit. God, however, withholds from them the gift of  
168 perseverance, and all is lost. They break the gracious new covenant they entered into at baptism.

169  
170 Thus, the covenant is a true revelation of God's salvation, for, in the covenant community, all God's  
171 people, even those who are only temporarily counted among their number find gracious blessings. The  
172 covenant really is gospel—good news—through and through. Yet only those who continue to persevere  
173 in loyalty to the covenant and the Lord of the covenant inherit final salvation. Those who fall away lose  
174 the temporary covenantal blessings they had enjoyed. Ultimately, this is because God decreed that these  
175 covenant breakers would not share in the eschatological salvation of Christ. Of course, these apostates  
176 cannot blame God for their falling away. It is their own fault, since God's overtures of love towards  
177 them in the context of the covenant were sincere. Conversely, those who do persevere to the end cannot  
178 claim any credit or make any boast. All they have done has been because of God's grace at work in them  
179 to keep them faithful.

180  
181 All covenant members are invited to attain to a full and robust confidence that they are God's eternally  
182 elect ones. Starting with their baptisms, they have every reason to believe God loves them and desires  
183 their eternal salvation. Baptism marks them out as God's elect people, a status they maintain so long as  
184 they persevere in faithfulness. By looking to Christ alone, the preeminently elect One, the One who kept  
185 covenant to the end and is the Author and Finisher of the faith of God's people, they may find assurance.  
186 Those who take their eyes off Christ, who desert the Church where His presence is found, will make  
187 shipwreck of their faith and prove to have received the grace of God in vain.

188  
189 Approved by the Session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church on September 26, 2002.

## Exhibit C:

### Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation (Revised)

1 *The following is a revised edition of our statement. We have been greatly blessed by the discussions, disagreements, and*  
2 *questions that have been raised about our initial statement. It was intended as a “summary” of our views and never intended*  
3 *to be anything other than a summary of our views (i.e., it was not intended to erect some new standard of orthodoxy or to*  
4 *imply that we were settled on these points and could not be challenged or dissuaded from them, and it was certainly not*  
5 *intended to erect another wall to divide the Church or as a means to denounce or exclude from fellowship our brothers who*  
6 *might disagree with us). These statements represent some degree of theological exploration in regard to the significance and*  
7 *meaning of covenant, baptism, and in the way we think of salvation. This revision is a response to the critique and instruction*  
8 *we have received and is an effort to make our position more clear and (we trust) more easily understood. We continue to*  
9 *study and learn and continue to be open to further correction and instruction.*

10  
11 **1.** Salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not of works. It is founded upon the  
12 obedience, death, and resurrection of the faithful Second Adam, Jesus Christ. Justification is an act of  
13 God’s free grace wherein sinners are accepted as righteous in God’s sight by virtue of the righteousness  
14 of Christ imputed to them and received by faith alone (WSC Q. 33). This justifying faith is always  
15 accompanied by all other saving graces and virtues (WCF 11.2). Justifying faith, therefore, is never vain  
16 but one that works by love (Gal. 5:6).

17  
18 **2.** From before the foundation of the world, God has sovereignly chosen a multitude no man can number  
19 for salvation. The basis of His election was solely His grace and mercy and nothing in the creature. The  
20 number of the elect can neither increase nor diminish. All who were chosen by God from the beginning  
21 will be surely saved eternally. Not one will be lost.

22  
23 **3.** God works out His eternal decree of salvation in history by means of His covenant. Salvation,  
24 therefore, may be viewed from two basic perspectives, the decretal/eternal and the covenantal/historical.  
25 The Bible ordinarily (though not always) views election through the lens of the covenant. This is why  
26 covenant members are addressed consistently as God’s elect, even though some of those covenant  
27 members may apostatize, proving themselves in the end not to have been among the number of those  
28 whom God decreed to eternal salvation from before the foundation of the world. Thus, the basis for  
29 calling them God’s “elect” was their standing as members of the Church (which is the body of Christ)  
30 and not some knowledge of God’s secret decree. The visible Church is the place where the saints are  
31 “gathered and perfected” by means of “the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God” (WCF 25.3).

32  
33 We cannot separate covenant and election, but, to do full justice to the Biblical teaching, we must  
34 distinguish them. Following the Biblical model, it seems that we must view fellow church members as  
35 elect and regenerate and, at the same time, hold before them the dangers of falling away. This does not  
36 contradict the decretal/eternal perspective, because our knowledge of God’s decree is only creaturely.  
37 We can never, in this life, know with absolute certainty who are elect unto final salvation. For this  
38 reason, we have to make judgments and declarations in terms of what has been revealed, namely, the  
39 covenant (Dt. 29:29). The covenant is the visible, historical context in which the eternal decree of  
40 election comes to eventual fruition.

41  
42 **4.** This covenant is made with believers and their children (Acts 2:39; WLC Q. 166). It is publicly  
43 manifested in the Church, the body of Christ to which we are solemnly admitted by means of baptism  
44 (WCF 28.1). The Church is not merely a human community, and the Church’s enactments of the means  
45 of grace are not merely human works. God works through the administration of the sacraments by the  
46 power of His Spirit and His word of promise (WCF 27.3). The Church herself is God’s new creation, the  
47 city He promised to build for Abraham. The Church is not merely a means to salvation, a stepping-stone  
48 to a more ultimate goal. Rather, the Church herself is the historic manifestation of God’s salvation

49 (WCF 25.1,2), the partially-realized goal in history that will be brought to final fulfillment at the last  
50 day. When someone is united to the Church by baptism, he is incorporated into Christ and into His body;  
51 he becomes bone of Christ's bone and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30). He becomes a member of "the  
52 house, family, and kingdom of God" (WCF 25.2). Until and unless that person breaks covenant, he is to  
53 be reckoned among God's elect and regenerate saints.

54  
55 **5.** Those who have been solemnly admitted to the Church by baptism (WCF 28.1) are bound to receive  
56 and rest upon Christ by faith, repenting of their sins, yielding obedience to his commands, making  
57 diligent use of the outward means of grace, and thereby persevering by faith to the end of their days.  
58 This perseverance is itself a gift of God and not a result of the "willing" or the "running" of the people  
59 of God.

60  
61 **6.** God uses means by which His Spirit works salvation in the hearts of His elect: the preaching of the  
62 Word, the faithful administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the  
63 communion of the saints (WSC #85,88,91). These means have been entrusted to the Church (WCF  
64 25.3). By these, through the blessing of the Spirit, the Church becomes the "mother of all believers"  
65 (Gal. 4:26). Apart from the Church and its ministry of these means of grace, there is ordinarily no  
66 salvation (WCF 25.2).

67  
68 **7.** By baptism, one enters into covenantal union with Christ and is offered all his benefits (Gal. 3:27;  
69 Rom. 6:1ff; 2 Cor. 1:20). As Westminster Shorter Catechism #94 states, baptism signifies and seals "our  
70 ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace." Baptism in itself does not,  
71 however, guarantee final salvation. What is offered in baptism may not be received because of unbelief.  
72 Or, it may only be embraced for a season and later rejected (Matt. 13:20-22; Luke 8:13-14). Those who  
73 "believe for a while" enjoy blessings and privileges of the covenant only for a time and only in part,  
74 since their temporary faith is not true to Christ, as evidenced by its eventual failure and lack of fruit (1  
75 Cor. 10:1ff; Hebrews 6:4-6). By their unbelief they "trample underfoot the Son of God, count the blood  
76 of the covenant by which they were sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of grace"  
77 (Heb. 10:29) and thus bring greater condemnation upon themselves.

78  
79 **8.** God has decreed from the foundation of the world all that comes to pass, including who would be  
80 saved and lost for all eternity. Included in His decree, however, is that some persons, not destined for  
81 final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real  
82 blessings, purchased for them by Christ's cross and applied to them by the Holy Spirit in his common  
83 operations through Word and Sacrament (Hebrews 6:4-6; Matthew 25:14ff; etc.).

84  
85 **9.** Salvation depends upon being united to Christ. Clearly, those who are eternally saved are those who  
86 continue to abide in Him by the grace of God. There are those, however, who are joined to Him as  
87 branches in the vine, but who because of unbelief are barren and fruitless and consequently are cut off  
88 from the vine and from salvation. Jesus says these "believe for a while" but do not bear fruit unto  
89 salvation. Why God would do this is a mystery, but the teaching of Scripture is clear: some whom He  
90 adopts into covenant relation, He later hardens (Rom. 9:4, 18, 11:1ff). In such instances God has not  
91 changed His decree regarding such people; to the contrary, He carries out His sovereign purposes in and  
92 through their unbelief and rebellion. Those elect unto eternal salvation are always distinguished by their  
93 perseverance in faith and obedience by the grace of God.

94  
95 **10.** Once baptized, an individual may be truly called a "Christian" because he is a member of the  
96 household of faith and the body of Christ (I Cor. 12). However, not all who are "Christians" in this sense  
97 will persevere to the end. Some will "fall from grace" and be lost (Gal. 5:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-5). Though the

98 difference between those who are predestined to eternal life and those who “believe for a while” is not  
99 merely one of duration (i.e., God works “effectually” in those whom He has predestined to eternal life so  
100 that they do not fall away in unbelief), the Bible does not explain the distinction between the nature of  
101 the work of the Spirit in the reprobate and the nature of His work in the elect, and even uses the same  
102 language for both.

103  
104 For example, the same language that describes the Spirit coming upon Saul (1 Sam. 10:6) is used when  
105 the Spirit comes upon David (1 Sam. 16:13), Gideon (Jdg. 6:34), Jephthah (Jdg. 11:29), and Samson  
106 (Jdg. 14:6, 9; 15:14). Yet in four of these five cases (David, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson), the man in  
107 question was clearly given persevering faith and brought to final salvation by the Spirit’s work (cf. Heb.  
108 11:32). The Biblical narrative, however, appears to draw no distinction between Saul’s initial experience  
109 of the Spirit and the experience of those who obtained final salvation. While God, no doubt, predestined  
110 Saul’s apostasy (since He foreordains all that comes to pass), God was not the author of Saul’s apostasy  
111 (cf. WCF 3.1). Saul seems to receive the same initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other  
112 men who persevered in faith received, but he did not persevere in that grace. Though this was according  
113 to God’s eternal decree and though God could surely have preserved him in faith, Saul fell in unbelief.  
114 The responsibility for his failure, however, is his alone. Saul’s failure to persevere was due to his own  
115 rebellion. Herein lies the great mystery of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility (cf. WCF 3.1, 8).  
116 [1]

117  
118 **11.** None of those elect unto final salvation can lose that salvation, however much he may backslide  
119 (John 10; WCF 17). God preserves all those whom He has chosen to eternal salvation in covenant  
120 faithfulness. The Biblical language regarding salvation, however, is more complicated. Sometimes the  
121 term “salvation” is used in an eschatological sense with reference to its ultimate goal of eternal life. In  
122 that eschatological and final sense, of course, it would be most improper to speak of anyone “losing their  
123 salvation.” All whom God has ordained to eternal life will surely be saved. But there is also another  
124 sense in which all those in the covenant are “saved.” They have been delivered out of the world and  
125 brought into the glorious new creation of Christ (thus, the Scripture speaks of those who had “known the  
126 way of righteousness,” “been cleansed from their former sins,” “have tasted of the heavenly gift,” etc.),  
127 but not all will persevere in that “salvation.” [2] Jesus spoke of those in the new covenant who were  
128 united to Him, but then cut off because they did not persevere in the fruit-bearing that is the evidence of  
129 a lively faith, by which we abide in Christ (John 15). Whatever the precise complexion and content of  
130 that union for those who do not persevere, nonetheless, if Jesus Himself is salvation, must we not  
131 conclude that being cut off from Him means being cut off the from source of salvation and, in that  
132 specific sense, from salvation itself?

133  
134 **12.** The Bible often speaks of salvation in relational and covenantal categories. “Salvation” is a matter of  
135 being rightly related to God through Christ. But relationships are not static, unchanging entities. They  
136 are fluid and dynamic. Our salvation covenant with the Lord is like a marriage. If we continue to rest  
137 upon Christ in faith, we will live with Him happily ever after. If we break the marriage covenant, He  
138 will divorce us. It is probably unwise and pastorally inept, especially for tender consciences, to speak of  
139 this in terms of “losing one’s salvation,” but it seems contrary to Scripture to say that nothing at all is  
140 lost. To draw such a conclusion appears to deny the reality of the covenant and the blessedness that is  
141 said to belong even to those who ultimately prove themselves reprobate (Heb. 10:26ff).

142  
143 **13.** With this understanding, the “five points of Calvinism” are still preserved, but they have been  
144 enriched by a nuanced covenant theology following the tradition and teaching of Augustine and Calvin.  
145 Framing the issues in this way, in no way compromises God’s absolute sovereignty and gracious  
146 initiative in salvation. At the same time, however, it holds covenant breakers accountable for their

147 apostasy. As such, this position appears to uphold the Scripture’s teaching on the nature of the Church  
148 and the efficacy of the sacraments together with the genuineness of the covenantal promises and threats.  
149 Moreover, it does so in a way that is fully consistent with Reformed and Westminsterian theology. This  
150 is not to say that it is the only way in which the fullness of Reformed and biblical doctrine may be  
151 maintained. Nevertheless, on this understanding of the application of God’s sovereign and covenantal  
152 grace, we lose nothing affirmed by our Westminsterian tradition and yet maintain a rich, workable, and  
153 pastorally useful understanding of how the sovereign God applies His salvation in history.

154

155 

---

Endnotes

156

157 1. We recognize, as the Canons of Dort point out, that the difference between those who are predestined  
158 to eternal life and those who “believe for a while” is not merely one of duration. God does work  
159 “effectually” in those whom He has predestined to eternal life so that they do not fall away in unbelief.  
160 In this sense, we may say that there are things which are true of the “elect” which are never true of the  
161 reprobate. But these distinctions normally manifest themselves over time and, thus, are impossible to  
162 recognize at the beginnings of one’s Christian experience within the visible Church. As they manifest  
163 themselves over time, they certainly become a matter for concern and pastoral care, exhortation, and  
164 intervention, as we continually call people to faith and repentance. But it is only in the face of final  
165 apostasy that we can know with certainty who was and was not “effectually called.”

166

167 In their reading of Heb. 6:4-5, some theologians try to draw subtle distinctions to make highly refined  
168 psychological differences between blessings that do not secure eternal salvation and true regeneration,  
169 which does. For at least two reasons, it is highly unlikely the writer had such distinctions in mind. First,  
170 it is by no means certain that those who have received the blessings listed in 6:4-5 will fall away. The  
171 writer merely holds it out as a possibility, a danger of which they must beware. In fact, he expects these  
172 people to persevere (6:9). If, however, the blessings catalogued imply something less than regeneration,  
173 and these people might persevere after all, we are put in the awkward position of saying that non-  
174 regenerate persons persevered to the end (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1)! Second, the illustration immediately following  
175 the warning in 6:7-8 indicates these people have received some kind of new life. Otherwise, the plant  
176 metaphor makes no sense. The question raised does not concern the nature of the grace received in the  
177 past (i.e., real regeneration vs. merely common operations of the Spirit), but whether or not the one who  
178 has received this grace will persevere.

179

180 Thus, Hebrews 6 does not call upon us to develop two psychologies of conversion and faith, one for the  
181 “truly regenerate” and one for the temporary believer destined to apostatize. Nor does it call upon  
182 sinners to discern their own deceitful and inconstant hearts, for even the elect would fall away were it  
183 not for the continued grace of God (cf. Canons of Dort, 5th Head, Articles 3 & 8; cf WCF 17.2). Rather,  
184 Hebrews calls upon us to turn from ourselves and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and  
185 Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1ff). Such a faith perseveres and bears fruit in keeping with repentance.

186

187 2. Illustrations of this abound in the Scripture: In Jude (5) the Israelites are said to have been “saved”  
188 and then destroyed, because they did not persevere. In the preface to the Ten Commandments Israel is  
189 addressed as God’s redeemed people. However, many of those who were “redeemed” did not continue  
190 trusting their Deliverer and perished. Peter (2 Peter 2) speaks of a similar class of people. Redeemed by  
191 Christ, they then deny Him and are destroyed. All of these are given as warnings to new covenant  
192 believers lest they follow these examples of apostasy. Paul specifically says the record of the Israelites  
193 who failed to persevere and were destroyed was “written for our admonition” in the new covenant era (1  
194 Cor. 10:11).

195

196 Summary: God, in eternity past, elected in Christ a great multitude to salvation. This election was  
197 wholly gracious and unconditional, having its source only in the free mercy and good pleasure of God.  
198 In the fullness of time, the Father sent His Son to die as the propitiatory substitute for those whom He  
199 elected to eternal salvation. The atoning work of the Son is fully sufficient for their salvation and  
200 completely accomplished their redemption. The Holy Spirit works in these same chosen ones to apply  
201 Christ's saving work to them and to keep them faithful to the Savior their entire lives. Because of the  
202 hardness of their hearts, this work of grace must be, ultimately, irresistible. No one chosen to eternal  
203 salvation can be lost, and no non-elect person can attain eternal salvation.

204  
205 God's eternal decree to gather His elect into a people for His name is worked out in history. Election is  
206 in no way a "process" nor is it at all dependent upon our obedience either foreseen or actual, but it does  
207 become manifest in the administration of Word and Sacrament as one responds to the preached gospel  
208 and enters the Church in baptism. Christ is present in His Church by His Spirit to see to it that all His  
209 elect ones are brought to faith in Him.

210  
211 God, however, mysteriously has chosen to draw some into the covenant community who are not elect  
212 unto eternal salvation. These non-elect covenant members are truly brought to Christ, united to Him in  
213 the Church by baptism and receive various gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. Corporately, they are  
214 part of the chosen, redeemed, Spirit-indwelt people. Sooner or later, however, in the wise counsel of  
215 God, these fail to bear fruit and fall away. In some sense, they were really joined to the elect people,  
216 really sanctified by Christ's blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit. God, however,  
217 has chosen not to uphold them in the faith, and all is lost. They break the gracious new covenant they  
218 entered into at baptism.

219  
220 Thus, the covenant is a true revelation of God's salvation, for, in the covenant community, all God's  
221 people, even those who are only temporarily counted among their number, find gracious blessings. The  
222 covenant really is gospel-good news-through and through. Yet only those who, by faith alone, continue  
223 to persevere in the covenant, trusting and resting upon the Lord of covenant, inherit final salvation.  
224 Those who fall away lose the temporary covenantal blessings they had enjoyed. Ultimately, this is  
225 because God decreed that these covenant breakers would not share in the eschatological salvation of  
226 Christ. Of course, these apostates cannot blame God for their falling away. It is their own fault, since  
227 God's overtures of love towards them in the context of the covenant were sincere. Conversely, those  
228 who do persevere to the end cannot claim any credit or make any boast. All they have done has been  
229 because of God's grace which preserved them and kept them faithful.

230  
231 All covenant members are invited to attain to a full and robust confidence that they are God's eternally  
232 elect ones. Starting with their baptisms, they have every reason to believe God loves them and desires  
233 their eternal salvation. Baptism marks them out as God's elect people, a status they maintain so long as  
234 they persevere in faithfulness. By looking to Christ alone, the preeminently elect One, the One who kept  
235 covenant to the end and is the Author and Finisher of the faith of God's people, they may find infallible  
236 assurance (WCF 18.1-2). Those who take their eyes off Christ in unbelief, who desert the Church where  
237 His presence is found, will find that their false hopes and carnal presumptions have perished (WCF  
238 18.1), having made a shipwreck of their faith and proven themselves to have received the grace of God  
239 in vain.

240  
241 **Unanimously adopted by the Session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church on April 3, 2005.**

## Suggested Reading and Listening

1 Waters, Guy Prentiss. *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004.

2 The best single introduction and critique of the NPP. Written by a PCA minister, professor and scholar. Here's what the  
3 highly regarded New Testament Scholar Don Carson has to say about this book. "In the last few years there have been several  
4 careful evaluations and critiques of the new perspective. This one excels for its combination of simplicity, fair dealing,  
5 historical awareness, and penetration. For the pastor who is vaguely aware of the debates, but who has little mastery of the  
6 confusing details, this book's careful presentation of each scholar's position is a model of accuracy and clarity. Even those  
7 who have been pondering the issues for years will see some things in a fresh light. The ability of Waters to combine  
8 exegetical, historical, biblical-theological, and systematic reflections, and all in relatively brief compass, enhances the  
9 credibility of the argument. Combine these virtues with pedagogically helpful chapter summaries and an annotated  
10 bibliography, and it is easy to see why this book deserves wide circulation. In a domain where the issues are too important to  
11 ignore and where polarization is dividing congregations and denominations, it is a relief as well as a pleasure to come across  
12 a book noted much more for its light than its heat."

13 Carson, D. A., Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds. *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume*  
14 *Two: The Paradoxes of Paul*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

15 Following the 2001 companion volume that addressed Second Temple Judaism, this volume concentrates on the biblical and  
16 theological issues touching the issues that the NPP have raised concerning the interpretation of Paul. Among the many fine  
17 essays in this volume are thorough exegetical studies of Rom 1:18-3:20 (Seifrid), Rom 3:21-4:25 (Gathercole), Rom 5-11  
18 (Moo), and a treatment of Paul's language of faith and works in Galatians (M. Silva). O'Brien argues in two separate essays  
19 that Paul was not a covenantal nomist, and that Paul was called *and* converted at the Damascus Road. Yarbrough and Carson  
20 attempt positively to define Paul's relationship to the Old Covenant. T. George offers a contemporary defense of the  
21 Reformation's (and particularly Luther's) reading of the apostle Paul. Each student of the NPP should prioritize a careful  
22 reading of this volume. Due out in the Autumn of 2004. See especially Stephen Westerholm's chapter "The 'New Perspective'  
23 at Twenty-Five" – This essay competently surveys recent Pauline scholarship in the wake of Sanders' scholarship on ancient  
24 Judaism and Paul. It both abbreviates and supplements his overview of scholarship in the 2004 *Perspectives Old and New on*  
25 *Paul*. Westerholm in this essay and in *Perspectives* is especially helpful in grouping the works of contemporary Pauline  
26 scholars into "families" of shared sympathies or similar approaches.

27 Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand  
28 Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

29 Westerholm's revision of his 1988 *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (above) is perhaps the most recent, comprehensive,  
30 and penetrating volume addressing the NPP. Part One helpfully offers the reader summaries of Paul as Augustine, Luther,  
31 Calvin, and Wesley have read him. Part Two updates Westerholm's 1988 survey of recent scholarship on Paul. Part Three  
32 expands and revises Westerholm's 1988 exegetical discussion of Paul's understanding of "righteousness," "law," and  
33 "justification by faith." The introduction will leave you on the floor laughing.

### 34 Other Important Pieces for the Discussion

35 Kruse, Colin G. *Paul, The Law, and Justification*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997.

36 This work contains a select survey of the works of pre-NPP and NPP scholars. It also highlights the work of certain critics of  
37 the NPP. Although it is now dated, this overview's brevity (about twenty-five pages) may commend it as an introduction for  
38 the beginning student.

39 Moo, D. J. Reviews of Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* and E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the*  
40 *Jewish People*. *Trinity Journal* 5 (1984): 92 - 99.



41 This review (read with Westerholm) will give the reader both awareness of the place of Räisänen in the NPP discussions and  
42 helpful and concise criticisms of his project. Moo particularly focuses attention on "where Sanders and Räisänen find  
43 inconsistency in Paul's view of the law" (93).

44 Carson, D. A. "Atonement in Romans 3:21-26." Pages 119 – 139 in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives. Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole*. Edited by Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004.

47 Carson gives the reader an accessible and well-digested discussion of a passage critical to NPP discussions. Interacting with  
48 NPP readings of Rom 3:21-26, Carson offers a concise defense of traditional readings of "righteousness," "faith," and  
49 "propitiation." He also persuasively positions his reading of Rom 3:21-26 within the larger argument of Rom 1-3.

50 Carson, D. A. "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields." Pages 46 –  
51 78 in *Justification: What's At Stake In the Current Debates*. Edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004.

53 This essay is a careful and measured survey of the biblical and theological issues touching on the imputation of Christ's  
54 righteousness to the believer. Although Carson does not primarily engage NPP readings in this essay, the passages he  
55 considers have played a crucial role in NPP discussions. Carson offers readings of Rom 4:4-5, 4:6-8, 3:27-31, 2 Cor 5:19-21,  
56 and 1Cor 1:30 in which he defends the traditional doctrine of imputation as Pauline.

## 57 **Representative Pro-NPP Works**

58 Stendahl, Krister. "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West." Pages 78-96 in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976.

60 Stendahl's revision of his famous 1961 address before the American Psychological Association in which he argued that the  
61 Reformation (following Augustine) had misread Paul. He proceeds to fault Western interpretations of Paul because of their  
62 preoccupation with 'sin,' 'guilt,' and because of their overly 'sensitive conscience.' Stendahl argues that Paul *really* is  
63 concerned with the questions of the implications of the Messiah's coming upon the Law and upon the boundaries of the  
64 people of God. The NPP may rightly be said to have begun with this address.

65 Sanders, E(d) P(arrish). *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977.

67 The book that officially launched 'New Perspective' scholarship into the mainstream of Pauline studies. In this massive  
68 volume, Sanders convinced most NT scholars that Judaism was a 'religion of grace' and not a 'religion of works.' He  
69 furthermore launched a project of Pauline interpretation that sought to understand Paul on terms other than soteriological  
70 disagreement with Judaism. See our comments above on Schweitzer's *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*.

71 Sanders, E(d) P(arrish). *Paul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

72 A short book that briefly and effectively outlines many of Sanders main contentions about the theology of Paul.

73 Sanders, E. P. Preface to *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, by W.D. Davies. 5<sup>th</sup>ed. Mifflintown, Pa.: Sigler  
74 Press, 1998.

75 One of the briefest and most incisive introductions into Sanders' thought. Written in order to introduce the most recent edition

76 of the ground breaking work of his mentor and colleague, W.D.  
77 Davies, Sanders' preface compares and contrasts Sanders & Davies with respect to Paul & Judaism. It also provides a brief  
78 digest of the most salient points of Sanders' proposals concerning Paul.

79 Dunn, J. D. G. "The New Perspective on Paul." *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of*  
80 *Manchester* 65 (1983): 95-122. Repr. pages 299 – 308 in *The Romans Debate*. Edited by K. Donfried.  
81 Rev. and enl. ed. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991. Also repr. pages 183 – 214 in *Jesus, Paul, and the*  
82 *Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990.

83 The ground-breaking essay [a published form of his 1982 Manson Memorial Lecture] in which Dunn coined the name the  
84 movement has come to adopt. Dunn expresses appreciation for Sanders' break from Reformational categories & conclusions  
85 regarding Paul. He argues, however, that Sanders' Paul remains too anthropocentric. In this essay, he lays out his  
86 sociologically informed approach to Paul by offering a new definition of the 'works of the law' (i.e., as social 'boundary  
87 markers') and its implications for the relationship between Paul and the Judaism of his day.

88 Dunn, J. D. G. *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster  
89 John Knox Press, 1990.

90 In this collection of previously published essays that have been updated and revised, Dunn addresses questions concerning  
91 Jesus & the Law (chaps. 1-3) and Paul & the Law (chaps. 4-9). Of particular interest is Chap. 4 ("A Light to the Gentiles,' or  
92 'The End of the Law?': The Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul") which provides the reader  
93 appropriate background to Kim's work (below). Chap. 6 gives Dunn's analysis of the controversy at Antioch (Gal 2), while  
94 Chaps. 7 & 8 provide the reader a reprint of Dunn's "New Perspective" and "Works of the Law" essays.

95 Wright, N.T. *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* Grand  
96 Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

97 At present, the fullest topical treatment of Paul that Wright has offered the reading public. Although it is a popular level  
98 treatment, this book addresses such issues as 'righteousness,' 'the righteousness of God,' and 'justification.' It is here that the  
99 reader is most likely to discern the contrasts between Wright's project and the accomplishments of the Reformation, as well  
100 as to learn what Wright perceives to be the practical outworking of his reading of Paul.

101 **Audio Resources on Justification and**  
102 **The New Perspectives on Paul (NPP)**  
103 **N.T. Wright (NTW)**  
104 **Norman Shepherd (NS)**  
105 **The Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue Theology (FV/AAPC)**

106 Tapes/CDs

107 For those interested in further study on these topics, there are three sets of cassettes/CDs available that will be available for  
108 examination.

109 1. Guy Waters. *Justification and the New Perspectives*, a set of 14 audio cassettes (only), in two albums, approximately 22  
110 hours, which formed the foundation for the book by the same title.....\$40.00

111 2. Guy Waters. *The Theology of Norman Shepherd*. A set of 7 CDs (only).....\$20.00

112 3. Guy Waters. *The Theology of the Federal Vision*. A set of 8 CDs (only).....\$25.00

113 They may be ordered from:  
114 First Presbyterian Church Tape Library  
115 1390 North State Street  
116 Jackson, MS 39202  
117 USA  
  
118 601 353 8316  
119 [www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org)  
120 [doug@fpcjackson.org](mailto:doug@fpcjackson.org)

**Questions for the MVP Credentials Committee to Consider and Improve Upon  
(for use in theological examinations)**

1 **New Perspectives**

2 (1) What is your understanding of "the New Perspectives on Paul" (hereafter, NPP) views on the Pauline  
3 doctrine of justification, as represented by such scholars as Sanders, Dunn and N.T. Wright?

4 [Rationale: This question provides the opportunity to determine the examinee's level of familiarity with  
5 the NPP]

6 (2) ["I think they are very helpful."] What in particular do you find helpful about it?

7 [Rationale: This question provides the opportunity to determine the examinee's level of affinity with the  
8 NPP and to indicate what aspects he finds helpful and what aspects he finds out of accord with  
9 confessional teaching]

10 (3) Do you believe that new discoveries regarding "Second Temple Judaism" require us to rethink the  
11 Reformers' understanding of Judaism and the Pauline Gospel?

12 [Rationale: Enthusiastic adherents of the NPP typically believe that the Reformers read the categories of  
13 medieval Catholicism into Paul's interaction with Judaism, and consequently led them into a misreading  
14 of Paul's teaching on law and grace in the Gospel]

15 (4) Do you consider the NPP to be correct in redefining "the works of the law" in "Second Temple  
16 Judaism" (i.e., as "covenant badges" of membership in God's people, rather than earning salvation,  
17 instead of relying on grace)?

18 [Rationale: This is a key point in Sanders' and Dunn's reconstructions of the context of the Pauline  
19 teaching]

20 (5) Would you agree with the NPP that Luther and the Reformers misinterpreted "the works of the law"  
21 by reading back into Paul's discussion of it their controversy with Medieval Roman Catholics over  
22 meritorious works as a necessity for salvation?

23 [Rationale: A historical-theological way of asking about the issue raised in question 3]

24 (6) Do you think Sanders was right in his theory on "covenantal nomism" (i.e., that the Jews of Paul's  
25 time understood themselves to be keeping the law, not to get into the covenant people, but in order to  
26 stay in)?

27 [Rationale: An opportunity to explore whether the examinee believes that "covenantal nomism"  
28 constitutes an adequate theology of grace]

29 (7) If the NPP is right, why did Jesus tell Nicodemus in John 3 that he needed to be born again in order  
30 to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?

31 [Rationale: Though adherents of the NPP probably think this question is answered via redemptive-  
32 historical transition, it does raise the issue of why Jesus would tell someone who was already in the  
33 covenant community that he needed the new birth. Presumably, if Jesus believed in covenantal nomism  
34 he should have told him to be faithful to the covenant instead]

35 (8) What do you think about Wright's assessment of the doctrine of imputation as "a cold piece of  
36 business"?

37 [Rationale: Wright rejects the traditional Reformed teaching on the imputation of Christ's righteousness  
38 to the believer]

39 (9) What is your understanding of the New Testament teaching on imputation of Christ's righteousness  
40 to believers and the non-imputation of their sins to him? Could you mention one or two major scriptural  
41 passages about imputation and non-imputation, and make some comment on them? [e.g., Rom. 3, Rom.  
42 4, II Cor. 5]

43 [Rationale: Allows for a helpful expression of the examinee's specific knowledge and commitments]

44 (10) How would you briefly summarize the main teaching of chapter 11 of the Westminster Confession  
45 of Faith (i.e., on Justification)? Please tell us what you make of this chapter's distinctions: a. (in  
46 paragraph 1) between "infusing righteousness" and "imputing righteousness"? b. (in par. 2) between  
47 faith as "the alone instrument of justification", but "not being alone in the person justified"? Do you  
48 personally hold to this classic Reformed understanding of justification?

49 [Rationale: Allows for a helpful expression of the examinee's specific knowledge and commitments]

50 (11) What does Westminster Confession, chapter 11 (paragraph 3) mean when it says that Christ made  
51 full satisfaction to his Father's justice on behalf of the elect? Do you agree with this teaching?

52 [Rationale: Allows for a helpful expression of the examinee's views on merit and satisfaction in relation  
53 to the atonement]

54 (12) Do you hold to the traditional covenant theology of the Westminster Confession (that is, the bi-  
55 covenantal, covenant of works/covenant of grace framework)?

56 [Rationale: Those sympathetic with the NPP usually take issue with the exegetical and theological  
57 validity of the covenant of works (and thus the larger framework of traditional covenant theology), but  
58 not merely on the semantic grounds nor on the same theological grounds raised by John Murray]

59 (13) Do you believe that the Confession's teaching on justification and imputation is exegetically and  
60 theologically sound?

61 [Rationale: Clarifies whether a person's view is – "I agree with what the *Confession* is trying to say,  
62 although I disagree with the exegetical basis and theological framework of the affirmation"]

63 (14) Do you have any reservations at all regarding the Confession's assertions or emphases relating to  
64 justification by faith?

65 [Rationale: Allows for the examinee to express his scruples or qualifications on his own terms]

66 (15) Do you believe there are errors of statement, emphasis, exegesis or theology in the Standards'  
67 treatment of justification or imputation?

68 [Rationale: Another way of getting at the issues raised in 13 and 14 above]

69 (16) Do you believe that we have underemphasized the relational dimensions of justification in stressing  
70 the forensic aspect? Is justification more about how we relate to other Christians or about how we relate  
71 to God?

72 [Rationale: These are standard parts of the NPP's popular critique of Reformed and evangelical teaching  
73 on justification]

## 74 **N.T. Wright**

75 (1) What do you understand by the phrase "the righteousness of God" in such passages as Rom 3:21-26,  
76 2 Cor 5:21, and Phil 3:9?

77 [Rationale: Is the "righteousness of God" a non-transferable aspect of his character and an expression of  
78 his covenant faithfulness or something else?]

79 (2) What do you understand by the phrase "the works of the law"?

80 [Rationale: NTW has a distinctive view on this in relation to other scholars in the NPP]

81 (3) Define justification. Does justification deal primarily with soteriology (matters of salvation) or  
82 ecclesiology (matters of who belongs in the people of God)?

83 [Rationale: A key issue in NTW's view]

84 (4) How does faith justify a sinner in the sight of God? What is the ground of the sinner's justification?

85 [Rationale: Allows for the examinee to relate NTW's views to the categories of classical Reformed  
86 theology]

87 (5) Do you have any scruples concerning the traditional doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness  
88 of Jesus Christ?

89 [Rationale: Since NTW calls this into question, those influenced by him may as well]

## 90 **Norman Shepherd**

91 (1) Do you have any problems or reservations with Reformed theology as it has been set forth in the  
92 Westminster Standards? Its formulations of justification? election? assurance?

93 [Rationale: NS works with a "straw-man" model of what the Reformed teach, i.e. "faith alone" means  
94 "faith not necessarily accompanied by works" / knowledge of one's election will yield carnal assurance /  
95 emphasis upon regeneration leads to antinomianism]

96 (2) Do you have any reservations concerning the word "merit" in connection with the obedience of  
97 Christ on behalf of believers?

98 [Rationale: NS rejects "merit" from all covenantal reflection. Our Larger Catechism, however, uses the  
99 term in connection with Christ's work on behalf of believers.]

100 (3) Do you have any reservations concerning either the terms "covenant of works," or "covenant of  
101 grace"? Do you have any objections to what the Standards mean by those terms?

102 [Rationale: NS rejects the covenant of works and understands there to be one covenant in Scripture –  
103 extending from before the Fall to the present time. Our Standards teach two distinct covenantal  
104 administrations.]

105 (4) How do you relate election and the covenant?

106 [Rationale: NS believes election should be subordinated to covenant. This means that the categories  
107 associated with election (true / nominal believer; invisible / visible church) ought not to be used in the  
108 church's preaching and teaching. It also means, as NS has famously argued, that one may apply John  
109 3:16 [which he paraphrases "Christ died to save you"] to any particular member of the covenant]

110 (5) Do you have any reservation concerning the distinctions "visible / invisible church" or "true /  
111 nominal believer"?

112 [See above]

113 (6) How do you relate baptism and regeneration?

114 [Rationale: NS regards baptism rather than regeneration to mark the transition from death to life. This is  
115 indicative of his system's emphasis upon the external and objective to the exclusion of the inward and

116 subjective. Only when he has been excommunicated, NS argues, may a baptized person be addressed in  
117 terms less than any other member of the congregation (i.e., he is not to be exhorted from the pulpit to  
118 question whether he is really a Christian)]

119 (7) How do you understand Gen 15:6?

120 [Rationale: NS applies this verse to Jesus (Paul applies it only to OT and NT believers) / NS understands  
121 "righteousness" here to be Abraham's covenantal faithfulness]

122 (8) How do faith and justification relate?

123 [Rationale: NS refuses to affirm that the act of justification contemplates faith in its receptive capacity  
124 alone. Justification, NS contends, always contemplates faith + the works of faith]

125 (9) Do you have any reservations concerning the phrase "faith alone"?

126 [Rationale: NS strenuously argues that the Standards simply understand this phrase to mean that faith,  
127 not baptism, is the instrument of justification. He does not understand this phrase to mean that faith is  
128 uniquely receptive in the act of justification. He believes it is a phrase best left unused].

129 (10) Do you believe that good works are necessary to justification?

130 [Rationale: Good works are necessary to salvation, but not to justification. Good works, however, are a  
131 necessary consequence and evidence of justification].

132 (11) Would you speak of the final judgment as the believer's "justification" in any way? Explain

133 [Rationale: NS uses the language of "process" to speak of the doctrine of justification. He understands a  
134 believer's "final justification" to be a justifying verdict [not a merely public declaration of the  
135 justification declared at the outset of the believer's Christian experience] that embraces the believer's  
136 covenantal obedience]

137 (12) Do you have any reservations concerning the ordo salutis?

138 [Rationale: NS questions the propriety of the priority of faith to justification; he also proposes an  
139 overhaul of the ordo that would result in the loss of traditional distinctions between justification and  
140 sanctification.]

## 141 **Federal Vision**

### 142 *Justification*

143 (1) How many instruments are there in justification? Do good works have any role in justification?  
144 Explain.

145 [Rationale: Allows for the examinee to relate the traditional categories of Reformed teaching to the  
146 AAT/FV]

147 (2) Would you choose to speak of "final justification"? If so, what do you mean by this term?

148 [Rationale: Some AAT/FV proponents, not unlike NS and NTW, speak of two justifications, with final  
149 justification based upon or conditioned by covenantal faithfulness]

150 (3) Do you have any reservations concerning the doctrine of the imputation of the active and passive  
151 obedience of Christ?

152 [Rationale: This has been denied or called into question by some AAT/FV proponents]

153 *Election, Regeneration, Conversion*

154 (1) Do you believe that the Reformed tradition has too often read Scripture through the "lens of the  
155 decree" and needs to read it through the "lens of the covenant"? If so, explain.

156 [Rationale: An affirmative to the above indicates an agreement with an oft-repeated claim of the  
157 AAT/FV]

158 (2) Explain your understanding of the difference between the saving and common operations of the  
159 Spirit. Do you have any reservations concerning the wording or doctrine of the Westminster Larger  
160 Catechism Q/A #68?

161 [Rationale: The WLC #68 views effectual calling from the standpoint of election rather than from the  
162 vantage of the external administration of the covenant of grace, *contra* the AAT/FV]

163 *Sacraments*

164 (1) Explain your understanding of sacramental efficacy. Are the sacraments efficacious to all recipients?  
165 Are they efficacious to all recipients in the same way?

166 [Rationale: A key agenda of the AAT/FV is to promote a "higher" view of sacramental efficacy than is  
167 currently embraced in the Reformed community, because, it is alleged, we have been unwittingly  
168 influenced by "baptistic" views of sacramentology]

169 (2) What benefits are conveyed to the recipient in baptism? How?

170 [Rationale: AAT/FV proponents will speak of all the benefits of union with Christ being conveyed in  
171 water baptism, and will fail to formulate adequately the relation of the sign and the thing signified]

172 (3) Would you choose to speak of the "gift of perseverance"? If so, what do you mean by this term?

173 [Rationale: Another aspect of AAT/FV teaching on the sacraments]

The original Mississippi Valley Presbytery report is housed on a server maintained by First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi, and may be downloaded from:

<http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/apologetics/PDFs/MSVP%20Ad%20Hoc%20Study%20Com%20Report.pdf>