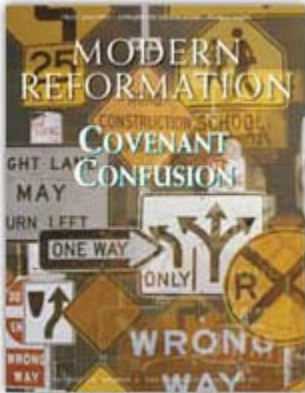


MODERN REFORMATION

Déjà Vu All Over Again

Michael S. Horton



Since the various versions of the New Perspective on Paul, as well as the "Federal Vision" perspective in our own circles, have been so helpfully defined, I will simply lay out the following argument: Despite significant variations, there does seem to be what E. P. Sanders would call a "pattern of religion" that pretty fairly captures what first-century Judaism, medieval Rome, and some contemporary challenges to the Reformation's reading of Paul share in common. The label Sanders uses to describe the Judaism of Paul's day-"covenantal nomism"-will be the term that we will use for this wider trajectory.

Whatever it means to say that Christ was raised on the basis of his flawless obedience, it surely cannot be grace; otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom. 11:6).

This is admittedly a sweeping generalization and by it I do not intend to suggest for one moment that the New Perspective on Paul (hereafter NPP) or the Federal Vision (hereafter

FV) theologies are nothing more than Trent redivivus, but that there are strong parallels that must not be overlooked. What's at stake? Nothing less than our definition of the gospel itself. I would like to offer three propositions shared across the board by all these versions of covenantal nomism, defend the parallels, and argue that a distinction between law and promise, which in Reformed theology is expressed in terms of bi-covenantalism (i.e., covenant of works and covenant of grace), is essential for a sound understanding of the gospel.

To Make Obedience a Condition of Justification Is Not the Same As "Earning" Salvation

The classic Reformation view is that Christ as the Second Adam merited everlasting life for his people (taking Rom. 5 as a major, though by no means sole, lodestar for this position). On the Reformed side, this meant that in this status Christ fulfilled the original covenant of works with humanity in Adam on behalf of the elect. E. P. Sanders attempts to demonstrate that the Jews of Paul's day did not believe in merit, strictly speaking, and so were not trying to justify themselves by legalistic works. And yet, his own magisterial study shows just how crucial the concept of merit was, although since for Sanders "merit" can only mean strict merit (i.e., apart from any divine assistance), he tries (unsuccessfully) to exonerate Second Temple Judaism from that charge.

Norman Shepherd and others within our circles share the view of NPP advocates that merit-a crucial category in Reformation theology (particularly with respect to Christ's) is a category we can do without. Not surprisingly, the crucial doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active obedience-indeed, imputation of Christ's righteousness at all, is denied. The reformers and their heirs simply failed to eliminate "merit" from their medieval vocabulary, we are told. Typical of the caricatures, FV advocate Rich Lusk summarizes the classic Reformed position as follows:

In other words, Jesus is the successful Pelagian, the One Guy in the history of the world who succeeded in pulling off the works righteousness plan. Jesus covered our demerits by dying on the cross and provides all the merits we need by keeping the legal terms of the covenant of works perfectly. Those merits are then imputed to us by faith alone.... Such is the view of bi-covenantal federalism.

Lusk affirms Jesus' sinlessness, substitutionary atonement, and "the infinite value of his obedience," but denies that his own obedience is in any way a meritorious feat that is then imputed to us. In this system, "the covenant is not intrinsically Trinitarian. Jesus is regarded as a dutiful servant who has to earn favor." (There is a prominent Servant theme in the Old Testament, isn't there?) He appeals to Philippians 2:9, of all places, to say that "Paul writes the Father *graced* him with such a name as a gift." But that passage actually says that "Christ became obedient even to death, even the death of the cross. *Therefore* [on the basis of that obedience] God also has highly exalted him and given him the name above every name."

The covenant of works, Christ's meritorious obedience, and imputation stand or fall together in Reformed theology, Lusk rightly recognizes.

Those who advocate a meritorious covenant of works put a great deal of weight on the so-called "active obedience" of Christ. I remember hearing sermons in which I was told "Jesus' thirty-three years of law-keeping are your righteousness. They were credited to you! He kept the law, the covenant of works, on your behalf!" ... But the notion of his thirty-three years of Torah-keeping being imputed to me is problematic. After all, as a Gentile, I was never under Torah and therefore never under obligation to keep many of the commands Jesus performed....The active obedience itself, then, is not saving in itself. Rather, it's the precondition of his saving work in his death and resurrection....The problem with the "active obedience" model is that it de-eschatologizes the work of Christ. The new age is not brought him by his fulfillment of the old law; it is inaugurated in his resurrection. The gospel, in other words, is thoroughly eschatological.... God's righteousness is his own righteousness, not something imputed or infused.... Paul is not identifying the gospel with the doctrine of imputed righteousness.

Yet, again there is a contradiction: "He was raised up *on the basis* of his flawless obedience to the Father," Lusk says. But "on the basis of" equals ground. He doesn't even refer to this flawless obedience as a means, but as the ground, yet he has told us that the ground was grace. What is the difference between saying that Jesus was raised because he had merited everlasting life by his obedience and saying that he was raised on the basis of his flawless obedience to the Father? If his flawless obedience is the basis, then, it is clearly a matter of deserts. Whatever it means to say that Christ was raised on the basis of his flawless obedience, it surely cannot be grace; "otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom. 11:6).

Lusk himself says, again contradicting his statements above, "Christ 'deserved' to be rewarded after he suffered and died, not because of some abstract justice (or 'merit'), but because the Father had freely promised him such (cf. Isa. 53:10-11; Phil. 2:9)." Although he puts it in scare quotes, even Lusk concedes some notion of Christ's "deserving" to be rewarded. And who says that it's "because of some abstract justice" as opposed to "the Father's promise"? Certainly not Reformed theology. Further, Lusk's claim that gentiles were never under Torah is refuted by Paul's argument in Romans 1 to 3, that "all the world" is swept into Israel, condemned by the law, whether written on the conscience (Gentiles) or on tablets (Jews).

At this point Lusk appeals to Shepherd's contrast between a works/merit principle and a covenantal approach. Yet Rome *had* a covenantal paradigm-very much like the covenantal nomism already described. Identified especially with the school of "nominalism," the slogan of this medieval covenant theology was this: "God will not deny his grace to those who do what lies within them." Strictly speaking, no one merits salvation *condign* merit). Rather, God accepts the imperfect obedience of those who belong to the church as if it were satisfactory for final justification (*congruent* merit). Grace was provided through the sacraments, just as it had been through the sacrifices of the old covenant. By cooperating with grace (faith formed by love-i.e., faith as obedience), transgressors could hope for divine favor. The "new law" as the gospel was called is a kinder, gentler form of conditionality than in the old covenant. Jesus is a new Moses, but a milder one (evidently, the Sermon on the Mount, with its far more demanding interpretation of Torah, was not determinative). While Shepherd and company do not embrace the "merit" aspect of that system, they do insist that faith and obedience (or faith as obedience) are the instruments of final justification, which amounts to the congruent merit advocated by late medieval theology. Furthermore, they collapse law and gospel, covenant of works and covenant of grace, into one divine way of dealing with sinners-one covenant of basically relaxed law; in other words, covenantal nomism.

Lusk confidently declares, Calvin "clearly repudiated the notion that Christ merited God's favor in any strict sense," citing Alister McGrath. But both Lusk and McGrath are wrong. If Lusk had gone to the primary sources, he would have seen very clear statements by Calvin on the subject of Christ's meritorious obedience, without which (says the reformer) there could have been no salvation.[see especially Institutes 2.17, 1,3] "Merit" is the category for Christ's saving work that one finds in the Reformed confessions (see especially Belgic Confession, Articles 22-24; the Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 62 and 64; and the Canons of Dort, Second Head, Rejections 3 and 4). Christ not only merited our salvation in a congruent sense-that is, in the sense that God graciously *accepted* his work as satisfactory, but in the condign sense: it actually *fulfilled* the obedience that God required of us all in Adam.

Finally, says Lusk, the covenant of works and its category of Christ's meritorious obedience leads inevitably to antinomianism-a charge, it is worth remembering, that was made concerning Paul's message as well. In a sweeping indictment of the entire Reformed tradition (including the Puritans who framed the Westminster Standards), Lusk writes,

Talk about obedience is always suspect because it smells of merit...The entire federalist theological construction creates massive dichotomies that make it virtually impossible to tie together faith and works, justification and Christian growth, grace and new obedience, and so on, in any organic, covenantal whole....Sanctification comes to fit only very awkwardly into our theological system and the pressures towards (theoretical, if not practical) antinomianism becomes greater and greater.

Such a comment reveals a remarkable ignorance of the most representative writings of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition; second, despite protestations to the contrary, Lusk cannot sustain his claim that he is still Reformed if he thinks that "the entire federalist theological construction" is this flawed, since that construction just is the system of doctrine found in all of the Reformed and Presbyterian symbols.

The most pressing problem, however, is that when Christ's fulfillment of meritorious obedience of the covenant of works/law on our behalf is categorically denied, it is not that the *category* of merit disappears, but only the *term*. "Thus, in Christ, our faith-wrought good works have value before God, but not *merit*," Lusk says. Just what is that "value" that is not "merit"? And is that value in reference to justification? According to Rome, the category of *final justification* answers that question. Although believers "get in by grace"-even grace *alone* through a regenerative baptism, they are justified on the last day according to their works. Not only FV advocates such as Lusk endorse something close to baptismal regeneration (emphasizing that this is by grace alone), we find in these writers comments such as the following from Lusk:

Biblically, judgment according to works comes at the end of history, not the beginning. Only after we have had time to mature into fruit bearers does God give a full evaluation of our covenant fidelity. Judgment according to works is eschatological, not protological. But the proponents of the covenant of works put this mature judgment at the beginning! The New Covenant sacramental system reveals this basic progression [toward a judgment according to works at the end]. God, not man, makes the water used in baptism. The one baptized has no works to offer. He is completely passive. But do to the Lord's Supper man must "make" bread and wine out of the raw materials of creation. The elements of the Supper represent human labor and are offered to God as a sacrifice of praise and thanks. Man is active in eating and drinking at the table, and God judges us according to our "works" therein (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:17ff). So baptism, as the sacrament of initiation, grants initial justification apart from works. But the Supper, as the sacrament of nourishment and maturation, includes an evaluation of our works.

This is a classic statement of the unfortunate consensus at the Council of Trent. And in some important respects, once different sacraments are substituted, it fits Sanders's definition of covenantal nomism in Second Temple Judaism.

There Is No Qualitative Distinction between "Law" and "Gospel" or a "Covenant of Works" and a "Covenant of Grace"

Even such a seminal architect of the NPP as Dunn recognizes, "The more obvious line of reasoning is that Paul was so remembered [as chief heretic of Judaism] because he was in fact the one who brought the tension between law and gospel (already present in Jesus' own ministry-Mark 7:1-23; Matt. 15:1-20) to its sharpest and indeed antithetical expression." "Wherever Paul poses the antithesis in his writings (explicitly or implicitly), he does so within the context of and as part of what amounts to a redefinition of the people of God." Similarly, even Wright makes a distinction between commands and promises. In fact, although he would not wish to be seen aiding and abetting a confessional dogmatic system, throughout *Climax of the Covenant* especially, Wright repeatedly strengthens the exegetical case for the Mosaic theocracy as a law-covenant distinguished from the Abrahamic promise-covenant. On Romans 7:7-12, Wright states the argument: "the law is not sin, but its arrival, in Sinai as in Eden, was sin's opportunity to kill its recipients." Many of these representatives of the NPP are far more careful in their exegesis and less radical in their repudiation of Reformation theology than those of the FV.

Wright's own exegesis aids Reformed theology's classic insistence on the covenant of works and even the more controversial but widely held claim that in some sense the Mosaic economy was a recapitulation of that law covenant. But then we are introduced again to a false choice: "In [Gal. 3] vv. 15-18, then, Paul is not merely contrasting 'law' and 'promise' as mutually incompatible types of religious systems." Fine, not *merely* that, but he is doing that, isn't he? The dominant view of the older covenant theology was never that the old covenant was a republication of the covenant of works *simpliciter*, but that it contained a works-principle alongside the promise-principle of the Abrahamic covenant. On election in Galatians 3, Wright's view seems to be that Paul modifies the single Jewish doctrine of election and covenant. Ours is that there are two covenants in view (as Paul says explicitly): national (Sinai) and individual-global (Abrahamic). This is already an Old Testament concept that Paul simply draws out and expands. They are not just two *successive* covenants, but two covenants that coexist *side-by-side*, one earthly (type) and the other heavenly (reality).

Neither Paul nor the reformers thought that the law was itself the problem. According to Paul, the law is good, but we are not (Rom. 7:12). This is why "law"-any imperative, cannot bring life. If any law could have, then Torah surely would have done it (Gal. 3:21). Justification and new life depend on a divine indicative, and not just any such indicative, but God's deed in Christ as offered in the covenant of grace. In fact, Paul's own use of the phrase principle of law versus principle of faith (as in Rom. 3:27 and 9:30-32) is not inimical lexically to substituting the term "covenant," where "principle" is used to refer to a regime, order, or economy. But Steve Schlissel simply rejects the validity of such a distinction:

God has peppered his Word with a lot of "or-elses," so many that no one could miss them. But while the or-elses couldn't be missed, they could be mis-assigned, as if they belonged to the Law and not to the Gospel.

This is a false division, of course. It is a division, however, famously *rejected* by Calvinists! ... Of course Christ has become a new Moses!

At this point, the FV writers are simply confused. On the one hand, they repeatedly reject Reformed bi-covenantalism (works and grace), realizing that it rests on the law-gospel distinction. And yet on the other hand, by calling it "Lutheran," they think that they can create a new "Reformed" doctrine out of whole cloth.

This was also Shepherd's argument: we need a distinctly Reformed (covenantal) doctrine of justification, not the "Lutheran" one that we find in the Reformed confessions! But whatever results, it cannot be called Reformed. Echoing the NPP, but simplifying to the point of making the position sound worse than it actually is, Schlissel claims, "Paul's point, therefore, was not to prove justification by faith, but rather to prove justification for Gentiles. ... Obedience and faith are the same thing, biblically speaking." Again the FV asks us to make a false choice: either a faith divorced from obedience or a faith that is obedience, the same false choice demanded by the Counter-Reformation, and, we would argue, by Paul's antagonists. In Rome's construction, faith itself is mere assent to church teaching. Therefore, in order for faith to be "fully formed" it must become a work: *fides forma caritatis*, "faith formed by love." So, too, for the FV, not only does genuine faith yield obedience; faith is not justifying except as it obeys.

Further, all of these challenges ignore the careful way in which Reformed theology has dealt with the obvious conditionality in Scripture, including Paul. We have never said that there are no conditions in the covenant-or even in justification. Rather, we have argued that the condition of justification is faith and the conditions of salvation as a whole process are many: life-long repentance and faith, sanctification, and glorification. But we have emphasized that these conditions are fulfilled by the gifts that come to us through union with Christ. Thus, God promises to give faith and perseverance, justification and sanctification, throughout the course of our life. The new covenant is a covenant of promise or gospel-that is, of what God will do for us, not only the promise to forgive all sins but to give a new heart (Jer. 31:30-1). Yet even here, while inseparable, regeneration and sanctification are distinct from justification. Only those who are being sanctified have been justified and will be glorified, and yet justification itself is not conditioned on sanctification. God's gift of new obedience can in no way serve as a second instrument of justification, nor can faith be defined as obedience (faith formed by love) in the act of justifying sinners. Certainly not on every point, but *where justification is concerned*, faith and works are absolutely antithetical (Rom. 3:20-28; 4:4-5, 13-17; 10:1-13; 11:6; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:2-14, 21-4:31; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Commenting on Luke 10:25ff, Schlissel writes, "It is effrontery, an insult, to suggest that Jesus' answer, 'Do this and you will live,' was anything other than plain truth.... [I]t was Christ teaching that obedience to the law was something very do-able and that such obedience, which includes repentance and faith, does save." Yet Schlissel so overstates his case that not even Wright would concur. The FV is so reactionary in its rejection of the so-called "Lutheran" paradigm that its own systematic-theological prejudices render responsible exegesis of Jesus as well as Paul an impossible quest. And as for the Reformed confessions, Hutchinson is absolutely right when he concludes, "The assertion that the law-gospel formula is a 'Lutheran' scheme is discredited just three questions into the 1563 *Heidelberg Catechism*: 'Q. 3. How do you come to know your misery? A. The law of God tells me.'"

Lusk seems to be a little more open to exegetical nuance than Schlissel, who sees no significant discontinuity between the old and new covenants. There is some need to distinguish the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants, says Lusk. Yet "the fundamental requirement of the Mosaic covenant was not any different from the basic requirements of the Abrahamic or Christic covenants: the obedience of faith." Further, "the law did not require perfect obedience" and "the sacrificial system clearly offered a remedy for sin." Thus, "the law was a pre-Christian revelation of the gospel." Lusk then cites passages from Paul and Hebrews indicating what we have called the redemptive-historical use of law and gospel, but as if this were the only use these apostolic writers made of those categories, and as if there were no contrast at all. So the sweep from Moses to Christ is continuum, not contrast. Paul's argument about the differences between the Abrahamic covenant of promise and the Mosaic covenant of law is simply lost in the fog of a one-sided emphasis on redemptive-historical progress of a single covenant. At the end of the day, Christ is simply a new Moses. But then why did Paul say in Galatians that the Mosaic covenant could not annul the Abrahamic? Why would that question even arise unless there was some contrast and tension? Whatever differences there might be between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, they do not seem to be principal, says Lusk. "Or to put it another way, the New Covenant is just the Old Covenant in mature, glorified form." But does this come close to the contrasts that are drawn by Paul and the writer to the Hebrews? Is it not the case that Paul employs both redemptive-historical and systematic categories-on one hand, treating the law and the gospel as Old Testament promise and New Testament fulfillment (e.g., Rom. 3:21) and on the other, as the covenant/principle of promise and the covenant/principle of law/works?

Luther's problem is that he took the law and gospel as contrast instead of continuum; abstract instead of redemptive-historical, according to Lusk. "Law and gospel actually perform the same (rather than contradictory) functions ... [and] are simply two phases in the same redemptive program." Once again, this simply does not accord with the facts, either with respect to Luther or Paul. And because this distinction is confused in the NPP and FV, there is no longer any

acknowledgment that there is even a difference between imperatives and indicatives. The law does not equal condemnation, says Lusk.

The flip side, though, is that the gospel is not a pure unconditional message of grace and blessing, as the law/gospel dichotomy seems to imply. The gospel can condemn every bit as much as the law.... Thus, whether or not a particular piece of God's revelation is comforting ("gospel") or condemning ("law") depends on the state of the person's heart to which it comes.

There certainly is an existential aspect: the sinful tendency of human nature to "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" will lead unbelievers to turn even the gospel into law. But should the hermeneutic of unbelief be used as a guide for our own hermeneutical reflections? Ironically, having correctly rejected Bultmann's existentialist hermeneutics, the NPP and some of its FV supporters return to it at just this point. Is there really no such thing as indicative and imperative moods encoded into the text? Does it all depend on reader response? The systematic-theological grid seems to impose itself over even obvious rules of Greek grammar.

We Get In by Grace, But Stay In by Obedience; That Is, Justification (or Election) Is by Grace, but Judgment Is by Works

Again, this position is identical to the covenant theology of the late Middle Ages. Unlike the strict justice of the old covenant, the new covenant reflects a relaxation in God's demands. As the NPP and FV advocates have told us, God's law is very "do-able" (Schlüssel above). It's easy: get in by grace, stay in by cooperating with God's grace-doing whatever lies within you. If this is the view of NPP and FV, then it is the height of arrogance to criticize the medieval church for its version of covenantal nomism. According to the Council of Trent, one "got in" by baptism, which could hardly be regarded as a human work of the infant. This is the "first justification." But one's subsequent status ("second justification") depended on cooperation with infused grace. "Final justification" referred to the last judgment, which involves a divine weighing of good works against transgressions.

The reformers challenged this entire paradigm by insisting that one not only gets in but stays in by grace alone. They realized that the law, which we could not fulfill, nevertheless had to be fulfilled. Clearly, this involves some notion of merit: either Christ's or our own personal obedience. Paul's contrast between "the righteousness which is by the law" and "the righteousness which is by faith" (Rom. 10:5-6, *passim*) is that of the reformers as well. Of course, there is a final vindication of God's elect on Judgment Day, but the point of the doctrine of justification is to say that this eschatological verdict has already been rendered in the present. There are not two verdicts: one dependent on Christ's obedience, the other on our getting in by grace, staying in by obedience. Like Paul's critics, medieval Rome, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, [has] not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (vv. 3-4). "This only I want to learn from you," Paul demands of the Galatians:

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit [getting in by grace], are you now being made perfect by the flesh [stay in by obedience]? ... For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. (Gal. 3:2-3, 10-12)

To revert to the argument in Romans 4, Paul says, "Now to the one who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (v. 4). Here it is clearly any and all works, not just those prescribed by the ceremonial law. The contrast is all-encompassing: works create a debt, grace is free remission of sins and justification. It is the principle of works-as-wages that Paul opposes to the principle of faith-as-gift. The NPP argues that the category "works of the law" refers to Jewish distinctives (i.e., the ceremonial laws) that would keep Gentiles out. But again in Romans 9:11, we encounter the sweeping contrast between works of any kind ("nor having done anything good or bad") and gracious election. Here, as elsewhere, the contrast is: "to him who does *not work* but *believes*." (Rom. 4:5). In Philippians 3 Paul draws two columns-assets and liabilities, and places his former life as "a Pharisee of Pharisees" in the latter:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ... and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. (Phil. 3:5-9)

Consequently, those who seek to be justified by works are not children of Abraham (the father of faith). In fact, they are slaves, not sons, heirs of Hagar the slave rather than of Sarah the free woman. Or, to change the metaphor, he says that the Jerusalem below is in bondage, while the Jerusalem above is free. There are two covenants, not one: a covenant of law

(Sinai) and a covenant of promise (Abraham and his Seed) (Gal. 4:21-31). All of this is consistent with the prophets, especially Jeremiah 31, where God reissues the unilateral promise that the new covenant "will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers" at Sinai, "my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord" (v. 32). Paul does not invent the gospel; he is simply reminding them that the covenant of promise (Abrahamic) cannot be annulled by the later covenant at Sinai (Gal. 3:15-18).

Covenant theology, whether "covenantal nomism" or the Reformed variety, is inherently communal. It resists reduction to "me and my personal relationship with God"-or to the question, "How can I be saved?" At the same time, the Reformed variety at least resists the opposite reduction to the question covenant membership. All of this comes down to the question, What is the "gospel"? For many today, Wright complains, it is "a description of how people get saved." Wright doesn't have a problem with those things being true. "I simply wouldn't use the word 'gospel' to denote those things," since it is, properly, "*the return of Israel from exile*" (emphasis original). Again, we do not doubt that this redemptive-historical (biblical -theological) aspect is crucial, nor has it been lacking in Reformed covenant theology. But does this narrow definition exclude equally important elements in the prophets: forgiveness of sins, a new heart, among others, all of which were both issues of individual salvation and the fulfillment of God's promise to restore Israel? It certainly marginalizes the host of passages in which the gospel announcement consists of personal benefits: eternal life, justification, rebirth, the resurrection of the body (presumably the bodies of individual people), reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, glorification, and so forth.

"What must I do to be saved?" was clearly a question that Jesus and the apostles were asked in the New Testament. Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the publican-where the former is clearly portrayed as self-righteous and the latter as casting himself wholly on God's mercy, and only the latter "went down to his house justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:14). It is not surprising that Luke places this just before the story of the rich young ruler who demanded to know, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). To be sure, the parables are not like Aesop's fables, with a purely individual application. They typically refer to Israel (the elder brother, the employees who had clocked more hours, etc.) and the nations (the younger brother who squandered his inheritance, the Johnny-come-lately workers, etc.). This does not exclude but rather intensifies the question, "How can I be saved?" Especially since not only Paul but Jesus says, "None of you keeps the law" (John 7:19), this becomes a paramount personal crisis. Even if revivalism has sacrificed ecclesiology to the quest for personal salvation, the fact is that "How can I be saved?" is not the question of Luther's tortured subjectivity, but is asked and answered in the Gospels (Matt. 19:25) and Acts (2:40; 16:30). In fact, says Paul, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15).

The Gentile mission would hardly have made sense if the gospel were simply the announcement of Israel's return from exile. And the Jewish mission would not have had any better success with the "good news" reduced to the imperative to relax the entrance requirements. As Kim notes, no more dietary laws or circumcision: "Would anybody-Paul or any of his gentile hearers-have considered this announcement a 'gospel'? Is there any evidence that Paul's initial gospel was only this?" What of all those places where Paul explicitly articulates the gospel in terms of an atonement for sin (1 Cor. 2:2; 15:1-5; Gal. 1:4; 3:1; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9-10)?

Conclusion

The NPP has raised a host of important themes and made some important contributions to our understanding of Paul and Israel. Furthermore, even the FV circle has raised crucial questions that face us, especially in the contemporary Reformed and Presbyterian community, when so much of our faith and practice has been influenced by alien movements (especially revivalism). It is not the Reformed confessions and forms that need to be revised, but the current Reformed practice where it has been distorted by an Evangelicalism that ignores the objectivity of Christ's visible church and means of grace, its covenantal ways, and its eschatological, cosmic, and redemptive-historical horizon. That we are always reforming according to God's Word is not to be denied, but what we find in our classic Reformed resources is far more reflective of the "whole counsel of God" than the reactionary tendencies of our day.

1 [[Back](#)] In the preceding article, Professor Horton has cited E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977); Heiko Oberman's *Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1983); E. Calvin Beisner's *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Ft. Lauderdale: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004); Norman Shepherd's *The Call of Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Press, 2000); N. T. Wright's *Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1994); N. T. Wright's *What St. Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); and Seyoon Kim's *Paul and the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

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