

## INSTEAD OF A REPLY A Quick Survey of MVP's Accusations Against Me

Mark Horne

Mississippi Valley Presbytery adopted a report on February 1, 2005 from their ad hoc committee

charged with facilitating the presbytery's study of the issues surrounding the distinct but related phenomena of the so-called "New Perspectives on Paul" (NPP) (including the theology of N.T. Wright, hereafter NTW); the so-called "Auburn Avenue theology" (hereafter AAT, which is sometimes referred to as the "Federal Vision," hereafter FV, or AAT/FV) and the theology of Norman Shepherd (hereafter NS).

Certain statements are made about myself in the endnotes of the statements made about the so-called "Federal Vision." What follows are my responses to these statements.

I stress that I am *only* addressing what is said about me personally and am not commenting on any other truth claims made in the document. My silence must *not* be taken as agreement or disagreement with the report's claims about any other person they have named. This is not a general overview or reply to the whole paper.

I realize, that in reading this document, you are reading what are merely the claims of one man. I am presuming to disagree with a person or persons of much greater stature in our denomination, and indeed with the official act of an entire presbytery. The only reason I believe it is right (and required) that I write on this issue is because this is, in my (admittedly brief) experience, an unprecedented act. A court, without the due process of a trial, has publicly and officially denied the doctrinal orthodoxy of ministers in good standing in the Presbyterian Churches of America. I have never been given the opportunity to confront my accusers, to stipulate the items admitted into evidence, to gain representation. Yet I have now a verdict pronounced over my head, one that has quite substantially hampered my ministry. In this special circumstance, I believe it is appropriate to answer what has been said. I hope you will read it with an impartial judgment.

On Page 12 of the document, the report claims on lines 7 & 8:

**Proponents of the FV identify themselves as Reformed. Most appeal to the writings of the sixteenth century Reformers in support of their views.**

This is referenced by endnote #3:

Examples of this approach include ... Mark Horne, "Samuel Miller, Baptism, & Covenant Theology;"...

### My Response

1. I do not only identify myself as Reformed, but
  - a) I identify myself as one who does “sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures” and who does “further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?”
  - b) Thus far three presbyteries have identified me as such a person: Pacific Northwest Presbytery where I was examined and ordained. Mid-America and then North Texas Presbytery where I pastored for over three and a half years, and Missouri Presbytery where I was received this last January. In this last, due to the damage my reputation has suffered by gossip and misinformation, as well as due to the present political climate in our denomination, I was examined quite closely on issues relating to justification and the sacrament, and *after hearing me speak for myself* I was admitted as not only Reformed, but Presbyterian and in conformity to the Westminster Standards.
2. It is false to claim that I appeal in any special way to the sixteenth-century reformers, as opposed to our seventeenth-century doctrinal standards to which I subscribe.
  - a) My essay on "Samuel Miller, Baptism, & Covenant Theology" is reproduced in **Appendix One** below. It is my opinion that Bucer is only mentioned in passing and that my argument is directly from the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (as well as the Bible passages used as prooftexts within those documents).
  - b) In fact, a great deal of my theological writing is an exposition of the Westminster Standards: To wit:
    - Sacramental Assurance & the Reformed Faith: The Biblical Perspective of the Westminster Standards  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/sacramental\\_assurance\\_westminster.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/sacramental_assurance_westminster.htm)

- Heads of Household Membership & Male-Only Voting in the Church  
<http://www.patriarchy.org/church/membership.html> (originally appeared at the pcanet.org website under the Christian Ed Committee, I think. It is an argument *against* the things mentioned in the title.)
  - The Necessity of New Obedience: The Westminster Standards, Repentance, and Pardon  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/necessity\\_of\\_new\\_obedience.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/necessity_of_new_obedience.htm)
  - Mixing "Law" & Gospel in the Abrahamic Promise: A Response to Michael Horton  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/mixing\\_law\\_and\\_gospel\\_in\\_the\\_abrahamic\\_promise.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/mixing_law_and_gospel_in_the_abrahamic_promise.htm)
  - Charles Hodge's Deficient Idea of the Church  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/charles\\_hodges\\_deficient\\_idea\\_of\\_the\\_church.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/charles_hodges_deficient_idea_of_the_church.htm)
  - Law & Gospel in Presbyterianism: The Reformed Doctrine Stated & Briefly Vindicated from Scripture  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/law\\_and\\_gospel\\_in\\_presbyterianism.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/law_and_gospel_in_presbyterianism.htm)
  - The Church: An Exposition of Chapter XXV of the Westminster Confession of Faith  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/of\\_the\\_church.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/of_the_church.htm)  
(Originally written for a seminary class on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Received an "A" in the denominational seminary)
  - The Westminster Standards & Sacramental Efficacy  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/the\\_westminster\\_standards\\_and\\_sacramental\\_efficacy.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/the_westminster_standards_and_sacramental_efficacy.htm)
  - Credo Regarding Personal Justification before God  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/credo\\_on\\_justification.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/credo_on_justification.htm) (Response to gossip and false statements)
  - A Quiz on Justification & Salvation  
[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/justification\\_salvation\\_quiz.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/justification_salvation_quiz.htm)
- c) While I do have an interest in sixteenth-century Reformation theology and worship, particularly in the English version of Zacharias Ursinus' *Commentary on*

*the Heidelberg Catechism*, my main interest has been in seventeenth-century theology. Francis Turretin and Benedict Pictet (at least those of their works that have been translated into English by American Presbyterians, who did not do so because they believed they were subversive to Westminster Doctrine). Also, I have a preference for Charles Hodge (despite a critical essay I wrote listed above) and have posted his material from time to time. Furthermore, a primary theological teacher in my theological development has been the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. It is true there was a time (1994-1995) when I went through an embarrassing “Calvin is the Greatest” phase, but I was set straight rather quickly under the teaching ministry of Pastor Jeff Meyers.

On page 12, lines 24-25 we read:

**FV proponents deny the imputation of Christ's active (and perhaps passive) obedience to the believer for justification.**

This is endnoted (#13) and on page 14 of the report we read in that note in part:

**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").**

#### My Response

1. It cannot possibly be controversial within the Protestant tradition to claim that justification is a conferral of a forensic status. The idea that this is somehow “a different track” than the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is an incredible premise to simply assert without argument. Yet without this alleged antithesis the entire argument fails. The committee does not address the possibility (a) that the claims I make in my writings are true statements in and of themselves without in any way jeopardizing the “traditional doctrine of imputation”; or (b) that my claims are quite compatible with the “traditional doctrine of imputation”; or (c) that my claims are part of a Biblical and exegetical case that proves “the traditional doctrine of imputation.”

For the record, I contend that (c) is correct, though any of the possibilities deals with the accusation. I continue to believe I am “not denying the traditional doctrine of imputation” because nothing the committee itself has alleged regarding my “positive definitions of the righteousness imputed to the believer” even offers a reason to think otherwise. For some good material on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, as related to the Biblical material, see D. A. Carson’s essay “The

Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields,” which starts on page 46 of *Justification: What’s At Stake in the Current Debate*, edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004).

2. Why did the committee, in listing my “positive definitions of the righteousness imputed to the believer,” leave out my “Credo Regarding Personal Justification before God”? See **Appendix Five**.

For the record, I affirm as my belief and teaching that God justifies sinners “by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them.” Furthermore, *above and beyond what the Westminster Standards require*, I affirm the imputation of Christ’s active obedience as well as his passive obedience.

On page 13, lines 29-31, we read:

**Following Norman Shepherd, FV proponents argue that election must be understood in terms of the covenant, not vice versa. The result is formulations of election that render one's election a process and a function of one's covenantal obedience.**

This second sentence is endnoted (#18) so that we read on page 15:

**Many FV proponents argue that biblical statements concerning Old Testament corporate or national election are determinative of our understanding of individual election. See here ... Mark Horne, "Election: Corporate & Individual."**

My Response:

1. I have never argued that the covenant cannot or should not be understood in terms of election (and remember that I am only commenting on my own beliefs and not those of others; my silence should not lead to any conclusions). That is not, and never has been, my position.
2. It is hard to be sure what is meant by “formulations of election that render one’s election a process and function of one’s covenantal obedience.” But if the Committee is claiming that I believe or profess or teach a formulation of election that:
  - a) Denies that, “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”
  - b) Affirms or leads people to think that God “decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon [foreseen] conditions.”

- c) Denies that, “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.”
- d) Denies that, “These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.”
- e) Denies that, “Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.”
- f) Denies that, “The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.”

then the committee is misrepresenting my teaching and position.

I am certainly open to other ideas as to what the committee means, since it is virtually unthinkable that they would make such a false accusation. But because other readers, I believe, will certainly be tempted to come away with the impression that I am some sort of Arminian, I see no way I cannot address the possibility. After all, if the committee is merely reporting on the fact that I believe that God foreordains the means as well as the ends, and that we come to know ourselves as elect through the gifts of faith and repentance through the immediate work of the Spirit and through the Gospel ministry, then why even mention the issue?

3. Likewise, I don't know what it means to claim, “biblical statements concerning Old Testament corporate or national election are determinative of our understanding of individual election.” If they mean that no one is ordinarily saved out of the visible Church, and that, therefore, election is ordinarily executed by bringing a person into the visible Church, then what is the problem? If they mean something else, see point 2 above.

Page 15, endnote 22:

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 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;"

My Response:

1. My position is that the saving graces of faith and repentance are sufficient for assurance and that the Sacraments are instituted in part to confirm our interest in Christ—to thus strengthen our faith.
2. My essay polemicizes against the idea that professing believers need to produce some number or quality of general good works in order to have assurance. That at least is my understanding of my intention and my meaning. Readers may decide for themselves by going to **Appendix Seven**.

The Committee claims on pages 12-13, lines 45-47:

**Baptism is assigned a place in the doctrine of the Christian life that denigrates the place of preaching as the instrument of conversion.**

Page 17, endnote 27:

**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."**

My Response:

1. I affirm of baptism and the ministry of the Word what the Confession and Catechisms affirm. I don't believe that there is a "zero-sum game" going on between preaching and either or both sacraments. The Preaching of the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, are all efficacious means of salvation for the elect. The preached word interprets the sacraments, invites to the sacraments, and exhorts believers so that they may profit from the sacraments. The sacraments confirm the promise of the preached word and seal the preached word. Unbelievers can be converted without sacraments but they cannot be converted without Christ preached to them. Sinners are not ordinarily saved out of the visible Church and baptism is the way one is admitted into the visible Church. Nothing I have said is inconsistent with this.
2. If we had doctrinal standards that assigned a numeric rating to preaching and a rating to baptism, and if I then disagreed with the assigned values, this sort of thing would be a matter for the involvement of the Church courts. Here there is nothing.

3. It is unfortunate that my rather exploratory essay calling for whole-life and whole-community evangelism is being used as evidence that I am unconfessional. Here is a large portion of what I wrote:

The truth is, taken in the narrow sense, I wonder if there can be any such thing as a "converting ordinance." Think of the best scenario, an unbeliever goes to Church for some reason and hears the Gospel preached by a minister in public worship. He repents and believes. But ask him to give his testimony. What happens? Does he tell of what he heard in the sermon and end it there? No. He tells us of why he was drawn to be in Church that day. Perhaps a neighbor invited him and he was intrigued because this neighbor had displayed a functioning and harmonious family. And then when he heard the sermon, was its persuasive power simply in the statements made by themselves? Almost invariably converts have stories of many instances in which they become confronted with the claims of Christ. The sermon reminds one of how her grandmother use to take them to VBS where she learned that Jesus died to satisfy our debts.

What I am trying to say is that an unbeliever is often converted not by one ordinance, but by many instances of confrontation with the New Creation that is Jesus Christ made manifest in the Church. The preached word is one part of a package of things involved in encountering Christian society, including hospitality, an example of good works (Remember: Peter tells wives to win their husbands not by preaching at them but by their submissive behavior), and a harmonious community (May they all be one so that the world might know that you sent me). How often does the preached Word convert if stripped of that context?

There is an analogy here with language generally. We learn language by being forced to participate with interacting bodies. Facial expressions, hand motions, and various actions are the context in which sounds are heard and eventually understood as words. Without gestures, language loses coherence. God established a community of interacting people by the administration of the covenant of grace. First in Israel according to the flesh and now in the Spirit-filled Church, Jesus communicates within a tangible family in which his Word is preached and confessed and followed. Interacting with this family can be described as encountering the Word of God as opposed to the words embodied by other communities (Mormons, JW's, surfers), but it seems terribly reductionistic to only think of this as the result of one "ordinance."

Again, this whole way of thinking seems more appropriate for battles among professing Christians. If the issue is that there are confessing Trinitarians who attend Church, support missions, and pray at meals, but who have not

been "truly converted," then it makes sense that one would ignore what is common among Church members and concentrate on one particular ritual (preaching the Word on Sunday morning or on other set occasions). But if we are increasingly going to find Hindus and non-practicing Buddhists are our neighbors, or simply people whose multiple fractured families have never bothered to let them see the inside of a church building, then none of this can be expected. The issue is not about "experimental religion" among practicing Christians, but about whole-life conversion about people who have little to no context for understanding much of what might be said from the pulpit. We're not in the colonies anymore and there are no ruby slippers to take us back.

That is why the recovery of the full power of the Reformed Faith, as is being done by people like Preston Graham, Michael Horton (who has probably done more than anyone to widely acquaint Reformed believers with the Reformed and Biblical doctrine of baptism) and others is especially relevant for a time such as this. Churches are not service stations in Christendom, but embassies in foreign territory. A concept of conversion that hinges on summary messages and decisional prayers is simply not adequate. Our model for conversion needs to be based on words like "recruitment," "induction," or--dare I say it?--"discipleship."

A lot more could be said here--a book or more at least. I notice I haven't used the word "repentance" yet in what I have written so far, so I remind the reader that I can't affirm and discuss everything at once. The basic point here is that evangelism now involves a true interaction between alien cultures. The question is how we get the gospel heard among the cacophony of many gods and many lords increasingly present today. People need to be confronted with an entirely new life and community. They need to be challenged to turn from their autonomous life and concretely entrust themselves to Jesus Christ the risen King.

Thus, baptism as the border and entryway of the Church, the replacement for circumcision under the previous administration of the covenant of grace, can be seen as a clearly important rite. In the Bible the pattern we see is clear. Men and women are confronted with a summary challenge to repent and believe in Christ, if they agree they immediately submit to baptism, and then they are taught and trained in the Church. If they later reject the Faith, then they are dealt with. But they do not have to be catechized first or to prove themselves "true believers." If they will confess that Jesus is Lord, with the understanding that Christ was exalted by God in his resurrection, then they are to be baptized as brothers and sisters in the family of God, with their children.

To promote baptism as the transitional rite that marks the difference between autonomy and discipleship to Christ does not in any way denigrate the need for the preaching of the Word or its role in converting and sanctifying sinners. It simply puts that ritual within the Christ-established context of baptism, the Lord's Supper (something else I've not mentioned yet), the Lord's Prayer, and other markers of Christian community. This context can no longer be taken for granted.

I don't see why I need to defend this essay against being some sort of doctrinal threat within the PCA. Nothing here is out of accord with my ordination vows. I reproduce the entire essay below as **Appendix Eight**. I acknowledge that I don't do enough thinking or strategizing about reaching the post-modern world for Christ, so that anyone with experience may find my suggestions rather naïve. Nevertheless, one has to start somewhere, and I am one who finds it easiest to think in writing.

## CONCLUSION

This is a true record of my thoughts on the matter. I remind the reader that even great men can make mistakes and even committees can err. If this were not so there would be no need to guard the rights of the accused to defend themselves and cross-examine those who testify against them. God is no respecter of persons.

I realize that some motions of conscience led the committee to express a desire not to name names in their report Lines 94-98:

The MVP committee had initially thought of not footnoting the FV summary statement, in order to avoid having to name names and involving personalities (hoping that a more detached and anonymous account of the FV theology would help keep the temperature of subsequent discussion down). However, when the charges of misrepresentation were spread abroad, the committee determined to provide full public documentation of its descriptions in order to vindicate the accuracy of the report, as well as to be maximally helpful to other church bodies wrestling with these issues.

Nevertheless, they *have* named me, and associated my name with the Pauline anathemas (Galatians 1.6-9; lines 203-209). I respectfully agree with the report that my name *does* bear to the issue of the accuracy of the report and that it would be "maximally helpful" for "other church bodies" to read my works in comparison to how they are characterized by the report.

I pray God will grant you wisdom as you consider these matters.

## APPENDIX ONE

[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/samuel\\_miller\\_baptism\\_and\\_covenant\\_theology.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/samuel_miller_baptism_and_covenant_theology.htm)

Theologia :: History :: Samuel Miller, Baptism, and Covenant Theology

### SAMUEL MILLER, BAPTISM, & COVENANT THEOLOGY

by Mark Horne

Copyright © 2004

Samuel Miller was one of the early professors at Princeton Theological Seminary. As a Presbyterian [he wrote a book that defended infant baptism](#). Miller's book was fine, but his [appendix on baptismal regeneration](#) seems problematic. Of course, his initial attack on superstition is quite warranted, but I am speaking of what he says under II:

But there is another view of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which is sometimes taken, and which, though less pernicious than that which has been examined, is still, I apprehend, fitted to mislead, and, of course, to do essential mischief. It is this: that baptism is that rite which marks and ratifies the introduction of its subject into the visible kingdom of Christ; that in this ordinance the baptized person is brought into a new state or relation to Christ, and his sacred family; and that this new state or relation is designated in the scripture by the term *regeneration*, being intended to express an *ecclesiastical birth*, that is, being "born" into the visible kingdom of the Redeemer. Those who entertain this opinion do not deny that there is a great moral change, wrought by the Spirit of God, which must pass upon every one, before he can be in a state of salvation. This they call *conversion*, *renovation*, etc.; but they tell us that the term "*regeneration*" ought not to be applied to this spiritual change; that it ought to be confined to that change of *state* and of *relation* to the *visible kingdom of Christ* which is constituted by baptism; so that a person, according to them, may be regenerated, that is, regularly introduced into the visible church, without being really born of the Spirit. This theory, though by no means so fatal in its tendency as the preceding, still appears to me liable to the following serious objections.

His first claim, that "It makes an unauthorized use of an important theological term," is entirely bogus for people outside his own theo-linguistic tradition. The word "regeneration" only occurs twice in Scripture, once for the coming of the kingdom age (Matthew 19.28) and once, according to the prooftexts of the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 165), in reference to baptism (Titus 3.5).

On other terms such as "born from above," "born again," "reborn," etc, I would very much like to see a non-circular argument that these refer to an interior transformation worked directly by the Spirit which irreversibly guarantees persevering faith—that is, "great moral change, wrought by the Spirit of God, which must pass upon everyone before he can be in a state of salvation." The phrase in First Peter 1.3, occurs in a passage with a great deal of common language with the context of Paul's use of the word "regeneration" in his letter to Titus. More tellingly, it is paralleled by *a later reference to baptism* in First Peter 3.21. Peter also says his readers have been born again through the Word of God (1.23), but again, where is the proof that this is not simply a metaphor for hearing the Gospel message and being brought into a new family through baptism?

As it stands, Miller's claim that others are making "unauthorized use of an important theological term" is based on nothing more than his own desire to use the terminology differently than others. In my judgment none of Miller's statements here are at all plausible to anyone who does not already agree with his hermeneutic. Since Miller surely knows that those representing other ecclesiastical traditions will take the book as a statement of the Presbyterian *argument* for his position, it is curious why he did not use argumentation that might persuade them. As it is, he has simply declared as a principle a way of interpreting Scripture in conformity to the conclusions that he wishes to reach.

Miller's second objection is even stranger than the first, both from the standpoint of the Scriptures and from the standpoint of the actual doctrinal documents to which Miller, as a Presbyterian clergyman, claimed to adhere.

If men be told that every one who is baptized, is thereby regenerated — "born of God," "born of the Spirit," made a "new creature in Christ" — will not the mass of mankind, in spite of every precaution and explanation that can be employed, be likely to mistake on a fundamental point; to imagine that the disease of our nature is trivial, and that a trivial remedy for it will answer; to lay more stress than they ought upon an external rite; and to make a much lower estimate than they ought of the nature and necessity of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord?

This is, on the face of it, an attack on the New Testament. Consider the following:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.38).

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22.16).

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not

know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6.1-3).

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (First Corinthians 12.12, 13, 27).

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3.27-29).

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2.8-14).

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3.5-7).

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which

corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him (First Peter 3.18-22).

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith all these texts are references to water baptism. Granted, it is not exactly unconfessional to deny that Titus 3.5 speaks of baptism (though mistaken, in my opinion) since Presbyterian ministers are not required to agree with the footnoted Scripture verses used to support doctrinal statements. Nevertheless, these statements don't seem to show the same kind of concern which Dr. Miller expresses concerning the likeliness to "mistake on a fundamental point." Is this baptismal language not guilty of the same accusation that Miller makes regarding "ecclesiastical birth"? If so, I don't see how this objection can be honoring to Scripture as God's own Word. We should not criticize brothers who are trying to use the Bible's own terminology simply for using the terminology.

In addition to running aground on Scripture, Miller's criticism does not match up to Presbyterian doctrine. While the Westminster Confession's and Catechisms' Scriptural citations are not considered a part of the required doctrinal standards themselves, the case should be different when these document actually quote or allude to Scripture in a way that undeniably appeals to a certain text. For example, Romans 6 quoted above is not only footnoted in the Westminster Larger Catechism but is obviously behind the text itself:

**Q167: How is our Baptism to be improved by us?**

A167: The needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; *by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace;* and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body [emphasis added].

It wouldn't be hard to multiply citations from the Westminster Standards. It never seems even acknowledged by Miller that the Confession affirms precisely that every baptized person is "born into the visible kingdom of the Redeemer." Baptism admits the baptized

person into the Church, "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (28.1; 25.2). One is thus placed in a new relationship that is explicitly called, both in Scripture and in the Confession, a *family* where God is father and Jesus is the elder brother. One's solidarity with the old family of Adam is covenantally ended in favor of solidarity with the new Adam. To claim that a change to a new family in which one is Abraham's offspring (Galatians 3.29) must never be referred to by the metaphor of "birth" or "rebirth" seems quite arbitrary and unnatural. Again, we are simply being ordered to speak and think in certain ways and interpret the Bible accordingly. But where is there any argument *from* Scripture?

In light of this, Miller's criticism of the wording in the Book of Common Prayer is rather amazing given the kind of prayers that were used by the Reformers. Consider Martin Bucer's 1537 Strasbourg liturgy for infant baptism:

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we give you eternal praise and thanks, that you have granted and bestowed upon this child your fellowship, that you have born him again to yourself through holy baptism, that he has been incorporated into your beloved son, our only savior, and is now your child and heir...

Such examples are easy to find both in the Reformed liturgies and in the Reformed catechisms.

We should also consider the other point of Miller's criticism, that the people taught in the importance of this "external rite" as an entry into the Church will "make a much lower estimate than they ought of the nature and necessity of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." I fail to see any logic to this. Romans 6 shows such "slippery slope" holds no pull on the Apostle Paul who warns his hearers that "the end of those things is death (v. 21), later elaborated in the declaration that "if you live according to the flesh you will die" (8.13). Paul warns the Corinthians of destruction if they do not pursue the way of faith and repentance (First Corinthians 10.1ff), without worrying that his assurances in chapter 12 are in tension with his warning. On the contrary, "we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (Second Corinthians 6.1).

We should also remember Augustine's controversy with Pelagius. The entire doctrine of original sin as it has come to us in Church history was done by pointing to the universal and historic Church practice of baptizing infants. The idea that such language, "in spite of every precaution and explanation that can be employed," *must* lead to the notion that "the disease of our nature is trivial" can only seem preposterous to anyone who has read Augustine's anti-Pelagian works. Augustine was highly recommended by John Calvin in his *Institutes*, especially his work, *On Rebuke & Grace*. This distinctively Reformed Protestant heritage makes Miller's fears hard to understand. The slippery slope, if history is any guide, works precisely the other way.

What is amazing about the view which Miller is opposing is that it seems so obviously *covenantal*. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith,

Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace [of Law and then Gospel], differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

Compare this with what is said regarding the visible Church:

Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.

The Church is the Gospel Administration of the Covenant of Grace. Her "external rite" is promised Christ's "own presence and Spirit." Yet Miller seems oblivious to this correspondence between his targets and his own theology. His opponents are simply saying that Baptism does *exactly* what the Westminster Confession says that baptism does-put the baptized person into God's family-and yet he treats the entire view as alien and suspect.

What makes all of the above much more strained is that he has already made the following comment about the early Church:

It is not forgotten that language which seems, at first view, to countenance the doctrine which I am opposing, is found in some of the *early fathers*. Some of them employ terms which would imply, if interpreted literally, that baptism and regeneration were the same thing. But the reason of this is obvious. The Jews were accustomed to call the converts to their religion from the Gentiles *little children*, and their introduction into the Jewish church, a *new birth*, because they were brought, as it were, into a *new moral world*. Accordingly, circumcision is repeatedly called in Scripture "*the covenant*," because it was the sign of the covenant. Afterwards, when baptism, as a Christian ordinance, became identified with the reception of the gospel, the early writers and preachers began to call this ordinance *regeneration*, and sometimes *illumination*, because every *adult* who was baptized, professed to be born of God, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. By a common figure of speech, they called the sign by the name of the *thing signified*. In the truly

primitive times this language was harmless, and well understood; but as superstition increased, it gradually led to mischievous error, and became the parent of complicated and deplorable delusions.

Obviously, though Miller doesn't ever seem to acknowledge it, the view of the early Fathers is that of his Evangelical Episcopal contemporaries whom he is criticizing. Compare what he says about them: Regarding the first and second centuries: baptism brings the baptized, "as it were, into a new moral world." This fits his description of the modern view he is opposing:

in this ordinance the baptized person is brought into a new state or relation to Christ, and his sacred family; and that this new state or relation is designated in the scripture by the term *regeneration*, being intended to express an *ecclesiastical birth*, that is, being "born" into the visible kingdom of the Redeemer.

Why go on to dismiss the propriety of this historical practice? *Why not claim victory for covenant theology as being the theology of the primitive Church?*

By insisting on opposing this language and practice, Miller has distanced himself and the Presbyterianism he claims to represent from the practice of the Church as we know it from the earliest times. He has, in fact, told readers that history is on the side of his Episcopal opponents. But as we saw above in looking at Martin Bucer's liturgy, this opposition is not necessary to maintain Reformed Theology. As we see above from question 167 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, his position does not fit well with the doctrinal constitution of his own denomination. Notice that the baptized person is to grow to assurance of pardon, not into the blessing of pardon itself which is assumed to already be his.

I'll conclude these brief thoughts with a statement of my own concern for Miller's approach. It seems to me to deny baptism as a seal to the baptized person "to confirm our interest in him" (WCF 27.1). If God does not, in baptism, give us a new status whereby we are entrusted to his care, then how can we trust God for our salvation? If "the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed" by baptism are dismissed, then what have we to "improve" upon by faith? Miller's concern about the example of Simon the Sorcerer seems misplaced since Simon obviously did not think much of the status that baptism had bestowed upon him, not valuing the benefits but wanting more, and not valuing the great responsibilities either. Certainly Miller would tell every baptized person that they should be "humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism" and have an obligation "to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness." How can these demands be made if the benefits are not also assured? If the imperative precedes the indicative than how can we avoid falling into moralism rather than the ethic of the Gospel? Consider this statement made at an infant's baptism in the French Reformed Liturgy of the Reformation:

Little child, for you Jesus Christ has come, he has fought, he has suffered. For you he entered into the shadows of Gethsemane and the terror of Calvary; for you he uttered the cry 'it is finished.' For you he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and there for you he intercedes. For you, even though you do not yet know it, little child, but in this way the Word of the Gospel is made true, "We love him because he first loved us."

*We love him because he first loved us.* The whole point of baptism is that it is the beginning of the Christian life, not something that you earn at some point later. Consider how our children are raised in Presbyterian Churches. They are baptized in infancy and raised in God's worship every weekday. Within a very short period of time, they are, in most congregations, praying the Lord's Prayer with their parents. Surely it is not without purpose that they address God as Father. Is allowing them to pray the Lord's Prayer something that denies faith? Does it not rather *teach* them faith-teach them to trust God? Will anyone claim that their past baptism into the "house and family of God" is irrelevant to their praying the Lord's prayer? When our extremely small children sin do we tell them that there is no forgiveness, or do we lead them in a prayer to God and assure them of their forgiveness? Will anyone claim that this practice has *no* relationship to the initiatory seal of God's covenant? Truly, baptism is a superstition if it is simply done for show without being a true means of salvation to be received and persevered in by faith in Christ alone.

It is true that some baptized persons reject God's promises in unbelief. But claiming that baptism signifies nothing to the person being baptized is hardly conducive to encouraging faith. Miller's attack on superstition is on target but his criticism of other Evangelicals ends up undermining his own tradition. If we want to see people understand the importance, centrality, and sufficiency of faith, we would be better served teaching them to trust God as he communicates his blessings to his people in Word and Sacrament.

Copyright © 2004

## APPENDIX TWO

[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/wright\\_righteousness\\_covenant.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/wright_righteousness_covenant.htm)

Theologia :: Soteriology :: Wright, Righteousness, Covenant

### Some thoughts on WRIGHT, RIGHTEOUSNESS, & COVENANT STATUS BY MARK HORNE

Copyright © 2004

1. N. T. Wright claims that in the Apostle Paul's writings "righteousness," as it predicated of humans, denotes "covenant membership." When he wrote this in the *New Bible Dictionary* edited by Sinclair Ferguson, J. I. Packer, and David Wright, no one thought this was too big a deal. However, when he expressed himself again later in his excellent little book, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, his claims attracted a great deal more criticism, some of it worthy of consideration (i.e. Charles Hill's review at [Thirdmill.org](http://Thirdmill.org)).
2. Frankly, I originally thought that Wright's claims about righteousness and covenant membership were somewhat overblown. What he rightly pointed out, as far I was concerned, was that Paul spoke of "justification" and "righteousness" as a forensic status especially in the context of dealing with the question of the status of believing baptized Gentiles in relation to believing baptized Jews (i.e. mainly Romans and Galatians). In most other epistles dealing with Christian life, faith, and conversion (see especially First Thessalonians for this last), Paul doesn't find any need to mention justification or even righteousness. But all this only showed *when* Paul used the word. That was a totally different question from what the word actually meant. Just because Paul had a certain use for certain terminology doesn't mean there aren't other legitimate uses for that terminology.
3. Still, since the Bible is authoritative, I thought it was a good thing to point out that the original situation in which Paul applied the doctrine of justification was arranged and recorded under the control and inspiration of the Spirit. While we can and should apply the doctrine in various ways as our particular circumstances demand, we dare not simply forget the original context in our exegesis. God told us about it for a reason. In this light, even if Wright was somewhat mistaken, it seemed obvious to me that his emphasis could be helpful to anyone who wanted to be faithful to Scripture. From this standpoint, Steve Schlissel's pleas that Biblical studies on justification not be suffered to entirely ignore the issue of Jew and Gentile seem quite reasonable. I can't help but wonder if the reaction to them in some quarters is more

a reaction against Schlissel in general rather than the actual content of his statements on this issue.

4. It needs to be pointed out (not because it is unclear, but because highly-polarized and pejorative mischaracterizations are common) that Wright has always affirmed that justification is the conferring of a forensic status or righteousness in God's sight—they are given legal right standing with Him. He never threatened the normal use of the word in Reformed dogmatics. On the contrary, he admirably defended justification as the conferring of a legal status and also popularized the need to distinguish justification from effectual calling in order to accurately reproduce Pauline theology. (Furthermore, he has consistently taught that this standing [has an exclusively extrinsic basis in the person and work of Jesus Christ](#).)
5. There is, however, more to be said regarding the meaning of righteousness or justification in relation to covenant status or membership. To have “right standing” can mean, by itself, just about anything. Two equals can have right standing with each other. Two strangers can get in an argument on the street, and when peace is restored, revert to being strangers who go on their way without any further relationship—which as strangers, would be a restoration of right standing. Obviously, this bare definition is simply not what the Apostle Paul *means* when he refers to God justifying the ungodly, nor would it be the meaning used by Saul the Pharisee.
6. After all, Adam was God's son (Luke 3:38). When God condemned him and Eve, they were disinherited from God's family. By definition, reconciliation with God, being again accounted as righteous in his sight, would mean being restored as God's children. In fact, it is difficult to think of a way that a sinful son of Adam could conceivably be pardoned of all his sins and accepted as righteous in God's sight (Westminster Shorter Catechism #33), without being, in that very act, given status in God's covenant.
7. Thus, Francis Turretin wrote that,

to no purpose do some anxiously ask here how justification and adoption differ from each other, and whether adoption is by nature prior to justification (as some hold, who think it is the first and immediate fruit of faith by which we are united and joined to Christ; or whether posterior to and consequent upon it, as others). For since it is evident from what has been said that justification is a benefit by which God (being reconciled to us in Christ) absolves us from the guilt of sins and gives us a right to life, it follows that adoption is included in justification itself as a part which, with the remission of sins, constitutes the whole of this benefit. Nor can it be distinguished from adoption except inasmuch as it is taken strictly for remission of sins, since in its formal conception it includes also acceptance

to life, which flows from the imputation of Christ's righteousness (*Institutes*, Vol. II, p. 668 / 16.6.7).

For God to give someone a relationship with himself is an inherently covenantal action. It is true that the prodigal son (Luke 15) could conceive of the idea of receiving some sort of forgiveness from his father without being restored to sonship, but his concept was quite obviously attenuated. If a father in that era were to say a son could only stay on the estate as a hired servant, he would be understandably perceived as disowning his son. Real forgiveness meant a restoration of the covenant relationship.

In short, if condemnation means expulsion from the covenant relationship then justification cannot fail to mean the restoration to the covenant relationship.

8. The discussion of the prodigal son, however, opens our eyes to why regenerate Jews and pagan Gentiles could both be said to have been justified when they heard the Gospel. Even though they enjoyed God's love and favor, many barriers separated pious Jews from the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. They were sons and yet were treated as mere servants in many ways. Thus, again, Turretin:

Now although this privilege as to the thing [adoption, righteousness before God] is common to all the believers of the Old Testament, no less than to those of the New, who were both sons of God and had a right to the heavenly inheritance (to which after death they were admitted), still it is certain that the condition of believers of the New Testament as to the mode is far better in this respect: they are no longer in an infantile age, held like slaves under teachers and the rudiments of the world, when they were not able to have either the sense or the use of their right, animated by the spirit of bondage. But now being adults and emancipated by Christ, they are admitted to the sanctuary of the Father and have a full sense and fruit of their right, the Spirit of adoption being received, in virtue of which they can confidently cry out, Abba, Father. Paul refers to this when he says, "Christ was made under the law to redeem them that were under the law" (to wit, under the curse of the moral law and under the yoke of the ceremonial law) "that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4.4, 5). Not that only by which we are separated from the children of wrath and the Devil, but also that by which we far excel infants, who do not differ from slaves.

Turretin goes on to refer back to his discussion of the covenant of grace (10.2), demonstrating that he sees adoption as a covenant identity.

9. So Wright's idea that justification declares believers to be members of God's covenant through Christ is not far-fetched. Indeed, it is impossible to escape. To be

given, by declaration, right standing with God, is inherently to be given covenant status with him.

10. The question remains: Is Wright really getting into Paul's mind to bring up such a meaning? Wright's commentary on Romans shows that he finds this connection in Paul himself. Commenting on Romans 4.11 he writes:

We should note, in particular, that Paul's effortless rewording of Gen 17:11 indicates clearly, what we have argued all along, that for him a primary meaning of "righteousness" was "covenant membership." God says in Genesis that circumcision is "a sign of the covenant"; Paul says it was "a sign of righteousness." He can hardly mean this as a radical alteration or correction, but rather as an explanation. The whole chapter (Genesis 15) is about the covenant that God made with Abraham, and Paul is spending his whole chapter expounding it; if he had wanted to avoid covenant theology he went about it in a strange way. Rather, we should see here powerful confirmation of the covenantal reading of "righteousness" language in 1:17 and 3:21-31. "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the covenant membership marked by the faith he had while still uncircumcised" (Romans, 494-495).

11. Consider also Paul's thought on what is reckoned:

- \_ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be *reckoned* as circumcision? (Romans 2.26)
- \_ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be *reckoned* to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised (Romans 4.11, 12).
- \_ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are *reckoned* as offspring (Romans 9.8).

Add to this how closely justification is tied to membership in Abraham's family (Romans 4, Galations 3.23-4.6).

12. Paul's interpretation would be backed by what the Bible says about Phinehas. Just as Abram was reckoned righteous when he believed God so Phinehas was reckoned righteous when he slew a Moabitess and apostate Israelite.

Then Phinehas stood up and intervened,

and the plague was stayed.  
And that was counted to him as righteousness  
from generation to generation forever (Psalm 106.30, 31).

What does being reckoned righteous entail? We are told in Numbers 25.11-13:

Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore say, "Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel."

13. Of course, the concept of justification can occur in contexts that don't use that exact word. In Romans chapter 2 the forensic meaning of "justify" is rendered undeniable by the context of the *judgment* of God. To ask for God to judge favorably is to ask for God to justify. Thus, Ezekiel 20.37-38 provide more evidence that being justified means being put into a covenant relationship:

"As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord God. "And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 20.37, 38).

14. God's message through Ezekiel reiterates a major theme in the Exodus that is tied to the covenant made with Abram in Genesis 15 when he was counted as righteous for believing God. The sequence is that God spoke promises to Abram and Abram believed so that God accounted Abram righteous and then made a covenant with him. But this covenant itself promises that God will vindicate his descendants: "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will *bring judgment* on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions" (Genesis 15.13, 14, emphasis added). By promising to judge Israel's oppressors God was promising to vindicate Israel, to justify them, to declare them to be righteous. Just as Abram had no outward evidence that he was favored by God as an "exalted father" (the meaning of his name) and simply had to cling to God's promise of offspring and inheritance, so the Hebrew slaves hardly seemed to belong to a powerful and faithful God.

But God's promises are of much more value than the way things seem to be at present. Moses brought the message that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was now going to fulfill his covenant promises. They believed Moses and they were publicly declared to be righteous. This was demonstrated in the plagues on Egypt culminating in the slaying of the firstborn and the Passover sacrifice and meal.

In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and *on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments*: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt (Exodus 12.11-13; emphasis added).

God's liberation of the Israelites takes place a courtroom situation. He is declaring and enforcing a judicial verdict in favor of his people and against the Egyptians. This is especially evident in the Passover meal, in which God judges the Egyptian gods who hold the Israelites captive, while providing escape from condemnation by the blood of a lamb or goat.

Thus there is judgment followed by being brought into a new or renewed covenant at Sinai, just as in Ezekiel's prophecy and in the sequence of Genesis 15 itself. What all this might mean, I am not sure. But it certainly gives us reason to think of theological justification as being declared in right relation to God and thus a member of his covenant.

15. Paul was not the only one to see the relational point of justification or righteousness. James cites Genesis 15.6 just like Paul does, but adds an interpretative statement: "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God" (James 2.23). Being given the status of righteous before God means being made God's friend. It may well be that this is a covenant term itself. "My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant" (Psalm 55.20).

But friend has another connotation in some relationships—that of close advisor or member of one's council. Haman had these sorts of friends (Esther 5.10, 14; 6.13)—notice that he summons them at will and they are also called his "wise men," a term already used in Esther to denote members of an advisory council for King Ahasuerus. The high priest's advisors who sat with him were also referred to as his friends (Zechariah 3.8). Job's friends seem to play this role, albeit rather badly.

Thus Jesus says of his disciples that they are his friends because he shares in his doings, and he promises them that their requests will be granted by his Father:

You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (John 15.14-16).

Jesus had said virtually the same thing about Abraham many centuries earlier.

Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him (Genesis 18.17-19).

The Lord proceeds to tell Abraham of his plan to visit Sodom and Abraham advises God to not to destroy the town for the sake as few as ten righteous men who might be there. No wonder Jehoshaphat called Abraham God's friend (Second Chronicles 20.7) and that James followed his example. Being justified means being given access to God's throneroom as a member of his council.

16. Jesus' contrast between servants and friends (John 15.14-16) reminds us of Paul's contrast between servants and sons and takes us back full-circle to his doctrine of justification and its relationship to covenant membership.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3.23-29).

Remember, the reference to Abraham has been mentioned in the context of a discussion of the Abrahamic Covenant. God vindicated Israel from Egypt because "Israel is my firstborn son" (Exodus 4.22) and because "God remembered his covenant

with Abraham” (Exodus 2.24). And so we are justified because we are sons in the Seed of Abraham.

Copyright © 2004

## APPENDIX THREE

[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/gods\\_righteousness\\_and\\_our\\_justification.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/gods_righteousness_and_our_justification.htm)

Theologia :: Bible :: God's Righteousness and Our Justification

### God's Righteousness & Our Justification

BY MARK HORNE

Copyright © 2003

My former pastor, [Jeff Meyers](#) has pointed out, "I've noticed a very nasty tendency in confessional Reformed circles lately. Men read N.T. Wright's [What Saint Paul Really Said](#) looking for statements to criticize, but they fail to read enough of Wright to be able to contextualize these statements and appreciate his work."

In my opinion, Jeff is right and perhaps the greatest area of offense is in relating what Wright says about how Paul uses the term "the righteousness of God." Since Wright's interpretation of the term in Paul's epistles is commonly mentioned in passing but rarely analyzed, it seems like a good idea to explicitly spell it out here so people can possess an informed opinion.

One should keep in mind a couple of things:

1. This has nothing conceptually to do with "the new perspective." It has nothing to do with the nature of first-century Judaism as being either grace-based or merit-based.
2. Wright's exegesis in no way contradicts the claims of The Westminster Confession and Catechisms (unless one wants to demand conformity to the prooftexts-which would be yet another novelty imposed on us as "traditional" orthodoxy). One can still believe (and should) that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to sinners who are united to Christ by faith. Nothing changes if one agrees with Wright about "the righteousness of God." Wright doesn't think that texts like Romans 1.17 are speaking of the imputation of God's righteousness to sinners. He may be right or wrong, but there is plenty of canonical grounding for Christ obeying and dying in the place of his people without those texts.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Isaiah 45.21-25

Declare and set forth your case;

Indeed, let them consult together.  
Who has announced this from of old?  
Who has long since declared it?  
Is it not I, the LORD?  
And there is no other God besides Me,  
A righteous God and a savior;  
There is none except Me.  
Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth;  
For I am God and there is no other  
I have sworn by Myself  
The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn  
back,  
That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.  
They will say of Me, "Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength."  
Men will come to Him,  
And all who were angry at Him shall be put to shame  
In the LORD all the offspring of Israel  
Will be justified, and will glory.

"Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength." Is strength imputed to us? No. The point of mentioning the LORD's strength is that He is powerful enough to save His people, and indeed all the ends of the earth. The issue in this passage is not what is imputed to God's people, but God's qualities which entail that He is trustworthy as a savior. God is a savior because he is strong-capable of saving His people. God is a savior because he is righteous-willing to save his people.

Thus Daniel (9.8-17) prays:

Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee. To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Thy truth. Therefore, the Lord has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. And now, O Lord our God, who hast brought Thy people out

of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and hast made a name for Thyself, as it is this day-we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, *in accordance with all Thy righteous acts*, let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people have become a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary (emphasis added).

A couple of points here: 1. Daniel appeals to God's righteousness precisely because Israel is being punished for sin. God's righteousness is his hope, not his fear. 2. God responds by sending his angel who reveals God's plan to save, giving Daniel a countdown of 70 weeks culminating in Messiah, the Prince who makes a covenant with many. This gives us every reason to expect the coming and work of Jesus to be "in accordance with all thy righteousness" and the Gospel which declares this to be a revelation of God's righteousness.

But before we get to the NT, let me point out that many places in the Psalms and Isaiah show God's "righteousness" to be parallel, not to wrath, but to salvation, lovingkindness, and faithfulness. For example:

Psalm 98.1-3

O sing to the LORD a new song,  
For He has done wonderful things,  
His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.  
The LORD has made known His salvation;  
He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations  
He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel;  
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Psalm 36.10

O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know Thee;  
And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.

Psalm 103.17

The lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who  
fear Him,  
And His righteousness to children's children.

Psalm 36.5

Your lovingkindness, O LORD extends to the heavens  
Your faithfulness to the skies.  
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;  
Your judgments are a great deep.  
O LORD, You preserve man and beast...

Psalm 88.11-12

Will Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave,  
Your faithfulness in Abaddon?  
Will Your wonders be made known in the darkness?  
And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

Isaiah 45.8

Drip down, O heavens, from above,  
And let the clouds pour down righteousness;  
Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit,  
And righteousness spring up with it.  
I the LORD have created it.

Isaiah 46.12-13

Listen to Me, you stubborn-minded,  
Who are far from righteousness.  
I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off;  
And My salvation will not delay.  
And I will grant salvation in Zion,  
My glory for Israel.

Isaiah 51.6b

But My salvation shall be forever,  
And My righteousness shall not wane.

Isaiah 51.8b

But My righteousness shall be forever,  
And My salvation to all generations.

Isaiah 56.1

Thus says the LORD,  
Preserve justice, and do righteousness,

For My salvation is about to come  
And My righteousness to be revealed.

According to the common view, God's righteousness should mean our damnation not our salvation. Yet for the Psalmist "righteousness" is parallel to "lovingkindness," and "faithfulness." Isaiah prophesies that the future salvation will be a revelation of the righteousness of God. We can be assured of our salvation *because* God is righteous. When salvation comes it *publicly demonstrates* God's righteousness.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT IN GENERAL

The Apostles knew of this use of the word "righteous" as one describing God's character as faithful and thus dependable for salvation.

First John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

First Peter 2:18-23

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.

Second Timothy 4:6

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

## PAUL IN ROMANS

So how is Paul thinking of "the righteousness of God" in his epistle to the Romans?

Romans 3.1-6:

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words,/ And mightest prevail when Thou art judged." But if our unrighteousness demonstrates *the righteousness of God*, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world? (emphasis added).

Notice that, as in the Psalms, "the faithfulness of God" and "the righteousness of God" are virtually synonymous expressions. In any case, this is certainly talking of God's own character, not a status that he gives to us. (To repeat: I am *not* denying that sinners who are to be saved from the Wrath of God must and do receive a verdict from Him which entails a righteous status. I am *not* denying that this is God's verdict on Christ reckoned to his people. I am simply saying that "the righteousness of God" is not how Paul is teaching us those great and essential truths. He has other concerns in this passage.)

Given Paul's use of the phrase in Romans 3.1-6, we have every reason to expect the meaning to remain consistent with this passage just a little later on in Romans 3.21-26:

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just [righteous] and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Again, we see here that "the righteousness of God" is his own character, his faithfulness, demonstrated in his work of salvation for his people—displaying Christ publicly as a propitiation in his blood. It is really violently discontextual to claim that "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" refers to imputed righteousness. I have come to agree with Wright and Richard Hayes that the phrase "faith in Jesus Christ" ought to be translated as "the faith of Jesus Christ." Paul is speaking of Christ's obedience rather than our trust by which we receive Christ and his righteousness. But that really doesn't matter. The traditional translation still demands that "the righteousness of God through faith" be seen as parallel with "Christ Jesus whom God displayed publicly as a

propitiation in His blood through faith." The propitiatory work of Christ is a manifestation of God's righteousness-his faithfulness to his people to save them from their sins.

Romans 1.16-18a:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...

Remember Isaiah 56.1b: "For My salvation is about to come / And My righteousness to be revealed." The Gospel declares the death and resurrection of Jesus and in doing so reveals God's righteousness. Notice Paul's parallelism between "the righteousness of God is revealed" and "the wrath of God is revealed." Obviously, "the wrath of God" is not something imputed to sinners so that they are reckoned as being wrathful with God's own wrath. Rather, it is God's character manifested toward them. That is yet another contextual cue demanding that we understand "the righteousness of God" to refer to his own character which compelled him to act on behalf of his people.

Finally, one needs to remember that the close proximity of references to God's righteousness and those to justification are perfectly understandable without any notion of a transfer of "righteousness" from God to the sinner. (To repeat yet again: I am *not* denying that Jesus' righteous status is shared with His people. It most certainly is. I am simply denying that Paul is speaking of such imputation *in these specific passages*.) Consider Psalm 35.24: "Judge me, O LORD, according to Thy righteousness." Though two different word groups are used, the Psalmist is plainly asking for *justification* and believes it will be given to him on the basis of God's *righteousness*. But there is no transfer imagined here. The point is that God's character and integrity guarantee that he will vindicate those who belong to him. Likewise, in Isaiah 45.24, 25, the righteousness of God means he can be trusted to fulfill his promise so that "all the offspring of Israel" will be "justified."

Of course, God's righteousness also demands that sinners be punished. Romans 3.21-26 acknowledges this fact. What makes God's righteousness a basis for hope for sinners, instead of fear, is that God made a covenant to deal with sin and justify sinners who entrust themselves to him. God's righteousness demands that He keep His promises as well as punish sin.

There are other instances of "the righteousness of God" in both Romans and other epistles, but at this point I will simply commend to people that they read Wright's own arguments in *What Saint Paul Really Said* or the much more complete case in [his commentary on Romans](#).

Copyright © 2003

## APPENDIX FOUR

[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/righteousness\\_from\\_god.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/righteousness_from_god.htm)

Theologia :: Soteriology :: Righteousness from God

### **Righteousness from God**

by Mark Horne

copyright © 2003

One meaning of "righteousness" in the Bible is moral uprightness. Perhaps a more basic meaning would be faithfulness. For example, Psalm 96.13 praises God, saying:

He will judge the world in righteousness,  
And the peoples in faithfulness.

In Hebrew poetry two lines often say the same thing using different words. In this case, "faithfulness" and "righteousness" are very close in meaning, if not identical. Because faithfulness to God's commands would constitute moral goodness, one can see how righteousness came to designate one's moral behavior in general.

But God tells us that none of us is faithful to all God's commands. As King Solomon confessed in his prayer to God at the dedication of the temple, "there is no man who does not sin" (First Kings 8.46). The question then is: How can we be counted as righteous before God when we are not faithful to God's commandments?

To get to the answer to that question, we have to realize that the language of "righteousness" is most at home in the setting of a law court. For example, in Exodus 23 we read:

You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute.  
Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous,  
for I will not acquit the guilty. And you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe  
blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.

I'm using the NASB here, but it is somewhat misleading. Because the word for "acquit" is the verbal form of the word "righteous" and "the just" also uses the same word: "the righteous." In this court setting the word "righteous" comes up repeatedly. As Biblical scholar, N. T. Wright summarizes the date in the entry for "righteousness" in the [New Dictionary of Theology](#): "Righteousness is the status which results, for either party [defendant or plaintiff], if the court finds in his favor."

Because God is the judge of all the earth, righteousness is very important for our relationship with him. When Solomon prays at the Temple dedication, he makes it clear that God's judgments are an important aspect of the new place of worship:

If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and he comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this house, then hear You in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying ["declaring righteous"] the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness (First Kings 8.31, 32).

Obviously, since Solomon goes on to admit that no one is without sin, the "righteous" here are not those who are morally perfect, but those who have conformed to the covenant requirements in the case of his oath.

Notice that being declared "righteous" here is not some inaudible activity on God's part. Solomon is asking God to intervene in history so that his verdict is obvious to all. Likewise, when Israel went into exile as punishment for sin, God promised to bring them back to their land through Isaiah the prophet (54.17).

No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper;  
And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn.  
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,  
And their vindication [or "righteousness"] is from Me, declares the LORD.

Here the promised military deliverance from oppressors and accusers ("no weapon... against you shall prosper") is interpreted as a judicial verdict from God.

Thus, righteousness can be used to describe a gift of glory and salvation from everything that is bad.

If only you had paid attention to My commandments!  
Then your well being would have been like a river,  
And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.  
Your descendants would have been like the sand,  
And your offspring like its grains;  
Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from My presence" (Isaiah 48.18-19).

Here one might think that God is simply saying that obedience would mean one is morally upright ("righteous" by one possible meaning). But in the context of promising well being and many offspring, "righteousness" probably means the blessings from God that are a public declaration that his people are righteous in his sight. We see the same thing in Isaiah 58.8:

Then your light will break out like the dawn,

And your recovery will speedily spring forth;  
And your righteousness will go before you;  
The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

The glory of the LORD, the light and recovery he gives his people, is a public verdict: "not guilty." This is probably the background to Paul's term "justification of life" (Romans 5.18) his concern that the Law cannot "impart life" or be a basis for "righteousness" (Galatians 3.18).

Then how can we, who suffer just like the nonchristians around us, have any confidence that we are righteous in God's sight. He has not publicly liberated us has he? First of all, by the Spirit, God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him new life. In the Gospel we see our righteousness, our vindication from God. Furthermore, by giving us faith, God has given public witness that we belong to him (Acts 15.8) so that we know we will, through Christ, be openly declared his children at the Last Day (Romans 8.20-25). There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8.1).

copyright © 2003

## APPENDIX FIVE

[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/election.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/election.htm)

Theologia :: Soteriology :: CREDO on Justification

### **CREDO: Regarding Personal Justification before God**

by Mark Horne

For the record:

1. I believe that those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.
2. I believe that faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.
3. I believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.
4. I believe that God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit, in due time, actually applies Christ to them.
5. I believe God continues to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored to them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

6. I believe the justification of believers under the old testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the new testament.
7. I believe that, for sinners to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, He requires of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.

Not only is the above a true and accurate expression of what I believe, but it is the only thing I have ever believed or wanted to believe (both as a Calvinist and, before that, as an Arminian) or have taught or have written. Nor is there a shadow of a doubt in my mind that these beliefs are Biblically justified and that I will remain committed to them.

\*\*\*\*\*

I testify before God and the Holy Angels that all of the above is true. If it were not so, I would be the first to reveal it.

I further express the conviction that all of the above is quite obviously my belief and anyone following Biblical standards for learning and believing the truth should already know it.

## APPENDIX SIX

Theologia :: Soteriology :: Election

### ELECTION: CORPORATE & INDIVIDUAL

Mark Horne

What follows is a handout for a Sunday School class I have taught recently at [my church](#).

copyright © 2003

1. Presbyterian doctrine teaches what the Bible says about God sovereign control over history and his unconditional choice (election) to bring some people to everlasting glory while allowing others to remain in unbelief and be punished for their sins (Ephesians 1.11; Romans 9.14-24; Proverbs 16.4; 21.1).
2. This doctrine guards against any form of human pride or legalism since those who end up in heaven do so only because of God's mercy, not because of anything they have done or any quality that they possess on their own (Ephesians 2.8-10; First Corinthians 1.26-31). It assures us that the elect can never fall away or be prevented from inheriting eternal life. This fact is often treated as the key to assurance.
3. But a problem enters the picture at this point. Anyone who knows he is elect knows he is perfectly safe, but not all those who profess faith actually are elect. Some do not persevere (Second Timothy 2.14-19). People end up looking for marks that they can claim only accompany those who are elected to eternal life. Invariably, these marks are incredibly subjective. Some raised in this doctrine will be unsure where they would end up if they were to die in the next hour, even though they have been raised to believe the Gospel message. They are not sure that they are elect.
4. To resolve all this, we need to begin with the understanding that even though God does not elect all people to everlasting life, it does not follow that he is devoid of love for those he passes by. Thus Paul states in Romans 2.4, 5: *Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* God's providing opportunities to repent is based on his kindness even though the objects of that kindness are destined for a more severe judgment because they resist the opportunities to repent.
5. Thus, the proper question to ask is not, "What are God's secret decrees?" but rather, "What has God promised me and/or warned me about?" We have to operate by what God has revealed not be his secret plan (Deuteronomy 29.29). If God reveals his love to someone, the proper stance toward that revelation is not to raise doubts by

speculating in regard to the God's plan for the future, but rather to take God at face value **now**. In other words, we must respond in faith to what God says.

6. What God has revealed in the Bible is that he has a special people on earth who belong to him through Jesus Christ (First Peter 2.4-9: *...coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but elect and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones... are an elect race...*). Notice that the Apostle Peter deliberately compares the election of Christ to glory with the election of the Church, using terms God used to assure Israel of his love for her.

*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19.4-6a).*

*For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7.6-8).*

*Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven, a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak? Know therefore today that it is the Lord your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you. Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people (Deuteronomy 9.1-6).*

7. Just as God chose Israel, or as Jesus chose his twelve disciples, God chose the Church, a transnational institution. The Church is an instance of **corporate election**. Just as Israel was formed by a supernatural deliverance from Egypt, preservation in the wilderness, and conquest of the Promised Land, so the Church is also formed by God's supernatural work. *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in [among] you? (First Corinthians 3.16).* *For even as the body is one and yet has many*

members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many... Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it (First Corinthians 12.12-14, 27).

8. The results of **individual election** are ordinarily found in the context of **corporate election**. God predestines the eternally elect to that everlasting glory by working in their lives to bring them into his people, the Church, by word and sacrament (Matthew 28.18-20). Those who persevere in the Faith show they are predestined to everlasting life. Those who stop trusting God are guilty of rejecting God's adoption and love. Thus, John Calvin wrote: *I admit that it was by their own fault Ishmael, Esau, and others, fell from their adoption; for the condition annexed was, that they should faithfully keep the covenant of God, whereas they perfidiously violated it. The singular kindness of God consisted in this, that he had been pleased to prefer them to other nations; as it is said in the psalm, "He has not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them," (Ps. 147:20). But I had good reason for saying that two steps are here to be observed; for in the election of the whole nation, God had already shown that in the exercise of his mere liberality he was under no law but was free, so that he was by no means to be restricted to an equal division of grace, its very inequality proving it to be gratuitous. Accordingly, Malachi enlarges on the ingratitude of Israel, in that being not only selected from the whole human race, but set peculiarly apart from a sacred household; they perfidiously and impiously spurn God their beneficent parent. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau," (Mal. 1:2, 3). For God takes it for granted, that as both were the sons of a holy father, and successors of the covenant, in short, branches from a sacred root, the sons of Jacob were under no ordinary obligation for having been admitted to that dignity; but when by the rejection of Esau the first born, their progenitor though inferior in birth was made heir, he charges them with double ingratitude, in not being restrained by a double tie (Institutes, 3.21.6).*
9. The mark of **individual election** to everlasting life is perseverance in faith in God (Mark 13.13; Hebrews 10.32-36). Thus, when Moses assures the Israelites of God's love, he can seamlessly move to a warning to persevere in that love: *The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them (Deuteronomy 7.7-11).*
10. The condition of perseverance, and the warning against abandoning God's covenant, does not lead to the same sort of introspective problems as has plagued less Biblical formulations. God's promises are sure. No one needs to worry about what will happen if they were to die in the next hour. God loves the Church and he will not allow one of his promises to fail. He is not going to say, "Sorry, I never elected you

and you weren't really regenerate so I don't have to honor any of my promises." Rather, continuing in God's kingdom is proof that one is welcome to God, is chosen by him, and is alive to him. Those who are disinherited are those who abandon the Faith, not those allegedly missing out on some alleged inward reality. Ulrich Zwingli, the early Protestant Reformer gave an example of what this means: *What then of Esau if he had died as an infant? Would your judgment place him among the elect? Yes. Then does election remain sure? It does. And rejection remains also. But listen. If Esau had died an infant he would doubtless have been elect. For if he had died then there would have been the seal of election, for the Lord would not have rejected him eternally. But since he lived and was of the non-elect, he so lived that we see in the fruit of his unfaith that he was rejected by the Lord* (Quoted by Peter Lillback, *The Binding of God* p. 105).

11. One perseveres in God's adopted family **only by faith**. It is not a matter of trying to earn God's favor or be good enough to be in heaven. The only people who will be raised in glory will be those united to Christ by faith. Faith perseveres because salvation comes in the form of a promise. Thus, the warnings issued to believers have a function in keeping believers from abandoning the faith, just as the promises do (i.e. John 15.1-11; Romans 11.17-23; First Corinthians 10.1-22, etc). Saving faith *believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come* (Westminster Confession 14.2). Only by remembering and believing God's sure and certain promises, will one persevere in God objective, **corporate** people—to whom those promises are made—and thus manifest that one is **individually elect** (Hebrews 10.37-12.3). One will then be numbered among God's sons and daughters in glory at the resurrection because God is faithful.

copyright © 2003

## APPENDIX SEVEN

[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/whose\\_legalism\\_which\\_worksrightheousness.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/whose_legalism_which_worksrightheousness.htm)

Theologia :: Soteriology :: Whose Legalism? Which Works-Righteousness?

**Whose Legalism?**

**Which Works-Righteousness?**

**The 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference and the Assurance of Grace**

by Mark Horne

copyright © 2003

Recently, there has been some controversy over [the presentations of four speakers at the Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference](#). Accusations have been made including a denial of justification by faith alone and something close enough to "baptismal regeneration" that it deserves to be called heretical. One does not need to read very far to see that the accusers are claiming that these ministers are teaching *legalism* or *works-righteousness*.

However, what has not received much mention or discussion is that these men seem to have exactly the same concern. They believe that there is legalism or works righteousness infecting American Reformed and Presbyterian churches and they want us to out-grow it.

Perhaps the first thing to be said is that the the conference took place in a [PCA Church, Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church](#). The pastor and session there have voluntarily taken vows to uphold the system of doctrine of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. While this paper will only deal with a few specifics, I will state for the record that I believe that the approach of these four men according to their presentations (I say "approach" because they are not all identical), were well within the bounds of the system of doctrine that is articulated in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

More than this, the four ministers explicitly affirmed Reformed doctrine at the conference--specifically that justification is only by faith. Thus, [Doug Wilson](#), one of the four speakers, stated:

Now there may be some people listening to the tapes of this conference so they hear about us and they say, oh, these guys are abandoning the reformation. These the guys, they're walking away from the solas. I am not walking away from any solas, I want to add more solas... I don't think it is going to make anybody feel any better but I am a black coffee Calvinist. I believe that God in a mighty work in the reformation restored the gospel in a wonderful and a powerful way and I don't think we should back off of that...

Likewise, Steve Schlissel stated quite plainly that he was *only* opposed to the way the *solas* of the Reformation could be misused as slogans, but *not* to their doctrinal substance:

Remember that in Amos God says, "I hate, I despise, your religious feasts. I cannot stand your assemblies." Who authorized those assemblies? God did. Why does He say that He hates them? Because they were not accompanied by a whole-hearted fear of God in conformity to His Word. It is just as easy for God to say today, "I hate, I despise, your confessions of faith. Take them out of my sight. I am disgusted by your *solas*." Why? Are they not true? Of course, they are true in a proper context, but they are not substitutes for the fear of the Lord. They are not substitutes for whole-hearted, biblical, covenantal religion.

Whatever one thinks about this analogy it clearly puts the *solas* on a high level. The festivals were from God and so are the *solas* (I assume that if we remember that Amos was speaking about Northern Kingdom shrine feasts, we will still find plenty of statements that apply to the Southern Kingdom such as the first chapter in Isaiah). Furthermore, lest one misapply the analogy, Schlissel explicitly stated "Of course the *solas* are true."

But more than simply affirming salvation by grace through faith, the speakers specifically targeted what they viewed as legalism and advocated a higher view of the grace as the only antidote. [Steve Schlissel for example stated:](#)

But what kind of faith is *sola fide* faith? There is a certain quality to this saving faith, and there is the spurious faith and there is the pretentious faith. Then the pulpits want us to begin examining our faith. Then we have to "bring up" our faith. Before you know it, everybody thinks that he or she is not saved. "How can I really and truly be saved?" To find out, come back next week and the preacher will make you feel guilty, by golly. Week after week the people are berated, bullied, and tortured in their consciences on the presupposition that God is as niggardly as the preacher believes Him to be. God only saves with the greatest possible reluctance. When somebody manages to squeak into the kingdom, He snaps His fingers and says, "Shucks! Another one made it. I was hoping that he would be deceived into thinking that he had saving faith when he really didn't have it." The whole notion of God is distorted, as if Paul preached a Gospel so full of qualifiers that faith becomes a new work--and outdoes what the most wicked, abominable, self-righteous Pharisee (as our own Reformed fathers viewed the Pharisees) ever taught about works that had to be performed to enter the kingdom of God.

Schlissel also quotes an unnamed author ([who I believe is Joel Beeke](#)) as proof that we need to reconsider the way we speak of faith:

One of the greatest struggles of the theologian and pastor of the post-Reformation churches lay with the area of personal assurance of faith and its relationship to saving faith. Their labor for theological precision in this area gave rise to a rich technical vocabulary in which they distinguished between assurance of faith and assurance of sense; the direct, *actus directus*, and reflexive, *actus reflexus*, acts of faith; assurance of the uprightness of faith and assurance of adoption; the practical and mystical syllogisms; the principle and acts of faith; objective and subjective assurance; assurance of faith, understanding, and hope; discursive and intuitive assurance; the immediate and mediate witness in assurance; and the being and well being of faith.

Such terminology was used within the context of a series of correlative issues such as possibilities, kinds, degrees, foundations, experiences, times, obstacles, qualifications, and fruits of assurance—all placed within a word regulated, Christologically controlled, and Trinitarian framework. With such scholastic distinctions the modern church and most scholars have little patience.

For Schlissel, all this often amounts to the functional equivalent of works righteousness.

[Note to reader: I would like to think that it would go without saying that disagreement with Beeke or with anyone else does not represent a dismissal of the great value of his ministry as a whole. I hope this essay will be regarded by all as a contribution to an ongoing discussion, not as a personal attack.]

John Barach expressed similar concerns. For example:

When you read some books, even some reformed books about assurance, they will say something like this, that anyone can have assurance provided he continues in godliness for a certain space of time. How long? Five minutes good? Does it have to be ten? Does it have to be a year or two of godliness before you can have any assurance? And I began to wonder what do you do with somebody who has struggled against sin, who falls into sin, terrible sin, wants to flee from them, finds himself terribly attracted to them, can a person like that have assurance of salvation or does that wait until much later on after he has already conquered his terrible sins that he is struggling against? But then how do you conquer sin when you have no assurance? How do you battle against sin when you are not sure that God loves you? When you are not really sure that Christ died for you? And when you're not really sure that you are one of his people, how could you ever fight against sin? What power would you have to fight with if you are not really sure that he has given you his Holy Spirit?

Doug Wilson expressed this concern especially when we deny our Christian children are indeed Christians:

When we say that all of God's word is perfect, converting the soul. When we don't divide it up into law and gospel, when we don't say law over here, gospel over there, when we say it's all gospel, it's all law, it's all good, when we say that, someone is going to accuse us of phariseism or legalism. What does Jesus say about this pattern? Matthew 23: "Then spake Jesus to the multitude and to his disciples saying, the scribes and the pharisees set in Moses' seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not." I want you to notice this next thing and ask yourself whether you see any Reformed preaching in this, particularly with our little ones. "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."

You want to come to the Lord's table you had better be, in short, you need to be close to ordination. If you want to come to the Lord's Table, you've got to pass a theology exam and you've got to be grilled by the elders, and well, we have to fence the table. The bible teaches that the table fences us, we don't fence the table. The table defines us. The table fences us, we don't fence the table. We say, for example, well we want to make sure this kid really understands the Lord's Supper before he partakes. Oh, like you really understand it? Who understands it? Who fully understands the Lord's Supper? Raise your hand, I dare you. Little Johnny, you grow up big and strong and after you have grown up big and strong, then we will give you some food. And then, of course, he keels over. He dies of starvation, wonders off, apostatizes and then we say, "Oh, see? He died of starvation. It's a good thing we didn't give him any food! What a waste!" He died. He died because you weren't feeding him.

And again:

I've be in situations where many times I've had occasion to speak to Christian young people, covenant young people who have grown up in evangelical homes, good church kids, well established, well taught and there are a hand full of topics that can get a room full of young kids to go deathly quiet, deathly quiet. And one of them, one of the two, is assurance of salvation. Because we have 350 years of our tradition requiring people to twist in the wind for an appropriate period to time before they can go through a crisis, convulsive experience and say, "I'm saved." This model has been developed. We take a snippet from the Bible: The Apostle Paul was converted that way. He has a convulsive, Damascus road experience and it is

wonderful when that happens. But we have made the Damascus road, convulsive, conversion experience the norm. And all over America you will have somebody come in to a special Sunday evening service, the former Hell's Angel who has \$300 a day crack cocaine, killed three people, scrambled his brains with a little egg whisk, he was on death row and the governor pardoned him and then led him to the Lord and now he is traveling around the country telling people about Jesus. And he is a mess. All right? He is a forgiven mess but he [is a mess]. And all these covenant kids are thinking "Ah man why can't I have that?"

Because your parents were obedient! Your parents brought you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Your testimony is *supposed* to be boring. It is! Glory to God for boring testimonies.

Steve Wilkins expressed the same concern in the his lecture on the Half-Way Covenant in American history:

So your son will say, "You mean Jesus has loved me this much to embrace me, bring me into union with him and I don't have to do anything but just kind of love him back and stay where I am and seek by his mercy to be faithful to him all my days and he has promised to give me that strength and mercy. That's it?"

You say? "That's it. That's grace."

"I don't have to ride a bicycle and get really hurt and be near death and then come back and have an after death experience and then be converted?"

"No. No, you just have to love him because he has loved you."

"I don't have to...?"

"No. It's grace we are talking about here-grace, not works."

Now you see, half-way covenant-and this is my last point-undermines the grace of God. It focuses on you and your experience over and over and over again! And that's were we are! The vast majority of Protestants focus on their experience not on Christ. And when you ask them, "Are you saved?" What do they tell you?

"Yea."

You say "Why?"

"Because I was there at this wonderful meeting on this mountaintop, you can't believe how pretty it was, and in the evening we were told to throw our little pinecones on a fire. I threw one, it was a big one. I still remember how it burned. I took a picture of it and I've got the picture right here. I know I'm saved."

Okay, that's pinecone salvation. We've got all kinds. But it is not salvation by grace. You, we have encouraged salvation by works in the name of trying to present the grace of God and trying to preserve the purity of the church and all the things we are trying to do, we have ignored Christ. By means of the half-way covenant thinking and acting we have inadvertently undermined the grace of God and in many cases have fallen from it altogether. And certainly our children have fallen from it.

Much more could be quoted, and online readers [are encouraged to listen for themselves](#). But enough has been presented to at least say that it is *prima facie* plausible to think that these four ministers are trying, in their own minds, to defend the grace of God in salvation and encourage people to actually trust God for that grace rather than trying to produce some sort of *work* that will win God's hard-to-obtain favor.

These men are not unique in their concern that some sort of specialized meaning of the word "faith," and/or a conversion experience has become a new *work* which one must strive to achieve in order to be saved. Richard Hays, in his [The Faith of Jesus Christ](#) makes this argument and quotes several authorities who back up his observation.

Since Luther's time, Protestant theology has found in Galatians the classic prooftexts for the doctrine that individuals are saved not by performing works, but by believing in Jesus Christ. As popularly understood, however, this doctrine has always carried with it the risk of turning faith into another kind of work, a human achievement. In pietistic-enthusiastic circles, this justifying "faith" has often been understood as a psychological disposition; in scholastic circles "faith" has been equated with intellectual assent to propositionally formulated dogma... "faith" is understood as an activity of the human individual, a means (putatively alternative to "works") of securing our acceptance before God... (p. 120)

To circumvent this objection, "Most typically it has been argued that faith is not the product of the human will but of divine agency, that it is a gift planted in the human heart by God" (p. 121). But that doesn't really help much since it can be acknowledged, and often is, that *all* our good deeds are gifts not of human will but of divine agency:

It should be pointed out that a precisely parallel argument could be mounted in defense of "works" as a means of justification: good works are not our creation, but they are God's work in us. Indeed, just such an affirmation may be found in Ephesians 2.10 (pp. 120-121).

Hays does acknowledge, however, that more sophisticated accounts of faith have been offered by Martin Luther, wherein he explicitly realizes that faith could become merely a new work and offers a way of understanding faith that will keep it free of such a problem.

Luther protested against the Anabaptist practice of "believer's baptism" precisely on the ground that it turned "faith" into a "work," ("Concerning Rebaptism: A Letter of Martin Luther to Two Pastors," p. 248 in *Luther's Works* 40 (trans. and ed. C. Bergendorff; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958). In Luther's view, the remedy for this error was to understand faith as a response to the grace of God objectively given as *verbum visibile* in preaching and the sacraments. He spells this view out in a passage that illustrates in illuminating fashion how Luther's own theology differs from the post-Kantian interpretation of it which has been popularized by Bultmann and his followers: "But these leaders of the blind are unwilling to see that faith must have something to believe-something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand... These people are so foolish as to separate faith from its object to which faith is attached and bound on the ground that the object is something external. Yes, it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into heart, just as the entire Gospel is an external, oral proclamation. In short, whatever God effects in us, he does through such external ordinances" ("Larger Catechism," p. 440 in *The Book of Concord* [trans. and ed. T. G. Tappert; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959]).

One can't help but notice that this exactly parallels the content of the Auburn Avenue's Pastor's Conference. The Conference speakers made much of an objective status and objective promises given by God, which we should trust God to be faithful to. The trustworthiness of God, and thus his worthiness as an object of faith, was repeatedly emphasized. The certainty that the covenant promise came from a trustworthy source, having come from God through Christ in the Spirit, was established over and over again.

Much could and, arguably, should be said here, but I only have time for one line of evidence. Time and again it seems that text we (rightly) apply to the question "How may I know that I am right with God?" are actually dealing with a different question: "How may I know that someone else is right with God and thus *must* be right with me?"

The most glaring example of this is found in Galatians. The classic Protestant proof for justification only by faith is framed by the issue of table fellowship:

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw

and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel... (Galatians 2.11-14a).

The fact that justification is only by faith is used as an argument that there can be no divisions among the people of God. There is much that could be said about this, but for the purposes of this essay only one thing needs to be pointed out: *The fact that one has been justified is a status that is recognizable to other Christians.* Paul presupposes that he and Peter should both know who is righteous in God's sight and have obligations in how they treat such people.

This same issue comes up in Romans 14:

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God... For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died (Romans 14.1-10, 15).

Notice that, for Paul, there is no mystery in who has faith, who is accepted by God, or who is a brother or sister. Indeed, Paul presupposes that we know for whom Christ died. Paul may acknowledge and teach there is the "wheat" and the "tares" are both in the church (c.f. Second Timothy 2.19) but he did not allow his knowledge of what might happen according to God's eternal decree to restrain him from claiming that professing believers were indeed the recipients of God's grace, adopted into his household the church, and the people for whom Christ suffered and died.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians both show the same rule and provide the exception which proves it. Paul begins his correspondence stating categorically to the Corinthian congregation:

I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (First Corinthians 1.4-8).

These are remarkable words for a congregation that is so corrupt and full of sin. But Paul reiterates such statements even when he sometimes warns them of temporal and eternal judgments if they continue in sin. First Corinthians 11.27 is perhaps the most startling of all: "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." Each one of the Corinthians is told here that he has been incorporated into Christ by the Spirit (c.f. context, especially vv. 12, 13).

At the very end of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he asks them to examine themselves. "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you=unless indeed you fail the test?" (Second Corinthians 13.5). So here we have what could be a proof-text for claiming that Christ might not indwell a professing believer. However, the context of this statement is a threat of impending excommunication:

This is the third time I am coming to you. "Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses." I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare anyone, since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you (Second Corinthians 13.1-3).

Thus, the only time Paul raises questions about the status of some of the Corinthians is when he is ready to excommunicate them. Until that point he *assures* them that they are members of Christ and that God is faithful to confirm them to the end.

How do some popular practices in modern Presbyterianism (as well as broad evangelicalism) comport with the Apostle Paul's pastoral style? How can we tell the members of our churches that they might or might not be saved and that they need to make sure they have been properly converted if we believe that Paul's letters are inspired by the Holy Spirit? Paul demands that we accept one another. How is that compatible with doubting whether one among us is truly regenerate? Paul says that we must not

destroy the brother for whom Christ died. How can we take such precautions if we don't know for whom Christ died?

When I remember hearing the words below at the conference, I can only think of what the two men on the Road to Emmaus exclaimed to one another: "And they said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?'"

In Samuel it says, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams."

"To do what is right and just," says Solomon. "is more acceptable to the lord and sacrifice."

The conclusion of Ecclesiastes in his ruminations about life is this, "All has been heard, here is the conclusion: Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man."

And yet, if someone says that today, they are accused of legalism! This borders on apostasy, in and of itself, to make the charge. It's a wholesale departure from the word of God in order to serve an abstract conception of what the word *ought* to teach, based upon what *I* want it to teach-which is how I can personally be saved. Which, again, puts God in the position of being the debtor to man because somehow we are going to bring to him something *good enough*. If it is not our works, then it the quality of our faith.

But what if we begin with the idea that we *really* need grace from God? And what if we begin with the radical idea that he has *given it to us*? And the even more radical idea that he has given it to our children? Then where do we begin? Teaching our children to *doubt God afresh in every generation*? Or to take what he has given us and to move it into action and into application in the world? "Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong; learn to do right; seek justice." (Steve Schlissel, "Covenant Reading").

copyright © 2003

## APPENDIX EIGHT

[http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/quest\\_for\\_a\\_converting\\_ordinance.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/quest_for_a_converting_ordinance.htm)

heologia :: Sacraments :: Quest for a Converting Ordinance

**BAPTISM,  
EVANGELISM,  
& THE QUEST FOR A “CONVERTING ORDINANCE”**  
by Mark Horne

Copyright © 2004

Awhile back I wrote the following, first quoting from the author of the excellent book, *A Baptism That Saves*:

The sacramental view [of baptism] most accords with the idea of God's initiating a covenant by his sovereign decree in election~effecting this through effectual calling. This is because, instead of God "watching/witnessing" the transaction represented by baptism, He is present as mediated through the sacrament to initiate and effect the covenant. *He is God the covenant Actor, not merely God the covenant witness, and this is related to the whole order of salvation held by the Reformed tradition.* Therefore, we don't think of baptism as something *we* do, but rather as something *God* does~at least in the ultimate sense. While the recipient physically gets wet, God washes the elect to with the Holy Spirit unto regeneration in effectual calling. (But keep in mind the WCF qualifications according to the principle of God's sovereign grace.)

Consider then the following passages of Scripture that, by a plain reading, will clearly depict baptism *effecting* salvation rather than merely signifying salvation~although it certainly does this as well~and ask yourself, *Why impose a meaning that is not most natural and obvious from the language itself?*

Preston Graham, the author, then goes on to quote Matthew 28.19; Titus 3.5; First Peter 3.21; Galatians 3.27; First Corinthians 12.13; Mark 16.16; Acts 2.38; Acts 28.16; Romans 6.3-4; and Luke 7.20 (I think this last is especially astute). He then writes:

If you read these passages as if you have never even thought about the issue before, try telling yourself that each passage

does not seem on the surface at least to treat baptism as somehow effecting something--namely salvation from sin in its various dynamics.

. . . . Graham wrote his book, available from [the PCA bookstore](#), to explain the differences between Baptist and Presbyterian thinking. He points out how the London Baptist Confession of Faith strips out language about grace being "conferred" in the sacrament. His book is written to defend and explain Presbyterian theology over against Baptist theology. . . .

While I am in basic agreement with the author, he concentrates on aspects of baptismal efficacy that I don't think are the most helpful. Graham concentrates most on the Berkhof perspective of sacraments as associated with special grace rather than common grace. This is great for the elect, but it makes it hard for me to see how sacraments can confirm our faith if we have to know if we're elect in order to believe they are effective. I think [John Murray's essay on common grace](#) would give us a better way to deal with this. This perspective would emphasize the nature of baptism as an admission into the institutional Church and the seal of a conditional promise. The condition would be that the baptized person perseveres in the covenant rather than departing from it in unbelief. Thus, the pastor can imitate the author of Hebrews and plead with his charges not to throw away their confidence with which there is great reward, but to add endurance to what they have received.

I think of this now and ask, would Preston Graham accept a description of his work as "a converting ordinance"? I highly doubt it. The term certainly leaves me cold.

Of course, if one views conversion as a daily Christian practice, then both sacraments could qualify as "converting ordinances" since both are "effectual means of salvation" for the elect (see question 91 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism). But the whole question of a "converting ordinance" (which as far as I can tell was only an issue among American Congregationalists in the colonial period and has not been considered a needed or helpful term either before or since or elsewhere) assumes that the all-important practical need is some grasp of that moment when an unbeliever becomes a believer-

But, actually that is not true either. Concerns about Muslims or Jews or pagans did not give rise to discussions about what is or is not a "converting ordinance." The question was *What do professing Christians need to do before we will recognize them as full-members of our churches?* The answer was that they had to prove themselves to be *really* Christian. A lot could be said about this, but what strikes me at the moment is how much the language of "conversion" was used to either correcting the theology of Christians, or else seeing them make a definite commitment to Jesus. One wonders if the model of evangelism was derived from Luther's "tower experience" or later John Wesley's sudden warmth of heart (though I

don't think either of these men presumed to make their experience the model of "conversion").

The truth is, taken in the narrow sense, I wonder if there can be any such thing as a "converting ordinance." Think of the best scenario, an unbeliever goes to Church for some reason and hears the Gospel preached by a minister in public worship. He repents and believes. But ask him to give his testimony. What happens? Does he tell of what he heard in the sermon and end it there? No. He tells us of why he was drawn to be in Church that day. Perhaps a neighbor invited him and he was intrigued because this neighbor had displayed a functioning and harmonious family. And then when he heard the sermon, was its persuasive power simply in the statements made by themselves. Almost invariably converts have stories of many instances in which they become confronted with the claims of Christ. The sermon reminds one of how her grandmother use to take them to VBS where she learned that Jesus died to satisfy our debts.

What I am trying to say is that an unbeliever is often converted not by one ordinance, but by many instances of confrontation with the New Creation that is Jesus Christ made manifest in the Church. The preached word is one part of a package of things involved in encountering Christian society, including hospitality, an example of good works (Remember: Peter tells wives to win their husbands not by preaching at them but by their submissive behavior), and a harmonious community (May they all be one so that the world might know that you sent me). How often does the preached Word convert if stripped of that context?

There is an analogy here with language generally. We learn language by being forced to participate with interacting bodies. Facial expressions, hand motions, and various actions are the context in which sounds are heard and eventually understood as words. Without gestures, language loses coherence. God established a community of interacting people by the administration of the covenant of grace. First in Israel according to the flesh and now in the Spirit-filled Church, Jesus communicates within a tangible family in which his Word is preached and confessed and followed. Interacting with this family can be described as encountering the Word of God as opposed to the words embodied by other communities (Mormons, JW's, surfers), but it seems terribly reductionistic to only think of this as the result of one "ordinance."

Again, this whole way of thinking seems more appropriate for battles among professing Christians. If the issue is that there are confessing Trinitarians who attend Church, support missions, and pray at meals, but who have not been "truly converted," then it makes sense that one would ignore what is common among Church members and concentrate on one particular ritual (preaching the Word on Sunday morning or on other set occasions). But if we are increasingly going to find Hindus and non-practicing Buddhists are our neighbors, or simply people whose multiple fractured families have never bothered to let them see the inside of a church building, then none of this can be expected. The issue is not about "experimental religion" among practicing Christians, but

about whole-life conversion about people who have little to no context for understanding much of what might be said from the pulpit. We're not in the colonies anymore and there are no ruby slippers to take us back.

That is why the recovery of the full power of the Reformed Faith, as is being done by people like Preston Graham, Michael Horton (who has probably done more than anyone to widely acquaint Reformed believers with the Reformed and Biblical doctrine of baptism) and others is especially relevant for a time such as this. Churches are not service stations in Christendom, but embassies in foreign territory. A concept of conversion that hinges on summary messages and decisional prayers is simply not adequate. Our model for conversion needs to be based on words like "recruitment," "induction," or-dare I say it?- "discipleship."

A lot more could be said here-a book or more at least. I notice I haven't used the word "repentance" yet in what I have written so far, so I remind the reader that I can't affirm and discuss everything at once. The basic point here is that evangelism now involves a true interaction between alien cultures. The question is how we get the gospel heard among the cacophony of many gods and many lords increasingly present today. People need to be confronted with an entirely new life and community. They need to be challenged to turn from their autonomous life and concretely entrust themselves to Jesus Christ the risen King.

Thus, baptism as the border and entryway of the Church, the replacement for circumcision under the previous administration of the covenant of grace, can be seen as a clearly important rite. In the Bible the pattern we see is clear. Men and women are confronted with a summary challenge to repent and believe in Christ, if they agree they immediately submit to baptism, and then they are taught and trained in the Church. If they later reject the Faith, then they are dealt with. But they do not have to be catechized first or to prove themselves "true believers." If they will confess that Jesus is Lord, with the understanding that Christ was exalted by God in his resurrection, then they are to be baptized as brothers and sisters in the family of God, with their children.

To promote baptism as the transitional rite that marks the difference between autonomy and discipleship to Christ does not in any way denigrate the need for the preaching of the Word or its role in converting and sanctifying sinners. It simply puts that ritual within the Christ-established context of baptism, the Lord's Supper (something else I've not mentioned yet), the Lord's prayer, and other markers of Christian community. This context can no longer be taken for granted.

Copyright © 2004