



JUSTIFIED IN CHRIST







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God's plan for us in Justification



K. Scott Oliphint, ed.

MENTOR





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How great presumption is it to condemn the supreme Judge when he freely absolves, so that this answer may not have full force: “I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy”? And yet Moses’ intercession, which God restrains in these words, was not to the effect that he should spare no one but that he should wipe away the charge against them even though they were guilty, and absolve them all equally. And on this account, indeed, we say that those who were lost have their sins buried and are justified before God because, as he hates sin, he can love only those whom he has justified. This is a *wonderful plan of justification* that, covered by the righteousness of Christ, they should not tremble at the judgment they deserve, and that while they rightly condemn themselves, they should be accounted righteous outside themselves.

John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.11





Introduction: The Justification Crisis

Sinclair B. Ferguson

One does not need to be a seer to recognize that evangelicalism today is experiencing a crisis of fragmentation.

Fifty years ago, to be an evangelical implied a deep commitment to the great creedal verities of historic Christianity. But it also included certain distinctive views about the nature of the work of Christ and how the blessings of salvation are received.¹ At the heart of these lay the authority of Scripture and the twin convictions that the death of Christ involved penal substitution, and that the beginning of the Christian life was marked by justification by faith alone.

Of course there were differences among evangelicals. But by and large there remained much common ground.

The map has now changed, perhaps beyond recognition and possibly permanently. The question “What is an evangelical?” would today receive a wide variety of answers, many of them much less robust than the historical definition.

It has been commonplace in contemporary analyses to comment that evangelicalism has experienced a series of seismic shocks, ranging from the charismatic movement (whose influence is today felt everywhere either in expression or reaction) to the (not unrelated) “worship-wars” with their attendant issues of seeker sensitivity and, in their wake the emerging/emergent church movement. But, all the while, something deeper has been taking place under the surface, the full force of which is now becoming increasingly evident.

¹ See, for example, the taxonomy of evangelicalism in D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989); D. M. Lloyd-Jones *What is an Evangelical?* (London, 1971)



One index that this “something else” would soon emerge should have been evident from the books produced by evangelical publishers, by the nature of pulpit rhetoric, and the themes of the conferences and seminars evangelicals organized and attended. One great theme tended to be overlooked. Sadly, it was one of the defining themes of historic evangelicalism: *Jesus Christ, his Person and Work*. Doubtless it was always assumed. But throughout the middle period of the twentieth century evangelical literature paid scant attention to this central theme of the gospel or to the way in which union with Christ brings the Christian every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). The most substantial literature published in the period tended to be reprints of earlier works. Despite the best efforts of a small number of scholars (particular tribute should be paid here to the late Leon Morris) it was probably not until the publication in 1986 of John Stott’s *The Cross of Christ* that a prominent evangelical drew attention to the theme that had been so missing from book catalogues. And it would surely be safe to say that the sales of even Dr. Stott’s widely praised and appreciated work pale by comparison with the sales of *The Purpose Driven Life*. It would be fascinating to know how well a book entitled *The Cross-Driven Life* would have sold.

There have been signs of hope, of course. Some of them have taken publishers by surprise (when J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God* was first published in England the print run was about as small as was viable and the publisher was heard to say that they did not know whether there would be many people really interested in a volume with such a title). But that notwithstanding, gone was the conviction that what people needed most of all was the knowledge of God the Trinity, and an understanding of Jesus Christ and his work and the grace and truth that are to be found in him. Martin Luther’s cry, “Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, ‘Cross, cross’ ...”² was relegated to a lower division. “How to” deal with fears, problems, pain, and low self-esteem, and having a good marriage and raising model children became the new evangelical agenda.

Without realizing that it was happening, evangelicalism had developed into a caricature of itself. Something inherently and

² Thesis 92 of The Ninety Five Theses of Martin Luther



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importantly present in its genetic structure became exaggerated out of all proportion: expressing things charitably, how salvation becomes mine now obscured how salvation was accomplished by Christ. In technical theological terms the *ordo salutis* concerns (how does salvation work out?) obscured *historia salutis* (what did God do in history to accomplish salvation?). At its worst the theme of *my life* obscured knowledge of the significance of *Christ's death*.

Curiously – or was it so strange after all? – this style of evangelicalism expressed patterns of thought that had certain parallels to the earlier liberal theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).

In his own way, Schleiermacher had patented and branded a “seeker sensitive” theology that (he certainly believed) made the gospel relevant to his contemporaries – “the cultured despisers of religion”³ who, under the spell of the Enlightenment had given up on the possibility that Christian doctrine could be true. For them the knowledge of God was no longer attainable. Kant’s critique of reason had limited it to the knowledge of the phenomenal realm; access to the noumenal was barred. Schleiermacher, refusing to believe that all was lost, turned things on their head, stressing that the essence of true Christian faith was the feeling or sense of absolute dependence upon God.

Schleiermacher thus fathered modern theology and launched a trend that would lead to that theology eventually becoming little more than religious anthropology, the study of religious experience. Thus in our own day departments or faculties of theology or divinity in many centers of higher learning have undergone a name-change to become departments or faculties of religion. The detritus of this in the modern world is the extent to which – not least among Christians – the “self” and its development has become the great (and very individualized) project of the hour. The knowledge of the person and work of Christ, clear thinking about the nature of justification and its grounds, and its relationship to and differences from sanctification – the issues to which Christians in earlier generations had given so much attention –

³ The allusion is to his famous earlier work, *Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799).



were now regarded as of marginal practical relevance. The Trinity – once the very foundation of the theological encyclopaedia – now, in Schleiermacher's theology, was relegated to what was virtually an appendix to his magnum opus *The Christian Faith* (1821–22, 2nd edition 1830). Somewhat unnervingly, the results in every recent poll of what evangelicals today apparently believe (or don't believe) suggest that a turning to the self and a de-centering of the Trinity has become pervasive in the subculture that was thought to be immune to liberalism.

When this is the ethos of the evangelical church, it is in no fit state to deal with any new wind of teaching. Hence the importance of this book.

The authors of these essays are bound together by their association with Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. They stand in a noble tradition of evangelical and reformed scholars. They share a love of learning and their very considerable academic gifts range from biblical exegesis to systematic and historical theology, from philosophical and cultural apologetics to homiletics and pastoral theology. They also share a common love for the church and aspire to serve the Christian community. They are actively involved in the life of the church, and in their own local congregations. Each of them exercises a broader influence by writing and speaking in both scholarly and popular contexts. They share the conviction that these two contexts are intimately related, and that what takes place in the academy eventually filters through to influence the preaching and teaching heard by congregations and the popular literature that Christians read.

This combination of love of learning, a passion for the gospel, and a love for the people of God brings these eight men to share a common concern that evangelicalism today lies open to influences which will damage its health and eventually destroy the coherence of its theological system and style of life.

The authors also stand in a particular epoch in the development of evangelical scholarship, and it may be worth pausing to comment on some of these trends.

Fifty years ago evangelical scholarship was small and weak. Evangelical students had few books to help them through the onslaught of liberal scholarship. Now that has dramatically changed. Evangelical scholarship virtually dominates the marketplace and



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conservative works of encyclopaedic length and learning are readily available. The growth in strength of numbers and scholarly output has been little short of phenomenal – from a trickle in the 50s and 60s to a flood in the 90s. Evangelical scholarship has also grown in confidence as it has come of age. Now there is less shame attached to being “evangelical” in the sense of having an interest in Scripture as the Word of God. In the academy it is less frequently said that to be an evangelical it is necessary to lose one’s mind (although it might still be said as a “put-down” of young students).

But largely unnoticed, as evangelical scholarship grew strong, two things were happening. There was a – perhaps naïve – conviction that if a new race of *biblical* scholars could be produced then theology – particularly *systematic theology* – of an evangelical kind would benefit from the knock-on effects. What was sometimes overlooked was the fact that Scripture is not pre-theological nor is biblical interpretation a-theological. It contains its own theological controls, its own “form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:17) to which believers are committed by the gospel. The theology taught in Scripture in turn provides an underlying framework for exegesis and biblical theology. The unity of Scripture makes that possible and in fact demands it. Sadly, however, the adage that scholars were “simply following the text” did not always take account of the fact that the text ought never to be isolated from its theological framework.

Without these theological controls it was only too possible for scholars who believed that they were simply following the text of Scripture where it led not to recognize the fact that the lenses they often wore for their work were ground in the historical-critical laboratory. Furthermore, much academic work involved entering the stream of scholarship at a particular point in the river, learning the rules, and playing according to them. That river offered few signs warning of the danger of the rocks that lay just under the water’s surface. The presuppositions expressed in a methodology can too easily be overlooked.

Over the decades, “new” positions have emerged in evangelical biblical scholarship. Those who developed them continued to affirm that these approaches were consistent with a confession of evangelical faith. What was too often overlooked was how similar



were the methods now used, and the conclusions now drawn by “evangelicals,” to those of nineteenth-century scholars who were the father figures of *non-evangelical* and eventually *anti-evangelical* scholarship over a century ago.⁴

Eventually what is taught in the academic world filters down into the popular literature in which evangelicalism abounds, and into the pulpits and classrooms of the church.

A parallel movement can be discerned in the discipline of theology. Where there is no middle ground to speak of, and the cutting edge is found in either liberalism or evangelicalism, almost inevitably evangelicalism attracts into its orbit individuals who are less than comfortable with the verities of a past generation. They see their task, by definition, not to seek a deeper understanding of the old but to advance the new. The more imaginative and creative the mindset, the more likely it is that the old will seem confining; the envelope must be pushed out further.

These two strands have now begun to run together. Thus some members of and speakers at what were founded as evangelical academic societies or conferences, have bade farewell to the distinguishing features of historic evangelicalism (while often remaining under its banner). Inevitably this has begun to trickle down into more ground-level, grass roots writing and speaking. It would seem likely that this will continue, and that many different points of evangelical theology will be questioned and eventually the map of evangelical theology will be redrawn – almost unrecognizably.

The result of these various influences and tendencies is that the term “evangelical” is no longer as fully or as clearly articulated as it once was. Indeed the value of the term itself has come into question. If it is possible to express reservations or even deny penal, substitutionary atonement, yet remain an evangelical then the term no longer denotes what it once did. A critical concern is associated with this, because the connected issue, “What is the evangel?” is not merely an academic one; on it hangs the message of salvation the church proclaims.

⁴ The words attributed to Thomas Carlyle were perhaps more prophetic than many of his contemporaries cared to admit: “Have my countrymen’s heads become turnips when they think that they can hold the premises of German unbelief and draw the conclusions of Scottish Evangelical Orthodoxy?” John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1943), p. 310.



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Against this background the particular cluster of issues on which this book focuses involves the obedience of Christ in his penal substitutionary sacrifice, how that obedience is imputed to individuals, and what this implies in terms of justification by faith. These intimately related issues belong to the kernel of what it means to be an evangelical, and (so evangelicals have maintained) belong to the very heart of the gospel.

The authors, it should be stressed, do not believe that salvation is received by a mere affirmation of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement and the imputed righteousness of Christ. But they do believe that unless the gospel is articulated in these terms (or worse, if they are denied) the good news about the Christ who does save and what it means to believe in him is distorted and the gospel is compromised.

As these eight essays indicate, debate over the work of Christ and its application has become a *cause célèbre* in much contemporary literature and discussion. That is true with respect to the objective aspect of the gospel: What was actually transacted on the cross in order to effect our salvation? But it is also true with respect to its application: What does it mean to be “justified” and by what means does this take place?

The more specific background to this whole book – as will soon become evident – is the authors’ shared concern about the influence of what is usually referred to as “The New Perspective on Paul.” It may therefore be helpful to readers less familiar with it to provide some hints to understanding what this nomenclature denotes, and to give some preliminary indication as to why it has become such a live issue among evangelical Christians today.

It is worth saying that what is in view here is a *perspective* rather than an agreed set of dogmas. It is shared by people whose views of specific Christian doctrine may differ substantially (e.g. for example, on the nature and the reliability of Scripture). For that reason, aspects of it, and its proponents, constitute something of a moving target.

The “New Perspective” began life as a new perspective on Jewish faith and religion around the time of Jesus and Paul. In essence its contention is that the Judaism of this period of the second temple was – contrary to Protestant interpretations of the past – actually a religion of grace. It was *most certainly not* a religion





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of “works-righteousness.” It did not teach that salvation is earned by self-effort. Rather, it held that salvation, or entry into the covenant community, was entirely a matter of grace. Thereafter obedience to the law was the way of remaining in the community whose principal external “boundary” markers were observing the Sabbath, the rite of circumcision, and the food laws. Consequently the teaching of Jesus and especially of Paul must be read (or re-read) in that light.

Hovering in the background here is a view not only of the Judaism of the first century but also of the history of the Western church since the time of the Reformation. Proponents of the New Perspective tend to emphasize that Western biblical scholarship was historically deeply influenced by the ghost of Augustine and the categories within which Martin Luther, the great German reformer, understood the gospel.

For Luther the great personal issue was how a sinful man can be justified before God. The “problem” the gospel solves was essentially that of his guilty condition before a righteous and holy God who abhors sin. Luther held that justification, being accounted righteous before God, takes place when the individual trusts in Jesus Christ who was “made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Like Calvin, Luther was awestruck by the wonderful exchange, in which our sins were accounted (“imputed”) to Christ on the cross, and his righteousness was accounted (“imputed”) to us through faith. For the Reformers, then, this “wonderful exchange” meant that a double imputation lies at the heart of the gospel. Thus justification was seen as “the standing or falling article of the church” (Luther) and “the hinge on which all religion turns” (Calvin).

Both Luther and Calvin believed that the late medieval church had distorted the gospel to the point of destroying it. They saw parallels and analogies between, on the one hand the Judaism which opposed Jesus and the Judaizers Paul encountered, and on the other the teaching of the late medieval church. They believed that in their exposition of the gospel over against Rome they were simply echoing the teaching of Jesus and Paul, and in their polemics against Rome were standing foursquare within apostolic teaching.





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In the past century, the trickle of scholarship that once suggested this was not the whole story – or even the true story – has become a river. Notable protests were issued almost a century ago by Claude Montefiore (a Jewish scholar), and George Foot Moore. They argued that Judaism was a religion of grace, exhibited in delight in Torah. This position would later be developed in the post World War II era by three individuals.

In 1948 a Welsh scholar, W. D. Davies published *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, in which he argued that Saul of Tarsus was essentially simply a rabbi who found in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah. In this – admittedly a dramatic enough *volte-face* for someone who had persecuted Jesus' followers, but not in any works-grace antithesis – lay the distinguishing feature of his gospel.

In 1963 the Swedish scholar Krister Stendahl, Dean of Harvard Divinity School and later Bishop of Stockholm, published a paper in *The Harvard Theological Review* entitled “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West.” Interestingly, in the light of its title and approach, Stendahl's essay had originally been a lecture given to The American Psychological Society in 1961. But its chief impact would not be so much on psychologists as on New Testament scholars.

Stendahl argued that the idea of the guilty conscience in Paul was a construction – a fabrication, really – of Western Christianity, in particular due to the influence of Augustine. It has always been – he believed significantly – absent in the Eastern church. Far from suffering from a burden of guilt prior to his experience on the Damascus Road, Paul in fact considered himself in a right relationship with God, “as to the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:6). His so-called “conversion” was in fact not a conversion from “guilt” to “grace” at all. Rather it was a realization that Jesus was the Messiah. Whatever he experienced on the Damascus Road, it was not a Western sinner's conversion, but rather a “call” to recognize Jesus as Messiah. Responding to this, Paul began to believe in Jesus and to proclaim him as Messiah. Paul's “sin” was not the guilt of spiritual and moral failure, but the error of persecuting the church and failing to recognize that it was the community of the Messiah. He was not a prototype Luther longing to have his guilty conscience relieved. One important development of this for



Stendahl was the contention that the heart of Paul's great Letter to the Romans (and therefore, the heart of his gospel) was therefore to be found not in Romans 1-4, but in Romans 9-11.

A sea-change came with the work of E. P. Sanders (son-in-law to W. D. Davies). His work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*⁵ took further the trajectory of his predecessors in a way that has revolutionized the map of New Testament, and particularly Pauline, studies in the past quarter century. Sanders' study focused on comparing *the pattern of religion* in Paul with that in Jewish literature between 200 BC and AD 200.⁶ Judaism, Sanders argued, was a religion of "covenantal nomism." A right relationship to God is established by his gracious covenant. Obedience preserves the individual in that position. The sacrificial system provides for failure. The key element in his thesis was that this "pattern of religion" is not dissimilar to the pattern of religion which we find in Paul the Christian – a pattern of grace, not a pattern of self or works-righteousness.

How does such a view impact the way Paul and his teaching are interpreted? It immediately raises a question about how his conversion is to be analyzed.

Sanders argued that our access to this is by reasoning from the solution to the problem. What was unveiled to Paul on the Damascus Road (i.e. what was the solution?)? It was: Jesus is the Messiah. Saul's problem therefore was not that he was seeking salvation by his own works, nor that he was racked by a guilty conscience; it lay, rather, in his failure to recognize Jesus as Messiah for all, and in the implications (persecution) that resulted from his blindness. In summary, in perhaps Sanders' best-known sentence: "*this is what Paul finds wrong with Judaism: it is not Christianity.*"⁷

This being the case Paul's problem with the Judaizers was not that they were smuggling works-righteousness into salvation, but that, by their insistence on the traditional boundary markers, they were *excluding* those whom the Messiah *included* in his community. For if salvation required the observance of those markers, (i) Gentiles would be excluded from God's people, and therefore (ii) Christ would have died in vain.

⁵ London, 1977.

⁶ Significantly, the book carried the subtitle *A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*.

⁷ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 552. The emphasis is Sanders' own.



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Sanders' work became the starting place for much contemporary rethinking of the New Testament. For scholars, of course, a Copernican revolution is always a highly productive event. Indeed it would be difficult today to write a paper or monograph on New Testament theology without at least paying lip-service at the shrine of the New Perspective. While some who once did so have changed their minds as their thinking has progressed, in the English-speaking world (where the New Perspective has most rapidly gained ground) the output of two British scholars has attracted a great deal of attention: James D. G. Dunn, formerly Lightfoot Professor at the University of Durham (usually attributed with coining the expression "new perspective on Paul") and N. T. Wright, coincidentally now Bishop of Durham in the Church of England. Without the influence of these two high-profile scholars it is likely that the New Perspective would have taken much longer to impact the evangelical church.

Like a considerable number of contemporary scholars, both of these authors have evangelical backgrounds, were active as students in the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship) and in the British scholarly society associated with it, The Tyndale Fellowship. They draw differing exegetical and theological conclusions from their new perspective – and this underscores the importance of the term "perspective." But in general they share the view that Paul's concern (e.g. in Galatians and Romans) was not that of grace over against works, or the pursuit of a self-righteousness, but the requirement, for fellowship, of the works of the law, in particular, the familiar "boundary markers" of circumcision, Sabbath, and the kosher food laws, contrary to the gospel way of faith in Messiah Jesus. For them too, Judaism was essentially a religion of grace, not of works-righteousness. Thus, when Paul speaks about "justification" he is not in fact talking about "the way in" but describing the status of those who already are in.

In essence, therefore, Saul's conversion was not at all like Augustine's, or Luther's, or Bunyan's, nor are his polemics like that of Augustine against Pelagius, or Luther against Rome, or for that matter Bunyan's against high Anglicanism.

The obvious implication of this, however guardedly or palatably stated, is that traditional Protestantism has misunderstood Paul



and with him Judaism. It has read Jewish religion and especially the Pharisees through Lutheran eyes, and mistakenly viewed Judaism through the lenses of the errors of Rome.

The “New Perspective” is seen to offer several benefits to the contemporary church. For one thing, it alleviates the charge that the Christian gospel, and in particular the apostle Paul, are guilty of anti-Semitism in the sense of misrepresenting true Judaism. For another, its implication would seem to be (and is sometimes virtually stated to be) that the conflict of the Reformation could have been avoided if both Roman Catholic and Reformation theologians had been able to understand the true nature of the gospel. Then both could have recognized their errors and arrived at... yes, a new perspective! The New Perspective then becomes a great – perhaps *the* great – ecumenical alchemy. Moreover, its focus on Jesus’ Lordship as Messiah is seen to provide a solid foundation for a this-worldly Christianity that engages in social and political action.

The critical side of this emerges in the conviction that this perspective recovers the true biblical gospel, and saves evangelicalism from part of its own history. Evangelicalism can live and breathe because it knows that salvation is by grace; but it has employed a false anatomy to understand and express how the heart of the gospel functions. This is particularly clearly articulated by N. T. Wright. Critiquing the view that the doctrine of justification by faith is the gospel, and that the gospel is “an account of how people get saved” he affirms, rather, that

‘The Gospel’ is the announcement of Jesus’ lordship, which works with power to bring people into the family of Abraham, now redefined around Jesus Christ and characterized solely by faith in him. ‘Justification’ is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family, on this basis and no other.⁸

Several things are worth noting here.

The first is that the implied critique of evangelicalism is a caricature. Doubtless the caricature exists – we have already noted the evangelical slide into focusing on experience. At that level we

⁸ *What St Paul Really Said*, pp. 132-133.



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can agree. But it is, nevertheless, a caricature, not the real thing. For the idea that justification by faith (or thinking that one is justified by believing in justification by faith) is the whole of the gospel has never been the foundation of historic evangelicalism.⁹ The work of Christ has always been foundational to everything else. Nevertheless, evangelicalism has always maintained that the “way in” is justification by faith.

The second thing to note here is not so much what is said – which, by its use of biblical language and categories may seem to be nuanced towards the language of historic evangelicalism – but what is *not* said. There is here no specific reference to the atonement, far less an explicit confession of Christ’s death as penal and substitutionary. It is not denied. It might be said that this is surely covered by the way “Jesus’ lordship ... works with power.” But its absence is telling. There are elsewhere references to key evangelical ideas (propitiation, for example, although in this writer’s view not adequately set within the context of a thorough exposition of divine wrath that evokes the horror of Romans 1:18ff, or Revelation 6:12ff). What is clear is that central to this vision of the work of Christ is not so much atonement as penal substitution but Christ’s victory over the “principalities and powers.” This view, when popularized by the Swedish theologian Gustav Aulén’s book *Christus Victor* (1931), certainly had in view a reconfiguring of the gospel – and in Aulén a de-emphasizing (even repudiation) of penal substitution as the heart of the atonement and therefore of the gospel.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that also associated with this view is a denial of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers. This is argued in part on the basis that righteousness is an *attribute* of God and in the very nature of the case, attributes cannot be “imputed.” The implication of this view is – logically and inevitably, even if not always recognized – that our sin cannot

⁹ In an illuminating personal note Bishop Wright comments on the “vital and liberating point” which he first met in the work of the sixteenth-century Anglican theologian Richard Hooker, that one is not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith (*What Saint Paul Really Said*, London, 1997, p.159). What strikes one as curious about this statement is that while such a discovery would indeed be liberating, one would be hard pressed to find an intelligent evangelical in the history of the church who has taught such a distorted view of the gospel.





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therefore be imputed to Christ. For my sin is also an *attribute* – my attribute! – and if an attribute cannot be imputed to another, it is not only Christ’s righteousness that cannot be imputed to me but, alas, my sin cannot be imputed to Christ. Thus the very heart of the evangelical faith is eviscerated.

A third thing should be mentioned here. It has been implied and sometimes stated by adherents of the New Perspective that the Reformers were mistaken in virtually equating the Judaizers who plagued the church with the “salvation without grace” teaching they saw in late medieval church life. But this seriously misconstrues if not misrepresents the historical situation.

In fact the late medieval church was almost obsessed with grace – and how the individual gets “more” of it by doing what he can. The Reformers well understood that Roman Catholic theology did not outright deny the necessity of grace. Rather they recognized that the “grace” referred to was really not grace at all – since its reception was so conditioned on a man’s good works. To say “grace” is by no means the same thing as to understand or teach “grace.” One should never be misled by the regular occurrence of the word “grace” into assuming that a biblical understanding of grace is well understood.

The result of this – paradoxically – is that at times one has the impression that the New Perspective fails to notice a strikingly similar phenomenon in Second Temple Judaism, or glosses over it when it appears: the use of the language of “grace,” when in context the “grace” in view is conditioned on man. It is in fact compromised grace, not true grace. It turns out, after all, that while the pattern of the Old Testament’s teaching is that fellowship with God is by pure grace, that grace is at times greatly dis-graced in the rabbinical literature, as it frequently was in the history of the covenant people. Even the notion that the reason Yahweh is so gracious to his poor people is *because* they have suffered so much turns out to be grace compromised by its conditionalism: there is a reason to be found in man to “explain” why, or to whom, God is gracious. But true grace cannot thus be qualified without being distorted.

More might be said about the question of whether or not Paul experienced a “guilty conscience” before he yielded to Christ. It seems to the present writer that the relationship between Saul





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of Tarsus and Stephen, the likelihood that they were members of the same synagogue (or synagogue group) in Jerusalem, the fact that Saul had never been excelled by any of his peers ... until he met Stephen, and the role that the law against coveting seems to have played in Saul's life, all suggest that much more was involved in his Damascus Road experience than a call to recognize Jesus as Messiah.

The New Perspective has proved to be attractive to a number of evangelicals who are concerned about the state into which historic evangelicalism has fallen, with its focus on the self and subjective experience. For with the New Perspective comes an emphasis on Scripture as story, on the history of redemption, on biblical theology, on the objective rather than the subjective, and a renewed emphasis on the community of the church and sacraments and on the social implications of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The authors of these essays share these concerns. They belong to an old tradition, indeed an older tradition, that has long guarded redemptive history, biblical theology, the life of the church, and the implications for the redeemed of the Lordship of Christ. Readers may readily spot here the influences of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos and Cornelius Van Til, Herman Ridderbos and John Murray, and behind them all John Calvin. It would be hard to find a group of evangelicals more aware of the dangers of a subjectivism or a pietism that focuses on faith rather than on Christ, on an experience of justification rather than on the cross. They are well-versed in the gospel, and its maintenance is their chief concern. In all of their discussions of justification in Pauline theology, historical theology, confessional theology, and in its philosophical, cultural, and pastoral implications they are concerned to guard what is of "first importance": "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures ..." (1 Cor. 15:3).

Much more could be said here, even by way of introduction. But before raising the curtain for the contributors to this volume to step on to center stage, it may be helpful to provide a road map to the journey on which the following pages take us.

Richard B. Gaffin Jr. opens this symposium with an important essay on the relationship between justification and eschatology, underlining that justification has a "last day" quality about it, because it is integrally related to the resurrection-justification



of Christ. Like adoption, with which it goes hand-in-hand in the gospel, justification is a present and perfect reality which anticipates a future realization. But how are these two “moments,” the present day and the last day related to each other? Dr. Gaffin proves a safe guide home for the Christian in insisting that the final declaration of justification, as the fruition or publication of present justification, is never rooted in anything but the finished work of Christ.

Lane G. Tipton then builds upon Dr. Gaffin’s work in expounding the importance of union with Christ. Rooted in a careful study of several important passages of Scripture, Dr. Tipton articulates the genius of this union in terms of the New Testament’s teaching on the distinct but inseparable, contemporaneous but eschatological nature of all soteriological benefits. He then discusses how well, or otherwise, this apostolic teaching is reflected in a variety of theologians, including an extended discussion of the work of N. T. Wright in this area,

This sets the scene for a series of historical-theological contributions. The first of these is authored by Peter A. Lillback, the current President of Westminster Seminary and also a Reformation scholar in his own right. He examines the views on justification of various Reformation figures, including Lutheran, and points to the genius of Calvin’s formulation of the dual, distinct yet inseparable covenant benefits of justification and sanctification. Thus Calvin teaches a forensic justification that can never be confused with sanctification, yet never exists without moral renewal.

Two contributions follow which draw upon and explore the rich theological discussions of justification in the seventeenth century. Carl R. Trueman develops the study of the Calvinist tradition with a careful essay on the teaching of John Owen the great English Puritan theologian (perhaps the greatest English theologian, period). Setting his exposition of justification against the background of the theological subcultures in the seventeenth century (not least that of Socinianism), Dr. Trueman underscores the clarity and depth of Owen’s exposition of Christ’s active and passive obedience and righteousness. Here is “Reformed orthodoxy at its best.”

Before leaving the seventeenth century, Jeffrey K. Jue invites us to linger at the Westminster Assembly’s debates and discussions



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of justification. This, as will soon be clear, is of more than merely historical interest in view of current claims that the Westminster divines glossed over the classical distinction of active and passive obedience in their statements on the work of Christ and in their exposition of imputation. Dr. Jue patiently lays out not only the historical evidence from the debates of the Assembly, but also sets them within the historical-theological context without which they have been misinterpreted. By way of conclusion he draws a striking parallel between views associated with the “New Perspective on Paul” and that of seventeenth-century Arminians.

William Edgar not only advances the discussion into the following century and beyond, but also takes us into the climate of the French Revolution and the rise of the modern world. Moving easily in the philosophical and cultural milieu of Europe, he offers some illuminating reflections on humanity’s need of – and substitutes for – atonement. Arguing, in the words of one of his subheadings, that “Warm embrace is not justification” Dr. Edgar calls us back to the foundation of the finished work of Christ.

This leads us to an essay by K. Scott Oliphint on covenant faith. Justification is “by faith.” But what is “faith” and in what sense is it related to justification? Dr. Oliphint takes up the question (much discussed in the work of proponents of the “New Perspective”) of the meaning of Paul’s phrase *pistis Christou*. He brings forward important considerations for maintaining the classical understanding that this refers to the faith of the believer in Christ, not to the faith or faithfulness of Christ.

Finally, J. Stafford Carson brings these discussions to a conclusion by examining the pastoral implications and value of the doctrine of justification by faith. In passing he notes ways in which the dilution of the doctrine not only involves an abandonment of traditional formulations but actually endangers the truth of the gospel.

Two “bonus tracks” complete this volume. The first is a valuable bibliography compiled by Professor Alexander Finlayson that provides an essential starting point for further study. The second is the brief but seminal monograph by the late Professor John Murray, entitled *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*. In a variety of ways Professor Murray’s influence and mantle have fallen on the contributors to this book, some because they were his students, all





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because they have taught at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The inclusion here of this careful study of imputation makes a fitting appendix to this catena of contemporary studies on a theme which lay close to Professor Murray's heart and was a crucial aspect of his life and work.

Now all that remains is to echo the famous words that once led to the conversion of Augustine: *tolle lege* – pick up this book and read on.

