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Sermon notes/follow-up
Oct 13, 2019 – Nov 3, 2019
James and Justification (Parts 1-3)

In the sermon, I linked the judgment of mercy in 2:13 to how God “tenderly” (to use Calvin’s term) evaluates the works of believers in justifying us at the last day. This is a consistent biblical theme. For example, in Exodus 20:6, God attaches a promise to those who keep the second commandment: “but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” This is the gospel in the midst of the law. God shows mercy – *hesed* -- lovingkindness – to those who keep his commandments. This mercy is reserved for those who keep his commandments – they are the ones who will be judged with mercy at the last day so that mercy triumphs over judgment. Of course, Jesus taught the same thing in John 15 – those who love him will keep his commandments and thus enjoy his love and mercy.

This is not to say the works merit mercy. Mercy can’t be merited. And obviously, our good works are produced by God’s grace at work in us. But grace leads to grace; those who are obedient (by mercy) will be shown mercy.

On good works, see WCF 16. This chapter affirms we can do good works, by faith and the power of God’s Spirit, and those works are acceptable to God through the mediation/intercession of Christ. These are the key ingredients to understanding James 2 and a doctrine of final justification according to works.

The so-called “Federal Vision” movement took a lot of flak a while back for insisting on good works as the “way” to final salvation. But this was always a hallmark of Reformed orthodoxy and, thanks in part to FV shifting the Overton Window of the Reformed world on this issue, is now making a comeback. For example, consider this article by Kevin DeYoung on a mainstream Reformed website:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/five-questions-faith-good-works/>
This kind of thing was virtually unheard of before the FV discussion (at least apart from proto-FV men like Norman Shepherd).

John 5:28-29 teaches those who have done good will be raised up to eternal life. Of course, we learn in John 6 that *the* good work God requires of us is to believe in Jesus. But there is no question all kind of other goodness – acts of obedience, good works – flow out of faith. John

5:28-29 can be understood as teaching a final justification according to works – especially since the opposite of resurrection unto life is resurrection unto condemnation (and condemnation is a legal/forensic terms, the opposite of justification).

Bnonn Tenannt has some interesting thoughts on justification in James:

<https://bnonn.com/does-james-teach-justification-by-works/>

<https://bnonn.com/final-justification-unchristian/>

How do we enter into a state of justification? Not by anything we can do. We simply trust in Christ, and God counts us as righteous in him, totally apart from our works, by faith alone. That's initial justification, unfolded most fully in Romans 3-5.

But what comes next? Does God justifying me change the way he looks at my works? Does the presence of the Spirit in my life change anything? Again, some Reformed people these days want to apply passages about the total depravity of unbelievers to believers. That's not good theology and it's not pastorally helpful. I would say that once God has accepted our persons in Christ through faith, he is also free to accept our works in Christ through faith.

Christians are still sinners. We need God's continual free grace and mercy to forgive us, and we are certainly subject to the chastening hand of our Father when we sin. Furthermore, we never do anything that's is really and truly perfect, even with God's Spirit working in us. Nevertheless, because of our new relationship with God in Christ, it really does change [a] what we do and [b] how God looks at it and evaluates it. Because we have the Spirit, we can do good works -- works that have real, genuine, even if imperfect, goodness. To deny this is to insult the Spirit and shortchange his work. Not only that, but God accepts our good works and even rewards them, as they are offered to him through the mediation of Christ. God judges our works with mercy. He looks at them the way a Father looks at the baby steps of his small child. And at the last day, our works will be established and crowned with glory; the fruit of our labors will somehow be woven into God's final new creation. Our works done as Christians do not get thrown into the cosmic incinerator, but "follow us" into eternity (Rev. 14; Ps. 90; Ecc. 9). At the last day, we will confess about ourselves, "We are unprofitable servants," but God will say about us "Well done good and faithful servants!" We will claim no merit, but God will approve of his Spirit's work in us as having value.

Michael Horton once said a final judgment according to works could only lead to condemnation (not sure how he gets around all those clear passages in Scripture, not to mention the WCF...). He said this is because the law requires perfect obedience and believers still aren't perfect. Well, ok, we're not perfect....but Paul also says we are not under the law! In fact, when Paul

lists the fruit of the Spirit, he then says "against such there is no law." And where there is no law, there is no condemnation, no wrath. The law will not and cannot condemn the work of the Spirit.

Think of justification, initial and final, in trinitarian terms. Initial justification is the Father's declaration of approval over the work of the Son for us, raising him from the dead. Final justification is the Son's approval of the Spirit's work in us, conforming us to his image. In initial justification, God justifies the wicked, and we transition in status from wrath to grace. Final justification is the justification of the righteous, or the doers of the law (Rom. 2, James 2, Matt. 25, etc.), and it confirms our status openly.

The initial justification (IJ)/future justification (FJ) model is found in Calvin and Bucer and was advocated at Regensburg. The historical precedent is there, within the Reformed tradition. Norman Shepherd suggested this was a "scholastic" construction. But historically speaking, it pre-dates the scholastics and only fell into disfavor when scholasticism (which found it easier to do systematics with a works/merit paradigm) arose. In other words, Shepherd has it backwards, historically speaking. Just look at how later theologians attenuate Calvin's robust doctrine of a final judgment according to works.

The works worked in us by the Spirit are accepted by the Father not only because they are the work of his Spirit but also because of mediation/intercession of Christ (see WCF 16.3, 6). So union with Christ needs to be kept in the picture. This is really the point of saying that final justification presupposes initial justification. The whole of our justification, initial and final, is enfolded into Christ, the Righteous One.

Calvin grasped the meaning of a "soft" or "fatherly" judgment, and made it clear the point of this doctrine is to cheer and comfort humble believers: "But we, on the other hand, without reference to merit, still remarkably cheer and comfort the hearts of believers by our teaching, when we tell them they please God in their works and are without doubt acceptable to him . . . [When God] examines our works according to his tenderness, not his supreme right, he therefore accepts them as if they were perfectly pure; and for this reason, although unmerited, they are rewarded with infinite benefits, both of the present life and also of the life to come. For I do not accept the distinction made by learned and otherwise godly men that good works deserve the graces that are conferred upon us in this life, while everlasting salvation is the reward of faith alone."

Does this sound controversial? As a pastor in the Presbyterian tradition, I am oath bound to teach this doctrine because I have subscribed to the Westminster Standards, which clearly teach [a] a final, open acquittal according to works at the last day (WSC 38), [b] which good

works are wrought in us by the Spirit (WCF 16.3), and [c] are necessary because they are the appointed way to salvation (WLC 32), and [d] are accepted by God the Father through the mediation of his Son (WCF 16.6). (Who needs the Bible when the Standards are so clear?! Ha ha!)

The real problem we face in getting this teaching across is biblical illiteracy. I have found many times people who object to this teaching are (unwittingly) objecting to the language of Scripture itself.

I'm reminded of when a Lutheran friend came into my office horrified one day because he discovered legalism in the Westminster Confession. The chapter on the final judgment described the wicked as those who "obey not the gospel." He said, "The gospel is not to be obeyed, it is to be believed!" At first I thought he was joking, but when I realized he was serious, I pointed out that that language in WCF came straight out of 2 Thess. 1. His law/gospel hermeneutic should have been crushed right there. Alas, it was not. Old paradigms die hard.

To John Piper's eternal credit, he has taught this truth about our good-but-imperfect-good-deeds a long time:

It is terribly confusing when people say that the only righteousness that has any value is the imputed righteousness of Christ. I agree that justification is not grounded on any of our righteousness, but only the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. But sometimes people are careless and speak disparagingly of all human righteousness, as if there were no such thing that pleased God. They often cite [Isaiah 64:6](#), which says our righteousness is as filthy rags. . . . [But] when my sons do what I tell them to do—I do not call their obedience "filthy rags" even if it is not perfect. Neither does God. All the more because he himself is "working in us that which is pleasing in his sight" ([Hebrews 13:21](#)). He does not call his own, Spirit-wrought fruit, "rags." ([Future Grace](#), 151-152).

See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ministry-god-does-not-view-your-labors-as-filthy-rags/>.

Mark Jones, from a 2015 essay (<http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2015/10/judgment-according-to-works.php>), using language very much like that I developed years ago (e.g., in my 2007 essay "A Federal Vision Postcard," published in the book *A Faith That Is Never Alone*):

It occurs to me that some speak of the final judgment in a sub-trinitarian way. It is all about declarative justification for some. Now, of course, declarative justification gives us the right to life. Only the imputed righteousness of Christ can withstand the severity of God's judgment. But, demonstrative justification, as I have highlighted above, is the

Father's approval of the Spirit's work - that is, the Spirit of Christ - in his people because of our union with the Savior.

The Father who gave two gifts to us, the Son and the Spirit, will look upon us as justified in Christ and sanctified in Christ by the Spirit; and he will be well pleased with his work. He will accept us for Christ's sake and reward and vindicate us because of Christ's Spirit, who has enabled us to do good works, which were prepared in advance for us to do ([Eph. 2:10](#)).

So, it seems to me, we need to do a better job - at least, from what I've been able to read - of describing the final judgment in explicitly trinitarian terms. To that end, I believe the account above aims to do just that.

If there is a better way to bridge together the freeness of justification by faith, the conditional language of Scripture ([Rom. 8:13](#)), and the fact that Christians will be judged according to what they have done in the body ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)), I'd be very interested in such an account. But I trust and hope the basic map laid out above, with help from a well-respected Westminster divine, is faithful to the overall teaching of the Scriptures.

Check out M. F. Sadler's work on reconciling James and Paul on justification here (with an intro by yours truly): <http://trinity-pres.net/essays/paul-james-sadler.pdf>

Interestingly, one of my favorite commentaries on James is written by a Lutheran. David Scaer's work *The Apostle of Faith* has an excellent discussion of James 2.

Many Reformed commentators have tried to reconcile James 2 and Romans 4 by saying that James is talking about a demonstrative justification — and so they'll say things like “Abraham justified his faith by what he did” or “Abraham justified his justification by his works.” But those ways of reading of the text twist what it says. Yes, there is a demonstrative element in James 2 — James says SHOW ME your faith by your works. But note four things about the text and the way James relates works to justification:

1. The justification in view comes AFTER works have been done. It is posterior to works (compare to Paul in Romans 4 who speaks of a justification prior to works).
2. It is persons who are justified in James 2. *Abraham* is justified not by faith alone but by faith and works. *Rahab* is justified by what she did. James does not use justification language with reference to anything but persons. He does not say “Abraham justified his faith” or “justified his justification” by works.

3. Justification in James means the same thing as in Paul: to declare righteous. It is a judicial verdict. There is no reason to think of justification in James 2 as anything other than a forensic verdict. But...

4. The distinction between Romans 4 and James 2 is with regard to TIMING. Initial justification (discussed in Romans 4, and underlying everything else) is by faith alone, prior to and apart from any good works. God declares us righteous by faith because we are united to Christ, the Righteous One and share in his judicial standing. James 2 is referring to a subsequent justification event. Note that the context for the discussion about faith and works in James 2:14ff is set by the reference to eschatological/final judgment in 2:13 (there should be no break in between v. 13 and v. 14). Romans 4 answers the question: who is judged righteous by God RIGHT NOW? James 2 answers the question: Who will be judged righteous by God AT THE LAST DAY? At the moment of your conversion, faith alone is sufficient. And in some sense this is always true because our legal status before God is determined by our relationship to Jesus. Nevertheless, at the last day, God will do more than look for faith. He will look for works (as the fruit of our faith, as the outworking of his Spirit in us). And we will be judged accordingly.

Now throw in all the necessary caveats, including but not limited to:

- the works we do are imperfect, but are accepted by God as the work of his Spirit in us and through the meditation/intercession of Christ (WCF 16)
- the works are not the meritorious ground of our final justification, rather they are put forward as evidence leading to the final verdict
- no one will have their legal status changed at the last day (no one who was not justified by faith alone during this life will be justified by works at the last day, and everyone who was justified by faith alone in this life will be justified by faith and works at the last day); initial justification flips our status from condemned to justified, final justification confirms and makes public our status as God's justified people
- etc.

This paradigm provides a much cleaner way of reading texts like Romans 2:1-16, Matthew 25:31-46, and obviously James 2 — all the problem passages that give Reformed people so much trouble. Just let the Bible speak for itself, and don't try to force your pre-understanding of what the apostle should have said onto the text.

Note the Westminster catechisms speak of God's people being "openly acquitted" (= publicly justified) in the day of resurrection. That's the doctrine of final justification in a nutshell. Westminster teaches a double justification doctrine.

Mark Jones is generally very good on this issue (e.g., see this series: <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2014/10/justification-by-precision-alo.php>). His book on antinomianism is excellent. And by blogging about these issues, he has raised awareness, so a proper understanding of works in relation to justification and judgment is re-entering the Reformed mainstream. (In other words, the FV – the "federal vision" -- is winning, but through

different channels.)

Some argue a “two justification” model is Roman Catholic. Actually, Rome does not teach a twofold justification, but a progressive justification, in which original sin is washed away at baptism, subsequent actual sins dealt with through confession and penance, and any remaining sins finally removed in purgatory. Then, you’re finally justified because you have actually been made righteous. But no one is “initially justified” in any meaningful sense in Roman theology. The Reformed tradition does in fact teach a double justification and Jones own quotation of Thomas Goodwin proves it. From Mark Jones (<http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2015/10/judgment-according-to-works.php#sthash.02m055Dy.dpuf>):

Goodwin speaks about what sense "a man may be said to be judged by his works at the latter day." All those judged will either be justified or condemned. "So there is no more danger to say, a man at the latter day shall be justified by his works, as evidences of his state and faith, than to say he shall be judged according thereto." He essentially argues that we will be justified by works, but only demonstratively as God justifies his own act of justification in each believer. After all, Christ speaks of a (demonstrative) justification according to works in Matthew 12:36-37, "...for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

The only problem that I have with Jones is keeping the scholasticism in check. Viewing initial justification as your right to life, with works flowing from that, leading to a final justification and possession of eternal life, is not a problem. And the distinction from Owen that Jones begins with, between a working faith that justifies and a false faith that neither works nor justifies, in a fine distinction. But the more Jones writes, the more the distinctions pile up. Some of them feel very artificial when compared to the text of Scripture. They also have the tendency to reduce orthodoxy to a word game — are you making all the right distinctions and do you have all the right categories? Many of the apostles would not pass these kinds of tests. The distinctions are useful in certain contexts, not in others.

I’m especially dubious of the of Jones’ authoritative justification vs. declarative/demonstrative justification distinction, largely because I think it stems from a poor reading of James 2. Jones also gets into God justifying himself (which is surely true, but not the main point in question), and justifying faith (as opposed to justifying persons), which seems like a pretty useless way to go with the biblical data — unless one ends up saying that in justifying the believer’s faith God is actually justifying the believer....but then i have to ask why we created this category of “God justifying the believer’s faith” to begin with. It accomplishes nothing except putting a barrier between us and the text of Scripture.

Of course, I’m very gratified that Jones insists that we not read Rom. 2:7ff in a hypothetical way. But I do wonder what he would say about 2:12ff. Jones is right that Goodwin would have a

hard time in many PCA presbyteries these days, and Jones' work on this issue is far, far better than, say, Rick Phillips, who has tried miserably to address these topics at various points along the way (he has gotten better over the years but has ways to go to really understand and speak like the apostles). Kevin DeYoung has been summarizing Turretin on these questions, which is also helpful. Turretin's use of scholastic tools is among the best. The fact that Jones, DeYoung, and Jones have all been blogging about this stuff a bunch shows that the FV ("federal vision") conversation, while largely over and done, really needed to happen and is bearing fruit, even if indirectly.

Is it possible to be initially justified but not finally justified? Yes and no – it depends. Yes, in the sense that someone can have a temporary faith and therefore experience temporary blessings, including some kind of forgiveness (Matthew 18). Calvin affirms this. But, no, in the sense that the justification temporary believers receive is qualitatively different from the justification the eternally elect receive (cf. Rom. 8:28ff). I addressed this topic in my essay on Hebrews 6 essay in the original *Federal Vision* book. I wrote:

Second, this is not to say that there is no actual difference between the grace that the truly regenerate receive and the grace that future apostates receive. No doubt, there is a difference, since God has decreed and made provision for the perseverance of the one and not for the other (Eph. 1:11). Systematic theologians certainly have a stake in making such distinctions a part of their theology, so the TULIP must stand unchallenged. Whatever grace reprobated covenant members receive is qualified by their lack of perseverance...

It can be found here: [http://trinity-pres.net/essays/published New Life and Apostasy.pdf](http://trinity-pres.net/essays/published_New_Life_and_Apostasy.pdf).

I've always said there is a qualitative difference between what non-elect covenant members receive and experience, compared to what the elect receive and experience. Certainly, I have no problem saying the non-elect covenant member received justification (Mt. 18), new life (Mt. 13), etc., after a fashion, but that does not mean he receives these blessings in a way that is identical to what the elect receive. I've also tried to get at this through exploring just what can be included in the "common operations" of WCF 10.4. I actually think 10.4 is a very good statement, balancing common operations that the non-elect covenant member shares with the elect, with the undeniable fact that the non-elect can never "truly" possess those blessings in Christ in the same way or to the same degree or with the same duration as the elect.

I have dealt with the topic of future justification extensively in a couple published essays, available here:

[http://trinity-pres.net/essays/published Future Justification.pdf](http://trinity-pres.net/essays/published_Future_Justification.pdf)

[http://trinity-pres.net/essays/published Reformed Doctrine Justification By Works.pdf](http://trinity-pres.net/essays/published_Reformed_Doctrine_Justification_By_Works.pdf)

We have elevated self-deprecation to an art form in the church. Many Christians seem to think expressions of self-loathing are marks of piety. But this is actually false. First of all, Christians are not totally depraved; we have been renewed and made alive by the Spirit, enabled to do good works God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:1-10). We should certainly be honest in confessing our sins and our sinfulness. But we should also continually remind ourselves that we are a new creation in Christ.

From Peter Leithart:

“With what disgust, contempt, and hatred Christ must look upon every second of our lives, the reviewing of which must be a long torture for us, were such a judgment in our future!”

These are the words of a Presbyterian minister, writing in a prominent evangelical magazine. He’s trying to refute the belief that we’ll be judged according to works at the last day. He’s wrong on that point. Paul says clearly and repeatedly that everyone will be judged according to his works. But that’s not my main interest this morning. My interest is the attitude this writer attributes to Jesus.

Do you think Jesus is filled with “disgust, contempt, and hatred . . . every second of our lives”? Many Christians do, and there are others who want to reinforce that view. Job’s friends did. They posed as “comforters” but they were really little “satans,” accusers more interested in convicting than comforting.

Job’s response is not meekly to turn over and take it. His response is not, “Well, you’ve got a point there. I admit I’m totally depraved.” His response is to deny their accusations and defend himself. That should be our response too. But how? We know how sinful we are, how often we fail and fall. How can we defend ourselves with the same confidence as Job?

The answer will come in a few moments, as it comes every week in the liturgy. As we enter the Lord’s presence, we first need to be cleansed by confessing our sins. When we’ve confessed, the Father tells us how he regards us, and He doesn’t express disgust, contempt, or hatred. What He expresses is free and absolute forgiveness, love, favor, brotherly kindness, mercy. Because you are in the Son, “He forgives you *all* your sins.”

When the accusations come, don’t grovel and don’t let yourself be manipulated.

Instead: Remember the words of absolution and realize that even more than Job you have grounds to protest your innocence. Remember the declaration of forgiveness, and believe that in Christ your sins are completely, utterly gone. Remember that you have been cleansed, silence the satans, and know that Jesus Christ by His Spirit is the true Comforter.

The next time some sophisticated theological accuser, some Confessional Satan, wants to convict you of sin, you've got a choice: Believe the accuser, or believe God.

["W]e must remind ourselves that the Catholic righteousness by good works is vastly preferable to a Protestant righteousness by good doctrine. At least righteousness by good works benefits one's neighbor, whereas righteousness by good doctrine only produces lovelessness and pride." (Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*)

N. T. Wright (emphasis mine):

James [2:13] is saying exactly what Jesus was saying in Matthew 18, the alarming parable about the man who was forgiven a huge debt but couldn't bring himself to forgive someone else a tiny debt. James is saying that if you close your heart to mercy then you close your heart to mercy. **The same door through which the mercy of God will come into your heart and life, rescuing and transforming you and enabling you to live by the royal law, is the door through which that mercy must flow out to others.** But if you slam that door shut because you don't like the others, or don't trust them, or feel yourself to be socially superior to them, then you have slammed and locked the very door through which God's mercy was longing to come to you as well. Judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy: a radical application of the Lord's Prayer, Forgive us our debts and trespasses, as we forgive those who are indebted to us, who trespass against us. Forgiveness is a two-way street, and if we block off that street we block off that street. But that can never be the last word, and I read the second half of verse 13 as a reminder that God's grace is always seeking ways to overcome our little prejudices, our small-minded judgments. This relates, you see, to the question of the rich and the poor at the start of the chapter. Verse 4 again: by your discrimination, you are acting as judges with evil thoughts. Now of course the moderately well-off Christians would know perfectly well that sometimes very poor people will, in their desperation, turn to crime, with the better-off a natural target. So there is suspicion built in to the social situation. But in the church mercy triumphs over judgment. This is the message, is it not, of *Les Misérables*, and indeed of Shakespeare's glorious but challenging *Measure for Measure*? Mercy reaches out even to the appalling, to the people who have flouted all God's laws, to the cynical and bitter, to those who have done their best to get their own way in life . . . in other words, to all of us. Thank God it does or there wouldn't be many of us left around. Thank God that in God's kingdom the Law of Love grows as the tree of life in such abundance that when the winds of diabolical accusation blow at their strongest there are places for us to shelter, places where we can stand upright. Places, too, where we can ourselves become life-givers to others. Because underneath the well-known 'problem of James' – that whereas Paul seems to prefer grace to law, James insists on law and on works –

there lies a deep misunderstanding at the heart of much Christian culture to this day, not least because of the ways the insights of the sixteenth-century reformers have been subtly filtered through Enlightenment philosophies.

From Francis Turretin:

THIRD QUESTION: THE NECESSITY OF GOOD WORKS

Are good works necessary to salvation? We affirm.

II. There are three principal opinions about the necessity of good works...; The third is that of those who (holding the middle ground between these two extremes) neither simply deny, nor simply assert; yet they recognize a certain necessity for them against the Libertines, but uniformly reject the necessity of merit against the Romanists. This is the opinion of the orthodox.

III. Hence it is evident that the question here does not concern the necessity of merit, causality, and efficiency—whether good works are necessary to effect salvation or to acquire it by right. (For this belongs to another controversy, of which hereafter). Rather the question concerns the necessity **of means**, of presence and of connection or order—Are they required ***as the means and way for possessing salvation? This we hold.***

IV. Although the proposition concerning the necessity of good works to salvation (which was thrust forward in a former century by the Romanists under the show of a reconciliation in the Interimistic formula, but really that imperceptibly the purity of the doctrine concerning justification might be corrupted) was rejected by various **Lutheran theologians** as less suitable and dangerous; nay, even by some of our theologians; still we think **with others** that it can be retained without danger if properly explained. We also hold *that it should be pressed against the license of the Epicureans* so that although works may be said to contribute nothing to the acquisition of our salvation, ***still they should be considered necessary to the obtainment of it, so that no one can be saved without them***—that thus our religion may be freed from those most foul calumnies everywhere cast not unjustly upon it by the Romanists (as if it were the mistress of impiety and the cushion of carnal licentiousness and security)...

VII. And as to the covenant, everyone knows that it consists of two parts: on the one hand the promise on the part of God; on the other the stipulation of obedience on the part of man... [emphasis added].

16TH TOPIC

EIGHTH QUESTION

Does faith alone justify? We affirm against the Romanists.

III. But that the state of the question may be the more easily understood, we must remark that a twofold trial can be entered into by God with man: either by the law (inasmuch as he is viewed as guilty of violating the law by sin and thus comes under the accusation and condemnation of the law); or by the gospel (inasmuch as he is accused by Satan of having violated the gospel covenant and so is supposed to be an unbeliever and impenitent or a hypocrite, who has not testified by works the faith he has professed with his mouth). Now to this twofold trial a twofold justification ought to answer; not in

the Romish sense, but in a very different sense. The first is that by which man is absolved from the guilt of sin on account of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and apprehended by faith; the other is that by which he is freed from the charge of unbelief and hypocrisy and declared to be a true believer and child of God; one who has fulfilled the gospel covenant (if not perfectly as to degree, still sincerely as to parts) and answered to the divine call by the exercise of faith and piety. The first is justification properly so called; the other is only a declaration of it. That is justification of cause *a priori*; this is justification of sign or of effect *a posteriori*, declaratively. In that, faith alone can have a place because it alone apprehends the righteousness of Christ, by whose merit we are freed from the condemnation of the law; in this, works also are required as the effects and signs of faith, by which its truth and sincerity are declared against the accusation of unbelief and hypocrisy. For as faith justifies a person, so works justify faith.

IV. The question does not concern justification *a posteriori* and declaratively in the fatherly and gospel trial-whether faith alone without works concurs to it (for we confess that works come in here with faith; yea, that works only are properly regarded because it is concerned with the justification of faith, which can be gathered from no other source more certainly than by works as its effects and indubitable proofs). Rather the question concerns justification *a priori*, which frees us from the legal trial, which is concerned with the justification of the wicked and the perfect righteousness, which can be opposed to the curse of the law and acquire for us a right to life-whether works come into consideration here with faith (as the Romanists hold) or whether faith alone (as we maintain).

V. (2) The question is not whether faith alone justifies to the exclusion either of the grace of God or the righteousness of Christ or the word and sacraments (by which the blessing of justification is presented and sealed to us on the part of God), which we maintain are necessarily required here; but only to the exclusion of every other virtue and habit on our part. Hence the Romanists have no reason for accusing us of confusion (*akatastasias*) in this argument as if we ascribed justification at one time to the grace of God, at another to the blood of Christ and then again to faith. For all these as they are mutually subordinated in a different class of cause, consist with each other in the highest degree.

I wrote this essay in 2003:

Keeping the Law

Paul states just as emphatically as James that the doers of the law will be justified (Rom. 2:13; James 2:14ff). But who are these doers of the law? Is Paul speaking hypothetically of a class of sinless people who do not really exist? Or does he have something else in mind?

Let's start by unpacking what it means to keep the law. The law simply did not require perfect obedience. It was not designed for the angels or sinless humans. It was given to

a fallen-but-redeemed nation at Sinai, and was perfectly adapted to their maturity level and ability. God was not mocking the people when he called on them to obey the whole law (Dt. 28:1ff). He had given them grace and they had no excuse for apostasy.

Law keeping in this context is not a matter of scoring 100% on an ethics test. It is not even a matter of scoring 51%. It simply doesn't work that way. Conformity to the law was a matter of relationship, not something mechanical. The law called for a life of faith (Hab. 2:4), a life of full-orbed loyalty to the Lawgiver. If one sinned, one did not automatically become a "law breaker," except in a highly technical sense. After all, the Torah made provision for sin in the sacrificial system. Law keeping included rituals for law breaking. If one repented by performing the proper offering, one maintained his status as a covenant keeper. Only apostasy itself constituted covenant breaking. All other sins could be dealt with within the confines of the covenant relationship [1]. Thus, David, despite his flagrant sin, was regarded as having kept the law (1 Ki. 15:5). Elizabeth and Zecharias were by no means sinless but are called "blameless" and "righteous" before God. They had not measured up to an abstract standard of moral perfection but they *had* done what the law required (Lk. 1:6). Paul, like the psalmists before him, often appealed to his own righteousness and blamelessness. He even claimed to have a clear conscience!

An illustration may help. If I say my 5 year old son is "obedient" I do not mean he is sinlessly perfect. I do not mean he never needs discipline. I am simply describing the overall shape, or pattern, of his life. As a way life, he obeys. As a habit, he obeys. And so forth. When the Bible speaks of people having kept the law, or walking blamelessly, it is not speaking in the highly rarified language one might use in systematic theology; rather, it is speaking in the everyday language of real life. It is a Father assessing the ethical condition and direction of his children.

Justification and Law Keeping

Calvin argues that Romans 2:13 is speaking hypothetically. *If* someone did the law, they could be justified by works . . . but of course, no one does so, so "doers of the law" is an empty set. But what happened to using Scripture to interpret Scripture? Why not plug into Rom. 2 the people that Scripture says elsewhere did (or kept) the law? That makes far more sense than filling in Paul's terms with our own notions of what "doing the law" might entail. The justification by works envisioned in Romans 2 cannot be any more hypothetical than the condemnation spoken of. Paul is simply pointing out the "two ways" we find everywhere else in Scripture (e.g., Proverbs). (Note also that the vindication promised to the obedient in Rom. 2 cannot be reduced to mere rewards piled on top of salvation itself. The whole context has to do with eternal salvation vs. eternal destruction.)

Several other texts bear on Romans 2. In James 1:22, James speaks in non-hypothetical terms of doing the law. Jesus is not kidding or messing around when he speaks of a future justification according to our words (Mt. 12:37; 25:31ff). When Jesus describes two paths — one leading to life, the other to death — he isn't propounding a hypothetical way of salvation by walking the narrow path of obedience (Mt. 7:24). Rather, he is demanding obedience as a non-negotiable condition of salvation. When Hebrews says that without holiness, no man will see the Lord, it is not proposing

holiness as a hypothetical plan of salvation by merit (Heb. 12:14). When Jesus requires cross bearing and life-losing as a condition of eternal life in the gospels (e.g., Lk. 9:23, Jn. 12:25), he means exactly what he says. And on and on we could go.

The White Robes of Righteousness

The symbolism of Revelation has a bearing on our theology of justification that often goes unnoticed. Revelation 3:4 and 19:8, 14 employ the image of a white robe given to the saints. But what is this white robe? Clearly, it links back to the priestly garments of the Levitical order. We find the priestly robes described in great detail in Ex. 28. In the New Covenant, all believers receive these clothes so they can minister in the Lord's house as palace servants (cf. Gal. 3:27-8).

But how do they come to possess these robes? Do the robes signify the imputed righteous status of Christ? Or do they symbolize the righteousness of the saints? The lexical data does not solve the dilemma so we have to look to the broader teaching of Scripture. In Zechariah 3, we have a prophetic narrative of Joshua being clothed in white so he can stand in the Lord's presence. On the one hand, the white robe is a gift of grace. Joshua is stripped of his filthy garments, symbolizing his sin, and given the clothes of another (3:1-5). On the other hand, this gift is not given apart from the requirement of obedience. Joshua can only continue to stand in the Lord's presence if he obeys the Lord (3:6).

The initial clothing in white is received by faith alone. This is the beginning of Joshua's justification. But if Joshua is to remain justified — that is, if the garments he has received are not to become re-soiled with his iniquity — he must be faithful. Thus, initial justification is by faith alone; subsequent justifications include obedience.

The plot thickens if we return to Revelation 3 and 19. Both these passages depict eschatological scenes. In Revelation 3 the final reward of the righteous is in view. The believers in Sardis already have their garments (3:4a), given presumably at conversion/baptism (initial justification). Those who have walked in faith have not defiled their garments. Therefore they shall go on living in the Lord's presence because they are loyal to him. This is the same pattern we found in Zechariah 3: initial reception of the white garment is by faith alone; ongoing possession of the garment is maintained by faithful obedience. The Sardis saints are even said to become *worthy* of the white robes. Worth does not indicate merit, of course, but it does reveal God's fatherly pleasure with their good works of charity and service in the face of intense suffering. Obedience is intrinsic to saving faith in this passage.

Revelation 19 does not develop the imagery with as much theological detail or precision, but nevertheless echoes the same pattern. The bride of the Lamb is robed in white linen, again, the garments of a priest. This white linen stands for the righteousness of the saints who compose the bride — righteousness received by virtue of her union with her husband, but also a righteousness worked out as she follows her Lord into battle.

The fluidity of these symbols suggests a certain fluidity in our doctrine of justification. The white robes stand first and foremost for Christ's free gift to his people. Just as he is clothed in white (cf. Rev. 1, 19), so he clothes his people in white. Their "whiteness" before the Father's throne is due solely to his death and resurrection. In this sense, the

robes stand for initial justification. But this forensic justification cannot be separated from the good works that make the saints worthy of their new apparel. In other words, the poetic imagery points in the same direction as the theological prose of Paul (Rom. 2:13) and James (2:14ff): those who will be vindicated in the end are those who have been faithfully obedient. There is no hint of a merit theology in these passages, but there is no escaping the close nexus formed between priestly investiture, justification, and obedience. To the question, “Are the saints robed in Christ’s righteousness or their own obedience?”, the imagery of Revelation answers, “YES!” In other words, the word pictures drawn in this book do not support a rigid separation of justification from holy living. Justification and sanctification are of a piece, both symbolized by the same white robes.

Justification Now and Then

The Bible is clear: obedience is necessary to receive eternal life. There is no justification apart from good works. But more needs to be said about final judgment. What role will faith play? What role will works play?

Again, we find the Bible teaching that future justification is according to works. Final justification is *to the (faithful) doers of the law* (Rom. 2:1ff) and *by those good works which make faith complete* (Jas. 2:14ff). Justification will not be fully realized until the resurrection. In fact, the main reason justification comes up at all in the Scriptures is because someday we will all stand before God’s judgment seat and answer for our deeds done in the body. This makes the question of justification the most practical question of all.

In James 2, “justification” cannot be referring to a *demonstration* of justification, e.g., justification does and cannot mean something like “show to be justified.” Rather, James has in view the same kind of justification as Paul — forensic, soteric justification. Good works justify *persons* in James 2, not *faith* or one’s *status* as a justified sinner. James is not telling his readers how to “justify their justification” or how to “give evidence of a true and lively faith” [2]. Instead he says their persons will *not* be justified by faith alone, but *also* by good works of obedience they have done. The use of the preposition “by” is important since it indicates a sort of dual instrumentality in justification. In other words, in some sense, James is speaking of a justification in which faith and works *combine together* to justify [3]. Future justification is according to one’s life pattern. No one dare claim these works to be meritorious, but they are necessary. There is congruence between the life we live and the destiny we will receive.

To unpack this a bit further, we can reconcile Paul and James by taking into account the factor of *time* (something systematic theology, with its abstract methodology, tends to leave out). Initial justification — the pole the Reformers focused on in their disputes with Rome — is by faith alone. Hence *sola fide* must stand unchallenged. Final justification, however, is according to works. This pole of justification takes into account the entirety of our lives — the obedience we’ve performed, the sins we’ve committed, the confession and repentance we’ve done. At the last day, our works will not have any meritorious value. In that sense, even before the great white judgment throne, we will plead nothing but the blood and resurrection of Jesus. We will place no confidence in anything we have accomplished — even what God has done in us and through us!

Nevertheless, God's verdict over us will be in accord with, and therefore in some sense based upon, the life we have lived. Those who have done well (as a life pattern) and those who have done evil (as a life pattern) will be judged accordingly at the resurrection (cf. Jn. 5:29-30). Our profession of faith and our life's work must match.

A Gracious Justice

The Bible clearly teaches that future judgment will be according to works. This was a common presupposition among Paul and his Jewish opponents. But how is this final judgment to be understood? What else can we say about it? Why would Paul insist that this future event is part of his gospel presentation (Rom. 2:16)?

Clearly, our works can never have any meritorious value. If God were to judge us according to strict justice, everyone would be condemned.

But the Bible nowhere says God will apply absolute justice at the last day. So why do we make that assumption? The only places where God enforces strict justice are the cross and hell. For the covenant people, at least, it seems God will use "fatherly justice" in the final judgment, not "absolute justice." He will judge us the way parents evaluate their child's art work, or the way a new husband assesses the dinner his beloved wife has made. The standard will be soft and generous because God is merciful. Our works will not have *merit* before God, but they will have *worth* precisely because of the covenant relationship we are in. (Again, compare this notion to those passages in Scripture which claim a particular saint is righteous, or has kept the law, or has done good, e.g., Jn. 5:29, Lk. 1:6, Ps. 7:8, Acts 13:22, etc. These examples show the kind of "soft" evaluation God makes of his people — and the kind of evaluation they should make of themselves and other covenant members. Remember, even David, for all his sin and folly, is regarded as a doer of the law in the Rom. 2:13 sense; cf. 1 Ki. 15:5.)

This is why judgment according to works is not something that undermines Christian confidence. We can have assurance because we are *in Christ*, and the *Father* will not evaluate us apart from him. Union with Christ and familial love form the lens through which the Father looks upon us and our works. We are appraised as sons and daughters, not as servants or slaves.

We can also rest assured that God will not judge us apart from our faith. Judgment according to works *includes* an evaluation of our faith. Good works, after all, are just the heart and soul of genuine faith. A judgment about works is really a judgment about faith, and vice versa. For example, it is *not* eisegesis to assume that the doers of the law in Romans 2 are those who have demonstrated the "obedience of faith," rather than those who have scored 100% on a moral exam. For Paul, as for James and the entire Old Testament, there is no sharp divide between faith and its fruit. Faith and obedience are integrated into a holistic response to God's covenant grace. God is not looking for perfection from his people; rather he desires a core commitment of loyalty that overshadows everything else we do, no matter how badly we may fail from time to time.

We have a number of false presuppositions that keep us from dealing with this issue the way we ought. These mistaken assumptions make rather simple texts (e.g., Rom. 2 and Jas. 2) very opaque. Our framework of "absolute justice" rather than "familial love"

taints our reading of key passages. We need to clear up our thinking and get back to the Bible.

Back to Biel?

I have claimed above that God's judgment of us at the last day will be "soft." That is, God will judge us as a Father and Husband, not as a cold, aloof Sovereign. Some might wonder: How does this not slide right back in the late medieval Pelagianism of Biel and others who, essentially, argued that Jesus had lowered God's standards and made it possible for us to save ourselves by works?

Several comments should be made here. First, the soteriology I have offered is still thoroughly monergistic, whereas as the late medieval scholastics were moving in a decidedly semi-Pelagian and even full-Pelagian direction. They spoke of autonomous cooperation with God's grace and so forth. I utterly reject that. Every last stitch in the garment of salvation is woven by God himself.

Second, I would insist on the utter sufficiency and uniqueness of Christ's self-offering on the cross. He died in our place and for our sins. Nothing has to be added to that in order to secure our salvation. But the point of the cross is not just to remove sin in a legal, forensic sense. It is to destroy sin altogether. (I think this is a large subtheme in Rom. 6-8). God saves not only by removing the barrier of guilt, but also by renewing us to his image. If our salvation did not include the latter, it would be incomplete. By insisting on works for salvation, I am not saying we merit anything; rather I am claiming that God's work of redemption is comprehensive. Ironically, those who seek to maximize grace by downplaying the requirement of obedience actually minimize grace because they truncate the wholeness of God's saving action.

Third, the "softer" standard simply seems to be the teaching of Scripture. Pietistic Protestantism has created a sort of "holy worm" theology in which we are never allowed to "feel good" about anything we've done. We can never please God, no matter what Paul said we aim for (cf. 2 Cor. 5:9ff). Everything we do, no matter how noble or faithful, is tainted with sin and therefore worthy of condemnation.

However true that is in the abstract, it's simply not the way Scripture evaluates things. The Bible repeatedly speaks of believers and their works as "good," as "worthy," and so forth. Calvin himself spoke quite frequently of God's gracious forbearance and fatherly indulgence in judging believers and their works. (For quotations, see Lillback's *The Binding of God*, e.g., 196, 197. Calvin focuses on God's fatherhood when describing his evaluation of our works. That is an emphasis often missing in contemporary discussions of future justification.)

So emphasizing future justification according to a fatherly evaluation of our works does not fall back into the errors of medieval scholastic soteriology. If anything, it takes us back to Paul who proclaimed again and again that future justification by works was part of his gospel (Rom. 2:16). But how could this future judgment be *good news* unless it somehow includes consideration of our new status in Christ and our new relationship to God himself as our Father?

From Frederic Godet's commentary on Romans 2:

Romans 2:6 – Ver. 6. “*Who will render to every one according to his deeds.*” — It has been asked how this maxim can be reconciled with the doctrine of justification by faith . . . Melancthon, Tholuck, and others hold that this standard is purely hypothetical; it *would be* the standard which God would have applied if redemption had not intervened. But the future, “*will render,*” is not a conditional (*would render*). Besides, *judgment according to the deeds done*, is attested by many other passages, both from Paul (Rom. xiv. 12; 2 Cor. V. 10; Gal. vi. 6), from Jesus Himself (John v. 28, 29; Matt. xii.36, 37, etc.), and from other writings of the New Testament (Rev. xx.13). Ritschl thinks that throughout this passage it is a Pharisee whom Paul introduces as speaking, and who starts from a narrow idea of divine justice—the idea, viz., of retributive justice. But what trace is there in the text of such an accommodation on the apostle's part to a standpoint foreign to his own? The logical tissue of the piece, and its relation to what precedes and follows, present no breach of continuity. There is only one answer to the question raised, unless we admit a flagrant contradiction in the apostle's teaching: that justification by faith alone applies to the time of *entrance* into salvation through the free pardon of sin, but not to the time of judgment. When God of free grace receives the sinner at the time of his conversion, He asks nothing of him except faith; but from that moment the believer enters on a wholly new responsibility; God demands from him, as the recipient of grace, the fruits of grace. This is obvious from the parable of the talents. The Lord commits His gifts to His servants freely; but from the moment when that extraordinary grace has been shown, He expects something from their labor. Compare also the parable of the wicked debtor, where the pardoned sinner who refuses to pardon his brother is himself replaced under the rule of justice, and consequently under the burden of his debt. The reason is that faith is not the dismal prerogative of being able to sin with impunity; it is, on the contrary, the means of overcoming sin and acting holily; and if this life-fruit is not produced, it is dead, and will be declared vain. “*Every barren tree will be hewn down and cast into the fire*” (Matt. iii. 10). Compare the terrible warnings, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, Gal. vi. 7, which are addressed to believers.

Ver. 13. “*For not the hearers of the law are just before God; but the doers of the law, they shall be justified.*” — The judicial force of . . . “*to be justified,*” in Paul's writings, comes out forcibly in this passage, since in the day of judgment no one is *made* righteous morally speaking, and can only be *recognized* and *declared* such. This declarative sense appears likewise in the use of the preposition “*before*” God, which necessarily refers to an act of God as *judge*. No doubt it is the Mosaic law which is referred to, but as law, and not as Mosaic. Some think that this idea of justification by the fulfillment of the law is enunciated here in a purely hypothetical manner, and can never be realized (iii. 19, 20). Paul, it is said, is indicating the *abstract* standard of judgment, which, in consequence of man's sin, will never admit of rigorous application. But how in this case explain the future “*shall be justified*”? Comp. also the phrase of ver. 27: “*uncircumcision when it fulfills the law,*” words which certainly refer to concrete cases, and the passage viii. 4, in which the apostle asserts that . . . what the law declares righteous, is *fulfilled* in the believer's life. It will certainly, therefore, be required of us

that we *be* righteous in the day of judgment if God is to *recognize* and *declare* us to be such; *imputed* righteousness is the beginning of the work of salvation, the means of entrance into the state of grace. But this initial justification, by restoring communion between God and man, should guide the latter to the *actual* possession of righteousness—that is to say, to the fulfillment of the law; otherwise, this first justification would not stand in the judgment (see on ver. 6). And hence it is in keeping with Paul’s views, whatever may be said by an antinomian and unsound tendency, to distinguish two justifications, the one initial, founded exclusively on faith, the other final, founded on faith *and its fruits*. Divine imputation beforehand, in order *to be* true, must necessarily *become* true—that is to say, be converted into the *recognition* of a real righteousness. But if the maxim of ver. 13 is the rule of the divine judgment, this rule threatens again to overturn the principle of divine impartiality; for how can the Gentiles fulfill the law which they do not possess? Vv. 14 and 15 contain the answer to this objection . . .

Thomas Manton:

We are justified by works, and not by faith only, by which are meant the fruits of sanctification. For true faith and true holiness will show itself by good works; faith gives us the first right, but works continue it, for otherwise a course of sin would put us into a state of damnation again; therefore at the last judgment these are considered: Rev. 20:12, “And the dead were judged out of those thing which were written in the books, according to their works;” Matt 25:35-36, “For I was hungry....” Faith is our consent, but obedience verifieth it, or is out performance of what we consented unto, the one as covenant-making, the other as covenant-keeping; we are admitted by covenant-making, but continued in our privileges by covenant-keeping...”

From Mark Horne:

Much that would be of value to us is now out of print. Occasionally I stumble over such a treasure in the seminary library. Thus, I discovered Benedict Pictet’s *Christian Theology* translated from the original latin in the last century. Pictet was the nephew of Francis Turretin and the last orthodox pastor of Geneva. Tragically, his main opponent in his fight against a slide away from Reformed Theology was Jean-Alphonse, Turretin’s own son. Yet Pictet was no mere imitator of former days, but an original theologian in his own right.

Unfortunately, his work was expurgated by his translator in the chapter on reprobation, and useless footnotes trying to register disagreement with Pictet’s defense of the legitimacy of Roman Catholic baptism (i.e. converts from romanism need not be

rebaptized) are inserted. My copy also had several torn pages. Nevertheless, reading Pictet was quite rewarding to me, and so I commend him to anyone interested in systematic theology. Of course, I have my disagreements (his sympathy for alleged Mary's perpetual virginity, his vacuous view of the sacraments, his doctrine of the "spirituality" of God as he uses it to inveigh against "carnal" worship, etc), but I still think he is worth reading.

The excerpt below is from the chapter "Of the Justification of a Righteous Man," which occurs after his chapter, "Of the Justification of a Sinner." The italics are Pictet's (or his translators?) and the boldfacing and underlining is done by me.]

We have spoken of the justification of man as a *sinner*; we must now speak of his justification as a *righteous* man, i.e. that by which he proves that he is justified and that he possesses a true justifying faith. Now this justification is *by works, even in the sight of God*, as well as of men; and of this James speaks when he declares that "by works a man is justified and not by faith only" (Jam 2:24). To illustrate this, we must remark that there is a twofold accusation against man. First, he is accused before God's tribunal of the guilt of sin, and this accusation is met and done away by the justification of which we have already treated. Secondly, the man who has been justified may be accused of hypocrisy, false profession and unregeneracy; now he clears himself from this accusation and justifies his faith by his works-this is the second justification; it differs from the first; for in the first a sinner is acquitted from guilt, in the second a godly man is distinguished from an ungodly. In the first God imputes the righteousness of Christ; in the second **he pronounces judgment from the gift of holiness bestowed upon us**; both these justifications the believer obtains, and therefore it is true that "by works he is justified and not by faith only."

From these remarks it is plain that James is easily reconciled with Paul, especially if we consider, that Paul had to do with judiciaries, who sought to be justified by the law, i.e. by their own works, but James had to deal with a sort of Epicureans, who, content with a mere profession, neglected good works; it is no wonder then, that Paul should insist upon faith, and James upon works. Moreover, Paul speaks of a lively and efficacious faith, but James of a faith without works. Paul also speaks of the justification of the ungodly or sinner, James of that justification, by which a man as it were **justifies his faith and proves himself to be justified**. For it is his design to show that it is not enough for a Christian man to glory in the remission of sins, which is unquestionably obtained only by a living faith in Christ, but that he **must** endeavor to make it manifest by his works that he is truly renewed, that he possesses real faith and righteousness, and lives as becomes a regenerate and justified person. Hence it is plain, that Abraham is properly said to have been justified, when he offered up Isaac, because by this he proved that he had real faith, and cleared himself from every charge of hypocrisy, of which he might have been accused. In this sense that passage is explained: "He that is righteous, let him be righteous still" (Rev 22), i.e. let him show by his works that he is justified...

From TPC's former associate pastor, Jimmy Gill:

Double Justification

We tend to think of justification as a binary choice between two opposites:

We are saved by our own merit/works **OR** We are not saved by our own merit/works

But these are not the only two options presented in Scripture. In fact, this is a false dichotomy that ignores the element of time between our initial justification (when we are first saved) and our final justification/vindication (when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ at the Last Day). In other words, the Bible teaches a "double justification" or a justification with two aspects. Our justification by grace through faith is the initial and foundational element of our righteous standing before God, while the vindication of our works at the final judgment is the future fulfillment of God's justifying work for us. Future justification presupposes initial justification. God's acceptance of our works is only because we have already been united to Christ and declared righteous for His sake.

We are initially declared righteous apart from anything that we can or will do. God's acceptance of us, forgiveness of our sins, etc. is only because of God's sovereign grace and the atoning work of Christ, which is applied to us by God's Spirit in the proclamation of the gospel and in the sacrament of baptism. Once we have been united to Christ and filled with God's Spirit, we embark on a lifelong process of becoming what we already definitively are in Christ. This lifelong process of being conformed to the likeness of Christ by the power of the Spirit is usually known as sanctification. The "good works" that we do apart from Christ are worthless (Phil. 3:4-8). But in union with Christ and by the power of the Spirit, we are able to do good works and the Father is pleased by those good works. They are not the basis of our salvation, but they are still accepted by God because they are the work of His own Spirit.

When God saves us and fills us with His Spirit, He renews our minds with His truth and enables our wills to choose what is right. We are called to walk in step with God's Spirit so that our lives will become more like Christ's and produce godly fruit. Any of our good works are ultimately a result of God's grace and empowerment, but we still have an important responsibility to pursue holiness and not to quench the Spirit. And when we do sin as God's children, we are called to confess our sin with the promise of God's forgiveness and cleansing. The Final Judgment will not be a matter of God only letting sinless, perfect people into heaven. We shouldn't think that God will condemn us to hell because we have sinned at some time (or many times) in our life. God's word promises us forgiveness and cleansing in Christ when we confess and forsake our sins.

When we are initially justified (saved, converted, regenerated, etc.), God the Father declares us forgiven because of what Jesus has done for us. At the Last Day, when

Christians stand before the judgment seat of God as His sons and daughters, the good works that the Spirit has produced in us will be approved. This understanding of justification does not minimize God's grace by allowing us to boast in our works; rather, this view magnifies God's grace by affirming that the good works we do in the power of the Spirit are also a testimony to God's power and mercy at work in and through us.

What follows are excerpts from various email conversations I have had over these issues. They may be hard to understand at points because they lack complete context, but I include them here because various bits and pieces of these discussions may further fill in the theology developed in the sermons.

What is the proper definition of faith? Some have said that stressing faith's fruit the way I have done imports works into the definition of faith. This is not true. So what is faith? See the WCF for an excellent answer. Faith is receiving Christ, trusting Christ, embracing Christ, resting in Christ, etc. Good works flow out of this faith. "Caring for the poor," "praying for my sick uncle," "putting lustful thoughts to death," etc. all arise from faith. They are activities by which faith expresses itself. (And of course, without them one should question if justifying faith is really present.)

Look at Romans 10 -- "believe in your heart..." That's faith. Look at Acts 16 -- "Believe into the the Lord Jesus Christ..." That's faith. Then look at the Bible's commands -- care for the poor, pray for the sick, fight against lust, etc. Those are the actions of faith. That's what faith does when it meets a given situation.

The doctrine of "JBFA" (justification by faith alone) does not provide a *comprehensive* doctrine of justification. Calvin gave it at best a qualified acceptance (or rejection) when he said "*sola fide* may be true or false depending on what's meant" (paraphrased).

There is ample biblical warrant for what the WCF about the "principal" act of faith (e.g., all the "believe into Christ language in Acts; Rom. 4; Rom.10) but faith is also "a way of life" that responds holistically to God's Word. Faith is more than trusting Christ for salvation; we are *to live by faith* in every aspect of our daily walk. And, thus, saving faith is always characterized by obedience. Faith and obedience are not two separate things but part of a single, overarching response to God. Like a husband and wife, faith and obedience can be distinguished but not separated.

But that does not mean we should make "obedience" part of the definition of faith – to do so is to make a hash out of biblical language. It's sloppy in a place where we should not be sloppy.

Faith is principally trust; but one of the things trust does is obey the one trusted. If I trust my doctor, I will take the medicine he prescribes (= obey his commands). But that doesn't mean "taking medicine" is part of the definition of trust. Trust is trust; but when I trust, I act out in a certain way. To say "trust obeys" is different than simply making trust and obedience synonyms. Trust gives me a certain life orientation; it points me in a certain direction. Now, as I walk through life, I respond to various situations and events in a different way because I have faith. Because I have faith I do A and don't do B. Etc.

One thing faith does is pray; but that does not make prayer a **part** of faith by definition. Rather, it's an act of faith. What something *is* can be distinguished from what it *does*.

Faith also helps the poor, as James shows, as Matthew 25 shows, etc. But that does not make "helping the poor" part of the formal definition of faith. Rather, those who have faith respond in a certain way when they encounter poverty.

In James 2, works are not a *part* of faith, they are *evidence* of faith. James says, "show me your faith." Faith shows itself in works. Works are demonstrative of faith. But all through the passage, he is distinguishing faith and works (in the case of Abraham, this is very obvious -- if works are a part of faith, how can faith "work together" with his works?). For James, a living faith will show itself in works, leading to justification. Faith that doesn't show itself in works is dead and demonic. If James considered obedience part of the definition of faith itself, I think the chapter would read differently.

The same thing is going on in Heb. 11 -- "By faith, _____ obeyed." There, obedience is not part of faith either. But it is the outflow of faith, the reflex of faith to a divine command. If you plug your definition of faith below into the formula in Heb. 11, it becomes redundant -- "by obedience, he obeyed"?

So by no means should we isolate faith from repentance and good works. But we should not confuse them either. It's the heart/lung illustration. Only the heart pumps blood, only the lungs breathe. But neither can do what it does in isolation from the other. In the same way, faith and works work together. (The illustration isn't perfect because biblically, faith has a kind of priority that you can't give to the heart or lungs.) We can't make breathing part of the definition of the heart because a heart without oxygen is dead. We can't smush organs together into a "leart" or a "lung" because we don't want anyone to think faith and works can exist apart from one another.

Thus, we shouldn't say "obedience" is a part of faith; instead we should say "to obey" is one of the things faith *does*. In the WCF, faith "yields obedience to commands." Or more

accurately, "By faith, the Christian....yields obedience to the commands of the Bible..." Yielding obedience is something faith *does*. But obedience and faith are distinguished. If I say X does Y, then clearly, X and Y are related yet distinct.

Now, it is true there are places in Scripture where faith and obedience are used interchangeably, such as Romans 10 and Hebrews 3 (see Don Garlington on these texts). There are places where faith is called "obedience to the gospel," or where faith fulfills a command, or where faith is even called a work. It is true that "trusting" is a human action just as much as caring for the poor, praying, etc. But none of those texts make a case for including obedience *within* the definition of faith. If anything, it's the other way around. Faith is a form of obedience; it is a subset of the larger category of human action. But saying that does not negate the special role of faith. It's not like believing in Jesus is just one in a long line of actions God requires for salvation. Rather, it's the answer to THE question, What must I DO to be saved? And the reason is because faith is unique in that it unites us to Christ; we believe *into* Christ. But because faith unites us to Christ, it, in a sense, becomes the source of all our other good works, as Heb. 11 and James 2 show. By faith Christ, our entire way of life is transformed. We can tell people, "If you believe into Him, you'll never be the same."

Faith/trust (considered distinct from the actions it produces) has a unique role as to play in salvation. The Bible does not call us merely to "trust" (as if faith could stand alone) nor to "trust and obey" (as if they were two required but unrelated things) but to "obey *by* trusting" (because the same faith that lays hold of Christ for justification also drives us towards total life transformation).

What about Gen. 15:6, a key text in both Romans 4 and James 2? WHY is faith reckoned as righteousness? What's so special about faith? Is it faith in general that gets reckoned as righteousness, or is it faith directed to a particular object/person? Hint: I think Paul answers this at the end of Romans 4. Justifying faith is faith directed to the seed, who we now know as the crucified and risen Christ. The reason Gen. 15:6 is the place Abe is declared righteous is because the promise he believes there is specifically the promise of the seed. The whole context of Abraham's faith there is a conversation about Abraham's present childlessness and God's promise to provide a son – see Gen. 15:2-4. Richard Hays even argues that when Paul uses Abraham as the model of justification by faith in Romans 4, he's doing so typologically. (In other words, Hays "out-Luthers Luther.")

Christ himself is always faith's righteousness. Faith is not a second righteousness; it is simply the means by which we are united to Christ, in whom we have righteousness. Even the objective/subjective distinction breaks down here since, as Luther shows, we

are justified by the Christ who dwells IN us. The righteousness of faith in Gen. 15:6 is Christ every bit as much as in Rom. 6 and Col. 2.

We need to wrestle with WHY faith is imputed as righteousness. (Or: Why we are justified by faith.) I contend that the righteousness of faith is simply Christ himself. As Luther says, "the righteousness of faith is Christ himself....Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ....Christ is present in faith itself."

Mannermaa summarizes Luther this way: "Christ himself, both his person and his work, is the Christian righteousness, that is, 'the righteousness of faith.' Christ – and therefore his entire person and work – is really and truly present in faith itself...The idea of the divine life of Christ that is present in faith lies at the very center of the theology of the Reformer....Faith means participation in the person of Christ...Justifying faith means participation in God's essence in Christ...Christ and faith belong together 'essentially'...In faith, the person of Christ and the believer are made one." Later, he shows that in Luther's thought, Christ is present and efficacious in faith, that Christ's presence in us takes the form of faith, that Christ is not only the object of faith but also (in a certain sense) the subject of faith.

We need a fully Christological, Christocentric view of faith. Every soteric benefit in its initial form is by faith alone. That's just a corollary of union with Christ by faith alone.

Following that, we maintain/continue in these soteric benefits by faith and faith's fruit since that's how we abide in Christ (Jn. 15:1ff) and since the faith that alone unites to Christ is never alone. (Christ gives himself to faith alone, but as the Spirit creates faith in the effectual call, the Spirit also begins creating other virtues in us.)

Faith's role in initial justification and its role in producing good works are distinguished in the liturgy: We cannot make the sin offering "logically simultaneous" with the tribute offering; we do not pass the offertory plate while we are on our knees confessing sin.

We can do the same thing with the sacraments: In baptism, God unites us to Christ (Rom. 6) in whom we have the forgiveness of sins (= IJ; Acts 2:38) and adoption (Gal. 3) and new life (Tit. 3), but the gift of baptism, in the nature of the case, can only be received by faith. Baptism is simply not a judgment of works, no matter how you slice it. Indeed, baptism is ultimately just the gift of Christ himself (though occasionally, Scripture singles out certain in-Christ benefits rather than talking about the whole package we get in baptism). But in the Lord's Supper, God does judge us by our works (1 Cor. 11). Baptism is IJ; it is proctological. The Eucharist is eschatological; it points ahead to the consummation of all things.

To put it more theologically: IJ is just an aspect of what happens when we are united to Christ; justification by works follows from and presupposes that "already," prior

acceptance of our persons. Union with Christ takes care of the acceptability of our works *because* it *includes* an acceptance of our persons by faith alone apart from works.

Justification is simply the forensic/imputative aspect of union with Christ -- just as adoption is the familial aspect, sanctification the transformative aspect, etc. When we are united to Christ by faith alone God imputes that faith as righteousness, which is to say he makes us sharers in Christ's legal status by faith. Again: It all happens in Christ, by faith. The same faith that unites us to Christ gets us all of his benefits. There are not multiple kinds of faith, one for each benefit. There is just the one kind of faith that unites us to the one Christ -- and in the one gift of Christ are the many sub-gifts of the so-called *ordo salutis*. Or to put it another way, the prongs of faith hold the diamond of Christ -- but that diamond has many facets (one of which is justification).

UWC is much broader, encompassing faith being reckoned as righteousness, but much else besides. But all those gifts are appropriated in the same act of faith, with the same kind of faith. Faith grabs hold of Christ; in Christ we are justified, renewed, transformed, adopted, etc. One faith and one Christ, with many gifts received in the one Christ through the one act of faith. There is one act of faith, in which Christ becomes to us righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, etc.

There is no union with Christ apart from faith. Union with Christ is offered to us in the Word and baptism; it is received by faith. But where there is no faith there is no saving union with Christ. So faith is always the gateway to everything else God has in store for us.

Further, the transition from wrath to grace, from condemnation to acquittal, is made by faith. I do not think faith comes in after the transition; it comes in as the means of the transition (see Eph. 2, Col. 2, etc.). If someone asks, What must I do to be saved?, we answer, Believe on the Lord Jesus. Faith is the means by which we transition into salvation; it is not just proof that the transition has already happened before we believed. This is important: there really is something man has to DO to be saved -- namely, believe. There's no passivity here, for faith itself is a human activity (and even when faith is receptive, it is still active). Yes, God takes initiative in the application of salvation, but not in a way that negates human activity, but rather in way that creates such action on our part. The transition from wrath to grace and condemnation to acquittal NEVER happens apart from a human response to the gospel.

The only pre-faith aspect of the "*ordo*" (for lack of a better term) that I can find in the Bible is calling. And calling is not so much apart from faith as it a way of telling us where our faith comes from. Calling is just another way of saying that faith is a gift, that the Spirit works faith in us by external means. We are effectually called, by the Spirit, to faith, and that faith unites us to Christ, in whom we have every blessing. Note that in Rom. 8:29-30, "faith" is included in calling since the call creates faith. Thus, Paul moves straight from calling (inclusive of faith) to justification (by faith). So the divine action of

calling and the human action of believing cannot be separated; they describe the same act/event from divine and human perspectives.

Union with Christ by faith contextualizes justification in every form. Thus, justification by faith must contextualize justification by works. The Bible doesn't just say that without union with Christ it is impossible to please God; it says without faith, it is impossible to please God. Theologically speaking, it is always the case that jbf makes jbw possible. JBW presupposes that the person has already been accepted and declared righteous in Christ. There's no other way to make jbw work.

Even though we can agree with Murray and Shepherd that obedience arises as soon as God gives faith (experientially), we also have to stress that all obedience is by faith, is through faith, is the embodiment of faith, and is the fruit of faith. We have to maintain faith's primacy as the source of all obedience and also the medium through which our obedience is acceptable. Surely none of us want our obedience to be evaluated apart from faith (and faith's union with Christ), right?! God receives and rewards our works from 'within' the circle of faith. And that's why I will always insist that jbf circumscribe jbw.

With regard to Gen. 15:6, keep in mind:

1. God counted faith as righteousness because that's the response he was looking for, so to speak. God made a promise. Abraham believed that promise. What else can you do with a promise besides believe it? That's always the right (or: righteous) response. Trust is the "right" thing to do in response to God's promissory speech.
2. Note the content of the promise, namely the seed. This is the seed in whom Abraham's family will be reckoned as righteous. So (as Paul indicates at the end of Rom. 4), for Abraham to believe that promise was the equivalent of us believing into Christ, crucified and risen. It's not so much that faith counts as righteousness in itself; rather, faith's object *makes* faith count for righteousness. Faith is a cup -- its value is found not in itself but in that which it contains/possess/holds (Christ). Faith is like the prongs on a ring, holding the diamond (Luther's fabulous illustration).
3. All that to say, faith reckoned as righteousness is really, ultimately, just another way of saying Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). It's not like we have two righteousnesses, faith and Christ. Rather, they resolve into one righteousness, as faith (the "right" response to God's promise/gift) unites us to Christ (who is the Righteous One). I think if you put the various texts together, that's where you end up. Gen. 15:6 is not shorthand for "the imputation of Christ's active obedience" as the anti-FV guys say; but it still is a kind of theological shorthand, and it has to be unpacked to really be understood. Or as I put it elsewhere, when the dust settles, "faith reckoned as righteousness" is just another way of saying "justification by faith."

Even the likes of Norman Shepherd says James 2:24 should be applied to future justification; whatever else he might say about the faith/works relation, he clearly refrains from applying 2:24 to what is usually called IJ (our transition from a state of condemnation to a state of acquittal).

It seems to me that applying James 2:24 to what is usually called "IJ" in any, way, shape, or form is, at the very least, outside the boundaries of Reformed precedent.

You cannot flatten out IJ into the same thing as later justification events. IJ is our transition from wrath to grace. It is our movement from a state of condemnation to a state of justification. Other justification events are not transitional in that way. When we receive justification in pastoral absolution each week, we are already justified in a very important sense. When we stand before Christ at the last day, we will be justified, but no one will transition from a state of condemnation to justification at that moment. It will be a justification of the justified, it will be God declaring the righteous to be righteous (e.g., Mt. 25:31ff).

There is no Reformed theologian in history who would teach that we make the initial transition into a state of justification by works. There is no support for that view in the Reformed confessions. If you look at Calvin, Bucer, Regensberg, etc., you just won't find it. I have also not found that view in Shepherd's writings and recordings, and I'm quite familiar with them by now. Some folks may have accused Shepherd of teaching that doctrine -- but he capably refuted those charges. Note that saying "faith without works is dead" is quite different from saying that we justify ourselves initially by works. The former is true and is solid, traditional Reformed teaching; the latter is utterly false. To state it again: to say that we transition into a state of justification by means of a living, obedient faith is not the same as saying that we make the transition by works. (All this is further reason why I do not think James is talking about initial, transitional justification. James places justification after works have been performed, not at the moment of baptism, as elsewhere in Scripture.)

The "IJ by faith/baptism" formula is important because it stresses that we transition from wrath to grace by transitioning from union with Adam to union with Christ. We do not unite ourselves to Christ by works. Rather, we believe into Christ -- and as we are joined to Christ by faith, we come to share in his righteous status. God grants and bestows these gifts in baptism, to be received by a living faith alone. Of course, after baptism, there is no problem stressing that justification is "by works" as James does. If there are no works following baptism, the person does not have justifying faith.

We can fault Westminster for failing to integrate "final justification" into its doctrine of justification (except for WSC 38), but this is understandable given the need of the

divines to stress "initial justification." The Westminster divines certainly believed that faith is ever accompanied by other saving graces (such as repentance) per WCF 11.2, but other graces play no role in IJ.

With regard to James 2, what does Norman Shepherd have to say? Every time I can recall discussing that text with him, it seems he starts off by asking, "What's going to happen to us at the last the day, when we stand before Christ in the final judgment?" James is pointing to the final judgment. In James 2, works demonstrate faith. A faith that does not go on demonstrate itself in works is dead and does not justify.

In James 2, the justification in view is posterior to the works performed. Thus, it makes sense to me to view James' whole discussion in light of the final day. Insofar as James is speaking to the issue of IJ, I would say he shows us the kind of faith we must have to be justified at any moment in time -- it must be a faith that will show mercy, obey, work, etc. It must be the kind of faith that will go to maturity, as seen in its obedience (cf. the example of Abraham).

So, for example, in Acts 2:38, IJ (the forgiveness of sins) is simultaneous with baptism, not posterior to any good works, as in James. We have to put James together with what the rest of what the Scripture teaches (especially about baptism) if we are to have a full-orbed doctrine of justification. When we do so, I think we end up with something like the IJ/FJ paradigm (with the allowance of further justification events in between those).

I think Norman is exactly right when he says that those who are presently justified are those who trust in Jesus and walk with him in obedience. That's an excellent description of what a Christian is. But I'm not sure that it works as a description of how someone becomes a Christian (that is, how someone makes the transition from wrath to grace). To become a Christian someone repents, believes, and receives baptism -- all as the fruit of the effectual call. Following that, they produce the fruits of repentance (Mt. 3), demonstrate their faith in works (James 2), and live out their baptismal identity as one who is united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6). Baptism is the watershed between the old and new, so to speak.

I certainly think we can tie ourselves up in knots with these kinds of questions because when God applies salvation to a person, all kinds of things are happening, or begin to happen, at the same time. Things that belong together in the closest possible connection in biblical theology (e.g., faith and baptism) may actually have some temporal gap in real life. And other things which are clearly distinguished in biblical theology (e.g., faith and the works it produces) may have no gap whatsoever in our analysis of our experience.

IJ is the foundation of FJ. God has already made his definitive judgment of us at the cross in Jesus; as soon as we come to share in Christ's righteous status by faith, the matter is (in one important sense, at least) settled for all eternity. No one one's actual status is changed at the last day (if you were not justified in this life by a working faith, you won't be justified at the last day), and the only way God can justify us by works at the last day is because we have already been united to Christ the Mediator/Intercessor by faith (cf. WCF 16).

IJ is just what happens at baptism, sacramentally and covenantally. In that sense, IJ is public and known. We are baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Just as surely as the water has washed over us, so we may surely be confident that we have been cleansed with the blood of Christ (see, e.g., Heidelberg 69). As far as our subjective experience is concerned, the two main "justification events" in our lives are baptism and the final day.

I In a certain sense there are "many justifications" and Calvin does not hesitate to acknowledge that – that in some sense justification is applied to us again and again, e.g., pastoral absolution, which Calvin saw as a renewal of the promise of forgiveness already made at baptism. In the Institutes, Calvin says, "Absolution has reference to baptism." That's exactly right, as I see it (and that's why Luther and Calvin did not regard absolution as a third sacrament.) I explore their interrelationship here: <http://www.hornes.org/theologia/rich-lusk/calvin-on-baptism-penance-absolution>. Calvin and Luther both challenged the Roman practice of penance with a strong doctrine of baptismal justification, followed by pastoral absolution.

Faith has to manifest itself in good deeds or it is not saving faith. 2 seconds (and 2 years, and 20 years) after a person is converted, James is going to say, "Now, SHOW ME your faith by your works." In a genuine conversion, faith will get busy right away -- and keep on getting busy. Genuine faith will begin showing itself in works right off the bat, and will persevere in those works. But the person doing good works has already received his initial justification/forgiveness/acceptance. In the nature of the case, it's impossible for good works to precede initial justification.

Obviously, God deals in his own way with those who never have the same kind of opportunity to publicly confess and demonstrate their faith (cf. Rom. 10 -- "if you confess with your mouth" -- we make allowances for infants there too). That's fine, and no threat to what I'm saying about James 2. Had Abraham died on the way up the hill to offer Isaac, he still would have heard "well done..." at the last day. God counts the will

for the deed when the opportunity to do the deed is cut off. (The same kind of thing could be said regarding the relative necessity of the sacraments for salvation, etc.)

What is the relationship of faith to works? Do not think works can be added to faith as a second, independent thing. Works of love are not "added to" faith in that way, as in the Roman scheme. Rather, works of love *flow out of* faith organically. The organic relationship between faith and works is seen pretty clearly in WCF 14 and numerous biblical texts (including James 2).

Also, WCF 11 cites several verses from James 2 to make the point that justifying faith must be a working faith. But it omits all the verses that actually use "justification" language. The divines rightly cite James 2 to show that faith always produces works -- but they (wisely) do not commit themselves to reading James 2 as a text about IJ (since the divines would not have all agreed on how to handle the text's teaching on justification anyway -- though they agreed on ruling certain things out).

The theme of eschatological judgment is found all over Scripture. God's evaluation of our works at the end of history fits with everything else we see in the Bible. God's evaluations/judgments of his work during the creation week come AFTER the work is done. Adam was not justified by works at the moment of his creation; the judgment by works would come later. Etc. It seems these judgment events in James 2, in the psalter, in the prophets (e.g., the day of the Lord), in redemptive history (e.g., 70 AD, Mt. 16:28), in the liturgy (at the eucharist -- 1 Cor. 11), etc. come at decisive crisis points, not each and every moment.

Norman Shepherd points out, like Calvin, that sola fide may be true or false depending on how it is meant. We must take "alone" an adverb rather than an adjective. I totally agree with Shepherd that if sola fide is taken to mean that we are justified without repenting, or without a faith that will evidence itself in good works, then it is a formula we should reject. But there are ways of using sola fide that are consistent with the Bible and confession -- even if the formula leaves a lot to be desired.

Justification is already/not yet just like the rest of NT soteriology. Shepherd's best students (Ferguson, Gaffin, Jordan, Garlington) drew the same conclusion. Jordan helpfully points out that Numbers 19 gives us this pattern (a third and seventh day resurrection). Jordan takes the initial/final pattern as BASIC to biblical theology. Everything works this way. For example, in Revelation and in Paul, you have 2

resurrections (initial and final). I just can't see the logic or benefit of rejecting a paradigm that shows up all over the place. And I see no reason why it should not apply to justification.

The IJ/FJ pattern most certainly matches the way the Bible presents the doctrine to us. There are passages that say believers have already been justified by faith (past tense) -- Rom. 5:1, 8:30. And there are passages that say there is a justification still to come, which is according to, or by, works (future tense) -- Rom. 2:13, Gal. 5:5-6, James 2:24 are all about the final judgment.

To state my view as a whole, in summary form, IJ (which I take to be our initial deliverdict -- forgiveness + deliverance from sin's dominion) is by a living faith/trust alone, as faith unites us to Christ. IJ is covenantally administered in baptism. Flowing out of that IJ/deliverdict by faith at baptism, all ongoing justification events and FJ are by faith *and* the works of faith (the burden of James 2). Faith is never alone in the sense that even at the outset it contains the seeds of every Christian grace and virtue; those seeds blossom into the full grown fruit of mature obedience over time ("good works"); these are these works, showing up later on our "spiritual timeline" after our initial justification, serve as evidence in God's court at the last day. We are to live our whole lives by faith, but the "principal act" of faith is to entrust and unite ourselves to Christ for salvation from sin in its every dimension. Trust can never be severed from the tangible, embodied loyalty it produces, but that does not negate a proper distinction between faith and its fruit.

We can't "rob James to pay Paul," and neither can we "rob Paul to pay James." Each must have their say and make their distinctive contribution to our understanding of the doctrine of justification.

The IJ/FJ pattern is in James. But do we also see it Paul? Paul clearly has people getting justified/deliverdicted as they come to faith. But Paul also has justification as a future hope (e.g., Gal. 5:5-6; Rom. 2:13; all the judgment according to works texts, such as 2 Cor. 5:8ff). Surely there is something to the fact that when Paul talks about justification in the past tense (IJ) it is always by faith, but when he talks about future justification it is always by works. And, as Don Garlington and others have pointed out, what links this IJbF and this FJbW is what Paul calls "the obedience of faith" -- faith that perseveres, faith that bears fruit, faith that works.

It is true that faith is something that it is commanded, and so it is (in a sense) a work (Jn. 6, 1 Jn. 3). Biblically, there is a contrast between faith and works of the law (and works of would-be merit) -- we all agree on that. But there is also a distinction to be made between faith and other Spirit-empowered works -- the good works we do as believers. Faith has its own role to play -- and it is a central role, a role no other virtue, grace, or Spiritual work can do. Faith is paradoxical -- it is a work, but it is also reliance on the work of another to do what one cannot work for oneself. Thus, it is a "heart posture" uniquely fitted for serving as the instrument of union with Christ and IJ. If that union-by-faith brings about an immediate share in Christ's righteous status, then no works are involved in the nature of the case.

I have repeatedly affirmed sola fide in an historically valid sense -- we're united to Christ by faith alone and in him there is no condemnation (we have forgiveness + deliverdict). My essays say that. Our church web site says that. The FV crowd again and again affirms that we really do hold to sola fide. And by that, we have not meant "fide" = "faith + works." Sola fide affirms something crucial about faith that does *not* pertain to faith's fruit. Thus, when Scott Clark says, "well, you say faith only justifies **because** it's living," we all say "no, living faith justifies because it alone unites us to Christ who is our righteousness." When Scott Clark says our "living faith" formulation means we believe IJ is *really* by faith + works, we have all repeatedly rejected that as a misunderstanding of what we're saying and have affirmed an inseparable-but-distinguishable relationship between faith and works.

It's that biblical integration that is so critical here. I think this has been an FV strength -- to show how the whole biblical story fits together, to show how different texts (like in Paul and James) mesh.

God looks at the works of a forgiven person differently than he looks at the works of an unforgiven person. The issue is not merit. The issue is relationship. FJ presupposes IJ. That is to say, God can only accept our works because he has accepted our persons. Forgiveness is "apart from works" -- Romans 4:6. That is to say, works are not a means of getting forgiveness (though we all grant works are **necessary**). But once we are forgiven, God accepts and rewards our works. (We all certainly agree that Gen. 15:6 is not Abraham's IJ -- and yet it is significant that at this juncture faith is accounted as righteousness, while in Genesis 22, it's faith + works. It's interesting that James inserts that Abraham became God's friend on the heels of quoting Gen. 15:6. Note the pattern: Faith--->friendship with God ----> works accepted.)

The overarching question in the text of James 2:13ff is: *What must I do to be justified in the final judgment?* That doesn't make the text irrelevant to IJ, but that's not the focus. It's eschatological.

Abraham's later obedience is a "fulfillment" of his earlier JBF in 2:23. The term "fulfill" is loaded with eschatological resonances in the NT. I think it's pretty evident from his use of Gen. 15:6 that James believes there is a double justification -- an initial justification in which faith is counted as righteousness, and a later justification in which faith and works are judged together. This fits with the flow of the Abrahamic narrative, which is the textual substructure for the whole argument, and also makes James consistent with Paul and the rest of the Bible.

The fact that faith 'works' -- indeed, even that it *always* works -- links IJ with FJ. The kind of works that justify in James 2, Matt. 25, etc. are works that have a public, persevering quality to them (e.g., helping the poor, 2:15).

The fact that Gen. 15:6 is not Abe's actual IJ (that happened in Gen. 12, when he left his homeland by faith) is not a problem any more than the fact that Gen. 22 is not really his true FJ. The passage is archetypal. This is the crux: *Why* is faith counted as righteousness there? It's NOT simply because faith produces good works (though that is certainly an aspect of it); it is because faith claims the promise and lays hold of Christ.

James emphasizes faith's obedient properties. James chose to use a climactic work in Abraham's life, long after his conversion/IJ. That's not arbitrary. This is his scheme: At one point, Abe's (living) faith is counted as righteousness; at a later point, he's justified by faith *and* (faithful) works. Over time, the faith that received IJ apart from works proved itself in works, resulting in FJ. IJ is pre-works; FJ is post-works. In James 2, the justification by faith + works comes AFTER the works have been performed. Abe is justified AFTER he offers up his son in crazy obedience to God's command.

The picture is quite simple, as I see it: by a living faith, we come into union with Christ and thus share in his status. (Dead faith does not bring about union and therefore does not bring IJ.) Posterior to that IJ -- after that IJ has been granted -- God can make favorable evaluations of our obedience as he sees fit. But the evaluation of works has to be subsequent to IJ, or else our works will never be acceptable anyway.

Note there is a distinction to be made between virtues (or graces, or dispositions, as they are sometimes called in the Ref trad) that accompany faith from the outset, and the actions that flow from them. Not a separation -- but a distinction.

As I see it, in IJ, God is making us sharers in Christ's justified status by means of faith. Yes, it is a faith that will spring into action -- but in the very act of working faith in us by his Spirit, God is joining us to Christ and to all his benefits (including his resurrection status). Yes, the faith that joins us to Christ brings with it hope and love, and works of obedience will follow, but those things are not "evaluated" in IJ. IJ is simply God making you a participant in the legal status of his Son (Rom. 8:1). If anything, in IJ the Father makes us sharers in the evaluation he made of his Son! It's the Son's work that gets evaluated, not ours.

The final justification in view in James 2 is a "fulfillment" of an earlier justification.

Look again at how James lays it out, in terms of the chronology of Abraham's life. There is an IJ in Gen. 15:6/2:23 in which no works are mentioned. This J even *preceded* his justifying work. Faith is reckoned as righteousness. Then there is a FJ event which follows from the works that demonstrated and perfected Abe's faith (Gen. 22/James 2:22, 24). That's the overarching pattern.

That doesn't mean Abraham's faith was "alone" in the sense of *nuda fide* at the beginning. From the beginning, faith is accompanied by other Spirit-wrought virtues such as love and hope, and over time, those virtues of faith, hope, and love manifest themselves in works of obedience. After those works, there is an evaluation and a judgment.

Jonathan Edwards:

God in the act of justification, which is passed on a sinner's first believing, has respect to perseverance, as being virtually contained in that first act of faith; and 'tis looked upon and taken by him that justifies, as being as it were a property in that faith that then is.

Edwards ties together IJBFA with a concern to insist on works/obedience. For Edwards, faith and faithfulness must not be separated. He's basically saying God justifies us at the moment of faith by looking to the future and seeing what faith will grow into. Faith justifies because of its future potentiality. Those future properties of faith (namely, perseverance in obedience) are considered qualities of faith at the moment of its inception.

The examples of Abraham and Rahab show us what judgment according to works means. Their acts are not discrete; they are part of a larger pattern of life. In the case of Abraham, James is tying together the whole pattern of life he demonstrated from Gen 15 to Gen 22 -- the latter event fulfilled/perfected/completed the earlier event. (Of course, we know he was not sinless in this time.) In the case of Rahab, she had already begun to fear God before she met the spies, according to Josh. 2. The faith that had been growing in her acted appropriately when a crisis of loyalty hit and she had to choose sides.

All acts of obedience are embodiments of faith. They are specific instantiations of faith. Good works are co-extensive with faith. My works are proportional to my faith. So when we 'see' a person's obedience, we are 'seeing' his faith (cf. Mk. 2:1-12). That doesn't make distinctions impossible -- as I've argued all along -- but it does show how deeply faith and obedience penetrate one another. Where there is faith, there is sure to be obedience.

Looking back at my earlier writings (2001-2004) when I was wrestling through these issues, these same themes are there. These quotations below are all from various online essays. I especially find the Edwards quotations useful/interesting. Edwards basically says faith contains within itself faithfulness. That is, justifying faith justifies not because of assent to gospel facts (what Paul and James both call "hearing" the word), but because it is a whole-souled entrustment of oneself to Christ that is bound to bear obedient fruit. In my writings, I've been consistent right up to today -- insisting on *ijbfa*, followed by *objf+w* and *fjbf+w* -- and I have tried to draw works and faith into the closest possible connection without actually confusing them:

Good works are always by faith. There's no way to do good works without faith. And at the same time, we must say that faith -- if it's not dead, non-saving faith -- will inevitably show itself in works. I very much want to avoid the notion that works can be 'tacked on to faith.' As James says, works and faith are related like body and breath -- distinguishable, not identical, and yet truly inseparable because they are organically related.

We can also rest assured that God will not judge us apart from our faith. Judgment according to works *includes* an evaluation of our faith. Good works, after all, are just the heart and soul of genuine faith. A judgment about works is

really a judgment about faith, and vice versa. For example, it is *not* eisegesis to assume that the doers of the law in Romans 2 are those who have demonstrated the "obedience of faith," rather than those who have scored 100% on a moral exam. For Paul, as for James and the entire Old Testament, there is no sharp divide between faith and its fruit. Faith and obedience are integrated into a holistic response to God's covenant grace. God is not looking for perfection from his people; rather he desires a core commitment of loyalty that overshadows everything else we do, no matter how badly we may fail from time to time.

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We can be assured of continual and even future justification because we are clothed with Christ's righteousness, which continues to avail for us. At the last day, God's judgment will take into account our works, not because they are meritorious and not because they have justifying value on their own. Rather, they will be, as Calvin says, "inferior causes" of our salvation:

The fact that Scripture shows that the good works of believers are reasons why the Lord benefits them is to be so understood as to allow what we have set forth before to stand unshaken: that the efficient cause of our salvation consists in God the Father's love; the material cause in God the Son's obedience; the instrumental cause in the Spirit's illumination, that is, faith; the final cause, in the glory of God's great generosity. *These do not prevent the Lord from embracing works as inferior causes.* But how does this come about? *Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, according to his ordinary dispensation, by means of good works* (III.14.21).

While I am no fan of the Aristotelian "causes" scheme as a theological tool, Calvin's point is plain enough. Works of faith-filled obedience, in a secondary way, *cause* our final justification and salvation. Works are the *means* through which we come into possession of eternal life. The path of obedience is the way we must tread if we are to be justified at the last day. For Calvin, works are *non-contributory instruments* and *non-meritorious conditions* of final salvation. In other words, works do not justify in their own right since they can never withstand the scrutiny of God's inspection. But we will not be justified without them either. They are not merely evidential (e.g., proof of our faith), but even causal or instrumental ("means") in our final salvation. Faith is the sole instrument of initial justification, but faith comes to be perfected by good works. At the last day, faith, as the solitary instrument of union with Christ, and obedience, as the fruit of our union with Christ, will be one and the same -- distinguishable, yes, but separable, no. Calvin doesn't explain exactly how this works, but we can be sure that he did not regard our works as meriting anything on their own or as having value outside of our union with Christ. God's judgment and reward of our works takes place in the context of the covenant. He judges us as sons and daughters, not as slaves or strangers.

Calvin is not alone in tying works into our final justification. He is simply explicating any of several Pauline passages that claim final judgment will be

according to works (e.g., Rom. 2:1-16, 2 Cor. 5:9-10, etc.). Paul teaches that only a working, loving faith has the hope of justification at the last day (Gal. 5:5-6). James teaches the same truth. James does not have in view final judgment in chapter 2 of his epistle, but he does not have in view in initial justification either. It is best to see the justification events he describes as paradigmatic anticipations of future judgment within history. The illustration of Abraham shows this: the good work which justified Abraham, along with his faith, came not at his first calling (Gen 12 or 15), but after he had been walking with the Lord many years (Gen. 22). God put Abraham to the test and he passed, receiving a favorable verdict because of his obedience. Likewise, Rahab's faithful action showed her loyalty. God was pleased and passed judgment in her favor, foreshadowing the future, final verdict.

In the Reformed tradition, Calvin is in good company as well. In a study of Jonathan Edwards' Trinitarian theology entitled *The Supreme Harmony of All*, Amy Plantinga Pauw quotes from Edwards' miscellanies: "Even after conversion, the sentence of justification remains still to be passed, and the man remains in a state of probation for heaven [until his faith produces fruits of obedience.]" Further, she writes: "Fruits of obedience are intrinsic to saving faith, not merely external evidence for its existence," citing another miscellany as proof: "Scripture is plain concerning faith, that the operative or practical nature of it is the life and soul of it."

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Rome wouldn't have me because I insist that justification is fully forensic and is received by faith alone. With the Reformers, and against Trent, I view justification as a law court term, not a process of moral renewal. Justification is the divine verdict, pronounced over us once and for all, when we are united to Christ by faith. This does not preclude a future dimension to our justification, but it does mean whatever justification is yet to come, when we are "openly acquitted" at the last day, will simply be a renewal and reapplication of the verdict already received at conversion (WSC 38). Even when God continually forgives our sin (cf. 1 Jn. 1:8-9; see also Calvin's *Institutes* 3.14.10: "[God] by continual forgiveness of sins repeatedly acquits us"), we are receiving nothing more than a reapplication of his prior justification. My colloquium essay does not even hint that I believe in infusion (a term I never use), as Smith claims. In no way do I believe that our works produce or cause our justification. In no way do I suggest our works satisfy God's justice or form the ground of the favorable verdict we receive. These things shouldn't even come up for discussion; they're not on the table with the AAT as far as I can tell.

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This focus on Christ's faithfulness (and our participation therein) is crucial, because it also allows us to carefully distinguish faith and works (the fruit of faith). While faith and obedience are inseparably and organically related (as Christ's own life shows), nevertheless, *only faith can unite us to Christ*. Works cannot play that function. And so whatever role works play, they cannot be the

ground of our justification, or even the instrument of our justification in the same way that faith is instrumental. Works are necessary, to be sure, but they are not parallel or analogous to faith; they flow out of faith. By faith, and by faith alone, we receive all that Christ possesses on our behalf, including justification.

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As already stated, faith and works can be distinguished. Faith alone is the instrument of justification because faith alone unites us to Christ. At the same time, faith and works must be put on a continuum because, as the Reformers insisted, "the faith that alone justifies is never alone." Faith is not dead, but living, vibrant, obedient, penitent, loving, and so forth. Faith brings within it and with it all the other virtues (or, to put it another way, faith is not *mere* assent). Obedience is not something tacked onto faith, but something that grows organically out of faith, expressive of faith. In that sense, faith is unique; in an ultimate sense it is the *only* condition for salvation.

Nevertheless, there *are* other conditions in a subordinate sense. WCF 14.2 describes the various functions of faith, including obedience. WCF 10-18 show conclusively that sanctification, repentance, good works, and perseverance are all necessary elements of salvation, arising out of our faith-union with Christ. Of course, all of this is by God's sovereign grace; we make no contribution to our salvation, other than "working out" what God "works in" (Phil. 2:12-13). All conditions for salvation are *both* gifts of grace *and* human acts. But the priority always rests with God's work, not ours.

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The conditions are ultimately eschatological. In other words, they serve to answer questions about final judgment, about what God requires of us that we may escape his wrath and be vindicated at the last day (cf. WSC 85). Our "final justification" before God will not be an event that changes our status – after all, that is already settled, as we have already received full acquittal in our "initial justification." (Thus, in an ultimate sense, there is *one and only one* justification. It is a forensic declaration, so it cannot be a progressive process.) But there are also passages of Scripture (e.g., Rom. 2:1-6; Rev. 22:12) which highlight the role of works at the last judgment. This is because what is for now only a matter of faith (our acquittal) will be openly revealed at the last day. This judgment will be according to works (2 Cor. 5:10). God will publicly pass judgment in our favor, simultaneously condemning the wicked. And the public evidence on which that positive judgment will be based will be the faith-wrought good works we have done in Christ (Mt. 25:31ff; note the validity of our faith is especially measured by our care for the poor). These works are not the ground of our justification or glorification, but they will serve as evidence that we belong to Christ. Of course, in rewarding us for our works with salvation, God will only be crowning his own gifts.

Obedience, then, as we've seen, can never earn anything; our salvation is constantly described as a *gift* and an *inheritance* in Scripture for just this reason (even in those contexts where works come into view; see again Mt. 25:31ff,

especially verse 34). At the same time, obedience is the *way* we must travel into that final inheritance. (The "way" theme is rather prominent in Scripture, e.g., Proverbs, Mark, and Acts.) We aren't saved by works, but neither are we saved without them. God accepts us as we are, but doesn't let us stay that way. This was just the teaching of the Reformers.

Calvin addresses this point when he says, "Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, according to his ordinary dispensation, *by means of good works*" (*Institutes* 3.14.21; emphasis added). Calvin distinguished the "way" of obedience, leading into the promised inheritance, from meritorious works (including congruous merit; cf. our earlier discussion of the merit/value distinction). Calvin insisted on obedience, without getting entangled in merit, because he understood the covenantal context of salvation.

Calvin says works are inferior causes of salvation in the same section. I wouldn't want to put it that way myself; causality is a notoriously confusing philosophical category. However, Calvin's language does reveal the stress he put upon obedience as a necessary feature of salvation. With reference to God's judgment, Calvin says in 3.15.4 (emphasis added):

Yet because he *examines our works according to his tenderness*, not his supreme right, he therefore *accepts them* as if they were perfectly pure; and for this reason, *although unmerited, they are rewarded with infinite benefits, both of the present life and also of the life to come. For I do not accept the distinction made by learned and otherwise godly men that good works deserve the graces that are conferred upon us in this life, while everlasting salvation is the reward of faith alone.* On the other hand, so to attribute to the merit of works the fact that we are showered with grace upon grace as to take it away from grace is contrary to the teaching of Scripture . . . Whatever, therefore, is now given to the godly as an aid to salvation, even blessedness itself, is purely God's beneficence. Yet both in this blessedness and in those godly persons, *he takes works into account.* For in order to testify to the greatness of his love towards us, he makes not only us but the gift he has given us *worthy of such honor.*

Turretin says the same thing in his *Institutes* when he writes good works are "required as the *means and way* for possessing salvation . . . [A]lthough works may be said to contribute nothing to the acquisition of salvation, still they should be considered necessary to the obtainment of it, so that no one can be saved without them" (17.3.3-4; emphasis added). He goes on in 17.3.12:

This very thing is no less expressly delivered concerning future glory. For since good works have the relation of the means to the end (Jn. 3:5, 16; Mt. 5:8); of the 'way' to the goal (Eph. 2:10; Phil 3:14); of the 'sowing' to the harvest (Gal. 6:7,8); of the 'firstfruits' to the mass (Rom. 8:23); of 'labor' to the reward (Mt. 20:1); of the 'contest' to the crown (2 Tim. 2:5; 4:8), everyone sees that there is the highest and an indispensable necessity of good works for obtaining glory. It is so great that it cannot be reached without them (Heb. 12:14; Rev. 21:27).

John Ball, a representative Puritan, wrote in his treatise on faith (emphasis added)

The commandments of God are laid before believers, *not as the cause for obtaining of eternal life, but as the way to walk in unto eternal life*, assured unto us by the free promise and gift of God . . . Our Savior Christ said to the young man in the Gospel [in Mt. 19], 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' . . . We grant, the Law to which our Savior referred that young man, to be the rule of obedience according to which people in covenant ought to walk, building their works of righteousness upon faith as the foundation; and *obedience, issuing from faith unfeigned, to be the way to eternal bliss.*

Jonathan Edwards, whose thought marks the culmination of Puritan theological development, insisted that God rewards good works with salvation not because of merit but because of the covenant of grace. While Christ alone has performed all the conditions necessary for salvation on behalf of his people, there are subordinate conditions that must be met in Christ's people, including faith, love, obedience, and perseverance. The fulfillment of these various conditions on our part only have worth because of our relation to Christ, established by faith alone. Edwards wrote, "*Faith*, when spoken of as compared with works, or an universal and persevering obedience, it *may be said alone to be the condition of salvation*, if by 'condition' we mean that which of itself, *without the actual performance of the others*, will, according to the tenor of the divine promise, give a man a certainty of life" (*Miscellany* 518; emphasis added). In other words, we are saved through faith alone; no other virtue can supplant the place of faith. Again: "God don't justify us . . . upon the account of any act of ours . . . but only upon the account of what the Savior did" (*Miscellany* 416). So Edwards maintained the uniqueness of faith and the foundational role of Christ's work. Nevertheless, "The actual possession of eternal benefits is suspended on a condition yet to be fulfilled: perseverance in good works" (*Miscellany* 689). In other words, those who are in Christ for justification must also come to share in his life in a practical, persevering way.

In his treatise on justification, Edwards writes, "God in the act of justification, which is passed on a sinner's first believing, has respect to perseverance, as being virtually contained in that first act of faith; and 'tis looked upon and taken by him that justifies, as being as it were a property in that faith that then is." Edwards believed in an eschatological justification. *Miscellany* 847 makes the same point: "Even after conversion, the sentence of justification in a sense remains still to be passed, and the man remains still in a state of probation for heaven." Saving faith is not separable from love; indeed, "love is of the essence of faith, yea, is the very life and soul of it . . . [T]he operative or practical nature of it [faith] is the life and soul of it" (*Miscellany* 820, 868). Thus faith cannot be minimized to intellectual assent; faith involves not just the mind, but the whole person: "Our act of closing with and accepting Christ is not in all respects completed by our accepting him with our hearts till we have done it practically too, and so have accepted him with the whole man: soul, spirit, and body"

(*Miscellany* 951). It has been well said that Edwards represents experiential Christianity at its best. The AAT wants to carry on that tradition, not promote barren formalism.

Thus, we have seen that Calvin, Turretin, and the Puritans insist that works are a *means* to the *end* of final salvation. They viewed eternal life as an organic reward for obedience. Good works are the son's way into his final inheritance. All of this is enveloped in a larger doctrine of union with Christ by faith alone, of course. Works, at most, are not causal, but instrumental (in a way secondary and subordinate to faith) and evidential. Works are necessary for final acquittal and glorification (Mt. 25:31ff; cf. WSC 38; WCF 33), but do not procure those blessings in any sense. The teaching of AAT on this point should not be controversial: we believe *the way* of salvation is faith and obedience, or, as Paul puts it, "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; cf. Rom. 5-8). This is nothing new to Reformed circles; careful readers will note that it's quite distinct from Rome's scheme of unformed/formed faith, congruous merit, and synergism. While formulations may vary among Reformed theologians (and we do not claim to have perfected our forms of expression), the only real *substantial* alternative to the AAT's approach is antinomianism.

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All of this shapes the way we understand God's evaluation of our works. To ask God to "repay" obedience is to ask him to graciously reward it, as he's promised. To say that his rewarding of our works is "just" is to say it is in accord with the covenant provisions. And so on. This is just Calvin's conclusion, after surveying passages like those we have looked at in this essay: "To confirm us in this expectation [of a reward for our services, e.g., Heb. 6:10], the apostle declares that God is not unjust but that he will keep his pledge once given. This justice, then, refers more to the truth of the divine promise than to the equity of rendering what is due . . ." (*Institutes* 3.18.7). God's justice is simply his pledge-keeping, or his promise-fulfilling. Long before the "New Perspective on Paul," Calvin had already taken note of this fact.

Thus, while our works of obedience performed as redeemed (in Christ/in the Spirit) sinners are imperfect and could never please God in their own right, nevertheless God righteously and graciously chooses to find them pleasing (cf. 2 Cor. 5:9; Phil. 2:13). The way of persevering faithfulness, repentance, and obedience is the way to blessing and life everlasting (Rom. 2:1-16). As I have pointed out repeatedly, our good works do not have merit but they do have value before God. And so in terms of the covenant, he may be said to reward us *because* we have obeyed. The reward is both (covenantally) *just* and gracious. It is a *repayment* for our hard service in his kingdom. Yet, it is all of *grace* because God enabled us to the good works and the blessings received are infinitely greater than the works deserve outside of a covenantal framework (we are "unprofitable servants" after all!).

Again, this is just Calvin's view in the *Institutes* (3.15; emphasis added):

[God] *examines our works according to his tenderness*, not his supreme right, he therefore *accepts them* as if they were perfectly pure; and for this reason, *although unmerited, they are rewarded with infinite benefits*, both of the present life and also of the life to come. For I do not accept the distinction made by learned and otherwise godly men that good works deserve the graces that are conferred upon us in this life, while everlasting salvation is the reward of faith alone. On the other hand, so to attribute to the merit of works the fact that we are showered with grace upon grace as to take it away from grace is contrary to the teaching of Scripture . . . Whatever, therefore, is now given to the godly as an aid to salvation, even blessedness itself, is purely God's beneficence. Yet both in this blessedness and in those godly persons, *he takes works into account*. For in order to testify to the greatness of his love towards us, he makes not only us but the gift he has given us *worthy of such honor* . . .

Finally, while they [the sophists] repeatedly inculcate good works, they in the meantime so instruct consciences as to discourage all their confidence that *God remains kindly disposed and favorable to their works*. But we, on the other hand, *without reference to merit, still remarkably cheer and comfort the hearts of believers by our teaching, when we tell them they please God in their works and are without doubt acceptable to him* . . .

Faithfulness to the Lord, demonstrated by a lifestyle of obedience, is the way into God's richest blessings. If we are loyal to our God, he is covenantally bound to save us, give us victory over our enemies, and exalt us to glory. The righteousness he requires of us is not sinless perfection, but covenantal integrity as a pattern of life. In Christ, he accepts our persons and our works [4].

A final caveat should be made. This teaching does not threaten or compromise justification by faith alone on basis of Christ's propitiatory death and his vindicating resurrection. God's holiness demands that sin be punished, of course. But in his righteousness and grace, he has made a way of free rescue for his people. Punishing sin is part of what God must do in order to set things right and put the world back in order. In other words, the covenant required the cross. In Christ, God's people are recipients of God's covenant fidelity. In Christ, they receive the status of "righteous," meaning God regards them as he regards his own Son. This status is credited to them and received by faith alone, although it is inseparable from an out-flowing life of faithfulness and obedience.

As always, we insist that our good works cannot unite us to Christ or satisfy God's holiness. Thus, we rely entirely on Christ as our Substitute and Representative. Justification is found in him alone. At the same, time those who are united to Christ by faith alone share not only in his status before the divine law court; they also share in his new life, freed from sin's dominion. A life of obedience does not secure justification, but it is the way the justified must travel, the path they must walk. Calvin goes so far as to say that works are inferior *causes* of salvation (*Institutes* 3.14.21). I would not want to say it just that way because causality is a confusing philosophical category; however, I do think Calvin is correct when he goes on to argue that, "Those whom the Lord has

destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, according to his ordinary dispensation, *by means of good works*" (*Institutes* 3.14.21; emphasis added). In examining those Scriptural statements "which call eternal life the reward of works," he writes, "That is to say, he receives his own into life by his mercy alone. Yet, since *he leads them into possession of it through the race of good works* in order to fulfill his own work in them according to the order that he has laid down, it is no wonder if they are said to be *crowned according to their own works, by which they are doubtless prepared to receive the crown of immortality*" (*Institutes* 3.18.1; emphasis added). Obedience is the road we must pursue on our way to final salvation. There is no final glorification apart from holiness of life (Heb. 12:14). The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:8-11).