

Inside this *Outlook*

This Issue: Justification By Faith, Apart From the Law

- Every Mouth Stopped* Rev. Zachary Anderson 2**
 How important is the Law of God in bringing us to the grace of God? In this article Rev. Anderson looks at Lords Day 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- Justification by Faith in the Theology of Norman Shepherd***
***Dr. David Van Drunen* 5**
 Dr. Van Drunen seeks to define and evaluate Dr. Shepherd's doctrine of justification from a Reformed standpoint.
- John Calvin and Christian Piety (1) ... Rev. Randal Lankheet* 9**
 Rev. Lankheet demonstrates how eagerly and intensely John Calvin focused upon Christ centered godliness in his writings.
- Rev. Paul Murphy In New York City.....Rev. Steve Schlissel.....12***
 Rev. Schlissel reports on the new church plant near Ground Zero.
- Legalism: The Perennial Heresy* Rev. Mark J. Larson.....13**
 Rev. Larson looks at the role legalism has played throughout history and especially within the Islam and Christian Communities.
- Soundbites - 1971* 15**
 Quotes from the twenty-first year of *The Outlook* that still speak today.
- Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (1)***
***Dr. Cornelis P. Venema* 17**
 Dr. Venema begins his evaluation of current views of key questions that the new perspective on Paul's theology fails to answer.
- Our Shameless Culture* Rev. Johan Tangelder 21**
 Rev. Tangelder writes about the lack of shame within our society and the effect it has on us.

Every Mouth Stopped

We need to know the law of God if we would claim to know the grace of God. We need to know what God demands of us. The conclusion of knowing what God demands of us is understanding that we are sinners. We need to know that because we are sinners we are under a curse. Those under a curse deserve one thing: wrath. Those who deserve wrath deserve a place of wrath: Hell. We must understand these things, if we are to look for a Savior and be satisfied with Jesus as the only way.

What the Law Reveals

If you want to know the grace of

God, you must know the Law of God. First of all our misery is described in the Law of God. **The Law of God describes our status.** We are aliens in a foreign land. That, in essence, is the message of the catechism.

Question Three of the Heidelberg Catechism asks: How do you come to know your misery?" The word *misery* means "alien". How do you come to know that you are an alien? How do you come to know that you are outside of where you are supposed to be? You are foreigners in a foreign land. You are supposed to be somewhere, but you

are not there. You are an alien. When you read the law of God your heart should be stricken. You should be able to say "I am not what I was created to be." You are in misery. You are an alien. You are outside of where you need to be.

We are foreigners in a foreign land of our own doing. We inherited our sinful flesh through Adam. In addition, the Bible tells us our guilt increases day after day. Who goes to bed at night saying: "Well, I did a little bit better today. Today I was a little bit more perfect. Today I sinned a little bit less"?

No, we do not go to bed that way. We go to bed recalling as the Psalmist says "while you are on your beds, search your hearts", and we remember our guilt.



Volume 53, No. 3 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon'" (Judges 7:20).

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We are in a foreign land of our own doing and we are not able to return by our own doing. Lord's Day Two teaches us that we naturally hate God and our neighbor. We are prone to hate them. No creature can love God unless he is born again of God.

We are in this foreign land of our own doing. We are not able to return of our own doing, and we do not want to return. That's the message of Romans 3. "There is none righteous; no, not one." Paul goes on to tell us in Romans 3:9-18 that each part of our body - our tongues, our throats, our bodies - are filled with unrighteousness. We don't want to come back to God.

The Law of God would have you see that you are accountable to God. We are under the law. When you read Romans 3:19 "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law", you can ask yourself who is "under the law". The very next phrase tells you exactly who is under the law because Paul writes "that every mouth may be stopped". Who is under the law? Every mouth is under the law. Every mouth is to be stopped, so every person is under the law.

We are silenced because of the Law's message. We sense our accountability to God and it reveals

our failure to please God. Jesus said all the law is to be fulfilled. Not one jot, not one tittle will pass away until the law is fulfilled.

Jesus warns us, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Jesus came to see that the Law gets kept. Jesus goes on to take Old Testament commandments and explains them in a way that would make sure that they get kept not only outwardly but inwardly in the heart.

The Law reveals that we fail to please God. We fail to love Him, and Jesus would have us know that. By nature we hate God and our neighbor. In Romans 3:18 there is a summary of what Paul has to say about those who know their sin. "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Why the Law Was Given

To what end or purpose does God give the law? To reveal our sin so we will seek His grace. That's the simple answer. To make man know his sin. Look at verse 20 again. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." If you read the law, even if you understand the law, it is not going to help you be better. It is not going to help you live a perfect life.

The Law is going to help you understand that you cannot live a perfect life. You are doing wrong. Your outward sins, your direct disobedience, and your inward sins, your heart and mind sins, are all an offense to God. Man is to know his sin.

God has given you the law to make you know your sin. He has also given you the law so that once you know it, your mouth will be silent. R. C. Sproul has some wonderful lectures on the Book of Romans. When he gets to this text he says the "essence of this text is God saying 'Shut up'". The first time you hear that, it hits you as kind of rude, but if anybody has the right to tell you to "Shut up" it is someone in authority over you, and, of course, that is God.

That means there is no excuse. That means you have no way to wiggle out. God says "Shut up". Jesus says the Holy Spirit will be sent to the church and into the world to convict of sin, to convict of righteousness, and to convict of judgment. This is where we separate the outward professors of religion from the inward professors of religion. This is where we are able to see the difference between those Christians who have no true faith and those who have true faith. The person without true faith knows nothing of that conviction. He knows nothing of distress when he thinks of his sin. The person who has the conviction of the Spirit is distressed. His mouth is silent. He has heard God say "Shut up".

Has God told you to "Shut up"? Have you discovered that when you hear of sin that you are to just simply close your mouth and offer

Q: How do you come to know your misery?

A: The Law of God tells me.

no excuse, just own up to it?

Jonathan Edwards made a habit of writing out resolutions. Not New Year's resolutions, but resolutions for life. He would read those resolutions every Monday morning. One of his resolutions was that whenever he heard of someone else's sin, any time someone would come and dare repeat to him an offense or sin of another person, that he would use that occasion to think of how wicked and awful his own sin was. Instead of thinking in judgment over that person, he would unite with that person and say "how I hate myself, for I am a sinner and I struggle with those same temptations and failures."

That is a good way to be silenced. Has God told you to "Shut up"? Has He silenced your mouth? If He has, it is to bring you to grace. Look again at Romans 3:19-20. There you see that every mouth is to be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Then especially pay attention to verse 20. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." We are thankful for that because we also know what verses 21 and 22 say "but now the righteousness of God without the

law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Christ Jesus."

What a wonderful world! What a reason to cry! What a reason to have hope in this life! A reason to have a light heart! You know God's law. You know your own heart. You know what you deserve, and yet you know that you have found grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Rejoice in his love.

Proper Use of the Law

How shall you use this knowledge? To convict you of sin, first of all. You should use this knowledge to let your heart come under the conviction of sin. Is there any one who does not need a healthy dose of conviction? Is there any one who thinks they have risen to such a place where they do not have to everyday search their heart? You need conviction of sin.

Secondly, you should use this knowledge to let God teach you again His grace. You are to come under the conviction of sin so that you can be converted again to rely on the grace of God. Do you take a step forward? It is the grace of God. Do you take another breath?

It is the grace of God. May you speak a word of love to a neighbor? It is the grace of God. Use this knowledge to realize how much you depend on the grace of God.

Third, use this knowledge to see that you are no better than any other man. Many times people come to me and say in so many words, "Pastor, I am better than someone else."

I have to tell you how many times I do that. In my attitudes, in my words, in my failure to love, in my selfishness, in my contentment with who I am, I tell everyone by my actions and deeds, I'm really doing quite fine. I'm really pretty special. I don't see myself as I ought and I don't humble myself as I should.

Use this knowledge, use this information to see that you are no better than any other man. You may be dressed nicer, but you are no better. You may have learned more manners than some, but you are no better. You might have been given better mental ability, better physical ability, you might have great prowess in some skill, but you are no better. Remember Jonathan Edwards' conviction, if you hear of someone's sin, let it lead you to loath yourself. Knowledge is not given to you that you may be wiser, it is given to you in the grace of God to change you.

Q: Can you live up to all this perfectly?

A: No. I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor.

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Justification by Faith In the Theology of Norman Shepherd

Reformed Christians have been perennially engaged in defending the doctrine of justification by faith alone against its detractors in other theological traditions. At times, however, debates over the doctrine have raged even within Reformed circles. Norman Shepherd, former Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) and pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, has been at the center of such debates recently in the American Reformed world. This article seeks to define the issues at stake in these debates and to evaluate Shepherd's doctrine of justification from a Reformed standpoint.

The Shepherd Controversies

Norman Shepherd began teaching systematic theology at Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia) in 1963. In the mid-1970s, controversy over Shepherd's teaching broke out in the Westminster community and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in which Shepherd was serving as a minister at the time. Though Shepherd's teaching on a number of related theological issues was called into question, the key point of debate was whether he held to the

Reformation's doctrine of justification by faith alone, as expressed in the Westminster Standards, or had, in one way or another, lapsed into teaching that justification was by faith and works together.

Shepherd had both defenders and detractors in the institutions in which he served, and only after a protracted series of events was he finally dismissed from his teaching post in 1981. At this time, he also left his presbytery, where disciplinary charges had been filed against him, and joined the Christian Reformed Church. He served pastorates in the CRC in Minnesota and Illinois before retiring in 1998.

Given the contours of this history, the Shepherd controversy may seem to be moot and of little current interest. However, the recent appearance of Shepherd's short book, *The Call of Grace*, has brought many of these old questions back to the surface and has stirred up considerable debate among American Reformed people. One of the difficulties in evaluating Shepherd's teaching on the doctrine of justification has been the lack of a writing trail. Though his 1979 unpublished paper, "The Grace of Justification," has survived, there

was little hard evidence of what Shepherd actually believed. *The Call of Grace*, then, has provided what was long missing: an extended discussion by Shepherd himself on the biblical teaching on salvation.

The question for this article, therefore, concerns Shepherd's views on justification and their consistency with the historic Reformed teaching.¹ Although Shepherd makes use of much orthodox terminology, I argue that he has articulated a doctrine of justification that is persistently ambiguous and that redefines the relationship of faith and works in a way at odds with the traditional, biblical doctrine.

The Doctrines of Faith & Justification

It must be acknowledged from the outset that Shepherd's writings on justification do make use of terms and particular articulations of doctrines that are common to Reformed theology. For example, he states: "Faith lays hold of Jesus Christ and His righteousness and the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to the one who believes. This is the distinctive function of faith in justification which it shares with no other grace or virtue."² Similarly, in another place he sets forth a very standard Reformed distinction between justification and sanctification: "Justification is an act of God's free grace with

The key point of debate was whether he [Shepherd] held to the Reformation's doctrine of justification by faith alone.

respect to His people whereby He pardons their sin and accepts them as righteous on the ground of the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to them and received by faith alone. Sanctification is a work of God's free grace in them whereby He transforms them progressively into the image of His Son."³

Nevertheless, there are many things in Shepherd's writings that call into question what he really means in his use of such language. Perhaps the most striking example is his continual claim (in "The Grace of Justification" and especially in *The Call of Grace*) that faith must be "living," "obedient," and "active."

The definition of faith is critical for the doctrine of justification, for the Reformed doctrine of justification "by *faith* alone" presumes a particular understanding of faith, one in which faith is sharply distinguished from works or obedience. In the Reformed view, faith is extraspective, a trust that looks outside of oneself and rests upon the good works of Christ that earned our salvation. In contrast, obedience consists of the good works that a person himself produces, works that flow from faith and only by God's grace. By faith we are justified; by obedience we are not.

Seen in this light, Shepherd's use of phrases such as "obedient faith" is inherently ambiguous. Such a phrase could refer simply to a faith that is always accompanied by obedience, and this would be wholly consistent with Reformed theology. However, it could also refer to a faith that is *itself* obedience, or, to put it another way, to a faith that is conceived in such broad terms that

it consists not only of a humble resting upon Christ and his work for salvation, but also of our obedience and good works that God demands of those who are in covenant with Him. In such a case, it is not by believing alone that we are justified, but by believing and obeying together.

In contrast to the clear precision of traditional Reformed theology in distinguishing the roles of faith and obedience, Shepherd never carefully defines what his terminology

There are many things in Shepherd's writings that call into question what he really means in his use of language.

means. Though the very presence of ambiguity is problematic for such an important subject, a fair evaluation of Shepherd's theology must try to probe beneath the ambiguity and clarify what Shepherd is attempting to communicate.

Unfortunately, despite some indications to the contrary,⁴ the evidence points to the conclusion that Shepherd indeed prefers an understanding of faith that makes good works not merely the fruit of faith, but an element of faith itself. This idea emerges quite prominently in the second half of "The Grace of Justification." Here he writes that faith "entails obedience" (13) and is "invariably intertwined with repentance" (19). While such expres-

sions might possibly be given an orthodox spin, a number of other statements in this document are far less susceptible to it. For example, he writes that saving faith is a faith that "yields obedience to the commands of Christ" (16) and that "forsakes sin and ungodliness" (17). Along the same lines, he calls the forsaking of sin and rebellion "an act of faith" (20).

Faith has been turned from the extraspective trust in the obedience of another into an act in which the believer himself offers obedience. This confusion of the faith that justifies with the obedience of sanctification is also manifest when Shepherd explains that "a living and active faith is the fruit of the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit." (15) This turns the Reformed doctrine on its head: faith is not the fruit of sanctification, but sanctification is the fruit of faith!

In his more recent work, Shepherd continues to speak of obedience and good works as part of faith itself. For example, he writes: "Faith is required, but faith looks away from personal merit to the promises of God. Repentance and obedience flow from faith as the fullness of faith. This is faithfulness, and faithfulness is perseverance in faith. A living, active, and abiding faith is the way in which the believer enters into eternal life."⁵ Following the train of thought here is not easy, but the logic seems to be something like this: "repentance and obedience" constitute the "fullness of faith;" the "fullness of faith" is "faithfulness;" "faithfulness" is "perseverance in faith"—all four of these terms or phrases are evidently identical. What then is the significance



that Shepherd, in the very next sentence and without a hitch, again refers somewhat climactically to the saving necessity of a “living, active, and abiding faith?” The obvious implication is that this “living, active, and abiding faith” is what is meant by the “fullness of faith,” which in turn implies that faithfulness, perseverance, and repentance and obedience are themselves part of this “living, active, and abiding faith.” Repentance and obedience, then, the very things that Reformed theology has so carefully distinguished from faith, become aspects of faith in the end.

There is stronger and perhaps even more problematic evidence that when Shepherd says that we are saved by a living and obedient faith he means a different kind of faith from that of the Reformed tradition. Shepherd says that *Christ himself* has “living and active faith.”⁶ Christ’s faith, then, becomes the model: Christ had obedient faith and thus we are to have obedient faith like His. What could be objectionable about this? Consider a standard Reformed definition of faith found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (xiv.2): “the principal acts of saving faith are, accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.” Of course, it is nonsense to say that Christ accepted, received, and rested upon Christ for justification, sanctification, and eternal life. Christ did not need a mediator in whom to put His faith—He is the mediator.

Christ, unlike us, did not need saving faith because He, unlike us, really was obedient! The unavoidable conclusion is that when Shepherd

refers to Christ Himself as exhibiting the living and obedient faith that we are to emulate and by which we are saved, he obviously has in mind a kind of “faith” that is different from the “faith” of the Reformed confessional statements. What are the implications? If we are saved by a living faith that is like Christ’s living faith, then we are saved by a faith whose principal acts are *not* accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ. Traditionally (and biblically), we affirm salvation to be by

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Christ’s works (as the ground of justification) and through *our faith* (as the instrument or means of justification). In Shepherd’s treatment, works and faith come bundled together, displayed first in Christ and then imitated by us.

Shepherd & The Reformed Tradition

There are certainly many other issues in Shepherd’s theology of justification that would be of relevant consideration here. Given the constraints of space, however, one final matter that deserves brief attention concerns Shepherd’s motivations in writing. Is he simply trying to restate the standard Reformed doctrine of

faith and justification, however unsuccessfully? Or is he really attempting to revise the doctrine? On the one hand, if he is simply trying to be a faithful Reformed theologian, then it is certainly puzzling that he forsakes the clear distinctions of the Reformed tradition for the ambiguous lingo of “obedient faith” and the like, even retaining the use of such language in *The Call of Grace* despite the decades of complaints about such terminology. On the other hand, if he is actually attempting to restate the traditional doctrine, then it does not seem too little to expect him—in his office of Reformed minister and seminary professor—to be forthright about his intentions. Yet, Shepherd sends his readers conflicting signals.⁷

Shepherd is also unclear about the relationship of his own Reformed tradition to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification. Given the historical battles of the last half-millennium, his perspective on the Roman Catholic understanding of salvation is certainly of pressing interest. In the opening pages of *The Call of Grace*, Shepherd makes reference to the important debates of the past decade engendered by *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. However, immediately after calling attention to this important movement, he declines further comment on it (though he returns to it very briefly, and no more clearly, later in the book). He states abruptly that he declines to discuss the “nuances” of the arguments that have been made in its wake.⁸ What could be more important, however, than the nuances? Grace, faith, Christ, good works—all of the parties, Roman Catholic as well as Protestant, affirm them. The

differences are in the details. Questions such as the precise nature of saving faith and its relationship with good works may indeed be nuances, but they are nuances upon which people have staked their eternal destinies.

Conclusion

That Norman Shepherd's theology of justification has attracted interest within Reformed circles in the past is indisputable, and that it is again a matter of great curiosity seems increasingly true. Whatever the importance of the variety of matters hotly debated among Reformed Christians, the present issue is undoubtedly of the highest urgency, for the nature of the Gospel is directly at stake. In light of this, our churches ought to be vigilant in keeping the clear distinctions of the Reformed doctrine of justification from falling into flaccid ambiguity, and persistent in refusing to revise the life-giving message that our faith, and not our obedience, justifies.

Notes

1. The author recently reviewed Norman Shepherd's book, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), in *Modern Reformation*, vol.11, no.2 (March/April, 2002): 38-40. Some of the present material originally appeared in this review.
2. Norman Shepherd, "The Grace of Justification" (unpublished paper, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1979), 3.
3. *Ibid.*, 14.
4. For example, Shepherd seems to distinguish faith from obedience and good works when he speaks of faith's "distinctive function" and "distinctive

office," in the accomplishment of justification; see *ibid.*, 3-4.

5. *The Call of Grace*, 50.

6. See, for example, the particularly troubling statements in *The Call of Grace*, 19: "All of this is made possible through the covenantal righteousness of Jesus Christ. His was a living, active, and obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross. This faith was credited to him as righteousness."

7. In "The Grace of Justification," Shepherd does call a number of stalwart Reformed theologians to his defense. Among the theologians he cites on various points are John Calvin, Francis Turretin, and J. Gresham Machen, in addition to a number of citations of the Westminster Confession of Faith. At the same time, he also gives hints of a lingering dissatisfaction with the sufficiency of the traditional doctrine of faith and obedience. For example, it sounds very much like traditional Reformed reasoning when he states that "those who truly believe in Jesus Christ will inevitably manifest this faith in obedience" ("The Grace of Justification," 13). However, though he admits that this is true, he adds that "it does not yet explain why Jesus and the Apostles go on to exhort men in the way of obedience that leads to eternal life and to warn them against disobedience which leads to destruction." What needs to be added to the usual Reformed answer? For Shepherd, it is the recognition that God deals "covenantally" with his people (14). How Shepherd's covenant theology compares with that of the broader Reformed tradition is certainly a critical issue, though constraints of space permit only a few brief comments. It may be noted that Shepherd's definition of "covenant" (on p.12 of *The Call of Grace*) makes a covenant simply a relationship of friendship instead of also a legal, forensic relationship, and his definition also fails to allow for the important distinctions that Reformed

covenant theology has made between the covenant of works with Adam and the covenant of grace with redeemed sinners (as described, for example, in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, vii.2-3). Shepherd also opines that there is a "glimmer of hope" of reconciling evangelical and Roman Catholic views on justification if both would adopt a "covenantal" understanding of salvation (*The Call of Grace*, 59). This also suggests that Shepherd is trying to add something new to standard Protestant articulations of the doctrine and thus also to transcend older (and somewhat passé?) Roman Catholic-Protestant debates.

8. *The Call of Grace*, 4.

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John Calvin and Christian Piety (1)

Many writers who reflect on the life of John Calvin are quick to criticize him and his later followers for their spiritual apathy, even coldness. These writers associate the Pastor of Geneva with a cold theology and a steely mind; rarely is he said to demonstrate a life of warmhearted devotion to God.

You can find such negative evaluations expressed about Calvin dating back to his own day. Consider, for example, Calvin's one-time follower and friend, Jerome Bolsec. Later, after abandoning the evangelical faith and returning to Romanism, Bolsec claims that Calvin was little more than an arrogant, cruel, and greedy man. He writes that as the Reformer lay on his deathbed, eaten with lice and vermin all over his body as divine punishment, he was cursing and blaspheming against God.¹ And so began a long tradition of Calvin-bashing, particularly among Romanist writers. A Calvin biography, authorized for reading by French Catholics well into the twentieth century, depicted him as a deceitful and despotic man with an unfeeling heart.²

With that kind of slander, no wonder that Calvin's followers also have

been treated with contempt by many writers even to the present day. Consider this line from a recent Associated Press story about the current political scene in the Netherlands: "Why is a country of 16 million people, one of the smallest and least vocal in Europe, at the forefront of liberal legislation? And why did it happen in a country that embraced the dourest, most regimented stream of Christendom, Calvinism?"³ Is it really true that Calvinists are the dourest (and sourest) among all Christians in the world today?

Or read what an American evangelical, Laurence Vance, has to say in his book entitled, *The Other Side of Calvinism*: "Nothing will deaden a church or put a young man out the ministry any more than an adherence to Calvinism. Nothing will foster pride and indifference as will affection for Calvinism. Nothing will destroy holiness and spirituality as an attachment to Calvinism."⁴

Of course, we have to admit that critics of Calvinism can find examples of shipwrecked spirituality in its nearly five hundred year history. But these critics also have to agree that some immorality is found

in all Christian movements throughout church history. In this regard, Calvinists are no different than other believers. Sin and temptation to sin are "equal opportunity employers," recruiting people across denominational and theological lines.

In this article, and in its continuation next month, I want to demonstrate how eagerly and intensely John Calvin focuses upon Christ-centered godliness in his writings. Indeed, living a holy Christian life in response to God's saving us from our sins through Jesus Christ is an important theme, if not the main theme, in Calvin's thinking. The apostle Paul declares in Romans 12:1, "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." Reflecting on these words, Calvin writes "... We ought to meditate on holiness throughout the whole of our life."⁵

In Calvin's writings, even in his deepest theological writings, you will find him often using the Latin word, "*pietas*." Usually this word simply is given an English transliteration: "*pietas*" is rendered "piety." But to our modern ears when someone speaks about "piety" or a "pious" Christian we think of an elderly grandmother, sitting quietly in her chair, reading her Bible for hours at a time. Many "pious" Christians today reserve one or

Living a holy Christian life in response to God's saving us from our sins through Jesus Christ is an important theme, if not the main theme, in Calvin's thinking.

even two “quiet times” for their devotions each day. Others, in their expression of “piety” might wear “WWJD” bracelets on their wrists or carry little crosses in their pockets. But is this what Calvin has in mind when he writes about Christian “*pietas*”? I would say, “No.”

The illustrations of “piety” given above have more to do with what church historians call “Pietism” than with “piety.” Pietism is the label given by church historians to a movement originating among German Lutherans in the late seventeenth century. This movement impacted later Dutch Precianism and English Methodism. Certain themes of Pietism were transported to America in the Second Great Awakening and later reappear in Pentecostal and Holiness movements. For many Christians today Calvin’s references to “piety” are liable to misunderstanding due to Pietism.

Calvin uses the Latin word “*pietas*” to render the biblical Greek word “*eusebeia*,” often translated in English as “godliness, worship, religion.” Given the historical baggage associated with Pietism I think it is preferable to render “*pietas*” as “godliness” or even “Christlikeness.” Indeed, when you read Calvin’s writings, you will be struck by how often he stresses godly living as “Christlikeness.” One of Calvin’s great ministry goals was to promote Christian *pietas*, urging believers to grow in the true piety of Christlikeness.

John Calvin employs *pietas* as a main theme in his *magnum opus*, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The final edition of the *Institutes* was published in 1559, just

five years before his death. As you may know, Calvin sent the first edition of his *Institutes* to the French king, Francis I, who had been growing increasingly hostile to the Reformers. Look at the first two sentences of the twenty-three page letter (in English translation) which Calvin sent to the king along with the *Institutes*:

When I first set my hand to this work, nothing was farther from my mind, most glorious King, than to write

***When you read
Calvin’s writings,
you will be struck by
how often he stresses
godly living as
“Christlikeness.”***

something that might afterward be offered to Your Majesty. My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness [*pietas*].⁶

There it is—*pietas*, godliness, Christlikeness—found already in the second sentence of what amounts to an introduction to the *Institutes*. Calvin explains that his purpose in writing is really two-fold: to give a summary of basic Bible teachings, and, as a result of doing this, to help Christians be shaped unto “true godliness.” Notice how Calvin connects “head” to “heart.”

Right knowledge of God is inseparably linked to right living for God. Only the most unfair of critics can make the slanderous accusation that Calvin and later Calvinists destroy Christian godliness and holy living.

Calvin emphasizes *pietas* also in the opening pages of his *Institutes*. Book One, chapter one, serves as a brief three-page introduction to the entire work. Calvin here explains how the knowledge of God is connected to the knowledge of oneself. Then, just four pages into the thousand-page *Institutes*, Calvin declares:

Now, the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory.... Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety [*pietas*]” (I.2.1; p. 39).

God cannot be properly known, says Calvin, apart from *pietas*, that is, true godliness or Christlikeness.

Later, in that same section, Calvin gives his definition of biblical piety:

“I call ‘piety’ [*pietas*] that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces” (I.2.1; p. 41.).

A reverence of God joined to a deep love for God—this is Christian piety in the best sense of the word. A few pages later, Calvin defines “real religion” as “faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence,



and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law” (I.2.2; p. 43). Faith in God joined to reverential fear of God, which is accompanied by worship in the broadest sense: offering the whole self as a willing sacrifice, out of gratitude to God. This cannot be reduced to mere feeling—it is feeling but it is also lifestyle—living a holy life while moved by loving reverence for God.

In his earlier published catechism, Calvin emphasizes that the Christian’s exercise of piety towards a holy God ought not arise out of terror of His judgment:

... true godliness [*pietas*] does not consist in a fear which willingly indeed flees God’s judgment, but since it cannot escape is terrified. True godliness [*pietas*] consists rather in a sincere feeling which loves God as father as much as it fears and reverences him as Lord, embraces his righteousness, and dreads offending him worse than death.⁷

By embracing God’s righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, the Christian must not be terrified of God’s condemnation. Though at times the Christian’s conscience is “harried by disturbed alarm, and almost torn to pieces” thinking about God’s judgment upon his sin, yet in assurance of salvation through Christ the Christian must be “convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him” (III.2.16; p. 562). It is out of that love for the Heavenly Father that the Christian will desire to live in true *pietas* before God.

Any unbiased reader of Calvin’s works continually will be struck by his recurring theme of *pietas*—biblical godliness. Yes, Calvin was a rigorous thinker and theologian. But never did he set orthodox theology against holy Christian living. Indeed, just the opposite: correct Christian theology necessarily will lead to greater godliness:

“...the only legitimate commendation of doctrine is that it instructs us in the reverence and fear of God. Thus we are taught that the man who has made most progress in godliness is the best disciple of Christ, and the only man who should be counted a real theologian is he who can build up men’s consciences in the fear of God.”⁸

So may our biblical and Calvinist doctrines lead all of us to increasing godliness as disciples of Christ Jesus.

Notes

1. Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, trans. George Shriver (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971) 20.
2. *Ibid.*, p 23.
3. Arthur Max, “Progressive or Degenerate? Pundits Debate Dutch Liberalism,” *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, 20 May 2001: A15.
4. Laurence M. Vance, quoted by James N. McGuire, “A Kinder, Gentler Calvinism,” *Reformation and Revival Newsletter*, 5 (March-April 2001) 11.
5. John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, vol. 8, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, eds. David W. Torrance, Thomas F. Torrance,

trans. Ross MacKenzie (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, rpt. 1973), 263.

6. John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to Francis I,” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 20 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 9. Hereafter, references from the *Institutes* will be made parenthetically, along with the page number from the Battles’ edition.

7. John Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism, A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster University Press, 1997), 8.

8. John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, vol. 10, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, eds. David W. Torrance, Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, rpt. 1980), 353.

Rev. Randal S. Lankheet is the pastor of the Ontario United Reformed Church in Ontario, California.

Rev. Paul Murphy in New York City

On Friday, January 31, 2003, Rev. Paul T. Murphy was installed as associate Pastor of West Sayville Reformed Bible Church (URCNA). Rev. Murphy, along with his wife, Julie, and their children Shannon, Joshua, Joel, Peter, Abigail will have their membership at West Sayville. The installation was nicely attended with representatives from several URCNA churches (it was great to see Elder Peter Moen of Pompton Plains after 10 years!), at least one OPC minister, and many folks from churches under care of the Consistory of Messiah's Congregation.

Rev. Murphy is charged with planting a Reformed church near Ground Zero in Manhattan. The church — called Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (MeRF) — is under the oversight of Messiah's Congregation in Brooklyn, NY. It meets on Lord's Days at four o'clock in the afternoon.

The first worship service was February 2, 2003. More than 70 souls were in attendance. We expect the attendance to drop because several were attenders came as a "first-time encouragement," including Dr. Paul Szto of the Queens CRC, with his entourage, and Rev. Ken Klett of a PCA in New Jersey, with his large family (his wife was raised in the Netherlands Reformed Church, by the way).

Still, only the Lord knows: attendance just might increase. The work is being promoted in several

ways. Our weekly radio show on WMCA (570 AM; 10pm Wednesdays) has resulted in many inquiries. And Murphy sermons are now posted at www.sermonaudio.com/MeRF. If attendance goes up, people may just have to find a cozy spot on the floor of the lovely chapel. The meeting place was filled to capacity yesterday. We rent the sanctuary of the beautiful Seamen's Church, 241 Water Street — just north of the Fulton Street Seaport (within sight of the site where the Twin Towers stood).

Please encourage all your Manhattan friends, relatives and acquaintances to visit this new Reformed work. You, too, are invited if you are visiting New York City. Note also the Thursday evening Bible studies (7pm) which meet at 323 E. 82nd Street (between 1st & 2nd Avenues; downstairs).

We truly praise God for a wonderful installation service and a powerful first worship service. I would especially like to thank the following brothers:

- The Officers and members of West Sayville for acting quickly and decisively. We are blessed to be able to partner with you in this outreach, and we praise God for your mission-minded hearts. Pastor Don Hoaglander has really risen to the occasion.
- The Consistory of Dutton URC for permitting Rev. Murphy to accept the call (he served Dutton

for 13 years and it wasn't easy letting him go!).

- Dr. N. Kloosterman for providing counsel to W. Sayville in structuring this missionary call. URCNA Church Order is a "work in progress," and Dr. Kloosterman's assistance in navigating it was invaluable.
- Dr. P.Y. DeJong for enthusiastically promoting this cooperative enterprise. Our first blessing from Dr. DeJong came years ago by way of his excellent commentary on the Belgic Confession, "The Church's Witness to the World." Our whole church studied it. He has blessed us most recently by helping us concretely witness to "the world" representatively gathered in NYC.
- Mr. Brian Harrington for his vision and missionary zeal.
- Messiah's supporters, officers and staff for making it all happen.

PLEASE PRAY for this new work in New York, a work dedicated to the glory of God, and to the Reformed faith which best serves that glory on earth.

Rev. Steve Schlissel is the pastor of Messiah's Congregation in Brooklyn, New York.



Legalism: The Perennial Heresy

The recent, intense media coverage of Islam has provided a reminder of the power and grip that legalism holds upon the human mind. It is a perennial view that we must keep the divine law and thereby earn heaven by human merit. Five centuries ago, Martin Luther drew a radical distinction between the gospel of grace and the legalism of all other religions outside of biblical Christianity:

“For if the article of justification be once lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost. And as many as are in the world that hold not this doctrine, are either Jews, Turks, Papists or heretics” (*Commentary on Galatians*). As Luther contemplated religions of works in the sixteenth century, he immediately thought of *Judaism, Islam* as exemplified by the Ottoman Turks, late-medieval *Roman Catholicism*, and various other heretical splinter groups.

The Ancient Jewish Leaven

The Pharisaic movement of the first century demonstrates the tendency of legalism to slide into fanatical excess. Even as Jesus pronounced woe upon the Pharisees, He reflected upon their lack of balance: “For you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). They were, as Paul testified, “The strictest sect” (Acts 26:5). Paul’s assessment was an insider’s perspective, for he

himself had been a Pharisee, and “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Philippians 3:6). By grace, he came to embrace a truly Christian perspective regarding *law righteousness*, the righteousness that a person seeks to build up by meticulous keeping of God’s law. He came to regard his past religious achievements as *dung* (as the King James nicely translates the Greek *skubalon* in Philippians 3:8). For Paul, there was something far superior to human righteousness which, at best, is nothing but filthy rags in the sight of a holy God (Isaiah 64:6). Paul desired “the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9).

Infecting Even the Church

The power of Pharisaic life and thought is demonstrated in its outbreak even within the apostolic church. Luke explicitly refers to “the Pharisees who had believed,” in the sense that they indeed believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah (Acts 15:5). Their position articulated at Antioch and at Jerusalem was that salvation depends upon the keeping of the divine law, namely the practice of circumcision and the observation of the Mosaic Law, in terms of its ceremonial aspects (Acts 15:1, 5). The position of the Judaizers, of course, was completely rejected by the Jerusalem Council. Peter nicely affirmed the gospel message that God cleanses hearts “by faith” and

that “we are saved through the *grace* of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:9,11).

Unfortunately for the church, the Jerusalem Council did not forever bury the legalistic mentality, which resurfaced in monasticism and the idea that the devoted monk earns eternal life. Benedict of Nursia reflects the legalistic mentality which became so wide-spread in the medieval church: “Let us, therefore, gird our loins with faith and the performance of good works, and following the guidance of the Gospel walk in His paths, so that we may merit to see Him who has called us unto His kingdom” (*The Rule of Saint Benedict*). Luther, commenting upon the religious life of many during his time, declared, “They build their confidence ... on the works they have done” (*Treatise on Good Works*).

The Islamic Contagion

Early in the seventh century, a new legalistic religion appeared through the efforts of Mohammed who saw himself as being in continuity with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. In reality, the discontinuity between Mohammed and the biblical religion of grace is total. Consider, for example, the Islamic doctrine of *jihad*. John Keegan, the premier military historian of our time, has rightly observed, “Muhammad, unlike Christ, was a man of violence; he bore arms, was wounded in battle and preached holy war, *jihad*” (*A History of Warfare*, p.33). Although many Muslims have been and are peaceful, Islam itself is a religion of violence. In the century following the death, of Mohammed in 632 A.D., the Arabs

conquered one of the largest empires in history, reaching from the Indus River in the East to Spain in the West. In addition to this historical evidence, there is the textual evidence coming from the pen of Mohammed himself who exhorted his followers: “O you who believe, fight the unbelievers who are near to you” (*Koran* 9:125). The Islamic armies which exploded out of the Arabian peninsula wielding the sword of conquest were motivated by Mohammed’s example and his summons to fight the infidel.

The fundamental distinction between true Christianity and Islam, however, has to do with the antithesis between a religion of grace and a religion of law. The contrast is strikingly illustrated in terms of Suleiman the Magnificent, the sixteenth-century Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. No doubt, in his time, he was the most powerful man on the earth. Luther certainly recognized the incomparable strength of his forces. “The Turk is such a mighty lord,” Luther wrote, “that no kingdom or land, whatever it is, is strong enough to resist him, unless God performs a miracle” (*On War Against the Turk*, p. 184). Although Charles V controlled more territory, he nevertheless had limits placed upon his power in the position of Holy Roman Emperor. Suleiman, in contrast, was an absolutist. Also known as Suleiman the Lawgiver, his objective was to establish the perfect order, governed by Islamic law. Whatever Suleiman decreed became a regulation for life. For Suleiman, there was a succession of great men in history: Moses, then Jesus, followed by Mohammed and finally Suleiman himself.

But while Suleiman conquered in the Balkans and even laid siege to Vienna, Luther in Germany preached and lived a very different theology. Defining what he meant by the concept of *passive righteousness*, Luther wrote, “For in this we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and suffer another to work in us, that is to say God” (*Commentary on Galatians*).

The fundamental distinction between true Christianity and Islam has to do with the antithesis between a religion of grace and a religion of law.

Things to Remember

The legitimacy of the sharp antithesis drawn by Luther between biblical Christianity and all other religions is underscored by Paul’s assessment of what the Galatians embrace of the Judaizer’s teaching really entailed. “I am amazed,” Paul wrote, “that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another” (Galatians 1 :6-7a). Their desertion from the apostolic gospel involved their reception of a religion which was not another of the same kind, but one which was completely different. Thus, he must warn that the attempt to be received by God through human effort and achievement is disastrous: “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from

grace” (Galatians 5:4).

The Jews, steeped in the mentality of legalism, once asked Jesus, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” (John 6:28). This indeed is the typical question of the natural man who knows not the gospel: What work of righteousness shall we do? How shall we establish our own righteousness (Romans 10:3)? Jesus’ response is crucially instructive: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29). Luther indeed properly maintained, “The first, highest, and most precious all good works is faith in Christ” (*Treatise on Good Works*). What, though, does it mean to *believe in Christ*? Jesus himself gives the answer in the same discourse: “He who comes to me will not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst” (John 6:35b). The parallel clauses are significant: *To believe* in Christ is *to come* to Him. If we come, He assures us that He will receive us: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37).

Through Christ and Christ alone, apart from works, we have hope, a glorious future: “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40).

Rev. Mark J. Larson is pastor of Catawba Valley Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Granite Falls, North Carolina.



Sound Bites

The Outlook - 1971

January 1971

“We need make no apology for our avowed intention to continue to engage in controversial writing as the need arises. The church on earth, in as far as it is a true church, is militant and not yet triumphant, always in tension, and constantly not yet able to be at ease in Zion. Controversy merely for controversy’s sake is reprehensible to be sure, but compromise and hush-hush when the truth is attacked and the church is in jeopardy is cowardice or even treachery.”

We’ve Changed Our Name
John Vander Ploeg

“...in the Installation Service...we are being reminded of our needs. We are being told that Christ cares for His Church. We are being instructed that these men, earthen vessels like us, have a tremendous God-given task. And seeing all this, we should bow our heads and hearts in gratitude to the Lord.”

On Special Assignment
Jerome M. Julien

March 1971

“It is both interesting and instructive to note how our Lord repeatedly directed critics and questioners back to the Bible for them to know the truth of a matter and what is right. And, however unschooled and unsophisticated we may appear in doing so, so often the only way out of our maze of questions, problems, and difficulties is to do just as Jesus did.”

* * * * *

“It is disturbing to become increasingly aware that the religious and theological milieu of our time is so greatly characterized by problems instead of solutions.”

“Have Ye Not Read?”
John Vander Ploeg

“There can be no true understanding of history nor can there be a true evaluation of historical process without that tremendous ‘I’ at the center - I am the light, I am the bread, I am the door, I am the way!”

The Harvest of Calvary
Leonard Greenway

“Everyone who deplores the present fragmented existence of the Reformed family of churches can only dread the prospect of further fragmentation.”

News of the Dutch Churches
Martin H. Woudstra

April 1971

“When the Word of God is no longer the basis for theological reflection, then there is room for every wind of change and one throws open the doors to every new cultural phenomenon which pops up. Then men stand above the Word instead of being subjected to the Word.

Does Theology Still Have a Future?
Johan D. Tangelder

May 1971

“Whoever gets off the track of divine revelation in Genesis had better beware lest he lose all sense of direction as he stumbles from one error to the next, further and

further away from the ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in the rest of the Bible as well.”

Another Look at Lever
John Vander Ploeg

“Have we the right to stigmatize brothers and sisters, who have withdrawn from a denomination out of love for Jesus Christ, as being schismatic?”

* * * * *

“...a schismatic is one who tears the Church apart by repudiating the doctrines of the Church, and one who uses foul means to draw many others from the Church with him. If a person or group of persons withdraws from our Church peacefully and starts a new Church with the three forms of unity as the foundation stones of their ecclesiastical structure, can we say that they have torn the Church apart and are therefore schismatics? Is the unity of the Church found in its structure, or is it found in the spiritual life which the Church expresses by virtue of a living faith in Jesus Christ?”

About “Schism”: Another Point of View
Cornelius J. Van Schouwen

“It has become a growing conviction with this observer that disruption of unity within the church is caused not so much by the conservative’s lack of understanding of the nature of the church as by the dishonesty of members of the church who remain within it although they can no longer accept the interpretation of the Word or the confessional standards founded upon it held by the church.”

Dishonest Church Members
Arthur Besteman

June 1971

“If we speak out to the best of

our ability, each with the talents the Lord has entrusted to us, in the Lord's strength - and then, in spite of all our efforts, the church and our institutions go the wrong way, we shall be clear before God! If for fear of the adverse reaction of certain people, we keep silent, the Lord will indeed hold us accountable."

Preachers Without Fear
John G. Kruis

July 1971

"...our synods, at times, act more like a people's court than like an ecclesiastical body."

Commends Articles
Peter J. Sluys

August 1971

"We can never expect to promote the Christian faith by attacking the Scriptures. One can never lead men to believe in Christ by saying He was mistaken in what He taught. Faith in Him doesn't permit attacking His authority.

The Problem Isn't Science but Unbelief
Peter De Jong

September 1971

"...let's never get the silly notion that young people are doing God, the elders, and the minister a favor when they are in church. The privilege is theirs. Which, of course, is true of us their elders also. To be allowed an audience with the Lord of lords and the King of kings - well, there are just no words to really say how unworthy every sinful mortal is of an honor as great as that."

Going to Church? Watch Your Step!
John Vander Ploeg

December 1971

"God had a purpose in making us channels of His grace, and that purpose is to forward obedience to the Lord among men."

Evangelism - Sideline or Lifeline?

Garrett H. Stoutmeyer

"...is it not true that 'your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour'? (I Peter 5:8). Of course it is, but lions do not roar as they stalk their prey out in the wilderness. They roar when they are brought in cages to the arena, as they were in Peter's day, in order to kill and eat for the entertainment of spectators. These lions that Peter and his readers knew were

still controlled by their lion trainers. And Satan is controlled by God today."

Millennialism and Missions
Timothy Monsma

"This world needs more Christians to enter the many spheres of the Kingdom, with fewer church pronouncements. The church is not fulfilling her mandate when she enters upon territory not belonging to her; we do not live under a theocracy."

About "Synod's Right to Speak"
Peter Sluys

Correction Notice

A number of changes were inadvertently printed which were not in the original manuscript of the two-part article, "The Snare of Misdirected Pity," in the December 2002 and January 2003 issues of *The Outlook*. One factor was an inaccurate fax machine. This notice is printed in deference to the authors quoted. Please note the following corrections:

"J" should be the middle initial for William Bennett.

"F" should be the middle initial for John MacArthur.

December 2002 issue, p. 5, column 2, 2nd quotation is from p. 82.

P. 7, column 1, quotation is from p. 116.

January 2003 issue, p. 4, column 3, 1st quotation is from p. 206.

P. 6, column 3, quotation is from p. 85.

Corrections to the content of the quotations include the following:

Dec. 2002:

P. 5, column 1, the beginning of Bork's quotation should read: Wood and Manchester are right. Equality is "the single most powerful and radical ideological force in all of American history" and ...

P. 6, column 1, "... [W]e" should begin the Bergman quotation.

P. 7, column 1, The Dobson quotation, lines 22 & 23 should read: friends in the mainstream media continue ...

Jan. 2003:

P. 5, column 3, lines 32 & 33 should read: nowadays "adults define themselves as children's ...

P. 6, column 2, the paragraph following (p. 138) is also a quotation from William J. Bennett's book, p. 138.

P. 6, column 3, the last line of the quotation by John F. MacArthur should be: Christ as Lord *or* Savior.



Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (1)

Scripture, Confession, and Historical Reconstruction

Any evaluation of the new perspective on Paul faces a number of daunting challenges. Since a considerable part of the argument for a new approach to the teaching of the apostle Paul rests upon E. P. Sanders' historical reconstruction of the pattern of religion known as "second temple Judaism," some evaluation of this reconstruction is required. One of the oft-repeated claims of advocates of the new perspective is that the older view failed to read Paul's epistles in their historical context, whether in terms of their Old Testament background or the Judaism prevalent at the time of their writing. A particular historical understanding of Judaism, consequently, has become a major linchpin in the argument for a new view of the apostle Paul's teaching. This means that any evaluation of the new perspective that fails to reckon with the historical studies of E. P. Sanders and others on the nature of second temple Judaism is not likely to be regarded as adequate to the task.

Many authors who are sympathetic to the new perspective also insist that we need a new or fresh look at the Pauline epistles, one that is freed from the constraints of the older Reformation reading. To seek to defend the understanding of the gospel that is reflected in the confessions of the Reformation is to risk the scorn of those who view

their project as a long-overdue liberation of exegesis from dogmatic strictures. Those who defend the Reformation's understanding of the doctrine of justification are regarded as would-be "guardians of orthodoxy," whose captivity to an older doctrinal system and paradigm makes their work outdated and out-of-step.¹ If a revolution has occurred in Pauline studies, the older Reformation paradigm being displaced by a new paradigm, then those who are found on the pre-revolutionary side of this paradigm shift risk being dismissed as the theological equivalent of "flat earthers." It is a fearful thing, indeed, to swim against the stream of what is now acknowledged as the reigning paradigm in Pauline studies.² In the view of many proponents of the new perspective, the older commentaries and treatments of the Pauline epistles are seriously handicapped by their Reformation assumptions regarding Judaism in the first century. A critical evaluation of the new perspective requires, therefore, not only a consideration of the new understanding of Judaism associated with the work of E. P. Sanders but also a re-reading of the Pauline epistles against the background of the new understanding of Judaism.

Though these challenges may seem daunting enough, there is the further complication of the fluid nature of

the so-called new perspective. As we have previously noted, many authors who write in sympathy with the new perspective, object when this perspective is treated as though it were uniformly understood by its adherents. Some authors specifically object to the language of "the" new perspective. Attention is called to the diversity of viewpoint among its proponents. Due to the tentativeness of many of the historical studies of Judaism in the first century of the Christian era, it is frequently acknowledged that a great deal of further study is needed. All of this contributes to a situation that is much like that confronting a marksman in a shooting gallery at the arcade. How is it possible to hit a target that is in constant motion and that, so soon as you get a bead on it, has bobbed up or down, or disappeared altogether?

As I embark upon my critical evaluation of the new perspective, accordingly, I am well aware of the modest and limited character of what will be presented. What I will offer is an evaluation that raises a number of key questions that the new perspective fails to answer adequately. In addition to raising these questions, I shall offer a defense of several of the key aspects of the Reformation's understanding of the apostle Paul, particularly its understanding of the doctrine of justification. My evaluation, however, will remain, in the nature of the case, something of a preliminary assessment of the new perspective. A more fulsome and adequate evaluation of the new perspective would require a far more lengthy and extended treatment of many issues that I will only briefly consider.³

The priority of Scripture

Because so much of the new perspective's understanding of the apostle Paul is shaped by E. P. Sanders' study of Second Temple Judaism, we will begin our evaluation of the new perspective by raising several questions regarding his conclusions. However, before doing so, we need to consider the relative importance of Scripture, confession, and historical studies for our determination of the apostle Paul's understanding of the gospel.

In order to assess the new perspective's claims regarding Paul's understanding of the gospel and justification by faith, we must ultimately appeal to the teaching of the Scriptures, especially the epistles of the apostle Paul. The debate regarding the correctness of the Reformation's understanding of the doctrine of justification can only be settled in a way that conforms to the Reformation's insistence that "Scripture alone" (*sola Scriptura*) is the supreme standard for determining the nature of the gospel. Whatever the usefulness and need for historical studies that place the Scriptures in their historical context, we have to take care that the tentative results of such studies not inappropriately influence our interpretation of the biblical texts. Even though historical studies may play an important role in the interpretation of Paul's epistles, which were written on particular occasions and in a special historical setting, they must always be subordinated to the arguments and specific claims of the epistles themselves.

What I have in mind by this observation is not a defense of a biblicism that ignores history. Rather, I have

in mind to warn against a kind of historical scholarship that *inappropriately predetermines* the exegesis of biblical texts. For example, someone might argue on the basis of historical studies that the kind of Judaizing tendency the apostle Paul opposes in Galatians is not represented in the literature of second temple Judaism. Consequently, the apostle Paul is guilty in Galatians of creating a kind of "straw man," a profile of a Judaizing tendency that simply did not exist in the first century, in order to make his case for a certain understanding of the gospel. The point of this illustration at this point is not to say that writers of the new perspective are necessarily guilty of such an approach. The point is simply to warn against the real temptation to employ historical studies as a kind of matrix or grid for the reading of Paul's epistles, so that the actual teaching and arguments of the epistle are not the principal basis for determining Paul's view of things. *When we seek to determine Paul's view of the gospel, we must allow Paul's writings to have the first and last word.* Nothing less than this is required, if we are to settle the question of what Paul meant by the gospel or the doctrine of justification.

One of the unavoidable issues that arises in connection with this observation is the authenticity of all the canonical epistles that are ascribed to the apostle Paul. Readers of the New Testament are well aware that there are thirteen epistles explicitly assigned to Paul. However, most of the more prominent authors who are associated with the new perspective follow the standard, critical consensus of New Testament scholarship that only seven of the

canonical epistles are genuinely Pauline.⁴ In this consensus, Colossians, Ephesians, II Thessalonians, and the Pastoral Epistles, are regarded as deutero-Pauline and therefore not wholly reliable sources for determining Paul's teaching. Though I do not concur with this critical view of the Pauline corpus, I will nonetheless restrict most of my appeal in what follows to passages in the generally acknowledged epistles. Since most everyone acknowledges the authenticity of Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Phillipians, I Thessalonians and Philemon, references to these epistles will be treated as sufficient to determine Paul's teaching regarding the gospel and justification by faith. Rather than becoming sidetracked by the important question of the authenticity of the canonical epistles of Paul, I will restrict my argument to references from the generally acknowledged epistles.

The place of the confessions

A somewhat more controversial subject is that of the role and place of the historic Reformation confessions in our understanding of the gospel. If the claims of the new perspective are granted, then it is not only necessary to take a fresh look at Paul's epistles. But it also becomes necessary to view the confessions' summary of the gospel, particularly the doctrine of justification, with considerable suspicion. Key elements of these confessions—that justification is a, if not the, central theme of Paul's understanding of the gospel; that justification answers the question how ungodly sinners can find acceptance with God; that justification is by faith alone, now and in the fu-



ture—must be rejected in the light of the new understanding of Judaism and the apostle Paul that is integral to the new perspective. N. T. Wright, as the title of his book *What Saint Paul Really Said* makes clear, argues that the Western tradition since Augustine has largely misunderstood the apostle Paul. Expressing an opinion that is common among writers of the new perspective, Wright insists that “[t]he discussions of justification in much of the history of the church, certainly since Augustine, got off on the wrong foot—and they have stayed there ever since.”⁵ Even if you factor in the possibility that Wright is being deliberately provocative, his words, and the sentiment they express, can hardly lend encouragement to those who might view the Reformation confessions as a helpful summary of the teaching of the gospel.

At one level, of course, these sentiments respecting the correctness of the Reformation’s reading of the gospel cannot be rejected out of hand. The confessions themselves acknowledge that they are subordinate to the teaching of Scripture and liable to correction if necessary. Even the most ardent subscriber to the Reformation confessions must be open to the possibility that they are in error. This is really only another way of saying that Scripture is the supreme test of what to believe, and the confessions are true only by virtue of their agreement with Scripture. However, at another level, these sentiments seem to betray a kind of historical pride, even recklessness, regarding our present understanding of Scripture in relation to the understanding of the past. At the very least, they

betray a kind of disrespect for the doctrinal consensus of the church in her history, or an unwillingness to grant a kind of presumption of “innocent-unless-proven-guilty” respecting these confessions. The point is not that the confessions of the Reformation are beyond criticism. Rather, the modest point we wish to make is that a great burden of proof falls to those who reject wholesale the inheritances of the past. Whether advocates of the new perspective have acknowledged or met this burden remains to be seen.

The subordinate role of historical reconstruction

The last observation concerns the role and place of historical studies in the interpretation of the Pauline epistles. Such studies are an important component of any responsible approach to the interpretation of Scripture. For this reason, the study of the literature of Second Temple Judaism provides an important context within which to read the epistles of the apostle Paul. Knowledge of the historical setting of biblical texts is critical to their interpretation. Thus, there can be no objection in principle to the interest of the new perspective in studying the literature of Second Temple Judaism with a view to its implications for an understanding of the apostle Paul.

However, though historical studies can significantly *illuminate* the meaning of biblical texts, great caution has to be exercised so as not to allow the tentative conclusions of historical studies to “trump” the apparent meaning of the text in its canonical context. To argue, for example, that the apostle Paul “could not be opposing any kind of legalism” because *we know from historical*

studies that no such legalism existed at the time is a dubious procedure. If the text seems to say something that does not fit with our historical reconstruction, it may be that our historical conclusions are incorrect or perhaps not directly relevant. When reading the Pauline epistles, great care must be exercised that our historical reconstruction of their historical context not become the governing key to their interpretation.

Perhaps a simple illustration of this point will help to make it clear. When E. P. Sanders summarizes his conclusions regarding Judaism in the time of Jesus and Paul, he offers the following remark: “The possibility cannot be completely excluded that there were Jews accurately hit by the polemic of Matt. 23 [woes against the scribes and Pharisees], who attended only to trivia and neglected the weightier matters. Human nature being what it is, one supposes that there were some such. One must say, however, that the surviving literature [of Second Temple Judaism] does not reveal them.”⁶ The remarkable feature of this observation by Sanders is that it only grudgingly admits the remote possibility that Matthew 23, which contains a series of woes pronounced by Jesus against the scribes and Pharisees, may have hit a real, and not imaginary, target. Whether Sanders representation of Second Temple Judaism is correct or not, it is striking that, upon the basis of the assured results of his study, he is reluctant to admit that the account of Matthew 23 might accurately represent at least one strand of the Judaism in the first century of the Christian era. It is not my purpose in citing this rela-

tively small point in the larger context of Sanders' work to imply that this is characteristic of his work or that of other writers of the new perspective. Rather, it only illustrates how it is possible to put historical studies and their tentative hypotheses on a pedestal above that of the Scriptural texts.⁷ This we may not do.

In our evaluation of the new perspective in subsequent articles, we will need to keep these points in mind throughout. When it comes to Paul's understanding of the gospel and the doctrine of justification, the principal source and standard must remain the Pauline epistles. Neither the Reformation confessions nor the tentative conclusions of historical studies may stand alongside or parallel the Scriptures in determining Paul's teaching. Moreover, though the Reformation confessions are subordinate to the Scriptures, they must be granted considerable weight. Due to the tentativeness of the conclusions of historical studies—however useful and important they may be—they do not have the authority of Scripture or even of the confessions as the church's historical summary of Scriptural teaching.

Notes

1. Cf. N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 19-20.
2. Cf. D. A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 505: "At least in the Anglo-Saxon world, it is not going beyond the evidence to say that the new perspective is the reigning paradigm."
3. There are already a number of excel-

lent studies that are more or less critical of the new perspective and that offer a defense of the essential correctness of the Reformation's understanding of Paul. See, for example: Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, The Law, and Justification* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1996); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Frank Theilman, *Paul & the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994); Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2000); and Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

4. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 431, expresses the consensus: "I take the sources for studying Paul to be the seven letters whose authenticity is unquestioned: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, I Thessalonians and Philemon."

5. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 115.

6. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 426. One significant weakness in Sanders' approach is evident from this comment. The literature of Second Temple Judaism is no doubt a principal source for ascertaining its religious practice and teaching. However, what is represented in the literature may differ from what was the case in practice. The proverbial "man in the pew" often subscribes to a pattern of religion rather different from that formally expressed in the literature of his tradition. For our purpose this means that, even were the literature of Second Temple Judaism devoid of any "legalism" or legalistic

teaching, legalism may well still characterize the actual practice of segments of the Jewish community.

7. It is interesting that this comment of Sanders relates to the subject of the profile of the Pharisees in the New Testament. Though there is virtually no significant literary evidence that would help to identify Pharisaism in the first century (Josephus is the best source, though he writes as a defender of a party within Pharisaism), there is rather ample New Testament literary evidence regarding them. It is difficult to suppress the impression that the New Testament evidence, because it paints a rather unflattering picture of the Pharisees, constitutes something of an obstacle to Sanders' claims regarding the nature of Second Temple Judaism. For an excellent discussion of the subject of historical reconstruction in New Testament studies, see Moisés Silva, "The Place of Historical Reconstruction in New Testament Criticism" (in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], pp. 109-33. Silva offers a helpful discussion of the Pharisees and rightly notes that their "relaxation" of the requirements of God's law could encourage a kind of legalism in which one's standing with God is partly based upon moral achievement.

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Our Shameless Culture

Our Western culture still exists, but as a tottering ruin. Its structures are radically criticized, and many of its traditions rejected. Michael Lind's rant illustrates my claim. He argues that the Judeo-Christian tradition has contributed nothing to the development of a free, "tolerant, individualist, commercial society" in the West. He also contends that Christianity is plainly hostile to reason in its opposition to "feminism, gay rights, abortion, contraception, and freedom from censorship." A new post-Christian - nihilistic culture is emerging that leaves the old one far behind. It is characterized by permissiveness, which is what most people mean by the word "freedom" today. No one has authority over us, they claim.

God has been removed from the public square. Christianity is under attack. It has become a minority view. It is no longer the victorious Christianity which embraced the world and which grew yearly in vast numbers. It is on the defensive and retreating. When God disappears from one's worldview, nothing has a fixed place anymore. Each individual is then considered autonomous, free to create his own truth and his own norms for morality.

Influenced by Darwinism and scientism, a human being is no longer viewed as the image bearer of God. He is considered no more than an animal, a natural thing. Some even seriously argue that human life is no more valuable than the life of animals. Media executive Ted Turner remarked in a speech that

Christianity was to blame for having taught that humans are of higher value than animals. An editorial in *Wild Earth* magazine suggested that every problem on earth, whether social or environmental, is caused by humans, and the author concluded, "No matter what you're doing to improve life on Earth, I think you'll find that phasing out the human race will increase your chance of success."

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But freedom from God comes at a price. A society which privatizes faith, cutting itself from God is like cut flowers in a vase. Someone wrote, "Set in water, cut flowers can flourish for a few days, beautifully; but they soon wither because they are cut off from the soil that alone can nourish them. Cut away from God our human social existence will wither."

In other words, our western civilization, great in its technology, great in its organization, great in its military might, great in its vast wealth is without an answer to the basic human questions. It is left to live in a world - hopeless, forlorn, desperate, frustrated, full of agony, believing

that life lacks meaning and purpose. One pointed evidence that we are now living in a post-Christian culture is the loss of shame as a demonstrable consequence of the 1960s sexual revolution. Already in 1971 George Huntemann published a little book in Germany called *Revolution of the Shameless*. In it he told the story of shameless sex in our time.

Freedom from Taboos

For many people protests against the moral breakdown of society seem "irrational". They even wonder: "What after all is wrong with prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism, pornography, or drugs?" But these questions reflect a culture of irreverence, of debunking and devaluing moral norms rooted in the Christian tradition. It has led to a constant breaking down of taboos.

Some decades ago, *Newsweek* featured an article, "The Permissive Society," in which it stated: "There is a shattering of taboos in language, fashion, and manners. It is part of larger disintegration of the moral consensus in America." With the disappearance of shame there has been a corresponding rise in vulgarity. Many taboos on language have also disappeared during recent years.

Norman Mailer, novelist, journalist and anti-Vietnam protester, wrote about conditions in the United States: "I have indeed many obscenities in my books. And I must, although I hate it. But such language is the only metaphor that can express the situation which has brought about Vietnam." The so-called bathroom humour, which is prevalent in modern entertainment, has a lowering

effect upon society. It no longer distinguishes refinement of taste and snobbery; it reduces everything to its lowest common denominator. The obscene word or joke, the double meaning, is used with the intention to arouse the hearer's sensuality and provoke it to action, to act sexually even though only in the imagination.

The relaxation of moral standards is accompanied with the exaltation of sex. The ancient Greek goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of erotic love, has made a big comeback in the last generation or two. She used to be worshipped openly in the ancient world, either under that name or under her Latin name, Venus. Sexuality as such is not sinful, of course. It gives joy and delight, sustains the bond of a husband and wife, and propagates the human race. But worship sexuality, and one becomes its slave, unable to resist its demands, even when it impinges on the freedom and happiness of others. I am thinking of the many young people who have become victims of the sexual revolution.

Clearly, their attitude toward premarital sexual activity differs from what most parents allow. In North America many teenagers are sexually active. Researcher Su Yates commented, "for many kids, you're considered out of it if you're not having sex - it's a rite of passage." Hence, the essence of our shameless culture is unchastity. In Leviticus 18 unchastity is forbidden to Israel. Our shameless culture does more than tolerate unchastity, it demands it. It has even made sexuality a commercial commodity.

The Impact of the Media

In the course of three or four decades, television has changed the habits, knowledge, and the whole outlook on the world of a large majority of our Western society. It panders to the lower instincts and emotions and makes erotic relations dramatically attractive. It features R-rated programs with all their gore and foul language. There are very few expressions of human

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sexuality that television now regards as serious enough to keep private that is to say, as inappropriate for use as a theme for programs or commercials. The advertisers, the dollar, and the consumers control their content. Consequently, there are no restrictions, economic or otherwise, only the occasional warning to parents that the "following program contains adult material ... etc." The latter only serves to ensure that more, not fewer children will watch. Taboos continue to be broken in the pursuit of audiences. It seems that little can shock viewers anymore, least of all intimate revelations about personal lives. Some shows do not hesitate

to parade the most outlandish perversions, the most degraded appetites.

In youth-oriented films sex is almost always a principal subject, represented as a teenage obsession and, more often than not, the primary source of teenage identity. In *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media*, the authors observe that with few exceptions, teen films gratuitously exalt sex, picturing it as the chief goal and pinnacle of human experience. And they note that the larger issues of unwanted pregnancy, sexual disease, and social and emotional tragedies are ignored. But Christians should not be surprised about the developments in our culture. When there is no longer a fixed moral reference point by which to judge behaviour, everything becomes permissible, norms a delusion, and self-restraint without a purpose. As Raymond Aron said, "That God is dead means not just 'Everything is permitted' but also, and especially, 'Everything is possible.'"

What is Shame?

What is shame? It is an unpleasant feeling that overtakes us when we do something wrong or when we feel others see something in us they don't like. We may feel ashamed over humiliations experienced. Shame is born out of fear of people dishonouring our name. It is an emotion that makes us feel exposed. We prefer, then, to crawl far away to a place where no one can see us. At times we feel ashamed of doing what is right and then ashamed of not doing things which are morally wrong.



For example, Christian young people know that sexual promiscuity is wrong but most of their non-Christian friends think that they are odd to be so old-fashioned. Consequently, they feel ashamed of doing what is morally right in the sight of God. Many of us may feel ashamed when explaining why we are Christians. But the apostle Paul testifies, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16). The apostle Peter, however, was ashamed of his Lord and denied Him (Matthew 26:69-75). But our Lord is not ashamed to call His followers - His brothers (Hebrews 2:11) But He also said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38) But if we are innocent of any wrong doing, we don't need to feel ashamed. "Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression." (Psalm 19:13).

The idea of shame rests in part on keeping something secret. By hiding something we make it mysterious. Clothing gives us a sense of self-respect and identity. It is a means of keeping a secret, and if we are deprived of the means of keeping a secret, we are deprived of the secret. The mystery has gone. When we think of "modesty" and "sobriety" (1 Timothy 2: 9), there can be no doubt that the motive for this lies in the realization that sex is a profound mystery. And this means that this mystery must be preserved and not allowed to degenerate. In the Bible, the removing of clothing from specific parts of the body is often portrayed as shameful. When the

sons of Noah, Shem and Japeth, were told of their father's nakedness they took a garment and "laid it across their shoulders, then they walked backwards and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness." (Gen.9:23).

Modesty is a moral quality. Our society cannot survive without the control of impulse and self-restraint. It needs a well-developed feeling of shame for the protection of chastity.

Our society cannot survive without the control of impulse and self-restraint.

"All healthy men," G.K. Chesterton observed, "ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, know that there is a certain fury in sex that we cannot afford to inflame and that a certain mystery and awe must ever surround it if we are to remain sane."

The Root of Shame

Nowhere is the connection between shame and nakedness better expressed than in the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. The moment Eve listened to the beguiling voice of the Serpent and ate from the tree of good and evil, she lost her purity. She also gave some of the fruit to her husband, and he ate. Their act of disobedience had consequences for creation itself. It is now under the

bondage of corruption (Isaiah 24:4-6). From the moment they ate from the forbidden fruit their minds and consciences were defiled. They could no longer see things straight. They had lost everything.

In paradise Adam and Eve had lived in perfect harmony with one another and with God, in an atmosphere of trust and truth. They knew they were both naked and were not ashamed of it. (Genesis 2:25) Their nakedness and vulnerability posed no threat. But after the fall they looked at each other from a different perspective. They became anxious and felt alienated. They felt ashamed.

By transgressing God's law the harmony was broken between each other. They didn't feel safe anymore. They became afraid of God (3:8). They learned the antithesis between good and evil, modesty and immodesty, what is proper and improper behaviour. When they disobeyed God, the trust was broken. They lost their innocence. They saw their nakedness, and looked for cover and protection. In Adam's words, "I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (Genesis 3:10) Centuries later the psalmist wrote, "Oh that my ways are steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put shame when I consider all your commands." (Psalm 119:5,6).

Conclusion

As I analyse our culture of shame, I am struck by the similarity of Paul's description of the last days and our time. He wrote to his young disciple Timothy: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, boastful, proud, abu-

(continued on page 24)

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(continued from page 23)

sive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lover of pleasures rather than lovers of God." (2 Timothy 3: 1-4)

How should we react to all what we see and hear? It is difficult in a culture which is breaking down, to walk a straight path in obedience to the Lord; the temptations are legion for both young and old. But this is not a time for despair, our sovereign God has called us to bear witness for Him, to have a positive influence, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and never to compromise our faith.

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