

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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When Protestants Err on the Side of Rome: John Piper, “Final Salvation,” and the Decline and Fall of *Sola Fide* at the Last Day

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The doctrine which Martin Luther declared is the article by which the church stands or falls, which John Calvin affirmed as the principal ground on which religion must be supported, which forged the conflict with Rome during the Protestant Reformation, resulting in the largest schism in the history of the church—is the doctrine of justification. Justification by faith alone, *sola fide*, is the answer to life’s most profound questions: “How then can man be righteous before God? Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4).¹ How does man get into heaven? “Then [the Philippian jailer] called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household’” (Acts 16:29-31). The *Heidelberg Catechism* thus answers Question 60, “How art thou righteous before God?”

Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me,

the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.²

It is faith alone, to understand and assent to the Gospel, “without any merit of mine,” that saves sinners. Despite their differences, the Protestant reformers rightly understood and unanimously affirmed this vital doctrine, “a truth which all the reforming leaders in Germany, Switzerland, France, and Britain, and all the confessions which they sponsored, were at one in highlighting, and which they all saw as *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*—the point on which depends the standing or falling of the church.”³ It is the heart of the Gospel, as the apostle Paul explains:

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ

² All citations from the *Heidelberg Catechism* and other Reformed confessions are from the *Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics*, <http://reformed.org/documents/index.html>.

³ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 149.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*, and all emphases are added.

Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (*Galatians* 2:14-16)

If faith is something man must “do,” however, does that make it a work? Does the act of faith contribute to his justification? The Bible and historic Protestantism answer both in the negative. After Jesus fed the five thousand by multiplying bread and fish, the people sought Him again, but Jesus tells them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (*John* 6:26-27). They apparently misunderstand Him because they then ask, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (v. 28) and Jesus answers, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (v. 29). Christ gave an ad-hominem reply⁴ to contrast faith and works, not to conflate them. Later He also reveals “the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (v. 40).

The Instrumental Copula

But if it’s not a work, how then does faith justify a sinner in the sight of God? Question 73 of the *Westminster Larger Catechism* answers: “Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.” A logical proposition has a subject, predicate, and copula. In the proposition, “God is holy,” for example, *God* is the subject, *holy* is the predicate, and *is*, the verb *to be*, is the copula. The predicate is what describes the subject. The copula adds nothing—no content, no meaning—to the subject; it merely connects the predicate to the subject. Similarly, faith contributes nothing to salvation. It is not a work, but merely the instrument, the bridge—the

copula—that connects Christ’s redemptive work and His benefits to the believer. Charles Spurgeon illustrates how faith is the instrumental cause of justification:

Remember this; or you may fall into error by fixing your minds so much upon the faith which is the channel of salvation as to forget the grace which is the fountain and source even of faith itself. Faith is the work of God’s grace in us. No man can say that Jesus is the Christ but by the Holy Ghost. “No man cometh unto me,” saith Jesus, “except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” So that faith, which is coming to Christ, is the result of divine drawing. Grace is the first and last moving cause of salvation; and faith, essential as it is, is only an important part of the machinery which grace employs. We are saved “through faith,” but salvation is “by grace.” Sound forth those words as with the archangel’s trumpet: “By grace are ye saved.” What glad tidings for the undeserving!⁵

Neither faith nor works contribute to salvation, for faith is the instrumental cause, “the channel of salvation,” and good works are the fruits of it, “for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (*Ephesians* 2:8-9). What, however, does “that” and “it” refer to? *Grace*, *saved*, or *faith*? Discerning commentators recognize that they refer to all three—salvation by grace through faith—because

to refer back to any one of these words seems to be redundant. Rather than any particular word it is best to conclude that *τοῦτο* [Gk. ‘that’] refers back to the preceding section. This is common and there are numerous illustrations of such in *Ephesians*. For example, in 1:15 *τοῦτο* refers back to the contents of 1:3-14, in 3:1 it refers back to 2:11-22, and in 3:14 it refers back to 3:1-13. Therefore, in the present context, *τοῦτο* refers back to 2:4-8a and more specifically 2:8a, the concept of salvation by grace through faith.⁶

⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 22, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/grace.html>, November 12, 2017. Whenever possible, online versions of classic works were cited so readers may easily consult them.

⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 342-43. See also John Eadie’s Commentary on *Ephesians* 2:8-10 at Monergism.com, <https://www.monergism.com/commentary-ephesians-28-10>.

⁴ For more on this type of argument, see Tim Shaughnessy, “The Scripturalist Ad Hominem Reply,” *ThornCrown Ministries*, March 27, 2017, <https://thorncrownministries.com/blog/2017/03/27/srr-scripturalist-ad-hominem-reply>.

Commenting on this same passage, reformer John Calvin concurs:

Paul's doctrine is overthrown, unless the whole praise is rendered to God alone and to his mercy. And here we must advert to a very common error in the interpretation of this passage. Many persons restrict the word gift to faith alone. But Paul is only repeating in other words the former sentiment. His meaning is, not that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God.

Salvation, in other words, is entirely by God's grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), in Christ alone (*solus Christus*), to the glory of God alone (*solus Deo gloria*), based on the ultimate authority of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). These five *solas* of the Reformation encapsulate what Protestants believed and taught concerning salvation—all of which is the gift of God. Good works contribute nothing to salvation, but rather result *from* it in sanctification, which is why the Bible says to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (*Philippians* 2:12-13). Christians are primarily sanctified by God's word, not by works, as Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (*John* 7:17-19). Good works are the fruit, not the cause, of sanctification, though God uses certain works, such as the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading and study, and Biblical preaching as secondary means of sanctification, hence the command to “exercise yourself toward godliness” (*1 Timothy* 4:7).⁷ Martin Luther said it well:

Beware then of trusting in thine own contrition, or attributing remission of sins to thy own sorrow. It is not because of these that God looks on thee with favour, but because of the faith with which thou hast believed His threatenings and promises, and which has wrought that sorrow in thee. Therefore whatever

good there is in penitence is due, not to the diligence with which we reckon up our sins, but to the truth of God and to our faith. *All other things are works and fruits which follow of their own accord, and which do not make a man good, but are done by a man who has been made good by his faith in the truth of God.*⁸

The Last Days of Evangelicalism

To be a true evangelical, then, is to be a true Protestant, for it originally referred to one who affirms the material principle, *sola fide*, and the formal principle, *sola Scriptura*, of the Reformation. But the term has been robbed of its meaning by ecumenical and liberal trends in the church. It is therefore nothing new for compromising evangelicals like Bill Bright, Pat Robertson, Richard Mouw, J. I. Packer, and Chuck Colson to sign (and in Colson's case, co-author) “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” which affirms that “Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.”⁹ Or that leading evangelicals like Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bryan Chapell, President of Covenant Theological Seminary, Ligon Duncan, Presbyterian minister and President of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, and Chuck Colson once again, signed (Colson also co-authored) the “Manhattan Declaration,” which states in no uncertain ecumenical terms: “We, as Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians, have gathered...to make the following declaration.... We act together in obedience to the one true God, the triune God of holiness and love, who has laid total claim on our lives and by that claim calls us with believers in all ages and all nations to seek and defend the good of all who bear his image.”¹⁰ It's now commonplace for influential

⁸ Martin Luther, *On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church, in First Principles of the Reformation, or the Ninety-five Theses and the Three Primary Works of Dr. Martin Luther*, Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim, editors, R. S. Grignon, translator (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1883), 209, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/first_prin.v.iii.iv.html, November 12, 2017. Emphasis added.

⁹ “Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” *First Things*, May 1994, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/05/evangelicals-catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium>, January 31, 2018.

¹⁰ Robert George, Timothy George, and Chuck Colson, “Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience,” November 20, 2009, <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org>, November 31, 2017. The list of signatories includes several Protestant and evangelical leaders. See also Ligon Duncan's

⁷ See John W. Robbins, “The Means of Sanctification,” *The Trinity Review*, August 1997, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=158>; Douglas Douma, “Sanctification: Clark, Robbins, and Piper,” *A Place for Thoughts*, October 24, 2017, <https://douglasdouma.wordpress.com/2017/10/24/sanctification-clark-robbins-and-piper/>; and the Reformed confessions and catechisms on sanctification.

Protestants such as Michael Horton to praise the work of “important theologians” like Pope Benedict XVI and Scott Hahn, a former Presbyterian who apostatized to Rome:

In this remarkable book [*Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*], Scott Hahn has drawn out the central themes of Benedict’s teaching in a highly readable summary that includes not only the pope’s published works but also his less-accessible homilies and addresses. This is an eminently useful guide for introducing the thought of an important theologian of our time.¹¹

reasons for signing the Declaration at “The Manhattan Declaration: A Statement from Ligon Duncan,” *Reformation 21*, December 2009, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/the-manhattan-declaration-a-statement-from-ligon-duncan.php>. For a critique of the Declaration, see Richard Bennett, “The Roman Catholic Agenda Embedded in the Manhattan Declaration,” *The Trinity Review*, May/June 2010, <http://trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=270>:

Some of the [Manhattan Declaration] signatories have already faced criticism and have published their own justifications for why they signed. These include Joel Belz, Bryan Chapell, Ligon Duncan, Albert Mohler, Niel Nielson, and Ravi Zacharias gave his justification on his radio broadcast. Some prominent leaders have written their own statements on why they did not sign the Manhattan Declaration, including Alistair Begg, Michael Horton, John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, and James White. Sadly, some of these latter prominent leaders have sounded an uncertain sound by having a signer of the Manhattan Declaration lecture at their conferences – Albert Mohler spoke at Grace Community Church’s (MacArthur is pastor) Shepherd’s Conference and is scheduled to speak at R. C. Sproul’s 2010 Ligonier Conference. [Duncan and Mohler also spoke at the 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 Shepherd’s Conferences.]

¹¹ Michael S. Horton, praise for the print edition of *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, by Scott W. Hahn (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), <https://www.logos.com/product/30788/covenant-and-communion-the-biblical-theology-of-pope-benedict-xvi>, March 3, 2018. Other Protestant scholars endorsed the book as well. Evidently, Logos Bible Software wanted to capitalize on Horton’s endorsement by removing his “disagreement” from the original, which reads:

Even when one disagrees with some of his conclusions, Benedict’s insights, as well as his engagement with critical scholarship, offer a wealth of reflection. In this remarkable book, Hahn has drawn out the central themes of Benedict’s teaching in a highly readable summary. An eminently useful guide for introducing the thought of an

Why would someone like Horton—a United Reformed minister and J. G. Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California, the supposed bastion of Reformed orthodoxy, who has a ministry called “The White Horse Inn: For a Modern Reformation,” inspired by the historical inn where Protestants gathered for “frequent and regular open discussions on the key issues of Protestant theology” and “became the kindling fire for the larger English Reformation as a whole”¹²—laud the work of a pope and Roman Catholic apologist? For academic respectability?

important theologian of our time. (“Horton on Hahn,” *White Horse Inn*, November 17, 2009, <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2009/11/horton-on-hahn/>, March 5, 2018.)

But instead of learning an important lesson about praising “remarkable books” that promote Roman Catholicism and its popes, Horton shamelessly defended his endorsement (“Horton on Hahn”). An incisive comment left by John Bugay sums up the matter apropos:

My own personal objection stemmed from the fact that Scott Hahn is not merely a “scholar” who is doing a “study.” Hahn is a person with a very clear agenda, and his agenda is not only well-known, but it is revered and imitated by scores of lesser known apologists, very many of whom bring nothing but mud to the show.

In lending your name to the legitimacy of Hahn’s work, you are lending your good name, and the name of Westminster, California, to this whole movement. (And since you know James White, why not ask him what he thinks about that movement?)

You may think that, in the spirit of Christian dialog, you will somehow accomplish something useful. But in dealing with Hahn, you are not dealing with a person who can make any concessions at all. Moreover, official Rome has very clearly re-articulated what it thinks of the churches of the Reformation. Equivocation on the part of individuals who have (with good intentions) tried to negotiate at any level at all with Catholicism — including Packer, Colson, George, and others — have seen absolutely no official budge at all from Rome.

How many Protestants, even your own seminary students, are well enough equipped to profitably read a work by Hahn, much less a work by Ratzinger, and to be able to deal with it adequately?

In the meantime, you are someone not unimportant at a very important Reformed seminary. Why not commission a study of Ratzinger’s work from a Reformed perspective, and endorse that?

¹² “Why We Call Our Radio Program White Horse Inn,” *The White Horse Inn*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2016/01/why-we-call-our-radio-program-white-horse-inn/>, March 5, 2018.

Ecumenical collegiality? Or just plain hypocrisy?¹³ This rampant ecumenical confusion subverts Biblical Christianity, “for if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?” (*1 Corinthians* 14:8).

To be a true Protestant by conviction, one must understand what he protests—Romanism—and why—Rome’s false gospel of justification by faith and works amidst a quagmire of other false teachings.¹⁴ Many professing Protestants and evangelicals are often ignorant, however, not only of the Reformation but of Roman Catholicism as well, and sound more like the magisterium of Rome than Jesus, Paul, and the reformers when expounding their views of justification. Legalism or Nomism comes in various flavors, whether it’s Roman Catholicism, Shepherdism, Federal Vision or Auburn Avenue Theology, or the New Perspective on Paul, all of which oppose Biblical Christianity:

In the 1970s and 1980s the attack [against *sola fide*] came from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and the teaching of Norman Shepherd who taught justification by faithfulness. If you are not aware of this you can read O. Palmer Robertson’s *The Current Justification Controversy*, Mark Karlberg’s *The Changing of the Guard, A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy* edited by John W. Robbins, and *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church [OPC] and Beyond* by Paul M. Elliott. After Shepherd was dismissed from both the Seminary and the OPC without discipline, Richard Gaffin, Jr. continued to teach a doctrine of justification similar to Shepherd’s for

over thirty more years. Another attack from the Reformed camp has been from the Federal Vision or Auburn Avenue Theology of John Barach, Peter Leithart, Rich Lusk, Steve Schlissel, Tom Trouwborst, Steve Wilkins, and Douglas Wilson, among others, who teach...that baptism is what makes a person a Christian, that justification is by faith and the obedience of faith, and that the elect can become reprobate because they are not given the gift of perseverance, among other false teachings. The New Perspective on Paul of E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright also attack justification by faith alone, teaching instead that Paul is more concerned with the “identity or boundary markers” of who is in and who is not in the church, and not how a sinner can be declared righteous before a holy God.¹⁵

These false teachings pervade Protestant churches today, even though they have been marked and rejected by discerning voices and church councils.¹⁶ In addition to an initial and final justification or salvation—a common thread among these views—they promote other dangerous, often subtle, falsehoods. They redefine and betray sound Biblical teaching and their Protestant heritage. They affirm justification by faith alone on one hand, thereby confusing many by appearing orthodox, but undermine it on the other by introducing Romanist concepts of justification. They give a markedly different answer to the question of how we get to heaven, irreparably damaging vital Christian doctrines in the process. One prominent example is John Piper’s doctrine of “final salvation.” In his attempt to reconcile passages like *James 2:14ff.* and *Hebrews 12:14*—“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”—Piper offsets the doctrine of justification by faith alone with a lopsided emphasis on evangelical obedience, claiming that believers are required to have good works at the last judgment for God to *allow them into heaven*. Piper’s false teaching of “final salvation” is the product of both bad hermeneutics and a failure to harmonize Scripture consistently. It suffers from not

¹³ Horton compounds his hypocrisy by refusing to sign the Manhattan Declaration. See “A Review of the Manhattan Declaration,” *White Horse Inn*, December 1, 2009, <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2009/12/a-review-of-the-manhattan-declaration/>. Horton should ask himself if any of the reformers he admires would ever be caught dead endorsing a book by a Roman Catholic apologist that celebrates the pope, who, according to Horton’s own confession, is “that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 25:6). Yet this isn’t Horton’s first time doing this. See John Robbins, “The White Horse Inn: Nonsense on Tap,” *The Trinity Review*, September/October 2007, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=245>.

¹⁴ See John W. Robbins, “The Roman State-Church,” *The Trinity Review*, March/April 1985, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=42>.

¹⁵ Thomas W. Juodaitis, “The Reformation at 500: Is It Over or Is It Needed Now More than Ever?,” *The Trinity Review*, March/April 2018, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=333>.

¹⁶ See, for example, R. Scott Clark, “Forty-Three Years of Federal Vision Theology,” *The Heidelbergblog*, February 18, 2017, <https://heidelbergblog.net/2017/02/forty-three-years-of-federal-vision-theology/>.

one but at least six flaws, all of them fatal, for the doctrine of justification is fundamental to Christianity and affects all other doctrines. To get justification wrong, to get salvation wrong, is to get Christianity wrong.

Fatal Flaw #1: Justified by Faith at First, Saved by Works at Last

Piper's errors are nothing new,¹⁷ though he has become more explicit in twisting Protestant doctrine to make it fit his neo-legalist mold. In 1993 he stated,

Our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth in Christ's courtroom to demonstrate that our faith is real. And our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth to demonstrate the varying measures of our obedience of faith (cf. Romans 12:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). In other words, salvation is by faith, and rewards are by faith, but the evidence of invisible faith in the judgment hall of Christ will be a transformed life. Our deeds are not the basis of our salvation, they are the evidence of our salvation. They are not foundation, they are demonstration.¹⁸

Note the legal terms Piper uses to describe how works relate to "final salvation." He claims "our deeds are not the basis of our salvation, they are the evidence of our salvation. They are not foundation, they are demonstration," that is, *forensic* evidence in "Christ's courtroom," which, as we will see, undermines the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers and every legal status the believer has in relation to God. Recently he's been stressing that believers will have to present their works at the final judgment, not just for heavenly rewards, but as "necessary confirmation" that they are worthy of entering heaven, otherwise they won't get in:

Paul calls this effect or fruit or evidence of faith the "work of faith" (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11) and the "obedience of faith"

(Romans 1:5; 16:26). These works of faith, and this obedience of faith, these fruits of the Spirit that come by faith are necessary for our final salvation. No holiness, no heaven (Hebrews 12:14).

So, we should not speak of getting to heaven by faith alone in the same way we are justified by faith alone. Love, the fruit of faith, is the necessary confirmation that we have faith and are alive. We won't enter heaven until we have it. There is a holiness without which we will not see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

Essential to the Christian life and necessary for final salvation is the killing of sin (Romans 8:13) and the pursuit of holiness (Hebrews 12:14). Mortification of sin, sanctification in holiness. But what makes that possible and pleasing to God? We put sin to death and we pursue holiness from a justified position where God is one hundred percent for us — already — by faith alone.¹⁹

Piper's answer to the question of "getting to heaven" is *not* faith alone; it is *not* the same answer to the question, How can a person be right with God? Faith, for Piper, is not enough. Believers must also have good works, love, kill indwelling sin, and pursue holiness for God to allow them into heaven on the final judgment, because "we won't enter Heaven until we have it." This is a Roman reversal of the Protestant Reformation, because Protestants have only one answer to both questions—faith *alone*. And though he correctly explains that "we put sin to death and we pursue holiness from a justified position where God is one hundred percent for us — already — by faith alone," Piper betrays *sola fide* by conflating it with sanctification, for he plainly states that God requires good works, the "sanctifying fruit" of faith, as "necessary confirmation" for believers to enter heaven at the last judgment: "In *final salvation* at the last judgment, faith is confirmed by the sanctifying fruit it has borne, and we are saved through that fruit and that faith. As Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 'God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, *through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*'"²⁰

Some excuse Piper because he nevertheless affirms justification by faith alone. But those familiar

¹⁷ See John W. Robbins, "Pied Piper," *The Trinity Review*, June/July 2002, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=113>; and Timothy F. Kauffman and Tim Shaughnessy, "John Piper on Final Justification by Works," *The Trinity Review*, November/December 2017, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=331>.

¹⁸ John Piper, "What Happens When You Die? All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ," *Desiring God*, August 1, 1993, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-happens-when-you-die-all-appear-before-the-judgment-seat-of-christ>, November 12, 2017.

¹⁹ John Piper, "Faith Alone: How (Not) to Use a Reformed Slogan," *Desiring God*, September 13, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/sola-fide>, November 12, 2017.

²⁰ John Piper, "Does God Really Save Us By Faith Alone?," *Desiring God*, September 25, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-god-really-save-us-by-faith-alone>, September 30, 2017. Emphasis in original.

with church history know that heretics use Biblical and orthodox terms to affirm the Christian doctrines they reject, all the while redefining them into heresies by twisting Scripture. John Robbins thus warns that “Piper denies justification by faith alone while professing to accept Biblical soteriology—which makes his work all the more dangerous. The most effective attack on truth, the most subversive attack on the doctrine of the completeness and efficacy of the work of Christ for the salvation of his people, is always couched in pious language and Biblical phraseology.”²¹ Piper’s own words mark him guilty in a similar admonition he gives his readers:

Bible language can be used to affirm falsehood. Athanasius’s experience has proved to be illuminating and helpful in dealing with this fact. Over the years I have seen this misuse of the Bible especially in liberally minded baptistic and pietistic traditions. They use the slogan, “the Bible is our only creed.” But in refusing to let explanatory, confessional language clarify what the Bible means, the slogan can be used as a cloak to conceal the fact that Bible language is being used to affirm what is not biblical. This is what Athanasius encountered so insidiously at the Council of Nicaea. The Arians affirmed biblical sentences while denying biblical meaning. . . . The Arians railed against the unbiblical language being forced on them. They tried to seize the biblical high ground and claim to be the truly biblical people—the pietists, the simple Bible-believers—because they wanted to stay with biblical language only—and by it smuggle in their non-biblical meanings.²²

This is what Piper does to Protestant doctrines when he twists their meaning with heterodox interpretations of Biblical passages in a way that betrays both the Reformation and Scripture: “You can see what extraordinary care and precision is called for in order to be faithful to the Scripture when using the five solas. And since ‘Scripture *alone*’ is our final and decisive authority, being faithful to Scripture *is* the goal. We aim to be biblical first — and Reformed only

if it follows from Scripture.”²³ Recently he added, “My answer is — and it’s the answer of the entire mainstream of the Reformed tradition, and really not just Calvinists would talk this way; many others would as well — works play no role whatsoever in justification, but are the necessary fruit of justifying faith, which confirm our faith and our union with Christ at the last judgment.”²⁴ Piper teaches contrary views: He cannot affirm the Protestant position that believers are justified by faith alone, but at the last judgment good works will be required to forensically demonstrate their worthiness to enter Heaven, for the latter fatally undermines the former. Piper “embraces” Protestantism to redefine it, ultimately to reject it:

The stunning Christian answer is: *sola fide*—faith alone. But be sure you hear this carefully and precisely: He [Tom Schreiner] says *right with God* by faith alone, not *attain heaven* by faith alone. There are other conditions for attaining heaven, but no others for entering a right relationship to God. In fact, one must already be in a right relationship with God by faith alone in order to meet the other conditions.

“We are justified by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone.” Faith that is alone is not faith in union with Christ. Union with Christ makes his perfection and power ours through faith. And in union with Christ, faith is living and active with Christ’s power.

Such faith always “works by love” and produces the “obedience of faith.” And that obedience—imperfect as it is till the day we die—is not the “basis of justification, but...a necessary evidence and fruit of justification.” In this sense, love and obedience—inherent righteousness—is “required of believers, but not for justification”—that is, required for heaven, not for entering a right-standing with God.²⁵

This is Romanism at its core—a travesty of the Reformation. According to Piper, “there are other

²³ Piper, “Does God Really Save Us By Faith Alone?” Emphasis in original.

²⁴ John Piper, “Will We Be Finally ‘Saved’ by Faith Alone?”, *Desiring God*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/will-we-be-finally-saved-by-faith-alone>, March 5, 2018.

²⁵ Justin Taylor, “John Piper’s Foreword to Tom Schreiner’s New Book on Justification by Faith Alone,” *The Gospel Coalition*, September 15, 2015, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/john-pipers-foreword-to-tom-schreiners-new-book-on-justification-by-faith-alone/>, November 31, 2017. Emphasis in original.

²¹ John W. Robbins, “Pied Piper,” *The Trinity Review*, June/July 2002, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=113>.

²² John Piper, *Contending for Our All: Defending the Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 64-65, 66.

conditions for attaining heaven” that believers must meet based on his unbiblical and anti-Protestant distinction between justification and “final salvation.” And to assert that “inherent righteousness” is “required for heaven” is to side with Rome’s analytic justification and to reject the true Gospel and the Protestant doctrine of synthetic justification, as we will see below. Piper’s apple of “final salvation” doesn’t fall far from the tree of Roman Catholic dogma defined by the Council of Trent:

CANON IX. If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.

CANON XI. If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema.

CANON XXXII. If any one saith, that the good works of one that is justified are in such manner the gifts of God, as that they are not also the good merits of him that is justified; or, that the said justified, *by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life,*—if so be, however, that he depart in grace,—and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema.²⁶

Recall Piper’s view of good works being required for Heaven: “These works of faith, and this obedience of faith, these fruits of the Spirit that come by faith are necessary for our final salvation. No holiness, no heaven,” and “love and obedience—inherent righteousness—is...required for heaven.” Now note how he echoes Rome, “that the said justified, by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is...merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life.” In the same

way that Rome requires “the said justified” to have good works for the “attainment of that eternal life,” Piper requires good works from those who are in a “justified position where God is one hundred percent for us—already” as “necessary for our final salvation.” Despite his attempt to separate justification from “attaining heaven,” Piper’s error is essentially Rome’s error because both conflate sanctification with justification. “The fundamental error of the Church of Rome,” writes Scottish Presbyterian James Buchanan in his definitive work on and stalwart defense of *sola fide*,

consisted in confounding [Justification] with Sanctification.... Popish writers confounded, and virtually identified, them; and thereby introduced confusion and obscurity into the whole scheme of divine truth. For if Justification were either altogether the same with Sanctification; or if,—not being entirely the same, but in some respects distinguishable from it,—it was founded and dependent on Sanctification, so as that a sinner is only justified, when, and because, and in so far as, he is sanctified; then it would follow,—that Justification, considered as an act of God, is the mere infusion, in the first instance, *and the mere recognition, in the second, of a righteousness inherent in the sinner himself; and not an act of God’s grace, acquitting him of guilt, delivering him from condemnation, and receiving him into His favour and friendship. It would not be a forensic or judicial proceeding terminating on man as its object, and rectifying his relation to God;* but the exertion of a spiritual energy, of which man is the subject, and by which he is renewed in the spirit of his mind. Considered, again, as the privilege of believers, it would not consist in the free forgiveness of sins, and a sure title to eternal life; *but in the possession of an inward personal righteousness, which is always imperfect, and often stained with sin,—which can never, therefore, amount to a full justification in the present life, as the actual privilege of any believer.*²⁷

It is, as John Robbins explains,

²⁷ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of its History in the Church and of its Exposition from Scripture* (West Linn, OR: Christian Publication Resource Foundation, n.d.), 63-64, <https://www.monergism.com/doctrine-justification-ebook>, November 28, 2017. Emphasis added.

²⁶ *The Council of Trent*, Session VI, “On Justification,” StGemma.com Web Productions, 2005, <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm>, November 31, 2017. Emphasis added.

fatal to Christianity, for it makes the conclusion inescapable that we are justified by faith and works. Augustine defined faith as knowledge with assent. So should you. Practice is the result of faith, not part of faith. Faith is the cause; practice is the result. Bonhoeffer's statement is precise and true: Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes. If a person does not believe, he cannot be obedient, no matter how "good" his behavior is; and if a person believes, he will be obedient, as James says. To put it in more technical language, sanctification is a necessary consequence of justification; and justification is a necessary precedent for sanctification. But justification and sanctification are not the same. To confuse them is to be ignorant of the Gospel.²⁸

Piper has more in common with Rome than with the Reformation on these essential issues, but his error is subtler, more dangerous, because he's a professing Protestant who's aware of Rome's denial of justification by faith alone, and thus attempts to distance himself by creating a false dichotomy of a justification that is by faith alone, but a "final salvation" that requires "love and obedience— inherent righteousness—" and good works as public, legal evidences in "Christ's courtroom" for believers to be judged worthy of Heaven. This makes him at odds with the words of Christ himself: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). Piper affirms Protestant doctrine but nuances the terms in a way that opposes historic Protestantism, resulting in a neo-legalist retreat to Rome.

Fatal Flaw #2: To Be, Or Not to Be Saved

Timothy Kauffman exposed another fatal flaw in Piper's teaching, because it begs the question: "Is there such a case as a person receiving present justification and not maintaining right standing with God through good works?"²⁹ Piper claims the answer is no, but his own words betray him:

²⁸ John W. Robbins, "The Counterfeit Gospel of Charles Colson," *The Trinity Review*, January/February 1994, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=187>.

²⁹ Timothy F. Kauffman, "Piper on Justification," *The Bible Thumping Wingnut*, October 31, 2017, <http://biblethumpingwingnut.com/2017/10/31/piper-on-justification/>, January 31, 2018. See also Timothy F. Kauffman and Tim Shaughnessy, "John Piper on Final Justification by Works,"

Jesus says that doing the will of God really is necessary for our final entrance into the kingdom of heaven. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). He says that *on the day of judgment* he really will reject people because they are "workers of lawlessness." "Then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (Matt. 7:23). He says *people will "go away into eternal punishment" because they really failed to love their fellow believers:* "As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Matt. 25:45-46).

There is no doubt that Jesus saw some measure of real, *lived-out obedience to the will of God as necessary for final salvation.* "Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). So the second historic answer to the question, how is Jesus the path to perfection? has been that he enables us to change. He transforms us so that we really begin to love like he does and thus move toward perfection that we finally obtain in heaven.³⁰

Writes Kauffman:

Piper's 2006 work was written to instruct Christians on the need to obey Jesus' commands (*What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006, 17). We agree that Christians are to obey Jesus. One rather disconcerting observation, however, is found in Demand #21, in which Piper explains that Jesus will send some believers to hell "because they really failed to love their fellow believers." We cited this same example above to show that Piper means "final justification" when he speaks of "final salvation." We return to it now to demonstrate that Piper's wavering on justification is due partly to [Daniel] Fuller's tutelage, and partly to his own confusion.

To arrive at his conclusion that Jesus will send some believers to hell, Piper combines Matthew 7:23 "depart from me, ye that work iniquity" and Matthew 25:41-46, "Depart from me, ye cursed ... Inasmuch as ye did it not...". Piper thus shows that Jesus will send some people "'away into eternal punishment' because they really failed to love their

The Trinity Review, November/December 2017, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=331>.

³⁰ John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 160. Emphasis added.

fellow believers” (Piper, *Demands*, 160). The two passages say nothing of the sort. ...

Piper assures us that that could never happen: “None who is located by faith in God’s invincible favor will fail to have all that is necessary to demonstrate this in life” (Piper, *Demands*, 210). If so, then in what way does Jesus “really” send some of our “fellow believers” to hell on the Last Day?³¹

We will see later how Piper undermines the glorification of believers with his claim that Jesus “transforms us so that we really begin to love like he does and thus move toward perfection that we finally obtain in heaven.” He also twists *Matthew* 7:21-23 into requiring good works from believers for them to attain heaven: “Jesus says that doing the will of God really is necessary for our final entrance into the kingdom of Heaven.... There is no doubt that Jesus saw some measure of real, lived-out obedience to the will of God as necessary for final salvation.” Ironically, Christ condemns precisely what Piper advocates in this passage. Christ condemns these professing believers *because* they present their works as their hope of “attaining heaven” at the last judgment: “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (vv. 22-23). Due to his failed attempts at harmonizing his view of “final salvation” with Scripture, Piper misinterprets “doing the will of the Father” as the evangelical obedience that believers will have to demonstrate at final judgment. But Christ reveals what the will of the Father is in *John* 6:40, and it has nothing to do with presenting good works at the final judgment: “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” What’s “required for heaven,” in other words, is faith *alone* in Christ’s righteousness *alone*.

Fatal Flaw #3: The Analytic Justification of the Believer

Piper’s view of final salvation contradicts the heart of the Protestant doctrine of justification, for the latter is not only forensic but also *synthetic*. It is not the believer’s own righteousness (he has none, compare *Romans* 3:10-20), but rather Christ’s righteousness,

which is *extra nos* (foreign, or outside of us), that is imputed to him; as opposed to Rome’s *analytic* or subjective justification, in which, according to the Council of Trent, “we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are, just, receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure,”³² and *requires* inherent righteousness and good works at the last judgment, which is what Piper affirms, that “love and obedience—inherent righteousness—is...required for heaven.”³³ As R. C. Sproul explains the differences, note how indistinguishable Piper’s view of final salvation is from Rome’s view of justification:

The Roman Catholic view of justification is known as analytic justification because in order for God to justify a person in the Roman system, that person must be righteous by definition. Righteousness must inhere within the individual. This righteousness may be rooted in the grace of God, but it must become a personal, inherent, and experiential righteousness through the cooperation of good works....

In the biblical view, we cannot be justified unless the alien righteousness of Christ is added to us in imputation. Unlike the analytic view of justification, our works do not combine with this righteousness in order to make us intrinsically righteous. Our right standing with God is never based on our own holiness. Because the perfect righteousness of Christ is added to us, or more precisely, declared to be ours, the Protestant view is called “synthetic” justification.³⁴

James Buchanan defines justification as “a legal, or forensic, term, and is used in Scripture to denote the acceptance of any one as righteous in the sight of God.”³⁵ When God justifies a sinner, He *legally* pardons him and reckons him righteous, so “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (*Romans* 8:1). Synthetic justification is final, irreversible, and definitive even at the last judgment, for the believer has already been legally and eternally pardoned on the Cross of Christ, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (*1 Peter* 2:24). Why else did Christ proclaim, “It

³² *The Council of Trent*, “On Justification,” Chapter VII.

³³ Taylor, “John Piper’s Foreword.”

³⁴ R. C. Sproul, “Synthetic Justification,” *Ligonier Ministries*, n.d., <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/synthetic-justification/>, January 31, 2018.

³⁵ Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, 115.

³¹ Kauffman, “Piper on Justification.”

is finished!” (*John* 19:30)? Because “he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (*John* 5:24). Although Piper affirms forensic justification,³⁶ he contradicts it because in his view believers *cannot* be forensically justified now; instead, they must wait *until the final judgment* for God to evaluate their personal works of holiness and be publicly, legally declared worthy of entering heaven. Piper uses legal language to describe the believer’s admittance to heaven after they first “demonstrate” their analytic righteousness publicly in the “judgment hall of Christ”:

Our deeds will reveal who enters the age to come, and our deeds will reveal the measure of our reward in the age to come.... It sounds to many like a contradiction of salvation by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God — not of works lest anyone should boast.” Salvation is not “of works.” That is, works do not earn salvation. Works do not put God in our debt so that he must pay wages. That would contradict grace. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 6:23). Grace gives salvation as a free gift to be received by faith, not earned by works.

How then can I say that the judgment of believers will not only be the public declaration of the measure of our reward in the kingdom of God according to our deeds, but will also be the public declaration of our salvation — our entering the kingdom — according to our deeds?

The answer in a couple sentences is that our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth in Christ’s courtroom to demonstrate that our faith is real. And our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth to demonstrate the varying measures of our obedience of faith (cf. Romans 12:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). In other words, salvation is by faith, and rewards are by faith, but the evidence of invisible faith in the judgment

hall of Christ will be a transformed life. Our deeds are not the basis of our salvation, they are the evidence of our salvation. They are not foundation, they are demonstration.³⁷

Again, Piper favors Rome’s analytic justification because he claims that the deeds of believers “will be the public evidence brought forth in Christ’s courtroom to demonstrate that our faith is real.... The evidence of invisible faith in the judgment hall of Christ will be a transformed life.” These deeds are *legally* demonstrated in “Christ’s courtroom” as proof and are rendered a final *legal* judgment of the believer’s worthiness to enter Heaven. Piper has abandoned synthetic justification because believers are already fully justified before God *solely* on account of Christ’s active and passive obedience, and therefore no longer subject to another judgment or evaluation of their worthiness to enter Heaven. Piper contradicts himself by claiming that “God is already one hundred percent for us,” yet still subjects believers to a final judgment where they could be denied entrance to Heaven due to a lack of personal holiness, or “because they really failed to love their fellow believers.”³⁸ Even when he further contradicts himself by claiming that the latter will never happen, Piper nevertheless impugns the justice of God by advocating a form of double jeopardy, in which he adds a second judgment of believers on top of the judgment that Christ already satisfied on their behalf on the cross, as do all legalistic systems that advocate an initial and final justification or salvation. Piper cannot legally eat his justified cake now and still have it at the last judgment. By contrast, Jonathan Linebaugh rightly explains that

justification is God’s final judgment. As Wilfried Joest writes, “there is no second decision after justification.” In the language of the Reformation, the “sole and sufficient basis” for our justification before God’s eschatological tribunal is Jesus Christ (*solus Christus*), freely given (*sola gratia*) to sinners in the word (*solo verbo*) that creates the faith (*sola fide*) to which Christ is present. In Jesus, God’s future word has invaded the present in such a way that, by faith, we know the future: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who

³⁶ “...this reality of forensic righteousness, which is imputed to us on the first act of saving faith (as the seed of subsequent persevering faith), is different from transformative sanctification, which is imparted by the work of the Holy Spirit through faith in future grace” (John Piper, “What Do You Believe About Justification by Faith Alone?”, *Desiring God*, January 23, 2006, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-do-you-believe-about-justification-by-faith-alone>, January 31, 2018).

³⁷ Piper, “All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ.”

³⁸ Piper, *What Jesus Demands*, 160.

justified. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died” (Rom 8:33-34).³⁹

It’s therefore impossible for believers to be fully justified by faith alone in Christ’s righteousness alone, but then be placed on a lifelong probationary period requiring evangelical obedience until the final judgment when they are legally pronounced worthy of Heaven by a public demonstration of their works. The latter nullifies the former. Linebaugh further expounds the Biblical link between justification and judgment:

Here’s an important rule of theology: Talk about justification is talk about final judgment. As Peter Stuhlmacher, on the basis of numerous published investigations of the Old Testament and early Jewish literature, writes, “The place of justification is (final) judgment.” (For those interested in such things, scholars like Simon Gathercole and the late Friedrich Avemarie have shown that inattention to eschatological judgment as the context of justification in early Jewish literature is a major deficiency in the interpretation of the soteriology of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism in the tradition of E.P. Sanders’ 1977 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.) When Paul introduces justification in Romans it is within a discussion of the day when “God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (2:5). This day is the day of judgment, the time when “[God] will repay each one according to their works” (2:6). Hence the first “doctrine of justification” in Romans: “the doers of the law will be justified” (2:13). The future tense of the verb and the contextualization of this justification as taking place on the day of judgment (2:5-10, 16) suggests that for Paul, as for his Jewish forbearers and contemporaries, justification occurs at the final judgment.⁴⁰

This is the clear teaching of the Bible and historic Protestantism. Piper’s view on the other hand falls under the apostle Paul’s rebuke to the bewitched Galatians: “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? *Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?* Have you suffered so

many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?” (3:2-4).⁴¹

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³⁹ Jonathan Linebaugh, “The Good News Of Final Judgment by Tullian Tchvician,” *The Spiritual Life Network*, August 12, 2013, <http://www.thespiritlife.net/facets/devotional/57-exchanged/exchanged-publications/4079-the-good-news-of-final-judgment-by-tullian-tchvician>, December 3, 2017.

⁴⁰ See note 39.

⁴¹ This is an excellent point made by Patrick Hines, pastor of Bridwell Heights Presbyterian Church PCA. See his critiques of Piper on Sermon Audio, https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?speakeronly=true&currsection=sermons&keyword=Patrick_Hines; and his new podcast, *The Protestant Witness*, at ThornCrown Ministries, <https://thorncrownministries.com/the-protestant-witness/>.