

The End-Time Erosion of Justification by Faith

THE END-TIME APOSTASY

While the 'last days' began with the cross, the turning point of history, there is also teaching in the New Testament relating to the very end of human history (eschatology), the period immediately before the Final Judgment. An example is, **But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come** (2 Tim 3:1). This is a reference to the Great Tribulation mentioned by the Lord Jesus and the great delusion mentioned by Paul in 2 Thessalonians.

At the end there will be a great falling away of the professing church followed by persecution of the true church, which will be forced underground. The key to the falling away is the penetration of deceitful doctrines. While there are many false teachings abounding in the church in these evil times, only very precise sophistry will entangle churches that were historically founded on true doctrine. Any number of spurious, or even fantastic, heresies can easily permeate superficial groups, as evidenced in the shocking and dreadful things tolerated in charismatic churches world-wide in the last 20 years. But to cause problems to Reformed churches, Satan needs to carefully craft insidious but appealing errors supported by once trusted teachers.

This is what is going on today. This paper seeks to explain perhaps the worst lie that is being foisted on the Lord's people, a lie that our forefathers would be amazed anyone could fall for - that of works righteousness. Yet when dressed up in the right garb and presented by trustworthy preachers, even this lie will find toleration amongst many.

First, let us consider that the church is under special attack at this time, that the Lord's people need especially to watch and pray and be on their guard for error.

New Testament warnings about deception

There is so much teaching in the NT on this that I will simply take a few characteristic examples.

Matthew - the words and warnings of the Lord

For many will come in my name ... and will deceive many. (Matt 24:5)

The church is in view here not the world, for these deceivers come in Christ's name to his people. The 'many' are not obviously worldly people, or their deceit would have no power. They are respected 'Christian' teachers who deceive many in the church.

Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (Matt 24:11)

Note again the use of 'many'. This is not some isolated aberration, at the end there is a constant threat of false teaching and false leaders who have a reputation for power and godliness, even a prophetic status.

For then there will be great tribulation. (v21)

We can't go into the details about events at the end here, or the comparison with the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, suffice to say that the deception of the church is part of a series of judgments that permeate the end.

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (Matt 24:24)

Here we see two of the three words often used to describe Jesus' ministry (the third is 'power').¹ Some of the deceivers will work powerful miracles and this will sway churchgoers who resisted false teaching. Despite the claims of the Charismatic Movement, we have not yet seen any genuine miracles. This deception is to come. Note that even a genuine work of power is no evidence of a work of God (Matt 7:22-23). Only what conforms to God's word and manifests Christ by the power of the Spirit is trustworthy. The satanic purpose here is to try to lead astray the elect of God. The implication of the words is that this is impossible, the true elect are preserved by God's grace to the end. However, very many in the church who are not true believers will be deceived. If the truth were known, I believe that many members in evangelical churches are merely professing Christians, having been brought in by a false, Arminian gospel. We can expect to see many church-goers led astray, and that is what is already happening in charismatic and Arminian churches.

Apostolic warnings: 2 Thess 2

Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition. (v3)

Before the Lord returns in glory, there is a falling away. The bulk of the formal church will apostatise. The deception will lead to the rise of the man of sin, antichrist, someone who pretends to be Christ but serves Satan.

The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie. (v 9-11)

Again, a reference to lying wonders. Here we have the three words used of Christ's miracles used in conjunction with unrighteous deception. There is such a powerful attempt to deceive at the end that many succumb to the lie. In choosing this unrighteousness, and for refusing the truth, God sends a strong delusion upon them. This echoes the lie of Rm 1:25, which itself harps back to the lie of Satan in Eden - that man could be like God. Many of the deceits in the charismatic church are based on mysticism and the occult lie that man can be a god by releasing the spark of the god within. At the end this lie will permeate conservative evangelical churches also. Reformed churches will fall into error that in history only extreme groups like the Quakers, Shakers, Quietists, Camisards, Convulsionaires, Holiness groups, charismatics and Pentecostals fell into.

1 Tim 4:1

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

The elect cannot depart from the faith; though they may grievously backslide like David, they will never completely fall away since they are preserved in God's hand, graven on his palms. However, very many in the church, who are not genuine believers, will leave the faith as a result of spiritual deception and teachings that arise from hell. We can see hellish teaching rampant already in the charismatic churches, shocking things that beggar belief, but this is only the beginning of the deception; worse is to come.

¹ E.g. Heb 2:4 ('miracles' in KJV and NKJV is 'powers' in Greek). A true miracle of God (miraculum that is a wonder or portent) can be looked at from these three aspects: **Wonder**: Teraj *teras*, a wonder, miracle or prodigy that attracts attention; **Power**: *dunamij dunamis*, a mighty work or power of God; **Sign**: *shmeion, semeion*, a sign or mark of God's purpose and activity.

Revelation

Would that there were time to delve into this area deeply. Sadly we can only pick out two examples.

And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.' (11:1-2)

This is clearly a picture of the church (temple, altar, holy city, worshippers). The court refers to professing Christians while the treading down of the holy city is the corruption of worship and false religion. The formal and public church will fall away and be taken over by false, pagan and occult elements, but a pure testimony will remain in the hidden church, in the temple and altar areas away from the public. True worship continues in the core of the church, in true assemblies focused on God's truth. (The following measuring and two witnesses speak of the preservation of the true church and its corporate testimony.)

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth ... he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast ... He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived ... [He causes] as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. (Rev 13:11-15)

At the end there is a satanic strategy to take over mankind that has two aspects pictured here by the two beasts.² One is political, whereby nations are brought into submission by deceit, control and temptation; this beast is Satan's delegated authority to attempt to rule the world. The characteristics of this beast (v1-2) follow the sequence of world empires seen in Daniel 7.³ This is historical, political despotism dominated by sin, best exemplified by the final empire, that of Rome, the one which confronted the emerging kingdom of God.

The other is religious, whereby men are brought under devilish sway; this is personified by Romanism and its blasphemous priesthood - appearing like a lamb but speaking (teaching) like the dragon. The first beast out of the sea (uncivilised nations, ungodly humanity) culminates in the lawless man of sin, antichrist, who rules the earth. The second beast, out of the earth (civilised society, kingdoms of the earth) is the religious leadership that causes men to worship the first beast. There is a strong implication that Roman Catholicism will dominate the religious affairs of antichrist at the end, having absorbed or conquered other faiths. Antichrist is not just the Pope but the antichristian world system uses Romanism, or something very similar, to its own political ends.

The point for us here is that it echoes the teaching of the Lord and his apostles that a great deception will arise at the end and that this deception is part of a satanic strategy to subvert and control people through religion and political power. False religions are easier to overcome, but churches founded on Reformed principles are more difficult and require a more intellectual strategy. Those who resisted false teachings may be subverted by works of great power that mimic the miracles of the Lord. Those Christians who resist will be persecuted as Jesus prophesied.

² Technically there are three beasts in Rev 13: the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. The dragon is Satan himself [Rev 12:9]; so we can speak of two beasts that serve his purposes on the earth.

³ Babylonian Empire (lion), Persian Empire (bear), Alexander's Greek Empire (leopard), followed by the iron teeth of Rome.

Summary

In the last days, that is the time since the cross, Satan wages war on the saints (Rev 13:7 prophesied by Daniel in Dan 7:21). This warfare is by persecution from political systems and worldly rulers, but more effectively by the deception of false doctrines arising from spiritual opposition ('doctrines of demons' 1 Tim 4:1). At the end of the last days, this warfare increases in intensity; in particular the deceitful teachings grow in number and become more insidious.⁴

The Lord Jesus warned his disciples that the end would be a time of great heresy and deceit, which would cause many to fall. The apostle Paul warned that ignoring the truth and succumbing to error results in a powerful delusion. The acceptance of false doctrine is tantamount to idolatry since all error elevates man, dishonours the work of Christ and denies God. It is a preferring of man's ideas (spawned by Satan) instead of God's truth and is thus anathema (cursed).

The job of pastors (shepherds) is not just to feed the sheep but to sound the alarm, point out error and defend the sheep from wolves by teaching the truth. This means confronting modern issues, fearlessly identifying false teachers and contending for the true faith.

There are huge numbers of errors, both doctrinal and practical, in the evangelical church today. These range from the rampant Arminian Gospel, aberrations of church practice, ecumenism, Charismatic delusions of all sorts, social Gospel variations, occult / mystical ideas and practices, liberal theology, psycho-heresies, sacramentalism, shamanism, Dispensationalism, weakened (Amyraldian) Calvinism and so forth. But the key assault at the end will be on cardinal issues such as: the absolute sovereignty of God, the Lordship and pre-eminence of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the Gospel of free grace, the complete depravity and inability of man. However, one of the enemy's main targets has always been to undermine the crucial doctrine of justification by faith.

Unification of church denominations in works righteousness

One of the key errors in history is the attempt to remove *faith alone* from justification. The glory of salvation is that it is all of God, 'salvation is of the Lord'.⁵ The foundation of the error is to deny this and claim that salvation is either all of man, or that man co-operates with God in salvation by choosing an existent, general salvation via his unfettered free will.

Either way the root of the error is works righteousness; that there is ability in human beings to contribute to salvation, that man can perform meritorious acts in salvation. All false teaching regarding the doctrine of salvation avers that man can achieve, in part or in whole, his own righteousness.

The satanic lie is that man can claim part of the glory in salvation. The progress of this lie has been expressed through different theological systems in order to corrupt different church denominations. Just as one natural pest will afflict roses but another ruins apples, one manifestation of works-righteousness more easily perverts Baptists while another corrupts Presbyterians; yet another better infiltrates charismatics, and so on. Before we

⁴ I believe that there are more heresies abounding in evangelical church at the present time than at any other time in history. All the previous historical errors are abounding today in some form or another, even the most astounding and foolish. Plus, there are new errors based on occultism that had not penetrated the church in earlier times.

⁵ Ps 3:8, 27:1, 37:39, 38:22, 50:23, Isa 12:2; Jer 3:23; **Jonah 2:9**; Rm 1:16; Rev 7:10, 19:1.

show how this lie has expressed itself in history, we need to confirm what the Bible teaches about justification.

THE TRUE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

It is fair to say that, apart from the doctrine of the penal, substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ for the elect alone applied by sovereign grace, justification by faith alone is perhaps the key distinctive evangelical and reformed teaching. In terms of walking worthily and in truth, it is utterly crucial to understand the Biblical explanation of our righteous standing before God.

In contending for the faith against heresy, justification by faith is paramount and stands as a litmus test to identify many errors. To enjoy genuine assurance of salvation, scriptural justification must be understood. Martin Luther upheld this when he said that justification was the article of faith that marks whether a church is standing or falling. Consequently, it is a doctrine that is continually attacked.

What is the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone?

The verb 'justify' is from *dikaio,w dikaioo* [Strong's 1344], which means 'to render righteous, to declare someone to be righteous, to exhibit someone to be righteous (e.g. Matt 11:19, 12:37). The cognate nouns are: *dikaiosune*, 'righteousness' Rm 1:17; *dikaiosis*, 'a declaring righteous' (action) Rm 4:25; *dikaioma*, 'a declaring righteousness that places one in a permanent state or relationship' (result) Rm 1:32. The Biblical words all suggest an action of God involved in declaring someone righteous. Many consider that the best concise definition is that of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Chap 11):

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Whole books have been written on this subject,⁶ but a fuller definition would be:

Justification is the act of God whereby he declares his elect righteous in time; forgiven, pardoned and delivered from sins and constituted legally righteous before the throne of grace. It was decreed in eternity, for the elect alone, whereby they were considered as 'in Christ'. It was effected in time by the penal and substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ whereby the elect's sin was vicariously paid for by their sacrificial substitute and the curse of the law removed when Christ became sin for the elect.

As well as forgiveness of sin and being declared 'not guilty', the elect are made legally righteous by the imputation (or accounting) of the obedience of Christ to the sinner. This righteousness is the obedience of Christ to every demand of the law in his life.

Justification is by faith alone as the instrument, or means, through which it is effected. This faith is given by God only to the elect. Faith is not the power that

⁶ For example, James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Banner of Truth, standing at over 500 pages. A paraphrased version of Buchanan's work was made by Grace Publications, called *Not Guilty*, 96pp. Popular works include, *Justification by Faith Alone*, MacArthur/Sproul/Beeke/Gerstner/Armstrong, Soli Deo Gloria, 188pp and *Faith Alone*, RC Sproul, Baker, 200pp.

achieves justification, or the basis of it, or man's righteousness,⁷ but merely the instrument God uses to impart grace. There are no human works involved in this. The sinner's sins do not hinder God's effectual grace, and the sinner's good works (even those under the influence of the Spirit of God at the time of his conversion) do not contribute to his righteousness. The perfect, meritorious work of Christ for the sinner and outside the sinner is the only work involved. God is satisfied with this work.

Justification leads to sanctification in life and immediately impacts the believer as God adopts and accepts the elect sinner into the family of God.

It is essential to affirm that the work of salvation is entirely in God's hands. There is no contribution made by man in any sense; even his believing and repenting are gifts by God.⁸ Man does not even co-operate with God in the work of conversion by believing; he receives grace to believe after a work of the Spirit in his heart. So justification is by faith alone, and this faith is a gift given by God as the instrument of receiving justification. When a sinner is declared as 'not guilty', there is nothing he can congratulate himself for, he can but worship in thanks that God called and drew him to Christ.

All the glory in man's conversion belongs to God alone.

This is why the Reformers coined a series of propositions to describe salvation using the Latin word for 'alone':

<i>Sola Gratia</i>	Grace alone
<i>Sola Fide</i>	Faith alone
<i>Solos Christos</i>	Christ alone
<i>Sola scriptura</i>	Scripture alone
<i>Soli Deo gloria</i>	Glory to God alone

Salvation is by God's grace alone, through the instrument of faith alone, and is found in Christ alone. It is based upon the word of God and not any other religious writing, and is for a testimony to the glory of God alone.

What is critical in justification is 'sola fide'; that it is through God given faith alone and not by human works, religious works or by any other contribution from man, including human faith.

Soon after the Lord ascended and the church began to expand, men began to add to this doctrine. The natural reaction of man is to find a way to co-operate with God in salvation. Thus began the long road of heresy of adding human righteousness to justification.

⁷ Prof. David Engelsma, The sinner's faith, as an activity or work, is not his righteousness with God. When the Bible teaches that Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3ff.), the meaning is not that God decided to regard Abraham's act of believing as the righteousness Abraham needed before God. Rather, faith was counted as righteousness inasmuch as faith lays hold of and receives the obedience of Christ. The object of faith, or faith with respect to its object, namely, the crucified Christ, is counted for righteousness. *Forum on Justification by Faith* to subscribers.

⁸ Jn 6:29; Acts 5:31, 11:18, 14:27, 18:27, Rm 2:4; Eph 2:8-9, Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:25-26.

EARLY CHURCH PERVERSIONS OF JUSTIFICATION

Judaizers

Perhaps the earliest attack on faith alone was by the Judaizing elements in the Jewish Christian church. We see Paul being forced to combat this in the book of Galatians. Certain Jewish teachers insisted that Christians had to keep the law of Moses legalistically. God's justification was not enough, man had to add his works righteousness to be accepted with God. Paul's response is clear:

A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ 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. (Gal 2:16)

This error set the scene for future heresies, adding human legalistic works to faith and grace.

Ebionism

After the death of the apostles, this error formalised into a cult called Ebionism, which was a mixture of Essene⁹ folk from Qumran and legalistic Christians. Eventually this sect exalted the law, rejected the letters of Paul and rejected the pre-incarnate life and divinity of Christ. Works righteousness immediately detracts from the glory of Christ and leads to further error where the Lord is denied.

Pelagianism

Pelagianism was an 5th century system of works righteousness that was developed by the British Celtic monk Pelagius and vigorously confronted by Augustine of Hippo. This denied the total depravity of man, the imputation of Adam's sin to all men, election, the need of redemption and essentially asserted that man could achieve his own righteousness. It elevated man's free will and claimed that man could obey the law sufficiently unto salvation, aided by Christ's example. It was the strongest teaching that contended against the sovereignty of God in salvation.

Semi-Pelagianism

Not long afterwards, Semi-Pelagianism arose seeking to reconcile Augustinianism (the doctrines of grace, denial of human ability) with Pelagianism. Key influences in this amorphous movement were the ascetic monastic, John of Cassian (d. 433) and Faustus, bishop of Riez (d. 490). This set the foundation for many future compromises on free grace. It taught that man, though fallen, was not spiritually dead and has some power to do good but needs grace as well found through the Bible. Man's will co-operates with the Spirit in regeneration and initiates it by free will. Man's decision is supreme and election is denied. This synergistic system¹⁰ (the basis of Arminianism) forms the essence of all future synergistic errors, as we shall see. All such systems deny election, total depravity, limited atonement and justification by faith alone.

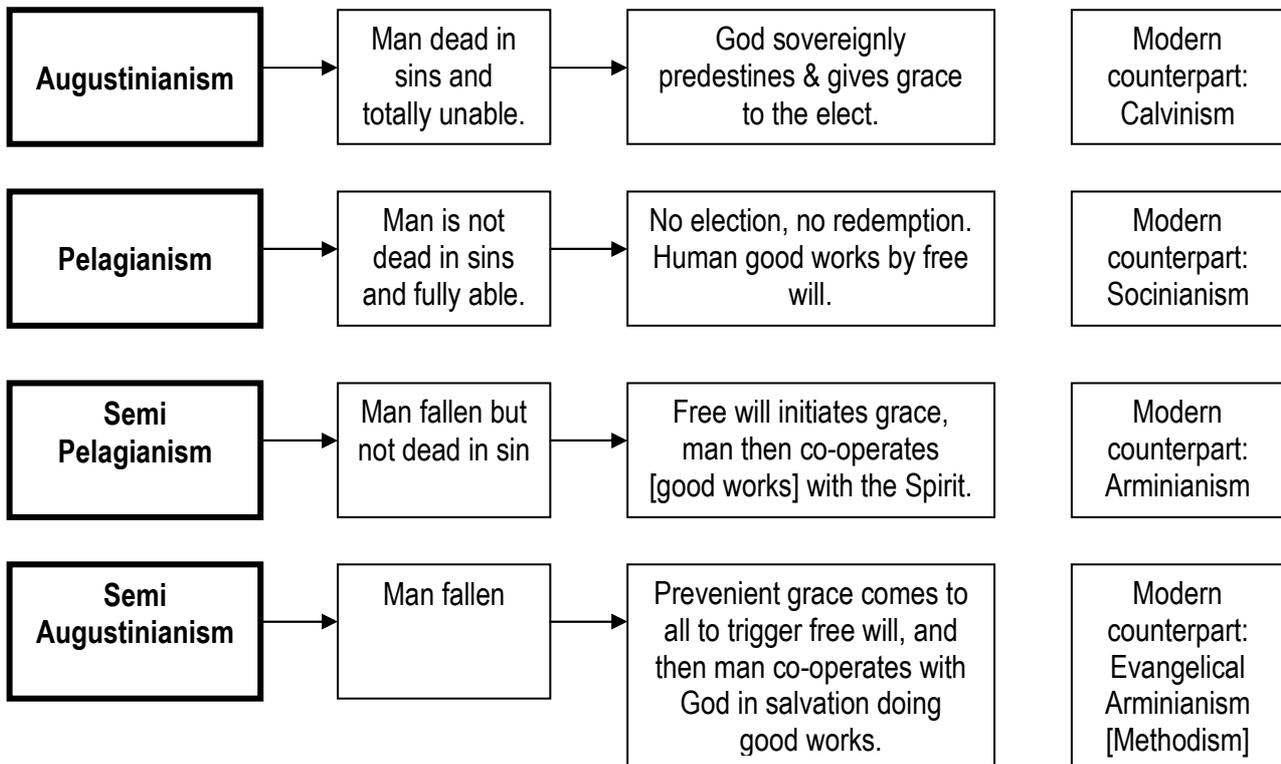
Semi-Augustinianism

This was a reaction in the Pelagian controversy against Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, which it condemned, in 5th century Gaul (France). It was mainly established by Caesarius the bishop of Arles (470-543). It proposed a moderated Augustinianism at the Second

⁹ A Jewish sect based upon secret doctrines, communism, rejection of animal sacrifices and asceticism. They were based in a secluded community at Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were later discovered.

¹⁰ Synergism [from the Greek *syn* – 'together' and *ergon* – 'work', hence 'combined work or action'] is the idea that the human will co-operates with God in salvation; as opposed to monergism, [from the Greek *monos* – 'one' or 'single and *ergon* – 'work, hence 'single work or action'] the Biblical belief that God alone is the efficient cause of salvation, the human will cannot contribute; God is sovereign.

Council of Orange (529), which became the foundation of Roman Catholic views on the atonement for the Middle Ages. Main teaching: Grace comes to all enabling man to choose God and perform good works necessary for salvation. It also teaches: the denial of reprobation and affirmation of baptismal regeneration.¹¹ Essentially it teaches that an unbiblical prevenient grace enables men to exercise free will to then co-operate with God in salvation by good works, rather than the Semi-Pelagian view that free will initiates grace. It denies irresistible grace and particular decree of redemption. To clarify:



Romanism

As the Christian church developed, it was not long before perversions in leadership and the nature of the church arose. Within 200 years monarchical bishops were ruling over several churches and a number of unbiblical, authoritarian church offices were established (such as priest, presbyter, bishop and metropolitan bishop as opposed to elders). Cyprian (b. 200) taught that the bishop was the absolute vice-regent of Christ, supreme over church members and other officers. Churches like those at Jerusalem, Ephesus, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome vied with each other to be the most important. In time, Rome assumed the ascendancy and the bishop of Rome became the supreme leader of the institutional Christian church. Doctrinal errors and aberrations of praxis began to proliferate.

Perhaps the key error taught by Rome was the corruption of justification. Rome denied (and still denies) justification by faith alone. Romanism is essentially a Semi-Pelagian religion, based on works righteousness. It teaches the necessity of the works-righteousness of the sinner and also of the church leadership officiating various supposed means of grace.

¹¹ The separation of Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism is a historical fact as evidenced in Roman Catholic monastic squabbles, but the doctrinal tenets are somewhat confused and interlocking. Both are Semi-Pelagian but the latter is more moderate.

Rome can make statements that at first sight seem Biblical, such as, justification is by faith 'on account of the merits of Jesus Christ only'. But 'faith' here does not mean reliance upon Christ alone. Roman Catholics understand this to mean the Spirit's influence in believers that produces righteousness in them, so that they begin to fulfil the law (as in Semi-Pelagianism or Semi-Augustinianism). It is a gradual progression of works righteousness. Rome also teaches that justification can be received in baptism and can be lost. The Council of Trent stated clearly that it depends, at least in part, upon human merit. Trent confused justification with sanctification (C. 16. Canon 24), thus stating that it is a gradual process. [This is another common error, e.g. seen in many early Anabaptist groups.] Roman Catholicism is based upon human merit in salvation, both in its initiation and continuation. Roman justification is not by grace-given faith alone.

We should also note another characteristic of false teaching here. Heresies often take Biblical words and frame propositions that appear at first sight to be Biblically sound. Word are used that have a scriptural and theological meaning, but are defined differently, so that to the false teacher the meaning of the doctrine is different. For instance, 'faith' for Roman Catholics does not mean the same as 'faith' in the scripture.¹² This is a deceitful technique used to fool adherents and defend from external attacks. Defending the faith calls for careful analysis, application, trust in God and wisdom.

ARMINIANISM

The error of Rome held sway for hundreds of years, aided by the lack of vernacular Bibles and the sanctions of tight political control. This was truly the Dark Ages. However, the Reformation, in a mighty act of God, changed this forever by letting the truth out. This was done pre-eminently by providing numerous Bible translations, beginning with the German Bible of Luther; but believers were also greatly helped by the sound teaching of the magisterial reformers, confessions, and catechisms. In a fairly short period, Luther's teaching was able to train young ploughboys to outsmart priests in town centre debates.

For a time the dangers of works-righteousness were brought into the open and discarded by those seeking salvation. This was intolerable to the enemy of God. Despite various religious wars in Europe to turn the clock back, the cat was out of the bag and the papal system could not control the situation with propaganda, torture or political threats. A new tactic had to be found.

Within a hundred years the new strategy (actually a refurbishment of an old system) was Arminianism. This is a restatement of Semi-Pelagianism, at root not very dissimilar to the Semi-Pelagianism of Romanism, being the synergism of man co-operating with God in conversion.¹³ However, in reality man has the upper hand since God is deemed powerless, after procuring the means of salvation, while man can either accept or reject this universal cheap grace by free will choice.

¹² The Baptist Andrew Fuller used this technique of constantly and arbitrarily redefining words to such a degree that it is exceedingly difficult to penetrate his meandering thinking and many readers are fooled to believe his false propositions. [See 'Fullerism'.]

¹³ *'Arminianism came from Rome, and leads thither again,'* (Augustus Toplady). There is evidence, that the introduction of Arminianism into England was the work of Jesuit priests in conjunction with Archbishop Laud. John Owen also connected Arminianism with Jesuit activity (*Display of Arminianism*, Works Vol. 10, p16, Banner of Truth). Romanism sought to infiltrate English Calvinism with Arminianism in an effort to later bring about Romanising influences in the kingdom.

The essential theological points of Arminianism will be well-known to readers of this paper, but it is important to explain that this system denies justification by faith.

Firstly, Arminian faith is something man does arising from human power; it denies that true faith is a gift of God or that man is spiritually dead, having no power to self-determination and unable to do any good work. Most Arminians teach that man first needs a general, unbiblical, prevenient grace, which can be accepted or resisted, but this is not the grace of the Bible that sovereignly regenerates and gives faith.

Secondly, Arminianism denies justification by faith alone as unconditionally resulting from God sovereign grace. It denies that man must first be regenerated. It denies that election is unconditional. For the Arminian, the key foundation is the human faith of man, which kick-starts the work of salvation in time. Election is merely the foresight of God knowing who would exercise faith. Faith is thus a righteous work of man that results in justification. Arminianism is a theology of human works-righteous.

As with all work-righteous systems, it elevates man and is thus useful for men seeking to have authoritarian power over churches. It is not surprising, therefore, that most (almost all) the churches in the Charismatic Movement are Arminian, some radically so (such as Roger Forster's *Ichthus* Church in London). Arminianism has also taken over most of the evangelical churches in the UK; only a few independent, Presbyterian and Strict Baptist churches are solidly Calvinistic. Some Grace Baptist churches claim to be Reformed but many are Amyraldian in practice. Many folk in the Free Churches think they are Reformed but they too have fallen for the Free-Offer Gospel and Amyraldism. Those that have been in this mould for some years are now gradually succumbing to charismatic and liberal influences bit by bit. Error always develops and degenerates systems; it does not stand still.

So, the scene was set for the next attack on Biblical faith to pervert those conservative churches following Reformed principles. This attack came in the form of Fullerism about 200 years later.

FULLERISM IN GREAT BRITAIN

Fullerism is the idiosyncratic and deeply erroneous teaching of Andrew Fuller; a British Baptist who lived from 1754 to 1815, who is best known for his support of the pioneer missionary, William Carey. Fuller's teaching is currently in the spotlight being championed by such Calvinistic folk as John Piper, Peter Masters, Michael Haykin, Tom Nettles, Errol Hulse, Robert Oliver, Crawford Gribben, The Banner of Truth Trust and *Sword & Trowel* Magazine.

Fuller's teaching is complex and difficult to summarise as it is so confusing, badly communicated and heterodox. However, it is essentially a hybrid of Amyraldism and Governmental Theory (Grotianism),¹⁴ mixed with a liberal treatment of scripture and even some Pelagian and Socinian elements.

¹⁴ The Governmental Theory was first codified by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), based upon Abelard's earlier Moral Influence theory of the atonement. It proposed that: Christ did not die as a substitute for man's sin, but suffered as a perfect example of a man who honoured the law. This death is then accepted by God to satisfy the law that sin demands death. An emphasis upon moral law as the natural governing feature of human actions known to the conscience, not as the rule of God's will. God controls the world by moral influence rather than predestination. Men are encouraged to obey moral law rather than God decreeing the salvation of particular sinners.

What this means is that Fuller taught an unbiblical view of law and atonement. He elevated the powers of man, denying the effects of the Fall and total depravity. He had extreme views about salvation and even denied the penal, substitutionary death of Christ and imputation (of Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness). Consequently, he denied unconditional election, justification by faith and effectual calling. For Fuller, justification is by human righteousness obeying the (un-revealed, universal) moral law; man repents from his own volition on seeing the cross as merely a good example. Even sanctification is by human endeavour without any involvement of the Holy Spirit. He even taught an early form of the Free Offer - faith as the duty of man to improve himself by his own efforts.

Fuller's theology is just about the worst type of works-righteousness that can be imagined coming from someone who called himself a Calvinist. What is worse is that he used disingenuous methods in his writings to give false impressions. He changes the meaning of theological words to suit his current purpose and claims to teach Biblical concepts (like election) but denies what the Bible teaches about these concepts in practice.

Fuller taught that justification comes about through understanding the nature, reason and fitness of things, being aware of God by nature, by obeying the moral law and accepting any revelation from God interpreted by reason.¹⁵ Justification is thus divorced from Christ's redemption. As natural, human repentance follows hearing the Gospel, a man is declared righteous by God - justification thus follows fleshly belief & repentance. The atonement is objectively for all but subjectively and conditionally only for those who have a mind for it; thus man chooses to get right with God unaided by grace.¹⁶ Effectively, a man's own righteousness saves him; indeed William Huntington (and others) charged Fuller with this error. He rejects the scriptural teaching that man is God's enemy until he is justified (Rm 4:5), teaching that man has a holy disposition before being justified in order to reach for God.¹⁷

Fuller was reacting to the high Calvinism of his day represented in Baptists like John Gill and John Brine, but also Anglicans like Augustus Toplady and James Hervey. He absorbed the Governmental Theory of the atonement promoted by Grotius as well as the New Divinity ideas from America. To this was added the liberalism of the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians. Despite criticising the Amyraldism of the puritan Richard Baxter, his own teaching is a more radical form of Amyraldism than Baxter's. The net result was a theology that was almost Pelagian and Socinian in some aspects, but is certainly liberal (in its cavalier treatment of scripture) and Amyraldian.

However, because of his close connection with Carey, Fuller has been applauded for promoting the Gospel, and his theology treated as encouraging evangelism amidst an arid Hyper Calvinism. The truth is that people like Gill and Toplady were not Hyper Calvinists, but were consistent high Calvinists. Many of the high Calvinists preceding Fuller, and ministering in his lifetime were far more successful in winning souls that he was and pressed the demands of faith and repentance to their hearers. The history claimed by Fuller's apologists is a false caricature.

However, Fuller's teaching brought an influence of works-righteousness into Particular Baptist circles and helped to lead to the later development of the Free-Offer, decisionism and easy-believism. What is interesting is that there is a huge amount of interest in Fuller

¹⁵ Fuller, *Works*, Vol. 2, p349; Vol. 3, p781.

¹⁶ Fuller, *Works*, Vol. 2, p709.

¹⁷ Fuller, *Works*, Vol. 3, p714-719.

at this time where several streams are pushing work-righteousness on to evangelical people. Several influential preachers are focusing on Fuller in 2007 and Michael Haykin has persuaded Paternoster Press to publish all his works in 12 volumes for the first time.

While Arminianism has been the route to push works-righteousness on to charismatic and many free churches; Fuller has been the means to do the same in Baptist circles and a few Presbyterian groups. His impact was mainly upon English churches but his influence today is much wider, and increasingly popular in the US.

New Haven Theology & OBERLIN THEOLOGY IN THE U.S.

New Divinity / New Haven Theology

New Divinity began as a development of *New England Theology*, a tradition following the rational system of the Calvinist revival preacher Jonathan Edwards. His followers continued this method of theoretical reasoning, but gradually began to drift from his pure Calvinism.

New Divinity arose out of the ideas of Edward's friends Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), and Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) who introduced the governmental view of the atonement. Further deterioration continued under Timothy Dwight (1752-1817, Edward's grandson and President of Yale College). The power of reason and human will became prominent thus diminishing man's depravity, alongside a new emphasis on law-work.

Later, Nathaniel Taylor (1786-1858) took the rationalistic erosion yet further and initiated what became known as *New Haven Theology*. This taught that man has the power of free-will and self-determination. Total depravity and the imputation of Adam's sin was abandoned, thus sin became the accumulation of errors rather than the fruit of a sinful nature. Then a universalistic system of atonement and rejection of penal substitution was taught alongside a complete denial of God's predestination. Man was seen as an innocent, free, moral agent with the power to sin or to save himself.

Within a hundred years of Jonathan Edward's death in 1758, the strong Calvinism that had permeated New England had fallen into a theology of works-righteousness. Alongside the death of Taylor in 1858 was the death of Edward's Reformed influence and the promotion of human ability.

Oberlin theology

Oberlin theology is closely connected to the teachings of revivalist Charles Finney and the ideas arising from New Divinity. Finney was professor of theology at the newly opened Oberlin Collegiate Institute in Ohio (now Oberlin College) and later became president from 1851-1866. He taught many serious errors tantamount to Pelagianism, They include:

- Moral Government (Grotianism).
- Man's ability to repent without grace.
- Denial of imputation of Adam's sin.
- Denial of election.
- Denial of the effectual call. The drawing of God was the human persuasion of Gospel preachers.
- Man's ability to create a new heart (self-regeneration, regeneration is only a change in the will).
- Denial of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers; thus a denial of Biblical justification.

- Perfectionism; sanctification was the continuation of holiness by human effort.
- Utopianism / Millennialism (working to create a perfect society; the human establishment of the Kingdom of God through conversions and social reform).

Both these systems deny Biblical justification by faith. Where the imputation of Adam's sin is denied there is erosion of total depravity and less cause to require a thorough atonement. These systems just teach a need for some kind of forgiveness of offences, or even just a change in will. Where the imputation of Christ's righteousness is denied, there can be no Biblical justification and no acceptance with God.

These two theological systems ally closely with the erroneous system of Andrew Fuller in promoting works-righteousness. Fuller was originally influenced by the earlier form of New Divinity but since his death there has been much cross-fertilisation. New Divinity and Finneyism have been accepted in some English circles, while Fuller has had a slow but increasing influence in the US. When folk hear preachers praise Fuller and Finney and hear of their evangelistic success (much exaggerated), or refer to New Haven theology with esteem, they are prone to accept that these systems must be orthodox without looking into them closely. In fact they are pits of vipers, able to emit as much poison.

THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

Since Arminianism was so successful, and while Fullerism/Oberlin theology mopped up smaller groups, so much damage was done to the churches that another jolt wasn't necessary for nearly 200 years. This attack on serious minded Calvinists came in the form of the New Perspective, having an effect upon Anglicans and some of the more academic Reformed teachers.

The New Perspective is a recent development within Christian theology supported by a number of academic scholars ranging from liberals to evangelicals. While there are variations within the movement, the key factors are a new way of looking at Second Temple Judaism¹⁸, and thus re-appraising Paul's teaching on justification as understood by Reformation theologians. Proponents include: EP Sanders, James Dunn, NT Wright, Alan Sogate, John Armstrong, Don Garlinton, Thom Smith, Scott Hafeman, Robert Gundry.

The novelty began with writings by EP Sanders and then James DG Dunn (liberals), but was revised by the evangelical NT Wright, and followed by John Armstrong and many others. Since the movement is diverse, it is difficult to summarise the position with absolute fairness to all participants, but some attempt must be made to take account of this new direction in Biblical studies. Not all participants believe all that's claimed of the new view. A big question has to be, is it possible that no one in history, until Sanders, understood Paul properly on such important matters as justification and righteousness?

It teaches that Second Temple Judaism was not a religion based upon legalistic self-righteousness, but on grace.¹⁹ Keeping the law flowed from a grace initiative from God establishing the covenantal scheme. Works are not to get in (God's gift), but to stay in the covenant (this is called 'covenantal nomism').

¹⁸ That is from c. 515 BC when the original second temple was rebuilt, to 70 AD when Herod's temple was destroyed by the Roman army.

¹⁹ This is supposedly supported by contemporary Jewish literature.

Therefore, Paul was not concerned about grace versus works for salvation, but about the status of Gentiles in the church. Justification was more about Jewish Gentile relations than personal standing before God. Justification is not concerned with acquittal from sin, but with being established in the covenant community.

Luther read his own presuppositions into his understanding of Paul in establishing the Reformation doctrine of justification. What is needed is to understand what Paul's hearers would have understood by it. According to Wright, [the Traditional Protestant way] *'of reading Romans has systematically done violence to the text for hundreds of years.'*²⁰

Justification is covenantal inclusion', a kind of badge of Christianity, something that shows believers are in relationship with God and each other; it is not about being saved nor a part of the Gospel. It is a recognition of God's faithful worshippers who will be justified at the end: it is thus corporate and eschatological. *'Justification... is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences.'*²¹ It is currently a temporary anticipation of a future acquittal on the Day of Judgment.

Righteousness is not something given to us by God, but is rather the declaration that we have believed in Christ and are recognised as being in covenant. *'It makes no sense that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or gas that can be passed across the courtroom.'*²²

Dunn and Wright openly deny the imputed righteousness of Christ. Those New Perspective theologians who still affirm it, do so with compromise and confusion. This means that Biblical justification is abandoned.

They claim that the works mentioned in the NT 'judgment' passages are more than evidences of conversion, however, they are not meritorious either. This is confused. Some avoid this confusion by suggesting that the believer faces a future judgment based on works – thus justification becomes based upon works. Thus we see the nonsense of the suggestion that the Pharisees were in a grace religion and Christians are in a works based religion – the tables are completely turned on the truth.

It is important to note that the new view started when a liberal scholar, who did not believe in Biblical inspiration, challenged the traditional Protestant view as a result of reading non-Biblical ancient Jewish documents. [Sanders does not even believe that Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians.] Recent textual and historical studies by evangelical scholars have challenged Sanders' basic concept as being unfounded.

The Old Covenant could not be kept (the new view insists it can) but instead its purpose was to convict sinners and expose sin (Rm 3:20, 5:13,20, 7:7-8). It was a ministry of death not life (2 Cor 3:6-7). It theoretically promised life, but only to those who attained absolute perfect obedience – which is impossible (Jm 2:10). As such it pointed both to sinners, as being wicked needing a saviour, and to Jesus as the only one who perfectly obeyed (Rm 5:19; Heb 5:8-9). The purpose of the law was to lead to Christ, in whom sinners can become legally righteous before God. The New Perspective threatens the cardinal doctrine

²⁰ NT Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Eerdmans, (1997), p117.

²¹ Wright, *ibid.* 120-122 Note: Wright insists that faith is the badge and justification the recognition of faith.

²² Wright, *ibid.* p98; *The Shape of Justification*, p5.

of Total Depravity with its view of the law, as well as the doctrine of imputed righteousness.

The idea that being a fleshly Jew meant automatic inclusion in the covenant, which was then maintained by faith to stay in, contradicts many scriptures. Righteousness (or being in the covenant) is established by faith in God's mercy, not law. For example: Lk 16:15; Rm 9:31, 10:3; Gal 5:4; Phil 3:9. In Jn 8 the Pharisees claimed righteousness and covenantal descent from Abraham, but Jesus stated that they were wicked because they committed sin, and thus were sons of the devil, not Abraham; they were not in the covenant. Nicodemus was a law-keeping religious leader of the Jews, yet he could not be in the kingdom of God until he was born again and justified (Jn 3). Abraham was declared righteous, before he was formally in covenant with God, because he had the gift of faith (Rm 4:3). Lk 18:9-14 (which discusses justification) clearly shows that Jews believed in salvation by works. Also it declares that one Jew was justified, the other was not. Both claimed a covenant relationship but one sought mercy from God, the other trusted his own law-works. The final word is from Paul in Rm 1-3 which clearly shows that all men are condemned, both those under law and those without law, because they are sinners – unless they receive a work of grace.

- Biblical justification is a legal, heavenly declaration that a man is pardoned from sin and now declared righteous before God due to the atonement of Christ whereby our sins were imputed to Christ and his righteousness was imputed to us in a great exchange. It is a once for all legal affair which leads to actual sanctification of the person in time. Justification results in adoption into God's family, which guarantees entrance to heaven and freedom from the final judgment against sin. The New Perspective destroys this.
- There is no real conflict between texts which state that salvation is solely by grace and passages that teach judgment is by works. The latter are evidential, not meritorious and related to rewards.
- If the righteousness of Christ is not imputed to us, we have no hope. The new view treats key scriptures (like Rm 4-8) with abandon.
- Faith for salvation is not our meritorious faith but God's gift.

FEDERAL VISION²³

The historic resistance of many Presbyterian groups to deny justification by faith outright required a further dose of refined error in the late 20th - early 21st centuries. Federal Vision is this bad medicine, being a development that has mainly affected American Presbyterian churches but is now spreading amongst other evangelicals; typically the error is centred in supposed orthodox seminaries by erring theological professors. Most of the conservative US Presbyterian denominations now support this heresy. As it is still developing there are few works exposing the error but material is slowly being made available; such as writings by Professor David Engelsma,²⁴ various Internet articles and a book by O Palmer Robertson [*The Current Justification Controversy*]. The positions for and against can be seen in the book: *A review of The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision. Edited by E. Calvin Beisner. Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004.

²³ Also known as: *Auburn Avenue Theology*.

²⁴ Such as: November 2005 issue of *The Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*.

Key Federal Vision representatives include: Norman Shepherd, Douglas Wilson, Duane Garner, Mitch Lusk, John Kinnear, Steve Schlissel, John Barach, Peter J. Leithart, James Jordan and Steve Wilkins. Some of these have openly claimed that the Bible is full of contradictions while Schlissel has stated that Luther's understanding of justification by faith alone was a 'malady'.²⁵ Federal Vision teaches heterodox ideas on a number of matters, such as: the covenant, faith, baptism, the Lord's Supper, election, regeneration, apostasy, and sacramental efficacy; but in this paper we are primarily concerned with justification and its corollary subjects.

Like Arminianism, Romanism, New Divinity, Fullerism and Finneyism it teaches a form of meritorious works righteousness: a right standing before God is achieved partly by Christ's work on the cross but mostly by the believer in obeying the law. A believer's good works, mixed with faith, become part of his justification (similar to Roman Catholic doctrine). Presbyterian Minister Mitch Lusk can dare to say that, *Works of faith filled obedience in a secondary way cause our final justification*;²⁶ while Steve Schlissel affirms that the law is observable.²⁷ The apostle Paul's statements that it is not are explained away as referring to Jewish ceremonial laws only.

Some of the emphases of Federal Vision appear to have been built on the foundational statements of the New Perspective in affirming that justification is not a legal declaration of graciously imputed righteousness but is mingled with sanctification in some way.

Like Arminianism and Fullerism the corollary teaching is forced upon them that election is merely a decision by God based upon someone believing in time and remaining faithful; a sort of rubber stamp founded upon man's performance. Thus election is conditional on man's faith; it can be resisted and lost. Consequently, like all semi-Pelagian systems, Christ's atonement is universal. Thus Norman Shepherd, *Missionaries can and must preach to everyone on the basis of Jn 3:16, Christ died to save you*.²⁸ In keeping with Arminianism the result is that salvation can be lost by disobedience; while like Romanism, salvation is covenantally linked with baptismal regeneration.

Amazingly, proponents can state that God can bring baptised, non-elect people into direct union with Christ, share in His covenant blessings, be sanctified by Christ's blood, receive new life, know the true love of God and still be lost eternally due to disobedience.²⁹

The close connection with these doctrines to Roman Semi-Pelagianism has already led a number of Presbyterians to Rome. The key to damaging Presbyterians in particular is its version of a conditional covenant theology - grace is universal to all baptised babies, but this grace can then be rejected. It is Arminianism mixed with covenant doctrine and as such is, *the gravest threat to the Reformed faith since Dort*.³⁰ Another reviewer claims that, *Federal Vision is a deviant, unbiblical view of salvation.... the proponents of the Federal Vision hold to a deviant view of the covenant, the active obedience of Christ, the way one receives salvation-justification, the role of baptism in conversion, the relation of*

²⁵ *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors. Athanasius Press [2004], p255.

²⁶ From the article, *The Tenses of Justification*; quoted in a speech by David Engelsma, *Federal Vision*. <http://www.prcs.org/Audio/Engelsma1.wma>

²⁷ *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner; op. cit. p260.

²⁸ Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*; emphasis mine.

²⁹ *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner; op. cit. p37, 62, 274, 288.

³⁰ David Engelsma, speech - *Federal Vision* op. cit.

*the reprobate to Christ and the means of assurance.*³¹ It also is a grievous rejection of sovereign grace and an elevation of man.

CONCLUSION

This attack on Biblical justification is part of the end-time general attack on the church. Its goal is the complete deception of influential, key evangelical leaders; destroy justification by faith and you destroy the Christian Gospel and undermine the Christian church.

The whole thrust of the enemy's strategy is to encourage works righteousness in the doctrine of salvation. This is a key plank in promoting a focus upon man in religion. Most, if not all, of the deceptions abounding in religion serve to elevate man - even those mystical aberrations that seem to focus upon a 'god' in some way. These merely serve man but in a more subjective and hidden way; they please and satisfy a human urge in certain types of people.

For instance: emotional worship that seeks to promote a feeling of being 'lost' in God is just pandering to subjective human emotionalism. Mystical Quietism that teaches men must lose themselves in God by becoming empty and passive is another form of pleasing man but in a more subjective manner. Even asceticism and purgings are forms of a focus upon man, though in a negative fashion. All denominations that have authoritarian structures are obviously focused, not just upon man, but upon a certain few men. Modern Charismatic triumphal Postmillennialism is clearly pandering to the aspirations of man for power.

The reason for this devilish man-focus is that, in his fallen condition, man is Satan's slave; the god of this world rules over a kingdom of sinful men. The final strategy of the enemy, which the Lord will allow for a time, is an antichristian world power where his slaves are marked with the number 666. This is merely a symbolic statement showing that the foundation of the devil's empire is man pretending to be God.³²

This is why there is such a continual attempt, through one deception after another, to infiltrate the principle of human strength into Biblical doctrines. The church that boldly proclaims that God is sovereign, that grace is free, that man is powerless in every way, that Christ is Lord of everything is a church that will attract considerable tribulation and various attempts at deception - but the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

True Christians must confront and combat every attempt by men to pervert fundamental Biblical doctrines by affirming that God is God, that salvation is by free grace, that without regeneration man is spiritually powerless, that mercy is discriminating (for the elect only) and that justification is by faith alone.

³¹ Dr. Joseph Pipa, *A Review of The Auburn Avenue Theology*; p281.

³² Rev 13:18 - 666 is the name or number of the beast; i.e. either the ambassador of Satan and world ruler (an individual) or Satan's counterfeit world kingdom (a corporate man). Six is the Biblical number for man who was created on the 6th day; Goliath is surrounded by the number as is Nebuchadnezzar's statue and vision representing the kingdoms of men Christ would destroy. 666 is a trinity of man; man seeking to be as God - the pride of man worshipping himself. We are told to calculate and understand this number. It is valid to seek a sane interpretation of it. The exaltation of man is the root of demonic religion. After the cross, Satan's strategy changed from trying to draw Israel into syncretism with other national religions, to counterfeiting Christianity in one form or another - from external corruption to internal deception. Satanic deception seeks to bring his original occult teachings and practices (elevating man) into the church by any means.

May God be glorified in his end-time church.

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Appendix One

The progress of works-righteousness in Modern evangelical churches

Romanism

Semi-Pelagianism

Main influence via ecumenism and the
Charismatic Movement

Arminianism

Semi-Pelagianism

Corrupting influence on many
evangelical denominations, especially in
the Charismatic Mvt.

Fullerism

*A complex mix of Amyraldism, liberalism,
Socinianism and Pelagianism*

Main influence on historic Calvinistic
Baptist churches, but increasingly
influential today amongst evangelicals.

New Perspective

*Outright denial of justification by faith
alone*

Main influence on Anglican and certain
Reformed and evangelical churches,
especially in America; increasingly
influential.

Federal Vision

*A restatement of covenant theology that
promotes works- righteousness*

Main influence on American
Presbyterian churches.

Appendix Two

Systems of Theology³³

Introduction

This is, by necessity, a simplistic view of the history of error regarding the doctrine of salvation, particularly to point out doctrines that affirm some form of works righteousness, and denial of justification by faith alone. There are a large number of more minor heresies, which all had their various effects, but these did not create the biggest threat to Biblical theology in the church, and are thus ignored here to keep the charts simple. For instance, the Latitudinarian Movement exercised an influence on many, and in part led towards Fullerism, but the main effect was on Anglicanism; it did not create a significant rift in Reformed churches. Only a few pagan errors are identified also.

My point here is that ever more subtle, synergistic error is developed in history in order to destroy the pure faith of Biblical soteriology that is contained in Calvinism. This subtlety continues today and must be guarded against.

The essential options in salvation

Monergism	Synergism	Paganism
God's Sovereign Grace alone	Human Co-operation with God	Human Works alone

These choices are exemplified the early church by

Monergism Sovereign Grace	Paganism Human Works
Biblical theology, apostolic teaching.	Ebionism (Jewish legalism, asceticism)
	Gnosticism (mysticism, various sects)
	Pagan cults

³³ This is a separate paper that is appended due to it's relevance.

The attack of more subtle error to lead evangelicals into works-righteousness

The next attack was to corrupt sovereign grace by a halfway measure that is not too obviously focused on human works, not appearing as paganism. This is the basis of all false teaching on salvation: claiming that conversion is partly by God's grace and partly by the meritorious works of man; especially human faith and free-will.

KEY STREAMS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Monergism Sovereign Grace	Synergism Human Co-operation	Paganism Human Works
Augustinianism (Augustine of Hippo; Early 5 th c.)	Semi-Pelagianism (John Cassian; 5 th c.) Fallen man has some power to do good, but needs grace as well. Man takes initiative. Grace and free will work together.	Pelagianism (Pelagius; 5 th c.) fleshly good works
	Semi-Augustinianism (Caesarius of Arles; late 5 th c.) Moderated Augustinianism. Grace comes to all enabling man to choose God and perform good works necessary for salvation. Denial of reprobation. Baptismal regeneration.	
	'Christian' Gnosticism (100 onwards) Various attempts to unite belief in Christ with pagan mysticism. E.g. Gnostic Gospels, Essene Gospel.	
	Romanism (200 onwards) Institutional Semi-Pelagianism. Sacramentalism etc.	

The gradual supremacy of the Roman church led directly to the period known as the *Dark Ages*, in Medieval Europe. The prime reasons for this were the suppression of truth, the dominance of error, prevalence of superstition, the authoritarian control of priests and the withholding of vernacular Bible translations from the people. This darkness continued until the Reformation, beginning with Martin Luther in 1517. The key means of success in the Reformation were the appearance of vernacular translations of the Bible and the publication of systematic theologies, catechisms and confessions, all focused on the sovereignty of God.

After the Reformation discredits existing synergistic errors, a new tactic for false teaching is required - Arminianism:

KEY POST REFORMATION STREAMS

Monergism Sovereign Grace	Synergism Human Co-operation	Paganism Human Works
Calvinism (John Calvin; Mid 16 th c.)	Arminianism (James Arminius; Early 17 th c.) Fallen man has power to believe, and choose grace. Denial of justification by God's gift of faith.	Socinianism (Faustus Socinus; Late 16 th c.) Men repent by their own power. There is no penal atonement; Christ's death was just a moral example.

This error was very successful, though not for 400 years. It gradually affected most evangelical churches by the 20th century. In 17th century England it affected a few Puritans (such as John Goodwin) and certain Anglicans. In 18th century England it mostly appeared as Wesleyan 'Evangelical' Arminianism (The Methodists) and amongst some Independents.

After Arminianism is discredited by Calvinists, a new tactic is required to lead Reformed folk astray:

Monergism Sovereign Grace	Hypothetical Halfway Systems	Synergism Human Co-operation	Paganism Human Works
Calvinism	Amyraldism (Mid 17 th c.) A self-contradictory halfway house between Calvinism and Arminianism. Universal atonement but election upheld.	Arminianism New expression in England as Wesleyan 'Evangelical' Arminianism.	

After Amyraldism is discredited, new errors are required:

KEY EARLY MODERN STREAMS

Monergism Sovereign Grace	Hypothetical Halfway Systems	Synergism Human Co-operation	Paganism Human Works
Calvinism	Fullerism (England) (Late 18 th c.) A type of liberal Amyraldism and outright denial of justification by faith. Human works mixed with grace.	Arminianism Note new expressions in the 19 th c. Holiness Mvt, US Methodist Camp Meetings and revivalism.	Socinianism
	Oberlin Theology US (e.g. CG Finney, early - mid 19 th c.) Self-regeneration. Denial of election. Perfectionism. Related to New Divinity .		Deism (Mid 17 th -Mid 18 th c.) Rationalistic. God, the creator, not directly involved in the world any longer.
	Amyraldism		

After Fullerism only affects Baptist groups (at first) and Oberlin theology mainly affects some in the US, a new works-righteousness error is required in the 20th century:

KEY MODERN STREAMS

Monergism Sovereign Grace	Hypothetical Halfway Systems	Synergism Human Co-operation	Paganism Human Works
Calvinism	The Free Offer (20 th c. based on earlier forms from late 18 th c.) Implied universal atonement. Rejection of election.	Arminianism Note new expressions in: 20 th c. Pentecostalism, Crusade Evangelism, Charismatic Mvt. and Higher Life Mvt.	New Age teachings (Late 20 th c.)
	Four-Point Calvinism (20 th c.) Similar to the Free-Offer and Amyraldism. Denies Limited Atonement.		Modern Gnosticism (Late 20 th c.)
	Fullerism		Ecumenism (Mid 20 th c.)
	Amyraldism		Liberal theology (20 th c.) God is not involved in any supernatural way. He is a moral figurehead. Man autonomous. God is dead.
			Evolutionary Humanism Man is slowly evolving into a better species. God is dead.

In addition to all these errors being present in the 21st century, further errors are designed to attack the remnant that holds to Biblical truth:

Monergism Sovereign Grace	Hypothetical Halfway Systems	Synergism Human Co-operation	Paganism Human Works
Calvinism	New Perspective on Paul (Late 20 th c. Early 21 st c.) Denies justification by faith based on historical overview.	Arminianism Now expressed in many forms.	
	Federal Vision (Early 21 st c.) Denies justification by faith based on a restatement of the covenant.		
	The Free Offer		
	Four-Point Calvinism		
	Fullerism		
	Amyraldism		

Conclusion

There has been a continual attack on the doctrine of salvation from the beginning. The most subtle (and dangerous) threats are forms of synergism that propose man's cooperation with God in the work of salvation; i.e. various forms of works-righteousness. Over time these attacks have spawned ever more refined heresies in order to infiltrate the minds of Reformed believers. At the present time there are more forms of these heresies than ever before.

This is a day to be watchful, prayerful and thoughtful. Never was there a time when discernment was more called for.

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