

# Contra the Joint FV Profession

by Daniel H Chew

The Federal Vision (FV) is a movement within professing Presbyterian and Reformed circles that has stirred up much controversy over its perceived defection from the Gospel. Historically, it is traced back at least to the Norman Shepherd controversy in the 1970s which brought no end of trouble to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia before Shepherd's departure from that institute.<sup>1</sup> In the Monocovenantal Neolegalism of Norman Shepherd can be found elements that we will later see in the FV: e.g. viewing election "out of the dynamic of the covenant," justification "is by the *obedient acts* done in faith as well as by *faith*," and that the individual elected "also could become reprobate."<sup>2</sup> With the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (AAPC) Pastors' Conference (AAPCPC) in 2002, the FV erupted into the scene, and has been heavily promoted by the writings of its proponents for example Douglas Wilson and Peter Leithart.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I would like to analyze the FV with a look at one of its confessional statements, *A Joint Federal Vision Profession*.<sup>4</sup> The authors claim that this "brief statement" of theirs should be understood as being in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>5</sup> However, is that truly the case? As we will see at the end, stating it to be so does not make it such. The signers of this statement are engaging in dialectical (hence irrational) speech when they make such a claim.

Without further to do, let us analyze this FV "brief statement" according to the Scriptures.

## **On God**

*We affirm* that the triune God is the archetype of all covenantal relations. All faithful theology and life is conducted in union with and imitation of the way God eternally is, and so we seek to understand all that the Bible teaches—on covenant, on law, on gospel, on predestination, on sacraments, on the Church—in the light of an explicit Trinitarian understanding.

— Joint FV Profession

---

<sup>1</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2003)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 95-97. Emphasis original

<sup>3</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology: A Comparative Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 5

<sup>4</sup> *A Joint Federal Vision Profession*. [http://www.federal-vision.com/resources/joint\\_FV\\_Statement.pdf](http://www.federal-vision.com/resources/joint_FV_Statement.pdf) (Accessed Jun 23rd 2011)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

As we begin, we can immediately see one major problem with this statement. Where in Scripture is God stated to be the "archetype of all covenantal relations"? We are only told that all members of the Trinity are involved in activities such as election, redemption etc. But works are different from relations.

One problem with this statement is the archetypal/ ectypal distinction.<sup>6</sup> Since God is three persons in one essence, can we even describe God's intra-trinitarian relationship archetypally? Since we cannot do so, what warrant do we have to even think we can describe it in such a way that we can use it as an **archetypal** template for relations?

A second related problem is the denial of the creator/ creature distinction. Since when can God's relations be analogous to how God (Creator) relates to Man (creature)? Even if we are talking about interpersonal relations between men, how can relations within the infinite transcendent **Creator** be considered as qualitatively similar to relations between **creatures**?

Biblically, the major problem is that the concept is not derived from Scripture but instead contradicts it. We are not left in the dark how God has related to Adam, Noah, Abraham and humanity in general, and these scenarios in the Bible bear no resemblance to the intra-trinitarian relations that God has revealed to us ectypally. God punished Adam for his original sin with death because Adam violated the creation covenant. Is anyone willing to suggest any analogue God's relation to Adam has with God's intra-trinitarian relationship? The thought of it is blasphemous!

We can thus see that the Joint FV Profession at its beginning is already unbiblical. Of course, it can be argued that this particular statement "does not contradict the Reformed standards", for which Reformer could have imagined such blasphemous nonsense? Who could have thought that humans are to try to emulate God in his essence, in who He is?

## **The Church**

### **The Church**

*We affirm* that membership in the one true Christian Church is visible and objective, and is the possession of everyone who has been baptized in the triune name and who has not been excommunicated by a lawful disciplinary action of the Church. We affirm one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, the house and family of God, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. In establishing the Church, God has fulfilled His promise to Abraham and established the Regeneration of all things. God has established this

---

<sup>6</sup> Daniel H. Chew, *The Archetypal/ Ectypal Distinction and Clarkian Epistemology*.

Regeneration through Christ—in Him we have the renewal of life in the fulness [sic] of life in the new age of the kingdom of God.

*We deny* that membership in the Christian Church in history is an infallible indicator or guarantee of final salvation. Those who are faithless to their baptismal obligations incur a stricter judgment because of it.

— Joint FV Profession

According to FV ecclesiology, "membership in the one true Christian Church is visible and objective." Therefore, within any local church body, a member in that church would be considered a true Christian without any qualifications whatsoever. Since "covenant membership" is objective, when the profession says that "in Him we have the renewal of life in the fullness of life in the new age of the kingdom of God," it logically follows that **objectively** all church members have the "renewal of life in the fullness of life in the new age of the kingdom of God" in Christ.

Such an objectivization of the covenant of grace creates a tension within the FV system. It is a fact that not everyone who calls himself a Christian and was a member of the church continues on as a Christian (cf. 1 Jn. 2:19). How can the Federal Visionists account for this undeniable reality? The way they have settled the tension between objective salvific membership and visible apostasy is to redefine faith as faithfulness, as we shall see later. Having affirmed that membership is objective, they put forward their statement that membership in the Church is "an infallible indicator or guarantee of final salvation." Members therefore have to persevere as faithful members of the church as Christians in order to have this "infallible indicator" to guarantee their final salvation.

Since the FV claimed that membership in the church is objective, this therefore translates into the fact that members who are faithless, "those who have faithless to their baptismal obligations," were at one time truly saved by Christ. For such individuals, they were truly saved while they were members in the church, but then when they became "faithless to their baptismal obligations," they do not have their final salvation. One indeed wonders what definition of "truly" we are operating with here.

While the FV advocates strongly deny believing in salvation by faith and works, the essence of their teaching promotes it, except it is not called "works", but "faithfulness". What exactly is the difference is anyone's guess. That faithfulness is non-meritorious? What is "merit"? Is "merit" necessarily defined in relation to boasting or being better than others? Or is it rather defined as positively doing something in order to achieve a certain result?

The FV Profession says that those who are not faithful will in a sense not be saved. This therefore means that one has to be faithful to be saved, and those who are faithless are lost. Such is the very definition of a works-principle whereby one has to do something (be faithful) in order to gain something (final salvation).

In this light, the FV denial of salvation by faith and works is mere semantics. Of course, nobody thinks that the FV advocates believe in salvation by obeying all the Mosaic ceremonial laws! The way they deny salvation by faith and works is through the refusal to label their idea of "faithfulness" as a work despite having all the trappings of a works-principle. In contrast to the FV, it is seen that faithfulness as they have defined it is a work, and therefore FV does indeed teach salvation by faith and works, as defined in its historic Protestant sense.

The Reformed view that Salvation by Faith Alone implies that a person is only required to have faith and nothing else. This means that a person **formally** does not have to be faithful in order to be saved. Salvation is by faith apart from any work including the absence of faithfulness.

This does not mean that a believer once saved can live like the Devil, because sanctification follows Justification as believers are united with Christ (cf. Rom. 6). But such works are post-salvation fruits, not salvation conditions.

Consider this analogy: An apple seed is genetically apple-like even though it looks like a seed — round/oval, black and totally unlike a tree or an apple. It will however grow into an apple tree when planted. A mango seed is genetically mango-like. Just as an apple seed is considered to be an **APPLE** seed because it is genetically "apple", even though no apples can yet be seen, so believers are considered saved even though no fruits (apples) can be seen.

In distortion of this analogy, according to the FV, all seeds are **objectively** genetically "apple." These "apple" seed then have to produce apples (faithfulness) in order to continue being an "apple" tree (final salvation). When any "apple" seed produces mangoes (being faithless), they cease to be an "apple" tree (are not finally saved).

In the FV system, faithfulness becomes something to **do** instead of something that true Christians **are**. This logically results in legalism which is further worked out in their distortion of the visible/invisible church distinction.

## **The Visible and Invisible Church**

*We affirm* that there is only one true Church, and that this Church can legitimately be considered under various descriptions, including the aspects of visible and invisible. We further affirm that the visible Church is the true Church of Christ, and not an "approximate" Church.

*We deny* that such a distinction excludes other helpful distinctions, such as the historical church and eschatological church. The historical Church generally corresponds to the visible Church—all those who profess the true religion, together with their children—and the eschatological Church should be understood as the full number of God's chosen as they will be seen on the day of resurrection

— Joint FV Profession

The FV idea of objective church membership results in salvation by faith and works. By collapsing the visible and invisible church distinction, all members in the church are to be considered Christians as they are members in a "visible and objective" covenant community.

Yet the FV advocates insist they believe in the visible/ invisible church distinction. What are we to make of their assertion in this regard?

It is in this light that we come to the very next section in the Joint FV Profession that supposedly deals with the very topic. Putting what is stated in this section together with that in the previous section, we can see how the FV advocates understand the Visible/ Invisible Church distinction.

The FV advocates understand the Visible Church as being co-extensive with the Local and Universal Church, which is fine. Their view of the Invisible Church however is a mere abstraction which is an acknowledgment that not all in the visible church may be saved. Therefore, for them the invisible church refers to the groups of true believers that will remain faithful to the end, of which we do not yet know who they are.

This distinction is diffracted by the slits of the objectivization of the covenant. Since all church members are truly saved now, therefore the "invisible church" does not really exist as a concrete reality. It is a mere phantom that only becomes actualized at the end of the age when those who are faithful will be seen as the invisible church.

The FV idea of the visible/invisible church distinction therefore should be better termed the historic/eschatological church distinction. That is because a virtual entity at present ("invisible church") should not be considered as a real entity now. The elect in

such a scheme are known by the mind of God but they are not presented as being real in God's sight.

In a lecture on the topic, FV proponent Douglas Wilson sought to set forth this unique understanding of the visible/invisible church distinction, and set them against what he thinks is the traditional understanding of that distinction.

If we abandon the Hellenistic ontological division between invisible and visible and adopted a more Hebraic biblical way of thinking and toppled the whole thing on its side, the invisible church is the eschatological church and the visible church is the historical church. Now notice what this now does, if I topple the whole thing on its side and it is now in history, the eschatological church is now the historical church and it is at the culmination of history, all right, and the visible church is that same church at an earlier point in time.<sup>7</sup>

Wilson sees the visible/invisible church distinction as a Platonic scheme of the church. In opposition to this Platonic idea, Wilson decided to adopt the scheme offered by spiritual Franciscan Joachim of Fiore of turning the Platonic scheme on its side. Whereas a Platonic understanding of the visible/invisible church distinction would mean that the invisible church is the idea/form of the church while the visible church is the appearance of the church, Wilson's Joachimite scheme would make the invisible church the eschatological idea which the visible church (appearance) is striving towards.

Contrary to Wilson, neither understanding of the visible/invisible church distinction is the traditional Reformed understanding. We are neither Platonists nor Hegelians. Our understanding of the visible/invisible church distinction is that the visible church is the church as Man sees it while the invisible church is the church as God sees it. They both exist at the same time. They both are on the same plane of existence. The reason why the invisible church is called "invisible" is not because they exist on another realm but because Man is not God. We do not know God's thoughts and decisions, and we cannot decipher the hearts of Man, not even our own. The terminology is an acknowledgment of our finitude, not of the truth of Plato.

So does the FV deny the Visible/ Invisible Church distinction? If we allow the FVists to redefine the concept, then no. However, if we are using terms the way they have been historically used, then yes.

## **Decrees and Covenant**

### **The Divine Decrees**

---

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Wilson, "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited," 2002 AACPC lecture. Quoted in Waters, 121-2

*We affirm* that the triune God is exhaustively sovereign over all things, working out all things according to the counsel of His will. Because this necessarily includes our redemption in Christ, God alone receives all the glory for our salvation. Before all worlds, God the Father chose a great host of those who would be saved, and the number of those so chosen cannot be increased or diminished. In due time, Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross, and in that sacrifice He secured the salvation of all those chosen for salvation by the Father. And at some time in the earthly life of each person so chosen, the Holy Spirit brings that person to life, and enables him to persevere in holiness to the end. Those covenant members who are not elect in the decretal sense enjoy the common operations of the Spirit in varying degrees, but not in the same way that those who are elect do.

*We deny* that the unchangeable nature of these decrees prevents us from using the same language in covenantal ways as we describe our salvation from within that covenant. We further deny this covenantal usage is "pretend" language, even where the language and terminology sometimes overlap with the language of the decrees. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may keep the words of this law. We affirm the reality of the decrees, but deny that the decrees "trump" the covenant. We do not set them against each other, but expect them to harmonize perfectly as God works out all things in accordance with His will.

— Joint FV Profession

The divine decrees are an integral part of Reformed theology. The idea of the redemptive Covenantal structure of all of Scripture along the lines of the Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace distinction is almost the "central dogma" of Reformed thought, although of course Reformed theology is a holistic system consisting of more than the covenants. Nevertheless, it is in this important doctrine that the FVists are seriously in error.

Being debtors to the Reformed tradition, the FVists work within the vocabulary and framework of Reformed theology. Thus, the doctrine of covenant and election is very much a reality in FV circles. Yet while the form remains similar, the content is radically transformed.

We can start to see the alteration of Reformed doctrines in the statement above. The statement makes the claim that there are indeed "covenant members who are not elect in the decretal sense". Now what does this mean?

The phrase can be taken to mean what Reformed theology has traditionally taken it to mean, which is that there are those who are externally in the covenant who partake of the benefits of being among God's people, yet who are not truly elect and does not have true faith in Christ. As the Belgic Confession states:

... the company of hypocrites who are mixed among the good in the church and who nonetheless are not part of it, even though they are physically there (*Belgic Confession*, Article 29: The Marks of the True Church)

However, as we have seen of the FV doctrine of the church, such language must be interpreted according to how it is used in the FV. The flattening of the church into one "objective" church means that the decretal sense is truly invisible to all. Rather, those who are elect in the decretal sense are merely believers who will persevere and have their "final justification" manifested on the last day.

Therefore all covenant members are in this life to be considered truly objectively saved. Those who are not elect in the decretal sense are basically believers who will be seen to fall away later, and therefore are truly elect for now.

As if to underscore the "objective" nature of the covenant, the statement continues to deny that this covenantal usage is "pretend language". Therefore, we cannot have any idea of a two-fold sense of being in the covenant, because how can a person who is in the church be considered not in the covenant community? Isn't calling a church member who actually is not a true believer a believer "pretend language"? So goes the reasoning.

This section concludes with the denial that the decrees "trump" the covenant. Instead, both will eventually harmonize perfectly. The language here suggests that the FVists see a present discrepancy between the decrees and the covenant. Indeed giving their idea of the elect being made up of those who will persevere and those who will fall away, this is not surprising. Instead of seeing the covenants as the outworking of God's decrees in time, the covenants are presently in tension with the decrees as not all who are in the covenant are the "elect in the decretal sense". The decree/ covenant dialectic, which was exposed in the errors of Norman Shepherd, has now taken root in the FV.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Covenant of Works**

### **The Covenant of Life**

---

<sup>8</sup> Robertson, 90



*We affirm* that Adam was in a covenant of life with the triune God in the Garden of Eden, in which arrangement Adam was required to obey God completely, from the heart. We hold further that all such obedience, had it occurred, would have been rendered from a heart of faith alone, in a spirit of loving trust. Adam was created to progress from immature glory to mature glory, but that glorification too would have been a gift of grace, received by faith alone.

*We deny* that continuance in this covenant in the Garden was in any way a payment for work rendered. Adam could forfeit or demerit the gift of glorification by disobedience, but the gift or continued possession of that gift was not offered by God to Adam conditioned upon Adam's moral exertions or achievements. In line with this, we affirm that until the expulsion from the Garden, Adam was free to eat from the tree of life. We deny that Adam had to earn or merit righteousness, life, glorification, or anything else.

— Joint FV Profession

Having a flattened 1-dimensional ecclesiology, the FV bring this same hermeneutic over to the realm of covenant and salvation. Together with ecclesiology, they form the basis for the FV unique and heretical teaching on justification.

The hermeneutical failure to differentiate between the different senses of being in the covenant likewise results in a failure to read salvation history properly. As the people of God are indeed one between the Old and the New Covenants, so the continuity between the two according to this 1-dimensional hermeneutic means that the differences between the two periods of salvation history are minimized. This is most evidently manifested in the denial of the Law/Gospel distinction, but for now we will stick to the flattening in the covenants which we can see here.

The FV denies the Reformed teaching of the Covenant of Works. It is perhaps illustrative to contrast this statement here with the description from the Westminster Confession of Faith on this issue.

I. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

II. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

(*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter VII: Of God's Covenant with Man)

Besides blatantly contradicting the Confession at this point, the main issue to be noted here is their appeal to what they think grace is and what kind of agreement is appropriate for God. First of all, grace is not unmerited favor. Rather, it is demerited favor. Grace is always what God gives to creatures who deserve His wrath, not to creatures like the sun, the moon, or the stars for example. To say that grace is mere unmerited favor is to trivialize grace as a mere relational state with creatures, whereas grace always has a sin motif as its background.

Since grace is demerited favor, Adam was not under grace before the Fall. Adam was under God's unmerited favor, but he in his sinlessness in the Garden before the Fall has not yet done anything against God. So while the Adamic administration was gracious (in the non-technical sense), Adam was not under grace. As for faith, one wonders what use is faith when Adam saw God (theophanically) in the Garden. Faith exists when sight does not (cf, 2 Cor. 5:7) and vice versa.

If one defines merit as making God a debtor to us, then of course there is no such thing as "merit."<sup>9</sup> Suffice it is to say here that if God has decided to reward Adam based upon the doing of a certain work, even though He did not have to, that work can be considered "meritorious" since doing it would fulfill the condition(s) set by God for His rewarding of obedience.

The Joint FV profession erred in this area. First of all, Adam could not have a "heart of faith" nevermind rendering obedience from such a heart. There was no grace in the Garden too, so glorification would neither be by grace, nor to be received by faith.

Ironically of course, the effort to be made it all of faith ends up making it all of law and works, a fact which we shall see in the denial of the Law/Gospel distinction. In the FV system, since God does not owe anyone, He could not condition reward upon obedience, and therefore the gift of glorification is not by obedience but by faith. Therefore, if the gift of glorification is by faith, then the failure of Adam in the Fall to achieve the gift must be because he ceased having faith. From this, the entire salvation heresy of faith as faithfulness flows.

---

<sup>9</sup> Daniel H Chew, *Merit and the concept of the Covenant of Works*.  
<http://puritanreformed.blogspot.com/2010/02/merit-and-concept-of-covenant-of-works.html> (Accessed Jun 23rd 2011)

## The Law/Gospel distinction

### Law and Gospel

*We affirm* that those in rebellion against God are condemned both by His law, which they disobey, and His gospel, which they also disobey. When they have been brought to the point of repentance by the Holy Spirit, we affirm that the gracious nature of all God's words becomes evident to them. At the same time, we affirm that it is appropriate to speak of law and gospel as having a redemptive and historical thrust, with the time of the law being the old covenant era and the time of the gospel being the time when we enter our maturity as God's people. We further affirm that those who are first coming to faith in Christ frequently experience the law as an adversary and the gospel as deliverance from that adversary, meaning that traditional evangelistic applications of law and gospel are certainly scriptural and appropriate.

*We deny* that law and gospel should be considered as hermeneutics, or treated as such. We believe that any passage, whether indicative or imperative, can be heard by the faithful as good news, and that any passage, whether containing gospel promises or not, will be heard by the rebellious as intolerable demand. The fundamental division is not in the text, but rather in the human heart.

— Joint FV Profession

The denial of the Gospel by the Federal Vision comes in the form of a totally alien system. A denial of the archetypal/ectypal distinction results in an arrogant presumption to build doctrines upon a certain view of the Trinity, which even if correct is a violation of the *regula fide*. From this denial of the archetypal/ectypal distinction is added an extremely externalist view of the church with the flattening of the concept of the church, and a divorce of the covenants of God from the decrees of God.

In the light of this essentially Medieval system, the Gospel is redefined, beginning with the denial of the Law/Gospel distinction.

It must be stated that the Joint FV Profession in speaking of the Law and the Gospel does include this statement: "We further affirm that those who are first coming to faith in Christ frequently experience the law as an adversary and the gospel as deliverance from that adversary, meaning that traditional evangelistic applications of law and gospel are certainly scriptural and appropriate." It denies however that Law and Gospel are antithetical to each other, but that what is Gospel to a believer can be Law

to an unbeliever and vice versa. Therefore, any Law/Gospel antithesis is merely experiential not ontologically true.

The problem with such a denial of the Law/Gospel distinction is two-fold: Logical and Biblical.

Logically, the denial of the Law/Gospel distinction necessitate that any passage in the Bible can be used as Gospel and any passage in the Bible can be used as Law. The Good News therefore can refer to the proclamation of passages such as Lev. 18:5 which states "You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Does the Gospel therefore include the view that law-keeping causes a person to merit life before God? Lev. 18:5 is furthermore quoted in Gal. 3:12 as follows:

But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."  
(Gal 3:12 ESV)

ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ' ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς. (Gal 3:12 BGT)

καὶ φυλάξεσθε πάντα τὰ προστάγματά μου καὶ πάντα τὰ κρίματά μου καὶ ποιήσετε αὐτά ἃ ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν  
(Lev 18:5 LXX)

The quotation of Lev. 18:5 in Gal. 3:12 shows that the principle of Lev. 18:5 applies equally in the New Covenant. Those who want to have eternal life must obey the commands of God. Is this really part of the Gospel? Do the FVists really think that the Gospel is a message of keeping the Law or rather "Glawspel" to earn eternal life? Such is Pelagianism and is the logical consequence of denying the Law/Gospel distinction.

It can be argued that perfect obedience is not what Gal. 3:12 has in mind. Here we will turn to the biblical evidence. Gal. 3:12 uses the plural form "them" (in both the Hebrew and the Greek) to denote all the commands and law of God. In the context of Lev. 18, Lev. 18:5 can be said to be a summary of the Law and its requirement. To say that Israel did not die even though she was not perfectly obedient is to interpret the verse backwards. The reason why Israel did not die was because forgiveness of sin is offered (typologically) through the various sin and guilt sacrifices instituted for Israel (Lev. 3-4:7). Even then, **no sacrifice for sin is possible** for sins like murder (Num. 35:30-34), or deviant sexual immorality (Lev. 18:24-30). Lev. 18:5 and therefore Gal. 3:12 have in mind the necessity of perfect obedience in order to gain eternal life, as

such a person must keep all God's commandments and judgments to live, with sacrifices available to expiate some sins only not all.

The first part of Gal. 3:12 is also very explicit in contrasting the Law and the Gospel. As it is written, the Law is not of Faith. The Law is not partly of faith and partly of works, and it is not of faithfulness. However one wants to translate πίστις, the Law is not "of πίστις." Thus, even if one were to eisegete πίστις as "faithfulness," the Law has nothing to do with "faithfulness." Rather, the context is very clear that the contrast here is between the Gospel which is by faith in verse 11 and the Law which is not of faith in verse 12. The contrast is a strict negation one over the other. Whatever is of faith is not of Law and vice versa.

Much has been said over the so-called New Perspective understanding of "works of the law" and understanding of its πίστις as "faithfulness." The main issue here however should be on the text of Scripture itself. It is an entirely fruitless endeavor to attempt to say that Judaism is a religion of grace and that Paul was only concerned about "boundary markers" etc. if the entire reconstruction has no connection with the text of Scripture. Paul has made it abundantly clear that the Judaizers' view was "beginning with the Spirit and completing by the flesh" (Gal. 3:3), which sounds very much like E.P. Sanders' idea of 'covenantal nomism'. Whether one thinks Paul is mistaken in his analysis of the Judaizers' beliefs is one thing (which of course is always interesting when one sees a scholar 2000 years removed claiming to know more about the Judaizers than their contemporary Paul knows about them), what Paul is arguing against is another ball game altogether.

The fact of the matter is that whatever the merits of Paul's concerns over the Judaizers, the epistle to the Galatians is clear that Paul is arguing that the Judaizers' error can be anachronistically labeled 'Semi-Pelagianism' — teaching that one begins the Christian life by faith and completing by works (cf. Gal. 3:3). Paul also teaches that Law and Gospel in antithetical to each other. To say that other passages have a more positive view of the Law does not mean that we tone down the Bible's express teaching here. It is not our job, much less the FVists', to alter the teachings of the Word of God just because it does not fit into their nice monocovenantal scheme. Our theology must change according to the teachings of God's Word, not the other way around. The job of systematicians is to reconcile all of the teachings of God's Word **after** collecting all of the biblical data relevant to the topic, not to create a Procrustean bed in which biblical data have to fit or be fitted to match.

The denial of the Law/Gospel distinction by blending them into a monstrosity called "Glawspel" begins the FV error on the Gospel. And as we will continue to see, this

extreme "continuity" hermeneutic destroys the Gospel message in the hands of the FVists.

## **Justification by Faith Alone**

### **Justification by Faith Alone**

*We affirm* we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. Faith alone is the hand which is given to us by God so that we may receive the offered grace of God. Justification is God's forensic declaration that we are counted as righteous, with our sins forgiven, for the sake of Jesus Christ alone.

*We deny* that the faith which is the sole instrument of justification can be understood as anything other than the only kind of faith which God gives, which is to say, a living, active, and personally loyal faith. Justifying faith encompasses the elements of assent, knowledge, and living trust in accordance with the age and maturity of the believer. We deny that faith is ever alone, even at the moment of the effectual call.

— Joint FV Profession

The FVists formally claim to embrace Justification by Faith Alone, as it can be seen in this statement. The question to be asked however is whether their profession match the reality. The answer is in the negative.

It can be seen that the Joint FV Profession defines faith according to the commonly accepted categories of knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assentia*) and trust (*fiducia*). When one looks closely however, it can be seen that the category of 'trust' is further expanded as being a "living trust." Presumably, they believe that there is a possibility of a "dead trust." Such a 'trust' which justifies is "living," "active," and "personally loyal." All of these emphasize the fact that this is something that believers do and continue to do.

From this section alone, we can start to see the FV denial of the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone. Traditionally, faith is something which believers are given, with the category of 'trust' referring to the disposition that validates the assent to be true. It is receptive in receiving the Gospel which comes about through the "hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2,5, cf. Rom. 10:17). Knowledge and assent are active actions in believing, while trust is passive. It is done as a reflex of true assent, not as an action in itself.

What the FV is trying to smuggle in is this idea of faith as being necessarily resulting in good works, or "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). That faith is never alone is agreed by all. But the FV not only insists that faith is never alone, but that faith

itself **includes** its attendant fruits in its nascent form, through the redefinition of *fiducia* as being active faithfulness.

Such a redefinition can be seen in the last sentence in this paragraph, where the FVists deny that faith is never alone even at the moment of the effectual call. In other words, when God calls a person effectually and gives him faith (gift), the person logically is already being faithful (work). Consistent with their denial of the Law/Gospel distinction, gift and work are undifferentiated in the FV idea of faith and salvation. The believer according to the FV is faithful co-extensively with his believing, instead of being faithful logically consequent upon his believing. To put it simpler, the believer believes-behaves, not that the believer believes and therefore behaves accordingly.

One implication in pastoral situations is that a believer who is backsliding is logically treated differently in FV circles than in Reformed circles. In Reformed circles, such a believer is treated as a believer who must be warned, rebuked and counseled. In FV circles, such a believer is treated as someone who at that moment has no faith (as he is not faithful) and as a covenant breaker who must be "reminded of their baptism" and warned against continuing being a covenant breaker. The former situation treats the backslider as having faith but having fallen for a moment into sin (until proven otherwise) while the latter treats the backslider as not having faith and thus not a believer then but rather as a "covenant breaker."

As we can see, "believers" in FV circles can have their salvation, lose it if they backslide, and regain it if they repent. Such is practically speaking a doctrine of salvation by faith plus works, or Semi-Pelagianism. Sure, such "believers" remain in the church until and if they are excommunicated, but what use is there in being church members, or covenant members, if they have lose their salvation? After all, according to FV ecclesiology, what matters for eternity is not being a church member **now** in the so-called "historical" or "visible" church, but rather their **continuance** as a church member into the "eschatological" or "invisible" church. In other words, church membership is useless unto salvation unless they are not excommunicated and cut off from the church, and such continuance is dependent on being faithful in this life, which is another way of saying salvation by faith plus works.

The FV therefore while formally professing Justification by Faith Alone denies it materially by their redefinition of *Fiducia* and the implications of their doctrine of the Church. The FV thus denies the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone.

## **Apostasy and Assurance of Salvation**

### **Apostasy**

*We affirm* that apostasy is a terrifying reality for many baptized Christians. All who are baptized into the triune Name are united with Christ in His covenantal life, and so those who fall from that position of grace are indeed falling from grace. The branches that are cut away from Christ are genuinely cut away from someone, cut out of a living covenant body. The connection that an apostate had to Christ was not merely external.

*We deny* that any person who is chosen by God for final salvation before the foundation of the world can fall away and be finally lost. The decretally elect cannot apostatize.

— Joint FV Profession

One major irritant of the FV is their continual redefinition and equivocation of terms. As they have redefined "trust," so now the redefinition of terms from their normal theological usage continues. In this case, the term is "decretal."

In normal theological discourse, whatever God has decreed that He works out in his relation to the world and the elect. However, in FV parlance, whatever God has decreed is not worked out in relation to the world and the elect but rather worked out for the world and the elect in a secret manner to be somehow manifested at the end of time, as we have seen in the FV relation of decree and covenant. What is happening in the world and in the church bears little if any relation whatsoever to God's decrees, which are probably so mysterious it's a marvel the FVists knew they even exist in the first place.

It is in light of this decree/covenant dialectic that the paragraph on apostasy can make sense, for otherwise we end up with self-contradictory nonsense. For FVists, apostasy is apostasy from the "covenant" but not apostasy from "decretal election." So believers supposedly can be said to be able to truly apostatize and yet to not be able to apostatize. Seeing that those who are decretally elect are those who will persevere, the whole statement is reduced to a meaningless tautology. In Reformed theology, decree and covenant are correlated, so therefore those who are not "decretally elect" are already fixed in the world (just not known by us) and will most certainly not persevere. In FV theology, those who are not "decretally elect" are not fixed except in God's mind and their perseverance is certain only inasmuch as God has decreed them elect.

The implication of this for assurance of salvation is clear. Under the FV, there is absolutely no sure way of knowing that one is eternally saved. One can only continue in being faithful and hope that one dies faithful. There is no comfort at all available from God because it is impossible to know God's decrees before the final judgment. In Reformed theology however, comfort from God is possible because God's Spirit testifies



with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16), as God's decree is worked out in relation to the world and the elect. Such is of course subjective, but being subjective does not make it false, the FV aversion to anything subjective notwithstanding.

The FV understanding of apostasy gives cold comfort to believers. Believers do not start off from knowing they are saved, but merely knowing that they are saved now and will continue being saved as long as they do not apostatize, which is indeed a "terrifying reality" to them. Much warmer indeed is the Reformed understanding of apostasy that states that those who apostatize were never true believers in the first place. While delusion is always possible, we can know that the Spirit's witness is testimony to our salvation, and that those who apostatize never had the Spirit's witness in the first place. We do good works because we are saved, not that we are faithful in order to continue being saved.

The FV's doctrine of apostasy is dialectical in nature. In light of their other doctrines, assurance of salvation in FV circles is conditional. Sure, the condition may be quite doable since the FV do not demand perfect obedience, but conditional it still is. The error is not lessened at all because of the psychological outlooks of church members who face a less demanding condition for salvation and assurance of salvation.

## **The Next Christendom**

### **The Next Christendom**

*We affirm* that Jesus Christ is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. We believe that the Church cannot be a faithful witness to His authority without calling all nations to submit themselves to Him through baptism, accepting their responsibility to obediently learn all that He has commanded us. *We affirm* therefore that the Christian faith is a public faith, encompassing every realm of human endeavor. The fulfillment of the Great Commission therefore requires the establishment of a global Christendom.

*We deny* that neutrality is possible in any realm, and this includes the realm of "secular" politics. We believe that the lordship of Jesus Christ has authoritative ramifications for every aspect of human existence, and that growth up into a godly maturity requires us to discover what those ramifications are in order to implement them. Jesus Christ has established a new way of being human, and it is our responsibility to grow up into it.

— Joint FV Statement

From where has the FV arisen? In his book on the FV, Guy Prentiss Waters states that the FV seems to be derived from theonomy. The goal of the FV is societal transformation, and it seems that that is the tail wagging the dog. As he states:

There are hints among those sympathetic to the FV that their views accompany a discontent with the success of the theonomic project. ... The FV, then, represents a chastened theonomy, an attempt to reconstruct the project of theonomy to accommodate its greater goal of cultural transformation.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of letting theology influence sociology and activism, the FV seems to be a movement that build its theology in service to its sociology — a sociology and missiology in search of a theology.

In the Joint FV Profession, the section speaking on the next Christendom is the third section discussed in the document, preceded only by the section on God and a section promoting the transformationalist postmillennial eschatology. Such an arrangement of topics seems to give credence to Waters' thesis that sociology drives the theology of the FV.

Nevertheless, let us analyze the transformationalist beliefs of the FV according to Scripture. We have already seen the distortion of the FV in their doctrine of God, and in their doctrine of the Church. As we will see, in line with their hyper-realist and one-dimensional hermeneutic, their doctrine of Church and State is similarly one-dimensional.

The section starts with the proposition that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. Certainly that is something all Christians believe in. However, what does this lordship of Christ entail? How is Christ's lordship manifested in life and in the world? The Joint FV Profession states that Christ's lordship requires "the establishment of a global Christendom." However, is that truly the case?

To look deeper, we will examine this section under three headings: The Great Commission, What Christ's incarnation means for us, and the Lordship of Christ.

### The Great Commission

The Great Commission is the commission Jesus Christ gave to the believers before He ascended into heaven. The most commonly cited proof-text for it can be found in Mt. 28:18-20.

---

<sup>10</sup> Waters, 296

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt.28:18 —ESV)

In the Great Commission, our Lord Jesus Christ calls believers to spread the Gospel and make disciples of all the nations. This is normally interpreted to refer to the various individuals from every nation who are saved, discipled, baptized and taught. Nations as entities cannot be in view here because for example there is no way to baptize a nation as only people can be baptized.

In the Joint FV Profession, we see a hyper-literalistic interpretation of the Great Commission. It is doubtful that the FV has in mind literally baptizing nations as entities, but as a shorthand to describe baptizing every individual in the nation as in the re-creation of Christendom as a political entity. This is however not the teaching of the Great Commission. Whatever one thinks of the transformationalist project, there is no way to find it in the Great Commission itself. The focus on the Great Commission is to "make disciples" and therefore the focus is salvation, not politics. Even if somehow majority or even all of the people in a nation turn to Christ, that does not by itself turn that nation into part of Christendom. Rather, that requires a certain connection between salvation and politics which states that Christians are saved in order to rule the world, an assertion that needs to be proven instead of assumed.

The FV interpretation of the Great Commission depends on a certain view of Christ's lordship and the goal of salvation. As we shall see, in both of these aspects the FV is seriously in error.

### The Incarnation of Christ

What is the role of the incarnation of Christ? The biblical answer is that Christ was incarnated in order to become a man so that He could die on the cross for our sins. For God could not die, so Christ must take on a human form and a human nature in order to die. It is not without reason that the Cross is a symbol of Christianity, not the manger.

According to the FV however, Jesus Christ came and established "a new way of being human." This is to put it nicely a Socinian answer to the question of why Christ came. It is true that Jesus Christ being sinless is the perfect human, yet how does Christ define his perfect humanity but by perfect obedience to the law (Rom. 5:19, 2 Cor.

5:20, Mt. 5:17).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, this manner of perfect obedience to the law the Scriptures made plain that Adam as a type of Christ was to have in the beginning (Rom. 5: 12-21). Therefore, in effect Jesus Christ as the second Adam came and did what Adam was supposed to but failed to do in passing the test in obedience to God.

We have seen that the FV denies the Covenant of Works, and such a denial is consistent with the view that Jesus Christ came and established "a new way of being human." However, the biblical evidence points to Jesus coming to be and do what Adam was supposed to be and do. The FV is totally inconsistent in its affirmation on the one hand of the forensic nature of Christ's death, and on the other hand the Socinian statement that Christ came and established "a new way of being human." Illogicity however runs rampant in the FV, but for those of us who believe that God is rational in His ectypal revelation to us (Jn. 1:1, 14), such irrationality is contrary to the very nature of God and the nature of His revelation.<sup>12</sup>

Christ' incarnation is therefore NOT meant to establish "a new way of being human." That is an error that flirts dangerously with the Eastern Orthodox view of theosis.

### The Lordship of Christ

Christ exercised His lordship over the world in two different ways. Christ as the Creator and Ruler of the whole world rules in absolute authority. When Christ rules in His church however, He rules over the affairs in the church regarding spiritual matters. The NT epistles have instructions over the ruling and discipline in the church, but it nowhere prescribes that Christians are to attempt to take over the government to rule in Christ's stead. Rather, Christians are called to pray for all people and kings and all in high positions that we might lead "a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Tim. 2: 1-2). While Christians are certainly to obey God's law, we are not called to take over the government to impose God's law. Rather, "God judges those outside" (1 Cor. 5:13a). The role of the church has nothing to do with politics, and therefore salvation is not for the purpose of creating a political entity.

The Joint FV Profession denies the two ways in which Christ exercised His lordship. Instead, like the many doctrines we have seen, they flattened out the distinction such that Christ can only exercise His lordship in only one way. Since Christ is the Creator and Ruler of the whole world, Christians must bring the lordship of Christ to bear in

---

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that the Joint FV Profession denies that "any particular doctrinal formulation of the 'imputation of the active obedience of Christ'" is to be required. This seems to show that in the FV, the humanity of Christ has little to do with salvation but more as an example to show us how to live.

<sup>12</sup> Waters, 263-73

every realm in the same way. Again, since neutrality is impossible in every realm, therefore every realm must be brought under the lordship of Christ in the exact same way. There is simply no room in the FV for Christ to exercise His lordship in other ways at all. Why must Christ be thought to not exercise His lordship through providence and natural law through men both regenerate and unregenerate in politics, instead of demanding that Christ **must** use Christians to bring forth the "next Christendom"?

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the FV view of culture and Church-State relations is in error. Their transformationalist agenda has no theological backing. Should Christians participate in politics and try to bring society into greater conformity to God's law? Yes, for we believe that such glorifies God and creates a better society for our fellow human beings. But we do so as citizens just as any other citizen in the nation both regenerate and unregenerate. Christ does not exercise His lordship over the nations now as Judge, but as Sustainer sustaining the present order while drawing the elect unto salvation (2 Peter 3:5-9). Until that last day, it is still called Today — the day of salvation, where everyone is invited to come to the Lord for salvation (Heb. 4:6-8). Today is not the day of judgment, and therefore it is not the day for believers to rule the world.

### **Conclusion**

The FV manner of doing theology is dialectical as follows:

- Utilizing a one-dimensional hermeneutic — As a perceived rejection of Platonism, all manner of talking about church, covenant etc cannot have two ways of speaking about the matter
- Yet on the other hand, the FV (illegitimately) relegate to “mystery” all irrational expressions that come about through the use of their one-dimensional hermeneutics, as being the expression of *finitum non capax infinitum*.
- This causes the creation of dialectics: 1) The Kierkegaardian dialectic between decree and covenant, election and reprobation, and 2) The Hegelian dialectic between the visible and invisible church

The FV as a pseudo-Reformed dialectical theology is totally irrational and unbiblical. It embraces irrationality with regards to God-given revelation, yet at the same time rationalistically speculate with regards to the doctrine of God in His intra-trinitarian relationships. It denies the visible/invisible church distinction, the Law/Gospel distinction, Justification by Faith Alone, and the Covenant of Works. Indeed, the FV is a form of Monocovenantal legalism to be avoided at all costs.