

## Intro:

The Lord put me on my back a week ago Saturday, and as I listened to the recorded message and Pilgrim's Progress session, I think I know at least one reason why. God is doing a work in our church. He is doing a work in you. Several of you had to step up and do things that others normally do. What was the result?

We saw the *power of God* on display in you. You folks give evidence that God is working in you, both those who spoke and those who supported in other ways.

It is overwhelming to be a part of God's eternal plan and kingdom. In that Pilgrim's Progress session last week, it was mentioned that the Lord makes his people 'princes'. You might not think yourself 'prince' material (or 'princess' as Bill added!). The fact is that the Lord will take the weak and confound the mighty.

I say all this to urge you to continue pressing on in your fellowship with one another and with the Lord. Your faithfulness will produce eternal rewards.

- All right, now for the message I intended to preach last Sunday...

We have been working our way through Romans, laying out the case against mankind for human sinfulness. We are going to put that case on hold this week, because I want to draw your attention to the subtlety with which some men will try to draw Christians away into error.

- The purpose of the local church is to *stablish* you (to use a KJV term).
- There are some believers in Jesus Christ who, though believers, are unstable in their minds and uncertain in their walks. False teachers prey on such as these, as well as on religiously minded unbelievers.

Our text last time in Romans is one from which a particular new heresy is taught, so I thought it appropriate to bring this error out into the light and examine it and its subtlety a little bit.

- I don't do this because I think you are particularly in danger of succumbing to this error!
- I do this as an example of how people teach errors and how vital it is for you to be Bible-minded people, so that you can be *stablished*, able to stand against the winds of false doctrine. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4:

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<sup>NAU</sup> **Ephesians 4:11** And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service,

to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup> but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

So do you see how the church is to function? The leaders of the church are to equip you so that you can equip others to be saints on guard, able to stand against the winds of false doctrine.

The title of our message is:

*A New Perspective or an Old Lie?*

Our text is again Rm 2.13, but let's read Rm 2. 11-16.

## I. The point of departure

A. Preface: the whole problem with this particular error takes a long, long, long time to explain

1. Many people have spent many hours writing and teaching refutations

I have five journal articles I am reading on the subject, and they only summarize the problem.

2. Our remarks will have to be very brief, but hopefully we can be precise enough to be helpful to you (who won't want to read the articles)

B. The New Perspective basic contentions

1. Pastor Minnick's article in *Frontline*:

"For some thirty years now, British theologian and writer N. T. Wright has been openly, unapologetically insisting that almost all Christians for the last fifteen hundred years have misunderstood the doctrine of justification."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark Minnick, "First Partaker: What's an Evangelical to Do?", *Sound Words*, p. 3, in *Frontline*

Sample Quotations:

- “The discussions of justification in much of the history of the church, certainly since Augustine, got off on the wrong foot — at least in terms of understanding Paul — and have stayed there ever since.”<sup>2</sup>
- “If you respond that the entire epistle to the Romans is a description of how persons become Christians, and that justification is a central theme, I will answer ... that this way of regarding Romans has systematically done violence to the text for hundreds of years.”<sup>3</sup>

2. Douglas Bozing in an article in the *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, “The New Perspective on Paul: A Survey and Critique”

“Fundamental to this paradigm [presentation or argument] is the contention that the long-accepted portrayal of Judaism in Paul’s time as a works-righteousness, merit-based religion is a caricature based in part upon an anachronistic reading of Paul through the eyes of the Reformers. Proceeding upon this basis, the NPP makes the following major assertions:

- “Paul had no real quarrel with Judaism as conceived and practiced in his day.
- “Paul did not ‘convert’ to Christianity; rather he responded to a call to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.
- “Paul was misunderstood by Luther (and, by implication, by subsequent generations of evangelicals, who have read Paul with Lutheran lenses), who incorrectly imposed his struggles with personal guilt and Catholicism upon his exegesis of Paul.

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*Magazine*, July/August 2008.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 115, quoted by Minnick, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, p. 117, quoted by Minnick, p. 3.

- “Paul’s primary concern in his exposition of ‘justification by faith’ was to address the issue of Jew-Gentile relations, not the universal problem of human sin.
- “Correspondingly, Paul’s arguments against ‘works of the law’ do not concern the issue of righteousness gained by obedience to the law, but rather the use of certain observances of the law that unfairly distinguished Jews from Gentiles.”<sup>4</sup>

C. The error of N. T. Wright on justification and Rm 2.13 specifically

1. Look at Rm 2.13

a. Two assertions are made

- 1) Hearers of the law are not thereby ‘just’ before God [just = righteous]
- 2) But doers of the law are ‘justified’ [declared righteous]

b. This is the first mention of justification in Romans [noted last time]

c. It comes in the midst of an argument that morality and religion are not mitigating factors when it comes to the judgement of God against sin

2. Wright’s comment on this verse

“The first mention of justification in Romans is a mention of justification by *works* — apparently with Paul’s approval (2:13: ‘It is not the hearers of the law who will be righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified’). The right way to understand this, I believe, is to see that Paul is talking about the *final* justification.”<sup>5</sup>

a. Note the word ‘final’: Wright (Pastor Minnick explains) believes there are two justifications

- 1) The first justification doesn’t pronounce us righteous on the basis of Christ’s work for us (the orthodox view)

<sup>4</sup> Douglas C. Bozung, “The New Perspective on Paul: A Survey and Critique, Part 1”, *Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Baptist Bible College and Seminary, 2005; 2006). vnp.9.2.97.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, p. 126, quoted by Minnick, p. 4.

- 2) Instead, according to Wright, the first justification pronounces that we are a member of the covenant family (the people of God)
- 3) There is a future justification (*final* justification) “declares that we are Christians on the basis of works wrought in us by the Holy Spirit”<sup>6</sup>

b. A restatement of Wright’s view

“*Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly (according to 2:14-16 and 8:9-11) on the basis of the entire life* (129). These words *entire life* are at the heart of Wright’s view of the basis of future justification. To repeat, *future justification will affirm publicly ... on the basis of the entire life.*”<sup>7</sup>

- 1) 2:14-16 – Wright misunderstands this passage by insisting that the condemnation of one’s conscience (15) is connected with the judgement of the last day (16)
- 2) 8:9-11 – Wright misunderstands the empowering of the Spirit in giving victory over sin as the means of producing *justifying works* so that you will receive *final justification*.

3. Two consequences of Wright’s views

a. A reinterpretation of the book of Galatians

- 1) Denies that Paul is actually in argument with Judaism
- 2) Denies that Paul is writing about how one becomes a Christian

b. An impetus to ecumenicism (the effort to join all churches into one)

There is a lengthy quote in Pastor Minnick’s article, I won’t quote it here – the essence is that this doctrine that belief in Jesus puts you in God’s family means everyone who shares that belief should sit down at the same table.  
Now, let’s look back to Rm 2.13 again...

<sup>6</sup> Minnick, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Minnick, p. 4.

## II. The truth of the passage

A. Not hearers but doers of the Law [note capital] are justified (13)

B. To be a ‘doer’ means more than possession of the Law

1. More than a hearer
2. More than someone who does ‘most’ or ‘a good bit’ or ‘the significant parts’ or even ‘some’ of the Law

Why?

- a. Because Gentiles are doers of the Law even without hearing it (14)
- b. Because Gentiles, even though they might do some or a part of the Law are nevertheless accused by their consciences (15)

What the ‘accusation’ means is that men aren’t justified because no one keeps the Law perfectly — everyone can be accused by conscience *somewhere*.

C. There is some debate on what Paul means by the one who is a ‘doer of the law’ in 2.13

1. Some would say that it is theoretically possible to be justified by works — if you keep the whole Law, every day of your life, no mistakes
2. Others would say that Paul is only offering here the standard of judgement (“justified” is future tense, pointing to final judgement)
  - The standard of judgement that will be applied is perfect keeping of the Law
3. Some combination of these two views is also possible

But there is no hint in any of Paul’s writings that there are two justifications and no justification by imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us.

And (isn’t it amazing?), N. T. Wright and the others who have come up with this “New Perspective on Paul” are saying that the teachers of the church for the last 1500 years or so have all got it wrong.

- What about the poor blighters who were depending on those teachings all those years?

- It is always a dangerous thing when someone comes along and tries to overthrow centuries of orthodox teaching.

### III. The preparation of the believer

But why am I bothering to go into this kind of detail with you here and now today? Do I think you are in danger of being swept away by the New Perspective on Paul? No... not at all.

- A. This particular error touches on the interpretation of the current passage we are in
1. Thus it is timely to point out how subtly men can twist the Scripture
  2. This particular error can become an example to warn us against other errors that involve other passages and other false teachers

It is impossible for me to keep up with every error, or for you to know every error, but our considerations today can be a help for you when you encounter some other error, new or old.

- B. The subtlety of error is a significant point for you to be aware of
1. Pastor Minnick describes this error as a “subtle soteriology of faith and works”

“This denial of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, combined with the present justification (a declaration that we are in the covenant) on the basis of faith but the future justification on the basis of spirit-produced works, creates a subtle soteriology of faith and works.”<sup>8</sup>

2. Pastor Minnick notes that serious Bible scholars have had to wrestle for many hours, write many pages, in an attempt to explain and refute the NPP teachers

The errors are so subtle they are hard to ferret out  
*Subtle errors are easily swallowed by believers who are not firmly established in the faith. (And sometimes even by otherwise strong believers.)*

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<sup>8</sup> Minnick, p. 4.

- C. You need to be watchful, growing, faithful, and maturing
1. Be a student of the truth (so you can smell error)
  2. Be a faithful member of a Bible believing church
    - a. Personal devotions: Bible reading and prayer
    - b. Public devotions: attending and serving in a Bible believing church
  3. Be a watchful Christian – realize that there are spiritual enemies lurking... who just happen to be nice, civilized, friendly, scholarly gentlemen.
    - a. Wolves in sheep's clothing are often very attractive sheep.
    - b. Old battle-weary true rams (true sheep) in the pulpit are sometimes seen to be a mean, ornery kind of sheep.
      - 1) Too negative
      - 2) Too demanding
      - 3) Too narrow-minded
      - 4) No fun

So beware!

## Conclusion:

And finally, let's pray for the Lord's return!

While we are left on this earth, let's maintain a faithful, fruitful life and witness.

And most of all, let us make no mistake that our faith is in Jesus Christ alone, depending on nothing of my works or righteousness to be justified before God.