

FOREWARD:

The 'Federal Vision' is a term coined by its adherents to stress the need for a renewed emphasis on the covenant and its significance to all areas of theology and the life of the church. The need of a such an emphasis is timely and difficult to deny. There have been positive contributions made by those under the banner of Federal Vision. There are many things being taught and emphasized that we can agree with. In fact some avowed opponents of the Federal Vision have made statements such as the following:

Their purpose is laudable. They have rightly recognized that modern evangelicalism has over-emphasized the subjectivity of Christian experience. Revivalism has distorted the objectivity of union with Christ. They have pointed out that this distortion also has affected the reformed branches of Christ's church. Rightly, they have reminded us that baptized members of the church are to be treated as Christians and that some Reformed people have treated their children in a baptistic manner (as seen in a failure to recognize that baptized covenant children are members of the church or in the assumption that covenant children are unregenerate). Moreover, they have sought to raise the view of God's people with respect to the importance and efficacy of the sacraments. They also have rightly warned against the danger of creating two, disparate entities in the definition of the church as visible and invisible. We commend the proponents for raising these concerns and share them.

However we share the following deep concern,

We believe, however, that in addressing these concerns they have over-reacted. In fact, their remedy is worse than the disease. It seems to us that they have swung too far in the opposite direction in attempting to address the problems. They are like a doctor who decides to amputate the patient's leg, because it was out of joint. Under objectivity of the covenant they have blurred some important biblical and historical distinctions.

Pipa, Joseph A. "Federal Vision Theology: An Overview of Critics' Concerns", in *The Auburn Ave. Theology: Pros & Cons*, 9-10, ed. C. Beisner, Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004

Furthermore, in the ensuing discussions, conferences, and writings of those who identify themselves with the "Federal Vision", questionable doctrines have surfaced. Some of these doctrines conflict with our confessions and with the traditional Reformed understanding of key doctrines of scripture.

The difficulty in identifying, and critiquing the 'Federal Vision', is that there are a multitude of thoughts being expressed under its banner. Among these are a significant number which are in conflict with one another. In fact each of the teachings that are dealt with in the attached overture will be found to held by some proponents, and rejected by others. There are indeed a few who have distanced themselves from some of the more troublesome doctrines. Yet overall, there is a sense of confusion, as to who is on which side of each of these issues. In addition, the writings are generally collections of lectures and writings by men articulating and defending their own particular views. There is no unified confessional statement unifying the adherents of the Federal Vision against which we can address critical judgement.

Therefore we recognize that we can only reject those particular teachings of individuals that come under the banner of Federal Vision and which we find to be in error. Though we certainly do not make statements about every wrong theological teaching, there are times when such a statement is rendered necessary. If any teachings cause controversy and division in churches and denominations essentially like-minded to ours, there can be a pastoral concern that may need to be publicly addressed. We remind ourselves of the words of our Form of Subscription,

"We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors.

We do believe that the following teachings undermine a Reformed understanding of scripture as well as the unity and spiritual welfare of the Church. We do not consider these exhaustive, but representative of dangers that churches are being exposed to in this controversy.

Therefore we overture the Synod 2005 of the O.C.R.C. federation to declare that, "We deny and reject any teaching or doctrine being taught under the name "Federal Vision" which contradicts the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt or Holy Scripture. The following teachings are representative of those we understand to be in error."

A. TEACHING REGARDING THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION:

1) The works which are excluded from justification are restricted to those "works of meritorious self-righteousness that only serve to mask gross sin and disobedience." Other works are included in justification. Man is justified forensically not only by faith, but he is also justified forensically by all those "works done in faith, according to the law of God, and for the glory of God". In justification, faith is equated with works done in faith.

Grounds for rejecting this teaching:

- a) This teaching strikes at the heart of the gospel and is a rejection of a central tenet of Reformational truth because it undermines justification by faith alone.**
- b) This teaching is being taught under the Federal Vision banner (see below):**
- c) This teaching is clearly contrary to our confessions (see below).**

Examples of this teaching (with explanatory notes):

Shepherd, Norman. "Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology". in *Backbone of the Bible*, 94,98,99, ed. P.A. Sandlin, Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2004:

The Works Excluded from Justification:

In Romans 3:28 Paul says that we are justified by faith "apart from observing the law." Literally he says we are justified by faith "without the works of the law." Many would hold that "works of the law" includes everything that God commands in His word, all works of any kind, whether good or bad, whether done in faith or in unbelief. This interpretation is reinforced by Luther's insertion of the word "alone" into the text of Romans 3:28 so that the verse reads that we are justified by faith alone, without the works of the law. The difficulty is that this interpretation brings Paul into conflict with himself....

...When Isaiah says in chapter 64, verse 6, that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags," he is not talking about works done in faith, according to the law of God, and for the glory of God, as we so often assume. He is not talking about good works that are somehow nevertheless tainted with sin. He talking about these "works of the law," these selective acts of righteousness that are designed to cover up the massive disobedience of the people who do them.

...The works of the law are the works of meritorious self-righteousness that only serve to mask gross sin and disobedience.

While Shepherd speaks of the traditional understanding of Isaiah 64:6 as one "we so often assume", it would be more accurate to say, "as the Reformed Church and confessions have consistently held."

Likewise, Steve Schlissel rejects the confessional and Biblical Reformed doctrine of justification. He too, reduces the works excluded from justification to the works of Judaizers and those trying to merit heaven. In his "system" any good work of faith is a work that justifies us forensically.

Schlissel, Steve. "Justification and the Gentiles", in *The Federal Vision*, 246-247, ed. S. Wilkins & D. Garner, Monroe, LA, 2004:

(On Galatians 5:4) The arguments about justification arise because of the crisis: Gentiles are being told they must become Jewish to become Christian. Paul makes it pretty clear that this ain't so: "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified; by the law; you have fallen from grace."
The distinction which must always be kept in mind is between the law as God gave it and the Law as it had come to be used by the Jews.

...In other words, Paul is arguing against Jewish abstractionism, the separation of Law and grace: the "perverse Jew" --- as opposed to the faithful Jewish Christian---sought from the Law only that which could be credited to his account in the bank of righteousness. It is only against a wrong view of the Law the Apostles argued.

...What was their message? Justification by faith apart from obedience? No. (p. 254)

Earlier in this chapter we sought to deliver Galatians 3:28 from the versifiers. We showed that the issue addressed in the epistle was not justification by faith as opposed to covenantal obedience, but justification for the Gentiles apart from becoming Jewish.

(underlined emphasis added)

In rejecting Schissel's assertion, we are not saying covenantal obedience is opposed to justification by faith either. We believe it is the fruit. But Schissel is arguing that covenantal obedience or good works cannot in any way be "apart" from the act of faith as the instrument of justification.

Therefore like Shepherd, Schissel teaches that only Judaizing or Pharisaical works of the law are excluded from our forensic justification. All other works are part and parcel of our justification. There is really no distinction between faith and works when it comes to Justification for the believer.

More generally, Lusk and Armstrong also reveal that they are dissatisfied with the historical Reformed understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. They are seeking a substitute, something new:

Lusk, Rich. "Justification: Ecclesial, Cosmic, and Divine", online at http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/justification_ecclesial_cosmic_and_divine.htm

"The traditional Protestant doctrine of justification fails to fully hold together the soteriological (forgiveness of sins) and the ecclesiological (covenant membership). This is part of a larger problem, of course, namely, the dichotomizing of church and salvation. Biblically and confessionally, there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside of the church (Acts 2:47; WCF 25.2). Salvation and the church are not related arbitrarily, as if God thought it would be a good idea to somehow get all those saved individuals together in one organization. Rather, incorporation into the church is integral to salvation precisely because salvation is the restoration and glorification of human community. By isolating justification from the church, we have dangerously constricted the scope of the biblical doctrine."

Armstrong, John H. "What About the Doctrine of Justification by Faith?", online at <http://www.christianculture.com/cgi-local/npublisher/viewnews.cgi?category=3&id=1043234596>

"...most evangelicals have assumed a great deal about what Paul said in Romans and Galatians and want no part of opening up "new" questions by means of the text. Really, they are afraid of the last century and its emphasis upon biblical theology, preferring to use confessions as the "final" word on the meaning of the Bible..."

There is nothing really new with the dissatisfaction being voiced by all of the above proponents of the Federal Vision regarding the traditional teaching of justification by faith alone. This opposition has always existed. (*View the appendix containing quotations from Charles Hodge, and John Calvin on these matters*). In rejection of these teachings we limit ourselves to the following statements from our confessions.

THE TESTIMONY OF OUR CONFESSIONS:

I. THE BELGIC CONFESSION

ARTICLE XXII OUR JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

We believe that, to obtain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior.

Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

ARTICLE XXIII WHEREIN OUR JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD CONSISTS

We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied; as David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the blessedness of man that God imputes righteousness to him apart from works. And the same apostle says that we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before Him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig-leaves. And, verily, if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed. And therefore every one must pray with David: O Jehovah, enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous.

ARTICLE XXIV MAN'S SANCTIFICATION AND GOOD WORKS

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes man remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it no one would ever do anything out of love for God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a faith working through love, which excites man to the practice of those works which has commanded in His Word.

These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace. Nevertheless they are of no account towards our justification, for it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works;

otherwise they could not be good works, any more that the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good.

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them (for what can we merit?) ; nay, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not He to us, since it is He who worketh in us both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. Let us therefore attend to what is written: When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do. **In the meantime we do not deny that God rewards good works, but it is through His grace that He crowns His gifts.**

Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, then, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be continually vexed if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior.

II. THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

LORD'S DAY 24

62. Q. But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?

A. Because the righteousness which can stand before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect and wholly conformable to the divine law, while even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

III. THE CANONS OF DORT

SECOND HEAD OF DOCTRINE:

THE DEATH OF CHRIST, AND THE REDEMPTION OF MEN THEREBY:

REJECTION OF ERRORS: PARAGRAPH 4

Who teach: That the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, in as much as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of faith, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.

For these contradict the Scriptures: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood (Rom. 3:24-25). And these proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole Church.

B. TEACHING REGARDING THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S ACTIVE OBEDIENCE:

2) There is no such notion as that of anyone "meriting" or "earning" anything in scripture. Therefore Christ's perfect moral obedience to the law did not "earn" or "merit" anything for God's people. Therefore there is no imputation of Christ's active obedience. Only Christ's passive obedience, --- namely what He did in going to the cross and suffering the penalty of our guilt and sin --- is imputed to us, rendering us forgiven and guilt-free.

Grounds for Rejecting this Teaching:

- a) It is clearly contrary to our confessions (see below) , the historical Reformed faith, and scripture which speak of the imputation of Christ's active obedience and of His 'merits' on our behalf.
- b) It is being taught under the banner of the "Federal Vision" (see below).

Examples of this Teaching (with Explanatory Notes):

Shepherd is explicit in his denial of the long-standing Reformed and Confessional doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active obedience.

Norman Shepherd, in Backbone of the Bible (edited by Andrew Sandlin), Chapter 6, pg. 115
 Shepherd, Norman. "Justification by Works in Reformed Theology". in *Backbone of the Bible*, 115, ed. P.A. Sandlin, Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2004:

Justification meant that God forgives our sins and on that basis accepts us as righteous and gives us the title to eternal life. There is no imputation of active obedience because the faith/grace paradigm within which they understood justification did not require it and no Bible texts taught it.

Others echo a rejection of this doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active righteousness:

Armstrong John H. "Justification, Imputation and the Righteousness of God" , online at
 (<http://www.christianculture.com/cgi-local/npublisher/viewnews.cgi?category=3&id=1109611207>)

"What I do not see so plainly revealed in Scripture is the idea that Christ kept the law for us and by this "merited salvation for all who believe on him. In this thinking we are saved by merit, Christ's merit. This merit idea is what I do not see plainly revealed by Scripture. By employing this merit category we effectively separate keeping the law, by the Spirit, from trusting Christ alone to save us."

Armstrong John H. " What About the Doctrine of Justification by Faith?" online at
 (<http://www.christianculture.com/cgi-local/npublisher/viewnews.cgi?category=3&id=1043234596>)

"I deny that I am teaching salvation by human merit or any work I do. I also deny that the "merit" of Christ saves me based upon his obedience fulfilling the place of my disobedience. (This is much closer to the real debate, which has to do with the idea of a covenant of works and how Reformed people want to employ this much debated and generally misused idea.) What saves me is the death and resurrection of Christ, his present intercession, the gift of his Spirit to me, and the final assurance of my vindication on the last day, promised to me now on the basis of the promises of God in the gospel. If I trust him I was saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved!"

James B. Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity", in The Federal Vision, 155, ed. S. Wilkins & D. Garner, Monroe, LA, 2004:

*"...My thesis is that what Adam was supposed to provide, and what Jesus provided for us, is maturity. That is to say, the new status that Jesus provides for us does not come about because He earned something Adam failed to earn, but because He persevered in faith toward the Father until He was mature, which Adam did not do. Rich Lusk has helpfully stated the matter this way:
 The covenant of works construction strikes at the filial nature of covenant sonship. Adam was God's son, not his employee. He wasn't to earn anything. Eschatological life was a promised inheritance, not something to be merited. When Jesus is brought into the picture, the problems with the covenant of works are even greater. Jesus is God's Son in an even deeper sense. To reduce His relationship with the Father to an employer/employee relationship, with Jesus earning wages, strikes at the heart of the intra-Trinitarian relationships. The Son never has to earn the Father's love and to suggest otherwise seems virtually blasphemous. The sonship of Adam and, behind that, of the Logos, simply rule out covenant-of-works style theologies. Sons never merit anything from fathers, in the Trinity or in creation. (R.Lusk, Private Communication, 27 May 2003.)*

THE TESTIMONY OF OUR CONFESSIONS:

I. BELGIC CONFESSION

(SEE QUOTATIONS ALREADY CITED REGARDING CHRIST'S MERITS IN JUSTIFICATION)

II. HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

LORD'S DAY XXIII

59. Q. *But what does it profit you now that you believe all this?*
A. *That I am righteous in Christ before God, and an heir to eternal life.*
60. Q. *How are you righteous before God?*
A. *Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, though my conscience accuse me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil, **yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.***
61. Q. *Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith?*
A. ***Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God, and I can receive the same and make it my own in no other way than by faith only.***

C. TEACHING REGARDING THE DOCTRINE OF THE SACRAMENTS:

3) Reformed Theology has undermined the importance, place, and efficacy of the sacraments. The sacraments are equal in importance with the Word. Neither are the sacraments are to be considered "means of grace". They are "saving" grace. A covenant member who is a recipient of such "saving grace" and who is a believer (possessing true faith and it's fruit) may completely apostatize and be a reprobate.

Grounds for Rejecting this Teaching:

- a) Our Reformed confessions distinguish the sign from the reality that is signified thereby. They also see the sacraments role not in the 'working' of faith but in the assurance and strengthening of faith.**
- b) A form of sacramentalism is being taught by some under the Federal Vision banner (see below).**
- c) This sacramentalism fails to uphold the importance of the exercise of faith and repentance as essential factors in personally appropriating and receiving forever the reality that is pictured by the sacraments. It is often united to the doctrine of paedocommunion and is hesitant to recognize the scriptural distinctions between 'saving' faith and other 'faith'.**
- d) The result is a teaching which affirms that even a believer who has exercised true faith and born the fruits of sanctification may completely apostatize. This results in a covenantal understanding that undermines the covenantal comfort of Lord's Day 1 Q&A 1 and 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism and is in opposition to the doctrine of the 'perseverance of the saints'.**

Examples of this Teaching (and Explanatory Notes):

Much controversy has been stirred up concerning the nature and efficacy of the sacraments. Such controversy is nothing new to the Reformed churches. We recognize there must also be a willingness to understand and respect the varied views that have been held by eminent and highly respected theologians throughout history. Regarding, for instance, Douglas Wilson's view of sacramental efficacy, even as strong an opponent of the Federal Vision as Richard Philips had this to say: *For the reasons stated above, I am persuaded that Wilson and those who share his view find themselves in sharp conflict with the sacramental teaching of the Westminster standards. The views he espouses are not heretical, and they find solid companionship within Reformed orthodoxy, so long as the necessity of faith is clearly maintained. Should he withdraw from the necessity of faith, as others have done, his sacramental teaching would then constitute another, different, and false gospel altogether. It is my hope and prayer that he continues his prior unwillingness to abandon the great Reformation principle of sola fide in his sacramental theology. (The Auburn Ave. Theology, Pros and Cons, page 252).*

We ought to be able to live with some distinctives in our understandings of sacramental efficacy. Nevertheless, there are teachings that are clearly in conflict with our confessions, and which give a decidedly non-Reformed understanding of the sacraments.

Leithart Peter, "Why the Sacraments Are Not Means of Grace," Credenda/Agenda 15-1:22, online at [Http://www.credenda.org/issues/15-1liturgia.php?type=print](http://www.credenda.org/issues/15-1liturgia.php?type=print).

"The "force" that acts on us, whether in sacraments or in ordinary food or washing, is God Himself. Thus, the model of the sacramental operation should not involve four terms-God, grace, sacraments (as "means" or "channels" of grace), church; but only three-God (who is favorably disposed to us), sacraments, and the church."

Below Leithart sees the Reformational understanding of the sacraments as an impediment to the correct 'grasping' of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Leithart Peter, "Against Sacraments," in *Against Christianity*, 75-76, Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003

"Six overlapping tendencies make it difficult for evangelicals to grasp baptism and the Lord's Supper.

He then lists them and gives the third one as follows....

....Third, the Reformation: The Reformers taught that the Word has priority over the sacraments. Salvation comes from hearing the Word with faith, not by mechanical adherence to the sacramental system of the church. Sacraments are an "appendix" to the Word.

...In the end all the factors reduce to one: the Church has embraced modernity's disdain for ritual, though we have given pious glosses to our worldliness. In the end, all these factors are part and parcel of our adherence to Christianity.

(Note: As can be seen by the title of the above book, "Christianity" is a term Leithart uses to describe most of what is wrong with the Christian religion today.)

Baptism and the Supper as appendixes to the Word: Despite its venerable pedigree, this is not a useful way to approach the issue.

In historic Reformed and confessional theology, one who is ultimately a covenant-breaker, although he may have partaken of many covenant blessings in Christ, (e.g. "tasted of the Holy Spirit"), he could never have been personally born again (regenerated) and have been a recipient of full 'saving' grace'.

Regarding the possibility of apostasy for those united to Christ, this is entirely scriptural (Heb 6: 4ff; 10:26-31; 1 Cor 10; John 15). However the prior union of one who falls away from Christ cannot and must not be equated with the union of one who is regenerated (made alive, born again) and who personally comes to saving faith and receives the integral gift of persevering grace. The later has a deeper, experiential, saving union and is able to "obey" God's law in a way that the one who falls away never did (Hebrews 11:6). That is why, (as William Heyns, for instance, shows from scripture)

there is a covenantal union that is not to be treated as absolutely equivalent with individual electing union. Not all covenant members personally experience, appropriate or possess the comfort of Romans 8: 31ff; and John 10: 25-30;

In the same way, one must be willing to say that there a covenantal election (which can be lost) and there is an individual saving unconditional election (which cannot be lost). They are not identical in their extent. This is scriptural. We cannot just level these into one and speak without qualification as if they are one and the same. To do that is to leave God's people in confusion and uncertain as to whether "election" really is "election" or not? When we compare scripture with scripture and read each passage in the light of its context, we should realize we may not do this. Our covenantal perspective is to be informed and affected constantly by what scripture reveals about God's sovereign and electing work in the heart of the individual sinner, just as our preaching must be.

The following quotes are from Guy Waters, an critic of Federal Vision teachings.

Waters Guy, "What's at Stake for Reformed Christianity", in *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul*, 208, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004. (quoting from Auburn Ave. PCA, "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation." online at <http://www.littlegeneva.com/auburn.html>)

AAPC argues that the traditional distinction between a saving and a non-saving work of grace is, at best, overdrawn; at worst, a fiction:

"The question (in Hebrews 6) raised does not concern the nature of the grace received in the past (i.e. real regeneration vs. merely common operations of the Spirit), but whether or not the one who has received this grace will persevere. Thus, the solution to Heb 6 is not developing two psychologies of conversion, one for the truly regenerate" and one for the future apostate, and then introspecting to see which kind of grace one has received. This is a task beyond our competence. The solution is to turn from ourselves and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith (Hebrews 12:1f).

The teaching that a person may be a full recipient of the atoning work of Christ and still apostatize conflicts with the doctrine of limited atonement. Norman Shepherd believes that the idea of a covenantal perspective can justify the (temporary?) setting aside the doctrine of limited atonement. He even goes a step further. He teaches that we should apply the covenantal "perspective" in our evangelism as we invite the lost to enter into covenant. We should, he asserts, feel free to tell them that "Christ died for them" as well.

Waters Guy, "What's at Stake for Reformed Christianity", in *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul*, 206, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004. (quoting from Norman Shepherd, "The Covenant Context for Evangelism," in the *New Testament Student and Theology*, ed. J. H. Skilton (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), p.57)

One example in which Shepherd's distinctive views become apparent is in his exhortation that "the Reformed evangelist can and must say on the basis of John 3:16, Christ died to save you.... Christ did not die for inanimate objects or preternatural beings, nor did he die for abstractions. He died for people, for you and for me." we may observe Shepherd conceding that from the "perspective of election" this statement is "only possibly true, and may well be false"; but because John 3:16 is "embedded in the covenant documents of the New Testament," we have covenant truth" simpliciter, not "an elaboration of the doctrine of election as God views election or a commentary on the extent of the atonement in an absolute sense".

(underlined emphasis added)

THE TESTIMONY OF OUR CONFESSIONS:

I. THE BELGIC CONFESSION

ARTICLE XXXV

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

....Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified nevertheless both are not received by all men. The ungodly indeed receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he does not receive the truth of the sacrament, even as Judas and Simon the sorcerer both indeed received the sacrament but not Christ, who was signified by it, of whom believers only are made partakers.

II. THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

LORD'S DAY XXI

54. Q. *What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Church?*

A. *That the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself⁴, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life; **and that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.***

LORD'S DAY VII

20. Q. *Are all men, then, saved by Christ as they perished through Adam?*

A. *No; but only those who **by a true faith are ingrafted into Him and receive all His benefits.***

LORD'S DAY XXV

65. Q. *Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith?*

A. ***From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.***

66. Q. *What are the sacraments?*

A. *The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel; namely, that He of grace grants us the remission of sins and life eternal, for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.*

67. Q. *Are, then, both the Word and the sacraments designed to direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?*

A. *Yes, indeed; for the Holy Spirit teaches us in the gospel and assures us by the sacraments that the whole of our salvation stands in the one sacrifice of Christ made for us on the cross.*

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72. Q. *Is, then, the outward washing with water itself the washing away of sin?*

A. *No¹, for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.*

84. Q. *How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?*

A. *By proclaiming and openly witnessing, according to the command of Christ, **to believers, one and all, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits;** and on the contrary, by proclaiming and witnessing to all unbelievers and such as so not sincerely repent that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them so long as they are not converted¹. According to this witness of the gospel God will judge, both in this life and in that which is to come.*

III. CANONS OF DORDT:

FIFTH HEAD OF DOCTRINE
THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS
ARTICLE 3

*By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and also because the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who are converted could not persevere in that grace if left to their own strength. **But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.***

ARTICLE 14

*And as it has pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, **so He preserves, continues, and perfects** it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, and by the use of the sacraments.*

SEE ALSO:
REJECTION OF ERRORS PARAGRAPHS 1-9

Conclusion:

The aforementioned teachings have resulted in deep concern, in confusion and in division, among faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches and denominations . While we recognize there is a measure of truth in the teachings of various proponents of a “Federal Vision”, there are very serious errors present among them. These threaten the unity, peace, and welfare of faithful churches of Christ. For this reason as OCRC Synod we must warn our Churches against an undiscerning acceptance of what is taught under the banner of “Federal Vision”, and to reject the serious errors with which it is affected.