

## **Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul**

WHEREAS the church in every age should expect that even from within the professing body of believers, new battlefronts to open in the incessant assault upon the gospel of God's sovereign and saving grace (Acts 20:27-32; 2 Cor. 11:1-4, 13-15; Gal. 1:6-10; Jude 3,4); and

The gospel of justification by faith alone is a matter of first importance and a doctrine of fundamental import, for without it the hope of salvation is negated and the church destroyed (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 1:16, 17; Matt. 28:18-20); and

Evangelical Protestantism has always clearly understood justification as the free and gracious act of God whereby He forgives all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us by means of faith in Him (Ps. 32:1, 2; Rom. 3:28; 4:5-8; Phil. 3:8, 9); and

The writings of men in our day, such as James Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright, with their new perspectives on Pauline theology call that understanding into question and seek to redefine the historically attested Protestant understanding of justification before God through the alien righteousness of Christ; and

These new perspectives on Paul are colored in part by select readings from extra-Biblical Jewish material that it is proposed help us to better understand Paul and his polemic against first-century Judaism; and

These new perspectives on Paul make the argument that Paul's controversy with first-century Judaism was not over meritorious salvation and self-justification through moral deeds but rather over racial exclusivity and cultural elitism by Jews and the disbarment of Gentiles from God's covenant community because of their failure to keep community customs; and

These new perspectives on Paul redefine justification as an issue of identity among the people of God rather than the establishment of a righteous standing before God, thereby shifting the focus from individual redemption to racial reconciliation; and

These new perspectives on Paul go on to redefine the conventional evangelical understanding of such phrases as "works of law" to exclude the thought of moral law-keeping and "the righteousness of God" to mean God's covenant faithfulness to His people; and

The bold accusation of this body of theologians is that evangelicals have been mistaken about Pauline theology for centuries because they have transposed Luther's conflict with Roman Catholicism on top of Paul's tangle with first-century Judaism;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we, the messengers of the churches in fellowship with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, meeting for our 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference in Lakeland, Florida, June 28–July 1, 2005, adamantly affirm our opposition to these new perspectives on Paul that we perceive as a clear and present danger to the integrity of the gospel and the sure hope that it brings to the believing soul;

THAT we will declare and defend the Biblical revelation that there is only one gospel, justification by faith alone in Christ's obedience and atoning death, and that any addition or alteration to that one gospel makes it another gospel that is not a gospel at all but a pseudo-gospel that bears the anathema of God (Gal. 1:8, 9);

THAT we recognize the primacy and the sufficiency of the Biblical text to inform us of the nature of first-century Judaism and consequently reject old or new perspectives of scholars who reject the historical accuracy of the Biblical text and refuse to bow before its authority (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:16–21);

THAT we understand the doctrine of justification to center solely upon how a sinful man is declared to be made right before God instantly, irrevocably, without degree through the alien righteousness of Christ credited to him after faith (Luke 18:9–44; John 5:29; Acts 13:38, 39; Rom. 4:2–4; 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:16; Phil. 3:9);

THAT we will treasure the repository of classic Protestant theology concerning the doctrine of *sola fide*, a theology that has been shaped and beaten upon the anvil of tested Biblical scholarship and true exegesis (Eph. 3:17–19; 2 Tim. 2:2; Jude 3); and

THAT since the gospel is a matter of first importance, that it above all things will be the message preached and promoted among us, and that it above all things will be the first test of fellowship among us and towards others who name the name of Christ (1 Cor. 2:1,2; Phil. 1:3–7; 2 John 9–11).

*Lakeland, Florida  
June 28–July 1, 2005*