

# **My struggle with the Social Structure in The Evangelical Tradition.**

My early experiences with organized Evangelical Christianity.

Evangelical churches are some of the most racially and culturally exclusive organizations in American society.

My experience with Evangelicals of European descent is that many cannot identify their ethnicity believing themselves to be ethnically neutral.



**The Legacy of the Reformation  
From the 95 Theses  
to the  
Westminster Confession**

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# Luther's problem with penance

By Luther's day, Roman Catholics believed that Christians required one of the church's seven sacraments – namely, penance – to be forgiven for the sins they committed after baptism. The sacrament consisted of several elements: “contrition” (or sorrow for sin,) “confession” to a priest, the pronouncement of “absolution” (whereby the priest told the penitent that the sin was forgiven), and “satisfaction” (or a way of discharging in this life the penalty entailed by the sin).

**In Roman theology indulgences became  
a means to effect satisfaction for the believer.**

**James' story:**



# Luther's interpretation of "works of the Law"

The work of the law then, according to Paul, signifieth the work of the whole law, whether it be judicial, ceremonial, or moral. Now, if the work of the moral law do not justify much less doth the circumcision justify, which is a work of the ceremonial law. Wherefore, when Paul saith (as he oftentimes doth) that a man is not justified by the law, or by the works of the law (which are both one) he speaketh generally of the whole law, setting the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of the whole law, or all that can be done, whether by divine power or by man's own strength, according to the law. For by the righteousness of the law, saith he, a man is not pronounced righteous before God: but the righteousness of faith God imputeth freely through grace, for Christ's sake.

## **Luther's work draws the following conclusions:**

“Works of the law” is synonymous with the entire Mosaic law.

“Works of the law” includes the circumcision associated with the Abrahamic covenant.

“Works of the law” is not sufficient for justification.

**Justification** is synonymous with **salvation**.



Luther's work offers the hermeneutical paradigm adopted by most of Post-Reformation theologies through the definitions of the following terms:

**Justification**

**Righteousness of God**

**Righteousness of the believer**

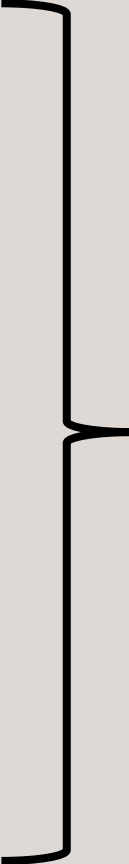
**Works of the Law**

**Abrahamic Covenant**

**Soteriological vs Eschatological**

**Cultural Mandate**

**Gospel**



The Definitions for these terms create the hermeneutical system.

# Augsburg Confession - 1530

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfaction, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace....paragraph 4

And the gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merits of Christ, when we believe this...paragraph 5

The fathers also teach thus, for Ambrose says, “It is ordained of God that who ever believes in Christ shall be saved...”paragraph 6



Luther's theology presented a soteriological priority at Augsburg.

The eschatological interaction with God throughout human history is understood as serving a soteriological end.

Most hermeneutical systems make this assumption.



# Heidelberg Catechism 1563

...and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me,

Heidelberg is still working from a soteriological priority:

Righteous and holiness, moral qualities, are imputed to the believer because of Christ's obedience.

# Westminster Confession - 1646

These whom God effectually calls he also freely justifies. He does not pour righteousness into them but pardons their sins and looks on them and accepts them as if they were righteous – not because of anything worked in them or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone. He does not consider their faith itself, the act of believing, as their righteousness or any other obedient response to the gospel on their part. Rather, he imputes to them the obedience and judicial satisfaction earned by Christ. For their part, they receive and rest on Christ and his righteousness by faith (and this faith is not their own but is itself a gift of God)

Maintaining the  
soteriological  
priority

Westminster locked down the definitive expression.

It moves away from the moral qualities of righteous  
and holiness being imputed to the imputation of  
Christ's obedience.

Luther, followed by the Post Reformation confessions are saying:

People are not saved by keeping the Law.

Salvation is by Faith in the finished work of Christ.

Rome was saying: we are saved by works, first baptism and then penance and satisfaction.

Both of these, based on a soteriological priority, believed their theology to be coming from Paul with Luther offering a corrective for Rome.

**Luther could have and maybe  
should have approached his  
theology through a different priority.**



## **From: “The Jews and Their Lies” by Martin Luther 1543**

He must hear how they exalt themselves and praise God for separating them from the heathen, and permitting them to be born of the holy fathers and chosen them for his own holy nation...

The other boast and superiority, on account of which they exalt themselves above all other people and despise them, is this: that from Abraham on down they have circumcision. God help, how we heathen here must suffer in their schools, prayers, songs and teaching! How ugly we despised people stink before their noses because we are not circumcised, etc...

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Jews were ethnocentric with a eschatological worldview.



Paul facing 1<sup>st</sup> century ethnocentric Jews with an eschatological worldview is saying:

Your ethnic heritage (ethnic Judaism) circumcision and/or the boundary markers of Judaism are not sufficient to justify or identify one as a member of the beloved community (members of the covenant with Abraham).

Membership is validated by Faith in the finished work of Christ.

Paul's is an eschatological model.

Paul's soteriological teaching functions to serve his eschatological vision.

Rome was teaching a works salvation and justification



Luther was caught between two theological traditions.



The 16<sup>th</sup> century Jew were teaching Ethnocentrism

# The Implications of a Soteriological Priority

A soteriological priority has led to individualism.

Individualism's focus is on me, and my salvation at a point in time.

Individualism has lead to a privatized practice of Christianity.



# The Implications of a Soteriological Priority

Individualism leads to ethnocentrism by denying the importance of ethnicity.

Who are the ethnic people?

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus – Galatians 3:28



# The Implications of a Soteriological Priority

The elimination of ethnicity fuels exclusivism and an emphasis on homogeneity.

What is the ethnicity (culture) of Christianity?



# The Benefits of an Eschatological Priority

The Abrahamic Covenant is the theological agent founded on an eschatological priority offering the foundation for a collective identity.

An eschatological priority is the foundation for inclusion and for building a multicultural community.

An eschatological priority is necessary for a healthy functional body of Christ – The Beloved Community dreamed of by Martin Luther King.



# Conclusions

I agree that the heart of the Reformation is salvation by faith and not by works.

Salvation by faith is the strength of the corrective theology needed to address the error of Rome.

I do not believe that this is the error faced by Paul in his 1<sup>st</sup> century struggle for the integrity of the Gospel.



# Conclusions

I do believe that Luther's choice of a soteriological priority over a eschatological priority:

1. Offered Hitler and the Nazi party validation for their action during the holocaust.
2. Has supported the destructive social structure plaguing the Evangelical Church today.



# Some Key scripture passages

In all of the key passages Paul's emphasis is on the status of one's identity as a Jew and member of Abraham's beloved community and not on salvation.

The salvation theme is present but it serves the larger eschatological vision.

The point of Paul's teaching is that Gentiles can be considered as members of the community by their faith in the finished work of Christ without identifying with Judaism through circumcision or other Jewish boundary markers.