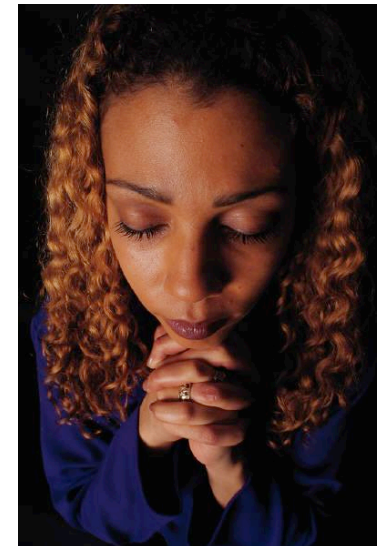


# *Community versus Individual Redemption*

City Reformed Foundations Lecture, July 17, 2010  
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# Preface: Three sub-groups in Reformed churches

(Marsden, Keller)

## “Doctrinalist”

John Calvin, Charles Hodge, Gresham Machen, R.C. Sproul, Michael Horton  
focus on careful understanding of the truth of the Bible as root of redemption  
temptations: dead orthodoxy; false teaching due to following logical systems rather than face value of Scripture

## “Pietist”

John Owen and English Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, Charles Spurgeon, George Verwer, Jerry Bridges  
focus on heart conversion and individual growth, missions and evangelism  
temptations: following the pop culture rather than leading it; false teaching due to pragmatism: whatever “works”

## “Culturalist”

John Knox, John Locke, Abraham Kuyper, Francis Schaeffer, Steve Garber, D. James Kennedy, Mark Driscoll  
focus on changing society in all aspects; mercy ministry, justice, and high culture  
temptations: following the high culture rather than leading it, compromising teaching; dead “social Gospel”

## All three need to be held in balance:

The church is comprised of those who respond to the *truth claims* of the Bible.

*“Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? “ (Galatians 3:2)*

The Bible itself teaches that individual heart conversion (faith and repentance) is at the core of all Christian life.

*“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:12)*

The Bible teaches that the church, comprised of all those who individually believe the truth of the Gospel, are converted by it, and connected to each other, will have major impact on the world.

*“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)*

New movements in our generation are a shift to strong “culturalist” emphasis that is in some cases out of balance

- disappointment with lack of community:  
*“shopping mall” or “cafeteria” church*
- disappointment with cultural isolation of the church:  
*canonizing the pop culture of the older generation*
- disappointment with lack of coherent political philosophy: *“reactionary” voting*
- disappointment with pietistic forms without real piety in life decisions: *“psychobabble” and “greeting card” sentiments, but divorce, etc., rampant*

Two redefinitions of the Gospel from the right and the left:

Federal Vision (Doug Wilson)

New Perspectives on Paul (N.T. Wright)

common themes:

The Gospel is not about “getting saved” and  
“going to heaven”: anti-individualism

Emphasis on externals to define church rather than  
heart conversion: sacraments, parish membership

Emphasis on long-term “conquest” of earth by the church

## Things Wright gets right (same as standard Reformed theology)

- covenantalism: connection of OT Israel and Church  
*Christ as fulfillment of OT promises*
- optimism about future-- connection of church and future glory  
*“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)*
- multi-faceted salvation, not just a “ticket to heaven”

### *Reformed “order of salvation” (Romans 8:29-30)*

- calling by Holy Spirit: regeneration
- faith and repentance: conversion
- justification: legal declarative act of God at moment of conversion: we are “in the right”
- adoption: legal declarative act of God at moment of conversion: we are “God’s children”
- sanctification: process of change during whole life
- glorification: pure state in Heaven

Specific point of debate: What is justification?

Reformed: “double exchange”

- Our sin imputed to him: his death is our death

*“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3)*

- His goodness imputed to us

*“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (Romans 8:11)*

We are “in the right” because God looks at us and sees Christ *in us*, right now.

In general, Christ’s death and resurrection are always discussed together: his death is our death, his life is our life.

Wright:

- Rejects imputation of Christ's goodness to us.  
(But accepts imputation of our sin to Christ.)
- We are "in the right" because we belong to the covenant people of God.
- We have the promise that in the future God will see something good in us because his Spirit will make us *actually* good.

*thief on the cross?*



Wright:

“Judaism in Paul’s day was not ... a religion of legalistic works righteousness. If we imagine that it was, and that Paul was attacking it as if it was, we will do great justice to it and to him... The Jew keeps the law out of gratitude... **not, in other words, in order to get into the covenant people, but to stay in.**”

“Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly... *on the basis of the entire life.*”

“[This declaration] occurs in the future,... **on the basis of the entire life a person has led in the power of the Spirit-- that is, it occurs on the basis of ‘works’ in Paul’s redefined sense.**”

Does this matter?

Does God *like* me?

A. God means well toward me but does not actually like me. Maybe later he will.

B. God likes me but does not actually see anything good in me. So God likes what is not good.

C. God likes me because he makes me actually good enough to like, in myself.

D. God likes me because he knows he will eventually make something actually good in me.

E. God likes me because Christ is truly in me, and Christ is good.

Does this matter?

*What assurance do I have, and on what basis?*

A. I have no assurance I will go to heaven.

B. I have assurance because I am baptized and admitted to the Table. All who are such go to Heaven.

*“For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?”  
(Hebrews 3:16)*

C. I have a pretty good assurance, but not complete assurance, because most, but not all, who are baptized and admitted to the Table go to heaven.

D. I have assurance because I have put my faith in Christ. This requires me to examine my heart.

*“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”  
(2 Corinthians 13:5)*

*“For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”  
(Romans 10:10)*

Wright and Federal vision have different variations on the answer to question:  
**How do I know that I will go to heaven?**

Fed. Vision: I shouldn't analyze my heart, only look at my baptism and affirmation of that in the Lord's supper. All in the parish are justified, but then we should remove some when they refuse to repent.

Wright: I should look at the changes the Spirit is doing to cause me to do good works as part of the community.

Both teach that we should take a similar approach as first-century Judaism (as researched by Sanders):

What matters is community membership; all who are in the community have reasonable hope of heaven.

We do good works to stay in the covenant community.

This gives us reasonable hope of heaven but we should not focus on heaven, but rather, God's kingdom here.

# The importance of actively working on our “heart” in Scripture

*“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.” (Deuteronomy 10:16)*

*“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 4:4)*

*“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 7:51)*

*“But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” (Romans 2:29)*

*And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,  
“ ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” (Mark 7:6)*

*“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)*

*“Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.” (Ezekiel 18:31-32)*

*“O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil, that you may be saved.” (Jeremiah 4:14)*

This is not “individualism” or “self absorption.” It is *humility* to say that my sin goes deep, and I can’t be content with “surface healing.”

*“They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush.” (Jeremiah 8:11-12)*

# The importance of the hope of heaven in Scripture

*If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:9)*

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. **My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.** (Philippians 1:21-23)*

*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, **they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.** (Hebrews 11:13-16)*

*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.’”(John 11:25)*

*This is the path of those who have foolish confidence; yet after them people approve of their boasts. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. (Psalm 49:13-15)*

*“If I make my bed in darkness, if I say to the pit, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ or ‘My sister,’ where then is my hope? (Job 17:13-15)*

*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. (Job 19:25-27)*

## General critiques of N.T. Wright

- Goes overboard on saying Gospel is not about my personal relation to Christ.

“The Gospel is not an account of how people get saved.”

*“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)*

- Goes overboard on saying Gospel is not about heaven.

“Salvation is not about the rescue of God’s people *from* the world, but the rescue of the world itself.”

Is our *hope* in changing this world?

*“What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.” (Ecclesiastes 1:15)*

*“For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them.” (Mark 14:7)*

## General critiques of N.T. Wright

- Buys too much into first-century Judaism as paradigm for New Testament church.

“Then and there I realized that most Jews of the time were not sitting around discussing how to go to heaven.”

Much of the New Testament is a *rejection* of first-century Judaism.

Wright’s “new perspective”: only error was *nationalism*, not accepting Gentiles in. Otherwise the church should look pretty much like Pharisaical Judaism, especially in regard to beliefs of world conquest and community membership.

*Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:15)*

*cf. Luke 18:9-14*

- Distorted use of term “justification” as “membership”

“[Justification] was not so much about ‘getting in’ or indeed about ‘staying in’, as about ‘how you can tell who was in’...not so much about salvation as about the church.”

*cf. Luke 7:29, Luke 18:14 (Luke was Paul’s Gospel)*



## General critiques of Federal Vision

- Goes overboard in saying we cannot know anything about someone's heart.
- Almost seems to return to “patriarchal” or “tribal” thinking. Real danger of cultlike authoritarianism.

## A plea to the younger generation

- Every generation has been frustrated by lack of change in the world, and gone for “revolutionary” communal fixes and demands for rule following.
- Real, positive communal change in the past has come when individual hearts are changed, one by one.
- People’s individual salvation matters!

“world strategy” would imply ignoring people of little strategic value.

- Strategic, long-term thinking and “great works” of science and culture are good, but never at the cost of people (including yourself).

*Use things, love people. Not the other way around.*

*“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (Luke 9:25)*

