
Just Who Is A Christian, Anyway?

Analyzing the Federal Vision
Lecture 1

Just Who Is A Christian, Anyway?

- The Federal Vision
 - Other Terms?
 - Breakdown of the Label
 - “Federal”
 - “Vision”
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Just Who Is A Christian, Anyway?

I. Scripture and Standards: Covenant of Grace

- WLC 31, "The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed."
- WLC 166, "...but infants descending from parents, either both or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, *are in that respect within the covenant*, and to be baptized."

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- Membership in the Covenant of Grace: Outward and Inward
- How do we explain Eph 1:4, 1 Cor 1:8?
- The doctrine of the judgment of charity
 - 1 Peter 5:12, "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother [*for so I regard him*], I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!"

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- The doctrine of the judgment of charity, ctd.
 - 1 John 2:19-20, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out, so that it would be shown that they are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know."

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The FV on Covenant Membership

1. It is *objective*

“And a covenant is also objective, like your marriage. It’s there whether the members of the covenant feel it’s there, or they believe it’s there, whether they even believe in the covenant or not.”

John Barach

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The FV on Covenant Membership

2. It is *essentially vital*

“Covenant is a real relationship, consisting of real communion with the Triune God through union with Christ ... The covenant *is* union with Christ. Thus, being in covenant gives all the blessings of being united to Christ.”

Steve Wilkins

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“Covenant isn't a thing. Covenant isn't a thing that you can analyze – covenant is a relationship. It is a personal, ordered and formally binding relationship. It's personal; it's not just a legal relationship. Some people present the covenant as if it were something somewhat cold and impersonal, like a business contract.”

John Barach

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The FV on Covenant Membership

3. It is *undifferentiated*

- John 15:1-8 (Vine and Branches)
- “All the branches are truly and vitally joined to the vine.”

Steve Wilkins

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“As in the old covenant, so in the new covenant.

There is an objective covenant made of believers and their children. Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union, then, with Christ and with the triune God. The Bible doesn't know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant, really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks about the reality, the efficacy of baptism. Every baptized person is truly a member of God's covenant.” John Barach

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II. Scripture and Standards: Election

The number of the elect: finite, unchangeable

“Some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.” (WCF 3.3)

“These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished” (WCF 3.4).

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Unconditional Election

“Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace” (WCF 3.5).

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The FV on Election

(1) Two elections:

according to the decree

according to the covenant

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“Paul is treating the generally, or corporately, elect, as specially elect until and unless they prove otherwise. True, corporate election may not issue forth in final salvation, as the nation of Israel shows (cf. Dt. 7; Rom 9-11). Apostasy is a real possibility for all covenant members, and is to be warned against. But corporate election is the context in which special election is worked out. There is indeed an election within an election (cf. Rom 9:6), but for pastoral purposes, the two can and must be collapsed into one another.”

Rich Lusk

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The FV on Election

(2) Conditional election

Election →

→ Reprobation →

→ Election

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“Though God declares Israel “my people” early in her history, we discover in Hosea that God later calls Israel “not my people” (Hos. 1:9). He made them His special people, and then He reprobated them in history: “Not my people.” Later in Hosea He promises to call Israel “my people” again. He promises to preserve a remnant and to bring in the Gentiles as well. He promises to choose, to elect, Israel one more time. That sounds strange to us, but it is scriptural language. [Isa 14:1 cited] God chooses Israel *again*. He *continues* to choose Israel as His people even though many of them apostatize...” John Barach

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III. Scripture and Standards: Assurance

(1) To whom does assurance belong?

“such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before him ... ” (LC 80).

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(2) How is assurance to be attained?

- “by faith grounded upon the truth of God’s promises
- “by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made”
- “by the Spirit ... bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God”

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(3) An “infallible” assurance (WCF 18.3)

(4) Assurance not “of the essence of faith”
(WLC 81)

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The FV and Assurance

Critique of the doctrine of assurance
as practiced in the church today:

Assurance = presumption

Assurance = unattainable

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The FV and Assurance: John Barach

Grounds of Assurance:

(1) Water Baptism

(2) Covenantal Membership

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“Every baptized person is truly a member of God’s covenant and therefore shares in his new life”

“You don’t need a special, dramatic, revivalistic conversion to let you know that you are elect. You had the special experience that God gives you. It was called baptism.”

John Barach

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“At baptism, God promises that you’re really one of His elect: I will be your God and you will be my child. And God never hands out counterfeit promises. If He made that promise sometimes but not all the time, then you could *never* trust the promise. But God’s Word is true and you must trust him. Doubting your election when God has promised it to you is sin.”

“a promise is not a prediction. God never promises that you will be saved regardless of whether you respond to Him in faith and love. His promise always makes you responsible.”

John Barach

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"we need to be able to tell our congregations... and tell individual members... , "Jesus died for you personally," and we mean it, to them, head for head, every one of them. How do we know that? Because they are in covenant with God and we view them as brothers and sisters because that's who they really are. But we look around the congregation and ... we do not give them a judgment of charity that says, "Well, I don't know. Maybe he is a Christian, maybe he isn't, so I will be charitable. I will regard him as a Christian."... Instead we go by God's promise. He has said that this person is in Christ and, therefore, believing God's promise, we treat that person as who he really is, someone who is in Christ."

John Barach

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The FV and Assurance: Steve Wilkins

- Ground of Assurance: Water Baptism
 - Assurance *Not* Found Through Self-Examination
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“By the blessing of the spirit, baptism unites us to Christ and his church and thus in him gives us new life [Rom 6:11, 2 Cor 5:17 cited] By our baptism we have been reborn, in this sense, having died with Christ, we have been raised with him [Rom 6:3-4 cited] You have been given new life by virtue of your union with him.

Christ's baptism meant that the old things were passed, the sin and the curse of the law had passed away and all things had become new. The same is true for all who are baptized. You die to the old covenant relationship to the world, you are resurrected to a new covenant relationship with the Savior and henceforth are required to walk in newness of life.”

Steve Wilkins

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“[Paul is] rather stating the objective reality that is true of [the Corinthians] by virtue of their baptism and union with Christ. The glorious reality of the covenant which is established at baptism is that **our children and all who are baptized** have this real, living, objective, gracious relationship with God.”

Steve Wilkins

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“All the things that you and I are rightly concerned about, externalism, presumption, things we see all around us, the covenant prevents that when it's preached in its fullness. We belong to Christ. Baptism is the infallible sign and seal of this, and now we must learn to live faithfully and never depart from him ... In regard to our assurance, we are pointed away from ourselves, and what we think we perceive to be true of us inwardly, *which no one can know*. And pointed to Christ, the only ground of your assurance...”

Steve Wilkins
