

# OpenTheo

## #139 Q&A on New Creation & Salvation with Pastor Miles McPherson Pt 1

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### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

NT Wright was interviewed by Pastor Miles McPherson at Rock Church San Diego. They talk about Tom's work to redescribe the gospel in terms of new creation, and what that means for the concept of 'getting saved'. Recorded in 2019.

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## Transcript

The #AskNTYAnything podcast. Hello and welcome to the podcast that brings you the thought and theology of New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright. I'm Dustin Bradley, heading up theology and apologetics for Premier Unbelievable.

And of course, the show brought you in partnership with Tom's UK publisher, SBCK, and NT Wright online who published Tom's video teaching courses. Well, last week we heard

Tom speaking on the New Testament in its world at the Rock Church in San Diego. Well, today on the show, we're bringing you the sit-down conversation that Tom had with Miles McPherson, the pastor of the church following that talk.

By the way, thanks to Leveske in Nigeria, who says, "I don't know why I've only just discovered this podcast, but I'm thankful." NT always tries to speak clearly, genuinely, and humbly about topics crucial to our faith. I'm such a big fan now. Listening to the episodes, it's like having a virtual conversation with an elderly, wise uncle who has a lot to share.

I seriously recommend this to all Christians and even seekers who are looking for some guidance and insights into the way of Jesus. Thank you, Leveske. I'm sure Tom will appreciate wise uncle.

I'm not sure about elderly, but you know, I think even Tom admits, you know, he's getting on in wise years, let's say. Anyway, leave a review on your podcast provider. It helps other people to discover the show and do get in touch with a question by registering for our newsletter at [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com). You can also support us from there as well.

We would value anything you can do to help us continue to bring you these shows. Again, [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com) and the link is with today's show. Let's get into today's conversation.

I'm sitting over there going, I don't want to do an interview. Why don't you just keep talking? Can you all get amen? But I'm going to do an interview. Sorry.

That was awesome. We have, so what we're going to do is we're going to talk about 37 more minutes. Then we're going to do a book signing in the bookstore.

He'll be in the bookstore. I'll be in the bookstore with him. This is one of his books, 900 pages.

You can read that by next Sunday. There you go. This is another book.

This is a small one. It's probably about 500 pages. Great books.

I read these last night just to kind of get to know each other. This is my book. It's 10 pages.

It's all pictures. Got a little coloring lines in it. That's enough for me.

Listen, I'm jacked up because I'm sitting down there listening to you and I'm writing all these notes. One of the words I wrote was engagement. We are working models of the kingdom of God.

We have to engage our society and we live in a dangerous world. Let's just talk about the working model. Flesh that out for us.

I imagine most people in here are Christian. If you're not, you're going to have an opportunity to become one in a few minutes. We're going to talk about that because we have a little different idea of salvation, which is interesting.

Just a little tiny bit, tiny, tiny little detail. Talk about being a working model because that's what we are. We're not students to get information.

We're working models. We are not simply students to get information. Jesus taught us that we should love God with our heart and mind and soul and strength.

The student getting information is part of the mind bit and that's really important. But you've got to go all the way around. In my experience, there's a pastor, different people, different people, groups, different churches score highly on one or other of those four.

The challenge then is to carry on round, as it were. But as we know more about the first century, then the other things do start to become clear. Sorry, I'm going off to the tangent.

I'll ask you a question again because it's the small working models thing. God's plan, according to Paul in Ephesians, is to sum up all things in heaven and on earth in the Messiah. That looks back all the way to Genesis 1 when God makes a heaven plus earth world.

And the scholars who've studied this that I find most compelling say this is basically a picture of a temple. When you have heaven plus earth together, this is a temple. And what's the last thing you put into a temple is an image of the God so that the world around can see who the God is and so that they can then worship through this.

Now, when God makes his heaven and earth world in Genesis 1, he puts an image into this world which is called human beings, male plus female. And they are designed to stand at the dangerous overlap of heaven and earth. With Genesis 3 and all that goes on with the chaos of idolatry and sin, this falls apart and humans are messing up.

But the vocation from the time of Abraham onwards is God setting up symbols and signs of putting this heaven and earth world back again. This is Jack of me up. I don't know how this people's sentences are still.

I'm not aware of it. I love Jack up because you go back to Genesis because just to think about the privilege and the power and the opportunity of being human. Exactly.

The human vocation is what Israel has when it's called the royal priesthood. That's to reflect the love and power of God into the world and reflect the praises of the world back

to God. That's the human vocation.

And that is what is renewed in the gospel. Paul says in Colossians, "We are to be renewed in knowledge according to the image of the Creator so that when a human being becomes," as Paul says in 2 Corinthians, "a new creation in Christ through baptism and faith, then they are in themselves modeling the new creation which God has promised to make, the renewal of heaven and earth from top to bottom. And the power of the devil is to trick us not to believe that.

Absolutely. Or to distort it so that we either back off and say, "Oh no, I've just got to be saved away from the world," or that if we think, "Oh, this is rather exciting. I'm supposed to be an image bearer in God's world." We then think we can go off and change the world in our own way.

And that's when we get into the real trouble when people forget that the way that God became King in Jesus climaxed in the cross. And if we put that to one side and think, "Oh, we're just going to improve the world by our will, we'll follow Jesus, but we'll make them. We know how to do it.

And if people get in our way, we'll drop bombs on them," or whatever. And then bad things happen. And that's the problem if you start out with a vision of yourself that has this trajectory, trajectory versus this trajectory.

God said, "You and me, the kingdom is in you. You are, you are made in my image and you are, what did you say, a working model of a new creation?" But the kingdom, the kingship, the word kingdom really means kingship. That is God becoming King.

I was writing about this some years ago and my wife always brings me down to earth. So what's your writing power? I said, "How God became King." And she wasn't God always King. And I said, "Well, yes, but the Old Testament is full of promises that he will become King in a new way because his kingship has been usurped by dark powers and forces." And Jesus, by announcing that this is the time for God to become King, somehow the dark powers are lured onto him and do their worst to him.

And he dies under their weight and so exhausts their power. Now it still looks to us as though they're part of the early Christians face this, first Peter revelation. Jesus died, he suffered so that we could be saved.

So why do we still have to suffer? And the answer is that the victory which was won through Jesus' death must be implemented through the life and work and the suffering of God's people. That's been so from day one and it's still so. Okay.

Let's go back salvation because I'm an evangelist. I'm like get people saved, they're gonna make a decision. And we were talking about this earlier and you had a little different, you know, description of that, I would say.

Let's talk about that. And by the way, let me say we were talking about how controversial people, well, like all of us are, to some degree. And what's great about people like Tom is that Tom expands our understanding of things that we might not have known and it's great that you're here.

And so when you challenge me in a great way to help me see salvation. I don't even remember what I said. I'll tell you what you said.

I'll tell you what you said. I'm like, ha, right? So, you know, in America, we do the salvation thing where you make a decision and you say a prayer and you get saved and you said in Britain that idea of being saved is not really well, okay. But then let me do some one more thing.

You said that some people, it's not a matter of the moment of conversion, but the state of having been converted. So you might not think back to that moment. We're about the moment.

And then after there too, but the moment. I would say if there's somebody who has no knowledge of God, no experience of Jesus, then there may well be a moment. Absolutely.

And I know many people who I have seen come that route and it's hugely exciting and you know this as an evangelist. When I was younger, I really wanted to be an evangelist because it's kind of dramatic and exciting and throughout my early... Well, I wanted to be a ball-headed theologian. You know what I'm saying? And instead you became a football player.

Yes, and you became a rugby player. He played rugby by the way. He played rugby.

He was violent before. That's the whole other story. I think the point I was making is that the language of "getting saved" in most British churches today would be heard in an older, maybe 19th century, either Salvation Army or fundamentalist sense, often in an escapist sense, namely saved away from the world, rescued from the wicked world of sin and all the rest of it.

And I think a lot of people have reacted against that. And also it's partly a cultural thing that when you cross the Atlantic, things get much more dramatic and exciting over here. And we British are trying to say, "Well, just keep it quite calm." And sometimes... Brilliant.

Cheers. Brilliant. Absolutely.

You got it. He's learning bit by bit. But I think the real thing is this.

God intends to renew the whole creation. Says so in Isaiah 65 and 66, says so in Romans 8, says so in Revelation 21, 22. The last scene in the Bible is not saved souls going up to

heaven, but the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, because the whole drama of Scripture is not about humans somehow finding their way to live with God, but God longing to come and live with humans.

That's what it's all about. That's why. So if the language of salvation triggers in people's mind, "I need to leave this world and go somewhere else," then we're wary of it.

Now, as to conversion, I mean, I'm one of these funny people that I just grew up knowing the love of God in Jesus from the earliest memories I have. And then I was kind of jealous in my teens because a lot of my friends really did get converted from an absolutely nothing start. We can take care of that right now, though.

Sorry. We can do that right now. And so I was greatly comforted when I read... I think it was Jim Packer, the great British theologian who's still alive teaching in Vancouver, when he said that, quoted one of the 17th century theologians saying, "It's not so important to have a moment of conversion.

What matters is the state of convertedness." And the example that I love is from Acts chapter 16 when Paul is in Philippi. And one of the first things that happens is this dear lady called Lydia, who hears Paul speaking about Jesus and the Lord opens her heart and she believes, and it's wonderful. She gets baptized, comes into the house and brings Paul and Silas in.

And then Paul gets beaten up and thrown into jail, and he and Silas are singing hymns at midnight as you do. And there's an earthquake and the walls fall down and the jail is about to commit suicide. And Paul says, "Don't do that.

Believe in the Lord Jesus." And he gets converted. And then you imagine a week or so later the jailer gets to meet Lydia and they have this conversation. How did you get converted? Well, I just heard him speak.

It all made sense. Oh, you mean there wasn't an earthquake? The walls didn't fall down. It didn't feel like killing yourself.

And then the jailer goes back and I'm a bit worried about it. So, I mean... Are you marking our way of getting saved? Not in the very... I am merely doing my job, which is expounding in New Testament in its way. That's an intellectual way of saying, "I got you." [laughter] We get saved, and this is where I'm going with this, I kind of tricked you or them into this intellectual conversation to get us to this point where I want to challenge us.

We get saved. We are the working model. Now we have to engage culture because a lot of Christians in our culture are engaging with some aren'ts.

They become students and that's it. They go in hiding their church or they go hiding their

Bible studying and they're not engaging culture because it's scary, dealing with racism, dealing with the poor, dealing with issues that's on television. Talk about our responsibility to be engaged in the culture.

Okay. Do that stomp you? In John chapter 16, Jesus says, "When the Spirit comes, the Spirit will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment." For many years, I would read that. It's in our electionaries in the Anglican church.

We read that. It's kind of a dense little passage, and when it's spelt out, it doesn't seem to get any clearer. But the point is, I used to think, "That's great.

The world needs convicting and the Spirit is going to do that." I was quite getting on in years before I suddenly realized the way the Spirit does that is through the Spirit living and speaking in Jesus' followers. In other words, we aren't spectators when the Spirit is holding the world to account, convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. The Spirit wants to do that through us, but not usually, I think, in a kind of a wild way of us just going around saying you're all sinners, you're all sinners, because people are, "Oh, come on.

Get over it." It doesn't have the effect. It really means what it means when we take the culture sufficiently, seriously, to analyze what's going on, to probe down and see the roots of the mistakes, the radical mistakes that were being made in our beloved Western culture, and to put your finger on it and say, "Here, we're simply going wrong." Now, if you want a working model of that, go two chapters further on, three chapters further on, and you find John 18 and 19, when Jesus is confronting Pontius Pilate, that's the kingdom of God confronting the kingdom of Caesar, and what are they arguing about? Kingdom, truth, and power. And Jesus is convicting Pilate of getting all three wrong.

In fact, Pilate says, "What is truth?" Because brutal empires make their own truth. And Jesus has come to speak the truth, which is the truth of new creation, which outflanks the old creation and challenges it with the news that God is God and is making a new world, whether the old creation likes it. Of course, then Pilate has him killed.

But John's readers know that that is the point when the God who is coming to be king claims his kingdom. It says it above Jesus' head on the cross, King of the Jews, in all three official languages. Because when he is lifted up on the cross, he has borne the sins of the world so that their new creation can be born, and so that all people everywhere, whatever their class or color or gender can be part of this new creation family.

That's how it works. But in the middle of that is the responsibility then to speak the truth to power. Now here's the other thing.

In our Western culture, ever since the 18th century, the church has backed off from that, and has become platonic and has said, "We're just going to heaven, so if the world wants

to do its own thing, that's fine." And particularly the media, the newspapers, I've got friends in the newspaper business and in the television business. And they basically think it's now their job to hold the world to account, to hold the politicians to account. If you go to the Chicago Tribune building in Chicago, it's carved in stone.

The politicians cannot hold themselves to account, somebody else must do it, and it's us. That is usurping the vocation of the church. How do we take it back? Not by brutal means, but by cheerfully preaching and living the gospel.

That's what ultimately holds the world to account. Some Christians have allowed, you usurp their authority, and they allowed politics to be their power, not the power of God. And our country is split politically, if you're Christian, you're over here, if you're Christian over here, and we fight through political beliefs versus through biblical beliefs.

Speak to that. It is tough because we created a vacuum in the 18th century when we separated church and state, etc. And I know people say, "Will you in Britain have an established church?" But actually, that's a formality, and the reality underneath is much more like how people in America assume things to be.

And of course, France, Germany, etc. Pretty much the same. We have said, "Christian faith is over here, and politics is over there, and usually never the train shall meet." In the New Testament, all power belongs to God and is vested in Jesus, and part of the trick of what we in the trade call "creational monotheism," and that is there is one God who made the world and loves the world, is that God wants his world to be wisely ordered through wise human rulers.

Part of the vocation of wisdom is that God doesn't want a holy anarchy. In anarchy, the bull is in the bad guys always win. Nor does he want a would-be holy tyranny, where one person just tells everyone else what to do.

Our modern democracies were a way of trying to avoid anarchy on the one hand and tyranny on the other, and they both have and haven't succeeded. And we are still in that trap. But because we had banished the rumor of the Kingdom of God from our political discourse, there's a vacuum.

And now, suddenly, as happens with vacuums, stuff is rushing back in, and people are saying, "If you're a Christian, you must vote this way. If you're a Christian, you must vote. In my country at the moment, it's the Brexit thing." I'm rather in an odd way, rather dreading Christmas, because we're going to have most of the family around, and I know my four children rather well, and I think that all four go and vote in different ways in the forthcoming election.

And this could get interesting around the lunch table. And I bet there's many American families that are in a very similar position. So we need to work on being the Kingdom



people for the world and in the world, which means training up a generation of leaders who can speak and write wisely.

It's no good having quick-neighure Christian reactions. We've got to have people who've thought through how to do that. There used to be a major Christian tradition of political theology.

That was really stifled when we separated church and state 200 years ago. It's coming back, but so often now people know in their bones we ought to be saying something, but it is pure knee-jerk, and then we just get into worse and worse trouble. Some people see Christianity as information, propositional truths, versus a person, the gospel, a person, a relationship.

And because it's a relationship, what I read your stuff and hear you inspires me to be engaged with people versus seek information. Because some writing is just information, but it doesn't connect you to the person. But it's back to what I said before about the heart, mind, and soul and strength.

If you leave the mind out, because you say this is personal and we don't want all that silly information stuff, then bad things are going to happen. You're going to slide way off, and that's happened again and again. So we do need the whole thing.

Thanks for being with us today and next week the second part of this sit down Q&A with Miles McPherson, which we'll touch on racial reconciliation and women leadership in the church. For now, thanks for being with us and for more from the show to register for our newsletter to ask a question and indeed to support us, go to [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com) and you can find the link with today's show. For now, see you then.

[Music]