

The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright by John Piper.
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Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder.

The doctrine of justification, which touches upon the central question of the nature of the Gospel, is once again discussed within evangelical and reformed circles. But this revival of interest is mainly due to the so-called "New perspective on Paul." Its prominent advocate is N.T. Wright, influential- renowned British New Testament scholar and the Anglican Bishop of Durham. He claims that "the doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means 'by the gospel'." He argues that the church (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox) didn't get this doctrine right for the first fifteen hundred years. "The discussions of justification in much of the history of the church, certainly since Augustine, got off on the wrong foot – at least in terms of understanding Paul – and they have stayed there ever since." He claims that Paul's doctrine of justification did not serve to answer the "timeless" question how sinners can find acceptance with God, but to explain how you can tell who belongs to "the community of the true people of God now and in the future." He defines justification as *the declaration that a person is in the covenant family*. He also believes that our future justification will be on the basis of works. "The Spirit is the path by which Paul traces the route from justification by faith in the present to justification, *by the complete life lived, in the future*." And he has the notion that first-century Pharisaism was a grace-based religion that has been much misunderstood and falsely maligned.

In, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*, John Piper, pastor for preaching and vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, defends the truth that justification by faith is at the heart of the gospel. He refutes Wright's interpretation of key passages on the topic with careful exegesis, pastoral concern, remaining faithful to the Gospel and the Creeds of the Reformation. He rightly says justification is part of the ground, not the declaration of saving covenant membership.

He points out that Wright's portrayal of the gospel – and of the doctrine of justification in particular – is so disfigured that it becomes difficult to recognize it as a biblical doctrine. He argues that it will lead to a kind of preaching that will not announce clearly what makes the lordship of Christ good news for the guilty sinner or show those who are overwhelmed with sin how they stand righteous in the presence of God.

What of our good works? Can't they contribute to our salvation? Piper notes that the Gospel includes the good news of justification by faith apart from the works of the law. Says Piper: "God has not ordained that living the Christian life should be the basis of our hope that God is for us. The basis is the death and righteousness of Christ, counted as ours through faith alone." Therefore, justification and sanctification are to be distinguished, but they may not be separated. The good works of the believers are the fruit of a true and living faith. The world needs to see the radical, risk-taking, Christ exalting sacrifice of humble love that makes us willing to lay down our lives for the good of others, without the demand of reward on this earth.

Piper has done the church a great favour with his pastoral refutation of Wright's so-called "New Perspective on Paul." He hopes that his book will promote serious study and faithful preaching of the gospel, which includes the good news of justification by faith apart from the law. Warmly recommended!

