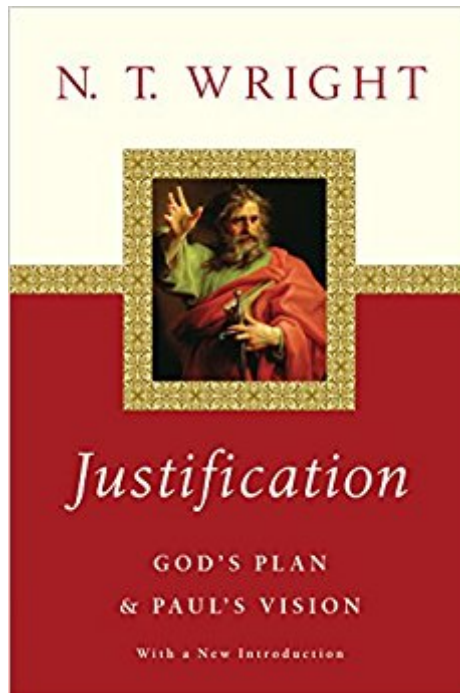




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# Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision



## Synopsis

Few issues are more central to the Christian faith than the nature, scope and means of salvation. Many have thought it to be largely a transaction that gets one to heaven. In this riveting book, N. T. Wright explains that God's salvation is radically more than this. At the heart of much vigorous debate on this topic is the term the apostle Paul uses in several of his letters to describe what happens to those in Christ—justification. Paul uses this dramatic image from the law court to declare that Christians are acquitted of the cosmic accusations against them. But justification goes beyond this in Paul's writings to offer a vision of God's future for the whole world as well as for his people. Here in one place Wright now offers a comprehensive account and defense of his perspective on this crucial doctrine. With a new introduction, he provides a sweeping overview of the central points in the debate before launching into a thorough explanation of the key texts in Paul's writings. While fully cognizant of tradition and controversy, the final authority for his conclusions is the letters of Paul themselves. Along the way Wright responds to critics, such as John Piper, who have challenged what has come to be called the New Perspective. For Wright, what Paul means by justification is nothing less than God's unswerving commitment to the covenant promise he made to bless the whole world through Abraham and his family. This irenic response is an important contribution for those on both sides of the debate—and those still in between—to consider. Whether you're a fan of Wright's work or have read his critics and would like to know the other side of the story, here is a chance to interact with Wright's views on the issues at stake and form your own conclusions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Justification remains a well-written, persuasive articulation of Wright's position, littered throughout with flashes of brilliant exegetical insight, which deserves to be read by everyone interested in the debate, friend and foe alike." (Alexander Stewart, Biblical Theology Bulletin, Volume 41, 2011)"...N.T. Wright's Justification is well worth reading. It's not a light read and may take some effort, but it is about one of the core issues of our faith, and touches on something that is both a contemporary issue and one that concerned the lives of Paul and Martin Luther. Wherever you fall in the argument, Wright's position is worth knowing." (Paul Metzloff, Trinity Seminary Review, Winter 2011)"Wright's work is brilliant, so full of inter-textual allusions and quotes that one can only stand in awe of the final product!" (Susan K. Hedahl, Currents, Winter 2011)"Whether you are a scholar or lay teacher, if you want to learn more about the New Perspective on Paul and N.T. Wright's views on justification, Justification is an important work." (Michael Makidon, Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society)"Wright is a versatile author, able to reach both academic and popular audiences. Justification will appeal to academic readers and serious students of theology." (C. Brian Smith, Christian Retailing, June 8, 2009)"For those interested in this ongoing debate regarding justification, this book offers an introduction to the overall debate, as well as a detailed biblical-exegetical understanding of Wright's own position." (Mary L. Vandenberg, Calvin Theological Journal, April 2010)"Wright offers a passionate and stimulating treatment of the core of Paul's theology. . . Both an engaging exploration of Paul's theology and a lively defense of his own approach to what in some circles is regarded as the heart of Christian doctrine." (Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., American, March 8, 2010)"Justification is likely to become his most controversial book to date, for it offers a fundamentally new reading of a doctrine at the center of Protestant and evangelical theology." (Douglas Harink, Christian Century, December 1, 2009)"Wright is pretty succinct in his argument. Wright's perspective falls in line with what is commonly referred to as the new perspective on Paul. Because, in Wright's mind, this perspective is much older than other conceptions. Put simply, it is an approach to Paul from within the interpretive context of Paul's original, Jewish milieu. Wright, and others on the same "quest" have argued that we have missed much of what Paul was getting at because we failed to read him through the original lens." (Darren King, Precipice (precipicemagazine.com), July 2009)"Wright does provide a vision of justification that - perhaps not surprisingly - is more in touch with the understanding of the 17th century Mennonite church than it is with Reformed theology. This is a great book." (Young Anabaptist

Radicals ([young.anabaptistradicals.org](http://young.anabaptistradicals.org)), June 14, 2009) Listed in the article Ten Theology Books for Your Beach Bag. (Collin Hansen, Christianity Today Online ([christianitytoday.com](http://christianitytoday.com)), June 15, 2009)"An outstanding book. Written in lively, if somewhat polemical style, not encumbered with many footnotes, Wright has here laid out his views with exemplary clarity. In fact, he is affirming all the major Reformation perspectives on justification. The burden of Wright's work, however, is to highlight how dwelling exclusively on the Reformers' emphases in Pauline soteriology can easily cause us to miss the bigger picture and the grander narrative in which those emphases are set. The problem for Wright with much of the Reformation and especially with John Peper's version of Calvinism is that it can quickly lose sight of the plan of God to redeem the entire cosmos through the people of Israel, culminating in the Messiah, as a blessing for the whole world. While one may still disagree with Wright's take on this or that passage or on one specific exegetical conundrum in a given passage, the only way I can see how one can deny that his major emphases are both correct and profoundly important is to ignore large swaths of Paul's writing and especially Ephesians. Perhaps Wright's critics will finally recognize him as a crucial ally and not an opponent." (Craig Blomberg, Denver Seminary)"Frank theological table talk is sometimes a necessary endeavor. Tom Wright's *Justification* is his substantive reply to critical work by many, including John Piper, on the New Perspective. Wright correctly reminds us that this approach should be better called New or Fresh Perspectives. The goal is to open up the text concerning what it originally said in the first century, not change it. This book sets up a meaningful and significant conversation between the camps in this debate through its direct interaction with the critique. It should be read and reflected on, just as work on the other side should be. So I recommend this book and say, pull up a chair to the table and pay careful attention to the conversation. In the dialogue, all of us will learn more about what Paul and Scripture say about justification (and a few other things as well)." (Darrell Bock, Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary)"This is a sharply polemical book, and N. T. Wright occasionally rises to Pauline heights of exasperation at his opponents. At bottom, though, it is about Pauline basics—about Abraham and Israel, eschatology and covenant, courtroom and Christology. With debates about perspectives old and new swirling around him like a cyclone, Wright does what he always does—he leads us carefully through the text. Some will doubtless remain skeptical about the Copernican revolution Wright proposes, but we are all indebted to him for reminding us once again of the breadth of the gospel of God and the majesty of the God of the gospel." (Peter Leithart, author of *Delivered from the Elements of the World*)"John Piper, it turns out, has done us all a wonderful favor. In writing the critique that invited this response, he has given Bishop Wright the opportunity to clearly, directly,

passionately and concisely summarize many of the key themes of his still-in-process yet already historic scholarly and pastoral project. Wright shows how convincingly how the comprehensive view of Paul, Romans, justification, Jesus, and the Christian life and mission that he has helped articulate embraces 'both the truths the Reformers were eager to set forth and also the truths which, in their eagerness, they sidelined.' Eavesdropping on this conversation will help readers who are new to Wright get into the main themes of his work and the important conversation of which it is a part. And it will give Wright's critics a clearer sense than ever of what they are rejecting when they cling to their cherished old wineskins of conventional thought." (Brian McLaren, author of *A Generous Orthodoxy*) "I find it quite stunning that a book dealing with the subject of justification could be this compelling of a read. Along the way you find yourself getting caught up in the momentum and energy of the book which pulls you into the momentum and energy of THE BOOK which is, of course, Tom's point." (Rob Bell, author *Love Wins*) "Tom Wright has out-Reformed America's newest religious zealots the neo-Reformed by taking them back to Scripture and to its meaning in its historical context. Wright reveals that the neo-Reformed are more committed to tradition than to the sacred text. This irony is palpable on every page of this judicious, hard-hitting, respectful study." (Scot McKnight, Northern Seminary) "For some time now, I have watched in puzzlement as some critics, imagining themselves as defenders of Paul's gospel, have derided Tom Wright as a dangerous betrayer of the Christian faith. In fact, Paul's gospel of God's reconciling, world-transforming grace has no more ardent and eloquent exponent in our time than Tom Wright. If his detractors read this book carefully, they will find themselves engaged in close exegesis of Paul's letters, and they will be challenged to join Wright in grappling with the deepest logic of Paul's message. Beyond slogans and caricatures of 'Lutheran readings' and 'the New Perspective,' the task we all face is to interpret these difficult, theologically generative letters afresh for our time. Wright's sweeping, incisive sketch of Paul's thought, set forward in this book, will help us all in that task." (Richard B. Hays, Duke Divinity School) "N. T. Wright provides yet again another fresh and exciting exposition of the apostle Paul. Here Wright shows how Paul proclaimed justification by faith as part of the Bible's theodramatic story of salvation, a story that stretches from creation to Abraham to Israel and all the way through to Jesus the Messiah. Wright responds to many criticisms including those of John Piper, and regardless of whether one gravitates toward Wright's or Piper's unpacking of Paul, you cannot help but enjoy the sparks that fly when these two great modern pastor-scholars cross swords over the apostle. Moreover, Wright artfully brings readers into the narrative world of Paul, and he sets before us a stirring portrait of the apostle to the Gentiles and his gospel." (Michael F. Bird, Ridley College) "Like

Paul himself writing to the Galatians, in this book Bishop Tom expounds and defends his interpretation of the apostle's teaching on justification with passion and power. At the same time, he seeks to move beyond divisive categories (old perspective versus new; soteriology versus ecclesiology; justification versus participation) so that Paul can speak from within his own context and thereby to us in ours. The result is an extraordinary synthesis of the apostle's views and the Bishop's views that should be read by the sympathetic, the suspicious and everyone else." (Michael J. Gorman, St. Mary's Seminary & University, Baltimore)"This sprightly and gracious yet robust work is Tom Wright's carefully argued and scripturally based response to those who think that he has deeply misunderstood Paul's doctrine of justification. Although it is intended especially for those familiar with the debate between the various scholarly perspectives on Paul, it is in fact a straightforward and reasonably succinct exposition of Tom's interpretation that incorporates a defense of his approach to Paul in general and his exegesis of specific passages in Galatians and Romans in particular. This is definitely one of the most exciting and significant books that I have read this year. Like all of the author's work, I found it hard to set down once I had started to read it. Strongly commended!" (I. Howard Marshall)

"Tom Wright has out-Reformed America's newest religious zealots--the neo-Reformed--by taking them back to Scripture and to its meaning in its historical context. Wright reveals that the neo-Reformed are more committed to tradition than to the sacred text. This irony is palpable on every page of this judicious, hard-hitting, respectful study." --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

After reading this book and hearing Wright's position on justification, I'm awed by its explanatory power as his thesis that justification is God's declaration that one is a member of the new testament covenant community through faith in Christ can be used to make sense of justification by works in James as well. Perfect consistency. An academic book aimed at the general reader means readability as well as gaining some serious biblical knowledge. Go for it!

I found the book very fascinating and engaging. It was a good read except for getting bogged down in the many technical nuances of Wright's explanations concerning his Law Court theory. Since this book is a response to John Piper's book, "The Future of Justification," Wright spends much of the book explaining where Piper is wrong, and he is right (no pun intended). Although I really agree with the NT Wright that Paul must be read in the context of a first century Judean Christian. I found him

to be very technical in his Law Court explanation but I do see his logic. I sharply disagree with his assessment that Paul was not as concerned with individual salvation as he was concerning the big picture of Israel and Gentile eschatological salvation. Or else why ask at all, "What must I do to be saved?" If it is more about being a christian than becoming one. Despite my nitpicking, it is a thought provoking theological book that, in my opinion, is worth reading. 3 and 1/2 stars for me.

I recently began to read N.T. Wright, and am very pleased to find, in addition to his many offerings aimed at his scholarly counterparts, many that are quite solidly within the grasp of those of us who aren't ourselves members of that esteemed company. I am especially grateful to have found so much insight into the importance of the metanarrative, and the central place the kingdom of God must always hold in our efforts to understand and live by God's truth.

I bought this to have a better understanding of the issues in current debate. Wright presents a thorough, in-depth, scholarly scripture based thesis on "justification" as presented in Paul's Letters. This is not a book for the casual reader looking to supplement a once-over-lightly Sunday school discussion. You are immersed in Wright's analytical dissection of some of Paul's deep doctrinal essays to the Galatians, Romans and Corinthians. No lawyer could make a better case for his client than Wright has done for Paul's prose. I gave it four stars---not for lack of superb presentation---but for the challenge of digesting the material. This is not light reading. If you are looking for a solid heart-felt presentation on one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith this should be in your library!

I've read a number of N.T. Wrights works. This one had a lot more personal meaning for me. I understand his concern for the tradition of forcing biblical interpretation to conform to specific beliefs which have their source external to scripture. For example, if one has been influenced by Manicheism and NeoPlatonism as significantly as Augustine was. Manicheism's view of the deity is dualistic, containing both good and evil. Neoplatonism contained the doctrine of universal divine determinism (all things are predestined by the gods). These pagan belief systems have many elements in common including the dualistic nature of the deity. Thus, Zeus can act as the protector of justice by punishing one of the lesser gods for an unjust deed. While alternatively Zeus can make himself irresistible to Europa in order to rape her. It is well acknowledged within Augustine's writings that even though he started to discard elements of these beliefs, many of them overtly influenced his view of the God of the bible, with the result that he envisioned a deity (who like Zeus) has the

potential to make himself irresistible to a soul, while alternatively, he has souls born for the specific purpose of an eternal lake of fire, for his entertainment (i.e. "for his good pleasure") .Thus Augustine's teachings were loaded with syncretism.Out of this would evolve the \*traditions\* of "irresistible grace" and "predestination".What we hold as absolute truth, influences our understanding of scripture.Elements external to the scripture, (e.g. universal divine determinism) become canonized in the mind of the believer.Once canonized, in the believer's mind, he sees every verse in scripture as affirming them.N.T. Write, in this work....although focused on the long-term Hebrew understanding of "Justification", pleads with the church to read Paul's letters without enforcing external \*traditions\* onto the text.The result, as Write observes is those verses which don't affirm the canonized belief, are relegated to valueless side-thoughts where Paul thoughts strays off the main topic. What we end up with is \*cherry picked\* verses that affirm what we believe prior to reading Paul and ignore all other verses that don't.Write is wonderful and witting while guiding the reader through his observations.The predestinationist will not find anything in the book to affirm what he already holds as cannon.The book is better suited for someone willing to approach the text's of Paul on Paul's terms.

This is a book I would recommend to everyone attempting to understand the current debates on justification. N.T. Wright clearly sets down a solid biblical foundation rooted in OT context for the doctrine of Justification. His answers may surprise and shock you, but his arguments come from the text and are solidly biblical. This has given me new eyes to look at the letters of Paul.The only flaws in this book is that he didn't devote enough time to studying the theology of John Piper who he was responding to, comes off a tad grumpy in the first part of the book, and over exaggerates heavily the differences between "Old" and "New" perspectives on Paul.None the less, this is a Christian masterpiece on Justification that I recommend to everyone, especially it's exegesis.

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