

From Justin Taylor, 11/18/09

Wright on Justification

David Mathis [reviews](#) N.T. Wright's latest on Justification.

Closing paragraphs:

Exegesis has two different flavors for Wright and Piper. Piper wrestles word by word, proposition by proposition, and then paragraph by paragraph. Wright moves much quicker through large chunks of Paul's thought, refers frequently to whole chapters and paragraphs, and quotes phrases (often as technical terms) seemingly removed from their immediate context. It is surprising that Wright would remind us that "the text is the text" (p. 249) when he has dealt so little with the actual biblical text in its context. For this reason, Wright's exegetical chapters are a serious disappointment as his exegesis proves to be a kind of hovering above the text—rarely, if ever, landing, while supplying his own meaning for a phrase here and there that contributes to a coherent whole but neglects to explain the connections between Paul's propositions and paragraphs. Does Wright not see that the discussion cannot go forward if he will not convincingly engage Paul on Paul's own terms but instead keeps the text at arm's length?

The student who takes the time to work through Wright's exegesis, with both a good English translation and the Greek text nearby, will see that Wright's claims do not follow Paul's text proposition by proposition. Wright has selected a few words, phrases, and so-called technical terms, accounted well for them in his system, and then made sweeping claims about whole chapters and paragraphs, relating one to another without pausing sufficiently to mind the conjunctions and show that Paul is thinking the same way. Reading Wright with Paul's texts open reveals that Wright is not yet demonstrating that he can explain Paul as well as his most careful critics.

Despite the impressive fact that he has published yet again, it does not seem that Justification will advance the discussion or benefit Wright's esteem at present or long term. Wright has done much outstanding work in the past, and it is a shame that he may have sullied his name with this disappointing volume.