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Hope Possessed or Hope Postponed: Paul's Presentation of the Believers' Present Justification and Future Hope in Romans 5-8 in Comparison to N.T. Wright's Future Justification Perspective

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2009

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the
Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, New Testament scholars of the Reformed tradition and the "New Perspective" have debated whether the Apostle Paul's Christian theology about the Law and salvation was in agreement with the teaching of mainstream first-century Judaism regarding the Law and the salvation of God's covenant people. Among these New Perspective scholars is the Bishop of Durham, N.T. Wright, whose works will be considered in this paper. The Reformed position's insistence that the imputed righteousness of Christ is the grounds of believer's present justification and hope has been challenged by Wright, who has proposed an alternative view on justification. This paper will examine whether Wright's "fresh perspective" on justification provides the same present hope which Paul celebrates in Romans 5-8.

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Introduction

There is no greater power that will drive a man to persevere in the face of adversity than the promise of hope. Hope is what kept three hundred Spartans fighting against the overwhelming force of one million Persians at Thermopylae. Hope is what inspired the Jewish Zealots at Masada to continue to resist the besieging Roman army. However, as they watched the Roman earthwork reach closer and closer to their mountain stronghold each day, their hope faded. When they lost all hope of escape, they committed mass suicide to avoid being captured by the ruthless Roman army. Hope is what inspired William Wilberforce to battle parliament for years at the risk of his fame, his health, and his safety. He believed that his efforts would one day force the British Parliament to recognize slaves as humans rather than property and grant them their freedom. What is the value of hope? An even greater question can be asked, "What happens to the human heart if the hope that once provided both the will to endure and the assurance of victory is suddenly undermined?"

This question has been posed to provoke the reader to consider what is at stake in the current debate between the long-held Reformed Protestant and New Perspective positions on the doctrine of justification. The doctrine of justification by faith alone has remained the doctrine par excellence of the Reformed tradition ever since the Reformation. Yet during the past three decades, various New Testament scholars have

challenged the Reformed understanding of the doctrine of justification, accusing those of the Reformed tradition of misunderstanding Paul, the kind of Jewish soteriological beliefs which his doctrine of justification was opposed to, or even his doctrine of justification. Arguably the most prominent and influential New Perspective scholar is N.T. Wright, whose works are read by scholar, pastor, and parish member alike.

The conclusions of N.T. Wright and others of the New Perspective concerning the doctrine of justification are based on a radical rethinking of the gospel message. The debate touches several different disciplines, including semantics, Pauline theology, church history, Judaic intertestamental studies, biblical-rhetorical analysis, and systematic theology. Few scholars possess the depth and breadth of knowledge required to engage in debate at all of these various levels of argumentation. Most works on this topic interact with the meaning of words such as "righteousness," "justify," or "works of the law," and attempt to articulate the beliefs of first century Jews regarding salvation. This thesis, however, will focus on the conclusions of the New Perspective's leading scholar, N.T. Wright, and will evaluate whether they can be validated by Scripture, even in light of their reinterpretation of some key passages. The text considered will be Romans 5-8, which New Perspective and Reformed scholars agree that Paul wrote to provide the Roman believers with assurance of their future glorification even though this present life of anticipation is marked with struggle. In Paul's mind, this present assurance can only be experienced because God has justified the believer. No matter what someone believes the essence of this justifying work to be, the truth of this conclusion will only be established if it aligns with the biblical description, a part of which is Paul's explanation of the believer's present and future hope in Romans 5-8. This thesis will determine

whether Wright's new understanding of the doctrine of justification is capable of providing the present hope which Paul celebrates in Romans 5-8. If it does, it ought to be investigated further; if it fails to do so, then it ought to be discarded.

Before putting the New Perspective to this test, it would be helpful to summarize both perspectives first and demonstrate where the New Perspective diverges from the old.

The Reformed Tradition

The doctrine of justification has historically been the origin of much division within the church. This division was not as distinguishable before the Reformation as it has been after, due to the fact that the early church fathers did not clearly understand the doctrine and "did not sharply distinguish between regeneration and justification."[1] This confusion continued beyond the church fathers into the Middle Ages. Then the beginnings of a popular understanding held among many Christians emerged under the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, whose belief that the believer was infused with grace became the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church's understanding of justification diverged further from biblical teaching as the doctrine was continually refined, until Canon XXIV spoke of "an increase in justification", demonstrating that by that point it began to be viewed as a process. [2] In reaction to this misrepresentation of the biblical doctrine of justification, many rose up in protest and attempted to recapture what they believed to be the biblical teaching regarding justification. Among these were Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli. These Reformers rejected the idea that justification was progressive and emphasized that it was

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[1]Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1941), 511.

[2]Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 512.

an instantaneous, legal act which was appropriated only by means of faith on the basis of the work of Christ alone. The Reformers' understanding of the doctrine of justification can best be demonstrated by summarizing part of the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in 1646:

> … not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous… for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself… but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.[3]

The Gospel

For the Reformers, the message of the gospel is mainly for individuals; it is the declaration that God has come and made a way for sinful man to enter into fellowship with Him. Man is out of fellowship with God because of his own personal, moral offensiveness against a righteous God (Rom. 1:18-32).[4] To speak of God's righteousness is to speak of "…the transitive holiness of God, in virtue of which his treatment of his creatures conforms to the purity of his nature…"[5] Because God is morally pure he cannot overlook sin and still maintain his righteous standard. Although the Jew has a covenant with God and the Gentile does not, both Jew and Greek face the wrath of God for their personal, individual failing to live a perfect life (Rom. 3:9-18).

The Basis of Justification

Thus, for the reformers it is the righteousness of God which demonstrates the problem of sin. However, since God put Christ forward as a propitiation for sin, the

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[3]The Westminster Confession of Faith. Cited from: A.A. Hodge, The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding The Westminster Confession (1869; reprinted; Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA), 1978.

[4]Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

[5]Augustus Hopkins Strong: *Systematic Theology*. (Bellingham, Wa. : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), S. 290.

gospel is now truly "good news," for it announces that the individual's debt to sin has been paid in full by Christ's atoning work (Rom. 3:23-25). It is on the basis of this atoning work of Christ alone that the believer may be justified, and the gospel is the proclamation that the righteousness of God has been made available to all who put their faith in Christ alone and are justified by this faith.

The Nature of Justification

For those of the Reformed tradition, justification has two elements: one is positive, and the other is negative. The negative element of justification is the remission of sins. The believer's sins are forgiven because of Christ's atoning work, and he receives a new status of "not guilty." The positive element is the imputation of Christ's obedience on the believer's, changing his legal status. When the believer is united with Christ, he receives Christ's life of obedience, and now the "righteous requirements" of the law are fulfilled on the believer's behalf. After the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the believer is declared "righteous."

The Divine Law Court

This act of justifying the believer occurs in a divine law court, where God is the judge, and the believer is the defendant. God determines that on the basis of the believer's faith in Christ he is "righteous," because he has been forgiven of his sins and received the obedience of Christ. The Reformers conclude this on the basis of their understanding of the verb δικαιόω, "justify," one of the crucial terms in this debate. According to the Reformed perspective, δικαιόω means to "declare forensically that the demands of the law as a condition of life are fully satisfied with regard to a person."[6]

[6]Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 510.

This verb is used extensively throughout the New Testament to describe the action of God acting as Judge over sinners. The noun δίκαιος, from which we receive the words "righteousness" or "justice," never explains what the word itself means, but always describes itself in relation "to some standard outside of it…"[7] This word carries a forensic meaning as it is most often used in a manner that describes a divine court with God presiding over the hearing of the condemned sinner. The forensic domain of justification is further evidenced by the fact that justification language often occurs in an antithetic position to condemnation language.[8] Thus, a basic two-fold definition of justification for the Reformed view is "an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight."[9]

The Means of Receiving Justification and the Place of Works

According to the Reformed tradition, justification is received *sola fide*, by faith alone, and not by any means on the account of works or "works of the law." Traditional Reformed scholars have said that the Jews believe their salvation could be earned by performing the works of the law. These scholars would maintain that in the epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians Paul was countering Judaizers within the church who claimed either that righteousness was obtained by the works of the Law or that the righteousness that the believer received was maintained by the works of the Law. It is for this reason that reformers believe that these two epistles give the clearest rebuttal to this

[7]Ibid., 511.

[8]Ibid., 510-11 (e.g.: LLX: Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Isaiah 5:23; NT: Rom. 5:18; 8:33, 34).

[9] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2000), 723.

false teaching of justification. In Galatians 2:16, Paul declares that no one can be justified by the "works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus." This pronouncement that man would not be justified by the works of the Law was repeated in Romans 4:5. In fact, no clearer statement of Paul's argument against justification by works can be found than in Romans 4:5: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." For the reformers, this means that Paul was teaching a radical new understanding of salvation that is in opposition to a Jewish system of belief, in which a person could earn salvation by human merit or mere covenant memberships. C.K. Barrett explains God's purpose in causing justification to rest solely on faith: "God's plan was made to rest upon faith on man's side in order that on God's side it might be a matter of grace."[10]

However, here the reformer would emphasize that faith is only the means by which one receives the justification offered through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Faith cannot be the basis of justification or else it would be a work. It is true that Scripture declares that Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness (Rom. 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6); yet, if this were to be the grounds of justification, it would contradict the entire argument of Paul throughout all his epistles. Rather, faith is the "appropriating organ"[11] by which one receives justification. Another theologian has described the appropriating role of faith as such: "…our participation in Christ is activated instrumentally by the gift of faith. This faith does not have any value in itself. Faith is merely the free reception of the

[10]C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 95.

[11]Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 520.

divine power of the gospel."[12] By stating that faith "has not value" by itself, we mean that it has no justifying value in the sense that it cannot qualify one to receive justification. It can only receive the justifying work of God on the believer's behalf. Faith does not save the believer, because faith cannot provide what the believer lacks for salvation: payment of the debt incurred by sin. Faith cannot pay the sin debt because the nature of faith is to receive, not to pay.

Those of the Reformed perspective argue that justification is by faith alone, but they do not argue that it is without works. A believer's faith is demonstrated by works appropriate to one's faith. The nature of these works is only to confirm one's faith. They do not secure or guarantee one's salvation, for salvation is already guaranteed by the finished work and perfect obedience of Christ which has been imputed on the believer's behalf.

The Result of Justification

As a result of being justified, the believer has been completely forgiven of his sin before God. This forgiveness is eternal, and the foundation for the believer's peace with God. He also receives what Reformed theologians since Luther have called an "alien righteousness." This righteousness is not the righteousness of the believer but the righteousness of Christ that the believer receives as a free gift (Rom. 5:17). It is the righteousness that Paul proclaims in Philippians 3:9 when he speaks of having a righteousness that was not derived from the law but was attained through faith in Christ, a righteousness which came from Christ.

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[12]Malcolm Yarnell, "Christian Justification: A Reformation and Baptist View," *Criswell Theological Review*, n.s. 2/2 (Spring, 2005), 82-83.

Because of this righteousness, the believer has a new legal status of "righteousness" and a new relational status as one that has been adopted into the family of God (Rom. 8:15) He is set free from sin (Rom. 6:2), and is no longer bound to the Law, because Christ has fulfilled the law on his behalf (Rom. 8:3-4). He has grounds for hope that he will be saved in eternity, because God has reconciled him in this present life (Rom. 5:9, 10).

Justification in The Order of Salvation

According to the Reformed tradition, God in eternity past foreknew certain persons and predestined them for salvation. At this point God elects individuals to salvation. This event is "chronologically the beginning of God's dealing with us in a gracious way…the first step in the process of bringing salvation to us individually."[13] Then, "at the right time" (Rom. 5:6), Christ came to pay for man's sins. Then, at some point in history, God calls these persons to repentance through the proclamation of the gospel message. God grants these individuals the ability to repent by faith, and they trust in the saving work of Christ and are justified. Once the believer receives justification, he enters into the completed present state of salvation. Justification is a work which God began and secured in eternity past, but applies to the life of the believer after regeneration and repentance.[14] However, there is still a sense in which the believer has not yet experienced the entire resulting fulfillment that justification provides. For justification, although fully possessed by the believer, and fully secured by Christ, will not be fully experienced until the believer is glorified.

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[13]Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 669.

[14]Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 517-521.

Justification and the Final Judgment

Since those of the Reformed tradition believe that during justification the perfect obedience of Christ is imputed to the believers' account, he will face no condemnation. Since nothing can be added to the perfect obedience of Christ, the believer will not face any condemnation during Final Judgment. The Reformers acknowledge that before become a Christian, Paul, as a Jew, had previously held the Jewish belief that the justification would not be experienced until the Day of Judgment. However, they argue that nowhere does he or other New Testament writers suggest that the believer must wait until after death to be justified because they have already been justified on the basis of the blood of Christ. Paul's conversion changed his doctrine of justification. For this reason, they maintain that any biblical passage which discusses the Final Judgment of the believer must teach that what is at stake is not the believer's "righteousness." Rather, he is judged to determine how he should be rewarded for how he lived out his new life in Christ.

The "Fresh" Perspective of N.T. Wright[15]

The History of Wright's Perspective

Nicholas Thomas Wright is currently the Anglican Bishop of Durham, a position he has maintained since 2003. He is a brilliant scholar who is respected both in evangelical and liberal Christian circles, and his works are read by scholar and layperson alike. He has written considerable on the historical identity of Jesus, the resurrection of

[15] The intention of this title is not to demean N.T. Wright, but rather is his preferred title for his view. In all of his works, Wright stresses that although his view shares many commonalities with those of other so called "New Perspectives" scholars, it is also distinct in many ways. When interacting with the New Perspective one ought to take great care to distinguish the numerous nuances of the various authors who inevitably find themselves lumped together under the collective title of "The New Perspective."

Jesus, and the life and doctrine of Paul. His works which address issues of soteriology have received both enthusiastic praise and extreme criticism from both liberal and evangelical Christians. His works which interact with the topic of justification have received the most divided response.

Having begun his scholarly career in basic agreement with the Reformed perspective as an ardent Calvinist, N.T. Wright now challenges some of the tenets of the long-held Reformed perspective and proposes instead what he calls a "fresh interpretation."[16] As is the case with all scholarly debates, this "fresh perspective" is work still being modified and refined as it receives critique from theologians. For this reason, a true presentation of Wright's position must not only include the direction in which it is heading, but it must also include its beginnings. Hence, brief discussion of the origins of Wright's view is in order.

During the mid to late twentieth century, some scholars began to challenge the claim that Paul's doctrine of Christian justification differed from the Jewish understanding of justification. Among these men were influential scholars such as E.P. Sanders and James Dunn. Although Sanders and Dunn disagreed about how first century Jews viewed justification and what exactly Paul's critique of the Jews who were trying to attain salvation by works of the law was, they both agreed that Paul's understanding of salvation was similar to that of first century Jews.

Wright claims to have begun to formulate his similar conclusions apart from the influence of E.P. Sanders and James Dunn, fellow forerunners of the New Perspective. Rather, he arrived at these conclusions by attempting to "think Paul's thoughts after him

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[16]N.T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 243.

as a matter of obedience to Scripture."[17] In Wright's opinion, one of the areas where the scholarly world had failed to understand Paul correctly was in relation to Paul's teaching concerning the Law of Moses. Paul makes negative statements regarding the Law in Galatians and positive statements regarding the Law in Romans. Wright attempted to resolve the apparent tension, but he found that he could not accommodate both the negative and positive statements about the Law by reading both books from either a Lutheran or Reformed perspective. One night in 1976, before Sanders and Dunn had raised similar questions in their works,[18] Wright discovered a way to resolve the tension.

The change took place as he wrestled with Romans 10:3, where Paul says that the Jews were ignorant of the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own. Wright observed that the greater context of the passage is an explanation of the position of the Jews and the Gentiles in God's eternal purpose. As he proceeded with the context in mind, he realized that the common understanding of this passage, that the Jews were seeking to establish their own righteous as a "*moral* status based on the *performance* of the Torah and a subsequent accumulation of a treasury of merit," did not fit that context. Rather, he proposed Paul's criticism of the Jews was their attempt to establish their own righteousness as an "*ethnic* status based on the *possession* of the Torah as the sign of automatic covenant membership."[19] This interpretation, in his opinion, resolved the apparent different teachings regarding the law in Romans and Galatians. This paradigm shift at the level of Paul's teaching of the law became a point of reference from which

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[17]N.T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 243.

[18]See E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977) and J.D.G. Dunn, "Manson Memorial Lecture 4.11.1983: The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL*, no. 2 (1983): 95-122.

[19]N.T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 245.

Wright began to modify his understanding of issues such as Paul's gospel message, the Jewish understanding of salvation, Paul's teaching regarding justification, and Final Judgment, and the central purpose of the book of Romans.

The Gospel Message of Paul

Wright, in an attempt to recapture God's eternal global purposes in salvation stresses that the gospel is not primarily a message which provides a plan for attaining salvation, although the proclamation of the gospel does result in salvation. For Wright, the gospel is "the narrative proclamation of King Jesus" and a "summons to obedience."[20] It is a proclamation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah who was crucified and has risen from the dead, proving that he is "Israel's Messiah and the world's true Lord."[21] In contrast to the Reformed perspective, Wright argues that the gospel message is good news, not because through the work of Christ a way of salvation has been made available to all, but because God, through Christ, "has dealt decisively with evil."[22] Wright uses this ambiguous language to communicate the truth that in His death Christ, defeated sin and death, making the future and final removal of sin and evil from the earth possible. The Jewish Messiah has been revealed and has been proclaimed to be the Lord of the universe.

First Century Judaism and Justification

In order to understand Wright's presentation of what he believes to be the true Pauline teaching regarding justification, one needs to understand what Wright believes

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[20]N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Saul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 45.

[21]N.T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 249.

[22] Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 52.

was the false Jewish view of salvation that Paul was addressing. He believes that Paul did not compare a Christian salvation that was received by grace to a Jewish salvation that was received by merit. Rather, Wright argues that Second Temple Judaism believed in salvation by grace through being a member of the Abrahamic covenant. He argues that Paul taught a Christian salvation that was in agreement with the Judaism of his day, which affirmed that "God's final judgment will be in accordance with the entirety of a life led." [23] Wright agrees with Sanders' basic understanding of covenantal nomism, that is, that the Jews entered into the covenant through grace and obeyed the law "out of gratitude as the proper response to grace."[24] For the Jew, justification was not a means of entering into the covenant or remaining within the covenant; it was "God's eschatological definition, both future and present" of those who were members of the covenant. [25] It is those who faithfully adhere to the Torah who were assured that they were covenant members.

Wright finds support for such claims through his reading of Second Temple Period Jewish Literature, especially Qumran's 4QMMT, which speaks of reckoning of righteousness at the "end time" on the basis of right living before God. Wright argues that the Qumran community considered justification to be a matter of community definition, *"not about entry into the community, but about being demonstrated to be*

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[23]Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 253.

[24]Wright, *What Saint Paul Really* Said, 19.

[25]Ibid., 119.

within it."[26] Although he admits that there was some diversity in thought among the sects of Judaism from the Second Temple Period, he believes that 4QMMT reflects the theology of first century Jews concerning justification. According to Wright, the Qumran community, along with mainstream Judaism, believed that the "works of the Torah" were designed to "mark out God's true people *in the present time*" so that they would be able to anticipate and rejoice in the verdict at the Final Judgment, when they would be confirmed to be the "true, renewed people of God."[27]

For Wright, the failure of much New Testament scholarship on Paul has been its inability to understand both that Paul and first century Jews considered salvation to be a matter of covenant membership, a membership received by grace. In Wright's evaluation, Paul's theology of justification also was eschatological in nature and concerned with community definition. However, he replaced the "works of the Torah" with faith as the indicator that one is presently part of the covenant community of the people of God. [28] It follows, according to Wright, that Paul's critique of the Torah was that it could no longer serve to indentify God's people, because Christ has ushered in a new age in which he fulfilled Deuteronomy 30.[29] The Torah was now useless for community definition. Thus, Wright argues, Paul's contentions with the Jews, which has been wrongly understood as being their failure to abandon a pursuit of works-based salvation in exchange for Paul's Christian, grace-based salvation, actually concerned their

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[26]N.T. Wright, "4QMMT and Paul: Justification, "Works," and Eschatology" in History and Exegesis: New Testament Essays in honor of Dr. Earle Ellis for His 80th Birthday, ed. Sang-Won (Aaron) Son. (New York: T&T Clark, 2006: 104-132), 117 (Emphasis in the original).

[27]Ibid., 118.

[28]Ibid., 118.

[29]Ibid., 124.

insistence of restricting covenant membership to a mere ethnic status attained by those who possessed and/or followed the Torah.

Justification and the Believer

Righteousness and the Law Court Analogy

Wright's understanding of justification is shaped by his understanding of the word "righteousness" especially when used in the phrase "righteousness of God" (δικαιοσύνη θεο□), which first appears in Romans 1:17. Wright argues that the word "Righteousness" should not be understood in moral terms as a moral quality which someone possesses, but rather in covenantal terms as a status that one has in relation to the covenant. In fact, according to Wright, the central Scriptural discussions on the topic of righteousness are concerned with this covenant membership and appropriate behavior which reflects that covenant membership.[30] He does not deny the extensive law-court language used in the New Testament; however, he argues that this law-court language functions within the setting of the covenant "as a strong explanatory metaphor."[31] Thus, the covenant language is the operating language within justification, and the law-court language only explains how this covenant status is established. The reason for this merge, in the opinion of Wright, is because the Torah is the "covenant charter."[32]

Wright's understanding of the essence of righteousness is grounded in his understanding of the law-court analogy. He argues that in the Jewish law court, from which Paul would have derived his analogy, "the vindicated part possesses the status of

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[30]N.T. Wright, "Righteousness," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. David F. Wright et. Al, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 592.

[31]Wright, *What Saint Paul Really* Said, 117.

[32]Wright, "Righteousness," 591.

"righteous." However, this was not in itself a statement about one's moral quality; but rather, it was a statement "of how things stand in terms of the now completed lawsuit."[33] The vindicated party did not receive any ethical righteousness, but rather was declared to be innocent in relation to the charges that were brought against him. It is for this reason that Wright denies that the righteousness which the believer receives in the act of justification is the imputed righteousness of Christ. He calls the notion that the defendant would receive the righteousness of the judge a "category mistake" that "makes no sense."[34] Instead, the justified believer receives a "'status' of righteousness that comes *from* the judge," the declaration that he is a "covenant member."[35]

The Righteousness of God

The reason that this declaration can be made is due to the righteousness of God. Using Isaiah 40-55 as his template, Wright defines God's righteousness as "the aspect of God's character because of which, despite Israel's infidelity and consequent banishment, God will remain true to the covenant with Abraham and rescue Israel nonetheless."[36] He does acknowledge that God's righteousness also includes His "impartiality" and "proper dealing with sin," but he emphasizes its relational aspect of God's positive dealings towards his people, such as "helping the helpless" and his faithfulness to honor his promises to Abraham.[37] Wright applies his Old Testament definition of righteousness to

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[33]Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 252.

[34]Wright, *What Saint Paul Really* Said, 99.

[35]Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 243.

[36]Ibid., 250.

[37]N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1991), 36.

his New Testament understanding of the righteousness of God because he believes that Paul, in his letters, is evermore dealing with the questions of God's righteousness: "How is God to be faithful to Israel, to Abraham, to the world?"[38] Wright believes that when Scripture speaks of righteousness in relation to God, it is speaking of His faithfulness to His covenant. When the phrase "righteousness of God" appears in Romans 1:17, Wright explains that it refers not to a status which God gives to His people, but to God's own righteousness that He possesses Himself.[39] It is not salvation itself, but instead is the reason that He saves Israel and the Gentiles. Justification is only possible because God was faithful to his covenant.

The Act of Justification

Wright states throughout his works that he believes that justification has been morphed into something that originally was not intended. He contends that justification is not the moment when a person turns to Christ in repentance, but rather God's declaration as a result of that event. As noted earlier, Wright argues that Paul agreed with first century Judaism that at the Final Judgment, God will pronounce judgment on the world and will vindicate His people, declaring them to be righteous because their lives reflected the life of a covenant member (Rom. 2:13). According to Wright, this great court case at the end of life is what every Jewish believer would have envisioned when they spoke of justification,[40] and Wright also claims that Paul had this same eschatological understanding of justification.[41] According to Wright, justification, in the

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[38]Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 251.

[39]Ibid., 250.

[40]N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really* Said, 33.

sense of "being declared to be righteous," is an eschatological event. Also, it is this eschatological event which shapes Paul's presentation of the believer's present justification. A true understanding of Paul's theology of the Christian's present justification can only be reached after one understands Paul's theology of the eschatological justification.[42] Wright's rationalization for this claim is that the present experience of justification is a pronouncement that one is in the covenant, and therefore they will experience eschatological justification. Wright explains this by saying, "…justification by faith…is the *anticipation in the present* of the justification that will occur in the future, and gains its meaning from this anticipation."[43] According to Wright, this present declaration contains both 1) the declaration that someone is forgiven, and 2) the declaration that they are in the covenant. [44] It does not determine one's standing with God, but rather the pronouncement that one has already been made right with God.

The Means/Basis of Receiving Justification[45]

As already alluded to, the basis of this final justification for Wright is the entire life lived. In Romans 2:13, Paul says that "the doers of the law will be justified." Wright believes that this passage refers to the final justification of the believer. He believes that this act of "doing the law" in 2:13 has been accomplished through what Paul describes as God's fulfillment of the law on the believer's behalf, but only the believer who walks

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[41]N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really* Said, 117.

[42]Wright begins his defense of his perspective on justification with this first point, demonstrating how foundational this statement is his theology of justification: "It's best to begin at the end, with Paul's view of the *future*." (N.T. Wright, "The Shape of Justification," (2001), accessed 1-30-09 at http://thepaulpage.com.) (Emphasis occurs in the original quotation.).

[43]Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 255.

[44]Ibid., 251.

[45]This title is used because in Wright's works there appears to be a category overlap between these two.

according to the Spirit as Paul describes in 8:3-4. Thus, according to Wright, the believer is justified on the basis of his entire life of works which are not the works of a moralist, but rather "show…that one is in Christ; the things which are produced in one's life as a result of the Spirit's indwelling and operation."[46] These works demonstrate that we are in Christ, that that we are united in him, and the Spirit is at work in us, and that is the reason that there is deemed "no condemnation" for the believer (Rom. 8:1). Wright explains that these works must demonstrate these two realities described above because these are the two bases of our final justification: "[1] God has condemned sin in the flesh of Christ…and, on the other hand, [2] …the Spirit is at work to do, within believers, what the Law could not do…"[47]

How do these works demonstrate that the believer is in Christ? Wright has answered this question with an answer that at first sounds very similar to the Reformed language of imputation. He announces that "…the accomplishment of Jesus Christ is *reckoned* to all those who are 'in him'." Wright differentiates this imputation from the Reformed teaching of the imputed obedience of Christ by which He, by fulfilling the moral law and receiving a "'righteous' status which can be shared with all his people." Instead he argues that the accomplishments the believer shares are the death and resurrection of Christ, thus making that which is true for Christ to be true for the believer.[48]

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[46]Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 254.

[47]N.T. Wright, ""Paul in Different Perspectives: Lecture 1, Starting Points and Opening Reflections," at the Pastors Conference of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, Louisiana (January 3, 2005); http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Auburn_Paul.htm.

[48]Ibid., Whole paragraph is a summary from this lecture. Emphasis appears in the original.

Once again, this future justification is based on the believer's present union with Christ and Spirit-enabled obedience, which demonstrate that the believer has already been justified in this present life by God's declaration that his sins have been forgiven and that he is a member of the covenant. This present justification is received as a result of the believer's faith, which on the basis of Romans 10: 9, 10, Wright defines as believing "that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead."[49] According to Wright this does not indicate that faith is a "work" because faith is not something which someone does that causes God to bestow on him a new status, but is a "…first fruit of the Spirit's call"[50] and the "God-given badge of covenant membership."[51] He also explains that this faith which the Spirit wrought in the believer is the "anticipation in the present time of the verdict which will be issued on the last day."[52] It is on the basis of this present anticipation that God declares the believer to be "'righteous' in the *covenantal* sense that they are members of the single family God promised to Abraham, in the *forensic* sense that the divine law court has already announced its verdict in their case, and the *eschatological* sense that this verdict properly anticipates the one which will be issued in confirmation, on the last day."[53]

The correlation between the faith in the gospel that results in present justification and the works produced by that faith that serve as the basis for the believer's future

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[49]N.T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 261.

[50]Ibid., 257.

[51]N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 160. It is important to note that Wright believes that the call is effective and leads to the individual's conversion.

[52]Wright, "Paul in Different Perspectives: Lecture 1".

[53]Wright, "Paul in Different Perspectives: Lecture 1". Emphasis in original.

justification can be expressed in this manner: The believer is declared to be in the covenant family of God on the basis of his faith which the Holy Spirit wrought in him. Afterwards, the believer lives out works which arise out of the obedience of faith as he follows the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is on the grounds of this Spirit-wrought, faith-conceived obedience that the believer is justified at the Final Judgment.

Even though the Final Judgment, at which the Christian will experience future justification, will be "in accordance with the entirety of the life that has been led," Wright emphasizes that these are not the works of the self-willed moralist. Rather, they are the works which are produced by the Spirit through one's union with Christ.[54] The Spirit, who is the Christians' down payment, enables the believer to fulfill the Law by walking according to the Spirit. Wright does state that the final justification is attained on the basis of one's life of obedience, proclaiming that "The path from initial faith to final resurrection…lies through holy and faithful Spirit-led service…"[55] Yet, Wright also, in a celebratory fashion, declares that "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." [56] Wright would disagree with any assertion that the believer is justified in the future on the basis of works alone apart from faith. By identifying the "path" from present to future justification as both the "Spirit" and "holy and faithful Spirit-led service," he is asserting that the Spirit, who is received by faith and is a guarantee that the believer is in Christ, is the source of the service by which the believer will be justified in

[54]N.T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 143.

[55]Ibid., 148.

[56] Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 148.

the Final Judgment. God declares the believer alive (forgiven) and part of the family because of the fruit of his life, not because of the fruit itself has any value, but because they demonstrate that the believer is indwelt by the Spirit, who all along was a guarantee that he would experience eschatological justification.

The Order of Salvation

The most effective way to synthesize the various aspects of Wright's perspective would be to summarize his teaching on order of salvation. According to Wright, conversion, what he refers to as the "call" (1 Cor. 1:26; Gal. 1:15), and justification are distinct. According to him, these two acts of God have become confused and entangled, but when one rightly understands Paul it will become apparent that justification is not God's "act of changing the heart or character of the person...." That, argues Wright, is what the Spirit accomplishes through the call.[57] The call is the "central event" of the order of salvation, and is the point at which the Spirit of God calls the individual to repentance. Before the call, there are two prior steps. First, God foreknows certain individuals, and second, He predestines them. After the call come two more steps. The believer is justified, declared to be a covenant member in this life, and "righteous" at the Final Judgment. Finally, the believer is glorified, after having been declared 'righteous' at the Final Judgment.

Wright's Understanding of the Book of Romans

It has already been mentioned that Wright considers the main theme of the book of Romans to be the people of God. Thus, he reads the book of Romans primarily ethnocentrically, arguing that Paul's purpose in the book is to vindicate God as righteous

[57]Wright, "The Shape of Justification".

because He will be faithful to His covenant people. In doing so, Paul also explains how God has been faithful to Israel, while honoring the Abrahamic covenant by bringing the Gentiles into the people of God.

He explains that Paul's purpose for writing the book of Romans is primarily to argue for the total equality of the Jew and the Gentile and to encourage a mission to the Gentiles.[58] In order for Paul to support this "goal of the mission and the unity of the church," he plants it in the "firmest possible theological soil…the exposition of God's righteousness."[59] Yet there is more to Wright's understanding of the book of Romans that needs to be explained, something which his popular works only allude to as "Paul's sense of an underlying narrative."[60]

In his essay entitled "New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3-8," Wright argues that Paul wrote Romans 3-8 with the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt in mind. Using this story as a substructure, Paul explains the story of God's faithfulness to his people in redeeming them from sin and leading them to the Promised Land, "life of the coming age."[61] In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul explains the problem of universal sin, which is seen as an obstacle to God's remaining faithful to His covenant promise. Paul explains in 3:21-26 that God will be faithful by sending Christ to

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[58]Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 234.

[59]Ibid., 234.

[60]N.T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 247 . The entire quote is "What I …find so powerful in some modern Pauline scholarship, is Paul's sense of an underlying narrative, the story of God and Israel, God and Abraham, God and the covenant people, and the way in which the story can to its climax, as he says, "when the time had fully come" with the coming of Jesus the Messiah."

[61]N.T. Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3-8," in Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday. ed. Gordon D. Fee, Sven Soderlund, and N.T. Wright. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999: 26-35), 25.

redeem His people out of slavery to sin. This language of redemption indicates that the Paul is beginning to tell the story of the redemption of the people of God, their "Exodus" story, beginning with their bondage under the yoke of slavery in the "Egypt of sin." Romans 4, through its explanation of Genesis 15:6, explains that Christ fulfilled the covenant made through his promise to Abraham. Romans 5 is the bridge in which Paul explains in vv. 1-11 that by faith, having been declared righteous, the people of God are assured that the glory which is their inheritance is in view. Romans 5: 1-5 anticipates Romans 8 and reminds the believers that while they are waiting to experience the inheritance of the Promised Land, they can have hope, because God will ensure that they arrive. Verses 12-21 of Romans 5 provides a summary of thought from which all of Romans 1:18-8:39 can be understood, and lays the foundation for the coming climax of the revelation of the people of God in Romans 9-11. This statement needs to be unpacked.

Wright does not agree with the Reformed position's insistence that Romans 5:12-21 teaches imputation of Christ's righteousness; rather, according to Wright, it is Paul's explanation of how Christ, as the second Adam, granted to God the obedience that Israel failed to give. He argues that the God chose to rectify the disobedience of Adam through the call of Abraham and the establishment of the people of Israel. Abraham and his descendants "inherit the role of Adam and Eve," which was to subdue creation and usher in the eschatological era of a perfected creation.[62] Israel, as the true people of God was unable to fulfill this role because of the presence of sin. Their new task was "the undoing

[62]N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christians Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 262-63.

of the sin of Adam."[63] However, Israel failed to obey God and went into exile.

According to Wright God sent Christ, who is "the representative of his people because, as Messiah, he stands for Israel, the people of God, the true humanity."[64] As the last Adam and Israel's representative, Christ fulfilled Israel's "eschatological task and role" by means of his obedience on the cross."[65] Thus, according to Wright, Paul's purpose in Romans 5:12-21 is to demonstrate how Christ, as the second Adam was to begin where Adam left off and to "deal with the 'many trespasses' and the consequent judgment, which resulted from the sin of Adam."[66] For Wright, this passage does not teach the imputation of Christ's righteousness by means of his obedience. Instead, it teaches that Christ accomplished the task that Israel failed to do in dealing with the sins of Adam.

Romans 6-8 continue the Exodus story. Those who were like Israel under the yoke of slavery to sin (Egypt) where set free by their baptism and union with the Messiah (the crossing of the Red Sea). Although they have been set free from sin (Egypt), they are now slaves to righteousness (God) and have received the law as their guide (alluding to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai). However, this law is not the like Law which can only condemn; it is the Spirit, which is a guide for the people of God as they proceed through this life (Wilderness) and a promise that they will share in the future glory of the inheritance (i.e., the Promised Land).

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[63]Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 21.

[64]N.T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 34-35.

[65]Ibid., 35.

[66]Ibid., 37.

Wright believes that the benefit of interpreting Romans with this Exodus substructure is that it forces exegetes to abandon any idea that Romans 3-4 embodies or expresses a different theology than that found in 6-8.[67] Another strength, according to Wright, is this theory's ability to explain Romans 6 as a whole. This way of reading Romans understands the righteousness of Romans 6-8 and that of 3:21-4:5 to be the same righteousness; "righteousness" signifies God Himself, the God who made a way to rescue His people from slavery to sin and "revealed his covenant faithfulness" in Jesus Christ.[68]

Wright prefers this understanding of Romans because it supersedes any other categories of division in which the book of Romans has been previously analyzed. "The story of the Exodus, as Paul uses it, overlaps and enfolds all these categories. The Exodus "is the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham; it is that which constitutes those "in Christ" as the people of God; it is that which declares that those who share Christ's faithfulness are the true, sin-forgiven people of God; it is that through which God has broken into the world and to the sorry history of Israel, unveiling his faithfulness in a radically new way in the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the outpouring of the Spirit."[69]

A Critique of Wright's Interpretation of Romans

There are numerous competing interpretations of the book of Romans, a fact which has caused some to give up hope of discovering Paul's own intended meaning in the book of Romans. Such despair is unwarranted, but it also serves to remind any who

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[67]Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance," 33.

[68]Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance," 33.

[69]Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance," 33.

study Romans that each interpretation proposed must be carefully critiqued before being accepted wholesale. What is the guiding criterion by which one chooses to embrace or reject any interpretation?

Modern scholars on both sides of the argument agree the degree to which the interpretation of any book can be accepted or rejected is the degree of its ability to explain the letter as whole with all of its parts. Brendan Byrne sets forth this guide with the rule: "The supreme test of an interpretation of Romans is seeing how it accounts for *all* the elements in the letter…"[70] Wright's reading of Romans does not account for much of the book of Romans, especially 5:12-21. Therefore, on the basis Byrne's rule, N.T. Wright's interpretation of the book of Romans and his revision to the doctrine of justification, which he derives from Romans, ought to be rejected.

Wright's interpretation of Romans does not properly explain the change in form from chapters 1-4 and 5-8, the difference of subject matter in each of these divisions, or Paul's argument for hope in chapter 5. Furthermore, Wright's proposal that Romans 5:12-21 is a summary of the whole narrative of God's faithfulness to his people arises more from a theological method which "seriously overstates the signification of narrative for the enterprise of Christian theology" than from a sound biblical hermeneutic.[71]

Neither does Wright adequately explain the Adam/Christ analogy, because he does not clarify how Adam's sin is transmitted to all mankind or how Christ's righteousness is transmitted to the believer. In doing so, he has "ineffectively sidestepped

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[70]Brendan Byrne, "Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post-'New Perspective' Perspective," *HTR* 94 (2001): 231.

[71]Cornelis P. Venema, "N.T. Wright on Romans 5:12-21 and Justification: A case Study in Exegesis, Theological Method, and the "New Perspective on Paul," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 16 (2005): 77.

a critical element in Paul's argumentation, namely the parallel between Adam and Christ."[72] This parallel, especially the imputation of the sin of Adam and the righteousness of Christ, is Paul's chief concern in Romans 5:12 because, as we will discuss later, this parallel functions as the basis of the believer's hope in Romans 5-8.

Wright's insistence on using "representative" language to describe the death and obedience of Christ demonstrates that Wright wishes to affirm that Christ's work some how belongs to the believer. Wright is unable to demonstrate how this occurs, leaving the question, "How do we get from Christ's work 'outside of us' to ourselves in such a way that we can meaningful say "what he did, we have done?"[73] Christ's work can only be described as "representative" in the sense that Christ was a *genuine substitution* for the believer.[74]

In his effort to demonstrate what he believes to be the dominant position of the question of ecclesiology in the letter to the Romans, Wright has not only diminished the soteriological emphasis of the letter, but he has also done damage to the doctrine of justification by undermining Paul's presentation of the believer's present hope in light of the final judgment. In order to demonstrate the dangerous ground upon which Wright is now treading, a presentation of Paul's argument in chapters 5-8 must be made in light of the rest of the book.

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[72]J.V. Fesko, "N.T. Wright on Imputation," *Reformed Theological Review* 66:1 (April, 1 2007): 19.

[73]Cornelis P. Venema, "N.T. Wright on Romans 5:12-21 and Justification," 71.

[74]Ibid., 71.

An Alternative Interpretation of Romans

The Place of 5-8 Within the Book of Romans

Today most scholars agree that in Romans 5-8 Paul changes his focus. This is evidenced by the transitional phrase "Having been justified by faith…." In the previous chapters Paul explained how the righteousness of God has been made available through faith (1:17). However, since all are under sin, unable to earn God's favor through righteous deeds or works of the law, and deserving of the wrath of God, all will receive God's judgment apart from his merciful intervention on their behalf (1:18-3:19). Yet, amazingly the same righteousness of God which demands retribution for sin, also provides righteousness through God's justifying act apart from the Law on the basis of the propitiating work of Christ (3:21-31). As proof that his righteousness is received apart from the Law by faith alone, Paul explains that Abraham, the father of the covenant, was declared to be righteous before being circumcised and before the giving of the law (4:1-24).

In Romans 5-8, Paul assures his readers that they have hope in this present life as they await the Final Judgment on the basis of their justified status (5:1-11). This hope is grounded firmly in the work of Christ, who as the second Adam brought justification leading to eternal life for many. This justification was accomplished by the imputation of Christ's righteousness on the believers' behalf (5:12-21). This will be demonstrated in greater detail later on. In chapters 6 and 7, Paul addresses the major objections to hope in this present life: the believer's continual struggle with sin (6) and the place of the Law (7). Paul's response is that believers are no longer slaves to sin and have been set free from the Law to serve through the Spirit.

In chapter 8, Paul resumes his celebration of the believer's present hope. There is now no condemnation from those who are in Christ Jesus because the Christ has fulfilled the Law on the behalf of the believer and the Spirit indwells the believer, and enables him to fulfill the requirements of the Law by walking according to the Spirit. He provides the believes with three more reasons for assurance: 1) the Spirit of God indwells the believer (8:9-17), 2) the Spirit makes intercession on the believer's behalf in the mist of trials and suffering and assures him that God will accomplish His purpose for him (8:18-30), and 3) nothing will be able to separate the believer from the love of God (8:31-39).

In chapters 9-11, Paul returns to the issue of the people of God and demonstrates that God is just in rejecting Israel because this upholds His plan of election (9:1-29). Israel has rejected Him (9:30-10:21), and he has reserved a remnant for himself (11:1-10) while He awaits the time when Israel will once again be grafted into the people of God (11:11-36). In Chapter 12-15, Paul explains how these justified believers ought to live in submission to God (12:1-8), each other (12:9-21; 13:8-15:7), and authorities (13:1-7). Then Paul closes the letter with reminding them of his gospel (15:8-13), his ministry to the Gentiles (15:14-21), and his desire to visit them soon and receive help for his mission to Spain (15:22-32). He closes in typical Pauline fashion with greetings.

The Form and Argument of 5-8

Chapters 5-8 in Summary

Chapters 5-8 as a whole can be distinguished from 1-4 by its change in style. Paul expresses his thoughts in these chapters in a "confessional style" which is a shift

from the "dialogical and argumentative" style which dominated chapters 1-4.[75] Not only is there a change in style, but there is also a change in subject matter. The Gentile and Jewish people are not discussed in this section; rather, Paul talks about believers in general, without referencing their nationality. The words "faith" and "believe" which appear 24 times in 1-4 now only appear three times. However, "life" and "to live," which were used only twice in 1-4, are now used twenty-four times in chapters 5-8.[76] Paul begins this section saying, "Having been justified by faith…", which indicates that he is about to build upon the foundation which he laid in 1:18-4:25 and provide his audience with the implications of their justification for this present life. What is the greatest implication in the mind of Paul? Hope! Douglas Moo, a Pauline scholar who specializes in the book of Romans, sums up Paul's purpose in these chapters by saying that they are about "how a justified sinner, living in the realm of grace, will find salvation in the day of judgment."[77]

Chapters 5-8 in Greater Detail[78]

Chapter 5. Paul begins chapter five with the wonderful announcement that Christians presently have peace because of their justified status. He introduces the chapter with the conjunction o□ν, indicating that he is about to demonstrate the

[75]Douglas J. Moo. "Israel and the Law in Romans 5-11: Interaction with the New Perspective," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism 2 The Paradoxes of Paul,* Ed. Donald A. Carson. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck [u.a.], 2004), 189.

[76]Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996), 292.

[77]Moo, "Israel and the Law in Romans 5-11," 193.

[78]This subheading may mislead the reader to expect a detailed treatment of Romans 5-8 as a whole. Although this is my longing here, it is impossible given the short amount of space allowed for this paper. The purpose of this section of the paper is not to examine this entire section of Romans in detail; rather, it is to provide the reader with an understanding of key passages found in Romans 5-8 that highlight Paul's argument for this section. For a detailed treatment of each individual verse within Romans 5-8, please reference the commentaries listed in my bibliography.

implications of his argument in chapters 1-4. This justification is a past act with present implication. Without straining the text, it is apparent that Paul considers the past act of justification to be the not only the foundation for the believer's present peace and hope, but it also servers as the inaugurating act which creates peace and hope. Paul uses the aorist, passive participle Δικαιωθέντες (having been justified) to demonstrate the action antecedent to the main verb, the present, active verb χομεν (we have). A basic rule of grammar is that when an aorist participle occurs with a present verb, the action of the aorist participle occurs in antecedent time to the action of the main present tense verb.

In Wright's estimation, present justification occurs subsequent to the call, which he believes includes not only the call of God to salvation, but also the application of that salvation to the believer. Its nature is not to inaugurate a "righteous" status, but to declare that such a status has already been given to the believer because the believer has already been forgiven of sin. If Wright is correct in his assertion, the believer would already possess peace with God before being justified, because God has already forgiven his sin because this wrath has been satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ. Paul's argument in Romans 5:1 would appear to be confusing what he had already said in chapters 1-4, not confirming it. Clearly the only way that Romans 5:1 can make any sense in light of both the grammar Paul uses and its place as in relation to Chapters 1-4 and 5-8 if Paul is presenting peace (and hope by extension) as a resulting state inaugurated/created by the believer's justification. Once justification is understood as creative and inaugural, the rest of Romans 5:1-11 makes better sense.

In 5:1-11, Paul lists three things that the believer possesses because he has been justified: 1) peace with God (5:1), 2) access into grace (5:2), and 3) hope (5:3-11). In

these verses Paul explains the believer's present hope in a celebratory fashion. This celebration builds to the climactic conclusion in vv. 9, 10. In these verses, Paul uses two parallel statements to explain why the believer can be confident that he will experience the fulfillment of his hope for future salvation:

> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

This is an example of the use of the Jewish style of argument referred to as the argument from the greater to the lesser. What he is saying is, "If God did the much harder work of justifying and reconciling us while we were His enemies, will he not also do the easier work of keeping us from His wrath?" Paul's use of δικαιωθέντες recalls verse 1. As in verse 1, justification here is a past act which serves as the foundation of the believer's present condition. Both Paul's selection of the aorist tense and the presence of the adverb ν□ν, indicate that Paul thought of justification and its imputation of righteousness as an "accomplished reality."[79] It is on the basis of Christ's work in accomplishing justification for the believer and imputing his righteousness that the believer can be assured that he will be saved from God's wrath at the Final Judgment.

Contra Wright, in order for justification to serve as the secure basis for the believer's present assurance of final salvation, the nature of justification must go beyond being merely "declarative." It must also accomplish something; it must be in some sense creative. This is not to suggest that justification is creative in the sense that it transforms the moral nature of the believer, making him actually righteous. Rather, it must create a status, which inaugurates hope. Only an accomplished, creative, righteous status explains

[79]Schreiner, *Romans*, 263.

Paul's greater to lesser argument. Paul's is not arguing that believers have assurance that they will be saved because of the *faithfulness* of Christ in doing the harder work of justifying and reconciling sinners. Rather, he is arguing that believers have assurance of final salvation because of the *effectiveness* of Christ in *accomplishing* the harder work of justifying the sinner, imputing a status of righteousness which inaugurates the peace, access, and hope which the believer currently enjoys.

Paul, the great pastor that he was, did not simply leave his readers with a promise they must simply accept. In 5:12-21, Paul demonstrates that the sure basis of the promise by use of his Adam-Christ analogy. Paul's use of Δι□ το□το in v. 12 proves this. Δι□ indicates a "final clause" and the antecedent of το□το is the promise of hope in 5:1-11, specifically v.9,10.[80] Thus, it could be translated "in order to accomplish this…," making 5:12-21 function as the basis for the promise which Paul just gave in vv. 1-11.[81] Paul makes this analogy by use of several "just as…so also" comparisons throughout the paragraph.

Paul's main argument can be summarized as follows: All have sinned in Adam. Death is the consequence of sin, and the universality of death proves the universality of sin (v. 12). Adam's sin brought condemnation to all (v.18) because all sinned in Adam. The truth that all are condemned is demonstrated by the fact that all die. All who are in Adam share in the consequence of the sin of Adam, eternal death. However, Christ, who

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[80]Moo, *Romans*, 317.

[81] Moo argues for this interpretation of Δι□ το□το. He cites several other NT examples in which Δι□ το□το states "final clause" with an accompanying □να clause (2 Cor. 13:10; Col. 1:9; 2 Thess. 2:11; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 2:10; Phlm. 15), and two examples without an accompanying □να clause (John 12:27; 1 Cor. 4:17). Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, 317. Cranfield and Schreiner agree with Moo that the in vv. 12-21 Paul identifies the foundation for the promises in vv.1-11. See: Cranfield, (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1: *Romans 1*-8, (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 217, and Schreiner, (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 6, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1998), 271.

is the second Adam, has produced an effect that is greater than the effect of Adam. Those who are in Christ share in the free gift of grace (v. 15) which results in justification (v.16). Just as death was the result of sin, life is the result of receiving the gift of righteousness" (v. 17). Paul assured his audience that they could be certain that they would receive life because the obedience of Christ resulted in them being made righteous, just as the disobedience of Adam resulted in them being made "sinners" (v.19.)

In his argument, Paul assures the believers that they will experience life in the future not only because of the obedience of Christ in the past, but also because of how that obedient act (his death and resurrection) changed the status of the believer before God. This passage teaches that the believer receives the righteousness of Christ and is "made righteous" just as he once received the condemnation of Adam and was made a sinner. This imputation was received by means of participation. The believer was once in Adam by birth and thus shared in Adam's sin and condemnation by virtue of Adam's position of the representative of mankind. Theologians refer to this concept with the term corporate solidarity. Yet, now the believer, because of his participation in the death and resurrection of Christ by means of his union with Christ by faith, shares in the obedience of Christ and receives his righteousness status.

What proof is there for this from this passage? There are several reasons to indicate that the righteousness which Paul says that the believer possesses includes the legal status of the righteousness of Christ. These reasons will demonstrate, as Brian Vickers states, that "There is an inescapable forensic context that builds up to a climax in verse 19."[82] First, in v. 16 Paul claims that the judgment (κρίμα) which followed the

[82]Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2006), 156.

transgression of Adam was condemnation (κατάκριμα). This condemnation is contrasted to the justification (δικαίωμα) which the believer received because of the obedience of Christ. κρίμα is a judicial term which probably refers to the "judicial verdict"[83] κατάκριμα, also a judicial term, does not just refer to the pronouncement of judgment but also the execution of that pronouncement. Therefore, as Cranfield suggests, the reference to condemnation also refers to "far reaching consequences issuing from it."[84] Second, it would be assumed from contrast δικαίωμα of to κατάκριμα that the reference to δικαίωμα has in view the resulting consequences of the justifying act as well. Because of this, it can be argued that Paul uses δικαίωμα to denote not just the justifying act but also "the righteous status that results from God's justifying action."[85] Third, believers are promised to be "made righteous" (δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται) by the obedience of Christ just as they were "made sinners" (□μαρτωλο□ κατεστάθησαν) by the disobedience of Adam.

There is an overlap between the practical outworking of the status and the status itself, which must be observed and embraced if we are to be truly biblical in our understanding of justification. All were "made sinners" when all received Adam's status of "sinner" by means of his imputed disobedience. However, there also is a practical outworking of this status since all commit acts of sin, in accordance with their legal status of "sinner." Also, believers who have been "made righteous" also live righteous lives by walking by the Spirit. Paul is speaking of something greater than a mere fictitious legal

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[83]Moo, *Romans*, 338, N. 105.

[84]Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 287, N.1.

[85]Moo, *Romans*, 338, N. 108. Moo also cites BAGD, Barnett, Cranfield, and Dunn for support.

status; the legal status serves as the basis for the practical outworking of that status, making people live in agreement with their status. To emphasize the legal status to the neglect of the practical outworking of that status is to diminish Paul's doctrine of justification.

The word "make" (καθίστημι) means "to appoint." It has a forensic nature, but it also "brings about a state of affairs."[86] Brian Vickers, drawing from the authority of Louw and Nida's lexicon, acknowledges that there are two semantic domains for καθίστημι, the first is, "Be, Become, Exist, Happen," and the second is, "Control, Rule."[87] Vickers argues in agreement with Louw and Nida that the occurrence here is best understood as belonging to the a sub-category of the first, meaning "to cause to be in a state."[88] It would be a mistake to assert that καθίστημι in the passage is a synonym for "reckon." Rather, according to Vickers, Paul chose to use rather than a word with a more restricted semantic domain such as λογίζομαι because "he is dealing with the foundations of redemption and not with the application or appropriation of redemption."[89]

Paul's choice of καθίστημι over λογίζομαι does not harm the doctrine of imputation, but rather strengthens it. It does so for two reasons. First, καθίστημι not only speaks of the creation of a status, but also indicates the reality behind the status. Vickers demonstrates this with this analogy, which is fitting since καθίστημι is often used to in reference to the creation of offices: "If one is "appointed" king or priest, one *really is* a

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[86]Ibid., *Romans*, 345, N.144.

[87] Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 116.

[88]Ibid., 118.

[89]Ibid., 155.

king or priest."[90] The believer is not only "appointed" righteous; he is also *really* righteous by virtue of his union with Christ. Second, just as is the case with λογίζομαι, καθίστημι does not place the emphasis on "the actions of person who holds the office or status."[91] Paul does not choose καθίστημι because he wishes to speak of transformative righteousness. Rather, he chooses to use καθίστημι because it places no emphasis on the action of the individual. This is the best selection because the focus of Romans 5:19 is not on the actions of the individual who receives the status of "righteous" or on the instrumental means by which one receives this status (as in Romans 4 and 4), but on "the status itself with particular emphasis on the actions that resulted in the status."[92] The believer is appointed the status of "righteous" because of his new identification with Christ. Because of Christ's obedience to the Father, Christ gives his righteous to the believer.

Schreiner also agrees that this verb does not merely refer to a legal declaration or an actual state because "One cannot separate the representative and constitutive roles of Adam and of Christ in these verses."[93] All this means that the believer is not merely treated as if he is righteous in a legal sense. Certainly he receives a legal status of "righteous," but he also is made to be righteous by virtue of union/participation with Christ whereby Christ's righteousness becomes his own. Just as he once was a "sinner," he is now "righteous." This is a new legal status in relation to God, but it is also a resulting identity.

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[90] Vickers, *Jesus Blood and Righteousness*, 121.
[91] Ibid., 121.

[92] Ibid., 122.

[93] Schreiner, *Romans*, 288.

Although Paul uses the future tense verb (κατασταθήσονται), this act of being made righteous ought to be considered to be experienced in the present tense because throughout this passage Paul speaks of justification as something the believer experiences in this present life. Moo rightly argues that Paul uses the future tense not to speak of the vindication of the believer at the Final Judgment, but rather because he has in mind the "continual, discrete acts of 'making righteous' that occur as people believe."[94]

Chapters 6 and 7. Although chapters 6 and 7 do not readily appear to be concerned with the topic of assurance, but instead are focused on the believer's relationship to sin and the law, these chapter's do contribute to Paul's argument for assurance. In chapters 6 and 7, Paul addresses the major objections to hope in this present life: the believer continual struggle with sin (6) and the place of the Law (7). Paul's response is that believers are no longer slaves to sin and have been set free from the Law to serve through the Spirit. Although Paul presents these realities as the grounds for his exhortation to proper Christian growth in sanctification, these realities ultimately contribute to Paul's understanding of the believer's hope.

Since Paul is concerned with ethical righteousness in these chapters, he grounds the believer's new reality of being set free from sin and the Law in his union with Christ (6:1-6; 7:4) instead of his justification. Yet the believer receives his justification by nature of his union with Christ; the two acts are inseparable. It is only by virtue of his union with Christ that the believer receives his status of "righteous." Paul, however, emphasizes the believer's union with Christ in Romans 6 and 7 because he does not wish to exhort his audience by virtue of their status of "righteous" but by virtue of their union

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[94]Moo, *Romans*, 346.

with Him who is truly righteous, by which what is true of Christ is true of them. Since one cannot separate the believer's justification from his union with Christ, the reality of the believer's justification in Christ must also be included, though not emphasized, in Paul's discussion concerning the believer's freedom from the law and victory over practical sin.

Chapter 8. In chapter 8, Paul resumes his straightforward approach in his presentation of the believer's present hope of future salvation. In 8:1 he proclaims, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." There has been considerable debate over the basis of this promise. Is the basis of this promise found in Romans 5:12-21, and vv. 2-4 explain the means by which one experiences freedom from condemnation? Or is the basis for the promise made in verse 1 found in vv. 2-3, namely, in the believer's sanctification? Good evidence has been set forth for both interpretations; however, the first is to be preferred.[95]

In 8:1 Paul's uses the noun κατάκριμα (condemnation). This noun is found only three times in New Testament, and the other two occurrences are found in Romans 5:16, 18. Although, the concept of condemnation does occur in 6:1-7:6, as Lowe correctly states, the grammatical connection between these two passages does not exist.[96] Paul used κατάκριμα 8:1 to refer back to 5:12-21. This promise of freedom from condemnation belongs to those who are "in Christ." The reference to those who are "in Christ" serves to remind Paul's audience of their union with Christ, which is the basis from their freedom from sin and the law (6:1-7:6). I have already argued above that

[95]Chuck Lowe provides a good summary of the arguments, although, in my opinion he arrives at the wrong conclusion (Chuck Lowe, "There is No Condemnation" (Romans 8:1): But Why Not?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 42/2 (June 1999): 231-250.

[96]Ibid., 233-34.

Paul's concept of being "in Christ" includes the justifying act which occurs on behalf of the believer who is "in Christ." Thus Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" to remind his audience of the union by which the justifying, imputing work described in 5:12-21 is applied to the believer.

In verse 2 Paul explains the reason that there is no condemnation: the νόμος (binding authority) of the Spirit has set the believer free from the νόμος (binding authority) of sin and death.[97] Moo argues that Paul specifically chose the phrase "the law of sin and death" to serve as a summary of "the total situation of the sinner" which Paul describes in chapters 6 and 7.[98] Since this verse serves to summarize the condition of the sinner, verse 2 cannot refer strictly to justification or to sanctification. Rather, Paul is stating that the reason there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ" is because "in Christ" the believer has been "set free by the Spirit from that realm, rule by sin, in which condemnation (=death) is one's electable fate."[99] In verse 3 Paul explains that this "realm transfer"[100] is possible because Christ condemned sin in his body by means of his sacrifice on our behalf. He continues in verse 4 to explain that God did this so the believer could be set free from the requirements of the law, which Christ fulfilled on his behalf, so that that he could walk according to the Spirit.

These verses do not teach that believer experiences freedom from condemnation by walking after the Spirit. Instead, they teach that there is "no condemnation" for the

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[97]Moo provides the best argumentation for this interpretation of νόμος. See. Moo, *Romans*, 473-76.

[98]Ibid., 477.

[99]Ibid., 477.

[100]Ibid., 477.

believer because of his "realm transfer" by means of the Spirit through his union with Christ. Within this union with Christ, the act of justification occurs, and the basis of the justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness for the believer by virtue of this union. These verses do not base freedom from condemnation in either justification or sanctification, but in believer's union with Christ, by which justification was accomplished and sanctification was made possible. This being said, the promise of "no condemnation" is conceptually dependent on Romans 5:12-21 for meaning because the imputation described in Romans 5:12-21 is applied to the believer by means of his union with Christ.

The rest of the Romans 8 continues to provide a theology of hope. In this chapter, Paul explains the believer's reasons for hope which result from this "realm transfer." The believer can walk after the Spirit because the Spirit of God indwells him (8:5-9). Walking after the Spirit provides hope, because it demonstrates that the Spirit indwells the believer and guarantees Christ will resurrect the believer through the Spirit (8:10-11). Not only this, but the believer can also enjoy hope, because the Spirit testifies that he is an heir with Christ (8:15-17) and will assist him as he experiences trials in this life while awaiting future salvation (18:18-27). Also, the believer has assurance that God's past decree that he would be saved, which was realized by the believer in justification would be fulfilled in his final salvation (8:28-30). Paul closes the chapter, and his discussion of hope with the reminder that God, who is the only one who can bring a charge against the believer, has a love for him that is so secure that nothing will be able to separate him from God (8:31-39).

Implications of the Form and Argument of 5-8

Paul's glorious presentation of the believer's secure, present hope of final salvation is grounded in the believer's present justification. The form and grammar of Romans 5-8 verifies this. Paul's lengthy argument of hope in5-8 is rooted in 5:1-11 (especially 5:9, 10). Romans 6-8 is a demonstration of the truth of 5:1-11, and Romans 5:12-21 provides the grounds for the promise of hope made in 5:1-11 (and all of 5-8 by extension). It does this by identifying the basis by which the believer is made righteous, the obedience of Christ. Just as Romans 3-4 explained *how* a believer is counted "righteous" (by faith), Romans 5:12-21 explains *why* a believer can be counted "righteous." All of this means that Romans 5, especially vv.12-21, is not an explanatory aside, but rather is the foundation stone upon which Paul builds his theology of hope present in chapters 5-8.

We have seen that Paul's presentation of hope in Romans 5-8 demonstrates that, for Paul, the believer is actually declared to be and made righteous by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This is accomplished by virtue of his union with Christ through faith just as the believer once was condemned and made to be a sinner by the imputation of Adam's sin by virtue of his former union with Adam and his participation in Adam's sin as the "federal head." If this interpretation is correction it is understandable why Paul would promise the believers that they could be assured that they would be saved from the wrath of God.

The wrath of God which has been revealed from heaven was set upon destroying them when they were in their sin because they were "unrighteous." The fact that this was wrath was due to a lack in moral righteousness is demonstrated by Paul's descriptions of

the sins which deserve such wrath (1:18-32; 3:9-18); therefore, only true moral righteousness could turn the wrath of God away. God as an omniscient and righteous judge cannot merely "show clemency or forgiveness and assign us a *status* of righteousness" (which Wright argues he does). God could not do that because that would require him to overlook unrighteousness. Rather, He rules "*in our favor* precisely because he counts us as having the moral righteousness that we in fact do not have in ourselves."[101] God imputes Christ's righteousness on the believer's behalf and makes him righteous by virtue of his union with Christ. That is the reason that Paul can promise the believers that they can be confident that they will be spared from the wrath of God at the Final Judgment. They already possess the righteousness of Christ, and God has already declared them to be righteous now. What Wright calls "nonsense" and argues does not happen really does and must happen![102]

Where Does Denying the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness Lead?

What are the implications of the denial of the imputation of Christ's righteousness? There are at least three implications. First, it leaves the gift of the status of vindication apart from the only true basis: the perfect righteousness of Christ. Since Wright argues that the believer does not receive or need the perfect righteousness of Christ for his vindication, the believer is without any perfect righteousness (because he lacks such righteousness and does not receive it from Christ). Second, because the believer does not have the righteousness of Christ as the basis of his vindication, this

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[101]Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*, 78.

[102]N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 99: The actual quote is "But the righteousness that they have will not be God's own righteousness. That makes no sense at all." I am indebted to John Piper for this witty critique, which he sets forth in *The Future of Justification*, 79.

leaves a void which the believer's "*own Spirit-enabled but imperfect, obedience*" appears to be required to fill as part of the basis "alongside of the atoning work of Christ." Third, the vague explanation regarding the function of works in the "future justification" creates uncertainty in how they function in relation to the believer's present justification. Wright argues that justification by faith is the present anticipation of the future verdict on the last day, and yet is ambiguous about the role that works play in that future justification. This is not a good way to assure anyone that present justification is not based on "Spirit-enabled transformation."[103] All of these implications demonstrate that the rejection of the imputation of Christ's righteousness destroys any sure basis of hope because it replaces the gift of the perfect righteousness of God, part of the immutable character of God, with transformation which expresses itself through works, even if these works are Spirit-wrought. Truly, without the righteousness of Christ, his perfect obedience, there is no hope.

Conclusion

Whether the source of a debate is a matter of systematic theology or rigorous exegesis of a passage, the determinant for the truthfulness of any argument will be how closely it reflects the biblical teaching of each passage involved. N.T. Wright professes that he has developed his "fresh perspective" on Paul and his doctrine of justification as the fruit of his attempt to be a student of the word of God and to think Paul's thoughts after him. If he has been successful in his attempt to do this, his conclusions ought to

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[103]I am indebted to John Piper's analysis of the implications involved in denying the imputation of Christ's righteousness. I have summarized his analysis in the above paragraph. Any of his exact words are in quotations: John Piper, *The Future of Justification, 128-129.*

reflect the teachings of Scripture in each passage involved in the present debate. However, as this paper has demonstrated, Wright has failed to do just that.

Wright's proposal that justification is a second-class doctrine and functions only as a subsequent declaration following salvation is unsubstantiated. Furthermore, his argument that present justification is forensic in the sense that it is a declaration in anticipation of the declaration at final justification on the basis of the whole life lived not only lacks support, but also provides the opportunity for the concept of a works-based salvation to destroy the assurance of the believer in regards to his present justification. His explanation of Romans 5-8 does not fit with the rest of the book of Romans. Yet, the most sobering failure of all is that his perspective fails to provide the hope that Paul argues that every believer now possesses because he denies the basis of that hope: the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Since Wright denies that the believer receives Christ's righteousness, His complete obedience to the Father, he denies the foundation for the believer's present justification and future hope. Justification is impossible without the righteousness of Christ to satisfy God's righteous demand of perfect obedience to His commandments. Wright denies the biblical basis for present justification, while promising that the believer can be assured of his future justification and final salvation. How can the believer be assured of his final salvation if he denies the grounds for justification? When it comes to the doctrine of imputation, the words of the hymnist ring true, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness...On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand."[104] Wright's doctrine of justification is unable to stand as a firm foundation upon which the believer can build any hope because without the rock

[104]Edward Mote, "Solid Rock," in *The Evangelical Hymnal* (Harrisburg, PA, 1921), 206.

of Christ's righteousness, Wright's view of justification builds a theology of hope upon a foundation of sinking sand.

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