

The TRINITY FOUNDATION

John Piper on Justification

By John Robbins

Dear Friends,

From time to time we receive feedback from fans of John Piper who say that we have misunderstood him on justification and that he is sound as a dollar used to be on that topic.

Today a friend called our attention to some statements that appear on Piper's website that demonstrate how far from Biblical Piper's views are:

"God justifies us on the first genuine act of saving faith, but in doing so he has a view to all subsequent acts of faith contained, as it were, like a seed in that first act. What we are trying to do here is own up to the teaching of Romans 5:1, for example, that teaches that we are already justified before God. God does not wait to the end of our lives in order to declare us righteous. In fact, we would not be able to have the assurance and freedom in order to live out the radical demands of Christ unless we could be confident that because of our faith we already stand righteous before him.

"Nevertheless, we must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith. The way these two truths fit together is that we are justified on the basis of our first act of faith because God sees in it (like he can see the tree in an acorn) the embryo of a life of faith. This is why those who do not lead a life of faith with its inevitable obedience simply bear witness to the fact that their first act of faith was not genuine." (http://www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/doctrines_grace/tulip.html)

Here are Piper's errors:

1. God does not have in view "all subsequent acts of faith" and obedience when he justifies us; he has in view only the objective work of Christ outside of us, his perfect righteousness. If God had in view our acts of faith and obedience, we would never be justified.
2. It is not "because of our faith that we already stand righteous before him." It is only because of the active and passive obedience of our substitute and representative, Jesus Christ, imputed to us freely, that we stand righteous before God.
3. It is false that "our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith." This is the doctrine of Rome. Our final salvation is sealed from the moment of first belief. It is not contingent on anything we do or don't do. The sole ground of justification is the obedience of Christ extrinsic to us.

4. We are not "justified on the basis of our first act of faith." Piper turns faith itself into the ground, reason, basis, and cause of our justification. The ground, reason, basis, and cause of our justification is wholly outside of us, in Jesus Christ.

5. Piper says that the reason that some are damned is their "ingenuine faith." He writes: "This is why those who do not lead a life of faith with its inevitable obedience simply bear witness to the fact that their first act of faith was not genuine." How ingenuine faith differs from genuine faith he does not say, probably because he has no clear idea what faith is. Like so many misinformed Protestants, Piper focuses on psychology and makes saving faith differ from generic faith, not because of its object, but because of some alleged difference in psychology, which is never made clear. That is to miss the Gospel entirely.

For a fuller account of Piper's fatal errors on justification, please read "Pied Piper" at <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=113>

Cordially,
John Robbins

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