

*Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed*, David J. Engelsma. Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017, 528 pages. Reviewed by Rev. John Marcus.

Who would have thought that the gospel truth of justification by faith alone would be under attack today in churches that have their heritage in the Protestant Reformation? Yet Engelsma makes plain that such is exactly the case, even as we celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. The current controversy concerning justification is so critical to the gospel that we do well to learn to defend the truth against the lie that spreads itself throughout the church world.

Anyone who is intimidated by the word *justification* in the title of this book and has the notion that such a book must belong only in seminaries and pastors' studies is sorely mistaken. This book belongs not only in the homes of those who care for the truth of the gospel, but also in their hands as they read every page. It belongs in the hands of members of faithful churches as a means by which God may protect the church. It belongs as well in the hands of members of churches that have not faithfully maintained the truth, so that they might begin once again to stand for the truth. And it belongs in the hands of those who have wavered concerning the truth of justification, so that they might learn the truth and repent of any errors they have held.

*Gospel Truth of Justification* is a sound and helpful exposition of the basic truth of justification by faith alone. The author covers the truth of justification from multiple angles, so that by the time one is finished with the book, he or she should have a thorough knowledge concerning justification, the "main hinge upon which religion turns" (as Calvin called the truth of justification). Engelsma quotes the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds to demonstrate the definition of justification as "God's pardon of the guilty sinner—the forgiveness of sins—delivering the sinner from eternal damnation. It is also the gift to the sinner of a righteousness that makes the sinner worthy of eternal life and glory." He shows that the creeds and scripture clearly teach that justification is 1) by imputation, not by infusion of righteousness; 2) a legal act that changes the sinner's legal standing before God; 3) by faith alone apart from the good

works that proceed from faith; 4) not based on faith itself as an act that substitutes for good works; and 5) based “wholly and exclusively [on] the righteousness of Jesus Christ.”

The book is especially valuable because it exposes the errors of ancient and modern heretics alike. One of the strengths of Engelsma’s work is that he helps the reader see errors hidden in the words of the most smooth-talking heretics. For the benefit of rooting out error and warning God’s people, he is not afraid to name names. In characteristic fashion he takes aim at various errorists, showing what they teach and then demolishing their arguments one by one. He deals with the related errors of the Roman Catholic Church; the Arminian heresy; the heresy of federal vision, which is rooted in the doctrine of a conditional covenant; and the new perspective on Paul, all of which deny justification by faith alone apart from works.

Lastly, the book is valuable for Engelsma’s development of the doctrine of justification as he unfolds the truth to reveal more of its beauty to sinners saved by grace. Some helpful topics discussed are assurance of justification; when justification takes place, including a discussion of eternal justification; the place of Christ’s active obedience in justification; the reward of good works; the harmony between the inspired apostles Paul and James in Romans and James, respectively; the tight connection between election and justification; and the relationship of justification to the final judgment.

This book deserves to be widely read and discussed. A hearty thanks to the author for his defense of the gospel truth. Above all, thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.