

# OpenTheo

## Tom and Justin introduce the podcast

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### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

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NT (Tom) Wright is the former Bishop of Durham, a celebrated Bible scholar, author, and Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

Tom and Justin chat about the new podcast in this introductory episode.

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## Transcript

[Music] The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast Welcome to the brand new Ask NT Wright Anything podcast where I sit down with leading New Testament scholar Tom Wright and ask your questions. The show is brought to you by the University of St. Andrews. The show is brought to you by Premier in partnership with SBCK and NT Wright online.

Tom is former Bishop of Durham, a celebrated theologian and author who's held numerous academic positions currently Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. I'm Justin Briely, Theology and Apologetics Editor for Premier and so very glad that you're with us for today's introduction to this brand new podcast. We would love more people to discover this show.

So please do rate and review us on iTunes or wherever you get your podcast from and do let others know about the program. If you'd like more episodes, updates on the show or want to ask a question yourself then do register at the website AskNT Wright.com. And to celebrate the launch of this podcast we're giving away three copies of Tom Wright's acclaimed book Paul a Biography to podcast listeners. Again sign up at AskNT Wright.com before the end of December this year and you'll be entered into the prize

draw for those three copies of Paul a Biography.

Do that at AskNT Wright.com. Tom, thank you so much for agreeing to do this very interesting and I'm hoping helpful and informative project for many people listening. Well let's hope so. Yes, I'll do my best.

Just to give a little flavour of what we're trying to do in this brand new podcast. It's all about listeners sending in their questions and allowing you the space to answer them. We've called it the AskNT Wright Anything podcast.

Probably car mechanics may not be the main thing that you're interested in. Car mechanics wouldn't be high on my list of priorities. I used to know how to change a wheel but that was in the days when you had to by the side of the road.

And today you can't even get into the engine because it's all computerized so you just have to call somebody. But you are pretty good at answering other kinds of questions. There are a few sorts of questions that I reckon I should be able to have a stab at.

Before we get into the rest of the podcasts in which we'll be hearing some of those questions. I suppose it's in the Q&A. It's in very often when you've delivered a lecture and then you're engaging with your students whether it be at St Andrews or Oxford or wherever you've been a tutor that you actually dig into some of the most interesting stuff.

Oh yes, I've often found that and though I enjoy doing lectures often it's when you get the Q&A that you realise, "Oh my goodness, that was something that was new to you and you need that spelt out." Because you never quite know from audience to audience who knows what and where they are with different bits of reading and so on. So there's always some surprises and that's great fun because then when I go back and either rewrite the lecture or write up a chapter of a book, I think, "Ah yes, now somebody was bothered about that. We need just to be quite careful and take that step by step." So it's always fun.

What are the most common questions you find yourself being asked? Obviously there are many subjects you cover but what are the typical things that tend to come up? Yeah, it depends a lot on what sort of audience it is. I find that the big questions about life and death and what happens after death and how we know and all of that, those go on being really important. And depending on what sort of church background some people come from, some people just assume an old fashioned heaven and hell framework and the idea of new creation is totally new to them and they struggle to get their heads around it and then all the sort of what-ifs and what you say are the funeral kind of questions.

There are some people, it's a kind of select band for whom the precise definition of justification by faith is really the all-important question. Fine, I've spent some good years

of my life looking at that. There are a lot of people who are much more interested now in the social and political and cultural meaning of the gospel in tomorrow's world and sometimes their people whose churches have said you shouldn't go there, that's the politicians.

And other times they're saying, "No, that's not good enough. God cares about the world." And how do we make the transition from Christian piety and theology into serious cultural, social, political action and so on? Part of the aim of this podcast is to bring your thought and theology to a wide audience. And you've been doing that obviously through your books, both the sort of lay level and academic books aimed at a more sort of academic audience.

And of course there's the anti-write online courses which people sign up for and do. That's been great fun, I have to say. This was totally new idea where my colleague in America proposed it to me, but it's clearly, it's hitting a spot for many people.

Do you think these ideas, which often unfortunately in theology can exist at the academic level, are filtering down if you like to the main level? Yes, it's funny, it's never quite felt like that for me because I've often found that when I'm preparing a talk for a very unacademic group, a group of sort of mothers, union or school children or whatever, that often forces me to think through an issue which as an academic I might have been able to slide around by using some long words and some complicated footnotes. And the other way around that sometimes when I'm working on an academic project, there's a sort of aha moment which instantly translates into something to say in church the next Sunday morning. So for me it's all part of a rich mixture and you're never quite sure which level is engaging with what? Now I'm going to embarrass you by saying that you probably have become one of if not the best known New Testament historian and scholar in the world.

Your influence is felt all over the place, especially in North America. Why do you think your ideas have been so widely adopted and contested around the world? Yeah, that's a puzzle to me. I mean I simply started out doing a doctorate in St Paul and wanted to be a teacher, etc.

And Karl Barthes tells a story about his own early life to which he likens what happened when he wrote his Romans commentary. When he was allowed, he once naughtily climbed up inside the inside of the church tower when no one was around, he wasn't supposed to do it. And he thought he'd found a handrail to lean on and he lent on it and it turned out to be the bell rope and suddenly everybody in the village knew that there was someone in the church tower when there shouldn't have been.

And I've had a sense that I have been trying to find my way as a Christian trying to be loyal to Jesus, trying to be faithful to the gospels. And as I've done that, I seem to have accidentally run some bells which then to my surprise and both delight and

consternation. A lot of people have said, "Oh my goodness, you never looked at it like that, that's really helpful." And other people have said, "Oh no, you can't say that, that's very dangerous, you're going wrong." And I've had to navigate between those two reactions and try to retain my own integrity and fidelity to the text which is the sheet anchor for me.

The New Testament is where I start and where I finish, that's what I'm trying to be loyal to. And I think people have realized that and realized that I'm not one of those people who's saying, "Well of course some of the New Testament's a bit silly or wrong or whatever." That's not what I'm saying at all. There are plenty of people who do that.

And so I think people are saying, "Well, if anti-right is actually trying to be faithful to the text, let's at least see how the argument goes even if in the end we want to disagree as of course people have got every right to do." Well, I'm really looking forward to spending time with you over the next several episodes. Tom, as we dig into some of the questions that are being sent in. And we also get to know you a little more as a person.

We've got a little bit of a treat coming up for listeners. We'll be hearing some of your musical talents as well from time to time. I mean, what were the sort of formative musical influences as you were growing up and as you entered your adult years? I sang in a church choir from the age of seven.

And the first thing I sang in was Bach's Matthew Passion in the Little Treble line that goes over some of the choruses. And then in a performance of Handel's Messiah when I was seven or eight. And those were absolutely formative.

And I thank God for that induction in some of the great music of the Western world and then singing the Psalms and so on. But at the same time, age sort of 10, 11, 12, this was the late 50s, early 60s. So we're talking the transition from skiffle into rock and pop.

And so early Beatles, Cliff Richard, et cetera, early, the earlier Cliff Richard, I should say. And then through the 60s, Bob Dylan, Joan Byers, Peter Paul and Mary, et cetera. While simultaneously, I was at a school where they had an orchestra and they ran out of trombonists.

And the music master came and said to three of us, you, you and you, you singing in the choir, you can play a trombone. Here you are. Come and sit in the back row and we'll give you some easy stuff to play.

I learned some of the great classics in an orchestra playing from scratch. And that's a great way to learn classical music like Greeks, piano, concertos, Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, et cetera. Which still takes me back to sitting there waiting for my time to come in.

Well, look, we'll be hearing NT Right Unplugged various points in the podcast. So look out

for that little treat for podcast listeners if you make it through to the end of an episode. Then you will be hearing something you don't very often get to hear from Tom Wright, but I'm looking forward to that as well.

In the meantime, we look forward to more questions coming in from you as we continue this podcast series. Very excited. And I hope you're looking forward to it as well, Tom.

Absolutely. No, this is going to be fun. Thank you.

[Music] Thanks for being with us on this introduction to the brand new podcast. The first full episode is available now wherever you get your podcasts from, and you can expect a new episode approximately every two weeks. Please do share it with others, write and review us, and sign up to ask questions, receive updates, and of course have a chance to win one of those three copies of Paul, a biography.

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