

Counted Righteous in Christ (Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?) by John Piper, Crossway, Carol Stream, IL, 2002. (9 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

This is basically an answer to N.T. Wright's book on a new perspective of Paul's teachings.

1. Biblical doctrine has been downplayed in the core values of what makes a church "successful."

The older I get, the less impressed I am with flashy successes and enthusiasms that are not truth-based. Everybody knows that with the right personality, the right music, the right location, and the right schedule you can grow a church without anybody really knowing what doctrinal commitments sustain it, if any. Church-planting specialists generally downplay biblical doctrine in the core values of what makes a church "successful." The long-term effect of this ethos is a weakening of the church that is concealed as long as the crowds are large, the band is loud, the tragedies are few, and persecution is still at the level of preferences. [page 22]

2. William Wilberforce considered fundamental principles of Christianity essential to the moral reform of England.

Stunning was the fact that Wilberforce made the doctrine of justification the linchpin in his plea for moral reform in the nation. He said that all the spiritual and practical errors of the nominal Christians of his age...

... RESULT FROM THE MISTAKEN CONCEPTION ENTERTAINED OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY. They consider not that Christianity is a scheme "for justifying *the ungodly*" [Romans 4:5], by Christ's dying for them "*when yet sinners*" [Romans 5:6-8], a scheme "for reconciling us to God-*when enemies*" [Romans 5:10]; and for making the fruits of holiness *the effects, not the cause*, of our being justified and reconciled.

It is a remarkable thing that a politician, and a man with no formal theological education, should not only *know* the workings of God in justification and sanctification, but *consider them utterly essential* for Christian piety and public virtue. Many public people *say* that changing society requires changing people, but few show the depth of understanding Wilberforce does concerning *how* that comes about. For him the right grasp of the central doctrine of justification and its relation to sanctification-an emerging Christlikeness in private and public-were essential for the reformation of the morals of England. [page 25-26]

3. Laboring over doctrinal studies, such as the book of Romans, is not wasted effort.

There are deeper and more connections than most of us realize between the grasp of doctrine and the good of people and churches and societies. The book of Romans is not prominent in the Bible for nothing. Its massive arguments are to be labored over until understood. And not just by scholars. What a tragedy that that this labor is regarded as wasted effort by so many who are giving trusted counsel in the church today. [page 26]

4. Justification and Biblical Counseling.

I spoke of a “love for biblical counseling.” There is so much brokenness. So much sin that seems intransigently woven together with forms of failing family life and distorted personal perspectives. And it doesn’t yield to quick remedies. After several decades of watching the mental health care system at work from the inside and outside, I am less hopeful about the effectiveness of (even Christian) psychotherapy than I used to be. I don’t see any one strategy of helping people possessing a corner on all wisdom. But more than ever I believe the essential foundation of all healing and all Christ-exalting wholeness is a soul-penetrating grasp of the glorious truth of justification by faith, distinct from and grounding the battle for healthy, loving relationships. Good counseling patiently builds the “whole counsel” of God (Acts 20:27) into the head and heart of sinful and wounded people. And at the center of it is Christ our righteousness. [page 31-32]

5. Definition of imputation.

By *imputation* I am referring to the act in which God counts sinners to be righteousness through their faith in Christ on the basis of Christ’s perfect “blood and righteousness,” specifically the righteousness that Christ accomplished by his perfect obedience in life and death. [page 41]

6. Christ is our substitute in two senses: in death and in life.

Christ has become our substitute in two senses: in his suffering and death he becomes our curse and condemnation (Galatians 3:13; Romans 8:3). And in his suffering and life he becomes our perfection (2 Corinthians 5:21). On the one hand, his death is the climax of his atoning sufferings, which propitiate the wrath of God against us (Romans 3:24-25); on the other hand, his death is the climax of a perfect life of righteousness imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. Romans 4:6, 11 with 3:21-22; 5:18-19). [page 41-42]

7. Freedom from the law of God.

Few things give lively comfort and lionhearted courage like the truth that Christ has fulfilled for me the demands made on me by the law of God. I am still trying to plumb the personal depths of Romans 7:4 for what it means about my dead-to-the-law relationship with Jesus Christ: “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the

law through the body of Christ, so *that you may belong to another*, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God” (ESV). [page 43]

8. We grow in likeness to Jesus through our right standing with God by faith alone.

Our only hope of progress in gradual sanctification (growing in likeness to Jesus) is that we already have a right standing with God by faith alone. By this justification we are accepted into God’s favor and enjoy a reconciled position. This right standing establishes the very relationship in which we find the help and power to make progress in love.

This is the very structure of salvation in the book of Romans. Precisely because “those who receive the *abundance of grace* and *the free gift of righteousness* reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17, ESV), it seems plausible to say, “Let us sin that grace may abound” (Romans 6:1). But Paul says, “No.” then follows his great teaching on sanctification in Romans 6 and 7. And the foundation of it is that when we were united to Christ by faith (Romans 6:5), Christ’s death and righteousness became ours. We died with him, and righteousness was reckoned to us in this union. Now, and only now, can we successfully break free from our actual slavery to sinning. “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, *so that* we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (Romans 6:6, ESV). A decisive death with Christ and bestowal of the “gift of righteousness” (5:17, ESV) has happened in union with Christ. Now we can joyfully and confidently fight to become what we are in Christ-free and righteous. “You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11, ESV). [page 49-50]

9. Christ bore the penalty for our sins and also became perfect righteousness.

We believe that Bible teaches that the saving work of Christ includes not only his bearing the penalty for our sins, but also becoming perfect righteousness for us that is imputed to us through our union with him. [page 51]

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