

325 Wright on righteousness

As I know no New Testament Greek, I'm in the hands of those who do, and I've come to believe that Tom Wright is a safe pair of hands. I am finding his New Testament For Everyone (NTFE) translation really helpful.

In November,^[299] I started trying to understand why 'righteousness' is not the most helpful of English words for communicating the Good News – indeed, Wright rarely uses it in his NTFE. Overleaf, I offer a number of parallel NIV / NTFE 'righteousness' verses for you to cogitate; Wright uses various alternatives, according to context, to help us understand what Jesus and Paul were trying to get across:

- 'covenant justice'
- 'God's justice'
- 'God's way'
- 'being in the right'
- 'God's whole saving plan'

What underlies Wright's translation, I believe, is his insistence^[299,321] that the Good News is fundamentally about **restoration** – yes, we are estranged from God because of sin, but through faith in Jesus that relationship can be **restored**; we're brought back into covenant.

Wright's other insistence (and mine) is that the Good News is about bringing the kingdom TO earth – both now and ultimately – not taking us AWAY from earth to a nice heaven.

What transformed our lives in 2017 was moving to a church that centres on **restoration**; and that's what started my writing pilgrimage. Early on^[2] I wrote, 'God's into **restorative** justice, not *retributive* justice.' How I thank God for showing me that!

Sadly, for the past few hundred years (maybe more?) the emphasis has *not* been on bringing us back into God's covenant family but more on avoiding God's condemnation and retribution. Am I wrong? Am I just being negative?

So, in presenting the Good News, I always focus on God's **restorative** justice, rather than the traditional: 'You're a sinner deserving punishment, **but** Jesus died...'

I'll be interested to hear how you react to the verses below, but here are some random thoughts about 'righteousness', from considering Wright's translation:

- R is about *trusting*, not initially about *doing* (but doing should follow, of course)
- R is more about *motives* than about actions
- R relates to God's covenant, God's promise of **restoration**
- R is a status we are given; we're adopted into God's family
- R and 'justice' are closely linked; that's **restorative** justice
- Jesus is R personified – R is about **relationship**

When you get time, do have a read of Jesus and Paul on righteousness.

Jesus on Righteousness

Mt 3:15 It is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.

This is the right way for us to complete God's whole saving plan.

5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessings on people who hunger and thirst for God's justice! You're going to be satisfied.

5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessings on people who are persecuted because of God's way! The kingdom of heaven belongs to you.

5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Yes, let me tell you: unless your covenant behaviour is far superior to that of the scribes and Pharisees...

6:1. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them.

When you are practising your piety, mind you don't do it with an eye on the audience!

6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...

Instead, make your top priority God's Kingdom and his way of life...

21:32 John came to you to show you the way of righteousness

John came to you, in accordance with God's righteous covenant plan

Paul on righteousness

Rom 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

This is because God's covenant justice is unveiled in [the good news], from faithfulness to faithfulness. As it says in the Bible, "the just shall live by faith."

3:21,22 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

But now, quite apart from the law (though the law and the prophets bore witness to it), God's covenant justice has been displayed. God's covenant justice comes into operation through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, for the benefit of all who have faith.

4:3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."...

So what does the Bible say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited in his favour, putting him in the right."

...(4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.)

5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness...

5 But if someone doesn't 'work', but simply believes in the one who declares the ungodly to be in the right, that person's faith is calculated in their favour, putting them in the right.

...6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:...

6 We see the same thing when David speaks of the blessing that comes to someone whom God calculates to be in the right apart from works:

...(7 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.") 9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness...

9 So, then, does this blessing come on circumcised people or on uncircumcised? This is the passage we quoted: "His faith was calculated to Abraham as indicating that he was in the right."

...(10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!) 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them...

11 He received circumcision as a sign and seal of the status of covenant membership, on the basis of faith, which he had when he was still uncircumcised. This was so that he could be the father of all who believe even when uncircumcised, so that the status of covenant membership can be calculated to their account as well.

...(12 And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.) 13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

13 The promise, you see, didn't come to Abraham or to his family through the law – the promise, that is, that he would inherit the world. It came through the covenant justice of faith.