

Luther & God's Saving Righteousness

This is a massive contrast with Roman Catholicism, both in the sixteenth century and in the twenty-first century. Rome teaches justification by faith and works, especially works! The gospel of Christ is that of justification by faith alone. The good news is that of a faith righteousness.

The German theologian also rightly saw that faith righteousness destroys “free-will” righteousness. After quoting Romans 3:20-25, 28, Luther declares,

From all this it is very plain that the endeavour and effort of “free-will” are simply null; for if the righteousness of God exists without the law, and without the works of the law, how shall it not much more exist without “free-will”? For the supreme concern of “free-will” is to exercise itself in moral righteousness, the works of the law by which its blindness and impotence are “assisted.” But this word “without” does away with morally good works, and moral righteousness, and preparations for grace. Imagine any power you can think of as belonging to “free-will,” and Paul will still stand firm and say: “the righteousness of God exists without it!”¹⁴

The true, living faith that justifies is highly personal. Time and time again, Luther points out that “I” must believe in Christ and His righteousness “for me.” Thus in *The Theses Concerning Faith and Law* (1535), he avers,

22. True faith with arms outstretched joyfully embraces the Son of God given for it and says, “He is *my* beloved and *I am his*.”

23. Paul gives an example of this to the Galatians from his own case, saying, “Who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*” [Gal. 2:20].

24. Accordingly, that “*for me*” or “*for us*,” if it is believed, creates that true faith and distinguishes it from all other faith, which merely hears the things done.¹⁵

J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1998), p. 294.

¹⁴ Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 289.

¹⁵ Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 34: *Career of the Reformer II*, pp. 110–111; italics mine. The

2. Legal Righteousness

Second, the righteousness of God is not only a faith righteousness but also a legal (or forensic or judicial or juridical) righteousness.

This is the argument in the opening chapters of Romans. Man is sinful and guilty before God (Rom. 1:18-3:20)—both Jews and Gentiles! The human race is arraigned before the Almighty in His courtroom: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). The judge is God. The standard of His judgment is the law. The accused in the dock is man who is “under the law.” The verdict is “guilty before God.” The evangelistic purpose of the apostle and of the preaching of the law by ministers of the gospel is “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

Then comes gospel deliverance: “But now *the righteousness of God* without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even *the righteousness of God* which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (vv. 21-22). This righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ, answering to man’s own guilt as a lawbreaker before God the judge, is, of course, a *legal* righteousness.

For our second passage in this epistle, we turn to Romans 8:33-34: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” Again we have courtroom language: a “charge” is laid against us (v. 33) and there is an attempt to obtain our “condemn[ation]” on account of this charge (v. 34).

However, we have the Lord Jesus Christ as our advocate in God’s court. He “died” for our sins and “maketh intercession for us” “at God’s right hand” (v. 34). On this basis, God “justifieth” us (v. 33) in the courtroom, legally. This is both our present peace and our future hope!

Preaching on Romans 8:34, Herman Hoeksema declared,

Heidelberg Catechism also emphasizes the “to me” or “for me” in justification: by a “true faith,” “everlasting righteousness” is “freely given by God” “not only to others, but *to me* also” (Q. & A. 21; cf. Q. & A. 56, 59-61).

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The fact that Christ makes intercession for us also reveals that He is our advocate. Jesus is our Attorney. He pleads for us. He pleads! He insists! He says, "I will that My people receive the blessings of salvation." Jesus is a strong lawyer, pleading for our justification. He says, "I will, Father, that Thou give Me power to justify My people." In addition He says, "I will that Thou give Me the power to give them the blessing of eternal life." If Jesus can at all accomplish it, He will win His plea.¹⁶

Christ, our great lawyer, advocate and attorney in the divine court of law, could and did accomplish it, and won His case for us! The antonym of "condemn" (declare guilty) is "justify" (declare righteous): "It is God that *justifieth*. Who is he that *condemneth*?" (vv. 33-34).

Thus to justify means to declare or pronounce righteous. This is the case with the New Testament Greek word (*dikaion*), the Old Testament Hebrew word (*hasdiq*) and even our English word. If someone justifies the United Kingdom's entering World War II, they are not retroactively *making* that entry just but they are *declaring* that it is just. In the Bible (e.g., Rom. 1:18-3:22; 8:33-34) and sound theology, justification is not to make righteous inwardly (Romanism) but to declare or pronounce righteous legally (Reformation).¹⁷

However, Luther typically does not use the later, standard Protestant terminology of justification as a "legal declaration." A significant factor in this is the focus of the theological polemic or the nature of the issues debated at that time, as Herman Bavinck points out:

In the early days, the opposition between Rome and the Reformation [including Luther] in the locus of justification was not formulated in terms of "ethical" [i.e., God's infusing grace into man] versus "juridical," but in terms of justification by works (love) versus justification by faith, on the basis of

¹⁶ Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Grandville, MI: RFP, 2002), p. 371.

¹⁷ Cf. Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, pp. 226-249; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4: *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), pp. 204-209.

our own works or on the basis of the righteousness of Christ accepted in faith.¹⁸

Jaroslav Pelikan notes that the idea of forensic, legal, judicial or juridical justification is there in the teaching of the German theologian:

Although Luther himself was not always so utterly precise as that, those who systematically formulated his teaching [in the 1531 *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* 4.305-306] explained that in the Epistle to the Romans “‘justify’ is used in a *forensic* fashion to mean ‘to absolve a guilty man and *pronounce* him righteous,’ and to do so on account of an alien righteousness, namely that of Christ, which is communicated to us through faith.”¹⁹

As in Romans 8:33-34, Dr. Luther speaks of justification as the opposite of condemnation (a legal declaration that one is guilty and worthy of punishment) in the following two strongly parallel statements: “Through [1] the Law, therefore, we are [2] *condemned* and [3] killed; but through [1] Christ we are [2] *justified* and [3] made alive.”²⁰

For Luther, “it certainly is” the truth that “the doctrine of justification” is that believers are “*pronounced* righteous” in our Lord Jesus Christ:

But the doctrine of justification is this, that we are *pronounced* righteous and are saved solely by faith in Christ, and without works. If this is the true meaning of justification—as it certainly is, or it will be necessary to get rid of all Scripture—then it immediately follows that we are *pronounced* righteous neither through monasticism nor through vows nor through Masses nor through any other works.²¹

¹⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 207.

¹⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 150; italics mine. Immediately before its definition of justification, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* cites Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

²⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 151; italics mine.

²¹ Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, p. 223; italics

Paul Althaus is not going too far when he summarizes the German Reformer's doctrine of justification in legal or forensic terms:

The fact that God *declares* the unrighteous to be righteous transcends all human understanding and reason. God's *judgment* contradicts the judgment of man and each man's judgment of himself. A man condemned as a sinner both by himself and by other people is *declared* righteous.²²

3. Alien Righteousness

The righteousness of God is not only a faith righteousness and a legal righteousness, but also, third, an alien righteousness. That is, it is not a righteousness produced by us or wrought in us. Our alien righteousness is a foreign righteousness, an extrinsic or external righteousness, the righteousness of another, even our covenant head and legal representative, our Lord Jesus Christ. This alien righteousness was wrought by another Person, in a different country (Israel), almost two thousand years ago—all outside of us! This is a righteousness that is completely finished some two millennia ago and vicarious, for Christ obtained it for us.

Martin Luther was very strong on this, including in his commentary on Christ's words "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more" in John 16:10:

This righteousness, however, is completely concealed, not only from the world but also from the saints. It is not a thought, a word, or a work in ourselves ... No, it is entirely outside and above us; it is Christ's going to the Father, that is, His suffering, resurrection, and ascension. Christ placed this outside the sphere of our senses; we cannot see and feel

mine. The Wittenberg theologian speaks of God *pronouncing* believers righteous in justification in many other places in this work (e.g., pp. 137, 160, 231, 450).

²² Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 229; italics mine. Commenting on Romans 2:13, Luther twice refers to justification as God's "declaring" someone righteous, which is "plainly the sense of the context," and he also speaks several times on the same page of God's "regarding" or "considering" people as righteous (*Lectures on Romans*, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Pauck [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006], p. 50).

it. The only way it can be grasped is by faith in the Word preached about him, which tells us that He Himself is our Righteousness. Thus St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:30: “Whom God made our Wisdom, our Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption,” in order that before God we may boast, not of ourselves but solely of this Lord.²³

This crucial point is also made in the Pauline texts on the saving righteousness of God. It is not in the child of God but in “the gospel of *Christ*” that “the righteousness of God [is] revealed” (Rom. 1:16-17). It is by believing on *Jesus* that one receives this righteousness: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Rom. 3:22).²⁴

Romans 10 speaks of the Jews (and all who seek to justify themselves):

For they being ignorant of *God’s* righteousness, and going about to establish their *own* righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of *God*. For *Christ* is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (vv. 3-4).

Those who believe in the Lord Jesus, who “is the end of the law for righteousness,” receive righteousness, “the righteousness of God.”

That “the righteousness of God” is *Christ’s* righteousness is very clear from II Peter 1:1. The most accurate translation of this verse speaks of “the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

²³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14-16*. ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 346–347.

²⁴ Whereas N. T. Wright and the Federal Vision interpret the “faith of Jesus Christ” in Romans 3:22 and elsewhere (Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil. 3:9) to refer to the Saviour’s own covenant faithfulness, Luther rightly explains this significant phrase: “‘the faith of Christ,’ which in Latin idiom would denote ‘faith which Christ has’ [i.e., a subjective genitive: Christ’s faith], means, according to Hebrew idiom, ‘faith which we have in Christ’ [i.e., an objective genitive: our faith in Christ].” In the next breath, he gives a similar example: “and ‘the righteousness of God,’ which in Latin idiom would denote a righteousness which God has, means, according to Hebrew idiom, a righteousness which we have from God and in God’s sight” (*The Bondage of the Will*, p. 291). This reminds us of Luther’s key Reformation breakthrough and his autobiographical testimony quoted at the start of this article.

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II Corinthians 5:21 explicitly links Christ's righteousness to His great work of redemption: "For he [i.e., God] hath made him [i.e., Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Thus Jehovah's believing people receive "the righteousness of God *in him* [i.e., Christ]."

Philippians 3 teaches the same truth of Christ's alien righteousness. Paul speaks of his personal Jewish pedigree in which he had formerly trusted for his justification and which he had come to repudiate for any part of his righteousness before God: "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews" (vv. 4-5). N. T. Wright and the New Perspective on Paul would agree that these Jewish traits must be excluded from divine justification. However, contrary to the New Perspective, the apostle goes on to rule out his personal moral achievements as contributing to his justification: "as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (vv. 5-6). These human works do not meet the divinely required standard, for they are mere "dung" (v. 8).²⁵ Finally, the apostle to the Gentiles expresses his new hope and assured confidence for justification: "And be found in him [i.e., Jesus], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, *the righteousness which is of God by faith*" (v. 9).

Jesus' sufferings on the cross for us (His bearing the punishment due to all the elect for our transgressions of Jehovah's law) and His sinless, lifelong obedience to God's moral will for us satisfy and meet the divine standard. This is the righteousness of God, the perfect righteousness wrought by God the Son incarnate, an alien righteousness. Clearly, though the *terminology* of alien righteousness is alien to Scripture, the *concept* of alien righteousness is not at all alien to God's Word.

In Luther's preaching and writing, he uses the language of "alien" to drive his hearers and readers away from their own sinful, personal achievements

²⁵ Elsewhere Holy Scripture also uses strong language and even repulsive imagery to speak of the idea of man's works constituting or contributing to his justification before God. In Isaiah 64:6, the prophet confesses, on behalf of all the church, that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy [i.e., menstuous] rags."

to the glorious work of the incarnate, crucified and risen Son of God outside of us. Thus we are saved not by our own works but by Christ's "alien works." We are justified not by our own merit (we have none) but by Christ's "alien merit." It is only by an alien mercy and an alien Saviour that God provides for believers an "alien righteousness."

In these theses on justification, the German Reformer explains that alien righteousness establishes faith righteousness (justification *sola fide*), since our works cannot appropriate a "foreign" righteousness that is "outside of us":

27. Now it is certain that Christ or the righteousness of Christ, since it is outside of us and foreign to us, cannot be laid hold of by our works;

28. But faith itself which is poured into us from hearing about Christ by the Holy Spirit, comprehends Christ.

29. Therefore, faith alone justifies without our works, for I cannot say, "I produce Christ or the righteousness of Christ."²⁶

In *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, one of his early sermons, dated in late 1518 or early 1519, Martin Luther contrasts the "alien righteousness" of Christ with "alien" unrighteousness in Adam: "this alien righteousness ... is set opposite original sin, likewise alien, which we acquire without works by birth alone" (cf. Rom. 5:12-21).²⁷ Dr. Luther states that "'the righteousness of God' in Rom. 1[:17] ... is the righteousness given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam. It accomplishes the same as that original righteousness would have accomplished; rather, it accomplishes more."²⁸ Christ's righteousness is an "infinite righteousness" and Luther states that we have by faith "the same righteousness as he."²⁹ This is exactly what we need!

In this same sermon, the German Reformer speaks powerfully of the comfort of those who receive this alien work, alien merit and alien righteousness, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, by faith alone:

²⁶ Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 34: *Career of the Reformer IV*, p. 153.

²⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Lowell J. Satre (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 299.

²⁸ Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, pp. 298, 299.

²⁹ Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, p. 298.

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Therefore a man can with confidence boast in Christ and say: "Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did" ... Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes ours.³⁰

4, Imputed Righteousness

Not only is the righteousness of God a faith righteousness, a legal righteousness and an alien righteousness, but it is also, fourth, an imputed righteousness. To impute means to account or reckon to someone's account. If justification is a legal term, imputation is an accounting term.

The two saving imputations regarding us in justification are especially clear in Romans 4. First, there is a negative imputation: our sins are not imputed to us. The apostle writes, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are *forgiven*, and whose sins are *covered*. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will *not impute sin*" (vv. 7-8). In the language of this text, the forgiveness or covering of iniquities and sins is their non-imputation, God's not reckoning them to our account.

Second, there is a positive imputation: the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ is imputed to us. Besides the non-imputation of sin (v. 8), the positive imputation or counting or reckoning to believers of God's righteousness is taught throughout this chapter (vv. 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24). With 90% of the references to imputation being positive, speaking of the reckoning of righteousness through faith, it is very strongly emphasized in Romans 4.

Dr. Luther himself underscored the prominence of imputation or reckoning in Romans 4:

The other righteousness [in contrast to the accursed righteousness of works] is that of faith, and consists, not in any works, but in the gracious favour and reckoning of God. See how Paul stresses the word "reckoned"; how he insists on it, and repeats it, and enforces it. "To him that worketh," he says, "the reward is *reckoned*, not of grace, but of debt. But

³⁰ Luther. *Luther's Works*, vol. 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, pp. 297, 298.

to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is *reckoned* for righteousness,” according to the purpose of God’s grace. Then he quotes David as saying the same about the reckoning of grace. “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord has not imputed sin,” etc. (vv. 4ff.). He repeats the word “reckon” in this chapter about ten times.³¹

The imputation of righteousness to believers is necessarily implied in each and every reference in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to sin’s forgiveness, covering, blotting out, pardoning, putting away, casting down, wiping out, washing away, not being seen, not being remembered, being cast behind one’s back, being cast into the depths of the sea, etc., or God’s not entering into judgment regarding it or His hiding His face towards it.³²

Why is this? Because of the logic of Paul’s argument in Romans 4:6-8. After stating that David “describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth *righteousness* without works” (v. 6), one would expect the apostle to quote a Davidic Psalm speaking of positive imputation, the imputation of righteousness, but he does not. Instead, he quotes a text on negative imputation, the non-imputation of iniquity: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will *not impute* sin” (v. 8; Ps. 32:2).

Since positive imputation (Rom. 4:6) is proved by negative imputation (v. 8), the former is necessarily implied by the latter.³³ In God’s accounting, the unbeliever is a debtor and the believer whose debt of sin is not imputed also has the righteousness of God credited to him. No child of God merely has his debt of guilt cancelled without also having Christ’s righteousness reckoned to his account. These two are sides of one blessed gospel coin, so to speak (*Belgic Confession* 23).³⁴

³¹ Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 296; italics original.

³² Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pp. 182, 206.

³³ Even N. T. Wright cannot escape the fact that Psalm 32:1-2, which he wrongly identifies as “Psalm 31,” speaks of forgiveness “in terms of the non-reckoning of sin” or its non-imputation (*Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016], p. 220; cf. p. 221). But this supposedly great exegete and mighty theologian has completely missed the apostolic logic of Romans 4:6-8. If sin can be not imputed to believers (negative imputation), why cannot righteousness (the opposite of sin) be imputed to God’s people (positive imputation)? What then of Wright’s attacks upon, and mockery of, imputation?

³⁴ Here we oppose the one-sided, counterfeit coin of Amyraldianism. This theological system is

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Martin Luther understood this too. Commenting on Romans 4:6-8 in 1515-1516, he wrote,

God regards as righteous a man to whom these two evils [i.e., both original and actual sins] are forgiven. Hence, the next line: "Blessed is the man to whom God will not impute iniquity." What our text calls "sin" must more correctly be understood as "unrighteousness" in order to be consonant with the intention of the apostle who wants to prove from this word that righteousness is given without works by the reckoning of God; and this happens only by the nonimputation of unrighteousness. Therefore, it is one and the same thing to say: to whom God reckons righteousness, and: to whom God does not impute sin, i.e., unrighteousness.³⁵

The German Reformer even makes these two imputations (or rather one non-imputation and one imputation) definitive of a Christian:

Therefore we define a Christian as follows: A Christian is not someone who has no sin or feels no sin; he is someone to whom, because of his faith in Christ, God does not impute his sin. This doctrine brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors. It is not in vain, therefore, that so often and so diligently we inculcate the doctrine of the forgiveness [or non-imputation] of sins and of the imputation of righteousness for the sake of Christ.³⁶

In Romans 4:1-8, Paul refers to two highly prominent Old Testament worthies in connection with the two imputations regarding us in justification.

a deviation from Reformed orthodoxy in many areas, including justification, for it knows only the negative (the non-imputation of sins to the believer) and rejects the positive imputation to us of "the righteousness of God" in Christ, thus robbing the child of God of the comfort that this gospel truth gives. Besides other problems with John Wesley's doctrine of justification, he, like Amyraldianism, taught that it consists only in the forgiveness of sins and not also in the reckoning of Christ's righteousness to the believer's account.

³⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 139. Jaroslav Pelikan also notes Luther's teaching on the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness based upon Romans 4:6-8 (*The Christian Tradition*, vol. 4, p. 149).

³⁶ Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, p. 133.

The first is Abraham, the father of all believers, whose positive imputation is spoken of in verse 3: “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (quoting Gen. 15:6).³⁷ The second is King David, the man after God’s own heart, who rejoiced in his negative imputation: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:8; quoting Ps. 32:2).

Clearly, the righteousness of God is not what Rome claims: an infused righteousness transforming us from within—that is sanctification, not justification. The righteousness of God is an imputed righteousness, one that is reckoned to our account, as Luther and the whole Reformation proclaimed.³⁸ Blessed and happy are all who believe the gospel!

³⁷ Genesis 15:6 contains the first reference in the Bible to “righteousness” (*tsedaqah*) and, strikingly, it is an instance of *imputed* righteousness. This is also the Old Testament text on righteousness that is most quoted in the New Testament and most theologically significant, as indicated by its use in Romans 4:3 and throughout that chapter, and in Galatians 3:6 and its context.

³⁸ N. T. Wright and the Federal Vision use union with Christ as a replacement for imputation (cf. Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012], pp. 388-405; Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology: A Comparative Analysis* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006], pp. 65, 78-81). However, the scriptural and Reformation truth is that God imputes Christ’s righteousness to those who are in union with Him, for we are “made the righteousness of God *in him*” (II Cor. 5:21; cf. Isa. 45:25; I Cor. 1:30; 6:11) by imputation (II Cor. 5:19), and it is those who are “found *in him*” who receive “the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:9). In Lord’s Day 23 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the Reformed believer confesses, “I am righteous *in Christ*” (A. 59) and “God ... *imputes* to me the ... righteousness ... of Christ” (A. 60). In justification, union with Christ and imputation are not to be played off against each other but harmoniously related: God imputes justifying righteousness to those in union with Christ through faith alone.