

# IS GOD WRONG DECLARING US RIGHT?

Romans 3:20-26

The Apostle Paul admonished Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

It is my duty as a Bible teacher to rightly handle God's Word; to teach it accurately. From time to time this requires me to present truths that challenge long-held beliefs. We are creatures of habit. We are suspicious of the new.

But today, as we study one of the most important passages in all the Bible I find it necessary to present a translation of this passage significantly different than the translations with which we are most familiar. I do this because I'm convinced this translation more accurately reflects the Greek text. This translation does not contradict your Bible: I believe it enhances and deepens the truths revealed. By offering this translation I am not suggesting our English translations are inaccurate and untrustworthy. You can trust your Bible. However, in this instance I am convinced the translation can be made more accurate.

This passage deserves our very best efforts to study and understand it because this passage reveals how God saves us from eternal death.

In Romans 1:18 – 3:20 Paul shows that we are all sinners under God's wrath. *None is righteous, no, not one. No one does good.* He further shows we cannot improve our condition; *for by works of the law no human being will be declared righteous in his sight.*

Paul has driven us to the edge of the cliff. There is nothing we can do. We cannot make ourselves right with God. Left to ourselves we are hopeless.

The glorious message of the Gospel is that God has made a way for us to be right with Him.

***But in making us right with Himself God does something very peculiar.***

As we read verses 20-24 from the translation provided, look for the peculiar thing God does when making us right with Him.

Romans 3:20–26 (New English Translation plus)

<sup>20</sup> For *no one is declared righteous before him* by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed—<sup>22</sup> namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and are falling short of the glory of God <sup>24</sup> but they are being declared righteous freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

What is the peculiar thing God does when making us right with Him?

***God declares us who believe in Jesus righteous even though we continue to sin!***

Verse 22 makes clear God's righteousness is *for all who believe*. Verses 23-24 further describe *all who believe* as those who *have sinned and are falling short of the glory of God*. To *fall short of the glory of God* is to fail to meet the standard of righteousness required to be in God's glorious presence. We continually fall short because we continually sin.

It is exactly these believers whom God, in His grace, declares righteous. Even though they continue to sin, in God's courtroom they are without guilt, innocent, righteous in God's eyes!

How can this be?

How can God do this and not violate His righteousness?

It is *through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ* as Paul states in verse 22.

In verses 25-26 Paul elaborates. These verses defend God's righteousness: God is doing right when He declares us believers righteous even though we continue to sin.

<sup>25</sup> God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed.<sup>26</sup> This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just even while justifying the one who believes because of Jesus' faithfulness.

Once a year, on Yom Kippor, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat. This atoned for sins committed the previous year. This sacrifice had to be repeated annually because animal blood could not pay the penalty of human sin.

Jesus' blood paid sin's penalty in full. Jesus fulfilled the purpose of the mercy seat and brought it to an end. On the day Jesus died what happened in the Temple? The veil was torn and the mercy seat exposed. Everyone can now come directly to the mercy seat - Jesus.

Rather than compromising God's righteousness, the cross upholds God's righteousness. At the cross God poured out His righteous anger and punished the sin of mankind from the Fall to the end of the Millennial Kingdom.

By His death, Jesus paid the penalty for all our sin – past, present and future. When you accept His death on your behalf by faith, His blood is applied to your account. All your sins are paid in full – past, present and future. Your legal standing before God is changed. On the basis of your faith in the blood of Jesus Christ God declares that you are righteous in His sight. You are no longer a sinner under His wrath; you are now a saint under His grace.

Because Jesus' blood paid for all your sins – past, present and future – God is just in declaring you righteous even though you continue to sin.

Your righteous legal standing before God is no excuse to continue in sin. Sin can no longer separate us from God but it still has many negative consequences in our relationship with Him, with others and in our experience in the Millennial Kingdom. As Paul will explain the ultimate goal of salvation in this life is to become more and more like Jesus Himself.

This passage makes clear we are declared righteous not on the basis of anything we do, but on the basis of the shed blood of Christ that paid for all our sins – past, present and future. In addition, this passage clearly addresses our legal standing, not our character. Legally we are righteous before God, experientially we should be growing in righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit. And this passage also shows that we cannot lose our salvation. All our sin is paid for and God declares us righteous even while we still sin. He is not going to reject because of sin.

All praise to God Who declares us righteous!

All praise to Jesus Who makes this possible!

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**QUESTION:** what are some examples of the law and the prophets attesting to the *righteousness of God* which is *apart from the law*?

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**NEXT WEEK:** Romans 3:27 – 4:25