

# Trusting God's Faithfulness in Jesus

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 8*, November 23, 2014

## Romans 3:19-26 (ESV highly adapted)

<sup>19</sup> We know that whatever the law (Torah) says it speaks to **those in the law**, so that every mouth may be stopped, and **the whole world** may be **accountable to God's judgment**.

<sup>20</sup> Because **from works of law** (Torah) **no flesh** will be **declared right** before him [Ps 143:1-2], for **through law** (Torah) **comes knowledge of sin**.

<sup>21</sup> But **now apart from the law** (Torah) **God's faithful righteousness** has been manifested, although the **Law** (Torah) and the **Prophets** bear witness to it – <sup>22</sup> **God's righteousness** seen through **Jesus Messiah's faithfulness** for all who **have faith / believe**.

For there is **no distinction**: <sup>23</sup> for **all have sinned** and have lost the **glory of God**, <sup>24</sup> and are **declared right** by **his grace** as a gift, through the **redemption** that is in **Messiah Jesus**, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a **mercy-seat** through the **faithfulness** shown in **his blood**.

God's purpose was to demonstrate **his faithful righteousness**, because of his passing over former sins in the forbearance of God <sup>26</sup> leading up to demonstrating **his faithful righteousness in the present time**, in order that he himself might **be righteous** and may **declare right** the one who lives by trusting the **faithfulness of Jesus**.

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## Psalm 143:1-2

LORD, hear my prayer, | Give ear to my pleas for mercy, in your faithfulness. | Answer me in your righteousness! | <sup>2</sup> Do not enter into judgment with your servant, | for no one living shall be declared right before you.

## Romans 1:16-17

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes (*pisteuein*), to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it God's righteousness is revealed from faithfulness (*pistis*) into faith (*pistis*), as it is written, "*The righteous from faith (pistis) shall live.*" [Hab. 2:4]

## Romans 3:1-3

<sup>1</sup> What then is the Jew's advantage? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way. First, they were entrusted (*pisteuein*) with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful to that trust (*apistein*)? Does their unfaithfulness (*apistia*) nullify the faithfulness (*pistis*) of God?

## Galatians 2:15-16 Paul speaking to Peter

<sup>15</sup> We who by birth are Jews and not sinners from the Gentiles; <sup>16</sup> but who know that a person is not declared right from works of law (Torah) but through Jesus Messiah's faithfulness (*pistis*), even we have put our faith (*pisteuein*) in Messiah Jesus, in order that we may be declared right from the Messiah's faithfulness (*pistis*) and not from works of law, because from works of law no flesh will be declared right.

## Exodus 25:22 God speaking to Moses about the Ark of the Covenant

<sup>22</sup> There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat (*hilasterion*), from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

## Leviticus 16:14 On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies

<sup>14</sup> The high priest shall take some of the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat (*hilasterion*), and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

## Ephesians 1:7

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us....

## The Drama of Now!

Paul has worked from God's good news about his Son (1:1-4), his power for saving humanity (1:16-17); through a powerful overview of humanity's brokenness, both pagan and Jewish, and God's judgment/wrath seen in the consequences of sin and final judgment (1:18-3:20). Paul ends referring to Ps 143:1-2: God's faithfulness/righteousness is our only hope.

"Now" (emphatic) begins v 21 ("in the present time" v 26). Something new has happened, surprising and unexpected, but once you see what God has done, you see it fits perfectly. That is the "Good news." We might expect emphasis on Jesus' life and death. It's there. But the great emphasis is on showing God's faithful righteousness (*dikaiosyne*, 4x). The theme is how the whole story works, now that we see Jesus at the center of it all. The text is highly concentrated with every phrase linked to a part of the whole story.

## Challenges of Translation and History

The translation given is very literal and tries to bring out a distinct understanding of Paul's words. Many argue about how several key groups of words should be interpreted. Part of the problem is the wide range of meaning and allusion these words have for Paul as they apply to both God and humans and as they are shaped by use in the Greek OT scripture.

Righteous-, just- (*dikaio-*), a large important group: both God's faithfulness to his promises and his justice as a judge. Human unrighteousness, and need to be judged right/innocent. Some interpret God's righteousness as a gift he imputes to humans by their faith.

Faith- believe (*pistis, pisteuein*). This has often been treated as belonging only to humans as the basis of 'justification by faith alone.' God doesn't have faith. But Rom 3:1-3 shows that Paul thinks of *pistis* as something belonging to God and v 22 speaks of the *pistis* of Jesus. This is usually translated as "faith in Jesus" (redundant) but needs the broader sense. Paul is certainly teaching that faith is the core of our response to the Gospel, but he emphasizes that our faith is focused on and grows out of Jesus' faithfulness, which embodies God's faithfulness to his promises and his way of mercy as a just judge.

Other important words are "glory of God" reflecting on the story of sin in Gen 3. The word "redemption" means deliverance as in the Exodus and breaking the enslavement of sin. "Mercy seat" (*hilasterion*) refers to the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God meeting humans and the place where the blood of atonement brought God's mercy rather than judgment and wrath. Thus the whole story of scripture comes together.

## Trusting the Faithful God through Jesus: vv. 21-26

21 In Jesus God has done something that reaches beyond anything Torah could do, but Torah with the Prophets anticipates it. 22 God himself in Jesus has become the faithful descendant of Abraham, David's son, the Messiah who embodies all of Israel. As Messiah/Israel, Jesus is the faithful one through whom God fulfills his promise to all humanity. Our response of faith/trust springs forth from his faithfulness (1:17): "out of faithfulness into faith."

23 Jesus deals with the human situation as a whole. As God's intervention, he brings God's image/glory back to us humans. 24 He brings God's grace, free gift of love, by redemption, delivering us from enslavement to sin's power by making it possible for us to be *in him*, "in Messiah Jesus." 25 He is the meeting place, "mercy seat," that God himself creates, by Jesus' faithfulness embodied "in his blood" on the cross. The impossible becomes reality.

God unfolds what was happening in the long story of his forbearance in scripture. 26 It all comes to focus "Now!" in the time defined by Jesus. God is faithful to his promises, just in dealing with sin, and merciful in declaring right every person who trusts Jesus' faithfulness.