

God's attribute of righteousness does not come through faith (God is righteous whether we believe it or not), and God's Law does not come through faith (God's standard is binding whether we believe it or not). What then can "the righteousness of God" mean in verse 22?

Before Paul answers this, he again refers to the fact that all human beings are sinners -- they all have sinned (transgressed God's standard of righteousness, His Law), and they all continue to sin (fall short of God's standard of righteousness, His Law, which reflects His attribute of righteousness, which in turn is one aspect of the magnificence of the splendor of His nature -- His glory).

And yet in verse 24 Paul states that these very sinners, these unrighteous human beings are the very ones whom God in His great grace, declares righteous through Christ's redemption (to be justified means to be declared righteous; thus when we read "justified freely by His grace" we should simply read "declared righteous freely by His grace").

Think of it! GOD DECLARES RIGHTEOUS THE UNRIGHTEOUS!

Someone may say, "How can God do that? isn't that a contradiction, to say that someone is righteous when he isn't?"

And someone else may respond, "What do you mean, 'How can God do that?' God is God. God is sovereign. God can do anything that He pleases!"

At this point we must interject the scriptural truths that God cannot deny Himself (II Timothy 2:13), that one of God's attributes is truth, and that God cannot contradict Himself, i.e., cannot say something is so when He says it isn't so! If God says an unrighteous human being is righteous, there must be some other explanation than simply to say that God can do anything that He pleases!

If God declares an unrighteous human being righteous, there must be some basis for this declaration; and since it does not lie in the righteousness of that human being, it must lie elsewhere.

In verses 24 and 25 Paul tells us where the basis for our justification lies. He says that God gave His own Son as a propitiatory sacrifice, a sacrifice of atonement.

There are various ideas used in scripture to describe this work: that of redemption, that of atonement, that of propitiation, that of expiation, and that of satisfaction. What do these terms convey? (see figures)

Paul adds that Christ's work is a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood; i.e., the benefits of Christ's atoning work become ours through faith (trust) in His redemption.

In verses 25b and 26 we discover that Christ's atonement demonstrated God's righteousness in two or three important ways.

During the time period from Adam to Christ it had looked as though God permitted men's sins to go unpunished. Although there were