

Digging Deeper: The Greater Meaning of Galatians 2:16

Monday, October 12, 2026

*“[We] recognize that a man is declared righteous, not by works of law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ. So we have put our faith in Christ Jesus, so that we may be declared righteous by faith in Christ and not by works of law, for no one will be declared righteous by works of law.”
(Galatians 2:16)*

Some in the Galatian congregations were being pushed to earn a right standing with God by keeping the Law of Moses, and Paul wrote to set them straight. The main point is that no one can earn a clean record before Jehovah; it comes only through faith in Jesus Christ and his ransom. The day's text explains that be-

ing declared righteous means the charges against us are dropped and our record is wiped clean, and Jehovah does this without bending his own standards of justice.

1 “Declared Righteous”: The Charges Are Dropped (δικαιόω, *dikaioō*)

The Greek word δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) is a courtroom word. The NWT study note explains that it carries the basic idea of a person “being cleared of any charge, held as guiltless, and therefore pronounced righteous and treated as such.” Paul used it in a special sense: God views an imperfect person who shows faith as guiltless.

This does not mean Jehovah pretends we never sinned or that he excuses sin. It means the case against us is closed. As

Paul wrote: “Therefore, those in union with Christ Jesus have no condemnation.” (Romans 8:1)

- When Jehovah forgives, he does not keep the old file open. We can serve him with a clean conscience instead of carrying past guilt.
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2 “Release by Ransom”: Why Jehovah Can Forgive Justly (ἀπολύτρωσις, *apolytrōsis*)

The day’s text points to Romans 3:24, which says that “it is as a free gift that they are being declared righteous by his undeserved kindness through the release by the ransom paid by Christ Jesus.” The Greek word there is ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolytrōsis*), which the NWT renders “release by ransom.” It is related to the word for a price paid to set slaves or prisoners free.

This is the answer to the question, “How can a just God declare sinners righteous?” The debt was not ignored; it was paid. Jesus gave “his life as a ransom in exchange for many.” (Matthew 20:28) So Jehovah has a fair legal basis for canceling our debts, and Romans 3:26 says he can “be righteous even when declaring righteous the man who has faith in Jesus.”

- Our forgiveness cost Jehovah and Jesus dearly. That moves us to value the ransom and not treat sin lightly.

3 “Jehovah’s Friend”: Righteous as Friends of God (*φίλος, philos*)

The day’s text says that those with an earthly hope are declared righteous as friends of God, and it points to James 2:21-23. There James says that “Abraham put faith in Jehovah, and it was counted to him as righteousness,” and he

came to be called Jehovah's friend. The Greek word φίλος (*philos*) means "friend" and is related to a verb meaning "to have affection for."

Abraham was not perfect, but his faith was real, and he proved it by what he did. The study note on this verse calls this "the most precious friendship that any human can enjoy." Anointed Christians are declared righteous as children of God, and the "other sheep" are declared righteous as his friends. Both are forgiven on the basis of the same ransom, and both are truly loved.

- Jehovah does not just tolerate those with an earthly hope. He wants us as his friends, and like Abraham, we show our faith by our actions.

Key Spiritual Reflections

- **A Clean Record:** Do I keep carrying guilt over sins I have already repented of, or do I trust that Jehovah has truly closed the case? (Romans 8:1)
- **Valuing the Ransom:** What is one way I can show Jehovah this week that I am grateful for the price Jesus paid for me? (Romans 3:24)
- **A Friend of God:** Like Abraham, am I showing my faith by what I do, so that Jehovah can view me as his friend? (James 2:23)