

## Romans 3:5-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rom/rom-3/romans-35-6/>

*Paul is presenting an argument made by the Jewish “authorities” that if our sin demonstrates the grace of God then it is not fair for God to judge us. Paul clarifies that this is a human argument that is false; God is God and He is the judge of the world.*

Paul makes a sarcastic argument in verse 5, *But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say?* In other words, “If my sin shows God is righteous, and therefore does something good for God, then how is it fair that God judges me for it?” Paul’s opponents are arguing against Paul’s teaching that we are justified by God’s grace, which is received through faith (John 3:14-15).

Paul answers that charge (that God can’t judge us for being unrighteous if our sin shows Him to be righteous) both with Scripture (Psalm 51) and logic, adding: *For otherwise, how will God judge the world (v 6)?* If God is God, then God is the *judge of the world*. So if God could not *judge sin* He would not be God. Therefore their argument is absurd.

Verse 5 connects with the previous verse, which quotes Psalm 51, written by King David after he sinned with Bathsheba. Paul quotes Psalm 51:4 in the previous verse (verse 4) and brings in the context surrounding Psalm 51:4, which makes clear that when God judges, His judgment is true and right.

David prays a prayer of repentance to God in Psalm 51:3–5:

“For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.  
Against You, You only, I have sinned  
And done what is evil in Your sight,  
So that You are justified when You speak  
And blameless when You judge.  
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.”

Therefore, Paul debunks the primary argument the competing Jewish “authorities” had against Paul’s teaching. They claim that Paul’s message that we are saved by grace, apart from law, teaches that we ought to sin because it does God a favor (verse 8).

In Romans 3:8, Paul calls this accusation slander, and since Rome was the center of the civilized world at the time, it was vital for Paul to answer this slanderous charge to protect the ministry God charged him with, which was to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Plus, Paul was supporting his ministry partners in Rome, Aquila and Priscilla (Romans 16:3, Acts 18:2, 18, 26).

In verse 6, we see the second of ten occurrences for the phrase *May it never be* in Paul’s letter to the Romans. In each instance, Paul uses the phrase to answer a question that echos the slander narrative being propounded by the competing Jewish “authorities.”

It is instructive to note the questions in Romans that precede each of the occurrences of *May it never be!*

- “What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?” (3:3)
- “But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms)” (3:5)
- “Do we then nullify the law through faith?” (3:31)
- “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” (6:1)
- “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15)
- “What shall we say then? Is the law sin?” (7:7)
- “Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me?” (7:13)
- “What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?” (9:14)
- “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He?” (11:1)
- “I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?” (11:11)

Paul is systematically unraveling the argument against his teaching from the competing Jewish “authorities.” Their primary objection is his message that God accepts us as righteous in His eyes through grace alone and not because of our “goodness” generated from following religious practice or laws.

The competing Jewish “authorities” believed that before anyone could become righteous, they must be circumcised and obey the Jewish laws (Acts 15:5). This was a position Paul argued against at the Great Council in Acts 15. In that Great Council, James, the head Jerusalem elder, and Peter, the lead Apostle, agreed with Paul that believers are saved by a free gift of grace, received through faith. The apostles and elders commissioned Paul to take his message of grace to the world (Acts 15:7–11).

Perhaps some of the Pharisees who thought circumcision was essential (Acts 15:5) were not convinced and decided to contest Paul. Paul had not visited Rome, but his teaching had taken root there, likely through Aquila and Priscilla, who were fellow Jews who labored with him in the ministry while having been exiled from Rome, and who had now returned to their home (Romans 16:3; Acts 18:2, 18, 26).

By making these arguments, the competing Jewish “authorities” seek to defeat Paul’s teaching that righteousness or justice comes through faith (Romans 1:16–17). Listed below are paraphrases of the statements made by the competing Jewish “authorities” mischaracterizing Paul’s teaching, which Paul answers with *May it never be!* (Bear in mind that Paul never backs down from asserting that righteousness comes only by faith) To all these statements, Paul answers *May it never be!*

- If people are *really* made righteous by God’s grace through faith (as Paul teaches), then God would break His promise to Abraham by not accepting unbelieving Jews. (3:3)
- If by sinning we demonstrate the love of God, and if it is *really* true that the more sin God’s grace covers the greater God is shown to be (as Paul teaches), then God is unfair to judge us for something that makes Him look good. (3:5)

- If faith is what *really* matters (as Paul teaches) then the law of God no longer matters. (3:30)
- If God's grace *really* covers all our sins, (as Paul teaches) then we ought to sin as much as possible so God's grace can be demonstrated more often. (6:1)
- If we are *really* under grace rather than under law (as Paul teaches) then we should sin as much as we can. (6:15)
- If we are *really* under grace and not law (as Paul teaches), then keeping the law would be sinful. (7:7)
- If we are *really* saved by grace through faith and not by law (as Paul teaches), then we are saved from the law, which means the law is a source of death and is therefore evil. (7:13)
- If Gentiles can *really* be saved without the law and without circumcision (as Paul teaches), then God has been totally unjust to Israel, because He cast Israel aside and broke His promises to Israel. (9:14)
- If God *actually* looks at the circumcision of the heart and not adherence to the religious laws which He gave Israel (as Paul teaches), then God has rejected Israel because He has rejected circumcision. (11:1)
- If Israel is being disobedient to God, and thereby fulfilling Scripture (as Paul claims), then God has thrown Israel under the bus. (11:11)

To each of these assertions by the competing Jewish "authorities," Paul answers *May it never be!*

But throughout these arguments, we will see that Paul continues to assert the theme verse that righteousness or justice comes by faith from start to end (Romans 1:16-17). Righteousness begins by receiving justification in God's sight through faith, just as Abraham believed (Romans 4:1-3). Righteousness continues in our life experience through humble obedience (rather than prideful self-seeking).

### **Biblical Text**

**5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) 6 May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?**