

## ROMANS 4.5 IN TEV: A PLEA FOR CONSISTENCY

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The twentieth century has witnessed a completely new departure in the approach to translating *dikaïosunē* and cognates in English versions of the New Testament. In essence it abandons the traditional approach which utilises two word-families (“righteousness” and cognates, “justify” and cognates) in favour of a one word-family approach (“right” and cognates) in which the stress is on establishing a right *relationship* with God. This translational approach is traceable in the first instance to Charles B Williams’ *The New Testament: A Private Translation in the Language of the People* (1937). It is echoed in a number of subsequent English versions,<sup>1</sup> among them the TEV. The enormous popularity of TEV (over 50 million paperback copies sold between 1966 and 1975)<sup>2</sup> has ensured a wide dissemination of this new translation approach.

Inevitably, such consideration raises the issue as to whether this approach (or, for that matter, the alternatives offered!) is accurate. That issue, however, is beyond the scope of this article. For the present purposes it is assumed to be the most viable means of rendering into English what Paul had in mind by his use of *dikaïosunē* and cognates<sup>3</sup>.

Our interest is focused rather on the way Rom. 4.5 is rendered in the TEV. As this view has been subject to revision in the several different editions, for convenience I have set them out in Table 1, together with the Greek text. The colometric arrangement is intended to facilitate comparison.

It will be observed that the phrase *tou dikaïounta ta asebeē* which is the particular concern of our enquiry, is consistently rendered in the several editions “who declares the guilty to be innocent”.

There are three compelling reasons for abandoning this rendering:

1. On the grounds that the Greek cannot be understood in this way from
  - (1) Paul’s usage in Romans;
  - (2) Paul’s usage elsewhere;
  - (3) Usage elsewhere in the New Testament;
  - (4) the Old Testament, with particular reference to the LXX;
  - (5) Greek literature in general.

Rather, the context is such that it has to mean here what it means in similar contexts elsewhere in the Epistle. Let us, for convenience, refer to these as “justificatory” contexts [= J-contexts], i.e., contexts in which Paul discusses “justification by faith”.

2. Such a statement, “God . . . declares the guilty to be innocent”, with the underlying concept it implies, does not have support *anywhere* in any of the

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Phillips (1947-1972) in part: **The Amplified Bible** (1958), especially in the amplified renderings; F. F. Bruce **An Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul** (1965), in part; W. Barclay (1969); **Living Bible** (1971), in part: **The Translator’s Translation** (1973).

<sup>2</sup> By selling over 50 million copies in the ten years after it was first published, the TEV set a world record for all paperback publications.

<sup>3</sup> The evidence supporting this assumption is given in my unpublished doctoral thesis **Right with God: Paul and his English Translators** (University of Queensland, 1988).

Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. On the contrary, it advances a view of the character of God which is diametrically opposed to the explicit and implicit statements of all the writers of Scripture.

3. Such a rendering is inconsistent with translation practice for *dikaïosunē* and cognates elsewhere in the TEV. The point made here should not be confused with the well-established and entirely valid Dynamic Equivalence principle that in the case where the same word in the original language is used with a variety of meanings in various contexts it will usually be necessary to utilise a variety of words or expressions when translating into the receptor language. But acceptance of this principle cannot be invoked to uphold the case where a word in the original language, used in various contexts with the *same* semantic force, is rendered in a *variety* of ways in the receptor language.

The situation for the fifteen occurrences of *dikaïoun* in Romans is shown in Table 2.

In endeavouring to establish the meaning of *dikaïosunē* and cognates in J-contexts we may dismiss (9) Rom 6.7, at once, as it is not in a J-context and the meaning adopted is supported by the standard lexicons, commentaries, and English translations in general.

(8) Rom 8.33, is a more difficult case, as there are aspects of the context which suggest forensic imagery (which I would deny for the majority of cases of Pauline usage, as does the one-family approach ["right" and cognates] we are considering). With this we may compare 5.18 for the only clearly forensic usage in a J-context, but this involves not the three words of the *dikaïosunē* family which occur most frequently in Romans: *dikaïosunē* (34×); *dikaïoun* (15×); *dikaïos* (7×) but *dikaïōma* (5×) and *dikaïōsis* (2×):

*Rom 5.18 Ara oun hōs di' henos paraptōmatos eis pantas anthrōpous eis katakrima,  
houtōs kai di' henos dikaïōmatos eis pantas anthrōpous eis dikaïōsin zōēs.*

For the present I do not wish to pursue this occurrence further, except to note the translations of others who have taken the same basic approach to *dikaïosunē* and cognates as the translator of the TEV (Table 3).

With (7) Rom 4.5, however, we have a clear instance of a J-context where there are no grounds for assuming that Paul had forensic imagery in mind. In these circumstances the rendering of *dikaïoun* in 4.5 ought to be consistent with its translation in other J-contexts, i.e., with its translation in cases (1) to (6) of Table 2.

To return now to the statement in 4.5 as a whole there is a further mistranslation which calls for noting. While there is no argument with the endeavour to express the underlying Greek in meaningful idiomatic English, the current ('1976) rendering of *tō de mē ergazomenō pisteuonti de by*, in part, "... *the person who depends on his faith*" can only be regarded as most unfortunate. Surely the unanimous call of the New Testament writers is for our faith to be in *God*, in *Christ*; there is certainly no place for faith in our *faith*! Faith is simply the means by which we obediently take hold of what God offers (Rom 1.5; 16:26 *eis hupakoēn pisteōs*.) Faith has no value in itself; its value depends wholly on the object towards which it is directed. In Paul's arguments advancing "justification

by faith”, the faith which God reckons as the basis for a right relationship has value only because it is directed towards *Christ*. It is consequent upon the good news of Christ being proclaimed and heard, and consists of accepting in a personal way God’s gracious gift of *dikaïosunē* (3.24; 5.17. Note that *ton asebē* in 4.5 is singular, giving it a very individual, personal sense).

May I make the plea then, that the defects at Romans 4.5 TEV to which attention has been drawn be remedied in future editions. I venture the following alternative translation (bold type) which endeavours to conform as closely as possible to TEV renderings, yet takes into account the translator’s usual approach to the *dikaïosunē* family and the translation style of the immediate context. (Verse 4 is shown for convenience [1976]).

Romans 4.4 A person who works is paid his wages,  
but they are not regarded as a gift;  
they are something that he has earned.

**4.5 As for the person who does not work, however,  
but simply puts his faith in the God who puts the wicked person right  
with himself,  
it is his faith that God takes into account  
in order to put him right with himself.**

**TABLE 1**  
TEV RENDERINGS OF ROMANS 4.5

NA<sup>26</sup> (7th Impression)

τω δὲ ἢ ἐργαζομένῳ  
πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ  
λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ  
εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

<sup>1</sup>1966

As for the man who does not work, however,  
but simply puts his faith in God, Who declares the guilty to be innocent  
it is his faith that God takes into account  
in order to put him right with himself.

<sup>3</sup>1971

But the man who has faith, not works,  
who believes in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent,  
it is his faith that God takes into account  
in order to put him right with himself.

<sup>4</sup>1976

But the person who depends on his faith, not on his deeds,  
and who believes in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent,  
it is his faith that God takes into account  
in order to put him right with himself.

**TABLE 2**  
**THE RENDERING OF ΔΙΚΑΙΟΝ IN THE TEV ('1976)**

1. Using "right" and cognates
  - (1) To put right with God (4.5 occurrences)     **2.13b; 3.28; 4.2; 5:1,9.**
  - (2) To put [someone] right with oneself (2 occurrences)     **3.30; 8.30a**
  - (3) To put right with one[self] (one occurrence)     **3.24**
  - (4) To put right (one occurrence)     **3.26c**
  - (5) To put right in God's sight (one occurrence)     **3.20**
  - (6) To show to be right (one occurrence)     **3.4**

TOTAL = 10.5 occurrences
  
2. Other approaches
  - (7) To declare to be innocent (one occurrence)     **4.5a**
  - (8) To declare not guilty (one occurrence)     **8.33**
  - (9) To set free (one occurrence)     **6.7**

**TABLE 3**  
**SELECT ENGLISH RENDERINGS OF ROM 8.33**  
 (Renderings of δικαιουν are shown in bold)

- Williams (1937)     Who can bring any charges against those whom God has chosen? It is God who **declared them in right standing**;
- Amplified Bible (1958)     Who shall bring any charge against God's elect [when it is] God who **justifies**—Who **puts us in right relationship to Himself**: (who shall come forward and accused or reproach those whom God has chosen? Will God who **acquits** us?)
- Barclay (1969)     Who can bring any charge against God's chosen ones? Not God, for it is God who **acquits** us.
- Translator's Translation (1973)     Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? Not God for he himself **acquits\*** us.
- Glossary\*** Acquit (Greek *dikaioō*) Ac 13:39; Ro 8:33.  
 See Right, righteousness, make right with.

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