

Romans 3:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

Analysis

God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar. Mē genoito (μὴ γένοιτο, "God forbid/may it never be") is Paul's strongest negation—appearing ten times in Romans alone. God's truthfulness is axiomatic; human mendacity is universal. Paul quotes Psalm 51:4 (LXX 50:6), David's confession after his sin with Bathsheba: **That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.**

The forensic language is striking: God is dikaiōthēs (δικαιωθῆς, "justified/vindicated") in His words and nikēsēs (νικήσῃς, "overcome/prevail") when judged. Even when God's own chosen king became an adulterer and murderer, David acknowledged that God's condemnation was righteous. If David—a man after God's heart—admits he deserves judgment, what hope has any other human? Paul uses Israel's greatest king to prove universal guilt.

Historical Context

Psalm 51 was Israel's premier penitential psalm, recited in synagogue liturgy. Paul's audience would immediately recognize the reference to David's adultery and murder. By citing David, Paul employs an argumentum ad hominem: if even Israel's prototype king confesses God's righteousness in condemning him, the argument is closed.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Do you approach God with David's radical honesty about your sin, or do you minimize and excuse?
2. How does God's commitment to His own righteousness actually serve as the foundation for gospel hope?
3. What does it mean practically that God must be "true" even if "every man a liar"?

Interlinear Text

μὴ	γινέσθω	γινέσθω	δὲ	ό	θεὸς	ἀληθής	πᾶς	δὲ
God forbid	be	be	but	G3588	God	true	every	but
G3361	G1096	G1096	G1161		G2316	G227	G3956	G1161
ἄνθρωπος	ψεύστης	καθὼς	γέγραπται	὾πως		ἀν		
man	a liar	as	it is written		That	thou mightest		
G444	G5583	G2531	G1125		G3704	G302		
δικαιωθῆς	ἐν	τοῖς	λόγοις	σου	καὶ	νικήσῃς	ἐν	
be justified	in	G3588	sayings	thy	and	mightest overcome	in	
G1344	G1722		G3056	G4675	G2532	G3528	G1722	
τῷ	κρίνεσθαι	σε						
G3588	art judged	thou						
	G2919	G4571						

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 51:4 (Righteousness): Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Psalms 116:11 (Parallel theme): I said in my haste, All men are liars.

Galatians 2:17 (Righteousness): But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

Hebrews 6:18 (References God): That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

Deuteronomy 32:4 (Righteousness): He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

Titus 1:2 (References God): In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

Job 36:3 (Righteousness): I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

1 John 5:20 (Truth): And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

Psalms 100:5 (Truth): For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Psalms 119:160 (Righteousness): Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.