

Righteousness. Conformity to a certain set of expectations, which vary from role to role. Righteousness is fulfillment of the expectations in any relationship, whether with God or other people. ✎ It is applicable at all levels of society, and is relevant in every area of life. Therefore, righteousness denotes the fulfilled expectations in relationships ✎ between man and wife, parents and children, fellow citizens, employer and employee, merchant and customers, ruler and citizens, and God and man. Depending on the fulfillment of one's expectations, an individual could be called righteous and his or her acts and speech could be designated as righteous. The opposite of righteous is "evil," "wicked," or "wrong" (cf. [Ps 1:6](#); [Zep 3:5](#)). Righteousness is the fiber which holds society, religion, and family together. Righteousness enhances the welfare of the community. A godly (not "pious" in the modern sense) person was called "righteous" (*ṣaddîq*). The *ṣaddîq* was a person of wisdom, whose "righteousness" brought joy to his family ([Prv 23:22–25](#)), to his city ([Prv 11:10](#)), and to the people of God ([Prv 29:2](#)).

In Israel the concept of righteousness transformed all of life, both religious and secular. Israel had been called into existence as a separate nation through which Yahweh was to witness to the nations concerning his universal rule, his nature, and his expectations of life on earth. This meant that Israel required a revelation from God so that they might learn his will and be instructed in maintaining a relationship with him. The quality of a person's relationship with God is directly linked to his relationship with his fellowman. God is righteous ([2 Chr 12:6](#); [Ps 7](#); [9](#); [103:17](#); [Zep 3:5](#); [Zec 8:8](#)). The righteousness of the Lord is a dynamic concept, since it describes his acts on behalf of his people and also the nature of his relationship with them.

Righteousness is an attribute which stems from a covenantal relationship ✎ . Israel received the revelation of God's creative acts, transmitting the glorious acts of God's salvation from Egypt, and the gift of the land of Canaan as expressions of his "righteousness." All of God's acts are righteous (cf. [Dt 32:4](#); [Jgs 5:11](#); [Ps 103:6](#)), and God's people rejoiced in the righteous acts of God ([Ps 89:16](#)). In creation, God's rule over the nations, and his acts of salvation, Israel perceived the ordering and design of God's manifold relations to this world and to his people. The fidelity of God to his creatures and particularly to his chosen people was an expression of his righteousness. Because of this revelation, Israel's conception of history was a linear, progressive unfolding of God's plan. By grace Israel had received a place in his order, and they could never claim

that their own righteousness had contributed to their inclusion in the history of salvation (cf. Dt 9:5, 6). The continuation of God's ordering (governance) is seen in his saving acts on behalf of his covenant people. His acts in creation and in salvation are righteous in that they are the working out of his glorious ordering of his kingdom purposes for the earth (Ps 11; cf. 2 Pt 3:13).

Not only is God righteous, revealing his righteousness in his mighty acts, but he also expects righteousness of others, who are to reflect the nature of their Creator. The expected response to God's rule is in the form of righteousness, that is, conformity to his rule and will. In this basic sense, Noah is called "righteous" because he walked with God and showed integrity in comparison to his contemporaries (Gn 6:9). After humanity's fall and acts of rebellion culminating in the flood and the dispersion at Babel, God renewed his relationship with humanity in Abraham and his descendants. Abraham was righteous because he ordered his life by the revealed will of God (Gn 15:6; cf. 17:1b; 18:19; 26:5).

The Lord revealed to Israel more clearly how they were to relate to him and to each other. The Law in Israel was for the purpose of helping the people of God to live in conformity to the will of God. The person who was devoted to the service of God in worship and life was called righteous (cf. Mal 3:18). Thus, righteousness is a state of integrity in relation to God and one's fellowman, expressing itself in one's acts and speech. Even as the Lord is righteous in his creative, sustaining, and salvific acts, so people are expected to act and speak in such a way that righteousness is evident and is advanced (Hos 10:12).

Yahweh, the Righteous One, freely established the covenant with Israel, lovingly redeemed them, and graciously promised to be their God and the God of their children. The covenant relationship was not dependent on Israel's righteousness, past, present, or future. In order to secure the outworking of his plan, he chose David and his descendants to lead God's people into righteousness. The Law was an impersonal instrument which found its complement, as in the days of Moses and Joshua, in a righteous leader, by whom righteousness was to be advanced.

The king in Israel was expected to lead God's people in righteousness. As God's appointed theocratic ruler, he reflected the glory and majesty of God. However, the king had another related responsibility. He was to protect the divine order and create a

sphere in which God's people would be encouraged to do God's will so that the blessings of God would be assured. To this end David exhorted Solomon, "Show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires" (1 Kgs 2:2, 3). Solomon's prayer (Ps 72) was for righteousness so that he might rule Israel righteously, the righteous might flourish, and the nation might enjoy God's blessing. "The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness" (vv 1-7).

The hope for an era characterized by righteousness was rooted in the prophetic revelation of the messianic rule and the establishment of God's kingdom (Is 11:1-9), whose rule will extend to the nations (vv 10-16) and last forever (9:7). Isaiah develops the revelation of the glorious, victorious entrance of the kingdom of God in a most exquisite way, when his enemies will be subdued, and his people will be gathered together and will live in a state of peace in his presence. The acts of restoration, extending from Israel's return from exile till the final coming of the external kingdom are, in his prophetic purview, the demonstration of God's righteous acts. He forgives, restores, remains faithful, loves, elects, and sends his Spirit to renew his people and to bestow on them all the benefits of the renewed covenant relationship. Both Jews and Gentiles will be the recipients of his righteous acts (Is 45:8, 23; 46:13; 48:18; 51:5, 8, 16; 56:1; 59:14, 17; 60:17; 61:10, 11). In the new era "then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever" (60:21), and the Lord will clothe his people with "garments of salvation" and "a robe of righteousness" (61:10).

Out of concern for the salvation of his people and the establishment of his everlasting kingdom, God revealed his righteousness in the sending of his beloved Son. The coming of Christ marks an era of renewal of his relationship with man, the renewal of the covenant and renewal of his kingdom on earth. The older covenant was mediated by Moses; the covenant was renewed by the Son of God, who came "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:15). The message of Jesus is consistent with the OT in the close identification of God's kingdom with his righteousness (Mt 6:33; 13:43; cf. Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 6:9). Jesus also taught that God expects all people to live in harmony with his will (Mt 7:21), rather than being mere imitators of other people's righteousness (Mt 5:20). Jesus is God's final revelation of what he requires of individuals to enter the kingdom and to live righteously. By repentance, faith in Christ, and following the Messiah, each person is again shown how to enter the kingdom. The law of the kingdom is freshly interpreted

by Jesus in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1–7:27) with the intent not to set the OT revelation aside, but to confirm it.

Jesus taught that legal righteousness was never intended as an end in itself. The righteous live by faith and walk with God in the footsteps of Jesus and in communion with the Holy Spirit. For Paul, too, righteousness was not a legalistic system (Rom 9:30; 10:5; Phil 3:6; Gal 2:21).

The apostle Paul develops most extensively the doctrine of righteousness when he distinguishes the righteousness of people from the righteousness of God. First, righteousness is forensic. Individuals cannot attain to righteousness, but receive it as a gift from God (Rom 3:21–5:21). There is no righteousness apart from Jesus Christ. In the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, “righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last” (Rom 1:17; cf. Hab 2:4). Therefore the Father requires acceptance of his Son as his appointed means of justification (Rom 3:25, 26; 5:9). Righteousness carries a forensic significance in that God declares people to be righteous (Rom 8:33, 34; 2 Cor 3:9; 11:15). God pardons sins, is reconciled with sinners, and grants his peace to them (Rom 5:1, 9–11; Eph 2:14, 15, 17).

Second, righteousness is a relational term. Those who have been declared righteous enjoy a new relationship. They are “sons of God” by adoption.

Third, righteousness is a dynamic expression for newness of life. The Father relates to his children righteously and expects them to relate righteously to him. Righteousness as a dynamic quality expresses itself in the newness of life in the Spirit, which is freely given to those who have been justified (Rom 8:9–11). The way of righteousness manifests itself in love (Gal 5:22–26; Jas 3:17, 18).

Fourth, righteousness is also an expression of hope, since the righteous acts of God stretch from creation to the new creation in Jesus Christ. Paul defines hope as the eager anticipation of righteousness (Gal 5:5), that is, the era of restoration of which Isaiah spoke. The fullness of righteousness will be manifest at the coming of our Lord Jesus, when all those who have been justified will also be glorified (Rom 8:30). The goal of salvation history moves toward the final glorious manifestation of God’s kingdom, when all creation will be renewed in “righteousness,” that is, conforming in every aspect to God’s plan in Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17, 21; 2 Pt 3:13).

See LAW, BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF; ISRAEL, RELIGION OF; GOD, BEING AND ATTRIBUTES OF; SANCTIFICA-

TION; JUSTIFICATION.

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